

Sally and Dent propped the tired druid up against an embankment of mud and tried to give him some air.

Norah tilted her head. "That's a new look for you, Humphrey."

The floating skull smiled sheepishly. "I will find a new body in due course, I am certain."

"You're still the big softie I adore even without the shining knight exterior." She smiled. "Do not fret."

Theo clicked his fingers and withdrew something from his Inventory. Into his hands, a flare gun appeared, along with a case of different colored flares. "Gold first," he murmured to himself, before loading it into the sky and firing it.

A streak of radiant light followed the projectile before it burst into a ball of bright light.

"Goblins have eyes on the area, so they know when the day was won." He grinned before loading a second one. As this went up into the air, a trail of purple shot up before blooming like a flower.

"What does purple mean?" Lucius asked, a question mark appearing beside his head.

Theo winked and stepped a few feet over to the side. Above them, a wide circle of dark green appeared, before a dark object fell out, crashing into the dirt and spraying mud and pulped zombie parts over everyone congregated.

Humphrey hovered up beside him. "I was going to ask how you knew, but I should know better than that by now."

An almost picture perfect replica of the original Death Knight armor now sat inert in the mud. A smoother metal, constructed to the same precision as the vampire's coffin, deep black with areas highlighted in a dark crimson.

With a flash of red light, Humphrey fused with it. The crimson areas glowing bright red as a flame flickered up behind his skeletal head.

"Ah, I feel like a brand new man, *ha-ha*." He grinned and turned as the Mummy looped her arm around his. "Your foresight is still slightly concerning, however."

"I know." Theo clicked his fingers before putting his hands in his trouser pockets and walking over to Chuck.

Edward was already there, his hands also in his pockets. "*Theo*. Apparently the System does not allow any kind of combat."

"Yeah? Want to try punching me to see if it works?"

The demon narrowed his eyes. "No."

"No, because you can't... or no, because *you can't?*"

Sally scowled up at them both. "Quit bickering for five minutes, you two. Theo, you have some explaining to do."

He nodded. "I agree, although you'll have to be more specific about what parts exactly."

"Killing Seven and taking ages to come back."

Theo raised an eyebrow at Lana, who avoided his gaze. "Well. You know how Bella's blood gave me super regeneration? And Edward's blood allowed me to respawn?"

"Yeah?" She narrowed her eyes further, before they opened wide. "You had a clone? Where are they now?"

"Dead." He shrugged. "Seven captured him and forced him to have a corrupted STAR."

Her mouth hung open. "What? When? *What?*"

"When the other me went up to the Cathedral. There were four *Last Word* members. Corrupted Theo couldn't be controlled, however, and he killed all five of them before I got there."

"And then you killed the bad version of you." She shook her head and sighed. "I don't even want to know how or when the clone came to be, when you switched, or whether you're the original or not. Okay?"

"Okay," he gave her a low bow, and rose to find that she was smiling at him.

"You did whatever bullshit you had to for us to win, thank you."

Archie yawned and stretched out. "Not quite the reunion I had imagined. I am glad to see everyone is well, however."

Humphrey leaned down to pick the cat up. "And what of you, little brother? Your eyes are still emerald."

"I liked this version best. Now that I am whole once more, I feel... like I am not as much of the Architect as he would have liked to have saved. While it may have looked like I just cannon-balled through the head of the other Architect, it was actually more akin to a key and lock situation."

"Using what you knew, you made it so that he had a vulnerable 'brain' that I could eat, and the crown that gives the powers comes with it?" Sally pulled a face.

"Correct. When Humphrey sacrificed his Death Knight life, it left them open for the only one who could immediately extract it."

"It tasted like carbonated blueberry." She nodded in agreement.

Chuck groaned and opened his eyes.

"You did it bud, you're the boss now." She prodded his shoulder.

“Ah, Doris retired?” He shook a daze from his head. “Oh, hmm. I’m *here* still.” With a raised eyebrow, he looked up at the swordsman and his face relaxed.

Sally prodded him again. “How’s the process? You feel powerful? Can you fix the System?”

“Ugh.” With a grunt, the new Architect stood up to his feet. “Let me have a look.”

They stood around and watched him as he closed his eyes and put a hand up to his forehead. The former druid hummed to himself for a handful of seconds before opening his eyes again - a light blue glow fading from them.

“I can see why the other guy had so much trouble.” He looked over at the cat and furrowed his brow. “Your naming convention and passwords are all pop-culture references.”

Archie grinned and waved his tail about. “A last act of rebellion against those that killed me.”

“It’s interesting, though.” Chuck rolled his shoulders out. “It’s a bit like a STAR menu, but different. And it’s not really code or magic, something in the middle.” He turned to Dent and gestured him over.

The swordsman stepped in front of the Architect, somewhat awkwardly, as if he was about to be presented with a knighthood.

“Calm yourself,” Chuck grinned, before putting his hand on the man’s chest. “Mmm. There’s... unfortunately, I can’t replace your arm.” He gave Dent a glum smile. “It’s like a part of your data has been deleted.”

