

## Chapter 62 Behind Green Eyes

"*What?*" Red flame jettisoned from the back of the Death Knights helmet.

"How is that possible? Aren't they a god?" Sally darted a look to the vampire, who shrugged in return.

The voice of the mobster shouted out from behind. "Got your message, tin-can, what's the- oh, hey Boss, fangs."

Humphrey turned and plucked Archie from the floor, grabbing the ginger cat by the scruff of his neck. With arm outstretched, he held him aloft towards the fading skull.

"*Merge.*"

"I... cannot, too... weak... against p-protocol..."

"Merge, or *perish.*"

Sally had never heard the Death Knight sound so serious or on edge. Things could not be good if the Architect was no more - what did this mean for them? Would the world as they knew it start to collapse?

She watched as the green Observer relented and hovered slowly towards the presented animal. With a green flash - they merged.

Humphrey turned Archie to face him. The once amber eyes of the cat were now bright emerald green, but he looked otherwise unchanged. The Death Knight narrowed his eye sockets. "How successful was the transfer?"

Archie blinked a few times before he opened his small mouth. "I'm still Archie, I think. But now I have... memories... and understandings that I did not before."

The cat was placed on the floor. "P-2T did not have the necessary strength to fully control you, but his will persists within you."

"Do you know what happened?" Sally crouched down beside him to stroke the fluffy head.

"Poison, in simple terms." Archie nudged into her hand. "Something had been weakening them for a period. I am sure even Humphrey had suspicions."

The Death Knight nodded and crossed his arms. The flames behind his head had lowered but still simmered with an above-normal ferocity. "Glitches are a result of that, was my presumption."

"It was minor at first," the cat continued, "but the connection was just severed. In the odd memories I now have, I can tell you that thirty-eight Observers have perished, and thirteen have bonded with Monsters, excluding the two of us. That leaves eighteen unaccounted for."

Theo scratched his chin. "Is there any way for them to survive without merging?"

The cat shook his head. "Although most of the world is no longer directly connected to the Architect, the Observers were more closely bound to their power."

"Unless the eighteen merge, they too are lost. For many, the choice to be erased is the correct one." Humphrey looked out to the darkened horizon. "We will need to keep an eye out for the Merged. Their prior knowledge of the System's inner workings may prove problematic in our adventures."

Sally scrunched up her face and resigned to sitting down fully, allowing Archie to climb into her lap. The warmth and slight purring just reminded her that they needed some good sleep pretty soonish. Tomorrow was a whole other barrel of trouble.

"What does that mean for this world?" Theo looked like he was trying to process twenty things at once. He also needed a good wash and replacement armour.

"It means," the Death Knight grinned, "there needs to be a new Architect."

"Dibs!" Sally shouted, disturbing the cat.

Theo rubbed the back of his neck and shot Humphrey a glance. "I'm not sure that is the best use of your talents - plus that is probably on the other side of the croissant."

Jackie blew a cloud of smoke into the gathering. "So, uh, do I still get my castle?"

"If we aren't dead tomorrow," Sally beamed, looking up at the mobster with bright red eyes. "I'm assuming this doesn't change our little scuffle tomorrow?"

"No." Humphrey shook his head.

Archie looked up towards the zombie Boss. "Are you sure this is wise?" His green eyes shimmered.

"It'll be rough, Arch, but twenty guards should-"

"Twenty? Who'd you get that information from?" Archie scowled towards the Death Knight, already knowing the answer.

Humphrey opened his mouth to respond but then closed his skeletal maw and turned to look off into the distance.

"Sixty," the cat continued, "Three Elites and a Champion."

Silence fell over the group. Arranged awkwardly in the twilight of the village square, the torchlight illuminated their impromptu didn't seem to be enough to warm them. Sally bit down on her tongue as she tried to concoct some plan. A glance over to Theo showed that he was trying to do the same, a confused frown across his pale head as his unfocused eyes darted back and forth.

"Do you think we can get another Town Portal scroll?" She looked up at Humphrey.

“Depends on how much gold you have, but yes.”

“Oh,” Jackie awkwardly stuck her hands into her pockets, Betty slung across her back. “I kinda came into a lotta cash recently. For th’ Guild, right? Should have enough for a scroll too.”

Sally narrowed her eyes at the mobster. No doubt she had used [Extort] on as many goblins as she could to acquire those funds. Still, better those resources found some use in keeping Sanctuary in their control. Jackie avoided her glare but jerked her thumb back to the Inn.

“It’s in a box in my room, don’t have big enough pockets, ya see.”

