



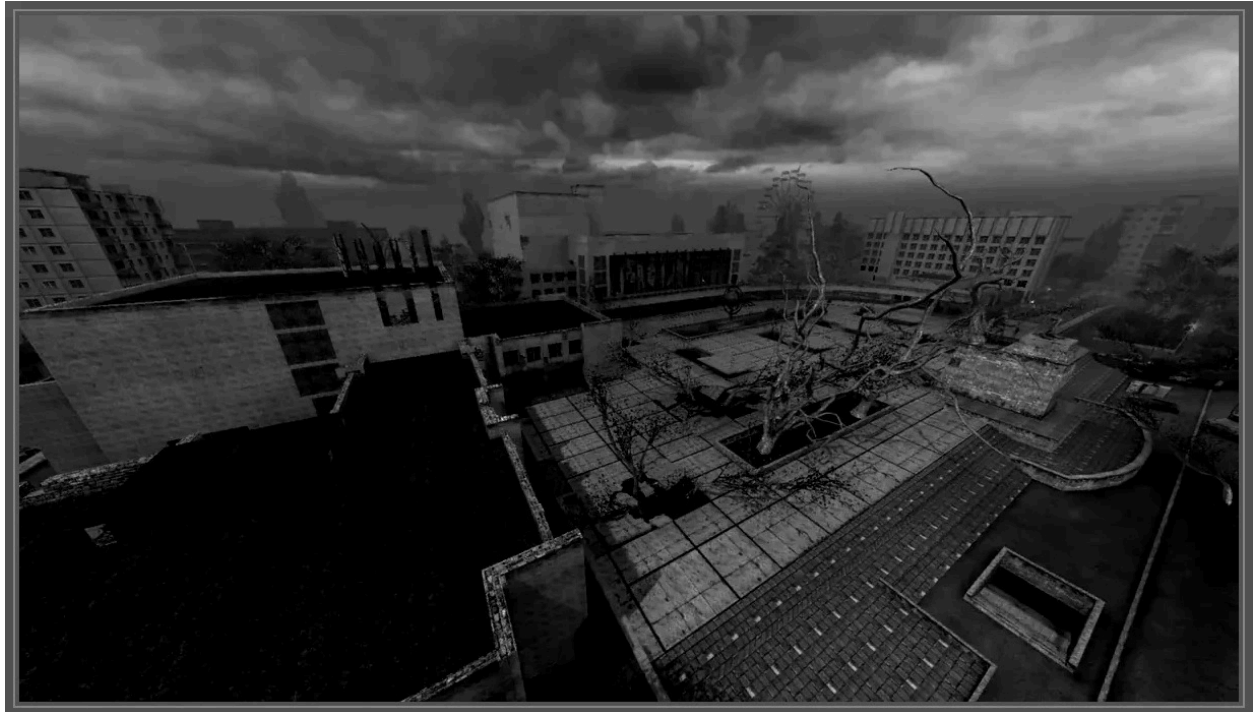
The Exclusion Zone, the area around the abandoned Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, was an extremely dangerous and unpredictable place, even for the bravest and most well-prepared individual. It had been walled off by the Ukrainian Military and it was extremely difficult to get into or get out of. However, there was still a way to enter the Zone... And it was by bribing the military forces, or sneaking inside through weak points. Those who ventured into the Zone, commonly known as stalkers, were usually seeking to find, retrieve, and sell artifacts, smuggle mutant parts and weapons, or simply explore the Zone in its entirety. Some were even looking to join the political factions, the most well-known of which were the Militaristic Duty, the Anarchistic Freedom, and the Fanatical Monolith.

One experienced Monolith stalker, named "Priam", struggles with flashes of his Mercenary past. It's hard for him to maintain his faith in the Monolith due to the destruction of the Common Consciousness. In addition to that, the Monolith itself had not responded to any of the stalker's prayers for a painfully long time after the sabotage of the Brain Scorchers. Causing members to be forever lost in their loyalty to the Monolith or to regain their initial identities. One day, during one of his prayers to a statue of the Monolith, he remembers something that forces him to leave, and to find out who he really was before...

