

**HALO** ®

**SILENTIUM**

BOOK THREE OF THE FORERUNNER SAGA

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TOR



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To my son, Erik—my Vergil  
throughout these three books

## **ONIRF TREVELYAN**

### **Top Secret**

This document is a translation of thirty-nine strings of Forerunner data, converted to text/audio. They have been abstracted from two sources: the shell or carapace of Forerunner remains #879 ("Catalog") and a damaged monitor associated with a single fossilized "Juridical," a hitherto unknown Forerunner type, presumably a legal functionary.

The "Catalog" carapace enclosed a highly specialized Forerunner that apparently served as an amplified collector of data. The misshapen body within has almost entirely rotted away.

No attempt has been made to restore or reactivate either the monitor or the carapace.

CONTEXT: At the very end of the Forerunner empire, as the Flood made major inroads and both Builders and the revived class of Warrior-Servants prepared their last defenses, the Juridicals were given free access to all citizens and personnel throughout the ecumene.

Their mandate: to investigate the circumstances alluded to in

the “Bornstellar Relation” (“Destruction of Orion Complex Capital World,” ONI File CR-537-21), but also to investigate the delicate question of human and Forerunner origins, and the fate of the Precursors, who allegedly created both species.

When the ship that collected, repaired, and debriefed Forerunner monitor 343 Guilty Spark is recovered, more of these issues will doubtless be illuminated. For the time being, some matters must remain obscure.

The fragments are arranged in a temporary logical order. Chronology of some fragments cannot be established, but all were recorded in the last decade of the Forerunner empire, before the apocalyptic discharge of the energies of the Halo rings.

Tactical translations in this report incorporate audio strings associated with the names of places, ships, and individuals. Some of these have been transliterated, with their modern equivalents in parentheses. All other translations follow colloquial style for quick comprehension. [TT] denotes Tactical Translator note.

ONI takes no responsibility for command decisions based on inferences made from these translations, particularly with regard to the Didact or the Librarian.

—ONIRF Investigation Team

## STRING 1

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SENIOR JURIDICAL

**W***ELCOME, JURIDICAL. THE Domain is especially clear this evening. I presume the transport of all those brutish wheels has come to a pause. Where may I guide you?*

“Thank you, Haruspis. I am empowered by the New Council to investigate the matter of the Precursors and possible crimes against the Mantle. Grant me access to that beginning.”

*A unique request—and not a welcome one. That region of the Domain has long been sealed. For you, it does not exist.*

“The Master Juridical orders it be opened.”

*Not even such a One has that authority.*

“Who does?”

*Ten million years have passed. Back then, Warriors were not yet servants and stood highest. Perhaps the greatest of your Warriors might persuade the Domain.*

“I am authorized to remove the Haruspis and access the Domain directly, should you refuse.”

*I see the authorization is legitimate. That does not make it virtuous or wise.*

“Forerunners are rapidly moving beyond virtue and wisdom. The evidence is essential to judge testimony gathered by Catalog regarding the Flood, the Master Builder, the Old Council, and the Didact. Surely you’ve stored other materials relevant to those cases.”

*They have been refused by the Domain.*

“How is that possible? The Domain is the soul and record of all things Forerunner. Is it judging and correcting before history is made?”

*Since the destruction of the Capital world, the Domain is frequently off-line now, and even when it is available and clear, it does not always respond to timely storage or retrieval.*

“Individuals and their ancillas have reported difficulties—but you?”

*What I know suggests the possible influence of an immense event yet to come. Do you anticipate such an event, Juridical? Does your request seek justification, or preparation?*

“That is beyond my scope.”

*You have come to remove me. Please do. I have been so long with the Domain that I will quickly pass into it—and I can think of no more suitable fate for Haruspis.*

“I would prefer of course to rely on your experience. I plead with you . . . !”

*Do not hesitate or your courage will fail. Wait.*

*Wait.*

“Is there a problem?”

*The Domain is making its own request. The Domain wishes to testify to a Juridical.*

“The Domain is not a recognized class of being. It is not in any way a citizen—not even an awareness!”

*How little you know. Haruspis is standing aside now. Are you recording?*

“Yes . . . Unprecedented! But recording.”

