



Down in the Little Green Valley

A young prospector from New California named Pete is on a scavenging run in the remains of Yosemite National Park. Alongside him are three individuals, hired to accompany his journey and watch his back while he works. Aberdeen is a doctor working for the Followers of the Apocalypse, and a former resident of Vault 33. Rolan is a caravan guard, who takes dangerous jobs that pay well in order to settle a debt and feed his wife and child back home. Franco is a former NCR Ranger, who turned to mercenary work after retiring.

After a run of bad luck, Pete contemplates cutting his losses and journeying out of Yosemite when his team is suddenly approached by a curious-looking individual, tattooed from head to toe in odd symbols and numbers and signs too complex to be your average tribal body paint. Aberdeen notices some of the tattoos are advanced math equations and formulae. Initiating contact, Aberdeen asks for the man's name. The man introduces himself as Battery and expresses that his people, a tribe known as the Ciphers, are in danger of being invaded by a gang of raiders calling themselves the Vipers. As citizens of the NCR, the team knows the Vipers as one of three raider gangs that emerged from Vault 15, the same Vault that the founders of the NCR emerged from. Battery proposes that the team accompany him back to his tribe and help defend their town in exchange for \$2000 NCR Dollars each, as well as whatever they may find while exploring the Yosemite Valley. Despite the cash looking bloodstained, Pete and his company accept the job, hoping to make up for their bad fortune prospecting the land. After a brief encounter with a pack of radscorpions, they make their way to the village.

Built into the canyon walls are the adobe pueblo houses of the Ciphers. While making their way through the town, the team notice some of the villagers cower from them in fear, hiding behind cover or retreating into their homes. Clearly they aren't used to outsiders trekking their land. Oddly enough, they also seem to be burning a pile of deceased off in the distance. The team's perceptive eyes notice some of the bodies don't belong to the villagers or the Vipers, rather they seem to be the bodies of another group of prospectors and mercenaries, just like them.

Battery escorts them to the house they'll be staying in while aiding the people of this village. When asked about the bodies, Battery explains that they were another group of wastelanders who promised to help but sought to use the desperation of the villagers to their advantage, attacking and attempting to steal from the Ciphers instead. He then clarified that they are a peaceful and isolated community who means no harm but aren't afraid to kill in self-defense. Battery soon leaves, and despite the

reasonable-sounding explanation, the team is still on high alert. They talk about their situation and discuss whether or not to trust the villagers. Nevertheless, sleep eventually claims them.

The next morning the team is awakened by the arrival of four Viper scouts, declaring to the villagers that in six days their leader, Asp, the Great Snake would arrive to take his tribute. The Viper scout leader demands the villagers surrender their belongings now to make the transition easier, threatening to make them suffer should they resist. The team sneaks into positions, and before the Vipers notice them, they open fire. The Viper leader is rendered unconscious in the ensuing gunfight by Rolan. The remaining three are dispatched shortly after. When the fight is over, the villagers disperse and the team restrains the Viper leader, dragging him back to their house for interrogation. The Viper leader attempts to bargain his life in exchange for the location of his scout camp. When the Viper leader claims that his camp is empty, Rolan can tell he is lying. A strong premonition from Rolan regarding the Viper leader puts him at odds with Pete, who wants him alive. After a short debate, they decide to leave the Viper leader's fate up to chance. Pete throws a six-sided die on the table. The result is clear, and Rolan executes the raider, not wanting to take any risks of being stabbed in the back.

As the team makes their way outside, they are approached by a middle-aged man with a shaved head and similar tattoos to that of Battery and the other villagers. Around his neck is an ancient pocket calculator, a symbol of his status as the leader of the tribe. The man introduces himself as Azkee, the Counter of the Ciphers. Azkee thanks the team for their swift action against the Viper scouts and emphasizes how there aren't enough able-bodied warriors to take on a small army of Vipers. He explains that most Ciphers are nomadic, wandering and living off the Yosemite Valley while those who stay in the village are mostly women, children, and the elderly. The villagers are self-sustaining isolationists and have not made proper contact with the outside world. The NCR knows of their existence but thinks of them as common wasteland tribals. The team realizes that since the Ciphers don't trade with caravans or even leave the Yosemite region, the bloodstains on the money given to them the night before heavily infers that it was taken from the bodies of the prospector company killed prior to their arrival. Despite this, the team doesn't seem to question it or care all too much.

Azkee gives the team a rundown of the village. There are three entrance points: one to the north, one to the south, and one to the east, all of which are entirely unfortified.

