

INITIATE HYPERSLEEP RE-AWAKENING
DATE: MARCH 4, 2182. 06:42 PLANETARY TIME
LOCATION: ORBIT, ZUMERIA 8, USS STRAKONIA
OCCUPANT: NEUMANN, THOMAS
DESIGNATION: M03, CAPTAIN
VITALS: STABLE

A slight hissing is heard as the hypersleep chamber opens. Out steps a red haired man, approximately 184 centimeters tall. He takes a look around the cold and sterile room, seeing only the two empty hypersleep chambers, a bulkhead door, and two personal lockers.

He approaches the two lockers, and takes a quick glance at both name tags. They read "Captain Thomas Neumann" and "Major Jonas Halsey."

Thomas opens his locker and starts getting dressed, and as he's straightening out his jacket the bulkhead doors opens with a loud hiss. In the entryway Major Halsey appears, holding a brown folder in his hand.

Neumann quickly turns and greets the aging man with a salute, and the Major responds in kind.

"Neumann, good to see you awake. I'm sure you're curious what we've been sent here to do" says the Major

"That would be an understatement sir, all I've been told is that we've been specifically requested by Weyland-Yutani for this mission" responds Neumann.

"Most of what you need to know is in this folder. Go get some post-sleep chow and then meet me in my office" Halsey says as he hands the folder to Neumann.

"Yessir, I'll see you momentarily" Neumann states.

As the Major steps out of the room Neumann takes a look at the folder, and slowly starts reading...

OPERATION SIDEWINDER
WEYLAND-YUTANI RESEARCH FACILITY, ZUMERIA 8

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS:

Gravity: 1.06Gs

Average surface temperature: 217.15 Kelvin (-56C, -68.8F)

Local Fauna: NONE

Classification: Not suitable for terraforming or colonization.

OPERATION TYPE:

Search and rescue.

Weyland-Yutani reports facility having gone dark within the last 17 cycles due to unknown reasons.

ASSET INSERTION:

The facility is located deep underground on account of the low surface temperatures.

A small hangar is located on the surface, directly attached to the main freight elevator.

Insertion of approximately 30 marines will be accomplished using the main freight elevator. Trip is estimated to take no more than 12 minutes.

LOCAL INTELLIGENCE:

Facility specialized in ██████████ research.

Weyland-Yutani has opted not to share details regarding their research due to corporate espionage concerns.

W-Y Research and Data Division officials have assured us there is no risk to our personnel as a result of their work.

NB. Six local Weyland-Yutani PMCs will be joining our forces at the bottom of the elevator.

OBJECTIVE:

Locate and retrieve the local site director in addition to any researchers present.

Colonel ██████████

Neumann wipes his mouth with a napkin and throws it away, as he starts opening the door into the Majors personal office.

He steps into the room, and greets Major Halsey with a salute.

The Major, sitting in a comfortable leather chair says "Ah, there we have you Thomas, at ease. So now you see what we're dealing with. We'll be getting ready to equip within the next 30 minutes. I'll be joining you on the ground today.", the Major fumbles with a cigarette before lighting it and putting in his mouth, "Cigarette?"

"No thank you sir, I'm not much of a smoker" Neumann responds.

"Ah, that's right. You always were an odd one" the Major responds while letting out a muffled chuckle.

"Well then, I asked you in here to see if you had any questions before we hit the ground?"

"Just one sir. After reading the mission dossier the question of why we're even here has been gnawing at the back of my head. According to the dossier there's at least 6 PMCs present on the ground, so I don't see why they need upwards of 30 marines for a simple search and rescue." Neumann asks

"It's funny you should mention it Thomas, because I've been thinking the exact same thing. I had the guys in the CIC scan for any planetside shuttles or ships in orbit, and scans have turned up nothing. It doesn't seem like this is something external, so I'm betting on those eggsheds down there having fucked something up. Unfortunately the Corporate bigwigs won't tell us what happened down there, so we'll have to wait until we make groundfall to figure out what we're dealing with."

Neumann makes a troubled expression and says "So we're going on totally blind? I'm not so sure that's a good idea sir."

The Major simply responds: "Me neither Neumann, me neither..."

