

Recording J2, 10th of July, 2011

Garbage... One would expect that the stench here would be terrible, but this is not the case at all. At least as far as the whole location in general is concerned, since you can find here, for example, a certain swamp with chemical anomalies. These are particularly annoying.

The wind was blowing from the left, although I could hear that it encountered obstacles. I guessed that I was already at the south post. And the lack of human voices was evidence that it was deserted.

Strange, because there were often bandits here. Nasty as always, only to a lesser degree, so there were no major problems getting along with them. Sometimes a pack of cigarettes or a bottle of vodka was enough. Something like a wedding gate, only more dangerous.

I pondered the situation, but then, I heard footsteps. And they were ones that were similar to mine. I had a suspicion as to whom they might have belonged to, but my doubts were dispelled by a certain tune that the gentleman was whistling.

"Well, well, well... I didn't expect you here, brother", I said calmly, removing my hood and mask.

"Like you, I explore even the farthest corners of the Zone", the traveler replied in a more charismatic voice. "Greetings, Rostislav."

"Formally, once again... right? Sorry, but it's not a formal meeting, Semek."

"Indeed. However, I prefer to maintain a certain level of culture, Rostik. I'm not asking you to do the same."

"You want to ask me again to return to the pack?", I asked, crossing my arms on the chest.

"I would like to know at least if you have changed your mind about this", Semek said, putting his clawed hand on my shoulder.

"I didn't change my mind", I replied, putting his hand aside. "I am not doing this to you out of spite. You know that."

"Eh... I know... but is it worth being an omega?"

"If I wanted to throw in some clever text I would say something like "you have to go down to the lowest levels of society to understand your existence". I have my reasons for traveling alone."

"I know and understand", my brother said, patting me on the shoulder. "I don't approve, but I understand."

"I don't need your approval. I need answers."

"I hope you will find them. What have you gotten yourself into this time?"

"Are you going to follow me?", I asked, then laughed a bit.

"I am simply curious."

"A stalker has hired me to find his friend's killers. Forty thousands are at stake."

"A sizable sum, I admit. I assume you have a lead."

"There was a recording", I said, raising a finger in front of me. "I didn't watch it and you know why, but I heard a Caucasian accent. And what kind of people here have it?"

"Mercenaries. The closest are in Wild Territory, if you believe the rumors."

"That's actually true. I know the leader of mercenary group there. His name is Wolfhound."

"And will this Wolfhound be willing to help you?"

"There is a good chance of that. I can be persuasive."

"Something tells me that by "persuasive", you mean torture", Semek said in harsher tone.

"Not from the start, at least. I'm not a fan of unnecessary violence. Just like you."

"Right. So you're going?"

"Yes. Forty thousand awaits me. And if it satisfies you, I'll drop by to visit our house. Mother will probably be happy."

"Everyone will be happy, myself included."

"I know, Semek," I sighed. "But you know that I won't stay permanently?"

"Let's say it will be some sort of vacation. Such success should be celebrated decently."

"I agree. Still, it would be necessary to achieve this success first. Catch you later, brother."

"See you later, Rostik."

"Very funny..."

Semek started laughing and I moved away, disgusted. I put my mask and hood back on, then began to move away from my brother. I had my hand close to my gun in case of some unexpected attack.

I walked along the road. It was easy, as the cracked asphalt was still in place. Yes, I also pay attention to the surface I step on. It helps me orient myself along the terrain I know. I felt something strange and my tail started moving in my pants, but I continued.

However, I had to be careful, because if I walked this path for too long, I would find myself close to the hangar, which is the main base of bandits. Even having the blessing of one of the important people of this organization, one have to be very careful when entering their territory.

Not far from the hangar is a bus stop. There, some group of mutants usually sits and rests. I could tell by the smell that I was lucky. They were fleshes. Mutant pigs... at least that's what Semek told me. I barked at them a few times and that was enough for them to start running away in panic.

I went sideways, or more specifically, more to the east, because I could sense the area I was heading for. I can also sense radiation pockets and to my left was a big pile of - most likely - metal equipment.

A growl. From my right. More aggressive than the ones you can usually hear. And that meant it was a pseudodog. I hate those damn things... for several reasons. I may tell you in a moment about that.

