

Chapter 32 Blood Moon

“What are you doing?” The Novice rubbed their eyes, “Don’t you know how late it is?”

The rising wave of panic flooding through Theo abated briefly. Of course, he just looked like a normal Novice, just a little out of place. His wooden sword was of little threat, surely.

“Couldn’t sleep. It’s a damned Blood Moon tonight.” He relaxed his posture and gave a shrug at the young man giving him the once-over.

“Is it, huh? Perhaps that’s why I was having a bad dream...” He turned as if about to retreat back into his room before looking back at Theo. “How are you at such a high level?” There was curiosity there alongside the suspicion.

“It’s a secret Class that you can unlock - but totally not worth it.” He waved his hands in the air in an attempt to wash the conversation away. “You don’t get any additional skills or benefits.”

The interloping Novice frowned and shook their head, “Whatever man, just be quiet.”

Theo grinned apologetically as the door started to close, almost in slow motion. It got to the last few inches-

And then a shrill scream of a whistle erupted from outdoors.

Not only did the door swing back open, but the sound of footsteps and muffled voices echoed dully from the other rooms.

He turned as the main door at the end of the hallway burst open. A large woman with a hefty mace stood in the doorway, backlit by her room’s lantern.

“You are not right,” she scowled, heavy brow descending her pale face. “Enemy in the Inn!” Her voice echoed through the whole building.

The other rooms opened, and a handful of Novices stepped out, clutching at their basic weapons with both fear and anger in their eyes.

Bella yelped, and the Healer yelled back in shock too.

In reflex she dove at him, dagger sinking into soft mattress as he rolled to the side and fell on the floor. The little goblin jumped atop the bed and readied a pounce.

Immediately, a blast of radiant energy struck her in the face, knocking her back. It... hurt a tiny bit - but then it was fine. She rolled to the side, getting tangled in the linens as a blade struck into the bed.

A shrill scream of a whistle filled the air, shaking the small windows of the room.

It was enough of a brief distraction that she could wiggle her way backwards from the trap of the bed, dropping to the floor. She was no match in a one-on-one fight. Escaping would not be good - they were relying on her.

“Come out you devil-rat! What are you doing here?” The man’s voice was shrill and stern, causing her to recoil against the wooden frame.

How dare he call her such names though? It was mean and unnecessary; shouldn’t elves be nice? As the Healer stepped around the bottom of the bed, she leapt forth and stabbed the man in the foot.

He hissed in pain and lashed down with a shortsword, catching her in the back of the head. Crimson droplets spattered across the clean floor as the man healed himself with a spell.

“Better tell the guard,” he growled, turning away from the prone body.

“*The Library is on fire!*” the voice called from above.

Jaxk thought about running, but as he turned to the hole, Oleb was there with the torch. “Finish the job,” the portly goblin hissed, “and be quick; there’s a bunch of-“

A shrill scream of a whistle reverberated around the whole of Yarch.

Jaxk swore, grabbed the torch and began moving from shelf to shelf catching the books alight. He watched in frustrated amusement as the zombie had managed to clamber and fall into a second bookshelf already, spreading small fires to the opposite side of the Library near the wide doors.

The Librarian emerged from the staircase to the right, wielding a long staff of polished wood and wearing either red robes or some really comfortable sleepwear. “Goblins?” he bellowed.

Jaxk flinched as the elf readied a spell and pointed it towards the small Monster.

Sally leapt forward, taking the guard by surprise and ramming her dagger in the underside of his jaw - her strength carving a large wound through his throat and spraying blood down her arm.

“Interesting,” she hummed as he slumped to the floor, “I have no urge to eat the System-created.”

“Bloody marvellous,” Humprey rolled his empty sockets, “how about worrying about the town being alert now?”

She wiped the blood onto her red skirt. “I’m sure it’ll be fine. All the teams will have done their jobs, and we’ll just mop up-“

The second door of the Forge swung open, and a large burly figure stomped out. Eschewing the norms of elfdom, the Blacksmith was heavily built and well-muscled - wearing just shorts and boots. A thick beard to match a tight cropping of black hair. The pointy ears looked more like afterthoughts to his design. In one hand he held a thick hammer with a short handle, and in the other, an axe with a blue-tinged blade.

“Undead?” He roared, almost excited at the prospect of a fight. “My speciality.” The hint of blue in the axe flared up into a flame.

“Uh, gentlemen first?” Sally sidestepped slightly behind the Death Knight.

