

Chapter 2.62

Dark Night Returns

Sally slumped to the floor. Lucius stood in front of her as Norah kneeled down beside her.

“Are you okay, hun?” Worry painted what parts of her face weren’t covered.

Claw laughed again, a slow, deep chuckle. “I hope it wasn’t *that one* you were going to pick? Edward sure is an insidious one playing you for so long, huh?”

Humphrey stood, his skeletal face a wide grin, and crossed his arms. “Just like that, our Party has been neutered.”

The bear raised up a glowing stone to his mouth. “Claw reporting. Edward double crossed them. The zombie girl is down. About to crush the small resistance and bring the weaker ones in.”

“*Norah*,” Sally whispered, opening one eye. “*You need to get that stone.*”

The mummy narrowed her eyes and then smiled. “*Understood, hun.*”

“Just goes to show who you can really trust, huh?” Claw drawled as he attached the magic stone to his belt. “Now, are you going to pick, or did you want to rethink your choice?”

“A good duel is always worth the wait.” The flame at the back of the Death Knight’s helmet rose slightly higher. “You will not be disappointed.”

The bear blinked slowly. “Well... I don’t have all day, so-“

Humphrey pointed upwards, and all eyes except for his and Norah’s looked to the sky.

A circle of dark energy opened in the sky, a light green grid fading within as a large metal object dropped from the sky. A dark steel rectangle, polished and reflecting the light of the sun, it fell and struck the sand with a thunderous crack. Crimson lighting pulsed from the impact, turning a circle of the ground into glass from the heat.

The front of the metal coffin popped open, and a figure dressed in dark leathers stepped out, pushing his red glasses up his face.

“I heard someone was talking shit,” Theo grinned, exposing his fangs.

“More little pets for Ruben.” Claw shook his head and went to grab the communication stone. His hands patted around the belt as his brow furrowed.

Noah’s bandage withdrew from beneath the sand beside the fallen zombie, the magic rock wrapped in the end. “Is that Theo?” she cooed.

“Uh-huh,” Sally grinned as she wiped her mouth and got back to her feet.

“Damn, good on you, hun.” Norah gave her a wink as she helped her stand.

[Theo has joined the Party]

The vampire turned and gave a brief bow to the ladies and Lucius, with the latter just seeming more confused than anything.

“Sorry to hear about Archie,” he turned to the Death Knight. “I guess we need to deal with these guys before anything else?”

“Yes. I told them we would duel them.”

“Just us two? Hardly seems fair.” Theo clucked his tongue and walked over to stand beside Humphrey.

The Death Knight shrugged. “I thought it would be a good chance to impress the... rest of the Party.”

Theo raised an eyebrow back at Sally and Norah. “Understandable, I’m in.”

“Level Ten?”

“Level Ten.”

Claw gave up on trying to find the stone. “Alright, no matter. If you two have a death wish, we can just get this over with.” He flexed his large paws as long, knife-like claws stretched out. “Kill them!”

[Impenetrable Defense]

As the pulses of skills activating lit up the sands, all readied spells and ranged attacks began to aim toward the Death Knight.

[Perfect Dark] turned the area to night, the sun now replaced by a moon of radiant crimson. Theo’s fangs glimmered brightly, and he immediately became a blur. [River of Blood] left a crimson wake behind him as he clashed straight into an armored foe wielding a large axe, knocking them to the floor. [Blood Shift] into [Vampire Bite] onto a spellcaster.

Sparks of magical shields and defensive layers flickered along the sands as his sword appeared in his hands.

“Incredible,” Norah whispered, looking between the red moon and the flashing lights of combat.

“Let’s have some fun,” Sally beamed. “It’s not a proper duel anyway, they won’t mind. Lucius - shadow Theo.”

He nodded, a brief thumbs up beside him as he leaped down the sandbank and vanished into mist.

She brought out a skull which burst into green flame and narrowed her eyes. A burst of blue energy sent Theo back away from his target - and her [Mortis Bomb] careened in to strike at

the unprepared opponent. Four zombies started clambering from the ground as the defensive barrier of the Death Knight faded away.

