

The Bayonet Charge

By

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EXT. BACKYARD - LATE AFTERNOON

A cicada chirps under poolside hosta.

In the background, beyond a chainlink fence surrounding the inground pool, CORBIN and HENRY idle in lawn chairs against an ivy-choked red tool shed.

ANGLE ON - SHED

Corbin, 13, pudgy and slobbish yet vaguely effete, leans two airsoft rifles against his Monobloc and rummages through a messenger bag. Yellow protective goggles slide down his nose; he pushes them back up, then pulls out a PB&J in a plastic baggie and tears off the crust before taking a bite. One of the rifles slips and falls into lush grass. Corbin rights it again carefully.

Henry, also 13, in an open African print camp shirt, squints into the distance while chewing a grass stalk, impatient yet aloof.

CORBIN

(mouth full)

Everything looks like it's been pissed on.

HENRY

Is that so.

CORBIN

These are like those beer goggles from D.A.R.E., but like... literally pissed... something to do with piss, pissed... You could figure something out there. You wanna try them on?

HENRY

I'm good.

Corbin removes the protective eyewear and surveys the yard along with Henry: long, stately, spotted with bushes and sloping width-wise between two dense thickets.

CORBIN

This is significantly bigger than the yard at your old place.

HENRY

Yep.

CORBIN

How many acres you figure this is? One and one half? An even two?

HENRY

Yep.

Corbin takes another bite of his sandwich. He smiles to himself.

CORBIN

Mr. Mayor, the trolls have the coal. I repeat, the trolls have the coal.

HENRY

What?

CORBIN

You don't remember that? *Plaza Saga*? Issue twelve, we had the mayor grant Emilio's Pizza an "acre" of land under the overpass so they could hold a "backyard barbecue" fundraiser, but then those like bridge troll, uh, hobos I guess ran off with with the coal so they could make more hobo fires.

HENRY

(stifling a chuckle)

Yo the mayor was in like every issue.

CORBIN

I know.

(laughs)

Love the mayor.

He reaches into his bag.

CORBIN (CONT'D)

I have some *Plaza Saga*'s here, I brought a couple old sketchbooks...

Henry is suddenly distracted, he sees someone approaching.

Corbin turns to look.

CORBIN

Who is that?

Corbin stands up and grabs the muzzle of his rifle.

HENRY
(disappointed)
It's Andrew.

CORBIN
Andrew...

HENRY
Your teammate, fool. Kevin's little
bro.

CORBIN
Right.

ANDREW, 12, in dog tags and camo t-shirt, holds his carbine out in front of him gangsta-style, cocking his arm back to mimic recoil.

ANDREW
Blaow! Blaow! I've gone rogue,
muthafuckas!

He nods at a sketchbook half-opened in Corbin's lap, opens it further with his muzzle.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
What's this nonsense? Sharing intel
with the enemy?

Bemused by the drawings he sights, he picks the book up and starts leafing through it.

We glimpse manga-style portraits, chiaroscuro crusader camps, half-finished comics about strip mall buffets.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Fuck is this?

Corbin strains to see what page Andrew's on while trying to remain stoic.

CORBIN
Stop. Give that back, dude.

Henry furtively starts lifting from his chair. Andrew turns to aim at him.

ANDREW
Ah ah ah.

Corbin grabs his book back and stows it away.

HENRY

(spits)

Yo turn your back once kid, I'ma bust
some ninjutsu on your red neck, bro.

ANDREW

Tough talk. Nah yo I actually gotta
dip though. I've had enough
babysitting your ass. Also Haley
Bramford is coming over for a bonfire,
so... Tsk. You know what's up, playaa!

(to Corbin)

Yo hold it down, Picasso. Keep an eye
on this clown.

He fist bumps Henry and walks off into the woods.

Corbin turns to shrug incredulously at Henry, but Henry has
taken off.

CORBIN

(sotto)

Fuck.

We see Henry pumping a rifle above his head and whooping,
running across the lawn to meet a dim figure in the distance:

KEVIN, 14, silhouetted against the sinking sun, all sinew and
swoopy mop top, fires a SCAR into the ombre air.

PRE-LAP: GUNFIRE

CORBIN (O.S.)

(sotto)

Fuck!

CUT TO:

INT. BASEMENT - EARLY AFTERNOON

PLASMA TV SCREEN

Halo 3, 3-player splitscreen deathmatch.

SCREEN 1 - CORBIN

Pinned down under MG fire, Corbin ducks into a concrete
bunker and vacillates between weapons to dual-wield. Settling
on two Spikers, he climbs a set of stairs leading to the
bridge on which the machine gun is installed.