In the crowded CIC, bustling with people preparing for the deployment, we see Neumann, Halsey and a third person bent down over a roughly sketched paper map.

"Captain Neumann, Lieutenant Clark, let me fill you in our plan of action" the Major says, before turning his full attention to the map and explaining:

"The facility has a simple layout. We'll be going down on the freight elevator into a small reception area.

From here, a corridor leads into the central residential area of the facility.

From here the facility branches out into 3 different directions.

To the left of the residential area we have the administrative wing.

Straight ahead we have the long term storage bays and the laboratories.

And finally, we have the medical and security sections to the right.

Due to the depth of the facility we will unfortunately not be able to stay in contact with the USS Strakonia.

Therefore we'll be setting up a makeshift CIC in the reception area, where Second Lieutenant Clark, Captain Neumann and I will be monitoring the operation personally.

We've divided the marines up into 3 squads, Alpha, Bravo and Charlie.

Initially we'll have all 3 squads search the residential areas for survivors. Once the area has been cleared we'll be leaving Charlie to guard the area.

The other squads will sweep the rest of the facility from here, starting at the administration wing, then the storage and laboratory areas, and finally clearing out the medical and security areas.

We're on a tight schedule, the suits want us down there ASAP. Get geared up and load up on the dropship.

Captain Neumann, you'll be briefing the troops on the way down on the elevator."

Neumann nods and says, "Understood sir. See you on the dropship. Lieutenant Clark, come with me and I can fill you in on what you'll be doing."

The three men look up from the map. As Major Halsey starts making his way towards his quarters Neumann starts talking to Lieutenant Clark.

"Lieutenant, I want you on overwatch for Charlie. It's absolutely crucial that you keep them in line. If they get distracted the two other squads will be cut off from the elevator. Do you think you're up for the task?"

"I'll do my best, sir." Clark responds

Neumann nods and says, "Good man, see you on the dropship."

The journey to the planet was wholly uneventful. The thin atmosphere of the planet resulted in a smooth landing in the empty hangar.

The dropship is greeted by 6 W-Y PMCs clad in white armor.

As the marines fan out of the dropship Neumann takes a moment to observe their behavior. Each man doing a job. Unloading

crates, checking gear, cracking jokes. Like most ships in the Neroid sector the marines of the USS Strakonia are made up of both hardened veterans, but also greenhorns straight out of basic training.

Neumann thinks to himself, "My primary objective is to keep these men alive, even if the mission dossier or higher ups say otherwise." Before Neumann can continue his chain of thoughts, he sees the Major standing on the elevator pad next to two PMCs, gesturing for him to come.

Neumann observes the elevator as he approaches the Major. It's not much more than a moving slab of metal. There's a small cabin for the operator in the corner, and there's a small raised platform running along one side of it.

"These two PMCs will be joining us in the facility and keeping watch over our makeshift CIC. The elevator is just about ready to take us down, are you prepared to do the briefing?" the Major asks.

"Yessir, just give me a minute." Neumann responds

Loud noises erupt from under the platform as the massive gears begin moving the platform down. Neumann steps onto the raised platform and looks out over the marines.

Looking out over the marines it's obvious to see who the veterans are, and who the greenhorns are. The veterans are standing around looking relaxed. Some of them making small-talk with each other and cracking small jokes. Meanwhile the greenhorn marines are standing perfectly still, every muscle tense and completely silent. For many of these marines, this will be their first non-simulated combat drop.

Neumann notices an overrepresentation of these inexperienced marines in Charlie squad, but before he's able to give it a

second thought, the Major gives him a nudge. It's time for the briefing to begin.

Neumann clears his throat and raises his voice:

"Settle down everyone! I'll be starting the briefing now"

The veterans quiet up and direct their attention towards the Captain.

"As you might have noticed we'll be going underground for today's operation.

The facility we're going down to is owned and operated by W-Y. As of yet we've not been able to ascertain what the emergency has been. Keep your eyes peeled for hostile activity, and keep your squadmates close.

Our objective is simple, this is a search and rescue. Our first priority is to find the site director and extract him.

Due to the 100 meters of rock between us and the surface, we will be cut off from communications with the ship.

The shortwave functionality of your headsets should allow you to stay in contact with each other in the facility.

