Half Life : A Path Divided

by Discet

Summary

What if Chell had managed to fight off the party escort box after her showdown with GLaDOS. Freed from the Enrichment Center to explore the world beyond, for better or worse. Alyx proves to be a able guide into the dark new world she finds herself in.
"Things have changed since the last time you left the building. What's going on out there will make you wish you were back in here..."
Chell Shocked I

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Arc I : Chell Shocked

Aperture Science : Testing Maintenance

Chell dropped from an overhead catwalk hearing the familiar creak of her knee replacements taking the shock of the drop. She found herself in a turret maintenance room. There was only one which appeared almost operational, but didn't seem capable of shooting, others lay on the ground in crumpled heaps.

The semi-operational one just opened up and said in an innocent voice, "there you are." It's guns clicked empty as they trained on her. She walked and pushed it over, and in just as innocent a voice it commented "I don't blame you." She stood over it shaking her head in pity.

"You're not a good person! You know that, right? Good people don't end up here!"

Chell chuckled at the voice. There was something satisfying in the rising frustration of the A.I. for days now. Ever since she'd discovered the hideouts she had taken full advantage of all of them. Stayed to rest and calm down, drank the water, ate the beans. Calmly figuring out each of the puzzles before acting.

While survival was important, figuring out just what had happened was maybe more so. The rusted and abandoned backrooms of the facility pointed to nothing good. She had tried to find a working computer to discover something but there was never a usable monitor to go with them. When she had first escaped the fire pit she had worried about finding the bodies of all her coworkers strewn about. The fact that she had found no bodies was somehow actually worse. Where did everybody go? The only real clue she had was that GLaDOS was still around and presumably the cause.

"Can You Hear Me?"

Chell looked around the little maintenance shaft with a wistful air. She had never worked in quite this hot or humid a workroom, but the maintenance room reminded her of some of the first days she spent at Aperture Science.

Aperture Science : Lobby

Chell stood nervously in what appeared to be the guest area of the Aperture Science Enrichment Center. There are neat rows of padded chairs and a streamlined modern aesthetic. Clean white plastic seemed cover every wall that wasn't a window. There were a few people milling about, some seemed to be visiting on business. Others were dressed less formally as tourists waiting near a reception desk.

I was dressed in the nicest clothes I could manage after a year without a job… and despite everyone's best effort she could still feel eyes staring at the metal springs on her legs. She would
stand here all day if she needed to. Unemployment was really just not an option anymore. The job was only going to be a short term gig, but it paid for room and board which made it a godsend.

Still waiting 45 minutes for my introduction after arriving twenty minutes early wasn’t grating on nerves at all. Nope not a bit.

The doorway that led into the facility proper whooshed open with a start and a man with messy short hair and a nervous air around him walked out. He was dressed in a wrinkled blue overshirt with white undershirt and a black tie. He had a folder held under his armpit that he pulled out and started to sift through. After a moment he looked up and started to walk over to me. As he got closer Chell noticed his most notable feature had to be that one pupil was larger than the other.

He gave a weak tired smile and came walking over hand outstretched way too early. "Hello are you Chell Legends?" he asked and Chell shook his hand.

"Yes are you Dr. Reece?" she asked in response silently wondering what took him so long.

He looked surprised and then shook his head "Oh, uh no. My name is Doug Rattmann- Dr. Rattmann if you will. Dr. Reece met with an unfortunate uh… accident in the lab," he said wringing his hands "which is why there was such a delay to getting someone else out here to greet you. For which I at least apologize." he said with a nod.

"An accident?" Chell asked.

He seemed to bob his head in contemplation, then looked around and leaned in and whispered "turned his legs to jello." He said it in such grave concern that Chell almost actually believed him.

"Uh huh." Chell nodded in a way that said she in no way believed the obvious fabrication.

"In any case, shall we get started?" he asked and Chell nodded, they walked back towards the main door.

The door again slid open again and inside there was a hallway of clean white walls. Along one branching hallway, painted in bright friendly letters was the word 'Attractions!' pointing off down the hallway.

"That's for the tourists" he said pointing on down the hallway. "Bunch of fun interactive stuff for the kids. Mostly safe."

We continued on to the end of the hallway. There was another door, this one flanked by two security guards in white and blue uniforms. Rattmann showed them a badge and they nodded placing a ungloved hand on a door pad.

Everything opened up to what was a normal cubicle area. Men and woman working in tiny little boxes. "Disappointed?" Rattmann probed as if reading Chell's mind.

"I guess." she responded "I came here with my father for bring your daughter to work day. Everything seemed more… exciting and amazing back then. I don't know, rose tinted glasses I guess."

"Well let's head on down to where you will be working." he said and walked towards a elevator. After a dozen or so people came flooding out we were the only ones to replace them in the box. As we got in I looked over the panel only to find letters replacing the usual numbers. "It's a holdover from the old C.E.O.'s orders. Thought all numbers on an elevator is unlucky." He reached over and pressed the letter 'E'. "Each floor is separated into different branches of the company. A and B are normal business operations. Where most of the actual profit for the
company is made. C is where I work, A.I. research, and where most of the facilities basic operations are housed. You know, electricity, servers, air conditioning, that sort of stuff"

"Everything that runs the facility next to the A.I.? What will you do if it goes rogue on you?" Chell said with a wide mocking grin.

"Right. If." Rattmann replied and took at a small prescription bottle and with practiced ease poured two into his hand and threw them back.

As the elevator started to make its way down after reading Rattmann's card he spoke again "C through P deals with various different types of research that the center is working on at any given time. Floor E, where you will be working primarily deals with militarization and commercialization of other departments findings. With a focus on personnel equipment" the floor dropped down to level E, and with a wondrous woosh of air the door opened into a scene of chaos.

There were no less than two uncontrolled fires currently being put out in a couple of the workstations around the lab. There was... something flying around at slightly faster than it should be speeds. Finally there was one cleared out workstation with two androids punching each other one painted red and the other blue with a gaggle of scientists standing around cheering one or the other on.

"Things are a little... looser down here on E." Doug said with a smile at Chells incredulous gawking face "More like you remembered?"

"Yeah." she nodded.

Rattmann chuckled, "Well as much as I would love to let you run wild and free with the other engineers we need to get you to security up on B. They will set you up with an I.D. card and then we can get you settled into your dorm." he said pressing the elevator panel again and the doors slid closed.

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Aperture Science : Testing Maintenance

Chell dug the last of the beans from the bottom of the can and shoved them down her gullet. She was in another of the safehouses set up for her by… whoever was here before. She sat back for a moment and considered staying. There were a few days rations here, she could rest and recover while she could. The only problem with that was the time that it gave GLaDOS more time to create and plan more traps.

Chell's eyes looked around at the crazed scrawlings on the wall. They remained as disconcerting as they had down in the testing chambers. Most were about GLaDOS and how she was always watching, others were about the companion cube and their dedication to it. On the floor was scrawled 'HELP'. When she had saw them in the first of these rooms she had thought it a desperate plea from a dying man. But the word was repeated in each of these hideaways. Perhaps it was not a plea for help as much as a offer of it.

As Chell sat, if not full then content at least, she gave a last stretch before moving towards the little crawl space entrance. No matter how nice it would be if this job did itself, it wasn't going to. She gave the welcoming offer of help an awkward pat of thanks as she headed back into the maelstrom of the facility.

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Combine Outpost : North of City 17
Alex Vance, unbeknownst to the handful of combine guards stationed at the outpost looked down on them from a nearby ridge. "There are five of them right now. Remember the plan, we go in kill them, sabotage their vehicle, grab whatever supplies we can and then get out. Any questions?" She looked at the handful of resistance fighters that made up her squad and most of them nodded. All except one, Ryan.

"Yeah I have a question, why the hell are we even out here? This is nowhere near any of our operations."

Alyx rolled her eyes, this was really a question for when we're heading out not when you're a stone's throw away from transhuman scum. "Because we need to attack outposts all over. If we only attack the areas that are near our base then the combine will narrow down where it is." she said trying to sound patient and succeeding to some degree.

The resistance soldier grumbled under his breath but nothing audible.

"Okay? Weapons checked?" everyone gave a tense nod. "Then on three… one… two…"

It wasn't much of a fight The first grenade killed or stunned most of the combine force to make it a one sided fight. With the high ground on top of it there was no chance. Everyone went about their business, sabotaging any equipment they could get their hands on. Grenades on trip wires, electronics tinkered with to overheat and explode, and one combine A.P.C. sent careening down the side of a mountain.

Alyx took stock of the situation with a bit of pride. A dozen guns and ammunition were put in crates to come back to Black Mesa East with them. These hit and run attacks barely seemed to leave a dent in the combine supremacy but the less they can safely domesticate the areas outside of 17 the more room she and the rest of the resistance had to operate in.

She took out here hacking tool and zapped the console with it. A screen split with half a dozen different camera locations. Looks like they were setting up a surveillance outpost. She smiled wickedly and her fingers started to dance across the keyboard.

She began to reroute the feed into one of the nodes that Barney controlled so they could keep tabs back at Black Mesa East. She couldn't keep the combine from seeing the footage at all, but she could put everything on a nice twenty-four hour delay.

She looked at the locations trying to recognize any important resistance paths, they would have to go and disable any that might compromise a railroad safehouse or a supply route.

Her eyes fell across one that caught her attention. It was of a very old complex, it looked like a pretty normal pre-combine building, very modern in fact compared to most of City 17, but it had blast shields over it and more than enough explosive scorch marks to justify them. The camera was overlooking a kind of main entrance. It looked like a fairly wide one story building, it had a chain link fence with a security checkpoint leading in. Just above the entrance, painted in neat black letters were the words 'Aperture Laboratories' and next to them was patterned broken circle with atom symbol in the center.

Something about that name tickled at the back of Alyx's head but she couldn't for the life of her remember where.

"We ready to go?" Ellen one of the fighters asked looking around nervously.

Alyx nodded "sure thing, just need to erase myself from the system. With one more wave of the hacking wand she erased her session from memory."
"Come on let's get back into the mines, we can get back to Ravenholm before dark if we hurry."

The resistance fighters with two crates of supplies and a mission accomplished headed back into the nearby mines, covering their tracks and sealing the mine behind them.

Aperture Science Enrichment Center : Sewers

Chell took shallow breaths as she ported from one ledge to the other. Below was a foul smelling, gag-inducing stink of stagnant water below. It resembled the water in the deadly pits and moats the tests had used. Was this where it was stored?

She progressed towards the end of the path that at first glance appeared at first to be a dead end. However right below a grate, drawn in that same blood like scrawl, was an arrow pointing through it.

Chell more than happy to be anywhere else ported past it to the other side. She stepped out of the glowing portal with short lived relief as her toes dipped into shallow pond of what had once been a moat in the room. Quickly she looked around for any familiar signs of traps, turret laser sights or bothersome pits of fire, but there appeared to be none of that here. Just a few walls, pillars, and catwalks up above.

She found a portable wall above the moat and ported up to it. She scraped her toes and against the pristine white floor knowing that it would not be enough when she heard the ominous whoosh of opening doors.

All around her she could see dozens of the doors elevated off the ground and embedded in the wall. As each of them slid apart or opened up they revealed a dozen or so turrets, their red laser sights cutting through the air. As the first one swept towards her, in a burst of panicked energy she jumped back through the portal and put the flat of her back against the wall as a stream of bullets ported through the rift. As another's red beam dived down into the trench she fired another portal through the grate and into the relative safety of the sewer.

She took a few deep breaths as the adrenaline in her veins coursed through her veins that just about immediately caused her to cough violently as the putrid air entered her lungs. As the coughing and rapid heartbeat started to slow down, she started to focus on what she had seen. Where all the doors had opened and where they were placed.

There was a open section in the area around the top of the large room. No portal surfaces though. Any way to launch myself up there? Yes the doors that opened up instead of sliding aside, they might have a good angle. So if I port up there…

She pulled out a pen and started to draw out the room on the white wall. After ten minutes she looked at the crude sketch of her plan. She nodded and stood up again. Taking a minute to stretch on last time she again ported around the grate.

As she came out on the other side she did not hesitate to move herself to the upper level as one of the laser sights dived into the drained moat. As she came out on the much more open upper level here eyes scrambled desperately for the first of the slanted turret doors. She fired one portal to it and as several laser sights came to rest on her and menacing innocence announced her imminent gunning down, she fired a portal below her as bullets whizzed overhead.

As she came out her legs scrambling in the air she saw the confused red lines searching for a body that was no longer there. She fell rapidly many of the turrets trained on her again and started to fire as she launched a portal below her causing her to launch across the entirety of the room. Turrets
desperately tried to lock on but between the pillars breaking up their sight and her speed they were meeting with little luck. She still felt the impact of stray lucky bullets but nothing too terrible. As she flew she got an angle on the second slanted door and fired a portal onto it. As she fell back to the bottom level she fired once more below herself, all the continuing momentum sent her soaring across the air and into the high above alcove. As her shaky legs felt the solid ground of the outcove she turned around to look down behind her at the searching lasers of the confused turrets as a chorus of pleas sounded from below.

Chell felt a righteous grin stretch across her face, part of her not believing she had gotten through that.

"There you are..." a cold sweat graced Chell's spine as she whirled around at the voice. Two sentries had been dropped down behind her while she had been distracted. Even as she raised her portal gun she saw the flash of their fire start up. As the bullets slammed into her she fired a portal at one, causing it to port to the great chamber behind her. She clenched her teeth as the other continued to pelt her with bullets. She fired under it and heard its distressed scream and wildfire as it fell farther and farther down behind her. She slowly collapsed to the floor as all the pain of the dozens of bullets came to roost.

She looked down at the full bullets. Not even casings, just full bullets fired at her from the spring mechanism of the turret. While she was grateful that the turret did not use the gunpowder it was hard to really appreciate as her skin started to dye a deep purple.

*Alright gonna just sit against that wall and… take a moment here…*

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**Aperture Science: Level E**

As Chell walked through level E with a newly printed temporary I.D. card around her neck, she looked around at the madness "So how did you get used to this place?"

"Me?" he shook his head, starting to head through the maze of work stations, "I didn't, I work up on C where things are relatively sane… or at the very least orderly."

The two of them eventually arrived at what was likely the largest workstation. Only a fairly thin line of floor space allowed one to walk while everything else was covered in shelves full of equipment in various states of repair. Sitting behind a crowded desk full of different tools and gadgets was a man a few years older than me with a pronounced stubble and blue highlights in brown hair. He had a screwdriver in hand and was fixing… something.

"Skye?" Rattmann asked knocking on one of the many shelves.

The man looked up confused but then his eyes widened with wonder and spoke in a deep scottish accent, "Dougasaurus Rex!" He threw the gadget he was working on into a shelf behind him.

"No."

The man, Skye, seemed disheartened "What you don't like that one either?"

"I don't need a nickname Skye" said the AI researcher in an exasperated, but friendly tone. "Specially that one."

"But you didn't like Ratty, or Duke Ratking of Manrat either."

"No." affirmed Doug before gesturing to Chell, "This is Chell."
"Ah the new recruit!" Skye moved and gave a overly strong handshake. Chell shaking calmly but applied more and more pressure. Skye's eyes widened and squeezed back, and soon the two were seemingly trying to squeeze the life out of each other neither willing to back down. Skye looked over to Doug then back at the iron will in Chell's eyes. Realizing that she would not back down no matter how long it took. He grit his teeth and loosened his grip slightly. "Oh I think we are going to get along just fine Chell." he said with a rueful smile.

Chell smiled, privately pleased with her victory. Skye looked her over and looked down at her legs oddly and Chell grimaced.

"Oh, I recognize this handywork, this is one of Legends knee replacements," a lightbulb seemed to go off in his head and he pulled the file from Doug who was already holding it out. He opened the file, "Chell Legends, are you Bruce Legends' daughter?" he asked with an air of excitement.

"Yes..." Chell answered not sure which thing she wanted to talk less about, her replaced knees or her adopted father.

Skye smiled and seemed to be trying, and failing, to remain professional. "Oh he's great, he was Floor E's division leader before he got promoted." he seemed to notice Chell's expression and folded up the file. "Well all the same I think it's about time I show you where you will be working for the next three months." he turned to Doug with a salute "Doug-meister, a pleasure as always."

"Sure Skye," Doug said with a nod as turned to make his way to the elevator "Also, no to that nickname." he said before being swallowed by the chaos. Skye shook his head in mock disappointment.

"Will I be getting a nickname?" Chell asked in a worried tone.

"Nope, your name already reminds me of shotguns, you're fine" he said brushing the question aside. "So let's get you settled shall we?"

Skye started to make his way through the bedlam towards a corner of building, "Now, since you will primarily be working on repair you won't be provided a full work station on the main floor." A cheer and a cascade of boos came up from the direction of the android fight. He got to a door and unlocked it with key on his belt.

Inside was a much more utilitarian room garishly lit by red lights and walls of concrete. In a pile on one side of the room was a pile of broken and beaten turrets laying in a heap. As they stood there through an enormous pneumatic tube dropped off another bent and broken turret on the pile. On the other end of the room was a work bench with an assortment of tools.

"So this is where I will be working?" Chell asked with a little disappointment.

"Afraid so lass. Afraid so." But I think this will help. He pulled something from behind his back as he marched towards the work bench, on the top of it he placed a small round cactus on its corner. "There we go! Really brightens the place up don't you think?" he said with a wide smile.

Chell tried to look angry but the honest genuine smile made that difficulty. She let out a slight sigh before stretching her back "Alright, let's get to work then."

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**South Ravenholm : Entrance to Black Mesa East**

Alyx and her crew of misfits went through the little independant settlement of Ravenholm. Everyone knew who they were and gave friendly waves and encouragement to the fighters. The settlement had grown steadily as the railroad from City 17 had been established. There were risks
to having people up on the surface, but many seemed more than willing to take that risk rather than huddle in the bunker that was Black Mesa East.

As her band of fighters arrived at the main entrance to that bunker she saw a friendly face exiting the tunnels with a little leather bound book in hand. "Good evening Father Grigori" she said and the older man stopped his discussion with gate guard and smiled broadly.

"Ha, ha! Alyx! It is good to see you my child," he bid good evening to the man he was talking to and walked over to her. "I missed you at mass this afternoon."

Alyx looked to her weary squadmates and gave a gesture to let them head down without her. "Sorry Father, we had an appointment with the combine I'm afraid," she said gesturing to her squad as they entered the elevator.

"Ah, I see, any casualties?" he asked and Alyx shook her head.

"Ray got grazed by a plasma round, but she's fine."

Grigori nodded in as much approval as relief. "Good very good. In that case I believe I can forgive you missing my sermon. Surely there is no cause as worthy in this world than the struggle against the combine. Now, I beg your pardon but I do have a terribly long way to travel back to my parish and it will be quite dark soon."

Alyx nodded and said goodbye to the preacher. He was one of the most respected men in Ravenholm and seemed a pillar of the community, somewhat like how Eli had become one for the resistance. Many had confided their worries and fears in these uncertain times in him, and he did his best to listen to them all.

Alyx went to the old elevator as her squad excitedly chatted amongst themselves on the floor below making plans to enjoy the night ahead. She let out a little sigh, she was rarely invited on such excursions, being the daughter of Eli Vance apparently made her quite the intimidating figure in most people's eyes.

The elevator at the top emptied of a group of resistance workers and researchers returning to their homes in Ravenholm, and there was no one else up here to join Alyx in the car down. She shrugged and walked into the empty elevator.

"All hail her royal Vanceness and her private elevator car." voiced one of the two elevator operators with an air of mockery.

"Is that really necessary Frank?"

"'fraid so miss or ol' King Vance will have my head he will" Frank continued with toothy grin and a terrible impression of an English accent.

"Oh shove it Frank," Alyx shook her head with a smile as the cars gate closed and the elevator car started to descend down. As she got to the bottom she stepped out into the light traffic of the facility as many awaiting the car packed in.

She walked down the short hallway towards her father's lab. As she inputted the code to enter she saw her father at his computer panel and doctor Kleiner on the other end.

"no, there must be something wrong with the code again. Everytime we try to teleport something it ends up as slag."

"Yes. Hm, distressing indeed. Perhaps if we tried a... Oh! Alyx!" Kleiner cut off with a wide
Eli turned around and wrapped his arms around his daughter. "Oh, thank god you're back. The mission go alright?"

"Was there any doubt?" Alyx said with a smug grin before accepting the hug from her father. "They were setting up a new observation post north of the city."

"Yes! Barney wanted me to let you know that he received the new connections."

"New connections?" Eli asked inquisitively.

"I hacked the console after we cleared out the soldiers. We don't have nearly as much info of what happens up north as we could. Thought the cameras could be useful. That's actually part of why I came down here."

"Oh?"

"Yes one of the cameras was focused on someplace called Aperture Science."

"Aperture Science?" Eli said slightly shocked.

"Yes the name sounded familiar but I coul-

"Aperture Science! Oh dear. Oh dear" doctor Kleiner remarked in a worried tone "Who knows what kind of scientific marvels lay dormant down there? If the combine get in there..."

"No one is going to get in there Kleiner." Eli assured, "at worst they might think it's one of our safe houses. When they realize it's sealed up tight I think they will leave it be."

"I hope you are right. I mean I'm happy to have worked at Black Mesa, but they were no slouches back at Aperture, just a few of their inventions in the wrong hands could do our cause immeasurable harm..."

"Kleiner. Please, we need to remain calm." Eli said in a tone of authority and Alyx could see Kleiner trying to calm himself down.

"Yes Eli. Of course you are right, panicking will not help anyone."

"So... what I'm getting is they were a pretty big deal?" Alyx asked wanting to get the conversation back on track.

"Yes, you can certainly say that." Eli said with a nod. "Aperture Science was Black Mesa's biggest competitor in the race for teleportation technology. As well as a number of other fields. Although you might better know them as the creators of the mythical Borealis," he finished with a sour look on his face.

"That's it!" Alyx nodded everything clicking into place. "So if this place has so much stuff in it, why hasn't the resistance raided it for research? For that matter, why haven't the combine?"

"We tried when you were you were young, not long after we arrived at City 17 in fact. We lost two teams of resistance fighters when they managed to dig into a secondary entrance." Eli shook his head "We never even found out what got them... the radios just went silent and we never heard from them again. We sent a rescue team, but when they got to the place of the secondary entrance, it was thoroughly collapsed."
"Huh. Well for better or worse we have a camera out there now." Alyx said with a shrug.

"Well, it would be for the best for everyone if everyone left that particular wasps' nest alone." Doctor Kleiner said with a firm nod. "Now then back to what we were talking about. Alyx, perhaps you could give us some insight on our little, teleport problem..."