This is basically fanfiction and just a short story written by Inkashes#6949. The GSC Game World team owns almost everything that is mentioned here. Any names, places, things mentioned are due to coincidence and/or are in the S.T.A.L.K.E.R. series.

Pripyat

"The Task"



In a weakly lit room of an old, high apartment block, a man knelt on both his knees, his arms spread out to the side as he spoke in an emotionless tone, in worship, constantly emphasizing certain words, "We thank you, oh *Monolith*... For keeping us faithful... In your will..." The room was lit by a small flickering fire that sprawled in a barrel filled with garbage with a rifle leaning against its side, placed right behind the totem, causing the shadows to cover everything in front of itself, including the man. The man was dressed in a SEVA hazmat Suit, with a gray, white, and black urban camouflage pattern. He also wore a bulky, dark olive green combat vest with three pouches for rifle magazines on the front of the right side, and two smaller pouches on the left, presumably for pistol magazines. An embedded hood over his head, and a visor that took a dome-like appearance with a white-painted spiral on the front. "May your *message*... Spread throughout this land and reach like-minded people... May your *message*... Boost our morale, so we may keep fighting... In your honor." As he moved his hands to his knees, he continued chanting and then suddenly started spinning his head in a slow circular motion while mumbling quietly. The fire crackled while an animal shriek sounded in the distance, though he wasn't disturbed... He just continued. It was just the outside ambiance that the Zone had.

A second person walked into the room, a man also dressed in the typical Monolith uniform. He was similar to the other man, but instead of having two left pouches for pistol magazines, he had a large singular pouch for miscellaneous items. He also wore a beige GP-5 gas mask with a moderately sized green filter attached to the front and a hood over it. The gas mask's left lens was shattered, leaving only three shards protruding from the frame, while a small green backpack was on his back, its straps tightened almost to a point where it could suffocate someone, visible by how it wrinkled his fatigues around his shoulders. A sling wrapped around his shoulder, and an AKS-74U which was dangling at his side. And, he wore military fatigues with the pattern, instead of the hazard suit. "... Brother *Priam*, you returned sooner... Then I thought you would." The worshiping man spoke loudly as if *Priam* was far away. Head, still spinning, he didn't even bother to look at him as he stood at the doorway, "I presume that you brought the medication..?" He then added. *Priam* would quickly grab onto the straps of his backpack, loosen them, and sling the backpack onto his arm, unzipping the wide compartment, causing half of it to swing downwards and spill the contents onto the floor next to his boot-clad feet. "I have. Here it is..." *Priam* spoke monotonically like the worshiping man did, with just a little bit more emotion. It wasn't so 'rough'. The contents that fell were two boxes. The first was a small, worn cardboard box with a torn label, and the other, a translucent plastic box full of small pill containers. The worshiping man suddenly stopped spinning his head and turned it to face the containers and the person who brought them. He immediately grabbed the container with the pills, then placed it in front of himself as he looked down at it. His back, still facing *Priam*. "...You have done well. As usual..." He flicked open the plastic container with both thumbs as *Priam* stood there momentarily before he zipped up his bag quickly, slung it onto his back, and tightened the straps again. The worshiping man would grab one of the pill containers and twist off the lid with his other hand before flicking it away from himself next to the Monolith structure, before tilting the pill container downwards and shaking two dark blue capsules into his other hand. With that hand, he fed the pills to himself, swallowing them down quickly, and letting out a few short, ragged coughs afterward. *Priam* gazed at the back of the man, uncomfortably watching as he coughed some more (also the fact that he somehow pushed his hand through his SEVA helmet's dome-like visor as if it was nonexistent), "Brother *Priam*. You have a new task," The man cleared his throat, pulled a PDA tablet out of his pant pocket, and started pressing the screen with his finger multiple times. "The... *Monolith* has reached out to me... You are to go back down... to the Red Forest... And join the reinforcements who are going... To defend the path to *Pripyat*." A 'bleep' sounded from *Priam*'s vest pouch as the man put away his tablet and he then started moving his head in a circular motion again. *Priam* stood there nodding, even though the man couldn't see him. "... Go on... Quickly." The worshiping man said and then fell into a deep silence. Since there was nothing else to do in the room, *Priam* quickly turned around and left, his gun kept in front of himself by the grip of his hand.

