

## Chapter 58 Flame Grilled

The Death Knight held the zombie back, shaking his head despite the pleas of her eyes. "He made his choice."

Sally shook with rage and turned back to the impaled Novice. That was her meal. *And her friend.* She tried to relax. Humphrey was perhaps right; this was Theo's choice - and it would make the situation worse to get herself killed too. The thought of running in and eating his brain was only a very brief consideration.

"Missed your heart - although I don't think the skill name is literal." The smile across the Rogue's face was wide and menacing.

Blood ran from Theo's mouth as his brow furrowed in pain. "Think that really h-hurts?" He stammered as his sword arm wavered. "I eat strikes like that for b-breakfast."

"Then let me give you your *late lunch!*" The rapier withdrew backwards, causing the Novice to twitch in pain.

*[Heartseeker Strike]*

A second strike pierced him in the stomach, and he bent over, growling out in pain. Sally seethed, a lump of nausea settling into her own gut.

The wooden sword clattered to the floor as Theo dropped to his knees.

"Not a bad show," Walter slowly clapped from behind. "I can see how you have a Bounty - you would be easily underestimated. Shame this is how it ends."

Jess leaned down, her trenchcoat hanging open as she put pressure on her embedded blade. "Any last words, Novice?"

Theo looked up at her with blurry eyes. He looked pale and sickly - about to pass out - if he also wasn't about to die. He had certainly done some damage to the Rogue, but eventually, he had just been outclassed.

A slight smile twitched across his face as sweat ran down his temples. "I... t-think you d-dropped a scroll?"

She looked down at the scroll held in his off-hand. "Huh, I-"

*[Scroll: Fireball]*

A blinding blast of amber followed a wave of superheated air washed over Sally and the Party - briefly - before a cooling blue light and the sense of immense vertigo enveloped her whole body.

*She fell to the floor. Cold cobbled stone lay beneath her. As her two brain cells stopped clattering around in her skull, she focused on the surroundings.*

*Sanctuary.*

A metal-plated hand came down to help her up, which she took.

“You two planned this?” She seethed as she shook the blur from her vision.

“Yes. *Ha-ha.*”

Sally turned around. Jackie and Archie were there, looking just as disrupted as she felt. Lars, Ben, and the asshole zombies were also here. The Warriors were here - something just as surprising to her as it was to them. A village full of goblins is only slightly less traumatic than an underground Mine of Player-killers and undead.

“They are *allies* now - it is like a loose Guild structure; we can't formally-“ the Death Knight cut off as Sally ran over to the prone body of Theo.

He looked rough. Not only from the blood loss and puncture wounds, but he had taken some fire damage - although not as much as she had expected. His eyes were closed, and her eyes slowly looked over to the [Eat Brains] ability showing the conditionals were active. With shaking hands, she pressed her STAR and withdrew a [Healing Potion] from her Inventory.

“Hi, Sally!” The voice of the small goblin Healer, Bella, rang out of the gathered crowd of goblins. She hadn't even noticed them.

“H-hey Bella - can you heal Theo?”

“Sure, that'll be [20 gold], please.” She gave a brief curtsy. “Sorry, he is just really beat up.”

After pocketing the potion once more, Sally handed over the money and watched the small goblin do her work. A pulse of energy was released from her hands and washed over the Novice. His wounds healed, and colour slowly returned to his face. As the glow of the magical healing faded, his eyes fluttered open.

“Come see me soon; I've got some goblins to heal!” Bella beamed at the zombie and then scurried off back through the crowd.

“Didn't get a Skill Book,” the Novice groaned weakly.

“I'm... not even going to bully you about it,” Sally sighed and lay down on the street beside him. “I didn't think I could get emotionally exhausted like this, but you managed to do it.”

“Usually I just tire people out with my extensively bad lore takes.”

She smiled and closed her eyes. “We would have gotten along well in the real world.”

The Novice shuffled onto his side and propped his head up on his hand. “Don't we get on well in *this* world?”

“Of course, but I'm a flesh-eating monster, and you're a self-destructive meme.” She opened her red eyes. “No offence.”

“None taken.” With a grunt, he righted himself to his feet and offered a hand down to her, which she took.

“So what was even the point in that, huh?” A brief scowl came back as she wondered why he had decided to put his life in such danger.

“Fireball damages things, whereas Fireblast-“

“Yes, yes, I’ve had this lecture before.” She waved her hand towards the Death Knight.

Theo watched as Humphrey awkwardly waved back. “Okay, so it wasn’t guaranteed that I would kill the Rogue even with the Fireball - but it should hopefully have destroyed a bunch of their Scrolls. Serves them right for having them on display instead of in their Inventory.”

