

BLACK PUDDING

CHAPTER 17

I gazed at the child's lifeless body, feeling a swirling storm of emotions, pain, guilt, sorrow, and above all else, burning rage. My anger boiled within me, and I thirsted for revenge! Fortunately, I had two phylacteries, but using one on an irritating brat who I had barely managed to resist killing myself felt like such a waste. But for someone else to come along and take the child's life was beyond bullshit. Death was not enough to satiate my desire for retribution. I was determined to make those three responsible pay with misery. However, there was one major obstacle standing in my way...

"Ava, I'm lost on how to use this damn thing," I voiced my frustration.

"No problem. Just watch closely as I perform the binding. The key to casting without commands is understanding the sensation and movement of magic in your surroundings. Instead of relying on the system to extract a specific amount of mana, you must work with the ambient mana, guiding it like you would with water."

Ava's explanation brought to mind a water bender from a childhood cartoon I used to watch. It was a more appealing method than having to chant spells. However, incorporating additional steps to cast magic still didn't sit well with me.

"I'm not waving my arms like an idiot to cast magic."

"There's no need to flail your arms while casting, but it can certainly help in aiding in the visualization process," Ava explained.

"Well, that's good to know," I sighed in relief. "Is it possible for me to use my internal mana the same way?"

"Yes, you can use internal mana the same way. In fact, you've been doing it with your shapeshifting, just on a smaller scale."

"Seriously? I didn't know that."

"Now, shush and pay attention to what I'm doing."

As Ava worked, I tuned into the sensation, feeling the mana flow surrounding my entire being. There was a feeling of something lurking below me, like a spark ready to be extinguished. I watched in amazement as Ava reached out with mana, easily manipulating that spark. It was warm, comforting, and at the same time, a little annoying to be around. With a gentle tug, she captured it, and I was struck by the sheer magnitude of her control. It was then that I realized the true extent of Ava's abilities – she had just used Soul Container to capture Wartie's soul.

As I watched Ava continue to weave and bend mana with the precision of a surgeon, I was filled with an overflowing admiration for her. Still, I wasn't about to let her know that. I didn't want to boost the bitch's already inflated ego and give her any more reasons to gloat. Trust me, I would have if I had anything to taunt her with. I mean, I'm the source of her awful personality, after all. Despite that, I couldn't deny the fact that I had a certain level of respect for her...but let's not get carried away. If I had the chance, I'd kick her out of my head in a heartbeat.

Ava carefully placed the child's soul into the phylactery with delicate precision. Observing her was like watching a master seamstress effortlessly thread a needle on the first try – an impossible task for someone like me. I couldn't help but wonder if I would ever be capable of performing an action with such care and accuracy, although, I suppose, if I imagined the soul as a tiny Great Dane puppy. *Ah, I miss puppies!*

“What's going on in that mind of ours? Why did we suddenly think about puppies?” Ava teased with a soft laugh.

“Uh... I have no idea what you're referring to.”

“If you say so,” Ava chuckled with a playful smile she placed on my face.

A soft glow emitted from the phylactery, indicating that Ava's work was done. Kneeling beside the child, she skillfully intertwined a strand of mana from the orb to the body, creating a bond between the two. In no time, the phylactery took over, continuing the process Ava started on its own. It seamlessly integrated the soul within the phylactery with the body. And just like that, Wartie let out a gasp of air. He was now a goblin lich.

“I feel something strange,” I muttered. “I can't quite put my finger on it, but there's an odd sensation coursing through me.”

“That's called pride, Blake. Congratulations, you're now a mother!”

