

Burble

and the Zombie Tear

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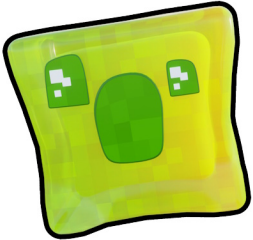
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To my mother, who convinced me that I could be good
at math *and* still like to read. I attribute my love of
books to her reading to me as a child.

You'll always be my favorite narrator.

Meet the Crew



Blurble:

Best friend to Wyoming and Leila, Blurble the slime loves to make new friends, play games, ride spiders, and eat, well, pretty much anything. Especially magic, or a good book. They are so delicious!



Wyoming Bones:

Archeologist, adventurer, and teacher, Wyoming has been cursed to be a skeleton—But he doesn't let that slow him down! He loves history, books, and keeping dangerous magical artifacts out of the hands of bad guys like Dr. Evil.



Leila Vangraves:

A Captain in the New Block City army, Leila gets sent in when secrets need to be found or bad guys need to be stopped. She's a master of disguise, an accomplished actress, and great with a sword.

Chapter 1

Blurple, friendly slime and intrepid explorer, inched toward the Zombie Tear. After hours of trekking through a deadly jungle, and more hours delving into this ancient ruin, they had finally found the elusive, magical gem. The crystal, shaped like a large drop of water but the size of Blurple's whole body, pulsed with a pale green light.

And it smelled *delicious*.

Finally in striking distance, the slime wiggled and prepared to spring at the glowing gem. Blurple could already taste the sweet, sweet mana swirling inside the Tear. Now it just needed to jump and—

A bony skeleton hand grabbed Blurple just as the slime leapt forward. Closing tightly, it held the slime down against the shoulder it had been preparing to leap from. *No! It had been so close! It had gone through too much to lose this snack now!*

“Nice catch, Wyoming!” Friend Leila stood on the other side of the Zombie Tear's pedestal in the center of the

chamber. She looked far, far too happy Blurble was being denied its hard-earned treat.

Wyoming chuckled, still holding tight to Blurble. His shoulder vibrated, jiggling Blurble's green cube body. "Yeah, we've gone through too much to lose this artifact to Blurble's stomach now."

Honestly, why had they even come all this way if they didn't want Blurble to eat the yummy magic glowing gem of deliciousness? Blurble farted in frustration and stuck its tongue out at Leila and Wyoming both.

To the slime's annoyance, friend Wyoming chuckled even more. "Sorry, Blurble. We'll try to find you another snack soon. I need this relic for my research."

Wyoming at least *sounded* apologetic. He even *looked* apologetic as he reached up to scratch his head under his explorer's hat. As soon as he lifted it from his head, his appearance changed and he looked like the skeleton he really was. Then the magic hat came back on and he looked like a rugged human adventurer again.

The slime really didn't care what Wyoming looked like—He was still Wyoming Bones, no matter what. And he was *still* keeping it from the yummy treat.

Blurble farted again, but stopped struggling to reach the glowing deliciousness only blocks in front of it. After a few moments, Wyoming patted the slime and let go. Blurble wiggled and hopped backwards off

Wyoming's shoulder to explore the rest of the chamber. Blurble couldn't eat the Tear, but what if there were *more* delicious treats hidden in the room?

Always hopeful, the slime hopped away from its friends to search. The room was large, with random mossy stone blocks scattered around. With more friends, Blurble could play an *epic* game of Chase in here. Or, even better, Hide-and-Seek! There were so many great hiding places.

The largest blocks of stone, with the best hiding spots, sat on the right side of the room. Blurble bounced toward them to begin its search.

"Do you think this could really be it?" Leila asked. "Could this turn you back into a human?"

Wyoming shrugged. "I don't know, Leila. I'm hoping it will at least give us a clue about what happened to me. Legends say the Zombie Tear can turn a human into a zombie. That's not exactly what happened to me, but..."

"But zombies and skeletons are both kinds of undead." Leila finished for him. "Yeah, I can see why you'd want to study this."

Her red hair fell forward around her face as she leaned closer to examine the gem. She kept her hands behind her back as she did, however, which Blurble thought was smart. Friend Leila was an amazing sword fighter, accomplished spy, and great slime-scratcher. Still, she

knew to leave the trap stuff to an archeologist and treasure hunter like Wyoming Bones.

Blurble reached the largest stone, still thinking. Was that why Wyoming didn't want Blurble to eat the Tear? He thought the magic stone might help him change from a skeleton into a human? Wyoming had been a skeleton for as long as Blurble had known him, and the slime didn't see why he would *want* to change. Wyoming was great, just the way he was! Still, Blurble didn't need to understand the reason to know it was important to its friend.

And if it was important to Wyoming, it was important to Blurble too. It added "objects that could help Wyoming change into a human" to its list of things to look for. Right below "delicious snacks." Hoping around the stone block, it looked around before squelching in disappointment. Just dirt. Not even a piece of cake.

"Well, what are you waiting for, Wyoming?" Blurble couldn't see Leila, but he could imagine her gesturing impatiently at the glowing stone. "Grab it and let's go."

