

CHERNARUS TRAVEL JOURNAL

BY TIM HENGEVELD

DayZ, as you may or may not know, is a mod for the military simulation game ARMA II which puts you in the aftermath of a zombie apocalypse. Players are left to scavenge for food and supplies and fight off both the zombie horde and other players. The game has no objectives or story structure whatsoever, other than 'survive'. All other occurrences are the result of the imagination of the players themselves.

In July 2012 I booked a ticket to [Chernarus](#), DayZ's fictional Eastern-European state 225 km² in size, with my pal Moz. We were ready for adventure. And we found some.



Day one

My arrival was not a smooth one. Within minutes of touching down outside Electrozavodsk, the second-largest town in Chernarus, I heard a snarl coming from my right. The rotting animated corpse of a middle-aged farmer had caught wind of my presence and proceeded to chase me across the beach.

With no way to defend myself other than shine a measly flashlight in its face I decided to careen into a nearby village in the hopes of finding a weapon. There were many more zombies there however. After running circles for 10 minutes I decided to try my luck and hopped a few fences before diving into the open door of an abandoned cabin. I didn't expect this plan to work, but remarkably enough the zombie lost sight of me, and after waiting for his grunts to fade into the distance I felt confident I could crawl out the door and into the nearby forest.

Moz had arrived a few days ahead of me and was further inland, waiting at a small survivor camp. I called him up and told him I was going to try to make my way to Mogilevka, a small town due northwest. With no compass or GPS I had to rely on recognizing landmarks to navigate the map, which was actually quite refreshing and fun to do.

Hours later I arrived severely dehydrated and bleeding from several zombie attacks and potshots bandits had taken at me from a nearby town. The most I had managed to scrounge up by that time was a hatchet and I had exhausted my medical supplies, so I was not doing so hot when I collapsed in the corner of a barn. Luckily it wasn't long before Moz tracked me down and patched me up with food and armaments.

Moz told me about an old fort on a hilltop nearby that he visited before, and we decided that was a good place to search for more supplies. We wanted to avoid any major towns until we had built up our arsenal a little, as they were rumored to be rife with snipers preying on less experienced survivors.

Night was falling quickly though, and with no electricity in the entire nation it was **real** dark. Despite my flashlight we lost our bearings in the pitch black forest, so we decided to return to the town until morning.

On our way back, Moz dropped to the ground and pointed his sniper scope at an open field. Zombies were running, which meant there was another player nearby.

We tracked the poor sod for a while, several zombies running behind him. Hungry for supplies we decided we ought to put this hatchet-bearing man out of his misery, so Moz shot him.

When we had trekked over to his body, it became evident he was still alive. Uhh, shit. He asked us why we shot him, and Moz and I exchanged nervous glances, and I came up with some fib about mistaking him for a zombie in the dark. It was transparent at best, but he bought it.

He was having worse luck than me at finding supplies, so he offered to go on a kamikaze run through the town for us since he was going to be dead meat soon anyway. We did not oppose to his plan (we offered him food of course but he declined), and passed by undetected in the wake he left behind. It did not turn out particularly profitable but not having to waste our precious ammo was nice at least.

Deciding we had had enough excitement for the night, we moved into a patch of forest at 4AM to find a place to rest.

Crossing through some bushes I was suddenly feet away from another survivor, standing there just staring at the sky. I retreated into the brush and carefully ventured a "Hello?" while Moz trained his ironsights on her just in case. The survivor startled and logged off.

A little creeped out and very tired, we decided to pitch camp and do the same.

Day Two

We continued to the fabled fortress the next day. Moz had had some time to figure out the route, and it wasn't long before we saw a tower peek up between the canopy. Inside we found some pretty nice loot - knives, ammo, bigger backpacks, binoculars. I even found a camera, which I decided to use to capture our day-to-day experiences.