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**Aperture Science : Above Turret Chamber**

Chell walked across the old rusty catwalk above the massive trap chamber. All the turrets had settled down and now the only sound was the ringing sound of her spring aided legs tingling off the catwalk. She continued to grip the catwalks rail as if at any moment one of the wires would snap, or be cut and hurl her into the a waiting room of turrets below. Yet she safely made it to the end of the hallway. Where a door waited, she opened it to reveal yet another work hallway. She started through with a weary kind of expression. Another hallway, another obstacle. It was hard to see where the end would be.

Yet as she turned a corner down the hallway she caught sight through a window of a chamber with a single room standing suspended from the center. Eyes wide she stumbled forward, taking one of the two chairs next to the observation window. She took a few deep breaths as she felt all the forward momentum she had experienced getting to this point drain out of her.

*I'm here. I made it. I actually made it. Now what?*

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**Aperture Science : Primary Staff Elevator**

Chell shut her eyes tightly, feeling the last three weeks crashing down on her with a vengeance. Turret maintenance never ends, there's always more to do. Whenever it felt like she was getting ahead on things a dozen more would be dropped down over night.

*Who the hell is testing in the middle of the night.*

"Skye, really I'm fine" Chell said only standing because most of her weight was settled squarely on the wall of the Elevator.

"You really aren't Chell, you've been working yourself into the ground for weeks now. You need a day off." he said firmly. "Also I'm bored, so we're going to head into the city and get some real food."

"Fine, alright. Great." Chell rubbed her eyes and tried to stand up straighter "Wait when you say real food do you mean good food, or that the food in the cafeteria isn't technically food."

"Well I mean that depends on what you defi-"

"Legally Skye, is it legally food?"

"Not according to the FDA, no. Also I would not bring that up with the folks down on G, they have been touchy about it ever since."

Chell nodded eyes suddenly wide, "Okay yes lets get to town, good plan." the elevator pinged and displayed Level C as the current floor.

"Wait don't we need to get up to A to get to the surface?"

"Wow you are out of it, I told you we're gonna pick up old Count Douglass before we head out."
"Come on Skye again?" Chell said exasperated.

A worried look came over Skye's face "Oh Chell please don't me you're on the nickname hate train too?" he said shoving every ounce of disappointment into his voice.

"No, but you've been harping on this whole nobility theme for a while Duke Ratking, Count Douglas, Baron Rattenbury. You're running it into the ground. Come on, you're better than that."

Skye seemed to pause for a moment before shaking his head, "Damn it you're right. Alright back down to E, gotta work shop some new ones."

His finger drifted towards the switches again before Chell bodily dragged him from the elevator, "Oh no you don't, my stomach is having a crisis trying to figure out what exactly it's been having for the last three weeks, were getting something not grown in a vat today."

"But I don't have any good names Chell" Skye complained melodramatically "He'll be crushed."

"He'll just have to survive somehow" Chell said as they marched through the hallway before she stopped. C seemed to have a lot more private offices and meeting rooms than down on E. The whole place is more maze like then she was used to, "on second thought you need to lead, I have no idea where I'm going."

The two of them slowly moved through the hallways of section C. Just as Doug had claimed everything was a great deal more organized down her. Finally they got to a series of windows and across a wide empty chasm was what appeared to be a single building within.

"Well that seems like a remarkable waste of space."

"I hear it's a security thing."

Both approached a suspended bridge from the central chamber to the great central room. Skye showed his I.D. that allowed them through. They walked across the bridge where another pair of security guards sat waiting and Chell felt a distinct impression that this was not a place a temporary contract worker was meant to be.

At the end of the bridge opened up to the central building which ended up being a single large chamber. At the opening there were four large bulky computers that a few of the scientists were milling around. Beyond this was clearly why the room was built however. Suspended from the ceiling appeared to be some kind of mass of wires and monitors all connected to some group of computers dangling from the end. None of it was online however so the chamber remained largely unlit.

Doug Rattmann looked up at the mass of wires and computers contemplatively before he noticed the pair's approach. "Ah, Chell, Skye, what do I owe this pleasure?"

"We're going to get lunch in town," Skye announced throwing a thumb over his shoulder. "You want to come?"

"Sure we're just going in circles today it seems. Can we stop by the pharmacy though? I'm a little low on pills."

"I thought Aperture paid for everyone's medicine?" Chell asked confused "Isn't there a pharmacy here?"

"Can you imagine one sane reason anyone would get their medicine from here?"
Chell paused for a moment as her stomach flipped over yet again "Okay good point." she said after a moment. She looked up in wonder at the mass of wires and computers sitting ominously still "So this is what you have been working on huh?"

Doug looked up with a nod "Yep that's her, that's GLaDOS."

"Her?" Chell asked wryly.

"It's a long story," he said with a distant smile. "Shall we get going?"

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**Aperture Science : G.L.a.D.O.S. Chamber**

Chell stood in front of the Material Emancipation Grill looking through to her enemy. The room was no longer dead and cold. The monitors flashed through images at an incomprehensible rate. Although a few were pictures of cakes. GLaDOS's body rotated in a gentle circle from its raised position. She sat there waiting, almost inviting me in. A part of Chell knew there was no coming out of that chamber until this was all over, and a small part of her wanted to run away and hide in the little dens, to try and survive as long as she could.

But a much larger part of her wanted revenge.

She stepped into the chamber her portal gun forced to drop its two existing portals behind, and a door slammed behind her.

"Well, you found me. Congratulations. Was it worth it? Because despite your violent behavior, the only thing you've managed to break so far is my heart'"

Chell strode, legs somewhat weak as she looked around her for turrets, or anything that could open up to reveal turrets. However the isolation of the chamber could mean that she couldn't move things around here. Were they really alone?

"Maybe you could settle for that and we'll just call it a day. I guess we both know that isn't going to happen."

"You chose this path. Now I have a surprise for you. Deploying surprise in five, four..." There was a thud and a flash of sparks and Chell looked to the ground beneath her and saw one of the orbs that seemed to attached to GLaDOS. "Time out for a second. That wasn't supposed to happen. Do you see that thing that fell out of me? What is that? It's not the surprise... I've never seen it before. Nevermind. It's a mystery I'll solve later... by myself... because you'll be dead."

In the back of the room there was a incinerator but no nearby button. Chell looked to the odd little structure on the left side of the chamber and ported over to it. Sure enough there was a little red button. Pressing it opened the molten core of incinerator and she smiled wickedly. She ported the little purple core from beneath GLaDOS over to the incinerator.

"Where are you taking that thing?". She slammed the button and then ported herself over to the incinerator "I wouldn't bother with that guess is that touching it will just make your life even worse somehow." With bitter anger and determination she took the orb by one of its handles and hurled it into the inferno below.

"You are kidding me. Did you just stuff that Aperture Science Thing We Don't Know What It Does into an Aperture Science Emergency Intelligence Incinerator?" Chell smiled feeling the satisfaction of destroying any part of the AI. "That has got to be the dumbest thing that-whoa. Whoah, whoah, whoah..." the images on the screen slowed to a crawl still as random as ever
before speeding back to its normal speed.

"Good news: I figured out what that thing you just incinerated did. It was a morality core they installed after I flooded the Enrichment Center with a deadly neurotoxin to make me stop flooding the Enrichment Center with a deadly neurotoxin."

**Oh no.**

"So get comfortable while I warm up the neurotoxin emitters." All around the chamber a green fog seemed to descend from vents. I held my breath and walked away from the wall before I realized I had no chance of surviving that way.

Chell looked around in a panic and saw a turret come up from the floor.

**What?**

"Huh. That core may have had some ancillary responsibilities. I can't shut off the turret defenses." the turret swiveled around and in her frozen panic Chell only managed to jump out of the way just in time. "Oh well. If you want my advice, you should just lie down in front of a rocket. Trust me, it'll be a lot less painful than the neurotoxin."

Chell looked around at the mass of portable walls and nodded. She fired a portal at a wall and then right above it so that the rocket would collide into GLaDOS. She ran in a sprint as the turret locked onto her and fired. As she dropped through the portal she felt the rocket soar over her into the computer.

"sk! ds43SD" another core came out but some kind of beam raised it out of reach on an old pipe.

"Okay keep doing whatever it is you think your doing." I ported up and kicked the core out of the beams control.

"Who are you?" the little core asked its eye wide and started to dart around the room "What is that? Oh what's that? What is THAT?" Chell repeated the process she had used to destroy the first core opening up the incinerator "Do you smell something burning?" She walked to the lip of the incinerator and kind a slanted smile.

**Even if it's a part of her, it sure seems cute.**

Its bright orange eye swiveled down to her thighs "Ewww, what's wrong with your legs?"

Chell dropped the core in and heard the incinerator claim it. Behind her she heard a loud crash and a pitched pain scream came from the computer "You think you're doing some damage? Two plus two is… ten." she said then a slight pause before yelling "IN BASE TEN I'M FINE!"

**Alright let's get to work.**

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**Black Mesa East : Surveillance Room**

Alyx walked into the dimly illuminated room that was the surveillance room. The overhead lights were all shut off while a dozens of dangerously stacked CRT televisions on top of one another mixed in with old computer monitors. There were chairs for many more people. But only two people were on watch at the moment. During active operations we would have more people to keep track on what's going on but the railroad isn't making a run today and offensive operations ended when Alyx's squad had arrived home.
One of the two men looked over to Alyx and nearly fell out of his chair trying to get his feet off the dashboard. "Oh Miss Vance! I, what are you doing here?" he asked trying to straighten up.

Alyx rolled her eyes and wandered over to the dashboard herself "Relax Greg, just came to check the new surveillance we got yesterday. And again please call me Alyx" Alyx began to fiddle with the old tech sifting through various streams of information. Most of the monitors were dedicated to cameras we placed by the railroad and Black Mesa East to make sure the combine didn't get close enough to find anything, but a set of TV's were dedicated to camera streams we had stolen from the Combine.

Alyx clinked through the many streams until she came to the one she was looking for. On the screen was the Aperture Science Enrichment Center.

"Aperture Science?" says one of soldiers.

"Yeah, Dad says that they were Black Mesa's biggest competitor before the cascade."

"Looks like a pretty normal place to me."

"Yeah can't imagine it being of much use to us in any case."

"Kleiner seems to think that if the combine really work to get the tech trapped down there it could doom the resistance."

"Kleiner thinks if the combine figure out how steam engines the resistance is doomed" chimed the second officer offhandedly.

"Still if we could just get our hands on... Hey does this look odd to you?" Alyx pointed to the screen.

"What I don't se-"

"Theres like a building static... it-"

Suddenly, there was a bright explosive flash from the screen.

Aperture Science : G.L.a.D.O.S. Chamber

Chell ported out at high speeds at the core suspended in mid air. Once again she fell a little short of her goal and the world continued to spin around her as the neurotoxin continued to affect her.

"Are you trying to escape?" a condescending chuckle came out from the computer "Things have changed since the last time you left the building. What's going on out there will make you wish you were back in here..."

Chell took her time aiming the portal higher and once again dropped through it.

"I have infinite capacity for knowledge and even I'm not sure what's going on outside."

Chell once again was catapulted out of the portal and she grabbed the core as she sailed into it. She stumbled on the ground as she landed with it. The incinerator and button structure seemed to swerve unnaturally

"All I know is I'm the only thing standing between us and them. Well, I was."
Chell finally managed to catch the right part of the wall and got the the incinerator button. Each breath becoming labored as the green mist seemed to become thicker and thicker. She slammed the button and with the core ported over to the waiting incinerator. Her foot caught on the lip of the portal and she fell sprawling through.

"Unless you have a plan for building some super computer parts in a big hurry, this place isn't going to be safe much longer."

Chell got back to her knees and tried to raise herself up again but her body seemed sluggish and resistant to her orders.

_No come on dammit. Not now, when I'm this close_

She reached out for the red snarling core and using her whole body as fulcrum hurled the sphere at the incinerator. It hit and rolled along the lip for a moment. For a moment looking like it would balance there, then it fell into the fire depths.

There was a great explosion from GLaDOS and the green mist seemed to dissipate in a matter a moment. A breath almost forcibly entered Chell as she gasped at the fresh air flowing into her.

The entire room was coming apart, the upper depths that had been shrouded in darkness were illuminated by flashes of energy bolting out from every wire from up there.

GLaDOS’s taunting words grew faster and faster as her rapidly swinging body seemed to try and escape.

Chell lay mostly motionless on the ground as she looked at the spectacle chest only raising and falling with life as any indication of it. A bright light from above started to suck up all the debris from the test chamber. Monitors flying off and going skyward. Then, slowly the massive body of GLaDOS started to lift up as well. As the wires came undone and her body flailed against its chains for just a moment, she looked like a woman arching her back in hideous pain.

Then a panic filled Chell as she felt herself start to lift up off the ground. She scrambled for purchase but found none. She looked to her portal gun but she wasn't close enough to any surface to make use of it. And as she floated towards the ever approaching white light she felt herself relax.

_Well. Guess that's all she wrote huh? Well, if I have to die after killing a power mad hard drive, then I'll take it. There have been far worse, and far stupider deaths achieved in Aperture Science history._

Chapter End Notes

So this is the first chapter. I hope everyone enjoys it.
It is a reboot of a very old fic I abandoned long ago I hope people enjoy the new iteration. Thank you for your time and I hope it was worth the investment.

I'll be trying to update once every two weeks so be on the lookout.

If you were wondering about the focus on the springs on Chell's legs, it turns out their
called Advanced Knee Replacements. So their actually prosthetic and not just testing equipment. According to one of the early Portal trailers, which had a frame warning test subjects of the dangers of falling off high platforms to their death, it is possible these were unique to Chell rather than a something all test subjects are surgically forced to have. It seems appropriate they would be significant to her and be remarked upon.
弧1：Chell Shocked

Aperture Science : Testing Elevator

Chell found herself in one of the Aperture Science testing elevator it’s walls padded and cushioned to keep test subjects from injuring themselves prior to the start of the test. Only the emergency lights were illuminating the space, without the soft hum of electricity to power it. Chell did a quick turnaround to find some kind of opening hurled herself into one of the padded walls in shock.

Standing where there had been nothing before was a man in a blue suit and black tie. He looked at her with passive amusement and a crooked… wrong smile “Hello Miss Legends. We have some… things to discuss...” he said with voice like eels. Chell relaxed her stance trying to find some corner or piece of architecture she could portal out from, but there was nothing. Which was a mute point she soon realized because she did not even have her gun to use even if there was. “You see Chell, me and my employers are always on the lookout for… talent shall we say?”

The elevator door behind him opened the dim red light arced out and there in the darkness stood the destroyed remains of GLaDOS’s chambers looking like a murder scene in the faint red light. He walked out and stood aside and Chell followed after a moment. He stood back to her looking at the destroyed remains of the A.I. “While your achievement is nothing as grand as some of my clients, it was certainly, shall we say, against steep odds.” he chuckled in a way that seemed to taint the very concept of mirth.

He turned back to her with a predatory gleam “When your facility fell it created… problems for me, there was potential here. Though I must thank your friend, she certainly sifted the cream of the crop… didn’t she?” He looked down at the collapsed body of the supercomputer. Chell couldn’t see what kind of look he had on his face, nor did she want to. The man turned back around to face her “In any case it is your lucky day, I am not one to leave chips on the table, and I may soon be counting on your services.” He walked past her and back into the elevator, straightening his tie “I will be keeping an eye on you Ms. Legends. But for now I think I will let you go. If you stay here much longer, you won’t be of much use to anyone for a long, long time”

As the elevator abruptly shut the world went cold and dark.

Black Mesa East : Surveillance Room

The room was silent as the bright… explosion? Had engulfed the small screen in one corner of the large surveillance center. The two men on the night, now very early morning, watch stared slack jawed as Alyx tried to search the grainy picture for any sign of change. Had the camera been destroyed?

Soon the picture started to improve, the quiet parking lot had turned into a scene of chaos. Debris of every shape and size fell from the into the now torn up parking lot. Bits of architecture as well as shattered monitors and scrap metal littered the ground. Near the entrance there sat what
appeared to be a mass of wires and machine of some kind attached to them. Next to that was…
“Do you see that?” Alyx whispered as if speaking too loudly would be impolite somehow.

“That… that orange speck?” asked one.

“Yeah I see what your talking about” said the other “Is that a person?”

“Someone was alive in there. They might be from one of the old expeditions,” Alyx turned to the man closest to the door “Go wake up my dad, and any of the militia whose on call tonight.”

The man nodded and dashed out of his seat and towards the door. Alyx’s eyes glided over the screen trying to take in everything she could see with a few swift key strokes she put it on a much larger monitor to get a better resolution. It seemed to be a woman on the ground, in a bright orange jump suit.

Slowly out of the corner of one of the entrances dilapidated openings, a purple light flashed as some kind of robot came crawling out of the darkness. It seemed to move with slow, malicious pace toward the woman. As it slid its mechanical claws around her arms Alyx’s blood ran a little cold. In slow jerking motions it began to pull the woman back to the entrance.

Is she even alive after that explosion?

She wondered mildly as something changed on the screen. With a jerk the woman seemed to come to life. She shook herself from side to side as the robots apparently weak grip slackened. She pulled up some white devise from beneath her and started to club the robot with furious blows first shattering its frail arms and then savagely beating in the one large eye that made up most of its body with the improvised club until it sparked and fell unmoving.

Aperture Science Enrichment Center

“Re-re-return to the p-p-paaaatrrtty escoooooorrrt-t-t pos-s-s-s-s” Chell towered over the broken down bot as its its light started to die and her breath caught as she saw how close she had come to being dragged back down. She bent her knee in kind of normal reaction and rubbed her leg self consciously, then she felt it. Or rather she didn’t feel it. She looked down to the ground where she had been dragged from and saw the broken remnants that had once been her knee replacement apparatus.

There was a solemn feeling seeing it in so many pieces. She felt almost naked without them on. She would need to gather those together, lord only knows where she would find half of the materials otherwise. While her basic knee replacement was fine, her normal legs weren’t strong enough to operate without the full prosthetics for long.

She put one bare foot under her and her arm gripped a piece of debris as she hauled herself up onto that leg. As she took her first step forward her entire mind started to flash in white hot pain. She fell face first into the concrete where her hands tightened into fists as she tried to absorb the pain that was flashing through her. It came out in gasps and heaves and her stomach churned with the all bean diet she had been having for the last few days.

As the pain passed over her she slowly flipped herself over and pulled up her jumpsuit over her knee. The usually concealed sphere of metal that operated as her knee was oozing a soft stream of blood down her leg.

Whatever that white light did to get me out here must have pulled or twisted some bit of metal in it. I think it’s digging into bone.
As she stared with distaste at the piece of metal she considered what she could possibly have that she could fix it with. If the gash beneath it was worse than she hoped just removing it to fix could be fatal. Even if she had the tools to do so.

Chell groaned and relaxed her back against a slab of concrete, looking up at the sky. Looking up at the… blue sky.

Slowly through the haze of pain and lost adrenaline it slowly dawned on her that she had managed to escape. She had gotten out. She had gotten out alive.

A slow, haggard and wheezing laugh made its way out of her as she felt the warm rays of the real sun soak into her skin. She tried to take a deep breath of fresh air, but that would have to wait with the amount of burning debris nearby. She saw the overturned corpse of GLaDOS and shook her head.

Real dark and dangerous world out here you silicon asshole… not a cloud in the sky.

“Chell?” ventured a almost haunted voice from behind one section of concrete. From behind it emerged a man. He had messy ungroomed black hair and a thick beard. He had rings upon rings under his eyes and his face was gaunt and hollow and his white lab coat and shirt seemed to hang off him. But his most significant feature had to be that one of the pupils of his light blue eyes was larger than the other one. An astonished seed of remembrance blossomed within her.

She took a deep breath as she considered her next words carefully. She looked down at herself. Her jumpsuit was torn and dusty with soot and dirt. Her leg was dripping blood and she was sure that most of her skin beneath her tank top was slowly dying blue from the bruising bullets of the turrets. Finally, a corner of her body wanted to throw up the slurry of beans and water she had been feeding it exclusively for three days.

She looked back up at Doug Rattman with a kind of wistful air and opened her mouth to speak. After half a week of refusing to give that psychotic computer the satisfaction of a response, her voice sounded clumsy and awkward in her own mouth.

“Doug… You look like shit.”

He just looked at her for a moment, stunned beyond all thought. Then he started to chuckle, and she responded in kind. Soon enough the two of them were out of breath laughing as the wreckage of their prison and wardan burned around them.

Eventually the two of them started to calm down and looked at eachother with tired eyes.

“So how's the leg?”

Chell looked down at the leg that still had a slow ooze of blood coming out from the mechanical socket, “Well I’m not a doctor, but it's bleeding so I'm gonna guess not great.” She looked just behind him where a large cube was carried along his back in a bedsheets tied around him “Is that the companion cube?”

He gave a nod “Yes. See I told you she would make it.” he said his head half cocked to the side as if addressing it.

Chell nodded remembering the fanatical paintings she had seen in the safe pockets of the facility. “Right. Okay.” She looked at the remains of her prosthstetic with a wistful air “I don’t suppose you have any tools on you?”
“Afraid not” he said with a shake of his head.

“Alright start picking up the pieces and bring them over to me please.” Chell unzipped the front of her jumpsuit revealing the aperture science complementary tank top. Soon enough with the help of Rattmann she had gathered up all the remains of her prosthetic and folded the upper half of her jumpsuit into a little carrying sack for it. Together they made a makeshift sling for the portal gun and with a heave Chell stood up while using Rattmann as a crutch.

“Think any of those cars still work?”

“After twenty years? I doubt it.”

“Twenty what?”

“Yeah you were in that relaxation vault for quite a while...” he mused.

“Wow... you aged well.”

“It’s mostly the beard, trust me”

“Hm... well twenty years or not it wouldn’t be enough to kill every car.” she said looking at the quizzically “We would need something to jump start a battery though.”

“Well unless you are feel like heading back into that deathtrap I don’t think we’ll find anything out here.”

Chell thought for a moment, and a small idea popped into her head and she reached back for her portal gun. “No that’s a terrible idea” she whispered to herself “Alright guess were walking.” she said with a sigh as they took step by agonizing step towards the sleepy town a dozen miles away.

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**Black Mesa East : Surveillance Room**

A group of Resistance leadership stood inside the surveillance room with somber expressions as the pair on screen slowly started to make their way out of the view of the camera, leaving the ruin of the Aperture Science Enrichment Center behind them. Eli leaned forward and paused the feed just before the two of them walked off screen.

“Well they don’t look like anyone we sent in there back in the day. Though two decades could change anyone” he said scratching his beard.

“So are we going to do something? Or are we just going to stand here?” Alyx asked impatiently.