He walked past the other rooms of the floor and down the dirty and trashy steps of the staircase. A wet, droopy plastic bag there, a crumpled-up can of sparkling water down there... As he walked down, he noted the floor he was on by spotting a mural that read "Floor - 6". As he kept walking down he would pass a few other Monolith stalkers who stood in the hallways. Most of them just patrolled the area while wearing their Gas Masks and Respirators. He spotted another mural and this time it read "Floor - 2" with unreadable Cyrillic graffiti and a painted illustration of a Geiger counter next to it, now he knew that he was almost there. He then reached the ground floor of the apartment block, the sounds of praising the Monolith, gear being

moved around, and general camaraderie echoing throughout. Well. Whatever small amounts of camaraderie they had left. Priam now stood there next to the staircase, scanning the surrounding area. A group of Monolith stalkers all huddled up around a fire, praying and praising the Monolith in their fanatical ways. Two other stalkers walked, donning exoskeletons and Russian PKM machine guns. Each step they took, shook the floor. The joints of the exoskeleton frames making a whirring noise with each movement. Priam quietly exhaled, making his way to the bullet-ridden exit, which was a doorframe where two doors once stood. He walked underneath it and took in the outdoor environment, noticing the dark green foliage that overtook and hung from multiple rectangular Soviet-era apartment blocks. All connected like a web of vines, and a few old cars littered the decaying streets, nature already taking over with grass sprouting out of cracks in the concrete. As he scanned his surroundings, he then stepped outside, pulling his PDA tablet out of the big pouch on his vest and looking at the map on it. "*Straight... Straight.. Left, right, right..*" Priam muttered to himself before he put away the tablet, repeating the directions to himself as he walked onto a street. His hand, still on his trusty AKS-74U's handle.

And on forth he went to Red Forest..

Red Forest

“Realization”



Priam now stood at a Monolith checkpoint at the end of the path from Pripjat to Red Forest, which didn't even go that far. The path he took was heavily forested and... Rather peaceful. But he didn't have time to ponder about it. He needed to focus on the more important things on hand. The Monolith checkpoint consisted of a singular guard tower, many long concrete barriers, and some crates. There was also an old, beige BTR-70 armored personnel carrier vehicle, that was rotting away. The barrel of its gun, somewhere on the ground next to its wheels and the logo of the State Security Service was peeling away from the hull of the APC. There was also a moderately sized, windowless concrete structure with a slanted roof, probably having been used as a security booth before the Zone appeared. He then noticed...

Two stalkers stood at the concrete barriers, and another one was in the guard tower with a Dragunov SVD sniper rifle in his hands as he aimed the barrel across the horizon, looking through its attached scope. One other stalker was armed with a weathered AK-47 rifle, and the third had a shiny PP-19 Bizon submachine gun. They stood attentively, looking down the road as if there was something Priam couldn't see. They were on edge, constantly shifting in their place to be able to move as fast as possible if