Next we trekked east towards the bigger harbor towns, stopping at the villages along the way. Moz and I parted ways for a little bit as I had other business, but we met up again near an abandoned factory outside Dolina. After we scoured it we proceeded into the town proper, and in a field we spotted our first wildlife.

Wildlife like goats and cows is sparse, but the meat it provides is pretty essential to survival. So like idiots we ran after it, attracting the attention of many zombies from the nearby town. They began coming at us one at a time which was easy to fend off while we skinned the goat, but gunfire attracted more of them, and by the end we were running down the road out of town with about eight zombies on our heels. Running circles through the adjoining hills we each took shots at the pursuing horde as we crossed each other's paths. With a little effort we were soon zombie-free again, and in our frantic runaround we ended up pretty close to the harbor town we had been eyeing, a smaller fisherman's town near Solvinchy.

The pickings there were slim though, and the zombies were plentiful, so we had just decided to backtrack out of the port when we saw a Humvee drive into town. We immediately hit the deck and rolled into cover. There were plenty of cars in Chernarus, but they were all rusty wrecks until someone fixed them up. So moving cars means skilled survivors, and probably more than one. We really didn't want to risk attracting their attention, so those were tense minutes. But luckily it didn't seem like they had stopped, so we moved out of town in the opposite direction at a hasty pace.

This was fortunate, as it put us right near an abandoned farm complex, which aside from presenting us with a fuckton of zombies, also harbored a goat, a cow and a sheep. Meat!

The zombie horde slowly shambled towards the pasture, but Moz went down to skin the cow while I covered him.



Our backpacks, bellies and bloodstream now full again, we were almost ready to set out when Moz shushed me and pointed at a man standing on the rooftop of a nearby building. If he had a sniper this would be over quick, but all he was packing was a hatchet. What's more, the man was not moving. Perhaps he was stunned by the death of his friend, who lay bleeding next to a ladder a few yards over, but he didn't seem to be very proactive about that fact.

After some contemplation I decided to go and investigate while Moz covered me from the treeline. He could see one side of the rooftop but not much else, so we were very aware that this might be a trap.



I crept up the stairs of the building while listening for Moz' status reports, waiting for him to shout something like "movement!" but the man remained stationary. So I slowly crawled up behind him and rifled through his backpack.



For a man packing a hatchet, I did not expect much, and I found even less. As an act of mercy I decided to insert a bandage and swap his empty water bottle out with a full one, since I had three, then crawled back inside before opening up comms in an attempt at communication. Much like the forest lady, Moz reported a sudden startled reaction (after we had seen him standing still for at least 20 minutes) followed by a log-off.

I made my way down again and hoped the man would check his backpack later and realize the kindness of his fellow survivors.

I stopped by the bleeding man at the ladder on my way out of the complex, who was well dead by now, flies circling his body. He was at the top of the ladder though, so it wasn't a sudden fall that had killed him. Our best guess was that it had been the militia that rolled through earlier, but we decided to take no chances and moved on into the next village, where I promptly broke my leg when a crawling zombie slashed at me from the bushes. Thank god we had morphine.

From the corner of my eye I watched Moz backpedal into the treeline again, firing at the zombies which his gunshot at my assailant had attracted while I patched myself up, hoping no other stragglers would feast on me as I lay there in the middle of the road.

Once I could walk again I scurried into the forest, safe from potential onlookers, and decided I would take some time to recuperate as Moz went ahead to scout out our route West. We decided it was best to avoid big cities in our current condition.

Day Three

Clouds had formed over Chernarus and rain was pouring down like nobody's business when I got up to rejoin Moz. After he had taken off he texted me that he had almost died falling down a flight of stairs in a barn nearby. Again, thank god we had morphine. He had then encountered a friend of his and they fixed up a car together. At the question when he was coming to pick me up he told me it had already been stolen during the night. Those goddamn bandits. Then again we probably would have done the same thing. A statement that was soon tested.

