

She groaned and rolled over into a sitting position. Clearly she had died, and this was some manner of penance for all the evil she had brought to the world. The Chat window closed down and she palmed at her eyes. She didn't even like bowling and was still lukewarm on the dragon.

Opening her eyes to glare at the empty darkness surrounding her, she now saw another pop-up that was behind the Chat.

[Dungeon of the Mad]
[Solo - Difficulty: Hard]

That started to make some sense. She had accepted entrance to the dungeon in trying to escape getting skull further broken in. Hand up, she massaged where she had been struck. Bruised, but any other damage had been healed up. Must have been some ability to have hit her so hard.

Her eyes narrowed in trying to see where the exit was, but after a dozen feet or so, there was just pitch black gloom in all directions. Nothing in her STAR allowed her an easy escape, either.

"What's the point?" she sighed and asked the empty expanse. "I've already done solo stuff recently, and it's pretty boring."

It only ended up with her amassing a bunch of zombies and chewing through any problem until one of her friends showed up to temper her runaway mania. A dungeon would be no different.

The squeal of a door came from behind her and she spun around, the green flames of a prepared [Mortis Bomb] illuminating the surrounding fog. There was a doorway there now, but it wasn't open.

She rolled her eyes and went over to it. "Spooky stuff won't bother me. You really don't know who you're dealing with." Might be odd to talk to the dungeon, but somebody had to hear her.

Grumbling, she pushed open the door and stepped into a brightly lit room, causing her to cover her eyes with the back of her arm. Sounds started to filter into her ears as her eyes adjusted.

"You're late for your shift, Sally." A voice came from the side.

Wide-eyed, she lowered her arm to see the diner where she had used to work. "Miss Doris?"

"Who else?" The woman shook her head. "Get into uniform and take order. It's about to get busy."

Sally nodded slowly in disbelief. The tables already had several people sitting and eating or drinking coffee. Warm daylight came in through the windows, illuminating the place so familiar to her. Absent-mindedly, she changed her current outfit back to the white blouse and red skirt. Slowly, she shuffled around to behind the counter.

“Not bad, System,” she murmured. Next to the counter beside the till was a piece of paper. A character sheet for necromancer, a doodle of a very angry looking cloaked zombie at the top. Looked a little like her.

The door opened, and a figure was silhouetted against the bright light, barely any other details of the world visible beyond the entrance.

By instinct, a smile rose up her face. “How can I help you today?”

As the figure stepped forward, she could see that it was a man, and younger than the usual clientele. Maybe around her age. Handsome, but looked like he could recite half of the script of... that fantasy movie... by heart. She couldn't think of the right reference, which made her brow furrow.

“Coffee, please.”

“Sure thing, Theo.” She smiled again, despite the confusion. “Not dead, anymore?”

“Not here,” he replied, as she turned to find the coffee pot. “I can be alive forever here.”

“Must be nice,” she murmured picked up the container of coffee granules. *Ratjuice*, it said.

“You can stay here with me, if you like.” His voice was calm, soothing almost.

She rolled her eyes and turned back around, a mug in hand. “You must really underestimate me. Here's your coffee.”

“Oh?” Theo tilted his head. “It's not tempting?”

“I'm only playing along for my own amusement.” She glared at him. “You think I give a fuck about the diner anymore? I'm the Queen of the Undead you hacky excuse for mental manipulation.” Her hands clenched against the edge of the counter, splitting the wood under her tight grip. “Either maintain the illusion or let me proceed with your dumbass dungeon challenges.”

The Theo pulled a face, before fading away, the whole diner following suit—blowing away like dust in a breeze she didn't to leave nothing but an empty, stone room lit by a lantern.

Sally deflated and looked over to the side, where a large treasure chest sat beside a closed door. “If that is a mimic, I will become *untenable*.”

The treasure chest faded away like dust.

She stomped forward into the next room. Her feet squelched on soft flooring, as lanterns lit up. A chamber made of writhing and bloodied flesh. Figures sat up against the walls, their heads cracked open and brains missing.

“Pass,” she waved her hand and yawned. “I've got better things to do today if you could just hurry this along.”

A few seconds of silence passed before this illusion vanished away too. She had spent every waking minute of her existence on this world trying to come to terms with what she was, what she had lost, and the effect her actions had on the System. Some cheap party tricks weren't going to dazzle her or shake her to the core.