Careful not to set off a radar ping, he sneaks up behind the gunner--KillaKev92--and attempts a melee takedown, but misjudges the distance, dropping one of his Spikers in the process.

His enemy rips the machine gun, already whirring, from its stand, then turns around and walks backward slowly as our would-be assassin eats a facefull of hot lead.

SCREEN 2 - HENRY

Henry weaves and hops across the arid earth, energy sword in hand. He picks up and deploys an active camouflage module, then scans up and down the gate at whose bridge KillaKev92 has perched.

Whipping out a rocket launcher, he halves his health in a brilliant gambit--exploding a rocket under his feet to propel himself high into the air, switching back to the energy sword as he attempts to land right on Kevin's head.

Alas, the elaborateness of the spectacle has given Kevin time to start revving his machine gun, which he aims nearly straight above him, puréeing the plunging ninja and showering himself in blood.

SCREEN 3 - KEVIN

The last man standing bunny hops from one dead body to the other, tea bagging them excessively.

KEVIN (O.S.)

Oh-ho! Rack 'em. Taste my nuts bitch!
Taste mah sawlty nuts!

BASEMENT

Corbin, Henry, and Kevin sitting on a couch, the light from the plasma TV playing across their respectively dour, sour, and satisfied faces.

Henry chucks his controller to the floor as Kevin coolly sips an energy drink.

HENRY

Fuck you Kev. That shit is OP.

KEVIN

You do get style points, H. Keepin' it
ninja, I respect that.

He squeezes Henry's nape like a mobster.

KEVIN (CONT'D)
But style points aren't actual points.

HENRY
(removing Kevin's hand)
Yo you like men sexually?

Kevin tosses his hair and sips deeply from his energy drink, casually throwing Henry an angled middle finger.

KEVIN
When are you gonna buy that shit for yourself so I don't have to bring it over every time you want your ass whupped?

HENRY
Bro you live like right there.

KEVIN
Online though.

HENRY
Nehh...

KEVIN
(mocking him)
Nuhhh.

CORBIN
Yeah I'm not sure I get the point of playing multiplayer like not in the same room as someone else. Like... I don't know. I don't know, you know?

The other two look mildly confused and a bit bored. Corbin shrugs.

HENRY
Let's watch *Chappelle's Show*.

KEVIN
Nah.

HENRY
What was that?

KEVIN
I said nah.

HENRY

Alright let's watch Katt Williams.

KEVIN

Nah!

HENRY

Did I say *Chappelle's Show* and Katt Williams? My bad, bro, what I meant to say was we should watch "If your family tree looks more like a stick... you might be a redneck!"

KEVIN

Let me get on that computer.

The three of them migrate over to a desktop PC. Kevin commandeers the captain's chair, swivels it around and drums on the desk while the computer boots up. Above the CRT monitor hang posters for Wu Tang Clan and *CatDog*.

Kevin pulls up Newgrounds and settles on a *Pitfall!*-like hentai side-scroller in which your pixelated female protagonist must avoid tentacular vines.

He and Henry switch off at each Game Over, snorting bumps of sour candy dust from a bag in the desk's top drawer.

Corbin looks down at his foot digging into plush carpeting while the other two hoot and holler.

He looks back up.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

The fuck, man!

The Flash player isn't loading. They try refreshing the page but there's no connection.

HENRY

That's wack. My pops is on this, though.

(shouting at the ceiling)

Eric! Dad!

No response.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Nigga's going deaf.

CORBIN

...I could go up.

HENRY

Okay. Don't eat all our food though.

CORBIN

I brought a lunch.

Corbin heads up the stairs while Kevin and Henry rub the sour candy dust on their gums, neighing with stimulation.

INT. KITCHEN - EARLY AFTERNOON - CONTINUOUS

Corbin walks past the granite countertop and spies a cookie jar by the stove.

He looks forward toward the home office's French doors, then mischievously back at the cookie jar.

INT. HOME OFFICE - EARLY AFTERNOON

ERIC, a graying gap-toothed 50-year-old, is working at his computer with his back to us wearing a hands-free headset. The well-lit room is lined with potted plants, mbiras, and National Geographic prints. Corbin, unseen by Eric, taps on the glass, munching a chocolate chip cookie.

A couple seconds pass--no response. He opens the door and steps in.

Eric turns, squinting, and lifts the mic on his headset.

ERIC

(froggy, wry)

Corbin! Can't you see I'm working?

CORBIN

There's no internet.

ERIC

Well, I already took care of that.

