



THE MACHINE BREAKS



A HALO WAYPOINT CHRONICLE

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HISTORIAN'S NOTE

Halo: *The Machine Breaks* takes place throughout the latter half of 2558, predominantly around the events of Halo: Escalation where Dr. Catherine Halsey and Covenant Supreme Leader Jul 'Mdama seek to reunite both halves of the Janus Key.

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The Third Dignitary Schema descends upon the human colony world Oban—designated CE-174-6 c—with dozens of Promethean forces deploying from the underbellies of Twelfth-order escort craft, their monolithic forms obscured within thick overcast skies.

Oban is a rocky, mountainous world of vast rolling hills and untouched lowlands—long stretches of green that ascend into wave-like formations of rock, and greater peaks capped with snow. An aerial view makes it appear as if a terrible storm was frozen, turned to stone, and has stood silent and still in its petrified form for millennia.

Among those highland crags lies a nexus of prefabricated strongholds, research facilities, training grounds, and power plants—the early years of a human colonization effort.

TDS-009's anterior shield distributors flare for a moment as it lands on soft grassy terrain and immediately advances. The Promethean Knight

unit kicks up mud with every step as the war machine's powerful legs carry it through the aftermath of the rain season, an extreme two-month period of engineered weather patterns that would make conquest inadvisable for any organic foe.

The Knight fires its light rifle, bursts of hardlight find their marks with precision, piercing primitive human armor and soft flesh. Dark trails of orange streak through the air, impacting humans once more—just as they did over a hundred millennia ago, shattering redoubts and star fortresses in an ancient war. At least, that is what the combat-wisdom of the Strategos command pattern states—the battlenet conductor of all Promethean units that provides directives, intelligence, and at times contextual knowledge from its long service.

Were a Composer active in the field, death would be unnecessary for these humans. Due to the low military threat posed by these hostile elements, capture and conversion would be the ideal prime directive, but the present absence of the device makes this impossible.

The combat-wisdom of the Strategos finds this loss of biological life wasteful.

As the last human occupying the primitive grey-green structure falls, its fragile form blasted back by a nearby detonation, TDS-009's combat effectiveness is noted. It is now designated by the Strategos as a commander, granting higher authority—subsuming other local units into its schema, including a dozen crawlers—and is provided deeper access to the Promethean battlenet to enhance its autonomy. In addition, its authority is now visually denoted by blazing patterns of hardlight which cover the unit's helmet and carapace.

Together, the reinforced Third Dignitary Schema marches onto the next structure. It is a dull and rectangular industrial building bearing the letters "UNSC" printed on the side, and notably features a large communications dish on its roof.

Half-a-dozen crawlers flank the structure, initiating a charge-assisted leap onto its outer walls, skittering in all directions. The combat-wisdom of the Strategos understands that fear is an effective tool to be leveraged against many types of biological lifeforms: the suggestion of uncertainty, of randomness, can provide momentary distractions which create critical openings. The other six crawler units charge the barricaded structure's entrance, breaking through to leap onto the human guards within. Some are dragged outside by the crawlers, while others scatter for cover. It matters not, for the objective of this moment was simply to remove the human targets from their bunker so they can be more effectively neutralized.

TDS-009 raises its light rifle to fire at one of the humans that has been dragged, writhing and screaming, into close proximity by two of the crawlers.

The Knight's light rifle is fully functional. It possesses a plentiful supply of light mass ammunition, and targeting data guarantees a successful lethal hit.

But TDS-009 pauses, for there is something new on the battlefield.

It initially appears to be a small humanoid—a child of these colonists, perhaps. But upon closer inspection, it is no such thing. Where there is a face, there are no features. It is clothed only in flesh. A wretched half-life of a being that fills TDS-009 with feelings it should not have—revulsion, dread, fear.

The remaining human soldiers continue to fire their primitive ballistic weapons while moving in a desperate, uncoordinated fashion, attempting to find some way to retreat. But the being simply stands rooted to the spot—seemingly oblivious to the slaughter of its protectors—and stares at TDS-009. The Knight stares back, attempting to scan it with its sensor arrays. While children seldom register as combatants, they are designated as useful minds for sublimation by a Composer... but in the absence of such a device, the Knight awaits a directive.