We met up back at the factory outside Dolina we had explored yesterday, and moved North in the direction of an airfield where we hoped to find some military-grade weapons. Right outside the settlement of Polana we spotted something big and red protruding from a set of trees in the middle of a field. A closer spying revealed it was... a tractor! And a fully functioning one at that.



We speculated why anyone would think hiding a big red tractor under a tree in the middle of a wide open field was a good idea. Hoping this wasn't a trap, I went in to investigate.

There was some gear stashed in it so it definitely belonged to a player. I left a little present and drove the tractor a few feet to indicate that maybe he should consider better camouflage next time. We returned to safety in the treeline to wait for Moz' friend to arrive.

It wasn't long before we saw a lanky figure blaze across the hillsides followed by some zombies. That was Kusanagi alright. We tried to snipe his pursuers but they were too fast, and between zero cover in the field or a town full of more zombies we advised him to take cover in the tractor.

"Where?" he asked.

"In the middle of the goddamn empty field," Moz replied.



An amazing plan, as it turned out, and Kusa drove that thing like a bat out of hell, running down zombies by the dozens. Sadly the thing also made a shitload of noise, I could hardly hear Moz speak anymore. We shouted something about thinking we heard sniper fire, but nobody was sure. All I know is at one point the tractor **exploded** while it was raging through town. Whether it was gunfire or a collision we didn't know, but Kusa was kinda dying.



Moz rushed in and dragged him into a nearby store while I circled around to find a safe entry into the town proper, which there was not. Zombies everywhere. Since there was no other way to reach Moz, I just opened fire at anything that came near me as I made my way to the central store where we barricaded ourselves.

Night had crept up on us, it was turning dark fast. My flashlight had broken during our previous nighttime adventure, so I had to rely on squinting hard and moving slow as we set out for Gorka after raiding the supplies at the store, led by the promise of fountains and churches, either upon arrival turning out to be very little use, all dried up and sealed off. So we made camp next to the empty water tower, our lullaby the gurgles and coughs coming from the shadows shifting around town, and awaited another day.



Day 4

With fresh courage we set out for Dubrovka this afternoon, heading north in our planned trek to the airfield. We soon revised that plan as we were ASSAULTED by a mob of zombies.

It was not even just one instance, it was a constant stream of angry and wildly flailing rotting lunatics coming out of the woodwork around us. This was a far more aggressive breed than we had encountered previously.



We were rifling through a nearby set of barns when it started. A few stragglers wandered in through the side door, and our gunshots set off a whole slew of snarls and grunts outside. Moz tried to distract them with a smoke grenade he had picked up, but that was a short-lived solution. So we ran straight down the road into Dubrovka hoping to find a house with an open door to jump into and siphon the horde.

When we found one we dove in and prepared for an onslaught. We had started off today with plenty of ammo, a few clips for each weapon at least, but within minutes we practically ran dry as zombie after zombie staggered into our killbox.

I think around the time we each had about four bullets left in total the stream subsided, and we drooped down into a corner of the living room, heaving, shaking from the blood loss, staring in disbelief at the pile of bodies piled up in the tiny hallway, laughing hysterically at the fact that we had survived this massacre.

I really thought we were never going to make it out of that house.



When we came back to our senses we carefully ventured outside with the intention of scouting out the town proper, but it wasn't long before more zombies appeared on the horizon. So we decided to backtrack in the hopes of replenishing our ammo at the nearby military watchpost.

We found a few interesting items but mostly more zombies who seemed to sprout up like dandelions. I was terribly thankful for the fact I never threw away my old rifle when Moz handed me an AK74, because it was the only thing we still had ammo for. Not nearly enough though, so after a while we decided to try the barns again. Maybe the horde had thrown itself at another unsuspecting victim in the meantime.

Sadly, no.



All they had done was wandered apart a little bit again, lulling us into a false sense of security until we realized we were totally surrounded once again. We hadn't set them off yet but that was only a matter of time at this point.

