

Chapter 2.66 Two Little Words

The ground shook as the first of the meteors crashed into the road ahead of them. Only, they weren't made of stone. Sally narrowed her eyes at the golden object that was twisted like a rosebud.

"I feel this is about to get a lot worse," Chuck grimaced.

The bud split, a hiss of steam rising from the top as a large metallic figure stood up from within.

"Golems," Sally said as she sighed. "Thanks, Chuck."

Another explosion rocked the buildings over to the left as another golem payload cratered somewhere out of view. There were dozens of these Monster-laden projectiles come down into the Bronze district - possibly even a hundred.

A house behind them burst open, stone clattering across the street as an obsidian golem stumbled out. The green glow around its head was only slightly more surprising than the purple-suited figure standing atop it, his eyes a blazing light blue behind the cloud of dust.

"Ed!" Sally beamed. "Nice of you to join us."

The golem moved up to them, and the demon looked down towards the vampire.

"Theo."

"Edward," he nodded in return.

The tax-collector turned back to the zombie and smiled. "I've mostly come to share information. I have told them you'll probably intend to fight your way through the zone to get to the Gold district. My assumption is they're sending the golems to hold you back while Ruben can gather all forces in the Gold area by the mountain-palace."

Sally wrinkled up her face and looked back up the street to see one of the golems walking toward them. The ground continued to shake as the area was peppered by more golems - no doubt soon they'd be breaking through to their current position.

She very much didn't want to deal with any of the golems - so fighting their way out wasn't a good plan. Teleporting straight to Gold might catch them off-guard, but they also might anticipate that and have a trap waiting for them. With a sigh, she looked at the vampire.

"Theo, I need to deleg-"

"I should have known it would be you."

They all turned to see a figure standing atop one of the buildings. The man's cloak waved in the breeze, the hilt of a long sword stuck out from his hip.

"Dent?" Sally grinned.

The swordsman dropped down to the street next to them, his eyes tired and face even more rough beyond his age than when they last saw him.

“You’re really doing this, zombie girl? I guess you’ll want to call in that favor now.”

She nodded and looked around at the group. “I need you to keep Chuck safe. As cool as it is to have all the known faces come back for the final battle against the big bag guy, you’ll get squished.”

Chuck opened his mouth to complain, but looked at Dent and relented.

Theo rubbed his chin. “If they might trap us at Gold and want to keep us stuck here in Bronze - perhaps the best thing to do would be teleport to Silver and establish a safer place to house those that can’t fight.”

Sally nodded slowly. “Dent you know what their plans are?”

He shook his head. “I’ve been in the Bronze area for a while. Things have been tight here since the Champion vanished a few days back.”

“Yes.” Edward crossed his arms from atop the golem. “They killed Maeve.”

“Oh,” Dent rubbed his stubbled chin. “That tracks. We’ll round up any rebels and bring to the Silvers once you message me then?”

Sally beamed. “Perfect.”

Bandages shot out from Norah and wrapped between the approaching golem's legs, tripping it to the floor. Theo and Humphrey grabbed one of Sally's arms each and flung her like a slingshot, the zombie landing atop the metallic figure with her dagger plunging easily into the hard shell of the Monster. Her shadow repeated the same action, adding a second gash that she could grab with her hand. As the golem struggled to stand, she pulled the makeshift handle until the metal snapped, and then jammed her arm inside its head.

There was a pulse of energy from the Monster, and then it fell inert with all life leaving its body. Sally hopped down and Lucius popped up beside her.

Dent whistled. “You guys really are something, huh?”

“You best get going,” she wagged a finger. “I’m not standing around showing off in front of you.”

“Yes ma’am. Right, Druid, let’s go.” With a nod to them, he turned and started off down the street, Chuck following along after giving them a worried wave.

“What about you, Edward?” She looked up at him.

“As your Bodyguard, it’s very annoying when I get the tingle that you’re in danger. However, I can’t teleport with my golem and I can’t show that I’m double-double crossing yet.” He wrinkled up his face as he looked out to the burning town, the sounds of breaking rock and

approaching golems growing ever louder. "I will watch what the golems do and keep you updated. I imagine they are hunting you five only - or at least the better known three of you."