“OH, HELL NO, AND FUCK YOU!”

~~~~~

I couldn't tell how long I'd been walking away from those dumb fucks who dared to cross me. The energy radiating from the spell that killed Wartie was enough to make me accept I was too weak to fight them. But that wouldn't stop me from gathering all the information I could on them. *Oh, I so hope they have families or at least someone they love!*

“Gimona Grimmail, Craycroft, and most of all, Anlyth the fucking elf.” I kept muttering their names like a dark mantra, cursing nonstop as I did.

Wartie was still unconscious as I carried him on my shoulder, with his phylactery safely stored in my Stellar Void. With a few modifications to the spell-casting process Ava's doing, we got a trickle of mana to seep out of the void to maintain a connection between the phylactery and his body. Although this wasn't the ideal solution since Wartie wouldn't be able to wander too far from me without his body collapsing. It was the best Ava I could give him under the circumstances. This

also meant I was getting a lot of practice on my self-control. Carrying an undead goblin's body around and not eating it took an unimaginable amount of restraint.

"Ugh! Come on, Ava! Can't I just devour him and find him a new vessel later?"

"Absolutely not! He's a newborn lich! He needs a familiar host body to control until his soul fully integrates with the phylactery. So, no eating your newborn!"

"Gah! Fuck's sake, Ava! I would kill you for that comment if you weren't some twisted voice in my head."

"Ha, I know," she laughed. "You really are a horrible mother!"

"Can you please stop calling me that!"

"Oh damn, now I know you're serious when you use that forbidden word," Ava teased.

"**I heard something up ahead,**" the all too familiar voice of the elf girl echoed up the pathway, causing me to stiffen.

*Ava?*

*Yeah, I heard it too, Blake. It seems we've found the other candidates.*

*What should I do with the kid's body?*

*Why, toss him into the Stellar Void, of course.*

*Wait, what? I didn't think I could put a living person in there!*

*Looks like I have to spell it out for you. He's not exactly living.*

*Ugh, you bitch! You could have fucking told me that earlier! I've been lugging him around for over a day, at least! Why didn't you say anything?*

*Because it was just too funny watching you! Plus, it's great practice for that whole self-control thing you struggle with.*

*Ava, I hate you so much right now. And I don't have self-control issues!*

With a fiendish grin, I took Ava's annoyingly belated advice, tossing the unconscious lich kid into Stellar Void. My spider legs exploded from my back, extending out like the wings of a demon, ready to carry me to my unsuspecting victims. The vaulted ceiling within this section of the deep roads was high above, like that of a cathedral, supported by massive pillars, providing the perfect hiding spots for me to strike from. I reveled in the thought of revenge for our last fight, treasuring the thrill of the terror I would soon inflict upon those who dared to cross me.

Scurrying up the wall with my spider legs, I found a perfect nook to hide in while I waited to ambush my prey. Crouched within the shadows, I watched with malicious intent as my prey approached. My spider legs twitched with anticipation, ready to strike at any moment. Their footsteps echoed off the walls of the deep roads, their ignorance of the monster lurking in the dark

almost laughable. I was still seething with rage from not being able to attack the elf, wizard, and dwarf earlier, but they would be dealt with another time. For now, I had set my sights on my original targets, and I wouldn't let anything stand in my way.

A spell crept to mind, Fear!



“I’m telling you, I heard something,” Yua whispered, her voice barely audible as she tried to mask the terror that was gripping her heart. Since the battle with that shapeshifting monster who called herself a candidate, her nerves had been frayed beyond repair. The mere thought of another battle was enough to send shivers down her spine.

But she wasn’t alone. The four of them had agreed to put aside their differences and leave the dungeon together, no matter what it took. Even Jason, the most stubborn of them all, had reluctantly agreed. Everyone suspected his agreement was more out of fear that Jeremy would use the mysterious spell he had kept a secret. Regardless, the truce was now a binding alliance forged out of desperation and the unshakable will to escape the horrors of the dungeon. All of them agreed that their trials were over, but little did they know their true nightmare was about to begin.

“Everyone, brace yourselves,” Jeremy warned in a low voice, trying to hide the fear in his eyes. “I won’t be caught off guard again.” He tried to hide the trembling in his voice from the rest of the group. But his nerves were just as frayed as the rest of them from their last battle. He clutched his fists tightly, ready to unleash Death Bolt at a moment’s notice. It was one of the three unique skills he had managed to unlock thus far, and he hoped it would be enough to keep them safe until they finally found a way out of this desolate hell hole.

“I-I can feel s-something. Does any-anyone else feel it?” Heather warned, her voice trembling with panic. The hairs on the back of her neck stood on end as a feeling of unease washed over her. She could sense something evil lurking in the darkness, waiting to pounce. The terror was almost palpable in the air, and she felt as if she was going to be sick.

