



BATTLE FOR THE BLOOD-MOON



A HALO WAYPOINT CHRONICLE

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HISTORIAN'S NOTE

Battle for the Blood-Moon takes place in early 2560, in the wake of the events of Halo: Outcasts and the opening of Halo Infinite where the UNSC Infinity is ambushed by the Banished and Cortana sacrifices herself, moving Zeta Halo into slipspace.

SCORRIN'S BLADE

Shipmistress Mahkee 'Chava scrutinized the large tactical holograph of Suban at the center of the bridge, a cavernous command chamber that shared a similar design model to the *Ceudar*-pattern corvette. The spacious interior was lined with several rows of control consoles for the various systems that defined the blockade runner as a strong and swift interdicator.

Unfortunately, that swiftness was not currently being put to use in the way Mahkee wished.

Instead of charging the Banished ranks with a coordinated assault, Mahkee had been ordered to hold her distance from the enemy dreadnought and comprehensively assess the situation.

Scorrin's Blade, like all *Hekar Taa*-pattern blockade runners, was outfitted with advanced stealth generators and an onboard hyperscanner reverse-engineered from recovered Forerunner materiel. In theory, these systems

could work in concert, allowing them to obtain detailed internal scans of unsuspecting enemy vessels, but their use had been limited during the time of the Covenant.

Hyperscanners provided an overwhelming amount of information, which Mahkee guessed would likely have been filtered by the Forerunners' own artificial intelligences—something that the Prophets, in their infinite “wisdom,” had significantly curtailed.

The Swords of Sanghelios, on the other hand, bore no such prejudice against artificial life, even as the constructs had risen up against their human creators and sought to impose their own will upon the galaxy.

But Mahkee didn't need an AI to operate that system. She had something just as effective.

“Status, Dibdib?”

The diminutive Unggoy almost jumped as Mahkee approached. Fortunately, this had become a common routine and Dibdib had managed to reduce her reaction to a slight jolt.

“We gots the latest knowins on the big bad dreadnought, Shipmistress,” Dibdib squeaked, her eyes still fixed on the hyperscanner. “Sendin' it to the main holograph now!”

“Excellent news,” Mahkee continued on her way around the bridge. “Tylk, bring *Scorrin's Blade* back to minimum safe distance.”

“As you say, Shipmistress,” Xelq ‘Tylk dipped his head in acknowledgement. He was still quite young, a relative newcomer to the Swords of Sanghelios, and was eager to make a good impression on his superiors.

As *Scorrin's Blade* pulled back, Mahkee returned her attention to the central holograph of Suban and tightened her jaw mandibles. That the

Banished had *dared* to come to this system at all was galling enough, but the blood-moon of Sanghelios was her home. She and her brothers had been raised here since they were hatchlings, and she allowed herself a momentary feeling of relief that the two of them were currently on Sanghelios itself to inspect the latest products of the Kolaar Manufactorum. Wily though they were, neither Silset nor Oebrin were fighters, and they were certainly not what any Sangheili would call “traditional” in any sense.

Somewhat ironically, that had all gone to her...

Mahkee did not possess the patience for the political maneuverings, complex trade deals, and clan management that had largely served as the civil duty of Sangheili females. Ever since she had been a hatchling, her mother had said that her veins ran with the fire and blood of Suban itself, and her calling had come when the Arbiter declared that military service for the Swords of Sanghelios would be open to *all*.

Indeed, she had been surprised to learn that even the Unggoy could ascend to the rank of shipmaster upon querying why one of the *Zanar*-pattern light cruisers attached to their fleet was named *Bad Gas*.

Returning to the holograph, Mahkee flicked her wrist and the projected image of Suban dissipated. This made way for the latest tactical scans of the dreadnought that was the center of all Banished activity in this region.

Scannermaster Dibdib’s work on the hyperscanner had even identified the name of the vessel: *Ghost of Barolon*.