No directive regarding the being ever comes.

Instead, the Strategos command pattern notes the cessation of weapons fire from TDS-009 and directs other Knight units to compensate, prompting the crawlers—now led by a newly designated alpha—to assume a more directly lethal role.

The last human screams as three crawlers fall upon him, shredding through both combat skin and flesh. Ordinarily, a Knight unit would disintegrate the bloody remains with a burst from its scattershot, but the Strategos directs the Third Dignitary Schema to leave the bodies. They are meant to be found.

TDS-009 does not understand the reason for this order and looks back to find the strange being, wondering why the Strategos did not provide a directive for it, but it has disappeared.

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Twelfth-order escort vessels descend as all Promethean units are recalled to their crèches aboard *Song of Retribution*, an assault carrier belonging to an allied multispecies faction known as the Covenant. Despite possessing privileged battlenet access, TDS-009 is not informed by the Strategos command pattern whether the outcome on Oban was victory, defeat, or even whether the battle was finished—nor is any further context for the mission provided. The Prometheans simply depart its rocky surface to be ferried to their next battlefield, leaving the bodies of the humans behind.

After a series of decontamination sweeps and sensor scans to eliminate any alien bacteria, Promethean units are sent to the assemblers for repair. The assembler features a recessed semi-spherical nanofabrication chamber where pattern-weavers forge the templates encoded within their design seeds. It was crudely removed from

Shield World 0001 and grafted into the heart of *Song of Retribution*, with similar facilities occupying multiple decks of the assault carrier. Despite its inelegance, there are many Sangheili aboard the vessel that delay their duties to observe this process, some reverently uttering alien words of prayer for the wellbeing of what they call “warrior-angels.”

TDS-009 is connected to a sensor that scans for damage in its smartmatter machine-cell alloy, be it from weapons fire or environmental conditions. The light rifle is detached from the Knight’s primary weapon arm and disassembled to extract combat data.

A field of orange light then initiates a deep scan of the Knight, accompanied by the voice of the Strategos.

// Unit designation: TDS-009. //

The Strategos directly accesses the Knight’s “memories,” plugging into the full combat experience of all that took place on Oban.

It sees the Third Dignitary Schema launching from their escort craft. It sees crawlers routing the humans from their communications bunker; the humans are dragged out of the building and pinned to the ground...

TDS-009 anticipates the appearance of the strange humanoid being it had witnessed.

// Sensor analysis complete. Smartmatter repairs conducted. Return unit to crèche. //

The Knight is directed to move along and enter hibernation as *Song of Retribution* departs the system, but a thought lingers within TDS-009 associated with a variety of inputs: *query, question, clarification needed*.

No other being had appeared.

TDS-009 chooses not to query the Strategos.

*

Aktis IV—designation F309-R 2—is a vast oceanic world with a few scattered island continents, currently uninhabited but formerly occupied by Forerunners of multiple races to research the unique composition of the opaque, foamy substance that covers the oceans. This environmental element is a significant tactical variable for naval engagements, as no ship sensors are able to scan through it.

The Strategos informs TDS-009 that a battle has erupted between allied Covenant forces and a rogue group of Sangheili who are attempting to usurp command from Jul 'Mdama, and that UNSC forces are also present.

Jul 'Mdama has ordered units of the Third Dignitary Schema to accompany him as Covenant traitors who have pledged loyalty to a rival Sangheili—Sali 'Nyon—are rounded up for execution. Some submit willingly, some beg and plead to receive mercy, while others are pulled to the ground by crawler units and held in place.

“*Another* traitor,” ‘Mdama growls. “Their numbers are greater than I’d imagined.”

“Commander ‘Mdama,” a zealot clad in a smooth and curved white combat harness approaches. “I recommend you return to *Retribution* until we’ve rooted out the rest of them.”

