1. Dubious Intelligence

**Authors Note: **Hey guys. Thank you for taking the time to read this novel. I appreciate it. If you think it's any good or if you have any suggestions of improvement, or just really need to tell me that it sucks, please review. Any feedback will help.

I'll get more in to characters in the next chapter. I just wanted you to get a feel for the story. I promise that the plot will pick up as well. Just felt like starting with something we're all familiar too (at least for those who have played Reach).

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_Dubious Intelligence_

_Planet Reach, 24th of July, 2552, Visegrad Relay Outpost (UNSC Communications Facility), 0700 Hours_

When the ODSTs walked through the blackened hallway it was in silence. Dead silence. They rounded corners, checking every inch of the facility, following their orders to the letter. Walking in pairs and sweeping their sectors and constantly moving forward because something didn't quite add up.

"I heard that facilities like this have been dropping off the grid all over Reach." Delta-Two said.

"You're kidding me?" Delta-Five responded.
"No, man. Echo is up north checking out some ammo caches and Alpha has been deployed somewhere near New Alexandria. Something's going on."

"Fucking Innies, always here fuck shit up. Can't they see that we're already losing a war?"

"Stay frosty," Delta-One said. "We don't know anything. We're just here to do our job. Don't worry about anything else."

"You heard the man." Delta-Three said. "Let's get it done."

Pushing through the maze of hallways however, nothing seemed out of the ordinary. No marks of combat or ambush could be seen. All was swell save for the dead silence.

Delta continued through another set of corridors until they finally reach the control centre. Upon entering the room they were welcomed by a foul stench of gunpowder and burned flesh. The room wore all the marks of battle and the walls and floor were stained with blood. A firefight had taken place here, one that by the looks of it seemed rather one-sided. No bodies were to be found.

"Delta-Actual, this is Delta-One, over." Winters tried to reach command. "Delta-Actual, do you read me?"

Static.

"Check your radio, see if you can raise command." He ordered the team.

Nothing.

"Something must be jamming us, Sir. Looks like we're in a dead zone." Dutch replied.

"Shifty, can you reach command?"

"Negative, Sir. Only static."

"Keep us posted. We might be here for a while."

Winters walked around the control room and inspected the damage. Most of the electronics had been melted onto one big pot and he didn't know if he could salvage what was left. Video surveillance was down and so was thermal and motion trackers. They were completely exposed here save for Shifty who was on guard outside.

"Well, I think we can establish why the station didn't respond." Romeo stated in his usual wiseass-tone. He dragged out a marine from a closet which he had just opened. "They're all dead."

"That's plasma burns." Mack said after inspecting the body.

"Pack your gear, boys. We're leaving Reach."

"We don't know what it means yet, but we need to get in contact with Command ASAP." Winters said.

"All the cords and electronics are fried, making this facility
useless." Mack said and threw away a data pad. "Nothing I can do about it."

"Three-Charlie-Six, we've got a lot of casualties over here. By the looks of it, they were overwhelmed. No survivors."

"Roger that, Delta-One. We've got a similar situation. A lot of dead bodies." 3 Charlie 6 responded.

"Try to reach command. We've got zero luck." Winters was interrupted by the main entrance opening, but there nothing was there. Winters squinted; was he delusional or was he just seeing badly, but his vision got slightly blurry.

"I got movement." Dutch called out. "Cloaked Elite."

Delta opened fire in all directions. It was hard to tell where the movement came from. The Elite moved fast, but here and there bullets ricocheted off something mid-air, throwing it off its trajectory.

"Contact left." Winters heard Mack call out. They all turned and adjusted their fire to the newly acquainted target. Bullets were fired and missed but more and more ricocheted and they got a more precise target until the Elite's cloaking failed and it fell victim before Delta's ruthless power.

The recent victory didn't last for long as Winters spotted in his periphery vision another Elite approaching Romeo from behind. The Elite decoated and reach out for his energy sword. He leaped forward and barely managed to push Romeo out of the way. The Elite hit Winters and his shoulder plate was cut off clean, but he managed to get away without a scratch.

Mack tackled the Elite mid-torso and sent him down on his back. Dutch jumped the energy sword and ran his knife threw the wrist. The Elite let out a scream in agony and assembled morbid strength. With his left hand he grabbed Dutch by the neck and threw him across the room. He kicked Mack who propelled against the wall and fell unconscious to the ground. The Elite dug out the knife from his wrist, but before he got a chance to get on his feet Winters fired a pellet round point blank in his face. The Elite fell to the ground, stone dead.

