

## Chapter 31

### Sun Fall

It was dark.

The cool breeze of the evening rustled through the shadows of woodland as tiny specs of amber light hung in the near distance. Illuminated by the slight red glow of the Death Knight, Sally huddled down behind a grouping of bushes.

“You remember the plan?” The voice of Humphrey was calm and level but still got her feeling a little anxious.

“Of course, we’ve gone through it several times since we left the Fountain. Four groups for four of the Leaders - attack at the same time. The last chap is hiding away in the Garrison so better to join up to kill him last.”

“Yes, yes - I know it too; you don’t have to tell me, *ha-ha*.”

She narrowed her eyes at the Death Knight. She supposed it made sense that she had been lumbered with him. Theo would have been too much of a distraction, all alone here in the dark woods... It would have been the second worst decision, probably slightly after making Chuck one of the Team leaders. To be fair to the clumsy zombie, he had the easier task.

Her STAR spun around, and she opened party chat.

[Sally: Team Dead in position]

[Theo: In position]

[Chuck: aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa]

[Henkk: We’re as ready as we’ll ever be]

“They didn’t use their team names,” she pouted at the Death Knight, who shrugged in response.

Together they crept from their hiding place and approached the village edge. There wasn’t a lot of activity that could be seen in the sparse areas of lantern-lit glow. An occasional guard meandered through the cobbled roads, but it was by no means well-defended. From the map, the town formed a rough star shape with five roads converging to a central mass; buildings sprung up in the gaps like moss around a tree.

Their targeted Leader was perhaps the second most dangerous - which wasn’t saying much. An elven Blacksmith residing in their quarters in the Forge. Even the System-created slept. There must have been no coincidences allowed when making this village, as each lower road ‘prong’ each had one of the Leader’s residences, with the fifth one in the Garrison at the apex of the village. It made the upcoming fight somewhat linear and structured... if everything went to plan.

They reached the back of the Forge and crouched down behind a set of cut logs around twenty feet from the stone building. She ran her tongue along her sharp teeth. Trying to get the timing right on the first blow would be difficult, as once the alarm was raised, things

would start to get dicey. Humphrey had no idea if the village was big enough to have a Champion. A bridge to cross when they got to it.

[Henkk: We have the signal]

Sally gulped. Frena had been put up as watch, being able to see the whole village from atop one of the trees. Her signal meant that the rotating guards were at their furthest points from the Leader's positions. This was the point of no return.

[Sally: All Teams Go]

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Theo sighed and closed his STAR. He had already drawn his wooden shortsword, but his hand rested on a sheathed dagger. Sometimes a meme was not enough. His footfalls were near silent as the grass of the woods turned to soft dirt - and then he was there, standing atop a stone doorstep. The backdoor of the Inn. With a deep breath, he pushed the door open. Thankfully it was not locked. Double thankfully it didn't make an awful creak as it slowly swung. Darkness loomed directly inside, but he stepped within to close the door gently behind. It wouldn't do to get caught by the guard patrol if they circled back.

With controlled breathing, he stepped from what must be some storeroom into a dimly lit corridor. A stairway led upwards directly to his left. A wide doorway in front of him opened into a tavern area, with two low lanterns illuminating the dark wooden tables and edges of chairs. Two figures sat hunched over empty steins, a dull snore radiating through the empty space.

As he licked his dry lips, he made the first step to head to the next floor.

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Henkk gave Frena the thumbs up to know that the plan had been put into action. He clenched his jaw and tapped nervously on a side pouch. He didn't think the goblin woman would have been too pleased that they were using her daughter as an assassin, but surprisingly she had been okay - even eager - about it.

He held his hand out, and Bella took it, nerves at the edges of her bright smile and wide, red eyes. "Remember," he said softly, his honeyed voice barely making it to her ears, "say the word and you will come back out."

She nodded and took a deep breath, her knuckles almost whiter than Henkk himself as they held her dagger.

The pale goblin frowned and closed his eyes, pointing an outstretched finger at the wall of the Hospital.

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Chuck groaned.

Jaxk raised an eyebrow at Oleb, who shrugged. "Must be the signal?"

Chuck started stumbling towards the back of the Library as Jaxk lit the torch.

Oleb licked his teeth and took a bite of the stone wall, a mouthful coming free just as easily as if it had been made of cake. A second bite widened the hole, and he salivated at the odd meal.

Jaxk yawned and sniffed the air. *That was an odd smell.* He turned and saw that the zombie had been caught alight by the idly held torch. The goblin's stomach immediately stuck in his throat in panic.