For some reason we thought it was smart to split up and get this done as quickly as possible, but mere moments later I heard Moz shouting in the other barn that he got his backpack stuck on a protruding nail in the wall and the horde was closing in.

He had just been in the middle of swapping weapons, so his rifle lay on the floor and all he had left to defend himself with was his axe. This didn't prove to be a problem however, as the man wielded it like a professional lumberjack while I covered his back from the doorway.



Another massacre ensued, this time more profitable and less goddamn frantic and terrifying. Among all the spoils I found a bunch of ammo, food and bandages, and Moz picked up a new rifle, so we were in fighting shape again. If we hadn't we would not have made it much further.

Packed up and more confident now that our kill count had tripled (100+) we decided to head back up the path north, curving a wide arc around Dubrovka this time and into the next settlement, although this didn't save us from being chased by more zombies, and we lost each other in the frenzy.

One thing was for sure: we had learned our lesson about moseying willy-nilly into towns.

Day 5



After a bit of a runaround Moz and I found each other again outside Dubrovka, and discussed our travel plans over a cooked slab of sheep meat (the cooking of which was not easy as the scumbag wind kept blowing the fire out, making it a two-man operation). We were pretty close to the airfield now, but we decided to zigzag through the marquee locations up ahead on the way.



First stop was Gvodzno, a fairly sizeable settlement. Unfortunately it turned out to be completely barren, but the surrounding countryside soon proved to be more interesting.

When we got to the edge of the forest we heard a set of revolver shots ring out in the distance. We slowed to a crawl and circled around the clearing to investigate the disturbance. Up ahead was a lone house. Zombies were wandering around it, but no sign of other survivors. Maybe they had moved on. Maybe they were watching us.

We didn't find anything when we reached it, so we continued on to follow a boar down the hill. Then something stopped us dead in our tracks.

In the middle of the field was a dead survivor. Was this the source of the gunshots we heard? Did zombies get him? Or was it a sniper from the town at the foot of the hill? And if not, why didn't he defend himself with the rifle on his back? It was very suspicious.

