

Recording J3, 11th of July, 2011

Of course, this was not my first walk into Wild Territory. Though I wish it was the last. This trip reminded me why I hate this place so much. Before I'll get to that, however, I prefer to continue the story from the point where it stopped.

I went outside the gate that sealed off the passage to Wild Territory. I could have walked toward Yantar. However, I had no reason to go to the dried-up lake for the moment. I walked in the opposite direction, which was not at all inviting. My tail reminded me of that.

I went to the right. The level of perceptible temperature was increasing. The road in front of me was strewn with fire anomalies. Specifically, there were a lot of Burners plus a Comet was circling around the entire field.

My destination was behind this "sauna," so I had to go through these anomalies. I literally put my hand out in front of me and moved forward. I didn't even want to look for artifacts there - I was focused on getting to Wolfhound.

I had to be really careful, so I focused mainly on the anomalies. It was fine at first, until a Comet almost turned me to ash. These moving anomalies are always the biggest problems.

The ground didn't help either. I felt there was a lot of dirt and debris. It was obviously slightly heated, so I had to take my steps quite quickly. And I know from experience that rushing in the Zone is one of the worst things to do here.

With minor issues, I managed to reach the other side. If I'd believe in gods, I would have turned to them and thanked them for good fortune. However, it seems that the Zone has given me some more time in this world by not burning my snout to a crisp.

From the descent, I was climbing uphill. The anomalies on the road should not be present. However, it is still worth being vigilant. Even if there was no Springboard underfoot, there could always be some dangerous mutant.

When the ground was even, I immediately went to the right side. There was a rather large building that had walls with a rough surface. On top of that, I moved slower than usual. I knew that the mercenaries had their post nearby.

I could sense the mercenaries nearby. It's easy to recognize them because they have one of the most sterile smells of all the factions. Ecologists are certainly more sterile than them. On the other hand, you can also smell cigarettes or cologne from them, so they have some similarities to bandits.

Walking at such pace, I wondered how to approach them. If I just came to their post, they would most likely execute me. Even though I had been there several times before. So I had to improvise.

I sensed one mercenary who was slightly distant from the rest of the bunch. Most likely, it was a guard. I picked up a stone and threw it in his direction. I wanted to throw next to him. But judging by the metallic sound, I hit his head.

"The fuck?!", said angry merc.

The man began to approach the place where I was at the time. I knew I had to act quickly. A lot of people in the Zone shoot first and ask questions later. When the sound of the footsteps was loud enough, I tried to catch the guy.

"What the...?", confused guard began.

"Quiet", I said in a commanding voice. "I don't want to kill you."

"Wait a minute... Balis?"

"I recognize you...", I replied, letting go of his hand. "Sorry, Vanya. I thought you would have a new guard."

"He died yesterday. Poltergeist."

"These are the ones I especially hate", I growled.

"Calm down...", Vanya patted me on the shoulder from the side. "This one is also dead. The bastard made it difficult for us to function."

"I figured. Listen, I need to talk to Wolfhound. Does he sit and do nothing, like usual?"

"Sure. Just be careful when talking to him. There are some new recruits and they don't know about your... you know..."

"I can handle it. As always. Just take me to him."

"Give me a paw."

I stuck out my hand and Vanya grabbed it. Then, he started dragging me to their post. I realized the ironic situation. A blind dog is being dragged by a man, where it is the blind man who should be led by the dog. However, that's what my brother would be more suited for.

Judging by the fact that we stopped, I guessed that we had reached the post. I smelled more odors. There were several mercenaries here. However, I also sensed the smell of whiskey and knew whose smell it was.

"You seriously are still drinking this shit, Wolfhound?", I asked sarcastically.

"Better than vodka", the leader of the group replied with confidence. "What do you want, mongrel?"

"You haven't changed, have you?", I muttered, at the same time approaching him. "Do you think you're in charge here? I can go and talk to..."

"He won't do shit to me. You better talk what you want or I'll end you."

"You won't have a chance."

I felt a slight gust of wind and guessed that he reached into his holster to grab his gun. I felt him draw his pistol, but I quickly caught his hand and turned behind him, aiming his gun at his head. I heard the others unlock their guns.

