

The sounds of combat were muted from back in the cathedral. While the candles had all been extinguished, the occasional flash of blue light or powerful ability shone brief illumination inside the gray interior.

Atop the base of the statue, four heads continued to stare in shocked awe at the fate that had met them. A macabre display of what someone so powerful could accomplish if truly separated from any chains tethering them to normal morality.

A body, amongst all the blood and gore, lay broken in the middle of the floor. Rivers of crimson ran from two puncture wounds in the neck of the corpse. Broken glasses lay amongst rubble, as some of the structure had not been able to escape the becoming collateral in the intense fight.

Despite the calm now settled in the building, slow footsteps echoed out. Away from the body, towards the door and outside world. Blood dripped down to the floor, decorating the stone amongst red shoe prints trailing behind the victor.

As the wooden door opened silently, a wide grin was illuminated by a flash of blue. Long fangs picking up the light with practised precision.

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Humphrey hummed with power. The flames of his ability engulfing him briefly before being washed away by a gust of energy.

Now, now longer in his dark crimson and black suit of armor, he radiated despite the lack of light. He was taller, each of his limbs thicker and gleaming in a reflective white. His new appearance was blockier, and his helmet no longer had the skeletal grin, but instead a flat plate angled into a triangle. Two eyes of flaming green energy blazed brighter than his usual crimson flame ever had.

He flourished his sword and stood to oppose the Architect.

*“See, told you he was a mecha,”* Chuck murmured to the zombie.

Sally had been waiting for this. The big metal lug had been keeping his Ultimate to fight against the Architect, and now that he had the full Archie in him... well, she didn't really know what it meant. Only that the cat was the key to winning this battle.

Still, something was not right. She scowled at Chuck again. “Do you know what is going on?”

He raised an eyebrow back at her as he prepared a spell. “Like, in the grand scheme of things, or more specific?”

“You made plans with Archie, right?” She winced as Jackie burst out an attack through the air. “What's actually happening here?” She turned and watched the Death Knight burst forward to engage the Architect in melee. “I suppose I feel like I'm a little useless right now.”

“Nah.” Chuck shook his head and smiled. “Everything here is because of you. Anytime one of us attacks or heals, it's an extension of everything you've fought for and put together.”

Sally tried to consider this. She had said before that Theo and Humphrey were like her sword and shield, and that in being queen it meant she didn't need to dirty her hands always. This was like that, but bigger. Over time, she had gathered all the pieces of the puzzle to *hopefully* take down the Architect and fix the System.

"I guess you're right. I wouldn't be here without all of you, either." She smiled as she watched the Death Knight.

"Even me?" a voice came from behind them.

They turned to see Theo standing there, his clothing and most of his chest in bloody tatters.

Humphrey flashed out with his sword, green light following the blade as it burst into flame. He ducked and spun around, knocking back both axes of the Architect and causing him to vanish and appear nearby.

"Perhaps I was a fool to not take you more seriously," the Architect growled, his axes switching to maces. "I had hoped you'd get the hint after I tried to assassinate you."

"That just renewed my ambition," Humphrey replied, leaping into a downward swing. "Knowing that you were afraid of me."

"Afraid?"

"Theo!" Sally grinned at him before her expression sunk away. "You look... *bad*."

He withdrew his hands from his pockets and shrugged, exposing his normal STAR to the extremely tense Chuck and Lana.

"Oh, thank fuck," the druid said and sighed deeply. Lana nodded along eagerly with this assessment, but still didn't feel safe enough to say anything.

The vampire stumbled down the mud and collapsed into the waiting hug from the zombie. "Got some good and bad news, my queen."

"What is it, pup?" She ran her fingers through the back of his hair to find it was matted with fresh blood.

"Killed Seven and the rest of the *Last Word*. Lost all my special blood powers, though."

"Oh, pup." She gave him a squeeze. "Architect just disabled passives, that's all."

Theo gave a tired look over to Chuck and Lana. "No, it's not."

Sally gave him a pat on the back. "Here, take a health potion. Pops has just gone super-mode. You good to fight?" She narrowed her eyes back to the group fighting. "Wait, Lucy hasn't used his Ultimate either, the little sneak."

"I'll do what I can. Not quite feeling myself." He worked his jaw. "Or... feeling too much of myself. It's hard to tell." With a shrug, he walked over to retrieve his coffin.

Chuck rubbed his face. "Can't wait to have to address that later."

Lana shuddered. "I suppose he *did* have my blood, right?"

"What are you two murmuring about?" Sally scowled. "Let's go kill the Architect! Hit it Lucy!"

Without waiting for a response, she leaped down the from the ridge they had been populating and ran toward the battle where Humphrey was exchanging blows with the large blue figure. [Meat Hook] struck the Architect near the bottom of their robes and she dug her heels into the soft mud, spraying up a wave of dirt on approach to obscure herself.

Lucius popped out of Norah's shadow to use his Ultimate, a shadowed version of himself appearing under each of the *Outsiders*.

Another two arms extended out of the Architect, large spikes at the end instead of hands. One darted in toward the zombie, striking just beside her before she was upon him. Her dagger went into where his leg would be, more dark blue blood spurting from the wound as a shadowed version repeated the action. As the second spiked appendage stabbed out at her, a flash of darkness had Theo in the way, blocking the attack with his punch-blades crossed against him, assisted by those granted by the Shade.

