

BLACK PUDDING

CHAPTER 32

The abrupt entrance of Yua into the Grand Hall sent chills coursing through the veins of all those gathered. I found myself delighting in the sumptuous scent of their dread as it tantalized my senses and stirred an exhilarating thrill within me. Yua's labored breaths and untamed gaze were a spectacle to relish, a perfect appetizer for my insatiable craving. And then, the cry, a beautiful sound of terror that shattered the stillness of the chamber.

"Hundreds of airships are coming this way!" Yua blurted out.

Ah, the chaos, the destruction, the sheer joy of it all! It was as if the world was throwing a party just for me, and I was the guest of honor. The anticipation of what was to come sent a thrill through my very being. My metaphorical heart pounded with glee as the tremors shook the very foundation of the ruins we now hid within. Debris rained down around us, a symphony of destruction that brought a grin to my face. I looked around at those around me, their eyes wide with fear and despair. They were so naive, so simple-minded. But not me, no. I reveled in the chaos and destruction around us.

Another desperate soul that looked all too familiar to me ran into the chamber, hollering about aerial bombardment.

"Rob, calm down," Heather shouted at him.

It was funny. I had taken Heather for the quiet, stuttering type, but the woman had an aura of confidence as she grasped a bunny-eared child's hand. Those within the chamber seemed to gaze up at her as if she were the beacon to their salvation. It was almost too comical to bear. And as for me, the one with the fractured mind and souls, I couldn't help but feel a sense of elation.

Oh, how I loved the chaos and madness that swirled around Ava and me. Destruction was quickly becoming our playground, our canvas to paint with the colors of blood and madness. Our only concern, however, was for Aurelia, our ferocious, sweet, beautiful Aurelia, who struggled with the Dungeon Core. Oh, how we longed to touch her bare flesh once more, to fill every nook and cranny of hers, even if it meant destroying everything and everyone around us.

Aurelia's visage shimmered with perspiration as she channeled her mana into the core. My mind was a chaotic abyss, a spiraling, twisted confusion that left me conflicted. At one moment, an overwhelming urge to protect her, to defend her with my very essence, enveloped me. In the next, I found myself overtaken by an insatiable craving to gorge upon the innards of those nearby, their terror and panic merely fanning the flames of my ravenous appetite. The havoc and disorder outside were but a trifling diversion, a pitiful exhibition compared to the upheaval festering within me.

Still, their attention was riveted on Aurelia's efforts, blind to the genuine beast lurking among them. Were they unaware that they served as mere delectable treats for my indulgence? As long as Aurelia continued to forget to forbid it, they were mine to manipulate and torment. The enemy would be unable to claim my prey if I devoured them first. Even with my surging ache within my stomach, they were mine to feast upon, toy with, manipulate... **TO SAVOR!**

As I was lost in the thought of my next meal, Aurelia's voice jolted me back to reality. "Beloved, I need your help," she said, her beauty captivating me once again.

I approached Aurelia, my own core pounding with anticipation. She was a vision of beauty and power, and I couldn't help but feel a sense of unbashful glee coursing through me. It was like a drug, an addiction that I couldn't shake off. Every fiber of my being longed to please her, to do anything she asked of us. The longer I spent in this reality, the more my mind spiraled into chaos. Aurelia seemed to have the power to bring out a deep desire for caring about others from within me. Well, I say others, but what I mean is just her.

Having a vampire of all creatures brings out the light within me was a strange feeling. It was as if she were the only one who could see the beauty that lay buried within the depths of my two souls, and I knew I was incomplete without her. It was terrifying and exhilarating to be so dependent on her, to have her as my guiding light in this world of darkness that I ever favored. And most of all, my broken souls didn't feel complete without her around. It was as if she were our missing piece. Yet, I couldn't explain why I felt so strongly about her. Yeah, she was gorgeous, but there was something else about her.

"My beloved, my mana is significantly reduced during the day. I regret not having enough reserve to activate the Dungeon Core. I need you to connect with it and pour your mana into it. While you do that, I'll guide the magic into a barrier and activate the portal," Aurelia said with a tone of longing. Still, I noticed a tinge of fear that she tried to conceal. It infuriated me!