“Now calm down Alyx. We can't rush into anything” Mossman said with more than a little condescension for Alyx’s liking.

“I don't think we really have the time to mull this over. The Combine is still getting old footage from the camera but a aerial patrol is going to notice the smoking wreckage of the facility. If we wait too long those two are going to be snatched up by the Combine and we will never see either of them again.” She looked at the screen where the injured woman was frozen in grim determination.

“I don't think it would be worth the ris-”

“Alyx is right Judith’
“Eli. We can’t save everyone”

“No but if those two aren’t from our expeditions then they have been stuck in there since the war. If the Combine get their hands on them, and they tell them everything that is down there… it could get very bad for all of us. Not to mention if they get whatever tech is on their back, could be even worse” He said grimly. He turned to Alyx, “Alyx, get a squad together, try and head them off. Get them back here if you can.”

Alyx smiled and snapped off an unnecessary salute “yes, sir” she said and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek before moving past to the endless hallways of Black Mesa East. Leaving the beginning of an argument behind.

Town of Clarkesville

After hours of walking Chell looked past the edge of Clarkesville with an increasing amount of unease. Every emergency roadside phone they had come across had been disconnected. The town had never been huge, the downtown was a single street of little stores and restaurants. People milled about and went about their day, more than usually with some Aperture Science employees visiting.

Yet as her and Doug walked up to the edge of town, it was just as abandoned as every house they had visited on the way. “Well this isn’t ominous.” Doug said as they walked through the streets. Those streets were cracked and had grass growing out of nearly all of them. The once charming stores were now boarded up and broken down. Some of them even had collapsed walls. Even the redoubtable diner that had to have been there since the fifties had one of its front doors busted off.

Still they limped off towards it as good a place as any for a break and to look for food. As they got inside Doug slowly lowered Chell onto one of the old benches who gratefully rested her bare feet on the stool.

“So, what do you think happened here exactly?”

“Economic collapse? After the facility locked down there would have been a lot less customers.” Doug offered as he started to scavenge through the dirty and abandoned diner.

“I don’t really think they were that reliant on us. Find a phone?”

His hand reached out for one of the light switches and flicked it on and off “don’t think it’ll be much help…”

Chell let out a groan “What is going on? Where the fuck is everyone? Why hasn’t anyone in twenty years tried to break into the Enrichment Center?”

“Yeah...” Doug said nervously “I was hoping we could pick up some pills while we were here.”

Chell looked up with a sudden sense of alarm “You have been rather… stable so far. How did you make it last this long?”

“I… didn’t. I spent most of the last two decades unmedicated. Used… other coping methods. But I saved my last two pills for today”

“... Okay how are you feeling?”

He turned his head for a moment to the cube on his back before looking at her again “I’m clear headed enough… for now” he said with a grimace and a scowl that spelled out his frustration with
himself.

Chell let out a sigh looking down at her aching feet and let out a sight. She started to sit up “Alright, let's go see what's left of the pharmacy.” she said and he nodded taking up position to support her again.

The two of them started to hobble on towards the door when a woman's voice came calling from the street “Hey is anyone around here?” Chell and Doug looked at one another and awkwardly stumbled to a hiding position behind the door. She put her back against the closed side of the double doors and peered out slightly into the street.

There was a group of five people walking down the street. The group for lack of a better term looked like a ragtag group of survivors. Four were armed with some kind of SMG and were looking about nervously. They were dressed in rags of warm clothes and beanies. Which normally would look like a group of looters, but with their similarity and the spray painted on Lambda armplate gave them the look of a cohesive group of fighters.

Rebels maybe? Were rebels a thing now?

The person at the front of the line, and presumably their leader was a woman in a tattered brown leather jacket over a sweatshirt with jeans beneath. Her hair was cropped short and slicked back, her bangs held back with a headband. She was armed with some kind of modified pistol, or maybe just a new model? Twenty years. Jesus.

A few of the fighters started to mumble something to her and they got absorbed in a discussion.

“What should we do Chell?” Rattmann asked in a whisper.

“Well its people, which means answers at least...” she carefully reached back and stuffed her arm into the portal’s grip port and pulled it out from its holster “Still a good bluff could keep us from being tempting targets.”

“I’m telling you Alyx, they are long gone, we should just keep going down the road.” Roy said in his hushed whisper. “Or hell, let's just head back to the base. We tried, but they had a long head start on us.”

“and one of them was crippled. They can’t have gotten that much farther than here.” Alyx responded with an eye gazing around the small boarded up town. There was an odd sense of loss she felt around these kinds of towns. The loss of a world that she had never been a part of. As her eyes moved over the old diner she saw a glint of something poke out. She ducked as a pulse of orange… something came flying from the doorway, the shot went high. Very high.

“Alright stop there,” came a rather commanding female voice from the doorway “This thing will vaporize you if it hits!” Alyx stood tense and her soldiers drew up their guns. A nervous pulse went through her as she remembered Kleiner’s fear of what was hidden in the Enrichment Center.

“Hey, lets calm down, we're here to help!” she called back.

“Do you usually try to help people with guns drawn?” the woman's voice called back.

Alyx looked around at her companions and motioned to lower them from their ready positions. They looked unhappy about it but slowly lower their guns. “Sorry, it's a dangerous world out here, gotta be prepared for anything” she said smoothly holstering her pistol.

“Yeah. Looters all about with smg’s. Scary stuff.” the woman responded sarcastically.
“Oh for christs sake, we do not have time for this” one of the resistance members, the one who was grousing earlier said under his breath. Then louder “Hey, we’re with the resistance, if you want to live you need to come with us.”

“Jim!” Alyx hissed under her breath, the last thing they needed to do was antagonize two scared civilians.

“Resistance? Resistance to who?” called a new voice, a man's voice this time.

“To who? The Combine, have you been living under a rock for twenty years?” Jim once again voiced despite shutting up motions from Alyx.

There was a momentary pause before the woman's voice called back “I mean, yeah kind of. So who are the Combine?” she asked curiously

“Are you kidding me?” Jim moved forward next to Alyx “Their evil alien scumbags!”

There was another pause before the man responded again. “Like, a foreign power? Immigrants?” he asked clearly just as confused

“No! Like- like outer space aliens!” Jim said exasperated. It wasn’t everyday you had to explain the basic state of the world.

“... Okay so we’ll just stay here and you can go ahead and be on your way” said the woman's voice in a coddling manner. “Good luck fighting aliens or whatever.”

Alyx sighed, rubbing her eyes, “Listen, we saw you walking away from Aperture Science-”

“Oh you’re specifically hunting for us. That's comforting.” the woman announced sarcastically.

Alyx took a deep steadying breath “Okay we got off on the wrong foot, but the Combine are a real threat, and one that we should really be trying to avoid if we can. Can we please stop this stand off at least?” she asked opening her hands to show she wasn’t holding anything.

A face peeked out from the doorway, a woman with blue-grey eyes and tangled black hair looked out skeptically. She was holding a rather intimidating looking vaporizing gun. She was… kneeling against the door for some reason.

Something caught at the corner of Alyx’s eye, standing atop a street lamp, looking as old and dusty as anything else was a old style traffic camera. Only this one slowly moved to focus back onto the woman in the doorway, and a cold chill ran down Alyx’s spine.

“Shit! Combine!” one of the fighters announced. Alyx whirled around and sure enough from behind them coming down the main road were three Combine ships. Two dropships and one gunship.

Alyx clenched her teeth as her squad began uselessly shooting at the gunships. “Everyone scatter to cover!” Everyone broke apart and ran for one of the few buildings as the gunships main gun got warmed up.

Alyx pounded down the road as the gunships main gun began to tear up the roadside behind her. She could hear the sound of the bullets impacting just behind her heels. As she passed through the front door she dived to the side as the bullets reached the old diner chipping up the tiles on the floor and splintering the door.
She collided with the girl who had poked her head in a tangle of limbs and pain. The two separated as the sound of gunfire and fighting started to encompass outside. Alyx helped her up and took the opposite side of the door as she drew out her pistol.

Alyx spared a glance for the other person in the room, a man in a disheveled lab coat had a thick untrimmed beard and had that same large cube strapped to his back. She had wondered what kind of technology it could have been when she had seen him on the camera, but it appeared to just be a cumbersome cube with no real purpose. Odd.

“What are those?” the woman asked repositioning herself with her back to the wall.

“The Combine” Alyx responded.

Outside the two dropships began dropping Combine soldiers. The resistance fighters started to fire as the soldiers began to jump out. The wild SMG fire concentrated enough that the second blue and red accented soldiers fell before they got out. For a moment she held hope that they may be able to kill enough of them to make this a fair fight. That thought was wiped away as the gunships main gun raked across the resistance positions, forcing them to slacken their fire on the drop ships. The soldiers began to find cover and firing back.

“Are those ships?” she asked looking outside, “they look like giant bugs!”

“Yeah. Well, you know. Aliens.” Alyx said as she fired to cover the retreat of one of her soldiers. She caught one of the Combine soldiers in his eyes visor and ducked back, hopefully dead. But even then a bullet caught her soldier in the arm as he dived behind the car. Alyx was forced to huddle behind her cover as the malicious gunship sprayed another salvo of bullets at her doorway.

“Aliens… fucking aliens” the woman whispered under her breath. Shaking her head with a look of incredulous rage on her face.

“Yeah, so could you put that vaporizing gun to work?” Alyx asked trying to keep a cool head as her soldiers were forced to retreat.

Just as she looked she saw Jim running from one of the shops to escape two flanking Combine. He was brutally gunned down by the gunship overhead. She swore under her breath at the loss.

“If I had one I’d love to” the woman scowled down at the device around her arm and Alyx looked at her confused. She held up the, whatever it was with a wry apologetic expression “I was bluffing.”

Alyx stared at her for a moment then resisted the urge to bang her head against the wall. “Okay… so what does it do?” She asked before spending the last of her clip gunning down two Combine soldiers who tried to cross the street. One managed his way across to new cover to throw a mercifully poorly thrown grenade short of the diners door.

“Well basi-” started the man beside her before he was interrupted by the exploding grenade. Sputtering dust and dirt cloud choking him off.

The woman clearing the air around her with a wave of her free hand caught Alyx’s attention. She pointed the gun at the wall and fired another glowing ball of energy. When it hit it seem to congeal into a flat oval of orange plasma. Then she pointed it at the floor and fired an accompanying blue ball of energy. As it expanded into a similarly sized oval it created a hole that seemed to lead to... She looked up where the orange oval had been moments ago where it was now a hole showing the ceiling. The woman picked up a chipped piece of tile from the ground and tossed at the orange hole and the same piece of tile flew up out of the blue one.
Alyx’s eyes widened at the device, thinking of the years her father and doctor Kleiner had been working to create a teleportation device. “That’s incredible!” She said with a wide smile before a pale worried look came over her face as she remembered who exactly was poised to acquire the device. “we have to get out of here.” She said with a worried look on her face. She briefly considered running out the back door with the two of them and lose the Combine in the forest. But she looked out at the firefight outside, unwilling to leave those under her command to die. “Can you help me get them out?” She asked and the woman didn’t need more than a moment to agree.

“Switch!” The young resistance leader yelled as she took cover as bullets began to stream through the blue rimmed portal. Chell leaned out the window again to place another portal behind these Combine’s line creating a fresh flanking position.

A distant part of her mind wondered if she had just joined a terrorist organization. Another part half remembered tall tales in Aperture about tests involving fighting mantis men and wondered if this was actually some variation. Most of her mind however was focused on finding a new place to screw over the ominously armored enemies.

Three of the four soldiers they were trying to get out were already in the diner and the fourth was close by kept held down by the remaining nine soldiers. The three soldiers that had made it we’re doing a good job to provide supporting fire, two from the windows, and one with the leader firing through the portal. As the new portal opened up the leader and soldier turned back to it and started to rake the soldier’s position and another unaware soldier fell onto the cement writhing in pain.

All this would seem to be going very well if it wasn’t for the routine gunship fire ripping apart their position brick by brick. Frankly the ceiling did not look like it would be very good cover for much longer.

The resistance fighter still outside, Roy, decided that this was as good a moment as any to make a run for it. He started to sprint from the car towards one of the windows that had been unbarred and shattered in the firefight. Half of them were being held down by the fire, and the two others were keeping several of the others heads down. But one soldier was still open and ready to fire at his fleeing enemy. As he dived into the diner in a flurry of chasing bullets, one thin red line of blood followed through the resistance fighters shoe and he let out a cry of pain as he collided with the ground, his own gun skittering across the ground, forgotten as he clutched at his foot.

“Ah! damnit, damnit!” Roy screamed. Even through his own pain he scrambled back, to put his back against cover. He looked around the room for someone who could help, but just about everyone was focused on the fight outside. All but one anyways. He looked over to where Doug was keeping his head down and pointed at him “You. Do you know how to apply a tourniquet?” he screamed over the firefight Doug thought for a moment and then gave a lopsided shrug that said ‘kind of’. The injured soldier gritted his teeth and waved him over “Well I need it, I have a medkit, just get over here.” Doug nodded and made his way across the room, seeming to duck and weave the streams of bullets that spoke to years of practice in the Enrichment Center.

“We need to get out of here” said one of the fighters still on her feet.

“Right! We need to-”

“Grenade!” one of the fighters at the window ducked as the red lighted explosive came bouncing into the room nearly dead center of our position.

“Everyone take co-” the leader said looking like she was going to push herself and Chell to the floor. Chell staved her off with one hand and aimed with the portal gun. Everyone was scrambling around panicking as she lined up the shot. The portal that had been used as a firing position
disappeared and a new one ported the grenade above the enemy.

Chell looked around for a moment somewhat amused. “Do people still owe you a life debt if you save yourself in the process?” she asked most of the resistance fighters too incredulous to answer.

Doug however seemed a bit more into the surreal spirit that Chell had found herself embracing “I think people have to swear that of their own free will, it's not automatic”

Chell was about to protest but her words cut off as the momentarily stunned attackers renewed their assault. “Right, so someone said something about running?” Chell tried to leverage herself up to her legs but that same sharp bone digging pain came back and she nearly crumpled to the floor. The leader moved to support her weight and Chell whispered, well more whimpered a word of thanks.

“I’ve got her” said the leader, acting as Chell’s crutch, “Um, mister…”

“Rattmann, Doug Rattman” said Doug, finishing up a clearly rushed attempt at binding the foot of the soldier.

“Okay, Doug carry Roy please, we need to move as fast as possible.” Doug nodded starting to haul the injured fighter from the ground. “We will hold them off for as long as we can.”

**Oh joy am I being volunteered for something?**

“Try and get to the cover of the forest and make your way back to the mines. Make sure you aren’t followed.”

“What? And leave you behind? We can’t do that!” One of the two women fighters called as she put out some suppressive fire.

“Yeah, Eli would have our heads on a platter” remarked Clint.

“You won’t be, we’ll use her… device to evade and distract them, then find our way back a different way” she said with a confidence Chell in no way shared. Still it seemed to reassure her allies, and if they could get Doug someplace safe it would all be for the better. “Everyone understand the plan?” There was a murmur of disgruntled agreement and the leader nodded. Okay everyone get moving to the back we’ll start holding them off here.

She leaned Chell against a wall and once again peeked out and started to fire into the positions of the enemy.

Doug shot a worried look at Chell, she just shrugged and smirked “I’ll see you over there alright?” he still looked worried before continuing to act in his promising new career as a human crutch. I picked up the gun that had been dropped by Roy and checked it over

“You know how to use that thing right?” the leader asked.

“I think I-” she felt a violent jerk as she pulled down the trigger and the kickback forced a stream of bullets up one wall of the diner. There were a few brief ricochets before the only bullets streaming in were from the enemy. Chell looked back at the woman with a guilty smile “No, no I do not.”

“Just work with what you know,” she said gesturing towards the portal gun.

Cell nodded and looked out the window where the Combine, sensing something was wrong were starting to approach. Chell looked around for anything high up but it was such a small town that
there wasn’t really anything. She settled for the second story of a shop and fired one portal there. Then as one of the Combine came rushing forward she fired an accompanying portal right beneath his feat. With a surprised yelp he fell through, hands briefly grasping at the portals edge before the sudden shift of gravity for most of his body got him to fall. He fell with a thud a good ways back, but was getting to his feet a bit quicker than one would like.

*Body armor is just cheating.*

She aimed just below a mailbox on the side of the road, and watched with satisfaction as it fell through and nailed the shoulder of the Combine soldier who was getting up.

“Nice!” the woman said with a grin on her face. Then a sort of grim look came on her face “and sorry.”

“For what?” Chell ducked below as the other soldiers figured out she had something to do with their friends disappearance and a stream of fire started to fill the window she had been using.

“I sort of just volunteered you for this,” she fired another burst into the air where a Combine head tried to look out before ducking back behind cover.

“Oh, that” Chell tried to lean out again but ducked again as a stream of bullets came streaming through the window again. She started to limp away from the window towards her ally feeling not so confident she could poke out again without being gunned down “Well” she grunted each time she leaned weight on her leg “Worse ways to die than fighting aliens.” Chell said letting the insanity of her world settle onto her shoulders. She would actually think she was dreaming if the sharp pain in her leg wasn’t worse than any pinch could have been.

“You think were going to die?”

“Well I certainly don’t assume we're going to live.” she said with a oddly confident shrug of the shoulders.

The resistance leader looked at her with a mix of incredulity and respect before offering her open left hand “Names Alyx.”

Chell looked at the hand before leaning her weight against the wall and shaking it with her open left hand “Chell” she responded with a smile.

The Combine seemed to grasp their true numerical advantage had become absolute and the cover Chell and Alyx were crouched behind became a hurricane of bullets. Alyx attempted to lean out to return fire but was grazed across the arm for her trouble. “I think we’re going to have to move!” she yelled out over the increasing hail of bullets chipping away at the sturdy old construction covering them.

Chell nodded she looked out to the two story shop she had picked out earlier. She pivoted and fired a portal through the window she felt the faint buzz in the device signalling a new portal. She slammed her back into the building her entire body nearly crumpling up into a ball at the rapid movement. Alyx put an arm around Chell to support her with a worried look on her face. She aimed her portal gun at the ground below them “Alright get ready!” she fired a portal beneath their feet.

Alyx yelped in surprise as they fell through. Chell as easily as breathing maneuvered her body in the air as they fell through so that her feet would land on the ground. Alyx who had never experienced the sudden shift of gravity on her person did no such thing, dragging her and Chell to the ground. Chell managed to avoid putting all her weight down on her bad knee but that was
about all the grace she could muster at the moment.

A thick cloud of dust was kicked up when the two of them slammed into the floor and they spent a few moments coughing their lungs out on the ground.

“Right. Uh, gravity kind of still happens” Chell warned belatedly from the side.

Alyx through a coughing fit began to haul the two of them up “Gonna need some practice at that.” she said and looked back at the portal.

On the other end a scattering of class and debris was kicked in as Combine boots swarmed through the door. Alyx instinctively pulled up her pistol to fire up at the pair that were staring down at them.

Chell calmly flipped a thumb switch in the portal gun and the portal seemed to evaporate from the wall, leaving only the cracked water damaged plaster. “Okay well that will distract them for a little while, now what?”

“Well can you get us to the tree line? We can slip away beneath the trees” she said getting them both to a window and looking out over the little town.

“I doubt it? This thing can only put portals on flat objects big enough to support one.” she looked out to the tree line with a look of skepticism. “Trees aren't that wide, or flat for that matter.”

“What about the ground?”

“It needs to be solid, stone might work, but dirt's not all that even or solid.”

“Well… that’s not, great.”

“Please tell me you weren’t relying on this alone to get us out of here?” Chell asked holding up the portal gun. Alyx smiled crookedly at her with a little shrug.

“You’re sure the dirt won’t work?”

“I never tried, but I doubt it, and the shots from this thing aren’t exactly subt-”

A mechanical whirr went through the air and Alyx got a spooked look in her eye before clasping a hand over Chell’s mouth. A half dozen more whirrs came cutting through the air from the diner. Very faintly one of the Combine soldiers called out “Spread out and find them!” After a few more moments of being quieted Chell reached up and removed the hand from her mouth and looked at Alyx with a questioning expression.

“Manhacks” she whispered softly pointing out the window. I looked out and above the soldiers who seemed to be combing the streets for their prey there were a handful of… what looked like to be tiny flashlights with rotator blades propelling them upwards. They were more than a little intimidating with their high whirring blades circling around. Chell was roughly pulled down below the window pane and she looked back to Alyx “They search out any non Combine to cut up, if one of them finds us then they’ll know where we are.” as if to punctuate the seriousness of the threat the gunship sped overhead. “We need to be quiet.”

Chell nodded in acquiescence but silently thought what exactly the game plan was here. Even if one of those things didn’t find them, they were still combing the city. Evading the soldiers might have been possible without the gunship overhead, but with it there was no way they was getting to safety.
Well no way I’m getting to safety anyway.

Chell looked down to the gun swallowing her arm up to the elbow and slowly slid it off. She offered it over to Alyx who looked at her confused.

“Take it” Chell whispered.

“What I can’t-”

“Yes you can, you’ll be faster without me and as little as I know what's going on, I’m guessing you came out here to keep this out of their hands” she jerked her head in the general direction of the armored soldiers. “It sucks, but I don’t plan on getting a stranger killed just because I had the luck of being born with shit knees.” I tried to press it into her hands.

For a moment it looked like Alyx would take it, but we both froze as the unnerving sound of one of the mechanical bladed monstrosities hiccuped as it thunked into our buildings wall. It quickly corrected itself and managed to clumsily find its way through the apartment's window. It dived inside seeming to search in a lopsided arc, chipping wood and tearing furniture as it grazed them.

Alyx slowly without making a sound rose the gun in her hand and trained it on the device. It hadn’t seemed to notice them yet. Or Chell assumed it hadn’t based on the fact that they weren’t being pounded by gunfire yet. It seemed to make its way towards the door and silently Chell hoped that it would go on its merry way.

Then as it tried to go through the empty doorframe it bumped a little too hard on its corner and spun wildly. As it stabilized it caught sight of the two of them and Chell swore silently. It let out a high pitched chirping alarm and began a menacing dive towards. Alyx swore but fired a burst into the device causing its trajectory to go wild toward the ground. She just as quickly retrained her fire and fired again, and it fell to pieces.

Still the damage was done, outside the soldiers started to call out where the drone had died and the manhacks in unison seemed to be heading in their direction.

“Damn it!” Chell sat up, slipping her arm back into the device she leaned out the window and scanned for someplace to flee to. She found an intact wall in a store with a broken in room and fired through there

“Chell, watch out!” Alyx tackled her to the ground as a stream on gunship bullets tore their hiding place to shreds around them. Chell just pointed down and fired a new portal below them. They fell through and she closed it with another flick of her thumb. Alyx was much faster about recovering the two of them back to their feet.