something were to happen. He quietly walked over to the stalker with the SMG, and the stalker slowly turned around to face him. "... Greetings, Brother. I was told that a 'Priam' would join us in guarding this checkpoint?" The stalker asked, his voice sounding like the rest of the other Monolith troopers. Monotone. Dead. Emotionless. He wore an unrecognizable, military-looking gas mask of some sort, and a plain metallic PASGT helmet on top. The lenses of his mask were opaque and amber, at least, they looked that way. "I am that 'Priam'." Priam simply said, looking down the road instead of the person he was talking to for a moment before he looked back at the stalker, "I was told to reinforce this area with the squad here. Orders from Praedicator himself.", Priam added. The stalker would look off to the side as he now responded, "We know, Praedicator told us that you would arrive.", he looked at the structure and pointed at it, keeping only one hand on the gun, its grip specifically, "... If you need to eat or drink, to be strong so that you may keep fighting for the Monolith, go there. If you have a sleeping bag and need to lay it down somewhere, you should lay it down in there." He said, looking at Priam now as he held onto his PP-19 Bizon submachine gun with both hands and nodded, "And if you need your daily prayer, we already have a statue built, in the Monolith's honor.", He finished speaking as he then turned back around to face the rest of the road.

"... Thank you.", Priam said quietly before he turned to face the structure and walk towards it. As he reached the structure, he took a deep breath... And stepped in. The structure itself had a rather dirty, dark but cozy interior with sunlight shining through the window frames. A ruined couch was next to one of the four window frames, the specific window frame being closest to the entrance. A campfire, surrounded by pale, grey bricks crackled with its fire bathing another crudely made garbage totem near the wall at the other side of the room. There were many rows of wooden containers. One row, being purely just cans of food. Another, just being bottles of water. And another one, being various unorganized ammo magazines. As he noticed the totem, he would loosen the straps of his backpack once again, crouching down and placing it down gently onto the ground before he stood back up and slowly approached the totem. He then slowly went on his knees, his hands at his sides as he looked up at what the stalkers here, pray to. As he closed his eyes, he weakly raised his hands in front of himself, clasping them together as he let his head look downwards. "Oh... Holy Monolith. Please bless us.. As we defend the path to our home.. Please grant me the power... To fight on and reestablish territory that we have unfortunately lost... Please..." He suddenly stopped speaking as he started to slowly raised his hands, placing them on the sides of his hooded head. He then started to grunt in pain as he bent his back a little further, increasing the amount of pressure he was applying to the sides of his head. *Something was wrong.*

As he held his head in pain, letting out grunts and groans. Thoughts started to pop into his head, thoughts that he felt like.. He lost a while ago. He would immediately go silent afterward, his eyes shooting open. His 'thoughts' are of a.. Person, walking through a forest of long grass and dirty water. The person would look down at themselves as they were wearing a dark blue uniform and an olive green vest, almost identical to his. They were holding a Western carbine with some kind of sight, with their gloved hands. But, Priam couldn't tell what kind of gun it specifically was due to it being... Somewhat blurry. As the person looked back up, they saw another person, which they seemed to be following, through the swampy grass. The other person had a black helmet with some unreadable graffiti on the side, a pair of non-transparent combat goggles strapped onto the other person's eyes as they wore a black ski mask underneath it all. They also wore the same blue uniform, and a light, black vest. They carried... A wooden rifle. An old one, almost fully made out of wood with a piece of metal sticking out of the top. Like a bolt-action rifle. "... Maciej, we're almost there.. Keep your guard up, yeah? Clear

Sky stalkers aren't particularly easy to kill. The other person spoke, his voice sounding like an exaggerated Southern American accent. Some parts of what the person said was garbled, almost as if they were bleeped out, or just put on a ruined recording or something. It echoed in Priam's mind, and echoed... And echoed... As if he were in a long, long, dark tunnel... So empty, that all there was, was that particular name that bounced against the walls of his mind... Maciej.

