

Chapter 2.53 Care Package

Sally peered down into the crate. “Oh, I guess I can just *loot all*. That’d be easier.”

[Healing Potion (10)]
[Dagger (37)]
[Personal Beacon (1)]
[Teleportation Stone (2)]
[Scroll of Mass Healing]
[Card Chance Box (3)]

Archie went to jump atop the wooden crate but just fell straight in as everything disappeared.

A blast of blue energy illuminated the area as Humphrey broke through the shield of the demon, his skeletons stabbing at him to generate a second [Decimate] attack - this one severing the head of Maeve clean from her shoulders.

“This makes me the winner,” the Death Knight grinned, deflating as he turned to see that nobody was watching.

“Anything good?” Edward asked the zombie.

As she cycled through the notifications, the gloomy clouds started to fade away and part. She wrinkled up her nose as the bright sun washed over the battlefield. “Humphrey,” she pouted at his as he walked up to the group, “should have kept her alive so we can get rain more frequently.”

The Death Knight shrugged and turned around to glare at the single skeleton still occasionally stabbing him.

“That was pretty cool, Lucius.” Sally tapped at her STAR to open up the menu. “Next time you should do that with Humphrey, that would be pretty neat.”

“Sure,” the Shade scratched at his misty head. “Although, I’m kind of worried I made myself the target of lots of strong opponents now.”

“Eh, you get used to it.” She hummed to herself. “There’s a beacon here, so Theo can teleport to me when he is competent enough. Enough potions for all since I have been greedy with mine...”

“Didn’t you have a bunch?” Humphrey crossed his arms.

“They just taste nice, okay? I’m pretty sure we have had this conversation before.” She leaned out from behind her Inventory screen to glare at the Death Knight. “I’m not sure how Theo thought he would save us with a big care package, but I suppose it worked out - I should let him know we are okay before I divide up the spoils.”

[Sally: ty for gifts]

[Sally: we are alive, fyi]

[Theo: good. Need me there still?]

[Sally:_]

Hmm, probably not *need*. She did want him around, but they could survive without him. The Party was a bit full now and it would be awkward to have to ask somebody to leave. If only one of them could have died in the battle.

[Sally: not yet]

[Theo: use the beacon when you need me.]

[Theo: and I'll be there asap.]

She smiled and closed the chat. Still no clue on what leveling had done to the vampire, but she was willing to wait out the suspense for him to be their last-minute savior at some point in the future. Although, they had managed to kill a level Twenty Champion with little damage of their own. Mostly by being smart rather than tough, but the brain was a muscle too. A tasty muscle.

"You okay, Sally?" Lucius tilted his misty head as a question mark appeared in the air. "Thinking about Theo too hard?"

"No!" She scowled at the Shade. "You're certainly more sparky now that you're not hiding your true self."

"Guilt is a wet blanket over the flickering flame of my zest for life." A large, grinning face popped up beside him.

Sally handed two potion bottles to him and then withdrew another two for the tax-collector. "You demons don't have to stick around, you know. It means a lot that you're proud Team Sally supporters - but things will be dangerous going against the dragon." She paused as she watched the demon attached a bottle to his belt. "So being ride or die isn't a requirement for you two."

"I'm good to stay for now." Lucius shot her some finger guns. "Now that I can be myself, I will be a bit more useful in combat, too."

Edward grimaced and looked away. "I will leave at some point. Probably soon - not to say it hasn't been an absolute joy..." He rolled his eyes and grinned at Sally. "Once the vampire takes his rightful place, then you shouldn't need me hanging about. I still hold some grudge against him and I wouldn't want to jeopardise this... ensemble."

"Astute and pragmatic," she nodded back at him in return. "There's a reason you're my favorite demon. You'll know when I'm in danger - so if ever you want to drop in and get massacred by something new..."

"My one dream," he bowed to her. "We will get one of my Teleportation Stones bound to you, so that I can come replenish my lives, too."

“Neat idea. Now that both of you are playing nice, it’s time to spill some details.” She tapped the side of the crate. “Once we are done with the pyramid, we’ll probably want to zoom to endgame as quickly as possible.”

“I’d recommend getting a few levels,” Humphrey added. “I’m sure they have much worse than the watery demon.”

“They do.” Lucius rubbed the mist where his chin would be. “I only know two of the other Champions though, and they were better suited to combat than Maeve. There’s Sidiv, the King of Snakes, and Lady Greenfinger - although I haven’t met her.”

“There’s also the Golemancer, Brakenfold,” Edward added. “Not sure about the last one.”

“Is Sidiv a snake-man or a man who likes snakes a lot?” Sally narrowed her eyes.

“I guess both?” Lucius shrugged and was accompanied by an emoticon reflecting the same gesture.

