

Chapter 2.58 Sliding Forth

The blaring noise ceased, causing silence to wash back over the Party. Sally peered into the room, scowling past the Death Knight to see a chamber lined with boxes - no, these were sarcophagi. Just as the realization hit, their stone lids swung open almost simultaneously, the grinding of stone and falling of aged dust combined with a handful of groans.

A dozen mummies stepped forth into the dim light, turning towards the doorway with bright yellow eyes and hunger in their open mouths. Wrapping of dark and dirtied gray covered their bodies.

[Endless Sleep]

They vanished into the ground.

"Neat! Free undead." Sally twirled her finger around. "Gotta catch... ah, it's wasted on you bunch."

"I'm not sure your skill is meant to be able to pluck random Monsters up," Humphrey scratched at his chin. "However, that is what it did - so perhaps I am in the wrong."

"Just like you were with the door," Edward murmured.

Sally just beamed. The prospect of more undead friends was enough to turn the slow dungeon crawl into a more interesting and lucrative venture for her. They were only here for the silly memory crystal thing the ex-observers wanted. Otherwise she would be chewing on brains. Ah, how she missed a proper meal. That's what this second area really needed, some good old-fashioned Player versus Player action.

"I shall try the next one then," the Death Knight narrowed his eyes at the demon. "Unless you would like to go first."

The confident look on Edward's face slowly slid away, and he gave the wall a glare instead. He may have extra lives to spend, but Sally knew that the demon wouldn't want to waste them on something Humphrey was must better suited to absorb.

Deciding that he had left enough of a silence, the plated figure turned to the next door - this time opening it a little more carefully. It slid to the side to reveal stairs going downward.

"This is the way to B2," he announced, pointing to an engraved sign on the wall.

"The pyramid sure is mysterious, huh?" Sally jostled the Shade, who just looked nervous.

"I hate stairs," Humphrey grumbled, his shoulder pads scraping against the wall of the more narrow passageway. As he took the first step, there was a click, and the stairs flattened into a steep slope. Then he was gone.

“Humps!” Sally ran over to the doorway and peered down. Some manner of gloom obscured the end of the stair-slope past fifty or so feet. There had been the scraping sound of metal on stone as the Death Knight had quickly descended, but now there was just silence.

“Looks like we need to find the reverse switch.” Archie sauntered between her legs.

She reached down and picked him up. “Are you kidding? Doesn’t this look like fun?”

The ginger cat opened his mouth to disagree as the zombie hopped onto the slope.

Things went by rather quickly, the stone not providing as much friction as she would have expected. A handful of wall torches came and went, flickering past her as she descended into the pyramid below. Then, ahead of her, was the Death Knight - standing with his arms crossed.

She dug in her heels as much as she could to slow. The hair on Archie’s back stood on end, but nothing could stop her colliding with the metallic barricade. With a hard clonk, she bounced back onto the slope. Her head now hurt, but she hadn’t squished the cat. Tattered pieces of the Death Knight’s cloak lay about the floor.

“Ow. *Why?*” She put the cat down and held her skull.

“I knew you could not resist the slope. Just behind me are bladed traps that rise out of the floor as you slide across them.” He turned to show his back raked with silver lines.

“That’s a pretty mean thing to put at the end of a fun slide,” she huffed. “Is there an off switch? Otherwise, the other two might...”

“They’re coming already,” Humphrey grinned.

Sally was pressed against the floor, suddenly covered by something warm and furred. After the moment of confusion, there was a vibrating thump that echoed through what she now believed to be a large Archie balloon - followed by a second thump and complaining groans.

The cat popped back to his normal size, and she caught him out of the air. Edward and Lucius lay tangled amongst each other, a panicked face and frustrated emoji alternating from the Shade's head.

“There’s danger ahead,” she grinned as the pair tried to right themselves on the incline. “It was either that or slamming straight into Mr. Iron Body here.”

“The armor is not made of iron,” Humphrey began before she waved him off. With a sigh, he rolled his shoulders out. “I will go disarm the trap now that you’re not all going to shred yourself to pieces.”

