

BLACK PUDDING

CHAPTER 22

And so, here I am, compressed and condensed down to the size of a tarantula, with most of my gooey tar-like body stored within Stellar Void. As I skittered on eight legs through an enemy camp just outside the town of Elsternwick's shabby wooden walls. I was certain I had stumbled upon the tent where they held Aurelia captive, but there was a small hitch. Twelve bastards, six in full elegant plate armor, and another six cosplaying Conan and Red Sonja fucks straight out of a Comicon. They were guarding every portion of the tent's exterior. I couldn't seem to find a way past them. Well, I could probably kill all of them, but not without alerting the entire camp. If Aurelia was inside, I couldn't risk endangering her.

Seriously, Ava, why are half of these soldiers prancing around half-ass naked?

My guess, the more skin someone has exposed to the elements, the easier it is for them to manipulate ambient mana for casting spells.

Guess?

Yes, guess! It also might explain why we're so good at it since we're always naked!

What? I am not – wait! I suppose I am. Hmph, but no. I've got my silk face and shoulders. That should count as clothing!

Your face? Blake, first off, it doesn't count. Spider silk is a creation of our body, so it still counts as part of us. Because of that, it shouldn't interfere with ambient mana manipulation. If anything, it might actually help.

Ugh, whatever!

As the last glimmer of sunlight vanished into the horizon, the camp was cast into utter darkness, illuminated only by the flickering lights of the fire pits. The shadows leaped and twirled like dancers upon a stage as the shadows swad along to the tune of the flickering flames, aiding in my concealment. I crept unseen through the camp like a spider on a mission. I was focused on one outcome – to find something, anything, that would cause the most amount of chaos, confusion, and anarchy...

What we need, Blake is to find where these assholes keep their stockpile of shit that goes boom!

Ava, that's a stupid idea. No, it is a really stupid idea!

Sometimes the worst ideas are the best because nobody ever sees them coming!

That's the dumbest reasoning I've ever heard!

Yeah, but do you have a better idea?

...

Thought so!

Two hours into my search, I felt as useful as a stripper at a funeral. **Ha!** That brought back an amusing memory of an ex-girlfriend of mine at my grandfather's funeral – **Anyways!** Ava's plan was turning into a never-ending egg hunt rather than a strategy. Despite my lack of success in finding their magical weapons cache or artillery used by those catapult thingies, I managed to grasp the full layout of their camp. I now knew, without a doubt, where Gimona and Anlyth's tents were pitched. But I had no luck finding that Dumbledore-looking piece of shit, Craycroft. He was nowhere to be seen within the confines of the encampment...

However, I've noticed how knights kept staggering in and out of that dilapidated village. This left only one last place to explore before considering my new plan. I had come up with it an hour or so ago. I'm calling it, plan MM for mass murder, all ninja-like! Ava was against it, claiming we would get caught. *Blah!*

As I crawled up the dilapidated wooden walls of Elsternwick, I caught sight of a figure I recognized from earlier. It was the hulking brute I had seen clinging onto Anlyth, heading towards the town.

And, surprise, surprise, it's that big behemoth.

Blake, Aurelia first! Murder him after.

But hold on now, Ava, he's all alone and important to that bastard who killed Wartie. I want him dead! And let's not forget Olin needs a new body. Preferably one that I'll enjoy torturing!

Can't we just leave him be and target the elf directly after we've blown this place sky-high?

*Yes, we could, but I don't want to just kill the elf. I want to take everything from the bastard and his companions before killing them all. What could be better than killing his lover and sticking a lich's soul inside him? Can you imagine if Olin were the one to deliver the fatal blow to that elf? Anlyth's face right before his death would be priceless! **Ha-Ha!** No, we're killing him. Now! And storing his body inside the void for later!*

As I crept along the deteriorating and rotting wooden ramparts of Elsternwick's outer walls, I kept my sights on the big man like a cat stalking a mouse. To my astonishment, the village was far more expansive than I had anticipated. Its buildings were concealed from view like secrets hidden beneath a bowl's rim.

I watched from my perch above the fray as I plotted my next move. But imagine my surprise when I saw the village below teeming with more soldiers and knights than I could've ever imagined. They stumbled about the cobblestone streets, lost in their drunken revelry. Yet, the villagers of this shithole invited the invaders into their homes like heroes returning from war. Oh, how I looked forward to the horrors I would bring down upon them all.

As I remained perched atop the ramparts, my gaze fixed on the object of my desire. My prey entered a dark alley, and I was ready to pounce. He approached a door at the end of the alley guarded by two hulking figures, like two sentries guarding the entrance to a kingdom's treasury.

They both snapped to attention, slamming their fists into their chests, and I was momentarily caught off guard by the display.

“General, it is good to see you!”

With a smirk that only the devil himself could muster, I slinked across the ramparts and onto the building’s exterior above them. I was thrilled Anlyth’s love was far more important than I had thought. My form shifted and twisted, swelling in size as my spider legs transformed into sinuous tentacles. I slithered across the cobblestone walls above, leaving behind a path of corroded stone in my wake. Maybe I was slightly too eager – I was a monster, a predator, and I would not be denied.

