A bulky man holding an overly large crossbow grunted as he aimed at the doorway raised at the top of the set of stairs. The lowered room they were in held no information about where the supposed cat had gotten to. Radiant light swirled around the thick bolt, ready to be fired. Once the undead Party stepped through, they'd get a taste of his corrupted skill.

If only Janie and Grant would stop bickering. He rolled his eyes and tried to tune them out. More the fool Lambert if he got picked off and killed. Seven might be mad about it, because it took a while to get a new Corrupt STAR sorted, but it wasn't really any trouble for him. Once he killed the undead group, he was sure to be lavished with praise.

A cloaked figure stepped out from the shadowed hall to the top of the stairs. Crimson eyes and a long staff in their hands.

His finger clicked the trigger, and the bolt went out, detonating at the top of the stairs into a burst of divine fire. Lowering his crossbow, he held his hand up, causing the fire to persist and block the passageway beyond.

"There we go," he grinned. "I'll just keep this up as long as needed."

"You want us to go ahead and catch Neil up, or assist?" Grant asked.

"Nah, you-"

"*That was rather rude*," a voice whispered from behind his ear.

Lucius rammed the dagger end of his shadowed staff into the back of the man, who stumbled forward. The focus on holding the fire wall up dropped, and it started to peter out quickly.

From the top of the stairs, the large figure of the Death Knight burst forth, leaping from the higher platform down to the wounded man. As his sword blazed bright crimson, he landed, skewering the bulky Player straight through.

"Damn!" Grant growled. "We need to-" he turned to the woman, but only a handful of purple bubbles were in the place she was just standing.

He turned back to see that the room was totally empty, as if everyone else had vanished. As his brow furrowed and his hammer shook in his hand, his boots started to take him down to the exit. Then, pain and a quick death—not even time to register what happened before he dropped to the floor.

"Hah!" Edward grinned. "Even your eyes betrayed you."

Sally slouched against the wall and rolled her eyes. "On one hand, it's pretty weak that you all have these abilities you've never told me about. But there's also no way I'm going to learn and remember like… way over a hundred skills."

"You at least know the basics of what we regularly use, though?" Humphrey wiped his sword off and grinned.

"The basics, sure." She rolled her eyes again. "You're invincible, Lucy is invisible, and Edward is inevitable."

"That's not…" The Death Knight narrowed his eye sockets. "What does that make you?"

"*Impatient*. Let's go eat the rest of these Players." She pushed off from the wall and started off toward the door out. "This one didn't even get to use his broken ability. How mean of you, Edward."

"I'm a demon, and it's not my fault he can't pass a basic Blindness check." He folded his arms and let her go past.

"Don't start talking like that's a thing. Any excuse to stab a man through the eye socket." She shook her head as the rest of them followed.

"That's not something I'm known for." He furrowed his brow and then looked back at the others. "Is it?"

The Shade twirled his shadowed staff. "I didn't think I'd get much use of it, but I can store the last three weapons I've shadowed to draw from as my own."

"You have my sword, then?" Humphrey asked, ignoring the demon.

"And Norah's bandages." A thumbs-up emoji appeared. "Those seemed like the most useful three. It uses a Shadow charge to bring out and opening up that wall used a bunch too, but since I've never fully explained or expanded on that idea, we'll continue on as normal."

Sally sighed. When was the last time she got to be meta about her skills or how the System did things? She couldn't remember, because she wasn't good at remembering. If only she could remember why that was…

The next passage took them to a split in three directions, stone doorways that led to three rooms. From the one straight ahead, amber light pooled out into the open space. Doorway on the left was closed, while the third on the right looked as though it had some kind of lock on it.

"Normally, I'd say that was our best bet." She jabbed her staff toward the locked door. "But bubble-girl could probably go through it."

Lucius stepped up beside her and put his gloved hand on the door. It vanished and allowed them to see inside.

Dead Monsters, some kind of storage room that had been looted already. She gave him a nod, and he removed his hand; the door turning back to solid stone.

Sally tapped her chin in thought. "Second guess would be the boss area, right? That's where I'd go and hide in plain sight, as the boss."

Humphrey nodded, and then put his hand up to his forehead, the flame behind his helmet flickering wildly. "To the left, then."

"You have a map inside that head of yours?" She grinned and turned to that door. Before entering, she paused and furrowed her brow at it.

