

BLACK PUDDING

CHAPTER 19

Despite the mind-boggling encounter with the dryad, I yanked open the weathered iron doors and strode into my next class, swiftly banishing the strange incident from my thoughts. My attention was immediately captured by the sight of a massive stadium spread out before me, with a bustling group congregated at its center. As I surveyed the scene, it became glaringly clear that the other damn campus I had been on was all about those stuck-up elves. But here? Here, I was one of just five elves amidst a wild mix of nearly fifty other races, some of them so bizarre I couldn't even put a fucking label on them. Seriously, one looked like a naked mole rat. Yeah, I knew I wasn't truly an elf, but with my freaking elongated pointy ears jutting out of my head like daggers, I sure as hell Polymorphed myself into looking the part.

Being my usual charming and sociable self, I positioned myself just outside the groups of chattering fools – I mean, students – utterly disinterested in their company... well, that wasn't entirely true. The truth was, quite a few of them looked rather delectable, though a bit of aging would be necessary for their corpses. Yes, I have, on occasion, savored the taste of corpses before they began to rot, and I have no aversion to enjoying a fresh meal. However, when given the choice between a raw, uncooked feast and a five-star culinary experience prepared by a master chef, I would always opt for the latter. That's the difference between rotting meat and a recently deceased body. Okay, perhaps not the most refined analogy, but it certainly adds a certain zest, and it gets my point across.

“Shut your mouths! You think you're here to make buddies? Hell no! You're here to learn how to fight!” roared the reptilian creature, his fierce gaze scanning over all of us.

Much to my delight, he bore an uncanny resemblance to the drake I had devoured in that cursed dungeon, Red Tail. And let me tell you, that bastard's flesh had tasted absolutely exquisite, like a tantalizing plate of lemon-infused chicken. The flavors had danced on my tongue without any need for the meat to rot, providing an immediate burst of zesty delight. Just the thought of him made my mouth water with excitement – and let's be clear, not in a sexual way. Men? No, thank you! But I digress... back to the drake. He boasted the same fiery red scales as Red Tail but with intriguing accents of black adorning each scale. And as if that wasn't impressive enough, he wore a gleaming chainmail beneath his imposing black plate armor.

“Whether it's one-on-one combat or being a worthless grunt in the army, it doesn't matter to me!” he thundered. “We've got separate classes for any number of those fancy specializations. But right here, right now, my sole mission is to turn you sorry bunch into fighters who know how to survive and crush your enemies into the dirt! So, listen up and give me your undivided attention, squirmuffs!”

“What’s a squimpuff?” I murmured to myself.

“A squimpuff is a worthless, brainless sack of squirming fluff, incapable of any combat skills. Now, shut your trap, elf, and pay attention,” the drake barked at me, catching me off guard.

I was mostly taken aback because I hadn’t been speaking to anyone but myself, and yet he somehow caught wind of my muttered words from over thirty meters away. To my utter lack of surprise, I overheard a few wisecracking students snickering at me being called out. But here’s the kicker, I wasn’t the least bit bothered or annoyed by their petty laughter. Nah, I was downright thrilled, eagerly wondering if this drake tasted as delectable as the one I had devoured before. My mouth watered from the thought, and I discreetly wiped away some of my yellow corrosive drool from the corner of my lip, hoping no one caught that embarrassing moment.

“Now listen closely, you worthless bunch of squimpuffs! I am Major Emberblade, dispatched from the royal military to whip your sorry hides into shape in combat lessons. I don’t give a rat’s ass if,” he paused to look at a literal rat man before continuing, “if you fight with a sword, axe, or wave a wand around like a damn idiot. But mark my words, in my class, you will fight! And for those useless squimpuffs among you who can’t win a fight to save their sorry lives, consider yourselves lucky. This arena you’re standing in houses one of the last remaining waystones, or as the ancients called them, respawn points,” the drake paused, allowing whispers to spread among the students.

Emberblade allowed the murmurs to linger, ensuring the weight of the situation sank in before unleashing another thunderous tirade. “Shut your traps! This particular waystone doesn’t require any fancy attunement like the legendary ones. You don’t need to be some ancient caster for it to work on you. All you need to do is die within the confines of this stadium, and it will do its job. So, I expect every single one of you to fight with a killer’s intent, or else you’ll end up dead. And let me make this crystal clear, squimpuffs: If you dare utter a word out of turn, you die. If you fail to follow my orders, you die. And if you so much as breathe the wrong way and irritate the living hell out of me, you fucking die!”

“You can’t be serious,” Prince Asshat, also known as Rayne Thunderleaf, blurted out, much to my surprise, as I hadn’t even noticed him when I spotted the other elves.

The drake didn’t even miss a beat, and in the blink of an eye, I saw the wood elf topple backward, a dagger lodged in his forehead. I couldn’t believe my eyes – our instructor had acted so swiftly that I hadn’t even seen him move. Asshat was dead before I could comprehend what had happened. The entire class stood frozen, their eyes fixed on the lifeless body on the ground, waiting for it to disappear and for Asshat to reappear unharmed. But that didn’t happen. Instead, his body remained there, a grim reminder of the consequences that awaited those who dared to defy our instructor.

“Did I not just make it clear what would happen if any of you spoke out of turn?” Emberblade’s voice thundered through the air. “Now, listen up, you sorry lot of squimpuffs! Gather yourselves into four groups!”