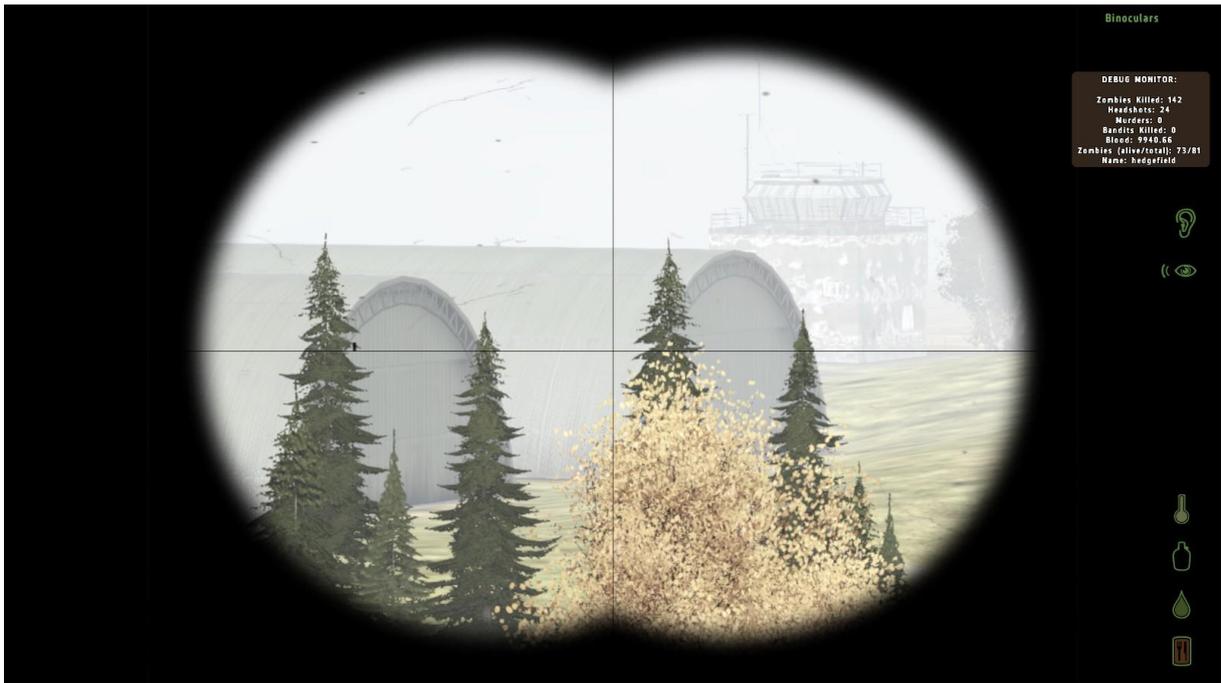


While Moz covered me I decided to belly crawl out to the body and see what I could discover. The guy was loaded, top navigation equipment, medical supplies and a GK17 and AKM with each two clips. It was becoming very unlikely this guy died from a simple zombie attack. I peered over the body down at the street leading into Gvodzno in the distance. If I had stayed there any longer I might have suffered the same fate.

We scouted the town ahead after returning to the safety of the trees, but it was slim pickings, and there didn't appear to be any sign of other humans.

Looking at the map we noticed we were very close to the famed Devil's Castle, former home of pirate Jakub Čert. We wanted to explore it, but bandits were rumored to flock there, and it was in the opposite direction of the airfield. So we decided to go to Black Mountain instead, a similar site on the way to the airfield. Unfortunately it was no more than a bunch of crumbling walls. Then we thought we heard a car engine in the distance, so we hurried to descend on the other side of the mountain and move into Krasnostav. Or rather around it to its airstrip. We didn't want to risk attracting another horde for a few meagre supplies when the airfield was now this close.

After some paranoid zigzagging through adjoining farms and dirt roads the hangars loomed large over the hills. Finally we had arrived.



On our way in a carefree goat almost blew our cover, happily traipsing alongside us despite our best efforts to shoo it away.



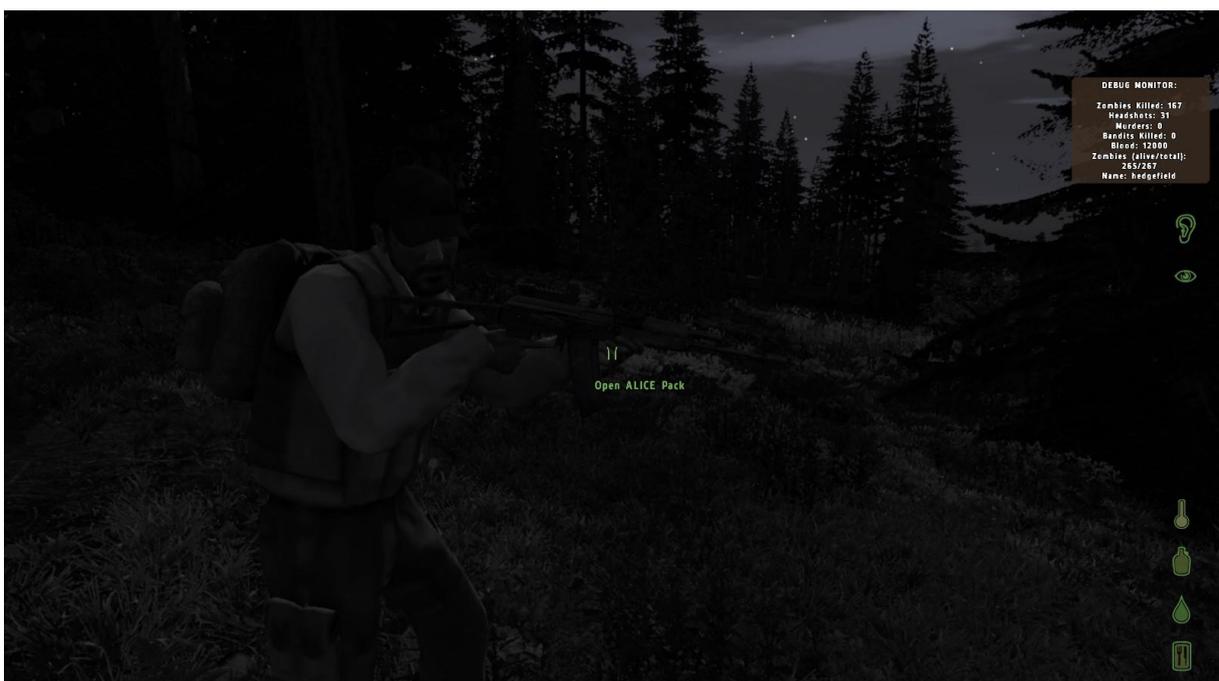
We snuck into the air control tower, the entrance of which was reinforced with barbed wire. Someone had been here before. There wasn't much to scrounge up either, though I did find a sweet Uzi and finally, FINALLY a functioning flashlight again. Feeling accomplished but slightly underwhelmed, we turned back south again.