*All paths are clear. Signal strength is remarkable, even willful . . . Haruspis has never seen it like this.*

“Recording . . . too fast! Too powerful! Can’t absorb it all . . .”

*You asked for it, Juridical. The Domain is here, the Domain is wide open—and it is not happy.*



## STRING 2

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### CATALOG

**M**IDDAY AND THE skies grow dark with ships. Lightning flashes along the far horizon. We stand on the rim of a promontory overlooking a wide, flat plain covered as far as the eye can see with dry grass—three Lifeworkers and me.

The Lifeworkers have been tasked with the selection and collection of but a few of this planet's living things, that the coming Halo desecration may one day be forgiven when our lives are summed at the end of Living Time.

The planet is called Erde-Tyrene. Ships great and small sweep over the continent where humans may have first evolved.

I am Catalog. I record all that I am called upon to witness. I am filled with evidence and testimony related to the cases at hand. Accessing investigations conducted on other worlds, I study many histories: clans and families and partners split apart by the Flood war, cities destroyed, star systems scoured to prevent infection. All that terror and hatred burn inside me like so many flame-carved scars. These events echo through the Domain, and inevitably attract the attention of Juridicals. The Juridicals then dispatch Catalog.

I am one of many.

We are all the same.

*In theory.*

Once my presence has been mandated, no one can refuse me. In the investigation of a possible crime, Catalog determines what is passed along to the Juridicals. Nobody wishes to be accused of crimes against the Mantle. But that is just one of the potential charges on which I gather testimony and evidence.

The three Lifeworkers beside me have finished early surveys and activated the beacons that in turn have told all humans imprinted with the Librarian's *geas* to settle their affairs and gather. The evacuation has been going on for many days. The plain before us is alive with an incessant, dreadful noise—the screams of frightened humans and other animals, cowering as ships swoop down and Lifeworkers emerge to collect.

Everywhere on Erde-Tyrene, across the prairies and

over the mountains, between the islands, even across a thick northern cloak of glaciers, terrified humans leave their hunting grounds, their farms and villages and towns. The animals so summoned have no choice. By the grace of the Lifeworkers, many will be preserved. Most will not.

The Librarian, it is said, favors humans. But as Catalog I am aware that she has studied and favored one hundred and twenty-three technologically capable species across three million worlds within the explored regions of our galaxy. How many of these she will seek to preserve, it is not my job to predict or even to understand.

The Lifeworkers have sworn to carry out the commands of the New Council, reconstituted from survivors found deep beneath the ruins of the Capital world. Most of the Old Council was killed by the metarch-level ancilla known as Mendicant Bias when it unleashed the killing power of Halo, possibly at the instigation of the Master Builder.

That is one of the cases Juridicals will examine and decide. But that is not why I am here.

The three Lifeworkers stand silent and solemn beside me. Their white armor provides them with information from around Erde-Tyrene. I receive similar data from Juridical probes spread around the ecumene in anticipation of new cases. At the moment, however, only the local network is available to me.

Across the thunder-booming plain, out of the bellies of the great ships, thousands of lesser ships drop and spread like mosquitoes, their engines a distant, buzzing whine.

Many trail yellowish curtains like tainted rain. This is solute, which will cause every animal killed by Halo action to instantly decay into component molecules. This will avert an ecological miasma. But it could also be construed as a way to hide a tremendous crime from later investigators.

Very interesting to Catalog.

Lifeworkers have time and resources to preserve less than one out of a thousand of Erde-Tyrene's large species. A great extinction will follow. Very soon, this world will be quiet. This may not in itself constitute a crime against the Mantle. Deliberate and total extinction would qualify, and this is not that.

Not yet.

The chief Lifeworker, a mature third-form named Carrier-of-Immunity, receives a signal from our ship, a seeker transport parked on a rocky promontory a few dozen meters behind us.

"The Lifeshaper is in the system," he says.

"Are we to meet with the Lifeshaper?" Celebrator-of-Birth, a young first-form, asks hopefully. There are billions of Lifeworkers but only one Lifeshaper.

"Not yet. The community of Marontik has yet to be processed." Carrier adds, "I have new orders, however. Catalog will be removed from Erde-Tyrene. I will accompany him to the Lifeshaper's ship."

"The Librarian interrupts my investigation?" I ask, suddenly on alert. Crime ever multiplies and grows!

