

Title: Playing by Your Rules

Soundtrack link: <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL21aUnslcAUiumi0mlt57vKkMyOT4m0J8>

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You knew me too well. You knew that I'd never be able to resist, and that's how you tricked me into it.

As soon as I saw it, I was drawn to it. Just like you knew I would be. I didn't stop to think. It was intoxicating. A drug slipping its way through my body, trickling through all of my limbs and rocketing me forwards towards its irresistible glory.

I barely even skimmed it. My fingernail touched the rough exterior, but before I could proceed any further, my vision began to undulate, and I found myself slipping through the nauseating spiral of lights.

If it was the other way around, you'd have worked it out instantly. You'd have known what I'd done, where you were, what was happening, how to escape. It would have taken you mere seconds with that stupid oversized brain of yours.

Me, however? I'm too average for that. Which is why you chose me, right? Everything that has happened between us became irrelevant to you; I was just an object, a pawn, something you could use to elevate your already exalted status. Ambition always was your most prominent trait, wasn't it?

Mine, clearly, was trust. Or ignorance, I suppose. Despite all of the proof I'm given, I still continue to trust people. I still continued to trust you.

And that's how I landed myself here, in this silly little game. Yes, I've managed to figure that much out! Are you proud? Or are you too busy laughing at how slow I am? Well, for your information, I figured it out pretty quickly. As soon as my vision cleared and I saw the big neon "Go" sign. My grandmother was a bit of a hoarder, so I'd seen all of those really old-fashioned board games. I knew that I'd become a piece.

It took me a lot longer to figure the rest of it out though – it all came in tit bits. You probably planned that too, didn't you? You know how my brain works, how I perceive the world around me. You know everything – or so you think. Did you realise, then, that you were just a piece on the board too?

Obviously, I followed the arrow. Don't laugh, I couldn't resist! Did they promise you that you'd be able to watch, see the product of your hard work and all of your meticulous analysis on me? Maybe I'm not the only naïve one.

You're sitting on the edge of your seat right now, aren't you? You want to know exactly what I went through, what I did, if you were right about me. That matters more to you than piecing together what happened to *you*, doesn't it? See, you're not the only perceptive one. I know you, too.

Well, I'll talk you through it. As soon as I stepped over the line onto the second square, trees shot up around me and a swarm of pigeons began to circle me. A cacophony of cooing, a storm of swirling feathers, a bassline of beating wings. It was sort of magical. Well, I've always admired the beauty of animals, haven't I?

Then, the voice telling me what to do.

I refused of course. Harmless, innocent animals. They were pawns just as much as you and me, and I certainly wasn't going to kill them for it.

Almost instantaneously, a snake dropped from the sky. Yes, a real live snake. A massive one, body as thick as mine. It could've crushed me in an instant, but that wasn't the point of the game. Instead, it lifted me up and flung me backwards. I had to appreciate the thought behind it once I landed. Just like snakes and ladders, eh?

After that, I complied with the rules. I didn't really have a choice, did I? Backwards and forwards, trotting along the little squares, playing the stupid little games, rolling the enormous dice. If I'm honest, some of it was actually quite fun. The aerial assault course, for instance – people back in the 2000s used to literally pay money to do that sort of thing, and the zipwire was rather exhilarating.

Until it crashed. And I ended up with your head bashing into my chin. We became a tangle of limbs, a messy little human knot. You were completely out of it – you must have been hooked up and pushed, because there's no way you could've navigated that harness yourself.

It was obvious that somebody else was in control anyway, because we were dropped from the wire. I found myself clinging desperately to you as we dropped down, screaming mindlessly and thinking about the irony of dying with you in my arms.

I was sure I was dead when we hit the ground. There was no soft landing, but luckily for me, you broke my fall. We weren't meant to die, not then. I don't know what they did to us, but we were never going to perish before they wanted us to.

Something about the fall seemed to snap you back to life, and you climbed to your feet, shoving me away from you. You still weren't quite right, though. Everything about you was robotic, like you were being controlled by somebody else (which you probably were). Being the idiot that I am, I still took comfort from your presence, and I let you take control.

The game became a lot easier after that. We worked as a team, completed the tasks together. I even enjoyed myself. It was just like the old days – me and you against the world. A small part of me didn't want it to end.

But it had to. Everything that we'd been through built up to one final task: me and you, battling to the death. I couldn't believe it when I first saw it. Why put us through all of that, just to make us kill each other?

I, obviously, refused. You had no such qualms.

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