

Another Monster dropped to the floor, and Sally wiped off her mouth. *Gross*. They tasted like asphalt, which didn't make much sense. Her stomach gurgled as she slid off the side of the creature before it could raise as a zombie.

Things had gotten easier the more they killed. Whilst most of her normal zombies had been pulped in short order, she now had a handful of these large lizard things at her beck and call. Too slow to be much offensive use, but they could body-block and draw aggro from their target and allow the Outsiders to attack almost unabated.

They'd been through two dozen of them now. [Curse: Decay] helped, but it seemed to drain health slower on the giant Monsters. The System didn't care to give her a tangible reason as to why—but she just assumed it was some inane bullshit. She sighed and wiped the sweat from her brow.

"Everything alright, hun?" Norah moved up beside her as the other two took a brief break to stretch out.

"It's this hair," she said as she deflated. "Half tempted to cut it off."

"It suits you, though." Norah tilted her head. "If I may?"

"Go ahead."

The Mummy moved a bandage around behind her and wrapped the hair around, snaking through to bind it into the shape of a long ponytail. "It's too matted with gore to do anything with right now, but this should keep it out of your way." The bandage snipped off and Norah tied it off to keep in place.

"Oooh, thank you!" Sally beamed up at her. "Can already feel the breeze on my back. Maybe if we find a proper town, I can wash it up and we can get it sorted properly?"

"It would be my pleasure, hun." Between the bandages across her face, she smiled back.

Sally leaned against the body of the fallen Monster as undeath started to bring it back as a zombie. "How are you finding it with us now? It's only been a couple of weeks, technically, and we've dragged you through a lot."

"Honestly?" Norah looked away to watch the Death Knight limbering up. "It's been the best time of my unlife. I don't think I could do this forever, though."

The zombie nodded in return. "It would be nice to have a vacation, huh? Actually enjoy what we've fought for. Waking up next to abs and not have to worry about getting more powerful or some calamity trying to kill us..." She shifted away from the creature as it stood back up.

"Did you just call Theo 'abs', hun?"

"No." Sally grinned and pulled a skull from her belt.

"Ready when you are," Humphrey called from the front, swinging his sword around as it burst into crimson flame.

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Theo spat blood on the ground.

A body dropped from his grasp into the dense foliage. Crimson pulsing down their neck and soaking through their clothing and tabard.

He crouched down and wrinkled his nose up at the dead body. "You are worth no experience. Waste of my time." His eyes glazed over as his STAR menu showed him what he could loot from the corpse.

"*You're a hard man to track down,*" a female voice came from behind him.

"Intentionally," he replied, still focusing on the loot. "You move quietly."

"Intentionally."

Theo hummed to himself, weighing up the options between two pieces of gear.

"Are you so over confident and rude that you do not turn to face me, vampire?" The voice was curt, but not overly aggressive.

"It must be difficult." He paused and furrowed his brow. "Believing you are the true one, the original, even though you know deep down... that it's a lie."

"*Face me.*"

A wide grin spread across the vampire's face, exposing his fangs. "Just how many of you are left, Lana?"

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Sally sunk as they stared at the Boss. "I'm feelin' dino-sore at fighting all these tough Elites."

A question-mark appeared beside the Shade and his crimson eyes narrowed in confusion.

"If we kill the Boss, we will Level Up," Humphrey tried to persuade her.

She wasn't so easily convinced. The Boss of these ball-like giant lizards was one even larger, with predominantly red scales. Surrounding him were five of the Elite Monsters as his Bodyguard.

Behind her, they now had ten of the zombified creatures, along with a token force of normal zombies. She'd need to top them off soon enough... although gathering more of these big Monsters would be fun once they moved away from this area. One step at a time.

"Alright, I'm convinced." She crossed her arms and tried to consider how to approach the group. "We might have to use our Ultimates, which makes us weak if we get jumped by anything unexpected."

Lucius turned around and glared at the surroundings. "We're pretty secluded. They'd have to fight through the respawning Monsters to get to us."

"People can do all sorts of bullshit," Sally tutted. "But I think it's worth the risk. Level Twenty is right underneath our noses, and then it'll only be five more before his highness will allow us to speak with him."

"Usually something that would take months," Humphrey murmured. "When the new Architect could appear at any moment."

"Best to get moving, then." She limbered up her shoulders and picked off a skull from her belt. "I'll work getting rid of the guards if you guys focus on the Boss?"

[Quick Death] - She commanded her fast zombies as they thundered past her. As soon as they got the aggro of the Monster group, she made them drag the Elites to the side. Before the Boss could join them, the large summon from Norah's Ultimate slammed into him, a blaze of golden light following the giant bird-Mummy.

Sally ran in beside the Death Knight, as Lucius activated his Ultimate to shadow all three of them. Five Elites for her to kill while the others beat on the Boss. She held her curse on the first and lobbed the flaming skull over into it.

With a hop, bandages lifted her up from the ground so that she could jump atop the Monster. [Skeleton Key] had no issue burying into the thick skull of the lizard, but didn't go deep enough to give her easy access to the brains. There wasn't exactly a great deal of stable footing for her to stand on either, and she slid to the side and almost fell off.