You'll notice you've been divided into three squads today.

Your HUD should have provided you with a rough map of the facility.

Orders are simple. Initially I want all 3 squads converging on the residential area.

After this has been swept and secured I want Alpha and Bravo to clear the rest of the facility, starting at the admin wing. Once cleared, you'll move onto the storage bays and laboratories, and finishing off at the SECMED wing.

Charlie, I want you staying put at the residential area to cover our rear.

Call in any contacts with the local staff ASAP and send them our way.

Godspeed, no marine left behind. Oorah!"

The marines respond in kind, putting out an impressive "OORAH!" that echoes up the elevator shaft.

As the elevator settles in at the bottom of the shaft Neumann takes one quick final look at his marines. He quietly thinks to himself that he'll likely not see all of them back in one piece.

The reception area is well-lit, the power and light still operational.

There's a small desk and security checkpoint between them and the hallway. Neumann looks around, "No sign of any of the researchers." he thinks to himself.

The marines quickly fan out, grouping up in their respective squads near the hallway.

Lieutenant Clark carries a crate containing 3 portable overwatch consoles over to the reception desk. As Clark begins setting up the consoles, Neumann presses a button on his headsets and start broadcasting to all 3 squads:

"Operation is a go, proceed along the hallway. Remember your orders, secure the residential area first. Call in any contacts, friendly or hostile."

As Neumann lets go of the button he spins around and sees Major Halsey approaching. The Major puts a hand on his shoulder and says, "Good work Neumann, quick and concise briefing. I'll be taking care of Alpha and Bravo overwatch and leaving you to lead the operation at large."

"Thank you for the vote of confidence Major, I promise you I won't disappoint." Neumann says.

As Lieutenant Clarks brings the 3 consoles online all 3 men sit down at the desk, ready to lead the operation.

The PMCs quietly shuffle off to stand guard at the entrance to the hallway. Neumann finds it weird that neither of the 2 men have said a word, but quickly drops the thought as the radio starts buzzing.

From the radio the voice of a marine appears, "This is Alpha squad leader reporting that all 3 squads have entered the residential area. There's a sign of a struggle, many of the

windows in the common area have been smashed in, and a bunch of the light fixtures have been destroyed. No sign of any deceased contacts, hostile or friendly. Continuing sweep."

Neumann reaches for his headset to respond and says: "Understood, keep us posted."

As the radio once again goes silent, Lieutenant Clark says "Major, Captain, this place is giving me goosebumps, why haven't we found any of the staff yet?"

"I wouldn't worry too much about it yet Lieutenant, the staff is most likely hiding out in one of the other wings" the Major quickly responds.

The Lieutenant makes a worried face but quickly buries himself in the telemetrics on his console.

The familiar sound of an incoming radio transmission sounds out across the room. The same voice as before appears, and says "Alpha squad leader reporting in. Residential area has been fully cleared. I'm taking my squad and Bravo and proceeding towards the administration wing."

Neumann quickly responds, "Understood, any sign of the staff yet?"

There's a slight delay before the marine answers, "Negative sir, no survivors found, no bodies located."

"Very well, proceed with orders, squad leader" the Captain responds.

The radio goes active once again, this time however, a new voice speaks:

"This is Charlie squad [STATIC] reporting. Motion detectors are going wild towards [STATIC]. Oh god what is that th--- [STATIC]", Neumann quickly reaches for his headset, "Sergeant? Respond, what's going on?"

The following 4 seconds of complete silence felt like an eternity to the 3 men listening to the radio.

"SIR! We've engaged hostiles in the [STATIC], coming from the research labs. --- GET THAT M56D OPERATIONAL --- We need immediate support, we can't hold them off for much longer!"

"What the hell are you fighting, sergeant!?! " the Captain quickly responds.

"We're not qu-- [STATIC] -- big bugs -- their blood is aci --- [STATIC] --- OH GOD IT JUST CUT THAT MAN IN HA --- [STATIC]"

"Fall back to the central residential area, there should be a courtyard with a better vantage point. I'm sending Alpha and Bravo back to your position." Neumann states over the radio.

"Understood sir, -- FALLBACK, GET TO THE COURTYARD! -- Falling back sir" the marine responds.

