

# BLACK PUDDING

## CHAPTER 10 – Nightmares & Tentacles

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There were five...

Heather treaded silently, a nervous tension pulsating through her veins, keeping her eyes averted from the four fellow champion candidates who followed closely behind. Together, they ventured deeper into the dungeon, their footsteps muffled by the eerie stillness that enveloped their surroundings. Each of them harbored a treacherous desire, eagerly anticipating the next act of betrayal that would fracture their fragile alliance. It had been Jason who had claimed the first victim amongst them, a brutal act that had seen him devour Sophia's heart. Since then, a tenuous truce had held them in an uneasy balance.

Amidst the oppressive darkness, Heather engaged in skirmishes with the rare creatures lurking within. Every spell cast was accompanied by a watchful gaze, her senses attuned to the subtlest of movements from her fellow candidates. The hunger to grow stronger, to level up and gain power consumed her every thought, a primal instinct fueled by the desperation for survival. But the scarcity of monsters gnawed at her mind, breeding a festering paranoia that twisted her thoughts. Who would be the first to break the fragile truce, shattering the uneasy peace? And, more hauntingly, which one among them would be the first to brandish a blade against her, aiming to claim her life?

As their journey through the dungeon persisted, Heather found herself engulfed in an ever-present dread that clung to the stagnant air. The silence was broken only by the echo of their steps, a haunting reminder of the desolate path they tread. Occasionally, a primal growl from the depths signaled the presence of a dungeon monster, though such encounters remained a rarity. In her relentless pursuit for survival, Heather's mind incessantly circled back to the looming question: *which one among them would strike first?* Could she truly trust someone like Yua, who, despite appearing protective over her, was undoubtedly driven by the same singular goal—survival at any cost?

Heather existed in a constant state of vigilance, her gaze forever darting, searching for hidden threats lurking within the group. She stood alone, isolated, devoid of any allies in this treacherous landscape. Bound within the vessel of a slender, dark elf woman with flowing white hair, she found herself living out her fantastical dreams of being a mage in another world, though the reality proved far from ideal. With grim determination, she acknowledged the harsh truth that survival demanded a willingness to fight and stand against her adversaries. Heather resolved to embrace whatever measures necessary to emerge victorious, to claw her way out of the dungeon's clutches with her life intact.

Yet, even as she whispered assurances of survival to herself, Heather was plagued by the weight of her impending demise. She recognized her inherent weakness, the truth that would inevitably

be discovered by her fellow candidates. Lying about her level had provided temporary respite, dissuading them from perceiving her as an easy target. It had served its purpose, holding their aggression at bay. But she knew that the facade would crumble, that the hour would come when the shaky alliance reached its bitter end. She would then find herself at the mercy of those she had deceived.

The long-awaited moment had arrived, and Heather stood at the threshold of the boss's chamber, confronted by the sheer grandeur of its imposing entrance. The massive doors loomed before her, casting a foreboding presence that seemed to swallow the surrounding light. Taking a deep breath, she endeavored to still the rapid beats of her heart and steady her trembling hands. The weight of the imminent battle lay heavy upon her, pressing down like a suffocating presence that fed off her escalating fears. Heather couldn't shake the disquieting sensation of being under scrutiny, as if unseen eyes traced her every movement, heightening her unease to an almost unbearable level.



Yua's arrival was accompanied by a visible trembling of her hands, a telltale sign of the inner turmoil beneath her enigmatic and composed demeanor. Behind the mask of calmness, doubt and fear clawed at her, threatening to consume her resolve as she stood on the precipice of the boss's chamber. Standing tall and commanding, her towering figure radiated confidence, further bolstered by her transformation into a high elf. Gifted with inherent intelligence and wisdom, Yua effortlessly distinguished herself among her peers, renowned by them for her exceptional ability to think swiftly and make sound decisions amidst the most intense and challenging situations. However, at this moment, she found herself grappling with her own internal fears, as if some external force was stoking the flames of her apprehension.

