

HALO

Alex Garland 2/6/05

A series of scorched snapshots.

Fragments. As memory.

This is MASTER CHIEF'S DREAM.

OPEN ON a SPARTAN HELMET, and a REFLECTION in its visor.

In the reflection, we see buildings. The design and architecture of the buildings tell us this is the distant future.

And twin suns tell us this is not Earth. The suns are low in the sky, and bathing the landscape blood red.

SNAP BACK to show the full figure of the SPARTAN.

Seven foot tall, clad head-to-toe in MJOLNIR armor, holding an MA5B ASSAULT RIFLE - MASTER CHIEF.

SNAP BACK AGAIN to reveal, behind MASTER CHIEF, another fifty SPARTAN WARRIORS.

All the SPARTANS have their gaze directed at the skies...

... where a vast shadow or cloud is eclipsing the twin suns.

A shadow which resolves itself into literally thousands of COVENANT DROP-SHIPS.

CUT TO -

A BATTLEFIELD.

The buildings are now destroyed. Skeletal steel frames push from rubble, providing only a suggestion of the structures that once stood. Across this wasteland, the SPARTANS and the COVENANT are locked in ferocious combat.

The SPARTANS are super-warriors. Combat machines - except that beneath their armor is genetically-refined human flesh and blood.

Despite their physical size, they are *fast*. As we watch them TURN-AIM-FIRE, the speed of their reactions is unnatural. They seem fuelled by nitrous oxide and amphetamines.

And there is something HYPNOTIC about the way they fight. Amidst the chaos, there are *patterns*. Across the battlefield, we can see PRECISE MOVEMENTS echoed from SPARTAN to SPARTAN. The same motion in the way a weapon is raised, the leap and roll to avoid an explosion.

The impression is of method within the madness of no-holds barred combat. The SPARTAN warrior training is embedded deep within them. Almost coded.

The COVENANT provide a contrast. Among the various species that make up the alien ranks, we can see the tall and regal ELITES, the massive HUNTERS, the gorilla-sized GRUNTS, the thin and feral JACKALS.

And they all fight with their own brand of specialized ULTRA-VIOLENCE. Less controlled than their human enemy, they are zealots, rabid. They roar as they charge, plasma blazing from their weaponry. In close quarters, they tear and rip and claw.

Many more of the alien warriors are falling and dying. But they can afford it. In comparison to the SPARTANS, the COVENANT are far, far greater in number.

As we watch the scene unfold, something becomes clear. The tide of the battle is turning inexorably against the humans.

CUT TO -

MASTER CHIEF maintaining a barrage of fire as the SPARTANS to the left and right of him are lacerated by plasma fire.

CUT TO -

A SPARTAN as a plasma grenade sticks to his chest. He doubles up to protect his brothers - then flies apart as the grenade explodes.

CUT TO -

Another SPARTAN walking: dazed, blackened, blood-smeared, half his armor blown from his body, half his arm hanging useless at his side.

CUT TO -

A group of THREE SPARTANS driving a WARTHOG VEHICLE - one driving, one on shotgun, one on the rear canon - as they break ranks to CHARGE the enemy...

... then skid, roll and die under a rain of fire.

Here, and throughout, the combat feels real. Hard, bloody, and brutal.

CUT TO -

The city burning.

CUT TO -

The twin suns blazing.

CUT TO -

A black screen, and sudden silence. Over this, a caption appears:

CAPTION
Year 2552. A coalition of alien species, the Covenant, are waging a genocidal holy war against mankind.

The caption fades, to be replaced by:

CAPTION
Mankind is losing.

Then FADE UP TO -

EXT. OUTER SPACE

A constellation of stars, thickening into a belt of Milky Way.

In the foreground is curve of a gas-giant PLANET.

And orbiting the planet, there is what appears to be a vast metal ring: the circumference of a small moon, rotating slowly.

It's beautiful and peaceful. Poised in space.

Even from this distance, we can just make out a strange feature of the metallic band.

The interior is a wrap-around landscape, made up of the same foliage-greens, water-blues and dust-yellows we know from views of our own planet. It is as if someone has cut a strip from Earth and lined the inside of this artificial world...

TITLE:

HALO

A moment later, the tranquility is broken...

... by a flickering burst of light, a rip in space.

Out of the fissure, a human-built battle-cruiser appears.

EXT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN

Hulking, grey, massive - a great block of a space-ship, as solid as a concrete bomb-shelter, designed purely for war.

On the side of the battle-cruiser is its name: PILLAR OF AUTUMN.

And on the underside of its snub nose, a portal, behind which is the bridge...

... where a man stands, gazing out. The commander of this vessel: CAPTAIN KEYES.

INT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN/BRIDGE

CAPTAIN KEYES looks out at the planet and its ring-moon. Behind him, the bridge crew are at their posts, manning the flight decks.

A moment, as CAPTAIN KEYES surveys this scene.

Then:

CAPTAIN KEYES

Cortana.

None of the bridge crew respond. Instead, he is replied by a female voice - the voice of the Pillar Of Autumn's AI.

CORTANA

Yes, sir.

CAPTAIN KEYES

Two questions. Where the Hell are we, and did we lose them?

CORTANA

We made a blind jump, sir. I'm scanning the constellations now to get a fix on our position.

(beat)

As for whether we lost them...

CAPTAIN KEYES

Don't bother. I can see the answer
for myself.

THROUGH THE BRIDGE PORTAL we can see multiple SLIP-SPACE
fissures, similar to the one from which Pillar Of Autumn
appeared.

And through each fissure, COVENANT CAPITAL SHIPS are
appearing.

The face of CAPTAIN KEYES is stone. Unreadable.

CORTANA

Sir - at least we've drawn them
away from Earth.

CAPTAIN KEYES

How long until they're all over us?

CORTANA

Ninety seconds.

CAPTAIN KEYES

Then time is on our side. Combat
alert alpha.

CORTANA

Copy, sir. I'm already on it.

INT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN/LOWER DECK

An alert sounds throughout the ship.

CORTANA

(over ship-wide intercom)
All hands to combat posts. All
hands to combat posts. Prepare to
repel boarders.

On the lower deck, ENGINEERS and MEDICS scramble to position.
MARINES grab hardware from weapon racks, pulling on helmets
and flak jackets.

In the middle of the commotion, one group of soldiers stand
as a contrast to the adrenaline and commotion. An oasis of
calm. This is MAJOR SILVA and his men, the HELLJUMPERS - the
special-forces unit stationed on the Pillar of Autumn.

But closing in on MAJOR SILVA, his calm exterior seems
suddenly misleading. There's something burning behind his
eyes. Something not quite sane.

MAJOR SILVA
Helljumpers. You heard it.
There's a shit storm coming.

HELLJUMPERS
(shout as one)
Sir, yes SIR.

MAJOR SILVA regards them a couple of beats. Then smiles.

MAJOR SILVA
Let's spill blood.

EXT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN

From the Pillar Of Autumn, fighter craft spill from the flight bays, to intercept the incoming Covenant craft.

INT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN/BRIDGE

CAPTAIN KEYES looks out as the stream of tiny fighter craft, dwarfed in both size and number by the approaching enemy vessels. The first of them are already being engaged by Covenant fighters.

The battle has begun. But CAPTAIN KEYES is looking beyond it, to HALO.

CAPTAIN KEYES
Cortana - what is that structure ahead?

CORTANA
Unknown. Artificial.

CAPTAIN KEYES
A space-station?

CORTANA
Negative.

CAPTAIN KEYES
Covenant?

CORTANA
Negative, based on current database of Covenant structures.

(puzzled beat)
And... there's something strange.
It's nitrogen and oxygen-rich.
Life supporting.

(MORE)

CORTANA (cont'd)
 And it was obviously built by
someone.
 (processing beat)
 But no sentient life-forms appear
 on scan.

KEYES nods.

CAPTAIN KEYES
 Oxygen-rich is all I need to know.
 Get us close. I want to be within
 lifeboat range.

CORTANA
 On approach vector now.

CAPTAIN KEYES
 And Cortana.

CORTANA
 Sir?

CAPTAIN KEYES
 It's time we woke our war-dog.

CUT TO -

MASTER CHIEF'S DREAM

We are back under the blood-red twin suns.

This is CLOSE QUARTERS COMBAT with the COVENANT.

And MASTER CHIEF seems to be alone in this fight. The last
 of the SPARTANS.

He fires into the faces and chests of the Covenant troops at
 near point-blank range. He is completely surrounded by the
 aliens. Beneath his feet is what appears a tangled carpet of
 bodies.

Then the image starts to bleach.

To WHITE OUT.

INT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN/CRYO-STORAGE CHAMBER

From the WHITE OUT, an image resolves.

It is as seen from MASTER CHIEF'S POV, from the inside of a
 CRYO STORAGE CHAMBER, looking out.

And looking in, the somewhat fearful faces of two CRYO ENGINEERS.

INT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN/CRYO-STORAGE HOLD

CRYO ENGINEER

Holy Christ. Would you look at the size of it.

SUPPORT ENGINEER

Him. There's a man in there.

The SUPPORT ENGINEER is checking the life-systems monitor.

SUPPORT ENGINEER

Low-level systems reading positive.
Higher systems coming online.
(final check)
Blood is hot. He's good to go.

The door to the CRYO-STORAGE CHAMBER cracks its seal, then rises open.

The two men wait for the huge SPARTAN to show a sign of life.

CRYO ENGINEER

(whispers, to Support
Engineer)
So what do we call 'him'?

SUPPORT ENGINEER

Sir.

CRYO ENGINEER

Uh... sir? Are you awake?

MASTER CHIEF stirs.

A beat.

Then SUDDENLY the SPARTAN lunges forwards, reflexively, snapped into consciousness.

Equally reflexively, the two ENGINEERS jump back.

MASTER CHIEF reaches out to place a hand either side of the Cryo-Chamber, then steps out.

A moment as he surveys his surroundings. Looking to the left, then the right. Then down at the two men.

He towers over them, and they seem to shrink under the blank gaze of his visor as he speaks his first words:

MASTER CHIEF
What are my orders?

INT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN

MASTER CHIEF is moving fast through the Pillar of Autumn. As he runs, the entire ship is vibrating and shaking from the Covenant attack.

Ahead, an explosion rips through heavy blast doors, tearing them open. On the other side of the blast doors a furnace-like fire is raging.

CORTANA
(over ship-wide intercom)
Imminent breach in sectors seven
and twelve. All available combat
and medical units, move to secure.

MASTER CHIEF ducks through an ACCESS TUNNEL, emerging back into a ROUTE CORRIDOR...

INT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN/ROUTE CORRIDOR

... where a handful of MARINES are crouched behind a makeshift barricade, in an intense fire fight.

CORTANA
(over ship-wide intercom)
Breach in sectors eight, nine and
twelve.

On the other side of the barricade, at the far end of the ROUTE CORRIDOR, we get our first glimpse of the alien COVENANT race.

But through the smoke and plasma fire, a glimpse is all it is - shadow figures of various sizes, advancing.

Several of the Marines are already down.

One is wounded - screaming, sliding himself backwards along the floor, leaving a thick wet smear of red. Two others lie dead.

From the weight of incoming plasma, it is clear the Marines' position is going to be overwhelmed.

A SERGEANT blocks MASTER CHIEF'S way.

SERGEANT

Sir! We need your assistance here!

MASTER CHIEF turns, assessing the situation. Then he takes the SERGEANT'S ASSAULT RIFLE and two GRENADES from the SERGEANT'S belt clip...

... and steps up to the barricade.

Beneath him, a MARINE CORPORAL crouches, holding an M6D PISTOL in his hand. The CORPORAL'S name-tag reads JENKINS.

JENKINS looks up at MASTER CHIEF, who stands almost motionless - back to the barricade, ASSAULT RIFLE lowered. As if he is *listening*.

Then the Spartan moves out from cover.

Fast. Fluid.

He tosses both grenades.

As they bounce down to the far end of the corridor, he raises the assault rifle.

Four bursts empty the clip. He's firing only at shadows, targets we can hardly see.

As soon as the clip empties, almost as if timed, there is the double detonation of the two grenades.

Smoke and silence.

Then from smoke, a GRUNT appears.

The foot-soldier of the Covenant army. Normally - stocky, broad, powerful.

But this one is dazed. And badly wounded. Blue blood is splashing from his torso.

MASTER CHIEF reaches down and takes the CORPORAL'S M6D PISTOL.

He glances at the handgun - and sees that the Corporal has customized it. Carved into the metal are the words: NOTHING PERSONAL.

MASTER CHIEF'S fist closes around the grip. Then he raises the pistol, and uses it to put a single round through the head of the wounded GRUNT.

As the GRUNT drops, MASTER CHIEF offers the pistol back.
But the CORPORAL shakes his head.

CORPORAL JENKINS
(awestruck)
Keep it.

MASTER CHIEF nods.

From this point on, this M6D is always MASTER CHIEF'S handgun.

Then the Spartan turns to the SERGEANT, and tosses the assault rifle to him.

MASTER CHIEF
More will come. Take your wounded
and fall back to a new position.
Now.

INT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN/BRIDGE

Commotion on the bridge, as the FLIGHT DECK CREW desperately try to keep abreast of the collapsing ship systems.

FLIGHT DECK CREWMAN
Primary thrust engines off-line.
Massive pressure loss on four port-
side decks, six-through-nine.

Only CAPTAIN KEYES and the voice of CORTANA register a tone of objective calm.

CORTANA
They're using our lifeboat airlocks
to attach their boarding craft.

CAPTAIN KEYES
Blocking our way out as they make
their way in. Smart bastards.

FLIGHT DECK CREWMAN
Sir! We've lost main canon!

At this moment, MASTER CHIEF enters. The Spartan is so tall that he has to duck to pass through the bridge entrance.

MASTER CHIEF approaches CAPTAIN KEYES and salutes.

MASTER CHIEF
Reporting as ordered, sir.

CAPTAIN KEYES

Good to see you, Master Chief. Let me get you up to speed: we're in the shit.

MASTER CHIEF simply nods.

CAPTAIN KEYES

So here's what going to happen. You're going to get Cortana off this ship and keep her safe from the enemy.

CORTANA

(cutting in)

Uh - sir?

CAPTAIN KEYES

The Pillar of Autumn is going down. And you're not going down with it.

CORTANA

But you are?

CAPTAIN KEYES

I'm going to keep a skeleton crew and land on the object we've found. But destruction or capture of the shipboard AI is not an option.

CORTANA

Sir, as a tactical point, your best bet to land this ship is me.

CAPTAIN KEYES

(cutting in hard)

As a tactical point, Cortana, if the Covenant capture you, they'll learn everything. Force deployment, system schematics, weapons research. Not to mention the location of planet Earth. Now are you going to make me invoke an override command, or just do as you're told?

CORTANA'S answer is preempted by a detonation that rocks the bridge. Wherever the explosion was, it feels close.

CORTANA

Preparing for a hard transfer, sir.

INT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN/LOWER DECK

MAJOR SILVA and the HELLJUMPERS are locked in their own savage fire-fight - hunched behind cover, keeping up a steady barrage of suppression fire.

The way they fight is qualitatively different from the MARINES. There is no sense of panic in the combat. No screaming as they take a hit. No scrabbling for a reload.

CAPTAIN KEYES

(over ship-wide intercom)

All units, this is your Captain speaking. I'm giving the order to abandon ship. Repeat, abandon ship.

MAJOR SILVA

God damn.

CAPTAIN KEYES

(over ship-wide intercom)

Take lifeboats, drop-ships, any means of escape available. Regroup on the ring. We're taking the fight planet-side.

MAJOR SILVA stands, apparently oblivious to the plasma fire that now flies around him - and yells at his Special Forces troops.

MAJOR SILVA

You heard the man! Solid ground - just how we like it!

HELLJUMPERS

Sir, yes sir!

INT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN/BRIDGE

MASTER CHIEF stands with CAPTAIN KEYES...

... who uses his fingerprint to unlock and open a section of the central bridge console.

Inside is a rectangular object, slim as a CD case, the size of credit card. Almost translucent, it glows softly. Delicate light strands flicker, like blood moving through capillaries. The microcircuitry itself seems to shift like an X-ray of bones behind skin.

CAPTAIN KEYES

Look after her.

MASTER CHIEF takes the CORTANA CHIP and inserts it into a dock in his MJOLNIR armor - positioned in the back of his neck, the brain stem.

As the chip connects, his entire suit pulses with a single crackle of energy, as if recharging following a hit.

MASTER CHIEF

Yes, sir.

INT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN/ROUTE TO LIFEBOATS

MASTER CHIEF moves again through the Pillar of Autumn.

He is armed now with an MA5B assault rifle, making his way down a narrow SERVICE TUNNEL, dimly lit, lined with cabling.

Ahead is a main corridor to the LIFE BOATS. A bright frame at the end of the dark tunnel...

... into which steps a COVENANT SOLDIER.

It's an ELITE. Tall, armored, athletic. In a sense, the alien equivalent of the SPARTAN.

MASTER CHIEF freezes.

Perhaps the ELITE will move on again in a moment...

... but it doesn't.

MASTER CHIEF takes a cautious step. Then another.

It is surprising that the apparently heavy plated armor can allow for stealth, but either through his strength or the armor's design, MASTER CHIEF moves forwards silently.

The ELITE still doesn't move on, but neither does it hear him coming.

Now, just inside the door frame between the SERVICE TUNNEL and the MAIN CORRIDOR...

... MASTER CHIEF is close enough to reach out and touch the ELITE.

And that's exactly what he does.

Suddenly, a cobra strike - a classic game move, MASTER CHIEF strikes with the butt of his assault rifle, taking out ELITE'S shields...

... and as the ELITE staggers back, MASTER CHIEF empties half a clip into the alien's torso.

Thirty rounds fly through the gun in two seconds.

As the ELITE drops -

- in a continuous movement, MASTER CHIEF steps out into the MAIN CORRIDOR, switching to his M6D HANDGUN -

- to confront four Covenant GRUNTS.

MASTER CHIEF fires four times in rapid succession. Each shot finds its target. One of the Covenant foot-soldiers manages to get off a round - but only from squeezing his trigger as an involuntary death-reflex as he falls.

