

Recording J5, 12th of July, 2011

We woke up the next day. After a big breakfast, gathering our belongings and saying goodbye to the other mercenaries, Tolia and I left the camp and had plans to meet up with Wolfhound's group again.

Not far from the farm where we rested was a road leading to an abandoned outpost. I knew where the path continued to lead and even suggested walking along it, but my companion refused.

Tolia asked me if I could be more alert, because he wanted to do a certain thing and I agreed. By electronic sounds, I guessed that he had pulled out a PDA. My guess was that he was writing with his boss.

"I chatted with Wolfhound", Tolia confirmed my guess.

"And what did he answer?", I asked, slightly curious.

"He will be waiting with the team in the eastern part of Rostok."

"So we have to return to the path from yesterday."

"Yes."

"I would be careful, if we were to go there". I replied, drawing my pistol. "There can be some soldiers there."

"You're probably right", he replied, then sighed. "How is your arm?"

"Quite well. The wounds are healing, as one can hear in one saying."

"That they heal like on a dog? Heh..."

We returned along the same path we had taken north. This time we walked south, still going around bloodsucker village. After my previous experiences, I am prejudiced against this horrible place.

The uneven terrain was as unpleasant to walk on as last time. Maybe boots made my paws uncomfortable, I don't know... At the moment, I imagined an anomaly where the blades of grass were really blades and after walking in such a place, all that would be left of a stalker would be tushonka.

However, leaving aside the strange and not very optimistic ideas, it was calm at that moment. A calm that did not reign for long. It was possible to try to sneak to our destination, but there was no guarantee that this would be successful.

We got to the hill behind the bloodsucker village. Tolia said that someone had a camp there. He mentioned a wooden canopy, a worn-out military tent, a sizable supply of wood, a campfire and an empty metal box.

Sometimes you can find something that belonged to the military in different parts of the Zone. This doesn't mean that a good portion of stalkers were soldiers. Sometimes those in camouflage exchange military equipment for various artifacts.

As for the soldiers, Tolia noticed a few on the road below. To him, it looked like they were on patrol. I, however, had a guess that it most likely could have been a retaliation expedition. Soldiers are people too, but most of them aren't saints.

"Little chance that we will pass unnoticed", merc commented.

"I can't help from here", I replied in a cold tone.

"Don't you have more grenades?"

"I have the last one."

"Then throw it... sixty meters to the northeast."

I holstered my pistol, then took my last grenade. At that time, I hoped that no large mutant would cut our way. Unfortunately, I had another problem at the time and after the last skirmish, I don't want to muck around in this cesspool again, just to finish it before it even starts.

So I took a deep breath in and an equally big exhale, then pulled the pin. I concentrated for a moment and threw it in the direction indicated by a mercenary. The blast was quite powerful, judging by the sound of the explosion.

"We have to kill the rest", I stated.

"Why?", Tolia was surprised. "After all, you killed everyone."

"Really?"

"It was a really good throw. We can go and continue our journey."

I nodded, after which my merc companion and I descended the hill and moved toward the road. The path certainly must have looked more interesting than before, but for obvious reasons, I can't describe it.

Tolia asked to stop. I guessed that he wanted to check the shrapnel-covered corpses. He even commented on how I was just lucky not to see the corpses. And it was, after all, an ordinary grenade. Unless, of course, whoever made it did some miscalculations.

After collecting things from the camouflage-clad stiff, the two of us were able to continue our journey toward Rostok factory. The road was cracked, but certainly more pleasant to traverse than the uneven wilderness.

The journey from Army Warehouses to the abandoned factory is a bit like roulette. Sometimes there are no problems traversing this path, but large groups of blind dogs and pseudodogs can often be encountered. Fortunately for us, we didn't encounter them.

According to Tolia, as the factory was already visible on the horizon, my merc companion could see a stealthy group of people with good weapons. It was not difficult to guess who these men were, so we quickly approached them.

"You could have arrived faster", Wolfhound chuckled.

"It's called "Army Warehouses" for a reason", I replied.