I took the shotgun off my back. Using smell and hearing, I could sense how fast it was approaching, as well as where it was, more or less. I didn't move from my spot. I took aim, pulled the trigger and the buckshot flew toward the mutant. It let out a lower-pitched growl, which was quickly silenced and that meant the animal had dropped dead.

I continued circling the irradiated hill. Pseudodogs... I've heard that they are mutated wolves, but I don't know how much truth there is in that. I know that they are more aggressive and annoying than blind dogs, which they treat with contempt.

But that doesn't stop them from forming and leading groups of blind dogs. And yes, they have their more human version. The relationship between us is the same as with animals. In theory, they are stronger than us. For example, they can see. Which, however, did not help them defeat me.

A sudden breeze from my left meant that the hill was over. If I had turned that way now and walked straight, I would have ended up at the flea market. I preferred to avoid that place, but I could use the help of the residents there.

Fort-500 went on my back and the pistol was in my hand. It's harder to hit with one bullet than with eight, but ammunition for this kind of gun is easier to find. I thought I could ask the people there for some goods.

I walked straight ahead. I wanted to get to flea market. Still, one had to be wary of the fact that the people there aren't always friendly. However, if they are bandits, I knew that I could manage, since they aren't that intelligent usually.

"Stalker!", a voice spoke from higher position.

"Hey, brother", I replied, casually waving my hand.

"Why are you here?"

"I was heading to this place, because I heard that you can make some nice trades here."

"You've come to the wrong place in that case. We are Diggers."

"That's bad...", I replied in a sadder tone.

"And where are you going, if you don't mind me asking?", stalker asked.

"Wild Territory. I have to talk to a certain someone."

"Happy hunting, stalker."

I waved goodbye and started walking in a new direction. Good that they didn't ask question about my mask. It's not easy to hide a snout. This time, to the west. I know that there is an outpost nearby, whose owners change so often that it is sometimes impossible to sort the situation out.

Sure enough, I stepped over the main road and continued in the direction I had chosen. Another pocket of radiation was near me. Most likely another mountain of debris that was used to clear the area of radioactive objects.

I had heard that there was an anomalous field on this peak. However, I never went up there, as only a fool would go to such an unfriendly place. And I am not immune to radiation... At least not completely.

Moving on, I felt something unusual. A field of psionic anomalies. Or rather, it was just a zone with this energy, because there were Electro anomalies there too. I knew I couldn't stay there too long, because hallucinations could lead to my death.

I pulled out my detector. It's not the best, but not the worst either. An important feature of it is the sound signal, which increases in frequency the closer I get to the artifact. Apparently it still shows the direction to it, but for me, it is useless.

I knew I could get false information from my surroundings after a while, but I can do something that helps me navigate through anomalous fields. I can sense them, which makes me know where not to stand.

The sound was heard more and more often. I didn't feel the level of psionic energy I expected. The reason may have been that I was not in the center of this field, but on its periphery. The artifact instead appeared right next to my foot, since I stepped on it.

I picked up the object and examined it in my hands. Two small disks that are connected by four bent legs. These legs were connected to each other by ribbing. It was quite light - I could easily hold it in one hand.

I hid the item and wanted to get on with my journey. To my misfortune, a fight ensued not far from my position. I was only able to hide near a small mound. It didn't help me, because later I had to leave the place anyway.

"We know you're there", someone spoke up with a snarling voice.

"Eh...", I sighed deeply.

I came out of my not-so-good shelter with my hands in plain sight. I smelled their scents. I smelled the typical odors of bandits, but in addition to them there were even nastier odors that I didn't recognize.

"I thought you were with the ones here", the man said.

"I'm not", I replied calmly. "I'm a loner."

"I see. Why are you here?"

"I was travelling to Wild Territory. I just wanted to cross through the road without trouble, but the fight started."

"We had some things to finish", dude waved his arm so hard that I felt small gust of wind.

"But who are you?"

"What the fuck do you care?"

"I have not met anyone like you."

"Renegades", the guy hissed. "Okay, fuck off. I'm in a good mood and we just wanted to get those bastards here."

"Fine, I'm going."

I immediately started running towards the passage I was heading for. It was a good thing that from here, I could go straight to Wild Territory. Unfortunately, I also knew what awaited me there. On the other hand... sum of forty thousands is something you don't see often. You get what I mean.