

Dust Runner: Tempest in the Valley 2

The Queen's heavy door opens and John walks out.

Mil

John Savage, you are still alive.

John

As are you!

A tone chimes dully.

Guard 2

The Queen says you are to be taken to quarters in the high palace. We will tend to your cruiser and supplies.

John

Ah! I imagine such courtesy will not be extended to my ambassador.

Guard 2

We extend to him the courtesy of not being knifed through the throat.

John

Do you have a home here, Mil, with room for me?

Mil

And not much else. There will be no room for the dead beast we loaded in your cruiser-bed.

John

Then we best sell it off! Come.

Guard 2

Queen Judge Krastick gave me clear orders to escort you to a private room here!

John

Then I hope she is leinent in the face of dissapointment!

They walk off. The outer heavy door opens and closes harshly. Transition. John and Mil walk the city. It's a noisy bazaar but also sounds like Blade Runner.

John

We need to sell this beast off quickly. Do you know any trustworthy merchants?

Mil

In Palms Iron there are not even trust worthy priests. But I know which merchants will surrender the best prices.

John

Our first stop then.

Mil

John, if we sell the entire beast in one place we will not get even half of what it's worth. The value of the meat is selling it pound by pound, fresh meat will fetch a higher price. Then the bones can sold as a lot to the banks.

John

We don't have the time, much has happened. First take me to the butcher merchant you trust the most, or the one nearest to a pub. We have much to discuss. You have a heavy decision to make tonight.

Mil

As you say.

Transition noises. The bazar gets louder until CHOP! a butcher blade through a slab of meat.

Band

Laerch! LAERCH! Get this flesh strung up outside and sell it today! It's rotten, we can't sell it tomorrow when the maggots start hatching!

Mil

Band the Butcher, not satisfied until he kills someone with his trash.

Band

MIL! I wrote you off as a bleached corpse with a boar hole razored into your guts. You gave up after only four days! I thought you were supposed to return with 2 pigs and a litter! HAW HAW HAW HAW HAW!

Mil

For three days I tracked a so-zarr boar across the sea. I don't know how close he was to returning to his den before this man cut it's neck faster than you can belch.

Band

HO THERE! Is that a middle-man, standing tall as anything in my butcheria??

John

Indeed. John Savage.

Band

Band! Say, my father used to tell us he had seen a middle-man once in his youth,. I never believed him. Guess now my kids will have something to call me a liar for!

Mil

Your rotted gonads won't give you any children, but Laerch will be glad of a new reason to doubt your words.

Band

HAW HAW HAW! Ah, true as ever Mil. \*belch\* How many pounds of pig flesh can I cheat you out of? I'll even give you a decent price this time, to impress your middle-man friend.

John

How much would you give us for, 5 pounds of killed yesterday meat?

Band

FIVE pounds? I suppose i could go as high as...7.

John

7?? And this is the price that's meant to impress me? 7 for five pounds?? Mil told me you were the finest, near most wealthy butcher on the east side of the city! And you offer me 7 LURA.

Band

I can do 8 LURA, if the meat's as fresh as you say. ONE time only price, Mil. For your attractive friend.

Mil

As though you had not ever traded 8 LURA to me for meat! And I've never brought in fresh boar meat! You've done better prices on the skin-black rabbits that i bring in for hot

stews.

Band

Alright! Alright, rob me blind, you may as well then. 9. 9 LURA and do NOT ask me for 10!

John

If I tell you this meat still has the bone in it, then could I persuade you to give us 10 LURA for 5 pounds?

Band

the bone? You would part with the bone AND the meat?

Mil

My friend is in a hurry, and I suspect, not very bright. Lucky day for you, Band.

Band

mmm...hmmm...fresh killed yesterday, WITH the bone...yes I think I can do 10 LURA for 5 pounds.

John

Ah, well done! Mil was right about you, you're reputation reflects very well on you!

Band

In this city, reputation is all we have. You might not know much about that Middle-Man.

John

Perhaps not. It's a deal then!

Band

A deal!

Mil

If you could call Laerch, we may need help bringing the meat in.

Band

THREE men to carry 5 pounds, how weak have you become Mil?

John

You misunderstand, we have brought the entire so-zarr boar.

Band  
w-wHAT? SAY AGAIN?

John  
A full buck. 700 pounds at least, tusk to tail.

Band  
HOLD ON! THE DEAL WAS FOR 5 POUNDS.

Mil  
PER five pounds. If you want to back out of the deal though, we can take our pig to another butcher. quote him your price and let him know you won't keep your deals.  
Hopefully word of that doesn't get around the city.

John  
Bad for business.

Band  
(growling) rrrrggrrr...you tricked me Mil! I never want to see your half rotted old face in here again! LAERCH! OPEN THE SAFE! THEN GET OUT HERE AND HELP THESE  
RATS UNLOAD THEIR MEAT!

