

## Chapter 63 War Room

Sally's eyebrows raised higher as she turned to the doorway to greet the rest of the kobold's Party.

The first was a stout female goblin, who nodded towards the zombie as she stood awkwardly. "Hi, I'm Cass. I can predict the weather, I-I think?"

Sally nodded politely. To her knowledge, the weather in the area was mostly stuck in the permantly-pleasant-with-a-light-breeze mode. But perhaps before she came to unlife, it had been more varied - it had only been a week or so.

Second to enter was an exceptionally slim and frail-looking orc - almost deathly so. His skin was a dull grey-yellow. As the light of the Library came to illuminate him, his face was dominated by empty sunken eye-sockets. He bumped gently into the goblin, who held his hand.

"They call me Scratcher." He intoned, his voice crackling with age as he levelled his blank gaze towards the zombie.

"Did you... scratch your eyes out?" Sally tilted her head. That seemed like a reasonable guess.

The orc smiled and shook his head. "Oh no. My eyes can move independently of my body and work just the same."

Sally wrinkled her nose. "Where are they now?" Given the appearance of the orc, she half expected him to be the perverted old guy trope.

"I've been watching the regiment approach for the last day."

She was somewhat taken aback. Perhaps she shouldn't judge a book by its cover, even if she was in the Library. "So you know how far they are out, what they're doing?"

Scratcher nodded. "They are currently sleeping, they have set up a camp about-"

"*HELLO*, I'm a fuckin' horse!" The orc was interrupted by a large horse's skull ramming its way into the open door. The skull was both attached to a normal horse body and also flamed wildly with a golden orange hue.

"Hello, horsie," Sally waved diplomatically, "did you used to be an Observer?"

"*Neigh!* Actually, yes." The flames flickered wildly for a second. "I've just always wanted to say that."

Another figure pushed past the overly excited horse-observer, one that she recognised.

"Oh! You have a Theo too?" She beamed at the vampire.

He frowned and came to stand beside her. "No - it's just me. I found these guys outside hoping to gain entrance. Humphrey didn't seem keen on meeting them for some reason."

"How strange." She shrugged.

A small voice croaked up from the floor. "I'm Adam!"

Sally crouched down to see a snail with a little top hat on their shell. There was something to be said about this odd Party. It was like she had just stepped into a weird twilight-zone or alternate reality. But then, maybe other people thought that about her Party when they met them.

"What can you do, Adam?"

"I'm a wizard," the high-pitched voice replied.

She stared blankly back before standing. Things had just gotten a lot stranger, and briefly, her mind reeled from the whiplash of the last few days. Theo becoming a vampire was one thing, but a second Party of oddballs was just too much seasoning to the broth. Mostly she just thought they shouldn't get too attached right before the big battle.

"Oh - what was your name and ability again?" She wrinkled up her nose at the kobold.

"They call me Foreman. I uh, was one of the driving forces behind the Mine expansion." His furred paw grabbed out at one of the nearby books. With a deep sigh, he opened it and grabbed a single page - tearing it from the book.

As they all watched, he took the held page and pointed to an open space beneath the walkway that led up to Oleb's rooms. A wooden beam sprung into view as the paper turned to cinders in Foreman's grasp. An oaken wood almost a foot thick now helped prop up the second floor - although it didn't match the rest of the furnishing.

"Ah, just the same as in the Mines," Theo nodded, "what are the limitations?"

Foreman twitched his ears as he snapped the tome shut. "How many books have you got?"

Blankly, the vampire gestured slowly around the room with a hand outstretched.

Sally cleared her throat. "So, I'm Sally, and I'm a zombie with some of the facets of a Player. This is Theo," she nudged the pale man, "he is the same except also my emotional support vampire."

The new Party nodded and murmured their greetings, with the added "*Nice!*" of the horse at the back.

"I'm going to message the others, Theo. I think we should meet at the..." Sally trailed off as her eyes narrowed from the STAR to the new Party. "... can't see what Level you guys are..."

The vampire furrowed his brow and leaned backwards to look between the zombie and the group. "I can't either, nor yours."

A weight gnawed at Sally's stomach. The Architect had died, and now parts of the System weren't working. Things had also gone weird when they had assaulted Sanctuary - a coincidence or another symptom of things going wrong?

"Heh, would be ironic wouldn't it?" Theo shook his head with an exasperated sigh. In seeing her confused look, he continued. "We wanted Monsters to be equal to Players - what if the STAR stops working and we no longer have Inventory and the like?"

