

Nick was able to sprint at superhuman speed now, thanks to the armour, using that speed to run straight towards the city nearby. After a surprisingly short journey, he made it to a deserted commerce street in the city.

Rubble was littered around the brutal grey buildings, fresh produce, and other products from shops were either stolen or toppled all over the floor. Glass fragments from shattered windows were scattered all around any shop entrance, alongside torn-off signs that took with it any soul they shops may have had in the past.

The smell was a unique evil. It was a mixture of concrete and blood, alongside the all-too familiar smog in the air.

There were bodies behind some destroyed stalls. Some still with saturated skin, showing that this ruin was created recently enough.

The dull sight made Nick grimace once again. He remembered this place to be a small but beautiful street, full of culture and leisure. He went here on good days to get some food and have some fun.

Now, nothing was left.

He walked up to one particular shop and peered inside. There was absolutely nothing. He held back the urge to shed a tear, feeling empty and mellow.

It was his favourite shop. It sold anything from old junk to fresh food; he could recognise the location and interior no matter what would ever happen to it. He was also good friends with the shopkeeper, and got good deals from that.

Nick climbed inside, stepping over broken glass and rubble. He opened a cupboard near the back, which contained some still unopened bars of chocolate. Nick opened and ate one, feeling a bittersweet wave of nostalgia in his heart.

He had at least hoped to find some indicator towards the shop cleric here. If there was anyone he could call a friend nearby, it was him. However, he was nowhere to be found inside his own shop. 'There is an upstairs, though,' he thought. He considered looking for a sign there.

But he didn't want to dwell on painful emotions anymore. If he found the body of a dead man up there that he cared about, he'd break for good. It was best to leave his curiosity unfulfilled.

He climbed back outside of the ruined shop, continuing to wander aimlessly.

After walking down the street for long enough and coming up to the end of it, he started to hear gunfire. He instinctively ducked, his instincts screaming at him to flee. However, he surpressed them, continuing to walk down the street.

As he got closer, sudden electrical discharges could be heard repeatedly going off underneath the sound of gunfire. Nick assumed that they were the sounds of the energy rifles firing, as they seemed to accompany the gunfire in the dance of battle.

Then, he turned a street corner, seeing around 50 Raxon soldiers waiting behind several quickly constructed metal shields outside a large building. All of the glass windows on the ground floor of said building were completely destroyed, shards of glass and other rubble scattered everywhere around the surrounding area. He quickly dashed behind a car nearby to stay hidden, peering out from one side to observe further.

Somewhere around 25 soldiers from his own planet's army in hard to spot grey camo uniforms seemed to be held up in the building; they were trapped in a stalemate against the outer space forces. Occasionally, volleys of gunfire and energy blasts were exchanged between the two forces, lasting only mere moments in bursts.

The blasts being fired by the enemy forces were the same bright blue as the rest of their tech, in the forms of beams of energy appearing for a few milliseconds. A few sparks of electricity came from out of the barrel in place of smoke upon each blast.

Nick also noticed something behind the soldiers. More people. Ordinary people. They did not look like they were fighting at all.

One was cradling a child.

Most were crying.

They all looked petrified.

Nick didn't need any more reason to let the battle continue, sickened at the sight of innocent people being ambushed. He immediately sprung out of cover, sprinting at hundreds of meters per second at the attacking forces, unsheathing and igniting the blade given to him by the robot.

The closest one to him didn't even get a chance to turn around and react, being quickly sliced into two pieces by the torso by Nick's dark blade.

Nick zigzagged straight towards the next one, landing another clean slice through them and even breaking their weapon, too.

One from afar realised what was happening, turning around and firing at Nick instead of the building. However, the speed at which Nick was travelling made him an impossible target, causing him to miss every shot.

After sprinting from soldier to soldier, cleaving through each and every one of them or rendering them unable to fight, Nick reached the end of the Raxon barracks surrounding the building, covered in blood and holding his blade tightly. It took him about 30 seconds to make it through every single one of them.

Breathing heavily and standing completely still, he zoned out while staring at the ground. He felt sick to his core despite having most likely saved lives. He couldn't understand why some lives must be ended to save others.

