

Stranded God

The projectile fired by the Coalition defence platform travels at Mach 8, enough to transform my landing craft into something that resembles the outcome of what my father called “bird hunting”, back when there were any birds.

So why am I not dea...

“Damage assessment complete: Emergency! Oxygen Unit Damaged! Emergency! Weapon Systems online. Sensory Systems online. Motion control online. Communication Systems offline. Thruster systems offline. Armor structure at 75% integrity.”

... Of course, the bloody thing still works. Back when they made them, they called it “Hephaistos” and the thing lives up to his name I tell you. I just did not think it would survive THAT much of a fall. Of course, there is something that fails usually long before the “god suit” or whatever the propaganda department calls it nowadays.

The person inside of it. Lightning jolts through my back and the region below my stomach is cut from any sensation. My lungs feel like I was hit by a freight train and breathing feels like being incinerated from the inside.

The Oxygen! Panic courses through my veins as I watch my Oxygen meter plummet with the speed of my fall from the stratosphere. **“Pull yourself together, young Cadet!”** I can almost hear my old drill-instructor program through the rustle in my ears. With shaking hands, I draw a patch from the emergency compartment, just need to find the leakage and pray it is not at the back unit of my Iridium-alloyed armour, where I cannot reach. There it is! A burning red sun in my diagnostics display shines right below my left shoulder. Watching my armoured glove slide under my shoulder trying to reach my suits wound, I realise this is going to get hairy. The feel sensors in my glove detect the breach as a thorny Canyon splitting my metal skin in two.

Could it be that the Projectile smashed into my flank right before it annihilated the ships reactor? The impact energy of that blast alone could have sent me a on a journey of about a hundred miles but could also have been my saviour, as the last thing I remember was seeing the “Dominator” ’s fusion reactor scrawling a new sun on the nights sky. Not that there were any other stars able to pierce the thick clouds above this hellhole. But yes, the burn marks all over my suits outer armour-plating confirm my theory. *Being clad in Iridium has its advantages, right Icarus?*

Pulling more and more patches out of the compartment I slowly manage to shut the rift for good and contain the invisible gold within. The fire inside my lungs is extinguished, for now. *12 percent oxygen remaining....* I need to get out of here. Fast.

The coalitionists would probably have their good laugh at their mightiest foe flailing their arms around like a bug flipped on its back, back when there were bugs. The bug, however, is not that amused. After what felt like hours, the realisation lets my heart sink like I would, had this been a lake I landed inside in. I cannot move my legs.

The impact has left me a cripple! I am going to be euthanized! The suit can be piloted without legs if you know enough about the steering unit, so I am at least not dead yet, until I return. Maybe I can convince them to keep me around as an advisor? One. Step. At. A. Time. It is imperative I find a way to reactivate my sensors, see where the hell I fell from the sky and maybe I can even find an emergency oxygen hideout somewhere.

“Command (2140)”. **“Confirmed: lower artificial muscles powered by 200%.”**

“Command (6700)”. **“Confirmed: Retinal Control activated. Bottom muscle control deactivated. Are you experiencing a critical injury?”** “No, this is a combat simulation, Command (0000)” **“Confirmed”**.

With my eyes, I steer my coffin out of the giant hole I tore into the soil. The commanders of the suits, like me, call them that: “coffin”. Unofficially. As my eyes grasp the edge of my little crater, I am shocked to realise that I hold a monopoly for craters in my near surroundings. Odd. Most of my generation’s cities, the giant grey leviathans we spent our lives in, look like the paste they sell us as nutrition nowadays. This leviathan however is fully intact, except for the giant dent I ripped into the aula. No, it is called a square, there is no titanium ceiling, odd as that is. The coffins sensors sweep my surroundings in search of threats or anything else that matters.

“No hostile units detected. No allied units detected. Acquiring position.... Failed. Retrying.... Failed. Anomalies detected. Large Oxygen supply detected. Marking position.”

Jackpot! The red sun shines again, this time on my navigation HUD. 200 Miles, doable but risky. How cool would it have been to tell my friends that I am one of those super soldiers we used to play with, back when there were things to play with? And Friends? More than that, I am a wrathful war god who fights for the cause, or whatever the propaganda department calls us nowadays.

