

BLACK PUDDING

CHAPTER 8

Kaida stifled an internal sigh, meticulously considering the ramifications of the pact her invaluable research specimen had struck with the pseudo-elf pudding—arguably humanoid, but such entities were exceedingly rare on Yaddith. From a scientific standpoint, the shapeshifting female entity could provide a wealth of data for her ongoing studies, Kaida theorized. However, the concept of thievery, specifically targeting the duke and the academy, seemed an irrational course of action, even from an objective standpoint.

But on reconsideration, both parties had arguably brought it upon themselves. The duke, for his misguided affiliation with the religious extremist group, had unsettled the city’s equilibrium. Undoubtedly, if the Queen of Yaddith desired to preserve the neutrality she so prided herself on, she would have to mobilize an army from the capital to quell this disruption. And then there was the Academy of Arcane Knowledge, which could undeniably use a dose of humility following their rash decision to sever her employment in the wake of the unfortunate incident leading to her transformation into a revenant.

However, an intriguing variable had presented itself—this lich, Olin, a fellow scholar of arcane arts, who had also discovered a technique to summon souls from a realm remarkably more remote from the veil than even the demonic plane. Its very existence was situated so far beyond what was presumed possible that magic held no dominion within it. Yet, against all odds, the souls birthed from this plane demonstrated a voracious consumption of mana and exhibited an extraordinary proficiency in its manipulation. The improbability of such an alignment of circumstances was truly astounding and statistically unlikely without some form of external intervention.

It became evident to Kaida that some elusive deity was meddling with her research, though whether their intention was to assist or obstruct remained unclear. Regardless, the emergence of the Black Pudding was an intriguing anomaly. More intriguing still was the soul housed within it. If the academy’s research on Black Puddings was correct, they were remnants of the Eldritch. Yet, the soul within the subject before her shouldn’t be able to integrate successfully if her hypothesis held water.

This hypothesis proposed that these ill-starred derivatives of humanity, thriving within a plane devoid of magic, weren’t true humans in the least. Yet, paradoxically, their souls resonated with this realm as if it was their native habitat. Kaida surmised the lich had also reached the same conclusion – these so-called humans were, in fact, the lost Titans!



Nikola was nothing short of electrified – he had encountered another Earthling. The setting was, admittedly, a tad unusual. Who would have thought he’d bump into one in the sewer depths of the

Boney Express? In terms of probability, it was an outright absurdity! That's why, despite her undeniable allure, he harbored a smidgen of doubt about this captivating woman before him.

And yet! The notion of pilfering from the duke and the academy sparked a lively thrill within him. He would dare the highest heavens and the deepest hells, endure any trial or tribulation, to gather the necessary mana stones. All to witness his splendid airship carving its way through the limitless sea of stars. Well, perhaps not a limitless sea per se, given that his vessel was constrained within the boundaries of Völuspá's atmosphere. Nikola did not know what that boundary was, seeing that Völuspá's atmosphere extended out to its constellation of moons. What's more, most of those moons were still shrouded in mystery. Astronomers speculated their count to be in the thousands, and some suggested new ones were added every century.

Nikola's thoughts were a whirlwind, a carousel of ideas spinning within his mind, but he was able to wrangle them back to the subject of his airship. Actually, "airship" seemed like such an inadequate term for his creation. No, if he had to label it, it was unequivocally a starship! A mere half a dozen potent mana stones were all that stood between him and the activation of each of its nacelles.



I meandered through the skeleton's remarkable lab, noting that much of her work seemed devoted to deciphering the fundamentals of magic—honestly, well beyond my grasp. Nevertheless, there was an undeniable allure. A caged three-headed gargoyle here, a bound and gagged lion-man there, and naturally, rows upon rows of shelves laden with jars and vials containing various liquids and powders. Some even appeared to have captured a tempest inside. Oh, how I was tempted to unscrew one of those lids and witness the ensuing chaos! Alas, I knew better than to indulge my morbid curiosity.

However, the abundant heaps of decomposing cadavers I had envisioned (and, dare I admit, salivated over) were glaringly absent. "Kaida," I ventured nonchalantly, "do you, perchance, have any rotting bodies I could, well, snack on?" A perfectly reasonable question, I thought.

"What?! Absolutely not... well, perhaps a handful, but do I strike you as some kind of necromancer?" Kaida retorted, a whiff of indignation coloring her tone.

I paused, my eyes lingering on her skeletal frame enveloped in a ragged purple gown. Memories of Razzle's insinuations of a necromancer and Faelwen's chattering reverberated in my mind. Then, with a casual shrug and an agreeing nod, I offered my candid assessment, "Indeed, yes, you absolutely do!"

The undead woman huffed in indignation, her gaze sweeping across the cluttered laboratory with a glare of annoyance. "I am a distinguished researcher with a mere inclination towards the intricate arts of necromancy. However, let me be unequivocally clear: I categorically refuse to be labeled as a necromancer, regardless of the ignorant assumptions and misguided judgments from the uninformed masses. But," she added, her voice tinged with a touch of resentment, "if, by any chance, you happen to be in need of spare corpses, you might just find a few conveniently tucked away in that closet over there."

With a casual nod of acknowledgment, I trailed after the skeletal finger's guidance, paying little heed to the woman's denial. Deep down, she and I both knew the truth: she was, indeed, a necromancer. The closet door creaked open under my grip, releasing a pungent wave of decaying flesh that set my mouth watering. A delightful mound of at least ten corpses greeted my eyes, each donning the unmistakable armor of the city guards. Glancing back at the skeletal woman, I found her engrossed in conversation with Olin as if the pile of lifeless bodies was nothing more than mere decorations. *Yep, I think I found myself a new friend.*

"Eew! Close that door. It stinks... wait, are those?" The little gnome's face contorted with a mix of disgust and horror as his eyes fixated on the mound of lifeless bodies.

