

Flame licked at the edge of the graveyard, fighting to take hold of the damp grass still under assault from the inclement weather.

Sally sighed and stretched out, ash falling from her burned and cracked skin. Her fingers twitched as she maintained the grip on her staff, but her shield arm was struggling to hold the defensive item up.

The dragon roared, vibrating the ground around them. Perhaps it served her right for being ahead of the Death Knight. While Humphrey had been able to absorb or deflect most of the fire-breath of those behind him, she was closer to the gates. Just her, and Theo.

She turned her head to the side, pain slowly fading as she regenerated some of the damage, to see if the vampire made it out okay. He had. In fact, other than having the top half of his suit had burned away to reveal his glistening abs, he looked mostly unharmed.

Funny how he always became such a spectacle.

As the Death Knight launched past her and Jackie spun up the stagecoach crossbows, she popped a Healing Potion and drank it down. A dragon. So far, the Invasion Monsters hadn't been very edible, but this might be different. Unfair to request dibs on the killing blow, as that might put others at risk. But if she got the chance...

A flare of light as she sent out [Mortis Bomb]. Her horde wouldn't do too well against a dragon, so she kept them in the back pocket. Not literally, although she hadn't questioned how the space she stored them actually worked. Hand extended, she started working [Curse: Decay] on the large opponent. It would be slow, but while her body recovered from the burning, it was helping the others out.

Why Theo's clothes seemed to burn away but hers remained only singed, she wasn't sure. Perhaps the vampire had his clothing designed to do just that, a sly gift to her. That was a bit self-*abs*-orbed though. She grinned.

Theo himself hadn't begun attacking yet, and she raised an eyebrow at him. Perhaps he was more hurt than he was letting on?

He caught her glance. "Oh. I'm just, uh... preparing."

Sally narrowed her eyes. "The rebirth didn't reset your stuff again, did it?"

"No." His eyes focused on the large dragon. It might even be slightly bigger than Ruben had been, but this one wasn't Unique and had no inclination to berate them. "I just... when I held you. I felt something."

She snorted. "That'll be a first, living dead boy."

Theo rolled his eyes. "No, I mean. Your power, it's not just the cool new shield, right?"

Sally beamed and looked over at the dragon. Humphrey had its attention and was holding steady, Lucius providing a second sword to help block attacks. A constant barrage of bolts were mostly bouncing from the tough scales of the Monster, but the occasional one would

find a way in between and into the softer flesh. Norah was trying to wrap around a foreleg, while the others were pensive - sending off minor ranged attacks to support the front line.

It felt different from the fight against Ruben. They were slightly stronger now, sure. But even with the Event shadowing them, the stakes didn't feel so high.

"Humphrey said that we're as strong as Raid bosses now." She tilted her head back toward him. "The event was against the *Outsiders*, but it also pushed me higher. I'm a World Boss."

Theo whistled and then gave her a low bow. "And here I was thinking you just did something nice with your hair."

"Ass." She rolled her eyes, but smiled. "Go flirt with the dragon instead. I'm not wasting my powers on something so beneath me."

"Ooh. I just got shivers." The vampire pushed his crimson glasses up and grinned. "Although that might be my state of undress."

Before she could reply, he was off. A blur of pink and red energy as his buffs swirled around him. Black punch-blades appeared on his hands as he vanished into a cloud of dark mist.

Norah stepped up beside her, her hands clutched at the extended bandages that the dragon was trying to escape from. "I'm sorry for my deception, hun."

"Oh?" Sally tilted her head, her curse still slowly draining at the Monster. "Don't worry about it. Rearranging his organs is kinda weird, but I spend half my days throwing up brains or pining after a future that might not be possible, so..."

"Things worked out okay... but in truth, I was trying to recreate parts of the resurrection ritual that I could remember." Norah looked down at the floor. "After I said his heart was in the right place, it jogged some memories. When I died, they moved my heart and put something in its place until I came back."

"See." Sally smiled at her. "That's slightly less weird than just desecrating his body for fun." Why everyone had to hide these things away from her, she didn't know. It's not like she couldn't be trusted with the truth.

She watched as the vampire dashed his way up the dragon, flickering around with his pink [Novice Strike]. "Thank you, though. You gave it your all, and I appreciate that."

Norah's face softened, and she gave the zombie a warm smile. "Say nothing of it. I'd die over and over again for any of us. It's almost a shame things worked out. I was ready to bring the world to its knees in anger with you."

Sally gave her a wink. "There's always time for that, still." After all, they didn't know how they'd really get out of this situation.

The curse cut off, signaling that the dragon was below half health. She yawned and sent another [Mortis Bomb] off, although the zombies would only get mushed immediately or be nothing more than a nuisance for their opponent.

What she needed to as a ranged magic attack that did damage based on held weapon. Then she would have a beam attack even better than the Architects one.

