

*The following has been translated from Vortigese by the original writer. The wording, grammar, and dialect have been modified to be better understood by human readers.*

It all started many Earth years ago. The Oppressors invaded my home, slaughtering my kind and forcing us to follow our master, the Nihilanth, into the border world known to humans as Xen. The Nihilanth led us in rebuilding our culture and adapting to our new environment. He taught us how to create machines to aid our work, ward off Gonarchs, and safely prepare headcrab meat for consumption. Once we had established ourselves we were able to live peacefully among the alien world we'd found ourselves in. We built sprawling factories, massive residential complexes, and even prisons for the few...dangerous individuals.

I, being of a decent stature within our culture, was allowed to go unshackled by the Nihilanth and even start a family. My original name is, regrettably, lost to both time and tongue, but In the modern day, I am known simply as 'Denny' by the inhabitants of planet Earth. My partner, who I will simply refer to as 'wife,' and our two spawn were allowed to live deep within the Nihilanth's main complex with the most protection that could be spared. We tended to use our connection to the Vortessence, the force that my kind is deeply connected to, in order to power the sprawling complexes that housed our factories. Our technology was almost entirely built around the use of the Vortessence.

One day, when Wife, our spawn, and I were walking to the Nihilanth's chamber for a meeting alarms began to sound as strange green portals sprang up all around our complexes and the surrounding areas, yanking workers and wildlife out of our reality and into a previously unknown universe. The Nihilanth began to telepathically order my kind to pour into these portals, overwhelm the inhabitants of this new world, and use it as a way to escape the Oppressors once and for all. I bid Wife and our spawn goodbye before sprinting into the closest portal.

I blacked out at first, overwhelmed by the sudden change in gravity, atmosphere, and air density. Upon coming to, I looked around the strange metallic, orange room I had warped into. The distant, and not so distant, sounds of Vortessence blasts, screams, and a strange sound similar to that of small, rapid detonations could be heard from all directions. I could feel the connections of my kind dwindling along with a new, very faint, network of connections rapidly dwindling as well. I pushed myself up to a standing position and moved to the door just in time to see a strange being, not unlike myself, covered in a brown material (I later learned that this was called 'hair.') and possessing a pale, white complexion. It was in a large, orange, bulky armour and was looking, wide-eyed, through a crack in a malfunctioning door.

I could hear another being counting a strange series of numbers as the first entity sprinted through the door. I cautiously followed, peaking around the corner as I saw the second being. It was clearly the same species as the first, however, its connection was even weaker. It seemed to be compressing the chest of a fallen comrade, counting as it did so. When it stopped

to look around it saw me, froze, and passed out. I could feel its connection to this strange new network within the Vortessence immediately vanish...it was dead.

I stepped over the two bodies, trying not to make contact with them out of fear for foreign bacteria and viruses. Upon making my way down the corridor I was confronted by an interesting sight; a headcrab had latched onto the head of the Earthlings, using them as a host and controlling their body. I had never witnessed such a thing, having only heard about this ability through rumours and gossip spread throughout the workforce. I stepped backwards, taken aback by the grotesque manner in which this being's body had changed.

There was a gaping mouth along its torso that showed their insides, they had grown massive claws on their hands, and the worst part of it was that I could still sense its life. This being was alive...and it was in immense pain. I decided that I'd kill this...abomination, both to end its suffering and carry out the orders given to my kind by the Nihilanth. Upon using a charged blast the creature was thrown back, immediately killed by the attack.

I heard a series of detonations, they were small and rapid judging by the way the sound reverberated through the corridors. Curious as to what this sound was, and seeing as I could still hear it all around me, I decided to go investigate. Clearly it must've been some kind of weapon or tool. I moved through the corridor until I came across a door leading to a vertical tunnel. I looked down and saw that whatever platform had been there was in pieces at the bottom. Looking around I saw a ladder that led up to a platform above me. Cautiously, I climbed the ladder to the top.