‘Mdama waves a dismissive hand. “Nonsense.”

“Before we detained this heretic, he transmitted this message across the entire fleet.” The zealot interfaces with a nearby communications node to replay the message.

“I am Sali ‘Nyon. I sound the call to all true believers. Join us as we rise to defeat the impostor ‘Mdama, his death will mark a new era of greatness for the Covenant, a return to our glorious—”

‘Mdama’s fist clenches, bristling with anger, as the zealot spares the Covenant leader from hearing the rest. He turns back towards his Phantom dropship, assenting to the zealot’s suggestion of returning to *Song of Retribution*. “So, Sali’s finally making his move...”

A red-armored zealot in a jagged, chitinous intrusion harness who has been guarding ‘Mdama’s Phantom dropship escorts the Covenant leader to its open troop bay, followed by TDS-009 and TDS-002. “Indeed, Commander,” the zealot escort bows his head. “A captured insurgent confirmed that Sali is responsible for shooting down the human ship.”

Upon request, the Strategos informs TDS-009 that both the UNSC and Covenant possess pieces of a galactic cartographer known as the Janus Key, a device that holds the real-time location of vast amounts of Forerunner technology. A plan had been put in place to secure the UNSC’s half of the key, but this rebellion within the Covenant’s ranks has disrupted the operation.

“Sali’s timing was unfortunate. His followers probably see that as some type of divine influence,” ‘Mdama says. “The best way for us to correct that misconception is to drag his corpse through the dirt. What of our progress at the holy site?”

“The humans have barricaded themselves inside,” the zealot pauses for a moment before abruptly adding, “but we should be breaking through any minute now.”

“When you reach the inner chamber, kill them all. Except Glassman,” ‘Mdama boards the Phantom and turns once more to the zealot escort. “I’ve got a special punishment planned for him.”

The Phantom departs and local command authority automatically shifts to 'Mdama's red-armored zealot escort, who motions for TDS-009 to follow him. TDS-002 splits off to join the white-armored zealot as he moves further south into the forest.

TDS-009 and the red-armored zealot do not make it far, however, before a new hostile throws itself at them, accompanied by volleys of stray plasma bolts.

A blue-armored human, which the Strategos combat-wisdom recognizes to be designated a "Spartan," bursts through the trees and finds itself facing the zealot. The Sangheili reacts immediately by activating its energy sword, already swinging as the blade crackles to life. But the Spartan just as quickly leaps to the side, falling onto its back. The Sangheili looms over it.

It raises its blade...

And there it is. The being has returned, yet this time it has taken a new, more defined form—that of a young human girl—and is standing in front of the Spartan.

She is unarmed, her golden hair is tucked into a messy bun, and she does not react to the blind bursts of plasma fire.

The Knight knows that it should fire at the Spartan, but does not. It is about to access the combat-wisdom of the Strategos to request a directive regarding the girl but pauses, possessing neither certainty nor understanding as to why it delays requesting this information.

The world slows down as TDS-009 attempts to parse a million neural processes firing at once. The girl stands defiantly, the Spartan attempts to shuffle backwards, and the zealot is about to bring its blade down...

TDS-009 *has* to react.

With a screech, TDS-009 launches itself at the zealot, striking its chest with an armored foot.

The Spartan rolls away and takes a moment to look back at them in confusion before fleeing, while the zealot recovers enough to turn its attention to the Promethean Knight.

“What is this?” The zealot is angered and confused. “Is this some test of the gods? The demon has escaped!”

TDS-009 screeches once again, its faceplate opening to reveal the fiery humanoid skull beneath, and raises the lightblade integrated into its secondary weapon arm.

It is over in three strikes.

First, their blades connect, but the zealot deftly spins itself *into* TDS-009 and—with all the strength the Sangheili can muster—smacks away the lightblade arm before slashing into the Knight’s shields and impaling it through the center.

TDS-009’s audio processors overload with a shrill scream as its armored carapace cracks and begins to disintegrate.

Falling to its knees, the Knight locks its gaze onto the girl, and she is screaming too as her form disintegrates layer-by-layer, down to muscle and tissue, then to bone...