"Maciej,"

"Maciej,"

"Maciej,"

"Maciej,"

"Maciej,"

"Maciej,"

"Maciej,"

"Maciej,"

"Maciej,"

Priam would suddenly rise, looking down at the unclean, tiled floor as he let his hands fall to his sides, breathing heavily as he just saw a vision of some sort. This vision... He felt as though he needed to pursue it. He felt as though he had a new path to follow. Maybe it was a message from the Monolith, a new task? No... It wasn't the same feeling. He didn't feel connected anymore, to the great deity. He didn't feel the same, and it just didn't feel as real—He didn't know, but he felt a strong urge to leave the checkpoint and head into the Red Forest... An irresistible urge. To part ways with the fanatical cult and find what the vision was entailing. He immediately crouched down, grabbed his backpack, slid it on his back, grabbed his AKS-74U rifle, and held it in both his hands, combat-ready as he stood, and turned around to face the exit doorway to the checkpoint itself. He cocked his rifle, a 7.62×52 bullet sliding into the chamber. Afterward, he started to take careful steps out of the structure as he held his gun, peering out of the doorway to check if the other stalkers heard his pain from before. The two stalkers at the concrete barriers simply stood there, still staring down the long stretch of road. So did the stalker in the guard tower, looking down his old scope to scan the surrounding area for any hostile entities. As Priam left the structure, he went over to the two guarding stalkers and stopped behind them. The one with the PP-19 Bizon submachine gun would turn around to look

at him, gazing. "... The holy Monolith has given me a new task, I must venture from this point, specifically alone... And look for enemy intelligence in the Red Forest and so forth.", Priam lied. Speaking in the same, bleak tone. "... Careful, brother, as nonbelievers and mutants litter the Red Forest. You might as well grab a few willing companions to help you on your pilgrimage. But if the Monolith say you need to venture on your lonesome...", the stalker said, gesturing to the forest by nodding towards it, "Then, I pray for you, for you have a long and treacherous way ahead of you. We shall be having more reinforcements soon...", following a little after what he said, he then turned around and stared down the same road down to the Red Forest again. Priam soon walked past the two stalkers, the concrete barriers, and the rest of the checkpoint, walking down the road to the main part of Red Forest. It was already pretty forested but with trees only on the sides of the road, other than that, it was rather clear. He would stop for a moment, turning his head to glance at the checkpoint he had just left... He then suddenly grabbed the Monolith patch on the side of his arm and quickly ripped it off, dropping it on the ground before continuing on his way.

And on forth he went to Red Forest...

"Hand"

A gentle breeze blew, making the trees ever so slightly sway from side to side, and causing the leaves to start falling onto the ground like they would in Fall. As Priam continued down the now-dirt path further, he stopped abruptly, watching as the dead leaves fell and glided downwards, past him. He would slowly reach out for the leaves, raising his hands as he cupped them. The sound of trees on the sides of the path rustling, and the grass moving... Made Priam at peace. He waited for a moment, waiting for a leaf to fall into his curious hands. And a leaf did indeed fall into one of his hands, as one landed right into them. It was slightly crinkled and had a bright, orange color to it. A very vibrant one at that. Looking down, he would then stare at it, looking at the features of the leaf before he grabbed the leaf with one hand as he reached down to the big pouch on his vest and opened it, gently putting the fallen leaf inside, closing it right afterward. Keeping it like a souvenir of sorts. Then, he took a moment to appreciate the environment. Something he hadn't done when he was mindlessly serving the Monolith...

As he did this, he would suddenly take notice of a rusty gate in front of him. The white paint slightly flaked off, revealing the corroded, brown, and black metal underneath. A tall fence joined the gate on both sides, walling off the main part of the entire forest, looking almost identical to the small gate. A big, weathered notice board of sorts stood next to the gate, slightly turned as if it was urging the person who was looking at it to enter the dangerous forest. Priam would walk up to the board so that he could see all the contents in detail. The board had a nailed-in map of the entirety of Red Forest on it. However, some marks showed that many stalkers beforehand had seen this board as well, as there were many marks and circled areas. One, circled one edge of the forest with a label that read *"Electro grouping, Beware!!!"* with a drawn thunderbolt symbol next to it. He noted the symbols and markings on the map, trying to stash it in his memory so that he wouldn't have a hard time navigating the forest... Then he remembered that he had the entire map of the Zone in his PDA tablet, so he just shrugged it off. There was also a long list of names off to the side of the

map where the legends were supposed to be, and it made Priam wonder why it was even there... "Dylan Bolt, Kostya Feather, Seryoga Corner-Cutter... Dietrich Dictator," He would scan the list of names, his eyes going down the words, repeating one name he saw after another. "Sergeant Kedzierski...", he muttered the last name before backing away and simply looking at the gate again, as there was nothing of interest in that list.

