

## Chapter 44

### Bad Bad Banditry

"They're already dead," she hissed to the pair behind her.

"Are you sure?" Humphrey bore down over her despite her glare in response.

"You think there are Players inside already? Or they've killed the bandits and left?" Theo waited patiently, despite also wanting to look.

Her eyes narrowed again as she tried to pick out more details. "The door to the second area of the camp is closed. There's a walkway over it, but it's sheltered - too much shadow to see if anyone is on it. This first section has no movement - lots of corpses." *And probably looted*, she thought.

"Well, let's investigate further, but stay on guard." Humphrey nudged them both before taking point.

There were two, maybe three areas where it looked like the bandits had been gathered in melee before being slaughtered. The bodies lay there, mouths agape and eyes wide in shock. Broken bones, blood, and some kind of burns. As much as it may be some kind of video game, the attention to detail was pretty realistic - as far as Sally could imagine anyway. She vaguely recalled being somewhat squeamish in real life, but here it didn't bother her one bit.

Slowly, they stalked around the outside of the almost circular camp, trying to keep out of sight of the walkway. Not the most straightforward of tasks, but between the roughly made shacks and a bit of crouch-walking they were able to block most line of sight.

Theo grunted and pointed a finger out towards the centre. "There's a second campfire, a smaller one - like our [Campfire]."

Indeed, next to the larger built-up campfire that had a black metal pot beside it, there was a smaller one that was spent and cold. The fight against the bandits had perhaps not gone as swimmingly as it seemed, and the supposed Party had rested before... heading out. Or further in?

They squeezed behind a couple of shacks, nearing the back end of this first area. The smell of damp wood overpowered the gore and slight remains of smoke. Suddenly Humphrey stopped, and they both paused behind him.

[Humphrey: Two figures on the walkway]

[Humphrey: Bandits]

[Sally: Nodders]

[Sally: Let me take lead]

She pushed past the Death Knight and strode confidently into the clearing in front of the closed door.

“Hey! Open up!”

Two crossbows peaked out over the shadowed wall into the light.

“Who are you?” A gruff female voice called down.

Humphrey and Theo sheepishly slid out of the hiding place to join her.

“We are The Outsiders, and we want to speak with your boss.” Sally put her hands on her hips and glared at the shadowy figures. She heard a second voice speak to the female bandit.

“*Weird, they aren’t adventurers? Right?*”

“One of them is, can tell by the smell of him.”

“No, you can’t, that’s bullsh-“

“*Ahem,*” Sally interrupted, “it’s rude to whisper! When we are waiting for your response.” She cast a side eye at Theo and murmured from the side of her mouth. “*I’m totally going to do it too, though.*”

“Doesn’t matter - you seem like assholes too, so I won’t shoot you - but you can’t come in neither.”

Sally pouted. “*Anybody have crossbow resistance?*”

“I implore you to reconsider!” Theo raised his voice, clearly not too enthused at taking a bolt for the zombie.

“No.” The crossbow turned slightly more towards the Novice.

Sally raised her hands; she didn’t want holes in her foodstuff. “Well, could you at least pass on a gift to your boss?”

The pair of bandits grumbled to each other before one spoke up. “Alright, no funny business though.”

She turned around to mime taking something out of a bag, stifling a laugh. *No funny business* indeed. Withdrawing an item from her Inventory she spun around and launched her [Torch] at the battlements. After a brief sputter of surprise, the bandits fired off their shots.

Humphrey stepped in front of one, deflecting it with his greatsword. The second struck the earth beside Theo, narrowly missing his thigh. Sally charged forward and swung her fist against the locked wooden gate, the bandits above her trying to prevent their walkway from catching alight.

To her surprise, her punch shattered through the gate, breaking whatever locking mechanism was on the other side. She shook her fist off and kicked the doors wide open, the rest of her Party standing alongside her.

