

The man coughed and sputtered as he hit the cold metal floor. He slowly pushed himself up, still coughing. He would have said that it was water stuck in his throat, but doubted it. Water didn't have a disinfectant aftertaste.

He looked around. Where in the hell was he?

His eyes slowly focused as he continued coughing. He was in a large room filled with shimmering tubes. That much was obvious. As his eyes sharpened, he saw the designs on the metal around him.

Forerunner. They were Forerunner designs.

What was he doing in a Forerunner structure? Where was 'here' anyway?

He noticed someone sitting in the corner. "Hey...!" He croaked.

They just sat there.

"Hey!" He said louder. Why wouldn't they get up? Were they dead?

He shakily stood up, steadying himself against a wall. Heavy drops of liquid rolled off his back and onto the floor. He staggered toward the armored figure. He touched their shoulder and they rocked back and forth. It wasn't a person – it was a doll. Who in the hell would leave this lying around? Was there a child here? There was a tag on it that read: 'Property of Marty.' Maybe this Marty was still around. Maybe they could tell him what had happened to him.

He looked behind him. There was some sort of force-field enclosure with a large broken cylinder inside. The enclosure's doors had slid open and, somehow, the cylinder had been broken. He wondered what had cracked it. He reached out a finger and touched the liquid dripping off a jagged piece. He rolled it between his fingers. It was the same kind of liquid that was coming off of him. And it looked like he was wearing some type of uniform, but it was too tattered to tell what kind.

He rubbed his head. He barely remembered falling out of the thing. Hitting the floor was something you tended not to forget. Everything before that however....

He truly didn't remember.

He didn't know who he was, his birthplace, name, and age – and how he had ended up encased in a test tube in a Forerunner structure was beyond him.

He headed out of the room and into a short hallway that led out to some larger lobby head. There was a glass window to his right. He weakly walked over to it, his legs refusing to fully cooperate.

Inside was another large circular room with more tubes in it like the

one he had come out of. Red lights and some sort of mist were coming from the ceiling.

His heart nearly stopped. It was a Forerunner containment and testing facility – for Flood. But the Forerunners were long gone.... So who was running the show now? He didn't see a monitor. And how did he know all of this if he couldn't even remember who he was? He noticed his reflection in the glass as he was about to turn away. Then, it wasn't a surprise that he had been locked up in a Flood research facility.

He was Flood.

He spent the next few minutes looking around the complex. He hadn't found anyone. Even after pounding the glass of locked off areas and screaming at the top of his lungs, no one had come. In fact, the place looked abandoned. A large section of the wall was falling in, snow had blown in after that, and everything was disjointed and in shambles. Bullets holes and burns had made a home on the walls, but had been largely iced over, almost erasing their existence. Most of the tubes were empty except for a few that contained remnants of Flood. He used the term 'remnants' loosely.

He hoped it wasn't any of his friends – if he had any.

He walked on, wondering how in the hell he was going to get out of here. There were no vehicles. From what he had seen outside the observation decks, he would clearly need a vehicle. There was nothing but vicious mountains below him, covered in a furious blizzard's snow and ice. The perfect place for a Flood research facility. Fantastic.

The bright star in the sky that was spewing gas and dust was just as worrisome as the blizzard. It looked like it would blow any minute. If it did, he would have something worse to worry about than freezing to death.

In his exploration, he had found some weapons on the upper levels, but ammo was scarce. They were all human weapons. It was one more scrap of evidence to file away for viable suspects. The Humans had probably meddled with the security systems and released the Flood. He noticed that the scenario did sound familiar. Maybe that's how he ended up in here. There could have been some sort of accident – one hell of an accident.

There were crates marked 'UNSC' all over the station. Whoever this 'UNSC' was, they'd left the place in an absolute mess, like a child's

room. Weapons and other objects were strewn all over the facility: on the ground, on walkways, and a random assortment of metal junk was piled in the ground floor corner. Most of it looked like crate parts and barricades. Nothing of value there. How in the hell was he making all these connections? He could have been part of this group in the past. That would explain all the things he knew. However, he couldn't find any evidence in these crates that he had been affiliated with them. He tried not to think about it as he gathered his weapons: a pistol, a shotgun, and a sniper rifle. He wanted to be prepared. After all this, he wanted the small comfort of safety.

He tried opening a few boxes that had been set aside in a corner. There wasn't anything inside except for garbage. He threw the lids in a fit of rage and frustration. Who used Forerunner crates to store garbage?