A river splits the village in two. On the outskirts of town where there's more grass to graze on is where they set up a Brahmin farm. On the canyon cliff tops there is a wind turbine built from scrap that powers a hydroponics farm in a makeshift greenhouse. Deep in the canyon walls there is a cave which the original settlers expanded into three chambers, each with a junk door that has remained sealed since the passing of the first generation. On the east side of the village is an impressively wide pit that the Ciphers call the Kiva, where the interior walls are etched and painted with ancient blueprints, calculations, and formulae. A ladder in the middle of the pit leads twenty feet down into the chamber of the Memory-Keeper.

Curious about the Kiva, Aberdeen investigates the pit. His intelligent mind details that some of the drawings on the walls are ancient computer components and schematics while the rest of it is beyond even his comprehension. If it wasn't evident already, Aberdeen notes that these people clearly aren't your average wasteland tribals. The team makes their way down the ladder of the Kiva into a room where a grey haired, grey bearded man in tan vestments is giving a lesson to a group of gathered children. They are being taught mathematics more advanced than even that of higher Vault education. When the older man spots the team, he cuts the lesson short and approaches them as the kids leave the Kiva.

He introduces himself as Nemonik, the Memory-Keeper. He isn't too pleased with the idea of the team helping the town. A steadfast conservative, he believes that the village would be better off were they to just pay the Vipers a tithe to keep them from attacking them. Rolan attempts to debate Nemonik's logic, stating that the Vipers won't be happy with a simple tithe forever, to which Nemonik raised the idea that the Viper's threats are an act of desperation as a result of being chased out of NCR territory, and that the Vipers would gain more from the steady flow of supplies from the self-sustaining village rather than raising it to the ground. Nemonik expresses that making the Vipers dependent on the Ciphers would allow for them to go back to their way of life and even gain an ally by circumstance that would ward away any other band of raiders that might seek to destroy or rob them in the future. Pete, whose mind is solely focused on the option that paid him the most, points out that their isolationist ways will never be fully reinstated as they are already within the borders of the ever-expanding New California Republic. Unsettled by this notion, Nemonik ponders whether the best course of action now would be to pack up and move the Ciphers elsewhere.

Curious about the Ciphers after seeing such advanced education among them, Aberdeen asks Nemonik to relay the history of their tribe. Nemonik reveals that their tribe's first ancestors consisted of scientists and soldiers who left the remains of the Groom Lake Facility, what people commonly knew as Area 51, mere weeks after the bombs fell. Carrying only basic survival supplies, a single computer, and a box of experimental technology, they searched for a safe haven, picking up other survivors and encountering many hostiles. Believing that they were the only civilized people left in the world, they established a settlement deep within the Yosemite Valley, away from any town or city. After a decade, the computer was finally beyond repair with the parts in their possession, and in fear of losing the technological advances of humanity to history and time like so much other human achievements lost in the Great War, they started carving and painting every bit of data they could within the Kiva. In order to ensure that future generations understood the workings of these technological wonders, they instilled a strong emphasis on mathematics in their education of children, a tradition that's upheld to this day two centuries later.

Nemonik leaves shortly after to fulfil his duties to the village, and with the newfound knowledge of the items within the sealed chambers, Pete proposes to the team that they alter the deal with Azkee to exterminate the Vipers in exchange for the experimental technology in their chamber. In agreement, the team approaches Azkee with their offer who accepts, wanting peace for his people so that they may finally embrace the outside world and its technology. Pete, Rolan, Franco, and Aberdeen, are determined to help the Ciphers defeat the Vipers.

Six days remain until the Vipers attack. The team decides to start the next day building fortifications around the southern entrance. Rolan in particular crafts landmines around the perimeter. At the end of the day, Pete heads to inform Azkee of the progress of the southern defenses as well as ensure that their deal will be honored. Azkee reassures Pete and suggests the team talk to the village's mechanic and inventor, Trig, the following day to inquire about a weapon she's been working on. During the conversation, Pete makes the mistake of threatening to kill Nemonik should he interfere with their activities in the village. Heading back to the house, Pete questions a Cipher villager about their security, arousing suspicion that the team intends to steal from them.

The next day arrives, and the team decides to train the villagers in riflery. Aberdeen scours the surrounding area for Broc Flower and Xander Root to make Healing Powder. Later in the day, they meet up with Trig and Pete inquiries about the weapon

Azkee tipped him off on. Trig shows the team a prototype Tesla Super-Canon she's been working on. Using the experimental Tesla technology in the cave chamber, she can make a canon that will blast a massive electron charge beam, killing anyone in its path before overloading and breaking apart. Not wanting to risk their prize salvage for a one-use weapon, Pete convinces the team to defend the village with what they have at their disposal so that they can sell the Tesla technology to the government in Shady Sands. Heading back to their lodgings for the night, Trig suggests that the team talk to Denom, the village farmer.