Upon reaching the top I heard the ending of a conversation followed by rapid footsteps. Going through the door I found a black metallic object. I decided to pick it up and, only having two fingers on each hand, fumbled with it until I accidentally pulled the trigger, causing a rather loud discharge from the object. I immediately back away and look around to see that nothing was attracted to the noise.

Once I was sure that nothing had heard the noise I moved on, seeking to carry out my mission. I worked my way through the facility, killing anything that posed a threat while observing the strange technologies around me. I found what seemed to be a break room and decided to experiment with a large metal box.

It had a screen made out of some sort of alloy behind a hinged metal plate with glass in the center along with a series of buttons along the right side. I pressed a few buttons that had the human numerals on them and waited for something to happen...nothing did. I looked in confusion at the machine until I saw a much larger button at the bottom. Assuming this was the 'start' button I pressed it and jumped back in surprise as it lit up, began to hum, and a plate inside began to rotate.

I sensed a shortwave radiation being emitted from the device and I looked on in amazement as the delicacy inside began to bubble. I moved my face closer in hopes of observing the process from a greater angle and flew back in a mixture of terror and surprise as the morsel exploded into a green splatter on the screen. I stood there, frozen and wide eyed, for several seconds before regaining my composure and looking around the room.

For the first time ever I had an insight into just how much humans rely on manufactured materials. The room and its decor was comprised of a tiled floor, polished wood, metal alloys, and other materials I am unable to name. Shaking my head in disappointment I walk out of the room and notice something that had been nagging at the back of mind throughout the endeavor; it was perfectly silent except for the hum of the machinery.

The fighting was still clear within the Vortessence, faint messages from far away fluxes were fading in and out and I could still sense the new connections, however, much fewer than at first. I could sense the emotions among these connections The most common emotion was...fear. These humans weren't even putting up a fight anymore in fact, I didn't sense any aggression aside from a single, distant ping of it.

The humans remaining in this facility...they were civilians. Unarmed noncombatants who were trying to hide. I ran through the facility, trying to find justification for our actions here and...and there was none. All the creatures had been caught off guard. Some were even holding onto makeshift weapons like wooden sticks adorned with numerals between horizontal lines.

I walked solemnly through five levels, observing the carnage with great sadness. I did notice one thing though, the humans built the facility below the surface of their planet judging by the number of levels listed in the stairwells. I didn't know their numerals at the time but I was sure three digits was a lot for them too.

After a while I found myself in what was clearly a place for organized work. There were flat surfaces, terminals, and storage units arranged between temporary internal walls. I walked around, observing more of their strange artificial machines. In the border world we only had natural materials and no way to artificially create new ones like we used to. I was so used to our new way of life I had forgotten what it was like to have alloys in machinery.

I was snapped out of my observations by a sharp mechanical sound. It sounded like a mechanism snapping into place. Curious, I followed the direction the noise had come from until I found a barricade blocking a hall. I looked through a window-sized hole in the barricade to see a small group of humans shaking with terror. Almost all of them were wearing long white clothes, but two of them were in black and blue armour. I raise my hands as a sign of peace and wait for their reaction, bracing myself for an attack.

To my surprise one of the armoured humans lowers his weapon and whispers something to the other, who relays the message through the group. The first armoured human walks slowly

up to barricade, raising his arms in the same manner as mine. He stops in front of the opening and deliberately blocks my view of the others, a wise tactical choice. I let out a greeting, my unfamiliar language causing him to flinch but still, he holds his ground.

I shake my head, frustrated by my ignorance. Slowly I lower one of my arms and move it through the opening, holding it out in front of him and hoping he understands the gesture. He looks me up and down, apparently surprised by my behaviour. I move my hand a bit closer and he takes it, shaking it timidly. I give a sigh of relief as he seems to calm down a bit.