As Yua made her way toward the imposing doors, the darkness seemed to seep into her very being, suffusing her mind and spirit with a heavy sense of oppression. A malevolent presence lurked on the other side, poised to strike at a moment's notice. The sensation of being watched intensified, engulfing Yua in an overwhelming wave of dread. It clung to her like a shroud, refusing to be shaken off. The weight of responsibility bore down upon her as she stood before the entrance to the boss's chamber. She knew that the outcome of the impending battle rested not only on her shoulders but also on the collective actions of her fellow candidates, individuals who would soon become her adversaries. The gravity of the situation was not lost on her, as the fate of their shared conflict hung in the balance.

With a deep breath, Yua held onto the hope that her own resolve and fearlessness would ignite a spark within Heather, propelling them forward as a unified force. Together, they would navigate the treacherous path ahead and emerge triumphant from this harrowing ordeal. Yua steeled herself, prepared to confront her own fears head-on and, if necessary, to eliminate the other candidates at the first hint of betrayal. Together, she and Heather would seize their chance to escape, leaving behind the trial altogether. That was the dream, at least, the outcome she desperately craved.



Jason approached the door next, a serene composure masking his true intentions. He cast a watchful gaze upon the others, silently assessing their strengths and vulnerabilities. In his mind, he deemed himself the most cunning, confident that his superior intellect would pave the way for his triumph over the rest. Unwavering in his resolve, Jason harbored no illusions—he had every intention of betraying the group.

With his lean frame, Jason sported an unsettling grin that mirrored his quick wit, evoking a sense of unease in those who crossed his path. His sharp, needle-like teeth further enhanced his fearsome demeanor. With a touch of vanity, he boasted of his resemblance to a character from a Mortal Kombat video game, though his hair was more reminiscent of Edward Scissorhands. Embracing the darkness that enveloped him, Jason reveled in his twisted perception as the ultimate champion of the darkness. After all, being thrust into the body of a dark fae had only heightened Jason's affinity for the cruel and sinister.

The palpable tension and uncertainty among his unsuspecting party members only fueled Jason's sadistic pleasure. Each passing moment heightened his anticipation as he eagerly awaited the chance to extinguish yet another unsuspecting soul. However, a flicker of unease began to infiltrate his usually confident demeanor. The massive doors exuded an unknown danger, and an unsettling feeling gnawed at him from the depths of his mind. Heather and he had already scouted out the toad a couple of days ago, but something felt different this time. Jason dismissed the nagging sensation, attributing it to his excitement and anticipation of mercilessly dispatching his companions and indulging in their hearts after confronting the boss.

Jason was a ruthless competitor and determined to come out on top. He was aware that the other candidates were plotting against each other. Still, Jason was confident in his ability to outwit them. The upcoming boss battle was crucial, and Jason was determined to use it to his advantage. He watched as the other candidates were mentally preparing for the fight, but he held back, waiting for the right moment to strike.

In the end, the choice was stark and clear. Either they faced the boss as a united front, or Jason could take matters into his own hands, disposing of his companions one by one before confronting the boss alone and inevitably meeting his own demise. As he stood there, feigning camaraderie while waiting for the others to gather their resolve, Jason's mind was consumed by sinister anticipation. The thought of executing his carefully crafted plan to murder each of his fellow candidates filled him with a perverse thrill. He was determined to prove himself as the ultimate dark champion, a testament to the power and dominance he wielded. With each passing moment, his heart raced with a mix of excitement and sadistic satisfaction. For Jason, the forthcoming battle held the promise of eliminating his competitors and securing his path to victory.



Besides the others, Rob arrived with a mixture of overwhelming fear and uncertainty coursing through his being. At the tender age of fifteen, he was the youngest among them and felt ill-prepared for the perils of this new world. The prospect of betraying his companions weighed heavily on his conscience, and the thought of shedding their blood in cold indifference left him paralyzed with doubt. In the depths of his soul, Rob silently pleaded for miraculous intervention,

desperately hoping to navigate the treacherous dungeon unscathed, with no stains of blood on his hands.

Rob's imposing presence was undeniable, his half-orc physique adorned with a musculature that demanded attention and respect. His brow remained perpetually furrowed, a testament to the seriousness and intensity that radiated from within him, despite his young age. In his previous life as an avid gamer, Rob had reveled in visions of becoming a paladin, a paragon of unwavering dedication to justice and a master of divine powers. Yet, the cruel twist of fate had destined him to be a necromancer apprentice, a role that clashed with his aspirations and left him grappling with his true purpose in this new reality.

