

Chapter 2.38

Monetary Loss

Sally slid down an inclined slope and then leaped across a pit to roll on the floor beyond. As she coughed out dust, she peered back over the edge. Looked like acid... or maybe some apple juice. Not the kind of fifty-fifty she should be entertaining right now.

"There's a pit to jump, Humps."

A rough screech followed from above where the slope began, and she took a few steps backward as it drew closer. Sparks lit up the dim corridor as the plated figure of the Death Knight came into view, using both his heels and greatsword as an anchor to slow his descent. Once he reached the last few feet of the decline, he launched forward, landing surprisingly deftly over the other side of the pit.

"I am beginning to detest the dungeon," he exhaled, looking back over the edge.

"Join the club; I've been simmering since a stupid poem tried to tell me what to do." Sally rubbed her arm across her forehead. They must be nearing the end soon, surely? There were only so many fatal traps and inedible Monsters the System could throw at them before the dungeon became unfair. This sort of place would be a horror for normal Players.

Edward slid down and easily hopped the pit with his long limbs, only wobbling slightly as he tried to find a place to land that wasn't too close to the wide Death Knight.

"Can you at least tell us how far we've gone, Edward?" Sally glared from the side of Humphrey.

"No. Well, I don't think so." The demon pinched the bridge of his nose. "It's not like me to get a headache - and I'm not sure if it's just the dungeon or having to listen to you two constantly prattle on."

"We don't prattle." Humphrey crossed his arms.

"Not *constantly*. But that is rather rude, Edward, after all that we've been through?"

Edward deflated. "You ever have the taste of the future in your mouth? Something rueful that pains you so much that it affects the present you?"

"I'm barely cognisant half the time," Sally sighed. "That sounds like something Theo would say, though. We'll ask him when he is back."

She turned back to the passage. It just went on further until it became shrouded in darkness. Perfect place for a whole bunch of traps. "Why don't you go first, Edward?"

"I'm... not the one that has to complete the dungeon?"

"Did the terms of our return of Lucius actually involve us completing the dungeon?" She crossed her arms and spun back to glare at him again, mostly blocked by the large form of the Death Knight.

"..." Edward's bright eyes blinked slowly a few times. "He is being held here, so you would have to find him, at the least."

“Or die trying, I believe you had told us?” Humphrey would have turned back to the demon, but maneuvering in the corridor was enough of a struggle with how wide his shoulder plates were.

“You don’t seem capable of that.” He shrugged back in return.

It wasn’t enough to reassure Sally, and she briefly seethed before looking back to the darkened alley before them. She withdrew a skull from her Inventory and bowled it down the hallway. Not exactly the most consistent of projectiles, it at least bounced a few times before the odd shape of it wore out any of the momentum.

As it laid to rest for a second, the floor dropped away to be replaced by a bright amber glow.

“Ah,” she rubbed at her eyes. “Pit drops into lava. Or magma.” The slight time delay made it a problem, but she would have to use one of her most secretly guarded and rarely used skills - patience.

“Humps, go in front and prob the floor with your sword. We’ll go spaced apart in case there is a weight limit.”

“If I can pass, I doubt either of you would tip the scales.” The Death Knight glanced between the two of them. “But, as you wish.”

She watched as he squeezed past her and began to strike the floor with his sword - waiting a few seconds to take a step forward and then repeating the action.

It took them sixty years to make it to the next door - at least, according to Sally. They had uncovered three other pit drops along the path and had managed to avoid them using their painstakingly slow plan. Perhaps it was a good thing the others weren’t here - she seemed to show off and be more reckless with more of an audience.

“Pretty good, huh?” She turned back to grin at Edward.

“Yes, I’m increasingly worried that you might actually pull this off.”

“Aha! So we are getting closer?”

He deflated. “I don’t actually know; I’ve told you several times I haven’t been through here before. Your friend could be in the very next room, for all I know-“

“Quick, Humps! Victory draws near!” She pointed her finger out at the doorway before them, much to the anguish of the demon.

The Death Knight approached the door and tilted his head. “This one has a barred window.”

“Like a prison door, perhaps?” She hopped up and down in hopes of seeing something past him.

“No, looks like a combat area.” Humphrey pushed the door open and stepped inside, followed shortly by the other two.

Sally narrowed her eyes. The wide chamber was of similar design to the statue room, except this one had no statue - and was lit by four waterfalls of lava/magma that fell slowly from the ceiling

and into recessed pools encircling the room. There was no other doorway out of here, but the center of the room held a small altar and a pattern of runes in a circle across the floor.

“Bah,” she shook her fist at the plain domed ceiling. “This better not be another puzzle.”

The Death Knight walked up to the altar, eyeing the surroundings for any traps or untoward shapes amongst the well-lit walls. Nothing prevented him from reaching his target, and he tilted his head in observation of the square stone shape that rose from the floor.

“What is it?” Sally called, still standing at the door-end of the room. If it was a puzzle, then she didn’t want to take a step closer, lest she throw up over everything as her brain took a vacation.

“Looks like... a coin slot.” Humphrey turned to her with a grin.

“My favorite sort of puzzle,” she gasped and started to run over, “putting the right shape in the correct hole.”

She slid across the stone as she reached the Death Knight and peered at the surface of the altar. Indeed, in the middle of the polished sandstone, there appeared to be a slot - just slightly slimmer than her finger, but as long as her hand.

“Why was your first instinct to try and fit your hand down it?” Humphrey narrowed his eye sockets.

“In case there were coins already in there we could steal, duh.” She rolled her eyes. Humphrey probably had no idea when it came to vending machines or claw machines or really any manner of machines - half of which she could barely recall.

There was a brief line of text beside the hungry coin maw, but it wasn’t in a language she knew. “What’s this say then?”

“You would think that as an ex-Observer, I would have the capability to read and understand all languages present in the System, and that-“

“Just say you don’t know.” Sally emptied her lungs through her nose. “Edward? Can you read it?”

With tired eyes, the demon followed over, standing around the other side and tilting his head at the muddy crimson lettering engraved in the stone.

“Unfortunately, I do not. It’s certainly odd, though.” He seemed genuinely perplexed and not just playing the part of not wanting to meddle.

Sally glanced around the room again. The runes on the floor she didn’t recall - although they bore some similarity to the demonic portal runes they had seen previously. Just the day before, perhaps?

“My best guess is...” she rubbed at her chin. “If we stick the sun-coin thing in, then either it opens a portal to somewhere else in the dungeon - or summons a big baddie to fight.”

“Fifty-fifty,” Humphrey nodded.

She hummed to herself as she went to open up her Inventory - pausing briefly to open Chat.

[Sally: now in a dungeon]

[Sally: 1/5 stars do not recommend]

[Sally: _]

She waited a few seconds for Chuck to respond, but he did not. A little shrug to herself, and she continued to hum and open up the right menu to withdraw the coin found earlier in the dungeon.

Gently, she placed it flat on the altar beside the ridges of the slot.

“See, but my question is...”

She then withdrew a second item to place beside the first.

Edward winced as he eyed up the Demon Coin she put down.

“What if we put this one in instead?” She wagged her eyebrows at the pair.

Humphrey shrugged. “Most likely, nothing would occur if whatever magic or mechanism is used to detect the right coin is not-“

Sally slowly slid the Demon Coin into the slot while maintaining eye contact with the still-talking Death Knight.

A wicked hiss filled the air as the lava falls turned a dark crimson, shadowing the chamber in a red hue.

Before them, the runes began to spark into life - white hot at first and then fading to a pulsing amber.

“*Fifty-fifty*,” Sally whispered, slowly withdrawing her dagger.