Emitter at the ready and switched on “Radar”, I head down the asphaltene line we used to drive those four wheeled things on. Hidden Coalition Trapper Drones are everywhere, and my left flank is useless. And with the giant dust storms at the horizon, it is safe to assume their wind generators have them charged and ready to bite me where the sun did not shine, back when the sun was shining. And do not forget the “Help me!” mines! You cannot trust anything out here.

The asphalt carpet rolls itself out in front of me for quite some time. The four wheeled things are scattered everywhere, there is more of them than there are humans back at the bunker. I remembered being a kid, and sitting at the back of them, playing with some machine, that was forgotten and outlawed. “It has copper! We need to salvage it!” I cried that day. The little machine had lots of blinking lights and helped me whenever my parents fought over what to do against the coalition.

Now I can throw the four wheelers like the baseballs my father used to watch on a bigger, now also forgotten and outlawed machine. There are tons of them here, machines of all shapes and sizes, it is just that there is no one there to use them. **“High abundance of salvageable copper detected.”**

There is even a shop steeped with them! A shop! The water in my eyes makes it hard to see asphalt, as I think about how we always spent hours at all kinds of shops after primary school, just before everything went south. But here they are again, ready to make people happy, or at least let them forget a bit. It is just that there are none of these people left.

You must report this. There is more copper in here than we found in an entire year and I bet my entire years ration, those food stores are still filled.

I pass a book shop. Useless things. They are made of the thing we needed most in our crisis. Now all that is left of our planet’s lungs are the stupid books and those fancy desks the Coalitioners horde like it is copper, titanium or fossilized carbon. We have tons of books; it is just that no people read them.

Something smiles at me. There in the dust. It is a miniaturized being, wearing something in an outrageous colour, holding something similar to mission controls communicators, just bigger. And light blue, but the metal net on top is the same. Should that person portray a “pop star”? The drilling programs made me forget a lot of things about my childhood, before the “last war” broke out, but I am sure I owned this at some point in my life.

The world around me freezes and I watch in absolute shock as this... thing... raises its arm and resonates a strangely familiar tune, that reminds me of times when the sky was still somewhat blue. I can watch myself from third person, switching the Emitter to “Laser” and pulling the trigger exactly three times. First goes to where I suspect the sensory and communication systems, buried in the dust, to isolate it and prevent further attacks. Second goes to where I think its primary weapon systems are located, to neutralize the “blind fire” failsafe program. Third goes to where I suppose the fuse is, to prevent the failsafe detonation. 9 Gigawatts later, I stare at the sea of glass in front of me, where the person used to be.

No blue smoke. No noises of something depowering. No detonation. No Trapper Drone.

The bloody mini person still had juice! It tried to soothe me with a song from my childhood so that I do not aim the Emitter at myself in the next hour. Not that it would have mattered, “Hephaistos” can only be destroyed by railgun ordnance above the 20-kilogram mark and the helmet is sealed until I complete the mission. In this armour you are an immortal, until you starve, asphyxiate, Coalition points their orbital defence platform at your shiny self, or you know the things I know.

But still, I have destroyed salvageable copper. And worse. I murdered someone, a witness of my past, that deserves more pity than all my former murders. Yet another victim slain in the pursuit of the cause, another foe struck down by my righteous wrath, or whatever the propaganda department calls it nowadays.

I celebrate my victory by storming off, as fast as my suboptimal controls allow it. Surely, the Emitter was detected, the landing craft was way within hostile territory. In my inner eye, the Coalition defence platform claims the skies above me to execute its task and fix the mistake it made hours ago and with it, incinerate this monument of when things made somewhat sense. When it fires its ordnance straight down, it hits like a fusion bomb and then there is no getting away with a bruised left flank and a lifelong disability.

Strangely, the only thing to fall from the skies today is me. The town gets to slumber for another day.

