

The ground shook as the radiant bolts fell down around the scarred battlefield of the graveyard. Sparks crackled in the air like electricity where they struck the thick mud, as the gathered Parties tried to avoid the attacks.

"They're not stopping," Sally growled, before leaping to the ground, a bolt buzzing as it flared just behind her.

Theo's coffin opened up, and he popped out, spinning to land back atop it. "Sallyyyyyy." he cooed. "What's going on?"

She narrowed her eyes at him as she picked herself up. "Observer fight before we beat up the Architect. Did you even sleep?"

"I removed two stacks of exhaustion," he replied in an odd monotone. "But plenty still remain."

A bolt dropped from the sky and struck his coffin. The glow of golden electricity pulsed across the shiny metal surface and crackled up the vampire's legs.

"Ah!" He said, jolting off of the coffin and into the mud. "Now my bones are extra itchy."

"I'm too tired for this." Sally sighed. The fight against Ruben had been a protracted battle too, but at least she had an army behind her and countless brains to consume. She didn't want to eat anyone that was corrupt, and now the Observers weren't likely to have anything worth chewing on either.

"Allow me, boss." Jackie stepped forward, her repeating crossbow aimed at the sky. Light blue energy waved around the cylinder as she fired a single bolt. It arced through the air and struck the bird-Observer, their body suddenly freezing over and turning a similar light blue.

As they dropped from the sky, the mobster continued to light it up with a continued spray of bolts, her weapon burning a bright orange as it fired at greater speed than normal.

Before Sally could lend her thanks to Jackie, the nearest trees burst apart as nine figures burst forth. Each of them with a skeletal head that burned with light blue fire. Each of them different Monsters. Each of them intent of stopping the *Outsiders* from attacking their boss.

She flourished her staff, before realizing that the end was normal again. "Shit! My dagger fell off." Hardly any time to dig around the mud for it - it must have broken off when she threw it at Seven to break his shield.

"Lucius with pops," she commanded, collaring the vampire to drag with her to the circle of scoured dirt where the Red Player had been.

A green glow illuminated the area, and Dent sat up with a cough. "Oh hells," he shook his head, trying to clear his eyes. "What happened?"

"Sorry swordsman," Chuck smiled softly as he put his hand on Dent's shoulder. "Your duty isn't over yet."

“Balls,” he replied, getting to his feet. “I won’t let you down this time.”

The druid rolled his eyes. “Don’t be an ass. Talking time is later, killing time is now.”

Sally slid across the dirt, while the vampire hopped up and down at the edge of the area that was burned out around Seven’s corpse.

“I’ll thank you later for cushioning my fall, pup.” She narrowed her eyes around the gloomy mud for her weapons. “When you can appreciate it... and understand it.” She briefly raised him a concerned eyebrow.

“Fifty-six, fifty-six,” the vampire replied.

“What?” She sighed before spotting the reflective silver of the [Skeleton Key] buried half in the mud. “Aha! Get ready, pup. Choose a target or something.”

“Seven sevens are forty-nine, eight sevens are fifty-six.”

“Perhaps you should stay in your...” she paused and let the words sink in. Sane Theo had said that Seven had probably absorbed the Observer they had abandoned near the Spire dungeon. Did that mean there were eight versions of him when they split?

She stepped up at the vampire, who was drooling as he stared down at the approaching Observers. “You need to do me a favor, pup.”

“Anything for my Queen,” he said with a grin, although his eyes remained focused forward.

“Track down and kill Seven.” She held up a fistful of the previous Red leaders inside meat. Maybe lungs or something.

The vampire sniffed it before giving it a brief lick. “I have his taste. I’ll be back, Edward.”

Sally narrowed her eyes at him as the vampire sped off deeper into the graveyard. She spun her dagger in her left hand and sent [Mortis Bomb] off toward the Observers.

Humphrey was at the forefront, a wide grin on his face as he blocked two of the encroaching enemies. One was some kind of warrior with a large axe, and the other was a centaur with a spear. With Lucius adding in a shadowed greatsword, they had no issue in holding their own, even with their slower speed.

Some kind of octopus-Observer was currently being held up by Norah, her bandages tripping the weaker legs and holding the weapon-arms together. Jackie was pinning down a spellcaster, an owl-like Observer in shimmering purple robes.

Chuck was assisting Dent and Edward as they darted into the flank, flickering their weapons through the less armored of the foes. Lana was sticking near Fern, protecting the dryad who was still recovering, but letting off a crossbow or utility skill towards the fray when she could.

Sally tilted her head toward the Architect. He was floating there, watching. Things had been oddly cordial, and she knew in her heart that the gathered Observers wouldn't really be much of a match for the *Outsiders*, even if they were tired and powered down.

While not engaging in the battle himself, there was something she didn't trust about the floating figure. With a scowl across her face, she marched toward him.

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Theo slipped into the cathedral on his tiptoes, despite verbally making creaking noises every time he stepped. The spacious interior was just as gloomy and poorly lit as earlier, with a slight chill to the stale air.

There was also a shadowed figure, breathing heavily before the statue.

"Hellooooo!" the vampire called out. "Looks like your *number* is up!"

