

Chapter 69 Nice Fireball

Blazing heat bore down on them as the trio of undead ran to clash with the Champion and players. The amber orb of fire was now maybe eighty feet in diameter, and the impact was imminent.

Humphrey withdrew a scroll from his belt, and with the sizzle of spent magical energy, it faded to ashes. A red circle of light illuminated beneath the Party.

Ahead, the Champion raised her staff, and a beam of light shot up towards the impending meteor. The descent slowed, almost to a stop as the white line of magical power maintained a connection to it. Arrows and spells shot from the enemy group, blasting some of the goblins and raised zombies.

Sally couldn't see the Levels or Classes of the opponents, but at this point, it didn't matter. She swerved around the remaining guards, avoiding their attacks and slashing out with her sword as they passed.

The Death Knight shoulder barged a guard to the floor, sending them sliding several feet away. With the majority of the space now clear, he levelled his greatsword towards the Champion.

[Compelled Duel]

The sneaky bastard, Sally thought. Her level up had of course levelled him too, as her bodyguard. He hadn't seen it fitting to let her know that he had regained that ability.

Eyes ablaze with fury, the Champion fought against the ability. She slowly lowered her staff to stare down at Humphrey, her concentration of the spell broken.

"Looks like you failed your Willpower save," he beamed, swinging his sword around in an arc and taking a defensive stance.

Now unhindered, the fireball struck.

Briefly, everything was away with amber light. A heat seared at Sally's skin. It hurt, but she didn't feel dead. More dead. As the light faded from her vision, the scene around them was awash with those without as powerful Resistance as their group.

Charred remains of goblins, zombies, and guards alike littered the road behind and before them. While few lucky ones remained, the attack had been devastating. Flames continued to lap at some of the corpses, and the grass and foliage on either side of the road smouldered.

"Fuckin' shit!" Jackie's voice carried out across the brief silence.

Someone grabbed Sally's elbow. She turned to the blazing red eyes of Theo.

"C'mon, let's end this," he hissed, before running towards the enemy.

She shook the disorientation from her head and started after him. The Death Knight was slowly advancing towards the Champion - if only he could have waited then she could have put Slow on her. Instead, she levelled the spell at the human Cleric ahead of them - the familiar blonde hair of the Skullsplitters healer now slightly singed.

Concern filled her as Theo took an arrow to the chest, and then a second - with the blue glow of a third held shot illuminated the face of the Ranger. Theo then vanished as this [Ice Shot] flew through the black mist and struck the road behind them both. The vampire appeared behind the surprised Player and began striking out with his blades.

Sally threw out [Necroblast] towards the Cleric, but the female Fighter from before stepped in the way and took the hit. There was anger in their faces but also some amount of trepidation. Their desire for revenge looked like a tastier dish before most of the 'good guys' had been all but obliterated. Enough seemed to remain to keep the battle going, or perhaps the forced duel between Humphrey and the Champion prevented the order of retreat from being issued.

A Rogue appeared beside her as she launched herself at the Fighter. Pain burned across her left arm as a blade cut into her dead flesh. Her feet stumbled as a numbness slid through her, but she shook it just in time to slide out of the way of the Fighter's axe swing. Jumping backwards, she circled around the two opponents until - [Necroblast] snuck past them and slammed into the Cleric, interrupting her healing spell.

The Fighter spun in response, a flare of orange as their attack turned into a [Whirlwind]. Sally jerked backwards as crimson flashed in front of her eyes, the axe biting a gash across her face. Warmth trickled down her cheeks as the Fighter stopped the attack and stared at her in confusion.

A beam of red light ran between the dizzied Fighter and somewhere behind her - Theo. [Stunning Gaze] had caught the frenzied woman. Sally surged forward, a crossbow bolt from Jackie striking the Rogue in the back with [Pin Down] and preventing him from interfering. The rare sword jabbed up beneath the ribcage and into the chest of the stunned Fighter, landing a critical hit. [Eat Brains]

[+7% Health Points]

Theo vanished from his position and appeared behind the Cleric, immediately using [Vampire Bite] in the back of her neck. Sally ran up to the dazed woman and watched the crimson leak from the wounds until her conditions were met. [Eat Brains].

