

Dust Runner: Tempest in the Valley 1

Synth music. Dusty wind.

Narrator

In the year 3524 A.D., after multiple nuclear wars known as the Big Blowup, the planet is divided by heavy deserts where monsters reign. Cities are powered by valuable gem stones, and ruled by the master race of mutants who gained phsyic powers from the radiation. most of the rest of the human race is sick and dying. A select few are neither sick nor mutated. these middle-men travel from city to city, always on the run, always pursued; trying to find others like them, to mate with and repopulate the human race. The Dust Runner's are monster hunters. Crossing the deserts to kill the beasts that swim, fly, and crawl. John Savage is a Middle-Man. John Savage is a Dust Runner. John Savage is fearless.

Synth music continues, just a little too long. A whizzing space truck whines across the landscape. The onboard computer goes beep beep.

John Savage

What is it? A warning. I've got company. Just ahead, 7 kilometers. Finally, some action!

The truck whines off. Transition new scene. The car stops and John gets out and walks. Suddenly the low grumble of an animal! John stops.

John

There! A So-Zarr boar. A big one. Valuable, but very dangerous. I'll have to be careful bringing this beast down. but I can live on his meat for weeks, and his bones will fetch a handsome price at the next city I get too, whenever that will be.

The boar snorts and shuffles around. Wind blows. John walks a few more steps.

John

I'll have to spear it with my lazer spear. right behind the eyes. quick, or it'll charge and I'm done for.

Step...step...snort...snort....John activates his lazer spear and runs forward with an awkward yell! the boar makes cool boar noises. There's scuffling and snorting. Some of the sounds are looped. It goes on just a hair too long (trust me, this is serving an aesthetic) suddenly ZAP STAB! SQUEAL! the boar is done.

John
Almost got me.

Transition noises and the truck is whizing along the desert again. the computer beep beep beeps quickly.

John
oh no!

TWANG! ZIP! the truck crashes into the sand. The cockpick pops open and John stumbles out.

Mil (distant)
Ho there! stay where you lie! I have my sights trained on you and reason to use them!

John
If you want to take my sand cruiser you'll have to shoot me dead to get it.

Mil (distant)
Not your truck I'm after.

John
If you're going to kill me then get on with it. Otherwise come out and face me.

Mil (distant)
Toss your weapon away, Dust Runner, and I'll come out.

thud.

John
come out then.

Mil approaches.

Mil
I've been tracking that beast across the Lizard Dusts for 3 days. Followed him for 126 kilometers and you killed it and loaded it into your bed. We need to discuss claims.

John
If it takes you 3 days to kill what i killed in 10 seconds, i think the discussion is over.

Mil

I was tracking him. I wanted to know where he sleeps. Maybe he has a mate and litter.

John

That much meat and boar bone could make a very comfortable life for someone clever enough to find it.

Mil

that was my thinking.

John

I'll give you half the meat, if you can tell me where the nearest city is.

Mil

I want half the meat and half the bones.

John

No bones. you wrecked my cruiser and I need to repair it. The money is mine, you can take the meat. Or not, if you think you can last the desert for 3 more days without it.

Mil

I do know where the city is. no meat, and a third of the bones. I'll tell you where.

John

You're one of the Sick. I can see the boils you try to hide under your hooded face. We both know that pistol you're holding won't do much more than get a rock bullet stuck in my armor.

Mil

Not so dumb as you look.

John

Dumb enough to not know how to find this city you speak of. Take me to it, and I will share the meat with you, and one quarter of the bones. Not the tusks.

Mil

A deal more than fair, coming from a middle-man.

John

My name is John Savage.

Mil

I was called Mil by my mother before she died, no one else has ever had to call me anything since.

John

Mil, help me get the carcass back onto my sand cruiser. how far to this city?

Mil

4 days on foot. less in your cruiser truck.

Transition noises. Inside the car again.

Mil

you see those rocks there on the horizon? head for them.

John

The city is beyond the rocks?