"I'm tempted to kill you, you know?", I said directly into his ear. "But it won't change anything. You will die and some other prick will come in your place. However, I know that we can get along without issues."

"Fucking idiots!", Wolfman shouted. "Are you guys batshit insane or what? Don't aim at him, because you'll hit me. Hide the trunks! This dog won't do anything to me."

The other mercenaries began to holster their weapons, when they heard their boss' command. I supposed they were confused by the whole situation, but I wouldn't say I really cared.

"Who is it anyway?", male voice I didn't know asked.

"Will you show them your muzzle?", Wolfhound turned to me.

"Only if they won't shoot me", I replied calmly.

"You heard him... Do not raise your weapons."

I sighed. Then I took off my hood and then my mask. I couldn't see people's faces at that moment, but some of them were certainly heavily surprised.

"Oh fuck...", said one of the mercenaries loudly. "It's a fucking mutant."

"Yes, yes...", I sighed. "I am a mutant. Have you guys looked enough at me? Because I have a matter with your leader."

"Maybe I'll finally find out what the fuck is going on here...", Wolfhound said with sarcasm.

"I need information about the mercenaries who were recently in Cordon."

"In Cordon? Now you've got me intrigued. Do you have evidence?"

"Here is my PDA. Play the latest recording."

I gave the device to Wolfhound. He easily found the video and launched it. Out of curiosity, other mercenaries came over and watched the video too. Some added their comments, but their boss told them to shut up. The video ended and the mercenary handed over my PDA.

"Indeed, it looks like a place in Cordon", Wolfhound commented. "I would say that these could have been some stalkers who captured our equipment, but..."

"They have Caucasian accent", I finished his sentence.

"Yup. And I don't believe in coincidences. Where did you even get this?"

"A stalker gave it to me. His name is Zhora Grim."

"I heard this name somewhere..."

"When you talked with Ara, I think he mentioned this name", Vanya added.

"See, Vanya? You have something between those ears. Ara is sitting in Army Warehouses. The fucker is doing quite well under the noses of soldiers."

"Where exactly?", I asked, slightly impatient.

"There is a farmstead near our post there..."

"I know where it is.

"Wait a minute! Do you think I'll let you go alone?"

"Do you care about me that much?", I laughed briefly.

"I care more about this whole situation. If it comes out that we go where we shouldn't and do what we like instead of working, then every mercenary will get his ass kicked. No one will want to hire us."

"Then I'll go to Ara and find out what's going on."

"I'm not going to say that I don't fucking believe you. However, I'd rather have one of my trusted people that would give me the information."

"So will you give me support?", I asked, folding my arms over my chest.

"I'll give you one man", Wolfhound said coldly. "It is necessary to have people for defense, if the need arises. Vanya, will you go with him?"

"My foot has not yet completely healed after you stepped on it while drunk", said the mercenary, slightly upset.

"I said sorry, damn it... Eh... Who else will go?"

"I can go", said a voice I did not know.

"Very well, Tolia. Keep an eye on him. Maybe he'll remind himself of something else on the way."

"No problem, boss."

"Okay, get out of my sight and don't come back without information from Ara."

I nodded and started to gather my stuff. I put on my mask and put the hood over my head. I started to leave the mercenary post, but I could hear footsteps behind me that belonged to my companion back then.

"Anatoly, right?", I asked, so we were not walking in silence.

"Yes", replied the mercenary indifferently. "But you can call me Tolia. Tolia Juggler."

"Okay."

"And who are you?"

"Call me Balis. I'm a loner."

"A lone wolf... Or a dog. Are you really blind?"

"Yes. I operate mainly on smell and hearing. So I'll stick with you without much trouble."

"Sounds like you're an interesting individual."

"Perhaps... We can talk later about it."

"Great", Tolia said with warmer voice. "I know the shortcut to Army Warehouses. We'll get to Ara in no time."

"Lead the way, then."

The mercenary led me to a nearby fence. It was mostly made of ready-made boards. Suddenly, I heard one of them being pushed back. Tolia explained that one was fake, as it was much lighter than the others.

He ordered me to go through the opening in the fence, and I - with his slight help - went to the other side. He then did the same and fenced off the hole. He began to lead the way and I kept pace with him. We were on our way to Army Warehouses to solve this whole problem.