

- Ghost: A Day in the Life of the Dead - Day 1: 8:00 pm

After a tiring search of the area, I came to the conclusion that I was in need of a break. A small snack and some water would pick me up. Maybe it would even clear my mind. No, not likely. I also needed to stop the bleeding caused by my earlier acrobatics. Of course, then I remembered that I had left my pack behind, and along with it my water, food, and bandages. Frustrated, I sat down on the floor with a thud and pressed my back against the resting place of 'Deeper Alarus'.

A moment later realized that 'Deeper' wasn't a first name, but by then it was too late. The stone slab gave way under the force of my slump and I was once again falling. "The hell!" was the most sensible reaction I could muster. I could have tried to grab hold of something to keep from falling down but no, I decided to just shout something angry instead!

I lifted myself up from the debris and made a quick check to make sure nothing was broken. I hadn't fallen far, not like my first couple of falls, so I wasn't really hurt. I decided that I should invest on some body cushioning if I was going to make a habit of this.

But I had done something stupid again; my beautiful brass lantern had been left behind. I tried for several infuriating moments to climb back up the shaft to get to it, with its warm yellow glow berating me.

I took a deep breath, and immediately regretted it. I smelled something like a cross between leather and bile. I knew that smell.

Then I heard a moan; another one of those bad moans. I froze, and for a fleeting moment hoped that it had just been some subconscious moan of anguish from myself, and not a bloodthirsty zombie. Then I heard movement, the shuffling of squishy feet, and the swish, swish, of rotting muscle dragging bone. I turned around and pressed my back against the wall. The light from the lantern in the shaft above was allowing some semblance of vision down here, enough to see basic shapes but not much else. I couldn't see anything moving, but the definite swish, swish was getting closer.

If I had my pack I wouldn't have worried. I had all of those wonderful things that I never, ever allowed myself to go into a tomb without, only now I was in a tomb without them. That stuff was expensive too! I'd have to spend my entire income from this haul just to replace my gear!

The zombie slowly lumbered into view from the pitch black recesses of the chamber, its arms reaching outwards ready to grab onto anything warm.

I still had my daggers, all six of them, but they weren't great against zombies. To a zombie muscles were optional, so slashing, hacking, or stabbing was pretty much useless. On the other hand, this zombie looked particular old and withered. I suspected that I could hack off a limb, but really I just hoped that it wouldn't notice me and go back to sleep.

But then I saw it; a big rock on one of the zombie's fingers. Distracted momentarily from my mortal peril (by something shiny, naturally) I pulled one of my daggers from my belt, dashed over to the zombie, and promptly hacked off its outstretched hand at the wrist.

Un-handed, the zombie recoiled, letting out a shriek of anger and lowering its grubby brow over empty eye sockets. I barely noticed. Its hand, now in my hands, was trying to gouge out my eye sockets as well. I wouldn't have any of that, and with a little bit of a skill and a very sharp knife, the hand was no more than a wriggling palm. I kept the ring finger and discarded the hand, throwing it as hard as I could at the zombie, who had recovered from the shock and was ambling towards me.

It swung at me with its handless arm, and the jagged bone came within a hair of my throat. I leapt over a nearby sarcophagus just as it made another lunge. It crashed into the sarcophagus, almost toppling over it, putting its head within biting distance. This gave me a grand opportunity to deliver a right hook. The zombie's head spun clear off its neck, and tumbled to the floor in some dark corner.

Zombies also tend not to need heads. It flailed its arms about menacingly and tried to climb over the sarcophagus to really mess me up. I kicked mightily at the sarcophagus causing the stone lid to slide off. It was big, and very heavy, and did bad things to the zombie's lower torso when it made contact, and pinned it to the ground. Then the lid fell over upside down with a rumbling thud, crushing the zombie's upper body with a crispy splat.

Well, I guess that made me a hero. My enemy dispatched, I casually pulled the big beautiful ring off of the squirming zombie finger. I imagined the head was somewhere in the dark, trying its best to chew its way over to me so it could taste my brains.

"So much for the guard," I said with a chuckle. I scanned the room, and noted that there were only three sarcophagi here, and none of them had plaques, nor dates, nor names; nothing. They were arranged with two in the front, one of which was now open, and one in the back of the room. My eyes had adjusting to the dim light nicely by this point, so the room was spooky, but not impossible to explore.

First I checked inside the opened one. There were no rings, no necklaces; nothing.

I went to the second one, and tried to kick the lid off just like I had heroically managed to do before. This time, all I managed to do was hurt my foot. Maybe I had just been lucky before, it maybe it was a shot of adrenaline that gave me super strength. Yeah, that had to be it. Slowly, I pushed and I prodded at the lid before it gave way, falling to the ground with a tremendous thud.

It was the same deal, nothing; just old bones. I frowned and growled to myself. If I was going to get stuck in a secret chamber with a zombie, at least there should be some loot in it!

I turned my angry eyes to the third sarcophagus. "Of course," I said, "these two were just servants, and you're the master. You're going to have a ton of goodies inside, and better yet, the star!"

"Nooo!"

I almost swallowed my tongue, digested it, and crapped it out all in one moment. My bulging eyeballs scanned the room as I slowly turned around, ready to face my company. To my shock, I saw no one.

"You will be cursed!" the voice hissed again.

I blinked a few times, and then realized who was addressing me. "Oh, is that a fact?" I replied.

Sure enough, I spotted the zombie's head, mouth gaping menacingly, sort of hissing at me from where it sat, or... slid. Yes, the head was actually sliding across the floor back to its body. This was one hell of a zombie. "Cursed!" It said, drawing out the "ur" part and hissing for a moment or two before he got to the d at the end.

"Yeah, cursed," I said, and then grinned heartily at the final sarcophagus. Grand-daddy Alarus, I have found thee!