"Sit-Rep." Winters called out.

"Mack is down for the count, but other than that." Romeo responded.

"I'm good to go." Dutch said and shook off his dizziness.

Dutch and Romeo each got one of Mack's arms and together they carried him. Winters lead the way out of the room, rifled leveled and ready. "Shifty, we've got Covenant inside the building. Get airborne and standby for Evac."

"Interrogative. The Covenant?" It was Corporal Travis, call sign 3 Charlie 6, who broke in on the Com channel.

"Affirmative. Assemble your team, Corporal, and get ready for pickup."
Delta-Four is en route to your position.

They continued to push through the same hallways they had entered the facility. This time however, Winters noticed several things that were out of order. Weapon racks were empty, ammo caches were clean and bunks that were unmade; all visible symptoms that this facility and its personnel had prepared for an engagement.

"Delta One, LZ is hot. Covenant is approaching your exit. The roof top is your best vector, how copy?" Shifty called over the radio.

"Solid Copy, Delta Four. We're en route."

Winters brought up the blueprint over the building on his HUD and made out the best way he could. They turned right on the next corner and push through a mess. They encountered a smell scouting party consistent of four Grunts. They exchange fire for a brief second until the Grunts retreated with heavy casualty. It wouldn't be long before they would give away Delta's position.

"Permission to pursuit." Romeo requested.

"Negative, we'll head for the roof and get out of here ASAP."

Pushing through the mess' doors they reached an elevator. Delta entered the lift and started climbing towards the top floor. During this short break, Winters removed his helmet and wiped his face from all the sweat.

"Gunny, how the hell didn't we know about this?" Romeo asked. "I mean, how could Covenant troops slip through all of our security undetected?"

Winters didn't have an answer. In fact, he had some questions himself. This was way too sloppy, even for the UNSC. He put on his helmet again and unpolarized the visor as he scrutinized his team. Slightly crippled, he was sure that he would manage to get them out of this mess.

"Shifty, get ready for pick-up. We're heading for the top floor fast. ETA for Evac, sixty seconds." He radioed.

"Solid copy, Delta-One. 3 Charlie is onboard and we're heading your way."

The doors slid apart and Delta was out. They turned a quick right and ran up a flight of stairs. Winters kicked the door and sunlight broke through the interior gloom. His visor polarized slightly to adjust to the brightness as he stepped out on the roof. To the west were only a long stretch of mountains and to the east lay an abyss; easily a two click fall to the ground. From this chasm rose a Pelican into view. It immediately drew fire from the Covenant on the ground, but took little damage.

"Delta-Two, you've got one bogy coming in from east." Winters alerted Shifty on the radio as a Banshee banked over the ridge. "Mike, take evasive action. Now!" He yelled in panic, but it was too late. Shifty pushed the throttle and climbed to the skies, but the Banshee hit his
aft engine and he lost control.

"Mayday, mayday. Delta-Two is going down. I repeat, Delta-Two is down." That was the last Winters ever heard from him. The Pelican lost altitude and crashed somewhere in to the north.

"Delta-Two, do you copy?" Winters tried to raise him on the radio. "Delta-Two? 3 Charlie, do you copy? 3 Charlie, please respond."

"Great, there goes our way out of this mess." Romeo said.

The door, from which they had entered the roof, was once again violently opened and a pair of jackals emerged. Delta quickly suppressed them but they hid behind their energy shields. The bullets simply bounced off of them. Dutch brought up his grenade launcher and fire a salvo. The explosion didn't kill the pair instantly, but it sent one of them over the edge, down the abyss. The other one fell unconscious to the ground.

"Gunny, what's our plan?" Dutch asked calmly as he reloaded his grenade launcher.

Winters, still in combat-mode, was caught off guard. He didn't really know what to do. "Uhm, we should probablyâ€”" His voice faded to nothing. He tried to think, but it was hard with all the adrenalin pumping through his body. All he really wanted to do was to shoot something.

"Sir, I suggest we try to find a way out of here quietly, considering our current status, and then search for the crash site." Dutch continued. Winters nodded.

"Romeo, you get to carry Mack. Dutch, you're our six." He ordered his team. Things were getting clearer now. "On me, Delta."

They retraced their way back to the elevator, carefully checking every corner for the enemy. When they got to the elevator, Winters entered and pushed the 'Bottom Floor' and quickly stepped out.

"Sir, we're not going down with it?" Dutch asked.