After a night of celebration, the air was thick with the scent of piss and vomit, a sweet perfume that only whetted my appetite for the kill. Like a moth to an open flame, I was drawn to the unspeakable horrors about to be had. As the General disappeared behind the door, I slithered down, a writhing mass of tentacles ready to strike. The two guards were mere playthings as I caught them by surprise, their heads smothered in my tar-like embrace, their muffled screams silenced before they could escape their lips. I savored the thrill of the kill and the delightful flavors that followed as they kicked and thrashed about. But I couldn’t linger too long, I had a few other goals this night. So, I stored their headless bodies within my void for a later feast to be savored.

My sly grin returned as I shifted into my human form and grasped the doorknob, my metaphorical heart pounding with eager anticipation. With a twist of my wrist, the rusted hinges of the old door let out a bloodcurdling screech as I pushed the door open.

“**Ha-ha!** So much for being silent,” Ava teased.

“Oh, shut up!”

With bated breath, I peered around the door. A spiraling staircase lay before me, leading into the unknown depths of a seemingly bottomless black abyss. Tiptoeing past the door, I crept down the stone steps. The voices of a heated conversation reached my ears, growing louder with each step. My curiosity was piqued, and I couldn’t help but wonder what secrets I would uncover. That said, I found myself frowning as I realized that what I had mistaken for a conversation was, in fact, an interrogation and a brutal one at that.

“Where has your lord sought asylum?!” A harsh slap echoed up the stairwell, “**OUT WITH IT!**” Another slap sound rang out. “**NOW!**”

My anger boiled up like a witch’s brew at the thought of them interrogating Aurelia. But, as I reached the bottom of the stairs, I glanced around a pillar, and I was relieved to witness the General and two burly men mercilessly beating a frog-faced man. Though he was familiar, I didn’t much care. Their ceaseless blows and shouted demands left their pathetic victim no chance of answering. It seemed they derived more pleasure from torturing the frog man than extracting any valuable information. *I can respect that!*

One of the interrogators turned to my prey, his eyes sparkling with sadistic glee. “General Ezad,” he growled, “permission to start severing limbs? Let’s see if that’ll loosen the wretched freak’s tongue.”

General Ezad gave a grunt of approval as one of the interrogators turned and started making his toward the staircase and passed me, an eager expression written across his face. But little did he know, I was even more eager than him. With a roll of my shoulders, eight writhing tentacles extended from my back. Before I knew it, I was hoisting myself up the wall and above the staircase, concealing myself from sight like a spider waiting for an unsuspecting insect to wander into her web. In a matter of seconds, my victim passed beneath me, and before Ezad and the other interrogator could even bat an eye, I had snapped the fool’s neck and pulled his corpse inside of me...inside my void – Stellar Void! *Ugh, damnit, Blake!*

Ha-ha!

Shut up, Ava!

That wasn’t me, Blake. That was you laughing at yourself!

...

Stealing a glimpse back into the chamber where the frog man was being tortured, his pathetic whimpering like music to my ears, I spotted a few prison cells lining the walls. A quick glance with thermal revealed nothing but an icy emptiness within them, as if the warmth had been ripped away. The General appeared to be getting annoyed as he cast his gaze back toward where the other interrogator had vanished, but thankfully, he remained unaware of my presence. I had carefully spread my Mana Sight evenly across my entire body. Which helped avoid the telltale orange glow that would give away my position. This made it easier to remain unnoticed, using only a sly tendril from my body to peek around the corner, keeping a watchful eye on them.

“Soldier! What’s keeping you?” The General bellowed, his frown deepening as no response was offered.

“It’s no use, human. You’ll be dead before you make it back to your pitiful Slaethia,” purred a seductive voice as sweet as honey from a cell that, just a moment before, I was certain was empty. “My beloved will make sure of it.”

Hearing that voice, my heart missed a beat, and yes, I meant that metaphorically – again! Of course, I don’t have an actual heart, nor blood – unless you consider my corrosive and poisonous secretions to be my blood...or saliva? *Whatever.* I was lost in absolute euphoria that I had finally found Aurelia!

Umm... Blake, what was in that tent within the encampment if Aurelia is here?

Not, sure, but I don’t think it matters anymore!

Perhaps...

The General let out a soft chuckle as he approached the cell. “Brave words for one who’s been captured. We stole the dungeon core from beneath your ruins without one of you monsters noticing. Most of your coven has been either slayed or scattered in the wind. So, tell me, dark princess, who’s left to save you now? You’ll be in Slaethia by the month’s end, where our King’s finest will see your proper integration. Until then, sit back and savor the sounds of your fellow captives’ screams.”

Like, I would allow that to happen!

Nope, not when we have far grander plans in store for Aurelia!

Ava?! I think I just read your mind for once!

Tentacle Hentia?

Yeah...

Huh, I guess mind-reading goes both ways!