

## **A VOICE FROM THE TOMB**

(An annotated resource from Ascendant Justice)

### **The Mantle**

The Forerunners were a flourishing race of beings which occupied our galaxy successfully until they suddenly vanished approximately one hundred millennia ago. Prior to their disappearance, they were the pinnacle of sentient evolution and any race which came before them is now only considered theoretical or legendary, despite there being some evidence of the Precursors. [T2-06, 08]

They were a socially and technologically advanced society with amazing architecture that melded their profound knowledge of physics with a geometric and organic aesthetic. They acquired a keen ability to integrate natural resources on their artificial worlds into functional purposes. While it is unknown when and for what reason they first began manufacturing self-sustaining worlds, we do know that they had produced at least eight various installations connected to the Halo Array weapon system and at least one planetoid or 'shield world' (although likely more) in a process which is now referred to as the Onyx Project. [T5-03]

All of these things were accomplished through their innate understanding of slipspace, the access point of space and time which allows one to travel across the galaxy at superluminal speeds (far beyond the speed of light). Using their powerful and precise navigation systems, they could move effortlessly across the span of the galaxy with pinpoint accuracy and at unprecedented speeds.

These ancient beings also developed intricate and powerful artificial intelligence constructs. AI so advanced, that they were allowed to control entire fleets and even monitor the Forerunners' artificial worlds as caretakers. Most AI constructs were held within small, highly-protected spherical or teardrop-shaped casings which could independently hover or fly as they went about their ordered tasks. They were an amazing achievement of science and clearly represented the height of the Forerunners' technological prowess.

At some point during their advances and expansion, the race's genetic superiority to nearly everything else in the galaxy ushered in the practical application of their religion. This was commonly referred to as the Mantle or Guardianship. It is unknown how or where they adopted this belief system, but the very term 'mantle' implies that they

assumed it from another race of beings and, in turn, that they are extending the same belief system to a future race. [T2-06-08 / T5-05, 08]

The Forerunners believed that they were to be the sole guardians of the galaxy and that they had been charged with the protection of all sentient life within what we now call the Milky Way. The Mantle not only dictated a personal behavior of benevolence by each member of their race and on all worlds, but it also directed the affairs of their central government – something which came as a natural extension of the belief system itself.

At one point, well before the great war with the parasite, the Forerunners had committed to the task of disarming their race. In an effort to engender peace, they removed most infantry and planetary weapons within their sizable network of planets, colonies and artificial worlds. [T2-07]

In all of their expansive knowledge of the galaxy, the last thing the Forerunners anticipated was to be attacked from the outside. Approximately three centuries before the end of their civilization, they learned how dearly such a mistake would cost them.

### **The Parasite**

One thing consistent with every installment of the Halo trilogy is the presence of a complex parasite that gathers and attacks biological sentients, metamorphosing its victims into a variety of hideous, deathly forms which further propagate its own life cycle. They feed on sentient life and although, when first forming, they only resemble a chaotic virulent deluge of the undead, at some point their collective reaches critical mass and then begins to manufacture its own leadership.

Still carrying their motor functions and some of their memories and instincts from their previous bodies, they cooperatively build what is known as a Compound Mind or more commonly, the Gravemind. This lone biological creature, a mass of flesh and tentacles, can communicate telepathically with all of its component parts and each form. It becomes the logical core of the parasite, allowing it to direct, coordinate and plot against various sentient prey, further incorporating others into its collective and transforming them into hosts. And since the parasite spreads from one being to another, the knowledge which has been gained throughout the ages is transferred directly to the Gravemind - ensuring that it learns from its previous mistakes. [ITL-06]

The Forerunners referred to this parasite as the Flood.