"No, we'll take the service elevator. This is just a decoy." Dutch and Romeo looked at each other. "Like you said, Dutch, I like it quite."

Mack's vision slowly came into focus. It took a while to shake off the blurriness. He looked around and found himself sitting at the entrance of a service tunnel. Winters sat opposite to him, mending what looked like a communications array.

When Winters noticed him he crouched over to his side to help him up. "How are you?"

Mack got up on his feet. He tested his body, his legs and his arms, to see of there were any malfunctioning. "A little sore, but I'm fit for duty."

"Good, we've got some work a head of us."
He picked up the Com equipment and stepped out. Mack followed and noticed that they weren't far from the Com Facility. Dutch and Romeo rounded a building just up ahead. Mack and Winters jogged to meet them.

"Sir, we've scouted the area. There was light resistance." Romeo patted his sniper. "Nothing I couldn't handle."

"Gunny, I think we found a road to the next valley." Dutch squeezed in, disrupting Romeo from his bragging.

"Then we'll take it."

"Hey, can someone fill me in?" Mack asked. "What happened?"

"Well, we were just about to..." Winters began but never got to finish.

"Long story short; Shifty got shot down in the air and we're heading to the crash site." Dutch finished.

"At least we didn't have to fight Innies, right Delta-Five?" Romeo said condescendingly. "You know, 'cause Elites are so much easier to kill." As he walked past Mack he deliberately struck him with his shoulder. He lost his footing and fell to the ground.

"Stand down." Winter ordered. Mack got up to challenge Romeo, but didn't take any further actions. "Fall out. Romeo, you're on point."

One after another, the team followed Delta-Two as he led the way to where they thought the Pelican had gone down. As they moved down the valley more Covenant aircrafts could be seen entering the area. This battle was about to escalate.

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There you have it! Please review!

2. Unexpected Help

**Author's Note:** I'm still messing around with the story, trying to find a style I can run with. Don't be surprised if the "writing technique" will change for chapter to chapter. As I said, I'm trying to find one I'm comfortable with. Regarding the story, it is still very unclear what it really is all about, but I promise that chapter three will get more to it. Right now, I'm just presenting the characters. Enjoy, and please review!

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Travis held on to the railing the best he could. The Pelican spun uncontrolled and the G-forces did its best trying to catapult him out of the aircraft. Most of the others in his squad had strapped into the seats, but not him.

"Shit!" He heard one of his men scream. It was Private Gore, whose
belt had failed. He started tumbling all over the interior of the Pelican dropship but increasingly tumbled closer to the edge every second. Just as he was about to fall out into the mercy of gravity, Travis reached out his hand and miraculously caught him. He found himself now inside a stretch bench. With his left hand he held on to the ship and with the other he held on to the trooper, the two powers combined started tearing into his bones. When he failed holding on to Gore, he was slung out and sent on a one-way ticket down. Travis didn't see where he landed. Merely seconds later he felt the Pelican hit solid ground.

Shifty tried to regain control but when the engines didn't respond he did the only sensible thing left; he aimed for the ground, because he'd rather make a hard landing below than going over the edge and freefall two clicks and most certainly die.

He did his best to gain some altitude before ground contact, but another direct hit from the Banshee send him straight into a cliff. The Pelican bounced off of it and crashed, nose down. With it's engines still in full effect, however, it plowed it's way through the dirt and straight towards the edge.

Travis regained focus slowly after the impact. He wasn't sure how, but he got on his feet. Then he realized that Private Fisher carried him under his arm. "Sir, we gotta get out of here. The ship is going over the edge!" The trooped screamed in panic. Two of his men sat inside their straps with their heads down. Blood sipped down from their noses and mouths which lead Travis to assume they were dead. The remaining two in his team struggled to free themselves, but the sheer panic crippled them from making any progress. Travis snapped out of his coma and ran to aid them.

"Here, help me with this one." He screamed to Fisher. Together they help Pvt. Wu out of his restraints. "Get Moore out of his seat, too." He ordered Pfc. Fisher. "I'll check the pilot."

A shudder through the ship sent the men on their knees. Fisher crouched over to Pvt. Moore, while Wu scrambled to get out of the Pelican. Travis threw himself at the cockpit door, but it was locked. That or something was jamming it. He pulled it violently, but it was futile.

"There's no time, Travis." Fisher screamed. "Let's GO!"