Seven stood and turned his head towards the large doors. "Didn't think any of you were smart enough to realize I had another. Laugh it up, though, while you can. I am spent. Weak." He held up his arm to show the previously red STAR. The corruption now faded away, the System button now pale gray and inert.

"Boo hoo," Theo said as he rolled his eyes. He clicked his fingers and the candles along the walls burst into flame, illuminating the interior softly. "You're in my house now. I'm here to judge your sins."

"Go ahead, I have nothing left to offer." The man held his arms open. "Your zombie wench all but destroyed me. I am a ghost now."

Theo grinned and started to walk towards him, hands in his pockets. "Any final words?"

Seven smirked, his eyes narrowing. "You mean any *Last Words*?"

Shadows flickered behind Theo, and his eyes widened.

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Humphrey wrenched his sword out from the torso of the centaur, their skull flickering and fading away as the body dropped to the floor. "Such a shame to see my brothers turn to ruin." He grinned at the warrior who was trying to regain composure as their legs bled heavily. The empty eye sockets of the blue flaming skull narrowed.

"You know, your footwork ain't half bad." Dent slid across the ground, and raised his sword-arm back up and the demon slew the spellcaster.

"Don't get any ideas. I'm not in it for the bravado." Edward grinned. "Combat isn't my speciality, but when fighting for our existence..."

The swordman's blade glowed bright red as they ran off toward their next target. "Fair. What is your speciality then?"

Edward's eyes narrowed. "Being an asshole. Subverting expectations."

"Being best pals with the vampire?"

The demon flashed forward, stabbing at a large elf-Observer currently healing and support the ones on the front. "If I gain his trust and friendship, then it will make the inevitable betrayal all the more sweet."

"Whatever you say, pal." Dent lunged forward with his own attack, a wry smile on his face.

Unable to move any longer, the octopus-Observer took the full brunt of a volley of bolts from the mobster, their skull eventually cracking and blue fire diminishing.

"Fuck yeah," Jackie grinned, spinning up the cylinder to look for the next target.

"We make quite the team," Norah said with a soft smile, bursting up a pyramid amongst the Observers to knock one to the side so that they could repeat the process. "You left the *Outsiders* back in the Forest area?"

"Sally and the rest of the shmucks are fun enough, but I was soft on a gal." The mobster shrugged and brought up the sight on her weapon to ready her next shot. "Dropped the adventuring life to run a tavern with her."

"If not for love, what greater fight is there?"

Jackie fired off a flaming bolt which exploded on the hapless Observer trying to escape from the entangling bandages. "Don't get me wrong, it's nice to get my boots dirty again, yeah? But it's coz the undead gal can keep that little dream safe that I'm here."

Sally stood before the Architect, her arms crossed. "What are you playing at here?"

He tilted his head to her. "Huh? Are you not meant to be fighting?"

"I do what I want. You're the one who is not acting as expected."

"I am a living god. I'm not about to stoop so low as to start punching my enemies because they think they can threaten me." He shook his head and turned back to the battle.

"You mean, you're having trouble accessing actual power, and you're hoping your goons will seal the deal so that you don't have to waste what little power you actually have in getting rid of the one and only threat to your ascension?"

The Architect stopped hovering, and slowly turned around to face her fully, a deep scowl over his empty sockets. "You know, you're really fucking annoying."

"Duh," she said with a wide grin.

Lana crouched down and swore, fumbling with her crossbow reload. She was tired and stressed, sure, but this was no excuse for being sloppy.

“You know,” Fern said, tilting their head toward her. “Sally wouldn’t hold it against you if you left.”

“I know. And I would, but... what would be the point?” The woman brushed the dark curls from her face. “This is a lot more than I signed up for, but there probably isn’t a greater thing that I could do with my life, right?”

She narrowed her eyes back toward the cathedral. Something wasn’t right.

Chuck yawned and cast another heal on Dent, before bringing up a wall of thick bark to wall off another Observer from trying to flank in his direction. Compared to some of their fights, this was comparatively easy. The enemy seemed to have a desire to pulp the Death Knight more than anyone else, and they weren’t having a good time of it.

He raised an eyebrow back at the zombie. She was in conversation with the Architect and they both looked rather tense. It wasn’t like her to miss out on a fight, but then again, it was going rather smoothly compared to the fight against Seven. Too well. Now *he* was suspicious, too.

If Seven had the power of seven Observers, or well, eight, then he... Chuck furrowed his brow. And where was Theo?

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The vampire looked at the floor, which wasn’t too far away now that he was on his knees. It was also covered in a lot more blood than usual. *His blood*, which was unfair because he liked to keep that in his own body for the most part. He would like to chastise those responsible, but his tongue didn’t feel like moving.

Mostly because it was about a dozen feet away. Which was a lot of feet, for his tongue. It would probably blush if it understood the humor of it, but it was unable to confirm that to him, unfortunately, on account of the separation.

“I’m not going to kill you,” Seven said, now flanked by two figures. “Don’t want you running back and telling on us.”

[Blood Shift] wasn’t working, despite the charges being there, eager for him to attack. His punch-blades lay on the floor, a place they shouldn’t be, in his opinion.

“In fact, you’ll be very useful to us once we corrupt that STAR of yours.”