

Chapter 23 Foreshadowing

"It *is* a dagger."

[Rare Dagger of Luck]

Sally exhaled and withdrew the new blade from her Inventory. It had a slight blue sheen to it and a nice leather grip. She would perhaps admit that it was a much nicer dagger than her Common ones, even if she still couldn't bring up the item details properly.

"Luck is self-explanatory at least," Humphrey shrugged, standing slightly further away from her, "if you keep it equipped on your belt you'll gain the Stat boost even when not wielding it directly."

"Thanks." She held back a sarcastic response. Luck wasn't a terrible statistic to improve, at least in theory. Depending on how the System calculated things, it would either be super effective but random or too low a chance to really come into play. If only she could see her own stats too.

They walked in silence for a few minutes, passing by the tombs they had previously entered and plundered. This time instead of heading up through to the woods, they found a path that led at a slight angle away.

"Sticking to the road might be more dangerous," Humphrey warned, "but will lead us almost straight to Yarch."

"I'm okay for a little danger," she grinned and wiggled her eyebrows, "I should be Level Five next right, and get some kind of keystone ability?"

"Perhaps," Humphrey looked thoughtful, "for a Player class that is true - for you, we will have to wait and see."

Sally pouted. If her next level-up was another boring passive skill, she would be quite annoyed. Buffing her Party was all well and good - but as a Boss Monster, she should be able to hold her own in a fight. Especially if there was a Player version of [Compelled Duel] or some kind of taunt like that Fighter had used.

As they left the Cemetery onto the road, the fog of gloom faded around them, and they were able to see the normal distance once more. The rough stones of the road were slightly overgrown with grass in places but stretched on into the woods for quite a distance. The more distance they made from the site of graves and tombs, the brighter and clearer the skies were.

"I don't feel so lethargic in the sun now." Sally winced as she looked upwards, but the light didn't seem to burn as much as previously.

"One of the benefits of being a Boss," Humphrey grinned, "you get minor resistances to certain conditions and maladies."

The armour of the Death Knight was even more eerie in the direct light. A mix of dark burgundy and blood-red metal, with dark silver edges and details. His once plain expression surrounded by purple glow was now a menacing grin that burned with intensity. It was a good look for him.

“How does it feel? Being a Monster now, I mean.”

He regarded her with a tilted head and then looked up to the sky. “I had always wanted legs.”

“...and?”

“They are very tiring to utilise constantly, *ha-ha*.” He grinned, and his helmet flame grew slightly more intense. “I feel like more of a real person now, rather than a tool, if that answers your question. *Sally the Unliving*.”

“It does,” she smiled back, “and you said I’d be getting more titles?”

“Yes.”

Sally opened her mouth to respond when instead a notification popped up on the STAR.

“Oh, this must be Theo.”

[Marius: Where are you, corpse?]

She wrinkled her nose at the little picture beside the text. “It’s the deranged Cleric. How’d he manage to message me?”

The Death Knight paused, and they stopped on the road as he leaned down to stare at the message. “That is odd; I’m not sure of the workings of-“

[Sally: Sorry, I’m not into you like that]

Humphrey sighed. “It’s probably best not to instigate him.”

“That was like the least bad thing I could think of - I didn’t say anything about his mother... yet. Wait, do we even have parents here?” Parents, now that was a weird lump in her pea-soup brain.

Bloip.

“Hmm.” The Death Knight stood back up straight and put a hand to his chin. “I am aware of parents existing.” *Bloip.* “But not whether yours are, or the exact-“ *Bloip.*

“Oh my gosh, *this guy*. Where’s the block option?” Sally scowled at the messages popping through.

[Marius: Reveal your whereabouts!]

[Marius: I already have a group after you]

[Marius: And I wouldn’t date a loathsome creature like yourself]

[Marius Brent Blocked]

“His signalling was all over the place there. Also - Players have real names? How quaint.”