He would focus back on the gate to the Red Forest... Many trees towered over the fence on the other side, their delicate leaves drifting away as well. Priam ignored this and turned to face the gate, walking towards it as he then stopped right in front of it and peeked through, looking both left and right. It almost looked like a forest like any other, albeit, very red and orange. An electro anomaly was present on the right area of the other side of the gate, crackling as a bunch of electricity spewed from it. Priam would notice this and simply avoid it by stepping off to the side as he walked through the gate and scanned the forested horizon. Anomalies were everywhere, especially the electric ones, as the crackling noises sounded in the distance. Even being in the trees, although that did not particularly threaten anyone. He would now start to walk more, away from the gate and further into the dreadful Forest itself, clenching his rifle with his gloved hands. As he passed underneath multiple trees and past numerous anomalies, he stopped and looked back at the gate, wondering if he could go back... Go back to what he was originally doing. He let out a quiet sigh as he turned back around and went further into the Forest, each step bringing him closer to... Whatever he needed to find in the forest, which he had no clue what it was. He was being led somewhere and he felt it. He walked and walked before he felt himself turning somewhere to the left, and walking towards the direction he turned to before he eventually ended up at a tree that looked exactly like all the other ones. But then, he noticed something at the bottom of the tree. A bloodied PDA tablet with a black color scheme instead of the usual gray one, with what looked to be... A severed hand that was 'holding' it. He would slowly approach it before letting go of his AKS-74U rifle, allowing it to swing back and forth slightly as it was slung around his shoulder. He felt... Like it was pulling him towards it, forcing him to look. He noticed, that the blood from the stump of the hand, was dried. So it must've been, *somehow* holding the tablet for a long time. Priam would slowly kneel and grab the PDA with one hand, before he then placed his other hand on the severed body part and pried the fingers off of the tablet. The severed hand then fell to the leaf-covered soil and lay there, where it would lay for the rest of time... He would then focus on the tablet, pressing a button labeled with a circle with a line protruding from the top, with his thumb as he stood back up. The screen, that hadn't been on, turned on to show the same map as he had on his tablet. He pressed a button labeled with "3", and the task tab opened.

There was only one task listed on the screen, and the title of the task read "Find Missing Mercs". Priam would press another button, labeled with a checkmark, and a small paragraph would appear on the lit screen. "Names of M.I.A. Mercs: Davis Harmon, Andrew Kaufman, Maciej Malinowski. Last seen: Red Forest. Objective: Find their bodies, and/or PDAs, and report back to fellow Merc Kalinov. If nothing is found, and you return, you will get 45% of your pay." Priam read to himself the text from the screen, but after he read everything, he just stared at the name, "Maciej". "There it is, there's the name..." He muttered to himself and then looked at the other names of the missing Mercs. *Andrew and Davis*. He'd think about the names for a moment before he eventually focused on the PDA again, tapping on a button that would mark the source of the task on the map. The screen automatically switched from the tasks to the map as it scrolled past all the other territories and then zoomed into a city. Dead City. Then, it showed the Mercenary HQ building with a 2D circular white marker hovering over the right side of the roof. After that, he would take out his own PDA, turn it on, and put a marker on the Mercenary HQ. That was his new task, so he held his rifle with one hand and

looked down at his tablet before looking toward himself and starting to walk... Vaguely, where the marker pointed.

And further, he went into Red Forest...

