

As the door opened, James finally realised that it wasn't the torch in Pedro's hand that had illuminated the building.

He activated Swift Dodge as fast as he could. His body slid backwards at high speed, allowing him to narrowly avoid an explosion of flame. The two Slavers that had been guarding the door leapt to the side to avoid the blast. Curses streamed from them as they hit the ground heavily. The impressive looking door splintered with the blast and chunks of it were engulfed in flames.

"What the hell is going on?"

James asked through gritted teeth as his hand found the grip of the Moonlight Pistol. His gaze darted between a confused looking Pedro and the open door of the Warehouse.

Before anything could be said or done, a resounding cheer burst out from the interior of the warehouse which caused The Butcher to groan audibly. It looked as though he had just figured out what was happening.

He gave James an apologetic look as he simultaneously patted down his smouldering shirt and his slightly cindered beard.

"I forgot, it's fight night."

Pedro sighed as he gestured for James to follow him into the warehouse as if that one sentence was reassuring and explained everything that was going on.

James stood his ground, making no attempt to move. There was no way that he was going to be going into that place after seeing an explosion of fire. He couldn't even figure out if it was a magical attack or a bomb exploding. His mind filled with even more questions that only managed to frustrate him.

Was Pedro leading him into a trap?

Was this an attempt at revenge for absorbing the Escravo Cartel?

Was this another test or some form of faction quest?

There were so many questions that he didn't have an answer for. One thing that he knew for certain was that he was going to be having a very long chat with the Loremasters once he logged out.

The Dread Pirate took a tentative step backward whilst still holding onto the pistol. He knew that if he entered the warehouse, he would no longer be covered in Moonlight. He wondered if that would remove his Blessing of the Vampire God.

Pedro stepped over the remaining flames that were littered in front of the entrance. When he was about two paces into the building he bellowed out a roar of greeting. All it managed to do was make the cheers of revelry rise even higher.

Another explosion erupted from inside the warehouse, illuminating everything and finally allowing James to see what was going on.

A swarm of Slavers were surrounding a pair of fighters. One of the combatants was a short and slender man, with hands completely enveloped in fire. Opposite him was a hooded figure that was twirling a scythe in an aggressive pattern.

James' eye widened as it locked onto the scythe.

It had the same patterns as his Pistol and Shari's knife.

"Are you coming in or not?"

Pedro barked from inside the building with a tankard of ale already in his hand.

James didn't want to go in. All of his instincts were telling him that it was a terrible idea, but another part of him was incredibly curious about the fight. He hadn't seen any magic yet and it looked like there was another follower of Dervius in the battle.

As if reading his mind, Otto appeared on Pedro's shoulder as if summoning the Dread Pirate to go into the warehouse.

The Butcher laughed uproariously as he started to introduce Otto to the other Slavers.

James took one more glance at the moon that hung high in the sky before making his way into the building. The moment his foot entered the premises, he received a notification which caused him to smile.

You have entered the Dread Pirate's Lair.

Pedro's delight came to an abrupt end after seeing a particular face in the crowd.

James cautiously walked in, looking around to get a better feel for the place. The warehouse was in pretty terrible condition. It's interior was obviously gutted in the past and repurposed for the Cartel with most of it being an open space that extended up to a patched ceiling.

There was a loft type conversion along one side of the building, with multiple shacks and blankets hung up like makeshift curtains on the ground level. The area above it looked like it had fancier rooms, which is where James assumed the Butcher slept.

Mismatched and broken furniture littered the open space on the ground floor and various Slavers were lounging around with drinks in their hands. Most of them were cheering around the fight that took place in the centre of their impromptu ring.

As James looked to his left, he was shocked to see that the entire wall was covered with cages. Dozens of eyes stared back at him.

The prisoners' faces displayed expressions of hate, curiosity and some of fear. James wanted to ask Pedro about them, but the Butcher was marching across the room with a look of anger on his face.