"That's all I know," Carrier says. "Please come with

me.” He walks toward the transport. I have no choice but to follow, leaving the others on the rim rock overlooking the evacuations.

We enter the ship and are swiftly conveyed to low orbit. I withdraw my external sensors and go silent on all channels and frequencies. There is no reason to discuss matters with this Lifeworker. He has little power and less culpability.

We dock with the Librarian’s ship and I am released onto the passenger deck. Carrier-of-Immunity withdraws, no doubt with relief, to return to Erde-Tyrene. I am alone. The deck is wide, empty, dark. Despite the power of the Juridicals, I am apprehensive.

The suspects in our investigation are legendary: the Librarian, the IsoDidact, and the Master Builder. All have yet to be deposed. The Librarian has been granted a temporary waiver due to her pressing duties.

The IsoDidact is an ingenious copy of the original Didact, who imprinted a Manipular named Bornstellar-Makes-Eternal-Lasting. He has assumed control of Fore-runner defense and oversees the security of Lifeworker activities. The Librarian maintains this copy is still her husband. He calls her wife.

As the minutes pass, I hear echoing noises in the gloom. Then, through an opening port, sunlight flows like burning gold and splashes against two shadows, one ominous and bulky, the other smaller and slender.

The IsoDidact’s form nearly overwhelms that of the Librarian. He is a Promethean, the most honored class of

the old Warrior-Servants, wide and thick and strong, with great arms and massive hands. His broad face, piercing eyes, and flat nose have a classically Forerunner yet brutish aspect. There is little hint of the Manipular that took the Didact's imprint. The segments of his battle armor hover just above an inner shell of hard light that outlines him in lines of pale blue. One can often tell a Forerunner's mood by the color of his or her armor. This armor is dark with displeasure.

"It is not right to interfere with Juridicals," he murmurs.

"There is no interference," the Librarian insists, stepping forward. Smaller, more delicately constructed than the Promethean, her eyes seem larger, all-seeing. She wears blue Lifeworker armor, narrow grooves and slots along the arms and torso concealing persuaders, scanners, sample bays, subcutanes, biopsy probes, and other instruments of her profession.

"Your escorts did not explain their reasons," the IsoDidact says. Culpability for the actions of his original could become an interesting point of law.

"They were following orders," the Librarian says. "They could not know my intent."

She turns her full attention to me. Lifeshaper is her title among Lifeworkers—a term of extreme regard. Her slender body and careworn face, with those great, dark eyes, revive emotions I might have felt before assuming the carapace. I once had an eye for beauty among all rates. Yet the Librarian's beauty lies neither in youth nor in physical perfection.

She is in many ways flawed: a tilt of one eye, slanted lower lip, unseemly whiteness of teeth. She seems to have deliberately adopted a few characteristics of those humans she now collects. I wonder if that makes her more or less beautiful to the IsoDidact.

“I am solely to blame,” she says, and walks around me, her gait light as air. Her eyes study and soothe at once.

For a moment, I am unhappy being Catalog. There is no particular reason for either the Librarian or the IsoDidact to show me favor or even civility. Recent history has not been kind to them—nor have the Juridicals.

I rotate my carapace to track her. “My work has been interrupted,” I say. “I am here on a Council-approved investigation.”

Now the IsoDidact makes *his* circuit, hand to helmet’s chin, as if studying an adversary. “Builders supplied your carapace,” he says. “Your colleagues have been subverted in the past.”

“Subversion is most unlikely,” I say, measuring the situation.

“What Builders have done to undermine your integrity, they can keep secret even from you. It has happened before.”

There is nothing I can or would wish to say to justify the crimes committed under the Master Builder’s centuries of misrule. “Those times were unfortunate,” I say. “They ended before I assumed the carapace. Those who strayed were punished.”

“Even so . . .” the IsoDidact murmurs. The Librarian

gives her husband a look of mild reproof, but with a hint of admiration. Are they about to shut down my investigation, sequester me? The probability, my ancilla tells me, is rather high.

“I have been cut off from my remotes,” I protest. “I insist on gathering evidence without interference.”

“We have no intention of interfering,” she says. “Husband?”

The IsoDidact lays his hand on my carapace. “Our diagnostics find no evidence of Builder tampering. Full access will resume.”