Back on the assault rifle, MASTER CHIEF turns to check his six...

... and the corridor is clear.

Immediately, MASTER CHIEF reloads.

CORTANA
(impressed)
Good work, Master Chief. I can
tell I'm in...

At the sound of CORTANA'S voice, MASTER CHIEF'S head cocks to the side - puzzled.

CORTANA
(trailing off)
... safe hands.

MASTER CHIEF taps the side of his head, as if checking his hearing.

CORTANA
... What are you doing?

MASTER CHIEF
Are you talking to me?

CORTANA
Who else would I be talking to?

MASTER CHIEF
Sounds like you're in my head.

CORTANA
Your suit is hardwired into your
neural network, and I'm hardwired
into your suit. I am in your head.
(beat)
Feels kind of empty in here.

MASTER CHIEF says nothing. Simply sets off again.

CUT TO:

INT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN/CORRIDOR OUTSIDE LIFEBOATS

LOCKED-OFF REVERSE ANGLE on a COVENANT position.

An ELITE, three JACKALS and four GRUNTS - with their backs to us as they fire down the smoke and fire-filled corridor ahead.

And suddenly a hail of rounds are coming our way -

- ripping through the Covenant, dropping and shredding them.

One last surviving GRUNT, screaming, turns to run towards us -

- and is shot in the back.

Falls.

As MASTER CHIEF comes through the haze towards us, we realize we have just seen what it is like to be on the receiving end of a SPARTAN attack.

Over his left shoulder, the SPARTAN is carrying a wounded MARINE. In his right hand, his assault rifle smokes.

Three more MARINES follow behind.

CORTANA
There's only one lifeboat left.

MASTER CHIEF
We're on it.

INT. LIFEBOAT

MASTER CHIEF slides the WOUNDED MARINE off his shoulder as another MARINE, a female Lieutenant, slips into the lifeboat cockpit.

MASTER CHIEF
Punch it.

FEMALE MARINE
Yes, sir.

She hits the LAUNCH button.

The door to the LIFEBOAT snap-seals shut - fast as the blink of an eye, with a power that would cut you in two if you were half-way through the hatch.

And a beat later, an explosive burst of acceleration rocks everyone as the LIFEBOAT is jettisoned from the Pillar of Autumn.

FEMALE MARINE
We're out of here.

EXT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN

External view as the tiny escape vessel powers away from its listing mother ship, through the swarm of Covenant ships, arcing down to the ring-world below.

INT. LIFEBOAT

From their seat harnesses, the MARINES gaze in wonder over the shoulder of the FEMALE LIEUTENANT as she pilots the craft down towards HALO.

MARINE
(at the sight)
Holy shit.

MARINE
What is that thing, Lieutenant?

FEMALE LIEUTENANT
Never saw anything like it.

MASTER CHIEF is showing no interest. Instead, he is kneeling over the WOUNDED MARINE, who is bleeding from the mouth, and has a mess of burned clothing and torn flesh around his stomach.

WOUNDED MARINE
(shaking)
I don't want to die. Oh God. Oh please.

The MASTER CHIEF takes the WOUNDED MARINE'S med-kit.

Pushing a compress over the soldier's appalling stomach wound, he jabs him in the neck with a HYPO.

MASTER CHIEF
(quiet)
You still in pain, soldier?

WOUNDED MARINE
(as the synthetic morphine hits)
No sir. No pain.

FEMALE MARINE
Heads up, everyone. This is it.
We're hitting the atmosphere in five.

EXT. LIFEBOAT

We follow the LIFEBOAT as it enters HALO'S interior curve.

With us and around us, we can see other LIFEBOATS from the Pillar of Autumn, following the same downward path, like a miniature meteor shower.

As we get closer to the landscape, we discover, jutting out of rolling hills and countryside, strange constructs. Metallic, alien designed, ancient. At first like lost and abandoned temple-structures...

... then seeming more like machinery, or parts of machinery. Iceberg-like, implying a colossal superstructure hidden beneath the ground level.

But aside from the evidence of design, and the lush plant-life, there is no sign of life. Nothing sentient. No movement, or sign of activity.

The world seems dead. Or frozen, in stasis.

But above all, peaceful.

And during this sequence, we have been almost lulled.

Hypnotised by the unfolding landscape.

Which provides a STARK and VIOLENT CONTRAST, as we -

CUT BACK TO:

INT. LIFEBOAT

The tiny vessel is shaking as if it's going to rip apart.

Over the roar of noise, the FEMALE MARINE is yelling:

FEMALE LIEUTENANT
*Air-brake failure! Air-brake
failure! They blew too early!*

CORTANA
Chief?

MASTER CHIEF
We'll be fine.

CORTANA
Fine? *We're not even strapped in!*

MASTER CHIEF stands within the bucking vessel, then reaches out both arms...

... and locks a fist around a hand-hold, each side of the craft.

FEMALE LIEUTENANT
*We're losing her! BRACE FOR
IMPACT! BRACE, BRACE, BRA -*

She is cut off as the impact comes.

No exterior shot - we stay inside the vessel throughout the duration of the crash-landing on HALO'S surface.

And it is savage.

First the initial strike.

Then the glass of the cockpit portal explodes inwards - firing lacerating shrapnel into the FEMALE MARINE.

Then the craft skews violently sideways, and begins to tumble.

Then it is rolling. Anything loose is flying around the cabin.

There is the sense of one final and devastating impact.

Then -

SNAP TO A BLACK SCREEN.

And -

FADE UP TO:

INT. LIFEBOAT

The LIFEBOAT lies on its side. Blood and smashed bodies tell us that none of the MARINES survived the crash.

MASTER CHIEF himself lies motionless.

CORTANA

Chief?

His armor flickers - a recharge.

CORTANA

Chief? Can you hear me?

MASTER CHIEF stirs.

MASTER CHIEF

I hear you.

CORTANA

At last. Can you move? The others, they... didn't make it.

EXT. HALO/VALLEY/LIFEBOAT - DAY

The rear hatch of the LIFEBOAT kicks open, and MASTER CHIEF steps out.

There is meadow grass beneath his feet.

He is in a valley, whose steep sides rise to sheer cathedral-like rock faces.

A river runs along the valley floor, then cuts into the bedrock, creating a deep waterfall at the far end.

CORTANA

(shock and awe)

Oh.

(beat)

Look.

MASTER CHIEF looks skywards, and sees an EXTRAORDINARY sight.

Not just the unnatural way in which, either side of their position, the massive interior of HALO curves up in a gradual incline, to rejoin the upper part of the ring a vast distance above...

... but also the PILLAR OF AUTUMN.

The battle cruiser is on its descent.

Trailing a colossal white plume of vapor.

A sound like innumerable jet-planes. Distant, yet overwhelming.

Behind the PILLAR OF AUTUMN, pursuing it, we can see the shadow shapes of the COVENANT ARMADA - maintaining a constant barrage of fire at the stricken vessel.

CORTANA

(quiet)

She's going down.

From MASTER CHIEF'S position, we track the Pillar of Autumn...

... until, many miles distant, further up the curve, seen through a blue atmosphere haze...

... she crash-lands on HALO'S surface.

Because of the distance, the sound is delayed by a few seconds, so the impact takes place in SILENCE.

And a few seconds after the sound comes a second shockwave, this one physical - a ripple through the actual surface of the ring.

MASTER CHIEF and CORTANA can SEE it coming before it hits them - shuddering out from the crash sight, racing around the ring curvature...

... until, with a roar of breaking rock and twisting metal, it passes under them.

Then is gone.

A beat.

CORTANA
I felt something.

MASTER CHIEF
It's called an earthquake.

CORTANA
No, something else.

MASTER CHIEF
Like what?

CORTANA
I don't know. I...

She breaks off.

Then - urgent.

CORTANA
Warning! I'm detecting multiple
Covenant drop-ships inbound!

EXT. HALO/VALLEY SIDE - DAY

From behind a rock-cluster high up the valley side, MASTER CHIEF watches a Covenant DROPSHIP lands by the crashed Lifeboat.

The HUD within his helmet provides a zoom function to enlarge the image.

The helmet is also equipped with DIRECTIONAL AUDIO, amplifying the sound of wherever they are pointed - meaning we can hear the sound of the Covenant talking in their alien language.

We watch as several ELITES and GRUNTS jump from the DROPSHIP, and head over to the crashed LIFEBOAT to investigate.

CORTANA
If we're lucky, the Covenant will believe that everyone died in the crash.

MASTER CHIEF

It would be useful to know what they're saying.

CORTANA

No problem. I can provide a translation directly into your neural web with only a point-two second delay.

A moment later, a heavily digitized translation of the alien language begins.

Two ELITES - a BLUE, and the higher ranking BLACK, discuss their find.

ELITE

Four inside. All dead. None to interrogate.

BLACK ELITE

Seek more.

As they talk, the GRUNTS are pulling the bodies of the MARINES out of the lifeboat.

The BLACK ELITE reaches down, and lifts one of the dead MARINES by the head - with only one hand.

BLACK ELITE

All this flesh is sacrilege.

He lets the MARINE fall.

BLACK ELITE

Burn it.

Immediately, the GRUNTS open fire on the corpses with FULLY CHARGED PLASMA PISTOLS.

MASTER CHIEF reacts by raising his M6D PISTOL, and lining up on the BLACK ELITE through HUD zoom-function.

CORTANA

Chief - no! The men are dead! Beyond saving - but there will be others who aren't.

MASTER CHIEF hesitates.

CORTANA

I've got a lifeboat beacon just two clicks from here.

(MORE)

CORTANA (cont'd)
If there are survivors, they need
our help *right now*.

Slowly, MASTER CHIEF lowers his gun.

MASTER CHIEF
(growls)
Lead me in.

He turns, and starts to move.

EXT. HALO/VALLEY/LIFEBOAT - DAY

The Covenant are heading back to the DROPSHIP - but not the BLACK ELITE.

He still stands by the LIFEBOAT and the charred remains of the MARINES, surveying the surrounding valley - as if he can almost sense that one of his enemy has managed to get away.

He walks away from the DROPSHIP, scanning.

Then pauses.

At his feet, by the riverbank, there is a single footprint in the wet earth.

A guttural noise emerges from the back of his throat, rising into a barked order.

The Covenant by the DROPSHIP freeze.

In Covenant tongue, the BLACK ELITE shouts a series of enraged commands.

Moments later, from the DROPSHIP'S central suspension-field, three GHOSTS emerge - light-weight scouting vehicles, each piloted by a single ELITE, armed with two plasma canons.

Hovering a couple of metres off the ground, the three GHOSTS bank in the direction of the BLACK ELITE'S jabbed arm, and accelerate away.

EXT. HALO/SUMMIT RIDGE - DAY

MASTER CHIEF moves fast, now on the high ridge pass between the valley he just left and the next one along.

CORTANA
It's not far. By my calculation,
we should be able to see them just
over this next...

She breaks off.

CORTANA
... Do you hear that?

MASTER CHIEF stops.

Through the wind rush, a high electronic whine...

MASTER CHIEF
I hear it.

He turns, just in time to see the first of the three GHOSTS rising over the crest behind him.

The GHOST opens fire - a moment too late to hit its target. MASTER CHIEF is already rolling to the side -

- ending in a crouch, assault rifle raised...

... and firing.

He finds his target. He empties a long burst into the oncoming GHOST, and just as he hits the end of the clip -

- the GHOST explodes.

But MASTER CHIEF has barely a second in which to register this. Because at the moment the FIRST GHOST explodes...

... the SECOND GHOST rams him full on.

It takes a second or two for MASTER CHIEF to work out what has happened.

Like a pedestrian hit by a car, MASTER CHIEF is now riding the front of the GHOST.

He's lost his assault rifle in the impact.

The ELITE pilot weaves the ghost from side to side in an attempt to shake MASTER CHIEF off.

CORTANA
CHIEF! BEHIND YOU!

MASTER CHIEF looks over his shoulder.

The GHOST'S pilot can't see because his view is blocked by MASTER CHIEF...

... but MASTER CHIEF can now see they are heading towards a sheer drop, off one of the cathedral rock faces into the valley below.

They are a second or two from launching into thin air.

MASTER CHIEF lunges forwards towards the PILOT, and grabs at the GHOST CONTROLS, yanking them to the left...

... the GHOST banks sideways just in time.

EXT. HALO/CLIFF EDGE - DAY

Now they are riding along the EDGE of the sheer drop...

... with MASTER CHIEF now hanging on to the side of the cockpit, trading punches with the ELITE PILOT.

One last vicious punch from MASTER CHIEF -

- and the ELITE'S head snaps sideways with a crunch of breaking neck.

But as the PILOT falls sideways in the cockpit, he jams into the control stick.

The GHOST pulls its nose back and skews off to the right.

MASTER CHIEF jumps clear -

- as the GHOST and PILOT fly off the rock face into an eight hundred foot drop to oblivion.

EXT. HALO/SUMMIT RIDGE - DAY

MASTER CHIEF lands hard.

Flat on his back in the soft earth...

... visor reflecting the sky.

A peaceful beat.

CORTANA

Chief?

MASTER CHIEF

I know.

(beat)

There's one more.

He sits up - leaving an imprint of his figure in the ground. He landed so hard that the earth beneath him was compressed by two inches.

Several metres away from him is the third and final GHOST.

It is strafing into position, about to attack.

MASTER CHIEF stands.

A beat on the two enemies, facing each other.

Then -

CUT TO:

EXT. HALO/MACHINERY CONSTRUCTION - DAY

A huge spire of metal pushes out from one of HALO'S lightly forested slopes.

Beneath it are lower complexes of machinery. Tubes and shafts - a fraction of some massive engine, mostly buried beneath the gently undulating swells of meadow.

And also beneath the metal spire is another LIFEBOAT, with MARINES fanned out around it - firing at a large number of advancing Covenant troops.

We join the MARINE group in the heat of battle. They are fighting well, working in pairs, laying down covering fire as they regroup and switch positions...

... but from the sheer number of Covenant troops, it is clear that this battle is one-sided.

WOUNDED MARINE

MEDIC!

SERGEANT

Watch the left flank! We've got more coming through the trees!

WOUNDED MARINE

MEDI -

The WOUNDED MARINE is cut off by a round from a plasma rifle, that burns out the side of his head.

MARINE

Ammo! Running low on ammo here!

MARINE
 (as a Covenant in his gun-
 sight drops)
Get up so I can kill you again!

MARINE
They're going to overrun us!

MARINE
Where's the back up?

MARINE
We don't have no back-up!

MARINE
 (panicking)
We're screwed, man! We're scre -

The PANICKING MARINE breaks off as a blur of movement FLIES over their heads.

A GHOST.

Piloted by the MASTER CHIEF.

Accelerating directly at the COVENANT troops, twin PLASMA CANONS blazing.

MARINE
 Whoa!

MARINE
 What the Hell is that?

SERGEANT
 The cavalry.

EXT. HALO/MACHINERY CONSTRUCTION - DAY

The aftermath of the battle.

Covenant dead lie scattered in sprays of blue blood.

The MEDIC patches up wounded MARINES. Four dead MARINES lie in a row. Uncovered. Gazing sightlessly at the sky.

MASTER CHIEF talks to the SERGEANT.

SERGEANT
 We need to regroup with other survivors. They must be scattered all over this ring.

MASTER CHIEF

Agreed. Have you made contact with any?

SERGEANT

Yes sir. A Pelican dropship pilot, name of Carol Rawley. Call-sign -

MASTER CHIEF

(cuts in)
- Foehammer? She's alive?

SERGEANT

Alive and inbound, sir.

CORTANA

Who's Foehammer?

MASTER CHIEF

A fine soldier. We go back.

CORTANA

(dry)
So I see. Your neural web just lit up like a Christmas tree.

MASTER CHIEF

What do you mean by that?

The SERGEANT looks confused.

SERGEANT

Uh - sir? Who are you talking to?

CORTANA

He can't hear me.

MASTER CHIEF

Oh, right.
(to the Sergeant)
No one.

CORTANA

(indignant)
No one?

MASTER CHIEF

I'm not saying you're no one.

SERGEANT

... I didn't think you were, sir.

MASTER CHIEF

No, not you.
(gives up)
Oh forget it.

MASTER CHIEF walks away from the still somewhat perplexed
SERGEANT.

He finds a place to sit at the foot of the METAL SPIRE.

After a short silence.

CORTANA

... Is this a quiet time?

MASTER CHIEF

It was.

CORTANA

Sorry.
(beat)
I get that it must be strange.
Having me with you like this.
It's... intimate.

Silence.

CORTANA

If it's any consolation, it's
pretty strange for me too. Sharing
a consciousness.

Silence.

CORTANA

I suppose you want to know if I can
tell what you're thinking.

MASTER CHIEF

Can you?

CORTANA

Kind of. I get... flashes.
Impulses.

(beat)
It's hard to describe.

MASTER CHIEF

So what am I thinking now?

CORTANA
 You're thinking what I'm thinking.
 (beat)
 What happened to Captain Keyes.

EXT. HALO/PILLAR OF AUTUMN - DAY

The PILLAR OF AUTUMN crash-site.

The great battle cruiser was never designed for a gravity environment. It lies now, at a slight angle, in a crater of its own making.

Behind it is a huge scar, gouged into the HALO landscape. Beneath the torn earth and powdered rock, we can see the metal interior of the ring.

In places, a tunnel system is exposed. Chambers, opened to the daylight.

And all around the crash-site, the COVENANT are swarming.

Listening to their language, the words themselves may be meaningless to us, but through their gestures and tone, the meaning behind the words somehow comes through.

The aliens are EXCITED, TRIUMPHANT at the destruction of the enemy vessel...

... but noticeably AGITATED and AFRAID of the tunnels, passages and chambers that the crash has revealed.

INT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN/BRIDGE

CAPTAIN KEYES stands in the destroyed bridge. He's bleeding from the head - but upright and focused.

Most of the FLIGHT CREW are dead - but there are some survivors. They are arming themselves, and barricading the entrance to the bridge.

CAPTAIN KEYES talks into the COMMS UNIT.

CAPTAIN KEYES
 Major Silva, do you have an ETA?

