

I had no choice but to watch as the two people stopped at the edge of the chamber, a few feet short of the point that would activate me. Most people that came to my chamber nowadays just ran right in and did their business, not even allowing me the time to finish my speech. If my internal clock was correct, it had been two days since I had last been activated, and staring at a single point on the wall for any period of time was almost worse than my usual fate.

The one was almost certainly human, and given what I could determine from his gear, he had long since moved past the need to come here. He was tall and broad shouldered, his frame hidden by bulky silver armour trimmed in gold. The other, a lanky Elfin female, was garbed mostly in skins, with a chipped sword in her hand. She reminded me of the days, so many years prior, when the line of adventurers had stretched around the corner of the hall and out of my line of vision, each waiting their turn to strike me down.

I had hated those days.

The two had paused for only a minute, during which I assumed the more experienced human had told his companion what to expect. From this distance, I could neither hear them nor see the text boxes that accompanied the words. With confident steps, he approached me. As soon as he came into my range, my body began to move, stepping forward and letting out a loud bellow. "You are fools if you think you can defeat me. This labyrinth shall be your tomb! Guards, get them!"

The two kobolds who stood to my sides, out of my line of vision, ran towards the adventurers, weapons drawn. My body crossed its arms and remained passive, simply turning my head to watch as the battle progressed, occasionally barking orders at the kobolds. The human quickly grabbed their attention and drew them off to the side as the elf began to strike them, doing her best to avoid the lashes of their tails. It's what I had expected; he was teaching her how to run my encounter, while keeping her safe with his sheer strength. She wouldn't have to worry about dying today, and whatever my companions or I dropped would surely be an upgrade for her.

The human wiped his brow as he called out to the elf, not showing the slightest care about the swords being swung at him. "Careful, they're almost down. As soon as the last one drops, move behind me so the boss doesn't target you first."

The text box appeared over his head and, inwardly, I chuckled. It had been a long time since I'd seen one of them talk. Nowadays, the most I saw was a few words of anger

before I faded out; they were always silent during battle. If you can call a few seconds of pain and torture a battle. But as the second kobold fell to the ground, my body contorted itself in anger, lashing out as it reached down and pulled my axe from the loop on my belt. "You have lost your chance to flee. Come and meet your fate, become my dinner!"

I was surprised when I managed to make it to the final word. Usually, I was attacked the moment I was targetable, and dead before I could start the second sentence. These two, though, were waiting for me to make the first strike. I quickly moved to do, rounding on the human that was taunting me by banging his sword against his shield. As I moved in front of him, I saw the elf step around to my side, her chipped sword stabbing and slicing into my ribs and leg. I knew she would go down easier, but I couldn't ignore the programming ingrained in every fibre of my being, which pulled me to strike at the human, who effortlessly parried my blows.

As I felt the life bleeding out of me, I bent over, grabbing my axe in both hands. I saw the human take a few steps back, out of my range, as the large, red circle on the ground began to form. Though I couldn't see her, I knew that the elf hadn't moved. I could still feel her sword poking me in the side.

"Get out of there, it's an AOE attack!" The human yelled out, panic colouring his voice.

I saw the text box right before my body began to spin, striking out in a circle around me. I felt my axe strike solidly against the elf, and watched as her body crumpled to the floor, lifeless.

A moment later, mine followed suit. With a single blow, the human had done more damage than the dozens that the elf had inflicted upon me. I watched as he moved to her body and his hands glowed, followed shortly after by her eyes opening once more. She stood up with a "thanks" and moved to stand over my body, checking the spoils of her victory.

"Oh sweet, a mount! What luck!" She spoke with genuine joy, something I hadn't heard in a long time.

"Not really, the odds on that mount are like 50%. It's to try and entice you to run more dungeons, since all the rest of the mount drop rates are much lower. They give you the first one easily to get you hooked."

“That’s lame,” she replied, before both of them were enveloped in a warm light, and they faded away, leaving me alone to stare at the wall. It was two minutes before I reset. The second of darkness and lack of body when it finally happened was always the worst part, as I couldn’t help but wonder what would become of me if my body simply never returned. As with every time before, my body came into existence a moment later and started up my useless initialization process. I opened my eyes, my vision locked on the same patch of the wall directly in front of me and, as usual, tried and failed to take...

I blinked as my foot shifted forward. For that matter, I blinked. Neither of those things should have been happening. Unless somebody was in my chamber, I was stuck, unmoving, unbreathing, simply waiting with only my thoughts for company. But now, I could feel the air of the chamber across my fur as my muscles tensed and relaxed, the subtle sound of my own breath escaping my lips. This was new territory, an unexpected development. Was I finally free to leave this unending torture?

Taking a deep breath, I closed my eyes, and took my first step forwards.