

## Chapter 19 Grave Intentions

[50 Gold]  
[Common Basic Boots]  
[Scroll: Savage Strike (1)]

"I am completely whelmed. At least I got some boots back?" Sally shrugged, bringing up her Inventory to switch them on. "I may as well check out this scroll whilst I'm here. One use, I take it?"

[Savage Strike: Your next Melee Attack deals 100% more damage]

"Yes."

"Skullsplitters had a Rogue. Why didn't they come to get the chest?" She crossed her arms and began walking towards the exit.

"Probably the terrible rewards; they must be here for a specific reason." The skull followed her out.

"Sorry gang, nothing too fun down there." She gave the Lurker a pat on the arm after emerging from the tomb.

The next one wasn't very far away. They passed by rows of gravestones, some ruined or crumbling. Sally noted that they were all worn enough that no names could be made out. That seemed convenient. Whatever passed as a pathway through the Cemetery hardly differed from the dried earth that the graves sprung up from. Once again, Sally wished she had the ability to raise the dead - *just think* of the army she could raise against the Guild.

"So, Humps," she began as they closed in on the next tomb, "is the Guild like a centralised organisation, or...?"

"There's an official Hall in the nearest town. Usually, the bigger hubs in each area have a Hall that is run independently, but is still part of the overall organisation."

"I really need a map. What's the closest hub?"

"Poppybrook. It's the main town for Novices and early-level First Classes." The Observer easily reeled off the information and then paused, remembering what the woman would be using it for.

"How are they defended? Is it like-

"*Nope.*" Humphrey stopped in midair and shook. "Quit trying to involve me in your plans of rebellion. I am sure I can be easily *unmade.*"

"I feel we keep going in circles with this, bud. I bet you the guardians of the Guild hub are a powerful Party or something..."

“...”

“...*ahh*, you're too easy to read!” She placed her hand on the cold stone of the next tomb and stuck her tongue out. “Maybe the System is too predictable... aside from little ol' me, of course.”

This second one was not locked, and the gate shuddered as it struggled to swing on rusted hinges. As Sally stepped down into the depths it became clear that it was built exactly the same as the previous one - except on coming to the steps of the chamber there was no chest waiting for her. Instead, two pairs of baleful yellow eyes glared back at her.

“New friends, come with me,” her voice echoed briefly.

She smiled as she returned to the surface once more. The gloomy sky may look like it was threatening rain, but she dared it to even try. Alongside her full Party, there were now five Skeleton Warriors that appeared to be able to take brief commands easily enough. It almost made her regret letting loose all of the dead in Hillan. Although, there would have been no chance she could have hidden from the Skullsplitters with them in tow, and even with their full force, it wouldn't have pushed that battle in their favour.

If she was going to head into civilisation soon, would it be an advantage to have a weak horde alongside her? That question would have to marinate. They would have their uses against the weak and System-created, even if they were immediately mashed by the higher-level Parties. The whole thing was a hastily put-together plan if she was honest with herself.

Dismantle the Adventuring Guild's hubs to reduce the efficiency of the Parties and give the Monsters a reprieve. Amass her own strong Party and stomp her way through the System until they get a meeting with the Architect themselves - and hopefully get some answers on how the souls of Players got here. And why. And, how dare they?

“This one looks much bigger.”

The Observer took her out of the distracted thoughts as the group trod through dirt and dried vegetative slurry. It was a bigger tomb - even on the outside it was nearly twice as wide as the prior two, and decorative pillars rose up at each corner to display worn gargoyles. Or cherubs? The amount of wear and decay made it hard to pick out the details beyond just looking a little creepy.

Sally glanced around first. No sign of anything. No living dead, and no living... uh, living. The gloom still sat obscuring the far distance making it difficult to judge how far into the Cemetery they were - and as she looked backwards the woods too were now out of view. She put the likelihood of it going on infinitely about fifty-fifty.

“The doorway is wider on this one,” she thought out loud, “I think we should *all* go inside - something is giving me the creeps.” Turning back to her group she frowned. “Except for Suits - you stay up the top of the stairway here and be our canary.”

“Very tactical,” the floating skull nodded as the male zombie groaned in resigned acknowledgement.

“No smarm from you, if you please.” Sally shook her head and opened the wide gate. This one did not creak or squeal, which seemed like a bit of a rip-off. Totally didn’t get the memo about the area theme. With one step inside, she waited for the Observer to catch up and provide some light.

“You know, most Novices start with torches.”

Sally just clenched her teeth in response. If Humphrey was trying to dissuade her from destroying the System that she felt gave her a bad deal then reminding her about these things wasn’t helping his cause. It probably came across as a little selfish, to want to destroy the world around her just because she had a rough start. There was something that was underlying though - a knowledge that this wasn’t right. She could remember the time before, and Theo must have some knowledge too if he recognised her. Whether the rest of the Players had the same mentality was something she would need to find out.