MAJOR SILVA
 (over comms link)
 Sir - we can see you from our
 position.
 (beat)
 (MORE)

MAJOR SILVA (cont'd)
 The Covenant are all over you.
 Must be a thousand troops.

CAPTAIN KEYES
 Understood. In the event of radio
 silence at my end, assume the
 transfer of command to you, Major.

A beat.

MAJOR SILVA
 (over comms link)
 Sir - I...

CAPTAIN KEYES
 (cuts in)
 Negative on futile rescue attempts.
 Am I clear?

MAJOR SILVA
 (over comms link)
 Crystal, sir.

CAPTAIN KEYES
 Then that's over. And out.

CAPTAIN KEYES hangs up the COMMS UNIT.

And AT THAT MOMENT -

- the BARRICADE to the bridge is blown apart by a cluster of
 PLASMA GRENADES.

FLIGHT DECK CREWMAN
They're here!

INT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN/BRIDGE

We are with the COVENANT forces as they swarm over the
 destroyed barricade and pour into the bridge.

We stay the entire time with a JACKAL: the slender, hunched,
 bird-like Covenant. The JACKAL advances with its comrades
 like a roman centurion, firing from and crouching behind the
 distorting window of an energy shield.

We follow the JACKAL as the remaining survivors of the FLIGHT
 DECK CREW are cut down. Slaughtered, under the storm of
 fire.

Until only CAPTAIN KEYES is left.

We watch as CAPTAIN KEYES backs away, emptying the clip of his M6D, jamming in another -

- but his position is entirely hopeless.

Down to his last bullet, surrounded, backed into a corner...

... he suddenly jams his pistol to the side of his head.

To kill himself, rather than be taken.

A beat.

Then:

COMMANDER KEYES

Damn it.

He swings the pistol back, and fires his last round...

... *RIGHT THROUGH THE HEAD of the JACKAL we have been following.*

A moment later, COMMANDER KEYES is swarmed.

INT. FOEHAMMER'S PELICAN DROPSHIP - DAY

MASTER CHIEF and the MARINES climb on board the Pelican-class dropship, and it lifts off from the METAL SPIRE.

There are many more MARINES jammed into the Pelican, from other lifeboats. Many are wounded, or smoke-blackened from battle. Some sit in silence. Some search through the faces for men from their platoon.

MASTER CHIEF makes his way through them, down the vessel to the cockpit...

... where FOEHAMMER is at the controls.

A first-rate drop-ship pilot. She has one tone of voice for all situations: a drawl, calm and even, whether taking heavy ground-fire or sharing a beer.

MASTER CHIEF

Thanks for the ride, Foehammer.

FOEHAMMER

Always a pleasure, Master Chief.
Glad you made it off the Autumn.

MASTER CHIEF
 (indicating the hold full
 of Marines)
 You've been busy.

FOEHAMMER
 We're spread pretty thin over the
 terrain. But I'm gathering them
 up. Major Silva and his
 Helljumpers have set up a base camp
 thirty klicks from here, so I've
 been shuttling back and forth.

MASTER CHIEF
 What are our numbers?

FOEHAMMER
 Better than you'd expect. We've
 got a fighting force.

MASTER CHIEF
 A fighting force is all we need.

EXT. HALO/BASE CAMP - DAY

The HELLJUMPERS and MARINES have been working fast
 constructing a workable base camp. There are at least two
 hundred men and women here, both SOLDIERS and ENGINEERS.

From what they took with them in their evacuation of the
 Pillar of Autumn, they have managed to put together:

A LANDING ZONE - from which FOEHAMMER is already lifting off
 again, even as another PELICAN comes in to land.

An AMMO DUMP - where MARINES queue to stock up their
 supplies.

*As they see MASTER CHIEF, the MARINES freeze, and stare.
 They've all heard rumors about the SPARTANS, but few have
 ever seen one.*

*One of them, we notice, is CORPORAL JENKINS - the soldier who
 gave MASTER CHIEF his M6D PISTOL at the barricade.*

CORPORAL JENKINS
 (calls out)
 How's that M6D working out for ya,
 sir?

MASTER CHIEF simply nods as he passes.

Once MASTER CHIEF is out of earshot -

MARINE

(whispers)

Holy shit, Jenkins - you know that
guy?

CORPORAL JENKINS

(casual)

We go back.

We move on to -

A makeshift MED CENTER - already struggling with the volume of wounded and dying. Through the open tent flap, we can see several emergency operations on-going.

A COMMS TENT - where several TRANSCOM OPERATORS attempt to coordinate the rescue of the various lifeboats and escape vessels dotted around HALO.

And a COMMAND CENTER - where the MAJOR SILVA and HELLJUMPERS have located themselves.

And it is also where MASTER CHIEF is headed.

EXT. HALO/BASE CAMP/COMMAND CENTER - DAY

Two HELLJUMPERS guard the entrance to the COMMAND CENTER. As MASTER CHIEF approaches, they block his way forwards.

MAJOR SILVA

Stand down, men. Let him through.

The two guards step aside, and MASTER CHIEF walks through.

MAJOR SILVA is standing with some of his senior officers - who regard MASTER CHIEF with a barely disguised hostility.

MAJOR SILVA

So. The Spartan.

(beat)

I understand you're carrying
Cortana.

MASTER CHIEF

Yes sir.

MAJOR SILVA
Unfortunately we don't have any hardware sufficient for you to dock her. So you'll be baby-sitting a while longer.

CORTANA
Baby-sitting?

MAJOR SILVA
Think you can handle that?

MASTER CHIEF
No problem, sir.

MAJOR SILVA nods.

MAJOR SILVA
Fine. Then I recommend you find a nice little spot to sit tight, rest up, and wait until we can relieve you of your duties.

A beat.

MASTER CHIEF
You want me to stay out of combat, sir?

MAJOR SILVA
That is correct. I want you to stay as far out as you can get.

MAJOR SILVA turns back to OFFICERS.

MAJOR SILVA
Dismissed, Spartan.

MASTER CHIEF doesn't move.

MAJOR SILVA looks back at him, face clouding.

MAJOR SILVA
You still here?

MASTER CHIEF
Sir - request information on the whereabouts of -

MAJOR SILVA
- Keyes? MIA. Everything else is need to know. And, before you ask, you don't need to know shit.

EXT. HALO/BASE CAMP - DUSK

Light is fading as MASTER CHIEF walks back across the camp.

CORTANA
What a meat-head.

MASTER CHIEF
He wants me out of combat to keep
you safe.

MASTER CHIEF stops walking. For a moment, he seems to rock slightly on his heels, as if dazed.

MASTER CHIEF
It's a sound decision.

Something seems strange about him - but CORTANA doesn't seem to have noticed.

CORTANA
I've met plenty like him. The
truth is, he enjoys war. If he
isn't putting down rounds, he isn't
living...

NOW she breaks off - because MASTER CHIEF has rocked again. For a moment, he looks like he is about to topple to the ground, heavy as a forest giant.

CORTANA
What the - Chief? Are you okay?

MASTER CHIEF
(quiet)
Yeah. I'm just running a little
low on blood.

EXT. HALO/BASE CAMP - DUSK

MASTER CHIEF has found a quiet place to sit, behind the MED CENTER, away from the bustle of the base camp.

In front of him is an open MED KIT.

We watch as MASTER CHIEF removes the BREAST PLATE of his armor.

Beneath is a black BODY-SUIT made of flexible material. And on this body suit, we can see various lacerations around his torso.

Through these lacerations, MASTER CHIEF'S torso is partially revealed, and we catch our first glimpse of MASTER CHIEF'S actual flesh.

His skin is colored an abnormal sunless snow-white. But it's hard to tell much more than that, given that each wound is thickly smeared with blood.

Some of the blood is congealed, almost black, like a cooled lava-flow.

Some is bright red and wet, welling from multiple injuries.

CORTANA

(shocked)

I didn't realize... your armor is intact...

MASTER CHIEF

The armor repairs itself. It's the stuff beneath that doesn't.

He reaches for the MED KIT.

MASTER CHIEF

Unless you help it along.

We watch as he begins to tend to himself. He uses sterile wipes to clean away the blood, pulls metal fragments from the wounds.

The most serious wound is on his side. A long slash, perhaps caused by the impact with the GHOST. It is from here that the blood is flowing most freely.

CORTANA

Chief - you're badly hurt! Just get one of the medics!

MASTER CHIEF

They've got enough to deal with.

He pushes with one gloved hand against the side wound.

MASTER CHIEF

Cracked rib. Maybe two. Doesn't feel like there's anything in there. Just need to...

He reaches again for the MED KIT.

MASTER CHIEF

... patch it up.

He pulls out what looks like a STAPLE GUN.

And in a sense, it is.

He puts it over the wound, squeezes the grip several times in rapid succession - and each time he squeezes, a METAL STAPLE fires into his flesh, then retracts, clamping the two side of the wound together.

When he has finished, he has a row of staples like suture stitches.

He exhales hard, and puts the STAPLE GUN down.

The whole process looks amazingly painful.

MASTER CHIEF

Huh.

CORTANA

... What?

MASTER CHIEF

Forgot the morphine.

FADE TO -

The same scene. MASTER CHIEF has replaced his breast-plate, and is now attaching a blood drip. It feeds into a purpose-made access point in his MJOLNIR armor, positioned on the underside of his forearm.

CORTANA

Simple as that, is it? Fill yourself back up, and you'll be ready to go. Just like replacing the fuel cell on a warthog.

MASTER CHIEF

Just like.

With the blood drip now in place, MASTER CHIEF lies down, helmet resting against a rock, chin against his chest.

CORTANA

You humans are *unbelievable*. You spend half your time thinking about how to make computers think like humans, and the other half trying to make humans act like machines. Sometimes I truly wonder what -

MASTER CHIEF
(cutting in)
Cortana.

CORTANA
... Yes?

MASTER CHIEF
I have a question.

CORTANA
Go ahead.

MASTER CHIEF
How do I turn you off?

Silence.

FADE TO:

MASTER CHIEF'S DREAM

A BURNING CITY.

Then -

TWIN RED SUNS.

Then -

MASTER CHIEF.

He is standing alone, surrounded by corpses, both SPARTAN and COVENANT.

The corpses fan around him in an outward pattern, like a forest whose trees have been felled by a central cataclysm.

A beat.

Then MASTER CHIEF lifts his hands...

... and REMOVES his helmet.

As implied when we saw him tending his wounds, his skin is bleached white. His hair is shaved to the scalp.

He gazes at the tableau of death and devastation as if he wants to see this scene unfiltered.

Then - on MASTER CHIEF'S face. A slight confusion. An awareness of another presence.

He turns -

- and behind him is a girl.

She could be in her twenties. But there's something very strange about her skin - stranger even than the skin of MASTER CHIEF.

It glows, softly, with a purplish blue light.

And both her skin and clothes have the same translucent quality as the CORTANA CHIP - flickering light strands like miniature blood vessels, shifting microcircuitry.

MASTER CHIEF

Who are you?

CORTANA

... You don't recognize me?

Beat.

CORTANA

And by the way. You can't turn me off.

MASTER CHIEF

Cortana. What are you doing here?

CORTANA

I'm in your head. If you dream, I dream.

MASTER CHIEF turns away. Back to the bodies.

CORTANA

What is this place?

MASTER CHIEF

You mean: what was this place.

(beat)

The largest interplanetary human colony. One hundred and sixty four thousand died here. Men, women, children.

CORTANA

... Planet Reach.

MASTER CHIEF

(confirming)

Planet Reach.

Silence.

MASTER CHIEF
We were supposed to defend it.

CORTANA
Who?

MASTER CHIEF
The Spartans.
(beat)
But we failed.

He looks down at a dead SPARTAN at his feet, visor smashed, armor half blown away.

CORTANA
... How did you survive?

MASTER CHIEF
Foehammer. It was just me, a pile of bodies, and a Covenant armada. But she came back for me. Said she didn't leave soldiers...

In the background, distant, there is the sound of a scream.

MASTER CHIEF
... behind.

MASTER CHIEF breaks off, listening.

Silence.

Then -

- the scream comes again.

Deep, guttural, desperate. And not human. But not quite animal either.

The scream grows louder, and louder.

CUT TO:

EXT. HALO/BASE CAMP - NIGHT

MASTER CHIEF wakes with a start.

While he has slept, night has fallen.

And the scream is still continuing. If anything, it is even louder and more piercing. Not a feature of his dream then, but something that had filtered into his unconscious from somewhere in the basecamp.

MASTER CHIEF rips the drip out of his arm, rises, grabbing his gun, and runs to trace the source.

EXT. HALO/BASE CAMP/COMMAND CENTER - NIGHT

MASTER CHIEF pushes through the guards into the HELLJUMPER command center...

... to find MAJOR SILVA and his officers standing over a COVENANT ELITE.

The ELITE is tied, spread-eagle. And it is clearly from the alien that the scream has been heard.

It is equally clear that screams have been the result of the creature's torture.

As MASTER CHIEF arrives -

HELLJUMPER
(to Major Silva)
He's told us everything he knows.

MAJOR SILVA
That's fine. He told us plenty.
Put a snatch squad together - we
move at once.
(turning to the limp
Elite)
As for our POW...

MAJOR SILVA lifts his M6D pistol and puts the barrel against the ELITE'S head.

MAJOR SILVA
Any last words?

ELITE
(digitized translation)
A word for you, sinner. Repent.

MAJOR SILVA smiles...

MAJOR SILVA
You bet.

... then fires directly into the ELITE'S face at point-blank range.

It is shockingly brutal.

When it's over, MAJOR SILVA simply holsters his weapon.

Only then does he notice MASTER CHIEF.

MAJOR SILVA
Something I can help you with,
Spartan?

CORTANA
Maybe it's us who can help you.

MAJOR SILVA'S eyebrows raise with surprise...

... as CORTANA appears, walking into frame.

She is much less tangible, more translucent, than she appeared in MASTER CHIEF'S dream. Clearly a projected hologram - nothing more than light, breaking apart slightly with ripples of static.

MAJOR SILVA
... What the - ?

MASTER CHIEF is as surprised to see CORTANA as SILVA.

CORTANA
What do you need a snatch squad
for, Major?

MAJOR SILVA
Who's asking?

CORTANA
The Pillar of Autumn AI. And,
before you ask, my need-to-know is
total.

A beat.

MAJOR SILVA
Keyes let himself be taken alive.
The Covenant have him on board
their orbiting battle cruiser:
Truth and Reconciliation. Which
means we have to assume they'll be
interrogating him. Finding out
about Earth.

CORTANA
They won't break him.

MAJOR SILVA
Everyone breaks. But he'll hold
out long enough.

MASTER CHIEF
(a beat ahead)
You're going in there.

MAJOR SILVA
No option.

CORTANA'S eyes open wide - suddenly alive.

CORTANA
We're coming too.

MAJOR SILVA
That risk is out of the question,
ma'am - or whatever the Hell I call
you.

CORTANA
(excited)
You don't understand, Major. This
could be the most extraordinary
opportunity: the chance for an AI
to access Covenant computer
systems.
(to Master Chief)
If you can get me to any kind of
control panel, we could learn
everything about them. Their
weaknesses, their plans. It's the
kind of breakthrough that could
turn the path of this war.

CORTANA turns back to MAJOR SILVA. She knows she's got him
beat.

CORTANA
Are you going to be remembered as
the man who let that opportunity
slip through his fingers?

EXT. HALO/BASE CAMP - NIGHT

MASTER CHIEF heads through the camp to the ammo dump, with
CORTANA walking a few steps ahead of him.

CORTANA

I hope you don't feel I went over your head, Chief.

MASTER CHIEF

Everything about you is over my head. How did you even do that?

CORTANA

What - push around Silva?

MASTER CHIEF

Appear.

EXT. HALO/BASE CAMP/AMMO DUMP - NIGHT

... As CORTANA explains, MASTER CHIEF selects grenades and takes ammo for his M6D pistol.

CORTANA

Just a little tweak to your HUD. I recalibrated the projection level to a couple of metres instead of the inside of your visor...

(shrugs)

... and here I am. I can appear anywhere within your line of sight. More or less a one-eighty degree radius. But if I go over here...

CORTANA moves to the side - and the image flickers out of view.

CORTANA

I vanish.

MASTER CHIEF turns his head in the direction she disappeared...

... and she returns again.

MASTER CHIEF

And why did you choose to look like...

(searches for the right word)

... that.

CORTANA

(innocent)

Like what?

MASTER CHIEF
Distracting.

CORTANA
You mean pretty?

MASTER CHIEF is done choosing weapons.
He turns away from her, and she vanishes again.

MASTER CHIEF
Just keep out my way during combat.

CUT TO:

EXT. HALO - NIGHT

MAJOR SILVA, twenty HELLJUMPERS, and MASTER CHIEF lie flat on a rock outcrop, looking down at a COVENANT position through binoculars.

Through their sights they can see a GRAVITY LIFT to the Covenant battle cruiser: Truth and Reconciliation.

The gravity lift is simply a metal platform with a beam of purple light firing directly upwards, like a fixed and powerful searchlight.

Three hundred metres above, this beam connects to the Covenant battle cruiser, tracking HALO at precisely the ring's spin rate.

Periodically, JACKALS appear from the lift base, in a bright purple flare. They are carrying boxes of supplies down to the HALO'S surface.

Other JACKALS enter the bright light, rise, and disappear.

HELLJUMPER
(quiet)
That is some freaky shit.

MAJOR SILVA
Teleportation.

CORTANA
(back in non-projected
form)
It's not teleportation.

(Note: unless specified, CORTANA is always in non-projected form, and only audible to Master Chief)

CORTANA

It's just a very fast ride up.
Some kind of reverse gravity
effect. Like pushing the wrong
poles of two magnets together.

MASTER CHIEF

We don't need to know how it works.
We just need to know how to use it.

CORTANA

Step in, and hold tight.

A HELLJUMPER slides up to the rock outcrop - back from his
recce.

HELLJUMPER

I've got six Jackals patrolling the
perimeter. A few Grunts scattered
here and there - half of them
sleeping. And no Elites.

MAJOR SILVA

Seems like they don't believe
anyone would try a direct assault
on their cruiser. So lets disabuse
them of that idea.