Rob's mind churned with a storm of unsettling thoughts as he lingered outside the foreboding entrance to the boss's chamber. The sheer magnitude of the massive doors served as a grim reminder of the weighty consequences they faced. Failure to overcome the imminent challenge would not only unravel the tenuous truce that held them together but also unleash a chaotic spiral of betrayal and violence. The very notion of Jason's sinister ambitions, fueled by a desire to eliminate his comrades and establish himself as the embodiment of darkness, stirred a profound sense of revulsion within Rob. The internal conflict waged fiercely as he grappled with his own convictions and sought a path that aligned with his moral compass.

Yet, what disturbed him, even more, was the uncharacteristic silence that cloaked Jason. It was as if a cloud of unease had settled upon the group, and Rob couldn't shake the unsettling feeling that something was amiss. Despite the fear that gripped his heart, Rob clung steadfastly to his unwavering sense of justice and morality, hoping that it would serve as a guiding light through the encroaching darkness.

As a contingency plan, Rob relied on the two undead goblins that trailed behind him, ready to act as a diversion against Jason and the boss while he sought his escape. While his primary objective was to survive this nightmarish ordeal, he knew that achieving it would require unwavering determination and resourcefulness. The instinct to flee surged within him, tempting him with the promise of safety, but Rob understood that yielding to such impulses would only invite Jason's swift and ruthless pursuit. Steeling himself, he prepared to confront the impending battle, drawing upon his wits as his most potent weapon. Though he had deviated from the path of the paladin he had once aspired to be, he clung fiercely to that distant dream, determined to find solace in the strength of his resolve, however tenuous it may be.



Jeremy found himself in the body of a formidable beastkin, characterized by broad shoulders, canine traits, and a resonant, booming voice. His innate potential as a fearsome warrior shone through, positioning him as a formidable presence among the group of five. Jeremy possessed a protective nature, constantly striving to maintain harmony and peace among his companions. Through Heather and Jason's scouting, they had determined that the looming boss was a colossal red toad, a formidable adversary that would require their collective teamwork to overcome.

Despite his reservations, Jeremy remained resolute in his determination to see their mission through to the end. He fully grasped the weight of their situation, recognizing that their only chance for survival lay in facing the boss together, lest their fragile truce crumble and devolved into a bloodbath. Taking a deep breath, he steeled himself for the impending battle, mentally preparing to confront any obstacle that stood in their way. The massive doors of the boss's chamber loomed before him, their imposing presence a stark reminder of the daunting task that awaited them. Yet, Jeremy stood firm, unwavering in his commitment to the cause. Despite his concerns, he braced himself for the forthcoming clash with the boss, resolved to persevere at any cost.



As Heather and the other candidates ventured further into the boss's chamber, anticipation burned within them, fueling their eagerness for the impending battle. However, their expectations were shattered upon witnessing an unexpected sight. Instead of the anticipated toad, they beheld the presence of a stunning woman, her flawless white skin and cascading raven hair. Her elegant attire akin to a gothic gown. Seated upon an imposing throne adorned with writhing black tentacles, she exuded an aura of otherworldly beauty and power. Yet, her mesmerizing gaze, bathed in a molten iron hue, held an unsettling quality. It was as if the radiance of an angelic being was juxtaposed with the hunger of a ravenous demon, her porcelain doll-like appearance belying the presence of unimaginable horrors lurking within her. As her lips curved into a smile, revealing porcelain white teeth contrasted against black gums, the air thickened with an unmistakably terrifying aura, sending shivers down the spines of all who stood before her.

The dim lighting of the room was only accentuated by the eerily glowing orange eyes of the woman on the throne. An overwhelming feeling of discomfort permeated the air, making it feel like they were inhaling a dense fog. Four of the five candidates cast uneasy glances at one another, their expressions reflecting the fear and uncertainty they all felt as they stood on shaky legs before the strange woman, bearing the full force of an ominous aura surrounding her.