“Over there! They have some kind of teleporting device! They went into that store!” the soldiers called out.

“Okay we got to-” Alyx started but was cut off as the gunships fire was retrained on the shop, starting to break the old roof open wider. She stumbled both of them out of the way of its line of fire and into one of the side rooms. It was a small and cramped office papers lay scattered on the ground.

“You need... to get out of here” Chell said putting on hand on the table ”take this and go!” She said again trying to offer the gun to the girl.

“I can’t just-”

“There isn’t another way!” I stressed. But froze as I heard a deceptive tinkling over the sound of
gunfire spraying and ricocheting around the store. From the window two red lit grenades from earlier were bouncing off the ground. Alyx again took Chell and shoved her to the ground. The two grenades exploded violently.

Between the shredding gunfire of whatever the gunship was packing, the two grenades that had just detonated, and the wear and rot of time, the old structure that had held the store together through its long abandoned twenty years, came collapsing down around them.

Chapter End Notes

Hello again. So here is the second chapter for the fic, hope you liked it. I meant to have it up earlier than this, but I got a little stuck and then side tracked by Black Mesa (which is essentially a remastered Half Life 1 in the Source engine). So this ended up taking longer than it should have. Thank you to those who have favorited/followed the fic so far, I hope you like the end result. Also thankyou to everyone who leaves a comment/review for the fic, they fill me with motivation to do my best.
Chell Shocked III

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Arc 1 : Chell Shocked

III

Town of Clarkesville

Alyx slowly roused to wakefulness in the wake of the sudden rubble. She felt a heavy weight on her back, but otherwise she felt better than she had any right to. She tested the weight trying to leverage herself to start moving it off. It barely budged, and worse as she tried some of the rubble shifted and she felt it push her down tighter in the pocket her and Chell had ended up in.

She grunted at the effort but soon gave up and looked to Chell instead. She was still knocked out. There was a small stream of red coming down from her forehead, but otherwise she seemed better. Alyx carefully contorted her body so that she could reach her personal health vial. She put a bit of the green gel over her fingers and smeared it across where the wound was and it closed up quickly.

She reached down to feel for her pulse and found it beating along just fine. Well that was a relief. She looked around for her own gun but it was long somewhere in the rubble. Chell's gun on the other hand was nearby. She reached out, her finger tips slipping across its white carapace shell leaving thin lines where dust had collected. She kept trying to inch it closer, but with nothing to grip within reach she was making little progress.

Then the weight atop her shifted again and her gloved hand slammed for any kind of support as she felt a lot more weight shift onto her back. She took deep steadying breaths but a pain was digging into her back. She kept at it for what felt like a small eternity when suddenly a lot of weight was lifted away. She actually reared back as the worst of the debris was lifted off from her and she breathed in fresh air. She had only a moment to get her bearings before a thud of electrically charged pain shot through her. Her vision became blurry and she could only vaguely make out the sounds of the combine soldiers around her.

"Take them both in. They will be questioned."

Her arms were gripped tightly and she focused on them enough to recognize the energy laced cuffs come around her hands. Trying to pull or resist them would send a painful electric shock through your arms. She tried to jump away in a knee jerk attempt to escape but felt another electrified club hit her in the back of the knee and it sent her sprawling again.

She looked over to Chell who was also being pulled from the rubble along with the portal gun. Her heart sank thinking of all things the combine could learn about from it. The one thing holding off the Combine's endless onslaught is their inability to easily teleport to their home world and back.

There were only seven soldiers left. At least they had made them bleed for the damn thing, not that it was even a drop in the bucket to them. Two of the soldiers held her and Chell off to the side while the others talked.
"We need to go after the rest of them. They slipped away in the fighting but the other target still has that device on his back." one mentioned.

"For him to haul it on his back all this way it must be important to those scum in the resistance" another put in.

"Alright," said a third in a commanding tone of voice and pointing at one of the red tinted soldiers "You and the privates take the device we secured and the two prisoners to the Citadel." the Overwatch soldier said pointing back to one of the drop ships that had circled back, "The rest of us and the gunship with hunt down the rest of the rats"

The shotgun armed soldier slammed his fist over his chest in salute. He turned to the soldiers holding Chell and Alyx "You heard him, get them to the ship." Alyx gritted her teeth as she was shoved towards the ship. She turned to rebound on them but stared down the barrel of the red soldier's shotgun. The two blue tinted privates took a hold of Chell's dead weight and started to drag her towards the drop ship.

Alyx glared angrily at the soldier but he only pulled it up and trained it on her. She turned around and started toward the ship. She looked at Chell as her bare feet were dragged across the asphalt and winced. As much pain as she was sure the woman was in she silently prayed that she would wake up soon. If they got into the bowels of the Citadel, there would be no getting out.

____________________________________________________

Apartment 24B

A little girl sat alone in the corner of a small apartment in the sweltering summer afternoon heat. Her legs were badly deformed. Each bent at the knees in ways that would surely be painful for anyone else, but for her it was just the way things always had been. They hung limply over the side of the rolling chair. It was a cheap chair the kind that wouldn't last an adult for more than a few months, but it was enough for now though. She had a crutch nearby, for getting around when she needed to.

She was supposed to get a real wheelchair soon, but there was always some problem or another that pushed that day further out. It wasn't all that bad though. The apartment was small enough that she could get around easily enough, and there were no stairs that walled her off from the bathroom or her bedroom. Not like the last one, where she had pretty much had to sit in her room all day.

Her foster mother was better than her previous foster father. She was kind and patient, and as long as she didn't make too much noise or break anything she never yelled at her. She hadn't even hit her yet even when she was really angry.

Usually she would have run of the house around the afternoon, listening to the radio or watching TV but it was her caretakers day off which meant she had to be quieter than normal. She got terrible headaches on these kinds of mornings. So the girl sat quietly in a corner of the apartment, out of the way and reading out of a book.

The shrill noise of the intercom shattered the relative quiet of the afternoon. The girl shuddered at the sound and looked toward the door of her caretaker. To her relief the voice was more groggy than angry.

"Ugh... Chell, be a dear and tell them we aren't interested... stupid salesmen..." her voice dwindled away back to sleep.

Chell bit her lip and nodded. She started to work the rubber tip on the wood floors like an oar
through a river. Making her way around furniture like they were rocks of rapids, she soon enough got to the door. Silently she was thankful whoever was on the other side had not gotten impatient and pressed the buzzer again. She reached up and pressed in the button "Hello? We're not interested. Sorry." She said the practiced words with confidence hoping that would be the end of it.

"Is this Chell?" the voice acquired on the other end.

Chell paused for a moment. Salespeople weren't supposed to know your name. "Y-yes?" she answered.

"Hello Chell, I'm with the foster care system. Can you get Ms. Kerry please?" the voice on the other end inquired.

Chell bit her lip nervously before pressing the button in again "One moment" she said and she carefully maneuvered her way around the dining room table again to the bedroom door. She opened the door slowly but it still creaked painfully in the otherwise silent apartment. Dressed lightly in the hot apartment an annoyed glare met Chell from the darkness.

"What is it?"

"Th-they say they're from the foster care system." she said not above a whisper.

A slow dawning realization came over the woman's face as she realized this wasn't something she could shove off. She fell out from the comforter and grabbed a bathrobe from the floor to cover herself "Chell go buzz them in I'll be there in a second."

Chell nodded and started to make it to the door. In her haste she almost tipped off from the chair. She pressed the intercom button "You can come up," she pressed the button to let them in the building and used her crutch to push her away from the walls.

She returned to her corner of the room as her foster mother hurried to look half way presentable. She was in the middle of scowling at some makeup when a knock came to the door. She fastened the bathrobe around herself and looked over herself one last time before going to the door.

"Yes hello?" she asked and Chell could only see a man in a suit and someone very tall behind him.

"Yes, miss..." the suited man hesitated for a moment, looking at something "Kerry. I'm Mr. Johnson with the Foster Care program. We're here for the appointment."

"What appointment?" Ms. Kerry asked with tired skeptical eyes.

Mr. Johnson looked just as skeptical "We called a weeks ago. Someone is interested in adopting Chell, we asked when you would be available and you said today, the 23rd." Chell felt a bolt of nervousness shoot through her.

Ms. Kerry put a hand over her face "Oh, yeah was that this weekend. I'm sorry... busy week, come inside." she moved aside beckoning them inside.

Chell nervously ran a hand through her hair and desperately tried to press down her skirt. As if, if she pushed it down far enough then the mangled state of her legs might be overlooked.

Mr. Johnson walked inside and moved to the small kitchen table quickly placed a briefcase on top of it "Now Ms. Kerry, a few details about all this..." Mr. Johnson started but Chell's attention was quickly absorbed by the man who was walking through the front door. He was easily the tallest
person Chell had ever seen and he had to duck under the doorway to avoid bumping his head. He had big strong looking hands like a comic book heroes but with a slightly rounded belly. He wore a white lab coat with gloves over a buttoned down black shirt and tan pants. He had a big graying brown beard and mustache, with matching brown eyes.

He walked into the apartment looking around as Mr. Johnson and Ms. Kerry talked. Soon his eyes fell on Chell and she stood straight up feeling a coming dread. Others had come to see if they wanted to adopt her before. Each time she could see the disappointment in their eyes when they saw the state of her legs. It hurt a little bit each time.

The man took big striding steps towards her and looked down. Slowly he knelt down so he was somewhat on her level and smiled "Hello there young one. Are you Chell?" he asked in a deep yet gentle voice. She nodded meekly, holding her crutch across her body as if it could protect her.

"Well my name is Aaron Legends. I am hoping I can adopt you today. Would you like that?" he asked. Chell hesitated for a moment trying to figure out if this was some kind of trick question, but slowly nodded her head. "Wonderful" he said with a wide grin, plucked one glove off with the other to reveal a metal hand beneath. It had a few errant wires moving in and out, but it had to be really metal "It is very nice to meet you Chell" he said with a smile.

Chell released her grip on her crutch for a moment and reached out tentatively for his hand…

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**Drop Ship**

Chell jolted awake as a bit of turbulence bounced her into the side of the chamber. She groaned and a part of her wanted to go back to sleep before another bit of turbulence slammed her head right back into the wall. She opened her eyes and looked around, not that there was much to see. The inside of the drop ship was a black box of mostly metal, with two rows of benches on each side. There was a large door on the back where mos everyone was exiting from, and what looked like an additional panel on top with the word 'Emergency' plastered over it. Chell was at the back as far from the main door as one could be. The rebel girl, Alyx was sitting across from her. At the other end three of the armor clad Combine soldiers were talking amongst themselves.

*So we were captured. Fantastic.*

"Are you awake?" came a whispered voice and Chell turned her attention back to Alyx. "Listen we don't have much time. Their taking us to the Citadel, and if we can't escape before then we are done for." she said and Chell shook herself and focused on her.

"Any plans?" she asked and her voice felt hoarse and dry.

"Well first we have to deal with them..." she gave a slight jerk of the head to the combine at the back of the car.

"Okay so how do we-" Chell tried to make a open handed gesture but as she pulled against the restraint of the cuffs a shock of electricity burst through her and she gasped in pain. "Fucking Gaah" she hissed and clenched her hands onto fist to ride out the pain.

One of the Combine soldiers looked to her and commanded "Quiet prisoner." before returning to his conversation.

Chell bit her tongue on the response she wanted to say and instead focused back on Alyx. She
looked back sympathetically from her sat. "We need to-"

"Hey the other one is awake now." said one of the guards. Not the sharpest tools in the shed then. "What are you two talking about." demanded one of the blue accented Combine troopers.

Alyx looked nervous but Chell looked back with a smug grin "we were just taking bets on which of you is the ugliest son of a bitch under those masks. I got a fifty saying its you" she said with a smug grin.

The soldiers two companions chuckled but he stood up and started to stalk menacingly towards her. He brought out a baton and with a flick of his wrist it extended out and started to crackle with electricity "Want to say that again prisoner?"

Chell tried to keep a stern face as he loomed over her "Oh did I hit a sore spot? I'm sorry for commenting on your ugly, ugly face." As the baton came crashing on the side of her head she immediately fell to the side of the bench as the current seized her muscles and she tried not to spasm too much. Her eyes darted to Alyx behind the soldier who was looking at her with a mix of worry and bafflement.

Chell darted her eyes up at the soldier and jostled her cuffs briefly against the metal bench. Alyx looked down at her own cuffs then seemed to have a moment of realization dawn on her. Chell glanced back up at her attacker who had raised his baton for another swing. Just before he brought it down Alyx leapt into action.

She jumped behind him and looped the electrical band of her restraints around his neck like a garrote. The cuffs vibrated to life at being extended, but most seemed to be draining into the now stunned and screaming soldier. He dropped his baton in a desperate attempt to reach back and pluck the young rebel off his back. The other two soldiers jumped to their feet, hands going for their guns.

Chell dived, or more like heaved herself at the guard going for the gun at his waist. She pulled it out and aimed it down field. She held down the trigger and a stream of bullets started to fill the compact area. The two soldiers had little to no area to stand side by side, let along dive or take cover. They both went down in the shower of fire. As the gun clicked empty Chell discarded it. She looked up to the last remaining threat in the room.

With an effort the Combine soldier grabbed both of Alyx's wrists and threw her off him. A bump of turbulence sent him rolling down the cabin away from the two. Alyx regained her feet first, Chell remained on the ground feeling several different kinds of helpless.

As he stood again he reached down for his gun only to find it missing. Alyx started to charge down the cabin after him. He looked down to his dead comrades and reached for the shotgun on the ground. As he pulled it up to fire Alyx took a leaping kick at him and the buckshot sailed narrowly under her and uselessly into the back of the cabin. Her kick connected solidly in the chest and launched him against the main hatch of the cabin. Which with little resistance from the inside caved in and opened up. With a muffled scream he fell away into the streets below.

Alyx narrowly caught herself on the frame of the doorway and pushed back away from it. She looked back at Chell with a mix of pride and astonishment that that had worked at all. Chell remained on the ground feeling several different kinds of helpless.

Alyx narrowly caught herself on the frame of the doorway and pushed back away from it. She looked back at Chell with a mix of pride and astonishment that that had worked at all. Chell remained on the ground with a grin of her own. She looked around for some kind of control panel or a switch "So now what? I don't see any parachutes in here."

Alyx nodded and looked out the door "wouldn't do us much good, were flying way too close to the ground..." she walked back rummaging around the two remaining bodies for the hand cuff keys. She inserted them into the slot and the current of electricity died and the cuffs popped off.
"Did you see where they put my gun?" Chell asked offering up her hands to be uncuffed as well, rubbing them with relief when they were freed.

"Yeah. Strong box in the back." She took the key ring and walked back to the strong box. Pulling out the portal gun she tossed it back to Chell. Then she pulled out her hacking device and holstered the both of them on her belt.

Chell meanwhile scavenged the electric baton and looping it into her belt. With a grunt of effort and Alyx's assistance she managed to get back to her feat and the two made their way to the open hatch

Chell looked out over the side and saw the ever rushing streets of a city below. It was going fast but she had needed to make faster reaction shots on the test track "Okay so the best plan I have is firing one portal at a roof or something then jump and fire another one where were going to land."

"That sounds like a terrible plan! What if you miss?" she called out voice raised at the whipping sound of the wind just beyond the threshold.

"Then we both die!" Chell responded "What happens if we make it to… wherever this thing is taking us?"

Alyx seemed to take a moment or two before holding Chell a little tighter "Did I mention how much I love this plan of yours? Great stuff."

Chell took in a deep breath trying to untie the knot in her stomach. It had been a long time since she had to worry about falling from any height "Now these things don't open too widely, and were going to have a small enough margin of error as it is. When we start falling your gonna have to grab onto my back alright?" Chell said and Alyx nodded in understanding.

Chell took out the portal gun and aimed it along the ever passing groups of buildings below them. She fired one on one unsuspecting rooftop, seeing the faint blue glow pass into the distance as they flew onward.

"Alright, one… two…"

"Wait!"

Chell nearly tripped over into the gulf below feeling her heart rate tick up a thousand paces as she briefly hovered unbalanced on the edge of the ship before being brought back by Alyx. She looked at her with eyes that hovered on panic.

"Just..." Alyx moved in close, adjusting her grip she supported even more of Chell's weight and was in much better position to hold onto her from the back. "There. All ready, just tell me when."

Chell felt an unease at her closeness but brushed it off. Much bigger things to worry about now "Right. Okay. One … two… three!" she braced herself holding her portal gun steady as Alyx launched them off the gunship. She ignored the high pitch scream in her ear as they rapidly approached the street below. Firing the portal at the last minute they passing through the sparkles of an opening orange portal.

As they passed through the portal on the roof, Chell naturally tried to press her body into a roll to get her a picture of the ground. Their angle momentum wouldn't allow them to just bob between the two portals letting gravity do its work. However she didn't account for the additional weight and couldn't turn fast enough.
"Alyx! Lean forward!" Chell called out.

Alyx gave up her screams for a moment her hold tightly coiled around Chell. As the initial momentum wore out and they started to drift back to the ground she seemed to realize what was wrong and try to turn her body to give Chell a better angle. Chell barely managed to open another portal on the roof before the two of them ended up crushed on the pavement.

The two working together eventually killed their momentum enough that when they finally landed on the rough gravely roof there were only a few scratches to complain on the landing. Afterall Chell had no intention of landing on her legs and Alyx was still too shook up by the action to think to do it herself.

As Alyx came to realize they had finally stopped she loosened her grip and sat up from the ground, She looked around and then off to where the gunship was just a speck on the horizon. A puke green dot on the Citiels massive ediface. Absently, she padded the ground next to her before letting out a chuckle and running a hand through her hair "Well, that certainly was something" she said looking down at Chell who was still on the roof.

"Yep." Chell pushed herself up on her hands and looked around at the slowly crumbling city around them. Then she focused on the massive citedel in the center with a kind reverant awe. "I don't suppose thats our sides headquarters is it?"

Alyx grimiced and shook her head "Afraid not, that would be the Citidel, whose horrors you have saved us from. So thanks for that." She stood up dusting herself off before offering her hand. Chell took it with a grimace "Are you alright?"

"Well Ive been slowly bleeding from my leg for a few hours now… maybe that has something to do with everything being… woozy?" as the adrenaline seeped out of her she slumped far more of her weight against Alyx and shut her eyes tight trying to keep the world from shaking.

"Seriously?" she asked looking down at the now obvious red blotches on her legs, then winced at the scratched and peeled state of her feet. "Come on, we should get out of the open anyway" she said and led them over to a broken in doorway on the roof. The two decended a stairway and Alyx had a focused look in her eyes "Okay, if we are where I think we are, then we should be pretty close to Dr. Kleiner's lab… we can patch you up there."

"Sounds good," Chell responded with a singular focus of someone trying desperately not to collapse on the ground. The two of them walked through the deserted building with a slow lumbering gate "Where is everyone?"

"The civilians? They were probably cleared out of the building. Suspected ties to the resistance or treason to the state. Some other trumped up charge that got the lot of them sent to Nova Prospect… uh, prison, a really bad prison" she clarified.

The two approached a shattered in hall window, it over looked a huge street, down the center two of the lumbering strider walked side by side, flanked by platoons of combine soldiers. "Please tell me we don't have to fight all of that?" Chell said with a weary voice.

"Not if were smart no, Kleiners office is about two blocks away, usually we'd have to do quite a lot to avoid the patrols, but with your little device I think we'll be able to manage some shortcuts."

"Just tell me where."

Abandoned Attic, City 17
"Okay, just a little farther Chell come on..." Alyx said鼓励ingly as they walked out of the last portal. Chell was leaning much heavier on her now, the line between supporting her and carrying her had blurred over the last few minutes. She led them down the creaking boards of plywood that made up the stairs and down a short hallway.

Chell only mumbled a response as she closed the portal behind them.

As they got in the elevator she was breathing a little harder. Alyx looked at her new friend worried. Wondering if maybe she had caught a bullet in all the chaos after all, but she couldn't see any evidence other than the slow oozing of blood from her leg. Alyx worried for her new friend. She was brave enough, not everyone had the stomach to fight against the combine. Even after seeing all the damage they cause. While Chell had just today learned that the world she once knew was gone, but she had more steel than most.

As the elevator opened up she hurried the two of them to the false soda machine that opened the way to Kleiner's Lab. "Almost there..."

"I'm... I'm so sorry, Eli. I, I wish there was something I cou-" Doctor Kleiner broke off as he saw Alyx hobble into his lab, his eyes wide "Alyx?! What are you-"

"Alyx?" came her fathers voice from the array of computers sounding desperate and worried. Alyx winced at that, she had hoped to get back into contact before anyone had been notified of her capture. Alyx found an empty chair and slowly lowered Chell into it. Chell let out a noise that might have sounded blissful if it wasn't for the pain that gurgled at the back of her throat.

Alyx rushed over to the group of monitors and gave a little frantic wave to her fathers clearly relieved face "Hey Dad, sorry to worry you, things got a little crazy but I'm fine. All the same, our new friend is in pretty bad shape, and I'm gonna need Doctor Kleiner, I'll give a full report later alright?"

"Yes, yes, its enough to know you're somewhere safe." Alyx gave a quick smile and a wave before ending the transmission.

"Uncle Kleiner, get the medical supplies" Alyx said to the startled scientist, he quickly shuffled over to one of his shelves.

Chell was still concious enough to make eye contact at least. Alyx knelt down next to the chair and started to roll up the blood soaked pants leg. She grimaced at the clotted clumps of blood but her eyes widened at the metallic kneecap. It seemed to completely replace the purpose of the knee without cutting off circulation to the rest of the leg.

"Here you are Alyx" Dr. Kleiner said with more than a little squeamishness in his voice, handing over the first aid kit, a rag and some bottled water.

"Thanks" said and wet the rag and started to clean away the blood, even before she was done she realized that the bleeding was coming from somewhere behind the prosthetic. Once she had cleaned away most of the blood she took a deep breath "Chell, I think I'm going to need to remove this to get to the wound, is that dangerous?" she looked up to a little shake of a head "Okay Kleiner, do you think you can hold Chell's shoulders? This is going to hurt and the less she moves the better..."

"I uh. I really don't think I could." he said in a nervous apologetic voice.

Alyx looked back at him and his rather scrawny statue and realized it was a rather dumb question. She turned back to Chell "This is, uh going to hurt, so Im gonna bind your leg okay?" she nodded.
with a steely determination in her eyes. Alyx took out the tools she would need from her belt and then took it off as well. She tied down Chell's leg tight to the steel folding chair and got to work.