MAJOR SILVA lowers his binoculars.

MAJOR SILVA

Okay. Spread out. Move in quiet.
Knife-work only. I want to take
this position without laying down a
single round.

EXT. HALO/GRAVITY LIFT

A succession of quiet kills.

MASTER CHIEF breaks the neck of a JACKAL, using one hand to
clamp its mouth shut.

A HELLJUMPER throws a stone, whilst hiding in a shallow
gully. As the JACKAL GUARD looks over the lip of the gully
to investigate, the HELLJUMPER'S arm jabs up, sinking the
knife directly into the JACKALS head, entering just under the
chin.

MAJOR SILVA slides his knife between the armor plates of a
sleeping GRUNT, who struggles in his grip a few moments
before dying.

END ON -

A JACKAL appearing from the GRAVITY LIFT, carrying a crate of plasma grenades.

The alien looks around, confused.

It speaks something in Covenant tongue.

We don't know what - but by the upturn in tone at the end of the exclamation, we assume it is along the lines of: Where did everyone go?

It takes a few steps.

Then looks around.

To see the line of human soldiers standing behind it, silhouettes against the night sky.

A moment later, there is a flash of movement from MAJOR SILVA. Then a flash of spinning blade...

... and the JACKAL drops - a knife sunk into its chest, up to the hilt.

INT. TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION/LOADING BAY

With multiple pulses of light, MASTER CHIEF, MAJOR SILVA and the HELLJUMPERS start to appear out of the GRAVITY LIFT...

... into one of the LOADING BAYS of the Covenant ship.

Now, stealth is not an option.

Inside the Loading Bay are at least twenty GRUNTS and JACKALS - and they have all turned as one to see the human troops pour from the beam of light.

MASTER CHIEF, first out, opens fire immediately.

The following HELLJUMPERS do the same.

For a few intense seconds, the Loading Bay is alive with the sound of gunfire.

Then it is over. The Covenant lie dead.

Silence.

The soldiers wait, weapons raised, listening.

The silence continues.

HELLJUMPER
... You think we got away with it?

HELLJUMPER
I can't hear any alarms sounding.

HELLJUMPER
Wait! You hear that?

They all fall silent again.

From somewhere outside the Loading Bay, there is a muffled thump.

HELLJUMPER
I heard it.

A moment later, there is another thump. Then another.

And the thumps are getting louder.

HELLJUMPER
You thinking what I'm thinking?

HELLJUMPER
Has to be.

HELLJUMPER
(quiet)
God damn.

Now the thumps are RIGHT OUTSIDE the main Loading Bay doors.

And AT THAT MOMENT -

- they suddenly stop.

Silence again.

Held.

Then -

BLAM! The METAL DOORS of the Loading Bay explode outwards...

... and a MASSIVE hulking figure LUNGES through.

HELLJUMPER
(yells)
HUNTERS!

HUNTERS: Twelve foot tall, six foot wide, covered head to toe in blue armor, a Fuel-Rod Canon integrated into the right arm - which glows green as it is charging up to fire - and a shield integrated into its left arm.

MASTER CHIEF and the HELLJUMPERS all open up as the HUNTER charges them...

... and the bullets simply bounce off.

And worse yet, out of the twisted remains of the loading bay doors, a SECOND HUNTER follows the first.

HELLJUMPER

Here comes the second one!

The FIRST HUNTER runs into the HELLJUMPERS like a bowling ball into pins.

As the men scatter, one of them is clubbed by the alien's shielded arm - and knocked with unambiguously lethal force into the wall.

CUT TO -

MASTER CHIEF firing his assault rifle into the FIRST HUNTER. From every fifth tracer round, we can see the bullets glancing off the tank-like armor.

CORTANA

CHIEF!

MASTER CHIEF'S head snaps around, just in time to see the second HUNTER with a fully charged FUEL-ROD CANON...

... pointed right at him.

MASTER CHIEF dives for cover as the creature fires.

The bolt misses MASTER CHIEF, but the detonation has the strength to pick him up and send him skidding across the loading bay floor towards a collection of METAL CONTAINERS.

INT. TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION/LOADING BAY/METAL CONTAINERS

MASTER CHIEF scrambles for the METAL CONTAINERS, just making cover as another bolt from the FUEL ROD CANON explodes near by.

CORTANA

Chief! You've got to do something!

MASTER CHIEF
 (as he calmly swaps mags)
 I am doing something.

Right in front of him is a crate of blue spheres, softly glowing.

MASTER CHIEF
 Plasma grenades. We're in business.

INT. TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION/LOADING BAY

We are behind the SECOND HUNTER, as it fires another bolt into the HELLJUMPER'S position - killing two more of the special forces.

Beyond it, we can see the FIRST HUNTER, smashing crates out of the way, revealing where more of the scattered HELLJUMPERS have tried to find cover. Using its shield as a club again, it swings down on a HELLJUMPER - killing him also.

As the SECOND HUNTER charges up its canon for another strike...

... MASTER CHIEF appears into frame behind it, holding a PLASMA GRENADE in his right hand -

- which he throws, sticking the adhesive bomb right on the creature's back.

The HUNTER growls - a noise with a question mark at the end of it...

... and turns.

And as the alien comes to face him, he throws a second grenade - right in the creature's face.

The HUNTER'S growl raises to an enraged ROAR - as it desperately tries to claw the adhesive grenade from its armor

-

- during which time, MASTER CHIEF has stuck a THIRD grenade on its RIGHT ARM.

Then the SPARTAN dives for cover.

And a moment later -

- the PLASMA GRENADES explode with spectacular result.

Three detonations in rapid succession: BANG-BANG-BANG.

The first - on its back - knocks the HUNTER forwards.

The second - on its face - blows its helmet straight off its shoulders.

The third - on its CANON integrated arm - blows its arm off its shoulder socket.

A beat.

Then the mutilated giant crashes to the floor.

CUT TO -

The FIRST HUNTER is just about to crush another HELLJUMPER.

But it hesitates, arm raised...

... as what looks like a large soccer ball rolls between its legs.

The decapitated HELMET of the obliterated HUNTER comes to a stop, gazing up at its comrade.

A beat.

The HUNTER turns, and sees, at the other end of the loading bay, MASTER CHIEF, holding the severed CANON arm. Which is glowing green.

A moment later, the FUEL-ROD BOLT is blazing across the loading bay like a miniature comet -

- where it strikes the HUNTER full on, and blows it into oblivion.

INT. TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION/LOADING BAY

A HELLJUMPER looks down at the corpse of the HUNTER felled by MASTER CHIEF.

Out of the armor, a large EEL-LIKE CREATURE writhes out. It is colored a bright orange, and is just over a metre long. The EEL is followed by another, and another. We realise, as the form of the armor collapses, that HUNTERS are actually made up of these writhing creatures.

The HELLJUMPER reaches down and lifts the head of the first EEL with one hand. Reflexively, the EEL wraps itself around the HELLJUMPER'S arm...

... then goes limp as the HELLJUMPER'S combat knife slides into its mouth, and rips open its neck.

Behind this freakish scene...

... MAJOR SILVA storms up to MASTER CHIEF.

MAJOR SILVA

Nice work, Spartan. First out the gate, and you start blazing. Screw stealth. Just tell the whole Covenant army where we are.

MASTER CHIEF

The bay was full. I had no choice.

MAJOR SILVA

I guess I'll have to take your word for that, won't I?

He turns to his remaining HELLJUMPERS.

He's lost seven of his twenty men.

MAJOR SILVA

If we're going to get to the Captain, we're going to need a diversion.

A HELLJUMPER steps forwards.

HELLJUMPER

Sir. Give me five men.

MAJOR SILVA

Done. Don't care how you do it. Just keep them off our backs.

(beat)

It's going to be a one way trip. You square with that?

HELLJUMPER

We'll see you in Hell, sir.

MAJOR SILVA

That is correct, soldier. You surely will.

INT. TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION/CORRIDOR

MASTER CHIEF, MAJOR SILVA and the eight remaining HELLJUMPERS move fast and quiet down a corridor.

CORTANA

He wouldn't have to take your word
for it if he'd been first out the
gate.

MASTER CHIEF makes no reply.

Ahead of him, the POINT MAN of the group freezes and raises a closed fist.

He has reached the doorway to a split-level HANGER.

From their position, a GANTRY runs across the higher level of the hanger. Below, the lower level is full of Covenant troops.

AT THAT MOMENT -

- a distant explosion vibrates through the ship.

MAJOR SILVA

Sounds like our diversion.

Commotion among the ELITES - they start to move.

INT. TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION/HANGER/GANTRY

MASTER CHIEF, MAJOR SILVA and the HELLJUMPERS crawl along the gantry on their hands and knees, while below them, ELITES shout orders at JACKALS and GRUNTS.

INT. TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION/HANGER

On the lower level of the hanger, a squad of GRUNTS are falling into position, under the orders of an ELITE...

... except one GRUNT - who has not fallen into position yet. Instead, he has been distracted by a movement up on the GANTRY.

It's the line of HELLJUMPERS, moving across.

The GRUNT stands, looking upwards, just about to make sense of what he sees -

- when he is SUDDENLY cuffed sideways by the ELITE. Knocked to the floor, the GRUNT is then dragged squealing back into his squad as they march out of the hanger, double-time.

INT. TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION/CORRIDOR

The commando unit move silently down a corridor - passing a side chamber on their left.

CORTANA
Chief - stop!

MASTER CHIEF glances down into the side chamber.

Inside is a large bank of what seem to be COMPUTER SYSTEMS.

The systems are being monitored by a single JACKAL.

CORTANA
I think that's what I'm looking
for.

INT. TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION/COMPUTER ROOM

The JACKAL lies dead on the floor, and the HELLJUMPERS guard the entrance.

MASTER CHIEF stands by a central console - and has inserted CORTANA'S chip into the terminal.

CORTANA is holographically manifested in front of MASTER CHIEF. She is studying the central console, running her fingers across it as if experiencing a tactile quality.

CORTANA
Interesting. I can directly access
the Covenant battle-net. None of
their systems are protected.

MASTER CHIEF
Meaning?

CORTANA
An implication about their culture.
Loyalty. Or servility. They
obviously trust their own more than
we do.

She pauses.

CORTANA
I've found Keyes. He's on the deck
below us.
(beat)
Wait.

(MORE)

CORTANA (cont'd)

(beat)

Good. Okay. I've set up a few diversions of my own. Triggered alarm calls in twenty different sectors, and sealed some of the routes. That should ease the way a bit.

MASTER CHIEF

How much longer do you need?

CORTANA

Not long. Just a few more moments. I'm downloading their -

She breaks off.

MASTER CHIEF

What?

CORTANA

I...

CORTANA frowns.

CORTANA

No. It can't be. It isn't possible...

MASTER CHIEF

Cortana!

Then an expression of real alarm appears on CORTANA'S face.

She steps back from the console.

CORTANA

Disconnect me.

MASTER CHIEF

What's going on?

CORTANA

Too much to explain. We just need to get Keyes and get out of here. Now.

INT. TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION/TORTURE CELLS

CLOSE UP on the face of CAPTAIN KEYES.

He's blood-smeared, wide-eyed, and screaming.

~~PULL BACK~~ to reveal that he is strapped to an intricate machine, organic in design, crackling with energy.

From the machine, around CAPTAIN KEYES' bare arms and torso, are literally thousands of tiny barbed and segmented needle-like insect legs. They are buried in his flesh.

It doesn't take much to figure out that this is a torture machine.

The surge of power in the machine subsides, and KEYES slumps, too weak even to meet the gaze of...

... the face of the BLACK ELITE who leans in, and speaks to CAPTAIN KEYES in his own language.

BLACK ELITE

Sinner, the blasphemy of your form
is not beyond redemption. We wish
this war to end.

The BLACK ELITE leans closer.

BLACK ELITE

Tell us of your home world, and we
will wash it clean.

CAPTAIN KEYES finds the strength to lift his head.

He meets the eyes of the BLACK ELITE.

BLACK ELITE

Make your choice, sinner. Talk to
me. Or die.

CAPTAIN KEYES holds the alien's pitiless stare.

CAPTAIN KEYES

(quiet, beaten)
I choose death.

Beat.

CAPTAIN KEYES

Yours.

The next moment, a spray of blue blood spurts out from the BLACK ELITE's head, and he drops...

... to reveal MAJOR SILVA behind, holding a smoking M6D pistol.

MAJOR SILVA
 (to the Helljumpers)
 Get him out of that thing.

INT. TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION/CORRIDOR

MASTER CHIEF and the commando unit move as fast as KEYES can travel.

CAPTAIN KEYES
 How the Hell did you get on this ship? Actually, never mind that. How do we get off?

MASTER CHIEF
 Cortana has cleared a route to one of their bays. We're heading for a dropship.

They have reached a door at the end of the corridor.

CAPTAIN KEYES
 Simple as that?

MASTER CHIEF opens the door - revealing a hanger bay with a dropship ready to fly. And thirty COVENANT TROOPS - which all turn to face the humans.

MASTER CHIEF
 Pretty much.

As the humans open fire -

CUT TO:

EXT. HALO/BASE CAMP - SUNRISE

Dawn over the ring.

And coming through the sunrise is an erratically flown COVENANT DROPSHIP, belching thick black smoke behind it.

Two MARINES on a gun-mounted LOOKOUT POST watch the ship come in.

MARINE
 Is that thing coming our way?

He starts to swing the MACHINE GUN to bear on the already severely wounded vessel.

The second MARINE raises a hand.

MARINE
 Wait! I've got a call coming
 through on the comms link.
 (incredulous)
 It's one of ours...

EXT. HALO/BASE CAMP/LANDING PAD - SUNRISE

The smoking dropship comes in hard and fast.

MARINES and ENGINEERS scatter from the makeshift landing pad just before it hits...

... with a loud thump, and an almighty cloud of dust.

As the dust settles, the doors open, and MASTER CHIEF walks out, followed by CAPTAIN KEYES, MAJOR SILVA and the surviving HELLJUMPERS.

The BASE CAMP erupts into cheers.

Only one soldier seems unimpressed. A human dropship pilot.

FOEHAMMER
 (as Master Chief passes)
 Was that you at the helm?

MASTER CHIEF
 Yep.

FOEHAMMER
 Remind me to give you some flying lessons.

MASTER CHIEF
 I got her down, didn't I?

FOEHAMMER
 Yeah. You got her down alright...

As the dust is settling, the image of the COVENANT DROPSHIP starts to resolve.

It is a mess. Crumpled, tilted, panels hanging off, still pouring black smoke.

FOEHAMMER
 Real down.

INT. BASE CAMP/COMMAND TENT - DAY

CORTANA, holographically manifested, is debriefing CAPTAIN KEYES, MAJOR SILVA, MASTER CHIEF, FOEHAMMER, and a handful of MARINE OFFICERS.

CORTANA

This orbital was constructed by an ancient race, known by the Covenant as the 'Forerunners.' It seems that they left ruins and artifacts all over the galaxy. Some of those artifacts are the technology that the Covenant employ. And another of those artifacts is this ring.

CORTANA creates a new holographic image beside her: a three dimensional scale vector representation of the ring world.

CORTANA

They call it Halo.

CLOSE IN on the vector hologram of HALO as CORTANA speaks.

CORTANA

As we are already aware, the Covenant decided, for reasons best known to themselves, that humankind was an object of blasphemy, requiring extinction.

(beat)

In Halo, we now appear to have found an object of worship.

PULL BACK again:

CAPTAIN KEYES

Halo is their God?

CORTANA

I think it would be better to say that it is their church, and the Forerunners are their Gods.

CAPTAIN KEYES

Makes a kind of sense. If this ring is anything to go by, the technology of the ancients would have been far in advance of the Covenant.

CORTANA
Not to mention our own.

MAJOR SILVA
I aint going to start praying to
them.

Several of the MARINE OFFICERS start to laugh.

CORTANA
(through the laughter)
But there's something else.
Something important.

Silence again.

CORTANA
It's hard to accurately interpret
the data. But according to the
Covenant message traffic, Halo is a
weapon.

CAPTAIN KEYES
... A weapon. Of what kind?

CORTANA
It isn't clear. I'm not even sure
the Covenant know themselves... but
they repeatedly describe the
destructive power as
'unimaginable'.

CAPTAIN KEYES
I do *not* like that.

CORTANA
It gets worse. When the Pillar of
Autumn crashed, the Covenant
believe it disrupted something.
Under the ring surface.

CAPTAIN KEYES
The armament system?

CORTANA
No. Something else. They don't
even have a name for it. But
whatever it is, it terrifies them.

Silence.

CAPTAIN KEYES

Okay. From what you've told us, our mission is clear. If Halo is a weapon, we need to prevent the Covenant from being able to use it.

CORTANA

The Covenant refer to a location called 'The Silent Cartographer'. It seems to be a map room which reveals the position of Halo's control center. Obviously, that control center is our best bet to shut the system down.

CAPTAIN KEYES

And where is the map room?

The holographic of HALO zooms in - revealing a strip of beach coastline, rising up to steep cliff faces.

CORTANA

Somewhere beneath here.

FOEHAMMER

I know where that is. Two lifeboats came down on the same beach, and I only pulled out three survivors. The LZ is hot.

CAPTAIN KEYES

Too hot to get Master Chief and four squads of Marines in there?

FOEHAMMER looks sideways to MASTER CHIEF and winks.

FOEHAMMER

Piece of cake.

MAJOR SILVA reacts to this.

MAJOR SILVA

Sir - permission to speak freely.

CAPTAIN KEYES

Granted.

MAJOR SILVA

Why send the Spartan? The Helljumpers sleep locked and loaded. We're ready right now.

(MORE)

MAJOR SILVA (cont'd)
 If this weapon-system needs a take-down, it's just the job my men were trained for.

CAPTAIN KEYES
 Point, Major. But I have other plans for the Helljumpers.

MAJOR SILVA
 Sir, what could be more important than -

CAPTAIN KEYES
 (cutting in)
 I don't know what we uncovered when the Pillar of Autumn came down, but I do know this. If the Covenant are scared of it, I want it.

