

[Endless Sleep]

Humphrey stepped through into the quiet room. Flattened against the walls were the crushed remains of the corrupt Players, along with a handful of dead zombies. Against the side wall, Sally sat, her head in her hands.

“Everything okay?” Concerned, he stepped over to her as Edward and Lucius filtered into the room.

“Yeah.” She sighed and looked up at him. With the back of her forearm, she wiped the blood away from her mouth. “It just seems like such a waste.”

“Their brains?” The Death Knight glared around at the fallen to ensure they were actually dead.

“No. I mean, I didn’t eat any of them. Corrupt brains are icky.” She stood slowly, her joints and bones clicking back into place. “It’s just... why do they try so hard, but always fail?”

Humphrey stood for a moment, a blank expression on his skeletal face. Eventually, he shrugged. “Isn’t that to our benefit?”

“Sure, it’s just unrewarding. Where is their caution? One life and they throw themselves at me?” Her shoulders sunk in exasperation. “I wanted to be overpowered to stay alive, but it just makes me a magnet, like... bugs on my windshield.”

“Yes.” The Death Knight turned and pointed toward the exit door. “Shall we?”

She glanced over at the other two, but they didn’t seem keen to weigh in on the issue. Well, one of them could come back to life, and the other could hide away to avoid damage. As much as she loved brains, she was tiring of being a killer of the weak. Hopefully, the bubble-girl would have seen what happened, and could tell the others in the Red team not to try fighting her in an enclosed space.

It wasn’t even fun. She took almost as much damage as the Players did, they just didn’t have her level of damage reduction.

From her Inventory, she withdrew the key and stumbled over to the door. It was engraved with a nice pattern and stood out from all others they had come across so far.

“Are you sure I can’t just shadow it?” Lucius asked from behind, a question mark appearing beside his head.

Sally turned her head and shook it slowly.

Returning to the task at hand, she pushed the key in. It didn’t fit. She blinked, her energy reserves totally spent for the day at present.

“I could just shadow the wall next to the door?” The Shade offered.

The zombie groaned. “Somebody else is in charge, I tap out.”

Humphrey put a hand on her shoulder and then gestured at the door, looking back at Lucius. "It's been a long day, Sally. The key is to where Archie is, not necessarily to the Boos room or wherever this leads to."

She leaned her head against him, a rather painful experience given that he was made of metal plate. They waited and watched the Shade step up and put his hand on the door.

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Norah wiggled her bare toes. Her legs, arms, and half of her face were now uncovered.

"Unfortunately, that's the best I can do," she said toward the golden-wrapped vampire. "You have to allow an old lady her modesty."

She smiled and looked around the chamber. The entirety of the walls, ceiling, and floor were wrapped with the dull gray bandages. A cocoon had been built around them both to reinforce the walls.

"I am absolutely itching to tear some adventurers limb from limb." She sighed and flexed her fingers. "Let me see how Sally and the others are getting one."

As she worked her Chat messages, a sound came from outside.

*"This is a strange building."*

*"Yeah, there's no entrance. Nothing on the map."*

*"What do you think it could be? Treasure?"*

Norah furrowed her brow and pouted. "Tease," she murmured.

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Sally idly brought up her STAR to check the messages coming through.

[Norah: Still safe here.]

[Norah: Hope everything is fine x.]

[Sally: all good. Killed some ppl.]

[Sally: about to rescue arch x]

"I feel bad we have left Norah in the middle of nowhere, alone." She pouted as she closed her Chat down, and looked up at the Death Knight.

"I know." Humphrey nodded. "I wish things had been different."

Unfair for her to beat him up about killing Theo, as tempting as it was. It was a sore spot for the large slab of metal, and she didn't want to push those buttons now that he had come to terms with having a figurative heart.

It was almost a relief that they couldn't level currently. While new skills were nice, it was one less pressure on them currently, when they already had a time limit. She did need new

armor, but otherwise the rest of the Party was pretty on top of things. It helped that they were Monsters will scaling stats, that didn't have Equipment like Players did.

Briefly, she wondered if she would ever get to see her own stats.

The door became shadow and Humphrey stepped forward to look through. "Staging area," he said. "A room to rest before the actual Boss." With that said, he stepped through, and then broke whatever passed as a locking mechanism on the other side.

Lucius dropped the shadow and then the door opened the normal way, allowing the three of them through.

"Dungeons aren't as fun when they're already mostly cleared." She stuck her tongue out and she looked around the chamber.

Pleasant and well decorated compared to some of the plainer rooms. Benches of polished sandstone around the edges for people to sit. Enough space for a Campfire, to sit and eat, prepare all your buffs before you faced whatever was on the other side of some double doors.

"Did you ever have fun in Dungeons?" Humphrey tilted his head.

"Sure," she said and shrugged. "When we did the thing, and I summoned the devil, who gave me the broken skill. That was neat."

