

> Buffer Missing //

By RoweGuy

In which an Exo is raised as a guardian of the Last City, sworn to fight the enemies of the Traveler... but not before finding some clothes.

The air crackled around the ghost as he dodged the thrust of an arc spear. The wielder of the spear rasped with dissatisfaction as the ghost floated out of range.

The Tangled Shore was a dangerous place for ghosts, the patch of asteroids held together by laws as flimsy as the cables that kept the shore connected. It was the home of multiple races whose hatred towards each other was only surpassed by their hatred for the allies of the Traveler. There was no place the ghost would rather be, though, as he had always believed that he would find his guardian in the middle of a battlefield. This inexplicable intuition had brought him to the site of a conflict between an ambitious crew of Fallen and a furious century of Cabal.

The ghost observed as a stray solar slug hit a patch of dust, unexpectedly sparking instead of fizzling. A bright orange piece of metal was uncovered by the small impact. Something – or someone – was buried there.

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>>
a:\>...
b:\>...
c:\> exomind detected
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BIOS Date: [CORRUPTED - PLEASE SEEK MAINTENANCE] 18:13:41 Ver: 20.3.10
exOS(c) CLOVIS BRAY CO. - DO NOT REDISTRIBUTE
DESIGNATION DETECTED -
{ "Welcome, you are Stark-8" }
*****
Checking systems...
*****
Auto-detect: MECHANICAL SYSTEMS (65.7.18)
Auto-detect: IMAGE PROCESSING CORE (546.45.1)
Auto-detect: NEURAL INTERPRETATION CORE (5.2600.5)
Auto-detect: CENTRAL PROCESSING UNIT (65.3.73)
Auto-detect: MISC (...)
Source-Master: (233/54)
Sys-Master: (5767/23)
[DAMAGE DETECTED IN 2/8 CORE SYSTEMS - PLEASE SEEK MAINTENANCE]
[DAMAGE DETECTED IN 38/445 SUBSYSTEMS - PLEASE SEEK MAINTENANCE]
Writing log...
Initializing...
[LOCAL MEMORY COULD NOT BE RECOVERED - PLEASE SEEK MAINTENANCE, AND
PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPY]
*****
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“Eyes up guardian! You’ve broken the record for ‘time to enter a firefight since being raised!’”

Life entered the eyes of the orange Exo, who simply stared for a moment before confusedly propping himself up to observe the strange little robot who was addressing him. He was forced back down as an arc bolt sailed over his head.

“Oh, don’t worry about dying; I can resurrect you! Get out there!” The ghost attempted to push the Exo up but was thwarted by the new guardian’s cowardly aversion to live fire, and the fact that he was far heavier than the small ghost.

“Little guy, I am perfectly content giving the lasers the right of way. You can go get blasted to bits all you want; I’ll stay here and watch from a distance.”

The *nerve!* If the ghost boasted only a fraction of the ability of this Exo to tear the Traveler’s enemies limb from limb, he would attempt to do so without a second thought.

Stark-8 suddenly coughed as his speaking revealed an uncomfortable amount of space dust in his throat. As he was clearing his windpipe, he realized that his entire frame was lodged with the dust, compelling him to shimmy his way into a nearby ditch to find cover from the battle as he brushed himself off.

As he regarded his grit-lodged body a new notion entered his brain.

“I need some clothes.” Said Stark-8, matter-of-factly to the ghost. Indeed, the Exo was covered only in a grimy layer of space dust and an ancient bright pink and green pair of boxer briefs emblazoned with the Clovis-Bray logo. Underneath this scant covering was the bright orange plating that covered his body, topped with a smooth orange head with a black stripe down the center.

“What you *need* is to get OUT of this HOLE and atomize some aliens! I did NOT resurrect you so you could gripe about your wardrobe, Guardian!”

“Alright, I’m calling you sarge” retorted Stark, standing up. A lull in the shooting had given him an opportunity to observe his surroundings. Covering his bare chest with his arms, he felt the wind blow more dust against his exposed plating. In one direction he observed the hulking forms of Cabal legionaries, and in the other he tried to keep track of the skittering silhouettes of Fallen dregs. The scene made him exhausted just looking at it, but he soon found rest as a bolt pierced his stomach and a slug impacted his head.

“Now THAT is the action I like to see, guardian! You might be 0 for 1 now but that’s- WHERE ARE YOU GOING?!” Barely resurrected, Stark made a break for a small round structure on the edge of the battlefield.

A Fallen Vandal peered through the scope of his wire rifle to see a bright orange shape make its way through a shallow trench, with a small olive-colored shape in pursuit.

“*There’s no way that’s a light-bearer, right?*” he said, pointing out the distant figure to his Captain. Peering through a viewfinder, the Captain confirmed, “*That IS a light-bearer!*” He couldn’t keep from laughing as he attempted to give the order to the other snipers to focus on the guardian. Able to decipher the orders between cackles, the line of Vandals began shooting the naked guardian, and soon began betting their glimmer on who could down the Exo the most.

“0 for 16! This is PATHETIC, guardian! Those Fallen are probably – 0-17 – getting some REAL good target prac– 0-18 – practice!”

