

A simple neutralization

Remaining perfectly motionless is an acquired skill. It could be hours at a time, standing motionless behind a cove of trees, legs aching, eyes twitching, unable to scratch that itch on your nose. A perfect mission for NU5. The wind whistled through the trees as the light began to fade. It has been 5 hours and 27 minutes since it had first acquired its position on the top of a steep hill looking down over the road. The faint lights of the city and the moon lit the road below. The night stood still, dark and motionless. It all seemed familiar, like a dream.

"15 hours in, slight shaking"

The second man in the lab coat began jotting down notes onto his clipboard.

"Number three, how are you doing?"

"I'm...so exhausted. How much longer do I have to stand here? I thought I was number 2...?"

"It's still re-adjusting after the last neural wipe, it could affect the test conditions"

"The confusion is only caused by the exhaustion and mental strain. It will be fine. Continue the test, this model looks promising"

"I don't know how much more I can take, please, can the test be over?"

"We'll test till you collapse number 3. We need to know how resilient you can be in this chassis."

The two men in lab coats turned towards the door. The first man turned back, just for a moment.

"Remember number three, you're doing a good thing for the state. We'll be back in another 7 hours. Don't move a bit."

The room was engulfed in darkness as the second man hit the light switch. The only light faded as the door swung shut. It felt like it had been motionless for days now. Slowly, the machine could feel itself fading away.

In the distance it could detect movement along the road, small black forms against the light of the city. As they got closer the patient behemoth faintly made out the gleam of white bones reflecting in the moonlight. Mission parameters were simple this time; those were the best missions. 5 hours 45 minutes now. The hulking figure stood perfectly still, undetectable in the trees.

The two men in lab coats paced around the room, their words quick and bitter.

"Two field tests. TWO FIELD TEST. It performed perfectly, 7 enemies of the state efficiently and effectively neutralized. What's not to like."

"Approval for field tests need to come from both of us, I did not agree to this. We haven't finished testing on it. I can't believe you went behind my back on this."

"You're too overprotective of our research. This has the potential to change how section 9 operates!"

"OUR research. This is OUR research. You can't go making these decisions without me. We haven't even tested the new alloy plating, and you're sending the culmination of 15 years of our lives work to crush a couple skeletons? What if it were captured? Killed? We'd have to start all over. You know how many neural wipes we had to do before we got it this obedient. It could take years to get another subject to this point."

"I'm doing what's best for the state. You're too caught up in yourself to see the potential in our work."

"You have broken my trust and half a dozen regulations. Don't you understand the gravity of what you've done?" The man paused. *"I need a moment."*

The first man left the room. The remaining scientist let out a sigh, and turned toward the door.

"I suppose we ought to continue testing then, eh number four?"

He picked up the rifle from the lab table, and pulled his goggles down onto the bridge of his nose.

"Alright number four," he said as he shouldered the rifle, *"stand about 200 yards back."*

The laughs of the undead started growing steadily louder. They seemed to be in good spirits, talking about their last raid and how their victims actually believed if they handed over their possessions they would be safe. 6 hours, 07 minutes: it was time. The undead bandits had no time to react, no time to reach for their weapons, no time to assess the threat, no time to fear for their lives. They all turned towards the heavy thud and the crack of bones as their friend was crushed beneath the falling form of a giant machine. A heavy great sword cleaved the second skeleton in two. By the time the undead leading the caravan turned around, there was nothing but dust in the air and bones on the road. The imposing figure of a machine he had never seen the likes of before slowly walked imposingly towards him. The last thing the skeleton saw was the seal of section 9 on its side, as he was hoisted up by the metal hand that clenched his head. The machine let the fragments of skull fall to the ground. Clean-up wasn't in the mission parameters. It was a simple neutralization, just how it liked them. Target neutralized; mission 37 complete.

The man in the lab coat stood proud over his machine. Strong, agile, resilient... Finally, his research had come to an end. He couldn't believe that after so many highs and lows, it was ready for its first official mission in section 9.

"Alright number 5, no more field tests. This time you're going after a high profile target. The target is in possession of highly classified state secrets, and is fleeing east. Your mission is a simple neutralization, make sure he doesn't escape." He added reassuringly, "Don't worry number 5, you were made for this. The state thanks you for your service."

The man in the lab coat handed over a file to the machine. The target was middle aged, with greying hair and a spindly frame. He looked familiar, but the machine couldn't explain why.

"Best of luck, Neutralization Unit Five"