At least, when they weren’t trying to kill her.

The start of the tomb began similarly to the smaller ones; a passageway began at the bottom of a dozen stairs, and engravings lined the cold brickwork. Sally waited for a second for the group to filter in behind her. Dave helped Chuck up when the zombie inevitably fell down the stairs.

“Chuck! You’re going to run out of health before you need it, and I’m not wasting this Med Pack on you.” She crossed her arms and waited for the clacking of bones to shuffle down the stairs as the handful of Skeleton Warriors joined them in the near darkness, leaving Suits up near the opening.

“Looks like it goes further in.” The Observer bobbed too close to the top of her head, setting her hair abuzz.

Where usually a couple of steps would lead to a small plain chamber; instead this room was slightly bigger with a domed ceiling. Across from them, the wall had some kind of mural carved into the stone - the exact details too hard to pick out in the wide shadows cast by Humphrey’s purple glow. Two doorways sat on either side of the mural, closed and made of dark wood with latticed black iron bracing. On the walls on the left and right of them as they stepped into the recessed chamber two armoured statues of stone stood, cobwebs surrounding them and picking up glimmers of the low purple light.

“Come with me,” Sally spoke to the statue on the right. It did not heed her call. “Eh, was worth a try.”

“Hmm,” Humphrey murmured from above.

“What is it?”

“Oh, nothing.”

She narrowed her eyes at the skull. “Are you observing things and not sharing? Telling me there is something to notice but then denying it is gaslighting, you know?”

The Observer sighed and moved over closer to the mural. As it illuminated, further details were revealed. It seemed to be of some kind of armoured warrior - with a crown? No, it was just an ornate helmet. The stonework wasn't super detailed; perhaps the area surrounding it had been painted to show the background of the overall design at some point, but had since faded with time.

"Oh," Sally squatted down and looked at the boots of the carved man. There was a faint red line that ran up the sides of the boots - it almost glowed in the darkness but was too thin to have been seen from a distance. She ran a dead finger along it. There was an odd tingle to it.

"A Party using torches probably wouldn't have seen that," Humphrey noted, unsure of whether he was being complimentary or not.

"Yes, but what is it?" What would be tingly and part of a mural? Sally stood and put her hands on her hips, head tilted in thought. The easy answer would be... Magic. But what good does that answer do her?

The Observer was silent now, which usually meant that he didn't want to interfere with whatever decision she made. Sally pressed her STAR and brought up her Inventory. This was probably a waste, but fumbling around in the dark with a bunch of dead bodies wasn't her idea of... oh no, that didn't sound that bad actually. The tombs had been quite relaxing. Cold, quiet, and comforting in a claustrophobic way.

She pointed the [Zap Wand] at the wall. "Uh, do I have to call out skills when I use them?"

"No... no? Why would you do that? There's no benefit in-"

"[Zap]!" Sally yelled, and an arc of blue-white lightning flickered from the tip of the wooden stick to the boots of the mural - briefly lighting the room and causing the undead to shirk away.

Humphrey tutted.

"*Observe that,*" she smirked and looked back at the wall. A cobweb of red lines now coursed up from the boots, making their way up through the legs and torso of the carved knight. Two prongs of red reached to the part of the helmet where the eyes would be, and small orbs of glowing light briefly lit up before fading.

A shifting of stone caused Sally to level the Wand at the left statue, as she watched it swivel around out of the way, the grinding sound stopping to reveal a hidden passageway.

She walked towards it and peered inside. A corridor that immediately went to the right and then a staircase that spiralled down out of view. Sally hummed to herself as she gestured for the horde behind her to follow. Humphrey lit the way, the purple light illuminating further thick dust in this secret area.

The spiral staircase only made a couple of twists before reaching the next level of the tomb - thankfully not far enough where Chuck could cause himself further damage when he eventually stumbled into the back of Big Dave. The Lurker had to squat down as it moved,

looking rather uncomfortable in the enclosed space. A doorway blocked their passage - a heavy wooden door with an insignia of the same helmet that the mural wore.

Sally pushed it open and stumbled into the room. "There's a little step right there," she pointed out and righted herself as the rest of her group filtered in through.

This chamber was twice as wide as the one above, along with the step that ran around the outside of the perimeter of the room; the walls were also decorated with carvings and paintings. In the middle of the chamber on the smooth stone floor was a low table also made of stone - but the table was a darker, almost unnatural colour.

Sitting on a throne made of equally odd, black stone at the other side of the room was an armoured figure. Or rather just the armour - the helmet sat on the knee of the reddish-black plated body, the head completely missing and empty.

Sally gasped and moved towards it, half expecting the Observer to start yapping on about the lore of the place.

Then a UI message popped up from her wrist.