

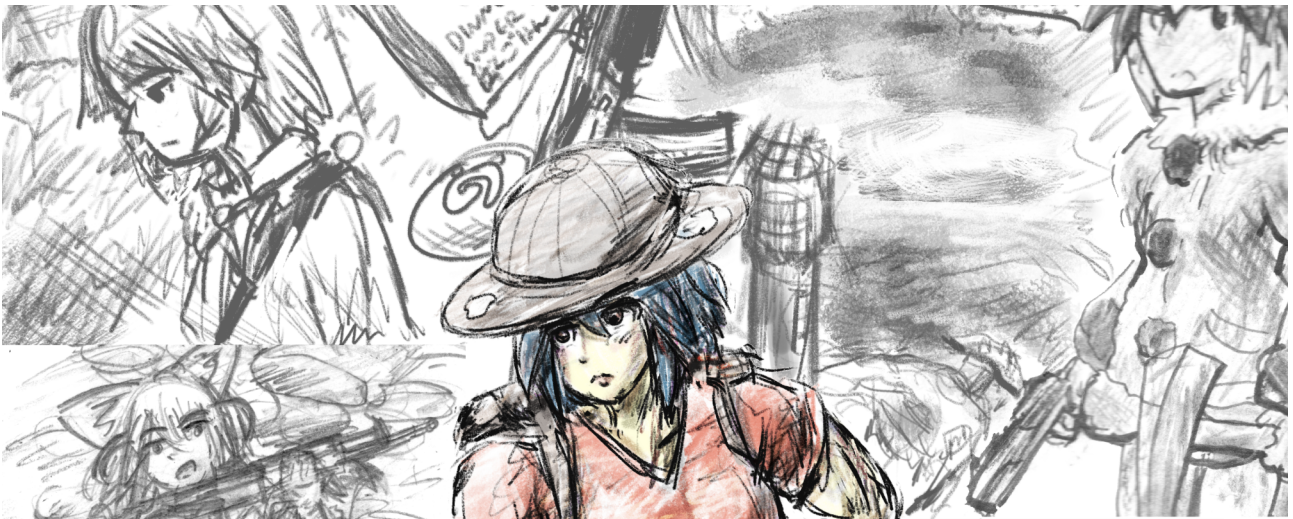
# F.R.I.E.N.D. SHADOW OF JAPARI

## Project Document TABLE OF CONTENTS

“Why is it called a *Table* of contents when it’s actually a list? Idungeddit.”  
- Forest Owlet

<b>About This Project</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Storyline Synopsis</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Setting</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Chapter 1 Example Snippet</b> .....	<b>9</b>

(sketches below are for proof-of-concept only.)



# **ABOUT THIS PROJECT**

**"Welcome to, yo-koso, Japari Park."  
- Tibetan Sand Fox**

*Friend: Shadow of Japari* is a crossover idea I had in 2019 between *Kemono Friends* (2017 season in particular) and *Stalker: Shadow of Chernobyl* (2007 post-apocalyptic FPS). These were chosen due to many similar or familiar settings and concepts shared between the two. However, other influences, such as *Metro 2033*, also show their part.

There were initial comics done in summer 2019, but I did not continue those further because I was not convinced I could keep it running in that format. As good as a full graphics project would be, I've come to realise that I would rather practise the storywriting aspect. At the least, I could use this as a plot synopsis and basic world-establishing document, with a few snippets written to figure out some basic story-telling. Bits of drawing would remain welcome, though.

However, amidst waning interest in the premise and burnout from solo reiteration and rewriting, I decided to just release what I had in early 2021. It consists mainly of a general plot synopsis, a brief setting explanation, and some early writing. I do have more information written, but it's in a less organised format.

If I had to summarise the entire intended plot in one sentence, it would be like this:

*An unusual Friend ventures her way through a dangerous Japari Park to find out who she is, opening up more of the Park and taking care of major threats along the way.*

There is no doubt I would be facing quite a few hurdles in doing so – pacing, elaboration approach, phrasing and storytelling methods, and so forth. However, we all start somewhere.

I think I would have considerable issues with using words to describe scenery and feelings in a descriptive way, which is where having side illustrations would be useful. Drawing style would then be another question, but I think pencil or pen doodles will be fine for the most part.

Now for disclaimers.