The mere thought of Aurelia feeling fear ignited a burning rage within me, making me yearn to tear apart those responsible for causing her distress. On the other hand, the suffering of the others brought me immense pleasure. Their pleas and cries for mercy were like a sweet melody to me. Yet, I couldn't afford to get too caught up in my sadistic thoughts. Aurelia's fear was different. It was an unpleasant sensation, one that enraged me to the core. I couldn't resist the urge to go outside and indulge in the feast of terror awaiting me.

Nevertheless, I was too smart to confront the enemy head-on, though. Nor did I want to risk being buried alive under these ruins. The walls continued to shake around us. I let out a deep sigh and stared into Aurelia's striking red irises. Despite my boiling anger, I put on a gentle smile. I gave her a subtle nod, knowing that her safety was Ava's and my top priority.

As I reached for the core, my mind was consumed by a mix of joy, fear, and a deep sense of unease. The touch of the energy source drained me of my mana, but I refused to let go. I clung to the core, gritting my fake silk teeth as my spider silk flesh unraveled to reveal my true nature as a Black Pudding slime monster to all present.

The pleasant gasps from onlookers were drowned out by the sounds of explosions echoing through the ruins. As the world crumbled and burned around us, I reveled in the illusion of power that the core brought me. Holding the core felt like I was holding the universe in my hands, and I felt like nothing could stand in my way despite being drained of my magic.

The drain of the mana began to fade my vision in and out, but I clenched my eyes shut and ignored it. I refused to let go! I would do whatever it took for Aurelia, even if it meant sacrificing everything. But the power drain of the core was too great to resist, but I would do anything to protect her, even if it meant embracing my end. It was maddening not knowing why I felt so strongly about her.



Jeremy positioned himself at the portcullis, his fingers clenching the corroded iron bars while he gazed at the menacing airships hovering above. A handful of vessels cast an unsettling gloom over the ground below, their shadows casting an eerie shroud upon those beneath. The rest circled above like vultures, waiting to swoop down and claim the soon-to-be carcasses. An undeniable sensation of foreboding crept upon Jeremy, threatening to engulf him completely.

Suddenly, a bright burst of color erupted from one of the airships, followed by an earsplitting explosion that shook the ruins around them to their very core. The stones trembled beneath Jeremy's feet, threatening to give way at any moment. He knew then that they were truly screwed.

Jeremy had hoped that the barrier surrounding their refuge would be their salvation, protecting them from the relentless attacks of their enemies. But as the airships continued their assault, raining down magical artillery, Jeremy realized their hope had been in vain. The magical barrier still hadn't been cast.

Amidst the chaos and destruction wrought by the airships, panic began to grip those who stared up at the sky. In despair, everyone gave up hope and retreated deep into the ruins. But the barrier and portal they had hoped would save them had yet to be cast. They were at the mercy of the invaders above, and the odds of survival were slim. Trapped in this way, the only other means of escape was through the dark depths of the husk of a dead dungeon – a prospect that filled all of them with dread and reluctance.

As Jeremy's eyes remained fixed upon the sky, dismay washed over him like a tidal wave. Jeremy bore witness to several massive segments break off a few dozen airships and plummet towards the ground, like some sort of drop pods descending from the heavens. Several ships continued their merciless assault, unleashing destruction upon the ruins below. He scanned the area and realized he was the only one foolish enough to remain outside, watching as chaos reigned above. Even Yua had disappeared into the crumbling structure at first sight of the vessels on the horizon.

With a deep breath, Jeremy spun on his heel and sprinted towards the relative safety within the structure. His heart raced with fear as he hoped that the dilapidated ruins would offer some form of shelter from the unrelenting bombardment.



As Wartie observed his amazing Mummy grip the Dungeon Core, he couldn't help but notice the lack of worry in the vampire's eyes. Instead, he sported a wide grin on her face as if some sort of secret was shared between her and Mummy. How odd Mummy's affection was towards the vampire, for he knew she didn't like people. Nevertheless, Wartie was grateful for Mummy's care and kindness, for it was more than anyone else had ever given him.

