

Chapter 39 Seeing Green

[Sausage (1)]

What? She shuddered with absolute anger... *disgust*. Literally, *what?*

“Are you okay, Sally?” Humphrey frowned at her. “You’ve gone an odd colour.”

“I feel like this is some big joke sometimes,” she hissed like a deflating balloon. “Like, maybe the Architect is just watching over me and having a good laugh.”

“They did not seem to have much humour from my interactions.”

Sally narrowed her eyes at the Death Knight. “Have you met them or just spoken to them?”

“Just... spoken.” He gestured for them to leave the road into the woods.

The trees here were darker - a deeper, almost redder brown, as well as being sturdier-looking. The foliage began to look more like pine trees than wide verdant leaves. As the zombie kept her narrowed gaze on Humphrey, she stumbled over a rough stone sticking from the floor. Looking down, this area was also less grass-dense and sparse rockery dotted around bare patches of dried earth.

“This is the woods East of Hillan,” Theo said, trying to be helpful.

“*I have a map*,” Sally shrugged, “I just don’t want to look at it.”

“Wilful ignorance isn’t an attractive trait, you know,” Chuck murmured loud enough for them all to hear.

“Neither is being Level One - try not to get killed by orcs.” She stuck her tongue out and smiled, almost biting her tongue in the process. These sharp teeth were pretty wild now that she thought about it.

Thankfully, their back-talking was quickly curbed as they entered this section of the woods. The change of scenery brought with it an air of tension, a thick foreboding texture to the very air. Quietly, they travelled until the Death Knight held up a plated fist before he pointed to the South-West.

Through the treeline, some darker wooden structures could be seen, and the faint whisper of smoke rose into the sky. It was reasonably likely that this was the orc encampment. As a group, they crouched down and began to sneak closer.

“Nice gloves,” Sally whisper-hissed at Theo as they crept between trees.

“Thanks,” his hushed reply came, “I had Oleb enchant them.”

“Whaat? That’s a thing?” She screwed her face up in envy. Perhaps she shouldn’t have slept in so late.

“Attack Speed Increase,” he winked before he caught the scowl of the Death Knight trying to keep them quiet.

Even if she eventually decided not to eat him, Theo might be useful to keep around just because he seemed to have more of a clue what he was doing in this world. There was something about him that concerned her, but she couldn't place what. Perhaps it was just that he had been here nearly a month before she had even awoken. That was plenty of time to learn the ins and outs.

Humphrey paused, and they sidled up to him, peering around a dead tree that had wrapped around a dirt-smeared boulder. The orc camp lay ahead of them. It was both smaller than Sally had expected but also more than anticipated.

A group of five houses sat on the left side of a clearing as they looked down at it. Roughly made circular structures of dark wood, with a thatched roof that rose to a point like a cone. In the middle of the camp - the campfire itself was surrounded by several half-log benches and small stools. Metal frames sat beside the fire, most likely for drying meat. The right side of the camp had a raised platform as it looked as though the camp had been built against a plateau. The ground at the higher level had two buildings but was otherwise sparse of interesting details.

There were three orcs on the raised ridge and six milling about the camp area. No doubt there would be more in the houses, Sally thought.

“Okay.” Humphrey turned back to the group, his helmet flames licking against the boulder they hid behind. “There’s an Elite here - I can feel it.”

“I bet they have a nice dagger for me,” Sally rolled her eyes before they huddled together for their plan.

Heavy, plated footsteps were the first thing to alert the orcs. Barrelling down the shallow decline towards the camp, the Death Knight burst into a red glow as [Adrenaline] activated. The brief confusion painted across the brows of the orcs gave way to anger, even if this wasn't a Player - they were under attack.

“*Attackers!*” one of them at the front bellowed out in a gruff, guttural voice as they withdrew an axe from their belt.

Around the top of the camp, the lighter armoured figure of Theo ran across to meet the three orcs readying bows at the top of the platform. Chuck trailed a distance behind him, Crossbow drawn, trying to keep as far away from the danger as possible.