The radio goes silent once again.

"Any idea what we're fighting here Major?" Neumann asks.

"Big bugs.. With what seems to be acidic blood.. I've heard the other Majors talking about this. Some kind of alien straight out of a horror story. How the hell did they get down here.." the Major states.

Neumann looks at the Major and asks, "What should we do Major?"

"Pull the men back just like you said you would. We hold them off at the residential areas." the Major responds.

Neumann reaches for his headset and presses two buttons simultaneously, "Alpha, Bravo, pull back to the main residential areas ASAP, Charlie has engaged an unknown hostile force. Do you read?"

The main radio starts outputting the voice of the Alpha squad leader once again, "Loud and clear Captain. Moving back to the residential area now. We've cleared the admin wing, no staff found except the site director. Dead in his office, suicide it seems. There was a folder on his desk, we're bringing it back."

"Captain, I'm reading 4 flatlines in Charlie Squad. Approximately 40% of the squad." Lieutenant Clark says.

"That's not good" Neumann says as he reaches for his headset, "Charlie squad leader, come in. Report status."

The radio roars to life, beaming out a mix of static and speech, "Charlie squad le--- [STATIC] -- KIA -- Corporal Mackenzie speaking. We're holding the balcon--- [STATIC] --- taking heavy los-- [STATIC] -- Need support ASAP!"

Neumann hastily responds, "Corporal, Alpha and Bravo are inbound. ETA is any minute now. Hold them off."

"We just lost another one Captain." Lieutenant Clark states.

"Fuck, this is going bad" Neumann thinks to himself. "Major, any brilliant ideas?" the Captain asks.

"No, afraid not Neumann. Group the marines up, I think it's time for us to get out of here. I'm sure the suits will be satisfied with the folder Alpha found" Major Halsey says.

The raspy voice of the Alpha squad leader appears on the radio again, "We've reached the residential areas and we're now assisting Charlie with containment. We've gotten confirmed kills on at least 2 of the critters as of now. I'll keep you posted on any further deve--- By god that's a big one. --- MEN, FOCUS FIRE ON THE BIG ONE! --- OH MY GOD WHAT IS IT DOI--"

The radio is suddenly flooded with a ghastly scream, causing all three of the men in the reception to cover their ears and turn away from the radio.

The three men are deafened for a short while, but as their hearing returns they hear the Alpha squad leader struggling on the radio, "We just encountered a big one, much bigger than the others. She just paralyzed half of my marines with that hellish scream. We're losing men rapidly, permission to fall back?"

"Granted, pull back. Get to the reception area ASAP" Neumann responds.

From the corner of his eye, Neumann notices one of the two PMCs reaching for something on the wall.

Before he has time to react, the blast door separating the reception area from the hallway starts closing.

The Major jumps to his feet, and storms towards the PMC. Neumann readies his hand near his handgun holster.

"What the FUCK is your problem?!?" The Major screams at the PMC. "You just trapped every single marine in that hallway! Get this blast door open right this second!"

The PMC opens his mouth and responds, "I'm sorry, I can't do that sir. Corporate orders, we can't let any of our property leave the facility."

The next few things happened in quick succession.

1. The Major quickly drew his Mateba sidearm and aimed at the PMC
2. The second PMC starts to raise his gun towards the Major
3. Captain Neumann raises his handgun and aims at the second PMC
4. Lieutenant Clark aims an M41A MK2 at the PMC
5. The Major fires his Mateba point blank into the PMCs head, splattering brain matter and blood all over the wall.
6. The second PMC takes 2 inaccurate shots at the Major, hitting him once in the shoulder
7. Captain Neumann shoots and hits the PMC square in the chest, followed by the Lieutenant putting another 4 rifle rounds in his chest.

As Neumann rushes towards the Major he quickly reaches for the "All" button on his headset and announces "Marines! The PMCs have betrayed us and have started to shut the blast door to the elevator. I need you all to sprint towards the door and you might make it. We're unable to reopen the blast door."

As Neumann reaches Major Halsey the Major says, "I'm okay Captain, the bullet just grazed me. Hand me a bandage and I'll be good to go."

Neumann reaches for a bandage in his first-aid pouch and gives it to the Major.