I couldn't help but find his reaction rather peculiar, considering the grotesque spectacle surrounding us within Kaida's laboratory. Suppressing the urge to roll my eyes, I complied with his request and closed the door. After all, I had no desire to jeopardize my means of escape from this forsaken moon. However, as I turned my attention back to the gnome, I noticed a flicker of unease in his eyes. He took a hesitant step backward, seemingly unsettled by my presence.

With my hands planted on my hips, I shot him a stern gaze. "You know, I had my sights set on devouring those," I declared, my voice filled with mild irritation. *So much for not jeopardizing my ride.*

Nikola sputtered in disbelief, his words stumbling out. "You. You. You are a cannibal?"

As I responded, a mischievous glint danced in my eyes, my tone filled with playful ambiguity. "No! I highly doubt any of those corpses are slime monsters or Black Puddings. So, yeah, of course, it's a no... Although I must admit, I have eaten a couple Gelatinous Cubes before. So, maybe?" I mused, stroking my chin thoughtfully.

"You're not going to eat me, are you?" I asked almost tearfully.

I let my gaze wander over the gnome's tiny, childlike eyes, feeling a peculiar mixture of amusement and indigestion swirling within my dark goopy core. "Oh, worry not," I assured him with a wicked grin as if relishing his unfounded concerns. "I have absolutely no appetite for your succulent flesh." Kneeling in closer, I continued, savoring in the aroma of fear wafting off him. "But let me regale you with three delightfully morbid reasons: First, you hold the key to my escape from this desolate moon and back to someone I care deeply for. Secondly, your irresistibly adorable appearance triggers a most peculiar revulsion within my darker inclinations. Guess I won't be auditioning for the role of the wicked witch dwelling in a gingerbread house anytime soon, my dear Orko."

"And third?" he asked, crossing his arms defiantly. "My name's not Orko."

"You're from home, which makes you practically family," I stated as if it were a matter of fact. Although I had killed Jason, Rob, Heather, Yui, and Jeremy. Well, the ceiling collapsed on me, killing Yui, Jeremy, and myself, but I'm counting that as my kill even though Jeremy caused it. *Ugh! I hate that dog-eared prick.*

"Fine, I'll trust your word, though I must say, the thought of you devouring those corpses is both morally reprehensible and utterly repulsive," he retorted.

“Ah, to each their own,” I replied, a wide grin stretching unnaturally across my silk face.

“That’s unsettling,” Nikola responded, clearly taken aback by my devilish smile. “We need to devise a plan to steal those mana stones.”

I couldn’t help but maintain my enigmatic smile as I assured him, “Don’t you worry, Nikola, I already have a plan in mind.”

He raised an eyebrow, curiosity evident in his eyes. “Alright, enlighten me. What’s your plan?”

With a devilish glint, I replied, “It’s rather straightforward, my dear Orko. I shall simply stroll right in and claim the stones for myself.”

“That’s not stealing. That’s a home invasion,” he remarked, exasperation coloring his tone.

“Oh, but my dear Orko, it won’t be a mere home invasion if I carry it out on eight legs.”

“What on earth are you talking about?”



Faelwen hurried back home through the murky sewers, her heart heavy with gratitude for finally escaping the clutches of the lich that had usurped her deceased husband’s body. The weight of her heartache was crushing, for she harbored a deep resentment towards her late husband for his treachery and his forsaking of their cherished goddess. The once tight-knit community that thrived beneath the city now cast her aside, ostracizing her for Razzle’s betrayal and his affiliation with the duke. Often accusing her husband of being one of the zealots that held the duke’s leash.

In her desperate hope for justice, Faelwen yearned for the queen to uncover the sinister events unfolding in Thirion and mobilize her forces to confront the threat. However, as the specter of the approaching season of monster waves loomed, Faelwen couldn’t help but feel a twinge of concern, knowing that the chances of receiving timely assistance were growing increasingly unlikely. A wistful sigh escaped her lips as she pondered the need for a hero, a savior of unimaginable power, who could rise up and deliver them from the impending doom that loomed overhead. But such tales were only found within the realm of children’s stories, Faelwen thought with a touch of resignation.

As Faelwen neared the entrance to her humble abode, a sense of unease gripped her as an eerie silence enveloped the surroundings. Though she occasionally allowed her children to venture above ground for play, it was highly unusual for them to be absent at this hour. Her eyes widened in horror as she caught sight of the door to her home, forcibly torn from its hinges. Fear pulsed through her veins as she rushed inside, her heart pounding in her chest. What she discovered within shattered her soul—her once peaceful sanctuary lay in ruins, remnants of a future now splintered and broken.

Her eyes fell upon a parchment ominously affixed to the stone wall by a wickedly sharp knife, the same weapon that came as standard issue for those who served the duke. As Faelwen’s gaze locked onto the words etched upon the notice, her heart shattered into countless fragments, each letter carrying a weight of despair.

To all who shall read this royal proclamation,

By the command of the noble Duke, it is hereby declared that the inhabitants of this dwelling, being of a distinct subspecies, have attained the prescribed age of service.

Let it be proclaimed throughout the realm on this momentous day that formal writs of enlistment have been duly issued.

With Esteemed Regards,

Duke Vicar the Third.