James tried to see who he was approaching, but there were too many Slavers that all looked the same. Suddenly though, a feather moved in the air and James noticed a very odd looking gentleman that was leaning against a makeshift bar. In his hand was a glass of wine and the feather in question was plumed in an eccentric looking hat. If James had to guess, he would have assumed the man was a Bard.

A few muttering Slavers were looking at James with suspicious expressions on their face. Their eyes darted to his still gripped Moonlight Pistol and James merely sighed as he gestured at them to come closer to him.

"Who is that?"

James asked as he used his pistol to gesture towards the man Pedro was approaching.

One of the Slavers looked over lazily while the other continued to stare down the Dread Pirate. The action was followed immediately by a curse of panic that caused the second Slaver to whirl around in confusion. When he too saw the man with the feather, he let out a stream of curses.

"Oh shit! How the fuck did he get in here?!"

The first one asked in an agonised voice. His face was a mixture of anxiety and annoyance.

"Who is it?"

James asked his question again, not feeling confident that either of these men were going to be helpful to him at all.

The second Slaver surprised him though when he answered almost immediately.

"It's Fibber. He's the Leader of the Vigo Syndicate."

James remembered his previous notification about the different factions in Rayth.

"I'm hostile with the Vigo Syndicate."

He answered absentmindedly, not sure why the game had planted an enemy right in front of him... in his own lair.

The list of questions that James had about this game were growing by the second and it constantly felt like he was being tested again and again.

When he logged in first, he lost an eye.

When he got into Abidden, a Siren tried to kill him.

When he got to the shore, the Slavers attacked him.

The only point throughout the day that he had really taken control of his own decisions had been when he launched the attacks himself. He attacked the Goblins. He attacked Rayth. He gained his followers because of his own choices.

The first Slaver turned around with a surprised expression on his face.

"We're hostile with them too! Or well, we were..."

The second Slaver jumped in too.

"See, we've actually all changed allegiance a little while ago. Some of us started hearing voices and others started getting new equipment out of nowhere. Lots of craziness, but now that I see Fibber... I guess it's obvious, isn't it?"

James just shook his head. Whatever line of thought this NPC had, it most certainly wasn't obvious to him.

The Slaver laughed as he clapped James on the shoulder.

"It's clearly one of Fibber's schemes! That's what those fuckers do... they hide from the fights and use sneaky tricks to wear you down."

You have learned more about the Vigo Syndicate. Information can be found in your Journal

As another Slaver jumped into the conversation and started weighing in with an additional conspiracy theory around the Vigo Syndicate, James couldn't help but feel tired of their back and forth nattering.

His head was filled with questions and uncertainty around the game and he genuinely had no idea how to best proceed. He had told Helena that he would act as a Playmaker for the Paragons in their fight to retake control of Abidden. That promise seemed like such a farce at the moment.

Rayth was an Island according to Jackal, surrounded by the Dread Lake... and he had absolutely no idea where it was in Abidden.

Was he near the Sky Palace?

Which continent was he on?

There was no map button or notification that popped up to show him where he was. The Loremasters had given him a wealth of information but James had foolishly thrown all his efforts into taking down the Heroes. He wanted to understand his threats and improve his character.

His quests were reactionary instead of logical so he had no idea if he was making good progress or just flailing around. All of those considerations and questions made James incredibly anxious and uneasy.

Jackal had said that Scarr was the best performer in Abidden because he played the storyline. He interacted with the different factions, the NPCs and the world around him. He was the best at Role-Playing.

"I'm not him though."

James admitted wearily which caused the Slavers to pause and look at him strangely.

After a moment of silence, James blurted out a question with no idea how it would be received.

"How do I leave the Island?"

The Slavers looked at each other before bursting into laughter.

"Leave the Island? Oh... I don't know, maybe kill all the demons in the Dread Lake?"

The first Slaver laughed as he put on a comedic voice.

The second Slaver followed suit with his own impression.

"Actually, why not take down the Lightning Barriers?"

Just as James was about to leave them, a notification popped up in front of him.

Class Quest Updated: Breaking the Wall
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"The Wall?"