Four more orcs had emerged from the group of huts by the time Humphrey slid into melee - raising his sword to meet the gathered throng of greenskins. Sally popped out from behind him, having trailed him closely on approach.

[Will of the Dark Lord]
[Summon Zombies]

The pair posed dramatically as they activated their new skills at the same time. A pulse of black light flashed through the orcs as the greatsword struck the ground, as fell energy pulsed from Sally's hands to the ground beneath her.

Five orcs grasped at their heads or lolled around stunned. Three were unaffected, and two were slightly out of range as they clambered from their housing.

Four zombies erupted from the dry earth, scratching and groaning. Two of which immediately latched onto stunned orcs and began biting into them.

Three steps closer Sally rammed her dagger into the throat of one of the stunned opponents, dark crimson blood spraying to the floor.

Two bloodied orcs fell down from the platform - a whirr of pink energy overhead as Theo battled with additional orcs from the structures up top.

One crossbow bolt flew across the clearing, striking one of the reinforcements in the chest. Their roar of pain echoed around the clearing.

Zero chance this could go wrong, Sally beamed - red eyes blazing with excitement.

The door of the biggest hut burst open.

A cloud of dust and debris obscured the figure that emerged from within. With the melee truly engaged, it drew Sally's focus away from the new opponent.

Theo dived and swung upwards, the [Wooden Sword] almost moving against his will as his set activation drew him to make continual attacks. The orcs were large - a head taller than him and twice as wide. These were just like the ones he had to fight the other day; full of muscle and tribal barbarism. He had taken an axe to the arm, which stung, but had felled three of the seven now atop the platform. More than they had expected, but not more than he could handle.

A crossbow bolt struck his attacker in the shoulder, interrupting their attack, which gave his [Novice Strike] two further chances to do damage. The extra attack speed from his gloves was fantastic, but he could feel the lethargy from the repeated fast movements - he could do with some Constitution. At least he had heard the Novice behind him level up once, maybe even twice so far.

Sally and Humphrey fought back-to-back. As he struck an orc with the pommel of his weapon, she darted forth to the briefly flatfooted Monster - a quick stab to the leg, followed up the arm, and then another stab into the eye socket. A second orc with a greataxe came her way, so she quickly withdrew the torch from her Inventory and blinded it. The Death Knight swung his large blade over her head and decapitated the opponent.

The zombies weren't a great match for the orcs; two had been sent back to the ground already - but they had taken down three orcs with a fourth in progress. Sometimes the extra distraction would be worth the use of the skill, and she had no emotional attachment to these shamblers.

The figure of the Elite loomed into view amongst a throng of even more orcs emerging from the buildings. Slightly larger than the others, with a large headdress and pauldrons of thin reed, skulls, and other small adornments. Pale yellow eyes glared from their darker green skin, and large fangs rose up on either side of their wide jaw. A jagged branch of dead wood formed a magic staff - some manner of animal skull sat at the top.

Tendrils of bright green energy began swirling around the top of the magic staff as the shaman began chanting a spell. A single beam shot out, weaving through the air and striking one of the standing zombies - exploding the corpse in two, residual green energy crackling around the impact.

"Watch out - magic user," Humphrey growled as he lopped a hand off his assailant.

Sally rolled beneath an overhead axe swing and sliced the calf muscle of a bloodied orc.
"Duh!"

Theo threw up and dropped his sword to the floor. This extra attack speed was nauseating at best, and now his arm ached. The orcs had been dealt with. He allowed himself a moment to recover as his bleary eyes looked out over the platform to see the shaman emerge into the fray. *He should go help.*

"You alright? Perhaps we should call *you* Chuck?" Chuck came up beside him, crossbow still loaded. "You know, like the food you just chucked-"

"I get it," Theo wiped his mouth and stood up straight, "but you should be staying back, still."

"Rats to that. Now that it's clear I can better shoot down at-" He turned his head to the noise from the smaller shacks on the ridge.

An orc emerged, taller and much thicker with more muscle than all the rest, wielding twin scimitars that gleamed with magical energy.

The real Elite of the camp.