

Chuck held his hand up, his fingertips glowing a pale green light. "Everyone to me!"

Outsiders, *Insiders*, and three groups of Blue faction started to pool towards the druid, pushing back the System-created, who now had murderous intent in their eyes.

"Looks like we are finally being targeted," Humphrey growled, stepping up beside the zombie to protect her.

Sally's head swam, not just because there was now an Event to kill her, but there were still a bunch of notifications pushing themselves into her vision, unwanted.

[Targets Remaining 5/5]

[Class upgrade: World Boss]

"Ugh, you seeing this?" She ground her teeth together as they became crowded by the press of other bodies.

"Yes, *ha-ha*. An unexpected outcome from their foolish plan."

She rolled her eyes. "Just after you said that they hadn't been implemented yet."

The Death Knight scoured the surroundings as the last of the Players gathered around the forge. "Then be proud that you are the first, and probably the most powerful living Monster in this world at present."

"And most wanted," Edward said from behind them, the stress in his voice evident.

Chuck circled his hand around and a bright bubble of green light surrounded everyone present, roots growing from the ground and following the arc of the dome to encase them all.

[Class Skills Unlocked]

[Death Aura]

[Ruin]

[Continuous Power]

[Brain Drain]

Her mouth opened and closed. "I got new skills?"

"World Boss privileges." Humphrey nodded. "They have made you a worthy challenge to live up to the threat against you."

Chuck clapped his hands together, as Dent encouraged people to be quiet. "Alright, the plan has changed. First thing, we need to create a moving barricade to get the *Outsiders* safely out of the city with minimal destruction of the populace."

The druid sighed before continuing. "Then I want you three groups to spread out and act as reconnaissance. I anticipate large groups gathering, so do not engage. Stay safe and stay alive. That's an order."

"Start getting ready," Dent yelled. "Move on the signal."

Sally grinned sheepishly as the druid look back at her. "This is a lot Chuck, everyone is fine with protecting me while I run my fool's errand?"

He nodded. "Our strength lies in our unity. There is little more we can do as Players to resist the new Architect at present. The *Outsiders* are..." he trailed off as he looked between them. "You're the antidote for what ails the System."

"I'm just full of ambition and empty of stomach." She grinned. "What are the *Insiders* going to do?"

"We're following you. You might be a Boss beyond reproach now, but we don't know what will be sent after you."

Sally nodded. "Strength in unity. Although having nine oddballs to banter with is going to hurt my head." She tilted to the side and narrowed her eyes at Fern.

The dryad stared impassively at her in response.

"Well..." Chuck rubbed his face. "Clock is ticking. When you are ready, we are going to head toward the south-east exit and then on toward the tomb."

She brought up her Map. Furrowed her brow and zoomed out. "Fuhhhh-that's a long way." The Architect really screwed them over by stopping teleports and mounts. Better get her walking legs on. Just as she turned towards her Party to ready check them, her STAR bloiped as messages came in from Norah.

The Mummy's bare hands clutched tightly at the stone arms of her throne. Knuckles whitening to a pale shade of blue-gray as her jaw worked.

"You see the messages, yeah?"

"Yeah, boss event, I can read."

"The tracker is saying we're red hot here."

"...you mean?"

"One of the Outsiders must be in this stone box."

They couldn't get it open. But that didn't stop them from trying. It just meant they just stood around and talked inanely about such annoying things.

Norah hoped Sally would get here soon, so that she could tear the gathered adventurers to shreds.

"She says there are Players at the tomb, but it is secure." It didn't do much to comfort her, though. Worry painted her brow as she pouted up at the Death Knight.

“The die has been cast,” he smiled sadly back at her. “Let us make do with what best we may offer this world.”

Sally rolled her eyes at the melodrama of the Death Knight. The Architect had just made her more powerful. Even if there was a target on her back now, Players didn't have it in them to actually organize and make themselves a threat.

Would change the odds against her? As much as worry rolled around in her recently emptied stomach, part of it excited her. She wasn't just a Boss or a Raid Boss now... she was a World Boss. A challenge of unequaled strength. Now she had to raise the vampire from the dead just to gloat over him. Technically, he was no longer in the *Outsiders*, so if he came back he wouldn't get her new bonuses, but he'd also be outside of being tracked.

“I'm ready, Chuck!” She turned and prompted the dam to be broken. While there was still plenty to try to process, she was a sitting duck currently. They'd have more chance to avoid danger on the move.

The druid nodded to Dent, and the swordsman strode to the front to yell at the prepared Parties.

“Fifth column to the front. Eight on the right. *My* right, smartasses. Third, you're on left. Insiders will protect the rear. Maintain formation to keep the Outsiders central. Do not kill System-created unless absolutely necessary. Am I understood?”

A chorus of acknowledgement came from the gathered Blues, and the groups started to align themselves, ready in the dome of thick vines.