The wooden door shuddered as it swung over the broken parts of the lock, opening to reveal the second camp. Buildings made of better wood loomed in the distance, as this area almost resembled a small village. There was a well, an archery range, a large hall, a ramshackle tavern, and several houses of modest size. Most impressive, however, was the number of bandits standing around - now gawking at the trio.

"I am Sally the Unliving," she bellowed out, "you have breathed your last!"

"Choke-point, near the tavern," Humphrey growled out.

"*Shit*, that was a terrible battle cry, huh?" She glanced at Theo.

The Novice didn't reply; he had a determined expression across his face as his eyes darted between the many bandits now drawing weapons and heading towards them as they ran to an alleyway.

"This seems more like a death trap?" Sally slid as they stopped in the passageway. Both wooden buildings on either side of them ran straight up to the mountain wall - a dead end (pretty apt).

"It is," Humphrey grinned as [Adrenaline] flashed crimson over his plated body, "but not for us."

The alley was a good ten feet wide. With the size of the Death Knight and his blade, it would make it difficult for any bandit to make it back to her or the Novice. Humphrey stood a few feet inside the alley so only one or two bandits could make an attack at the same time. A simple plan. Ranged weapons would be the main problem.

"Hey, gimme a boost," she nudged Theo as the first bandit made it into melee with the Death Knight. Blood flicked up the wall as the greatsword severed an arm.

With a little effort, she climbed atop the roof of the shorter building and wobbled as the uneven roofing almost didn't support her. They really needed to get better contractors. She withdrew the [Zap Wand] from her Inventory and watched as Humphrey sliced a third bandit from leg to neck with a quick flash of his blade.

Around fifteen bandits had gathered at their choke-point, almost politely waiting their turn with a variety of weapons drawn. They obviously weren't that smart if this was their idea of an attack plan. A handful of bandits stood near the back with crossbows and shortbows at the ready but unable to make a shot with their companions blocking the way.

The flames from the [Torch] had been extinguished and had caused little damage - the only evidence of the attempt being the slight burning smell in the air and a slight haze of smoke over by the platform. The two bandits had climbed down to join their fellows in combat. Perhaps the higher ground would have been the smart option for them though.

If only she had a Resistance to Piercing damage ring instead, she mused, as a couple of these ranged bandits noticed her on the roof. What she was actually hoping to find was the higher-level boss of this second camp area. Her eyes narrowed - but she almost needn't

have bothered. In the middle of the clearing, an absolute unit of a man stood, a large axe in one hand and a small crossbow in the other. *Hank Redfang*, she read from the UI.

She watched as Hank scratched his messy beard with the butt-end of the crossbow. He seemed rather perturbed at his fellow bandits running (somewhat) literally head-first into the blazing sword of the Death Knight. However, he also seemed less inclined to get involved in that melee and risk the same fate himself.

Humphrey continued to carve bloody swathes from the bandits, his reach and experience sufficient enough to keep them at bay from getting into the alleyway. Theo looked mostly useless and glum, only occasionally withdrawing some kind of basic weapon to lob over the Death Knight into the crowd - to some minor effect.

She turned back to the leader and winced as an arrow flew overhead, clattering against the rough mountain rock behind her. Several of the bandits were now drawing their bows or aiming bolts in her direction. Hank was probably out of range of the wand for now - she would have to draw him closer and quickly.

“Hey, ugly! Why don’t you-“ She ducked to the side as a crossbow bolt almost took her ear off. The roof below her shifted and buckled slightly at her movement.

“I said, hey! Ugly-“ Two further attacks whizzed past her, barely missing. She bared her sharp teeth as her temper started to rise. The bandit leader slowly looked up in her direction.

There we go. “Hey u-“ She jumped to the side as a bolt clattered off the wall behind her.

With a short but dramatic creak, the roof collapsed, sending the zombie down into the tavern below - shattering through a table as remnants of the ceiling clattered down around her.

She let out a long hiss of pain as the sound of heavy boots stomped towards the door.