The Captain looks down the hallway, and in the distance he can see the shimmering of flashlights. What's worse is that he can hear the screams of his men being hunted down. Running into the hallway wouldn't help, so he decides to keep watching, praying that at least some of the men make it through.

As the lights get closer his headset starts vibrating.

"Alpha squad lead here, we're almost there. [PANTING] They got most of Charlie and Bravo, there's -- [PANTING] -- 8-9 marines left."

The Major staggers back towards the overwatch consoles, panting heavily. He rummages through his pouches and finds an injector to stab himself with.

Neumann grabs the PMCs rifle and starts aiming out into the corridor. The lights are coming closer, and he can now hear the gunfire of the marines trying to hold off the hostiles.

As they approach, the Captain opens fire on the pursuing hostiles, trying to hold them off.

As the squad leader comes into view, the realization that they won't be able to fit through the ever-shrinking gap dawns on Neumann.

He can only watch on in horror as the Alpha squad leader dives for the closing blast door, only managing to fit his arm through. The sickening sound of an arm being crushed and torn off the marines body rings throughout the elevator shaft.

As the blast door fully seals, faint screams can be heard through it. They soon stop, and the room is enveloped in a sickening silence.

The silence is soon replaced by hammering on the blast door, and a sizzling sound.

Neumann looks down at the arm laid out in front of him, only now does he realize it was grasping something. Neumann claws back the fingers and realizes that it's the folder they found in the administration wing.

He holds the folder up high so the Major can see it.

"Neumann, we have to get out of here. You have to get that folder to high command. We can't let these creatures escape either." the Major says in response.

"Listen closely, here's the plan. We're going to make the shaft cave in, we'll use the C4 in that crate over there." The Major points towards a crate of supplies sitting on the elevator.

"Lieutenant Clark, Captain Neumann, start planting the charges."

"The charges have been planted Major, let's get out of here" Neumann says.

Lieutenant Clark and Captain Neumann are both standing on the elevator, ready to go, as the Major says "I'm sorry. I can't go with you, there's no remote detonator. Someone has to stay behind to set off the charges."

Clark makes an audible gasp, and Neumann makes a confused face. "What are you saying Major? We can't leave you behind, if anyone should be setting off the charges it should be me!" Neumann exclaimed.

"Neumann. You and Clark are going to take the elevator up and deliver that folder to High Command. That is a direct order. I haven't been exactly truthful with you two, that bullet did more than graze me. I doubt I would make it to the surface anyhow." the Major responds.

"We have to at least try! We can't leave you behind Halsey! Please, come with us, we can figure out what to do about the bugs on the surface." Neumann pleads.

"I'm sorry Captain. There's no way out for me, we can't risk these bugs getting out. Go, now!" the Major exclaims as he presses the "Go" button on the elevator controls.

As the gears of the elevator start turning, the 3 remaining men face the blast door as a giant claw starts raising it from the ground.

As the elevator moves past the charges, the Major turns to the 2 men on the elevator. He smiles as he performs one last salute, preparing to set off the charges with his other hand.

Moments before the blast door is fully opened the charges detonate.

The initial concussive blast knocks Neumann unconscious, but he quickly wakes up to the sound of gunfire.

One of the bugs made it under the blast door, and onto the elevator before the charges were set off.

Neumann watches with blurry vision as Lieutenant Clark tries to fight it off with his M41A. Neumann fumbles, and tries to reach for his pistol. He quickly realizes that it is missing, it seems he forgot to buckle it back into the holster, and it's now laying a few meters away.

Neumann starts crawling towards his pistol, in the background the gunfire continues before abruptly stopping, replaced only by horrifying screams.

Just as Neumann reaches his handgun and turns around the hostiles jumps towards him.

With practiced skill, Neumann quickly puts 4 rounds into the chest of the creature, spilling acidic blood all over him and the platform.

The creature lies by his side, unmoving. Neumann drags himself up against the control housing of the elevator, digging through his first-aid pouch for supplies.

As grabs his emergency auto-injector, everything starts going black.

Neumann awakens in a hospital bed. He looks around and sees nobody, except a single man clad in a black suit sitting in the corner.

Neumann looks down on himself, and sees his injuries treated with burnpacks and brutepacks. The man in the suit stands up and approaches the bed.

