

Chapter 2.21 Double Trouble

Sally hopped up the broken furniture they had arranged and rolled onto the dry street of the outside. She gave Lucius a hand up, and then after Theo's battered body was unceremoniously hauled up, they both struggled to assist the Death Knight.

"So what did we learn today?" Archie sat and wiggled the tip of his tail as they all collapsed to the ground.

"Huh?" Sally rolled into a sitting position. "I'm not made for learning."

Theo exhaled as his face was mashed into the ground. "I learned I could kill all demons."

The zombie put her hand on his gore-matted hair. "And how does that make you feel?"

"Sad." He groaned.

"Enough with annoying Theo," Humphrey shooed her away. "He is in a state of calm now, but without a way to get him to sleep, we have only have so many last straws to tug on."

She blew air out of her mouth but swiveled around to face the demon. "You leveled too, Lucius?"

"Yeah. First time for everything, right?" He was looking up toward the sky, probably focusing on his options.

Sally shrugged and pressed her STAR again, she remembered Humphrey saying that Level Eleven was another Improvement Skill selection, but she was more excited for Twelve and something new.

[Pick One]

[Improved Mighty Aura] [Increased Bonuses the lower your %HP is]
[Improved Summon Zombies] [Zombies Summoned are higher Level]
[Improved Zombie Curse] [Chance for kills to turn into zombies is doubled]

The Curse one was pretty weak - thanks to [Eat Brains], the only time she bit someone was when she was getting the guaranteed turn anyway. And as neat as their Auras were, her small army could do with a level boost to suit the new area.

[Improved Summon Zombies]

It would have been nice if it gave additional uses or increased the numbers summoned... but she would take what the System could give her. It's not like there was an Architect to complain to now, anyway. She sighed and brought up the golden STAR once more.

[Pick One]

[Gravewalker] [Movement and Attack speed is increased when near undead allies]
[Desecrate Life] [30ft Area Curse, targets have lowered STR and CON]
[Foul Breath] [15ft Cone Attack, necrotic damage]

For starters, she wasn't going to pick [Foul Breath] even if it was overpowered - because she wouldn't be able to live down the skill name. It was easy to imagine Theo giggling every time she used it. With a different name, it may have been in the running.

[Gravewalker] seemed good on the surface. She was practically always around undead allies with Theo and Humphrey - even if her zombies were currently absent. It only affected her, though, and as much as she liked being powerful, things that could benefit the group took preference.

[Desecrate Life]

More interesting than another Aura, she shrugged. A thirty-foot area was a decent spread when it came to melee and would soften up enemies for the whole Party. When their defenses were already stacked high, lowered target Strength just made them even more effective. Not flashy, but living was preferable to exploding into sparkly body parts.

"What are you picking, Humps?" She turned back to the Death Knight, who had now wrestled the floppy vampire back over his shoulder. "Oh, you didn't tell me about your Keystone still?"

"Yes. I went for [Improved Compelled Duel] and [Decimate]."

"Gnarly. Care to enlighten on what they do?"

"*This sucksss,*" Theo whined from behind Humphrey, "*I didn't level, and now I have to listen to all thiss.*"

The Death Knight grinned. "[Decimate] gives me a powerful strike every time I take ten hits."

"I guess that's roughly paired with the true meaning then. I would have thought it'd do ten percent of their health or something." Sally rubbed her chin and briefly considered getting up off the floor.

"I'm not sure what to pick," Lucius continued to stare above. "I didn't really have skills before."

"Any ranged damage options or healing?" Sally cooed, hopefully.

"I chose [Improved Emote]." A more animated, higher-quality sweat drop appeared beside his head.

Sally blinked. Somehow she should have expected that, yet didn't. It had been a long day, and she was a little off-kilter from everything she had witnessed. Maybe it would be a bad idea to ask the demon what his other skill would be.

"Oh, here you go - [Inspirational Word]. It doesn't do any damage, but it gives a boost to Stats or something." He now turned to look at them and shot them two thumbs up.

"It's support," Humphrey shrugged. "As long as it's not too annoying."

"*Are you a deeeemon?*" Theo whispered from the back again.

With a yawn, Sally stood to her feet. "No point asking you, Archie? No offense," she continued as the cat nodded, "but we need to get some sleep and then work out what to do with our boneless vamp."

“We’ll need to hold watches, old school adventuring style,” a twinkle radiated from within the Death Knight’s eye sockets. “Not only to make sure Theo doesn’t try and murder us, but Ed the Witless will surely turn up soon.”