- None of the quotes, details, or information presented are representative of the final product.
- Japari Park here is a *completely distinct entity* from other official works; only a few names are shared. The overall topography and backstory are completely different.
- There are no official relationships with other KF fanworks.
- Details may be subject to change without notice.

## **STORYLINE SYNOPSIS**

**"So, Marked Friend, I saved you, and I'm not going to pretend I did this to win favours upstairs. You do some jobs for me, and we're even."**

**- Tibetan Sand Fox**

The story starts when a Friend finds another unconscious Friend near a wrecked truck, and takes her to a trader in the Savanna Region of Park South, Sandy (Tibetan Sand Fox). The Unknown Friend is alive but suffers from amnesia, unable to remember anything - all she has to go by are instructions on her phone to "Kill Kaban" and a tattoo on her forearm saying "F.R.I.E.N.D". Sandy gives her the moniker "Marked Friend" (thereafter MF). She begs not to be eaten, which is honoured.

MF repays Sandy by rescuing Jaguar from a group of Bandit Friends. In return, Sandy gives MF info on Kaban and her revelatory excursion to Park Central, a long-since-closed part of Japari Park. However, Friends have not been able to find her since then, blocked by a powerful radio emission called the Friend Scorcher. Sandy requests MF to move north to the Desert Region, to both investigate one of Kaban's rumoured hideouts and to obtain radio information from that area for her contact, Suri Alpaca.

**"Hello, we are Lucky Beasts, and I am their commander, Lucky Doc."**

**- Lucky Doc**

With this info, MF moves northwest to the Desert Region, where she finds her first piece of evidence of Kaban's whereabouts - a note from African Wild Dog (AWD) mentioning Kaban's injuries and AWD's own moves to the Jungle Library and its Professors. Following that, MF infiltrates a nearby transmitter. She takes a packet full of radio information, but afterwards encounters a number of Lucky Beasts and their leader, Lucky Doc (hereafter LD). The two introduce one another, and MF is led out of the compound by LD. LD decides to accompany MF under the guise of a tour guide.

**"So you must be the Marked Friend, nye. I heard about you from Sandy and others... you've piqued my interest recently. Have a seat, Friend - tea's on the house."**

**- Suri Alpaca**

MF then heads north to the central town of Rosutoku, meeting first with Suri Alpaca. Taking interest in the radio files, she intriguingly takes the former and converses remotely with the Professors.

Upon debriefing, Suri then directs MF and another Friend, Toki, to investigate the Desert Region's military base to the southeast for more radio information. After a long trek, MF and Toki enter the base, where they meet all sorts of bandit Friends, strange phenomena, and unknown experiments. Despite the situation, they pull through and retrieve the documents. The two split after a brief return to the Savanna.

**"Anyone out there! Assistant Professor Eurasian Eagle-Owl here, requesting assistance versus these mercenaries! Please respond at the Paradiso Highway! Confirm!!!"**

**- Mimi**

MF reports back to Suri, who tells her to take all the documents to the Professors in the Jungle Library to the west for further research. En route, MF rescues Mimi (one of the Professors) from groups of mercenary Friends and Cellienised Friends. Once they arrive at the Library, Mimi and her supervisor, Konoha, scour over the radio documents whilst ignoring MF's questions about her identity.

The next day, they ask MF to investigate the JSRT Station to the north to find out what happened to the last Friend they sent. In preparation against the station's mini-Friend Scorcher emitters, they first test a prototype emissions blocker (shaped like a blue Park visitor hat feather) as an emission strikes. Although both Mimi and LD are temporarily incapacitated by the emission, the experiment is successful, and MF is granted the blocker.

**“I wish I could ask you about Kaban, Lycaon. But you don't seem interested in talking things out. So I really should get going....”**

**- Marked Friend**

Following the owls' instructions and AWD's note, MF proceeds west into the Jungle area, fighting apparitions and Cellienised Friends along the way. MF finds an assortment of equipment and information in one room, guarded by a Cellienised AWD who attacks her. Rather than fight, MF disables the local emitter, grabs the info, and makes a getaway via a drainage tunnel.

MF gives the info to the owls. They discover that they mentioned the central location of the Friend Scorcher broadcasts – the main station further north in Downtown Japari, across the strait from Park Central itself. They instruct her to go there and disable it, so that Park Central can be accessed without fear of emissions. But that comes after cooking dinner for them and visiting PPP troops.

