

EMOTIONS

[Part 1 - First contact]

The first thing I noticed, was the sound they made. A low humming, a manmade noise, not natural to the planet, that reached my extra sensitive ears at a level below my consciousness. Alerted, but not yet understanding why, I stood up and scanned the area from my lookout atop the hill. A brief flash of light reflecting off a shiny surface caught my eye. Yes, there it was. As my robotic eye zoomed in to take a closer look, I whistled between my teeth.

Across the desert they came. A scraggly group of travelers, most of them dragging their feet as if unwilling to move. They had three vehicles with them. In the front was a four-seater I recognized from my days on earth as a DuneRail. In the middle a large TransRover lumbered along. And bringing up the rear, a small, red single-seat ATV.

I was surprised, as far as I was capable of such feelings. Such a large group, and so well equipped. That was uncommon. All I had encountered over the past years, since being dumped here, were small groups of wanderers, three, four, sometimes five men and women. But none possessed vehicles. And certainly not some kind of weaponry. My internal scanners revealed the group had at least 3 Mag Pro's among them, as well as some other handguns.

As I was watching, the red ATV stopped. An auburn-haired woman walked up to the driver and said something to him. I was too far away to eavesdrop on the conversation, but from their postures I gathered they were arguing. Then the male turned the ATV with brusque movements and drove back in the direction they had come from, the woman staring after him.

I could see her switching on her gear and talk into the mouthpiece. The group slowly came to a halt and the weary travelers sank to the ground. I was thinking, trying to make up my mind. Should I go after the lone man that had turned back? It made for an appealingly easy target. Or should I stay with the group, trying to gather more information about them before making my move?

[Part 2 - Setting the stage]

I was reluctant to leave my hiding place, perched as it was on the hill, so I decided the best course of action was to stay and watch the group. I saw they were in the process of setting up tents and shelters, so they must be making camp right here. Again, I was

impressed by how well equipped and organized they were compared to the other humans I had seen so far. I felt something akin to a mild shock when I saw they even had a worker robot traveling with them!

The rest of the day, I stayed where I was, watching, observing, judging. I thought they must be new arrivals, not really used yet to walking the dirt of the desert. I also wondered if they knew winter would arrive soon. They'd better find shelter, if they were caught out here in the desert when the snows came, they'd certainly die. I smiled at my own thoughts. It didn't matter; by the time winter came, they would all be dead anyway. And my memory banks would overflow with the data they were gonna give me.

My memory banks... A vague sense of worry slithered through my enhanced brain, a feeling more remembered than actually experienced. The banks were pretty full already. If they weren't unloaded soon, they *would* overflow, literally, unless I discarded some of the data. I was reluctant to do so however, having spent the last few years gathering it. Besides, I wasn't very good at judging what'd be useful and what could be thrown out. No, better to leave that to the satellite brass up in orbit. I vaguely wondered why they hadn't contacted me yet. Had they forgotten? Had they lost me? Or didn't they care about the planet anymore?

I stopped my musings as I realized darkness had fallen. I turned my attention back to the group. The dark-haired woman I noticed earlier was obviously in charge of the camp. Now that was unusual too. Most of the women I'd seen were subservient to the men's needs, not physically strong enough to defend themselves against the primitive cravings of mankind. Not with this group however, they were different. I wondered what the woman's sin had been, to be sent here.

A large male seconded her, a man with blond straggly hair down to his shoulder. He set out guards, a wise thing to do, even if the position of the guards wouldn't stop anyone of my caliber. It'd be enough to stop a doling Grendler though. I was impressed. It was gonna make for some interesting hours questioning this man, I thought.

As the lights in the camp blinked out one by one, my thoughts turned back to the lone male that left. Would he be back? Yes, he would, I was quite sure, even he seemed to've left in anger. No one in his right mind wanted to be alone here. Well, I chuckled to myself, a glimmer of humor appearing, at least no one that didn't have my enhanced capabilities.

[Part 3 - Mistakes made]

The next morning before the sun came up I was back in my spot high on the hill,

overlooking the makeshift camp. As the bright disk appeared from below the horizon, I noticed the first activity. The tall man, who was second in command, readied the Rail for travel. A black man walked up to him and they talked. I could only pick up snatches of their conversation.

"... need to waste... scout ahead..." the blond man said.

"... within range..." the black man responded, and then the Rail left the camp, traveling forward in the direction the group were headed the previous day.

As before, I was in discord. Follow the single man, or stay with the group? I decided there was still much more information to be gleaned from simply observing the campsite -and I suspect I was getting a bit lazy-, so I let the man go, for now. I did direct part of my observation capabilities toward tracking the Rail. That way I'd be able to find him if I desired so.

Two hours later, I smiled in satisfaction as I spotted the small ATV coming across the desert. As it came closer, I felt another pang of surprise when I noticed the small vehicle now held two people. Behind the same man that turned back yesterday, a petite blond female was perched uncomfortably on the motor compartment.