“I’m used to it now,” he shrugged. “At least it gives me an excuse to try to be the strongest swordsman in the System.”

Chuck grinned. “Oh, you’re definitely the strongest.” His eyes then went over to the demon, and he gestured for him to replace where Dent was standing.

Hand upon his chest, the Architect furrowed his brow. “Okay... I think I see it. This will be useful, thank you. Lana next.”

Edward shrugged and moved away, slightly confused.

“Is this where you can tell me that I’m definitely a copy?” she asked, tilting her head.

Chuck shook his head. “No, there’s... your existence isn’t defined like that. This is early days, but your importance to this world cannot be understated.” He gave her a pat, and she moved into give him a hug. “You *are* Lana.”

“Thank you,” she whispered, before moving away.

Sally was nothing but smiles. It still hadn’t really settled in yet. They had *won*. Chuck was the Architect, and they didn’t need to struggle any more. Things literally couldn’t get any better.

Chuck swiveled around to face her. “Alright, you and Theo.”

They both stood in front of him. He closed his eyes and hummed to himself. "Well... bad news is that I can't turn you back into normal humans. Even knowing *how* Theo got this way... there isn't a clear reversal or even a way to duplicate it."

Sally pouted, but gave him a nod.

"However..." his eyes glowed bright blue. "You can now eat normal food, and... well, thank me in the morning." His eyes went back to normal, but he paused before he turned away from them. "Actually, *do not* do that. Pretend I didn't do anything." With a grimace, he moved over to look at who was next.

Sally frowned. "I don't get it. I don't feel any different, really."

Theo leaned over and whispered in her ear.

"Oh... *ohhh*." Her eyes widened.

Lucius was next up.

"Another one of the most important members of our little gathering," Chuck smiled as he put his hand on the Shade. "I think this should give me enough homework to start putting the System back together in a better shape."

"Eh, what? Rest of us don't have anything useful for you?" Jackie grinned and took a drag of her cigarette.

He raised an eyebrow. "Fight is over mobster. Want me to have a chat with Fran about making smoking illegal?"

"Asshole," she shook her head, but smiled wider.

"It's been a while since I saw my home," Archie said. "Perhaps we can go there soon."

"It would be nice to see my new home," Chuck said. "But one thing first." He then smiled before vanishing.

A few awkward seconds of silence passed, before he returned to the exact same position, earning plenty of raised eyebrows.

"Just had to lower the area four barrier and slay the rest of the betrayers who were part of the usurper's group." Chuck nodded toward Archie. "Perhaps Sally can give us a speech and then we'll head off to celebrate our win? ...Sally?"

"Huh?" She shook her head. "Sorry, miles away. What the what now?"

"Speech!" the Architect grinned, as everyone else started to join in with chanting the request.

"Alright, alright." She cleared her throat, suddenly feeling very put on the spot. "Where to begin? I started in this world as a humble zombie, full of anger and violence toward the System. I guess nothing really changed, huh?" She grinned before she continued.

“Making morally questionable decisions along the way, I happened upon at least a dozen really amazing people. My found family. From my adoptive pops, Humphrey, right at the start, all the way up to Fern, who is probably very traumatized from our interactions.”

“I am,” the dryad noted, sitting on the ground still.

“You’re all a piece of the puzzle that makes up my life here. Each of you has done your best and followed me through hell and back, even though I am literally a violent criminal. I’ve done a lot of bad things in the System, but it’s all been toward making this a better world for all of you goofballs, and any goofballs behind our trail of blood and destruction.”

She rubbed the back of her hair, now running out of pleasantries. “So, to sum up, thank you all for believing in me, helping me along the way, and putting your lives on the line. We’ve... we did it. We won.”

Theo started the clapping, and they all joined in. One of them might have even yelled pancakes, although Sally might just have imagined that. She felt like a dog that had caught the van, and although victory was sweet, the speech had made it real and overpowering.

[Teleportation is enabled]
[Mounts are enabled]
[All Skills are enabled]
[Stat Bonuses are enabled]

Chuck cracked his knuckles. “I’m keeping combat off for now. Monsters and Players alike can have a holiday until I have some things worked out.”

“What do you have planned?” Sally asked him.

“A way everyone can live here and be happy.” He smiled. “But for now, we need to celebrate, surely?”

“Hell yeah,” she shot a glance over at Jackie. “I’d love to go back to the tavern and see Fran and the goblins!”

The mobster shrugged. “I would sure like to see Fran, and we definitely deserve a drink or two.”

Sally gasped and put her hands over her mouth. “I can *drink* now.”

Chuck hovered up into the air atop waves of blue energy. “Alright, everyone gather around then. I haven’t done this before, so... if we all die or something, then that would be amusing, right?”

“One second.” Sally held up a finger and dragged Theo over to the rest of the *Outsiders*. “I started this because we needed to struggle and strive to rise against all the odds stacked against us... so, I am doing this as our first step into our new future.”

Humphrey grinned and nodded, as they all came in for a hug.

“I love you guys.”

[Party ‘*Outsiders*’ has been disbanded]