

Chapter 61

Worse than his Bite

“Holy balls,” Sally whispered to herself, mouth open in awe as she watched the creature tear itself through the magical portal.

A second paw and then a long wolf head burst through into the Ritual chamber. Waves of heat follow, the creature itself aflame as if it crawled from hell. Three bright white eyes beamed out across the room as the rest of the body slunk onto the raised stage. As the burning tail passed through the portal, whatever magic that had summoned it then vanished.

The zombie looked over at Theo, who looked up from his STAR. She jerked a thumb over to the giant fire wolf, who leapt down off the stage to pounce upon one of the Cultists - tearing into their body and scorching the robes from their torso. The vampire nodded and ran over to her, knocking a distracted Culist over.

“Level Five Elite,” she grinned. “I’m not a fan of fire, but we could take it, I reckon.”

“Sure. I did my Level Two stuff - I think I’m almost Three.”

“I can’t even see my experience bar, can you?”

“No - but I have a feeling?”

She wrinkled up her nose. The Fang had killed or maimed five of the remaining Cultists, and her zombies had taken down another. This was not great for helping Theo level up.

“Hey!” Sally yelled out. “Cats are better than dogs!” As the flame-covered wolf turned its three eyes to her, she leaned over to Theo. “*I actually like them both the same; I’m just doing a bit.*”

“Yeah, I got it.” He stood in an approximate martial stance as his fingertips glowed pink-red.

The Fang leapt forward as Sally hit it with [Hex: Slow], giving them both time to roll to either side.

[Sanguine Weapon]

[Necroblast]

Her magic shot blew a chunk of furred flesh from the flank of the beast as it turned to face the vampire. With a further roll, she spun with her sword, taking a slice through the back leg. The blood that sprayed from the wound hissed and burned her skin where it landed.

“Don’t bite this one!” She called to Theo as he came into view.

His [Novice Strikes] were landing repeated blows on the Fang - but there was something else. A third hand, floating in the air and made of pink energy was attacking at the same time. A blur of pink energy followed the quick arcs of all three strikes. Pain wracked his face as the impact burnt at his skin.

Struggling against the relentless assault, the large wolf recoiled and opened its large maw. Suddenly, a jet of fire spewed forth like a dragon's breath, enveloping Theo fully.

"Theo!" Sally yelled and leapt at the beast, stabbing repeatedly into the Fang's side and ignoring the spattering of painful blood.

The beast swung around with the tail of fire, and she ducked under it, some of her hair singeing from the proximity. Large teeth gnashed out at her as it turned its attention to her. Theo wasn't where he was just a moment before, only a scorched and blackened patch covered the area of the room where the flame had touched.

She blocked the next snapping jaw attack, and the force knocked the sword from her hand. The knife switched to her main hand as she waited for the next bite. As soon as the attack was started, [Necroblast] left her free hand and struck the overgrown pup in the nose. As the beast whined in pain, Sally jammed the dagger up into the bottom of the mouth - unable to reach the throat but doing enough damage to make the Fang choke in pain and surprise.

As she rolled backwards away, she retrieved the Crossbow from her Inventory with practised precision and quickly aimed the bolt into the middle eye of the beast. As it struck, the Fang lifted a paw to rub at the protruding bolt as it yelped in pain.

Then a darkened figure dropped down from nowhere, landing atop the beast's neck.

[Vampire Bite]

Sally watched as Theo, burnt and blistered, his armour scorched black and half missing, dropped to sink his fangs into the wounded creature. Her mouth was agape in horror, expecting the vampire to suddenly combust from within from the boiling blood.

Instead, his wounds started to heal. As Fang lowered, weakened, to the floor, Theo's face became as new. He withdrew with a gasp, his eyes ablaze with red energy, and turned to focus on her.

"Here, left some for you." He beamed, hands shaking.

Conditionals were met, but should she? Drool pattered to the floor as she did it.

[Eat Brains]

[Trait Unlocked: Increased Fire Resistance]

"You get the trait?" She gasped, stumbling back from the open skull of the beast. It had tasted almost as plain as the system-created, but... spicy? Even saying that sounded ridiculous.

"Sure did!" He hopped down from the felled animal, his face once again covered with blood.

The Ritual chamber was now a ruin. Blood covered the light grey stone, corpses lay beaten and hewn to bits amongst the benches, and the large body of the fire creature lay inert.