As a feral goblin, he had been forced to fend for himself, rummaging for scraps wherever he could find them. Then he was taken in by the dungeon folk, but his manner of life never improved much with them. His only friends were the pet slimes he could tame. Unfortunately, those vial friends of Mummy's had slain not one but two of his precious pets. But now, thanks to Mummy, he had a family. He had a mother who had even resurrected him after being slain by a Paladin. She had given birth to his new life as a lich. And when the goddess spoke through her High Priestess, she had referred to Wartie as her grandchild. It was almost too much to bear. Then the realization that Mummy was the daughter of a goddess – the daughter of the Crone was his Mummy! Though, he still wasn't sure why the goddess referred to Mummy as her daughters, for there was only one Mummy. Regardless, for the first time in his life, or rather unlife, Wartie felt a sense of belonging and love he had never known.

Fortunately, Wartie's ears were larger than his head, allowing him to catch every word whispered by the vampire into his precious Mummy's ear. "My beloveds," she said, "you possess a vast pool of mana, but you must stop allowing the core to drain it from you. Unlike me, you are an ambient mana wielder, and I know it to be true, for I have felt it, seen it. Instead of trying to let the core take from you, let the magic around us flow through you and into the core."

The young goblin lich couldn't determine if his mother had acknowledged the vampire's words, but he sensed a strange shift in the atmosphere. It was as if the warmth was being pulled away, leaving behind a bitter chill.



Aurelia's breath brushed against my neck, an icy dance that kindled an ecstatic chaos in the darkest depths of my mind. Oh, the irresistible desire to hurl the cursed Dungeon Core into the gloomy chamber, claiming Aurelia as my own while brushing aside all consequences! The once-alluring artifact had devolved into a despicable parasite, siphoning my magical vitality with each monstrous pulse. The mana I sacrificed to the abhorrent sphere surpassed my own capabilities.

Aurelia's calming murmurs reverberated within the recesses of my thoughts. Her sugared phrases intertwined with the unsteady rhythm of my unbalanced mind. I was enthralled, an unwitting moth spiraling uncontrollably toward the insatiable flame that lured me with its inviting heat. This enchantress, a blend of magnetism and malevolence, crafted a cloak of darkness tailored to ensnare my eager heart. And she did it all with a mere whisper.

She's right!

About using ambient mana?

Yeah, let's give it a whirl.

My eyelids remained tightly sealed as I clutched the Dungeon Core. At the same time, the cacophony of explosive tremors assailed the ancient stone chamber. The shrieks accompanying each violent impact were a masterpiece to my senses as the acrid stench of fear, and urine permeated the air. A perverse delight blossomed within me at the aroma.

Ignoring the ache in my stomach that seemed to grow stronger by the moment, I extended my senses. Following the faint trail of knowledge Ava had once bestowed. Her once boundless wisdom had been whittled down to the meager scraps of my own understanding, leaving us ill-equipped for the challenges ahead. Yet, together, we had swiftly adapted to harnessing the ambient magic around us to cast magic, a crucial skill as the system continued malfunctioning.

Heeding Aurelia's advice, I latched onto the ethereal strand of magic that swirled about me. It felt as though an invisible valve had been released, unleashing a torrent of mana that surged into me, coursing through my very being and flooding the Dungeon Core. Amid this maelstrom, I grew intoxicated by the heady sensation of the mystical energy coursing through my body. I became a mere conduit, a vessel for the core to satiate its ravenous appetite for mana.

In that fleeting instant, I realized the explosions had taken on a muffled quality as though submerged beneath murky depths. Miraculously, I had prevailed – the Dungeon Core awakened. Through the whirlwind of magic, I felt the tender embrace of Aurelia's guidance. She expertly directed the core to create a shield around our sanctuary. My cruel heart swelled with adoration for her. Amid the pandemonium, Aurelia had become Ava's and my everything. The enigma remained, however, as to why she possessed such a bewitching grip over my souls.