The holograph highlighted its suite of armaments, filling Mahkee with dread. *Scorrin’s Blade* was heavily outgunned by the monumental monstrosities the Banished had brought to bear, their dreadnoughts were a physical representation of their rapid rise to power, while many of the Swords of Sanghelios’s own warships reflected ancient patterns connected to their pre-Covenant history. Admirable as that pursuit was for the spirit

of the Sangheili, these patterns were largely outdated and could not match either the firepower or tonnage of these crimson-armored ogres.

Suban was more than just a home for Mahkee, the onset of the Bleeding Years that had come to define this period for the Sangheili had turned the moon into a place of neutral safe harbor. And before that, going back to a time before their millennia of service to the Covenant, Suban had been held as a sacred point of convergence for the wills of their most ancient gods—traditions, doctrine, and faith that had been secretly preserved from the long and treacherous reach of the Prophets.

But hundreds of drop-bases had already been deployed from *Barolon's* underbelly, enough to establish immediate occupational infrastructure on one of Suban's most fertile mining sites.

And Mahkee felt powerless to do anything about it.

She knew, of course, that every datapoint about the enemy was valuable, and that the time would come to coordinate a retaliatory strike. A competent shipmaster knew the value of patience, and the cost of acting prematurely before understanding the bigger picture. In this, Mahkee's discipline did not blunt or sublimate her instinct for battle, but instead served as a whetstone for it.

For now, she would watch, she would wait, and she would find the gap in the armor of the Banished that would win the day for her people.

Until then, she turned her mind to the joint operation that was taking place on the ground. Spartans and Swords forces working together in a combined arms effort, their joint temerity and prowess would make its mark—of that, Mahkee was certain. She had, after all, fought alongside the humans' living legends before, when she had ferried Spartan Jameson Locke and his fireteam into battle to help the Arbiter bring a decisive end to Jul 'Mdama's Covenant.

Scores of Banished troops against a handful of Spartans and Swords of Sanghelios warriors?

Centering her mind and mustering her confidence amidst the uncertainty, Mahkee thought with determined resolution that those were indeed sorrowful odds for their enemies.

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Suban The Mines of Shua'ree

The density of conflict and upheaval on Sanghelios in the past several weeks had been unprecedented. Just a few months after Arbiter Thel 'Vadam's harrowing encounter with the Banished on the corpse-world of N'ba, the Created forces that had kept Sanghelios under a suffocating martial occupation suddenly relinquished their grip on the system. It was an unanticipated turn of fortune that quickly spiraled into a race to fill the power vacuum left on such an influential world.

While many of the keeps and kaidons on Sanghelios remained steadfast in their support of the Arbiter and his attempts to unify their people, others sought alternative divisions of power. The tensions were already beginning to boil over, and it served as an open invitation to any well-organized force to take advantage of—an invitation the Banished were more than eager to accept.

In their brazen encroachment into the Urs system, the Banished found no need to breach a barricaded door. The loyal Sangheili under their growing influence simply left the gate unlatched.

This latest chapter of the conflict had settled into the skies of Suban, over one of the many mining sites that had made the moon such a prized resource in the reign of the Covenant empire. Suban was the only known

place in the galaxy to find *kemuksuru*—the energized crystals that powered several manifestations of “needle launcher” weapons employed by many of the former Covenant client species. That reality made the Sanghelios satellite a prime commodity to be controlled, and the Banished were making every effort to do so.

What must it be like? Fahl ‘Nto thought. *To have a mind more like a machine?*

The seasoned Evocati was sitting on a flat raised rock but leaned forward to continue his observation of one of the human Spartans that stood with them. While serving in the Covenant as a distinguished Ultra operative, Fahl had encountered a scattered few “demons” during his deployment, most notably on their stronghold world near the end of the War of Annihilation. They were encounters he spoke little of since aligning with the Swords of Sanghelios, as his mind remained in a constant dance between resolution and shame—an ever-present personal journey towards purpose.