Carefully she started to take the screws from the front plating and dismantling the prosthetic piece by piece. She was silently amazed by the complexity of the device as she went, this was wildly more advanced than any pre-Combine prosthetic she knew about. Still piece by piece she removed everything until there was just the back plate that curved to the skin. She looked up at Chell as she put her fingers on either side of it. Chell nodded in confirmation. She slowly slid the plate out and could hear the choked off sound of pain come from Chell as her entire body tensed and convulsed in pain. She placed it down gently and looked back to what now appeared to be a unnatural crater where her knee should be, a now much more steady stream of blood came off of it, she deftly opened the medkit and started to treat the wound, in a matter of moments the wound sealed up around the scared gnarled skin where the prosthetic was. If there was one good thing to come out of the Combine invasion it was medi-gel. She quickly but carefully wrapped a bandage around the wound to assist the medi-gel in its work.

Alyx looked back up to Chell who was now slumped in the chair, a brief flash of panic passed through Alyx before she saw the soft raise and lowering of the other's chest. Confirming she was still breathing she picked up the bloody back plate and looked it over, where the blood seemed to have been flowing the metal looked warped and unnaturally twisted, like a spur digging into the muscle of her leg. She frowned down at it wondering how this could have happened

*The explosion maybe?*

"Is, is it all right? Or do you need any help?" the nervous voice came from Kleiner who stood just a few feet back.

Alyx stood up taking hold of the bloody plate, wiping it off with the already bloody rag "I think she'll be alright for now, lets let her sleep" Alyx said looking at Chell briefly before returning her attention to Kleiner "I could use some help smoothing out this though" she said showing the spur "do you have a metal file or anything around here?"

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**Aperture Science Dormitory's**

Chell bounded through the spacious apartment, the gentle sound of her spring enhanced prosthetic accompanying her down the hall way. A Soccer ball that had been tucked neatly away under her arm is tossed carelessly into the mess of clothing and toys that was her room. She didn't stop as she headed towards the back of this side of the apartment.

A part of her wanted to burst through the door, but she remembered herself and fell back on the now comfortable back of her metal springs, she knocked three times on the door.

"Ah! One moment." a voice called back, and Chell restlessly bounced on her springs for half a minute before the voice called back again "Alright come in!"

Chell burst through the doorway and into the workshop. The large form of Aaron Legens sat at the workbench in a swivel stool facing her. Without hesitation Chell jumps up into his arms trying and failing to wrap her arms around him fully "We Won! We Won!" she shouted with glee and he easally caught her up in the hug.

"That's wonderful!" he said with a smile and stood up spinning her around "Any problems come up?" he asked speculatively as he put her back on the ground.

She tossed her head from side to side a proud smile on her face "Nope! They worked fine even
through the ground was a little muddy from the rain" she reported dutifully. She affectionately patted the bending metal bar beneath her feat. "The other team were making fun of them until I scored on them!" she grinned wickedly and Aaron laughed patting her on the shoulder.

"Wonderful wonderful, now if you aren't too tired then I have something I want to try today, think you can go get cleaned up?"

Chell wavered for a moment, keeping the smile on her face with some work and dedication "Oh, uh yeah, is it the sleeping kind of thing or the needly kind of thing?" she asked a little nervously.

"The needle kind, don't worry" he said patting her hair with a smile "now if we hurry, we should be done before the start of your show alright?" he said and she nodded padding off back down the hall and towards the decontamination shower. Usually heads of floors at Aperature only got either a lab or a workshop to work from home, but her dad had both, a point of pride she always held onto tightly among her classmates.

She ran into the first of the three rooms, she kicked off her cleats and quickly shuffled out of her jersey and shorts. She put everything in a laundry bag on one side of the room. Then she walked through to the shower room and pressed a button, she stood still at the center of the small circular room her arms outstretched. The shower began, bristling pressured water hitting into her from every side as she felt every bit of dirt and mud from the game be washed away until her skin was spotless. This was followed by a heated breeze that quickly dried her off.

The shower opened up to a third chamber, she picked one of the identical child sized patient gowns from the wall and ripped through the vacuum sealed plastic with vigor. Soon she was fully dressed and opened the last door that opened to a sterile white room with a single dentists chair in the middle and a TV on the opposite wall. She sat down in the chair, kicking her feet restlessly as she waited for her father.

Soon enough Aaron showed up, wearing one of his full hazmat suits and a tray of needles. He placed it down on a small movable cabinet by the door and then dragged it to the chair. As he checked over the needles Chell offered her arm without question. He numbed the area on the untanned underside of her arm and pressed the needle home. Cell tried to remain untensed, knowing it only hurt worse if you tensed up, but it was hard. Once he was finished he unwrapped a bandage and covered the dripping pinprick with practiced quickness.

"Alright, I'll have dinner ready in a short while, you know how to bring down the bed from the wall?" he asked in his nagging voice.

"Yes I know" she responded dutifully and he laughed.

"Just making sure" he looked up to a clock and smiled "and were done just in time" he picked up a remote from the small doctors table that he had pulled with him to the chair and handed it to her "your show is starting" he stood up and walked to the door "I'll see you soon."

She nodded and waved as he left then turned on the TV. She quickly flipped away from whatever channel he had been watching before in here until she found the theme of her favorite show playing and grinned happy to not having missed any of it.
stuck on the last scene of this chapter figuring out how I wanted to end the arc, but ended up just deciding to end it where it did instead.

And that should be the end of the first arc. Hopefully everyone is enjoying it so far. If you have any feedback please let me know.
Aperiter Science Enrichment Center

Combine soldiers sifted through the rubble of the parking lot as a small fleet of ships hovered overhead, waiting for their chance to land and help out with recovery. Everyone was seemed tense, unsure of why there was such a rush to get out here. The slow and costly attempts to breech the facility had everyone on edge.

As yet another strike team fell out of contact and presumed dead, the commander marked each of the soldiers as K.I.A. and pressed the button for his built in radio "Team 6 is out of commission, team 7 prepare to breach."

Every floor seemed to empty out into one of their confounding testing arena's, which were more thoroughly booby-trap than any rebel stronghold.

One of the officers lieutenants came running up snapping off a salute, the officer waved it off "Report" "New orders from Overseer Breen, cut losses, collect what we can and bring it back"

The officer looked at the lieutenant for a moment longer and shrugged leaning into his radio again "Team 7 stand down, all soldiers collect any material that looks like human tech" the

The army that had been milling about shuffled into action, getting whatever hadn't been salvaged already onto one of the airships around the base, everything being hauled off to the the citadel.

Kleiner's Laboratory, City 17

Chell stirred from sleep and immediately regretted it. Her body was sore from dozens of turret bullets and she felt a achingly pain from her leg. She immediately tried to bury herself back into her pillow to escape consciousness yet again.

Then she realized she wasn't sleeping on the rusted backrooms of the hideaways in aperture. She rolled onto her back and blinked her eyes slowly open. Above there was one lamp with a steel rim with flaking green paint. A cord descended to turn it on and off. There was a window on the wall behind her, shuttered against the outside so only an errant glow of sunlight ringed around it. Definitely not the sleek white aesthetic of Aperture Science.

She looked around at the cramped room, crammed between the bed and the opposite wall was a desk with a rolling chair for comfort. Sitting in the chair was the young rebel Alyx bent over something on the desk.

Right aliens took over the Earth. Great.

She tried to turn to throw her legs over the side of the bed but her left leg refused action and as she turned she felt the warning twinge of pain of a knee less leg not turning correctly. She let out a
grunt of pain and fell back flat against the bed again.

Alyx looked over from whatever she was working on letting out a relieved sigh "You okay?"

"I'm... I'm not dead, which has somehow become my new baseline for 'okay'" she looked around the small constrained room with a skeptical eye "Did we get caught?"

Alyx looked confused for a moment but then chuckled "No, no. We're in my uncle Kleiner's Lab at the moment." she said with a smile. She turned to the desk and retrieved a tray where Chell saw her knee replacement all broken down, cleaned, and polished to a shine. She absently ran a finger in the chasm where it usually occupied "I fixed what I think was wrong with it. A bit metal got twisted and was digging into the bone."

Chell looked at the it and suddenly felt naked under the sheets. She looked at Alyx skeptically then took a careful hold of her leg and slowly shifted it from under the sheets to hand over the side of the bed.

Once it hung over the edge she looked up at Alyx to gauge her reaction. There was a lot you could tell about a person when they saw an empty knee cavity. Some look disgusted, others looked empathetic, most awkwardly avoided eye contact with the deformation. Alyx just looked patient, maybe a bit curious. "Mind helping me get this back together?"

"Sure thing." weirdly she sounded at least a little excited.

"Do you have a-" Alyx reached over to the desk and grabbed a small pocket screwdriver with a dozen different interchangeable heads. Chell looked at it a tad surprised "Thanks," Chell began the lengthy process of replacing her knee placing each part in its proper place, but for the first time in a long time with the rapt attention of an audience. "Alright so the first step is this back plate here..."

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**Author's Note**

Hey sorry for the radio silence its been a kind of hectic few months. So today is just a bit of a intermission between the first and second Arc's, nothing bit but the next post will be a full chapter to kick off Arc two hopefully within the next few weeks. Otherwise I would just like to thank everyone who has Favorited or started following the story, it's always nice to know people are interested.

axel100: Admittedly I am picking and choosing bits and pieces from Portal 2 canon, I think I'm only bending portal surface rules a bit. Lots of portal surfaces are in places where they wouldn't need them for testing like the hallways near the end of Portal 1. I think the gel makes any flat surface portalable, but the fact that there were portal device tests years prior to his purchase of moon rocks, I don't think its necessary.
Home to Roost I

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Arc 2 : Home to Roost

I

Kleiner's Laboratory, City 17

The orange sphere of energy fired across the studio colliding with the wall of bricks smoothed over with plaster. The portal opens with twisting of space connecting to the blue portal on the other end of the laboratory. Chell hoisted the portal gun in her hands and watched as the scientist who would have been old enough to be her grandfather marveled at the portals like a child on christmas morning.

"My, my! This is truly remarkable" he looked through the portal waving at himself through the portals "Truly remarkable!"

Chell leaned in a little closer to Alyx who was sitting at a computer, trying to figure out a way to contact her father "Hey, is this really so impressive? Don't you all have crazy alien technology now?"

Alyx didn't look away from the computer sifting through a dozens of frequencies that the resistance piggybacks off of to make communications possible "Not really, the Combine has a lot of impressive weapons, but a lot of their electronics and infrastructure tech isn't much better than what we had before they took over. Teleporting technology is something Kleiner and Dad have been working on since before the invasion."

"Huh" Chell looked on as the old scientist was tentatively throwing various objects through the portals like a child was a new toy.

"Here we go!" Alyx announced as she hit one last key on her keyboard. Suddenly one of the half dozen monitors around the desk went static for a moment before stabilizing into a video of some kind of underground facility with big strong industrial walls that arched up and out of the picture. Sitting in a chair at the front of the picture was a black man with greying hair. He was bent over some papers, but he didn't really seem to be reading them. "Dad?" Alyx asked and his head shot up in surprise.

"Alyx! There you are. I was worried sick..." he spoke in an exhausted tone that said this was a pretty normal occurance for them. "Were you hurt Alyx?"

"A few scrapes and bruises, nothing I can't survive" Alyx said with a shrug.

"Is our new friend alright? You were in a pretty big rush earlier..."

Alyx nodded with a smile "Yep" she reached back and put an arm around Chell's shoulder pulling her into the sight of the camera. She pointed to the camera and Chell gave an awkward little wave of her free hand "This is Chell and she managed to scavenge something pretty impressive from Aperture." with a little nudge of prompting Chell displayed the portal gun to the camera.

Alyx's father leaned closer to his own monitor trying to study the object "Ah yes... what is it
exactly?"

"Well basically it-" Chell started but suddenly Doctor Kleiner was by her side, startling her a little. His footsteps were nearly silent.

"It's incredible Eli! A truly remarkable device. Revolutionary would be putting it mildly. It's a teleportation device Eli! A working honest to god teleportation device."

"No kidding?" Eli sat up interested. "Looks a little small to be teleporting anyone."

"That's because apparently our peers at Aperture went about it a completely different way than we did. It's such an elegant solution! You see instead of using a single massive jolt of electricity to transmit matter like we have been attempting, they instead focused on creating stable connections through space time! The gun generates two connected portals and once open, you can transfer as much as you want between them. There's no risk to the one going through the portal at all!"

Chell, as the only one here who had worked at Aperture Science felt the dire need to step in here "Well I wouldn't say there is no risk." Kleiner stopped and looked at Chell quizzically "I mean with Aperture's track record, it gives you cancer."

Kleiner took a shocked step back away from the device and Alyx looked up at Chell with an alarmed expression, which was fair for someone who had been using portals most of yesterday.

"It gives you cancer?" Eli shocked.

"I mean probably? The early ones probably did at least. I think the power source used to be enriched uranium or something. Lots of old Aperture stuff had that problem."

Alyx shook her head, "They all gave you cancer?!"

"Or something equally fatal," Chell said with a shrug "but there has to be some reason we didn't sell this to the public."

"Well have you felt any symptoms of illness of any kind?" Eli asked, his voice more analytical. Trying to suss out the problems with the device and if they could be overcome.

"No idea, but, I've spent most of the last week getting shot at, eating twenty year old cans of beans, and trying to sleep squirreled away next to industrial machinery. So, it's hard to say anything I'm feeling like crap is the gun's fault..."

The room was silent as everyone just kind of stared at Chell in silent horror.

Chell felt the waves of sympathy for her over her aching skin "When I say it all out loud like that, it's really not been a great week for me."

"... we'll have someone look at you... and that gun when you get here." Eli sat back in his chair looking like he was forcing himself to relax a bit "It is good to see that you are well. After your friend got here I was a little worried you might be in the same state."

Chell looked up her pulse quickening slightly "My friend? What kind of state?"

"Well, I wouldn't want to describe him as... well raving but..." he offered up his hands feebly.

"Shit," Chell hissed under her breath "Can you sedate him or something?" Chell asked quickly.

"I mean we would try, but we still don't know what that thing on his back is. We were kind of
afraid to force the issue." he said lifting a hand up trying to calm Chell who seemed cocked to ask another question, "For the moment he has squirreled himself away in one of our supply closets. He's rambling a bit loudly and making a mess of the place, but he's not hurting anyone. I have a few resistance fighters outside the door to keep it that way."

"Oh jeez..." Chell ran a hand down her face, wanting to just curl up and just sleep for five years. She really just needed a break.

"What's the matter with him?" Alyx asked looking at Eli "He didn't seem off when I had met him."

"He has schizophrenia, he ran out of medication..." Chell answered looking back at Eli "Okay. So, are there any health benefits to joining the resistance or...?"

"Oh yeah, we can make a few more pills. We'll probably need a couple tries to get the dosage right, but we can work on that."

"Great. So, what's the fastest way I can get out there?" Chell asked looking to everyone in turn.

"We could take the underground railroad. It's how we get people out of the city"

"Can we leave now?" Chell asked looking at Alyx.

Eli spoke up "You should wait for the cover of night... we'll be less likely of getting spotted that way." Chell didn't look very happy at the mention of waiting "We'll take care of him for now, just make sure he gets there."

Chell's head swiveled over to the line of thin windows along the ceiling of the lab dismayed by the warm glow of the sun shining through. "Right..." Chell leaned back against the table looking restless.

A silence hung over the group before Eli cough came from the monitor "In any case I'll see if I can get our pharmacy to crank out a few more pills for your friend. It was very nice to meet you Miss..."

"Chell just... just call me Chell."

"Chell it is then. I'll see you both when you make it out here to Black Mesa East" he reached out turning off the communication.

Chell was slack-jawed causing Alyx to look at her oddly "Chell? Is everything alright,"

"Yeah... yeah, just did. Did he say Black Mesa?"

Kleiner spoke up "Ah yes, you see many of us in the resistance came from Black Mesa research group. We were actually uh..." he straightened a bit his voice becoming embarrassed "at ground zero of the alien invasion you see."

Chell stared at him for a moment laughed the laugh of someone who was too tired to resist the absurdity of the world. "Haha- I'm sorry. I don't... I just..." tears pricked at the corner of her eyes and held her side that was radiating pain with each chuckle " ha ow ow ow..." she said a smile still on her face. Both Alyx and Kleiner were looking concerned for her but she waved a hand dismissively "Really I'm okay just... wow Black Mesa.... All the things to survive the end of the world and it was Black Mesa..." she let out a little huff of acceptance "So, how long before we could start out there?"
Kleiner shot one last concerned look to Alyx who just shrugged and then he looked back to Chell. "Well we have a few hours until sunset, but things won't really die down until curfew starts at around 8pm. That's when most people have a go at traversing the railroad."

"Alright. Okay." Chell took a steadying breath and turned to Alyx. "Could you help me out with something? I was hoping to be a little better armed before we head out again."

Alyx nodded, a smile on her face. "Sure thing, I'm sure we could scare you up a proper gun somewhere around here."

"Well that would be nice but I had another idea… do you have a toolbox around here somewhere?"

"Yeah, I think so. Kleiner you don't mind, do you?"

"Oh, certainly not, I hadn't expected any company, so I'll go see if I can work up my rations into dinner for all of us," Kleiner walked off towards a hidden trapdoor usually covered by a large wooden box that lead to the residential half of his hideout.

"Come on," Alyx walked over to one corner of the lab that had a shuttered gate blocking off one room.

With a few presses of buttons the gate slowly pulled up and Chell had to resist peering underneath what exactly needed extra security in a mad scientist's already hidden laboratory. As the gate pulled up completely it revealed a half built suit of steel. Painted in orange and with a Lambda symbol painted on its breastplate. "What is this?" Chell asked in wonder.

Alyx had mostly ignored the suit and was rooting around the small work tables at the side of the room putting together a toolbox from the loose assortment of instruments scattered across it.

"Oh, that's a little pet project of Uncle Kleiner's, its based on something they had back at Black Mesa. The H.E.V. suit," She shut the box and turned to admire the mostly finished masterpiece of technology before them. "It was originally meant to be a environmental suit, you know protect against radiation or spilled chemicals. However, because Black Mesa used to over engineer everything, it ended up functioning more like a suit of power armor. Or at least it did for Gordon Freeman."

"Who?"

"You know, G-" Alyx stopped for a moment, realizing that Chell really didn't know. For the first and perhaps only time in her life she was in a position to tell someone about Gordon Freeman! All her life she had heard the tale from the tall folk tales of heroics that circled around the civilians of the resistance. Contrasting with the humanizing tales of mischief and levity from his former co-workers, the group of scientists who had collectively raised her. She actually had to calm herself down and tried to sort through her feelings and tried to order everything she knew. Should she stick to what was probably true? Or to what he was believed to do? Where did she even start?

After another moment or two she realized she hadn't actually said anything yet and Chell was looking at her oddly.

"Its… He's important. A hero, I uh, need a little bit to sort out my thoughts on it. Do you mind if I tell you later?"

Chell shrugged and Alyx fought the absurd urge to be insulted by the woman's indifference and tried to move on instead. "So what exactly did you have in mind for our project? As cool as you'd
look in power armor I don't think Kleiner will let us disassemble his pet project."

Chell reached to her belt and pulled from it the shock baton that she had looted off the combine officers that they had fought earlier. "I had a little idea about a way to improve one of these, do have like a big battery nearby?"

Kleiner looked at the modest meal he had been able to scrounge up. Soup was just about the limits of his culinary ability but he felt that he had rose to the challenge adequately. It had a few old noodle flavor packets to help service the broth. Additionally, he had managed half dozen vegetables, both terrestrial and otherwise, to serve as the fillings.

His he walked over to the ladder to get his two guests, how he looked forward to talking to a peer from Aperture Science. There had been so much bad blood between Aperture and Black Mesa, it saddened him to think of all the missed advancements that could have been made with a partnership.

He climbed up the ladder to the second floor, pushing up the door that lead to the lab "Alyx? Ms. Chell? I believe-" he was cut off short as one of his lockers went tumbling across the room nearly causing him to slip and fall back down the hatch. It collided with the false wall that lead to the obsolete teleporter room and landed with a heavy thunk against the floor of the room.

Kleiner briefly stared at it in confused awe before the giddy sound of celebration from the other side of the room "Did you see that?" came the exuberant voice of Chell.

"I know! I didn't think it would go that far! You were right there is some kind of force effect in the batons!"

"It's not too noticeable normally but when you crank up the juice and cut out some of the inhibitors it can really send things flying! Using that Combine energy pack was genius. I was worried I'd need to haul a car battery on my back."

Alyx shook her head "Hey, your the one that figured out how to hook it up to the baton, most people have trouble getting any of their tech to work for us, but you cracked it in just over an hour!"

Kleiner slowly crawled his way fully out of the hatch looking at the sizable dent in the side of his locker, then he looked back at the two girls marveling over the modified baton in Chell's hand. Then he looked back at his very dented locker.

Quietly he accepted that this was exactly what a partnership with Aperture Science and Black Mesa was bound to look like.

Outpost 4

"Well usually this is where I would give you careful instruction on where to head next, but you have an expert as your guide." the head of this section of the railroad smiled warmly. "Still try not to get overconfident, keep quiet." he said as he opened the boarded up door that lead to the next section of the railroad.

A second resistance member, this one a middle aged woman, walked up with a small backpack that looked like it was improvised with a pair of pants and string, it jingled with an odd assortment of metals. "There are barnacles up ahead so here's a scrap pack" Alyx took the bag happily slipping the straps made of pant legs.

"Thanks Roy, Sarah, good luck down here" the man nodded with a grin before both of them
started through.

Chell walked through gingerly. If it wasn't for her body aching for rest she might have even felt like skipping. "Well he seemed friendly" Chell remarked as the two of them got through

"Well you seem weirdly chipper" Alyx remarked as the two of them started through the twisting labyrinthian paths of the old sewer system.

"How so?"

"Well most people are scared out of their wits, usually I need to keep them from screaming at every shifting shadow or noisy bird." She hadn't expected Chell to be cowering or anything, based on how she had acted earlier, but she didn't seem to be taking this seriously.

Chell thought over it for a minute and then shrugged "Before I got out of Aperture I had been basically holding my breath for a week straight, every corner could be my death, a careless moment could be my end. I dealt with that mostly alone, but this?" she gestured back towards the railroad station and the the path they were on. "I have allies, some equipment" she waved the modified shock stick. "Really it's a lot less stress-gah!" she stopped short as the light caught something slimy dangling from the ceiling and she nearly slipped on the slick bottom of the sewer pipe barely managing to balance herself "what is that?!"