"Just checking for traps." Wyoming looked pensive. "This whole thing has been too easy. I don't trust it."

Leila hummed in response. "Fine, but hurry. You owe me a pumpkin pie for dragging me all the way out here, you know."

“Almost done, Leila.” Wyoming shook his head with a chuckle. A few moments later, he sighed. “Okay, here goes nothing. Get ready to run if I missed something.”

Blurble snorted to itself. Friend Wyoming wouldn’t miss a trap. Wyoming was the *best* explorer—even better than Blurble! Still chuckling, the slime kept sniffing along the floor, but all it smelled was dirt and rock.

Suddenly, pale green magic swept through the room. Shielded behind the stone block, the wave passed over Blurble. Motes of mana floated down, and the slime caught a few on its tongue. Delicious! They tasted just like the Zombie Tear had smelled! Friend Wyoming and friend Leila had shared their snack after all.

Excited to tell its friends thank you, Blurble bounced around the stone block. “Blur—!”

Blurble’s shout died, half-formed, as it saw its friends. They stood like statues, unmoving, Wyoming’s hand extended to just shy of the crystal. Also like statues, they were completely gray.

Something had turned friends Wyoming and Leila to stone.

Blurble stared with wide eyes, unmoving. It felt like it had frozen too. Wait—Had it turned to stone as well? Was Blurble a statue, cursed to spend the rest of its days stuck in this room? Blurble didn’t want to be a statue. It was pretty certain statues didn’t get *any* snacks.

The slime crossed its eyes and turned in a small circle, trying to see itself. A wave of relief swept through it when it saw beautiful green jelly instead of hard stone. Blurble was saved!

Now it just needed to save its friends. But how?

“Silly mortals!” A loud voice rasped, and Blurble spun back around.

There, in the center of the room, stood a strange-looking zombie. It still had the green, dead skin of a regular zombie, but instead of torn clothes, it wore a nice black suit.

“You adventurers always spend so long looking for traps, never realizing that the Tear itself is the trap!”

Oh, also the zombie could talk. That was new. Blurble had met many zombies in its adventures, and so far they had all been kind of... Boring. All they wanted to do was chase and chase. Blurble enjoyed a good game of Chase, but the zombies always did it *wrong*. Instead of tagging people when they caught them, the zombies would try to bite them. That wasn't how you played *at all*.

Maybe, since this zombie could talk, it would be a better, less bitey friend? That could be so much fun!

The zombie pointed at Wyoming and Leila. “Only a little longer and you shall be my newest minions! So much better than being *adventurers*, don't you think?”

Well, that answered the question for Blurble. This zombie was no friend. Blurble still did not know what was going on with its actual friends, but this zombie was responsible. And that meant he was a Bad Man.

Blurble knew what to do with Bad Men.

“Bluuuuuurrrrrble!” Blurble yelled its war cry as it jumped on top of the stone. It wanted to poof the zombie, but first, the slime needed to force the zombie to turn its friends back. “Blurble bloop, gromp!”

The zombie stopped chuckling as Blurble threatened it, turning around. Its eyes searched the room, quickly finding Blurble.

To the slime’s annoyance, the zombie smiled. Somehow, the undead man made the friendly expression look... much less friendly. Instead of happy, it made the zombie appear cruel and mean. “Ah, slime. I wondered where you had gone off to. Worried about your friends?” He gestured at Wyoming and Leila. “Don’t worry. They aren’t really statues. Not for forever.”

Blurble tilted its slime body as it looked at its friends in confusion, then turned back to the not-nice zombie. “Blurble?” They *looked* like statues. What did it mean?

The zombie put a hand against his chest. “A spell to turn mortals to eternal stone is beyond even myself, the great Zachariah.” Then its smile turned even more cruel, and he chuckled evilly. “Besides, what use would

I have of statues? No, this spell does something *much* better. Inside their shells of stone, your friends are even now changing. Transforming into my undead minions. A few hours near my Tear are enough to change any mortal into my puppets.”

Zachariah the zombie’s chuckle turned into a full-throated laugh as he looked up at the ceiling in dark joy.

Blurble had heard everything it needed to. The zombie wouldn’t change Wyoming and Leila back. That just meant Blurble would have to do the job itself.

“Blurble!” Blurble charged forward, directly at Zachariah. It would poof the evil, talkative zombie, then it would figure out how to save its friends.

Zachariah’s laugh died to a low chuckle as it watched Blurble race toward it. The zombie didn’t even try to dodge. Good. That would make it all the easier for Blurble’s Super-Amazing-Head-Butt-Attack-of-Awesomeness to take out the Bad Man.

Blurble sprung into the air, flying like a green jelly bullet for Zachariah’s smug face.

At the last second, the zombie swung one hand, smacking the slime backward easily. Blurble rocketed away, Zachariah’s laughter following as the slime sailed out of the open doorway. A moment later, Blurble slammed into the far wall.

It slid toward the ground, its vision growing fuzzy around the edges. Before the slime reached the floor, everything went dark.