The ship suddenly tumbled violently forward, just as it was about to go over the edge. Fisher barely managed to get out in time. Travis leaped forward but it wasn't nearly as far as required to get off the ship. As the Pelican leveled down ninety-degrees he slowly slid down to the cockpit door.

Fisher threw himself out of the Pelican just in time. "Travis!" He called out. He immediately grabbed the rope from his backpack and blindly threw it down the Pelican just as it went over the edge.

"Gotcha." He mumbled as he braced himself to counter the weight from the line. Together with the squad, they pulled Travis back over the edge.

Travis got on his knees to catch his breath. It was a long time ago
since he had experienced anything similar, if ever.

"Ammo and weapons check. I wanna hear you call 'em in." He ordered his team. Fisher hunkered down to check if he was still in one piece. "Thank you." He whispered to Fisher in secret. Fisher only nodded in reply. He wished he had something to say in return, but frankly, he didn't. Fisher had never been the man with the right words at hand. He had never been able to express himself. That's why he had just as many divorces as he had marriages. The reminder of this left him feeling sad. The thought that the only legacy he would leave behind was campaign ribbons and a handful of divorces wasn't an encouraging one. A lifetime of words left unspoken.

"Sidearm and a mag, Sir." Pvt. Gore reported. He rendezvoused with the team from the south, from a small trail going in to the canyon that Travis had completely missed.

"Jesus, how the hell did you make it?" Pvt. Moore asked him in genuine surprise.

"An Elite took most of the impact." He answered grinning. How much truth that lied to this was unknown, however. Everybody was just happy to have him back from the 'presumed dead'. "I got a way out of here." He said and gestured to the trail came from. "And even better, I got transportation."

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"Jesus, Maria and Joseph. Is this what you call transportation?" Pvt. Moore burst out when Gore presented his solution. They had followed him half a click south of the crash site as he had led them through the canyon, avoiding Covenant scouting parties. When they finally arrived, it was to a barn. To his surprise, Travis found a dead Elite just right outside the storage facility. He wasn't a doctor, but it was painfully obvious that he had been squashed by something that had fallen from the sky.

"What do you suppose us doing withâ€¦ _those_?" Travis wondered and gestured towards the fold. Inside, two dozens of Moas strode around and ate from the grass.

"We'll ride them." Gore answered as if it was the most obvious thing on the world. His childhood accent had returned, as if it had been resurrected by the sheer presence of his these creatures. Obviously they had been a great part of his earlier life, suggesting that Gore had grown up on a farm. "Oh, c'mon. I did it all the time when I grew up." He jumped over the fence and started inspecting the creatures. "Wu, Moore, you can have these two. Fisher, this one is yours." He said after he had walked around for a while and screened the herd. "And this oneâ€¦" He continued and gently stroke one of the other Moas on the neck. The creature didn't appreciate it one bit and tried to bite Gore's head off. "This one is definitely yours, Sir." He said to Travis.

Gore then limberly jumped up on one of the others and gave the team a short walkthrough. "You grab them by their wings." He said and showed them. "You pull right, it goes right. Got it? You accelerate by kicking it gently with your feet in his or her sides, like this." He softly used his heels to kick the Moa on the side of his stomach and it moved forward instantly.
"And how do we make it stop?" Travis asked concerned.

"Not sure, really."

"What do you mean, James?"

"Well, usually I fell off before I got to that part." He said and started moving out of the fold, through the fencing, and the other Moas instinctively followed with their respective riders. "But I wouldn't worry about that, Sir. Once you get these up to speed, you don't want them to slow down."

Travis hated the fact that Gore was right. Once he had started kicking his Moa, the pure thrill he got from it was stunning. They moved with such grace he barley felt that he was moving. He tapped his creature lightly again and it took off even faster. The wind played with his hair like he was inside a tornado. He had to squint so his eyes wouldn't tear up so much.

"Fun, isn't it, Sir?" Gore shouted to Travis when he ran up beside him. He didn't bother to answer. He tried to overlook the excitement and started working out a plan. Contacting command was a priority and to do that he needed to get out of this dead zone. But he felt uneasy to leave Delta behind.

Last contact he had from Delta was when they were about to pick them up, when they had been shot down. He assumed, because the Covenant were assaulting their position, that Delta had fled the control centre and moved towards the crash site. Therefore, after his conclusion, if he was to have any luck finding Delta he should move north. Problem was, in order to head north they had to find some kind of route through the canyons, and that would be problematic.

"It's another dead end, Sir." Gore reported back when he returned from scouting a trail that lead into the rock wall. "But I think I spotted another one up ahead."