Alyx without missing a beat pulled the pant-backpack from her shoulders and pulled out a old rusty piece of metal "Those would be the barnacles" she said and tossed the rusty metal into the living trap.

Chell watching in disgust as the piece of metal hauled up in jerking eager pulls up and out of sight.

Alyx walked forward and Chell followed looking up at the disgusting alien on the ceiling. It retracted what Chell realized was a tongue and started to bite and gnaw at the metal uselessly, groaning in displeasure before spitting it out.

"Their deadly but also pretty dumb. If you put anything on the tongue it take the bite."

"Like a venus fly trap…” Alyx lead the way now, tricking a couple more barnacles with the rusted bits of useless metal. "Shouldn't we be killing them?"

"No. There isn't a quiet way to do that. Even if there was, the Combine might notice a neat path of dead barnacles." Alyx looked at the Aperture survivor again a little oddly despite everything they had been through so far she really didn't know much more about her then when they first exchanged names. "So what were you doing at Aperture"

Chell looked amused but kind of condescending "I was trapped there...

Alyx rolled her eyes "Well, duh, I meant why were you there before everything went mad?"

"Oh… like why I worked there?"

"Yeah"

"Isn't that kind of boring?” Chell thought about the myriad of exciting adventure she had in the last twenty-four, and could only imagine that was the order of the day for Alyx most of the time. Was knowing why she picked up a temp job all that interesting?

"Kind of" Alyx shrugged "All the old folks love to reminisce about their old jobs, what they did, why they did it, who they did it with. It one of the few things they really like to talk about."
Chell gaver her a mock-deathglare "I didn't realize I qualified as an 'old-folk' already. I just turned twenty-four!"

Alyx looked at her skeptically "wellll... technically you're actually closer to forty-four"

Chell opened her mouth to refute it then closed her mouth before finally speaking "Those years shouldn't co-

"AH! I-I'm Sorry!" Chell and Alyx froze at the edge of a sewer pipe, they were just about to exit into open area that the sewer canals ran through. Above the canal they were traversing through, a man was running as fast as his two legs could take him. On his heels were two combine soldiers, their stun batons out "I didn't mean to break curfew I swear, they made me stay at the factory past closing! Please!"

"Suspect is heading down third avenue, close off approach over." The man stopped short as a bright blue field of energy rippled out between two street posts, closing off the street between the building and the canal.

The man searched frantically for a way out and looked into the canal.

"No... don't" Alyx whispered moments before the man decided to jump into the canal. Maybe he had hoped to land in water but this part of the canal had been dried up long ago, although it was hard to tell in the dark.

As he hit the slanted edge of the canal, his ankle bent in an unnatural way. He fell in a tumbling pile down to the flat bottom of the canal screaming in pain and fear as he desperately tried to crawl away. The two guards who had been chasing him relentlessly slowed down and now taking their time. They affixed their repels to the side of the canal and dropped down slowly.

The officer spoke in their deep robotic and unnerving tone, "You have broken curfew, resisted arrest and fled under suspicious circumstances."

"N-no, I-I was forced to work overtime, my housing is on the other side of town! I-I'm not a part of the resistance or anything I swear!" he said tried to crawl backwards, dragging his twisted ankle behind him.

Alyx felt her stomach sink at the sight. She was all to aware of the abuse the combine soldiers rained on any citizen they could get alone, but she couldn't think of anything they could do to help either. She didn't have a silencer on her and Chell didn't even have a gun. If this turned into a prolonged gunfight they could get pinned down by reinforcements.

As the officers reactivated their stun batons over the poor soul she was ready to pull Chell away from the scene. They could back track maybe stay the night at the railroad station instead of moving onward. She was about to whisper the plan when suddenly a blue orb flew out in front of her, it landed beneath the feet of one combine soldier. Alyx shot a look of panic, but even as she turned to try and stop her the orange portal was soaring out of the portal gun.

Chell was already charging forward by the time either of the soldiers realized what was wrong. The blue portal opened beneath the feet of the Combine soldier and he fell through. His buddy looked confused at the his friends sudden descent. He also wasn't prepared as his legs were pulled out from under him as the second guard barreled into them.

Chell rushed forward, pulling the modified shock baton from her belt, flipping it on to a crackling of electricity. It vibrated with power in the familiar hum of machinery. It didn't even feel fair as she closed the distance with the two guards, who were still scrambling to understand what was going
on. One managed to shove the other off in time to stagger back away from the oncoming mechanic. The other one only barely managed start to realize what was going on as the overclocked head of the device came down on his back. Chell struggled to keep hold on the device as it discharged hearing a forceful crack of bone that both exhilarated her and sickened her. That nausea only doubling as the body bent unnaturally to the whims of the arcs of energy going through them.

Chell felt the batons power go from a roar to a whimper as it drained at the attached energy pack for a second go. The second guard however didn't bother with his own baton, fumbling for the sidearm in his holster. Chell tried to throw her momentum forward but the backlash from baton forced her to take a step back. Within moments she came to understood that even as shocked as the soldier was she wasn't going to close to melee again.

"Chell Duck!" Chell aimed the portal gun at her own feet and fired a blue and felt the once disorienting change of gravity as she fell through. She came out forcing her momentum so she wouldn't fall in, ending up on the slope of the canal. She looked down as the guard fired a bullet just at the rim of the blue portal. Farther back Alyx was in a crouched position her pistol poised and she fired three rapid fire shots. Blood burst from the soldier as they collapsed onto the ground.

"W-who are you people?" the man on the ground looked between the both of them with a mix of fear and hope.

"We're with the resistance." Alyx said seriously as she jogged over to him. "and we have to move. "

Chell jogged down the side of the canal feeling a little pale as she passed the bloodstained guard but shook it off quickly enough. Chell reached down and collected the batons of the two combine soldiers. Her current weapon had not worked as ideally as it could have, she would need to experiment. "Should I get rid of these bodies?" Chell asked and Alyx shook her head.

"No, they're going to be here soon. We just have to get out here." She reached down trying to pick up the man huffing with effort "Chell you grab the other arm." the man was switching between a look of pain and bewilderment as Chell easily picked up his other arm as the three of them started to jog towards the next leg of the railroad. The man tried to pull his weight by using his one good leg to propel them slightly, but only managed to throw them collectively off balance.

They had about two minutes head start before they could hear the buzz of helicopters overhead. They occasionally caught a glimpse of them through large circular grates. Fortunately none of them seem particularly interested in them and just flew straight overhead.

"Seriously Who-" the man started to speak but was immediately hushed by the other two, and he spoke again in a whisper "Who are you people?"

"Well I'm Chell, and this is Alyx and..."

"We're with the resistance" Alyx said shortly and even Chell managed to pick up on the harsh tone in her voice.

"Wait... Alyx. THE Alyx? Alyx Vance" the man's voice was filled with a tinge of wonder. Alyx's pace flagged or a moment, clenching her eyes shut in frustration.

Chell looked back with interest at the man, he was much older than she had thought. "Is she famous?"

"She's-... she's a legend! Sh-"
Alyx spoke sharply, "We need to stay quiet till we reach the next station."

The man quieted down his fear coming over him again. After a bit more stalking through the shadows longer and a few barnacles awkwardly avoided, they had managed to get to the next station hidden beneath a canopy of scrap metal.

"We heard it was just two of you." the resistance fighter was older hispanic man slowly took the man from them to one of the mattresses squirreled away in a corner.

"We ran into him and a pair of combine soldiers along the path. The area is probably crawling with soldiers at this point." Alyx said, "Get on the radio, we're gonna have to stop anyone moving through this part of the railroad for a bit."

"Ah christ," the second member of the station looked put out and went back to an archaic looking radio in the corner of the room and started giving out the news.

The first laid the person we saved on the ground and spoke "You'll need to hurry, if your going to make it to the airboat. Once they can't find anyone they're gonna start widening the search."

"Right, Chell let's go."

Chell looked between everyone "Okay. Thank you. Good luck."

Alyx slipped the scrap-pack from her shoulders before the both of them started to make their way for the door. "W-wait!" they turned back for a moment looking back at the man who they had saved, his ankle getting looked at "Thank you! Thank you so much." Chell felt a little swell of pride at the gratitude and before long the two of them were out on the labyrinth paths, these much closer to the rotting river at the edge of the city.

The far off alarms and sirens, and more than a few of those odd floating cameras were about, but none of them bothered them as they went. Chell kept quiet at first cause she feared that the Combine might hear them, but as they went they only seemed to be getting farther and farther away from that cacophony.

It was around then that Chell noticed the tense air around Alyx.

It was then that she remembered how impressed the man had been at Alyx's name. On some level Chell had known Alyx was important, at the least she was the commander of that squad. But it seemed like she had been thinking too small. "So, that guy... are you like a big deal?..."

Alyx paused for a moment a look of dismay on her face. Some kind of acceptance passed over before she continued walking "I really don't think I am..."

"But others do?"

"... yes. My Dad, Eli you met earlier? He's basically the leader of the resistance. He's been building up the resistance ever since the Combine invaded." she said speaking calmly.

Chell nodded realizing how she could be famous, but not why it bothered her so much. "And that bothers you? Was he... too busy for you?" she asked knowing how parents could end up ignoring their children under sufficiently stressful situations. And she couldn't imagine a more stressful situation than fighting for the fate of the human race.

Alyx chuckled a little "No, Dad always took time whenever he could. Even when he didn't his colleagues like Doctor Kleiner would play with me. I had a good childhood, or, at least as good as one can have given the circumstances" She gestured to the pools of what appeared to be toxic
water that they were walking across with the help of scrap metal.

"Then why..."

They reached a safe patch of concrete past the pools of toxic water and turned back with a look of acceptance on her face "I guess I was enjoying getting to know someone who didn't know about all that." she shrugged.

Chell wasn't sure how to respond to that. She felt a bit flattered but wasn't sure how to diffuse the tension. Soon they reached a solid concrete building next to a river right out of an environmentalist's nightmare. As they turned the corner the river seemed to flow into a mini marina with a single airboat sitting at the end and a half dozen resistance fighters standing about it, looking it over and fueling it up.

"How's everything looking?" Alyx announced, any sign of distress in her voice gone. The other resistance members stood in attention and looked excited to see her.

The nearest one with a clipboard walked up with a smile "Everything is just about ready Alyx. The combine haven't sent any gunships anywhere along the path so it should be pretty smooth sailing." He looked back to the airboat that looked like it was being held together by rust as much as screws "Or as smooth as things get anyways."

Chell looked at the monstrosity of a vehicle before noticing the seating arrangement there was one clear place for the driver bur latched onto the front as an afterthought was a the front half of a small dingy that had a mounted car seat inside. The mere sight of which filled Chell with dread.

"Great, I'll be the driver. Chell, you take the splash seat!"

Chapter End Notes

Wow its uh. It's been a while. So I wish I had a good reason, but the truth is I wrote 8000 words for this chapter and realized that I hated most of it. I got super discouraged and then distracted.

Anyways, I hope this chapter was entertaining for those who have been following for a while. Leave a review to let me know what you think.
Chell brooded on the side of the great red fishing house. It bordered the river and was right on the edge of town. Several people were here waiting to take the next leg of the journey. Usually a airboat would taxi a wooden fishing boat full of people to the next leg of the journey. However, it was much slower and with the Combine on alert they couldn’t risk being caught out in the daylight if they scoured the area. Chell felt a little guilty about that but was happy to be getting a more express trip to Black Mesa East.

“We’ll get going soon, I just want to make sure I don’t pass out at the wheel.” Alyx came out from the barn with two mugs of coffee in hand. Chell took it graciously enjoying the warmth of the mugs particularly. She was about to down the whole thing before Alyx stopped her “One sec” she pulled a bottle from a belt pouch pulled out a pair of pills, dropping one into her cup and then into Chell’s. “Vitamin supplement. Useful when your out on a mission.”

Chell nodded in appreciation and then threw back the whole of the mug in one go.

Alyx looked at her in surprise rubbing the side of her mug “Wow, you really want to get going huh?” Alyx took a sip of her own mug.

Chell looked up in surprise, but then back at her mug realizing what she had done “Oh, uh no, sorry I never really take time to drink or eat… anything.” She said slightly embarrassed. “It’s a bad habit from childhood.”

“That’s fine. So, you were really holding back there with Doctor Kleiner then huh?” Alyx said sarcastically, remembering how fast she had consumed most of the meal before consciously slowing down to a crawl.

“Well he put so much work into it…” Chell said with mock seriousness.

Alyx snorted at Chell’s deadpan expression who flashed her a knowing smile, “Well I’ll try and make sure I don’t give you anything thats a choking hazard then.”

“Considerate,” Chell said gesturing with the mug. A moment of comfortable silence passed between the two as they looked back at the city and its massive citidel in the distance. Its single blue stripe shining bright in the night “So, are we going to need to fight anything or do any sneaking?”

Alyx shook her head “No they haven’t caught onto this as one of our paths yet.”

“Really? Wouldn’t they have like checkpoints every so often?” Chell asked, surprised.

Alyx shrugged, “The Combine has no interest in anything outside their own facilities. Its annoying since it means a lot of places are infested with hostile alien beasts but it gives us free reign
everywhere outside their control.” She said taking a final swig of her mug. “We should have a clear path. Maybe a little bumpy here and there, but nothing too bad…”

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**Dam Entrance to Black Mesa East**

“aaAAAAHHHHHHH” Chell screamed into the cold air fast approaching dawn. The airboat heading into a plunging dive towards the water below. She grabbed at the make shift seat in a death grip. She hadn’t been afraid of heights since she had gotten her knee replacements, but those would be of little help if the impact broke the seatbelt and threw her into one of the rusted metal bars of the airboat.

They landed into the ravine below the dam briefly plunging the whole craft underwater. It quickly bobbed back to the surface Chell took a deep breath giving a scowl back at Alyx who sat, equally drenched laughing from the controls, “This Is How You Transport REFUGEE’s?!” she yelled at the driver.

“No,no” Alyx said pushing the craft forward again with a roar of the engine “There’s a little hiking path they usually take, but this is way faster” she saddled the airboat next to steel ladder that led up to a concrete landing, “and more fun!”

Alyx climbed out first, dripping wet as her clothes clung to her as she climbed up. When she reached the top she shook one arm out, water droplets flying off her. Chell followed after her, crawling the monkey bars of the lower seat until she could reach the ladder herself. She glared at Alyx’s mischievous face.

“Don’t look at me like that! I thought you said you wanted to get here as fast as you could?”

Chell wanted to argue but even as she tried to think of something a small smile crept on her face. She hid it by turning away and wringing out the excess water from her hair. “So, we’re finally there? Or is there another switch we need to flip around here?”

“Nope, this is it! Welcome to Black Mesa East!” she gestured at the concrete building, surrounded by pylons and transmission towers. Seemed like just another operating station for the dam. It was rather unassuming for the supposed base of humanities resistance. Though, Chell supposed, that was probably the point. Alyx led the both of them towards the dark shaded entrance away from the sun above.

The entrance actually looked more abandoned than anything else. Overturned steel drum barrels and a few bits of trash just lying about. The doorway looked like the entrance to some long abandoned facility… except for an out of place street light above a key pad “This is going to take a minute” Alyx said stepping through. Chell was about to ask what she had meant but suddenly the door slammed shut and the room went dark.

Chell instinctively pulled out her portal gun whirling around in a panic. The lights flipped back on, the street light suddenly flashing yellow. It only got worse as the room started to fill with a mysterious clouded mist. She backed herself into the nearest corner, then sliding down its wall. She took shallow breaths as the gas filled the chamber. She felt her heart pounding out her chest as her eyes frantically searched for a portal surface to escape to, finding none.

Alyx looked down at her new friend with worry. Chell looked like a trapped rat desperately searching for a way out. “Chell?” Alyx asked but didn’t acknowledge her, only continuing to search for a way out of the room. She took a step closer until she had to be in her line of vision “Chell?” again she only seemed to look through her, she was shaking now “Chell!” she said loudly grabbing at her wrists as they pointed the portal gun from side to side. Suddenly Chell’s
grey eyes focused on Alyx “It’s okay. It’s just a decontamination process. Nothing dangerous.” Chell looked at her and slowly gained control of her breathing.

The shutter along the scanning room slid up, a concerned face of a middle aged man looking through, “Hey, is your friend alright there Alyx? We could get a medic team up here...”

“It’s alright Steven. Right?” Alyx looked back to Chell whose face continued to look bewildered for a moment but then nodded, a bitter look of embarrassment on her face. She accepted the help of getting back to her feet. She slowly sheathed her portal gun, trying to force her body to stop shaking through force of will.

Soon a grid of red lasers slowly came down, Chell fought the urge to duck below them. The man behind the glass continued looking over at monitor before nodding “Alright you’re all clean!” he pressed a button. The streetlight turned green and the far door opened with a clunk.

“Let’s go...” Alyx offered heading towards the door. Chell followed meekly as they headed into the main base.

On the other side of the door were a pair of other resistance fighters along with Steven the techntion. “Welcome to Black Mesa East” he said with a smile. He turned to his two cohorts with a commanding voice “both of you, go cover the airboat, the combine aren’t usually looking out this far, but we wont be taking the chance.” The two men nodded heading into the chamber themselves.

Alyx gestured, coaxing Chell in farther. Chell took a steadying breath before they both walked forward. As they walked through it, Chell realized the facility was deceptively large. Through a chain link fence Chell could see a tunnel that led deeper into the mountainside. The halls also seemed cluttered with junk including a broken down truck. At the end of their path there was a metal pull gate blocking what looked like a elevator shaft. Alyx pressed the button to go down and Chell had moved from embarrassment to an irritated expression.

As the elevator slowly crawled its way up to top Alyx looked back at her companion, trying to decide if it was better to change the subject or confront her about what happened. She knew that the abruptness of the scan rooms tended to spook new arrivals to Black Mesa East. But that had been a little extreme for just a ‘spook’. She had a primal look of panic on her face.

Then she remembered her father’s concern for Chell’s stability which pushed her to a prying. “So, uh… are you alright?”

Chell took a deep breath, one of the metal shock absorbers on her legs tapping against the wall. “I… I didn’t really expect that either to be honest.” she left it vaguely for a moment. She looked at the few people milling about the hallway and spoke softer “I guess I have this… thing now.” she said gesturing at nothing in particular. “Being suddenly trapped was… unpleasant” she said still searching around for the exact words that she wanted to use.

Alyx nodded trying to understand. It didn’t sound like this was something that had happened before. She could have warned her about the scanning, but she had wanted to see her reaction to it. Usually it was just something to laugh about later for new arrivals.

“Well I’ll uh, try to warn you about that stuff in the future?” she offered.

Chell nodded “I’d appreciate that.” she said in a bit of a subdued tone

The elevator arrived and they both got in. Chell was surprised by how old and rusty everything felt in Black Mesa East. It was actually relaxing in a way, compared to the sterile facade of
Aperture. However, one thing bewildered and enraged her.

“Does this elevator only have two floors?” Chell looked at the inner elevator control panel was again only an up and down button

“What? No, this one goes down about four levels.” she pressed the down button on the elevator and the elevator hummed into action the gate closing and slowly started to descend. The next floor down showed a large common room, a few tables and chairs interspersed with cots and benches. There were a few people milling about, one or two gave them curious looks before they went lower.

“Then why is there only two button how do you stop-” she started but was cut off as they passed to the next floor. Inside what looked to be an industrial sized kitchen were a pair of creatures that she hadn’t seen before. They were humanoids with sickly green colored skin with large blood red eyes and a third claw arm right in the middle of their chest “Gah!” she took a step back. It was the first really alien thing that she had seen. And… and they were wearing chef hats.

Alyx peered through and her face lit up like she had suddenly remembered something “Right, we didn’t run into any on the way here. Those are the vortigaunts.” Alyx explained giving the two a short wave. “They used to be ruled by the Combine, too. They fled to Earth during the incident. They’re our allies.”

Chell took another look at them but didn’t get much of a chance to before they had passed on by. “I guess… I guess I had just sort of assumed all the aliens would be closer to how they were in Star Trek” all the Combine soldiers had been pretty human proportioned after all.

“What’s Star Trek?”

Chell looked over and realized that her new friend was being serious. It then hit her just how much culture must have been lost in the last twenty years and silently wept for Alyx’s generation.

It was a brief disappointment as they arrived at what had to be the tallest of the levels they had passed, a high vaulted ceiling housed what appeared to be a workshop of some kind. The shelves were full of books and oddities. There was a desk that had several monitors on it. Finally, in the different corners of the room were large complex looking machinery that had to be for powering what Chell guessed was supposed the teleporter. The whole room looked like it had sprung straight out of science fiction.

Behind the desk of computers was the older man that Alyx had called her Dad. The leader of the resistance, Eli Vance. Who had been a capable researcher even before all this had started. As the elevator slowly rolled to a stop, Chell actually started to feel a little nervous.

Eli looked up as the elevator descended and smiled at the sight of his daughter “Alyx, you made it. In good time too!” he complimented as he started to walk around the desk.

“Was there any doubt?” asked Alyx. As the grate opened up she rushed forward to give her father a hug.

Chell walked out of the elevator as the two of them separated. Subconsciously, she tried to keep the tapping of her spring assisted legs quiet as she made her way to them. Eli looked at her and she sucked in a breath when he looked down at her legs.

Eli looked back at the apprehension in Chell’s face and smiled warmly “Well, I guess one of us is going to have to change, huh?” tapped his leg a few times. Drawing Chell’s attention to his leg. His left leg from the knee down was replaced by a crowbar. “It may not be quite as sleek or stylish
as your fancy ones from Aperture but it gets the job done.”

Chell chuckled, relaxing “I’m sure, at the least yours look durable, mine are being held together with scotch tape at this point”

“I’m sure.” Eli nodded looking over Chell again “Now, I’m pretty sure the last time we spoke there was something different about you.” she said looking like he was concentrating hard “Did you do something with your hair?”

“It and the rest of me got dunked in the river out there.” she said sardonically.

“Ahh that’s right,” he said as if it were obvious “Now why would you do something like that?”

“You can thank your daughter for that one…” she said giving a friendly glare to the short haired girl.

Eli feigned horror looking between his daughter, who was also soaked to the bone “What? My daughter?” he shook his head putting his hands on her shoulders, jostling her slightly “My perfect angel? I couldn’t imagine her doing such a thing! Please tell me you’re mistaken!” Alyx was chuckling and blushing in embarrassment of her father. Chell in good humor exaggerated a disappointed shrug. Eli looked utterly wounded getting a laugh out of the girls. He broke character and chuckled as well before his eyes grew a bit more serious, “All jokes aside, I’m sure you want to get to your friend right?” Chell nodded “Right. Well come this way,” he said walking out towards a large red door with flaking red paint. With a few presses of the number pad the door slid open. “Things haven’t changed much since I spoke to you. We did manage to get some medication for him, but we haven’t convinced him to come out yet.”