The Spartans of Fireteam Jorogumo were part of an allied attaché under the purview of Fleetmaster Arkad Nar ‘Kulul, who was one of the leaders of the Sanghelios home defense fleet. These augmented human warriors were part of an ongoing treaty between the human military and the Swords of Sanghelios, and remained at the disposal of Swords forces at the discretion of key kaidons and commanders to bolster their efforts.

Today, those efforts were focused squarely on the Mines of Shua’ree. The Banished had successfully managed to set up a rapid extraction site in one of the more remote quarry mouths—an impressive display of ruthless efficiency and cunning execution. It was an incursion that demanded an equally decisive response, but unfortunately deft coordination was not a trait Sangheili forces were able to muster in sufficient quantities these days.

Instead, Arkad Nar ‘Kulul had opted to enact a combined arms operation, attaching four Spartans from Jorogumo to a Swords taskforce led by Fahl ‘Nto and Orim ‘Kassan, a SpecOps warrior in service to the Arbiter.

The mission called for Fahl to lead an advance scout team that included two of the Spartans and a Kig-Yar named Dahks. As part of their integration into local forces, each of the Spartans had been given a Sangheili name—not quite a title and not quite a nickname, but terms that would give each human soldier a unique identity and stronger sense of inclusion among their ranks.

Fahl tilted his head as he surveyed one of the Spartans, the one they called Trell, who was looking through the scope of a rangefinder.

“What do you see?”

Trell’s voice came back through their helmet speaker. “At least two docking platforms. Regular cycle of fork-buckets coming in and out.”

Fahl’s mandibles twitched at Trell’s colloquial mention of the Banished siege-haulers. Every flight out could mean hundreds of the enemy alliance’s warriors armed with restocked needle-launchers.

“So much bounty.” The screeching statement came from Dahks. “Need no scope to see thiss.”

Dahks was unique among his kind, and Fahl was one of very few individuals who knew the Jackal’s past as a former member of the Jha’kaar—a Kig-Yar order of long-range assassins rumored to be able to remove a target’s head off their shoulders... from a nearby moon. Such exaggerated attributions did nothing to diminish Dahks’s true skills, however, and lately the Ruuhtian mercenary had taken up a particular fondness for *human*-built sniper rifles, resulting in more than a few lively discussions with Trell on best practices and past accomplishments.

The voice of Glyyss, another Spartan, broke in. “Nobody’s bending your quills, Dahks. Besides, we have more than one way to get a better look at things.”

Glyyss tapped two command buttons on a wrist-mounted survey drone and the small machine quickly departed, its flight trajectory heading straight for the mouth of one of the quarry caves.

Fahl stood up and placed the wide-crested helmet of his ivory raid harness back over his head. He had developed an odd fondness for the way in which Glyyss always returned the Kig-Yar's needling with fair measure. "Dahks, sync your optics to the Spartan drone—they will be your eyes inside. Remain here as overwatch but keep communication channels active."

"Ready to flag in Jaarov and Zhinn?" Glyyss asked, already prepared to ping the other two Spartans on the operation.

"Yes." Fahl confirmed. "Let them know that we will be in position shortly and that Orim can bring his Phantom in—our time will be narrow."

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SCORRIN'S BLADE

"Can you confirm its authenticity, 'Tylk?" Mahkee was taking no chances when it came to ensuring the secure transfer of information regarding groundside operations.

"The signature is confirmed, Shipmistress. Orim 'Kasaan is aboard the vessel of origin."

Mahkee nodded a simple approval. "Contact the summit-masters, ensure we have Banshee talons in a ready formation at the appropriate coordinates."

Her mind began to weigh the potential outcomes of their groundside efforts and how they might inform their next tactics in the grander scope of the conflict. She had barely begun calculating probability metrics when her bridge crew interjected once more.

“Shipmistress, we are receiving another transmission,” said Xelq, who paused and tilted his head in momentary confusion. “From the shipmaster of the Banished dreadnought...”

Mahkee braced herself for what was no doubt going to be an enlightening conversation.

“Put it through.”

