

Chapter 2.43
Bossy Boots

Sally shielded her eyes as the golden light blinded her.

"The Eternal Sands shall consume you, wear you down until you are one amongst us." The voice reverberated around the large chamber.

As the immediate glow faded, the Outsiders turned to look at the figure that had risen from the floor. A tall humanoid, male in appearance but with a bird-like head, either fully comprised of gold or perhaps illuminated by some radiant power.

"I reject your threatening and substitute my own," Sally yelled back. "Come a little close so that I can eat your brain!"

The golden bird-like figure, muscular and wielding a long spear, turned his head down to leer at her. His eyes were blank circles of golden hue, and briefly, she was lost within them as the Boss slowly drew his arm backward.

With a rush of air, the pointed end of the weapon flashed forward, and the zombie narrowly missed being impaled as the golden spear dug a groove into the stone floor.

Light illuminating the area alongside a pulse of energy, the Party activated all their buffing skills.

[Inspirational Word] - "Sally, you can do it!" said Lucius

At the same time as their skills were being cast, the boss raised their hand, and crackles of golden lightning started to rain down from the ceiling. Instead of being able to launch directly into an attack, the party found themselves having to avoid the sudden downpour of electrical energy. Where each bolt struck, it scorched the sandstone flooring, leaving a scar of charred stone.

Hopping spot to spot in brief panic, the Party managed to avoid all of the attacks. Eventually, the spell ceased, and the Boss lowered his spear in preparation for the renewed assault.

Sally raised her left hand as the right held [Skeleton Key]. Confusion flashed through her face at the realization that she didn't have Necroblast anymore, and her attack just didn't come out. She rolled beneath a wide arc of the long spear as both Edward and Archie dropped below it too.

Humphrey blocked the swing with the flat of his blade, the force sliding him several feet across the stone floor before coming to a stop. He slid his greatsword down the metal shaft of the spear and ran forward, [Grave Strike] pulsing dark energy through his weapon.

[Hex: Slow]. Sally winced as it didn't seem to hold very well on the creature - perhaps their level reduced the effectiveness? If it had been three days, then she should have her zombie pals waiting in the wings. [Summon Zombies] Five of the undead began to crawl from the floor around her as the Death Knight struck the Boss in the leg.

A hiss rang through the chamber as a mark remained across where the large blade had struck as if he had bruised the metallic figure. In response, the Boss jabbed the blunt end of the spear down toward Humphrey - who buckled beneath it as he barely blocked the strike.

[Summon Zombies] - Another five rose up, this group in the midpoint between her and the Boss.

Edward looked pained, as if angered at the sudden assault of the statue-esque creature, yet also panicked into not wanting to lose a level and his life in the attempt - so he stood in place.

Likewise, Lucius had slowly recoiled away from the melee as far as possible, almost up against the back wall now as he occasionally murmured out encouragements too weak for them to hear over the thumping adrenaline battle.

The Golden Boss kicked out at the Death Knight, sending him stumbling backward, and raised a hand out to cast another skill. Further down near the entrance, small whirlwinds of dust started to form - bright amber eyes bursting into view as the living storms began to work their way toward the Party.

"Don't stand in the red stuff!" Sally yelled, casting the final [Summon Zombies] right up close to the Boss. Another five - a decent roll at last. Now she had a loose train of walking corpses from her current position to the large figure focused on Humphrey.

"There *isn't* any red." Edward narrowed his eyes.

"Will be if you don't move it, buster." She nodded towards the approaching tornados - three in total, before she started off for her attack.

As the Boss whipped the spear around to dislodge the Death Knight further, it sensed her approach and turned to level a quick jab at her.

Sally weaved between her summoned pals, dodging behind them and using them as cover on her approach. The sharp tip of the spear surged forth and impaled the corpse next to her, breaking the body clean in half. The Boss withdrew their weapon to sweep forward with the blunt end - but again, she spun to the side between the next zombie which was flung dozens of feet into the air from the missed blow.