I send out queries. The ship’s ancilla cooperates. I receive new data from my remotes. They fill in gaps in my continuous record. But communication with the greater Juridical network is still problematic.

The IsoDidact keeps his hand on my carapace. I am not sure of his intentions. “Juridicals are investigating the destruction of the Capital world,” he says. “I was there, you know. Ask *me* what happened.”

I was not aware of this. Had he been present as the IsoDidact, or as the Manipular?

Into my silence he continues, “Catalog must also report new crimes—crimes in progress—to the Juridicals and to the New Council, correct?”

“That is my duty,” I say.

“Would it not be efficient to take our testimonies now, while Lifeworkers preserve this system’s life forms? There is no crime *here*, Catalog—only mercy and pity.”



I had never expected to be brought before these two, or to take their testimony on any matter. I could make a request to expand the scope of my investigation, but with communications so sporadic, the response may be delayed.

“I have little power in the matter. I must obtain permission. . . .” Very embarrassing.

The IsoDidact and his wife link hands and engage in silent conversation. When they finish, the Didact faces me. “I see by your manner that you were once a Warrior-Servant. Why diminish—why *abandon* your rate for *this*?”

Strange for this one to speak of such! Yet once, I had been almost as large and nearly as strong. Why did I give up that strength? Because of my own crime, before I assumed the carapace. Going against the creed of my rate. Against the express command of my mentor. Allowing anger to overwhelm judgment.

*The strength of Catalog lies in personal awareness of the nature of guilt.*

“Be not so bold, Husband,” the Librarian cautions.

The IsoDidact raises a massive hand and gives it a half-turn. I know the meaning of the gesture: command received. He clenches thick fingers, then loosens them. Their offer may be withdrawn. And what they may have to say does seem relevant to many cases under our review.

“I am not presently in contact with the Juridical network,” I say. “Until such time as communication resumes, I will take your testimonies.”

“Wise move, Catalog,” the IsoDidact says in an under-

tone. But we are suddenly interrupted by alarms. A group of Lifeworkers and Warrior-Servants gathers protectively around the Librarian and the IsoDidact. The deck has gone weightless; we all float. Field activators flicker across the bulkheads, coordinating with armor and carapace, as if in preparation for a quick journey to interplanetary orbit—an emergency jump. Images of looming Forerunner squadrons dance around the IsoDidact.

I am for the moment irrelevant.

“We’re in danger,” he growls. “Flood-infested ships have broken through our defenses, spread thin out here. We are ending operations on Erde-Tyrene. The Flood may be in this system in a few hours. You are far too important to risk, Wife.”

“But there are many more species to be saved!” she protests.

“These will have to suffice.”

Another silent communication between them. Husband and wife will be parted yet again. The Librarian’s expression turns deeply sad. Her beauty increases and my objectivity is once more threatened.

The IsoDidact directs that he be delivered to the only fully armed dreadnought in the system. After conducting defensive operations, and insuring the safety of Lifeworker ships, he will make his way back to the heart of the ecumene; his force here is far too small to go on the offensive.

“You’ll travel with the Librarian,” he tells me.

Between us, as between Warrior-Servants of old—the

rate I once was, the rate he grew into so suddenly—there is a current of request, bequest, demand.

*Protect her.*

Strangely, I am happy to comply. “It would be my honor,” I say.

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Their last moments together are spent in private, in a secluded angle of the bridge. Outside, the limb of Erde-Tyrene is serene, brown and blue and beige, capped in the north with great sheets of ice and all over deckled with clouds. All seems peaceful. The Lifeworker collection ships are withdrawing with the last of their specimens.

The Lifeshaper indicates I should follow her. “We will do what we can to save those we have collected,” she says. “I hope we can reach the greater Ark and deliver them to safekeeping. . . .”

Down a corridor, I see the IsoDidact conferring with other warriors. Their armor grows thicker and sturdier. A port opens and they push through into the dreadnought.

The ships separate.

The Librarian and I drop deeper into the collection hold, through layer upon layer of stacked zoological compartments, each hundreds of meters wide and equipped with illusions of sky, sea, land, whatever the animals carried therein will find relatively soothing. We are descending to the compression and storage chambers at the ship’s core.

