

It took a few minutes for me to describe exactly what a sawtooth was to my soldiers, at least at the best of my ability. Its design was stuck firmly in my head, as it was the first really dangerous zoomorph you fought in the game. In the encounter, it was attacking the Nora, the tribe that Aloy came from. It really trashes the place before the main character comes around to finally put it down, and if I remembered correctly, it was a fight known to put players down at least a few times. I know I got frustrated with it, something to do with a spike in difficulty...

Either way, all that meant was that this was not a fight we could just stumble into and expect to come out the other side uninjured, or at all. This required planning, information, and, if possible, information from the natives.

If anyone knew how to make killing one of these easy, or at least give us a fighting chance, it was the people who had grown up around them. With any luck, they could direct us to somewhere we could hunt them, assuming there were sawtooths nearby, which there likely were, seeing as the entities wouldn't give me a quest if there weren't any of them close by.

"Do we know any of their weaknesses?" Joseph asked. "Any exposed machinery or glowing spots we can take down for massive damage?"

"I... I honestly don't know," I admitted with a frown. "I remember the fight pretty vividly, but... most of that was shouting at the screen as I desperately tried to roll out of the way. They are big, angry, and surprisingly quick."

"Smart money is on setting a trap," Carlos pointed out. "We could rig up a basic trip mine with some paracord and our grenades....?"

"...That's not a bad start," I said, giving Carlos an approving look. I am worried that one or even a few grenades might not have enough energy behind them to cause any real damage. These are combat-ready zoomorphs, after all. They have armor and reinforced systems..."

"What if we bumped up the power?" Joseph suggested. "We have access to some pretty potent fuel in the form of blaze, or we could try something with chillwater. We could harvest some of that from other robots and set up a trap with them."

"And then use a grenade trap as an ignition source," Carlos finished. "Best bet would probably be blaze in that case."

"There are also parts that hold a string electrical charge," I added. "Like a capacitor. If we can locate some of those, we could set up a shock trap."

"Is that better than burning or freezing?"

"Well, yeah. This isn't a game," I pointed out. "We aren't just applying elemental effects for bonus damage. If we pump a large amount of electricity through all those sensitive electronics? How much of that is just going to short out and immediately fail?"

"That... is a fair point, sir," Joseph accepted.

"How do we find the charged parts?" Carlos asked. "Just start cutting until we see sparks?"

"I have no idea," I answered. "And honestly, I'm a bit nervous to go digging into things now that I remember that some of the parts hold enough charge to seriously damage zoomorphs. Poking one of those with our knives would *not* be fun."

Both of the soldiers winced, suddenly a lot less eager to do exploratory zoomorph butchering. As they came to terms with that, I formulated a basic idea in my head.

"Okay, here's the plan," I said, catching my soldiers' attention. "First, we grab the charger kill quest. We head into the Horizon world and make our way to our new hunting grounds. We kill some chargers, grab their blaze, and make our way back, stopping at the hunting bridge. There we will wait."

"For our friends?" Joseph asked.

"Exactly. I want to know if they have any advice, or if they could direct us to a sawtooth directly," I explained. "Better than wandering around, looking for trouble."

Both soldiers agreed with the plan, and soon we were ready to head out to start our day. Once again, we pushed out into the Fallout world for a quick jaunt through the residential area, clearing a single building before quickly turning back and heading straight into the Horizon world, leaving our loot behind for Maxwell to go through. Notable finds from a rushed excursion included two small medkits, a few bottles of booze, a stack of books and comics, as well as some ammo. I was also happy to exchange my rough, poor-quality .32 pistol for an almost pristine version from a safe.

As we made our way through the forest and along the river, we switched sides across the hunting bridge, paying close attention to the area. While I was hoping we could find our friends, I didn't want to make a scene by calling out for them, since that would likely attract unwanted attention or even put a hunter in danger if we spooked a robot at the wrong time. So instead, we hung around for a few minutes, looking around obviously, making it clear that we were looking for them and weren't actively hostile.

After about ten minutes of that, we moved on, now on the opposite side of the river. Eventually, we reached the crossing point up along the mountain to the higher hunting grounds. Joseph and I paid close attention to the area, trying to figure out the best way to make climbing easier. Joseph had the idea of cutting down a few taller, thinner trees, then lashing them together with paracord to form a plank. While it wouldn't solve the entire climb, laying down a few of those would make some of the more treacherous parts a lot safer, not to mention faster.

When we finally arrived at the higher elevation, we made a beeline across the [shallow river](#), heading to the further reaches of the area we had explored. While I was fairly certain we had spotted a few chargers in that area when we first started looking around, whether they were still there was another question.

After taking a short break, hiding in the gap between several large boulders, we continued to trek across the extensive area. The foliage up there was much sparser than what followed the smaller, faster-flowing river after the falls. It was a much larger, open area, dotted with thick copses of taller trees and bushes. As you walked from cover point to cover point, it was impossible not to feel vulnerable. Yes, there were vast stretches of long grass for us to dip into, but it was nothing compared to the safety and security of a whole forest around you.

After nearly an hour of searching, on top of our travel time, we finally stumbled onto a herd of chargers. There were seven of them, one more than we needed, but that wasn't necessarily a good thing. These robots were considerably more antagonistic than almost any other zoomorph we had hunted so far. Once we started to take them down, they would likely *all* attack us directly, following their namesake and charging at us.

"We need to follow them," I said quietly, watching as the small herd ambled slowly across the grassy area. "Until a better angle of attack shows up. Then we can engage from a favorable position."