The next morning, the team takes her advice and makes their way to the outskirts of the village but are stopped by Hex, the town guard, who tells the team that they're stepping out of line by threatening to kill Nemonik and fishing for security weaknesses to exploit. Rolan, Franco, and Aberdeen are confused at these accusations as it was Pete acting alone during these incidents. Hex reminds the team that upon entering the village, another group just like them were in the midst of being disposed of for similar transgressions and warns them that any more actions against his people will result in them being forced out. After the run-in, they press on to Denom who helps them build scrap defenses and spears for the villagers. At the end of the day, they return to their lodgings. The team gets into a heated argument over Pete's recent actions. Rolan in particular doesn't like how Pete is acting and Pete retorts that they were all hired to watch his back, not to grandstand. He intends to squeeze as much as he can from the Ciphers and doesn't want anyone getting in the way, reminding the team that they're all here because of him. They sleep uneasily that night, in disagreement over their drastically different outlook on morality.

The next day, Rolan decides to build punji stick traps around the northern entrance. Franco talks to Azkee, wanting permission to check out the guns and armor in the sealed chamber. Azkee hands him the key. Franco gets his hands on a few sets of US Army Combat Armor and Sniper Rifles. With this new gear, the team is able to equip a small squad of handpicked tribal sharpshooters. Later that night, the team decides to trek out of the village the following morning to find the scout camp the Viper leader told them of.

When the sun comes up, they gear up and head toward the entrance of the village where Azkee meets them and asks that they not dawdle too long as the Vipers are due to attack the village in a couple of days. The team reassures Azkee that they'll be back before the attack. The trek to the scout camp is easygoing and before midday they arrive to a secluded area of the woods where junk fortifications surround a

handful of tents around a campfire. The team attempts to get a closer look but fails to sneak properly. A bullet whizzes past Rolan's ear and soon after a hail of gunfire pins them all behind rusted car hulks. The team manages to pick some of the Vipers off from their cover, but the last shooter atop a ridge eludes them. Rolan decides to risk his life sneaking up on the shooter. He manages to make his way under the shooter's peripheral then grabs his leg, dragging him off the ridge and executing him. While they are ultimately victorious, each of them is hurt in their own way.

Not wanting to risk getting killed, they decide to stop the offense and return to the village. Along the way back, Aberdeen finds some empty syringes, allowing him to make Homemade Stimpaks. As they near the village they watch as a paranoid Cipher walks pass them without acknowledgement, and Rolan touches his shoulder asking if he's okay. The Cipher jumps at the touch and explains that he's leaving the village out of fear for the Vipers and guilt for giving up the location of the village. Taking his words for cowardice and betrayal, Rolan attempts to tackle the Cipher and restrain him with rope but fails, allowing the villager to start running scared. Pete shoots his leg, and he falls to the floor. Before Pete could question the Cipher however, Franco executes the Cipher out of disgust for his cowardice. The rest of the team is horrified by the sudden killing. Pete gives Franco a dressing down, but ultimately decides to hide the body and cover the murder up as a Viper killing.

When they arrive to the village, Hex asks if they've seen Radian, the murdered Cipher. They lie and tell Hex they haven't seen him, and Hex asks if they could look for him. Pete volunteers and returns later that night to give Hex the news that the Vipers killed him. Rolan asks who Radian was to the village, and Hex explains that Radian was among the group of Cipher nomads who first encountered the Vipers. They tortured him into giving up the location of the village, but he broke free and managed to make his way back to warn Azkee about the raiders. The team realizes Radian didn't betray the village purposefully, but rather was a broken victim of the Vipers, and Franco murdered him in cold blood. Returning to their lodgings, the team erupts into a heated argument, with Rolan laying into Franco for the killing. Franco unmask his disdain for the Ciphers and tribals in general, noting that his career as a Ranger opened his eyes to how pointless it was to lay his life on the line for lower people and that he originally only took this job to watch Pete's back and doesn't care about whether the villagers die or not. Franco storms out of the lodgings to sleep in the sniper nest in the southern entrance.

Rolan and Pete then spat over their priority to secure the technology over saving the lives of tribals. The night ends in cold silence as each member of the team all wants to go home for different reasons. Franco in particular was sick of the tribals, sick of this job, and sick of Rolan.

