

Chapter 2.37

Taste of Metal

Sally was no stranger to pain. Although, with how overpowered they were, fights often ended without too much injury. These traps hurt quite a bit, though. Perhaps she was underselling it.

The harpoon that had pierced her torso had dragged her back through rising floor spikes. Her armor had deflected most of the damage, but enough had gone through to shred her legs pretty badly. After she had stumbled back through these, the end of the trap had greeted her. She imagined it was supposed to be some form of Iron Maiden - old metal that pierced right through her.

It was perhaps designed for adventurers slightly thicker than her, however - and utilizing the baseball bat; she had been able to wedge the two metal parts far enough apart to only be pierced by the end tips of the toothed maw of the trap. She should have chosen the left door.

Theo's regenerative aura would be really nice about now. She had heard Humphrey bash at the door and then argue with the demon. Assuming the bat didn't break, she could hold out here long enough for the Death Knight to solve the puzzle. In fact, she did feel like having a nap. She shivered, her body convulsing against the spikes, a painful expression of how the contrast of her warm blood felt against her cold skin. Why was her blood even warm?

Actually, she didn't feel like waiting. Slowly, she blinked. Oof, sleep would be nice. But saving herself would be even better. Gritting her teeth as one of the pointed metal parts dug gradually deeper into her muscles, she moved her arm to press the STAR.

She growled as blood coursed down her arm, and the trap groaned, pressing a spike against her forehead. From the intangible space of the System, a sword dropped to the floor from in front of her, landing at an awkward angle due to the plated lip of the trap. And then a second and a third clattered down, getting stuck between the spikes.

"You are under the impression that I know how to work this." Edward sweat as his light blue eyes darted over the mix of tiles.

Humphrey was gripping the edges of the altar so tightly his plated fingers had dug into the stone, his helmet flame becoming a blaze that illuminated the chamber in bright crimson.

"I've never been here before, you understand. I just handed over to your friend to F... to the boss here." His eyes darted between the Death Knight and the puzzle.

"You better do it," Humphrey seethed, "Sally is your only chance of freedom from the dragon."

Edward licked his lips and renewed his efforts. Tentatively, he moved one of the tiles.

Behind them, the door rumbled open - followed by the clattering of metal as Sally slid out of the trap chamber of a small wave of weaponry.

"*I yet live!*" she gurgled, her body unresponsive on a bed of dropped metals, as blood ran from her mouth.

Humphrey stomped over and lifted her gently to place her sitting against one of the walls. "You are injured."

"Only physically," she grinned, her eyes staring off into the ceiling. "There's like floor spikes and then a big mouth trap - it tried to eat me, Humps."

"You are not that palatable." He grinned. "I will set up a Campfire, but I do not have an Inventory, so I can't"

"Urghhh, I get it." She closed her eyes and exhaled. "You only have a few items."

Edward hovered in the distance as the Death Knight began setting up the campfire to slowly heal them all. "Is she... are you okay, Sally?"

"What, you don't think I can survive being cored and impaled? I'm not... I'm not... ah, you wouldn't get the reference anyway." She sighed. "Where's my stupid vampire guy?"

"I would hope that he is at least having more rest than us," Humphrey turned to her as he sat beside the lit campfire. "I do wish for his recovery, and not just for his regenerative assistance."

"You're a chunk of soft metal, Humps. I'm not sure he could have stopped me either." She exhaled and relaxed against the wall as the warmth of the fire made her feel comforted.

Quietly, Edward came over and sat around the fire with them, crossing his long legs.

"It's been a while since I've been humbled," Sally murmured. "Sucks that it was to an uncaring room."

"I can see your internal organs," Edward narrowed his eyes, unable to take them off of the injured zombie. "I'm not sure how I feel about that."

"Probably better than I do," she grinned before coughing up blood in the place of a chuckle.