Transaction transition noises. City noises. Then BOOM we're in a pub. It sounds less like a bazaar and more like an arcade. Not Mos Eisley, more like Tron.

John  
Perhaps I'm not as dumb you think I am, Mil.

Mil  
If you think tricking Band the Butcher makes you clever, then maybe you're more dim than even I think you are.

John  
Come now! Together we nearly emptied his safe! Easily we took half his chits! I barely have enough pockets to hold it all! BAR MAN! Bring me a bucket of your harshest draught, and two deep cups for me and my friend! We are in a spending mood!

Mil  
Keep your voice down, if you want to keep your LURA's. So we lightened his pocket a fair bit. That carcass you gave him will make him rich enough to buy 5 more butcheria's.  
You could have gotten much more with a little patience.

John

Taking the most doesn't make one clever, but always having a little more than one needs...

Mil

There may be something to that.

BARMAN

Your drinks, sirs. If you need anything else...just shout.

Barman sets down the stuff. He talks all sly and cryptic. like he plans on robbing John as soon as he can.

John

Thank you, we will. Band the butcher, he's the type to always take as much as he can. And what's he got to show for it? A butcher shop full of rotten meat? He may soon have 6 butcher shops full of meat, but what is that? a hole in the wall where the boys can see it all? It's nothing.

Mil

But a man like you, a man with just enough and then some?

John

A man like me is sitting on a small fortune as the guest of honor of the King of the Castle.

Mil

Krastick has no honor. You are not her guest, you are caught in her trap.

John

She's a woman who wants all she can get. So she has a lot to lose.

Mil

And you plan on taking it from her?

John

Then I would have a lot to lose! No, I only want what I've always wanted.

Mil

You don't want to kill the Mutant Queen of Palms Iron?

John

Even if I wanted to, I never could. I'm certain that as long as i'm in her city walls, she's reading my every thought. Probably listening to this conversation.

Mil

S-surely not!

John

Trust me, no man or woman living, middle or sick, could kill her. Not that the idea appeals to me much. I have no interest in ruling over a city of the sick. My search is out there.

Mil

Perhaps. It wouldn't take a mind reader to see into the hearts of the Sick. She would know we all want her dead just from one look in our eyes. Those of us who still have eyes.

John

Maybe that's why she is so liberal with her killing. Maybe she knows your hatred and wants to keep your anger in check.

Mil

You could not understand, Middle-Man. She awards the strongest of us to be her city guard. They get medicine and food and dry homes. They step on the rest of us for their meager lifestyles.

John

If the city guard joined forces with the rest of you, couldn't you over throw the rule? Couldn't you, an entire city of the sick, kill a handful of mutants?

Mil

You have never lived under the foot of someone who would snatch your life away without a thought.

John

I have not. I refuse to.

Mil

What a privilege choice must be.

John

Hm, I cannot free your city from the mutants' rule. But I think I can help at least you,

friend Mil.

Mil  
Finally he comes to it.

John  
Queen Judge has it in her mind that I will kill Anuk the Tenth for her.

Mil  
Ha! You sound as though you've been chewing too much Pak Root. Spearing a boar is not like felling a monster.

John  
I've killed plenty of monsters in my years! I've downed Harris Cats-

Mil (mocking)  
oh!

John  
I slew a wing-a-derm while traveling with the Drunge Caravan!

Mil (still mocking)  
well then!

John (lowering his voice)  
I took a tere-heart from a slore-sloth.

Mil (no longer mocking)  
You didn't!

John  
Aye. I was a younger man then, but I lived for a good number of years off that sloth's heart. How do you think I managed to keep a wife and son? Well, for as long as I kept them at least.

Mil  
Heaven's gate...you truly did these things?

John  
I have. So, tell me about this Anuk, what are we up against?

Interrupting loudly, quieting much of the bar.

SHORSS

You're up against your own damn ass, and a pointed sword!

(beat)

John

Who's this now?

Mil

Shorss

SHORSS

SHORSS THE RIDER. SHORSS THE BRAWLER. SHORSS THE SLICER OF NECKS  
AND DUST RUNNER CHAMPION OF PALMS IRON.

John

So you say. You don't lack the heart for it, clearly. But how does slitting the throats of  
your fellow sick, or killing a few so-zarr boars make you champion here?

SHORSS

I kilt more than boar, boy. I used to hunt the slime snakes that would carry off babies in  
the crib. Cleaned the whole city out of that lot. I drove down a sand whale, YOU BEEN  
OUT HERE LONG ENOUGH TO HEAR ABOUT THE SAND WHALES?

Around this time, Shorss stands up and begins limping toward John. Shorss clearly has a  
heavy metal leg.

John

I've heard of them.

SHORSS

I bet you did, I DROVE ONE TILL IT BREACHED THE SAND. It died gasping on the  
rocks while I cut out its eyes.

Mil

I wonder how many other pubs in the city are filled with fat drunks who claim to have cut  
the hearts and heads from savage beasts under the sun?