She began muttering to herself, her words so hushed that they were barely audible, yet they stirred a sense of unease and madness within four of them. Abruptly, her attention shifted from them, her demonic orange eyes disinterestedly fixating on her own black nail polish. It was as though she deemed their presence beneath her, fueling their growing discomfort and trepidation. Her murmurs persisted as if completely oblivious to their existence, intensifying their sense of dread and confirming that the unsettling aura they had felt upon entering emanated solely from her.

“Ugh, are you sure about this? I mean, seriously? But still, I can't help but question it. Yeah, yeah, I know I need to toughen up for what's out there, but is this really the way? It's just... I never expected you to be the one pushing me to ditch the system. Didn't you create it? I guess there's that reason. Oh well, I hope so, but everything outside of this noob dungeon can't really be as bad as you insist. Alright, fine, no casting with the system.”

“Suffer the eye of the seer, for none shall hide, [**Appraisal**],” Heather whispered the incantation. The air grew heavy with anticipation, and she braced herself for the revelation that awaited her. But when the screen materialized in her vision, horror washed over her, freezing her in place.

**Name:** Blake

**Race:** Black Pudding

**Class:** Dungeon Monster

**Level:** ??

Titles

**Hopeless Crusader**

“S-she’s a dungeon monster,” Heather uttered under her breath. Unfortunately for her, the others were too preoccupied to notice her words; their attention focused on the woman.

Heather was unfamiliar with Black Puddings, but that didn’t faze her much. After all, there were many other monsters and creatures in this reality that she had yet to encounter. However, the question-marked level of the Black Pudding puzzled her. She had never come across anyone or anything with a title, and the name gave her pause. Could it really be the same monster?

Despite the fear and uncertainty that permeated the room, Jason remained undaunted. The prospect of the battle ahead only fueled his determination to emerge victorious, and he couldn’t help but relish the experience. With a steely gaze, he surveyed the strange woman’s body, his eyes hungry and eager for the challenge that lay before him. He was ready to confront it head-on and savor every moment of the encounter.

Yua finally found her voice and asked the question that had been lingering in her mind, “What level is she?”

However, no response came as the strange woman resumed her murmurs, seemingly lost in her own world. “Yeah, I got this! I don’t want to scare ‘em off before the fight even begins! Yeah, yeah, I guess you’re right, but I feel like I’m cheating. No. No, I like cheating!”

Yua’s ears perked up, catching fragments of the mad woman’s whispers, but they were disjointed and elusive, preventing her from fully comprehending the conversation. Nevertheless, the erratic nature of the woman’s murmurs was enough to solidify Yua’s conclusion—the woman was nuts!

The four candidates, minus Jason, were plagued by uncertainty, their faith in their pursuit wavering. They knew that faltering would lead to their demise. Despite the tremors in their resolve, they could not bring themselves to give up, having come too far to surrender. Their only options were a brutal defeat at the hand of a fellow candidate or united in a violent confrontation with the strange woman. Standing on unsteady legs, they braced themselves for the impending terror as they listened to the woman’s manic whispers.

“Fine, but at least let me savor the taste of their flesh in silence afterward. Well, gee thanks...though I must admit, I’m rather surprised by your sudden helpfulness.”

Jason’s razorblade-filled smirk only grew, “this bitch is crazy!”

Jeremy asked with urgency, “I want to know what happened to the toad. Heather, what’s her level?”

“I-I don’t know! Her level is hidden behind question marks. But it does indicate that she’s a dungeon monster,” Heather replied.

Yua asked curiously, “What about that creepy chair?”

“Appraisal only d-detects her. However, she has a name. It’s B-Blake,” Heather answered.

“Blake,” Yua repeated.

Jason laughed, “Ha! So, she’s all by herself.”

Rob proposed, “The chair could be an object. Maybe we should try to get her away from it.”

Jason waved off their concerns, his voice laced with confidence. “Why are you all so nervous? It’s obviously just a decorative throne. If we work together, we can take her down without a problem.”

Heather’s voice trembled with urgency as she emphasized their lack of knowledge about the woman’s level. Unfortunately, her timid tone failed to catch the attention of the others, who remained oblivious to her warning.