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Sally frowned at the distant figures. Most were shades and shadows amongst the places the village's lanterns did not reach. Team Firehazard looked a little brighter than she would have expected, but it was hard to judge from this angle. With a shrug, she made her way to the side of the stone Forge.

She cursed the building - it was perhaps one of the harder ones to breach in the village and much more suited to the rock-eating goblin. The Blacksmith inside was rumoured to be a competent enough fighter. In comparison to the other Leaders, anyway. The Forge had no back entrance or side doors and no windows to breach on the lower floor. There was just an opening where the Forge itself sat, amongst an anvil and other darkened shapes used in smithing that Sally cared not for.

They stepped inside, paying caution to the village centre that they could clearly see - and quickly skirted back into the enclosed side of the building. Two identical doorways blocked their way. One to the back storage room and one that led to the quarters of the Blacksmith above. Neither had markings or a way to identify which was which.

With a shrug to the Death Knight, she held a stale lungful of air and reached for the first door.

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A floorboard creaked.

Theo winced. Droplets of sweat started to run down his back. He had neither the Stats nor the inclination for a stealth mission. How Sally had convinced him that it would be a smooth and uncomplicated task, he did not know. The fact that he talked himself up that he could do fine solo was on him, though.

Here he was, in a Party, just like he said he wouldn't be. He had told himself it was different, but the bread and butter of it was the same. Perhaps he wanted a Party after all. He had just needed to find the right one. Just the right amount of crazy and different.

Another wooden board complained of his presence.

He had passed four doorways down this wide corridor - the goal being the single one at the end leading to the Innkeeper. The decor, he had tried not to be distracted by. A plain rug of faded design, drab paintings of forest landscapes, a small table with miserable-looking potted plant. All bathed in dim shadow.

A door started to creak open from behind, and he slowly turned to meet the wide-eyed surprise of a sleepy Novice.

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Bella vanished from the light breeze of the open outdoors and briefly felt as if she was floating through mud. Her breath was squeezed from her lungs as the sensation weighed in on her.

And then it ceased. Wooden floorboards were beneath her hands and knees, and she blinked slowly and fought the urge to gasp air inwards. Slowly, carefully, she allowed her lungs to reinflate through her nose as her heartbeat pounded in her head.

Snoring filled her ears. Close by. She allowed her gaze to scan past the immediate flooring to her surroundings. A small room lined with shelving. Cupboards and the smell of something... sharp? Like the medicine Pa used to make.

Beside her, a bed. She turned slowly to face the wide wooden frame. Atop the bed, sheets were bundled over a figure facing away from her. The blue linens rose and fell with every snore. Gingerly, she stood to her feet.

One step. Two steps.

Each light footfall brought her close to the figure - a sleeping elf with long blonde hair and a sharp goatee. Bella frowned. This wasn't an adventurer or currently a huge threat to her well-being. It was a person sleeping. Would they try to kill her if the roles were reversed? *Probably.*

Her held dagger glinted in the dim lantern light. It was for the good of the clan. She would do it.

Third step.

The figure shuffled restlessly and turned over, facing the goblin girl as she froze in place.

Bleary blue eyes flickered open.

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Jaxk tried to waft the flames off of the zombie as Oleb sped up his chewing, but if anything it had just increased how much the zombie burned.

The hole was just about big enough for the goblins to fit through, but the zombie would have to squeeze.

The flame-immune goblin pushed Chuck towards the hole, flames licking against his own skin to no effect.

“*Hells!*” Oleb whispered, removing himself from the situation and wiping his mouth. The torch had been discarded in panic and had now lit up some dryer brush in the surrounding area. He waddled up to it and started to try and stamp it out - a job much better suited to the other goblin.

Jaxk fell through into the library as Chuck finally popped through, the zombie immediately stumbling into a bookshelf. With a brief groan, the shelves collapsed backwards, sending the aflame corpse sprawling across dusty tomes which almost immediately started to burn.

“Hey, what’s that noise?” A deep voice boomed from above, freezing Jaxk in place.

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Sally pulled on the handle. It didn’t budge.

She pursed her lips and frowned. Was it locked? Maybe she should just try the other door then - but her gut had said this one. She gave it a slightly harder tug, and yet still it did not relent.

Humphrey tapped his foot impatiently.

With clenched teeth, she gestured for him to try the other door. *This one was hers*, after all. She stared at the handle and tried to see if there was some manner of visible lock that could be picked or broken. Not that she could pick locks...

The Death Knight grasped the handle of the second door firmly and braced to pull it before they both froze in place.

“Ey, what’s all this then?” A voice resounded behind them, rising in both fear and anger as a rattling noise rose from their belt.

They both spun around as the small object reached the lips of the patrolling guard.

A shrill warning blasted throughout the sleeping village.