Everyone obediently followed the instructions and organized themselves into four groups, including myself. However, all of us couldn’t help but keep our eyes fixated on the lifeless body

lying on the ground. I must admit, I found myself gazing at it longingly, feeling the familiar pull of hunger tugging at my insides. Amidst this peculiar scene, an individual with horns, white hair, and a glistening fish-like sheen to his red skin foolishly joined my group and even had the audacity to raise his hand, looking like a complete idiot as he stood beside me. Though, it was then that I realized that no one else but me was wearing their school robe. Instead, everyone else was clad in battle-ready attire, or in the case of some, barely any attire at all. Even this red-skinned freak appeared to be some sort of barbarian cosplayer.

“Great, another Crimson Orc in my class. What is it?” Emberblade bellowed at the idiot standing beside me.

“I’m an Oni, actually,” the red bastard muttered. “Sir, umm, how long does it take for someone to be revived from the waystone?” the nervous idiot inquired, his gaze fixed on the lifeless body of Asshat lying on the ground.

Major Emberblade paused, scratching his chin thoughtfully. “If the waystone is still functioning properly, your body should eventually vanish and reappear by the end of class,” he explained with a hint of uncertainty. “Now, while I had initially planned on conducting group battles, your enthusiasm has led you and your companion here to be our first combatants,” he declared, a dark grin spreading across his face as he pointed directly at me.

“What?” the red bastard squeaked.

As for me, I had a mischievous grin plastered on my face, oozing with excitement. Well, not literally oozing. That would be a bit too much. I had to maintain a semblance of normalcy, after all, and that meant keeping my tentacles firmly in check and hidden. However, a sudden realization struck me – what if my delicate silk shell got torn during one of these fights? My cover would be blown. But then again, it didn’t seem to matter much anymore, especially considering that dryad had already caught onto me. Taking a glance around the classroom, I noticed a diverse array of species, including a few individuals who appeared translucent, reminiscent of other slime monsters I had encountered before, only these ones weren’t in cube form. Besides, if my assignment to the dormitory for freaks and monsters was any indication, it was clear that the academy was well aware of my monstrous nature... or at least, I believed so. *Huh, I really should make an effort to find out more about why I was specifically assigned to House Baku.*

“You may begin whenever you’re ready,” the drake announced, his commanding voice echoing through the arena. “And as for the rest of you, I’d suggest giving them some damn space,” he added.

Just as the major finished saying that, my prey turned to me, a bit nervous, and extended his hand towards me. “I’m Ignisar,” he greeted.

I quickly noticed his shoulders straightening, a sign that his confidence was being restored as he scrutinized me. I offered him a sly smile as I lifted my own hand, returning his gesture. With a single word, I greeted him, “Blight.” Yeah, I knew that skill wasn’t in my system commands anymore, and it was one of the few spells I could cast without explicitly uttering a command.

While it wasn't necessary to mention the spell's name like I just did, I thought it would be rude not to respond to his introduction without one of my own.

The arena was filled with the piercing screams of Ignisar, and I couldn't help but relish in the sound. The black cloud of disease I had conjured engulfed the red-skinned orc, or oni, or whatever the hell he was, causing his skin to blister and his flesh to erupt with pus-filled sores and lesions. Every inch of visible skin was covered, and considering he was dressed like some barbarian cosplayer, there was quite a lot of it exposed. The screams continued, and I found myself oddly satisfied with the torment I had unleashed upon him. I decided to prolong his suffering, finding a twisted pleasure in his anguish rather than swiftly finishing him off.

However, my sadistic pleasure came to an abrupt halt when a dagger materialized in Ignisar's forehead, abruptly ending his agonizing screams. I couldn't help but frown, my attention shifting to the drake. Surprisingly, he didn't appear upset or annoyed by the turn of events. Instead, Emberblade's expression held a hint of contemplation, as if he was mulling over something in his mind.

"Why did you attack him while he was introducing himself?" the major inquired, his tone almost quiz-like as he sought an explanation from me.

"I don't believe in waiting for my enemy to be ready before attacking," I retorted, maintaining my frown as I locked eyes with the major.

He nodded with a hint of approval, his eyes narrowing as he asked, "And why didn't you finish him off, leaving him to suffer from your attack?"

"Fucking sadistic," a female voice muttered, but before another snarky comment could escape her or anyone else's lips, a dagger swiftly found its way into her forehead, silencing her in an instant. The class fell into an eerie silence, broken only by the thud of her lifeless body hitting the ground. Though, with the waystone in play, there was a chance she might not be silenced permanently.

"That wasn't for him. That was for everyone else," I replied as my eyes drifted over my fellow classmates, as my grin returned.

"Explain," Emberblade ordered.

"I can see the expressions of disgust and fear on everyone's faces, and it will certainly have an impact on my next battle," I stated, my voice filled with a tinge of dark glee.

"Perfect! Do you see that, class? Not only did she not hesitate to strike when her enemy was unprepared, but she also utilized his suffering to launch an attack on all of you! That's how you win battles! None of that chivalry and pride bullshit, but by any means necessary! In my class, there is no room for honor. You will fight using any means available to emerge victorious because, in the end, only the winners are left standing," the major bellowed, his voice filled with a newfound sense of joy.

I turned to walk towards the rest of the group, ready to watch the next fight, but the drake had other plans for me. "And where do you think you're going? You're not finished fighting until you've

been defeated or defeated everyone else!” He scanned the group before singling out a random student. “You there! You’re up next, squirmpuff! The fight starts now!”