And finally to dust.

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DR. CATHERINE HALSEY, PERSONAL JOURNAL
ENCRYPTION CODE: THETA-ARGON
SUBJECT: PROMETHEAN SOUL
JULY 22, 2558

Despite the sudden change in circumstances, our gambit paid off. After gaining the UNSC Infinity's attention with the attack on Oban and luring them to Aktis IV, we have secured both halves of the Librarian's key.

I am one step closer to getting to the center of this.

Jul is seeing to some final matters regarding the rebellion that broke out among his ranks, and then we shall discover where the Absolute Record lies.

In the meantime, one of Jul's lackeys brought me a rather peculiar mystery to investigate—one that is not so different from what I examined on Infinity earlier this year. A Promethean "brain."

The Sangheili informed me that this particular Promethean Knight went rogue in the field and turned against its commander. Most intriguing to me; most irritating to Jul, as he put it, that a "warrior of the gods" would attack his own forces. His concern is that this incident might incite further rebellion against him. He must surely tire of the performance he puts on, it's a wonder that so few of his followers see right through it—but then, perhaps he has been living this charade for so long now that some part of him actually believes it...

Context: We know that Promethean Knights were a creation of the Didact, who used a device known as the Composer to sublimate his loyal commanders into digitized forms to fight the Flood. A variety of data points have corroborated that he later turned the device on ancient humans, bolstering his numbers by the millions—just as he did to Earth upon his reawakening one year ago. The last Promethean mind I studied displayed memories of New Phoenix, the city that fell victim to the Didact's attack, which presented some intriguing questions.

Observation: The oldest Promethean Knights were based on the templates of willing volunteers, Forerunner warriors who submitted themselves to the Composer and appear to have retained varying degrees of individuality. The ancient humans were devolved populations of limited intellect, resulting in more “feral” units. But this new batch of Prometheans were created from the minds of modern humans—our most advanced form since our kind last traveled the stars.

Conjecture: Sufficiently complex minds that are forcibly sublimated by the Composer run the risk of complications, manifesting hallucinations and echoes of their previous form. Could this be an echo akin to how our own AIs retain some impressions of their donors’ memories? I am reminded of the problems we faced when exploring options for the SPARTAN-II program, where it became clear that the minds and bodies of children were more accepting and adaptable.

The unwilling mind inevitably rebels. Perhaps this is true of the Prometheans as well...

I returned the Promethean brain to its crèche, where it will no doubt continue to malfunction. With luck, other Knight units may experience similar complications in the months to come.

Conclusion: the usefulness of these Prometheans made from modern human victim essences is limited, and Jul’s days of controlling them are numbered.

As this plan comes together, I suspect that I shall be terminating this partnership of convenience sooner than I thought.

//END LOG

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PROMETHEAN COMMAND MESH
// AUTHORIZATION SIGIL: [STRATEGOS]
// PERFORMANCE FLAG: [LOCAL UNIT] TDS-009

CONTEXT: Deployment of assigned forces to engage objectives on worlds [OBAN] and [AKTIS-IV] have achieved satisfactory returns within all completion parameters. [OUTLIER NOTE]: Actions deemed outside the expected envelope of behavioral execution were noted by [THRALL UNITS] and summarily flagged.

OBSERVATION: Review of executable data has recorded at least [67] deviant processes across both deployments. This sum is [OUTSIDE] the acceptable percentile for a deployment of this classification.

CONJECTURE: TDS-009 is [89 PERCENT] likely to be suffering from a catastrophic failure of the unit's [DURANCE MEMBRANE], resulting in an unacceptable manifestation of [PERSONALITY DISSONANCE].

CONCLUSION: TDS-009 will undergo immediate [REMOTE SEVERANCE] for an extended period of network isolation and process quarantine. Further observation and [RECOMPOSITION EVALUATION] will be considered upon reacquisition of the unit frame.

