

Chapter 2.35 Three Hundred

Edward narrowed his eyes. "What does that even do?"

"It's like, earth resistance or something?" Sally closed her eyes and leaned over, still struggling to recover from the violence. "What is even earth damage? Like fire or ice, I can understand - but mud doesn't usually hurt."

"Are you not hurt now?" The demon raised an eyebrow.

"Yeah, from the trauma to my body from being pierced by big ass spiked maces. The stone just tasted gross." She withdrew a Medicine Kit and passed it to the Death Knight.

"It doesn't even have brains," Humphrey mused.

"Right?" She stood up and stretched. Her spine and possibly some of her ribs cracked back into place. From the holes in her shirt, it looked like one of the hits might have gone all the way through her. "Glad I can arbitrarily fix my clothes," she murmured to herself, finding the option on the STAR.

"It surprises me that you are able to overcome such obstacles. This is meant for a full Party of Level Fourteen plus."

"Levels don't mean anything," Sally grinned back at the demon, "it's what's up here that counts." She winced as her arm clicked as she tried to tap the side of her head.

"You say that now," Humphrey sighed as he healed himself, "but wait until you get your first Ultimate Skill."

"What? *What?* What's that? Why do you not tell me about these things sooner?" She glared at the Death Knight. "What Level is even that? Thirty? Fifty?"

"Fifteen," he grinned. "Although you do get a second at Thirty and a third at Fifty - so, very astute as always."

"*Ultimate Skill*," she whispered to herself, looking around the room. There didn't seem to be any chests to spray goop at Humphrey - there should be some reward for winning against the big lump of rock, though. She wondered if Theo knew about Ultimate skills - maybe that was why he was in such a rush to level up.

"You know, you can loot bodies," Edward frowned and walked over closer to them. "Like you did to me?"

"Ah damnit - the one thing I always forget." Sally kicked up some dust and then turned to the statue. "This one, I can't loot his underwear, though." She didn't turn around but could hear the demon shuffling awkwardly.

[Powdered Stone (12)]
[Coarse Stone (5)]
[Loose Gravel (16)]
[Plain Stone (6)]

“*Neat*. I noticed that I say *neat* a lot when we receive loot, or I don’t generally know how else to process the interaction.”

“It could be some trauma related to you being half-undead,” Humphrey shrugged glumly.

“*Neat*. So, Edward,” she turned back to the tax collector. “How close are we to our friend?”

He raised an eyebrow and folded his arms across his lavender suit. “I am unable to say.”

“What about if I use the [Summon Demon] scroll and think really hard about Lucious? Will that bring him back to us?” She leaned toward him and narrowed her eyes.

“No, I don’t... I’m not sure how the spell works, but I doubt it.” The demon shrugged.

Sally exhaled through her nose. She wanted this leg of the journey over with already. As much fun as it was to have some classic Sally and Humphrey adventures - being stuck in an underground dungeon was not as cool without the rest of the Party. Other than getting Lucius back - which was partly Edward’s fault in the first place - this whole side-quest wasn’t really furthering their main goal.

Which was... making everything equal and balanced for everyone? That all seemed more clear-cut in the Forest, where Uniques didn’t have it anywhere as easy as Players despite also having the one life to live. The solution there was just to kill the right people, and enough of them, that the System allowed them to live and thrive.

But what about the Wastes? Other than Lana, and her Guild members, she hadn’t seen any other Players. If they were all on the other side of the sandstorm, then she would be hungry for a while. By the time she got there, would any really be morally okay to eat? From what she gathered, they’d all been put to work in service to the dragon - it didn’t seem fair to free them for that and then eat them.

She exhaled. Too many problems that weren’t affecting her current position. There was nothing to do but continue - carve what path she could and hope that everyone could rejoin soon and they’d have a better taste of what was going on in this terrible place.

“Ready to move on, Humps?” She shot him a smile, but there was clearly worry written across her face.

“As you wish, my Queen.” The Death Knight feigned an over-the-top bow.

“Ass, go open doors,” she waved him off, but a genuine smile had managed to cross her face.

They moved over to the doorway at the opposite end of the chamber, and once again, Humphrey put his hand on the carved stone door to gauge what lay next for them. “I do not detect anything untoward.”

