

## Episode 1: Brondahl

The giant rat in front of me snarled, drawing my attention away from my groupmates behind me and back to its hideous, malformed face. Saliva dripped from its mouth as it lunged at me once more. “You better hurry up with that health potion, or we’re gonna need a rez!” I shouted to the scout just behind my left shoulder as the tainted monstrosity’s needlelike teeth skidded harmlessly off my plate mail.

With my last glance over my shoulder, I had seen Jareel’s health – low and fading fast. That poison DOT wasn’t letting up. We hadn’t been told the rats in here were diseased, and we’d come unprepared. I guess no one knew. Explains why the miners hadn’t been reporting back. We couldn’t finish clearing the zone like this, but at least we could let Va’al Serasi know what was happening. We’d either need a healer or a few more levels to get through this dungeon alive. Time to retreat.

“Come on,” I yelled, backing toward the cave entrance after thrusting my claymore through the body of the rat, ending its onslaught in a series of shrill cries and spilled entrails. The scout, a random PUGger we’d picked up outside the front of the cave, yelled, “EVAC!” and started waving his arms around, throwing them wide in an elaborate pattern that I knew would end with his hands coming together in a resounding clap before we would fade away, to reappear at the cave’s entrance. This time, however, as I watched, running toward him in horror, but too far away to do anything about it in time, another rat darted out of the shadows behind him and gutted him with its teeth, interrupting his cast and dropping his health from half full to completely empty in one swift stroke.

“Ambush!” I shouted, closing ranks with Kierkendall (our warlock) and Jareel, who was out of mana, only a sliver of her health remaining. I sidled around them, putting myself between them and the rodent. But I could see more movement in the shadows around us. There was no way I could protect them both. The scout’s body disappeared, leaving only his empty soul behind, his bags scattered haphazardly around it, but I made note of the name hovering over his head before it did: Nosepru. I’d find him later.

“Incoming!” Kierkendall cried, and I looked around in time to see two smaller rats scurrying toward him.

“Get over here!” I bellowed, using some of my mana to beckon everything within thirty feet to me instead of allowing them to swarm my groupmates. “And somebody get that health potion out of the scout’s bag!”

I used more of my dwindling supply of magic juice to fortify myself, giving myself immunity to damage for 30 seconds, as the rats crowded around me – all seven of them, including the ones that came pelting out of the cracks in the walls after my AOE taunt went off. Nosepru whispered in my mind: “Hey, I respawned. Meet you back at the entrance for a corpse run?”, but I didn’t have time to deal with that right now.

Spells flew all around me in a shower of lights – that was Kierkendall at work, I’m sure – and I heard Jareel’s death cries as she dropped to the ground at my feet, but not before she played a few notes on her lute, granting me renewed strength and vigor. Good old Jareel; she could always be counted on in a pinch to put everyone else before herself. No one had made it over to the bag.

“Jareel’s down!” Kierkendall bawled in my ear, but there was nothing I could do about that at the moment either.

“Get that potion!” I roared. He couldn’t though, and I knew it as well as he did. The only chance we had would be to kill off as many of these rats as we could before our enhancements wore off.

My sword danced through my enemies, keeping time with the upbeat tempo of Jareel’s last spell. Five rats succumbed to my onslaught, but the DOTs kept adding up, and I knew that as soon as my fortification wore off, I’d go down fast. Making the split-second decision to use what remaining mana I had left, I tried to cure the worst of them, sacrificing damage prevention to do so. Pros and cons. I’d cured a few by the time my fortification dissipated, but in the meantime, Kierkendall had hit one of the rats with a heavy-handed single-target strike, and its attention turned toward him.