“So they can’t move about as well. Either getting them caught out with the System or being unable to patrol the Swaps as effectively.” She punched him on the arm, which he reeled away from. “I’m sure there will be no repercussions for that.”

“Bought us some time at least,” he shrugged. “Best case is we have to fight them at the Swamps when we are ready?”

“Worst case is they’re on their way to crush us.” Sally put her hands on her hips and raised her eyebrows.

“Gotta die someday?” Theo rubbed the back of his neck.

“If you two are done yabberin’” Jackie yelled out from the other side of the crowd of goblins, “it looks like we levelled up?”

They both looked down at their STARS, which now glowed a tarnished gold colour. They had killed a good number of Level Five Players, even if the Level Ten Rogue didn’t die.

“Neat, enjoy your *nothing!*” She skipped away to join the Death Knight. She punched him on the shoulder, a dull clang ringing out. “That Portal Scroll was something huh?”

“Yes. If you are going to be amassing a lot of followers, I knew I couldn’t go for the basic option.” He turned his head downwards to meet her gaze. “Only the best for you.”

Sally pushed her filthy blonde hair from her face and stuck her tongue out at Humphrey. “Alright, Ainz, what skill did you get?”

“I can’t choose until you have levelled up.” He crossed his arms and looked out the village.

It was pretty much how they left it the previous day. It was a slight guess that the structures and layout of the village would be set - any modifications to the defences they’d want to do before the regiment arrived tomorrow would have to be done after the nightly reset.

“Ayyy,” Jackie grinned, “I got [Critical Aura]. I’m off to schmooze around.”

“Alright, but no [Extort]ing people,” Sally wagged a finger to the eye-rolling of the mobster.

She jabbed at her own STAR. Archie probably wouldn't know what he got - nor would he be able to tell her anyway.

"H-hey."

Her eyes rose from the UI messages to see the red-haired Fighter from the Warriors standing nervously before her - the other members behind her.

"We wanted to thank you, kinda? You killed our friend, but not us, and you saved us from the PvPers, and these goblins currently aren't murdering us, so..."

"Sure," Sally waved them off, away from her impending skill choice. "If you want to leave the ally-ship or whatever it's called, just do it outside the village."

"That's - we are considering *staying*."

The zombie looked up properly from the UI messages. *This was unexpected*. "Are you sure - we are kind of evil, blah-blah?"

"Seems to be safer on your side than against it," one of the other *Warriors* interjected from behind. "We will help raise the Gold so you can make a proper Guild if you allow us to join."

Sally said nothing for a few moments, allowing the conversation to settle inside her skull. "Okay. Go now, though - go see the Innkeeper; she will take good care of you."

She watched them leave and then focused on her skill choice.

[Level Six]

[Choose One]

[Triple Bite - Melee Attack - Attack three times]

[Necroblast - Ranged Spell 10s Cooldown]

[Foul Aura - Passive Aura 20ft - Enemies have reduced save chance for CON checks]

"Necroblast!" She yelled out loud, much to the displeasure of the Death Knight.

"What are you doing?"

"If I pick really quickly, then it doesn't become a cliffhanger - livin' da vida loca and all that."

The Death Knight shrugged. "I have no idea what you are talking about. I am now Level Five and have a keystone [Dead King's Court] and also the passive skill [Undead Regeneration]."

"What's the first one do?"

"Mostly Stat Enhancements."

"Mostly?"

"Yes."

Sally narrowed her eyes. "Let's go see what Mr. Novice has gotten. At least that should be a straight enough answer."

The crowd of goblins had all but cleared now; only a few of the nosiest had stuck around to observe the idle zombies and the odd Party who had acquired the town. It was therefore not a huge undertaking to find Theo sitting on a bench, not far from where she had left him.

His eyes were glazed over as he read through something on the UI.

"Another love letter?" Sally rolled her eyes.

"That was just a message to Humphrey to tell him to prepare—"

"Humps, you *cad*," she jostled into the Death Knight, to no effect. Instead, the large plated figure walked around and stood behind the Novice to see his UI.

"I forgot you could do that," Theo murmured. "What do you think?"

Humphrey's empty sockets briefly scanned over the window the man had been deliberating over, then looked up at the waiting zombie before back to Theo.

"You not only have the Class selection of all Player Classes but most Monster Classes too."

Sally's mouth hung open.

"This is an overwhelming amount of options." He mimed scrolling through a list. "How do I see more information on a Class? Do I just click—"

"No."

Theo paused, his finger outstretched before the Death Knight had even responded.

"Oh," he stated, before the colour drained from his face and his eyes rolled back in his head.

Then he flopped off of the bench onto the floor.

*Dead.*