And then it hits me, almost as hard as the feared tungsten round. *This town is not on satellite maps! No one has been here for sixty years!*

Hours feel like decades as I sleepwalk through this mausoleum, my tons of iridium pressing the dust under my feet into form. The coffin does its best to keep the pain at bay and keep me

hydrated in my shell exposed to 50 degrees Celsius upwards on the outside. Good thing I filled the emergency canisters with water too.

“Oxygen source nearby!” The suits inner voice rips the veil of silence to shreds. Odd. My sensors locate the source in the first story of a building. They never leave hideouts in the entrance parts of buildings, too easy to detect, too easy to be detected. I approach the main door and am greeted by a rotting mat telling me that the “force” may be with me. Odd. The thing was no program, just a little mat with letters on it. The Emitter still on “Laser”, I prepare for forceful entry. Ever since the coalition decided to place “Help Me!”- Mines at the last oxygen reservoirs, things went even souther. My body, overgrown with armour, slams through the door like it was Mjolnir itself. Reinforced Iridium alloy meets wood from 2030. My sensors do not even register the impact as I conquer the hallway, absent with light, sweeping my Emitter and secondary Gatling and grenade systems around. Nothing. Odd. I am the only war machine in town it seems. With patience I make my way through the hallway, hoping my 3-ton suit does not fall through the floor. This place would have been full of cobwebs, if there were any spiders left, but all that is ever left is the dust.

After an eternity, I arrive in what seems to be the living room. Full sensor sweep. Find the oxygen, find it fast, and get away from this mausoleum of hurt-, but joyful memories as fast as possible before they corrupt me entirely. Chair. Table. Glassware. Cupboard. Tree. Painting. Fireplace. Books. Shelves. Pillows. Odd.

Tree?

My body comes to a full stop. Everything stops, to be exact. I run the full sweep again. Tree. Okay, full sensor failure. Rare but not impossible, like the tree is.

“Command (0011)” **“Lifting the combat visor. Extreme caution is advised.”**

My Iridium death mask slides apart, to lift the curtains for the absurd play I am most certainly the audience of.

There it is.

Throning on the remains of what was certainly once a plant pot, sits an insult to the realm of death around me. The lifeform which I thought left only the heritage of books and fancy desks.

A tree. Producing free oxygen. In 2090.

And then I break. Not with the detonation of a fusion bomb. Not with a radiation pulse. Not with a railgun projectile. Nothing but with the sheer force of my memories. No conditioning on this hellhole I once called home can restrain the storm surge of raw emotion that floods every part of my brain. How my dad used to push me on my swing under such a tree. How I tried to climb them, chasing my friends. How I cried knowing I could not bury my friends under those trees. How everyone knew that things went south irreparably, after both factions confirmed that every other lifeform on the planet is extinct.

With the most broken laughter I realise how frustratingly close I really got. But the last step will be forever out of reach. The coffin is called coffin for a reason. The visor can be lifted, but triple-armoured glass will still block the outside. Everything is hermetically sealed. The patches I applied have long hardened out, almost as unbreakable as the rest of the armour. Once you are in it you do not get out. Ever. You may be given spare time between the missions but then you only feel the cold hard metal of the tables and chairs in the bunker. They call it “god armour” because you can level entire cities and even countries with it. Everyone knows why Coalition has been breaking every convention known to man in the last decade. They are losing. Both are losing.

All this power to kill the last of my kind. To destroy. To annihilate. But no way on earth to breath from this being, as all my ancestors did. All because we laid claim to everything and plundered every Ounce of resource our planet had.

I am a god, stranded on the shore I once came from.

Life finds a way. In all my arrogance I always assumed this would include my kind.

My heart is heavier than my armour. Weeping, I cautiously lay down in front of the victor and decide to pull my last trick. It took a lot of favours, but I have the key to freedom.

“Command (-26428), I repeat Command (-26428)” **“Are you sure? There is 2% of Oxygen remaining.”** “Positive. Suit ID: Thanatos” **“Confirmed. Morpheus protocol initiated. You can rest now, hero”**

I softly exhale as the suit pushes the entirety of the reserve narcotics into my bloodstream.

And with my last breath of recycled air, I can feel the soft breeze of leaves, as my father pushes me on my swing under the tree again.