What was going on? A vague sense of unease crept up on me. Too many oddities happening in such a short time. It confused me and that sensation left me feeling tense and uncertain. I decided it was time for me to start making my move.

I lifted my gun as the small ATV came to a halt, a dozen meters or so from the campsite. The male got out and after the woman handed him something from her pocket, he walked towards the camp where the group's leader was waiting for him, the group members huddled closely around her.

I tsk-tsked to myself. To stand around so close together, stupid, stupid.

I lifted the gun to my eye and sighted. I was going for the male that just arrived. But as I squeezed the trigger, I realized I made a mistake. The second the bullet left the barrel the group started milling about in turmoil, looking around, running towards whatever shelter they could find. Damn! I'd forgotten the robot! I was annoyed with myself. How could I have made such a dumb mistake?

One of two black males was hit and thrown to the ground. In the chaos in the camp, I saw the blonde run from the ATV towards the downed man. The others were busy getting him in a comfortable position while the robot was scanning the surroundings. Afraid of being discovered, I decided it was best to hang back for a while, see how they

were gonna react to being attacked. I'd try again later.

While I hid from view behind an upjutting rock, I was chastising myself. Damn, how could I have been so stupid to forget the robot? Deep inside my brain fear sparkled through my circuits. I did not make mistakes. Not since they changed me, boosted my senses, armored my body. Were my internal systems malfunctioning? Breaking down? Were my memory banks too loaded already for me to function properly?

As I fretted about these questions, the first worries I experienced in a long, long time, a sudden boom invaded my senses. The bullet! I forgot about that too. As I looked over the ridge I noticed a cloud of dust drifting. It only added to my unease when I noticed it was too far away from the camp to have been the man I shot... unless they took him out. Remembering how they tried to make the shot man more comfortable, I doubted that. So they must've known about the bullet and had been able to take it out before it exploded. Now that was most unconcerting!

A few hours later I decided they'd have lowered their guard, the camp experiencing no further attack since the morning. I crawled back towards the ridge to take a look. The camp was still heavily guarded. The man I tried to shoot earlier (but missed) squatted halfway up the far hill, scanning the surroundings ceaselessly through a pair of jumpers. One of the women was patrolling the perimeter. The others were scattered between the boxes, taking cover behind the large vehicle.

Again, I decided to aim for the man on the far hill. I put the gun up, looking through the sights to get a clear view but as I pulled the trigger I heard confused shouts and warnings. Had I been discovered?

The blond woman was running through the camp, grabbed the gun from the other female and was yelling and shouting as she held the gun high over her head. What was she doing? The man must've asked himself the same question, since he stood up appearing uncertain what to do. I counted down the seconds, three, two, one... and with a shout he fell down. Right on target!

Satisfied, I dropped below the ridge again. This should keep them bunkered down for a bit. I decided to go and find the other male first, see what he could tell me about this curious group.

[Part 4 - Guilt and innocence]

It was late afternoon when I finally located the large, blond male again. He was prowling through the wilderness, trying to be cautious but not doing a very good job of it. I smiled

at myself. Definitely station born and bred, this one.

As I aimed my gun, he started running away from me, apparently alerted by some birds that scattered at my movement. But he couldn't outrun the titanium alloy bullet.

With a thud it hit him in the leg and he fell down. I made my way down and was, as usual, rewarded with the utter look of fright that crept over people's faces the first time they laid eyes on me. I found this vaguely satisfying. At least some things still were as they were supposed to be.

I moved to him, jutting out the thin needle I used to gather blood from my catches. I grabbed his leg and he screamed as I stabbed the needle in the bullet wound. He begged me, as they always did. Why didn't they realize begging was useless with me? I told him not to move and as he finally stopped squirming, I said "You see, it hurts less when you stop moving."

"It still hurts plenty," he shot back at me through clenched teeth.

Patiently I explained, "The bullet slows, but it doesn't stop moving. It continues to travel to your abdomen and explodes one hour after impact."

The horrifying implications of what I just said dawned on him slowly.

"Unless I stop it," I added, as an afterthought. "You obey or you die. I need your name to label the blood sample."

After some more useless evasion, he told me his name.

"John Danziger."

I quickly scanned the data I had on file about the inhabitants. Confusion hit me again. How could this be? He had to be lying about the name. Didn't he realize I knew *exactly* who were here?

"I have no John Danziger. That name is not on the manifest."

He laughed, a short, almost hysterical bark.

"So I can go home then!"

Damn, he was just like the rest of them. They were all the same! I felt disappointed. I hoped this one'd be more interesting than that.

"So, you're innocent," I remarked coldly. "Like all the others, defying me for no reason." As I gazed upon his face, slow comprehension crept over it.

"You think I'm a criminal!" he exclaimed. I looked into his eyes and once more a sudden sense of something amiss fogged my usually so clear mind. *He* obviously believed what he was saying. That was different. All the others said they were innocent too, but they all lied - and knew it. His next remark took me totally of guard.

"You work for the Council..."