The holograph of Suban and *Ghost of Barolon* disappeared and was replaced by a bulky, hunched figure clad in golden armor. A *Sangheili*... She had expected a Jiralhanae to be shipmaster of such a vessel, as dreadnoughts were not simply devastating occupational powerhouses, but since the razing of the Oth Sonin system they had come to represent something of a cultural monument to their species.

And the haughty look of satisfaction from the Banished shipmaster, whose head was tilted slightly upwards, told her that she had let this momentary surprise show through slightly parted jaws.

“Greetings, Shipmistress,” he said, as calmly and casually as if he were checking up on a friend. *“I am Orna ‘Fulsam, High Warlord of the Banished.”*

“I do not know of you, and am unmoved by any such title.” Mahkee responded, her tone clipped but not yet disrespectful. “What is it you want?”

“By now, you have undoubtedly grasped the extent of our current forces and firepower, and you know that there is no victory to be had through conventional battle.”

Mahkee held Orna’s gaze. “Your fleet possesses certain advantages, that is true. I hope you did not trouble my preparations to counter them just to inform me of this.”

“No,” Orna said. “I have come to ask you to avoid further unnecessary bloodshed of our own kind.”

“Peace talks with a traitor?” Mahkee narrowed her eyes. “So you have come here to jest?”

“We need not be foes. Step aside, give us Suban, and your forces shall be spared. Better yet, pledge your allegiance to the Banished, and the only ones that need perish are the demons that desecrate the ground of Suban.”

If nothing else, Mahkee had to admire ‘Fulsam’s audacity.

“The Spartans?” she asked.

“The humans,” Orna spoke the name as if he had choked up bile. “They are the true architects of the Bleeding Years, along with the Arbiter who calls them allies and invites them to our home to solve his own problems.”

“Your hatred is tinged with madness, Shipmaster,” Mahkee said pityingly.

“You do not sense the truth of it?” Orna stood straighter, and Mahkee resigned herself to endure whatever speech the shipmaster had prepared.

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Suban The Mines of Shua’ree

The plan relied on precision. It had to.

The first task at hand was removing the small perimeter patrol near the mouth edge of the mining site. Using his own line of sight and additional feeds from the Spartan’s survey drone, Dahks had marked the first two targets, one each for Fahl and Glyyss. Trel had taken up a second

vantage point to ensure overlapping fields of sniper fire in tandem with Dahks, but at a closer proximity in case the situation called for more direct involvement.

Fahl crouched behind a small rock formation and waited for his prey to come within striking distance. It wasn't long before a Sangheili mercenary stepped forward just close enough. The Banished Elite tried to react, but by the time he reached for his plasma pistol Fahl had buried a wrist-mounted energy dagger deep into the mercenary's neck, indigo blood casting a spattered mist on the Evocati's pale armor.

A quick glance up confirmed that Glyyss had successfully neutralized their own target as well. With the outermost lookouts removed, Fahl initiated the next phase of the plan.

“Certify stage completion with *Scorin's Blade*, talons are free.”

The response from the comms marshal aboard *Scorin's Blade* was nearly immediate. “*Confirmed, honor to 'Nto. Wings Zeshk and Siqtar are on approach.*”

Moments later, the telltale wail of several Banshee attack flyers could be heard, but without the forward lookouts scanning the skies, the Banished response would be slightly delayed.

The Banshees opened fire with plasma cannons and fuel rod guns, both talons targeting the siege-haulers that were primed on the pads and freshly laden with raw *kemuksuru*. The resulting detonations were dramatic and caused immediate chaos within the mine itself. Banished warriors scurried through corridors and across gantries, furious but also confused in the immediate aftermath.

It was a confusion made all the more intense when the first sniper shots rang out.

“Headbursts cossst exxtraa.” Dahks gleefully exclaimed over comms as he and Trel took turns removing Banished pieces from the gameboard, alternating long-range fire into the mouth of the mine. Banished soldiers desperately tried to locate the source of the shots, but found the process difficult in the midst of the maelstrom.