Jason’s laughter reverberated through the chamber, eliciting a sense of unease among the remaining four. Without hesitation, he charged towards the woman, his steps resolute and determined. The others stood frozen, their surprise leaving them momentarily defenseless. Meanwhile, the enigmatic woman remained seated upon her throne of writhing tentacles, an embodiment of fear and dread in their eyes. As Jason neared his target, the woman raised her hand, and a single tentacle recoiled, poised to strike with lethal intent.

Remaining seated upon her throne, the woman directed a single finger towards Jason, who had closed in on her. In an instant, a tentacle sprang to life, lashing out and releasing a cloud of yellow mist that engulfed him. The noxious fumes swiftly engulfed Jason’s body immediately succumbed to the noxious fumes, his strength waning as the mist infiltrated his lungs. Agonizing sensations wracked his form as if his flesh were being consumed by acid. A piercing scream tore through the air, only to be abruptly silenced as Jason vanished from sight. Moments later, he reappeared by Jeremy’s side, his face contorted in pain as he clutched it, groaning in torment.

“That fucking bitch threw acid at me,” Jason cried out!

As the mist dissipated, the woman slowly rose from her throne, her presence commanding and eerie. Her eyes, aglow with an intense orange hue, held a flickering inner fire that seemed to consume her very being. With a detached gaze, she observed Jason’s collapse to the ground, leaving the remaining four candidates stunned and rendered speechless.

The porcelain doll woman snickered to herself, seemingly entertained by the chaos she had caused. “That wasn’t a bit much,” she murmured, a mischievous glint in her orange eyes. “I haven’t killed him... yet.” She paused as if listening to an internal conversation. “Oh, that? Well, I couldn’t resist trying out one of my new skills. I know, I know, system commands and all that. Geesh! Alright, alright, I’ll feel the so-called ambient mana... No! Ugh, you sound like a hippie. Yes, I’m paying attention!”

Heather's eyes widened in shock at the sight of Jason's agony. With cautious steps, she approached him, her hand trembling as she reached out to touch his shoulder. Drawing upon the power within her, she channeled her magic and stammered through the incantation, her voice quivering, "I call upon the darkness, m-mend!" A gentle warmth enveloped Jason, emanating from Heather's touch, as a soothing aura of healing magic embraced his wounded form. Gradually, the damage inflicted by the acidic mist began to fade, replaced by a sense of relief and comfort.

Despite her efforts to heal him, Heather's true feelings toward Jason simmered beneath the surface, far from warm and compassionate. In truth, she despised him with every fiber of her being, harboring a deep-seated desire to witness his suffering and demise. She understood all too well that he wouldn't hesitate to inflict pain upon her if their positions were reversed. However, in this moment, self-preservation took precedence over personal vendettas. Keeping Jason alive, albeit begrudgingly, became a necessary evil in their harrowing struggle for survival.

Yua shook her head, "We've got to work together, you dumbass!"

"Yeah, I think I figured that out," Jason muttered as he stood back up, fully healed.

In the face of their initial fear and personal reservations, the group quickly recognized the urgency of banding together to confront the common enemy before them. The mysterious woman posed a shared threat that required their collective strength and cooperation. Reluctantly setting aside their differences, even Jason understood the need for a united front. Taking a moment to gather their courage, the group prepared themselves for the impending battle, fully aware that only through unity could they hope to overcome the formidable challenges that lay ahead.

Yua was the first to shout, "I call upon you, oh dark goddess, heed my plea, [**Darkness Arrow**]!"

Jeremy followed, "From the gastral depths of my soul, I call forth, [**Acid Ball**]."

The dual attacks of Acid Ball and Darkness Arrow hit the dungeon monster disguised as a stunning woman with full force. She let out a scream of agony and stumbled, falling to her hands and knees. Jason burst into triumphant laughter, but Heather noticed the smile on the woman's face and felt herself shiver.

"Dramatic? Oh, shut up and let me have my fun," the woman muttered beneath her breath to herself.

"Fear the phantoms, for they shall consume you, [**Phantom Slash**]," Jason chanted before vanishing.

