

Wildcards - Chapter 31: The Butcher

A genuine laugh left James' lips as his body finally started to listen to each of his commands. Since he had moved to manual mode, each of his movements had been erratic and slightly outside of his control.

The Charlatan's Cutlass whipped up to parry an incoming attack from a slaver. The shock in his opponent's face made the moment all the sweeter.

James sidestepped at incredible speed, moving into the slaver's blindspot before delivering a heartless cleave aimed at his eyes.

The Aimpatch that was gifted to the Dread Pirate by Dervius glowed softly as it activated the 'Aim' attribute. As if by magic, the tip of the cutlass found its mark and cut away the slaver's vision.

Before the slaver could scream out in dismay, James was darting towards his next opponent.

Your Follower has levelled up!

James glanced back at the slaver he had just cut. Standing over his now lifeless corpse was Shari, a satisfied smile was resting on her face.

The cobbled streets felt fantastic under the Dread Pirate's feet. He had been running through earthy forests and sandy shores the whole time in the game, so being able to run properly was such a nice sensation.

Coupled with his movement speed, James was starting to get a better feel for the basic attacks of the different slavers. Each of them launched forward with one of four different attacks.

James ran down the centre of the main street. Directly behind him was a host of corpses that lay strewn across the makeshift gate. The small force that had attempted to defend the gate had been the first to die.

The smarter residents of Rayth had all rushed into the surrounding buildings for safety, but like anywhere there were many more that were standing aimlessly in the streets. Each of them trying to get a closer look at the action.

As he ran, James managed to catch brief glances of the town around him. Most of the structures were roughly made with stone and in various states of disrepair. Some walls showed signs of paint, while others held battle scars of previous wars.

"Die!"

A slaver roared as he rushed forward. James didn't even need to look to know where the attack was coming from. All of the slavers that yelled the word, *Die*, thought they had the advantage and went for a two-handed overhead swing with their sword.

James activated Swift Dodge unconsciously, which flashed him backwards out of danger.

Before the sword came down or the slaver even reacted, James activated Swift Dash.

The Charlatan's Cutlass plunged into the slaver's side before James yanked the sword out of his torso. The momentum of Swift Dash made a simple stabbing action turn into a cleaving attack.

James slid to the right as an arrow thudded into the dying slaver.

An aggravated curse sounded out from a nearby rooftop, which was all James needed for his counter attack.

The Moonlight Pistol glowed in the darkness as James whirled around and aimed it at the panicked archer.

"Bang."

James said wryly as he pulled the trigger. The bullet of pure moonlight skewered through the night air to hit its target, square in the face.

The Archer was thrown backwards from the roof and James knew that if the bullet didn't kill him, the fall might finish the job for him.

Current Quest Progress:

- Destroy the Escravo Cartel - 62% Complete
- Claim Escravo Cartel Territory - 0% Complete
- Defeat The Butcher - 0/1 Complete

James glanced at the progress screen once again to see how much of an impact they had been making, and he was grimly surprised to see that the number was going up rapidly. His plan had been to lead the attack and have Shari dispose of all the slavers that were close to death. He didn't know exactly how strong she was, but he knew that there was a high chance that she would die if she led the charge against the slavers. It made the most sense for him, with the superior stats, to be the focal point of their attack.

Or at least, that was the intention. Their most effective killer was in the midst of battle.

A guttural scream echoed out in the distance and James turned and focused his eye to watch Otto in action. Flashes of yellow flitted between a group of slavers.

Each time the tiny octopus appeared, it was accompanied by a scream of anguish from a slaver.

"Good boy."

James laughed as he deftly climbed onto the roof of the nearest building. Unlike the other large buildings that stood alone in the street, this one was built tightly beside other structures, creating an elevated path for James to start his next wave of attack.

His blue eye gleamed as he spammed his skill again and again until his peripheral vision was filled with notifications.

A Good Eye For People has been activated.

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James dismissed each of the villagers that had nothing to do with the Escravo Cartel. He needed to know who was aligned with the faction and it was the most effective method he knew of to identify them.

Finally, after a few attempts, James found another Slaver hiding amongst the crowd. It was a skinny lad that had thrown a cloak over his cuirass to disguise the fact that he was a part of the faction.

"I love this part."

James laughed as he activated the skill, Crackshot.