Making the way northwards to the Alpine region, she and various arctic Friends struggle against particularly strong, Friend-like Celliens - known as Monolith - whose equipment and tactical knowledge far exceeds what most Celliens are capable of. They sneak their way through the harsh mountains, but due to the Friend Scorcher, MF descends to the coastal Downtown Japari area alone. There, MF finds the transmitter station she was looking for. After fighting her way through scores of Monolith troops, she finds the transmitters and gives her all-clear message before destroying the radio tower.

**“The Park is open now, Friends. Marked Friend, signing out with a PPP classic.”**

**- Marked Friend**

MF heads out and takes an old railway back to Rosutoku. Back at Suri's café, Suri states that most Friends have moved north already, seeking fame, fortune, and especially the mythical Wish Granter. MF takes the opportunity to restock on supplies before going back to Park Central.

MF makes her way back to Park Central via the railway, and is immediately surprised at the reception. Rather than a scene of merriment and sounds of joy, she instead finds Park Central to be unruly and chaotic. Amidst the ruins, Friends are seen fighting each other with little discretion, not

to mention dealing with Monolith and Celliens alike between the streets and the attractions. In the chaos, MF and LD are split.

MF takes a few hits from gunfire, so she heads into a hotel complex to rest. However, she sets off a flashbang tripmine, stunning her. She comes to, seeing Arai and Fennec.

**"Well, lookie here. We've heard a lot about you lately, Marked Friend.  
...or should I say, *Kaban*?"**  
- Fennec

*[MF will be referred to as Kaban from here forward.]*

Arai tends to Kaban's wounds whilst Fennec gives Kaban info on what happened to her and her former squad, as well as a blue Park Guide feather (called "the Key to the Park" by Arai) to Kaban. Kaban sticks it to her cap. Kaban decides to head to Kemono Castle alone.

She makes it to the castle grounds, but only in time to witness significant combat between LD's troops and Monolith, vying for control of the centre. But this is cut short by an impending emission. Kaban meets LD and the two rush inside the Castle grounds.

**"Is this thing on? Anyways, Park Guide Mirai reporting...."**  
- Mirai, via recording on LD

As Kaban and LD traverse Kemono Castle, the latter stops at times to play recordings by the late Park Staffer Mirai. Kaban discovers that Mirai was instrumental in previous Park adventures, that the Cellien threat was coming strongly from volcanic activities further north, and that the "Four Gods" could potentially stop that. Kaban questions LD why he's broadcasting these messages; LD reveals Mirai's operational details, now assuming that Kaban has full Guide authority.

As they traverse the castle, Kaban increasingly suffers from voices and visions of the Wish Granter despite LD's objections, and eventually stands in front of it, a monolithic structure with an eerie gate and a hallow glow. Desperate to keep Kaban away from its temptations, LD decides to activate an alarm and countdown, detaches his transponder, and charges at the Wish Granter, detonating on arrival. The blast knocks Kaban back, and she passes out shortly after.

Kaban later wakes up to only find LD (now a transponder only), a way out, Mirai's skeleton, and a missile launching system labelled "FOUR GODS GUIDANCE SYSTEM". LD projects Mirai's last broadcast, which pleads anyone who finds her later to aim the system at the Volcano from Japari Tower, then fire the Four Gods - a set of specially designed ICBMs - at the Volcano as a way to reduce Cellium emissions/eruptions. As Kaban takes the equipment, she is greeted by the Cellien Queen.

**"We fight a life or death struggle against each other for no reason...."**  
- Cellien Queen

*[NB. This Cellien Queen takes the form of Mirai.]*

CQ gives Kaban multiple things about the state of Japari Park, Friend-Cellien relations, her own desires to unify the two (and get more Animal Girls to appreciate), and how she intercepted Kaban's old group and dissipate Kaban (only to later give a revived Kaban the mission of killing herself before sending her down to Park South). Most importantly, she offers Kaban a chance to jointly rule Monolith with her - and ideally, all of Japari Park as well.

Unconvinced by CQ's approach and recalling the Friends she met along the way, Kaban refuses CQ's offer. In response, CQ furiously calls in Monolith troops and forces pressure. She is, however, cut short by JSRT APCs bursting through the wall, followed by a supporting brigade of Friends. Kaban and LD take advantage of the commotion and ensuing battle to leave the scene and head towards Japari Tower, missile launcher in tow.