“Thanks, Humphrey!” [Living Dead]

Perhaps an unnecessary spell cast at this stage, but the boost helped everyone aside from Archie and Edward. Unless a powerful enemy was right around the corner, the cooldown would be up before they really needed it. Perhaps slightly necessary, as she watched the

Death Knight walk over the blades that rose up from the floor under the command of his weight.

Only about an inch tall, they would have done some pretty terrible damage to the group going at full speed. As Humphrey rounded a corner, she also saw that the wall at the end of the blades had protruding spikes. She shuddered in remembering the iron maiden trap. The post-gel trap was pretty horrific too, if she thought about it too much, which she didn't. Some things were just easier for her unfeeling undead side to keep hold of.

With a terrible grinding sound, something snapped and the floor-blades retracted. The stairs also popped back up to their normal form, which again set Edward and Lucius stumbling into one another and tripping into her. She held them back and allowed them to stand and sort themselves. Sometimes she forgot how strong she was.

"Trap is now disabled." Humphrey poked his head around the corner with a grin.

"Any more friends around the corner for me to steal?" She grinned and picked Archie back up, stroking his head as she stepped over the previously dangerous area. The others followed tentatively behind her before they reached the corner.

Humphrey was standing in a small room, arms folded and a grin on his face. On the left wall were the remnants of whatever mechanism worked the trap, the metallics guts of which lay at the floor. A dozen feet away on the wall opposite her was a wide door. Ornately engraved in vibrant colors, with gemstones set in the carved archway. The doors themselves were a very dark wood, but made well - with dark metal bracing across them.

"That says 'treasure room' atop it," Archie spoke up from her arms.

"It that where your magic gem is?" She worked her jaw, half excited and half labored with apprehension.

"It's possible." The cat stretched out and jumped down to the floor.

While she hadn't been super keen on the idea, it was important to the two ex-observers to get some insights on the system and Architect. If that was possible, anyway. They certainly seemed to think so, and they had spent enough time running around after and her odd questline, so it was only fair she allow them this. It could even give them some help with the looming dragon fight - at least that was the hope.

"The door is locked," Humphrey continued, grinning from where he stood.

"Good thing we have a-" Sally withdrew her dagger and immediately fumbled it, dropping it to bounce once and then embed itself into the floor. "Rats! That was going to be like a whole line thing. You know, like a capstone that we could quote in future years."

"You anticipate being alive in a couple of years?" Edward asked, clearly unimpressed with how his time was being spent.

"Sure, unless you plan on killing me first?" She scooped her blade from the floor and pointed it at him, the demon just rolling his eyes in response.

With no further objections, she walked over to the large door and looked for where the keyhole was. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it didn't have one.

"I think it's a key-phrase that opens it," Humphrey widened his grin as he stood beside her.

She clucked her tongue. He had gotten her over here all excited to use [Skeleton Key] for its namesakes purpose - and it had all been a ruse because it didn't open like that. Well, there was more than one way to open a skull.

With her eyes closed, she put her hand against the door to feel it. Wood. Yep, that about summed it up. But now it looked like she was about to do something cool, so she couldn't just moved away just yet - but if she stood too long, they'd start getting suspicious when nothing happened. Oh, had that time already passed? Perhaps she could pretend to be asleep.

"This door... is cursed," she eventually said, to the slight gasp of at least Lucius - although he had no accompanying bubble. She tilted her head at the side of the wall. The blocks here were around three or so feet wide and deep. "Lucius, can you shadow there?"

"Sure," he pointed his finger at the designated square block and it turned into a dull gray, slightly translucent version of itself.

Sally crouched down and looked through. Beyond the shadow, the room was dimly lit and there wasn't much that she could make out. After a moment's consideration, she shrugged and began to crawl through with the cat joining alongside her.

Clear on the other side, she stood and dusted herself off, thinking that she should probably get a change of clothes in soon. She looked around the room and gasped.

It was large, even more so than the double-dog room. Filled with long treasure chests around the edges, the center of the room was a raised step dais that led up to a container of solid gold - a beam of light from the high roof illuminating it like a spotlight.

With a crunch, a large and shadowed figure stepped amongst the treasure boxes, looming into view over the pair.

A sharp beak amongst pitch black feathers opened and screamed at them, bright white eyes fixated on the intruders.