Sally felt around the inside of her mouth with her tongue. That would be ironic - but also pretty terrible. That's where she kept her skull collection. Well, all but one of them. Her mind idly wandered. Would Jackie have been more antagonistic if they had stopped to remove the heads of all the bandits they had murdered?

With a brief pause, she opened up her Party Chat.

[Sally: everyone to the Garrison - planning time]

[Sally: AND HUMPS the bandits were human??]

[Sally: you said only Players were human]

[Humphrey: No, they were bandits.]

[Sally: human bandits]

[Sally: the cultists were human too...]

[Humphrey: No, they were Cultists.]

[Humphrey: I fail to note the distinction.]

[Archie: Jackie is currently... preoccupied]

[Archie: On my way n\_n]

"Did he just..." Sally shook her head.

"Alright," the vampire clapped his hands to address the room, "we are going up to the Garrison to plan with the goblin Leaders. I assume Oleb must be already up there. Otherwise, he'd eat you for tearing up a book."

Sally wrinkled up her nose. Oleb hadn't been especially book-centric before his term as Leader started, but perhaps after the System-assigned position had its grip on him and he had found a new passion in life.

The group started to saunter out of the Library, Foreman scooping up the snail and the goblin holding the forearm of the orc to guide him.

Cass looked up at Theo, then past him into the upstairs of the Library. "Eat literally, or...?"

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The Garrison had a large hall with a round table at the centre. Banners depicting goblinoid skulls hung from the stone walls, and bright torches illuminated the open space. Sitting around this table was the oddest collection of characters one might even hope to see. And yet, they were the salvation of Sanctuary.

*Intended* salvation, Sally thought as she looked at those present. Jackie was still absent from their group, but the new Party of Monsters - apparently called 'Us Against' - and the five goblin Leaders filled in most of the other spots. The Warriors sat in a huddle, their faces painted with the same confused and overwhelmed expression that Sally felt inside.

Henkk had a case of constant stress painted across his pale face. His fingers tapped at the table beside piles of paperwork as the orc relayed the message about the regiment's current situation.

"Troubling, indeed." His smooth voice wavered as though his confidence was cracking. "Although, perhaps not as bad as if they marched on us without pause."

Sally dug her fingernails into the padded arms of the chair. Her first ploy was to go and raid the Regiment, knock over as many as they could and [Town Scroll] back to Sanctuary for the morning. Apparently, travel would take too long - plus they would miss out on sleep.

"We tried to set up some pits and spikes along the road," the muscled Jaxk shrugged, "but we are tied to the town - after fifteen minutes we just teleport back to our housing."

"And the townsgoblins are useless," Oleb added, "they literally won't pick up arms to heed the danger until the Regiment actually arrives."

The zombie nodded but dug her fingertips in tighter, piercing the cloth. She wanted to kill and live, not wait and die. Her eyes turned to the Warriors, and her thoughts dallied over Chuck and the White Foxes. Even if they were allied, she didn't want them to die here. It made more sense for them to go on even if the village was retaken... this was her fight and burden to bear. Bare? She wished she had some bears.

She watched across the table as Bella brushed at the Observer-horse, whom the goblin had named Petal. Petal had been staring excitedly over at the Death Knight since the meeting had begun. Humphrey, however, had been sitting at an angle facing away from the horse. It was amusing, and she was itching to dig into the details there. Instead, she turned her gaze back to the white goblin.

"How far can your teleport-y thing work, Henkk?"

He sighed deeply. "I knew that question would come eventually. It's... well it's not a teleport as such... but at this range..." He furrowed his brow further and rubbed his chin. A small map of the area lay beneath his intense stare, the location of the guard camp roughly denoted with a cross.

"You can say it's too far," she gave him a glum smile. "We have to be realistic."

The goblin closed his eyes and leaned back in his chair, face angled towards the ceiling. He took one deep breath, in and out, before responding. "I could do it. But it would be one... two people at the maximum. It would be inaccurate too - the distance makes it harder to judge."

"Two people," Sally repeated in a hushed tone as her eyes scoured past all the occupants in the room.

Theo sat up a little straighter.

“Humphrey,” she stood and put her hands on her hips. “Go and get Jackie, and tell her to bring all the Gold.”

A sense of excitement built up inside her as the pieces of half a plan began to slot together.