She makes her way to the top of Japari Tower, only to be greeted by CQ. CQ proposes a hand-to-hand fight to the death to determine the fate of the Park; Kaban accepts. While the two fight evenly to the point of fatigue, Kaban gains the upper hand when she kicks CQ through a railing, which breaks. Kaban rushes and grabs CQ's hand to save her, but CQ refuses the assistance forcefully and falls to her death.

**"I heard the Park sing a new song, thanks to you...."**

- Toki

Now alone with LD, Kaban aims the missile system and fires the Four Gods at the Volcano to the north. As the missiles fly overhead and hit the volcano, Kaban wonders if this was the right move. Shortly after the impact, Toki arrives, praising MF for her action. Kaban simply asks to return to ground, and the two fly back down to Park Central.

**"Yo, Suri! We'll have the usual, double shots for my friend!"**

- Caracal

In an epilogue scene back at Suri's Rosutoku bar, Caracal and an aloof Serval arrive late one evening. Suri updates the two on the recent activities of MF and how Friends have since moved elsewhere. Caracal believes this to be the work of a human, and asks Serval about her own experiences with a human Friend. Upon hearing this, Serval drops her drink in shock, paralysed as she trembles and mutters "K-ka-...no, how...?".

## SETTING

"I don't know if you can call this a Park any more. A better name would be Japari Roadside Picnic, and we animal girls are left with its trash and breadcrumbs."

- Unknown Friend

The story is set in Japari Park, but not the same Park as seen in official Kemono Friends entries. While similarities exist between the settings and regions, they are **completely unrelated to one another**.

The Park in *Friend: SHOJ* is divided into several geographic areas, mostly named by direction:

- Park Central is the main island which contained many amusement parks and tourist things, but Friends have not been able to get there recently.
- Most Friends reside in Park South, the largest island. It is also the most varied in terms of climates, backdrops, and features. However, the northern portions of it are inhospitable currently.
- Park North, a set of smaller islands, is a hotspot for both Cellien and volcanic activity. The tallest island contains a highly active volcano.
- Park West, Park East, and the Riukiu Islands also exist; these are irrelevant to the current story.

A WIP map is provided on another page.

Most of the story focuses on Park South, with parts in Park Central. The terrain is based on a mix of the NYC and Hong Kong metro areas, but with little respect to the real-life climates and terrain. I opted to change around the Park to better fit the intended plot; it would be possible to adjust things to fit either canon Japari Park or Stalker's Zone, however.

The presence of Sandstar and Cellium have resulted in many areas where the laws of physics, climate, etc. simply do not apply normally. These are generally referred to as anomalies, and their properties are neither well understood, nor considered to be inherently good/bad. In particular, one called the Wish Granter draws in Friends with its temptations to make visitors' deepest wishes come true, but none have ever confirmed it convincingly.