“Perfect,” she grinned. Look back around them, the blazing sun had already started to dry all but the most puddled areas of the street. Her dozen or so remaining zombies seemed to now be joined by a handful of undead crabs, all standing idly around awaiting something to do. She waved them back away with [Endless Rest], contented that she seemed to be able to save the beasts that had turned. The golem sat idle, its controller now dead.

In seeing her gaze, the demon went over to the corpse of the Champion and removed the device for taking possession of the golem. “I’m taking this for myself, for when I leave.”

She shrugged. “Oh snap, I still haven’t looted anything.”

Humphrey sighed. “Make it quick. I’d like to move from this area before anybody else finds us, and Archie has fallen asleep in the crate.”

Sally hopped around, grabbing everything she could from the fallen lizards, as well as the Champion. The Party started preparing to depart as she did so.

[489 Gold]
[Skull (28)]
[Dagger (5)]
[Campfire (3)]
[Uncommon Armor Chance Box (3)]
[Unknown Chance Box (2)]
[Healing Potion (2)]

“Not a bad haul,” she eventually rubbed her eyes and sighed. “Everyone good?”

Their murmured replies leaned toward the positive. With one last look at the town, they headed out towards the rock and sand that eventually would take them to the pyramids - in fact, if she narrowed her eyes Sally could see the peak of it in the hazy horizon.

“Make us level Fifteen already, Humphrey, so we can get mounts.” She deflated just thinking about the distance they’d need to walk.

“I am unable to do that.”

“I could,” Archie piped up from the Death Knight’s shoulder. “But there’s a caveat.”

Sally narrowed her eyes and tripped on a dead lizardman arm as she waited for the ginger cat to continue.

“I can cultivate my own experience worth. With enough time, you could kill me and level up a few times.”

As tempting as that sounded, she wasn’t about to murder one of her core Party members - especially not one who was her bodyguard. Doubly especially as he was so cute. She shook her head and pouted toward the horizon.

“Just think of something amusing and we will be there in no time,” Lucius offered.

She tilted her head to him. “What’s the limit on your shadow ability?”

The Shade pulled his hood over his misty head and pondered for a second, ellipses appearing by his head. “I believe I can do it indefinitely, but certain damage types knock me out of it. Also, it can’t be anyone too large or small - generally humanoid size is fine.”

That probably ruled out Archie and the dragon. Both Humphrey and Theo would be amazing with a shadow ally, though. She drummed her fingers on her dagger sheath. If she was honest with herself, she was not looking forward to what lay beyond the sandstorm.

As much as she wanted a few Player brains in her stomach, fighting through another area seemed like a tall order. Getting to Level Twenty themselves might take more time than they had, though and there was no telling how tough Ruben himself was. Unless Theo had become a walking demi-god then they’d have their work cut out from them.

She sighed in missing the simple life of the Forest. Eating brains and making friends. Not that they weren’t making friends now, but the fight for Sanctuary definitely had more weight and draw to it. The Wastelands had been them bouncing from encounter to encounter, just getting by on Errors and her magnetic personality.

“What made you decide to join us, Lucy?” She raised an eyebrow at the Shade.

“All Ruben and Maeve had to offer me was power and fear...” he tilted his head and looked out to the desert. “I knew my chances of dying were higher being on your side, but so were my chances of living.”

She smiled, feeling a little more upbeat about their progress.

“You guys were strange, but willing to accept me and treat me as a friend. Even after the lies... you haven’t turned your back on me.”

“Just be yourself and be willing to fail upwards.” Sally clicked her fingers. “Say, you’re still demonic, right, not undead?”

Lucius shrugged.

“His alignment is out of... alignment.” Archie yawned and stretched out. “Shades are usually chaotic evil, so masquerading as a demon probably held some reality. If you want, I can nudge you one way or the other?”

A question mark bubble appeared next to the Shade’s face, followed by a face deep in thought. “You could make me undead, or a demon?”

“It wouldn’t change much about your physiology or abilities, it’s just about what you’re more comfortable with.” Archie slid down the Death Knight’s arm with a scrape of claw against metal as he dropped to the ground.

“Huh.” Lucius once again rubbed at the mist where his chin would be. “I have some locked skills. Perhaps being true to what I really am will unlock them?” He stopped, and the Party paused to observe.

He kneeled down in front of the cat. “Archie, please make me undead.”

Sally raised her eyebrows to the other two, both of them returning shrugs. This was good for the group, but came as a slight surprise.

“Okay,” the cat replied, and tapped him on the knee with his paw. “Done.”

“Oh.” Elipses dotted the air. “I thought it would... OH WOW!” The Shade jumped to his feet, exclamation marks popping into the air before bursting like bubbles.

“Now *this* is living!”