It was kind of Chuck to keep the System-created safe. She gave her Party a brief smile as they gathered behind Fifth Column. While they could have easily killed and eaten their way through the city to reach the open wilderness, the druid was true to his word in wanting some manner of peace to the System.

“On three!” Dent yelled, having received the nods from each Party leader as well as Chuck. “Three!”

The druid clicked his fingers, and the vines receded, lowering the dome covering them until nothing remained. Flares of light illuminated the dark streets as the groups marched forward. Defensive skills and wards pulsing around, stopping the attacks of the System-created or pushing them back. It was quite the trick for the Architect to turn the whole world against her. It made her feel important.

“This is probably a grave error on their part,” Humphrey added, almost able to see her inner monologue across her facial expression.

She grimaced. “Do you think there will be *grave consequences*?”

“For some.” He shrugged. “This will delay their full ascension, but they are keen to get rid of you without having to bloody their own hands.”

Sally nodded, but didn't have anything to add. It was enough that the bad Players were foolhardy and brash in trying to oust her from this world - if the Architect themselves wanting to fall into her stomach due to their hubris, then that would be a bit anticlimactic.

"It won't just be Players and the occasional Monster group we need to worry about." Humphrey continued to fill the silence as flashes of light continued to paint their route through the rest of the city. "There will be set waves of System-created that will test you, and any remaining merged Observers will be coming straight for you."

Rolling her eyes, she then deflated. "Ugh." Sally pulled her hood lower down to her eyes. "So you're saying the next... however long is going to be filled with constant and gradually escalating combat again?"

"You act like that is a surprise." He grinned in return. "We have some advantage with it being night. It'd do us well to-"

[Day Reset]

Blinding them all, the sun started to rise, as if the whole night had been skipped. In fact, as Sally clenched her teeth together, she had no doubt that was the case.

Lucius pushed up between them, sweat-drop emojis at the side of his head. "What happened?"

The Death Knight shook his head. "More foolish actions. It does not bode well that the new Architect is a gambler."

The question-mark that then appeared beside the Shade just prompted Humphrey to continue.

"Another use of their scant power to reset the day to morning again. It was not likely that many would come for us right before bedtime. Now everyone has the benefit of a good rest, all their skill charges to full, and daylight - so that we may be hunted immediately."

Sally sighed again. "Joy."

They reached the gate of the city and passed throughout onto the open road. Behind them, Chuck raised both his hands into the air and a wide wall of vines and wood rose up to block the exit and prevent any System-created from following them out.

"Alright, Dent," he said. "You organize the recon routes."

The swordsman nodded and gathered up the Blues while the druid stepped up to the outsiders alongside the rest of the Insiders.

"This is going to be a very long day, isn't it?" Sally asked him, pouting before he could respond.

Chuck shrugged, right before the mobster pushed him out of the way slightly.

“Scoot, plant boy. Guess what resetting skills means, boss?” She wiggled her eyebrows, her lit cigarette hanging limp in her mouth.

It took a second for it to click, but then Sally’s eyes opened wide. “Your stagecoach doesn’t count as a mount, right?”

“Nah. It’s ready and raring to go.”

Humphrey grinned. “That is fortuitous. I am glad to have you on our side once more.”

Jackie brushed him off. “Yeah, whatever, tin can. We’ll be pushing the suspension to the limit with your heavy ass on board, luckily the rest of yous are bean poles.” She glared around the gathered group as she removed the cigarette from her mouth.

“No time like the present then.” Sally clapped her hands together. “It will still be a few hours of travel, but we’re much better off.”

Chuck nodded his agreements, and the mobster stepped over to the side, raising her hand up with index finger outstretched like she was going to fire a gun. With a faux click of the trigger, an area of plain grass hummed as her stagecoach fizzled into being. A large thing of dark wood and black metal supports. Two horses whinnied, their dark pattern resembling pinstripe suits.

The mobster gestured for everyone to start loading up, and they moved over to the door that popped open.

Fern collared the zombie as they shuffled over. “Sally. I still do not know what is going on in this world. But this whole experience has been interesting. Thank you for taking me from the tower.”

Sally tilted her head. “Of course. I knew you’d have a little more fun out here.”

“Chuck is strange. I am yet to decide if his power over nature is divine or scandalous. But I am keeping an eye on him.” The dryads impassive eye-holes glared at Sally.

“We’re all kinda weird in our own way,” she replied, gesturing for Fern to hop on the coach before her. “But we look after each other and live the best we can.”

Edward leaned his head into the doorway. “Even if that involves mass murder.”

She stuck her tongue out and pushed him out of the way. Sure, she had killed more normal people than many of the actual villains in this world. Eaten because she was greedy, and gotten revenge through cold-hearted bloodshed. Even made sport of it on occasion...

But she was pretty sure they started it first.