

## 24) Game

You were playing Shovel Knight, one of your favourite games ever since the Kickstarter for it had been announced. You passionately watched as your favourite youtubers played through the game,

And now, it was finally your turn to adventure. You'd just recently managed to defeat Plague Knight in his Explodatorium, the usual victory music playing as the level drew to a close.

Just as the loading screen should have appeared, the game would suddenly glitch out, as the screen shifted to the Tower of Fate, Enchantress floating there. You'd skipped to the end of the game? How was that possible? Was it a bug? A glitch?

"I see you, being from another world. You thought you could hide from me? No presence escapes my notice." She said, staring directly through the screen. Was this one of those rare Easter Eggs developers sometimes put in?

"So... you're the reason Shovel Knight has made it thus far, guiding him through his trials. I wonder how he'd fare without his guardian angel watching over him..."

Before you could react, the screen shone bright, your body involuntary frozen in place as purple light washed over you, wrapping around you like chains, before suddenly dragging you through the screen, your body pixelating and compressing down to match the resolution of this new world you were entering.

You tumbled to the cold hard floor of the Tower of Fate, your entire body feeling off, flatter, less substantial. Everything looked

"And so we meet. Such strange apparel, yet... human. How strange. I was expecting something more... monstrous to lie beyond the bounds of our reality. No matter. Now that you are here, you will *submit*."

Those purple chains reappeared around you, binding your body and will as they seeped into your very mind, the concept of disobeying the one in front of you completely erased as you kneeled before her.

"Tell me, what is it you've seen? What *is* that Shovel Knight up to. What are his weaknesses. Where are his allies. Tell me everything you know of this world and its people"

You opened your mouth to speak, but words never left it, instead a dialog box with a pixelated version of your face appearing at the bottom of the screen, your words projected onto it. It was an extremely strange sensation. Against your will, you were forced to tell her everything. How this was all a game in your world, everything you knew that had happened and would happen. Battles to come, and her eventual defeat at the hands of Shovel Knight.

The Enchantress's facade dropped briefly in shock and anger, her hands glowing ominously, before she composed herself once more

"Hmmp. Surely you must know a way to defeat him then, yes? I can give you strength, weapons, whatever you need, to slay that pest in my name~. Just give the word. Tell me... what can you do for me?~"

“Nothing. I don't know how to use weapons, or fight. I didn't even know magic was real until now.” You hung your head in shame, having to admit that, in this world at least, you were useless

“How disappointing. I had been hoping this grand presence would be something of power and grandiosity I could use to rule the realm. But it appears, now bound to this plane, you are no more than another powerless mortal. Not even skilled in magic or the blade. Disappointment after Disappointment. But I cannot very well let you go, lest you blab your secrets to that wretched knight. So I think I will have that mouth and mind of yours sealed away~”

The Enchantress's hands glowed once more, as their magic washed over you, but instead of chains, it was more like a blanket had wrapped itself tightly around you, your limbs going numb as you were levitated up into the air.

Under the Enchantress's dark magic, you were powerless to watch as your body broke apart, limbs shrivelling up, breaking apart into luminous blue feathers, your face itching as more feathers started to sprout from your cheeks. Your arms and legs vanished, as even your torso was slowly retracting, shrivelling up as more and more of it was replaced by sapphire and cyan feathers, the same that was sprouting across your entire head now as it was crushed and squeezed out into a more triangular and aerodynamic shape.

The changes advanced further back, feathers spreading across it like a wave, covering and replacing all that remained of your human hair. Not even your ears were spared as they broke apart into a ruffle of feathers, joining what remained of your once body, now nothing more than a decorative crest of feathers adorning the back of your head.

Your mouth started to ache, your teeth and lips fusing together as one as they hardened. It grew larger and larger, absorbing more and more of your face, consuming your nose as it shrunk down, turning into just a pair of simple barely visible nostrils atop your new avian beak. It continued to grow, before curving downwards, taking on an appearance reminiscent of that of a Hawk's, as it now took up a majority of your face, your eyes struggling to see over its mass, before they were pulled aside, shifting to either side of your new avian skull.

But the changes were far from just physical. The dark magics wormed its way into your skull, invading your very mind, squeezing it like a vice as you felt any remaining will to resist be sapped. Much of your human mind, independent thought, your understanding of the human language, the ability to understand and innovate, it all melted away in favour of animalistic instinct and behaviours.

You could still remember everything, but without any way to speak or apply that knowledge, it was useless to you. Even after the magic faded, and you were let go, you instinctively began to fly, flapping your feathers as you bobbed around, moving in a straight diagonal line until you collided with a surface, at which point you simply bounced off like a ball, continuing your path around the room. You tried to change directions, to take a different path, horizontal, vertical, but you didn't know how. The concept simply could not be fully grasped by your new mind, and so you continued to bob and bounce around, much to the amusement of the Enchantress it seemed.

“Ohoho... such a proud being, reduced to a mere Birder! Such a delight to see. Maybe if you try hard enough, that Shovel Knight you seem so attached to might be able to rescue you.”

She smugly approached you and tapped your beak with a finger, sending you bouncing back the way.

“Though... I doubt you'd be capable of such things with your new birdbrain. But that's fine, a servant has no need to think for themselves. Just keep flapping and bouncing around aimlessly. You'll fit right in with your new kin.”

She didn't seem aware her spell hadn't fully succeeded. Perhaps your higher dimensionality had saved you? Not that it mattered much considering how helpless you were in this body, especially as a bridle and leash formed over your new beak.

“Right then. That's enough fun. I suppose we should get you acquainted with your new home.” She clapped her hands as a Hoppicle appeared, grasping ahold of your leash, going taught and causing your body to start rotating around its length, before with another clap the two of you were transported away, finding yourself now within some ruins. Without any knowledge on how to control your body, you were struck continuing to circle around as the small knight wandered about, dragging you along. Leaving you, somewhat ironically, a passive spectator to their exploits.

Would Shovel Knight be able to triumph without you? Would the Enchantress use her newfound knowledge stolen from you to finally succeed in taking over the world? Who knows. That kind of information wasn't available to a simple Birder such as yourself. Perhaps one day you'd figure out how to get free, how to control your body, and maybe even turn back, but until then... you were trapped as just another NPC, a basic enemy within a game, now playerless, it's hopes all placed on a single knight lacking the subtle guidance you once provided.