"If you find a way of stopping them..."

"I will." Edward bowed and went to move his golem away, before glancing at the vampire again. "*Theo*."

"*Edward*," he nodded back.

They briefly watched the demon leave before Sally clucked her tongue. "Love to see a future bromance about to bloom."

Theo rolled his eyes. "Let's go then. If we're dragging the golems with us, we'll want to be quick. Establish some control in Silver, and then outpace them by going to Gold by foot?"

"A better plan than I could come up with," the rest of the Party nodded along, "let'ssss hit it!"

Just as the building beside them exploded outwards at the emergence of a large golem, blue light flashed around them and they vanished.

A wave of vertigo, and then they were in another chamber. Similar to the receiving room of the Bronze area, but this one looked better made and more maintained. There were no guards, however.

"You think they've all gone to Gold?" Sally rubbed her chin.

Humphrey shrugged. "Seems odd that it would be completely unmanned, however."

"There should be some token force," Norah agreed, "at least to send communication if we came here."

Theo said nothing, but looked pensive. Sally understood it - they were in the depths of enemy territory and completely winging a plan to dethrone a potential demi-god. If things were going too well, it was suspicious. Failing upward didn't work unless you were actually failing.

She shook the doubts from her mind. "No worries, let's go establish a safe zone somehow quick as we can - and get the word to the Players." Then they could fail as much as they liked in the Golds.

They hopped up onto the side platforms and moved through the door. The hallway was even similar, except it had slightly nicer paintings along the walls. Almost made her want to teleport to the next area to see how much better those would be.

No surprise that the main office at the front was slightly better furnished, either. This time she turned to see the notice board on the wall - the Wanted posters sitting there proclaiming the great reward for their death. These said *Dead or Alive*, however.

She grabbed the fountain pen from the side table and scrawled an UN next to the dead, and cross the Alive part out.

With a smile she wagged her eyebrows at the unimpressed vampire and then pushed out of the double doors - closely followed by her Party.

And then they stopped atop a dozen or so stairs. The stairs led down to a wide town square - easily two hundred feet wide and deep. Maybe more, Sally was no good with numbers.

This was a shame, on account of what filled the square.

'Regiments' would perhaps be the most apt descriptor. Four of them, standing to attention and looking directly their way. Between the two middle ones, a large figure that was half plant, a cannon-looking object wielded across their shoulder. Between the other regiments were a pair of giant golems decorated with gemstones. They stood at least fifty feet tall and held giant swords of polished obsidian.

"Twenty Players, a Party each leading thirty System-created. One-Six-Three including the bosses," Theo murmured to himself.

"Welcome to the end of the road, un-pretty ones!" The flowered woman yelled almost melodically from the center.

"*Humps*," Sally hissed, her eyes wide. "*Conditionals are met.*"

The Death Knight gave a brief nod. "Theo, you need to buy us some time."

With a sigh, the vampire winced at being called up to perform. He took a few steps downward with his arms held high. Eighty-seven of the opponents looked capable of ranged attacks, possibly One-hundred-twelve if you counted projectile skills.

"May we parlay?" He yelled.

"Do we look like pirates?" The Champion laughed, a gaggle of surrounding figures joining in.

"*First thing I'm fixing about the System*," he muttered to himself. "How about a deal, then? We have plenty of gold if that is what Ruben wants?"

The Champion opened her mouth, but then narrowed her eyes as if reconsidering. "How much gold are we talking?"

"I can count it out if you're not in any rush."

"*Ten more seconds*," Sally hissed from the back.

"Bluffs and tricks won't work on us, vampire." The flowered figure brought around her cannon and grinned. "We'll just loot your dead bodies."

"Funny," Theo grinned and pushed his glasses up, his fangs exposed. "That was *my* next line."

“That doesn’t even-“

Vibrations pulsed around Sally, disrupting loose gravel. The sky, already a darkening amber color, now started shifting to a dull blue. Lightning flickered across the gathering clouds.

“That’s it, kill them!”

Eyes blazing a bright red, crackling with electricity, Sally laughed. A wild cackle, fitting for the most cliché evil villain.

Her hand shot into the air, and the temperature of the area suddenly dropped.

[Zombie Apocalypse]