Mil

I'll tell you where to go when we get to the rocks together.

John

you don't trust me do you?

Mil

I trust my heart and my hand. I trust no other man.

John

If I wanted to kil you I would have left you. I have enough boar meat and water to last for weeks. I can find this city on my own.

Mil

So you say, John Savage. I think your will and honor may be tested at the great city of Palms Iron.

John

What makes you think this city will shake me? You don't even know me.

Mil

I know you are hard enough to kill a So-Zarr boar in under a minute, but soft enough to take one with the sickness across the sand sea we call the Lizard Dust and share your

wealth with him. Palms Iron will take what you have, if it can.

John

I've been to hard cities before. Large ones even. Dusk Well, Cantanфина, even spent one week at the bottom of Rospers Gate, if you can believe it.

Mil

I have not heard of these places before. or any places. I know only Palms Iron and the sand sea.

John

Yes, your Lizard Dust. What makes Palms Iron so special that you would be frightened on my behalf?

Mil

The mutant's who run it are cruel and hard. Sharp teeth and cold wills.

John

I've never heard of a mutant who was otherwise. To rule a city, the mutants must be harsh. It's always been the way.

Mil

Maybe the cities are the same everywhere. But in Palms Iron, the mutants kill the sick ones if they cannot work. If they are too clever. If they are just in the way. death is no stranger to the children there.

John

It is that way in some places, Mil. But not most.

Mil

It is the Queen Judge, Krastick. She has ruled too long and is too vile. she will not welcome you. she hates the middle-men and women. She will take your meat, take your bones, and you will not leave the city alive.

John

I've left every city I've ever entered alive. I don't plan on stopping now.

The truck whines away. Transition noises, new scene. Night time, a fire crackles. Strange animal noises in the distance.

John

you cook So-Zarr boar meat much better than i do.

Mil
I imagine so.

John
I was always better at killing and traveling than I was at cooking. Or anything else really.

Mil
Why do the middle-men and middle women not live in the cities? Do you have a city of your own?

John
No. We travel searching for each other. We hope to one day have our own city. Like it was before the Great Blowup.

Mil
No mutants? No sick?

John
that's right.

Mil
have you found others like yourself?

John
I found 3. One was dead already. The other tried to kill me in an oasis that was already dying. The 3rd I took as a wife. She carried my child, then both of them fled one night. she never said why.

Mil
So the life of a middle man is just as sad as for the sick.

John
All lives are sad now.

Mil
We will reach the city wall tomorrow, before the sun sets.

John
Why do you return, if you hate it so?

Mil

Where else would I go? If I walk into the desert for a week I would die before I found another city. Or water. Or oasis.

John

There's something you're not telling me, friend Mil.

Mil

There are many things I don't tell you, friend John.

John

Tomorrow at the city, I think I'll find more questions than answers.

Spooky animal wails and moans in the distance.

Mil

Do you hear them?

John

What are they?

Mil

To us they are a warning. Do not leave the city at night. If you do, no one will expect your return. They in the dark will sing you to sleep. Then their songs turn to silence, the night whales come from under the ground to swallow you up, and even the desert forgets you were here.

John

You don't seem worried.

Mil

I learned long ago: sleep on the rocks, not under them, and the singing beasts cannot harm you.

John

I sleep in my cruiser. Keeps the sand fleas away.

Mil

My point, John Savage, is when you arrive in town tomorrow with your great boar and its bones, the Queen Judge may sing to you, and let you sleep in the shade. But if you are

not careful you will get swallowed whole by her city, and no one will remember your name.

The whales sing. The dust blows. We transition to a new scene. The crusier whines across the desert.

John

There's your Palms Iron. most cities are fortified with a fence or moat but...I've never seen a wall like that!

Mil

It's a troubled city, never safe.

John

This has to be the safest city I've ever seen that's not built inside a cavern! Your city safe inside it's iron jar. What could possibly stand against such a wall?

Mil

Anuk the Tenth.

John

Another mutant?

Mil

No.