Looking around the area, I try to find some way to convey my message. There was a functioning terminal down the corridor so I hold up one finger, imitating the shape of one of their numerals, and walk back to the terminal. I raise both of my hands above the terminal and sap its power, hoping some of its data would come with it. From what I observed of the human technology, it seems to almost all work on electrical impulses so the data stored within must as well.

As I sap the terminal's energy I feel information flooding into my mind. Words, numerals, equations and even some schematics are revealed to me by a simple machine. Ecstatic, I walk back to the barricade in time to hear a conversation that I can now understand.

"I don't know but...it didn't seem like the rest. It didn't even try to attack!"

"I don't know man, but I wouldn't get too clo-" the human stopped speaking when he saw me, his expression one of terror. I raise my right hand and wave, an idea strikes me and I decide to speak.

"He-hell...hell...o." It was rough, the new word barely able to form on my lips. The humans stare at me, wide eyed, but not with fear. They were surprised. The human I'd interacted with previously, he seemed to be a sort of unspoken leader, came up to me followed immediately by a giddy human in what I'd learned was called a lab coat. The female civilian was giving off an aura of excitement as she looked me up and down, almost leaning over the male's shoulder.

The male pats her hand and she backs away reluctantly. He smiles and offers me his hand. I grasp it as well as two fingers can and shake it firmly. I decide to try and tell them that I mean no harm and try to formulate the sentence in my head.

"N...nn-nooo...no h-h-har-harm..." I close my larger eye and shake my head in frustration. When I open my eye again the humans are backing away, the two guards raising their weapons.

I jump back, instinctively raising my arms to attack before I sense multiple beings behind me. I spin around to face whatever creature may be there only to be faced with three of my kind. They're giving off an almost palpable sense of rage. They look at me accusingly and I realize why they're angry.

I look behind me and nod at the guards, a look of determination on my face. I look back at my comrades and try to negotiate before resorting to a fight. As Vortigese is not possible to write, I will simply translate it to English. *(The original writer has instructed this publication to put translated text into the bold you are currently seeing)*

**“Friends! Do you not sense the fear these people are feeling? None of these humans deserve what we are doing to them!”**

**“We do not care, we *must* escape the Oppressors. Now move aside.”**

**“You do not understand. These creature...this world. All I sense is fear and desperation. All I see is a crime that we are committing.”**

**“The Nihilanth gave us our orders, if he thinks they deserve to die then so be it!”** I begin to hear messages from a nearby flux, it carries with it a feeling of pure malice. *(The original writer has transcribed fluxes in italics for clarity.)*

*We’re through the barricade, fry them!* Immediately afterwards screams echo through the corridor followed by the nearby sounds of Vortessence blasts. I look towards the sound, back to the group behind me, and finally towards my newfound enemies. I charge an attack and let it loose towards the one in the middle, hitting him square in the chest and knocking him backwards.

**“This is your last chance to change your mind. These humans are defenseless, don’t you feel any regret?”** The other two begin to charge their attacks, I turn to the humans and speak english again, yelling the first words I could think of “BACK! DOWN!” Just as I turn back to the fight I’m struck by the first Vortessence blast, throwing me backwards and causing the second blast to miss me entirely. Quickly, I recover and utter a final warning.

**“I will give you one last chance. Back off, stand down, and order all of our kind to STOP FIGHTING!”** Upon yelling the last two words I hear the human civilians whimper, I completely forgot that they don’t understand our language. **“I will not tell you again, these beings do not deserve what we are doing to them, if we continue down this path then what’ll make us any different from Them? We’re only repeating a cycle of genocide and suffering. We...we are NOT the Oppressors! We are their victims and these beings are *our* victims. We need to end this.”**

The two lackeys look at each other, unsure of what to do. I see their leader getting up, clearly dazed. The lackeys turn to their leader, charge their Vortessence blasts, and release them towards the leader, killing him instantly. The larger of the remaining two walks up to me and spares a glance at the humans hiding behind the wall of furniture.