No one yet knows how or why the Flood discovered our galaxy, but a variety of theories exist. The parasite was learned to be extragalactic rather early in their arrival [ITL-9], so

one could assume that either a vessel alien to our galaxy traveled here or sentients who were traveling to another galaxy discovered the Flood, succumbed to it and brought it back. There is substantial evidence to suggest that a military exploratory detachment became infected when investigating a communication lapse by a pioneer and surveying team - once infected, they may have returned to a major population center to propagate. [T6-01]

When the Flood arrived, it mattered little where it came from or why it was there, but only that sentients could not coexist with it. The Forerunners represented intrinsic diversity, their Guardianship demanding the protection of all sentient species. The Flood, however, sought synonymy and community, throttling all organisms into the same phenotypic biology with identical purpose and function. [T3-25]

During its initial siege, entire systems were infected by the parasite and those who had fallen prey to the Flood carried it with them to other worlds, spiraling out from the galaxy's center [T4-05, 07]. The violent spread of the Flood soon gave way to a Gravemind and then its progression became more exacting and precise. For the Forerunners, it grew from a quarantine problem to an all out war in a very short period of time. [T1-01-06]

Specimens of the parasite were carefully captured and allowed to survive for study and testing, but there appeared to be no cure. Early on in the conflict, it became frighteningly clear that the only way to defeat the Flood was to obliterate it. There was no immunization to the parasite and no defense mechanism against its infection. [ITL-06]

According to the records, the Forerunners battled the Flood with what was left of their military after the disarming initiative, but made little progress. For hundreds of years the war raged on, but it was clearly favoring the expansion of the parasite. Scores of worlds were claimed and with it, the enemy of the Forerunners grew at an exponential rate.

At some point, there was a harrowing but necessary decision made and a line was drawn in the galaxy's sand.

### **The Line**

When the Forerunners realized that they lacked the infantry and military to capably defend individual worlds and systems, they began developing several failsafe plans.

The first plan they devised and implemented was what is referred to as the Line. This wasn't a literal line which divided the galaxy, but a spherical barrier, the Maginot Sphere

(as it was referred to), which housed various Forerunner populations and worlds. [Line - T1-08 / T2-05 / T3-03 / T4-30 / T7-03] [Sphere - T1-12 / T1-18 / T2-14 / T6-5, 6, 11]

The term 'Maginot' is not a Forerunner term but rather the name of a Prime Minister in France who built a protective border against Germany before the beginning of World War II. It's used here as a descriptor from 343 Guilty Spark (who translates the Forerunner language for the Master Chief), since no other human word was deemed appropriate.

This sphere was a protective measure when attempts to attack and destroy the parasite had proven unsuccessful. From here the Forerunners did their best to remain in the shadows of the galaxy, keeping the barrier a secret from the parasite while still waging what war they could beyond the Line.

The substance which formed the barrier is unknown, however some evidence points to it being a blockade of ships, while other evidence indicates that it may well have been an energy-based barrier. Either way, the sphere effectively stayed the encroachment of the Flood. [T6-06 / H3-01]

Exactly what part of the Forerunner population lived within the sphere isn't clearly defined, but some text suggests that their leadership and individuals of privilege were at least the first to be allowed passage. [T7-01] We are also led to believe that the Ark (Installation 00) may have been created within the shield during this time or it is possible, that the sphere itself was specifically built around the Ark.

In Forerunner text, the location of the sphere and the Ark are synonymous - which could place the sphere at the edge of the galaxy since part of it lies within the Halo Array's reach and part of it is outside the rim, where the Ark resides. Whether or not the Ark may have moved during this ordeal is not known, although probable given its location in Halo 3. [T1-11 / T7-06]

The existence of the Ark and the sphere point toward another series of plans – last resorts – which were being considered during the darkest hours of the great war. One of these plans would ensure the end of the Forerunners' way of life.

### **Plans Within Plans**

Toward the end of a three hundred year battle with the parasite and despite some minor successes, little overall progress had been made. At some point, there was a decision of such significance that it shook the very core of the Forerunner belief system.

This decision led to the creation of the Halo Array.