The Moonlight Pistol fired, but instead of the normal flash of a bullet, a continuous stream of light shot from the barrel of the gun... creating a laser of death that punched a hole straight through the skinny slaver's face.

The crowd around the man screamed as the beam of light disappeared.

James rushed across the rooftops, glancing left and right and activating his skill to identify more slavers. His pistol fired again and again, killing slaver after slaver.

Continuous notifications poured in to indicate that Shari was levelling up. Every so often, Otto would experience a level up too which James was relieved to see. He had been curious about how much of a difference there would be between Standard Rank levelling and Master Rank levelling.

As James aimed his pistol at a Slaver, a collective gasp from the crowd on the street made him pause. He didn't know exactly why he did it, but a self-preservation instinct kicked in and James activated swift dodge.

James slid backwards just in time to see the corpse of a slaver smash into the roof tiles where he had just been standing.

Turning around to see where it came from, James couldn't help but laugh at the sight.

A muscled man, wearing nothing but a pink towel was picking up another corpse to throw at him.

You have successfully drawn out the Leader of the Escravo Cartel, Pedro The Butcher

"Stop buzzing around like an annoying fly. Come down here and face me like a man."

Pedro shouted as he used the corpse he held as a shield against the Moonlight Pistol's bullets.

James considered the request for a moment as he kept his distance from the terrifying figure. Shari and Otto would need a little time to finish their individual battles, so James knew that he'd need to keep the Boss occupied until they were ready to engage in the fight.

The first thing the Dread Pirate did was activate his identification skill.

Name:	Pedro The Butcher
Level:	15
Rank:	Unique

Class:	Slaver Captain
Faction:	Escravo Cartel
Assessment:	Stubborn, Terrifying, Playful
Crew Role:	Quartermaster

"Fuck."

James cursed as he saw the rank and level of the boss. Additionally, it looked as though the Butcher would be suitable for his crew. He had no idea what to make of his traits... terrifying made complete sense, but a playful and honourable slaver? It was bewildering.

Suddenly James had a thought. He wasn't sure if it would work, but it would hopefully buy him a little more time.

"Pedro! I'm the Dread Pirate Sylvian. I don't wish for violence between us and would like to invite you to join my crew."

Roguish Charm: (Success)

James couldn't believe it. The skill actually worked on the Boss.

However, Pedro dropped the corpse of his henchman and folded his arms.

Disappointment was etched across his face as he looked up at the Dread Pirate.

"Joining a crew sounds like fun. But... you killed so many of my men?"

Pedro countered as he gestured at the body he had just dropped on the ground.

Before James could even answer, the Butcher continued with a frown on his face.

"You're trying to avoid fighting, aren't you?"

James paused, not really sure what was the best way to respond.

Pedro shook his head and waved his finger back and forth.

"No. No, I don't like that. Get down here and fight me. I judge a person from their actions, not their words. I want a fight."

James stared at the Boss, completely bewildered about this turn of events. A notification popped up in front of him soon afterwards.

The Butcher has resisted the effects of your Roguish Charm due to being stubborn.

Without waiting for an answer, Pedro roared as he sliced his hand upward.

James' eye noticed at the last moment that the Butcher was holding a small knife in his hand.

A skill that James had never seen before suddenly activated, and a broad arc of red lightning burst from the Butcher's movement.

"Cleave!"

Pedro shouted as the attack released and powered towards James' rooftop location.

James leapt into the air, knowing that dashing forward or dodging backwards would still result in him getting hit.

The red lightning slammed into the corner of the building, shearing through the stone and tiled roof like a knife through butter.

James twisted in the air so he could land deftly on a neighbouring rooftop. He saw in the corner of his eye that Pedro's ability had collapsed the entire roof of the building he had been standing on.

Pedro's voice called out once more.

"I have some people waiting on me inside, so can we hurry this up?"

James gritted his teeth as he whipped up his arm, Moonlight Pistol in hand as he activated Quickdraw and Crackshot at the same time.

The beam of light slammed into The Butcher's chest, causing him to stagger back ever so slightly. When the light disappeared, Pedro still stood with a smile on his face.

"Is that it?"

His mocking tone caused a few of the onlookers to laugh nervously. While the Butcher was terrifying, he was still a resident of Rayth. Many of the villagers were scared of this new threat that had just appeared and started killing people. It was clear from their faces that they wanted Pedro to end the fight quickly so they could return to their homes without further worry.