**“I...understand your concern for these creatures, but you understand that we can’t simply abandon the mission... I’ll relay the message through verbal means, try to convince the others...we’ll let the humans go, but we at least need to look like we’re trying.”**

**“I understand, these beings will be grateful for your mercy.”** The larger Vortigaunt walks down the corridor followed by his companion. Once they’ve rounded the corner I turn back to the Humans and try to calm them down.

**“You...order evac...evacuat-evacuation...yes?”**

“Are you askin’ if I ordered an evacuation?” I nod, not wanting to waste energy on needless thinking. The human looks around, sighs, and presses a button on a plastic box strapped to his shoulder, a radio I guessed. He says a series of words that I don’t recognize and looks shocked when a gruff voice responds.

“Copy that, Charlie Echo we’re inbound and we’re coming in hot. You may wanna brace yourself.” Mere seconds after the transmission the entire facility begins to shake violently. Distant explosions echo from above as I sense numerous deaths from both Vortessence networks. The explosions continue for about two minutes before fading to nothing. The humans look around, I sense a mix of glee, confusion, and uncertainty.

I’m about to say something when I hear hundreds of fluxes all carrying the same message; *fight until your last breath*. Slowly I come to a grim realization.

“Military...E-Earth military.” The humans register what I’m trying to say and exchanged worried glances. I continue, starting to finally understand the human language. “My...my kind. Send message, to companions. Not kill humans.” The two guards realize what I said first and move to the opening in their barricade.

“Those two, the ones you let go, were they supposed to tell the others to stop?” I nod, “Fucking...looks like the marines just fucked our little truce. Look, you see what we’re wearing? These uniforms are ours. Anyone wearing something other than any of these is probably out to kill you. You’re gonna have to...to kill them if you want to live.”

“Civilians...military...both guns. My kind attack both.”

“Alright, lemme think.” The humans stops and concentrates for a few minutes before clapping his hands together and asking me a question, he gives off an aura of hope.

“You got a name? Maybe some way of signifying peace? Mercy? Something that your ‘kind’ will take seriously.” I ponder this for several seconds before thinking of an adequate answer. I tell him my Vortigese name and my kind’s word for peace and he immediately gets to work, keying his radio.

“Attention all remaining Black Mesa security personnel. Tune to emergency channel Six-Eight-Three for immediate instructions.” The human waits, anxious until he gets multiple responses. Letting out a sigh of relief he keys the radio again. “Alright, if you see any of those bipedal aliens,” he makes an apologetic glance at me and I nod, “say what you hear at the end of my transmission, remember it, and tell any and all civilians to do the same. But first, the military is here,” cheers erupt from the small device, “but we almost had a truce with the aliens. You find out how I know shortly. Of course they’re bombing the facility, we’re still in it, and for all we know they might not even be *our* military.”

The cheers have now become silence upon hearing this last part. The guard is about to key his radio when I send out the loudest flux I can muster, a loud wail escaping my lungs and echoing throughout the facility. It carries with it a pleading message along with a new set of orders.

The guard stops mid sentence and looks at me. His radio is a cacophony panicked transmissions, meaning my message was heard throughout the complex. I hear many fluxes

fading closer and closer as the confirmation is relayed straight back to me. I turn to the guard and explain, "This One has sent message. My kind is ordered not to attack facility uniforms."

"How the hell? What was that noise?"

"Explanation later. Action now." The guard nods and keys his radio. He explains the current situation and continues with his instructions. Eventually he hands me the radio and shows me the button to transmit. I first speak in my own tongue to get the hard part out of the way. Afterwards I speak English and tell those listening exactly what to say should they meet one of my kind.

I end it with a regrettable admission, saying "Sadly, not all my kind will accept this. If this becomes the case then you'll have no choice but to fight back." I am met with a silence that lasts around one minutes until one of the humans over the radio speaks.

"Ok...so, this is one those aliens?"

"Affirmative."

"Well then. How do we know we can trust you?" I look at the security guard and he nods, taking the radio.

"Listen, this one saved my group's lives. If it hadn't been for hi-" I nod, affirmating that I am male, "him, we'd all be dead."

