

Chapter 2.3 To Nothing

Humphrey slid in front of the two undead and raised his hands into the air.

[Impenetrable Defence]

“You have ten seconds,” he growled, the flames of his helmet rising as the spells and arrows coursing towards them started to bend towards the Death Knight.

“Well then,” Theo raised his empty hands, “looks like it’s time for fun.” His black punch-blades popped back into existence as he grinned wildly. “Although there’s only one minute and twenty-three seconds left of [Perfect Dark].”

“If Jackie gave up smoking for Fran, you should be able to stop doing that for me.” Sally scowled at him as she withdrew her [Dagger of Luck] into her right hand.

“Six seconds.” Spells fizzled out, and arrows were deflected by a barrier around the Death Knight.

“Aw, but it makes me look like that cool superhero... the *uhh*.” The vampire scratched his head in thought, almost impaling himself with the wielded blades.

“The animal one?” Sally wrinkled up her nose as her own brain scoured the depths for memories long hidden away.

“I think? He fought *Goreblaster* one time.”

“Three seconds.” Colours flared around them as the various spells and special attacks glowed in the dark night sky.

Sally shook her head. “I still don’t get that reference.” She held out her left hand and pointed out towards the group of combatants only seconds away.

[Endless Dead]

She couldn’t help but beam wildly as she cast her Level Nine skill. After all her zombies had been buried in the fight against the Champion in Sanctuary, this was an easy pick.

Scores of hands burst from the ground amongst the enemies. Twenty-five if Theo’s count was correct, which it usually was. The slow shamblers had finally started scaling, although they were only Level Five. Much better than the default, however.

“I’m done,” Humphrey lowered his arms to draw the large greatsword from his back. He pulsed with energy as he activated [Adrenaline], [Dead King’s Court], and his improved [Grave Strike].

Sally tried to peer out from behind the large plated figure to find the leader of the Zeroes. There were too many figures, but there seemed to be flashes of his dirty white armour nearer the back.

“We’ve lost three... four zombies already,” Theo licked his lips as his crimson eyes darted around the battlefield. “Let’s go.”

She gave him a nod as he darted forward and looked back to see what Archie was doing. The cat had been preening himself, seemingly content to just appear as the Party mascot. He sat up straight and opened his mouth.

His eyes and mouth were briefly illuminated by a radiant light as if his head were a jack-o-lantern. Blinding the area, a beam of white light shot from his tiny maw across to the tree line beyond the fight. Three Players were rendered from various limbs, with a fourth being totally cored by the blast.

Humphrey barrelled into a group of Zeroes that were dispatching some of the slower zombies. [Will of the Dark Lord] stunned two, with the rest saving their Willpower rolls. A wide slash of his sword knocked one of the stunned Players into the waiting grasps of a couple of zombies.

Sally slid up beside the Death Knight and stabbed the other stunned Player repeatedly. As soon as the conditionals were met, she used [Eat Brains] before immediately being struck by a lightning attack. She rolled backwards behind Humphrey again and wiped the bloody mess from around her mouth.

[+10% Melee Damage]

The flickering blue text of the stacking upgrade reminded her that Monks were especially tasty to consume. Clangs of arrows bounced off of the plated armour as the defensive juggernaut continued to swathe a path into the melee. She took a quick glance to the side to see how Theo was faring. The unmistakable pink blur of his [Sanguine Weapon] combined with [Novice Strike] darted from enemy to enemy.

He stopped briefly to drink the blood of one of the Players and then [Blood Shift] away when someone came in to assist. Sally noticed that he hadn’t killed anyone... she was saving them for her! Her dead heart did nothing, but she salivated at the pre-cooked meals he was dishing up.

“Archie,” she called back, “support Humps.”

She darted off, weaving through the throng of zombies and assailed Players. A Paladin stood woozy from blood loss - [Hex: Slow] rendered the woman unable to turn in time before Sally rammed her dagger into her side between armour plates. [Eat Brains].

The added boost of the temporary Stat theft from the upgraded skill made her feel elated, and she didn’t even bother to read the notifications telling her what permanent boost she had received. She twirled and moved to the next weakened enemy. [Necroblast] struck a disorientated Fighter in the leg, making them drop to a knee. [Eat Brains]. Now this was what the improved version was made for!