Both Joseph and Carlos nodded, and together we watched the herd slowly move, stalking after them, staying low as we moved. After about fifteen minutes of following them, they passed a group of thick, sturdy trees, large enough to protect us from their attacks. With a quick signal, we moved, skirting along the side of the group before settling into the trees.

"Best bet is to aim for the legs," Joseph pointed out, as we all steadied ourselves. "Can't charge if they can't stand."

"There isn't much to aim for there," I responded, looking through my optic.

"Have you considered getting good, sir?" Carlos asked, a smirk on his face as he settled against a large rock.

Rather than answer, I quietly counted down from three, before gently pulling the trigger, my rifle barking as a three-round burst punched through the left leg of the closest robot. Both of my soldiers opened up a moment after I did, bullets whizzing across the brush, sparks shattering off the legs and shoulder plates of the large zoomorphs. Three dropped in the first wave of bullets, shifting and moving but unable to stand. Then another two succumbed, one of them collapsing after its head exploded. They managed to actually charge, making it a dozen meters closer before we finally dropped them.

The last two were right behind them, heads lowered, seemingly determined to bash themselves against the trees we were hiding behind. All three of us stood, moving out of cover and further away from the robots, deeper into the trees. Joseph and I happened to focus on one of them, our rifles emptying just as it stumbled and rolled, unmoving once it came to a stop.

The last zoomorph slammed into one of the thicker trees, leaves and branches falling from higher up, knocked loose by the impact. The dense wood, however, absorbed the zoomorph's momentum, stopping it dead in its tracks. Seeing an opportunity, Carlos slipped his

sawed-off from its holster, reached around the tree, and pulled the trigger, a shell of buckshot blasting off chunks of the robot's facial armor, and dropping it in a split second.

After a moment of careful listening, all of us standing stock still, our eyes on the surrounding area, we finally unclenched. The only things we could hear was our heavy breathing and the sound of the disabled nearby chargers. Everything else was silent. Slowly, all three of us reloaded, before wordlessly splitting up to double-tap all of our targets, one final shot of sparks shooting from each unit.

Once I was reasonably sure none of them would suddenly spin around and gore us, we set to work, only to immediately realize that this canister of blaze was different from the "standard" ones we had seen so far. Those units had been smaller, open to the air, and generally unprotected. After a few cuts and a bit of prying, those blaze reservoirs would come free pretty easily. These containers, while still partially exposed, were significantly bigger and plated with armor to protect them.

After about five minutes of fiddling around, two of which I spent fighting off *deja vu*, we had managed to figure out how to remove the containers without burning ourselves alive in the process. We carefully removed all seven from the now-defunct chargers, before packing up and making our way back across our hunting grounds.

After once again crossing the shallow river and making our way to the falls, we backtracked along the side of the mountain, before once again following the faster-moving portion of the river all the way to the hunters' bridge. There we crossed, before finding a place to sit and wait among the group of trees that stood along the opposite side. I was prepared to wait the remainder of the day, basically crossing my fingers and hoping that Toando and Yalna would show up. Barring that, I hoped someone else from their tribe, someone who would hopefully be as friendly as they were, would show up instead.

As we sat, waiting, we debated how best to set up our trap. We agreed that splitting up the blaze we had harvested into at least two traps was for the best, since having all seven at one spot would be a bit risky. If it went off before our target was close enough, or failed in some other way, splitting them up would at least give us a second chance. Beyond that, we needed to design the actual IED.

"I don't think it's very complicated," Carlos said with a frown. "Tie the cans together, wrap some cord around the grenade, and string it between two objects. The sawtooth walks through it, big fireball, we finish it off with our rifles."

"Assuming your target will behave as you want is asking for them to do something completely different," Joseph pointed out. "And we can't just have a big ball of paracord all wrapped around the grenade, the spoon needs to pop free. If anything gets in the way of that, the whole thing becomes a deathtrap, and not for the robot."

"So, how would we ensure the sawtooth activates the trap?" I asked, focusing on Joseph, curious about what he had in mind.

"We set it off ourselves," he responded. "You explained that these robots have routes they travel. Well, let's find one of the sawtooth routes, plant our device, hide in some nearby bushes, and wait for them to come back."

"That was in the game. Their behavior is much more... Divergent here," I explained, shaking my head. "Before I got you guys, I had an observation mission, where I had to basically watch a group for several hours. Boring as hell, but I did learn that their patterns aren't really set, they are reactive. To each other, to the weather, and to what they find as they explore. There might be a basic patrol pattern, but it's something so wide and open we might not see a repeat for a long time."

"...what if someone plays rabbit?" Carlos asked. "We set the bombs nearby, then someone spooks the sawtooth, running through a chokepoint or something, then the other two pull the rope and boom."

"What? You want one of us to willingly get chased by an angry murder robot the size of a sedan?" I asked, letting my shock freely show. "That's insane."

"I hate to say it, sir... but he might be right," Joseph admitted with a wince. "It's dangerous, yes. But it's the best way to control the board. Otherwise, we have to bend to their whims, which is only going to make things more complicated."

"But putting our lives at risk to act as bait?"

"To be fair, sir, every bit of this is putting our lives at risk," Carlos pointed out, gesturing to everything around us. "What's a little more danger for the cause?"

"Not to mention, they will be able to focus on running," Joseph pointed out. "We can go in without most of our gear to slow them down, but we can bring a few spare grenades to act as deterrents, just in case."

I opened my mouth to respond, but before I could, the sound of a cracking twig caught my attention. I turned to look over the simple hunter's bridge, spotting Toando and Yalna. There was also a third person with them, though he was much younger, maybe around twenty. He was looking at us with wide eyes, while Toando smiled and waved, and Yalna scowled at us.