

## Chapter 2.55 Entrapment

Archie yawned and stretched out.

“Yeah, this looks like a suitable spot.” Sally stretched out her neck. The first room of the pyramid seemed devoid of any danger and only had a small entrance on either side. Humphrey had gone through and checked everywhere for traps, places Monsters could climb through, or ports for gas or lava to flow from. It was just a room.

Which made it all the more suspicious.

Sally was tired, though. It would have been nice to have been able to eat the Champions brain, but it probably wouldn't have sat well in her stomach. It was a good thing they were no longer allied with any nearby normal Players otherwise she would be tempted to break bad. What was the point of being a villain in that case?

She let her stomach continue to grumble as the rest of the Party collapsed against the walls. The inside of the pyramid was surprisingly less run-down than she had expected. The stonework was half a soft yellow paint, and dark brown coursed from the floor tiles up to about midway on the walls in blocky, rectangular designs.

“I'll take first watch,” Humphrey offered, placing himself facing the open doorway to further into the pyramid.

There wasn't even time for her to argue or bring out a campfire before she was asleep. A sleep without dreams, but an odd feeling. Not exactly being watched, just an uncomfortable feeling of... change. She awoke and blinked the blur from her eyes.

“We were about to wake you,” Lucius waved from across the room. “You must have really needed that.”

“You mean she doesn't always sleep like the *dead*?” Edward rolled his eyes.

“Laugh it up, suits,” Sally stood up and groaned. “It takes a lot of effort to herd you weirdo cats. No offence, Archie.”

Archie was either still asleep, or didn't pay her comment any heed.

She stretched her back out and then withdrew her dagger. It would probably be bad form to drink one of the [Healing Potion] bottles just to get rid of the stiff muscles from sleeping awkwardly on the stone. Maybe she could just throw herself at the first danger and get a little injured, too.

After rallying the troops and prodding the cat awake, she started to lead them to the next room.

“I should probably go first,” Humphrey offered, pointing at the slightly arched doorway. The room beyond looked pretty plain and unassuming.

She hesitated at first, before allowing the Death Knight the honors. After all, he was her shield, so he'd need to-

Just as he stepped into the doorway, a large axe head slammed into him like a pendulum - the clang and resulting squeal of metal as it squeezed him against the wall echoing around the chambers. Humphrey growled and pulled the shaft of the trap with him, bending and eventually snapping the sharp metal piece off.

"Disarmed," he stated impassively, dropping the axe head to the floor to inspect the inch-deep gash running up the side of his armored body.

"Point made, no need to show off." Sally deflated and walked through the doorway, followed by the pensive shade and demon.

The new chamber had a doorway on each right and left wall right at the end corners. On the far wall was more text that only Archie could read.

"Left is to go up the pyramid, right is to go down."

"There's a down?" Sally sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose. As if things couldn't get any more complicated, she would have to considering things on another dimension. "Do we know which has your magical item?"

Archie and Humphrey exchanged glances before the Death Knight shrugged.

"Aren't you just going to flip a coin?" Edward verbally jabbed from behind.

Sally rubbed her face in thought. It was too early in the day, or whatever manner of time it was, to be stuck with such an issue. Where would she go if she was a magical item of some importance? Probably right at the apex. Harder to reach. But depending on the nature of the item and whatever was below them, it might also be hidden away somewhere dark and dangerous.

"Well, we always fail upwards," she eventually concluded, "so if we go downward, then if it's the wrong way, we'll eventually end up on top, right?"

"Sure." Humphrey shrugged with a wide, skeletal grin.

The others gave some manner of acknowledgement for her plan, either accepting her odd decision-making skills, or too tired to argue with the logic. Not that she wanted them to be pliable yes-men, but it helped get the ball rolling and stopped her from wanting to eat their brains.

Without ceremony, they continued to the door on the right, immediately leading to shallow steps and torch-lit walls. After a ninety-degree turn to the left, it went further down until it reach the first floor. The brickwork became less yellow and brown and more amber and black as they descended - as if the decor was darkening to signify they were moving below ground.