SHORSS don't like that. Shorss knocks the drinks and bucket off the table. quick scuffle

as John is on his feet.

John

Steady on! You've clearly had too much drink, Shorss, or not enough. Let me buy you a cup of something strong enough to put you to sleep and away from us.

Shorss

You fool. Did she promise you a governor's home if you killed him? Did she promise you clean meat and riches until you're too old to stand? What life did she swear would be yours if you could kill the lizard king of the north?

John

Whatever dealings I have with the people of this city are no concern to you. Take your drink or take your leave.

Shorss

SHE PROMISED ME A CITY BLOCK. I was going to have everything. ANYTHING. I rode out with a clan of 7 strong. ANUK THE TENTH killed half of us before he blinked! The lizard is big enough to scare off the sand whales, and loud enough to silence the dry lightning! 7 strong went to her castle in the caves! only I came back, and with one less leg to worry about.

She clangs her leg. Or his leg. Whatever. She's clearly crazy. Like Saw Gerrara crazy.

John

Big huh? And loud? I've killed big and loud before.

Shorss

NOT LIKE THIS! When he passes overhead, it's like a cloud hiding the sun. But the only rain that falls is the slick slime from her salivating jaws. He took my leg and left me alive only to warn the city she was coming! AND WHEN HE COMES HE SHAKES THE WALLS OF THE CITY! HE TAKES US BY THE SCORE! HE WILL KILL US ALL!

Barman

Calm down, Shorss, or I'm gonna have to cut you off.

Shorss

YOU LEAVE THE CITY GATES AND RIDE NORTH, STRANGER, HE'LL TAKE MORE THAN YOU LEGS!

Mil  
Step back!

John  
Mil!

Shorss  
NNYEAAAAAA!

FIGHT. Same deal as before, looped sfx, awkward fight noises. stock sound effects. finally Shorss is knocked down with a loud SMACK from John's fist.

John  
Tougher than he looks. But anyone who talks that much, isn't going to be much good in a fight! Anyone who helps carry this man outside gets a free drink courtesy of John Savage!

Faint cheers and scuffles as many people scurry to toss Shorss outside on the pavement. John sits down with Mil.

John  
And draught for us!

Mil  
You have a strange way of doing things, John.

John  
It's not so strange to punch a loudmouth in the face at a pub, is it?

Mil  
You agreed to defeat Anuk the Tenth, and you didn't even know who he is. What he is.

John  
I know now, thanks to the 'champion of Palms Iron'. Sounds tough. The flying one's are always tough. We'll have to get him in his home, the castle in the caves to the north. If he gets out we're done for.

Mil  
We?

John

You wanted a taste of choice, here it is. You help me defeat Anuk and Queen Judge will make you governor of a whole block. You'll be set for life. Big reward, but I'm sure someone as smart as you knows that means...

Mil

Big risk. My very life. Losing my life though... is maybe not so big a risk. I don't have much. And the rewards for ridding the city of the lizard king are far too tempting to ignore. I must agree to helping you.

John

I thought you might. Still think I'm dumber than I look?

Mil

Crueler perhaps. This choice you offer isn't much of a choice at all. And if you are offering me my own block, whatever you're getting must be worth a city's fortune.

John (lowers voice)

It is. She's promised me one of sun diamonds that powers Palms Iron.

Mil (whispering)

No!

John

Yes! I'm going to use it to power a city for middle-men and women.

Mil

So much for the humble adventurer, taking only what he needs and then some.

John

HA! Fair! Very fair. And I take your point. I did know you had little choice but to help me. I was taking advantage. Will you accept my apologies?

Mil (after a pause)

Offer me all you have to spare instead. Fix your cruiser-truck, buy supplies to fight Anuk, and promise me the rest of your LURA. Offer it to me free of any obligation. Tell me it's mine, and we can part as friends. That is a choice. That is a freedom.

John (after another pause)

My trusted friend and ambassador. I am going to repair my cruiser, get supplies, water, food. After these expenses, I offer you the rest of the LURA Band gave us. To start a life here. Or leave, find another city less cruel. There ARE kinder mutants out there. Not

many, and not by much. But you'll have enough chits to do what you like.

Mil

You cannot offer this lightly.

John

I don't! I won't need it. If I kill Anuk, I'll have more than enough power to command a city. If I don't, I'll be dead. The money is yours, whatever you decide.

Mil

I could fill my purse with LURA right now and leave? You wouldn't stop me?

John

I would stop you only long enough for one more drink.

Mil

But still you ask for my help?

John

I don't know if I can do this alone. Hell, I don't know if we can do it together! But it seems to me we're at a crossroads. Here we have the chance to fulfill our life's dreams. We could have it all, and all we need to risk is everything.

Mil

Now that is a choice I am happy to make. Let's you and I kill a lizard king, or die in the desert, as eventually we all will!

John

[laughs like Charlton Heston]