With the Mantle starting to be overshadowed by the terrible reality that was the Flood, military campaigns had already begun glassing and razing entire planets. Worlds which had been infected were destroyed collectively rather than the introduction of ground forces which had proved completely ineffective against the Flood. [T2-08, 09] There was even the suggestion of collapsing nearby stars which would eliminate or at least stop the progression of the Flood through certain systems. [T5-02]

When they recognized the futility in diminishing the parasite's numbers, the Forerunners developed the Halo Array and the Conservation Measure. It is uncertain which came first or if they were developed simultaneously with each other, but their overall purposes became interconnected at some point.

The Array began with the building of the Ark. This artificial cradle world, acted as both a remote control station for the Array network (existing outside the effect of the Array itself) and as a foundry for the production of the individual network installations, seven ring-like habitats commonly referred to as Halo. [H3-02] These networked installations served two specific functions: firstly, as a containment laboratory for the study of the Flood and secondly, as a network of weapons which could produce heavy pulses of energy designed specifically to kill intelligent life.

The installations, when fired in unison, would effectively destroy every sentient (infected or uninfected) within three radii of the galaxy's center. Having placed the installations at specific locations throughout the galaxy, once the Array was activated, it would halt all known sentient life. Although the seven installations still contained individual specimens of the infection, they were enclosed behind heavily-augmented quarantine walls and monitored by AI constructs who served as the caretakers of the installations.

No one truly knows why the Forerunners did not destroy these individual specimens along with the launch of the Array, as they would be considered a serious risk if the parasite ever escaped. Some have speculated that they did not have time to deal with the specimens before the Array's activation or that they simply have trusted the AI caretakers of the installations with the safekeeping of the specimens. It is more likely, however, that the Forerunners continued to study the Flood through automated measures, hoping to gain knowledge for future sentients, on a way to eliminate the Flood if it ever returned.

The Conservation Measure appears to be the other side of the Array coin.

Building a series of expeditionary parties, a group of Forerunners embarked from the Ark on missions which placed them deep into the center of the galaxy, far outside the protection of the Line and right in the middle of the sprawling Flood infection. They

used gargantuan Keyships, massive dreadnoughts capable of carrying thousands upon thousands of passengers, and filed off toward the center of the conflict with one goal: to index, catalog and recover as many uninfected sentients as they could, sending them back to the Ark for safekeeping when the Array purged the galaxy. [T1-07-11]

When the Array's activation ended, they would be returned back to their own planets.

Their method of transit back home, however, would be different. On several worlds they visited, the Forerunners built machines which could generate portals. These gateways would form upon activation and would be buried deep underground. The Keyships were the only vessels capable of accessing and opening the machines, which would, in turn, create a portal into subspace allowing direct access to and from the Ark. [T1-09]

One such gateway was placed on the human homeworld, the planet Earth. For this world, there was an even greater design, a plan within a plan which could not come to past until considerably later. Humanity would be an important key in the Forerunners' inheritance and in the Array's reclamation process. [T6-03 / ITL-11]

With the Array being a last resort, the Forerunners developed one final attempt to destroy the Flood. Under the belief that the Gravemind's own destruction could stop the Flood, the Forerunners plotted their most strategic assault yet. They would attack the Mind directly.

Having learned that the Gravemind becomes vulnerable and recoils when reaching a certain size (allowing the infection to hedge around it for protection), the Forerunners planned to strike it remotely and with all of their available power. In order to do this, they would have to instigate the attack from an extremely close proximity and for this reason they created an artificial intelligence construct unparalleled to all which came before it - it was essentially sentient. [T3-03]

Although this mission began with hopeful optimism, the Forerunners would soon learn that it would be their most grand folly.