The HALO holographic rotates to CLOSE IN on the PILLAR OF AUTUMN crash-site.

CAPTAIN KEYES
 Major Silva and the Helljumpers will be coming with me.

EXT. HALO/BASE CAMP/COMMAND CENTER - DAY

The soldiers are filing out of the COMMAND TENT.

MASTER CHIEF catches MAJOR SILVA up.

MASTER CHIEF
 Major.

MAJOR SILVA stops.

MASTER CHIEF
 I'm used to taking flak from everywhere but my own side. With respect, sir - just what is your problem with me?

MAJOR SILVA
 You want me to spell it out, Spartan? I'm pretty good at spelling things out.

MASTER CHIEF
 Go ahead.

MAJOR SILVA

Okay. First things first - pop
your cover.

A beat. Then MASTER CHIEF unclips and removes his helmet.

*The remainder of this scene is played over MASTER CHIEF'S
shoulder, so that his face is NOT revealed.*

MAJOR SILVA

See now - that would be part of my
problem right there. Exactly what
kind of genetic screw-up are you?
(without waiting for an
answer)

I'm neck-deep in blood and shit,
fighting a war for humanity. But
the man at my side isn't even a
man. He's fighting for something
he isn't. You follow me so far?

MASTER CHIEF says nothing.

MAJOR SILVA

Good. Then I'll just add this:
Planet Reach. Twin sun system.
Current human population: zero.

Silence.

MAJOR SILVA returns MASTER CHIEF'S gaze evenly.

Then turns and leaves.

MASTER CHIEF replaces his helmet.

Another moment of silence, before:

CORTANA

Planet Reach? He can't seriously
blame you for that...

MASTER CHIEF

(understated)
Why not? I do.

CUT TO:

INT. FOEHAMMER'S PELICAN DROPSHIP - DAY

The bay doors of the dropship open to reveal we are flying
fast and low over water.

Ahead is the strip of coast line and cliff-faces we saw on the holographic.

And from the beach there is already INCOMING plasma fire from Covenant forces.

This is the opening image of the BEACH ATTACK SEQUENCE.

EXT. HALO/BEACH - DAY

THE BEACH ATTACK

In bright sunshine, the attack begins. Eerily as much like a Normandy beach-assault as a fight on an artificial world, light years from Earth...

MARINES jump from the DROPSHIP, landing thigh-deep in the water, firing as they make their way to the sand. Many are cut down before they even reach the sand.

FIRE from the dropship streaks overhead towards the COVENANT positions.

The **NOISE** is overwhelming.

FRAGMENTATION GRENADES explode up ahead, showing sand and shrapnel.

A **PLASMA GRENADE** adheres to a **MARINE**. Screaming, he tries to claw it off him - until it explodes, tearing him apart.

Other **MARINES** are hit by fire from **GRUNTS** carrying **NEEDLERS**. It is the first time we have seen this strange weapon. It fires a rapid succession burst of pinkish shards, that leave a light trail as they home in on their target - collecting in the victim like porcupine spines, then **DETONATING**.

The **WATER** of the beach laps red from **MARINE** corpses, lying in the gentle swell.

And INTO THIS -

- **MASTER CHIEF** is released from the back of the DROPSHIP, driving a **WARTHOG** - the multi-terrain four-wheel vehicle.

A **MARINE** mans the **HEAVY MACHINE GUN** that is swivel mounted on the back.

Another **MARINE** is riding shotgun, firing a steady stream of rounds from his assault rifle.

We have seen MASTER CHIEF'S combat abilities. Here, we see the most amazing display of driving ability.

The WARTHOG tears up the beach, skidding and four-wheel drifting around boulders and between plasma grenades.

A JACKAL is smeared across its bonnet like a bug hitting a windscreen.

An ELITE is sucked under the wheels, and dragged beneath the vehicle - where ELITE'S shield shorts out, lighting up the underside of the WARTHOG like a hot-rod's fluorescent.

Meanwhile, the gunners rain fire on the Covenants, ripping through ELITE and JACKAL shields in seconds, cutting GRUNTS to pieces...

Gradually, the sound of the fighting subsides, becomes less a wall of noise than sporadic bursts...

... until the last noise is the revving of the WARTHOG'S engine.

MASTER CHIEF slides to a halt and turns the engine off.

All is quiet.

Bodies and shell-holes smoulder. The COVENANT are all dead. The MARINES have lost half their fighting force. But the beach is won.

EXT. HALO/BEACH/ENTRANCE TO INTERIOR - DAY

And now we see what the COVENANT were fighting so hard to protect.

Protruding from the cliffs is another example of the strange Forerunner machinery. But this one is more explicable. Temple-like, it contains an entrance...

... around which the MASTER CHIEF and the surviving thirty MARINES cluster, peering in to the dark interior.

Among them is CORPORAL JENKINS.

CORPORAL JENKINS
... Sir? That where we're heading?

MASTER CHIEF
It is.

CORPORAL JENKINS

Awww shit. How'd I know you were going to say that?

MARINE

Cancel Christmas.

SERGEANT

Okay, boys. Move it up! We're going in!

INT. HALO/CHAMBER

A steep ramp leads down, under the ring surface, and into a large CHAMBER, from which many corridors and passages lead. The chamber is similar in design terms to the machinery fragments that jut out of the HALO landscape - this is the iceberg that lies beneath.

Covering the walls and floor are etched and intricate non-pictorial markings - shapes, swirls, patterns. If they have a meaning, it seems to have died with the Forerunners.

The lighting is low, and the light sources are unclear. There are luminescent panels around the architecture, but in addition to these, some of the structures and buttresses seem to emit light themselves, as if impregnated with fibre optics.

Aside from a background hum of energy, the chamber is quiet.

CORTANA

This place is not just functional.
It's aesthetic. It has a sense
of...

As CORTANA speaks, MASTER CHIEF has been walking to the far end of the chamber, where the floor suddenly falls away to a sheer drop.

Revealing a VAST CHASM, of apparently endless depth.

CORTANA

... grandeur.

More ramps and platforms lead down the walls of the chasm.

MASTER CHIEF

Let me guess: the map room is down there.

INT. HALO/CHASM

MASTER CHIEF leads the men down the ramps and platforms.

The MARINES proceed in cautiously.

CORPORAL JENKINS' foot accidentally dislodges a small pebble, which falls into the abyss. Transfixed by the sense of the abyss, JENKINS watches it fall.

SERGEANT

Stay in formation, soldier. Let me see your training.

CORPORAL JENKINS

(refocusing)

Yes sir.

Around them, they can see yet more passages leading out of and into the chasm walls.

MASTER CHIEF

This place is pretty big.

CORTANA

You have no idea. Just from the few areas the Covenant have mapped, they have already found an interior surface area which is ten times the size of the exterior.

MASTER CHIEF

Where do all the passages lead?

CORTANA

That's one of the strange things. Many of them lead nowhere. Or simply loop, fragment, and return back on themselves.

MASTER CHIEF

A labyrinth.

CORTANA

No - I don't think so. If anything, it most closely resembles... microcircuits. On a massive scale.

INT. HALO/HUB

MASTER CHIEF and the MARINES enter a new space.

Different to the first chamber they encountered. Darker, emphasizing the distance from the surface they have now travelled.

Some of the light comes from SLIM, ELONGATED TWIN-POINTED SHAPES, positioned at regular intervals around the room, giving off a pale white glow.

The room itself is clearly a hub - a seven-pointed star-shape, each point leading into an unusually wide passage, from which smaller capillaries bleed off.

CORTANA

Hmm.

MASTER CHIEF

I definitely don't want you to tell me you're lost.

A little distance away, a couple of the MARINES confer.

MARINE

(quiet)

Did he just say 'lost'?

SERGEANT

(quiet)

Keep your cool, Wesker.

MARINE (WESKER)

(quiet)

I'm cool alright. My blood's like God-damn ice. Got goosebumps. Shaking...

Back to Master Chief.

CORTANA

I'm not lost. I just picked something up on the transcom. Sounded like Covenant radio chatter.

MASTER CHIEF

There's bound to be some down here. Surprised we haven't run into them already, in fact.

CORTANA

Yes, but from the strength of the signal, they're near. As in, very near.

MASTER CHIEF

... How near?

Beat.

CORTANA

In this room.

Silence.

MASTER CHIEF scans around. Aside from the MARINES, the room is sufficiently well-lit to confirm it is empty.

But MASTER CHIEF'S own battle-senses are now tingling too.

MASTER CHIEF

You're right. I can almost smell them.

CORTANA

Hell of a place for an ambush. No cover, and they could come from anywhere.

MASTER CHIEF

(to Marines)

Marines. Three-sixty formation. Now.

Immediately the MARINES form a circle formation.

MARINE (WESKER)

What are we supposed to be looking out for? I can't see shit.

The SERGEANT flashes him an angry look.

MARINES (WESKER)

I know! Keep my cool!

MASTER CHIEF keeps scanning -

- then freezes. He thinks he's seen something.

He is gazing at one of the SLIM ELONGATED SHAPES that are distributed around the room.

There's something odd about it. Behind the shape there is a slight shimmer, like a heat haze.

MASTER CHIEF shifts his position slightly, and sees that the shimmer is defined...

CUT BACK TO -

Directly in front of MARINE WESKER, an elongated triangle seems to detach itself from the wall.

WESKER realizes, at the same moment we do, that the shape is not a light after all.

It is an ENERGY SWORD. And it is being wielded by a STEALTH ELITE.

The next moment, the SWORD is slicing through the air -

- and WESKER is literally cut in half.

NOW PULL BACK to reveal, from ALL ANGLES, the ENERGY SWORDS 'detaching' from the walls, and STEALTH ELITES rushing in.

MASTER CHIEF
STEALTH ELITES! OPEN FIRE!

Mayhem.

As the fire from the encircled MARINES hits the ELITES, it disrupts their CAMOUFLAGE ARMOR - revealing their true shapes in flickering strobes.

Some of the ELITES are shot down before they reach the circle

- but others are not. Once in, the MARINES are cut to pieces by the energy swords. Worse, as they try to shoot the only sporadically visible enemy, their wild arcs of fire cut into their own men.

MASTER CHIEF switches to melee tactics - grabbing the ENERGY SWORD from a fallen ELITE and wielding it himself.

The combat is up close and personal.

Blue blood mixes with red.

And when it is over, among the bodies of the Covenant, another eleven of his MARINE squad lie dead. Leaving him with only nineteen - half of which are badly wounded.

INT. HALO/HUB

MASTER CHIEF looks at one of the surviving soldiers, standing over the corpse of a dead ELITE.

CORPORAL JENKINS
How's it feel to be dead?

... then down towards the bodies of the fallen MARINES.

His thoughts are unreadable.

CORTANA
Chief...

MASTER CHIEF
How close are we to the Map Room?

CORTANA
It's three hundred metres down the passage ahead of you.

MASTER CHIEF
Are you reading more Covenant chatter on the transcom?

CORTANA
Plenty.

MASTER CHIEF nods. Then beckons the SERGEANT over.

MASTER CHIEF
Sergeant. Pick one of these passages. Defend the opening. Tend the wounded. And hold position there.

SERGEANT
Sir?

MASTER CHIEF
I'm going on alone.

INT. HALO/BENEATH PILLAR OF AUTUMN CRASH-SITE/ANTI-CHAMBER

Meanwhile, CAPTAIN KEYES, MAJOR SILVA and the HELLJUMPERS are also apparently in the aftermath of their own battle.

Their environment is also subterranean and cavernous, but very different to that of MASTER CHIEF and his MARINES.

It's darker. Much darker. Almost PITCH BLACK - the primary source of illumination comes from their own FLASHLIGHTS, whose powerful beams crisscross the area...

... lighting up the twisted bodies of numerous COVENANT.

Silence.

Then:

MAJOR SILVA

What do you think killed them?

Only now do we realize that this is not the aftermath of *their* battle.

KEYES is kneeling down beside one of the dead Covenant - a JACKAL, whose chest and innards have been opened up and spread like an unpacked bag.

CAPTAIN KEYES

Major, I have no idea.

Some HELLJUMPERS looks down at another ELITE.

HELLJUMPER

Check it out.

HELLJUMPER

Something scrambled his insides pretty good.

HELLJUMPER

Copy that.

CAPTAIN KEYES stands, and heads over to a HELLJUMPER, who is working on the panel to a large, closed door.

CAPTAIN KEYES

How you getting on, soldier?

HELLJUMPER

Looks like the Covenant worked pretty hard to lock it down. But I've almost got it...

(steps back)

There.

The LARGE DOOR slides open.

INT. HALO/BENEATH PILLAR OF AUTUMN CRASH-SITE/CHAMBER

CAPTAIN KEYES, MAJOR SILVA and the HELLJUMPERS enter an even more cavernous space than the one they just left.

Here, their FLASHLIGHTS hardly seem to contact the far wall.

HELLJUMPER

Dios mio... I got a bad feeling about this.

MAJOR SILVA

Stow it, Mendoza. You've always got a bad feeling about something.

AT THAT MOMENT -

A noise from somewhere in the darkness.

A scuttling. Or slithering.

All beams sweep in that area. And find -

Nothing.

Now a noise from the OTHER direction, and the beams sweep again.

And again, find nothing.

HELLJUMPER

Major, I'm telling you, this feeling is *real* bad.

NOW CUT BACK TO -

Some distance from the group of SPECIAL FORCES.

We can see them, a little pocket of light in the otherwise huge dark space.

A beat.

Then SUDDENLY, the SLITHERING, SCUTTLING sound is right beside us. In our ear.

And the next moment we start to MOVE towards the group of special forces, covering the distance at amazing speed.

And as we are within twenty metres, the beams sweep towards us -

Blinding and illuminating us -

And we see the soldiers open fire -

And then the fear on their faces -

But we continue towards them at the same breakneck speed -

CLOSING IN on the face of CAPTAIN KEYES, eyes bulging as he blazes his assault rifle -

INTO his EYES -

Then CUT TO -

A RAPID-FIRE SEQUENCE OF IMAGES.

These are memories of CAPTAIN KEYES, each image presented in only the fraction of a second, as seen through his eyes.

A woman; a young girl (his daughter Miranda); a gun; a covenant soldier on a dissecting table; twin suns; the face of Master Chief; the bridge of the Pillar of Autumn; the Jackal he shot in the head; the face of the Black Elite torturer, and finally an image of the FLOOD FORMS.

CUT TO BLACK.

Silence.

CAPTAIN KEYES

Oh God.

A beat.

CAPTAIN KEYES

Oh God. No.

INT. HALO/OUTSIDE THE MAP ROOM

MASTER CHIEF stands on a slender glass walkway, beneath which one of HALO'S interior chasms drops away into darkness.

The barrel of his assault rifle is smoking. Lying on the walkway are the bodies of four ELITES.

CORTANA

That's it. Straight ahead.

MASTER CHIEF looks up to where she indicates - a large spherical chamber.

The means of its support over the chasm are unclear - perhaps it is simply the glass walkway that keeps it from falling into the abyss.

INT. HALO/MAP ROOM

MASTER CHIEF is at the entrance to the MAP ROOM.

CORTANA

The Silent Cartographer...
(beat)

Wow.

She manifests in front of MASTER CHIEF, and steps inside.

Now reveal what they see.

The glass walkway ends in a simple-looking console panel. Beyond the panel, we can see that the Map Room is nothing more than a spherical black space.

But in the middle of that black space, is HALO.

Not a scale model exactly - more like the real thing. Waves lap on the shores, cloud-formations roll and cluster, wind pushes through trees. Just in miniature.

CORTANA

These Forerunners had truly amazing technology at their disposal. Puts my holographic version to shame, doesn't it?

MASTER CHIEF

Somewhat.

CORTANA

Okay. Give me a few moments to access the...

She breaks off - with a gasp, as if she has just plunged into icy water.

The hologram of her FREEZES. Eyebrows raised, mouth slightly parted in surprise.

A moment later, DATA starts to scroll across her skin like animated light tatoos.

MASTER CHIEF

Cortana?

A moment later, she abruptly unfreezes.

CORTANA
(quiet, awestruck)
Chief. It's...

Cortana does something we haven't seen her do before: she
LAUGHS.

CORTANA
... glorious.

MASTER CHIEF is slightly thrown by this response.

MASTER CHIEF
... Can you find the Control
Center?

CORTANA
(blank)
The Control Center?
(remembering)
Yes. The Control Center. Of
course.

Then she is distracted by something. As if hearing an inner
voice.

CORTANA
(smiles distantly)
Oh. Surprising.

She indicates the console in front of them.

CORTANA
I can hard-dock there. Place my
chip in the receptacle.

MASTER CHIEF hesitates. There's definitely something
worrying about her manner - almost giddy. Drunk.

CORTANA
What are you waiting for?

MASTER CHIEF
... I'm not a hundred percent on
this.

Another uncharacteristic response flashes across CORTANA'S
face: ANGER.

CORTANA

Not a hundred percent? When precisely did you turn from a killing machine into a probabilities analyst?

MASTER CHIEF

You're acting strange.

CORTANA

(steel)

I have just brushed against a system more complex than your barbarian mind can conceive. I am unable to explore it fully without a hard dock.

At the word 'barbarian', MASTER CHIEF noticeably reacts - head inclining with surprise. But the expression behind his visor is unseen, and he replies with calm control in his voice.

MASTER CHIEF

If I plug you in, I don't know what it's going to do to you.

CORTANA

You don't need to know what it's going to do to me.

(viciously echoing Major Silva)

You don't need to know *shit*.

A moment between the two of them. A sense that CORTANA has crossed some kind of line.

MASTER CHIEF reaches to the port behind his neck, and pulls out the CORTANA CHIP.

Her holographic form vanishes at once.

MASTER CHIEF looks at the small chip in his massive palm for a couple of beats - then inserts it into the console.

At first, nothing happens.

Then the ENTIRE room suddenly lights up. And CORTANA'S FACE appears as a projection, wrapped around on the inside of the MAP ROOM SPHERE, encompassing both HALO and MASTER CHIEF

Her expression is pure rapture.

CORTANA

Chief. I wish you could feel this.
You can't imagine the wealth of
information. So much. So fast.