Crossing through Krasnostav on the way out was not the brightest idea though. We attracted a little too much attention, and feeling a little overconfident in not having died yet we underestimated the gravity of the situation.

After a series of increasingly bad navigational decisions I ended up in a courtyard where a trio of zombies pushed me into the wall, causing me to break my leg and dislocate my shoulder. The knockdown stunned me for a few second, leaving me defenseless and unable to reload while they pummeled me. For a moment there I thought I was a goner, and had Moz not been there to intervene I certainly would have been.



Leaning on each other we stumbled into the woods after having dealt with the immediate threats, and took a moment to patch ourselves up. I had lost my backup rifle, and night was setting in, so I sent Moz ahead to scout the route south while I recuperated on a mossy patch of hillside. We had received distress calls from two other friends, but they were all the way down near the coast, so we had a hefty trek ahead of us, and I didn't want to stumble into it half-assed and get myself killed.



Day 6

Once I picked myself up again night had come and gone, and Moz radioed me that he had made it all the way down to Elektro, although self-admittedly he could not remember much of the journey after he passed by Devil's Castle. He said something about visions of dying and strange empty plains doused in sunlight, but I understood very little of it. I had more pressing problems - I was utterly lost.

We had ran blind into the forest the night before, and I had lost my bearings. I knew running straight east or south would put my ass at the ocean eventually, so that was the extent of my plan. Soon after I hit a barn in an open field of which I kind of suspected the location based on logical reasoning, but whose buildings were not marked on my map at all. Inside I found a veritable arsenal. Two Winchester rifles akin to the one I lost yesterday and a scoped CZ sniper. I gladly restocked and continued on.

It wasn't long before I regained my bearings. I hit a town southeast of the barn which brought back memories of our last visit here - it was Dubrovka, site of our desperate stand against the horde two days ago. I decided to avoid it and use my new-found awareness to move towards a coastal town to the east which I had been eyeing for a while - Berenzino.



It was the biggest city I had explored so far, by at least threefold. The promise of extensive loot did not offset the paranoia of running into someone else here in all these twisty corridors. I recalled the advice of my travel agent to 'stay low and move fast, don't linger' as I followed the winding road into the heart of this disheveled city, forced to fire off some shots at pursuing zombies. If there was anyone in the town they would surely know I was here now.

I was used to the relative solitude of Chernarus by now, but experiencing it for the first time in a large settlement made it all the more grave. Entire apartment blocks stood vacant, stores with their doors open, supplies raided long ago, hospitals with nothing more than empty cardboard boxes, knocked-over chairs and shell casings. Rubble and burnt-out cars in the

street, signs of makeshift military fortifications and a few feet further the lifeless bodies of those appointed to man them. It was a sobering experience.