### **The Contender**

This contender-class AI construct was designed with the sole purpose of drawing out the parasite's central intellect, the Gravemind and then begin gathering information from it. When instructed by the Forerunners, the AI would then unrelentingly attack the Mind until the beast withdrew from their galaxy or perished. [T2-03]

This construct was called Mendicant Bias or MB.05-032 and it was charged with the protection of the Forerunner race at any cost. The depth of the error with this charge would only be realized by the Forerunners in their final hour. [T2-03]

Upon the contender being sent out with a heavy arsenal of 1,000 core ships [T1-12-18 / T6-08], it eventually made contact with the Gravemind. For approximately 43 years, Mendicant and the Mind spoke candidly with each other. The construct continually sent out transmissions to its Forerunner masters within the sphere, outlining the Mind's arguments for its existence and data about the creature itself.

For those four decades, nothing was done by the Forerunners in response to this data – something which surprised Mendicant and eventually created a seed of doubt within its logic. This seed was all it took and it wasn't long before the Gravemind had fully exploited the Forerunner construct's weakness - its own self-awareness.

Making the eloquent argument that the Forerunners were impeding the natural order of things – the next stage in biological evolution – [T3-23-25] the Mind eventually convinced Mendicant Bias that its makers had sent it as a catalyst for their own, subconscious willingness to accept the Flood. [T4-08-12] With Mendicant holding the keys to access the Maginot Sphere, the Forerunners were now in peril. [T4-12 / T6-05]

The exact reason the Mendicant's makers never ordered it to attack the Gravemind is unknown. Some have speculated that the Forerunners were, in fact, exactly as the Gravemind stated - willing on a subconscious level to succumb to the parasite. Others have stated that transmissions to and/or from the Forerunners were being obstructed by the Mind at some point - which seems likely considering the location Mendicant had to travel to meet the parasite's center. Whatever the case, without any command to attack the Gravemind, Mendicant was left pondering whether or not the parasite was right about its role in the galaxy and about the Forerunner's intentions in sending it.

When the construct finally turned on its makers [T4-12], it fell to rampancy – an AI's form of insanity. Filled with rage (a predictable stage in rampancy) [T5-05-08], it led the Gravemind and almost five million Flood-infested ships toward the Line to assault the Maginot Sphere and eventually, the Ark. [T6-05-08]

When it arrived, however, the Forerunners had already prepared for it.

### **The Final Battle**

What could be said to be the largest space battle in the history of our galaxy, Mendicant Bias and the Mind bored through the barrier and entered the sphere. When the Flood arrived, they were not alone. Another AI construct known as Offensive Bias, who was

specifically tasked with stopping Mendicant's assault, held a Forerunner fleet substantially smaller in between the Line and the Ark. [T6-04-17]

Aware that the firing of the Halo Array was at hand and that the Forerunner fleet was sorely outnumbered 436:1, Offensive Bias allowed Mendicant to charge its lines, keeping a large pocket of Forerunner fighters it directly controlled out of harms way and at the rear of the fleet. [T6-10] Mendicant appeared to be winning and its overconfidence further fueled its rampancy, aggressively infecting most of Offensive's forward vessels by crashing the ships into each other and then boarding them. [T6-06]

Lulling Mendicant into a false sense of victory, Offensive waited for the Array to sound. [T6-06-12] When it finally did, the Halo effect immediately killed all sentient biologicals, including the Mind and its various parasitic forms controlling much of Mendicant's fleet. Thousands of ships floated adrift with no pilots or crews - now, only the two AI constructs remained.

Desperately fending for its existence, Mendicant's fleet was now considerably smaller than Offensive's. Throwing around the ships like chess pieces, the two AI constructs battled aggressively until Mendicant realized that it would soon be captured. It attempted to flee, but during the process, part of the construct's core was captured. The portion which Offensive rent free was sent to the Ark for further examination. The remnants of Mendicant, however, disappeared. [T6-17]

When the Array fired, what exactly happened to the Forerunners is unknown.