Sally struggled to get her breath back as she looked up into the glowing eyes of the vampire. He too was panting, a wild excitement having taken the eaters of the living.

“I guess this is the point where we’d kiss in a cliché romance novel?” She beamed, stretching her back out.

“Seems really unhygienic with all this blood around,” he frowned at the state of them both.

“Right? There’s nothing romantic about death. I crave nothing but eating brains.”

“And I nothing more than to drink blood.”

Sally grinned and held out a fist. “Platonic care gang?”

He returned both the bump and the grin. “Of course, even Monsters need found family, right?”

“This is all very sweet,” Baldrick interrupted, removing his hood to reveal a bald head and piercing blue eyes, “but can we get out of here now?”

Sally looked around at the carnage wrought. Any Cultists remaining must be hiding in one of the side rooms. “What say you, Vampire Lord, need any more experience?”

“I’m good - I’m Level Four now.” He gave his stomach a pat as if that had any bearing on how it worked.

Baldrick had the foresight to grab the lantern from the outside door before they headed back to Sanctuary. It was near pitch black outside now, so Sally was thankful for that.

“Imagine if we came across a couple of Novices,” Theo thought out loud. “Just putting that out into the world.”

“Keep it in your... mouth,” Sally nudged him as she opened up her STAR. “There will be plenty of opportunity tomorrow I bet. If the news of the regiment has gotten around, then some Parties will want on in the action.”

[Humphrey: Status report?]

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[Humphrey: I can see Theo’s HP bar - it’s really low]

[Humphrey: Oh it’s better now]

[Humphrey: Sally]

[Sally: alright dad, on our way home]

[Sally: bringing an evil old man with us]

[Humphrey: Okay]

[Humphrey: We will talk when you’re back]

“Hey Baldrick,” she motioned towards the Cultist as she closed the Chat, “you keep saying you were evil - what do you do?”

“Mostly, extract goblin juice for the Ritual.”

Theo gave her some raised eyebrows. At least there wasn't a text box around it, right? As much as they could do with a Librarian, perhaps the goblins in Sanctuary would not be too pleased about his presence.

“Goblins probably don't regard you too highly then?” Theo asked as politely as he was able.

“Oh no, the things I did to their children. You just have to wait for them to reappear, though after the process - it was like growing a crop. A *squealing* crop.”

“About time you got back, young lady.” Humphrey tapped his foot on the cobbled stone of the square. “And you should know better, Theo. Where is the old man?”

The pair wiped their mouths in reflex.

“What old man?” Theo shrugged. “I got to Level Four though, quite the feat for one evening.”

“You had the best trainer, to be fair.” The zombie punched him on the shoulder, but this time he didn't get displaced by the jovial strike.

“What did you unlock,” Humphrey narrowed his sockets further, ready to judge his choices.

“At Level Two I chose [Sanguine Weapon]. At Three, [Blood Shift]. Four was tough, but I eventually went with [Crimson Aura].”

“You picked your Level Three while you were being burnt alive?” Sally frowned and crossed her arms.

“Er - yeah, the Health increase is what kept me standing. [Blood Shift] has three charges based on recent kills of a certain strength. That's how I got atop the beast.”

The Death Knight gestured for them to head towards the tavern part of the Inn. “There was a beast?”

Sally grinned and looped one arm with Theo's, her other with Humphrey's large plated one. “We accidentally completed some kind of summoning Ritual; it was a large fire wolf called-“

“The Fang, yes. You didn't tame it?” The question caused the zombie to pause, stopping the other two with a brief jolt.

“That was an option?” She pouted at the vampire. “We kinda ate it and received fire Resistance.”

“Interesting. I had never considered that an-“

Humphrey stopped mid-sentence and dropped to one knee, a plated hand grasping at his head. A whining hiss escaped his skeletal mouth before he righted himself with the help of the two undead Players.

“Humps?? Are you okay?”

The Death Knight turned his head to the sky in silence as a faint shade of green flickered into view.

“HM-3.3?” The dry voice crackled as the skull lowered to their level. The Observer was lethargic, and the normally blazing eldritch energy was flickering and dull.

“*What has happened?*” Humphrey growled.

“It’s the Architect... he has been... murdered.”