I found a breadth of supplies; plenty of food I eagerly scarfed down and weapons I picked up but had to discard a few blocks later because I'd blown through all their ammo. But all the while I found absolutely nobody with any breath left in them, or my gunfire would have surely attracted them. I'm not sure if I had been happier if they were there, but the threat of the vast emptiness was oppressive. Strange shapes darted through my peripheral vision. Not the infected. Worse. Reality collapsing in on itself. Something was very wrong in Berenzino.

It was becoming increasingly hard to move now, like my limbs were getting heavier. I ventured into places even the zombies would not go. I decided it was time to get the hell out of there.

Day 7

Another night had come and gone, and I still found myself around Berezino. The city had a strange pull, inciting repeat visits even though resources were stocked, but which were subsequently depleted by simply hanging around town for too long, justifying the whole scavenging trip retroactively.

By now Moz had hiked his ass over here, so in we went again, leaving no stone unturned. We searched every building, carrying armloads of medicine and bullets around from door to door, spilling half of it in the street. Killing infected was no longer a debate of ammo vs immediacy of danger. We had become veterans, alive for much longer than we had anticipated at the onset.



Our goals for this trip were almost all marked off, and the last remaining two - find a tent and find a ghillie suit - were achieved at dusk, when, after spending an hour running back and forth around town looking for the military camp I found on my first run and being utterly unable to find it even though it turned out we were running circles around it the whole time, we were forced into an apartment building by a posse of infected we had run into at the supermarket (where we found a tent).

After we had dispensed with our uninvited guests, I started a fire in the backyard to distract any stragglers and went into the building while Moz explored the adjacent one.



By the time I reached the second floor I heard ecstatic cries from the open window of the other building, where Moz had found a ghillie suit tucked away under a bed. Relishing in this rare discovery, I moved up to the third floor and found another ghillie suit. As excited as little children we couldn't wait to try them on.



Putting it on resulted in another one of Berezino's trademark strange occurrences, briefly teleporting us into the ocean and back, or what appeared to be an ocean, some strange place far away or perhaps in our mind, a place of transition to let us know that we had officially transformed from hunted to hunters. Armed with silenced rifles, nightvision goggles and the appearance of a lively bit of shrubbery, we became unstoppable.

At least until pitching our tent.



We had spent some time trawling the surrounding woods, raiding tents and following zombie and survivor alike, until we reached our intended campsite near the Black Lake.

In the dark and rain it was unclear whether we were accidentally dropping shit and losing it or if darker forces were at work here, because we kept misplacing the gear we stuffed in our tent. Then the tent started multiplying, and subsequently disappearing. But the shriek I heard when Moz pitched our last remaining, original tent, I'll never forget. I turned around and fumbled for my flashlight. It revealed a gruesome sight.

My partner in crime was impaled by a tent rod.

As thunder erupted overhead he cursed the tent with his last breath. A suspiciously man-shaped bush, the scourge of the undead, ended by a camping utensil. A sad moment indeed.

I returned to the coastline and walked back to the airport. I made no effort to sneak around anymore, our adventure was complete. We had achieved all that we set out to experience in Chernarus, and I guess it was fitting that we went out at our peak. We would never have lived to see the plague end, to see all infected vanquished and humanity prevail. Not here. It was all just an unending cycle. So our time had come to join the other team now, it was time for the next hopefuls to make a name for themselves within these borders.

I walked onto the airstrip and slung my rifle around my back. A few campers were sitting around a fire next to the control tower. They looked up as I approached, and one got up and aimed his rifle at me. "Friendly?" he shouted nervously, but I did not respond. I could tell they were intimidated by the suit. I did not stop.

The rifleman was uncomfortable with the idea of shooting me, I could see it in his eyes, though his buddies started shouting in fear. I got within two meters before he pulled the trigger. He had good aim. The light went out before I hit the asphalt.

Take my gear. You have a fighting chance now, friend. Maybe you will make it to the end.

Maybe you will make it.