“My husband has long held controversial views on Flood defense,” the Librarian says. Her eyes are stoic, but I sense reflections on an even deeper loss. “You may have guessed, he is skeptical about any Juridical investigation into the Master Builder.”

“I detect that opinion.”

“He is old-fashioned, you know. He expects you to do your best to protect me . . . even though you are no longer a Warrior-Servant.”

That stings, somehow.

The flexible tube deposits us in a weightless maze of storage cylinders attended by hundreds of monitors. This part of the ship is not accustomed to visitors. We drift a moment before an environmental field draws us down to a platform and courteously supplies breathable air.

“He presumes that any investigation should have begun centuries earlier—does he not?” I ask, absorbing these details.

“Had the Juridicals been *vigilant*,” the Librarian says, “my husband might not have had to go into exile. He might have blocked the Flood’s most recent incursions—and we would have avoided all this.” Her hand sweeps around the broad inner chamber. “We will save less than one-thousandth of the larger species.”

“Animals,” I say, and then, to an arch of her brow, add, “Animals *and* humans, on Erde-Tyrene, due to your grace, Lifeshaper. Will saving fewer humans disappoint the Iso-Didact?”

“I have heard Juridicals hold conservative views,” she counters. “Do you?”

“Before I took the carapace, I absorbed the attitudes of Warrior-Servants. I never fought humans, however. As for the Juridicals—their conservatism comes of long experience with the Domain. The cosmos, Lifeshaper, is highly conservative, don’t you agree?”

“The cosmos brought life into existence. Life is ever changing,” she says. “I have seen it open itself time and again to change, down to its living heart. But fascinating as these matters may be, I am here to testify about other events. Events that have yet to come to the attention of a Catalog.”

Implication that Catalog is many and not unity is a forgivable rudeness. Few understood the oaths and training involved in taking the carapace—or the singleness of purpose it brings. “Defense of your husband’s efforts is not to the point of our present inquiries,” I say. “Not now, at any rate. We have sufficient testimony about the Master Builder.” I am forbidden from telling her that the Master Builder is still alive and active in Flood defense. That is not my role.

“My husband and I were separated for a thousand years,” the Librarian says. “Much happened during that time. The Didact, while fully functional, currently possesses less than a third the active memory of . . .” She can hardly bring herself to say, “the original.”

“Understood,” I say. I am also forbidden from telling her that the Ur-Didact is alive as well and has been returned to the ecumene. Why does she not yet know?

“That may change in time,” she says, “as his imprint continues to flower. Yet he does remember some very disturbing things.”

“Strange you have not been called to give such evidence before now.”

“I was, when Juridicals were instruments of the Master Builder,” she says. “I rejected the request. You, however, *are* pure,” she says. “Are you not?” Her eyes shine with a sentiment mixing curiosity and, could it be, humor? This change from sadness energizes me. I am beginning to understand the power this Lifeworker has over those who share her labors.

All I can answer is, “I have to presume your diagnostics are accurate.”

“Good. What I will testify to is no longer of any use to the Master Builder, alive or dead, or to my husband’s opposition in the New Council.”

Alone, we have made our way to a closeted space away from the grim reduction. Only a few intact specimens will be kept in stasis; the rest will be reduced.

“It will be secure at any rate from political interference,” I say.

She thinks on this. “The Didact swore to protect the Mantle. And that is the primary duty of Lifeworkers.”

“Observing the rule of the Mantle is *our* primary duty as well,” I remind her. “All our laws rise to that brilliant glow.”

The bulkheads shape rudimentary furnishings. The

Librarian's armor unwinds from her upper torso. She stretches lithe arms, flexes her fingers, exhausted perhaps not so much from recent labors as the long burden of her story. Catalog has seen this before. Catalog can lift such burdens.

It is my duty to bear witness.

"A thousand years ago, my husband and I did not part on the best of terms. Now I am blessed to make peace with him. But as with all things in our lives, along with this gift comes something more.

"When the Didact left his imprint on a young Manipular, and returned to me in that way, a memory he had withheld for ten thousand years surfaced again to haunt him." Her face loses some color. "Forerunners assert our duty to the Mantle. Yet on more than one occasion, our survival, pride, and arrogance took precedence. Forerunner humility gave way to desperate anger. Once, we rose up against our very creators. . . ."

I know nothing of this. A fable, perhaps?

I do not judge. I record.