Norah sent out bandages from each arm, burrowing beneath the ground to wrap around the legs of two opponents. They stumbled in their movements, allowing Humphrey to approach as his skills pulsed over him.

Sally couldn't help but grin at the disarray. While the Gold Players certainly had enough damage absorption and none had died yet, they weren't very prepared for the sudden onslaught. Their ranged users were caught up in the melee, and their melee couldn't land a hit on Theo, who was unnaturally fast. It had all ended up with them tripping over each other, sending spells and attacks in all manner of direction.

"Your boy is really something," Norah purred, her eyes lighting up a brighter yellow. "Watch this!"

[Monarch's Blessing]

Amber light encircled the vampire, and his movements had a sandy-blur to them. Even from this distance, Sally could see his grin widen. Wherever Theo had been moving since the start of combat, small globes of blood hung in the air - growing in size the more he drew in the melee against his opponents.

In addition to his sword strikes, his shadow reflected his damage, striking behind and over the side. [Blood Shift] into an improved [Vampire Bite] and the first of the Gold Players fell.

Claw burst forward from the crowd and slashed out at the Death Knight. Humphrey deflected it with a ring as his five skeletons rose around him. "Now you want to duel?" He grinned. The bear didn't reply, but sent out a shockwave of force that knocked the plated figure back.

[Living Dead]. Sally rubbed her chin. Standing back and watching was okay. Humphrey was the immovable object and Theo was the unstoppable force. There was no real need to get physically involved. *No wait!*

Her feet dug into the ground and flung her forward.

Brains!

She used [Summon Zombies] three times on her way in, drawing [Skeleton Key] as she approached. A woman with a bow saw her coming, and a green pulse of energy began to flow around a held arrow. Just as was about to fire it, a sarcophagus burst from the ground and snapped shut around the archer.

Sally leaped through the air at the container - the magic vanishing just as she arrived to plunge her dagger straight through the defenses of the woman and into her skull.

[Eat Brains]

Delicious! A new lease on life burst forth within her - possibly the best brains she had ever had. System messages could wait. There were more heads to crack open.

[Desecrate Life] [Will of the Dark Lord]

Humphrey used the skill intuitively after hers. Most resisted the stun - but one close to Sally didn't. A flash of a metal dove in front of her as she went for the kill as a knight intercepted the strike, her dagger just sliding down his sword ineffectively.

As he went to follow up, she hopped backwards, a bandage wrapping around his leg and keeping him from moving with her. [Mortis Bomb] scoured a dark sphere across his polished armor and three more zombies crawled up around him.

Humphrey stumbled backwards, one of the skeletons shattering as Claw swiped through it, his furred arms blazing red. He had grown in size and seemed to be shrugging off any damage inflicted on him. "Let's make this official," Humphrey grinned, his helmet's flame waving brightly in the air. [Compelled Duel].

Whether or not it was successful, the bear continued to slash wildly at the plated figure - silver gashes lining across his dark armor. Every time he blocked, he was pushed back by the overwhelming strength. With Theo's auras back in the group, and his defensive capabilities, the Death Knight was maintaining his footing quite evenly. As [Decimate] burst blue light along his sword, he slashed forward, carving a long gash across Claw's chest.

[Eat Brains]. Sally plucked the dagger from the neck of a spellcaster and stuck her tongue out at the entangled knight. A blaze whipped around, the burst of blood from the man's severed arteries spraying across the sand as Theo appeared behind the armored figure, kicking the body over to her after having slashed his neck. [Eat Brains]. "Thanks!" She beamed at him as he tipped an invisible hat and blurred away.

Radiant bubbles appeared across the Players remaining, the damage of the Party now almost ineffective as their attacks were deflected or absorbed. There was an element of them wanting to escape or regroup - and they started to gather together to heal and buff each other.

"Unfair," Theo tutted, pushing his glasses up. "But you were already dead as soon as I arrived."

[Death Syphon]

The orbs of blood that had been hanging around the battlefield burst into miniature explosions of crimson that caused the radiant bubbles to flicker - before dark energy pooled like tendrils from all the Players struck, weaving back into Theo.

He held his hand up, a tiny orb of infinite darkness between his fingers.

"Now perish."