"Archie has memories of the layout. It is imperfect, but will lead us to the right path." He stopped behind her. "Everything okay?"

She tilted her head backward to look up at him. "Usually we aren't expected in a dungeon, so we are at a disadvantage this time. If Theo was here, he would say we need to develop a door breaching routine for safety."

"Are you sure he wouldn't just push through and solo everything?" Edward murmured to himself at the back, still loud enough for everyone to hear.

"Here's my plan," Sally started. "We'll do it as I explain it, so it's like one of those… no, you wouldn't get the reference. How sad is it that there's only two people in this world I can make pop culture references with? And one of them is double-dead, and the other wants to ascend and become god?"

Lucius flexed his fingers, his whole body tensed and ready. "Is this part of the routine?"

"Not… no, it's not." She pulled a face at him. "Humps, you're going to block the majority of the door, because you do. Have something defensive ready for if we are immediately attacked. Lucius, you'll shadow the door, squished next to pops so that we get the jump on anyone trying to jump on us." She took a deep breath. "I'll scoot down between Humphrey's legs with [Meat Hook] and [Mortis Bomb] ready to assault any targets."

They stood in position, awaiting her word for the door to be shadowed.

"And what about me?" Edward asked.

"Ah!" Sally jolted up and turned back. "I forgot you were still there, bud. You can check our six for any betrayers."

The demon rolled his eyes, but made the effort to look alert.

Rolling her tongue across her sharp teeth, green flame burst across the skull at the top of her staff. Left hand out ready to latch onto waiting enemies, she gave the signal to the Shade. "Hit it!"

In an instant, the door became nothing but dull shadow, allowing them to see in. Straight into the shallow cupboard.

"Oh," Humphrey said, his posture relaxing. "It was probably the next left, then."

The zombie growled and got back to her feet. "Good practice run. Eddy get that smirk off your face." She stretched out her neck and began walking towards the already-open door.

[Chuck: We have 80% of the time fluid.]
[Chuck: One team has all of the metal bars.]
[Chuck: Rest of the Blues are getting the other parts.]

She smiled to herself. Where was this Chuck with the army of followers back in the other areas? Would have made her life easier and perhaps she would have eventually got that crafting tutorial done if other people got her all the boring stuff.

[Sally: gr8]
[Sally: we are in dungeon hunting Arch.]
[Sally: killed some corrupted players - keep an eye out.]

The elephant in the room was, what do they even do once they have all five of the cats inside the Death Knight? Does he ascend to something powerful? Even so, and if they managed to bring Theo back—how do you even go about fighting something like the Architect?

She rubbed her staff against the side of her head. In some way, she knew already. The same thing that she had been doing since the first day she came into this world. Break things and cause havoc. Eventually the big bad in charge will notice her causing a ruckus and make themselves available for her waiting maw.

They moved through the open doorway into a wider room, well lit by a burning fire in the middle.

"Some kind of ritual pyre." Edward narrowed his eyes. "It's no wonder they didn't all die from smoke inhalation."

"Maybe they're immune," Sally murmured, circling around the outside of the flickering flames. Perhaps she was supposed to be more wary of open fire, as she was a zombie. Around the other side of the room were more dead lizard-people. "Dungeons are even less fun when someone has ruined all the uneaten brains already."

"Indeed." Humphrey said, stepping behind her. His armor glimmering bright amber as it reflected the fire. He held up a plated hand to his forehead and let out a long hiss.

A question mark appeared beside Lucius. "You alright, pops?"

"Yes." Humphrey withdrew his hand to glare at the Shade. "Architect just gave a new directive to the Observers."

They all turned to watch him.

"I have maintained control. Do not fret." His shadowed eye sockets sparkled with crimson light. "They are now unable to break my spirit."

"What did Theo whisper to you with his skill?" Sally tilted her head.

Humphrey stared at her impassively for a second. "I do not recall. The Architect has told all active Observers to move to this third area for further instructions." He turned his head to see the Shade glaring at him with arms folded.

"Looks like we're running out of time." The zombie turned with a sigh. "Let's go find this silly cat."

The Death Knight nodded as they moved past him, Lucius turning and walking backward to maintain eye contact.

He then unceremoniously tripped over one of the lizard corpses and fell straight on his back.

"Oh," he said, an emoji of a bandaged head popping up. "There's something written on the ceiling."

Sally stopped and looked up. "That's not writing," she said, furrowing her brow. "That's…"

Her eyes opened wide.