Jason materialized above the woman, a wicked smile etched on his face as she writhed and trembled beneath him. With sadistic delight, he raised his sword, relishing the anticipation of the final blow. But as he swung the blade towards her neck, a chilling realization struck him. The woman's cries were not of pain but of perverse pleasure. Her laughter filled the chamber, stirring a twisted mixture of confusion and exhilaration within Jason. Undeterred, he executed his strike, severing her head from her body in a single swift motion. Yet, as her lifeless form collapsed, a strange transformation occurred. The woman melted away, merging with her grotesque throne, leaving Jason standing beside it, a perplexed expression plastered across his face.



“What just happened?” Jeremy asked.

They all stood in stunned silence as the squirming tentacles of the throne abruptly vanished before their eyes. It wasn't a simple disappearance; it was a rapid burst of acceleration that only one of them managed to perceive. Rob, with his heightened battle senses, was the first to catch sight of her. The woman's dress underwent a startling transformation, hugging her curves with a newfound allure while her oily black hair cascaded down to the curve of her lower back, writhing with a sinister delight. Despite the change, her glowing orange eyes remained unmistakable, cutting through the darkness with an intense gaze. One of her arms had twisted into a tentacle, ensnaring one of Rob's undead goblins, which fought desperately but futilely as it dissolved within her grasp.

“Okay, now it's my turn—what? Ugh, yes, ambient mana, gotcha. Well, I needed to use the system for burst. I get it,” the woman muttered, her tone bordering on argumentative, leaving the five onlookers thoroughly confused.

Jason started yelling in frustration, “WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT!”

“What is she talking about,” Yua asked?

“Yua, how long until you can recast Darkness Arrow,” Jeremy probed while considering their options.

“It normally takes around three minutes. What about your Acid Ball?”

“Same,” he groaned.

The woman's gaze shifted away from the sight of the oozing goblin guts and landed on the group. “It's not wise to state your cooldown timer like that in front of an opponent. Geesh, isn't that basic gamer common sense?”

“FUCK YOU,” Jason screamed!

Heather, however, realized something was immediately off about the woman's comment. “How do you know about gamers,” she asked?

“Hmm...? Oh, well, that's an interesting tidbit,” the woman mused, seemingly lost in her own thoughts. “What? Why not? It won't hurt anything,” she continued, engaging in her peculiar internal dialogue. She then turned her attention back to Heather, her eyes gleaming with a mix of madness and excitement. “That's because I'm a summon candidate too. Just. Like. You!” she declared with a twisted grin. “And not only am I going to win, but I'm also going to savor my meal when I devour each one of you!”

“She's a sadistic psychopath,” Jason stated.

“Well, isn't that rich,” the woman retorted, her voice dripping with sarcasm. “A demon accusing the devil of being sadistic! At least I have the decency to finish my meals, unlike you, leaving behind a delicious corpse after your murderous rampage. What a waste of a perfectly good meal. Oh, what was her name again? Sophia?” Her mocking tone carried a hint of dark amusement.

Rob stepped back, his last remaining undead goblin in tow. “Who are you?” he asked.

“Hmm... Oh... Uh, myself,” the woman responded, her voice laced with a touch of confusion.

Jeremy advanced confidently, trying to mask his fear. “We don’t need to resort to violence,” he said. “Perhaps we could collaborate and find a way to escape the dungeon without having to murder each other.”

“That’s a fair point,” she mused while smiling. “But, alas, it will not come to pass. For I am hungry, and you are here.”

Rob was consumed by fear. The thought of dying in this cursed place was too much for him to bear. Despite seeing himself as a noble and heroic paladin, the reality of being summoned as an evil half-orc necromancer went against everything he believed. Despite this, Rob was determined not to let fear control him. He was filled with dread and terror, a scared little boy trapped in a man’s body, and he didn’t want to die in this place. Rob took a deep breath and pushed away the negative thoughts, trying to focus on the task at hand. He tried to convince himself that he was a brave and heroic hero, but deep down, Rob knew he was simply lying to himself.

With a silent whimper, Rob pointed his hand toward the woman and started his chant for his most powerful attack spell. “The death of the undyings’ pain knows no end, [**Necrotic Flame**].”