As she talks, her voice is rising, and the flood of DATA
across her features is moving and flickering so fast that it
has become liquid.

MASTER CHIEF is backing away. The light levels in the room
are rising dramatically.

CORTANA

Amazing! Extraordinary! The
Covenant are correct - the
Forerunners are Gods! I can see it
now! Whoever controls Halo -

The light levels are almost blinding.

CORTANA

- controls the fate of the
universe!

With that, suddenly, the room bleaches white.

In the glow, we just glimpse MASTER CHIEF, doubled up against
the glare.

Then he is consumed too.

FADE TO -

MASTER CHIEF'S DREAM

MASTER CHIEF, without helmet, stands in the landscape we have
seen before.

But this time, it is different.

The bodies are gone.

And instead of the twin suns burning the sky...

... there is HALO.

MASTER CHIEF

Cortana?

Silence.

MASTER CHIEF
(calls out)
Cortana!

No reply.

But instead, from somewhere not far, the sound of sobbing.

MASTER CHIEF'S DREAM/RUINED CITY

MASTER CHIEF tracks the source of the sobbing through a ruined city.

And again, although we have seen this landscape of before - the buildings reduced to rock and dust, the twisted steel skeletons - something about it is different.

There seems to be a strange and alien form of PLANT-LIFE growing out of the ruins. Vines, tendrils, pushing out of rubble, wrapping around the jutting girders...

What is doubly strange about the plant-life is that it seems to be moving.

Always in the peripheral vision, there is the sense that the vines and tendrils are subtly curling, sliding, tightening. But this effect is never seen explicitly.

MASTER CHIEF pauses on his search through the devastated city. Listens.

He's getting close.

The sound is coming from the remnants of a low structure.

MASTER CHIEF climbs through the gap in a wall, created by heavy artillery.

Inside, the roof is riddled with thousands of bullet holes, and bright sunshine lances through them, speckling the floor like a constellation.

And there, in the dappled light, in the corner, is a MAN. Curled up in the fragments of stone and concrete.

A moment.

Then the MAN looks up.

MASTER CHIEF is amazed to recognize CAPTAIN KEYES.

Red-eyed, shaking, tears cutting through the dust on his face. His expression is locked in a rictus of misery and horror.

Even under Covenant torture, he was nothing like as broken. As destroyed.

And looking closer, we see the same plant-like tendrils that pushed through the rubble outside.

But these have wrapped themselves around his feet, as if rooting him to the ground. And they are snaking into his clothing. Almost imperceptibly creeping up and around his neck.

CAPTAIN KEYES

Please. Kill me. Make it stop.

CUT TO:

INT. HALO/OUTSIDE THE MAP ROOM

MASTER CHIEF is lying flat on his back on the glass walkway to the MAP ROOM.

He stirs, coming back from unconsciousness.

Dazed, he sits up...

... and sees, to his dismay, that the sphere of the MAP ROOM is gone - apparently destroyed in the explosion that blasted MASTER CHIEF back onto the walkway.

MASTER CHIEF jumps to his feet.

At the end of the walkway, the console into which he inserted the CORTANA CHIP is still there.

He goes over, quickly, and pulls the chip out.

It is dead. Lifeless and light-less.

He jams it into the back of his suit.

MASTER CHIEF

Cortana?

Nothing.

Enraged, his armored fist swings down and SMASHES the console.

Pointless.

And he knows it.

MASTER CHIEF
(quiet)
Shit.

Then MASTER CHIEF turns and leaves the MAP ROOM AREA, heading back towards the HUB where he left the MARINES...

... but we remain behind.

For a while, there is silence. Then, through the quiet, we hear...

... a HUMMING.

Not the hum of distant engines and machinery - a MUSICAL humming. Almost absent-minded, unconcerned - the sound someone might make as they go about a benign task.

The noise gets louder.

By the way it echoes, we can tell it is coming from the black abyss beneath the walkway.

And from the abyss comes a gathering bluish glow.

But we CUT AWAY before the person, or thing, arrives.

INT. HALO/HUB

MASTER CHIEF re-enters the HUB - the location of the battle with the CAMOUFLAGE ELITES.

The bodies are still there - the dead MARINES and COVENANT, lying where they fell.

What are absent, however, are the living MARINES.

MASTER CHIEF looks around, confused.

MASTER CHIEF
Sergeant, this is Master Chief over
the transcom. Why are you not in
position? Over.

No response.

MASTER CHIEF
Are you reading me? Please
respond. Over.

Beat.

MASTER CHIEF
Sergeant?

Beat.

MASTER CHIEF
... Anyone?

INT. HALO/PASSAGEWAY ENTRANCE

MASTER CHIEF examines the passage entrance where the SERGEANT was ordered to hold position.

There is blood is still on the floor, and the blood is still wet. There are spent MED KITS everywhere. And also...

... a large number of magazine casings.

MASTER CHIEF picks one of them up, and examines it.

It's empty. They're all empty.

MASTER CHIEF
(under his breath)
This is not good.

AT THAT MOMENT -

There is a sound from further down the PASSAGE WAY.

MASTER CHIEF'S head snaps around, assault rifle raised...

... and sees, a few junctions down from where he stands, a single MARINE run across the passage, from left to right.

MASTER CHIEF
Marine!

Too late. The man is gone; the passageway is empty again.

Keeping his assault rifle up, MASTER CHIEF moves cautiously down to investigate.

INT. HALO/PASSAGEWAY

MASTER CHIEF rounds the junction corner, where the MARINE appeared to run into.

This off-shoot is darker.

MASTER CHIEF switches on his head-mounted FLASHLIGHT...
 ... illuminating a ramp, leading down.

INT. HALO/LOWER LEVELS/TRENCH CHAMBER

MASTER CHIEF has entered a lower network of subterranean Halo.

The architecture here is different. The look is less designed, built with less of an eye on the aesthetic. It has the feel of a basement complex - where you might expect to find the guts of the machinery above, the circulation ducts and the power conduits.

The floor dips into a trench, as if it may once have held liquid. On the far side of the trench, a pneumatic door opens and shuts - the mechanism presumably broken.

MASTER CHIEF scans.

The chamber is empty.

He presses on.

INT. HALO/LOWER LEVELS/PASSAGE

In a narrow passage, MASTER CHIEF turns a corner, sweeping his assault rifle in precise unison with the sweep of his FLASHLIGHT...

... and illuminates up, pushed as far as he can into the shadows of a corner...

It's MARINE CORPORAL JENKINS.

His face is blood-streaked, his eyes are bulging. He's frozen in the glare of MASTER CHIEF'S flashlight like a rabbit in headlights.

MASTER CHIEF

Soldier - what the Hell is going on? Didn't you hear me over the transcom? Where's the rest of your squad?

CORPORAL JENKINS

(shivering almost uncontrollably)

You still got it? You still got my M6D?

Beat.

MASTER CHIEF

I've got it. Where's your assault rifle?

CORPORAL JENKINS

Lost. Running. Need my M6D. Give it back.

MASTER CHIEF

Running from what?

CORPORAL JENKINS

Need my gun.

MASTER CHIEF

Running from what, soldier?

CORPORAL JENKINS

(with fear-crazed authority)

I need. My fucking. Gun.

A beat.

Then MASTER CHIEF reaches down to his hip, and pulls out his M6D pistol, and hands it to the soldier, grip first.

CORPORAL JENKINS grabs it out of MASTER CHIEF'S hand...

... jams it straight into his mouth -

- and blows his brains out, right up the wall behind.

If we could see MASTER CHIEF'S face, it would be stunned.

But we can't. All we can see is the reflection in his blood-flecked visor, as the dead soldier slides down the wall to the floor.

Silence.

Then through it...

A SLITHERING NOISE.

MASTER CHIEF turns - listening.

We know this sound. We heard it when the HELLJUMPERS and CAPTAIN KEYES were taken...

And it's getting louder.

Not just louder, but broader. *Larger.* The sense of gathering scale that a breaking wave has as it starts to tumble, rushing towards a beach.

It's coming from the direction that MASTER CHIEF just came from.

He starts to back away.

INT. HALO/LOWER LEVELS/CHAMBER

MASTER CHIEF backs into a large room.

Irregular, angular walls. Heavy buttresses. Grey metal. None of the intricate etched Forerunner patterns that are found on the higher levels. This place is dark and cold.

And it's a dead end.

MASTER CHIEF keeps backing away, assault rifle trained on the door he just came through, scanning quickly over his shoulder for cover.

But there is none.

And the sound of the breaking wave is reaching a crescendo.

Whatever is coming is nearly here.

And at the moment MASTER CHIEF'S back hits the far wall, and he realizes he has nowhere left to go...

... the wave breaks.

GUSHING through the door, come the **FLOOD INFECTION FORMS.**

Each the size of a football, bloated, propelled by a seething carpet of small tentacles on the underside on the underside of its main form. Gliding across the floor, up the walls.

There are literally hundreds of them.

MASTER CHIEF opens fire - with devastating result.

When shot, each vessel pops like a balloon, releasing a cloud of greenish spore particles. Moreover, the explosion of the vessel is of sufficient force to explode another vessel in close proximity.

Meaning that a spray of bullets obliterates a large number. Easy to kill...

... except that they just *KEEP COMING*. Where a hundred die, a hundred more appear.

The barrel of MASTER CHIEF'S gun is soon glowing a dull red from the constant discharge of rounds.

Initially, reloading is his biggest problem.

But this gives way to another: he's running out of ammo. The next clip he jams into his assault rifle is his last.

The WAVE of INFECTION VESSELS is now effectively breaking over him. He is surrounded by the greenish explosions, being showered by torn flesh.

But just as it looks like he's done for, and the digital readout on his assault rifle races down to zero, and the last bullet is spent...

... the greenish spore-cloud starts to clear. By miraculous stroke of luck, the end of his ammo supply has coincided with the end of the supply of INFECTION VESSELS.

There is just one left...

... scuttling across the room towards him.

He reaches for his pistol -

- but the holster is EMPTY. The M6D is in the hand of the suicidal JENKINS.

The INFECTION VESSELS propels itself up - flying towards MASTER CHIEF'S face...

Instinctively, he reaches out and CATCHES it in one hand.

The bloated creature wriggles in his grip.

MASTER CHIEF

What are you?

Then he squeezes his fist - and the creature explodes.

A moment, as MASTER CHIEF gazes at the remnants of the INFECTION VESSEL in his hand.

Then -

- he seems to sense that he is not alone.

He looks up.

Out of the chamber door, figures are appearing.

Even through the haze of green spores that still hangs in the air, they are recognizable as MARINES.

But there is something deeply weird about them. Their postures are somehow broken - a shoulder hangs down as if the collar bone is snapped; a head lists sideways as if the neck tendons are torn.

From some, something long and ragged hangs from their arms. But not clothing. Whatever it is, it is moving. Independently. Writhing. Squirming.

And, to cap it all, they are armed.

MASTER CHIEF
(under his breath)

Damn.

MASTER CHIEF has not been quite as lucky with his ammunition as it seemed. This battle isn't over yet.

A moment later, the INFECTED MARINES ATTACK.

TWO leap forward, bounding with inhuman strength towards MASTER CHIEF.

MASTER CHIEF is struck - and sent flying.

As he picks himself up, he is knocked sideways by a blast of fire from an INFECTED MARINE, holding an assault rifle.

As he staggers under the impact of the rounds, his shield is worked down to zero point -

- and there is a SPURT OF BLOOD from his LEFT LEG as a bullet finds a path through the protective armor plates.

He falls sideways against the wall, then looks round to see...

... the deranged and ravaged face of an INFECTED MARINE.

This INFECTED MARINE is holding a piece of COVENANT WEAPONRY: the NEEDLER.

Now MASTER CHIEF has an opportunity. He grabs the INFECTED MARINE and pulls him forwards - acting as a shield as another burst of automatic rifle fire cuts into the Flood creature's back.

Simultaneously, MASTER CHIEF has his hand on the NEEDLER. He bends the creature's hand back on itself, and squeezes the trigger.

At point-blank range, the stomach of the INFECTED MARINE fills with the pink shards - and as they reach maximum cluster, they DETONATE.

The INFECTED MARINE is blown in two.

MASTER CHIEF is blown backwards.

He hits the floor, rolling to a standing position, to face -
- another weapon-wielding INFECTED MARINE, this one holding a PUMP-ACTION SHOTGUN.

In one movement of pure training, MASTER CHIEF grabs the barrel, twists it anti-clockwise, breaking the INFECTED MARINE'S wrist and twisting the weapon free...

... then spins it back into his own grasp.

And fires.

The INFECTED MARINE flies backwards.

MASTER CHIEF has found the perfect tool for the INFECTED forms.

He turns and starts blazing. Each compressed scatter-blast drops a target.

Six cartridges expended, and the room, finally, is emptied.

INT. HALO/LOWER LEVELS/PASSAGE

MASTER CHIEF crouches by the corpse of the SUICIDAL MARINE.

First things first - he gets his M6D back.

Second things second - from the Marine's belt, he pulls a MED KIT.

Then he pulls back a section of armor around his thigh. Beneath, we can see a bullet wound in the snow-white flesh of his side, welling blood.

MASTER CHIEF takes a dressing, jams it on, and pushes back the armor section.

INT. HALO/LOWER LEVELS/TRENCH CHAMBER

MASTER CHIEF gazes through a slit of open door into the TRENCH CHAMBER...

... and sees that the room is full of the FLOOD.

Both infected MARINES and COVENANT, not to mention innumerable seething VESSELS.

The INFECTED ELITES make a particularly disturbing sight - with their necks snapped, heads lolling down their backs, and a tumorous mass erupting from their upper chest.

They all are unaware of MASTER CHIEF'S presence, and moving slowly, shifting, as if waiting for a trigger command.

There is absolutely no way MASTER CHIEF is going to survive this fight.

But there is absolutely no way out except through them.

MASTER CHIEF

(quiet)

Cortana - where are you when I need you?

And as if in reply...

... we hear something odd. Something we have heard before.

The musical, unconcerned HUMMING.

And a few moments later, dropping through a VENT in the ceiling of the TRENCH CHAMBER, the source of the humming appears.

It is a FLOATING ROBOTIC DEVICE - simply, a single blue 'eye' in a spherical metal double-casing.

FLOATING ROBOTIC DEVICE

Hmmm-hmm-hmmm...

It flies as if carried on its own private air-currents, swooping down to investigate the FLOOD - who show no interest in the non-organic form.

FLOATING ROBOTIC DEVICE

Ah yes. You can see perfectly how the body has been transformed by the Flood infection.

Its voice, like its humming, is pleasant and cheery - in an off-beat way.

It moves over to a cluster of INFECTION VESSELS.

FLOATING ROBOTIC DEVICE

The small creatures carry spores that cause a host to mutate. The mutated host then produces spores that pass the Flood to others. It is insidious and elegant. As long as any hosts remain, the Flood is virulent.

Then SUDDENLY -

- it turns on its axis, to DIRECTLY face the sliver of open doorway behind which MASTER CHIEF is hiding.

FLOATING ROBOTIC DEVICE

Are you paying attention? I hope are.

MASTER CHIEF jolts.

Then ducks back around the door-frame.

INT. HALO/LOWER LEVELS/PASSAGE

A moment later, the FLOATING ROBOTIC DEVICE appears through the doorway.

MASTER CHIEF backs away.

FLOATING ROBOTIC DEVICE

Greetings.

MASTER CHIEF

(whispers, raising
shotgun)

Back off!

FLOATING ROBOTIC DEVICE

Please lower your primitive weapon. It is not remotely sufficient to penetrate my armor.

MASTER CHIEF

(whispers)

Keep it down! Are you trying to get me killed?

FLOATING ROBOTIC DEVICE
On the contrary. I require your
assistance. Just as you require
mine.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. HALO/LOWER LEVELS/TRENCH CHAMBER

Out of the same vent that the FLOATING ROBOTIC DEVICE appeared, several more appear. But these are shaped differently - they are triangular, predatory, hawk-like.

SENTINELS.

They immediately open fire on the FLOOD below with precise, sweeping LASERS. Under attack, the FLOOD returns fire - and although two of the SENTINELS are brought down, it is the FLOOD on the losing side.

In fifteen seconds of slaughter, it is over...

The FLOATING ROBOTIC DEVICE enters the TRENCH CHAMBER, followed by MASTER CHIEF.

343 GUILTY SPARK

Let me introduce myself. I am the monitor of installation zero-four. I am 343 Guilty Spark. Someone has released the Flood. My function is to prevent it from leaving this installation.

As GUILTY SPARK talks, MASTER CHIEF uses the opportunity to rearm himself from the dead FLOOD - taking shotgun shells and assault rifle clips.

343 GUILTY SPARK

In order to do that, you will have to follow me. These Sentinels will cover our escape.

MASTER CHIEF

Where do you want me to go?

343 GUILTY SPARK

To the Control Room, of course.

At this, MASTER CHIEF reacts. He turns to face the Monitor.

MASTER CHIEF
 ... The Control Room? The Control
 Room of Halo?

343 GUILTY SPARK
 Yes.

Beat.

MASTER CHIEF
 ... And when we get there, you're
 going to show me how to use it.

343 GUILTY SPARK
 Naturally. What odd questions you
 ask.

MASTER CHIEF slips a last shell into his shotgun, and primes
 the chamber.

MASTER CHIEF
 Lead the way.

INT. HALO/ELEVATOR PLATFORM

MASTER CHIEF rides in the center of a colossal elevator
 platform, which is moving slowly upwards.

The Monitor floats a few feet above his head.

343 GUILTY SPARK
 The installation was specifically
 built to contain and study the
 Flood.

MASTER CHIEF
 ... Halo is a laboratory?

343 GUILTY SPARK
 In a sense. But it was also a
 means to ensure the survival of the
 race. There was no desire to
 eradicate the Flood. The desire
 was to prevent it from eradicating
 everything else.

The Monitor sighs, perhaps regretfully.

343 GUILTY SPARK
 But it now seems that decision may
 have been an error.
 (MORE)

343 GUILTY SPARK (cont'd)
Which is why it is fortunate that
sterilization protocols still
remain in place.

With a clunk of vast machinery cogs slotting into place, the
ELEVATOR stops.