"Okay, okay... I'm waiting for confirmation of Ara's words."

"You don't believe him?"

"Sometimes he likes to change up the facts. So...?"

"He said that this Zhora and his colleague wanted to become mercenaries", Tolia began. "Ara's men were supposed to check them out."

"So that's correct...", Wolfhound began to wonder, judging by the tone of his voice. "Anything else?"

"Nothing more."

"Damn... So we have nothing..."

"Not quite...", I interjected.

"Then fucking talk, so we won't be standing here like whores under a lamp post", the leader of the mercenary group yelled.

"As I was to find out something about the killers of his colleague, we were to meet in this part of Rostok. You probably guessed where specifically."

"Yeah... Those assassins - as he put it - are dead."

"Wait...", I was a bit surprised. "What?"

"They're dead. Ara blasted them for insubordination."

"Interesting operational methods right here...", I said in a sarcastic tone.

"I told you... If it came out that we are not so professional at all, then all the mercenaries would be fucked."

"Yes, I remember... So we gather for the meeting?"

"Gentlemen, let's go!"

Wolfhound ordered to go to the "square", as some stalkers call it. Tolia stayed with me. However, Vanya still joined in. He helped me navigate through the location. Quite a lot of different turns there, too.

Just in case, I took out my shotgun. It is known that there can be some mutants there and for them, the shotgun works perfectly. Of course, you have to hit the enemies with it first, not your comrades.

We walked slowly and quietly. If we frightened the resting mutants, then there could be problems with blasting them later. Fleshes are capable of moving surprisingly fast, not to mention various dogs.

The turns I mentioned earlier were yet to begin. For that moment, the road was quite straight. I heard some people unlock their guns and started shooting. Not for long, because after a few seconds, the firing stopped.

"Good thing these are just mongrels...", Vanya growled. "It was worse with the poltergeist."

"Don't even fucking remind me...", Wolfhound became slightly upset. "The bastard almost strangled me with a bottle."

"It managed to kill the new guy, though."

"I didn't like him anyway... He was talking to himself. As if they had taken something precious from him."

I even wondered what the whole situation was about. It didn't last too long, though, because I had to be focused on survival. The threat of mutants is one thing, but the terrain is also dangerous for me.

So we walked on. With every step I took, I could feel the air flow getting smaller and smaller. This meant that there were more and more buildings in the area. That is, we were entering the actual factory area.

I could tell by touch that the walls were made of hollow blocks, wood and sheet metal. The sheet metal was most likely an addition added by the local residents. The factory had been closed years ago, so it was certain that it would begin to slowly fall apart.

I had some help, as we moved up the stairs. Interestingly, Wolfhound somehow didn't comment too much on this. He was probably laughing in his mind about the whole situation. I don't know what exactly was in his head. Probably my brother would know.

After crossing the path, which - at least for me - was quite a challenge, I felt that we were coming out into a larger space. I also heard the sounds of guns being unlocked. The shots didn't go off right away, so it wasn't mutants.

"What you want?", man with unpleasant voice asked.

"Not your fucking business", Wolfhound growled.

"Language..."

"Shut up, stalker!"

"Eh...", I sighed. "We are looking for one of yours."

"And what are you doing with them?", stalker asked in surprised tone.

"It happened that we have a common goal. We need to find the stalker we were supposed to meet here."

"What is his name?"

"Zhora Grim."

"You must be Balis, then. He mentioned that you can't be trusted."

"And what do you think?", I asked with calmness.

"I think he's lying, if I'm being honest", loner replied. "When we asked why we should not trust you, he used some strange arguments."

"Bastard...", I had to muffle my more bestial growl.

"Such people like him are the worst. It's good that he went away."

"And did he say where he was going?"

"Dark Valley. The gas station."

"You heard it, gentlemen", Wolfhound said loudly. "We are gathering for Dark Valley. Let's get moving!"

We started marching toward the location with the ominous name. At least we now had a clear goal. To find Zhora at the gas station, get information out of him... And most likely the mercenaries would shoot him down. And maybe I'll finally see the promised money.