CORBIN

Oh. Okay. Well that makes sense. You're in IT, right? What does that, um... consist of.

ERIC

It consists of staying on the line with my clients and not getting pestered by Henry's little friends.

(MORE)

ERIC (CONT'D)
Where are your buddies?

CORBIN
They're in the basement.

ERIC
You came up those stairs by yourself?
Every time I worried you were gonna
break your neck. Somehow you could put
pen to paper, but aside from drawing,
the hand-eye coordination was just not
there.

CORBIN
What? It wasn't that bad.

ERIC
It was not good. Tossing you a
football, I quickly realized, was a
completely futile endeavor.

CORBIN
(tugging his collar, looking
around for support)
I'm getting roasted here.

The sound of feet coming up the steps.

ERIC
Alright, go see your friends. I gotta
get back to work.

INT. KITCHEN - EARLY AFTERNOON

Henry and Kevin emerge from the door to the basement and meet
Corbin at the dining table.

KEVIN
Alright here's the plan. We're playin'
airsoft. Henry's got a rifle, I've got
some hardware I can share but if you
break it you're gonna actually get
murked for real. Me and Henry can be
one team, my little bro Andrew is also
gonna be playing, you can team with
him. Henry you're cool with doing this
on your property?

HENRY
Yup.

CORBIN

What, just like shooting each other?
You ever told Kevin about *Garbage
Roadshow*?

KEVIN

What?

Henry and Kevin move toward the patio door and start putting their shoes on.

CORBIN

Garbage Roadshow, Henry and I used to play it where we'd get a bunch of kids on the playground to go around and find like candy wrappers and empty Capri Sun pouches for us to appraise like they were antiques. It was funny, you know, like you get a Capri Sun and you're like, "mm, yes, this specimen exhibits a fine luster."

HENRY

Nigga do you see any candy wrappers around here? Do you see little kids running around my lawn dropping empty juice boxes?

CORBIN

You've got a point. Although--

HENRY

We're playin' airsoft, 2v2. Gear up, let's go.

KEVIN

Let's go! Let's do this!

Kevin slaps the lintel and pulls open the patio door; he and Henry walk out into dazzling daylight.

Corbin scrambles to get his shoes on then follows them out the door, almost forgetting to close it behind him.

AT CLOSE OF DOOR, CUT TO:

EXT. BACKYARD - LATE AFTERNOON

A row of cypresses lines each side of the fence around the pool.

Corbin jogs into view hurrying up behind one, messenger bag bouncing against his hip. Once again he is wearing the yellow protective goggles.

He looks down at the gun in his hands and, with a look of resignation, flips the safety toggle off.

He looks around at what he can make out of the unfamiliar yard:

the pool and an opposite row of cypresses beyond it, too tall to see past--

the shed with its two lawn chairs, one upright, one tipped over--

the patio and house--

some threatening trees uphill--a branch on one shakes--

--his clammy hands raise the iron sights, he presses the butt to his cheek--

a squirrel pops out, skitters chittering up the trunk.

The adrenaline rush gives him a burst of energy. He does a ridiculous secret agent twirl to move from cypress to cypress, getting dizzy by the time he reaches the last one at the corner, just barely preventing himself from stumbling out of cover.

He peeks around the corner, then scans from base to branches the tree the squirrel ascended.

Vigilant in all directions, he jogs up to the trunk of the tree.

He clambers up to a sturdy-looking limb, then pulls off a piece of bark, mimics wiring its underside, and throws it a few feet down the hill.

He waits and looks around:

Eric typing in his office.

The treeline above the thicket, sky with bird of prey, Kevin's property.

Corbin tightens his shoelace.

Henry and Kevin approach, unaware of Corbin up in his perch.

Kevin steps on the strip of bark--Corbin makes the sound of an explosion, revealing himself.

CORBIN
(pointing)
Stepped on a mine!

The other two look up unfazed--coldly they aim their weapons.

CORBIN (CONT'D)
Uh!

Corbin jumps down from the tree and trips on the slight incline.

He runs past the pool limping slightly, swivels his head, and dives behind a hefty bush.

Plastic pellets pelt the hedge's laminated little leaves. One of them bounces off of Corbin's glasses.

Corbin attempts some potshots but soon enough gives up. The sneezing of their guns dies down. A bevy of white pills, at the end of their momentum, dot the grass around Corbin's feet like useless ersatz manna.

He lifts a branch within the shrub to spy on his assailants through the August haze--

Henry's hands are on his waist, he's still chewing the same long grass stalk.

