

Chapter 2.72

Dragon On

Golden light filled Sally's vision. It was calming in a way. She could just give up and accept the inevitable. Finally, be done with this weird world and constant conflict. Find out where her soul actually went after this. That would be too easy, though.

[Share Burden]

The beam struck, blasting a large crater around her, the stone cracking and sizzling against the heat of the attack. As it waved away and cleared, the dragon landed before her, wind from the landing buffeting her stunned body.

Immediately, fifty nearby zombies burst into bloody mist.

"Full of tricks, aren't you?" The large dragon growled from in front of her. "Such willpower from a little error ridden girl."

Another beam formed in his mouth as Sally blinked slowly.

[Impenetrable Defense]

The spike of golden energy twisted in the air and curved toward the Death Knight, melting the ground around him as he shook, holding the attack at bay.

Ruben huffed smoke from his nostril. "How are you all too stubborn to die? It is very annoying." He lowered his head to glare at Humphrey as his defensive ability faded away. "Why must you come ruin my day?"

"You ruined the Wasteland." Sally raised her fist. "Made it hard to Players and System-created alike to live and prosper."

The dragon rolled his eyes. "Oh please, like you haven't killed and eaten your way through both yourself. There's not enough room for both of us on the high horse."

"Everyone deserves a chance," she glared at him. "Everyone lives and dies, but they have choices and options. You take that away from everyone."

"Is it because I treat the little ones like cattle? That I see you all as beneath me and nothing more than a stepping stone for me to gain power?"

Sally rolled her eyes. "Can't you see how cliché and short-sighted that is? You're falling on my blade because you're tripping on your own ego."

"Falling on you-" Ruben let out a deep laugh. "Speaking of ego..." He took a deep breath and another golden spike burst from his long maw.

[Dread Counter]

Theo appeared in front of her and absorbed the attack, his whole body crackling with crimson electricity.

“Put a shirt on, Theo,” she whispered, “you’re distracting me.”

He vanished away, appearing above the dragon and plunging his punch-blades into the golden scales atop Ruben’s head. There was a screech of sparks and then he was shaken from about the head to drop and roll a little distance away.

“What are you, *Level Ten*?” Ruben sighed. “Well out of your depth, all of you.” He loomed his face forward towards Norah. “What about you? Do you have an ability to prevent my attack?”

She just crossed her arms and glared at him.

“No? What about the shadow hiding behind the little dead one?” He raised an eyebrow to glare at Sally.

His head alone was the size of a bus, his fully body was massive. Even Theo’s critical attack hadn’t been enough to puncture through his golden scales. Maybe she should give him her cool dagger. Her eye twitched in thinking that would be a good idea - although they didn’t have time to swap all the normal daggers that would make it worth it.

The sound of heavy footsteps came out from the side, and they glanced over to see the obsidian golem approach, Edward standing atop it.

“Edward the Betrayer,” Ruben growled, light flickering in his eyes.

“You knew it would be... *eventual*.” The demon raised an eyebrow and smiled. “I may be a demon, but I’m not stupid. There’s evil and then there’s evil-“

“Yes, okay,” the dragon rolled his eyes. “This isn’t your redemption arc. You don’t need to start monologing me.”

Sally rubbed at her chin. She wanted to eat the brains of the dragon, but he probably wouldn’t be too keen on that. Ruben seemed powerful enough that it would be hard for them to do damage from the outside - but maybe if she could get him to eat her whole, she could stab him from the inside.

They had already used their strongest defensive skills, and she wasn’t too confident they’d do much with the offensive ones they’d saved up. Still, the fact that the dragon had come out from the mountain to stop them meant that he was worried and didn’t have many cards left to play. She glanced over past the Golds city to the mountain.

“So, are you really just trying to take over the world?” She tilted her head at him and put her hands on her hips.

“I’m trying to become invincible and all powerful. Isn’t that your desire, too?”

“Yeah, got me there,” she said as she grinned. “Are you going to give us the ‘join me’ speech part next?”

“No. You will just die now.” He opened his mouth wide and a similar beam grew, but this roiled with red energy mixed with the golden, as if it was empowered with flame.

[Bodyguard Edward has Died]

The blue light faded, and the Party stumbled into the Gold portal receiving room.