“I’m surrounded by a bunch of pussies!” Jason spat, his contempt for his fellow companions clear in his voice. “As long as it’s not a boss or another one of those shapeshifting freaks, we can handle anything that comes our way in this shithole——hrrrk!”

Heather’s shrill scream echoed through the hall as a dark, serpentine tentacle descended from the shadows above. With lightning-fast speed, it skewered Jason through his mouth, piercing him from head to ass. The tentacle curled out of him and around his thighs, lifting him off the ground and tossing him off its grotesque appendage. He impacted the wall with a revolting whack. He let out a soft whimper of agony as he crumbled to the ground. Though he was still alive, his insides were likely shredded beyond repair. It was only a matter of seconds until he succumbed to his horrific wounds.

“Please, let me leave this place! I want to go home. I want to go home! I WANT TO GO HOME!” Heather’s cries became more frantic as she begged to escape the terror surrounding her.

A demonic cackle resounded throughout the stone walls, filling the air, taunting them, daring them to run. But Jeremy was determined to survive. He was ready to face this unseen horror head-on. His heart raced with fright, but Jeremy refused to let it consume him. He was braver than this. He would stand against anyone or anything that threatened him. And he would not be defeated by this unseen monster.

**“Show yourself, you monster!”** Jeremy bellowed in a mixture of anxiety, dread, and rage.

Heather’s muffled scream pierced the air behind them, causing Jeremy and Yua to whirl around in alarm. But all they saw were Heather’s feet kicking wildly as she was lifted into the dark abyss disappearing above. The inky blackness crept closer, enveloping them in its suffocating embrace, for they knew they were soon to follow. Yua’s scream echoed through the halls, filled with fear and desperation as she wildly searched the darkness for any sign of her friend. But there was nothing but emptiness and the ominous sound of Heather’s fading cries. A few seconds later, Heather’s lifeless body plummeted to the ground, crushing Yua beneath her. Jeremy stood frozen in terror, unable to look away from the sight of Heather’s headless corpse. The silence was broken only by Yua’s inconsolable sobs as she clutched her friend’s lifeless body.

**“I call forth the rage of the gods, [Death Bolt]!”** Jeremy unleashed his spell into the void above, blindly firing out of desperation, hope, and frustration. The darkness seemed to mock him as he hit a pillar with a shattering blast, reducing it to rubble. But the demonic cackling grew louder, filling him with despair.

**“SHOW YOURSELF!”** he shouted with all the power he could muster. The cooldown on his unique spell wasn’t too long. But he needed a few more seconds.

“Now, why would I do that? The fun of the unknown is so much more alluring, don’t you think?” A hypnotic female voice teased from within the darkness.

However, Jeremy was horrified as he realized the source of the voice. “You! How is this possible?! I saw you get blown to pieces! I watched as you turned into nothing but goo!”

“Hahaha! Did you get a notification of my death?” The voice laughed from the darkness, taunting him.

Jeremy felt a surge of guilt as the realization hit him that he had never confirmed if he had received the notification of his supposed victory. After Rob’s loss, grief consumed him, clouded his mind, and left him in disarray. And now, as he faced his impending death in the shadowy depths beneath the dungeon. Jeremy was surrounded by Yua’s heart-wrenching sobs and the taunting cackles of the insane woman about to take his life.

However, a glimmer of hope sparked in his mind, reminding him of his previous reincarnation into this world. Who was to say it wouldn’t happen again? A twisted smile tugged at his lips as he accepted his impending death. His time was up!

Raising his hand, he aimed his finger out and cast his spell. **“I call forth the rage of the gods, [Death Bolt]!”** With a flick of his wrist, Jeremy unleashed his spell at a pillar. And yet, before the

energy dissipated, he deftly redirected it towards as many pillars as possible, reducing them all to rubble in an instant.

“Jeremy, what are you doing?!” Heather cried out in panic.

“Taking that evil monster down with us!” He declared with a remorseful smile toward Yua.

The ceiling shook above them as the walls groaned like an earthquake had been unleashed overhead. Massive stone blocks began to rain down, one after another, as Jeremy stood there, waiting to see the monster reveal herself before it was all over for them. A sickening crunch was heard as a chunk of stone crushed Jason’s remains. Dust filled the air, nearly blotting out the star-like crystals that dotted the walls and floor, but soon enough, she emerged from the shadows, her face twisted in a snarl of anger. Jeremy found her rage to be a terrifying yet beautiful sight.

“You dumb ass!” She screeched as she hurled Heather’s severed head at Jeremy, striking him in the abdomen and sending him crashing to his knees.

“You crazy bitch!” He coughed out.

Then everything went black. The last thing Jeremy heard was the monster’s final scream, “**SHHHIT!**”