“Only Players can join a Guild, but if you have allies, then it’ll confer some benefits.” Archie purred from her lap.

“So many different boxes to put people in now,” Sally shook her head. “Speaking of, how have my zombies been doing?”

“They have remained in a pen.” Humphrey levelled a finger over to behind the Forge. “The goblins threw them meat, like some kind of zoo. It was conflicting.”

Theo snapped his fingers. “If you know what a zoo is, are there some in this world?”

“Yes, *ha-ha*. Of course, what kind of question is that? You are just too low-level to go there.” Humphrey grinned and gestured towards the cat.

“What my big brother is trying to say,” Archie yawned, “is that the fourth zone has what you might call more ‘modern’ architecture and amenities. However, I suggest we focus on our toes before we start climbing trees. They will arrive at midday.”

“*Big brother?*” The Death Knight murmured to himself.

“Alright, alright,” Sally fumed as she rubbed her temples. “Enough yapping. Theo, we’ll have our platonic date at the zoo eventually if we live that long. Humphrey, I need to take all the spare gold and get a list of things, plus anything you think would be helpful - Jackie help him.”

The zombie stood up, lifting the cat with her. She snuggled Archie with a smile. “Arch, you go help Theo plan things. I’m going to create the Guild and see what allies we have.”

With nods and murmured agreements, the Party split up to move around the dark village. For the first time in a while, Sally stood alone. It was briefly overwhelming - the emptiness of the square, how quiet it was, the feeling alone. She shuddered and headed towards the Library.

The door opened quietly. Inside, lanterns lit the corners with dim amber light. Humphrey should be in later to wake Oleb and pry some items from the new Librarian if he wasn’t already with the goblin Leaders - but for now, she would take the peace for herself. She sat on the nearest chair and put her feet up on the table. Her clothes really were filthy. The

normally bright red skirt was now various shades of dark brown from mud and dried blood. Not to mention her white shirt, which was anything but.

It was about time she updated her signature look. Maybe Archie could help unstick some of her bugs with the little power of the Observer he had in him. She leaned the chair onto the back legs and brought up her STAR menu to open Chat.

[Sally: hey bud, your mail was 10/10]

[Sally: lil thing tho]

[Sally: Sanctuary has 63 dudes on the way tomorrow]

[Sally: arriving at noon]

She paused and wrinkled up her nose. Archie had been pretty off time-wise when it came to the Voice of Gaia assault at the bandit camp. Was he at least speaking with the Observer knowledge now?

[Sally: maybe]

[Sally: making a Guild if you want in]

[Sally: we're looking at some ultraviolence tho]

[Chuck: don't you guys ever sleep??]

[Chuck: you got the gold already, how?]

[Chuck: no, don't answer that]

[Chuck: but we're in. We also have a Quest to assist Sanctuary so?]

[Sally: see you at dawn?]

[Chuck: at dawn]

Sally smiled and closed the Chat. With the White Fox and Warriors, that gave them a Player count of... eleven? Quite a few low Levels - but any help was help.

She considered messaging Dent, but he was unlikely to assist. He barely cared for their existence. It was unlikely he would be able to get here in time too. After Yarch fell, all the teleport options became invalid.

Her brain ached from wracking it as she tried to think of any further allies she could call on. Skullplitters? Definitely not. Voice of Gaia? Very unlikely. Whatever that annoying Cleric was called? He would more likely be fighting on the side of the System, no doubt.

Perhaps eating people was not the right way to make friends. Not that she was short any, in fairness. She had turned a nice duo of her and Humps into a Guild in formation - not to mention those who were unable to join.

No matter - that just left her to focus on planning her next daring gambit to give some advantage for tomorrow.

A knock from the door drew her attention away and as she turned the chair almost tipped over backwards.

"Woaa-hello?" She managed to control her descent by hastily grabbing onto a bookshelf.

“Oh hello?” A nervous voice came from the doorway as a short, furred figure came into the light. “Is this the right place for fighting against the System?”

An excited grin spread across her face at seeing the Unique Kobold - he must have heard about her from the Mines!

“It sure is!” The chair clunked forward as she stood to greet the still-nervous figure. He was about two feet tall and snowy-white - his shaky disposition almost giving the impression he was extra chilly. Yellow eyes widened as she approached to shake his paw. “Always glad to have more on board; I’m sure we could find you a Party to-“

“Oh no,” his head shook, tiny ears flopping back and forth, “I already have a full Party.”

Behind him, further figures stepped into the room.