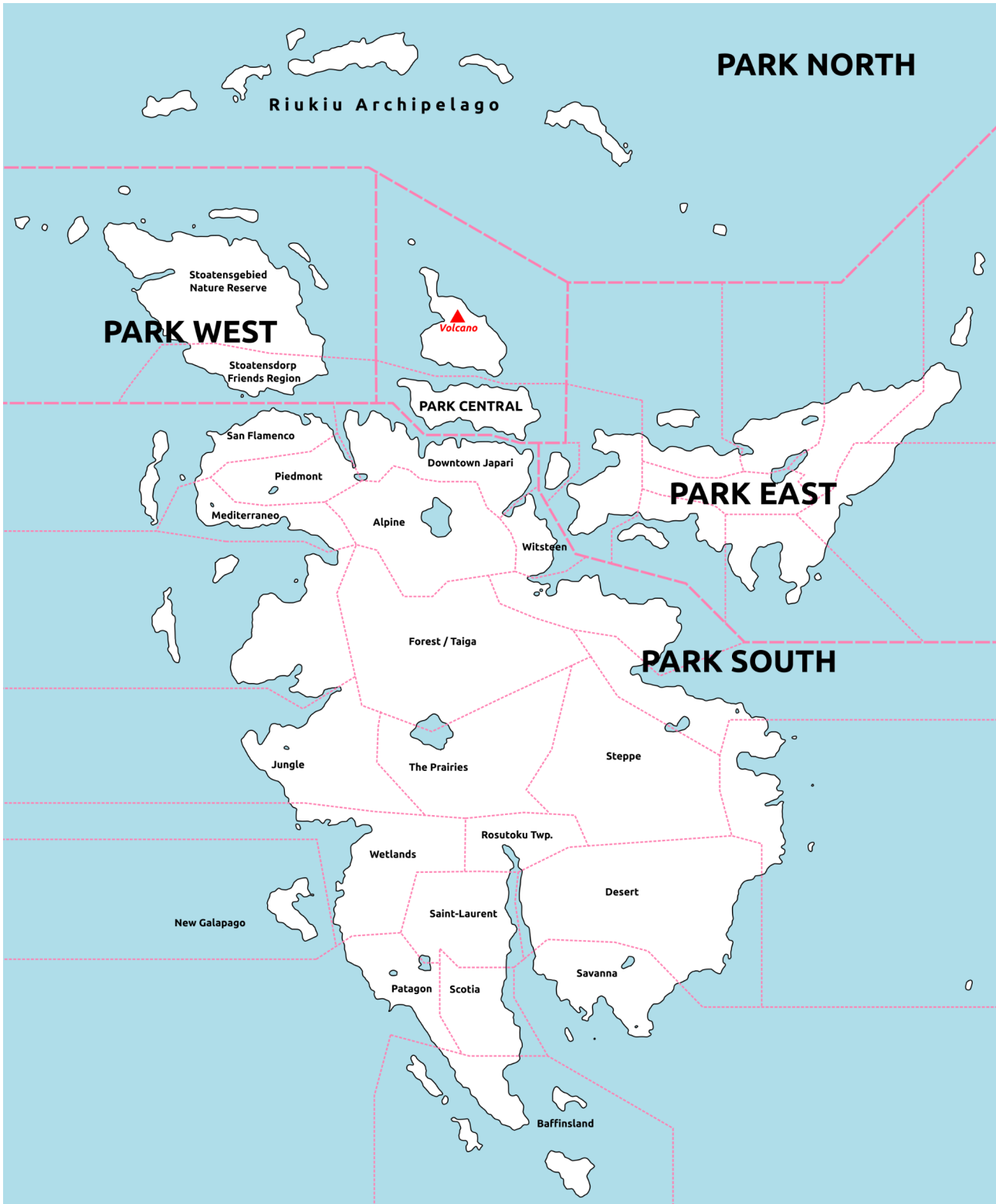
The remains of modern human civilisation (eg. 21st century consumer technology, souvenirs, books, etc.) from Japari Park's tourism days are present, but not all of these are understood clearly. There are efforts to understand both anomalies and artifacts by interested parties.

Friends and Celliens both heavily use guns and gun-like weaponry against one another; gone are the days of charging with melee attacks for *pakaan* effects. For Friends, most of this comes as Cold War-era surplus arms, complete with standard ammunition. Though Friends shoot other Friends sometimes, Friends are far more resilient to standard arms, and combined with the ability to eventually settle disputes with discussions and food (as well as the Cellien threat all Friends share), they seldom have to shoot to kill one another. However, they are vulnerable to the Cellium-powered weapons Celliens use, but conversely, Celliens are vulnerable to Friends' weapons. Basically, against each other, they're glass cannons.

# WELCOME TO THIS JAPARI PARK

“Everything the light touches is our domain...if only that were actually true.”  
- Unknown Friend

(Note: This map is tentative and not final. Not all provinces/regions are named.)





## CHAPTER 1 SNIPPET

*Damn it, it is all a haze.... Head's throbbing, these lights fade into existence, and someone is staring at me from behind the counter... what a serious look they have.*

“So, Marked Friend, **I saved you,**”, said that person, “and I’m not going to pretend I did it to win favours upstairs. You do some jobs for me, and we’re even.”

*...Marked Friend?* I guess she means me – and the mark must be that “FRIEND” tattoo on my arm. Weird name...but whatever. What even is my *name*?

“...besides, keeping you busy might help you with your amnesia.”

That would explain why I don’t remember my name. But what about -

“I don’t give a damn why you want to kill that Kaban Friend - I mind my own business. But I’ll see what I can find about this Kaban while you work.”