As his words struck home, I stood up abruptly. His words rattled me. But why? I mean, the man was right. I did work for the Council. But this man made me feel it was the wrong thing to do, like it could be different. Should be different. How could I feel that way? They created me, made me to do their dirty work.

"No more questions!" I bit at him. But he continued to accuse me until, as a last resort, I grabbed his wounded leg. He screamed then but it left me cold. As it should. Satisfied, I hunched down, a bit away from him, his bright understanding still unsettling me.

"You will answer all questions honestly and precisely," I promised him.

Suddenly, my mechanized ear buzzed with interference. What was this? Another sign of malfunctioning? Ah, no.

With relief I sensed a magnetic field behind the wounded man. I walked back to him. He cringed in anticipation of more pain as I neared him. But I wasn't interested in causing him pain. Pain was only used when necessary. To induce a prisoner's cooperation. To convince them to answer.

Behind him he hid a gear set, activated to transmitting only. I crunched it and told him matter-of-factly:

"Warning them won't help. I will take them one by one," and the cold truth of my words must've hit him, 'cause he paled and a desolate air came over him.

While darkness fell, as always on this planet swiftly and suddenly, I continued my questioning. He was reluctant to answer, silent most of the time. I could easily have made him answer quicker, by adding to his discomfort. But I did not want to cause this man any more pain. And this only added to my confusion. When had I ever been bothered by causing pain? Something about this man frightened me.

[Part 5 - Redemption]

Unexpectedly, I sensed eyes. Eyes watching me from nearby. I stood up and turned to look. Enhanced night vision helped me spot the ATV, a few people standing around it.

With a final warning to the man who called himself John Danziger, I left, slinking towards the assembled group. Through the sights of my gun I saw them, first the female leader, then another man, then... the robot. Seen up close I realized this was a worker series robot of the kind used on earth in the mining provinces. I had seen plenty of those during my tour on earth, beating down the miner's insurrection in the early 2180's. What was it doing here?

As I stood there, scope lowered, indecisively, sudden footsteps sounded behind me. Instinctively I grabbed, and a black man fell over my shoulder to the ground. He tried to attack *me*. These people did *not* behave as they were supposed to. I felt I was slowly losing control of the situation. I never lost control! But from my right another voice sounded.

"ZED unit. Identify yourself," it commanded. The voice belonged to the blond woman that joined the group that morning. Who was she?

"Advance and be killed," I tried to warn her back. But although she obviously was cautious, she did not budge. My looks or my gun did not frighten her.

"I am an appointee of the Council," she said, "ID Delta 04917."

That threw me off guard.

"That is a physician's code," I said, feeling more and more unsettled. What was a doctor doing here? These feelings of confusion were very disconcerting to me. I was not supposed to feel surprised or confused or any other complicating emotion, I was supposed to just do the job I was sent here for.

"You have no authority here," I tried, but she wasn't fazed.

"I have Council authority," she declared and continued to command me to prepare the convict for transport. Desperately I tried to regain control of the situation. "Transport is at my discretion only."

I could not withstand her voice of authority though. So I promised to relocate the imprisoned man to my camp. As I bent over him, she stepped forward. I felt a sudden sting in my neck and in a reflex I grabbed her arm. The last sound I heard, as the world went black, were her bones snapping in my grip.

[Part 6 - Peace at last]

Slowly, oh so slowly, the world returned. And with it feeling in my hands and legs.

Cautiously I tried to move, only to discover that my hands were tied. As I opened my eyes, the blond woman, the doctor, that sedated me, turned towards me.

"I am a prisoner?" I asked her in wonderment. She was a Council representative, wasn't she? So why would she hold me prisoner?

"For debriefing purposes only," she explained. "Reilly's issued a change in your op procedure," and then, a most amazing thing, she apologized for sedating me.

I told her she had better hurry, if she wanted to unload the data on the fourteen convicts I killed since landing on the planet. I realized upon waking that my built-in cyanide release would've been triggered the moment I went down from the sedative.

She remarked she wanted to take me to headquarters before unloading the data. "I'd rather spend my last breath here than up with the satellite brass," I informed her.

It became clear to me that she was lying. She was only pretending to work for Reilly, but she was scared. Her response confirmed my suspicions.

"You mean Reilly isn't even on the planet?" she asked incredulously, trying in vain to hide her surprise. And so were the people with her: the leader of the group and two of the men I shot earlier.

In the back of my mind a voice whispered in admiration. She had to be a good physician. She managed to get three of my bullets out before they exploded. I wondered how she'd done that with the last one, her left arm broken and now supported by a sling.

A sudden pain spasmed through me. I was dying. I wasn't afraid of death though. My life had been over years ago. I felt an odd sense of calm. At last it was over. I would finally know peace. My last thought was of the mysterious woman who caused my demise. I wanted to know who she really was. I tried to ask.

"Who... are..."

Disclaimer: This story is based on the Amblin Entertainment/Universal Television series Earth 2. The original creators own all original characters. The story is meant for entertainment purposes only and does not have the intention to infringe on any copyrights.