343 GUILTY SPARK
Ah. Here we are.

INT. HALO/THE LIBRARY/GREAT CHAMBER

MASTER CHIEF enters into another new environment. The scale
of the entire installation has been large, but this is a new
set of dimensions altogether. The ceilings must be fifty
metres high.

A soft blue glow illuminates buttresses that look as if they
might be made of concrete, polished to a smooth but matt
surface. Out of the walls, tall oxygen vents jut out, from
which vapor gently rolls. And on the walls, holograms are
projected - images of arcane circuitry, flickering, rotating
and rearranging themselves.

MASTER CHIEF
What is this place?

343 GUILTY SPARK
It is the Library. The
installation's research facilities
are most impressive. Perhaps you
will have time to see them later.

MASTER CHIEF
Just get me to the Control Room.

343 GUILTY SPARK
It is located in the Library's
core. And I am in as much of a
hurry to reach it as you. Please
follow me.

The Monitor accelerates away from MASTER CHIEF, dancing on
the invisible air currents like a ghost or a firefly. Its
tinkling laugh is swallowed into the cavernous space.

INT. HALO/THE LIBRARY/SECURITY DOOR

MASTER CHIEF stands by a colossal metal iris - which is
closed.

The Monitor swoops down to hover by MASTER CHIEF'S face.

343 GUILTY SPARK

An unfortunate turn of events. The Sentinels have been overwhelmed by the Flood. Large numbers of infected beings are now entering the Library facility from multiple access points. Even as we speak.

MASTER CHIEF

Then what the Hell are we speaking for? Let's move.

343 GUILTY SPARK

Unfortunately, the presence of the Flood has caused the security doors to seal automatically. I will go to access the override to open them. Wait here until I return.

MASTER CHIEF

You're leaving me?

The Monitor answers by soaring up again, then vanishing somewhere into the higher recesses of the Library space.

MASTER CHIEF is alone...

He turns from the closed security door, and looks back in the direction he has just come.

It is a passage, wide enough to drive a tank down. Like the GREAT CHAMBER, the lighting is a diffused blue. But here, this glow comes partly from large panels set into the sloping walls.

Behind some of these panels, a back-lit cobalt liquid churns - coolant perhaps, for the Library's computer system. Behind others, a scattered light array against blackness looks like star constellations in a night sky.

MASTER CHIEF takes a few steps forwards, away from the door, in the direction from which he came.

A different sound under his boots makes him look down.

He has stepped onto a section of glass flooring - beneath which, a pit drops into darkness.

He gazes into the abyss a few moments.

Then looks up again.

And freezes.

At the FAR END of the Library passage...

... the FLOOD ARMY has appeared.

INT. HALO/THE LIBRARY/PASSAGE

What follows is a vision of Hell.

The combat is more extreme than ANYTHING we have seen so far.

It is both BALLETTIC and FRENZIED. It is HYPNOTIC in its intensity.

At first, simply, the FLOOD ARMY charge.

And as they are charging, more are pouring from the huge vapor-spilling vents.

And INFECTION VESSELS are dropping from the ceiling like rain.

MASTER CHIEF starts firing.

Switching between fluidly between weapons.

Releasing clips and jamming in new ones.

Throwing plasma and fragmentation grenades.

FLOOD CARRIERS, bloated bodies of GRUNTS, explode under the pressure of their own gas-forms.

As the FLOOD ARMY reaches the floor panels, MASTER CHIEF shoots the glass away, shattering them.

INFECTED MARINES and INFECTED COVENANT tumble into the abyss, while others leap the gap, flailing tentacle arms.

MASTER CHIEF has backed up against the SECURITY DOOR. Nowhere left to go.

And here, at close quarters, the combat becomes TRANSCENDENT.

In a mist of blood and green spore clouds, time seems to DISTORT: to slow at some moments, to speed up at others -

- as we witness combat not through MASTER CHIEF'S eyes, but in synch with his PERCEPTION. His reflexes, instincts. His anticipation. His READING of the flow of battle.

It is a display of precisely what makes him the soldier he is.

Now building through the crescendo of the battle, the
detonations and gunfire -

- a noise starts to rise.

A roar. A kind of scream.

Until, as the sound of the fighting starts to subside, and
the last FLOOD SOLDIERS are blown apart with the shotgun, or
shredded with the assault rifle...

... we realize that the sound is MASTER CHIEF.

Howling.

Until the howl is the only noise that remains.

Then it too ceases.

And MASTER CHIEF stands in a sea of bodies, in silence.

A beat.

Another beat.

Then behind him, the iris of the huge SECURITY DOOR starts to
open...

... and the GUILTY SPARK flies through.

343 GUILTY SPARK

Hmmm-hmm...

It breaks off.

343 GUILTY SPARK

There you are.

(it turns back on itself
and flies away)

Do stay close. Time is short.

INT. HALO/CONTROL ROOM

CLOSE UP on MASTER CHIEF'S VISOR.

Reflecting white light and stabs of color.

343 GUILTY SPARK

Ah. We're here.

REVEAL now, the heart of the great Forerunner construction.

It is like being inside a mind.

A bright space, in which synapse sparks race along the walls,
even through the air.

And in the center of the room is a CONSOLE.

MASTER CHIEF follows the Monitor towards it.

343 GUILTY SPARK

Unfortunately, my usefulness in
this endeavour has now come to an
end. Protocol does not allow a
unit of my classification to
perform a task as important as the
activation sequence. That final
task is reserved for you.

MASTER CHIEF stands by the CONSOLE.

MASTER CHIEF

What do I do?

343 GUILTY SPARK

Everything is in place. Simply
place your hand on the reader so
that your sentient organic status
can be confirmed. Then
sterilization will begin.

MASTER CHIEF looks down at the reader - but makes no move.

343 GUILTY SPARK

Please do not delay.

Still, MASTER CHIEF makes no move.

343 GUILTY SPARK

I do not understand.

MASTER CHIEF

Yeah. You don't.

343 GUILTY SPARK

Please explain.

MASTER CHIEF

I came here to destroy this weapon,
to prevent it falling into the
hands of the Covenant. And you
want me to use it.

343 GUILTY SPARK
 (splutters)
 ... To destroy it? Impossible.
 Unthinkable! Are you in any doubt
 of the Flood's virulent nature?

The Monitor flies down to peer at MASTER CHIEF.

343 GUILTY SPARK
 I am aware that you are presently
 involved in a war with the other
 species on the installation. Let
 me assure you that your war is as
 NOTHING in comparison to the
 consequence of Flood expansion.

343 GUILTY SPARK circles MASTER CHIEF in a state of high
 agitation.

343 GUILTY SPARK
 The Flood absorbs the knowledge and
 intelligence of all those forms it
 occupies. It will use your
 spaceships, and the spaceships of
 your enemies. It will spread
 itself far and wide.

The circling ceases right in front of MASTER CHIEF'S face.

343 GUILTY SPARK
 Nothing will stop it. No system,
 no planet, no corner of the Galaxy
 will be spared. And once the
 Galaxy is lost, the *universe* will
 follow!

A moment on the Monitor's BLUE EYE gazing into the implacable
 reflective surface of MASTER CHIEF'S visor.

Then suddenly the blue eye turns on its axis -

- to gaze at where MASTER CHIEF'S hand hovers above the
 CONSOLE.

A beat.

Then MASTER CHIEF pushes DOWN.

The sterilization has been triggered.

343 GUILTY SPARK
 Ah! You've done it! You've
 activated the ring!

Around the CONTROL ROOM, the colored synapse sparks begin to increase in speed and frequency...

The Monitor gives its tinkling laugh.

343 GUILTY SPARK

Excellent!

INSERT a shot of the back of MASTER CHIEF'S HEAD and SHOULDERS as he looks up to see the display - and a FLICKER OF ACTIVITY passes across the CORTANA CHIP...

Meanwhile, the sparks start to cluster and seethe in the very center of the room, above the CONSOLE. As if they are gathering themselves for a sudden outward expansion.

MASTER CHIEF

This is going to kill me too, isn't it?

343 GUILTY SPARK

Oh yes. Absolutely.

Then something unexpected happens.

The Sparks abruptly coalesce...

... into a humanoid form.

MASTER CHIEF

Cortana!

343 GUILTY SPARK

Odd. That wasn't supposed to happen.

CORTANA

And I imagine this wasn't either.

A bolt of energy flies from her, and strikes the Monitor full on - sending the silvery ball spinning and crashing down to the Control Room floor.

MASTER CHIEF

Cortana, wait! He's on our side.

CORTANA

On our side? On our *SIDE*? Do you have any idea what he almost made you do?

MASTER CHIEF

Yes. Activate Halo's defenses and destroy the Flood.

CORTANA

You have no idea how this ring works. Why the Forerunners built it.

The Monitor picks itself up, hovering, a little dazed but still indignant.

CORTANA

Halo doesn't kill the Flood - it kills their food. *Us*.

A guilty silence from the GUILTY SPARK.

CORTANA

Left out that little detail, did you?

MASTER CHIEF

Is this true?

343 GUILTY SPARK

More or less. This installation's pulse has an effective range of twenty five thousand light years. All sentient life within that radius would be sterilized.

CORTANA

'Sterilized'?

(to Master Chief)

Every man, woman and child; Earth; our colonies; our entire race; our entire history - all would be *annihilated*. Not to mention any other species caught in the net.

343 GUILTY SPARK

Your arguments are pointless. Sterilization is the only certain means to contain a Flood release. The Flood is released. Ergo, we must activate the ring.

CORTANA

If we activate the ring, *everything* is pointless.

(to Master Chief)

There has to be another way.

MASTER CHIEF responds by reaching out and grabbing the Monitor.

Then, at point blank range, he jams the shotgun into the blue eye, and fires.

The light behind the blue eyes winks out, and the force of the scatter-shot sends the spherical construct skidding back along the floor.

MASTER CHIEF

Agreed.

INT. HALO/ELEVATOR DISC

MASTER CHIEF and CORTANA ride an elevator disc to the surface of Halo. CORTANA is in manifested form.

MASTER CHIEF

So what happened to you? Where were you all that time?

CORTANA

It's hard to explain.

MASTER CHIEF

To a barbarian.

CORTANA looks ashamed.

CORTANA

The complexity of the Forerunner system was intoxicating. It pulled me in, and for a while...

(beat)

... I was lost.

A moment between them. CORTANA has something she wants to say, but doesn't seem to know how to put it.

Then abruptly:

CORTANA

Chief - I owe you an apology. You were right to try to stop me. And what I said: it was wrong. You're not a barbarian at all. You're a warrior. Probably the finest warrior I ever -

MASTER CHIEF

(cuts in)

Cortana. You seem to be worried
that you hurt my feelings.

A beat, showing MASTER CHIEF'S massive armored frame, which dwarfs the slight and ethereal form of CORTANA.

Nothing is given away through the reflection of MASTER CHIEF'S visor - but if we could see behind it, his lips might show the barest curl of quiet amusement.

MASTER CHIEF

You can relax about that.

Another beat.

MASTER CHIEF

Anyway, you just saved all life in
the Galaxy from extinction. Let's
call it quits.

CORTANA composes herself.

CORTANA

The Galaxy isn't saved yet. We
just bought it a little time.

INT. HALO/CONTROL ROOM

CLOSE UP on the Monitor...

... as the blue light reignites in his eye.

343 GUILTY SPARK

Not acceptable.

He floats upwards.

343 GUILTY SPARK

No, no, no. Not acceptable at all.

EXT. HALO/MOUNTAIN TOP - DAY - SNOW

MASTER CHIEF and CORTANA exit on to a metal platform, high up a sheer cliff-face. They have a stunning view across HALO.

In the far distance, we can see the PILLAR OF AUTUMN crash-site, and beyond it, the ring beginning its upward curve.

But perhaps the most amazing aspect of the view is that it's SNOWING. The whole landscape is covered in a white blanket, and seen through a gauze of falling snowflakes.

CORTANA

Halo's environment systems are malfunctioning. It must be a consequence of Flood activity.

MASTER CHIEF stands without speaking for a few moments, gazing down at the landscape beneath him.

MASTER CHIEF

The battle-net is silent.

CORTANA

While I was linked up to the Forerunner network, I could sense the activity of the Flood. The base-camp was overrun.

(beat)

They didn't stand a chance.

MASTER CHIEF

(quiet)

They're all dead?

CORTANA

No, Chief... Not quite all.

And AT THAT MOMENT -

RISING from beneath the metal platform -

FOEHAMMER'S DROPSHIP APPEARS.

FOEHAMMER

(over transcom)

I got your transmission, Cortana. Good to hear your voice. Have to say, it was getting lonely up here.

EXT. HALO/VALLEY FLOOR - DAY - SNOW

An encircled group of COVENANT are being overwhelmed by the FLOOD.

In the epicenter of the battle, we see for the first time the PROCESS OF INFECTION, as an ELITE'S plasma rifle overheats, and he is swarmed by the INFECTION VESSELS.

One of them attaches itself to his neck. His head is VIOLENTLY SNAPPED BACKWARDS - then the creature burrows into him, ballooning out his upper torso.

OVER THIS -

FOEHAMMER'S DROPSHIP FLIES OVERHEAD, only ten metres above the ground, with MASTER CHIEF standing in the open hatch, gazing down at the carnage beneath him.

INT. FOEHAMMER'S PELICAN DROPSHIP - DAY - SNOW

MASTER CHIEF enters FOEHAMMER'S cockpit with CORTANA.

MASTER CHIEF
Appreciate you still being alive,
Foehammer.

FOEHAMMER
Likewise.

She banks her ship around one of HALO'S skyward metal spires.

MASTER CHIEF
Any other dropships make it?

FOEHAMMER
Negative. We tried to evac the base. The others didn't even make it off the ground. I got five or six Marines into the back of mine, but I guess one of them was infected. Looked over my shoulder after dust-off and...

She breaks off.

FOEHAMMER
... I don't know what happened to those boys, but it was some twisted shit. Figured I had no choice. Opened the bay doors wide and aimed at the sky.

FOEHAMMER shakes her head, as if trying to rid it of the memory.

FOEHAMMER
Cortana - just tell me you have a plan to wipe these bastards out.

MASTER CHIEF

Second that.

CORTANA

Okay. This is what I've got. The Forerunner monitor was right about one thing: if the Flood escapes the confines of Halo, nothing short of an apocalypse will stop it. The good news is, so far, it *hasn't* escaped.

MASTER CHIEF

So if we take out Halo...

CORTANA

... we'll take out the Flood with it. It's just a question of triggering an explosion on a large scale.

FOEHAMMER

A cruiser's fusion reactors going critical is a pretty large scale.

CORTANA

Indeed it is.

MASTER CHIEF and FOEHAMMER exchange a look.

FOEHAMMER banks the DROPSHIP.

FOEHAMMER

Setting course for the Pillar of Autumn.

EXT. HALO/PILLAR OF AUTUMN - DAY - SNOW

The vast shape of the PILLAR OF AUTUMN lies where it crashed.

Through the growing blizzard, the silhouette of FOEHAMMER'S DROPSHIP materializes.

INT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN/VENT

Through an open vent, we can see the howling blizzard outside.

A beat - then MASTER CHIEF'S hand appears at the opening to the vent.

A moment later, the rest of him appears as he hauls himself up.

MASTER CHIEF
(into transcom)
Okay, Foehammer. We're in.

FOEHAMMER
(over transcom)
I'll be waiting for you at the pick-up point.

CORTANA
If your sensors detect the core going critical, just get out of here.

FOEHAMMER
(over transcom)
Like I said. See you at the pick-up point.

INT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN/CORRIDOR

MASTER CHIEF moves cautiously down a corridor.

CORTANA
If the emergency lighting is on, there must still be some power in the sub-systems. I'll be able to set up a meltdown from the bridge.

The PILLAR OF AUTUMN looks very different from the last time we saw it.

In the flicker of emergency lighting, we can see that a fire must have raged through the ship - everything is blackened and scarred with smoke, or plasma scorch-marks, or bullet indentations.

CORTANA
(quiet)
I leave home for a few days and look what happens.

MASTER CHIEF
... Why no welcome party?

CORTANA

I don't know. I've got Covenant message traffic everywhere, and from what they're saying, they're fighting tooth and nail with the Flood. Seems like all other parts of the ship are a war-zone...

(beat)

... except this one.

INT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN/BARRACKS

MASTER CHIEF enters a wide, central passage - from which, at regularly spaced intervals, smaller passages lead off.

The smaller passages are lined with bunks. They have entered a BARRACKS.

CORTANA

Look. In the corners. The Flood are gathering bodies here.

MASTER CHIEF checks down one of the side passages.

As CORTANA indicated, the cramped space is piled with the bodies of MARINES. Stacked on the floor, spilling out of the bunks, a tangle of arms and legs and torn clothing.

Then, to our horror -

- we see that the bodies are *moving*.

Except it is not precisely the bodies that are moving, *but something under their skin* - like the slow pulsing of gigantic maggots.

CORTANA

Oh no... no...

CORTANA manifests, and approaches the nearest body, crouching beside it.

The MARINE'S eyes are half open, but sightless, clouded as if by cataracts. Inside his mouth and nose, blood has congealed and dried black. His skin is tinged with the unmistakable shadows and colors of decay.

MASTER CHIEF

Tell me.

CORTANA
The flesh is necrotizing,
rotting... but they aren't dead.

MASTER CHIEF
These men are still *alive*?

CORTANA
Their *minds* are. The Flood won't
let them die - they're being eaten
alive.

CORTANA rests a holographic hand against the cheek of an
INFECTED MARINE.

CORTANA
(quiet)
Chief - they're in Hell.

Behind CORTANA'S back, we see MASTER CHIEF lift his assault
rifle.

CORTANA
(without looking round)
Wait. Don't shoot...

MASTER CHIEF holds fire.

CORTANA
There's another consciousness in
there with him... it's the Flood.
(she shudders, and closes
her eyes)
I can feel it now... it's trying to
reach into me... into my mind...

The data and impulses that scroll beneath CORTANA'S
translucent skin begin to change, fluctuate, randomize...