"Pilgrimage"

Each step on the dirt path brought Priam closer to his destination, the road to the Army Warehouses. The tall trees swayed as he had his PDA held in one hand, the other on the handle of his AK-47U rifle. He clutched it tightly as he scanned his surroundings, eyes going from side to side as he continued walking. The leaves, still gracefully dropping past him as his boot-clad feet stepped on the fallen ones, breaking them and making a crunching sound every time he did so. He eventually looked down at the path as it seemed to get more covered with leaves the further he went before he suddenly noticed a strange thing in front of him... The strange thing was a gravitational anomaly that produced a heat haze-looking effect in the air. Letting out a relieved sigh upon realizing that if he hadn't looked up, and that he would've stepped right into it... He stood in front of it as he took notice of the relatively huge crater underneath the anomaly. Rocks hovered in the anomaly, something that would defy physics if it were outside the Zone. But that's the thing—The Zone does not care about logic... He lowered his rifle, and the PDA in his hand, as he stared down the hole. The bottom consisted of a pile of rocks and bones—bones that looked relatively fresh as they glistened a reddish, crimson color. It also consisted of what he recognized as broken gun parts and a twisted gas mask, which he figured was an unlucky stalker.

Suddenly, he heard noises. The noises of a pack of dogs. Their barking got louder as they approached from the other side of the anomaly. Their faces worn by living in the Zone. The dog's mouths opened each time to reveal a set of canine teeth, blood, and saliva spilling out. However, he did not flinch because he *knew* these small mutants were relatively stupid and overtaken by primal, unintelligent instincts. So—He stood and watched as they tried to jump over the crater. And one by one, their bodies turned and twisted, ripped apart and turned into a whirlwind of death before splattering downwards into the center of the crater, joining everything else that was down there. A tiny drop of blood spilled from the twisted corpses and shot toward Priam, landing on his left lens. He stood for a moment longer to see if there were any left... Silence. He quickly raised his PDA-holding hand and smeared the blood all over his lens with his free pinkie finger, trying to clean it off. He shook his head lightly and gave up, leaving the smeared blood on the lens, which gave it a red tint. Raising his rifle and lowering the PDA, he continued on his way, walking around the crater and the anomaly, taking care to not trip on anything that would cause him to meet his disturbing demise. Afterward, he kept on where the path was, looking down at the PDA to not stray from the path he was taking. Crunch, crunch, crunch, the leaves continued to sound underneath his boots. After a while, he began to notice that the path was clearing again, and surprisingly, there were no other mutants... Well, so far, anyway. Now he was on the same, dirt path again, enjoying the chirping of the birds and the trees that covered the gray skies while meandering past Gravity and Electro anomalies. The electric ones seemed larger and seemed to produce more electricity than the ones back in Pripyat... They also looked to be grouped and all placed in line formations, reaching high enough that they looked like tall fences made out of moving lightning. After he

made his way past all the anomalies, he kept on the path until he, once again, heard noises. He stopped momentarily, gripping his AK-47U before immediately running behind a tree to hide or take cover, just in-case it was another mutant or even a stalker. He stood there for a while, putting away his PDA into his big pouch and holding his rifle with both hands as he then leaned to the right of the tree, peeking to check if there was anything out there.