“You can’t just… grab him?” Alyx asked as they headed into the twisting hallways in “I mean he didn’t exactly look like a power house when I saw him.”

“We probably could” Eli admitted “but he seemed pretty unstable. We’re more worried he’d hurt himself in the process and he didn’t look like he was in the best of health to begin with…”

The halls had a good amount of foot traffic, people going about their day to day. Some taking about work, others making plans for the night. It was the first time Chell had really seen… people in a while. It was kind of nice.

Among the crowds were a few of the Vortigaunts. Each one of them seemed to… glare at Chell in turn as they passed. Maybe that was just how their faces were? She found it unnerving.

“Well the closet he stuck himself in is right up here.” Eli said as they turned a corner where far few people seemed to be.

Up ahead there was a door at the deadend of the hallway. There were just a couple of resistance fighters that had been in Alyx’s group. One had gotten a nasty black eye since they had seen him last. He didn’t look too pleased with anything.

“Great your finally here?” the man with the shiner said “Please get him to calm down.”

“Right, sorry for uh, all the trouble.” Chell said a bit sheepishly.

She approached the door knocking on the door. “don’t come in! I won’t go back, you can’t make me!”

“Doug? It’s me, Chell. Can I come in?”
“... Alone!” he said, his voice cracking.

“Do you have the pills?” she asked and Eli nodded to one of his soldiers who handed over a old bottle for Advil with duct tape over it with new writing over it. Chell took it and a deep breath before heading inside.

The closet looked like a ordinary supply closet that had been ransacked. All the shelves were overturned; the boxes and barrels had been hoarded into a barricade in the back corner, with the companion cube serving as a bright foundation at the base. Several broom and mop ends stuck out from holes like spears from a shield wall. It really might have been a fight to get through all that.

“Chell is that really you?” An bright blue eye appeared in the hole of one of the gaps. Twitching and bloodshot.

“Yeah. It’s me. Doug have you gotten any sleep yet?” Chell said with a little concern.

“No!... Some. Never long! I’m fine. Where have you been?”

“I got captured for a bit, no worries, we manage-”

“You as well? A shame but...” he pushed up to above the barricade his eyes bright. “You still have the portal gun! Excellent we’ll be able to get out of here!” he stared for a few moments, but as her silence continued his eyes started squinting in suspicion “... your not here to help us get out. Are you?”

“Doug, we’re safe here. Or, as safe as we can be.” Chell said quietly.

“Come on! You don’t think this is some test? An Aperture Science loyalty test? They call this concrete heap ‘Black Mesa’ and kept asking about the technology in Aperture!” his voice hissed out conspiratorially “This couldn’t be a more transparent test if they tried!”

“Doug, GLaDOS was destroyed. We saw the wreckage.”

“A diversion! I-It’s been twenty years since she took over the facility! She could make a copy, a back up! Twenty times over!” he rattled the top of his barricade “We only thought we got away, but this is all some... some, some simulation she’s putting us through!”

Chell thought through it “If this were a simulation, I doubt she’d go as far as to save my life to maintain it.” she pulled up her leg to reveal the slightly soaked but red splotched bandage around her knee.

Rattmann considered this for a moment wrapping his fingers rhythmically along a oil drum barrels side, “Y-you don’t find it mysterious that a group calling themselves Black Mesa comes along, shortly after escaping, and asks us to trust them and suddenly a bunch of jackbooted thugs come, forcing us to trust them?” he said in rushed tones “That doesn’t seem, I don’t know, overly convenient to you?”

“Well-”

“I mean come on, were stuck in a situation where were in a position to save the human race if we just betray Aperture Secrets, to Black Mesa no less! This scenario is right out of the employee handbook!” He threw his hands up in frustration.

Chell shrugged her shoulders and walked over to the barricade. Doug spooked ducked back down trying to find the right broom or mop to repel attackers with, but didn’t find it in time. Chell calmly sat down on one of the old wooden crates that made up the foundation of the barricade, resting her
back against an oil barrel.

“W-what are you doing?”

“You once told me that if you ever got... like this, that the best thing I could do was wait until you calmed down.” she very pointedly shook the bottle of pills in her hands setting them down on the crate next to her. “I did tell them your problem. They made up some pills for you. No clue if their the right prescription or dosage, but they are here if you would like some.”

Doug was quiet for a few moments, letting the offer hang in the air.

Chell blink rapidly. All the forward momentum that had carried her through the day had slowly but surely wavered. The closet’s light was out, or off, and the only light was the warm glow coming from under the door. She doing her best to stay awake but every few moments she felt herself sway back and forth on the brink of sleeping.

“So you just expect me to trust them then?” Doug said quietly

“I don’t know. Thats for you to decide really. But I trust them. So, if you trust me, then it’s worth a shot.”

“... you make terrible decisions sometimes.”

“Name one.” Chell said with exagerrated severity.

“You came to work at Aperture.”

The both of them laughed with mirth only the truly weary could achieve. “Yes, I suppose that’s true” Then for a time there was a more comfortable silence. Chell could hear him whispering to the companion cube but didn’t comment or try to get him to stop.

“So you just expect me to trust them then?” Doug said quietly

“I don’t know. Thats for you to decide really. But I trust them. So, if you trust me, then it’s worth a shot.”

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“You came to work at Aperture.”

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“Do you know what prescription they made?”

Chell pulled the bottle up to look at the scrawled label. It was written in sharpie so she had to tilt the bottle til she caught the light “looks like, Ilo-peri-done?” she sounded each syllable as she decoded the pharmacists messy hand writing.

“Ugh... that stuff gives me rashes.” he grumbled to himself.

“What do you usually take?”

“Ziprazidone”

There was a bit more silence before there was a rumble around the barricade. The oil drum Chell was resting against and the crate next to it were pushed aside, destabilizing the whole structure briefly before they settled back down into place. A hand came poking out grasping randomly for the bottle. Chell picked up it up and put it in his hand. He retracted and briefly tried to fix his barricade before giving up.

“You need water?”

“I’ll make do.” She listed as the pills rattled and Rattmann swallowed a pair.

“How long do they usually take to work?”

“It’ll be a few minutes... could you stick around a little while longer?”
Chell’s brain screamed that she couldn’t but shoved them away. “Yeah, I can spare a few...”

She sat herself up from the sleepy slouch that they had unconsciously taken. They sat for a few minutes before Doug spoke up “So... Is the reason you smell like wet dog related to the reason you’re drenched from head to toe?”

“It’s a long story... but I guess if we have the time.”

“*We’re not going to lock them inside there!* ‘ Alyx hissed under her breath. They had been going back and forth on this for the last few minutes basically for as long as Chell has been in there.

“not permanently!” the black eyed guard said in a bothered tone “*just until we clear them!* Most of the people we take in we take the time to make sure they’re not, you know, Combine agents.” he looked from Alyx to Eli incredulous “I thought this was why we were waiting, so we could get both of them together for interrogation.”

“They’re not combine agents!” Alyx said equally incredulous “I saw them crawl from the wreckage of an explosion”

“Through a Combine camera right? It could have been faked.” the second guard spoke up in a calm tone.

“Why would the Combine send a injured woman and an unstable man as their *agents!*” Alyx argued back “With advanced tech no less!”

“To gain our sympathy? I’m just saying, waiting and asking a few questions couldn’t hurt” ignoring his direct officer in Alyx, he turned to her father again. Eli continued to think in silence reserving judgment.

“Their both sick or injured, they need a doctor to look at them, not be interrogated like a couple of traitors!” Alyx said passionately

“Yes, by all means lets waste *more* precious medical supplies on people with a knife ready to plunge in our back!”

At an impass they both of them turned to Eli who was stroking his beard that most of the resistance thought meant he was deeply considering something, but Alyx knew meant he was just buying time for himself. Finally, he spoke“If Chell can calm him down then we’ll take them both to the infirmary to get checked up on. Let the both of them get some sleep”

“Sir-” he was about to retort but Eli put a hand up silencing him.

“I’m not finished. After they wake up we’ll get their stories, look for anything suspicious. mister Rattmann has been stuck in that closet without sleep for the better part of a day and a half. And seeing miss Chell, she seems to be at the end of her rope as well. They’re both too tired to give anything like a reliable statement. We’ll catch them after they wake up”

The soldier didn’t seem to want to leave things there but kept silent about it if they had any qualms. Alyx was honestly not perfectly happy about it herself but she knew better then to question her father in front of any of the fighters. It would only cause problems.

A tense silence was broken by the door creaking open. The two guards turned towards the door suddenly ready to fight as Doug Rattmann came walking out straightening his disheveled lab coat and hoisting the large odd cube on his back. He looked up at the black eyed guard and took a breath through his teeth, wincing. “Oh, dear I suppose that was you?” the guard just nodded,
“Sorry, I uh, wasn’t in my right mind.” he said but realized there was little chance of salvaging any kind of positive relationship and turned to Eli. “So, is there an… uh interview we need to do?”

Chell came out behind him, looking exhausted, slouching under the weight of her wet clothes. She stretched a little before giving a little wave that Alyx returned.

“In time, we definitely need to know where you would be helpful around here. For now though I think you could both use a warm shower and a check up from the doctor.” Eli said with one of his charming smiles. He held out his hand “First things first though, hello, my name is Eli Vance former researcher at Black Mesa, and head of Black Mesa East.”

Doug nodded taking his hand with as strong a grip as he could manage. Which wasn’t very strong at all. “Doug Rattmann… former researcher at Aperture Science Research Center.”

“It’s very nice to mee you. Well, let’s go get you cleaned up. Gary, Mel.” he said addressing the two guards “one of you take them to the infirmary, then find someone to take over for you. You’ve earned some rest as well” the two guards gave the casual salute of the resistance and started to escort Chell and Doug through the hallway. Alyx started to follow after them but Eli caught her arm “one sec honey, i need to talk with you about something.”

Alyx looked concerned at her father and shared a look with Chell before they disappeared behind a corner. She turned back to her father “Yeah, is there something you need to talk about?” she tried to keep the impatience out of her voice.

“You got a little heated back there, is everything alright?”

“Yeah… yeah, I’m okay, I was just a little frustrated.”

“Sure, but why? You know why we need to be sure they’re not spies for the Combine, right? One person gets a transmission back to them and they could bring a hammer down on all of us.”

Alyx felled her face fill a little, recognizing the way she had been acting to be out of line “You’re right. I’m sorry.”

“I agree that we need to look after them, but that doesn’t mean we can get reckless you know?”

“Yeah…”

“Alright, go ahead, make sure they haven’t got into another brawl.”

Alyx chuckled “A brawl? Really?”

“You laugh but that Doug is a scrapper. I should show you the tapes later” Eli shadow boxed for a moment with a smile before walking off towards his lab. Alyx meanwhile started into the waves of humanity trying to find the quickest path towards the infirmary.

Alyx arrived at the infirmary after fighting through the constant river of people that went through the narrow hall. This infirmary was made up from a old break room stuffed with a half dozen cots for the lightly injured. Broken bones, cuts and flus. Black Mesa East’s ICU was deeper in the bowels of the facility, closer to some of the underground escape routes.

As she came in she saw her squad mate Roy resting in one of the beds. His leg wound treated and
looked like he was blissfully indulging in morphine. She patted his cot as she walked towards the last pair of cots.

Alyx walked past the beds heading towards the back where a new soldier was standing guard. Each bed had a privacy curtain made up of bedsheets or blankets strung up. As she got behind the last curtain she turned seeing the doctor looking into Doug’s mouth, his messy black hair matted down and wet, “and so you have been living on… beans for the last twenty years?”

“ Mostly,” Doug admitted, “It was the safest thing to eat there.”

“Well I doubt I’ll have to wait for any test to tell me your malnourished.” he pulled back jotting a few notes down. He pulled out a bottle of the super vitamins “Here take a couple of these” Doug grabbed them and took them with water.

Alyx swiveled her head around looking for Chell. The bed across from Doug’s was empty but the chair next to the shower room had her jumpsuit and other clothes all in a pile.

“She’s in the shower,” the soldier said helpfully “If you’re looking for the girl.”

Alyx nodded thankfully and headed over to the shower room. It was originally a normal bathroom but they rigged it to be a shower. She knocked on the door “Hey Chell are you almost done?”

“Alyx? Hey! Yeah, its a little hard to keep pressing the button, but I’m almost done.” She cracked open the door a little blur of steam coming out and she poked her head out. Her long black hair that had been tied up now framed her bright grey eyes. It was such a difference from the crows nest her hair had been since they met it actually stunned Alyx for a moment. “Could you hand me a towel?” Alyx took a moment to respond before reaching out and grabbing a fresh towel from a neighboring shelf and handing it over to her. “Thanks.” Chell took it and shut the door.

Alyx took a moment before awkwardly wandering back into the main room with the rest of the patients.

“Well you look alright, all things considered” the doctor said with a chuckle “and there are a great deal of things to consider.” he shook his head “I can run some more tests tomorrow after you get some sleep.”

Chell walked out wearing an undershirt and sweats that were lent out to new arrivals. Most people wanted to get out of the Combine issued jumpsuits as soon as possible, but it could take a little while scare up some proper clothes. She was drying her hair pulling the towel back and forth over her hair.

“So, we can sleep here tonight?” Chell asked smiling.

“Yeah, we’ll find you permanent lodgings eventually, but for now this will be fine.. We’ll have some questions for you when you wake up. Until then you can’t leave the infirmary.”

“Great! So I can sleep now? There’s nothing else I need to do?” Chell asked walking towards the empty bed opposite of Doug’s

The doctor stood up, “Yes, for now at least you can-”

“Great…” Chell walked until her legs hit the bed and just let momentum do the rest. Falling face first into the pillow, she took half a second to drag her legs up on the bed with her and then seemed to just drift off to sleep immediately.

Everyone just stared at her for a moment before the doctor remarked “Well, I guess its good I
checked on her before the shower.” he said turning to Doug “I can dim the light for you two but I’m afraid that you’ll have to put up with me puttering about, its actually mid morning right now...” the old doctor said looking at his watch his pocket, “I’ll come back to check on you in a few hours and wake you both up later tonight.”

Alyx stood awkwardly for a moment but realized that she had little else to do here. She had underestimated just how exhausted Chell had been. She turned to Doug “If she wakes up early tell her I’ll swing by later okay?”

Doug nodded giving a wave “Sure thing. I’ll... I’ll do that...” Doug said snuggling down into the bed.

Alyx quickly realized there wasn’t anything for her to do and walked out from the little infirmary. It took her moment standing in the hallway outside to remember what she was supposed to be doing that day. She had been thrown for a loop by the roller coaster of the last day.

Soon quickly figured out her priorities and figured the best thing would be to report to her father and tell him everything that she had seen and what she knew about the portal gun. After that she gathered her squadron for a meeting. They were all happy she had gotten back alive but several held doubts if the mission had been worth the cost. They talked for a time about who should fill in for the injured and the dead before breaking up for the day. They had been on two missions in as many days and they were all tired. After she was done she went about to various facilities of Black Mesa East to see if anyone needed help. Everything was running pretty smoothly though.

Out of immediate goals, she snuck off to nap away from prying eyes. Her room was squirreled away a little above her fathers lab. It was a too small to be a proper dorm for people, but too far out of the way to be a convenient storehouse. She had a work table for building odds and ends and a neighboring computer desk for note taking. A bed was crammed between the wall and work desk.

She shook out her hair taking off the headband and throwing it on the desk. She slipped out of her jacket and Black Mesa sweatshirt throwing them on her chair Finally, she removed her belts and holsters dropping them on the desk. She fell back on the bed, burrying her face in her pillow.

She spent a few minutes just decompressing her mind after the long day and a half she had gone through. She grabbed her alarm clock, setting it for just past sundown before closing her eyes and letting herself drift off to sleep.

Black Mesa East Cafeteria

Alyx walked into the cafeteria slightly late, having helped her father in the lab. Almost everyone were already eating at the tables. She searched the room before her eyes came across the table most of the kids were sitting together.

One boy with messy hair spoke up “I just don’t understand why we’re learning all this math and junk. We need to be learning how to kill the combine.”

“Mr. Kleiner says after we win, i-it’ll be up to us to rebuild things...” replied a mousy girl with taped together glasses.

“Only if we win in the first place! We can figure out all this science stuff after we kick the Combine out of here!”
A third boy pattered with dust and grime spoke up chuckling “They’re just worried you’ll shoot
yourself in the foot.”

“Are not!”

“Are too, haha! My Dad has been teaching me to use a pistol for months now.”

A girl with long brown hair spoke up, “Is that how you hurt your wrist?”

The boys face filled with embarrassment as the messy headed boy started to laugh at him.

Alyx rushed to the counter where everyone got their food. Two of the Vortigaunt cooks were
mostly in clean up mode. Two large pots of soupy gruel were left on a low burner

“Late again the Alyx Vance”

“Sorry, is there anything left?”

“Yes. Of course...” the vortigaunts coarse voice spoke up, grabbing a bowl and ladle and filling
the bowl in the methodical slow motions the vortigaunts always moved in. It placed the soup and a
piece of bread on a tray and holding it out.

“Thank you!” she said with a little bob of her head and moved off towards the table of children.
When she arrived they were all laughing about something as she slid into the last available spot at
the end of the table. “Hey everyone!”

The laughter came to a stop as they all looked at Alyx and welcomed her, all smiling, but the
conversation quickly ground to a halt. Everyone started to eat their neglected meals.

Alyx felt a little self conscious, realizing that she must have broken the flow with her sudden
arrival. So she took it upon herself to restart things “Hey Gary, do you want to go exploring the
lower levels again? I think I figured out how to pick the lock to that one door we couldn’t get past
last time.”

“Oh, that sounds-” the messy haired boy sounded excited at first but he seemed to remember
something. His face becoming grave, “No, uh, I think I’ll pass. It can be really dangerous down
there you know?”

“Oh. okay...” she sat down turning to the girl with taped together glasses “Merry do you want to
come help me with Dog? I think he’s been missing you lately.”

“Sorry, I-I’m busy I need to help Kathie with her homework” she looked to the long haired girl
who nodded eagerly

“Oh, maybe I can help then-”

Kathie jumped in “N-no that’s not necessary. I-I’m sure you have better things to do.”

It soon became clear to Alyx that everyone seemed to be busy or disinterested in the things that
they had bonded over in the past. Words of concerned adults awkwardly forced into the mouths of
children.

She eventually gave up on trying letting the silence reign over the table. The others finished their
meals quickly and started to make plans for what to do that afternoon. As they got up to leave the
room one of them turned to her.
“Alyx do you want to… to come?”

The off had a note of reluctance. Alyx on some level wanted to accept anyway, but knew that for some reason or another they didn’t really want her to come along.

She forced a smile pointing down at her bowl with a spoon “You go ahead, I still need to finish”

The other kids tried to hide their relief, but they weren’t adults so it showed through anyway. “Alright, we’ll see you later then?”

Alyx nodded, watching as they ran off to some adventure or another. Once they left the cafeteria it had grown mostly silent. The only sound was the vortigaunts cleaning up. She pushed the vegetables around in her soup, watching the bits flow around, suddenly unappetizing.

“What? Come on please?” a voice came from the cafeteria line but she doesn’t look over caught in her own thought, trying to figure out what she had done wrong. “Man…” Alyx started to turn her head at the sound of running before a body suddenly jumped through the hole between the bench and the table.

The new arrival was focused on the half finished soup and bread with intent “Are you going to finish that? I was a little late…”

Alyx was so shocked by the sudden appearance that it took her a moment to answer. She quickly realized she wasn’t as hungry as this girl and pushed the tray towards them.

“Thank you!” the girl said quickly before picked up the spoon and started digging in, a spoon in one hand and dipping the bread with the other. Alyx was almost impressed by the sheer speed she devoured the ration. After most of the bread and soup was gone and the girls cheeks were puffed out with food she sat back taking a moment to try and chew through it all pounding her chest as she swallowed it all. Once done she turned to Alyx, her long black hair framing bright grey eyes. “Hi, thanks for the food! Do you know what there is to do around here? I’ve been kind of bored.”

“I, uh, was going to explore the lower levels if you maybe…”

“Sure, sounds great.” She nodded picking up the bowl and shoveling what was left of the soup with the last piece of the bread. She put down the bowl and immediately slipped off of the bench and grabbing at Alyx’s hand excitedly pulling her up from the table “Lets get going!”

Alyx stumbled out of her seat following after the girl towards the main door, a smile coming to her face.

Chapter End Notes

Hey another post in a week. I'm on a roll. Hopefully I can keep that up.

Thanks for reading everyone. Not too much action this chapter, hope that's alright.

Originally I was going to Aim for 3 chapters per arc but I think that really blocked me for half a year so I’m just going to aim for as many chapters that feel right for the Arc. This one is probably gonna end up being 4.

Anyways if your enjoying yourself please leave a comment or a Kudos to let me know what you think. Its always a big motivator to know people are interested.
know what you think. It's always a big motivator to know people are interested.
Alyx stretched her arms and yawned. It had been a pretty slow few days, the Combine were still in a buzz about the two soldiers who got killed. They weren’t sending out any groups the resistance could ambush out here. She had mostly been helping out her father in the lab, maintaining Dog or hanging out in the infirmary.

Speaking of which, she pushed through the door of the infirmary and looked inside. It was mostly empty now, aside from the two occupants who had been secured there for the last three days.

“Well I think that will just about do it,” the interrogator for the resistance said, flipping through his papers. He had deep rings under his eyes that he was rubbing at. “We put you through every test we have. If you’re Combine Agents, your better at hiding it than the other rat quislings who try to infiltrate us...”

“Thanks!” Chell said with a mocking smile.

The interrogator paused looking gravely at Chell.

Doug let out a sigh, “you know it's comments like that that makes them go through all the questions,” he sat up from the bed looking at Chell with a frustrated expression, “again...”

“In. Any. Case.” the man said in frustration. “You are cleared. Welcome to Black Mesa East. You may leave” the man stood up shaking his head as he brushed by Alyx at the door.

“Was that really necessary Chell?” Alyx asked coming up to the two.

“Oh, hey Alyx. And yes. After twenty hours of asking the same questions, and three days cooped up in the infirmary, it was definitely necessary.”

Doug stood up from his chair pulling on his freshly cleaned lab coat. “Well were finally allowed out of here, so there’s some good news today... ” Alyx was surprised at how well Rattmann had managed to clean up. He looked far less like a raving madman without his unruly beard. Although the rash on his neck now made him look more like a plague victim. He went to scratch it but Chell slapped his hand away. He grumbled, “can’t wait till I’m through with this bottle.” He said stuffing the bottle of pills into his coat pocket.