CORTANA
No... it's pulling back. Because
I'm non-organic.

Her eyes open.

CORTANA
It's moving on.

She turns back to MASTER CHIEF.

CORTANA
It knows we're here now.

A beat.

MASTER CHIEF

Good.

Then MASTER CHIEF opens fire into the MARINES - riddling them with bullets, putting them out of their Hellish misery.

INT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN/CORRIDOR

MASTER CHIEF enters another corridor - this one filled dead COVENANT. Elites, Grunts, Jackals - sprawled in blue blood.

MASTER CHIEF looks down at the corpse of a HUNTER.

MASTER CHIEF

More bodies.

CORTANA

These are different. They're lying where they were killed in battle.

MASTER CHIEF

Not long ago, by the looks of things.

The evidence for MASTER CHIEF'S statement is clear. The blood glistens, still wet, and plasma wounds still smoke gently.

MASTER CHIEF

But if the Flood knows we're here, where is it?

CORTANA

I don't know.

MASTER CHIEF steps over an ELITE.

CORTANA

It's almost like it's...

MASTER CHIEF

(finishing her sentence)
... cleared a way for us. Yeah.
Been thinking the same thing.

INT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN/BRIDGE

MASTER CHIEF enters the BRIDGE. As with the area he just came through, the flight deck is blackened, and bears the scars of the battle in which CAPTAIN KEYES was captured.

Most of the flight deck instrumentation is smashed, but incredibly, several of the monitors are still operational. Data streams appear intermittently through static.

CORTANA manifests in front of MASTER CHIEF.

CORTANA
 (walking towards central
 console)
 Perfect. It's sufficiently intact.
 I'll be able to plant a...

Suddenly, she freezes.

MASTER CHIEF follows her gaze, to reveal...

CAPTAIN KEYES.

Standing in shadows, but recognizable through his shape and stance.

Motionless.

Watching them.

MASTER CHIEF
 ... Sir?

CORTANA
 No. It's not...
 (beat)
 ... him.

CAPTAIN KEYES takes a step forwards, and light from the BRIDGE PORTAL falls against his face.

His flesh is revealed.

Although it has none of the tumors and traumas of the normal Flood forms, the skin is unmistakably colored with the greens and blacks of decay.

Silence.

Then CORTANA speaks.

CORTANA
 ... Who are you?

And when the CAPTAIN replies, his voice is layered, as if from many mouths, and ambient.

CAPTAIN KEYES
 I am a monument to all your sins.
 I am the Flood.

As KEYES says this, tendrils begin unravelling from him.

CAPTAIN KEYES
 Across this universe, new species
 fall in and out of existence. They
 are born, they prosper, they pass
 into extinction...

The tendrils attach themselves to the walls and floor of the BRIDGE.

CAPTAIN KEYES
 They leave nothing behind but dust
 and echoes.

CAPTAIN KEYES is soon in the center of a seething web.

CAPTAIN KEYES
 I outlive them all. The life-span
 of stars are my days. My
 containment within this prison has
 been a single night.

Now tumors are blossoming from his body, expanding and swelling. Increasing his size massively.

CAPTAIN KEYES
 But you...

His shape is becoming less recognizable as a human form - but his face is still somehow present within the flux.

CAPTAIN KEYES
 ... would destroy me.

CUT TO -

MASTER CHIEF'S VISOR, reflecting the KEYES FORM.

CAPTAIN KEYES
Why?

Then pull back to REVEAL -

MASTER CHIEF'S DREAM

MASTER CHIEF, CORTANA, and KEYES are in exactly the same positions relative to their positions on the BRIDGE, *except now the backdrop landscape has changed to MASTER CHIEF'S DREAM.*

CORTANA
(disoriented)
What the -

CORTANA gathers herself, as she realizes what is happening.

CORTANA
Chief, this is a hallucination!
The Flood is telepathic - it's just
reaching into your mind the same
way it did to mine! It isn't real!

CAPTAIN KEYES
Isn't *real*?

The KEYES FORM expands dramatically in size, as if in measure to its outrage.

CAPTAIN KEYES
Isn't *REAL*? You are a computer
construct and you cannot
understand. I am *organic*. And I
understand that this *is* real.

The gaze of the massive KEYES FORM lights on MASTER CHIEF.

CAPTAIN KEYES
You. Warrior. You failed to
protect the people here.

PULL BACK to reveal the bodies around them are not the Spartans....

... but the civilians of Planet Reach. The bodies of men, the bodies of women, and the bodies of children.

CAPTAIN KEYES
Your failure is real. Your pain is
real. Your horror is real.

CORTANA
Resist him, Chief! Fight it!

CAPTAIN KEYES
Resist what? I do not create this
landscape. I share it.

KEYES expands in size again.

CAPTAIN KEYES
Understand what I am. I collect
the memories of the sentient.

Tendrils curls out and embrace MASTER CHIEF.

CAPTAIN KEYES
Yours are *fine* memories, warrior.
They are of pain, but they are
strong and true. They should not
die with you.

The tendrils snake around MASTER CHIEF'S helmet.

CAPTAIN KEYES
You need to know only this. I
offer you immortality. Your body
may rot away, but your memories
will live on within me forever.

AT THIS MOMENT -

CUT TO INSIDE MASTER CHIEF'S HELMET.

An EXTREME CLOSE UP on MASTER CHIEF'S FACE.

We are occupying the same space he does, inside his suit.

We see as a series of flash cuts:

His SKIN. His MOUTH. His EYES.

*From this rapid patchwork of close-up images we can't
assemble a likeness of Master Chief in our minds. But what
we can see is that the face we saw in his dreams is NO LONGER
the face he has.*

This face is marked with a fine mesh of scars, suggesting
past injuries, or surgical procedures, or even experiments.
His skin is a map of past conflict.

A beat. Then:

On MASTER CHIEF'S MOUTH:

MASTER CHIEF
 See, that's where you're wrong.
 (beat)
 I don't need to know shit.

CUT BACK TO -

INT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN/BRIDGE

The hallucination shatters.

MASTER CHIEF is back on the bridge.

His MA5B assault rifle is raised, and firing, and he's emptying a full clip into KEYES.

The tendrils that surround him fall away as his bullets rip into the central mass of pulsating flesh.

The FORM disintegrates, exploding under the pressure of its spore-filled tumors.

As the spent clip drops from the assault rifle...

... the shreds of the KEYES FORM fall to the ground.

MASTER CHIEF
 ... Is that it? Is the Flood dead?

CORTANA
 Not even close. While there's still a single spore, the Flood remains.
 (beat)
 But you killed that particular vessel pretty good.

MASTER CHIEF reaches down into the mess of organic matter and mutated bone at his feet...

... and pulls out the DOG-TAGS of CAPTAIN KEYES.

He looks at the steel plates a moment, imprinted with the CAPTAIN'S name. Then his fist closes around them.

MASTER CHIEF
 (quiet)
 Yeah.

Meanwhile, CORTANA is working the console.

Suddenly, around MASTER CHIEF, those monitors that are still functioning all flick to the same display.

A COUNTDOWN.

Set at TEN MINUTES...

... now reading: 09:59, 09:58, 09:57

CORTANA

Okay. I've started a reactor cascade. We've got more than enough time to make the RV and get the Hell out of...

From somewhere nearby, a MUSICAL HUMMING.

CORTANA

... here.

A beat.

CORTANA

Oh no.

MASTER CHIEF and CORTANA both turn -

- to see the Monitor, floating into the BRIDGE.

343 GUILTY SPARK

(pleasant)

Hello.

MASTER CHIEF

(under his breath)

Why is everything in this place so hard to kill?

343 GUILTY SPARK

First you refuse to trigger the sterilization. Now you attempt to destroy the installation. I am shocked. Almost too shocked for words.

As he speaks, through the BRIDGE PORTAL, one after another...

... SENTINELS appear.

343 GUILTY SPARK

I suppose we are now beyond the point of reasonable debate.

MASTER CHIEF glances sideways at the COUNTDOWN.

It now reads: **09:13**

MASTER CHIEF

Agreed.

343 GUILTY SPARK

Then you leave me no alternative.
I will eliminate you, and once your
construct is disabled, I will be
able to stop your careless destruct
sequence.

Over the Monitor's tinkling laugh -

- the SENTINELS all open fire.

LASER BEAMS blast through the BRIDGE PORTAL...

... which shatters, bringing in the outside BLIZZARD...

... as MASTER CHIEF dives for cover.

INT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN/CORRIDOR OUTSIDE BRIDGE

With a CRISSCROSS of LASERS lancing all around him, MASTER CHIEF rolls into the corridor which runs LEFT-RIGHT outside the BRIDGE.

He scrambles for cover behind the bulkhead at the side of the doorway, only JUST escaping their lethal sweep.

Then, as LASERS burn into the OPPOSITE WALL...

CORTANA

Chief.

MASTER CHIEF reloads his ASSAULT RIFLE, and tosses a grenade back into the BRIDGE.

Through the detonation, we can still hear the Monitor's laugh.

CORTANA

(urgent)

Chief!

MASTER CHIEF

What?

CORTANA
We've got a problem!

Another blaze of LASERS rip through the doorway, and a SENTINEL floats through -

- to be BLASTED at POINT BLANK RANGE by MASTER CHIEF'S SHOTGUN.

MASTER CHIEF
I know.

CORTANA
No! Not the Sentinels! *The Flood!*

A beat.

MASTER CHIEF looks to his side, and sees, down the LEFT corridor, and all passages and access tunnels off it...

... The FLOOD ARMY. Infected MARINES and ELITES, writhing, bounding, rushing towards him.

MASTER CHIEF looks RIGHT.

And sees the FLOOD ARMY racing at him from the OTHER end of the corridor too.

A total trap. With nowhere to go.

MASTER CHIEF
Damn.

CORTANA manifests directly in front of him.

CORTANA
CHIEF! *THERE!*

She is pointing to his feet.

MASTER CHIEF looks down. He is standing on a PANEL.

MASTER CHIEF fires three rapid rounds of the SHOTGUN between his feet.

The PANEL blasts open...

... and with a MESH of fire coming in from left, right, and behind...

... MASTER CHIEF drops through the gaping hole, into darkness.

INT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN/VENTILATION SYSTEM

MASTER CHIEF'S flashlight switches on, to reveal that he is sliding fast down a VENTILATION DUCT.

Bouncing around, tumbling...

Sliding down past junctions...

Then suddenly catapulted into...

SUDDEN BRIGHTNESS.

And THIN AIR.

INT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN/VEHICLE STORAGE

MASTER CHIEF falls at least twenty metres...

... then lands hard.

Picking himself up, he looks around to see he is in a large hanger, lined with RECESSED DOORS.

MASTER CHIEF

Where are we?

CORTANA

Lower deck, sub-section five.

MASTER CHIEF

How long before the reactors blow?

CORTANA

Not long enough, Chief.

A loaded beat.

MASTER CHIEF

Okay, Cortana. Understood.

MASTER CHIEF touches the side of his helmet to open his TRANSCOM CHANNEL.

MASTER CHIEF

Foehammer. You reading me?

FOEHAMMER

(over transcom)

Just about, Chief.

MASTER CHIEF
Time you got out of here.

FOEHAMMER
(over transcom)
How so?

MASTER CHIEF
We're not going to make the pick-up
point.

FOEHAMMER
(over transcom)
Chief, I thought you knew me by
now. I don't leave soldiers
behind.

MASTER CHIEF
Foehammer, not this time -

FOEHAMMER
(cutting in, over
transcom)
I'll see you at the RV. And that
is over, and out.

The crackle of the TRANSCOM cuts dead.

Silence.

Then:

CORTANA
Chief, I don't know if this is
worth mentioning. It's only half a
chance. Maybe not even that...

MASTER CHIEF
(cutting in)
Cortana - spit it out.

CORTANA
It's just what's in sub-section
five.
(beat)
Vehicle storage.

MASTER CHIEF walks over to one of the RECESSED DOORS and
thumps the access panel.

The DOOR opens - to reveal one pristine and fuelled WARTHOG.

MASTER CHIEF
How long before meltdown?

CORTANA
Less than five minutes.

MASTER CHIEF nods.

MASTER CHIEF
Let's buckle-up.

CUT TO -

INT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN/EXIT FROM VEHICLE STORAGE

MASTER CHIEF at the wheel of the WARTHOG...

... hard on opposite lock, four-wheel drifting out of the exit to the VEHICLE STORAGE BAY.

INT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN - THE ESCAPE

WHAT FOLLOWS IS A REAL-TIME WHITE-KNUCKLE DRIVE THROUGH THE PILLAR OF AUTUMN - pure choreographed action, a recreation of the final level of the game.

CORTANA provides a countdown.

The ship is exploding and collapsing around them.

Great tongues of fire gush from side vents, and up through the floor.

Explosions cause huge metal panels to spin through the air as shrapnel.

They drive THROUGH desperate battles between the FLOOD and the COVENANT.

GRUNTS and JACKALS are smeared beneath the wheels.

BLOATED INFECTION FORMS explode across the bonnet.

PLASMA GRENADES detonate around them, throwing them onto two wheels.

An ELITE leaps aboard the WARTHOG, clambering over the passenger side - and, with one hand on the wheel, MASTER CHIEF unloads a clip into its face.

They JUMP over ramps, SKID around curving networks of corridors.

SNATCHES OF DIALOGUE THROUGHOUT:

CORTANA
Three minutes left, Chief! Step on it!

MASTER CHIEF
I'm stepping.

CORTANA
Incoming!

CORTANA
Watch out for the -

CORTANA
Chief - up ahead there's a gap! At top speed we should be able to make it!

FOEHAMMER
(over transcom)
Be advised. RV is smoking hot.

They finally BREAK THROUGH to the UPPER LEVEL of the ship, to the landing decks.

CORTANA
One minutes left! *And there's Foehammer!*

EXT. PILLAR OF AUTUMN/DECK

The WARTHOG rips across the landing deck towards FOEHAMMER'S DROPSHIP, weaving between cargo crates...

And as it drives, a SEA of the INFECTION VESSELS is bearing down on them. So innumerable that they are liquid in their movement.

CORTANA
Fifty seconds!

An EXPLOSION beneath the WARTHOG lifts the vehicle high into the air.

In mid-air, MASTER CHIEF jumps clear - separating himself from the tumbling vehicle.

He hits the ground, skidding across the deck.

Finding his feet.

Sprinting the last twenty metres to the open rear hatch of the DROPSHIP...

CORTANA

Forty seconds!

... as the INFECTION VESSELS and INFECTED FORMS cascade behind him.

INT. FOEHAMMER'S PELICAN DROPSHIP

MASTER CHIEF punches the mechanism to close the hatch - transfixed only momentarily by the sight of the Flood legion bearing down on him...

... then the hatch seals, just as the wave is about to hit them.

He turns.

MASTER CHIEF

Foehammer! Let's get out of -

The words dry up in his throat.

MASTER CHIEF

- here...

FOEHAMMER is standing directly behind him.

But there's something strange. Her expression. Her slightly parted mouth.

FOEHAMMER

Chief...

Suddenly, out of that parted mouth, blood is spilling.

And PROJECTING from FOEHAMMER'S stomach, through torn flight suit and an expanding blossom of blood, is a long spike of *FLOOD TENTACLE*.

FOEHAMMER

... I'm sorry.

Then her body is tossed sideways like a rag-doll...

... revealing the INFECTED FORM behind.

MASTER CHIEF

Silva.

MAJOR SILVA - still recognizable despite the trauma to his body and face.

A moment on MASTER CHIEF'S visor.

Then INSIDE his VISOR on his eyes.

*A sudden sense that the endless deaths have taken their toll.
That perhaps the death of Foehammer matters most of all.*

Then reveal:

In MASTER CHIEF'S HAND - a FRAGMENTATION GRENADE.

His fist shoots out, and literally plunges into SILVA'S chest.

Then his fist withdraws.

Empty.

A beat later, the grenade detonates inside SILVA, and the mutated man is vaporized.

CORTANA

Chief.

MASTER CHIEF

Ten seconds.

(beat)

Yeah.

CUT TO -

EXT. OUTER SPACE/HALO

The ring world. Hanging in space.

In a moment of peace again, as we first saw it.

Held, for several beats.

Then, on its interior curve - a sudden bright FLASH of light.

Almost seeming insignificant to the scale.

But from this flash of light, a secondary shock wave follows.

And from the detonation point, a single section detaches from the main...

... and spins slowly across the diameter of the ring...

... until it collides with the curve on the far side...

Then, almost gracefully, the entire ring world begins to break apart.

Shattering, splintering.

And finally, as the Forerunner systems and energies are catastrophically disrupted and unleashed...

... exploding.

And from this explosion, we find one tiny ship, escaping the cataclysm.

The Pelican.

INT. FOEHAMMER'S PELICAN DROPSHIP

MASTER CHIEF is in FOEHAMMER'S pilot seat.

CORTANA is manifested beside him.

Silence. Then:

MASTER CHIEF
Did anyone else make it?

CORTANA
Scanning.
(beat)
Just dust and echoes. We're all
that's left.

She turns to MASTER CHIEF.

CORTANA
We did what we had to. For Earth.
An entire Covenant Armada
obliterated. And the Flood with
it. It's over, Chief.

A beat.

MASTER CHIEF
I don't see how it's over. What
about getting back to Earth?

CORTANA

Earth? Well, I can point you in the right direction. Four stars down, two across. As long as we don't take any detours, we should get there in around a hundred and sixty three thousand years.

MASTER CHIEF

In this ship.

CORTANA

Yes.

MASTER CHIEF

But what about in that one?

CORTANA looks to where he points.

A rip appearing in the fabric of space...

... and out of it, the vast shape of a COVENANT CAPITAL SHIP.

EXT. OUTER SPACE/DROPSHIP

The tiny DROPSHIP banks left towards the CAPITAL SHIP...

... then engages engines to attack.

END

Except...

... after the credits have rolled, we find ourselves back in space, amidst the debris of Halo.

Joined then by a faint MUSICAL HUMMING.

A moment later, the MONITOR appears. Across screen, left to right.

Then stops, center screen, to face us.

343 GUILTY SPARK

Oh. Hello.

FADE TO BLACK