“You might need to fling me soon,” she said to the Mummy. Unlike Ruben, this dragon didn't have the same amount of self preservation - which made it more difficult as it didn't have to consider running away or focusing anyone other than the Death Knight.

Humphrey was doing an exemplary job of tanking. He had turned the Monster to the side so any errant flames missed them all, and they were safe from any potential tail swipes. Using his absorption or parrying skills meant that any ability the dragon attempted was mostly thwarted, leaving the rest of the group to level constant attacks against the enemy.

“Just say when, hun.” Norah smiled. “I'm a little sore, but I can get you most of the way.”

That would be perfect, and [Meat Hook] could take her the rest of the way. She turned her head around to the rest of the group.

Chuck and Jackie continued to support from atop the coach. While the druid was casting heals and defensive buffs, the mobster laid out sustained damage with her mounted weaponry. There was the occasional spray of different colored bolts, as she switched between different skills. Fern was watching the rear to make sure nothing came from the cathedral side, while Dent and Edward each had an eye on the dense woods on either side of the graveyard.

*Tactics.* She grinned to herself. Who'd have thought?

A lot more useful if one of the Invasions was a swarm or something. She was desperate to bring out her horde - the graveyard would be so nice for them. Plus, her level appropriate zombie summoning hadn't been touched. How unfair that she was made to fight and eat Players, but they found themselves against boring and inedible System-created.

Still, only a matter of time before Seven and the Reds, or maybe an Observer or two, would come knocking. The question was, when would the Architect give up?

She could definitely see the Invasions continuing on and on until her group started to get picked off. Even killing off most of their detractors wouldn't cause them to be the winners. The Architect just wanted someone else to do the dirty work, and if they were smart, they would just wait out the inevitable.

But they had the cats, a possible ace up their sleeves. The reason they had risked burning up their power to kill the Death Knight off quickly. If Humps knew what he needed to do, then perhaps he was the most important one to save.

Not that she would give up any of them. She watched the dragon writhe around in anger as the vampire continued to draw blood from dozens of wounds. The System-created were getting tougher, but it was hard to contend with what both the Parties brought to the fight. If they had the other three groups of Blue team, they would have an easier time... but she wanted them away and safe.

“Ready, Sally?” Norah’s eyes burned brighter as two more bandages circled out from behind her.

She nodded, and the wrappings whirled around her, drawing her closer to the Mummy. With a grunt, she was launched forward and into the air, spinning a little as the bandages unraveled. Halfway up, she shot out [Meat Hook], latching onto the dragon. Staff spun in her hand as she pointed out like a spear. She rocketed into the side of the Monster, impaling it in the side of their neck, her staff actually embedding way past the dagger.

“Darn it,” she growled, “it’s stuck now.” Sally swung from it, trying to get a purchase with her feet on the large creature. With how the dragon was moving around and trying to dislodge her while batting away the Death Knight, she couldn’t quite get hold of anything.

A flash of dark mist and Theo was above her. “Need a hand, my Queen?” He reached down to her, his weapon stowed away.

“Dork.” She reached up and took it with a smile. Using her staff as a springboard, she jumped up using his help to stand precariously on the back of the head of the dragon.

“It’s not quite low health yet,” he said with a shrug, helping hold her up so that they didn’t drop down the back of the Monster. “You’re a little early.”

“Rats.” She slid in against him as the dragon tried to turn away from Humphrey. “That means you weren’t doing your job.”

Theo shrugged again. “I did die.”

“Well…” they scrambled up onto the dragon’s head. “If you like being alive, then you’d better step up. I have standards now.”

He pouted and gave her a nod, not wanting to argue that point any longer. Punch-blades back onto his hands, they burst into sun-bright light and with a flash he cut a large X along the top of the Monster’s skull.

Sally slipped and fell atop it, a burst of the dragon’s blood spraying all over her. Not the worst thing, and it did get her closer to her goal.

[Eat Brains]

She slid out of the hole carved from her skill, onto an extended bandage that took her safely to the ground. Theo landed beside her as Lucius popped out of Humphrey’s shadow.

“Another dragon kill for the *Outsiders*, huh?” She wiped the blood from her mouth. “Now we go in for a hug and fall into a coma again.”

“Pass,” Theo stuck his tongue out. “Thankfully, the System isn’t sending Uniques out against us.”

“Don’t count your chickens yet.” Humphrey rubbed the side of his helmet and looked out at the space beyond the dragon. “We don’t know what could happen.”

Sally narrowed her eyes at him. Certainly, he probably knew more than most. They'd just have to keep their position and work through anything foolish enough to come their way.

"Anyone smart would wait until we are busy with an Invasion," the vampire said, going through his STAR to fix up his suit.

"Well, then..." Sally grinned widely, as the shadow of the zombie dragon rose up behind her. "Perhaps we should start our own Invasion."