

## Chapter 2.30

### Soloed It

"Can you take me to him?" Sally's eyes searched the face of the main Lana.

The woman held a hand over her eyes and turned to the side as if she was trying to think - or perhaps read something only she could see or understand.

Sally tapped her foot on the floor as the woman thought. "Lana?... Laaaanaaa?"

The cloned woman tensed up and turned back to the zombie with a glare. "*What?*"

"Can you take me to him or not? I feel as though he is in some manner of danger. Like a whole area of it - if you will." She grinned to herself.

"I can, but it will take time." Lana deflated. "Things have to be crossed in a certain order, and -"

"I won't get cloned, will I?" Sally interrupted, screwing her face up. There were definitely some things that would be more fun with a body double, but the prospect of being weaker to any degree put her off more than anything.

"Unlikely - again, it's only certain movements that can do that." With a nod to her fellow clones, she gestured for Sally to follow. "Come on, we will get there as fast as I am able."

With grim determination, she returned the nod and started to jog after the Lana group.

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Humphrey slid backward across the dusty stone and dropped to one knee. He raised his empty sockets to see one of his Skeletal Warriors get ground into dust beneath a large foot.

The Death Knight growled as he stood, the tears in his plated armor vibrant silver in contrast to the dark crimson the outside was made of. His helmet flame flickered wildly as if fighting not to be put to rest.

<Do you see now the futility? This is what will come to pass>

"I cannot allow it," Humphrey hissed, leveling his greatsword into a defensive stance. "It ends here."

<Ho-ho-ho. Something certainly will, Humphrey.>

With a burst of energy, he ran forth toward the waiting maw, activating his Keystone ability.

[Endless Knight]

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"What do you do for food down here? Or water? Do you just sleep on the floor? Do you usually just shoot visitors? What's your endgame plans with this setup?" Sally barraged the woman with questions. More out of worry than needing to know.

"Could you *please*." The main Lana growled as the rest rubbed at their respective temples.

The zombie closed her mouth. She had been away from Humphrey for long periods before - usually when adventuring with Theo or sleeping - but now he wasn't even responding to her messages. As much as she annoyed him, he wouldn't leave her worrying.

"You said there was someone else. Do you know what?"

Lana shot her another glare but then softened in seeing the expression on the zombie's face. "Some kind of large monster - I imagine it was something Unique to have wandered down here this far. Usually, they are allied with the dragon, but..."

They ran in silence for a handful of seconds before she continued.

"But something was odd, nothing I can really explain - but it was overwhelming, in a way. Trouble with a capital T."

Sally knew when things started to require proper grammar, then it was important. Especially when it came to nouns. Humphrey was pretty tough, though - the most defensively proficient out of all of them. If anyone could hold out against an unknown assailant, then she'd bet all her chips on him.

That didn't stop her from worrying, though. They were a Party, after all - and part of their ridiculous strength was being together and supporting each other. Of course, that was going super well, a sour expression crossed her face. With Theo and Archie in some nether space, and Lucius kidnapped - with Humphrey gone, things seemed to be crumbling apart again.

They took a right turn and then, after a while - a left. Lana and her group of Lanas then stopped, and the real one put her hand on the wall and closed her eyes.

Sally said nothing, a rarity in times of quiet. In truth, the running had tired her out a little more than she had expected, and combined with the lack of Player brains in her stomach, she felt a little ill. Nerves didn't often get the best of her, but she tried to draw focus away from inner turmoil to stare at the back of the round cranium of the other woman.

"Alright," Lana said, turning. "We go back now."

Sally sighed and made to jog behind the group once more. It looked as though the planes of... reality? If that's what you could even call it. They shifted on a schedule, and the Death Knight must have been split from her as they crossed over the junction as it changed destination. That was surprisingly smart, she thought; she should use her brain more often.

"There's three splits there," Lana called back, a little out of breath herself. "You went on number one, and your friend went number two."

With a wide grin, the zombie struggled to keep the giggles to herself. Things may be serious - but the Death Knight would have appreciated the joke. Probably not, actually, but Theo would have. Perhaps not in his current condition... she sighed again.

The tunnel turned slightly to the left, the curve blocking off her sight further down - until they came across it.

Sally gasped.

Humphrey was kneeling, his sword planted on the floor. A tiny flame, no more than what a candle would emit, was wavering slowly from the back of his helmet. His armor was pierced straight through, and several places had wide and deep gashes, exposing bright silver metal within. He didn't acknowledge the newcomers.

She ran towards him. "Humphrey!" Dirt had been moved around - there were also gashes in the stone, crushed skeletons, and dark patches of something akin to blood. All blurred in her vision as her eyes filled with tears.

With her feet sliding to a stop, she immediately opened up her Inventory to withdraw a Healing Potion and poured it into his open skeletal maw. Part of the magical liquid dripped from the open gaps in his armor - but most seemed to settle.

Gradually, the flames at the back of his helmet grew a little brighter, and he lifted his head to observe her.

"Humps!" She called again and wrapped her arms around his plated form, her shirt catching on some of the twisted metal parts of his armor.

"Good to see you again, Sally," he sighed warmly. "I wasn't planning on dying here. I was just resting."

"My ass," she said, stepping back and giving him a light punch on the shoulder. "Couldn't go ten minutes without me before you fell apart."

"Yes, *ha-ha*."

She wiped her eyes with the back of her arm. "So, you wanna tell me what happened here?"

"Not particularly. It is safe to say that I won. Could we not leave it at that?"

Sally looked back at Lana, who was investigating the aftermath of the fight and put her hands on her hips. She gave the Death Knight her best scowl. "No - we cannot. I've just been worried about you, and you almost died; we need to know what it was, surely."

Humphrey slowly stood, his right leg shaking as he tried to put weight on it. Eventually, he straightened up fully and placed his sword over his shoulders. He looked over the zombie's head to look at the group of women inspecting the area.

"New friend already?"

"She is pretty weak but knows that these tunnels are wonky. Like - the System has split them into different paths. Fragments of different planes? You know, like Henkk's stuff?"

"Hmm." The Death Knight tilted his head, absorbing this information. Already, some of his holes and gashes had begun to slowly bend back into their right place.

"Don't change the subject, though," she jabbed a finger at his chest.

"She is a Player? All of them?"

“Yeah. She found a way through the split paths that somehow also split her. There’s the main one, and then clones - but each time, it lowers her power, like it is shared between them to a degree.”

Humphrey nodded. “And you didn’t ask to be duplicated?”

“Could you imagine two of me running amok?” She smirked and crossed her arms. “The System wouldn’t know what hit it. I’m not really interested in being less powerful, though, only *more*. Much more.”

She cast her eyes back to the ruined cavern and then growled at the Death Knight again. “Why won’t you tell me?”

He shrugged. “Why must you know? If it is not something easily given, then there must be a reason. You trust me, correct?”

Her mouth opened and then closed. Dick move. Certainly, she trusted him more than anyone - even Theo. But it didn’t make sense that she couldn’t tell him what he had seen and had to fight - there’s no Monster that could be that bad. Plus, now that they were together, a second one would be no issue. Plus plus, if he had defeated the creature, then the trouble with a lower-case T should be in the past now.

“I trust you,” she relented. “If you can’t tell me, that is okay - but you know I’m here for you if you ever feel you can, right?”

“Yes,” he grinned.

“Hey, uh?” Lana waved a hand over to them to get their attention. They turned to see her crouched by the wall, hands on her knees with her nose wrinkled up.

“Why is there so much ginger fur here?”