“*Good job, big brother, keep it up!*” Archie called out from the back.

Humphrey sighed out loudly as he blocked the thrust of an out-of-position Cleric. The flare of Radiant energy ricocheted off his shoulder armour. [Lord of the Damned.] The earth around him turned and radiated with a foul energy as five Skeleton Warriors burst out around him.

Despite the bravado of the enemy Guild and the loss of half of the zombies, things were easily falling in the favour of the Outsiders. Sally dodged underneath the blazing amber of a Knight's skill and carried on going, her eyes set on another Fighter. Theo appeared in a cloud of mist behind the man and held his arms back as she ran up and used [Eat Brains].

The vampire grinned as he dropped the spent corpse in anticipation of it turning into a walking body shortly. "Hey, does this remind you of that time? You know, when we killed people?"

"Can't talk - need eating," she panted back, her eyes wide and blazing bright red. "Where's Walter?"

Theo wrinkled his nose up and darted his eyes over the battlefield. "There." He pointed a bloodied finger out to near the back of the fight, the dirtied white armour just visible as the leader looked sweaty as he batted away some of the remaining undead.

"Hey, Walter!" Sally shouted out.

The man turned with furrowed brow to see where her voice had come from, and then his arms hung limp as he stared at them.

"Boy, you got some range on that [Stunning Gaze], huh?" She began to run off in the direction of the paralyzed man.

"I just didn't want Humphrey to get to use [Compelled Duel] first," the vampire murmured to himself as he maintained eye contact. He winced as an arrow struck him in the leg. A second one embedded into his shoulder. The sound of a flaming special attack came from the side. "*I'm busy right now,*" he growled.

As Sally stalked through the melee, flashes of blue light lit up in the darkness as remnants of the various groups decided to cut their losses. Walter twitched and then regained his composure as [Perfect Dark] ended and light washed back over the top of this incline. His hands immediately went for something on his belt - a Teleport, she guessed.

She withdrew her crossbow and fired it immediately with practised precision. Walter reacted just as fast and raised his sledgehammer as a golden light surrounded him - deflecting the bolt out of the air.

[Necroblast: Barrage]

As he lowered it, his eyes widened to see five of the eldritch energy orbs floating around the zombie's head in an arc. With a flick of her finger, Sally sent them out towards him. He flinched and tensed to move away, but the sudden [Hex: Slow] made him completely misjudge the time he had to spend. Each blast of dark energy slammed into him. The first two were absorbed by his white armour, with the third breaking it. Number four and five rode up into his flesh, a burst of blood painting the dry grass as he stumbled to the floor.

Sally kicked away his weapon and grabbed at his greased hair. Panic and anger reflected back from his sweat-slick face.

“But how? There’s only three of you,” he spat.

“No,” she rolled her eyes, “there were like thirty. You are worse at counting than me.”

His dark eyes darted around the battlefield to see most of his Guild either teleported away or being cut down.

Theo slowly came and stood beside her. He had six arrows in his left side, and half of his body was scorched. He narrowed his eyes as the captive leader. “Ask him if they have any Skill Books?”

“True, we did win the duel this time, right?” Sally nodded as she pulled back on the hair of Walter, exposing his neck a little more.

“N-no, we used them all.” The man winced as he slowly came to terms with his fate.

The Death Knight stood up beside them and sheathed his sword to his back. The sound of battle had quietened to a low murmur of the shambling dead. “Shame. I could really use one of those.”

“It was for me. I won the duel.” Theo folded his arms, forgetting to stow his punch-blades and almost cut his arms open.

Sally pouted up at them both. “But I’m the boss - I should get it.”

“Rock, paper, scissors?” The vampire ventured.

Humphrey shrugged. “I don’t know what that means. I pick rock.”

“Paper!” Sally beamed.

“...S-scissors?” Theo rubbed his head.

Walter just looked up at them in despair. “How have you made it this far... being this incompetent?”

“Easy,” Sally beamed and held her hand out. [Endless Sleep]. The ability paired with the mass zombie raising skill, caused all of the undead under her control to sink back into the ground to be summoned later on. “I have a lot of friends to support me.”

The last thing the Player-killing Fighter saw was the looming sharp teeth of the Queen of the Dead.