And then, she had made it close enough. Her dagger found purchase in the leg of the Boss, sinking deep into the golden skin where Humphrey's sword had just made a blunt dent. As she rolled through past the legs, she saw that the Death Knight had engaged one of the tornados - Edward was trying to bait out an attack from the second, and the third was trying to chase after Archie.

The cat had decided it was finally time for the zoomies and had begun rushing around the more open space of the other end of the chamber - stopping occasionally to abruptly change direction whenever his assailant got closer. Distracted by how he looked with his ears back and a wild look in his eyes, Sally would have found it amusing to continue to watch him were she not kicked in the stomach by the Boss.

She tumbled across the floor, righting herself just in time to see the closed golden fist come down upon her. With no time to react, she held the dagger up to block and was crushed into the ground.

The crimson greatsword flashed a bright green as Humphrey was able to use [Decimate] for the first time, the strike passing straight through the dust storm elemental but seeming to destroy whatever core held it together. As the Monster faded away, he spun around to see the golden bird-man looming over the prone zombie. [Compelled Duel].

The impassive eyes of the Boss looked up at the Death Knight briefly before ignoring the challenge. Instead, the spear flickered forward and crashed into the stone floor, cracks forming from where it struck.

Sally rolled back up to her feet, dizzied. It would take more than that to keep her down; she was *overpowered*. She spat her own blood on the floor and tried to remember how to reset a dislocated shoulder. Thankfully it wasn't her dagger-wielding arm - although her dagger wasn't even being wielded currently as it was still lodged in the Boss's hand.

[Descrate Life]. She briefly regretted not picking more active attack skills during leveling. Giving some away wasn't super smart either - but the look on Theo's face when she used her new skill would-

She leaped backward, falling onto her back, causing a sharp pain to flare through her inert arm as a plume of dust erupted from where the Boss tried to strike her with the spear.

The weapon caused sparks to shoot into the air as the Boss pushed it forward, slicing across the sandstone and just catching Sally in the upswing - a large gash immediately flooding with crimson along her thigh.

Clouds began to gather in the high ceiling chamber as the golden bird raised a hand up to cast the lighting skill again. Humphrey made it back to her and was trying to help her up. Edward had just about managed to finish off his opponent but looked rather blooded himself.

Archie was... well, there were now five Archies sprinting around erratically, causing the tornado to become... confused if nothing else.

"You need to move," Humphrey growled, partially lifting her and then pushing her out of the way as a shock of golden light snapped to the floor between them.

She fumbled for a Health Potion as she hopped on one leg, the other numb and unresponsive. The Party really needed to get a healer as soon as possible. Being overwhelmingly powerful was no use when the Monsters were glitched or high level. The cork popped from the glass bottle as she cast a nervous glance upwards to the ceiling for any incoming lighting. She raised the potion to her lips and-

"*Sally!*" Humphrey yelled.

A blunt force struck her, and she was sent tumbling across the room, slamming into the far wall, the healing item shattering on the floor. Something cracked inside her, and a flood of cold ran through her body. As her eyes stopped rolling around, she regained focus to see the Boss briefly harried by the throng of zombies who had managed to clump around the golden feet.

She found that she couldn't move her legs and only one arm. Not ideal - so much for the armor being any use. Oddly, she felt... good. Obviously, she wasn't in very good shape, and the pool of blood from her leg that didn't seem to want to stop was less than ideal... a notification popped up.

[Crimson Armour Set Bonus Passive]
[Low Health Threshold Reached - Temporary Bonus Stat Buff Activated]

The Death Knight slid across the floor in front of her to protect her. Archie had become a tornado of his own, a literally spinning dervish of multiple copies of himself. Edward was cautiously circling around the Boss, watching and waiting for an opportunity to strike. She could still hear the encouraging words of Lucius in the distance, his emoticons switching between panicked sweat drops and jubilant fireworks.

She popped the cork of another Healing Potion as her stash dwindled.

“Help me up, Humps.” Her arm extended towards the Death Knight, and he lifted her to her feet as bones cracked back into position and her severed arteries sealed up.

“There's only room enough for one boss in this chamber.”