"Alright, we'll check out that one too." He answered. Travis was completely lost inside the maze of hidden trails and canyons, and the Covenant could be lurking anywhere.

They moved another click up ahead when they arrived to another trail that lead into the rock wall. This one, however, distinguished itself from the other ones. It was wider and had been beaten by all the men that had walked upon it. It was clearly a popular route.

"Well, this one looks promising. We'll recon it in full force." He commanded.

Gore on point, 3 Charlie, mounted on Moas, moved in a single line on the trail. It appeared like it was a dried out river they were walking in. All the rocks were rounded and smoothened, like when water shapes an object over hundreds of years. The slope up to the edge overlooking the trail was at least ten meters; a perfect stage for an ambush. He gestured to the others to keep an eye on the edge above.

After a ten minute hike they entered a larger area with several trails, similar to that which they just had travelled on, leading
somewhere else. It was here their comfortable journey on the Moas ended, however. Without any admonishment, Travis' creature suddenly started stuttering and jumping around like a maniac. Gore's and Fisher's did the same until they all fell off. Then they ran at away, pedaling to the metal, in different directions. Their sudden caution wasn't without reason. From nowhere, a giant, two legged monster, with claws of the same size of a grown-up and tusks just as big, ran out and killed one of the fleeing Moas. When this happened, the creatures carrying Wu and Moore, who until this moment had remained calm, fled in panic. Moore and Wu held on in fear of falling off in 60 kilometers per hour, a fall that would kill anyone.

"What the hell is that?" Travis demanded.

"I have no clue." Pvt. Gore answered. Another giant jumped out into view. When it came apparent that it's buddy would share his prey and catching any of the now fully aware Moas was out of the question, it starting looking around for prospect. It didn't take long before it found Travis and his team.

"I think it has spotted us, Sir." Fisher stated as the monster began moving their way.

"You think, Private?" He answered sarcastically and opened fire. The bullets only seemed to slow the creature down.

"Move!" He screamed and jumped to evade the monster as it hammered the spot he had just stood on. The creature appeared determined to have Travis for lunch as he continued to pursuit him. This, however, left his back open for a practice target. Fisher and Gore burned through their mags, but pistols had no visible effect on it.

When Travis reached the conclusion that they couldn't be able to take the creature down, it left him with one option.

"Fuck it!" He yelled to Gore and Fisher. "We're Oscar Mike, damn it!" And he started running like never before. To their advantage, speed wasn't one of the monster's many perks. Strength and indestructibility were.

They took the trail leading out towards north-west, the same route Moore and Wu had been carried off at. This trail, however, didn't last for long as they entered another large opening. The route had led them out from the labyrinth and into a canyon. Further downhill, Travis spotted Moore and Wu in a fierce firefight with a squad of Grunts and Elites. They were cornered against a cliff with nowhere to run. A creek was running through this small valley and ended in a waterfall. It was from this creek the enemy was advancing. The only advantage they had was higher ground.

"This is Three-Charlie-Five, requesting reinforcements. Damn it, get that guy!" He heard Moore say on the Com. "Travis, where the hell are you guys?"

"We're on our way, Private. Hang tight." Travis broadcasted. He checked his ammo. With only his sidearm, this wouldn't be a very long firefight, but abandoning two of his men wasn't an option. He started moving down hill, closely followed by Gore and Fisher.
"We'll establish a perimeter and try to fall back as quick as possible." He said to the team over the radio. "Hooah?"

"Hooah!" They all responded.

Travis started picking out easy target whilst moving. Mostly Grunts that didn't have a understanding of basic rules of engagements. They stood completely exposed in the open making practice targets. Of course, they did just what they were supposed to do: draw fire from the Elites so they could sneak up and stab you with their energy swords.

He got down to Moore, who stood crouching behind a boulder. He fired single shots whenever a Grunt tried a frontal assault. They were met with a small hole between their eyes.

"Sir, we're screwed if we stay here."

"Copy that, Private." He answered frosty. "Mayday! Three-Charlie-Six, does anyone read? We were attacked by Covenant forces. The Covenant is on Reach. I repeat: the Covenant is on Reach." He broadcasted on the UNSC emergency band.

This was similar to preaching for the deaf. He knew his only hope was to call for reinforcements, but the only squads out here was his team and Delta, and for all he knew, Delta was already dead. That's why it came as a shock when his distress call was answered.

"3-Charlie, this is Noble Team. We read you loud and clear and en route."

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Thank you for reading! Please review.