John

More secrets, eh?

Mil

You see that silver patch? Where the sun reflects most brightly? that is the gate. There we will see if our boar is enough to get us inside.

The truck whines up and over to the gate. The cockpit hatch opens and John gets out.

John

HO THERE! I SEEK THE GUARD OF THE GATE IN THE WALL OF CITY OF PALMS IRON!

Guard (always distant)

HO THERE, STRANGER. I AM HERE. WHY DO YOU SEEK ME?

John

I WISH TO ENTER THE CITY. I NEED SUPPLIES.

GUARD

WE ARE WARY OF STRANGERS, EVEN THOSE THAT KNOW OUR NAME WHEN
WE DO NOT KNOW THEIRS.

John

I AM JOHN SAVAGE, AND I DO NOT COME EMPTY HANDED. I COME TO
BARTER WITH YOUR MERCHANTS, THEN BE ON MY WAY.

GUARD

WE HAVE NOT HEARD OF JOHN SAVAGE. HOW IS IT THAT YOU HAVE COME
TO KNOW US?

John

THE IMPRESSIVE CITY OF PALMS IRON, WITH IT'S WALLS AND GREAT DOME
AND LIZARD DUSTS FILLED WITH SINGING WHALES IS KNOW FARTHER
AWAY THAN IT SEEMS YOU'VE EVER TRAVELED.

GUARD

PERHAPS! WHAT HAVE YOU TO TRADE TO SUCH A GRAND AND IMPRESSIVE
CITY THEN?

JOHN

I SPEARED A SO-ZARR, 53 STONE AT LEAST. I HAVE MEAT AND BONE TO
TRADE FOR REPAIRS AND WATER. OPEN THE GATE, MAYBE EVEN YOU WILL
GET A TASTE OF FRESH BOAR.

(BEAT)

GUARD

YOU MAY ENTER HERE. YOU WILL BE ESCORTED TO HER QUEEN JUDGE'S
TOWER. SHE WILL DETERMINE IF YOU MAY TRADE HERE, OR IF YOU MUST
GO.

JOHN

HO!

He walks back to the truck, the gate opens, large and loud. He closes the hatch of the

cruiser again.

John

Tell me, friend Mil, does your mutant queen personally meet every traveler who knocks on her gated doors?

Mil

Never have i seen it.

John

Ha ha! Perhaps then she will give me the answers you won't. Or certain death!

Mil

All death is certain.

TRANSITION thru the gate. The truck whines. The synth music plays just a little too long again. A heavy door chains open.

Guard 2

HOLD THERE! State your buisness at the castle of Queen Judge!

Mil

This man has come from far away, hearing of our city's power, and wishes to trade for supplies. The city guard watch sent us here for her highness's approval before peddling the city streets.

Pilliam

Oh that's you, eh? No one mentioned he was a middle-man. Or that he had a sick slave.

John

My name is John Savage, this man is my guide and ambassador to your city and your people. We were told we had an audience here, if that's not the case then we'll be on our way.

Guard 2

HOLD THERE! You'll have your audience, but not your "guide".

John

Fine, I will abide by your rules. I expect to find my friend here when I return, or you will answer to me.

A tone pitches briefly and highly

Guard 2

She's ready for you. Don't keep her waiting. Go.

John walks across a very echoy room and goes through yet another heavy door. It closes behind him. He walks into the room.

John

I am John Savage, middle man, trader, traveler, and enemy only the beasts of the sand seas. Is the mutant ruler Queen Judge hiding in the shadows like a child at play? or have I been lured into a trap, and this room my mausoleum?

When queen judge 'speaks' different tones are played softly underneath.

Queen

Welcome, traveler. I am the mutant Queen Judge, Krastick. this city belongs to the council, the council belongs to me. If I wished you dead I would have left you outside our walls with Mil.

John

You know Mil?

Queen

You know Mil. And I know you and all you think and feel. Am I your first female Mutant?

John

If that. I can hear you speaking in my mind. Have you lost your power of speech, or merely common courtesy?