"I...well, alright. Just tell me this; How do you plan on us relaying this message? Half the facility is a deadzone and a good chunk of our radios were fried during the Cascade. Most of the security team doesn't even know this conversation happened!"

"I'll leave that to you to figure out."

"Whatever you say. I just hope the military finds us soo-" The human over the radio stops speaking, but keeps his radio keyed. He seems to be speaking to someone but it's too muffled to hear. Suddenly the humans begins to yell, panic clear in his voice.

"WE AIN'T ONE THEM! JUST GET US OUTTA HE-" gunfire emanates from the radio along with a scream just before the transmission ends, cutting to silence. A stunned silence fills the air with a tangible tension. The security guard looks up, scans the room, and looks to the others.

"Alright. Pack up. We're getting the hell outta here." Without another word they all get up and begin checking for supplies they may have taken out. Just as the guard is about to speak to me I feel myself being pulled out of their world, followed by darkness as I black out.

I wake up after an hour of unconsciousness and look around. I am in the Nihilanth's chamber and he seems to be fighting something. After focusing on where his attacks are going, I notice that the entity that he is fighting is the same human I witnessed leaving the room I warped into. The Nihilanth speaks to me and others of my kind that he'd warped along with me.

"My children, I require assistance from you...please." I was surprised, he was speaking English verbally, but I heard Vortigese at the same time telepathically. We all sit and stare, watching as our leader is defeated by a human, "Why? Why do you not defend your leader?"

"You had us enter an alien world! Slaughter countless innocent beings! It is only fitting for their champion to avenge their fallen." I look around, wondering who else had learned the

human language. Across the room I see another of my kind, one who is unshackled no less, who seems to be of the same social caste as me. He is speaking the human language even better than I could, shocking me quite a bit. The Nihilanth takes an explosive to his chest, knocking him backwards as he yells in pain. Knowing the Nihilanth's end is near, I find myself making one last act of goodwill to both my people and those that were also under His control. After taking a deep breath I let out a flux with a message to those of my caste and the council of elders, requesting that they assist me in deactivating the shackles given to the rest of our race. Without any response I already know the answer as the shackles throughout the chamber spark and fall to the ground, releasing those that had worn them.

Cheers erupt throughout the facilities as my kind is once again free. The Nihilanth takes a projectile to his head and looks down at us with open abhorrence as he falls to the ground, never to move again. To be quite honest, we had no idea what to do with our newfound freedom.

The Elders called a mandatory gathering to decide what we should do. The gathering starts like any other, we talk amongst ourselves for a bit, eat some food, and meditate for a while. After all the formalities had been taken care of the Council calls for our attention. After a short round of voting the majority had won and we began moving through the portals in small groups, so as to not alarm the humans.

What we saw, however, was incredibly painful to witness. A rather large group had gone through the same portal as me, all of us being transported to a city in chaos. Human civilians were smashing windows, stealing whatever was inside. There were human soldiers and, we assumed, law enforcement trying to keep the peace while bullsquids, headcrabs (and their hosts), and pit drones were scattered around the area, adding to the mayhem. Me and the Xen refugees that came with me all send out fluxes, ordering our kind for miles around to assist the humans, which causes everything, even the Bullsquids, to stop in their tracks and look our way.

The civilians run away from us while soldiers and law enforcement form a line in front of them, weapons ready. I raise my hands in a gesture of surrender and yell a single word.

"LISTEN!" The armed humans lower their weapons, somewhat reluctant, and look at me and my entourage in shock. I speak once more, explaining our purpose, "We are here to help. We must make amends for our crimes against your race. Please let us as-" I let loose a beam attack over the shoulder of a law enforcement officer, striking a lunging headcrab and causing him to dive toward the ground. He looks around, seeing the charred headcrab, and looks back at me with a dumbfounded look on his face.