Humphrey tilted his head as they began walking again, but didn't press the issue.

“Walking the road might be a sure way to run into the Party he mentioned, but that's on the assumption that they'd have a clue where to look; this is a big area and-“

“As a Boss Monster, you are now easier to find.” The Death Knight raised a finger. “Where a Bounty will say what Region you are in, being a Boss Monster the location can be narrowed to a smaller area. Like, *the Cemetery*.”

“People can just grab that information from the town at will?” She was shocked at how brazen and unfair that was. That definitely seemed like a breach of her privacy.

“No. Only through a magical item - a [Kill Contract Scroll]. When used, it gives the location of a random Boss or Elite Monster.”

“Are you also an Elite Monster, Humps?” She raised her eyebrows.

“Yes, *ha-ha!*” His mouth opened wide as a burst of flame exited the back of his helm to emphasise his outburst.

“Great, that means we are twice as likely to be found then.”

“Oh. Yes, you are right.” He rubbed the back of his armoured neck apologetically.

Sally sighed. Turning towns into rubble and breaking the System was hard enough if they had the element of surprise, but now if random groups would be hunting them down as well - well, that just didn't seem fair. *The unfairness was the point*, she reminded herself, as she received another notification.

[Theo: On my way]

“Not even an apology or promise that he has been seasoning himself,” she huffed, closing the menu. “We need to teach that man some manners.”

“It will be useful to have a Player in the Party,” Humphrey scratched his chin, “one that can access all the normal Player things, I mean.”

Sally chose to ignore this slight and carried on down the road that followed a gradual curve through the woods. Trees adorned the raised grassy embankments on either side, shade cast intermittently over their path. It was another calm that surely must be hiding some form of impending anguish.

“There must be interesting locales just off of the path, right?” She narrowed her eyes into the woods to either side.

“Yes. Various locations for Quests, Monster Dens, and Resource Gathering nodes.”

“There's crafting?” Sally looked glumly at her lack of menus.

“To a degree. It is mostly useful for Player Housing and making Gold to pay the-“

“What can I craft with... a dozen skulls?” She poked at her Inventory window, squinting at the collection of skeletal parts.

The Death Knight shrugged.

“Is it worth us looking for any side-quests then, out in these woods? You have map information still, right?” The text from her STAR flickered away.

“Probably not,” Humphrey looked out into the dense trees to the side, “you are unlikely to get any decent reward or experience from anything in this area.”

“That’s sad, I was hoping we could-“ Sally stopped mid-sentence.

She whirled around to face behind them, her Rare dagger drawn from its sheath. The Death Knight drew his greatsword and stood back-to-back with her as the two zombies started walking a slow circle around the pair.

“What is it?” Humphrey asked, eye sockets narrowed.

“I thought I heard something... or could sense something... I’m not sure.”

The path on either side remained clear - the woods too dense, and it would be easy to hide away behind one of the countless trees. For a moment, the only sounds were the rustling of leaves in the light breeze, the shambling footsteps of the Party zombies, and the low hum of Humphrey’s flickering helmet flame.

Sally relaxed and slowly put her weapon away. She continued to scour the way behind them with her red eyes, trying to spot any slight hint of movement or something amiss. With a shrug, she relented and turned back around. The Death Knight looked her way as he put away his sword, but did not seem to see anything that she couldn’t.

“Weird, perhaps my brain is just playing tricks on me. I only got to eat one adventurer.” She patted her stomach and pouted at Humphrey. “I wonder which way the rest of them went - the tasty blood trail just petered off outside of the tomb.”

“Let’s hope they found a different way to Yarch, so you can finish them off - *ha-ha!*” A gleam of red light sparked in the eyes of the Death Knight.

“I’m salivating already,” she beamed, literally drooling as they continued down the path ahead.

A few minutes later, as the undead group became dots on the horizon, the faintest sound of exhaling was followed by darkened shapes slipping from between the cover of the trees.