Stark-8 was doing his best to ignore the admonishment from Sarge as he attempted to reach the edge of the battlefield, though it was impossible to focus as he was downed one step and resurrected the other. He found himself running in circles, losing his orientation with every death.

A Cabal Phalanx peered through his shield as he detected a lack of impacts against it. Finding the Fallen had ceased firing on the Cabal, he waited to be ordered to move up. Looking to the Centurion he was confused to find her out of the cover of the shield wall, intently tracking something in the middle of

the battlefield. Looking to his left and right he found the gaze of his fellow Legionaries focused on the same thing. Cautiously peeking around the side of his shield, he soon found the target that had captivated the entire century. A bright orange Exo guardian was running in circles through the battlefield, *in the nude*.

"Centurion! Fallen Vandal at 2 o'clock!" Came a call from a Legionary. The Centurion snapped her vision away from the guardian and raised her rifle, only to find the enemy in question waving its arms as it peacefully approached the Legionary. A few moments later the Legionary relayed the information the Vandal had been sent to bring.

"Centurion! The Vandal wants to know if anybody would like to raise the stakes!"

"What?!" responded the Centurion.

"The Fallen are betting which one of them can kill the naked guardian the most! He wants to know if anybody would like to bet on any of the current leaders!"

The Centurion was incredulous. These pathetic fallen could never hope to surpass the sharpshooting prowess of the Psions of the Red Legion.

"Legionary: Inform the Fallen camp that NO members of this century will be placing ANY bets on their LOUSY snipers, but that we are PERFECTLY willing to accept bets made for members of OUR esteemed firing line." She then addressed the imperial snipers: *"PSIONS! FIRE AT WILL ON THE UNDRESSED LIGHT-BEARER!"*

As refreshing as it was to experience a new flavor of pain coming from a new direction, Stark-8 was still desperate to reach the structure he had set out to find. He was even spared the updates on his worsening score count as Sarge was beginning to slow down from the constant healing of the guardian. *"How many times has this chump gotten shot now?"* Sarge thought silently. *"One, two hundred?"* His only solace came in that he was able to resurrect Stark's scant clothing, leaving at least a little distance to go before complete embarrassment in front of the sworn enemies of the Traveler.

After what felt like an eternity, but only the difference of a few yards, Stark-8 finally made it to the safety of the old Fallen structure outside the battlefield. This was much to the dismay of the Cabal Centurion, as her troops were only trailing the Fallen by 8 shots. A series of excited shrieks were then audible from the Fallen crew, sending her into a rage. She threw her arms above her head as she was about to give the order for the Legionaries to charge the Fallen camp as she noticed a change on the battlefield. Where once had been a wide, empty, patch of no-man's-land were the spiky green silhouettes of the Fallen House Spider, the Tangled Shore's only law. Amongst their ranks were scores of other light-bearers, weapons trained on the ranks of Cabal and enemy Fallen.

"House Dusk needs to check their ambition, guardian. As does the Red Legion. I won't have my shore turned into a battleground for their petty squabbles. I appreciate your continued volunteering in this pursuit."

The Hunter rolled her eyes at the transmission. The only reason she had helped was to pay back the debt she owed for Spider's help in tracking down Uldren and the Scorned Barons, but it sounded like he wasn't going to budge. As she watched the spider's enemies get marched to ships headed for the Prison of Elders, she heard the groans of her fireteam over comms, indicating that they had received a similar transmission.

The optimistic voice of her Titan friend came over the comms: *"Cheer up guys, at least we get first dibs on loot. Looks like these guys left a ton of glimmer behind for some reason."*

As the Hunter combed the ditches for the strangely plentiful glimmer, she came upon an old Fallen structure at the edge of the battlefield. Hearing something inside, she motioned for her team to back her up. She entered carefully, but soon broke out into laughter at the scene that was before her.

The rest of her fireteam couldn't contain themselves either, save for a soft-hearted Warlock who offered his outer robe to the nude guardian.

Stark-8 was too exhausted to accept the protection, so just allowed the robe to fall over him like a blanket. Sarge, similarly, was too worn out to greet the fireteam of guardians who were far more heroic than his deadbeat excuse for a light-bearer. The Hunter, out of breath from laughing, was only barely able to say something to the grateful pair.

"Oh man you guys! Ho-ho man! I've never- I mean hey! At least you're fashionable, man!" She said, pointing to Stark's gaudy green and pink boxers. "We were wondering what all the Fallen and Cabal were distracted by! You gave us the perfect opportunity to take them by surprise!"

In disbelief of this gross overstatement of Stark's valor, Sarge leapt to the beratement of his guardian.

"Do NOT give my guardian any praise for his COWARDLY antics in front of our enemies! He deserves NO positive sentiment from you or anyone for the EMBARRASSMENT that he's caused me today!"

"Aww, you're just the most precious little thing, aren't you?" Said the Titan, plucking the ghost out of the air.

"LET GO OF ME YOU BRUTE! YOU'RE ALL INSUFFERABLE!" Sarge tried in vain to free himself of the Titan's grasp as the fireteam of guardians laughed at him while helping Stark-8 to his feet.

On their way outside the Hunter assured Stark "Don't worry, we'll bring you to the Tower. This is going to be one helluva story to tell the Vanguard."