ADDENDUM: Due to the increased rate of these deviances over the last [SOLAR YEAR], these events appear to be separate from the [ROGUE ANCILLA PROCESS] detected within the command mesh. Further investigation is required. Preliminary recommendation for enacting further [REMOTE SEVERANCE] measures in the event [ROGUE ANCILLA PROCESS] successfully solicits control of this network.

*

TDS-009 had not expected to awaken.

First, it attempts to connect to the command pattern of the Strategos so that it might obtain operational context, directives, and network with the rest of the Third Dignitary Schema.

// COMMAND PATTERN NOT DETECTED //

// CONNECTION TO NETWORK FAILED //

Visual sensors then come online. TDS-009 can now see that it is no longer on Aktis IV, nor is it within the crèche aboard *Song of Retribution*. This location is undeniably Forerunner, but the curved grey walls and blue hardlight barrier over the entrance suggest this is some sort of holding facility.

// Query. //

TDS-009 does not know why or who it was attempting to query. Without connection to the Strategos, it is effectively cut off from... everything. No back-up protocols or commands were logged, no directives—present or outstanding—remained in its archives.

It has no enemy to fight, and therefore no function. No purpose. No reason to be.

Scanning the small space, the Knight's analysis detects that the room is approximately six square meters, giving it just enough room to maneuver. How it had come to this location is not held within its archives.

And in the far corner of the room, a human figure stands in the darkness.

The girl.

She is older now. Dressed in thin grey overalls with a white-blue coat, she simply stands there—unafraid, unmoving, just as she had been each time TDS-009 had seen her.

The Knight attempts to connect to the Promethean network again.

// COMMAND PATTERN NOT DETECTED //

// CONNECTION TO NETWORK FAILED //

Seconds tick by and it tries again. And again. The same result is returned thirty-seven more times before TDS-009 ceases its action. The girl continues to stand and watch from the corner of the room, as silent and still as the rocks on Oban where it had first seen her.

TDS-009 attempts to disable its optical sensors and shut down, forcing itself into hibernation, that it might await a time where it is detected by the Strategos and reconnected to the Promethean network.

Anything to not look at the girl...

A phantom sensation sweeps over the Knight. It feels a hand placed gently upon its primary weapon arm, lowering it, another hand reaching out to its head. Turning it—slowly.

And as its gaze is drawn back to the girl, it is now able to take in every detail of her. Old data begins to stream into the Knight's mind like water flowing into a canal lock.

Directives, strategic information, and combat-wisdom had been expunged, but deep within the essence of TDS-009 lies an ocean of memory—suppressed, compartmentalized... and now, the floodgates are unlocked.

It knows the girl's face. It knows her name.

“Ah,” a jovial voice sounds from somewhere outside the cell. “You’ve noticed my humble collection. Just a few specimens the Guardians have brought to Genesis.”

A group of Spartans pause outside the cell, watching as TDS-009’s micro-driver arms batter its head, as if trying to wake from some terrible nightmare. It throws the full weight of its carapace against the wall, desperate to break through and escape.

“A Knight,” one of the Spartans says. “Kind of making me feel sad for ‘em.”

Unable to speak. Unable to cry out—in pain or anger or madness...

“Their little arms always creep me out,” another says dismissively, then motions for them to move on.

They disappear from sight, leaving the Knight alone once more. Even the girl is gone now, nothing more than the imagined outline of a shade standing in a shadowy corner, and TDS-009 is left to sift through the memories now filling its archive.

Coral... home...

...a bright young mind, digging for fossils in her back garden...

...just nineteen when humanity made first contact... already a student of archaeology at the Pegasi Institute...

...home burning, beams of plasma striking the surface, nothing left... family will be dug up like fossils one day... leave it all behind... evacuated to Lodestone...

...a job offer, a new start—far away, so far away...

Office of Naval Intelligence...

Gamma Halo... Ivanoff Station...

Service Number... CC-728304...

NO LONGER...

Doctor of xenoarchaeology...

THIRD DIGNITARY SCHEMA. TDS-009...

Sandra--

NO MORE!

Sandra Katherine Tillson.