“Gladly!” Humprey grinned, the flames of his helmet flaring out as dark energy pulsed around his greatsword.

Sally turned towards the town square, where the doors of the Garrison opened, and a large armoured figure strolled out, accompanied by a score of more guards.

“Oh, for fu-“

Theo dodged the first swing of a Novice. It was an amateur attempt. Even with his oddly distributed Stats, his hard-learned experience fighting the wilderness around the world gave him a slight advantage. Although, against seven enemies in this tight space... he was used to being able to kite trouble around.

Even in this dire circumstance, he was reluctant to attack.

Despite trying to disassociate these last few weeks, he found himself unable to stomach how very real this had become. Staying solo and fighting Blue Slimes made life simple - he needn't have to worry about much. Just kill, collect, and camp out at night. Did it matter that the last thing he remembered was leaving the diner? This was the new normal now. He could live it and keep his mind free of any deeper considerations.

Then Sally showed up.

He pushed away a Novice as they drew closer and blocked the swing of a mace from another with his wooden sword. Sally had been like a key, sliding straight into the mental lock he had put in the past - allowing the weight of his situation to sink back into his gut. Now he had followed the zombified version of the girl he had a brief conversation with into attacking Yarch. A village with very real Players living in it.

Theo exhaled. The rate of his breathing had increased as his footwork scuffed around on the worn rug - trying to get the low Levels caught up in each other trying to attack him. The spark of trying to escape back down the stairs had flared up - but where would that leave him? Back in a hostile town with a group following him - and ruining Sally's plan.

A shortsword cut into his free arm, a sliver of pain that worsened as he bent his arm in recoiled shock. He ducked the follow-up from a second opponent and shoulder-barged the first to the floor. This was PvP - heavily penalised by the System. The punishment would be-

The Innkeeper struck his shoulder with her mace. A dull pain that numbed his whole right arm. His grip loosened as he fought against the debilitating blow. He hopped backwards into the wooden wall, almost falling through into one of the open doorways - that was it! He rolled across the room as the mace struck the wall, wood splintering to the floor. A lantern lit the empty bedroom, and he stood poised at the doorway.

A choke point would have to do. With a staggered sigh of resignation, his wooden sword bathed in a pinkish light as he readied his [Novice Strike].

The Healer fumbled for the latch on their door. Sweat ran down their brow - what a rude awakening that had been. To think a goblin could somehow make it into the village - into his very bedroom, even! He gripped the handle and went to turn it.

Bella launched herself silently from the floor and wrapped her arms around the taller man's leg. The Healer jumped in shock, having thought the girl dead. As he went to strike down at her with his sword, she glared up at him and opened her mouth.

"Cabbages," she growled.

Then, with a brief suffocating weight placed upon them, she vanished from the bedroom.

[Greater Fire Bolt]!

Jaxk just blinked as the burning energy of the spell shot across the room and struck him. He would be the first goblin to put his hand up and admit to not being the sharpest tool in the pit... but why the Librarian would use a fire spell in the currently aflame library was beyond him.

The Librarian looked equally as blank as the spout of fire just petered out ineffectively against the goblin.

Scratching his chin, Jaxk turned to see Oleb chewing around the base of the wall - heading towards one of the structural supports. With a shrug, he drew a dagger and leapt atop one of the burning bookshelves. The dancing flames played in his eyes, and the Librarian buckled from the intimidation.

Chuck drew the old man's gaze away from the hellish goblin as he clambered over a table to get closer.

With shaking hands, the Librarian began preparing a new spell.

Sally tried to recoil against the inside of the Forge whilst peering out at the gathering town guard. The clash of melee behind her was making that difficult though, with the Death Knight

and Blacksmith whirling and flailing about behind her. She winced as the noise of metal and metal drew the eyes of the Town Captain and his guard.

There had been a yell over in one of the other buildings, and the Library had started to smoulder from any opening that allowed it. She could almost hear the crackle of wood splitting and burning - if it weren't for the periodic clangs of the fight.

She turned back to them with a scowl. Humphrey had taken some damage, but the heavily muscled elf was sweating heavily, with two long gashes across his chest.

"Seal the deal, Humps," she hissed, "we have company imminent."

"Yes. I'm just going to-"

A clang rang out - the blue glow from the Blacksmith's weapons pulsed as they struck the Death Knight.

Humphrey dropped to one knee, and his sword arm slowly lowered.