"Mr. Neumann, was it? You're very lucky, the doctors thought they lost you for a moment there." says the man.

"Who are you? Where am I? Lieutenant Clark...." Neumann responds, groggily.

"Slow down Captain. I'm a representative sent by the company. You're onboard a Weyland-Yutani shuttle headed for our local corporate headquarters.

I'm sorry to say, but your colleague.. Mr Clark was it? He didn't make it. My condolences." the man responds.

"Local headquarters? What? Where's my ship?" Neumann asks.

"Don't worry about that Mr. Neumann. Our local division manager would like to speak with you. You'll be returned to your ship after" the man responds.

"Fuck...." Neumann thinks to himself as he lays back down and closes his eyes.

Neumann is sitting in a comfortable leather chair, looking around he sees wood veneered walls adorned with paintings and statues.

"The Director will see you now, Mr. Neumann" the secretary states.

Neumann stands up, adjusts his uniform and makes his way to the large oak door leading into the Directors office.

As he opens the door, he's hit by the stench of cigarette smoke. Looking around, he sees a lavish office, rivaling even that of the highest ranking officer aboard Chinook station.

A large man, clad in a beige suit sits behind the big mahogany desk in the middle of the room. Puffing on a cigarette, the man gestures towards the leather chair in front of the desk.

"Mr. Neumann, sit down. I'm glad you could make it. Cigarette?" the man says.

"Sure, thank you" Neumann says, as the Director hands him a W-Y Gold cigarette and a Zippo lighter.

Neumann lights the cigarette and takes a few puffs.

"So... Yesterday I had a productive discussion with USCM High Command. It is the consensus of both Weyland-Yutani and USCM High Command that the Operation Sidewinder never happened. According to official records the USS Strakonia never entered orbit of Zumeria 8." the Director says.

"There's just one loose end and this whole thing will be dealt with. I believe you have something that belongs to us, Mr. Neumann."

"I'm not quite sure what you're referring to, sir." Neumann responds.

"I've talked to your superior. We're prepared to offer you a promotion if you hand over the folder." the man counters.

"What folder? I think you're mistaken sir." Neumann responds, in an agitated fashion.

"Cut the shit Captain. Hand over the folder, the papers are ready. The Admiral will sign off on the promotion as soon as you hand it over." the man angrily responds.

Neumann sighs and reaches into his jacket pocket, retrieving a folder with the label "ZUMERIA 8 BIOLOGICAL RESEARCH REPORT." Neumann places the folder on the desk, and the Director quickly snatches it up and places it into a drawer.

"I knew you'd see reason Mr. Neumann. Your superiors said you would. The papers have been filed. They're stationing you on the USS Almayer. We're skipping the ceremony and keeping this somewhat on the down-low. You'll be shipping out as soon as we're done here." the Director says as he takes a long puff on his cigarette.

"I have just one question, if I may?" Neumann asks.

The Director sighs and says, "Go ahead, what is it?"

"Why didn't you just kill me? I must've been the only survivor, what problem would one extra body be?" Neumann asks.

"Ah.. You're attentive, just as your superiors said. It's simple Mr. Neumann. The dropship that brought you down unfortunately recorded your still-breathing body on the elevator, in addition to relaying your vitals to the USS Strakonia. Doing it this way is much easier than having to infiltrate and delete biometric data from a USCM ship. But Mr. Neumann, know that if you even THINK about sharing what happened on Zumeria 8 with ANYONE we can't guarantee that you won't perish due to a 'workplace accident', understood?" the Director responds.

"I think I get the gist of it.." Neumann says.

"Very well. That should be all, **Major Neumann**. For both our sakes, I hope we never meet again." the Director says, as he spins in his chair and faces the opposite direction.

Neumann stands up and walks out of the office, trying to process what just happened.

INITIATE HYPERSLEEP PROCEDURE
DATE: MARCH 7, 2182. 18:25 PLANETARY TIME
LOCATION: ORBIT, [REDACTED]
OCCUPANT: NEUMANN, THOMAS
DESIGNATION: M04, MAJOR
DESTINATION: USS ALMAYER
VITALS: HEART RATE ELEVATED