“Oops,” she grinned. The room seemed to be devoid of any traps, so they quickly rushed to the front office.

“He will assume we came here, so we don’t have much time.” Humphrey slid across the wooden floor to look through the window. “What is the plan?”

She shrugged. “Try not to die. Edward is now back in the mountain palace, so I’m hoping he has some wits about him.”

“Can’t believe I couldn’t hurt him,” Theo leaned in the corner, brooding to himself.

“*Shirt*, Theo.” Sally rubbed at her eye sockets. Things started getting real now. They had a hammer and all the nails had been beaten in. Now it was just a giant shark they had to... no, where was that even going?

She turned to the group, somewhat disappointed Theo was now wearing his leather armor. They all looked rather pensive about the whole situation, and awaiting her instruction. Her teeth clenched together.

“I’m kind of at a loss, gang.” The tension sunk from her shoulders. “We kind of just make it through stuff. I thought this was going to be just as easy.”

Humphrey walked up to her and put his hand on her shoulder. “It will be. We just need an opening to do some damage.”

“I can feel him approaching from the vibrations through the floor,” Lucius said as Sally’s shadow shook.

“Alright,” she stood up straight. “We’re in the Gold district - so we have the advantage of cover. We’ll need to distract him, split up, and try to avoid him. Hopefully, we can find some way of hurting him.”

They nodded, despite it being less of a plan that she had hoped. They flung the door open and stepped out into a beautiful courtyard. Above them, the sky was darkening, clouds of apprehension giving the fight some dramatic flare. Down the short staircase, they emerged in the groups of retreating Golds.

In a quick blaze of violence and panic, they were cut down and a few zombies stood up from the carnage. Then, the Outsiders scattered amongst the built up houses and buildings, just as the shadowed form of the dragon slammed down into the courtyard, breaking up stone and crushing plant pots.

“There was supposed to be a group guarding the teleporter,” Ruben growled, scouring the area with his large eyes. “Lucky for you, I suppose. But don’t think you can just hide from me.”

[Perfect Dark]

Night sky shadowed the whole area, as a crimson moon rose into the wide sky.

The dragon looked up and ran his forked tongue across his lips. "Theatrics won't"

[Mortis Bomb] struck him, marring his chest with a dark green smudge. Four zombies arose from the ground by his feet. With a quick motion, he lifted his clawed foot up and smashed it down on one of the slow undead, pulping it and cracking the flagstones beneath.

With a deep breath he shot a beam out toward some houses, tearing stone and wood into charred cinder, the buildings collapsing into dust clouds. He narrowed his eyes to see if there was any movement. There - he leaped forward and crushed the escaping figure beneath his claws. *A skeleton.*

Something drained his strength. Must be close by, and his tail whipped through another row of buildings.

"I will burn everything to ash to find you," he growled, snaking his head around the rubble. "Do not waste my time."

Sally pressed herself against the back of a building and panted. Too much cardio for one day. She had no idea where the rest of the Party was, apart from Lucius, who was still acting as her shadow. Cooldown on Mortis Bomb was still ticking away, not that it really did much to the dragon. The sound of cracking stone came from the opposite side of the courtyard, before Theo slid across the stone around fifty feet down the alleyway from her.

"Shit!" He muttered, before running the opposite way of her.

She dropped to the floor as the tail swiped through the building behind her, knocking stone and wooden beams across the alleyway. Unharmed, but that was close. She glared out at where the vampire had been to see a floating orb of crimson down the alley.

Ruben ground his sharp fangs together, searching around for the little man zipping across the way - just as he caught sight in his peripheral, he was prevented from turning by a bandage wrapping around his foot. He yanked on it and it came loose, to fall limply amongst the ruined buildings.

Movement again and he leaped forward, snapping his jaws around... another skeleton. He gnashed it apart in anger and spun back around. They were toying with him; he was sure of it.

"You are only delaying the inev-" he sighed before finishing the sentence. "I don't play games."

His eyes turned to pure golden light, and a shimmer of energy rolled down across his body.

Like a flash of lightning, he turned and lashed forward with his maw.

There was a crunch, and he rose with the blooded and limp body of Theo impaled between his teeth.