Sally winced and moved slightly further away from the door.

With a deep grumble, the door opened, vibrating as if not set on the hinges properly. A well-lit room was beyond, and it didn’t immediately pelt the Death Knight with anything dangerous. He tilted his head as he stood in the way of her seeing more.

“Looks like... a room to rest?” He stepped forth, allowing them to follow him in.

Another smaller room - this one seemed to have a handful of beds aligned in the room equally. A table with two chairs. Sally wasn't sure how long they had been up now - but after that fight, she sure did feel sleepy. She yawned and stretched her arms out, regarding the plain beds for the one that looked just right.

A grinding came from the Death Knight as he rubbed his chin with his plated hand. “I suggest we move on.”

“Aw, but I'm so sleeee... hmm. You might be right.” She shook her head and glared at the room again. There was something about it that didn't settle with her. Maybe the arrangement of the furniture, or the textures of the linen... there was something that was just slightly off - like an uncanny valley - but for places to sleep.

Another door to the north and one to the west.

“Flip time,” she yawned, swaying slightly. “Your turn to call it, Humps.”

“Blank.”

“I haven't even... you do it when it's in the air.” She frowned, and her vision became slightly blurry. “Actually, yeah, blank wins. Choose a door.”

The Death Knight turned and leveled his boot, a dull crunch of the stone door to the north shifting open and bringing a cool breeze into the chamber - briefly giving Sally a little energy.

“Ack, something is off here - don't fall asleep, Edward!” She hopped around the room, avoiding touching anything.

Edward said nothing but sighed - hand holding his nose, as he walked through the room. Once in the next chamber, he stopped, as the greatsword rose up to meet his neck.

“Ah- hello?”

Humphrey narrowed his eye sockets. “I know you do not fear death, but how are we so sure you are not just collecting information on us for the dragon?”

“Hmm?” Edward recoiled slightly from the edge of the sword, and it followed him.

Sally stood in front of him with her arms crossed, tapping her foot on the floor. “Damon was mostly watching us to report back. You guys don't just collect money but are prospecting out your next big gold farmers.”

“That's not... how did you even decide to jump me together like this?”

The zombie smirked. “You see us talking a bunch of rubbish constantly, but there's a lot of unsaid communication.”

“No, I'm not gathering information to report back.” The demon shook his head.

Humphrey moved closer, his skeletal face looming into that of Edward's. "How can we believe you? Caution would dictate we send you back anyway; you're not exactly helping."

His eye twitched, and his luminous blue eyes switched between the hard glares of Sally and the plated figure. Eventually, he sighed. "I'll tell you my secret - but it has to stay between you two."

Humphrey tilted his head towards her, and Sally gave him a nod. The Death Knight moved away and relaxed the sword.

Edward licked his lips and looked to be trying to reconsider his honesty. "I'm... every time I die... I lose a level."

Both *Outsiders* nodded slowly.

"Ah," Sally clicked her fingers. "That's why you are so weak - we've dropped you by three levels alone."

"Yes," Edward grimaced. "In doing so, I am now far below the power needed to effectively level up again - and due to my duties, I am unable to travel to the first area."

"Have you tried asking nicely for help?" Sally glared at him, to which the demon just returned a shrug. "What about leaving your job? What will happen?"

"Probably one of the Level Twenty goons will come and twist my arm - or my head - off." Edward placed his hands in his trouser pockets.

Humphrey grinned and turned to observe the new room. "Shame you were not more pleasant from the start - you could have joined us and leveled up."

"We got two whole levels from Damon and the broken portal," Sally beamed. "Theo didn't, though."

Humphrey dropped his sword with a loud clang and held his hands over his face.

"You okay, Humps?" Sally moved over to him. "I know it's terrible, but Theo will get over it, he always-"

"No," Humphrey shook his head, and his voice sounded strained. "You cannot see this System message, but for some reason, I can."

"What does it say?"

Humphrey looked up at her with his empty eye sockets wide - confusion and apprehension across his skeletal face.

Sally put her hands on him. "*What does it say?*"

"Please welcome 300 new Players to the System."