Who’s Kaban? Why do I want them dead? All I see on my device is “KILL KABAN” in big, scary letters. Also, who are you, lady with fox ears – are you a so-called Friend?

“Anyway, the choice is yours. Either I treat you like a rookie Friend and brainwash you with instructions, or I treat you like a real Friend and I give you a mission right away.”

I’d like to leave, but hell if I know what I’d be getting into, especially given that blast door behind me.

“Treat me like a rookie....whoever you are,” I tell her. “I don’t remember shit.”

The Friend nodded and didn’t change her facial look at all. How friendly.

“First of all, Marked Friend, welcome to, *yo-koso* Japari Park. I am Tibetan Sand Fox, but call me *Sandy*.... I’m a trader and informant around these parts, serving Friends in the Savanna Pavilion right above us.”

“Japari Park....? Friends? Am *I* a Friend?”

“Yes, yes.... Long story short, Japari Park is where we are – a vast set of islands with lots of tourist attractions. It has a thing called Sandstar that leads to animals becoming humanoid girls – myself included. We call them Friends. You’re one too, Marked Friend, but hell if I know what kind of Friend you are..but you can ask other Friends and they might tell you.”

...well I am curious now.

“Anyways, hand over your Guide’s PDA – that white block thing of yours – so I may show you around....”

I handed over my *PDA* thing to Sandy. She then provided all sorts of instructions...too much info, can’t sort it out. Something about detecting Friends in range, anomaly or celery sensors, being able to talk with them long ago...zzz...Snake....

...”HEY, Marked Friend!”

*Mmmh, must’ve zoned out....*

“...I see I’ve bored you, so let’s cut to the chase. I have a job for you. A Friend, Jaguar, has been caught by bandits to the north of the Savanna Pavilion. She holds information that I

requested. A group of Friends is waiting nearby for extra help, but none of the other rookies in the Pavilion are willing to go. How about you?”

I don't know what I am getting into...hostage rescue? This doesn't seem friendly at all... but what else am I going to do? This smug fox is the best I have right now between me and this Kaban.

“Yes, I'm listening and willing,” I reply timidly.

“Good, good. Go up to the surface and talk to Aardwolf – she'll be at the Pavilion somewhere. There, she'll provide you your equipment and further instructions. I shall open the doors for you.”

Basic training...? This seems a bit serious.

With that, Sandy pressed some switch, and CREEEEEEAAK. The door clanged and opened behind me to reveal a staircase. Guess this is my way out.

“Thank you, Sandy,” I respond as I turn towards and ascend the stairs.

“Oh, before I forget....”, she responded. I turned around.

“**...good hunting, Friend.**” She tried to make a light smile, but it looked awkward against her sultry gaze. Ah well. I waved back in earnest, then turned around to head upstairs.

*Hunting*...what an odd choice of word. What am I getting into....

===

As I turn the corner, I see a bright blue sky overhead, with the radiant sun blinding me quickly. My hat's helping a little at least. One last step...and I'm on the surface proper. Around and across me is a vast swath of golden grassland, with the occasional acacia or baobab tree around. Air's dry, warm, and quite pleasant. So this is what they mean by *savanna* ....

Anyways, what should I do? I have to head to the Savanna Pavilion...I guess it's that set of buildings right ahead of me. Seems there are other...Friends?... there. Well, maybe they can lead me to this Aardwolf.

...”Yo-hoo! Hello there, New Friend!~” A Friend up front holstered her weapon and gave a big wave and smile towards me.

“Uh...hi?”, I replied.

“Welcome to the Savanna Pavilion, where any Friend's welcome anytime!”, she replied. “I'm Thomson's Gazelle. What's your name?”

I've no choice but to be honest here. “I...uh, don't know.... That Sandy Friend called me 'Marked Friend'....”

Thomson remained cheerful. “...ah! So *you're* that Friend everyone was talking about! Come on in; I'll show you 'round, how about that?” She gestured at me to come closer; in return, I followed behind her as we crossed the fence into the Pavilion. For all I know, maybe she is genuine and Friends are this way, or maybe I'm literally nothing more than fresh meat.