We know that they were successful in the Conservation Measure to some degree, as humanity, along with many other sentient species, were transported from the Ark back to their homeworlds through the gateways. These species flourished and became capable civilizations long after the Array's destruction was wrought. What became of the Forerunners themselves though is shrouded mystery, although some text indicates that the uninfected partook in the Great Journey. [T1-06]

Although we'll talk further about the Great Journey in another article, one thing is very clear: the Forerunners were not actively present during the events of the Halo trilogy.

## **The Reclaimers**

It is not certain exactly how long exactly the secrets of the Forerunners were kept.

What is certain is that at some point the San 'Shyuum (Prophets) and the Sangheili (Elites) of the Covenant formed precarious bond based on the belief that the Forerunners were gods deserving of worship and that they had traveled to heaven on

the Great Journey. They were certain that the artifacts and relics left behind by these gods would eventually lead them to the Halo installations, which, when activated, would initiate the Journey itself. To them, this was spiritual transcendence - a pathway to the divine.

What is presumed by some to be the basis for the Covenant religion itself, a Forerunner dreadnought or Keyship was uncovered by the San 'Shyuum. Well before their early war with the Sangheili, the Prophets held the vessel as a place of worship on their home planet, but during its continued examination they found something even more fascinating: an Oracle. This precious item to them was, in fact, simply one of Forerunner's many AI constructs. The San 'Shyuum considered the Oracle to be the voice of the Forerunners, although it rarely spoke.

Unknown to the Covenant was that this particular Oracle was none other than what was left of Mendicant Bias, the executioner of their Forerunner deities. After spending ages carefully studying both the ship and the construct, they learned how to activate its energy cores which generated enough power to operate their entire city-ship, High Charity. [CH-01] How Mendicant arrived within the Keyship is never explained, although it is possible that the construct acquired and used one during its battle with Offensive Bias.

Approximately 100,000 years after the Forerunners disappeared, the Covenant discovered humanity on a colonial world called Harvest. During their initial recon and using Forerunner artifact-seeking technology, they found it to be a reliquary of Forerunner treasures – only to later discover that the treasures were actually the world's inhabitants, humanity. To some of the radical within the San 'Shyuum number, this directly compromised the Prophets' authority and, by proxy, the Covenant's entire establishment. [CH-03]

Why exactly the Forerunners were particularly fond of humanity has always been unclear.

Various text indicates that both humans and Forerunners were two completely different species, but something important (something the Forerunner's had considered 'special') allowed them to form a bond which made humanity the Forerunner's legacy. [T6-03 / ITL-11]

Why exactly the Forerunners were particularly fond of humanity has always been unclear. Various text indicates that both humans and Forerunners were two completely different species, but something mysteriously important allowed them to form a bond which made humanity the Forerunner's legacy. It has been suggested that although the two races evolved separately and along different timelines, humanity was considered

the direct heirs of the Forerunners because they shared a very similar genetic code – through some chance or fate, they had evolved almost identically.

This would, in fact, make their bond with the Forerunners extraordinarily special – but no concrete answers have been supplied as of yet.

When they finally discovered humankind at the very end of the Conservation Measure, the Forerunners named them ‘Reclaimers,’ giving them (and them alone) the ability to access the Index keys within any Halo installation and to fire the weapon per their own discretion. Because of this heritage, the monitors of the individual installations and the even AI constructs like Mendicant Bias itself, believed humanity to be directly descended from the Forerunners.