As he finished his tantrum, he noticed boot-prints in the snow covered floor. There were drag marks behind them like someone was dragging around the crates or their feet. Were they his prints? He compared them and sighed in relief. His boots were bigger than the ones in the snow.

He followed the trail, which ended suddenly and then picked up again a meter away. It looked like someone was milling about right in front of a snowbank that had frozen itself to the walkway. Why would someone stop here? He knelt down and dug into the snowbank. Maybe they dropped something?

He couldn't have been more wrong.

There was nothing but blood. It was so mangled with the ice; he couldn't tell whose blood it was. Human? Flood? Both?

Note to self – no more digging in snowbanks.

So why had the Flood escaped? Had they taken out the Humans? Why had they left him in his cell? More importantly, why wasn't he crazy like every other Flood in the universe? Had he been so damaged by the stasis that they had considered him useless? That seemed the most likely answer given the circumstances.

He had also found a blast door, highlighted in blue lights. He couldn't budge it, so he let it be. That's when he heard a buzzing to his right. He turned to see red lights on the opposite wall pulsing with energy.

"What the hell..."

What he could only describe as laser beams shot out of the lights, aiming right at him. He jumped backwards as the beam scorched the ground where he had just stood. He dodged again and his back hit a

hologram the wall. He thought it was ironic that the hologram looked like a Forerunner lightrifle – and, how at the same instant, a lightrifle suddenly materialized in his hands. He aimed at the lasers and fired. He fired until the lights were nothing more than smoking husks. This Flood containment was getting ridiculous.

I could use a drink after all this.

“Are you done trying to kill me!? What the hell do you want!?”

No one answered and his cries echoed back to him.

He backed up, shaking. He kept an eye on the walls. He staggered as his back hit the Monolith at the center of the room. It seemed to be at the heart of the facility and for some reason, he hadn't looked at it yet. He was hesitant as to whether he should poke around anymore. However, he needed some confirmation on his theory on what had happened and any evidence as to who he was. Was that worth being fried alive? It damn well better be.

The bottom of the Monolith had a stand for a specimen tank like all the others in the facility, but the tank was missing here. From what he had seen, it seemed to be the only one missing in the entire place. It must have held someone very important to be moved....

His tentacles twitched as he came closer to the stand. He could sense the pheromones... and the memories.

Bullets were flying everywhere. People screamed. Laser beams cut the air. There was a human in the corner, cowering, gun in hand.

Suddenly, he was gone – taken from above by a combat form on one of the walkways. Other Flood dragged their terrified victims into the shadows. The Proto-Gravemind howled out orders from its containment in the Monolith.

But the orders soon turned into howls of anger as the Humans carried its tube away. Flood turned and followed, ripping soldiers apart. One Human smashed a combat form backwards into an occupied specimen tube, cracking it. The surviving Humans wheeled out the Proto-Gravemind through the blast door. Its screams for help were drowned out by the blowing snow and wind.

Suddenly, there was an explosion. One of the combat forms had used a rocket launcher on the wall ahead of it, allowing the rest of them to escape. Their cries of anger followed them out of the facility. So that was who had left him here – the Proto-Gravemind. Well, he'd show that a-hole. If that attitude is what got him stuck here, maybe he should kick the habit. No, screw it. Their loss. The Proto-Gravemind was still in captivity it seemed, so despite the Flood escape, the

mission had failed. At least, they had cleaned up the bodies. Flood weren't big on starving to death, especially in this climate. Suddenly, an icicle fell next to him, almost skewering his foot. He was tired of all of this – the traps, the memory loss, the cold, and the shitty supplies. It gave him one more reason to leave this damned place; everything was trying to kill him. He gave up exploring the station for anymore answers. He certainly wouldn't find what he was looking for here. He climbed through the large hole in the wall and was outside in a perpetual blizzard. It was bitterly cold and the wind hit him as he tried to climb down the structure. Snow and ice slapped him in the face as he made the lengthy climb. He looked back over his shoulder through squinted eyes to see more structures just like the one he was leaving. They were regularly spaced throughout the mountain range, rising up like rotating gray dancers. He decided not to even bother with the other facilities. They were all in the same state most likely. Thank God for his instincts. He didn't sense anyone alive on the other stations. No heartbeat, no breath, not even a telepathic whimper. He went back to climbing.

Any signs of life were long gone in the snow and ice as the man trudged on. No one was there to watch him struggle. No one saw him pass out in the snow – Except for one lone infection form on the mountain, far below the Forerunner stations.

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