For a few minutes, they sat in silence, until Sally was able to move her arms to open up the STAR and remove two [Healing Potions]. The first one was a struggle to get down, as her arm shuddered, opposed to rising to her mouth. After the wave of magical healing went through her, the second was much easier to down.

"Ah, nothing like a bit of magic, huh?" She pulled her knees up to her chest and wrapped her arms around her legs. "Doesn't quite heal the trauma, but hopefully, the undead part of my brain will cope with it."

Edward rubbed his fingers together, seemingly withdrawn. "Sometimes I wonder what the last death will be like. When I run out of levels. Dying hasn't been fun so far, but I can glaze over it because I know I'll come back. What about when I don't?" He looked up to the zombie, who was now beaming at him.

"Got ya! This whole thing was a ruse to get you to open up. Stole your heart; now you belong to us." She stuck her tongue out and felt pleased with herself.

The demon opened and closed his mouth, trying to process, and looked at the Death Knight.

Despite the grin also on Humphrey's face, he shook his head. "No, she didn't really get maimed for the reaction. But all rivers come from the mountain or something."

"Honestly," the zombie rubbed at her hair, "I just wanted to make sure you were okay on the inside and you weren't just a hacky two-dimensional B-Plot villain."

The Death Knight nodded. "We have standards."

"Yeah," Sally continued, "you should have seen the antagonist for the first area. Cliche *and* a hypocrite." She made a face as if she was retching.

"I'm not specifically your antagonist." Edward leaned back on his palms. "I'm just doing a job that happens to be assigned to your Party and happens to be something you don't agree with."

Sally shook her head. "You don't agree with it either. When was the last time you even asked for gold? Plus, you said we were getting reassigned to someone else more capable soon."

"I'm not sure I said more *capable*," he grumbled. "But sure - you caught me. I want out of the schemes of this sand pit, to have my own life to live. Several lives."

"Just think of all the good you could do with all those lives," she winked.

"Once the dragon is out of the way, I'm all ears."

"That would be pretty creepy." Sally stood from the floor, stretching her arms out and then brushing the dust and blood from her clothes. "Wow, we had a heart-to-heart with you before Lucius. Should we swap which demon we take with us?"

"I would prefer no demons," Humphrey stood and rolled out his shoulders. "Both irritate me in a manner, but this one is weak, and Theo doesn't like him for some reason."

"Hmm, yeah. True." She narrowed her eyes at the sitting demon. "Theo could sense when you were nearby. Why is that?"

Edward looked blankly up at the pair. "I have no idea."

Sally exchanged a quick glance with the Death Knight before extending her hand down to help the demon up. With a brief pause, he grasped onto her and lifted himself up, dusting off his suit.

"If it's something bad, you'll soon find out what happens when you run out of levels." Sally glared at him, her finger raised. "Theo is a goof, but he is my only reasonable ship - so I trust him more than most."

Edward furrowed his brow. "I'm not sure I understand the-"

"We'll cross that bridge when it requires decapitating," she smiled. With a quick turn, she put her hands on her hips and glared at the doorways. "Now, to get on with this terrible event."

The demon stood and watched the woman walk around the chamber, her clothing still matted with blood, as she withdrew her dagger. He was perplexed, and it was taking a while to fully absorb what had happened in the last fifteen minutes.

“You get used to it,” the Death Knight grinned at him as he passed. “Or you don’t. Some just get dead.”

Sally stabbed the middle of the puzzle with the dagger, and a screech of agony hissed from within as if a magical spell he had been dispelled, and was unhappy about the fact. The shunting sound of doors becoming unlocked around the room immediately followed.

“*Ta-da*,” she bowed before them, “I shall now give my dagger a name.”

“Skeleton Key?” Humphrey grinned and crossed his arms.

“Ah- oh, yeah! That would be much better than what I was thinking, huh.” She tilted her head in thought and then flipped the blade in her hand. “Skeleton Key, it is!”

Edward shivered and followed them towards the next door they intended to pick.