With gusto I went and grabbed onto the lid, determined to pull it free with my bare hands just to make the zombie head mad. Amazingly, I pulled it off, and for an instant, felt as if my luck was about to change.

I looked down into the open sarcophagus triumphantly and saw... a female mummy. There were no jewels, no gems, no rings, no necklaces, hell, I'd have settled for a crappy nose ring at this point, but worst of all, there was no star.

The zombie head started to laugh. Bastard.

Wait, there had to be something in there, otherwise mister zombie wouldn't be making such a fuss. I looked over my shoulder to it just so it could see my smirk, and then I drew one of my daggers.

I hated living dead things, I hated stumbling around in the dark, I hated falling on my head and my ass and other body parts, and most of all, I hated wasting my time in tombs with no loot in them. With conviction, I sunk my dagger into the mummy of Grandma Alarus and cut her open; throat to groin.

"Nooooo!" shouted the zombie head, with much more fervor this time. That guy could sure move a lot of air for something with no lungs attached.

"Nooo!" I mimicked, trying to sound like a whining baby. Its protest only strengthened my resolve. I dug my hands in and pried open her rib cage. There, barely visible in the faint light amidst the dust of decomposed flesh, was the Alarus Star. I grinned with triumph as I pulled it out and turned around so that I could gaze upon it in better light. It was just as it was described, a spectacular gold amulet shaped like a five-pointed star,

trimmed with hundreds of gems that seemed to dance widely in just the faintest of light. "Thanks Lady Alarus," I muttered to myself.

"You are cursed!" the zombie moaned. "It will haunt you to the end of your days! Cursed!"

I chuckled at it. "You don't have much of a range for conversation, do you?"

"Cursed!"

"Yeah, I heard you the first time. Say, how do I get out of here?"

"Death!" It proclaimed, and I could have sworn I felt the ground shake as it did so.

"Uhm," was my reply.

"Death!" it shouted even louder, and the ground most definitely shook that time.

"How about not death? How about something significantly other than death, okay?"

Now the ground was shaking all on its own, without the zombie to give it a rallying speech. I could hear rocks begin to tumble in the distance, crashing, smashing things. Wow, I guess there was a curse after all. I lost my footing as the ground heaved beneath me, split down the center by a massive crack. The light in the other room ceased suddenly, the lamp probably smashed under falling rocks. As if things couldn't get any worse, the next thing I heard was the spray and slosh of water. I felt it too, rising quickly.

"Bullocks!" I shouted. Well, if I was really cursed, I may as well curse. I guess I would have only bad luck from here on out. On the other hand, I already had pretty back luck before the curse, so maybe it would negate the effect, and now I would have good luck? Not thinking beyond that point, I grabbed grandma Alarus and heaved her out of her sarcophagus. I jumped in and, as best I could, tried to close the lid. "There, dead, now enough with the earthquakes and the rising waters!"

No such luck. I could still feel the shaking, and hear the water pouring. Well, this was it, I decided. At least I wouldn't have to worry about a fancy burial. I was wrapped up tight in a royal sarcophagus, after all.

My coffin lurched, and then I felt it begin to tumble. Water started to trickle in from around the lid. I felt myself being shoved this way and that, spinning, like I was rolling downhill. Then the tumbling stopped, and there was just the sound of rushing water, so loud I wouldn't have been able to hear myself scream. It went on seemingly forever, with my coffin slowly, and then not so slowly filling up with water. Well, I figured drowning was better than dying of asphyxiation. Wait...

This was the second time tonight that prayer hard occurred to me. I never thought too hard about Gods or Builders or Tricksters or things like that. I always figured it was just a way to control people and make money.

Try as I might, moments from death, I still figured it was all just a way to control people and make money. Well, so much for a prayer before death.

After I was done thinking pseudo spiritual thoughts, up became down and I found myself falling against the lid of the coffin. Then right became down, up became sideways, left went somewhere else, and I became sore, knocked this way and that until I had more bumps on my head than I had fingers. There was a tremendous crash, a cracking sound, I saw a flash of light, and then...

Then...

Then?

Then there was a blurry glow all around me. I tried to open my eyes. "Hell?" I asked aloud, trying to regain my senses. No, Hell was supposed to be hot, and while it wasn't cold in here, it was a little too comfortable. I blinked a few times, and squinted, and then realized that I was the luckiest fool in the world. Somehow, when the Alarus chamber had collapsed and all of that water flooded in the designers didn't take into account that there was a cavern under it all, and filling a room with water that was being shaken to pieces would result in a cave-in.

It wasn't any old nasty cave either; it was filled with glowing mushrooms as far as the eye could see. The water that poured in, and was still pouring in, only made them glow brighter.

Laughing, I pulled myself free of the rubble and fell to my back into the bed of mushrooms, stretching out my aching body. I was tempted to try a couple, but no, I needed my senses intact if I was going to get out of this cave. I may have lost all my gear, but I had the star, had a bit of loot, and I had foiled the curse. I put a few nice looking small mushrooms into free pouches on my belt, and began hunting for a way out.

I wandered for a time and enjoyed it. It was nice to be out of mortal peril, and the mushrooms were pretty. I just hoped that this cave eventually lead to daylight, or moonlight; either would be good. This would have been a funny time to take up diary writing. That way, if I never got out, someone would eventually stumble upon my journal, and read my last entry, which would say something about buried treasure, and a lost mermaid, and a golden mushroom that would make you king of the world. Then the poor sod would spend ages searching these caves for just those things, until he wrote a journal, died, and someone found it.

The cave sloped upwards, and the further I went, the fewer mushrooms there were. Eventually the darkness up ahead gave way to stars, and the open air. I came out in a walled yard, wild with plant life, with a modest looking house sitting at one end.