James repeated as he read the notification.

The laughing Slaver was shaking his head after laughing at the notion of leaving.

"Yeah, that giant dam that keeps us all locked in here? You know, the one that's manned by the Elves? The one that shoots lightning at anything that approaches it? Yeah... that Wall."

Class Quest Updated: Breaking the Wall

For some reason, James became unnaturally annoyed at the fact that a notification for something important just appeared because he was talking to two jovial Slavers.

In every game he had ever played, everything was straightforward and he knew the requirements. He usually needed to defeat or kill a certain amount of players in a certain time frame or in a certain manner. That was what he had been doing successfully in the slum arcades for the last decade.

Now, he was in the highest acclaimed game in the world... soon to be revealed on stream to millions of people, and he had absolutely no idea how to play the game.

The storyline of the Dread Pirate was being teased out piece by piece through accidental interactions and it felt as though it was completely outside of his control.

Gritting his teeth, James walked past the two Slavers and raised his Moonlight Pistol.

This was his lair.

He was hostile with the Vigo Syndicate and it's Leader was standing in front of him.

"Time to stop being reactive."

James muttered as he aimed at Fibber from across the room.

The Dread Pirate breathed for a few seconds as the pistol was aimed directly at Fibber's head.

You're being impatient.

The sudden thought crossed his mind which caused him to falter. It was true.

I need you to be our Playmaker again.

Helena's words echoed in his head.

James slowly lowered the pistol in his hand. He had abandoned his principles that gave him an edge... on his first day.

"Are you okay, mate?"

One of the Slavers asked in a concerned voice.

James looked at him for a moment before making a decision.

He holstered his pistol and turned to look at the crowd of Slavers.

"I've never been better."

Whilst many of them were watching Pedro lead a smug looking Fibber to the back of the warehouse, others were watching the exhausted fighters. The scythe duelist was covered in burns but still stood firm against his opponent. The flame practitioner was revealed to be an elven male who looked completely drained of energy. The only sign of his once ferocious fire magic was one of his hands glowing red. Another interesting thing about the elf was the slave collar that hung around his neck.

Thoughts and ideas started to run through James' head as he looked at the crowd with a different perspective.

Command has been Activated.

"Everyone, listen up!"

James shouted across the room after activating his newly acquired ability.

Many of the assembled Slavers turned to look at the Dread Pirate, most of them seeing him for the first time.

Each and every one of them fell quiet at his words.

Command: (Active)

Give orders to a group of allies to increase their performance. Subordinates that successfully follow your orders will gain a buff.

"My name is the Dread Pirate Sylvian and I am the Leader of the Dread Faction."

Looks of surprise crossed the crowd, with some of them connecting the dots faster than others.

"I have defeated Pedro the Butcher. He has become a part of my Crew."

The Dread Faction has reached maximum morale. Your Commands will carry a greater effect.

The Slavers burst into excited chattering, many holding looks of astonishment and disbelief on their faces.

"I want you all to speak to the Vampire God, Dervius. Listen to him."

As if he had just flicked a switch, the entire crowd started to burst into individual columns of light. It looked like all of them were availing of Dervius' offer.

A Follower has been granted a Class Upgrade (Dervish)

A Follower has been granted a Class Upgrade (Duelist)

A Follower has been granted a Class Upgrade (Nightblade)

A Follower has been granted a Class Upgrade (Ranger)

James had to push the torrent of notifications to one side so he could continue to address the crowd. When they stepped from the light, gone were their mismatched armours, their tattered clothing and dirtied appearance.

They were now fully equipped with new robes, tunics, leathers and weapons. Each and every one of them looked threatening. Some held Scythes in their hands, just like the combatant from before. James guessed that the fighter was more adept than the others since he had already spoken to Dervius. He made a mental note to remember him.

"None of you are Slavers anymore. You're now part of the Dread Faction.

James grinned as he finished his speech.

A cheer erupted from the Dread Faction, so loud that it shook the building.

"First order of business... is taking over Rayth!"