The Savanna Pavilion seems quaint. Several buildings are here, with the largest being some rectangular building with a big “motel” sign on the top floor, alongside a large dirt field in the centre, a covered area with tables and a large bowl, and some other buildings. All surrounded with a flimsy picket and barbed wire fence – rustic, to say the least. But everything looks mottled and worn. Either I'm in a sleazy park, or no one's visited in a while.

“G-g-greetings pooose!”, trembled one Friend at the ground level of the motel in front of one room. She had her arms held out to her sides, looking nervous but genuine. I waved back candidly, and she soon after broke her pose and nervously turned back around.

“Aweh!”, shouted another looking from the upper level. “Lookie op daai wat we have~, a newcomer, eh? Jy’s een mooi meesjy, hé?”

“Oi, African Rock Python, not too hastily to our new Friend, now!”, Thomson replied back. Confusing Friend there. Onwards we went towards a lodge labelled “Park Staff Office”, passing by several other Friends on the way. All of them also had firearms of some sort, huh....

We went inside the office, where another Friend greeted us from her desk. It was cluttered with information, a roll or bun of some kind, some bullets, and a white sport backpack. I guess she’s the head of the pavilion.

“I’ll handle our new Friend from here, Thomson,” the Friend said. Thomson acknowledged it, told me to hang out anytime, and left the building. Just me and this other Friend now....

“Hello there, Marked Friend”, she said. “Welcome to the Savanna Pavilion – I am Aardwolf. You were lucky I found you by that wrecked bus – any longer and you’d be Celliens’ breakfast!”

H-huh? This has gotten more confusing. “...thank you, I guess?” I respond.

“Don’t mention it – we’re glad to have new Friends around. Anyways, Sandy told me you’re coming my way, en route to a troop of Friends I sent out....”

“...uh, yeah.”

“I should give you your welcome gift. See that backpack on the table? Well, everything in it is yours. Take it.”

I took a look into the pack, noticing the following:

- An unloaded pistol labelled “*Pistolet Makarova*” along with magazines, pistol holster, and a 50-pack box of bullets
- Multi-tool (Aard commented that very few Friends can use these)
- Matchbox
- 3 buns in a fabric bag. (Food, possibly)
- A badly-worn “Welcome to Japari Park” tourist guide and Japari Park-branded pens
- A fabric case loaded with bullet cases of various sizes

This is far more serious than I anticipated. Did I enter a war zone? I put the pack on – and without any adjustments, it fit snugly and perfectly.

“Now that you have your equipment,” Aardwolf replied, “you can join the Friends I sent over east to the River Depot, just down the road before the broken bridge. I’ll let them know you’re coming.”

How unhelpful. I would have at least liked a tutorial. Yet, as I hold the PM in my hand, it somehow *feels* familiar. Magazine release button, eight bullets in magazine, push, click --

*Rrrrrrrrrr*. My abdomen growls fiercely – how embarrassing. I’ve impressed everyone I’ve met with both amnesia and hunger.

“Oh!”, Aardwolf responded in pleasant surprise. “Here’s a Japari Bun – go ahead, take it,” as she took the bun from the desk and pushed it to my hands. “U-uh, bon appetit!”

I couldn’t resist her suggestion. I put away my pistol and went straight for the bun, rushing it down...but mm, that flavour and heartiness....

**“M-mmh-! This is...amazing!”**

“Pretty good, aren’t they?” No kidding; I could go for seconds! Best part of my day thus far. “...anyways, Marked Friend, head east, meet with other Friends, and rescue Jaguar, okay?”

“Got it. Thank you!”

“Good luck, Marked Friend!”

I stepped outside and made my way east, out of the pavilion and onto a rough paved road. Here I am now, armed and possibly heading to a battle front. I don’t know who I’m fighting against. Maybe I won’t know until I shoot something.

Northeast at a bridge, they say...

...let’s see my bag...no, don’t need the buns, I need the tourist guide. There we are.

Savanna region, page 58. I seem to be at the Savanna Pavilion, and a few tiles above and to the right, there’s a rail station, it seems? Must be the bridge. There we go, then. Time for a walk.

Maybe I can have some more of those Japari Buns with the Friends after all this is done. I also want to hear more from them. What is Japari Park? How they they get here? Most importantly, do they know about this Kaban?