Warm air billowed past her as the Boss activated some kind of ability. It wouldn't be anything Humphrey couldn't handle. The plated ex-Observer was nigh invulnerable and hadn't even activated his Ultimate yet. Her shadow stabbed downward, and she did the same, using the wound as an anchor to stay atop her foe. Lucius continued to stab as she held in place until the conditional came up.

[Eat Brains]. *Gross.* She leaped through the air, shadowed wrappings zipping out to assist her make it to the next. Two of her zombie dinos had been shredded by the living ones, and she dropped [Living Dead] on the remaining. They had managed to down one of their own, and the two fallen slow started to raise on her side. The ground shook and the sound of grinding metal caught her attention.

Humphrey was wedged inside the mouth of the Boss, his armor screaming out as the large teeth tried to chew down on him. Norah had a sarcophagus wedged in beside him and was trying to pry the jaws apart with her bandages.

[Soul Knight]. Humphrey burst into flame that was quickly extinguished to reveal his ivory-bone coloration, eyes gleaming bright emerald. "Chew on this," he growled.

"What a goof," Sally grinned and murmured to herself, as she started to stab at the next lizard Monster. It tried to buck her off, but was too pressed in between the zombies to really move effectively. Suited her just fine. [Eat Brains].

The Boss roared out and Humphrey dropped to the floor behind her. In her peripheral she could see the flourish of his sword glowing bright blue with [Decimate]. She yawned and hopped toward the next Monster, hitting the floor as the wrappings didn't come to save her. Instead, she rolled into stabbing into the leg of the Monster, diving to the side after as it tried to swipe for her. Mortis Bomb and then her curse on it again. It was weakening, but not quite good enough.

Beside her, the last Elite was enveloped by dozens of bandages, assisted by the shadowed versions provided by Lucius. As the beast became fully wrapped up, the flash of yellow from behind her signaled the skill was cast and the Monster turned to sand.

"Sorry for interfering, hun." Norah turned to focus on the Boss. "We need you here."

Her zombie Elites took down the last lizard, so she turned to run at the Boss. It looked like it had regenerated some of the damage already inflicted and was slightly too large for Norah to do much to it. Her bird-giant punched it in the side of the head, but other than snarling and starting to charge up an ability, the Boss didn't have much of a reaction.

The Death Knight fell to a knee as the Monster tried to crush him underfoot, the flat of his sword held up to defend against the attack.

"Need a hand, Humps?" She held up her curse against the Boss, even if it might not do much due to his regeneration.

"Don't tell anyone, but I miss Theo being here." The flames at the back of his helmet flickered wildly.

"Oh, I'm definitely telling him that." Sally grinned and put her hands on her hips. "*Hey!* Big Monster? Don't you know I'm the only Boss allowed around here?"

It turned to her and narrowed its large eyes. Steam blew through its nostrils and a glow of red and orange began to pulse around the four large feet.

"Don't get mad," Sally grinned and prepared herself, raising her dagger. "You'll meet your friends in my stomach soon enough."

The Boss burst forward, waves of heat billowing behind it as it passed Humphrey. The moment of impact drew close as it snapped forward to strike her with a heavy charge.

[Escape Fate]. She popped into the air as the zombies took the brunt of the strike, bursting to pieces in a spray across the dried stone ground. Feet landing on the Boss's back, she slammed the dagger down into it. The Death Knight had caught up and slashed away at the rear legs, while Norah weaved her bandages all around the underside of the Monster to trip it as it tried to turn. All the forms of Lucius assisted, causing additional damage as the three wailed away at the creature.

This was where the skill to eat brains sooner helped out. On a large boss, especially one with regeneration, getting that instant kill quicker was huge. She couldn't use Decay on it, so it must be getting low.

She slid off its back as it bucked around, landing on the floor with a roll. Flames burst around it, shredding all the entangling wrappings, and it charged through a couple of the large zombie lizards brought back from the dead. It was a lot stronger than them, but not it had surrounded themselves with bodies. [Living Dead].

Stuck between the thick presence of its own dead kind, and the constant force of the Death Knight slashing from behind, eventually it sunk to the ground. Lethargic and too injured to continue.

Norah flung Sally over to it. [Eat Brains].

“Ay, Boss brains aren’t so bad.” She grinned and crossed her arms. Still not as good as Players, but it was a step up at least. Not only did her STAR light up a golden color, their Level Twenty skills ready to be chosen—but something caught her eye in the loot window of the creature.

She gasped. “A legendary item!”

Humphrey returned to his usual armor, his Ultimate form wearing off. “Interesting. What is it?”

“You wouldn’t believe me even if I told you,” she winked at him and jumped down from the corpse.

Even Lucius popped out to glare at her.

“Oh, fine.” She rolled her eyes. “The System must have a thing for me. It’s a staff called [Corpseboon].”

“For necromancy then?” Humphrey raised an eyebrow.

She removed it from her Inventory and held it in her offhand. A twirling dark wood with rough twine wrapped around it. The head of the staff was two sharp horns of deep red, a jawless human skull hung in the circular gap they created.

With a twitch of her eye, the skull burst into green flame.

“Now we’re cookin’” she said with a wide grin.