No door appeared.

"If you're struggling for ideas... how about the time that Theo and I tried to smooch under the Crimson moon—but now he's dead! What about reliving the time Humps killed Theo, and I was unable to stop it! All the loot I never looked at was secretly useful stuff! Show me that the world would have been better if I hadn't killed the people that I had!"

She clenched her jaw and relented to the silence.

"You are no fun." A voice hissed from outside her peripheral vision.

Sally turned, but there was nobody there. "I'm loads of fun, just not in this specific type of Dungeon."

"Well," the voice continued, now seemingly on the other side of her. "If you don't complete it properly, then how can I give you the reward at the end?"

"I'd rather just leave, thanks." She glared around, but still nobody was to be seen.

"Even though it is something that will..." the voice cut off and faded away.

Sally rolled her eyes. "You can't decide whether to say it'll help bring Theo back, or help me defeat the Architect, right? Which one is more important to me?"

"...fuck you!"

"Just let me out and I'll—" she stumbled out into the heat and smells of battles, directly into the weight of heavy armor.

[Eat Brains]

She pushed the figure over and glared around. The Death Knight was withdrawing his sword from a fallen Player, while Edward was patching himself up with some bandages.

"Oh, there you are." Humphrey grinned. "We were worried that you had fallen."

"As if." She rolled her eyes. "I just went through the Solo Dungeon."

Lucius popped out of the Death Knight's shadow and stretched out. "I did wonder why I was forced out of helping you. Almost ate some damage myself for a change."

"What Solo Dungeon?" Humphrey crossed his arms.

Sally jerked her thumb backwards towards the empty space she had vanished from. "Got a pop up over there."

He raised an eyebrow and stepped over the dead bodies to get closer to her. "There is nothing there. The actual Dungeon you have to enter physically, over there." He leveled a plated finger over toward the clear doorway leading down into the something underground.

She shrugged. Either that Player had a weird skill that stuck her into a space where her mental faculties were tested, or something else was keen to prod around inside her empty skull.

"Are you okay? What happened?" He put a hand on her shoulder, concern in his skeletal face.

"It was somewhere with a lot of illusion magic, to either trap me or cause me trauma, perhaps." She rubbed the side of her head with the staff. "The diner from the old world, bodies of people I had killed. Then I broke it, so it let me out."

"That doesn't surprise me," Edward murmured, as he walked over. He was soaked with sweat and had rips through his bloodied suit.

Humphrey scratched at the side of his head. "Hmm, I am not aware of such a thing. Even with the memories I have absorbed."

Sally pouted. "So that was some kind of bespoke shenanigan? Someone targeting me to take me out?" She glared around the area.

"Yes. Shame they underestimated you."

She waved him off. "I have plenty of issues, but I'm aware of them. Prodding at my last life, my morals, or what is troubling me at present just makes me angry. And hungry. But I couldn't see them to eat them." Her head tilted to the side and pouted. "Think it was Seven or the Architect?"

Humphrey opened and closed his mouth a few times. "It is too beyond me to say. I could imagine cases where that could be possible, but it is unlike anything I am aware of."

The zombie deflated. Architect could probably do something similar with little issue. Seven could only do it if they had some kind of Unique ability, or their STAR had been corrupted. Those should be the only two currently targeting her specifically.

She turned her head toward the Dungeon. "So I guess we still need to do this, then?"

"Yes. There might be more Reds in there as well. It is not a 'closed door' dungeon." The Death Knight looked over at the other two, the Shade helping to patch up the demon. "We can't rule it out as a hiding place for Eyepatch."

Sally nodded. She was glad that the three had no issue finishing the Players off, even if they did look a little more damaged than usual. [Living Dead] wouldn't help Edward, but she threw it up for the rest of them. She ground her sharp teeth together. There was something stuck in the back of her mind.

A choice to be made. Some weakness to be erased. The illusion dungeon put it all into perspective—helped her instead of breaking her. With the weight of everything happening in the System, there was a moment of clarity in her aching head.

“Lucius,” she gestured the Shade over. “I want you... nah, I can’t even make that joke.” She sighed and shook her head from side to side.

“What is it?” He slipped over some gore as he tried to get closer.

“I want you to use [Seek Answers] on me.”