They stopped by the door and allowed the Death Knight to shuffle to the front. Sally looked at the engraving beside the closed stone door. It said B1, which was somewhat immersion breaking.

“That means this is the first basement floor,” Archie added helpfully after clambering up Edward's suit to sit on his shoulders.

“You know, I'm not a fan of *cats*,” Edward narrowed his eyes at the encroaching creature.

*“I'm the Architect.”*

“Focus, people.” Sally felt like she needed a nap already. Back to five oddballs again, and it was sucking the air out of the room. Not that she didn't enjoy their company, but the bickering made her feel Theo's absence more. If only her Party could be larger than five members. She crossed her fingers as she thought that out into the world, just in case the System was listening to her inner monologue. Or they should set up a second Party - but who would join which...

“Ready when you are, Sally.” Humphrey grinned from the doorway.

She nodded and turned to the Shade. “Assuming there's no trap, but there're enemies then go ahead and shadow form with Humps, okay?”

Lucius nodded, a thumbs up appearing beside him.

Although it had been fun having him help her out, with the Death Knight stomping into the room first, he would be a powerhouse with a shadow wielding a second greatsword. One big ball of metal and a swinging sword. The perfect defense.

Humphrey pulled the doorway to the side, the stone grinding heavily against the floor. With the flames on his helmet flickering higher, he stepped into what lay beyond. Silence followed, before there was the long escaping of air.

“It's a puzzle room.” His voice echoed out into the hallway.

With a groan, Sally slunk into the new chamber, followed by the others. There was an odd red lighting to the room that wasn't just coming from the Death Knight. Six statues stood equally feet apart in a grid. Each held an item and had a hand pointing in a certain direction. They were all facing random directions.

“This is impossible,” she slunk against the wall. “I left my thinking brain at home.”

“Don't be so eager to give up,” Humphrey grinned. “I think I have worked it out.”

She tilted her head and then turned to raise her eyebrows at the rest of the Party. Edward looked as drained as she felt, probably having dungeon flashbacks. Lucius had a question mark bubble twitching beside his head as he cupped his misty chin - so who knew what he was feeling. Archie was facing the wrong direction.

The statues were all relatively humanoid, but weren't detailed enough to determine if they were human or specific genders. Whether they were worn by time or meant to look this way, she wasn't sure, but-

Humphrey swung his sword around at the closest statue - the thing immediately cracking and splintering into dozens of powdery chunks. The only thing left atop their stand was a stumpy torso.

"Ah," the Death Knight scratched at his chin. "Perhaps not then."

"Now we don't know what that one was supposed to be doing," Edward worked his jaw, his right eye slightly twitching.

Sally looked over at the supposedly locked door on the other wall. "Do the statues rotate, Humps?"

He turned his attention to the next one that he hadn't battered. Placing his sword down, he took a wide grip around the lip of the base the statue was positioned atop. With a grunt, he tensed and made the attempt. At first, nothing - but then with a deep grinding, the base started to rotate.

And then tipped slightly as the Death Knight became unbalanced. The statue fell off the podium and burst across the floor. "Ah," he repeated. "I do not seem to be the right one of us to attempt puzzles."

"Humphrey," Sally slowly walked across the room. "Did you think of checking the door?"

He turned to her as she stood before it, and as she gripped it, it slowly ground across the floor and opened. She gestured with her hand and raised her eyebrows.

"So you've just destroyed someone's art collection," Edward tutted.

Lucius pulled his hood over his non-face a little more. "It's fine, it wasn't exactly good art..."

"Hey now," Sally wagged her finger. "No need to be a critic. True art is about the joy of expressing yourself. Even if the results are... lackluster."

She shrugged and walked into the next room.

Although, she seemed to stop about a foot into it, as her feet somehow stepped upon the thick air. She opened her mouth, but it became filled with something.

The floating skull just to her right said nothing, as a burning sensation began to flare up across her whole body.