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Narrative Design • Cinematics

Writing Sample: XCOM 2 - Unification Day

This first chapter is loosely based on the introduction cutscene of the game "XCOM 2", with embellishments from Central Officer John Bradford's perspective. The planet has been taken over by aliens, and the remnants of Earth's defense force, XCOM, are on one last mission to find and rescue their long-lost Commander.

John Bradford's even step masked the dread he felt as he moved his way through the crowded streets. Even with his heavy coat obscuring his weapons and his upturned collar obscuring his face, he felt sure he would be discovered at any moment. Unification Day celebrations were underway, maintained by a heavy security and surveillance force. Calm but alert, he glided past the "Peace Keeper" Advent soldiers that seemed to be at every corner, in every doorway. It had been a long time since he tried to blend in with the law-abiding crowds. Hiding on the fringes of free humanity for decades was bound to make him rusty at acting like a "normal" person. Though he was afraid to ask what "normal" meant these days.

A short blaring alert to his right sent a shock down his spine. He maintained an even pace, watching from the corner of his eye as someone was detained by two Advent soldiers under the street scanners. He knew they would probably disappear, and there'd be nothing he could do. He had to push forward.

Bradford followed the crowd up to a security scanner checkpoint as they sorted into a slow moving line. Beyond the gate he saw the park square, the festivities, more security...and his primary goal, the Advent medical headquarters. He took a deep breath, trying to ignore the pit in his stomach. Was he sending his team into another dead end? This was the deepest they'd ever gone into Advent territory. If they didn't find her here…

He reminded himself there wasn't much of XCOM left anyway. At least he'd be able to say he finally got off his ass and tried.

"You were right, they've definitely got their hands full today." Bradford's buzzing earpiece pulled him back to reality. His team was in position. "Stay focused", he whispered, half to himself. He was only a few steps away from the checkpoint now. "Prep Gatecrasher. 60 seconds."

Bradford stepped forward through the checkpoint. Immediately the warning alerts blared around

him. No surprise there. He just needed to buy a little time.

The four Advent guards rushed towards him, weapons drawn, their human-like faces shouting commands at him in an alien tongue. He directed a hard stare back at them, refusing to move.

The rifle hit him square in the gut and he crumpled to his knees, gasping. As he heard the rifles cock and prepare to fire, he glanced up and saw Lt. Kelly's sticky bomb blinking a friendly "ready" light on the side of the Advent truck ahead of him. Damn, she was fast. The Advent guards were screaming at him now, seconds away from riddling him with laser fire. His eyes darted around the square, making sure Kelly was clear. Bradford lifted his head and stared straight down the barrel of the rifle.

"Now."

The explosion shook the park square, knocking his four captors off their feet. They scattered around Bradford with a hard *thud*, knocked unconscious from the impact. He quickly stood as the square filled with screams and running in every direction. Advent would have their hands full for a while if he was lucky.

Bradford quickly shed his coat and retrieved the shotgun strapped to his back. He bolted towards the chaos in the park square and barked into his earpiece, "Gatecrasher, you're up!"

In seconds the XCOM Skyranger dropship zoomed overhead and released ropes on the far side of the square, dropping his ground troops into position. As Advent soldiers rushed to engage the new enemy, Bradford found cover behind a park statue and spotted his three closest targets. His worn, steady hands aimed the shotgun at the back of the Advent soldier. *Alright*, he thought, *here we go*.

The close proximity shredded his first target from hip to shoulder, their limp body lurching forward onto the concrete. The two remaining soldiers instantly spun around and laid down suppressive fire. Bradford ducked behind the statue, laser fire blazing past on either side of him.

Bradford waited. *Your move*.

It didn't take long to hear the Advent Commander barking orders. The suppressive shots continued, but he could tell one of the guns had ceased to fire. He took a deep breath and pulled out the knife strapped to his leg. His eyes continuously darted to either side, waiting for the flanker.

Just as the Advent soldier rounded the corner, Bradford leapt with deadly precision and buried his knife in the gap between the soldier's chest armor and helmet. The soldier helplessly attempted to wrench the knife free from his neck, but Bradford spun his body towards the remaining Advent commander like a meat shield. The rapid laser fire tore through the soldier, killing him instantly. A stray shot whizzed across Bradford's side, searing through his shirt and burning his skin. Bradford hissed through his teeth but held his grip on the expired meat shield

slumped against his shoulder.

Bradford pulled the pistol from his belt and breathed. *One. Two. Three.* He let the body fall.

In the split moment of exposure he aimed and fired, piercing the Advent commander right through the gap in his helmet. The commander fell into a crumpled heap, and for a moment the loudest sound was the blood pumping in Bradford's ears.

Fading adrenaline and age forced Bradford to acknowledge the laser wound scar in his side. He groaned as he tenderly examined it. No major damage, but it hurt like hell. *I sure didn't miss that feeling*, Bradford mused to himself.

Bradford registered the sound of his soldiers barking commands on the other side of the square. He gathered himself up as best he could. They still had a mission and very little time to do it. He retrieved his knife from the expired Advent soldier, reloaded and made his way to the Advent medical headquarters.