The small platoon of Nick's planet's soldiers and civilians held up inside the building witnessed the complete bloodbath outside in complete shock, the innocent among them becoming greatly unsettled. However, the soldiers began to cheer after a short moment, realising they were out of the stalemate.

The cheers forced Nick's body to start moving again. He quickly unignited his blade and placed it on his side, walking up to his own planet's forces.

He was greatly relieved to see friendly faces instead of more bloodshed. Well, friendlier faces, at least. He spoke loudly, asserting himself to the people inside the building.

"I'm with you, don't worry, I repeat, I'm Gyreanian." Nick assured them, putting his hands up in the air.

The platoon was right to have suspicions after Nick defeated all of the attacking soldiers, but unlike him, the platoon had no clue about anything that had occurred beforehand.

The captain of the platoon emerged from behind a counter and spoke up to Nick with respect clearly present in his rapsy voice. He took a suspicious look at Nick, who stood still upon being observed.

"I just stole some of their armour. I swear I'm with you." Nick repeated.

The captain waited for a short moment, still mostly hidden from sight. After a moment of awkward silence, the captain sighed loudly, placing a hand over his face and climbing fully out of cover.

"Do you have a fuckin' clue what's going on?" He asked, thoroughly confused.

Nick laughed, not expecting the sudden switch in tone. He speaks again, this time slightly less serious.

"I'll be honest, I don't know. I think we're being attacked by a space empire or something. Apparently, I was supposed to warn people, but I don't think it would've helped."

An even more awkward silence follows.

The captain speaks again, trying to sound like he understood a single word Nick just uttered.

"Can we exit this building? Is the surrounding area secure?"

Nick looked around shortly after, looking to see any sign of danger in the nearby area. He couldn't see anything moving at all, let alone any people nearby.

"Yeah, you should be safe. I don't see anything -"

But before he could finish, he felt a supersonic wave of wind sweep over the street, a slight grey blur having soared through the sky a moment beforehand. A blue trail followed it, indicating to Nick that it was a sort of fighter jet.

An explosion then went off in the distance, several more jets and one large ship flying in from above. Gunfire began thundering away in the distance. The largest ship sounded like it was landing, air pushing through gaps in buildings, an impossibly jarring whirr of alien machinery crashing through concrete buildings.

"No, ok, NO, WE ARE NOT SAFE! ROOF, NOW!" Nick shouted out to the soldiers and civilians in the building, panicked and shocked.

Suddenly, an enemy soldier appeared from the end of the street. Nick unholstered the energy rifle over his back, shooting at the soldier a few times and killing them before they could strike back.

Then, another soldier appeared, who was also promptly defeated. Then, another. Then, another.

Nick quickly became overwhelmed, tens of soldiers having appeared every second from the end of the street. He took a blast straight to the chest, the impact winding him a little, but most of the damage was nullified by the armour. He immediately holstered his rifle over his back and sprinted away in a parallel direction, thinking he was lucky to be alive.

Sprinting through alleyways at incredible speeds, Nick felt indebted to the armour every step he took. He got used to it quickly, which not only helped him save the building full of people but saved his own life, too.

He leapt upwards, landed on a wall and pushed off of it, flying upwards and over the buildings nearby due to the armour's servo and movement enhancers. He landed atop a taller building, giving him a great view of the prior attacked building and the many, many Rexon soldiers suddenly sprawling in the streets below.

Thankfully, the people and other forces must have made it to the roof before they were spotted, as the soldiers seemed to be searching the streets diligently to no avail.

"Shit... shit, shit, shit..." He murmured, panicking.

Nick immediately went prone, crouching down and hiding up against one of the walls leading off of the roof. He took a deep breath and began to think.

Firstly, there were way too many Rexon soldiers to defeat with brute force, even if he factored in his own planet's forces, so that was not an option. Secondly, he still had to

worry about the building full of people and their safety. Running seemed like the best option, but one that wouldn't allow him to take the people with him.