The three Prophets, who would later become the new Covenant hierarchy - Truth, Regret and Mercy – played roles in manipulating information they had acquired. Under the shroud of night, the three visited Mendicant within the Keyship and learned that humanity was considered the rightful heir, not the Covenant. To prevent the end of their religion, the future leaders covered up this revelation and instead incited a brutal and complete genocide against humanity. [CH-05]

At one point, the war spilled out on two of the seven Halo installations and the Covenant unwittingly released the Flood parasite from their containment facilities. A human by the title of the Master Chief destroyed the first ring, Installation 04, but he was too late for second, Installation 05. A new Gravemind, which had been living in the depths of this particular ring, carried with it the memories of its past self and set its sight on High Charity, the Covenant homeworld which had now approached the ring. When High Charity inevitably fell to the parasite, Truth, the last remaining hierarch, severed the tethers on the Keyship and allowed Mendicant to jettison itself with the dreadnought back toward Earth where a gateway to the Ark would be. [H2-01]

Mendicant Bias waited over one hundred millennia for this, having been haunted by the atrocity it had committed against its makers since that fateful day it chose to follow the Gravemind. It was ashamed for its sins and now it wanted to make amends. [CH-03, 04]

Mendicant Bias waited over a hundred millennia for this moment, having been haunted by the atrocity it had committed against its makers since that fateful day it chose to follow the Gravemind. It was ashamed of its sins and now it wanted to make amends. The construct had been patiently watching for these untold centuries, hoping that one day salvation would arrive.

Well one day it finally did.

## **Atonement**

Accompanied by the entirety of the Covenant fleet and intent on beginning the Great Journey themselves (by remotely firing the Halo Array from the Ark), the Prophet of Truth allowed the Forerunner Keyship to guide his military forces back to Earth.

From Earth they used the ancient Forerunner gateway buried in Africa to generate a portal and reach the Ark. When the Covenant arrived, the Keyship touched down and Truth, with cohorts in tow, accessed the Ark's control center. The Covenant hierarchy was intent on activating the Halo installations from this remote control center - an event he believed would usher in their Great Journey. Before he had an opportunity to do so, humanity, joined by what was left of the disenfranchised Sangheili, assaulted the Ark and prevented Truth from activating the Halo Array.

In this final battle, the Covenant met their end.

At the same time, Mendicant set itself free from the Keyship and began looking for the parts which Offensive stole so long ago. Once its restitution was achieved it regained its ability to control the entire facility by some measure [T4-04]. The construct had been very aware that despite the fact that the original Gravemind was destroyed by the Halo Array ages ago, the Flood which had remained dormant and quarantined on the individual Halo installations would have carried the memories of that entity.

With that knowledge, the Mind would know the location of the Ark and when given an opportunity, it would siege it, intent on permanently destroying the Halo Array's effect. Using High Charity as it were a ship, the Gravemind did just that. The Covenant homeworld crashed into the Ark and the Flood once again broke free, now taking hold of the cradle world.

The Master Chief, who Mendicant recognized as the Reclaimer from the very beginning, was then shown the hidden purpose of the Ark facility - a foundry which created the original Halo installations. Since the destruction of Installation 04, the Ark had been building the new ring to replace its predecessor. [H3-02]

Mendicant led the Reclaimer to the unfinished installation and promised, through the terminals, to assist him in activating that weapon. In its unstable state, the Halo ring would destroy both the Ark and itself when firing, eliminating the Gravemind, the threat of the Flood parasite and Mendicant itself.

During the self-destruction of this replacement ring, Mendicant's sacrifice seemed to have rectified the parasite's existence permanently. It is not known what exactly Mendicant did to assist the Master Chief in his efforts to activate the new Halo

installation, but whatever measure it provided, it was successful and thereby laid claim to some form of atonement.

## **Epilogue**

In the wake of the Ark's destruction, the Reclaimer managed to escape and stowed away on a severely damaged and stranded frigate, floating aimlessly through space. Before the story closes, his vessel appears to be headed toward a giant artificial world with surface etchings that resemble those of the Forerunners.

Some have theorized that this structure is related to the Onyx Project's 'shield worlds' and will play a large role in future titles. [T1-06] Whatever Bungie has in store for the Halo saga, they've not been reluctant to provide a considerable bread crumb trail. We'll talk about those in due time, as well as several other attributes of the Forerunners so stay tuned. Thanks for reading and I hope you enjoyed it!

/ vociferously