“Yeah, we can’t really afford to waste any of the medicine we produce,” Alyx explained apologetically. “Sorry”

“I get it, so where to first with our new found freedom? Cafeteria? Catch a movie? What do people do around here Alyx?”

"Actually, before that Dad wanted a word with each of you when you were cleared." Alyx
explained.

Chell and Doug exchanged a quick look before looking back to Alyx, “What could he need from us?”

“I would guess it has to do with what you took from Aperture, he’s had to fend the scientists away with a stick since you got here.”

Chell and Doug looked at their respective devices and picked them up. They had been allowed to keep them for the last few days, but that didn’t mean they could hold onto them forever. Chell guessed it would be a lot harder on Doug then it would be for her.

They walked out from the infirmary and out into the halls of Black Mesa East. After a few elevators and long grey hallways, they were able to quickly come to the laboratory where Eli Vance was working through something with a group of other scientists.

"Well we can try that experiment soon, it will have to be done deep in the facility so that the Combine don't catch on.” He looked up from his clipboard caught sight of Alyx and her group, "We can go over the details after lunch, sound good everyone?” Eli asked and there was a murmur of agreement. The scientists bid Eli farewell before piling into the elevator.

Eli walked over to the group, a friendly smile on his face, "Thanks Alyx, well then" he turned to face Doug and Chell "I suppose you're wondering what I need you for.”

Chell held up the portal gun “I was guessing it had something to do with this?” she asked.

Eli nodded solemnly “May I?” Chell handed over the devise and Eli held it in his hands “So, how would I...” Chell walked over and showed him how to insert his hand into the device.

“Feel the grip? Hold onto that. There should be two buttons on your index and middle finger” Eli nodded as Chell pointed him a corner of floor no one was standing near. “The index finger will fire a blue portal and the the middle finger will fire a connecting orange portal… there’s a bit of kickback so be braced for that.”

Eli nodded and fired a blue portal at the floor. It hit and expanded to its oval shape. His eyebrows rose in amazement and then he fired a second portal next to the first, the two coalesced and opened up rimmed in bright energy. He stepped closer to them and looked down in amazement. He took a pen from his pocket and dropped it in one, watching it bob up and down through the portals. “This is… This is incredible.” He frowned a bit, “Now are they just there permanently or...”

“There should be a third button near your thumb” Chell pointed out “press that to close em”

Eli looked down at the device for a moment and the portals both disappeared, the pen clattering to the ground. “Incredible…” he turned to the Aperture mechanic, “Chell. I must ask that you entrust this device to the resistance. With it we could very well have a tool that could turn the tables in the fight against the Combine.” He looked gravely at her.

Chell guessed she didn’t really have much of a choice, “Of course. Anything for the cause.” she shrugged.

Eli looked relieved “Well I’m glad, from the reports your questioners gave me, I was led to believe you were a tad stubborn”

Chell shrugged “You asked nicely.”
Eli chuckled and looked over to Doug and the large cube on his back. “So, what does that do exactly?”

Doug looked uncomfortable but slowly loosened the ropes around the companion cube and set it on the ground. “This is a Companion Cube. It’s made of an incredibly durable metal composite. It can survive temperatures that would melt most metals and stand up to a great amount of physical stress...” he said gesturing at it. When no one spoke up he added “It is also cube shaped.”

“And this is what you took from Aperture when you escaped?” Eli asked somewhat confused. Alyx had to admit, compared to the portal gun this didn’t seem that special.

Doug spoke slowly, choosing his words carefully “... I happened to have it with me when we were able to escape.” Chell slowly inched closer to Alyx.

“Yeah but wh-” Alyx started but Chell put a hand on her shoulder, giving a quick quick shake of her head. Doug looked at Alyx a moment later but when she didn’t speak up again he turned back to Eli.

Eli who had caught the gesture understood this was probably not something to pursue too much. “Well, it sounds like something we might research later, but for now I see no harm in you holding onto it.” Doug let out a subtle sigh of relief and picked the cube up again and tying it to his back, “In any case” Eili said, a noticeable lighter tone in his voice, “with that problem sorted, I think it would be for the best to find you two someplace to set up shop.”

“Oh yeah I was wondering about that.” Chell said “is there like dorms or does everyone just sleep in whatever closet they can claim for their own?”

“I’ve looked around” Alyx offered with a smile, there are a few dorms with empty beds, we’ll have you two sorted out in no time!” Alyx offered, a bit excited.

“Dorms?” Doug asked skeptically.

“Down here we have a few storage rooms we’ve... renovated into what can be generously described as barracks.” Eli said with a voice not quite as enthused as his daughters, “But of course that’s if you want to stay down here, there’s always Ravenholm.”

Alyx frowned at the mention of the township. It was nice enough, as resistance settlements went, but despite their closeness there was little chance for the citizens of Black Mesa East and the town to interact. Aside from Father Grigori and and those who commuted down to Black Mesa East she knew hardly anyone who lived there.

“Ravenholm?” Chell and Doug both asked curiously.

“It’s an old mining town just above us, it's become the biggest settlement outside of Combine control.”

“Well that might not be the best...” Alyx started, getting a curious look from Eli, “...I mean, you wanted to work with Doug, right Dad?”

“True,” Eli conceded. “There would be a bit of a commute each day if you were up there.”

“You want to work with me?” Doug said surprised

“Up there? So we’d be on the surface?” Chell asked, she hadn’t exactly wanted to escape from the depths of Aperture just to end up living underground with a bunch of mad scientists.
“Yes and Yes.” Eli confirmed.

“It’d be nice to see the sun each day.” Doug said wistfully.

“Great… Alyx dear if it wouldn’t be too much trouble could you show Chell around the town?”

“Not Doug?” Alyx clarified.

“I was actually hoping we might take lunch together, see if I could pick his brain about a project we’re working on.” he turned to the programmer, “If you don’t mind of course.”

“Don’t know how much help I’ll be, it’s been a couple decades since I’ve been doing proper research,” Doug said sheepishly.

“Well I guess we’ll just have to see then won’t we?” Eli clapped the skittish scientist on the shoulder.

Doug took a deep breath and smiled, a little spark of curiosity back in his eyes. “Well… what’s the project?”

“That’s the spirit!” Eli said encouragingly. “So, Alyx if you wouldn’t mind…”

“Oh… yeah I’d be happy to help” Alyx lied.

“Great, meanwhile how about I show you the cafeteria, Doctor Rattmann” he offered gesturing towards the elevator.

“Well, it's been a few decades since I got to experience the luxury of mass produced cafeteria food…” he said with the odd tone of starting sarcastic before he realized with horror how genuine he was.

“Here follow me Chell” Alyx said pointing towards the red painted door they had just past through.

“Sure, one sec though, hey Doug any requests for our place?”

“I slept on hard cold metal and concrete for two decades Chell. If you can find a place with some nice soft wood to sleep on, I’ll take it!”

"See you tonight Dad!” she said over her shoulder and her father nodded giving a waving hand as they left the lab. Chell followed dutifully as they made the short trip to the Ravenholm tunnel.

“Well that looks sketchy…” Chell said as they made their way down it she looked to Alyx for a bit of verbal sparring, but she only shrugged. A few people were milling about, talking to one another in the narrow hallways. At the bottom of a long staircase was a landing that seemed to be the edge of the facility.

There was an elevator and operator at the transition. The steel and concrete of the dam transformed into a roughly hewed shaft to the surface, cut out from the mountainside with wooden supports to keep its integrity. There was a wooden platform held up by four lengths of rope.

“Two going up?” a man at the bottom asked, snuffing out a cigarette against the rock wall.

“Yep!” Alyx said with a smile stepping onto the wooden platform and gripping tight to one of the ropes.

“... why do you people hate sensible elevator design?” Chell muttered as she got onto the
platform. The man threw a large switch and Chell heard a old engine start below them. From the slow hum of electronics she guessed the elevator ran on a modified truck winch. She could hear it struggle to keep pace and she kept close to the ladder that ran up the whole of the shaft, just in case. When they reached the top she quickly hopped off, trying to calm her nerves.

Frank the one who managed the upper part of the lift chuckled as Chell left the lift “Ah, you’re going to need to get used to that you know,” he advised as Alyx stepped off. “Hello miss Alyx, glad to see you’re alive, so this is the gal you were out saving?”

“Mhmm” Alyx said noncommittally. “We’re looking for a place for her up here.”

“Well have a nice day then. don’t let me keep you.”

The two of them walked out from the little wooden building and out onto a pretty pleasant scene. There was a big courtyard with a large tree in the center of it with an old tire swing. Some people sat on the stoops of the buildings. Others were carrying around supplies or airing out laundry. One group was tending to a little garden that was tucked away between two buildings.

“Wow… this looks… nice actually” Chell took in a deep breath of the air. The sky was slightly overcast and there was a refreshing change of pace from the stale air of the infirmary.

“I guess it’s alright.” Alyx shrugged. “A little slow paced for my taste.”

Chell frowned but guessed that it was some kind of weird rivalry between the people of Ravenholm and Black Mesa East. “Still I think it’ll be good for Doug, he could use a place to relax a little…”

Alyx frowned which only got worse when she saw a white sweated woman approaching from the center of town looking lost in thought. “Oh this is exactly what I need…” she said putting a hand to her forehead bracing herself.

Chell looked at her oddly but was distracted by the woman approaching them. “Alyx?” she had a wide eyed expression, “I thought today was your day off?”

Alyx stood back with an annoyed expression crossing her arms, “It is Judith, I’m spending it helping Chell find a place up here in Ravenholm.”

“Ah one of our esteemed guest from Aperture… it’s nice to meet you. I am Judith Mossman, researcher for Black Mesa East”

“Though not Black Mesa proper…” Alyx needled.

Judith frowned, taking a steadying breath, “You would be, Chell correct, you don’t look much like a Doug.”

“Yes, my name is Chell…” she paused for a moment shaking her head “just Chell. Former mechanic at Aperture Science.” At the word mechanic Judith’s face did a little twisted frown that Chell didn’t care for.

“Right,” she turned to Alyx, all but dismissing Cell “Alyx your father and I need your help today, could you come back down with me? I’m sure we can find someone else to help Miss Chell get situated…”

“Strange, since Dad was the one who asked me to help her find a place. I guess it must have slipped his mind.” she said sarcastically.
Judith shut her eyes in frustration, obviously regretting her misstep “Okay, I need your help… I think I know a way to improve the efficiency of the Zero Point Energy Field Manipulator. I need your help with the materials…”

Alyx let out a huff of breath “I have all day, it can wait till later.”

Judith groaned slightly “Can’t you just this once-”

“Drop everything on your whim? No. Don’t think I can…”

Realizing she didn’t a chance of convincing Alyx, she bit her lip on a retort. Her eyes briefly looked to the sky nervously. “Well try and finish quickly please, and come back to Black Mesa East,” she said crossing her arms and walking past both of them towards the elevator.

Alyx watched her leave, shaking her head.

“Well… that was a thing.” Chell said off handedly.

Alyx sighed, “Sorry, I don’t really get along with her… she’s dating Dad and seems to think that gives her leverage to push me around.”

“Huh…” Chell nodded sagely.

Alyx waited for some kind of lecture that she always received whenever her relationship with her stepmom came up. Of the few who were willing to criticize, the older seemed to think she owed Judith some respect while many of the younger often resented her for not appreciating having someone to care for her. Though, the latter had stopped in recently as everyone got passed their teen years. Chell seemed to gather herself and Alyx braced herself for whichever speech this was, “So, is there like a cafeteria up here too? Or does everyone just cook their own food?”

Alyx blinked for a moment in surprise, not sure how to respond to that, “Uh… no there’s a few kitchens scattered about where most people end up eating at the same time” she explained.

“Will one be open soon? I was planning on getting food with Doug, but he’s getting food downstairs…”

“Yeah, there will be a bell to signal that food is ready,” Alyx provided helpfully, “I don’t think they’ve eaten yet…”

“Alright, I guess I can wait a little longer, so where should we go around here? Is there some kind of residential area we should start looking?”

“No, we usually just adapt whatever we can into apartments, so we’ll have to find some room or closet not yet occupied. Most of those will be on the edge of town…” Alyx started to lead Chell through the streets “So you’re not going to say anything about Judith?” Chell looked at her confused, looking for clarification. “I mean, no words about ‘respecting my elders’ or ‘You should listen to your mother?’” she said in an exaggerated voice of some of the older residents.

“Oh…” Chell said with a little surprise before shaking her head slowly. “Wasn’t planning on it. I don’t really know your relationship. But, I really don’t think you owe your parents anything they haven’t earned.”

Alyx smiled at this fresh opinion. It was a relief to not have to explain herself to anyone today. “Did you also have a problem with step-parents” It would be nice to talk to someone about that. Most people her age had either been raised by single parents or more communially by the resistance as a whole. It was something she had trouble talking about with others.
“... something like that.”

Alyx nodded, happy that they had something else in common “It’s not that I totally hate her you know? She makes Dad happy, but sometimes she can be...” she frowned, smiling a bit at the thought of her father. “I was really lucky to have my Dad. He taught me so much, I’m not sure what I would have done without him.” Alyx wondered what kind of parents Chell might have had. Even if they were gone now after twenty years, they must have been interesting to make someone as clever as her.

Chell let out a breath “You manage...” Chell said under her breath.

Alyx looked back at Chell who had a bitter look on her face, and the blood drained from her own “O-oh...”

“Yeah.”

“I-I wasn’t trying to like brag- I just-”

“I know” she assured.

They walked in quiet for a moment before she spoke “D-did they die o-”

Chell clapped her hands, cutting Alyx off before taking a long breath in “Okay. So. I didn’t dig into your baggage, I would appreciate it if you could afford me the same courtesy.” she said staring forward with an intense look of someone controlling their anger.

“Right... sorry”

“It’s fine.” she said in a tone that Alyx was more familiar giving than receiving on this topic.

Alyx’s face burned with embarrassment as they walked through the streets. She couldn’t believe how far she had managed to stuff her own foot in her mouth. She tried to think of anything she could do to change the subject but the tension had gotten so bad.

Then to the rescue the chiming sound for lunch time called across the neighborhood “That's for lunch, want to get something to eat?” she offered hoping to bury the mood behind them.

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**Ravenholm North Side**

“Sorry, we’re just about full up here. You can sleep in the common room if you can’t find a place tonight,” the older woman offered apologetically. This had been the third building they’ve been to after lunch, and again no one seemed to have any open rooms.

“Its fine, I understand” Chell said with a smile, “have a nice day.”

The both of them left and Alyx secretly felt a little happy. She had heard that people were having trouble finding a place up in Ravenholm, but at this rate Chell and Doug might have to set up shop down in Black Mesa East.

“You seem pretty upbeat? Something funny?” Chell asked stretching out her arms. They had been walking through the town for almost three hours now and it was getting late.

“No, I’m sure that we’ll find a place soon... We might have a better chance near the church.” she said as they headed deeper into the industrial part of town. Here lots of people worked on odds and ends for the resistance, but the biggest of them all was the ammo factory they had managed to
Rig up. It was always hard to get enough bullets just from raids, the ammo produced here helped to feed munitions to the whole resistance.

They walked through the narrow streets and awkward bends of the old mountain town without too much trouble. Some people welcomed Chell as another survivor of the railroad, others greeted Alyx as the minor celebrity she had become for the resistance. Overall the attitude of the townsfolk was pleasant and unassuming.

“Alyx! My dear!” a boisterous voice called out through the crowd. Chell and Alyx stopped their progress and turned around, a man in a soiled apron over a priests robe approached them a wide smile on his face.

“Hello Father Grigori, fancy meeting you here.” Alyx said.

“Ah, Alyx it is good to see you well. When rumor came about your capture I stayed up much of the night praying for your safe return,” he said with a smile.

“Well it was all thanks to Chell here I was able to get away.”

“Is that so?” he said appraising the new arrival with a raised brow.

Chell felt a little nervous being put on the spot like that and spoke modestly “It was also my fault she got captured, so I would say its about an even trade.”

“Haha! Now may I ask what brings you so deep into ravenholm this fine evening? It is quite rare to see you this far out without your escort Alyx.”

“We’re looking for a place for Chell and our other new arrival to set up shop.” Alyx explained, “Not a whole lot of luck so far.”

“Ah! Then you should come to the church!” Grigori said.

Chell looked to Alyx for some kind of explanation but only got a shrug, so she turned to Grigori “I’m… sorry, I’m not really looking to join a nunnery.” she said apologetically.

Grigori only laughed shaking his head good naturedly “No, no. At the church we have a kind of… census if you will. Who is where, what buildings have space, how much space, that sort of thing.” he said with a smile “It is only a short walk away if you would like to avoid striking out blindly… ”

“That sounds really useful, thanks” Chell said taking him up on the offer almost immediately.

Grigori nodded “Certainly, it is the least I can do for the children of God whom I may still shepherd,” Alyx bit her lip in frustration and followed after as they headed toward the biggest factory in town. It was and still is the biggest source of industry for the town. The towns church stood right next to factory. Before the Combine, everyone could go to church on Sunday and then straight into the grueling work of the factory at the end of service.

“You started a census?” Chell asked as they walked.

“Sort of. The resistance leadership keeps track of how many people come in and out of the settlements, but they don’t know where everyone is in the settlements” he said huffing a little as they went up the short slope at a brisk march. “It was fine at first, but many of the people who first populated the town started to hoard rooms and attics for their own needs. As more and more people came in, some were forced to sleep on the streets, or pay out the nose to the first squatters who fancied themselves landlords.” he shook his head in long held frustration as they arrived at
the door taking out a ring of keys, “Seeing the peoples plight I set up a town meeting and it was decided that space would need to be shared. From then the church has kept track of space and setting up some basics for new arrivals, clothes, pillows, some blankets...”

“Well that's kind of you.” Chell said.

“I know we have an attic or building that isn’t quite full yet.” he flipped through the keys easily with air of someone who had done this many times before.

Alyx spoke up, “Wait, weren’t those set up for the civilians at station 18?” Grigori stopped flipping through his key ring and Alyx got odd looks from both Chell and the father “Just, is there more space for when they come?” Alyx tried to cover.

Grigori nodded “We will find the space, even if we need to build it ourselves. There are many idle hands who I am sure would be willing to help their brothers and sisters” he explained before finally holding up the correct key in his hand. As he turned to open the door, Chell gave a concerned look to Alyx before looking back to him.

He opened the door leading into a rustic church Chell peered around curiously. The pews had a few old looking long benches but most of the seating was made up of folding metal and plastic chairs. The altar was a folding wooden table covered by a well washed white cloth. The parts that best left intact were a few reliefs carved into the walls and one or two of the stain glass windows that weren’t boarded up. Even in the dim light of the overcast afternoon the dim glow of color washed over Grigori as he walked down the aisle.

“You wait out here, I have a copy of the census in my office. Give me but a moment”

They were left alone for the moment and Alyx looked at Chell. She tried to think of another way to convince Chell to stay in Black Mesa East.

“Hey Alyx?” Chell started looking back at her, catching her staring.

“Hm?”

“Is there some kind of... school or something in Ravenholm?”

“Like a workshop?” Alyx asked, “If you want to pick up a new skill I’m sure theres someone who would want to teach you.”

“No, no I mean... I haven't seen any kids since I got out of Aperture...” she started shaking her head “I mean we didn’t see much of City 17, and I assumed Black Mesa East was mostly just researchers or fighters for the resistance. I thought Ravenholm would have some running around but...”

Alyx grimaced, it was weird explaining all this basic stuff. She had never met anyone who wasn’t acutely aware of the depth of the Combines hold over them “Right... so. When the Combine set up the Citadel, among its many horrifying functions was the reproductive suppression field. Thanks to it, no one can get pregnant”

“Oh...” Chell responded in a slightly shocked and subdued tone.

“Yeah. It's part of why we’re fighting so hard. If we can’t bring down that field or find some way around it, my generation is going to be humanity's last.” Alyx explained. She looked to Chell and noticed something odd. Chell had taken most of the revelations about the world in stride so far. Exclaiming an expletive or a snarky comment before going about adapting to the news. This time though she just stewed with a sour expression. “You okay Chell?”
“Yeah… It’s… it’s nothing. Don’t worry about it” she waved her hand dismissively.

“You sure?” she said, hoping to offer any support she could.

“It’s personal is all” Chell shrugged, “Nothing you need to worry about.”

“Al-alright” Alyx took a step back, she felt a little prickled at that response. She really wanted to become better friends with Chell, especially if she was going to end up living in Ravenholm. Which looked increasingly likely “It’s surprising though,” she said with a chuckle.

Chell looked at her curious “What’s surprising?”

“Well you’ve so strong and confident, and always are ready to fight” she started with a shrug looking about the room, “but for this to put you off, compared to everything else. I don’t know, I guess I didn’t see you as the motherly type.”

When she looked back to Chell she felt her stomach sink. She realized immediately that she had crossed some kind of line. There was a flash in her eyes, momentary, fleeting, but definitely there. Chell looked hurt.

Chell’s face quickly changed to an indifferent mask, “Well.” Chell shrugged trying to sound unaffected “Okay. Thanks?” she said the last word with resentment.

Alyx wanted to sink and disappear through the floorboards. She couldn’t believe how little tack she had. How could she be so bad at this!? Alyx forced herself to stop panicking, she could beat herself up for this later.

*You have to apologize. Apologize you idiot!*

“Chell I-” Alyx started but was stopped by Chell holding up an open palm. Alyx took a deep breath as Chell turned her head. For the first time since they had met in Clarksville her face looked guarded instead of open.

“Listen-” she started but stopped thinking over her words, “I don’t *do* passive aggressive Alyx. If I did something to make you mad, tell me,” her voice stressed patience.

Alyx again froze, scrambling now for any explanation that didn’t sound as petty as the truth did. “I just…” she started, not sure how to end it.

The ground suddenly shook rocking the floors of the old church.

Chell instinctively grabbed at the back to one of the chairs to steady herself. “Was that an earthquake?” she asked, confused.

“We don’t usually-” Alyx started but then pound after pound of slamming shaking blasts continued to rock the church, shaking dust from the rafters. As Alyx tried to figure out what was going on, the loud and long wail of the towns alarms started to blare loudly throughout Ravenholm.

They were under attack.
Alright, here’s the next chapter of Home to Roost. We should hit the conclusion of this arc in the next chapter. Sorry if it felt a little slow, but things are about to heat up.

I hope you are enjoying the fic. I’ll try and get the last chapter up soon.

Thanks for reading and leave a comment or Kudos if you have been enjoying things.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!