Road’s quite wide...I don’t think it was made for Friends...but hm, that looks like the bridge they were talking about. Except, the bridge seems broken. Just straight ahead --

*Beep...beep...beep...*

...the hell? It’s coming from that PDA thing. It’s probably not important -

**BEEP BEEP BEEP!**

Will ya just shut up?! Also what’s with the air in front undulating -

**BIIBIIBIIBII ---**

FINE, I’ll check ---

***SPATIAL ANOMALY WARNING:***

*THROW OBJECT IN INTENDED*

*PATH BEFORE MOVING.*

*TAKE DETOURS IF YOU SEE*

*UNUSUAL REACTIONS.*

*PROCEED WITH EXTREME CAUTION.*

What kinda park gives weapons and anomaly warnings?! I’ll assume things are honest though. Lemme see...one of these bullet cases will do. Here ya go --

*[The bullet case immediately crumples in on itself in mid-air, akin to a floating chewing gum wrapper. The anomalous area then emits dust clouds.]*

W-What have I just witnessed?!

This park has to be a cruel joke. One thing’s for certain - I’m not going straight ahead. Off to right near the road shoulder...

[beeping lowers in intensity]

Good, good. I think a little more will do the trick. Bit more...and okay, beeping stopped. Time to go forward again...nice and slow. Another bullet....

[The thrown bullet case hits the ground without issue.]  
Great, my path is safe then. Rinse, and repeat.

===

“Yoo-hoo! Friend! Over here!”

Someone’s calling me over, waving enthusiastically. I rush over to her call. Huff, puff, huff....

“So, howdy’do, *rook*, ya actually gonna help us?” I nod nervously, not knowing the right call.

“Fricking finally, a rookie Friend worth their own hide!”, the Friend responded. “Name’s Chappie, for Chapman’s Zebra. Here’s the rest of the crew: Desert Warthog, Rothchild’s Giraffe, and...uh, yeah, White Lion’s asleep again.”

“Nice meeting all of you. Call me the Marked Friend, I guess”, I reply.

“**Marked Friend?**”, barked Desert Warthog sarcastically. “More like cannon fodder – err, hi.” Chappie winced angrily at Desert Warthog.

“...ahem, sorry about that, Marked Friend!”, Chappie assuaged. “So, here’s the situation: We’re here to the south of the bridge, but the bandit Friends are on the bridge itself holding Jaguar, probably in that train car on the right side. We tried to talk with them, but their negotiator, some bird Friend, made a demand of 500 million Japari Crisps. Like hell we can fulfil that!”

“So you’re instead going to attack them?”, I reply.

“We already have, but no luck so far,” Rothchild responded. “Every time we attack head-on, we get pushed back and have to lick our wounds.”

*This doesn’t surprise me. I assume they went for a frontal assault when the bandits have the high ground.*

“...uh, give me a tour so I can think up a strategy?” The other Friends accepted.

We went up the depot’s small tower, which gave us enough coverage to see the entire bridge and the terrain behind it. From there, I made my assessments.

- One Friend, likely that bird one, is flying between each bridge segment, but takes frequent breaks to either have snacks or to twirl her pistol.
- There’s one land Friend on the left bridge, and another on the right...both are dead-set looking down onto the road below. Both have old rifles.
- Warthog said that there is one more Bandit friend who stays around the train car, but she is a rather tough one.

So with that, I gave the battle plan. Two of us (Rothchild and White Lion) would go to the left bridge and distract the left guard and bird, whilst three of us (Chappie, Warthog, myself) would go to the right side towards Jaguar. I really wonder if our paltry equipment – some pistols and a sawed-off shotgun – would be sufficient, but this is the best chance we have. The others decided to go with it.

“Oh, Marked Friend, before I forget,” Chappie said whilst en route, “don’t shoot Friends to kill.”

Wait, *what?* Here we are with loaded guns, about to face off against our enemy...and yet we’re using these to maim them only? There are safer ways to compete, I’d imagine....

“Why, exactly?” I ask concernedly.

“Friends don’t mind fighting, but we’re not interested in murdering one another. ‘sides, we really have these guns for Celliens.”

“But doesn’t it hurt to get shot?”

“No doubt about it, but we can take a few hits. So long as it isn’t anything serious, we’ll be fine... ‘sides, it ain’t like we can’t eventually settle fights ov’r Japari Buns, aye?”

***[I didn’t write beyond this segment yet.]***