Edward narrowed his eyes at her, apparently still put out that he didn't get his turn to put the coin in and get a skill reset.

"Are we just going to go in and kill the *whatever-is-in-our-way*? My zombie summoning is back off cooldown now, so unless they are going to turn the tables and have something I am actually weak against, we can just pop them and move on."

The demon shuffled, looking around. "I am still aware we have one Player lurking in the shadows waiting for us to show a moment of weakness."

Sally looked around, as if she expected to catch the corrupted woman in the act now. "It would be a really bad idea if she tried. I would hope that she had enough brain cells to know when a battle was lost." The zombie sighed. "I really don't want another life thrown away in vain, thinking I am so easily humbled."

"I think you're very humble," Lucius said.

She clicked her fingers. "I'm not even going to make the obvious joke there, that's how tired I am." Her eyes narrowed as if her brain wanted to reconsider. Instead, she spun on her heels and strode over to the exit door.

Edward sidled up to the Death Knight. "With all your absorbed knowledge, don't you know what the Boss here will be?"

Humphrey grinned. "Yes." Then he moved forward to step up behind the zombie.

She flung the doors open to reveal a bridge walkway that led to a large, square platform. Stepping out, she could see that there was a moat about a dozen feet wide all around this middle area. Filled with...

"Is that acid or just green flavor water?" Her face scrunched up.

Edward sighed. "Let's assume the former and not try the latter. I feel we'll know soon enough, anyway."

They all looked over at the figure standing in the middle of the platform, illuminated by light pouring in from the high ceiling. Sally had expected a giant lizard, or maybe even a dinosaur, given the theme. Some Monster of large size with a brain that tasted like algae.

Instead, a lizardman of relatively average size stood with his muscled arms across his chest. Two short horns protruded from his scaled head and his golden eyes glared at the empty wall, as if he hadn't seen them come in yet.

"Not a Unique then," she surmised. "We had gotten a bit too used to that being the default in this sort of situation."

"Yes," Humphrey agreed, readying his blade.

As overconfident as she usually was, Sally didn't get this far by using only half of her brain. Oh, maybe that was a lie. Either way, she knew that the smaller the Boss, the more dangerous they were. She was her own proof of such a thing. Still, they were Bosses in their own right, so if five Players were meant to kill this lizard guy, then she should have no problem.

Her eyes narrowed as they stood at the edge of the bridge before it joined the main platform. Although the Boss was mostly bare-chested, he wore a large necklace that looked like... yes! It was a lock, with a keyhole.

"You see that, Humps?"

"Yes."

"Ah. We can work it post-mortem, right?"

"Y- hmm, no, I don't think so." With a plated hand he rubbed at the side of his head, the metal of his finger scratching out, causing Lucius to wince.

Sally narrowed her eyes. "Are you just saying that to make this more of a challenge?"

Humphrey shrugged, a wide grin growing along his face.

With a sigh, the zombie stretched her shoulders out and flexed her arm to ready the staff for combat. "Alright, I've got the key, so I just have to get up close to him. How hard could it be?"

"At your command," the Death Knight said. The other two nodded their readiness as well.

Sally's boots dug into the bridge and she launched forward, twirling the staff as the skull at the top burst into green flame. Her hand outstretched, she started to cast [Curse: Decay] on the Boss as he turned to finally notice their presence.

[Mortis Bomb] went out in an arc of green light as the lizardman withdrew a pair of hand axes in the shape of crescent moons.

With a quick sweep, he knocked the necromantic projectile out of the air and it careened down onto the platform floor ineffectively. Pulsing waves of blue energy started to build up around him as his face contorted with anger, his sharp fangs bared towards the approaching undead.

Sally growled. If the boss wanted to play it like that, then perhaps she should just go for the easy option. Now, almost in melee range, her eyes blazed bright crimson.

[Endless Dead]

Over two dozen zombies began to crawl out from the platform floor towards the lizardman channeling his skill. As Sally started approaching from an angle, she ducked and dodged through the rising zombies to give herself a cover against whatever ability the boss was about to use.

And then, just before the Death Knight could get into combat alongside her, the axes both went down and struck the floor amongst the spiraling blue energy. A pulse of power washed through Sally right before a wave of force pushed against her. She dug the dagger end of the staff into the platform and held on tight, gritting her teeth as she avoided being pushed back.

Many of her zombies weren't so lucky, however. Turning her head as the energy whipped through her cloak, she saw a handful of her slow shamblers succumb to the force and fall off the edge of the platform. The waves continued, one after another, keeping her rooted in place.

Humphrey remained in place, unmoving, but unable to progress further. The Shade had become a shadow for him to avoid the same fate, whereas the Demon had been pushed back to the safety of the bridge.

"Acid?" Sally yelled out towards him.

Edward pushed his head forward and frowned down off the site of the bridge towards where the zombies had fallen.

He said nothing in return, but the slow nod was confirmation enough.