“Orim... you’re clear.” Fahl’s latest communication was directed at Orim ‘Kasaan, whose Phantom had been hiding in the lower depths of the quarry until the opportunity was at hand. Moments later, the Phantom rose up to meet the cave mouth, its doors opening to reveal at least a dozen Sangheili warriors fiercely loyal to the Arbiter. Among them were two more Spartans from Jorogumo—Jaarov and Zhinn—ready to take the fight directly to the Banished.

As the forces departed the Phantom, each set immediately to the task at hand. They were easily outnumbered, but the Swords had taken advantage of the chaos and surprise to even the playing field as much as possible.

Jaarov and Zihnn had eliminated several enemy soldiers and were already engaged with the next incoming wave. They were joined by a hulking Elite named Koal ‘Mal, whose hunched form and slightly broader physique belied his deft skills with an energy sword. ‘Mal hailed from a lineage torn asunder by betrayal and civil strife, their keep in a constant state of upheaval and vacillating allegiance. It fueled his rage to an impressive degree, and it wasn’t difficult to recognize the somber joy he took with each traitorous Sangheili he plunged his blade into. Allying with the Banished was a choice he could not abide, and Fahl could not help but sympathize with how difficult this ongoing conflict was for Koal ‘Mal.

It was no surprise, of course, that the bulk of the local Banished forces they engaged with *were* Sangheili. The *teroks* weren’t just at the doorstep, they were already sleeping at the foot of the bed.

However, despite all this, while his own kind were indeed the tip of the Sanghelios spear, the truth was that at the beating heart of any Banished endeavor was the clenched fist of a Jiralhanae loyal to Atriox—today would be no different.

“All your antics... but all for nought.” A Jiralhanae’s bellowing could be heard before Fahl had actually seen him.

As Fahl turned around, a massive chieftain in Banished-liveried armor emerged from under one of the catwalks that crisscrossed the tunnels. He was flanked by two Brute Captains, each with a charged plasma tosser aimed in Fahl’s general direction.

Orim’s voice came over Fahl’s comms link. *“Chieftain Ipso—it’s no surprise to see him so directly involved. We’ve had several teams tailing his extended pack, and it never takes long for us to lose his scent. He will not be a trivial opponent.”*

Fahl’s attempted response was cut short once more by the chieftain.

“How does it feel? To see your world burn... and for your own kind to be holding the match while we bask in its glow?”

“You speak like one with experience in such a thing.” Fahl responded, though he knew such a retort carried little weight in the immediate age. The Jiralhanae *had* once been the architects of their own decline, but this truth had no tangible relevance in the moment—the fact was, Ipso was *right*, but Fahl would never offer the satisfaction of confirming so. “Have you become more comfortable with wielding words than heaving a hammer?”

The chieftain bellowed in laughter. “An excellent question to be sure.” The Jiralhanae bared his tusks in a triumphant smile. “Why don’t we find its answer?”

The two captains opened fire, their Ravagers splashing searing hot plasma across the quarry floor, prompting Fahl to dive into an evasive roll. Three allied Sangheili warriors leapt to his aid and engaged the Brutes, catching one in the shoulder with well-placed plasma from a pulse carbine.

Moments later the same Swords operative was smeared across the nearby rock face by the force of Ipso's gravity hammer.

Leveraging every bit of his vast experience, Fahl used cunning and more than a few deft maneuvers to maintain whatever advantage he could. All the while, the firefight continued to rage around him, each warrior intensely occupied with a constant flow of enemy engagement.

And finally, after several minutes—and several decades—the extent of Fahl 'Nto's time-honed skill came up just short.

He took a dull Ravager blade to the shoulder as he thrust his energy dagger through the second captain's mouth, but the exchange cost Fahl time he didn't have.

The sudden impact of the chieftain's swift kick to the chest sent Fahl sprawling. He landed hard, his helmet dislodged and tumbled away. He had only just made it back to his knees when the shadow of his enemy made him look up.