The noises he heard started to become comprehensible as he figured out that it was the sound of crunching leaves and gear shuffling around. And a muffled voice sounded out. He couldn't exactly hear what they were saying, but he knew that they were talking. It was a group of three Loner stalkers, all looking to be novices due to how unprepared they looked. They wore simple brown overcoats with gas masks and were armed with pistols, though, one of them also had a sawn-off shotgun. He knew they were loners due to the patches with the radiation symbol, that were sewn onto their arm sleeves. "*Easy pickings...*", He muttered under his breath as he raised his rifle, using the tree as a support to rest his arm on so that he could aim easier. The stalkers hadn't noticed him yet, as they were trekking past him... If he did not get rid of them, they would probably cause him trouble in the future. And so, with that, he aimed at the stalker with the shotgun and took a deep breath before he quickly switched the safety off and lightly squeezed the trigger. A gunshot echoed from the same place where a fiery muzzle flash appeared for a split second from the gun barrel of his rifle and almost instantaneously, the Loner with the shotgun collapsed on his side. The two other stalkers quickly dispersed for cover, one going behind a tree stump, the other going behind a tree, similar to what Priam was hiding behind. As Priam went to aim at the one behind the stump, he was immediately met with retaliating fire from the other stalker, who had leaned out of cover to fire potshots at him. Priam quickly rotated to the other side of the tree he was hiding behind and quickly aimed at the firing stalker, firing off two shots that both landed, making the stalker collapse. At the same time, the last stalker quickly went out from behind cover, using the stump to lean his hands as he held his pistol, firing a couple of shots at Priam. A bullet barely hit his arm as it just barely scraped by, causing him to recoil back into cover. He quickly looked down and checked his arm by patting it down, not the best way to check if you're injured, but stress is one hell of a drug... The stalker fired a couple more shots at the tree that Priam was taking cover behind. Then Priam grabbed his rifle once again, whipped around and side-stepped, quickly flicking his firing mode to automatic as he then sprayed down in the general direction of the last stalker. Fortunately, the stalker then shortly fell, letting out a gut-wrenching scream. Priam stood next to the tree for a moment, taking a breather, as he had just been in a firefight... He had never felt such stress before. He felt, as though he needed to survive, to live. Not for the Monolith, but for himself. A strange experience to say the least. And then—A groan emanated from behind the tree stump. The last stalker did not die, he was just grievously injured. Priam let out a quiet sigh as he switched his rifle back to semi-automatic and walked out of cover once again to the tree stump, stepping on top of it and standing on it. He saw the last stalker, writhing on the ground as he held his stomach area. Crimson red was pouring out his wound, making a puddle of blood and dirt underneath. He eventually made eye contact with Priam, weakly reaching out towards him as if he wanted him to spare him... Priam stared at the dying stalker as he raised his rifle at the last stalker and aimed straight at his head, letting off a single shot. The last stalker stopped moving as he had passed and Priam stepped down from the tree stump, shaking his head slightly as he then realized that he should probably loot the stalkers (There are so many times this word is used, it's brain cancer-inducing) he had just massacred. And so he did as he walked over to one of the corpses, knelt, and started looking through the pockets of their overcoat. He found a box of matches and another box of matches. Some pistol magazines which he did not recognize... Two grenades, which they, for some reason,

did not use. And the last thing, a red first-aid kit. He put the magazines in his two ammo pouches and the rest, he put into his big pouch. He stood up, looking left and right to make sure that nothing was watching or about to ambush him... Nothing. But, the last time there was nothing, he had to take care of the three stalkers—So it wasn't exactly, *that* safe. He waited a little while more, listening to the chirping of the birds and the trees swaying... And the leaves that left the branches and glided down to the ground.

He let out a sigh of relief as there was nothing else that posed a danger to him... For the moment. He quickly chose to not loot the other bodies, and started to walk toward his destination once again, past the rest of the dead Loners. He then walked past another crackling Electro anomaly and more of the same trees... Eventually, he stumbled upon something strange. A house, of some sort. A ruined one at that, most likely being here even before the first Chornobyl incident. They wouldn't build anything *after* the first incident... He looked behind himself, over his shoulder, before he looked at the house further, examining each detail. The windows were barricaded, possibly by some stalker who inhabited it. The roof tiling was almost gone, having all crumbled to bits or hit the ground... And the door was smashed in. There was also a huge graffiti mural of a side-profile of an eagle, in a blue color. The color of the Mercenaries. And so, he pulled out his PDA and walked to the house to check it out... Maybe to scour the place for supplies or to just see what was inside.

And on forth he went towards the house.

"House"