Kevin throws him a pompous pontific hand signal--Henry smirks and shakes his head at the corny gesture--slowly they fan out, attempting to flank.

Corbin looks over his shoulder, at the gloomy mouth of the woods.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. HENRY'S OLD YARD - LATE AFTERNOON (1999)

A distant, high, golden-lighted view of Corbin and Henry running as children into a thicket surrounding a garage at the end of a driveway, attempting to hide from a black-haired, sandaled Eric.

BACK TO PRESENT:

EXT. BACKYARD - LATE AFTERNOON

Corbin sighs at the sight of the woods behind him, then faces forward.

He backs away from the bush; suddenly--SNAP!

A twig cracks in twain under his beat-up Converse.

Henry whoops.

Corbin turns and bolts away into the open field, his pudge and messenger bag bouncing wildly. The other team gives chase.

Finally Corbin breaches the threshold of the thicket, bashing at briar with his rifle and cursing.

He feels a sting on his bare calf, turns around to see what thorn harmed him--

and beholds Kevin, one eye closed, helmet of hair shifting in the breeze of the cooling air, advancing toward him with his burst fire SCAR raised.

The machine whines indifferently, pisses out its cache of arcing pellets--they shower Corbin's legs with points of warm pain as he hops panicking deeper into the woods.

EXT. THICKET - LATE AFTERNOON

Aching, tawny sunlight pierces through the canopy.

Corbin slaloms through the trees, tangles of thornbushes and fragments of drywall giving way to more matted, even ground as Kevin's vocal fry slowly subsides.

The passing trees, at various distances, occlude and then reveal a monstrous copper sun, following Corbin's progress as implacably as the Eye of Sauron.

Out of breath, panting and coughing into his arm, he settles down in a small clearing behind a rock. He removes the strap of his messenger bag and, sitting cross-legged on a bed of dry leaves, tucks his rifle into his lap and tosses off his goggles.

He checks the welts left on his leg, registers with surprise and indignation the genuine physical injury. Slowly, grudgingly, as if to assuage his pain, he begins to subtly stroke the barrel of his gun.

He coughs again and reaches into the bag for his sketchbook.

Retrieving it, he opens to a fresh section and taps a pen on the paper.

His eyes look up into the misty ether. Then back down at the blank page, where we enter--

CORBIN'S SKETCHBOOK - ANIMATED

Sinuous lines converge to form the woman from the hentai Flash game. She frolics, a nymph, through sylvan Arcadia.

Vines appear from above and below, she tries to run but is soon bound tightly. Her body is wrapped in pulsating vines; she bows her head in pain.

When she lifts it the vines unravel and fly off then limply sink. She's now a geisha in traditional dress, hair messy, kimono slipping off her shoulder. Two more of her kind fan out and emerge from behind her.

Petals from a cherry blossom drift across the harem--an anime likeness of Corbin catches one in his palm.

He is approached by the buxom geishas, they jiggle their glossy breasts giggling at his growing bulge, then stare urgently into his hot face with their enormous cartoon eyes.

Suddenly the pink of the floating petals has darkened into crimson.

He opens his hand and finds himself holding a smoking rifle.

He looks up, sees Henry slumping down the gilded wall of the pleasure palace. Blood bubbling out his mouth; a sarcastic, dismissive smirk.

BACK TO WOODS - LIVE ACTION

Corbin snaps the book shut, crumples a leaf in his raw hand.

He looks around, paranoid, having lost track of time. No sign of anyone. Alone.

A caterpillar crawls onto his finger. He pets its fur and stares at it, then lets it onto a nearby rock.

He stands up soberly, brushes off the seat of his pants. He slings the strap of his bag back over his shoulder and begins to crunch his way back to civilization.

The last pale of trees is before him, the green of the lawn

just beyond them. He approaches, then pauses.

CLOSE UP ON, AS IF BEHIND BARS

Batik bøgòlanfini--a light breeze lifting the back of Henry's rayon shirt.

The cicadas thrum.

Corbin approaches carefully, slowly raising his rifle.

He lines up his shot--we see iron sights trembling--his finger is on the trigger--

Henry turns around. His brown freckled face bears a look of blithe recognition.

Corbin charges, yelling comically, thrusting forward an imaginary bayonet.

Smirk breaking into smile, Henry returns a battle cry and plays along, charging wildly at Corbin.

They meet against the sun, each skewered on the end of the other's weapon, and topple groan-laughing over into the tickling bayonet-sharp grass.

Kevin walks over, impotent and confused, as they toss and clutch their sides and scoop up spilled intestines.

FADE OUT.

THE END.