

Chapter 2.65 Bronze Detailing

It's not like Sally could complain. Their time in the Wastelands had been almost totally devoid of proper Player on Player combat. The dragon had perpetuated the myth that the *Outsiders* were a group of merciless monsters, and in doing so had brought it into being. After offering a way out of the grind he had forced on them, Ruben had energized the Players in Bronze and Silver - killing Sally and the group was a sure ticket to an easy and prosperous life.

Well, ask all the corpses littering the streets how that was working out for them.

Sally wiped the blood streaked with sweat from her forehead and took a deep breath. Her arm ached. The fight had sprawled out down the street and drew in anyone nearby that thought they had the chance of felling any of them. There were a lot of System-created mixed in too, who didn't care for the promotion but wanted her dead all the same.

A hand touched her shoulder. "You okay, hun?"

"Yeah," she grinned up at Norah. "Weird mix of giddiness and exhaustion."

"I don't think I've ever had to do so much dirty-work myself." The mummy looked back at the carnage left in their wake. "It's exhilarating."

It was clear most of the Bronze and Silver players weren't near level twenty. Theo looked particularly bored, one hand in his pocket as he was somehow fighting two people up on the roof of one of the houses. Lucius had shadowed Humphrey, and the pair were a near immovable wall preventing most enemies from getting through the street unhindered.

Sally hadn't even needed to call up Endless Dead - the bodies from Mortis Bomb and eating the brains of anyone that got too close had been enough zombies to pad around the Party.

Now the potential assailants were losing heart. Something about a road running crimson with the blood of others that had tried, their undead corpses making it an even harder battle, had made the effort seem less worth it. Sally wasn't even sure they were going the right way, but until people stopped trying to kill her, it didn't matter.

She winced as the Mummy pulled an arrow out from her back. "Sorry, hun."

"It's fine. I've had a lot worse. Thanks, Norah - I'm glad you're here with us." She grinned.

"How could I say no to a face like that?" Norah smiled back, as her bandages wrapped around a summoned sarcophagi, tossing it into the air ahead of the Death Knight to crash amongst the wary attackers.

Sally held up a skull, which burst into green flames. With a full undead party now, things were smooth sailing. All their buffs, auras, and skills that targeted the undead would be fully effective. If she didn't know any better, she was pretty sure Theo would have picked up another aura or two with his extra Skills. She wanted to pick Humphrey's skeletal brains

about Kneel as well - that seemed pretty powerful, in tandem with his forced duel. Perhaps a single target stun?

The green skull flew out over the Death Knight and struck a System-created townspeople, the flame scouring their flesh from bone as four more zombies rose up.

Theo hopped down from the building to land beside them, now with both hands in his pockets. "How's it going, ladies?"

"Having the time of my unlife, hun." Norah gently pat his shoulder as she passed to go assist the Death Knight at the front.

"I feel great." Sally scratched at the dried blood in her hair. "But... something else feels off."

"Mmm, agreed." The vampire narrowed his red eyes back up the road. "The Golds will know what has happened by now, so we are mostly killing time until they make a move."

"You think Ruben will come here?"

"No. Not yet. He has too much to lose." Theo turned back to look into her eyes. "But so do we."

"Ass," she snorted. "Don't be such a cliché."

He grinned and gestured to the front of the melee with his head. "Care to dance?"

"They what?" Flame burst forth from the mouth of the dragon.

"Killed Claw and the Golds sent, sire. And now they're in the Bronze area, causing havoc."

Ruben growled at the robed figure. How did this one Party keep being a thorn in his side?

"They must have used teleportation taken from the Golds to get to the Bronze area." He sighed, blowing smoke from his nostrils. That was the only way to get through the sandstorm without going through the heavily guarded checkpoint.

"What are your orders, sire?"

"Divert all but minimum forces, close off the sandstorm entirely. Send the remaining Champions to me."

Theo threw Sally over the confused guard with a twirl, before slashing up their front his sword. The zombie landed and stabbed into the Player's back with her dagger, before eating their brains.

Lucius popped out next to Humphrey with a sweat drop, and pointed his finger at a rooftop archer, turning part of the house into shadow and sending the figure collapsing inside. "This is exhausting," he panted.

"You're doing fine," Humphrey grinned, planting his sword into the ground. Although he didn't really breathe or sweat either, his helmet flame was flickering wildly.

"Let the young ones have a bit of fun for a bit, eh?" Norah crossed her arm and smiled warmly at the Death Knight.

"I'm not old," Lucius grumbled. An orb of shadow swirled around in his hand until it reached the tip of his finger. With one crimson eye narrowed, he aimed it at Sally and shot it forth. The projectile swirled through the air until it reached the zombie and then started to orbit her - tiny tendrils of darkness crackling toward the nearest enemy as she moved around.