The vampire hit the dirt and slid through the mud. Bright red light had given life back to his eyes, a heal from the druid running through him where his passive regeneration could no longer do the job.

"More worms wriggle out from the soil," the Architect seethed at the vampire, before turning his focus back to the Death Knight.

Bandages flung Sally through the air, and with a fist raised back, she threw a punch out - connecting with the skeletal fact of the Architect.

As Humphrey charged up a powerful upswing, a pyramid burst up from beneath him, popping him up into the air so that his slash went over the prepared defenses of the two axes, a shadowed version of the attack ensuring the first went through unhindered.

The Architect flashed away from the combat, appearing a short distance away to examine the long line of dark blue up his chest. "It seems this is not working, I will return when you-"

[Compelled Duel]

"Fool, I'm not going to..." The skeletal face of the Architect contorted in weird ways. "No! But how?"

Humphrey grinned beneath his mask and held up his free hand to beckon the large figure closer. "I have the power of the old god and found family on my side."

"Fool!"

Sally rolled her eyes and walked back up to the ridge with Theo. "Necessary evil," she grumbled. "Stops the big boss from running away and blah blah."

Theo shrugged. "I ever tell you that I love you, Sally?"

"Of course, who doesn't?" She smiled and punched him on the shoulder. "All that death and exhaustion got you feeling sappy?"

He looked over at the pensive druid and Lana. "Ah, I'll tell you later."

Edward stepped over and narrowed his eyes at the vampire. "*Theo.*"

"*Edward.*" He narrowed his eyes in return before they went in for a hug.

"For some reason, I feared something dire had happened to you."

The vampire stepped back away and smiled. "Nah. The only person powerful enough to stop me would be another me." His eyes darted briefly back to the pair of humans, who both held an uncomfortable grimace.

Humphrey danced beneath the blades, twisting away from the attacks to dart in himself. Another brief line of dark blue against the robes of the angered Architect.

"How can you even damage me? You are infuriating! It is *his* power, isn't it?"

The Death Knight activated his parrying ability, blocking the flurry of blows leveled at him. "I do not know what you mean."

"Of course you do, betrayer! The false Architect split themselves into fragments after I poisoned them. You hold the powers of the cat." He grew another two arms, these ones also pointed spikes.

"Scared of a cat? Such folly unbecoming of the Architect!"

Sally rolled her eyes, before looking over at the rest of the group arranging themselves in a certain position. "What's going on?"

Norah paused. "It's part of the plan, hun."

"Told you that she doesn't read her messages," Chuck murmured, before shooting her a sheepish grin.

Theo put his hand on her confused shoulder. "Don't worry, Humphrey and I had this planned out. Just do what comes natural to you." The vampire took the end of an offered bandage and walked to the other side of her.

The Death Knight dropped his sword, the weapon spinning away to stick into the dirt as he clutched at his injured arm. Green fire bloomed in his eyes as the Architect loomed over him. As one, all six arms turned into large hands, and they grabbed up Humphrey to lift him into the air.

"Such a curious waste of resources. All that power, just to be squished like an insect?" The skeletal face grinned towards the plated figure as his hands squeezed tighter.

Humphrey winced as his form started to buckle and squeal. "You do not have the strength or conviction to crush me, let alone run the System."

"Wrong." The Architect buzzed with energy as he pooled his power into his hands. Sparks and steam hiss out from the joints of the empowered Death Knight as he was crushed further.

"*Ha-ha,*" he laughed. "I lose. Making me the winner."

With one last push, the Death Knight broke. The power left him, returning his armor to the small black and crimson design, albeit now twisted and silver in several places. His helmet hung limp, shadowed in the grip of the Architect.

Then, his chest burst open, and a rail of orange energy shot through the air, striking the Architect through his forehead.

He dropped the spent armor to the floor and clutched at the wound with a pair of his hands - a split going straight through his head. He turned his eyes to see a ginger cat drop to the floor on the other side.

"*You,* I am not so easily..." he hissed, before the rush of air caught his attention too late.

[Eat Brains]

Sally bounced off of the empty head of the Architect and fell down to the ground, landing uncomfortably on the wet mud. "Archie!" She immediately sat up and vomited, light blue liquid flooding over her hands until a crown was painfully expelled.

"How... dare... you," the tall figured hissed, as he sunk to the floor.

With the flick of her brain-vomit soaked hand, Sally threw the crown out across the battlefield like a frisbee, to land straight into the hands of the druid. With no hesitation, he lifted it up and put it upon his head.

So much had just happened that it was hard to properly parse through it all. Sally looked over at the crushed body of Humphrey, her eyes filling with tears at the sacrifice he had made to allow her that opportunity to attack.

"There's no need to cry. Everything is well."

She looked up at the familiar voice, to see the floating purple skull grinning down at her. "*You lump,*" she sniffed. "Had me worried for nothing." Her eyes turned over to everyone else, all of them currently looking at the druid with apprehension across their faces.

Chuck flickered, his normal appearance turning fully blue before going back to his usual look. Back and forth a handful of times, until he slumped over to the ground as a Player.

"Everything okay, Chuck?" Sally slid over and crouched down beside him, concern on her face.

“I really hate wearing robes,” he complained.

Dent stood over him and scowled. “You’ve been wearing them all year?”

Chuck smiled. “Dress for the job that you want, right?” He held a hand in the air. “Things are pretty confusing, but how about this for now?”

[All combat is disabled]

“Enjoy your pacifist run,” he murmured, before passing out.