The next day, the team decides to fortify the eastern entrance and the Kiva. Rolan quietly slips away from the team in the morning to head back to the site of Radian's murder. He gives him a proper Christian burial and says a prayer. Out of spite for Rolan, who he believes will rat him out to the Ciphers, Franco writes a note blaming Rolan for the murder of Radian, detailing the location of his body, and creating a false timeline of events. They meet with Azkee at the end of the day to discuss their plan of defense. Azkee tells the team that the Kiva will be the most crucial defensive sector as it's where a majority of the village's woman, children, and elderly will be taking shelter among the generations of knowledge and history. The big attack is tomorrow, and the team goes to bed uneasily.

Village alarms ring out, the Vipers have arrived. The team springs into positions at the southern entrance where they put up a good defense. Vipers pour out of the forest, some stepping on Rolan's mines and traps. Franco takes the high ground with his Sniper Rifle, picking enemies off like a true NCR Ranger. Rolan provides suppressing fire as Pete lobbs grenades at the invaders. Aberdeen treats the wounded. After successfully defending the southern entrance, the team arms the surviving Cipher warriors with what they can spare and orders them to keep watch of the area while they press on to the east.

The fight for the Kiva is brutal, the Cipher warriors here are dropping quickly in the defense, and some Vipers even manage to infiltrate their defenses. Franco and Rolan move to secure open positions, taking out the intruders who got past the wall fortifications. During the gunfight, Franco and Rolan are grazed. Aberdeen rushes to the aid of Franco but is shot on the way over by a stray Viper who manages to breach the perimeter. He falls over, the Homemade Stimpak lying in his cold, dead hand. The team sustains its first casualty but there's no time to mourn as the Vipers retreat from the Kiva and rally to the northern entrance where Asp, the Great Snake is making a final push.

As the team arrives, they witness Cipher warriors torn to shreds by the thunderous roar of Asp's Minigun. The remaining Vipers are locked onto the ridgelines on the sides of the canyon where the squad of Cipher sharpshooters are picking them off. Asp reloads his Minigun, then blasts the canyon walls, eviscerating the

sharpshooters. Franco targets Asp's leg, causing him to shriek a war cry as he lays fire on the team's position. A couple of Vipers fall into the punji traps built by Rolan. When Asp starts to reload his Minigun, the team pokes out of their cover and opens fire, cutting down Asp's forces. Hex, the head guard of the Ciphers, attempts to charge Asp with his spear but is killed when a Viper tackles him while holding a live grenade, shielding Asp with his own body. Rolan and Franco target Asp as he readies to mow them down, and Rolan lands a critical headshot, killing the Viper's living god and ending the battle. The rest of the Vipers retreat or are picked off. Though the team is victorious, it's a pyrrhic victory at best. Many Ciphers were lost in the fight, and Aberdeen will not be coming home with the rest of the team, who gather what salvage they can find from the battlefield before heading back to tell of their success and receive their rewards.

With the Vipers taken out, the Ciphers were finally free to expand outward from the Yosemite Valley.

Under his leadership, Azkee would foster a more progressive Cipher tribe, encouraging the use of technology in their day-to-day lives, and pushing the younger generation to better understand the outside world. The Ciphers would go on to make official contact with the New California Republic, forming trade relations over the years, and sharing the knowledge they held secret for over a century.

Trig would move to Shady Sands where her intellect and skilled hands landed her a position within the Followers of the Apocalypse.

Battery would leave the Ciphers, making his way East. He would eventually find New Canaan, a peaceful community in need of his knowledge of old-world schematics and technology.

Days after the team departed back to Shady Sands, a Cipher nomad would come across a small note on the southern outskirts of town detailing the circumstances of Radian's murder and accusing Rolan. Digging around the site written, the nomad would eventually find the body of Radian, returning him to town for all to see.

Radian would be remembered as a martyr by Nemonik and his supporters who saw Azkee's progressive leadership as a betrayal of the Ciphers. With their mistrust vindicated, Nemonik and his loyalists would depart the Yosemite Valley and head East, never to be heard from again.

After making his way back to Shady Sands, the box of experimental Tesla technology from the Cipher cave would be confiscated from Pete by the NCR

government. What remained from the Viper battle net him only \$2,364 in NCR Dollars, which after paying Rolan and Franco, would render his time in Yosemite useless. Humbled, Pete would eventually leave the NCR, prospecting and selling his wares to small towns out East.

Franco would return to the NCR where he found more mercenary work in the years to come. His murder would never come to light, nor would he ever feel regret for his actions that night.

Having fallen during the attack, Aberdeen was counted among the piles of dead in the aftermath of the town's defense. The Ciphers would record his name in their history books, remembering him as a hero and carving the records obtained from the NCR of his life onto the walls of the Kiva.

Rolan would return to his home, finding solace in the arms of his wife and kid, and eventually more work in an effort to provide for them.