“Especially after coming into so much riches.” Sally made the show of patting her side pouch, despite the gold being held in the abstract nether of the Inventory.

“*Can I count it?*”

“You can count yourself lucky we didn’t leave you down there,” she wagged a finger at the back of Theo. “You’ve been very rude lately and... and... don’t be an ass anymore.” Her lecture faltered in remembering how mind-numbingly awesome it was for him to kill hundreds of demons in such a short time.

[Inspirational Word] - “Great leadership, Sally!”

She smiled and felt better with the weak attempt at admonishing the out-of-control vampire. “Thanks, Lucius. Very kind of you to say.”

The demon gave her a pair of finger guns, despite the narrowed glare of Humphrey from the side.

“Right meow, there isn’t anywhere we can get a coffin,” Archie looked up at them with emerald eyes, “with the town destitute, our travels tomorrow should prioritize helping Theo.”

Sally nodded. “Let’s head to a house that still has a floor. Are there any other towns nearby?”

They began walking down the street to find a building with a big enough ground floor for them all to sleep in a circle, as if by campfire.

Lucius thumbed at his belt. “There’s a town to the north and to the east, but they’re in a similar state to this one.”

Sally sighed as they pushed through into a building. The coolness of the inside was instantly relaxing. “So how far do we have to go to get Mr crazy-pants a sanity box?”

A thoughtful emoji rubbing his chin appeared. “Well... from a System-created... unless there are some underground towns I don’t know about, then we are looking at past the storm.” He shrugged apologetically.

The zombie slumped against the wall with a groan and flopped on the floor. “Unfair.”

“We could always go back to Sanctuary now that Theo has... calmed.” Humphrey offered. “It would mean the travel back through without an easy way to teleport back.”

“Not quickly, anyway,” Archie added. “But remember what we had discussed, big brother?”

“Ah. Yes.” The Death Knight rubbed his chin in contemplation, ignoring the narrowed glare of Sally.

Eventually, she tired of the scratching sound. “Spill it, you two.”

“The power to unlock our... other memories,” Humphrey folded his arms. “There is a location to the West that has the object we seek.”

“And...”

“It would have coffins, of a sort.”

“Oh!” Lucius snapped his fingers. “The pyramids, right? You’re thinking sarcophagus’... sarcophagi?”

Sally righted herself and pointed an accusatory finger between the two ex-Observers. “You mean to tell me there’s a big undead place, and you weren’t going to say anything?”

“Well...” Humphrey turned to place the limp vampire down against the wall. “We wanted to get a couple levels first - which Theo has now done.”

“I didn’t get any levels,” he moped sadly.

“You’ll catch up, pup. Don’t fret.” She looked at him, concerned. Mopey Theo was definitely preferable to the bloodthirsty killer Theo, but she would like him to be somewhere in the middle. All he needed was some rest.

“I’ll take the first watch,” Humphrey nodded as he watched them both.

“I’d prefer it if you didn’t kill him when I was asleep, though, Humps.” She turned her concerned glare towards him.

“My disdain for the bloodsucker is only banter; I would not really harm him unless *necessary*.” He grinned in a manner almost convincing.

“I propose we should watch in pairs,” Lucius chimed in, “just for a little accountability?”

Sally shrugged and looked towards the Death Knight.

“Yes. You’re with me, demon. Sally and Archie can have the next watch.” Humphrey waited for them to nod their acknowledgments, which they did.

“I’ll watch, too,” Theo whispered.

They each took up a position and used a [Campfire] to soothe their remaining aches of the day. Somehow it didn’t seem to clog the enclosed hall with smoke, which would have been a reasonably anticlimatic way for them to go out.

Sally stared at the wooden wall, unable to sleep. Their first day in the Wasteland had been... well, it was certainly different. Same old killing and oddball antics. But something else was nagging at her. The whole thing with Edward and the dragon was-

Death approaches.

She frowned at the wood. Voices in her head weren’t very welcome. Just because it was a long day, that was no reason to go a little crazy. A few screws loose was already her normal state of being if she started-

Death approaches.

Slowly, she turned over. Humphrey was turned away from the fire, staring at the doorway in his statuesque pose. Lucius was on the other side of the almost inert [Campfire], and she couldn't see him. Her eyes ran up the wall further down to see the vampire staring back at her.

"Death approaches," Theo whispered, his face slack and impassive.