[+7% Magical Damage Defence]

Their blazing red eyes met as the vampire discarded the consumed Cleric to the floor. His gore-caked grin was quickly ended as he was struck in the side of the head. Theo's body slumped to the ground as an armoured Paladin pushed into the zombie and began to glow a holy light.

Sally barely blocked the follow-up attack as a burst of radiant energy knocked her backwards. She tried to get a glance at the vampire, but he hadn't moved from the floor. Behind her, the Rogue had now vanished. [Hex: Slow] switched to the Paladin, and she

rolled to the side to avoid a crack of yellow thunder. She felt lethargic in his presence, despite the stacking buffs from the eaten Players.

There must be some kind of Aura. She tried to back away, but he moved closer quicker than she thought possible. Out of the eight Players, four still remained. There was another crack as the hammer of the Paladin struck her left arm, the dagger dropping to the floor from her grasp. The plated foe went for a follow-up swing but stumbled as something ginger darted and weaved between his legs.

Sally grabbed onto the Paladin with her good arm and threw her body weight backwards to pull the Player off-balance. They landed side-by-side on the charred cobblestone road, and she scrabbled at his neck, trying to get through the fabric and layers of armour. An [Explosive Shot] rang out nearby as Jackie tried to guess where the Rogue had gone.

“Foolish,” the Paladin hissed as he put his hand against her bloodied chest. A radiant glow started to flare around his plated fist. Even with her hand finally around his neck, she couldn’t puncture his skin or choke him in such a short time. [*Necroblast*]. Gore shot out across the nearby stone as the eldritch ball blew out most of his neck. [Eat Brains].

She stood again as pain wracked across her body and turned to see where Theo had gotten to. The vampire was standing again, but half of his clothing had burned away by acid, rending patches of his pale skin raw and bloodied. He stepped away from the pool of steaming green liquid, creating bloodied footprints on the darkened ground. The offending spellcaster paled at the sight and tried to mumble another spell. Theo teleported behind him in a cloud of mist, sunk both of his blades into their back and then bit into their neck. Even from here, Sally could see his skin regenerating.

Instead of rushing over for the brains, she grabbed the second Health Potion bottle and downed the contents. Turning as she did, she kept an eye open for the Rogue. Unaccosted, she met the sight of the Death Knight and Champion duel.

Both combatants looked worn and exhausted. Humphrey had two holes pierced straight through him, and the flame on his sword looked dangerously close to going out. The Champion had split and dented plate and a cut up the side of her face.

Archie was sitting nearby, watching intently.

A heavy downward swing from the crimson greatsword was blocked by the staff but sent the woman down onto one knee.

Sally realised it had still been raining. The fireball had briefly blocked the drops from landing or finding purchase, and then the adrenaline had caused her to focus on other things. It was actually reasonably quiet now. The Players she had killed just now raised as zombies to stand and join her, and Theo stumbled over to join her, wiping his mouth.

“It is over,” Archie proclaimed, causing the duellists to pause. “Your forces are spent and have been repelled. Sanctuary belongs to the Monsters now.”

The Champion stood and brushed off her arm. Except for the rain beating down, silence filled the road as all living and not waited to hear her response. Her breathing was haggard, and she lowered her head in resignation.

“The Crown yields, on this day you have-“

Humphrey stepped forward and without hesitation cleaved her head clean from her neck, the blazing arc sending it bouncing across the stone road. “I won the duel,” he beamed, resting the blade across his shoulders.

Any remaining guards turned tail and fled. They didn’t make it far, as the Party and remaining Monsters cut them down.

Sally shuddered and sat down on the body of the Champion. “Losing the buffs is not a fun feeling.”

Theo just stood, waving side to side slightly as if listening to a tune in his head, his eyes focused up into the clouded sky.

“Not a terrible battle,” Humphrey huffed, sitting on the floor.

“Sanctuary is indeed safe for Monsters now,” Archie nodded. “As for your fates, it is still to be decided.”

“What are you talking about, kitty?” Sally frowned at the wet cat. Then she heard a noise - faint at first but slowly rising above the rain.

The Party turned to look down the road. Fast approaching was a horse-drawn coach. A flash of lightning revealed a figure standing atop the roof, arms stretched as wide as his black feathered wings. A crimson halo sat atop his head.

Sally narrowed her eyes at the Cleric and drew her sword.