A huge bang goes off in the distance, interrupting his trail of thought; a sonic boom. A few enormous flying structures, each glowing bright blue, appeared out of nowhere in unison and began to circle the city.

Shortly after, several drones the size of cars arrived one by one, shining down large spotlights from their sides that sifted through the city in search of something.

Him.

Nick started to shiver, having realised his situation was far from good. It would take them no longer than a minute to find him and the others now.

Another boom goes off far in the distance.

Nick quickly got to his feet, sprinting toward the stairwell to hide inside the building.

A spotlight then hit him, encasing him in a large illuminated circle.

He was spotted.

"No, no no no no!" He cried, frantically looking up and around to find the drone that had found him.

Upon locating it, he took the laser rifle from over his back and fired at it several times. None of the blasts were able to hit it, and the few that did didn't do enough damage to destroy it.

Another boom. Louder this time.

More drones shone their spotlights down at him, making him quickly feel like he was a main actor in a pantomime. The light was blinding, searing his eyes and inviting a headache to brew within him.

One particular light shone a deep red, which was confusing due to its different colour to the rest. He covered his eyes with one hand, being forced to do so as he would have gone blind otherwise from the sheer number of spotlights now on him.

The dark red light grew in luminosity through the back of his eyelids until it completely dominated the spotlights.

Then, in an incredible instant, they all vanished.

Nick opened his eyes, and after they had processed the afterimage of the light and allowed him to see, he saw nothing in the sky at all.

Every drone was just gone.

Nick looked around frantically, trying to see where they went while in utter disbelief from their sudden disappearance.

Then, he spotted a streak of dark-red light curve through the sky with astronomical grace. It spun around in the air as any remaining ships in the sky desperately fired at it with enormous energy salvos.

The streak of dark red light slowed down, and as it reached a much slower velocity, fired a shockwave of air forwards in one direction comparable in strength of a volcano. It shot through the sky towards several ships, completely annihilating them in an instant. They exploded violently, the debris falling down to the ground over the city as steel rain.

The fierce wind that the shockwave then pushed across the surface of the city after it hit the ground almost threw Nick off of the building he stood upon, however, he was able to withstand it thanks to the armour.

He looked up in utter awe at the thing that had just saved his life. 'How could a weapon like that be so strong?' He thought. 'No, not a weapon, a hero. The hero.'

The Loyalty. The saviour of his planet.

Nick quickly shook his head, realising that everyone below must be as shock-ridden as he was now. If he could take advantage of the situation, he could do a lot of damage.

He sprinted to one edge of the rooftop, equipping his energy rifle and starting to fire down at the soldier filled streets below.

Nick took down over a hundred soldiers in rapid succession, each blast from his rifle being enough for one each. The soldiers were completely distracted, so many were stood still and didn't even notice they were being attacked.

However, unexpectedly, his own planet's forces began to fire down from the rooftop of the prior held down building. Both Nick and the other soldiers managed to clear the streets quickly.

Once every soldier was out of sight, Nick holstered his laser rifle and sprinted backwards. He looped around the rooftop, gaining momentum before leaping off of his roof and onto another.

After stumbling for a moment, he continued to run across the second rooftop, then leaping and running several more times before making it to the rooftop with his own planet's forces.

He stuck the landing perfectly, but the force on the roof that he exerted caused a small crater to form and knocked a poor soldier backwards. He slowly stood up from his landing pose and smiled at the rest of the soldiers.

“Thanks for the help. We’re safe again.” Nick complimented the Gyreanian forces.

The captain brushed dust off of his shirt, hopped down into the small crater and up to Nick. He coughed a little, waiting a second before putting out one arm for him to shake.

“You’ve got good aim, sir. Consider joining us, please.” He offered.

Nick chuckled and shook his head.

“No. I’d rather fight for myself.”

The captain respectfully nodded but seemed moderately disappointed.

“Shame. After this is over, I want a drink with you. You saved our lives. We’re in debt to you, soldier or not.”

Nick smiled brighter, chucking and brushing the back of his head.

“I’ll look forward to it. But we gotta win first.” He added. “Any ideas on what to do next?”

The captain sighed, dropping the professional act. His shoulders fell alongside his head.