James' eye glowed momentarily before his pistol snapped back up and fired, killing a nearby slaver in a single shot.

"It's enough to kill your men."

Pedro's smile faltered as he gripped the tiny knife in his hand tighter.

Confusion crossed his features as he attempted to reach behind his back.

Turning his body to look at what was happening, the Butcher finally saw a tiny yellow creature adhered to his skin.

James continued to pull the trigger on the Moonlight Pistol, shot after shot hitting the Butcher as he tried to grasp at Otto who clung resolutely to his back.

The earlier mocking tone from Pedro had devolved into annoyed grunts as his body was hit with a barrage of bullets. Every five shots, Crackshot would come off cooldown and James would activate it for a stronger attack.

"Got you!"

Pedro finally exclaimed with a laugh as he gripped Otto in his hand. Without wasting any time the Butcher threw the little octopus at the ground with all his strength.

Otto disappeared immediately, teleporting directly behind the Butcher and slamming his acidic body into the back of his head.

"Aaahhh! I will kill you, little octopus!"

Pedro shouted as he repeated the cycle of pulling at the tiny creature.

On the rooftop, James continued to fire the pistol at the Butcher. He was aiming for all of the vital areas of the body, which had a momentary effect before vanishing.

"Why... aren't... you... dying?"

James breathed in exasperation as bullet after bullet off of Pedro's body. The discolouration on his skin caused by the Moonlight bullets reverted back to their normal state after seconds. When a few more seconds passed, James started to wonder if he was going about this fight the wrong way. At least Otto was able to keep the Butcher distracted.

Suddenly Shari appeared on the street beside James' rooftop. Her face was a mask of concern as she glanced between the Dread Pirate and the Butcher. It was clear that she wanted to tell him something.

"What is it?"

James called down to her as he continued to fire his pistol, a part of him wanted to create an attack pattern that utilised Shari's abilities, but she wasn't strong enough yet. James had instead tasked her with reconnaissance.

Since the battle with Pedro had started, Shari had kept herself in stealth as she inspected the Butcher. As she was only Standard rank and he was Unique, her ability attempts kept failing. Coupled with that, her intelligence stat was quite low so the ability didn't have a high success rate to begin with.

When she finally broke her silence, her voice had a hint of urgency in it as she revealed her findings.

"Sylvian! His health is over nine thousand! We need to fall back!"

The Rogue insisted as she gestured towards a nearby alleyway that they could escape to.

James sighed before finally shaking his head and smiling. He felt like an idiot as he realised what was happening.

"He's able to regenerate, and my bullets aren't hitting the same spot. We just need to attack the same wounds over and over again to deal the most damage. Thanks Shari! We're not going to retreat. "

James laughed as he gestured at his Moonlight Pistol. The Blessing of the Vampire God had started to make him complacent. He was using the pistol too much because of the added bonuses to his damage. Thankfully, he had used his time in Rayth wisely. James had tested the limits of his movement speed and finally felt as though he was in control.

Holstering the Moonlight Pistol, James drew his Charlatan's Cutlass and looked at it for a moment.

Charlatan's Cutlass: Skill Steal Progress: 11%

"Time to steal the red lightning!"

James psyched himself up as he gripped the hilt of the sword.

Just as Shari urged him to reconsider, the Dread Pirate disappeared from her sight.

Camila sighed as her patrons flocked out the doors to watch Pedro in action. Many of her girls gave her a sideways glance, but she warned them off being too persistent with the customers.

Pedro would finish the fight quickly and everyone would be back in their seats, continuing to feed her information and coin. Her eyes once again darted to the pink towel around Pedro's waist. No matter how many times she tried to tell herself that it was a good marketing and branding opportunity, it was still a towel.

From experience, she knew that she was playing the role of concerned Matron perfectly. Some of her customers were touching the swords on their belts while attempting to give her reassuring looks. Camila would have snorted at their pitiful showmanship. Not a single occupant of the Veil brothel was a better combatant than Pedro and in a fair fight, nobody in Rayth could best him.

Gasps and cheers escaped the crowd as they watched Pedro's fight against the man with the pistol. The appearance of the little octopus had been a surprise, but after everyone saw the red lightning of Pedro's signature 'Cleave' attack, they knew the outcome of the fight.

Or at least they thought they did.

Nobody was expecting the shooter to change his attack style.

Nor did anyone expect him to be just as terrifying as Pedro.