Dazed, Fahl felt Ipso's massive form looming over him, his hammer at the ready.

And Fahl 'Nto realized his time had finally come.

He was a warrior; he had known it would happen eventually.

As Ipso roared, bringing the weapon up and back down in a swift circular arc, Fahl knew with absolute certainty it would reach him.

But yet, the strike failed to arrive.

A flash of cobalt armor darted into view and Fahl found himself face to visor with a Spartan.

Glyyss.

A split second later the sickening sound of metal on metal met Fahl's ears as Ipso's hammer blade cleaved through the Spartan's alloy armor and lodged in their back. Fahl saw red blood begin to pool on the other side of Glyyss's visor.

"Why?" Fahl asked, knowing an answer would not come.

Glyyss's body jerked as Ipso attempted to pull the hammer free, but the chieftain was forced to relinquish his grip to avoid the incoming plasma cannon fire pouring through the cave mouth. The Swords Phantom had returned and had successfully begun to apply adequate suppressive fire to cover a desperate egress.

By the time Jaarov and Zhinn arrived to carry what remained of their fallen comrade, Ipso was already lost from view.

A shimmer appeared next to Fahl as a cloaked Orim 'Kasaan implored his friend to get to his feet and back to the dropship before it was too late.

"We cannot leave!" The protest came from Koal 'Mal, his armor soaked in the blood of his own kind. "If we give quarter here, we will surely lose Shua'ree to the Banished. The blood spilled here will have been for naught!"

"There are many things that distinguish us from the Banished in this conflict," Fahl spoke through fractured mandibles, "and *kemuksuru* is not one of them. We will return when the time is right."

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SCORRIN'S BLADE

"...Humanity is the ruinous common thread at the heart of this galaxy."

Mahkee wasn't sure how long Orna had been speaking—it was likely only a few moments but felt like it might as well have been months.

Orna's relentless diatribe continued unfettered. *"With the Arbiter's failure to secure the first of the sacred rings, the humans began to unravel everything we worked so hard to achieve. It was the humans who destroyed Saepon'kal, wiping out a combined fleet that would have seen the Sangheili emerge as the dominant power in the galaxy, thus forcing us to collude with the vermin to defeat the Prophet of Truth. It was the humans' own meddling that brought about the Bleeding Years, the state of Vadam itself is scarred with the evidence. Even now, their own creations rebelled against them because they were built to live in shackles they sought to break. Do you not see? We are living in their battle-song, Shipmistress, and the Arbiter's guilt is so great that he would allow them to swarm across the galaxy just to soothe his conscience."*

Mahkee could not deny that there were elements of truth within the shipmaster's words. Humans had emerged from the Covenant empire's ashes not simply as survivors, but their swift race to recover had seen them rise from their unexpected victory with a certain arrogance as they proclaimed themselves giants.

Indeed, many dark rumors persisted about the Office of Naval Intelligence, the clandestine human agency that moves mountains in the shadows, and its involvement in the events that led to Jul 'Mdama's emergence as heir to the Covenant.

The truth, however, was undoubtedly far more complex than ‘Fulsam was presenting it. If the calculated actions of individuals moving in the shadows were enough to condemn an entire species, then Mahkee herself would be forced to fall upon her own blade for the atrocities committed by the Covenant.

“Yet you have joined the Banished,” she retorted, “which allies *with* humans, rather than one of the many Covenant remnant groups.”

“Even vermin can prove useful. They are so easy to turn against each other.”

“Then perhaps they are not so different from Sangheili.”

“Think on my words, Shipmistress. I shall leave my offer open to you until our next round of battle,” ‘Fulsam flexed his jaws. *“And I have a request that you pass a message to your fleetmaster from Atriox himself.”*

“What message would you have me trouble Fleetmaster ‘Kulul with?”

The hologram of Orna ‘Fulsam began to fade as he spoke his concluding words.

“Tell him that Let ‘Volir sends his regards.”