Queen

There is nothing common about me, middle-man.

John

Then show yourself and let me be my own judge.

soft footsteps as she appears.

Queen

I've been right here the whole time. I clouded your mind, hiding myself. I am not seen

until I wish to be seen.

John

I wonder what else in this seemingly empty room does not wish to be seen.

Queen

Welcome to my city, John Savage.

John

Your mouth doesn't move when you talk. You speak with your mind. I've heard a mutant use his mouth to speak before, his voice was weak from atrophy. You are a strange people.

Queen

We are many things.

John

Fine. I was told I needed your special permission to trade a few pounds of pig meat and sell some bones to the merchants on the street. I may not have the mind of a mutant, but I'm no fool.

Queen

You want to know why you are hear and why you are not dead?

John

I don't know what you've heard about the middle men and women of the far cities, but I have no wish to kill you, or exterminate the sick ones, like my new friend Mil. I just want to make my way through and find more like me.

Queen

I don't care about your small quest to ride yourself into dust out in the wastes. I have seen your mind. You are no simple pork trader. You kill the monsters that keep us in caves and behind walls.

John

When I have to.

Queen

And so you do. There is a creature who comes to us, on the nights when the moon is clear enough thru the hazy sky and dry lightning that it can see us.

John
Anuk the Tenth.

Queen

Yes. our walls have kept him out, but not completely. He tears open our city dome and scoops out our city guards like salted beef in a can. We repair the ceiling, but he always returns. I fear one day he may come for us all. You will slay him. Or you will die.

John

Ha ha ha! I may not be able to bluff a psychic, but you sure as hell can't bluff me. If you need me so bad to kill this Anuk then you're not going to just kill me if I don't.

Queen

We allow you to trade here, sell your bones, fix your lorry. For this you will kill the monster.

John

I can sell this boar at any city I stumble across. or keep my belly full for as long as I please. Tell me, what does this Anuk want with your city? There's plenty to eat out in the sand seas

Queen

The Great Blow up destroyed almost all that was before. It left little for us to use and live by. Except the Gems. The Gems power this city, and all cities. Only the mutants know how to harness the power. What a lizard like Anuk wants with them only he knows.

John

Ah, power crystals. Solar diamonds. I've heard of the Gems. I understand.

Queen

then you must do as I say.

John

I suppose I do! if I don't, it sounds like your precious city here is going to be torn apart by some slime eyed monster.

Queen

Yes!

John

Fine. Mil and I will sell our boar, fix our cruiser, and then we will slay this monster, as I

have slain so many before. But I will ask for payment that equals the task.

Queen

If you do this, you will live like no other citizen in the city. you will never know desire again.

John

You would pay that much?

Queen

To save this city, to protect my reign, I would give you an entire block to govern. Any man or woman you want will be yours. fresh water, meat that has no rot on it, anything your primitive mind could ever want.

John

Queeny, you have a deal.

Queen

Excellent! But I see in your mind you want more even than my generous offer.

John

If I stick my neck out for the whole of Palms Iron and kill this creature you fear so deeply, then I wont' do it for anything less than one of the very Gems that powers this city!

Queen

You ask much. Maybe too much.

John

It takes many Gems to power a city this size. You can afford to spare ONE to save the rest.

Queen

Outrageous.

John

If Anuk takes your city, and leaves the bodies of the citizenry rotting in the sun, I think you would trade much more than one Gem to get your kingdom back.

Queen

A very high price indeed. But perhaps a fair one.

John

And that govener block you promised me, that seat goes to Mil.

Queen

That sickly peasant?? A govener?? No! Never! He can not rule side by side with the council! He is one of the sick!

John

These are the terms, Krastick. If you want to save your city from a monster, you give me a Gem, and Mil a block. How much is your pride worth to you?

Queen

[growls angrily] I can see inside yout stubborn mind that you will accept no less. Very well. If you can kill Anuk your friend will be a govener, and you, John Savage, will have a Gem that can power a city!