The humans look at each other and come to a silent agreement. Over the course of the next day my kind works with Humanity in order to set up safe zones for civilians. We teach the humans about our culture, the creatures they are fighting, and the battle that took place on our homeworld. By the time morning arrives we've safeguarded all the civilians in the city, with similar results around the continent.



It wasn't until mid-day that we sensed Them. Small groups at first, recon units. Then, without warning, a large network appeared in the Vortessence. A very familiar one. I spring to my feet, my kind following suit, and look around for signs of danger. A human I had befriended looks at me, asking a question.

"What's got you guys so weird all of a sudden?"

"They have come..."

"What? Who has co-" he doesn't finish his sentence before the sounds of gunfire and screams echo all around us. My human friend's radio comes to life with chatter.

"Charlie team, status repo-"

"We need backup at the East barrica- ARGH"

"This is Checkpoint Three, we're under attack by an unknown enemy force. Heavy casualties!" He looks at me, an aura of pure despair on his face. I look to my kind and speak, a plan already forming in my head.

"Four of you, stay here with me. The rest of you find any and all humans, civilian and otherwise, and evacuate. I expect you to honour those lost in the invasion of our world by protecting those we've wronged. *This* is how we will make amends." A cry of agreement rises through my group and I feel an overwhelming sense of pride.

Soon after, me and four others have set up a barricade and readied ourselves for a last stand. The fighting draws nearer as the frontline becomes visible. Human soldiers retreat only to be gunned down by the very Oppressors that invaded my world. A feeling of pure rage fills my very being, the four standing by my side giving off the same exact aura. As the humans' first line of defense falls multiple human aircraft fly overhead, letting loose a volley of gunfire and explosives that decimate the frontline of the invading army.

As the fighters come around for another volley we hear shouts behind us. Human soldiers, law enforcement, and even some civilians run to our side, weapons ready. I look around myself, taking in this display of courage. These humans, despite facing overwhelming odds, would rather stand and fight than run and hide. I feel proud of this species, but I don't have much time to reflect when the Oppressors advance again. I yell at the top of my lungs.

"Aim for the head of the bipedal ones, use explosives on everything else! Ballistics only slow those ones down for a moment!" Just like that, the Seven Hour War has begun. Our defence didn't last long but, we showed the Oppressors that they weren't taking this planet easily. As the Oppressors advanced, the humans pushed them back. The aircrafts were able to make short work of ground troops, preventing them from getting too close for almost an hour.

After two hours of fighting in the ruins of the safe zone, the Oppressors sent in their gunships. They appeared to be insectoid in origin, but they were heavily modified. Their wings had been shortened into aerodynamic fins for steering, their abdomen replaced with rotors in a way not unlike those of human helicopters. Their proboscis had been turned into a dark matter chain gun, ripping through any armour with ease.

The fighters saw them and moved in to attack, firing their ballistic weapons at their rotors. The gunships avoid the volley with ease and fire their dark matter guns, causing the first fighter to crash to the ground with no human emerging. The second fighter swung around again and fired a volley of heat seeking missiles. The gunship spun to face them and shot them out of the sky with astonishing precision. The fighter's wing was clipped by a stray round and it was spiralling towards the ground.

The pilot released his entire payload, taking out a large amount of the enemy's front line before hitting the side of a building, bringing it down in a fiery explosion. I was charging my attack when a very loud, very close, thumping rose from the rubble around us. Remembering what happened on my homeworld, I feel my heart drop. I had no sooner given the order to retreat than the three legged monstrosities known as Striders climbed over the remains of the city, firing down on us.

These synthetic beings had met the same fate as those who became the gunships. A large, mostly nomadic, grazing species that had been conquered by the Oppressors early on in their bid for complete conquest. They'd had their hide replaced with highly bullet resistant armour, their eyes removed and replaced with internal video feeds of their surroundings, a large dark matter pulse turret was fitted to the undercarriage with a warp cannon fitted to the top of the same gun. Most of my human friends now would say that they remind them of the "War of the Worlds." If humans had fought another war against an alien empire, they didn't seem to care.