“Ugh. I don’t know. This whole thing has been such a shitshow since the big thing in the sky arrived. Just sit down for a bit, I need to think.”

Nick smiled, nodded, then stepped out of the crater and up to one guardrail on the edge of the roof, sitting down and taking a well needed break. He rested his head against the cold metal fence, closing his eyes.

He heard the captain going down the stairs and to the civilians below, most likely to comfort them. Other Gyreanian soldiers discussed Nick himself, whispering things along the lines of “Thank god for him.” Or “What a strong warrior.” But mostly, “Badass.”

The booms above from the Loyalty’s fierce air assault continued to explode consistently but began to slow down more and more as the sky became clearer.

After the other soldiers had calmed down, Nick opened his eyes and turned his head to the man to the next to him. He looked pale and was breathing heavily despite appearing fine on the surface. He spoke out to him, shuffling himself closer to him.

“Hey man. Are you feeling alright?”

The soldier slowly turned around, facing Nick.

“Yeah. J-just... not used to this.”

“You’re gonna be fine. This shouldn’t take long. What’s your name?” He replied.

Nick realised the soldier was slightly shaking. However, he still spoke, having turned back forward while staring aimlessly.

“Davey. S-steve Davey.”

“That’s a good name. Keep going. You’ve got this.” Nick assured him.

Davey nodded, then picked up his rifle and began loading magazines with bullets.

“I’ll be honest, I was expecting the space guys to be a little bit better trained. They scattered like bugs under a rock once we started firing at them. Just got to get a big enough boot to squash the queen.” He joked.

Davey chuckled a little at this.

“They’re called the Raxon Ascendancy, I think. But they’re all just tired. They must have only ascended out of bed.” He joked in turn. Nick laughed.

“Definitely.” Nick smiled, glad he was able to get the soldier back on his feet and raise his spirits.

He stared upwards, looking up at the night sky. He looked over at the enormous capital ship in the sky but felt no intimidation like he had before.

The Loyalty, having destroyed the flying structures above, suddenly shot across the sky and soared toward the central city across the ocean. A sonic boom erupted around him as he flew, a dark red streak of energy following him.

They were going to be fine.

A few quiet minutes later, a hyper-technologised jet of Raxon origin flew across the horizon. It took a sharp turn upwards and slightly right, beginning to fly directly toward them.

‘The Loyalty must’ve missed one.’ Nick thought.

A moment later, the jet shot across their city a few miles to the right, dropping a bright blue energy sphere. It took a minute to hit the ground, but when it did, it exploded violently.

The soldiers around Nick suddenly jumped up, staring off into the distance at the huge explosion that had just levelled part of Quartz city.

The hairs on Nick's skin stood tall. He also jumped to his feet, trying to track the jet in the sky as it moved. The howl of its engines in the sky made every man below it shiver.

The Loyalty wasn't here to save them this time.

The jet dropped another bomb, this time directly onto a radio tower on a mountain. Some of the soldiers began to panic a lot more than Nick was.

The jet then circled around one more time before coming directly towards them all. Nick frantically ran through his mind, trying to think of a plan. However, nothing worked.

They couldn't escape in time.

They couldn't destroy it in time.

They couldn't stop it.

The only solution he could think of wasn't rational at all. But it just might work.

He stood in the centre of the roof, crouched down in a position ready to leap upwards. There was no time for his life to flash before his eyes: the bomb was already falling.

Nick slammed his fists together, creating a wide energy shield in front of him. He then leapt straight up into the bomb with all the strength he could muster from both his legs and the armour.

He clashed with the bomb high in the air, causing it to instantly explode.

The soldiers watched in shock and awe as Nick leapt to his death in a brave sacrifice. The large energy explosion grew in size rapidly, the light of the initial impact almost blinding.

But it was just far enough away to keep them safe.

The captain had made it to the top of the stairs and witnessed the explosion dissipate. Disgruntled and annoyed, he sighed, shaking his head.

“Fuck’s sake. I’m late, as always.” He murmured, throwing the rocket launcher he brought with him to the ground.