"The Architect really should have limited it to five to ten skills each," Humphrey shook his head. "Can you imagine us in thirty-six more levels?"

"I hadn't thought that far ahead, to be honest." Lucius cupped his misty chin. "I thought I'd be stuck at my level and still have half my abilities locked, so even now it's quite overwhelming."

"You said Theo has more skills too?" Norah tilted her head as she watched the pair ahead carve through the remaining. "So he's pretty dangerous?"

Humphrey shrugged. "He has the potential to be the most powerful Player in the world. But he could just as easily become corrupted, lose his powers, or be unable to live with what he is."

"*Fun,*" Lucius added, a sweat drop appearing beside his head.

The carnage had warmed the street, even though the area this side of the sandstorm was less parched. Between the smell of death, spent magical energy, and something burning, Sally's smile beamed out past all the terrible things around them.

Theo kicked the body away. "No, I'm pretty sure you've told the pancake one before."

"Impossible," she snorted. "It's my best one!" An arrow struck her in the side.

"Not saying I didn't like it," the vampire shrugged, turning to the archer. "Just that I've heard it before."

"Rats." She pulled the offending projectile from the side as Theo used his glare to stun the enemy. From her Inventory, the trusty Crossbow popped out, and she buried a bolt into the immobile figure's neck. "Oh, can you use mounts now?"

He shook his head as he watched the body drop from the roof to crack on the floor. "I'm still technically level ten. I just receive skills as if I never dropped back to level one."

"So when you get to twenty, you'll get the level thirty ultimate?"

He nodded and sidestepped the downswing of a halberd. Theo stepped atop the head of the weapon and leaned in to the struggling assailant. He whispered in their ear, and after their eyes went wide, they dropped the halberd and ran off down the street screaming.

“What is that whispering skill? That looks broken.” She narrowed her eyes and crossed her arms.

“Want me to try it on you?” He raised an eyebrow.

Sally shrugged. “Sure.”

He leaned in, his warm breath brushing against her ear. “I missed you,” he whispered.

She pushed him back and shuddered, her eyes wide. “Dickbag! That really does work, huh? *Theo Danger.*”

He grinned, but furrowed his brow. “Shouldn’t we have different surnames, you know...?”

Sally pulled her dagger out and rubbed her chin. “Hmm. We can be married, right? And you took my name? Now you have a new step-Mummy.”

Theo grimaced and looked around at the rest of the Party, who just gave him a wave in return. “That’s a bit presumptuous...” he raised an eyebrow back to her. “I’m a hard man to tie down, you know?”

She snorted at him, turning to stab a System-created that got too close. “I’m glad you’re still a dweeb. You can be as powerful as you like, just don’t... change who you are.”

He opened and closed his mouth, but resigned to just nodding.

“Plus, can you imagine me in a white dress? Ruined immediately.” She rolled her eyes. “I can’t go three minutes without getting mud, blood, or vomit all over me. Let’s catch up to the rest of the family.”

Theo looked around - there was plenty of smoke and small fires raging amongst the houses, but other than the zombies, there was little movement. Then something caught his eye.

“*Sally? Sally!*”

She turned to follow the vampire’s gaze - and there was Chuck.

He waved and ran over, only moderately appalled by the destruction and bodies littering the streets. The Druid looked tired and grubby, but life had sprung anew in his eyes at seeing them.

“Chuck!” She beamed. “We were going door to door to find you.”

“I can... see.” His brow narrowed as he stopped by them. “I wasn’t sure if you’d be able to get here - but, holy nine hells, do you both look terrifying? Theo, you look like you exterminate worlds for a hobby.”

Theo shrugged and grinned, “Early days.”

“And Sally,” the Druid continued, “simply horrifying. Like you’re a terror beyond imagining.”

“You okay, Chuck?”

“It’s been... tough.” He eventually deflated and allowed them to prompt him towards the rest of the group.

“Chuck, this is Lucius and Norah, they’re our new Party members.”

“Pleasure,” he nodded, looking like it was anything but.

“Chuck is a human but one of the good ones. We Partied together for a while.”

A waving hand appeared beside Lucius, making the Druid wince. Norah gave him a brief curtsy. “Always great to meet a friend of Sally’s - she has great taste in company.”

Chuck glanced between the Mummy and the grinning Death Knight, and then between Theo and Sally. He deflated. “I reckon I’ve just jumped from the frying pan into the fire, haven’t I?”

“Frying pan full of blood,” Sally clicked her fingers, “we’re on the way to kill the dragon.”

“That doesn’t shock me,” the Druid grimaced, then frowned as he looked into the sky. “What is that?”

They turned around and looked into the darkening sky. Multiple golden streaks began forming through the air, like a meteor storm burning through the atmosphere.

Only the golden objects were coming straight for them.