It didn't take long for my allies to realize what was happening as we all fell back, the humans firing blindly behind themselves. As we ran through the city our numbers grew thinner and thinner, the Oppressors catching us at every turn. It wasn't until we were several kilometers outside the city that we were able to catch our breath. Out of the one hundred fighters that manned the defense, ten of us remained. The humans' radio chatter had ceased and they were low on ammunition. I looked at our exhausted group and felt a general sense of despair.

I could tell that no one was in the mood to talk but knew we couldn't just give up. I knew that if we gave up then humanity would be destroyed. I stood up, my head held high, and spoke.

"This One know all seems lost," They all looked up at me, their weary faces igniting a fire within me,"but we have to keep fighting. We all lost someone close to us. Friends, family, and then some. Some died in the initial storms, some died to Xenian wildlife, and others died fighting. Fighting for something my kind didn't have the strength to fight for. Freedom. Where my kind ran, hiding between dimensions, your kind stood and fought. This One has never seen such bravery in the face of insurmountable odds."

"In fact, This One doubts the Oppressors have either. They have always defeated their victims in the first hour of their assault. You stood your ground for two hours without budging. Your fallen are certainly watching from the Void and This One is certain you made them proud. Now, are you going to fight or are you going to die, making the sacrifices of your kin all for

naught?" The humans and Xenians around me exchanged glances before collectively rising to their feet.

Ten minutes later, we've built a temporary camp and established a defensive perimeter. The humans found it hard to sleep, with great reason, while my kind and I simply refused to sleep. It didn't take long for the humans to pass out from exhaustion, giving them the sleep they needed. I looked curiously at the sleeping forms, their faces so peaceful, but their emotions anything but. Almost all of them were feeling immense sadness in their dreams, a few felt anguish. It filled me with sorrow, knowing that this race would never know peace again. After only thirty minutes of rest, the portals began to widen, large monolithic structures descending from the other side. It was an awe inspiring site, for sure, but it spelled certain doom for many of Earth's inhabitants. As they fell, the monoliths known as Citadels gained speed before crashing down on cities around the globe, the force of the impact detonating the dark matter reactors and decimating entire cities and their surrounding areas.

I began to yell, first in Vortigese, then in English. The humans awoke slowly then immediately got a rush of adrenaline when they saw the pulse of dark matter energy speeding towards us.

"Find cover! NOW!" We all dove for cover, most of us finding vehicles or rubble to hide under. The two that didn't were thrown by the pulse, vaporizing less than one second later. I waited, covering my head, my feeding arm curled against my abdomen, as the dark matter washed over us. Mere moments later, there was no sound but that of the rubble settling. Debris and abandoned vehicles fell to the ground while the near constant gunfire that had been audible a mere minute prior became increasingly distant. The pulse of energy vaporizing almost all remaining resistance within the city. The humans cautiously crawl out from under their cover, looking around in fear.

"What the *hell* was that!?"

"Where's Johnny?"

"You guys alright?"

"I think we're sa-" A shot rang out from the surrounding rubble, the human's neck sliced by a pulse round, silencing him instantly. I began scanning our surroundings in search of the shooter and saw nothing. A second, then a third shot rang out and I saw a blue light on the fifth floor of a skyscraper. Immediately, I begin charging an attack but, just as I'm about to release a precise shock, a mechanical scream is heard in the distance. It's getting progressively louder as the scream turns into the sound of a jet engine and a fighter plane, the left wing engulfed in flames, plunges into the sixth story. The building's windows all explode outwards and the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh floors of the building are engulfed in flames.

We all gather what was left of our gear and begin making our way out of the city. After a while, we were able to find a train yard that still had one train, mostly intact.

"Alright, Adams and Jane, get that thing moving. Everyone else, set up a perimeter. We're probably going to have company." We all begin setting up barricades and traps. Using landmines, we're able to set up a minefield that covers the entire front line.