As the incantation slipped from Rob’s lips, a surge of dark purple flames erupted, converging into a colossal wave aimed straight at the woman. Yet, with a disconcerting burst of speed, she effortlessly sidestepped the attack, leaving Rob’s spell to crash against empty space. Her black dress billowed behind her like a sinister cape, defying the laws of physics even as she stood motionless. Rob turned, his eyes widening in shock at her sudden agility, realizing his attempts to redirect the spell were futile. The woman’s wicked laughter reverberated through the air, delighting in the spectacle as she disappeared in a blur once again, only to reappear just behind him with eerie grace.

Yua let out a startled yelp and stumbled backward, losing her balance and collapsing onto the ground. The sight did nothing to deter the woman, who simply chuckled in amusement, a wicked grin stretching across her face. With a swift flick of her wrist, her arms transformed into sinister tentacle-like appendages that snaked out, wrapping tightly around Rob and his undead goblin companion’s necks. All the while, she muttered to herself.

“Ugh, seriously? It was just the Burst command. Should I have stood there and let those damn flames hit me? Give me a break! Using ambient mana isn’t as simple as you make it out to be. Urgh, you’re such a bitch!” the woman mumbled in frustration as she argued with herself.

The group looked on in confusion and disbelief as Rob, instead of fighting or lashing out, remained suspended in the woman’s grasp, seemingly paralyzed with fear. Yet, his eyes darted around frantically, searching for any sign of help or escape. A sickening grin spread across the woman’s face as she reveled in her dominance over him. Suddenly, Rob’s body collapsed, his head separating from his dissolving neck. The severed head rolled across the floor, coming to a stop just a few meters away from Heather, a ghastly reminder of the gruesome fate that had befallen him. Heather’s scream of sheer terror echoed through the chamber, her eyes widening in horror at the sight before her. Meanwhile, the woman’s tentacle maintained its tight grip around the struggling

goblin, tightening with sadistic pleasure as it thrashed futilely. Her moans of twisted delight filled the air, creating a chilling soundtrack to her malevolent enjoyment of the horrifying scene.

The abrupt loss of Rob struck Heather and the remaining candidates with a heavy blow. The harsh reality of the peril they faced washed over them, intensifying their fear and trepidation. Heather's screams echoed through the chamber, mingling with the heavy silence that followed Rob's brutal demise. As she stared into his lifeless eyes lying before her, a chilling reminder of the danger they all faced, a wave of fear enveloped the group, leaving them frozen in place, unable to move.

However, among the four, one candidate stood apart, his resolve unyielding in the face of adversity. Jason, with a mix of disappointment and a twisted sense of desire, voiced his thoughts. "Dammit, I wanted the pleasure of ending him myself," he muttered, his words laced with a disturbing undertone.

Jeremy's emotions swirled within him, a turbulent mix of hurt, pain, anger, and an overwhelming rage that consumed his being. His voice erupted in a piercing scream, the word "murderer" escaping his lips like a vengeful cry. In a display of unleashed fury, he summoned forth the most potent spell he had concealed from the others, his words resonating with raw power. "I call forth the rage of the gods, [**Death Bolt!**]"

A blinding brilliance engulfed the chamber as a vibrant, purple bolt of arcing lightning erupted from Jeremy's outstretched hand. The spell surged forward with unyielding force, striking the woman with a cataclysmic impact. She was sent hurtling through the air, trailing smoke and crackling electricity in her wake. The resounding crash echoed through the room as she collided with the wall, her body merging with it in a sickening splat. In an instant, she transformed into a viscous puddle of black ooze, dissolving into the chaos of the collapsed chamber, covering her liquefied remains.

The group stood in disbelief, each trying to process what had just happened. Heather released a sniffle, trying to hold back more tears, while Jason sighed in disappointment. On the other hand, Jeremy was filled with a sense of victory, feeling that the justice he sought had finally been served. Yua was frozen in place, her mind racing as she tried to make sense of what she had just witnessed.

The aftermath of the brutal battle left the once grand chamber in disarray. Thick smoke hung in the air, intermingling with the pungent stench of death, engulfing the space in an eerie haze. The destruction was evident, with half of the chamber collapsed and debris was strewn about, hindering their visibility and making each breath a struggle.

"I didn't get a kill notification," Jeremy muttered.

"I say we get out of here while we can," Yua replied.

"I'm not digging through that rubble," Jason retorted. "Let's just go."

"...", Heather silently added.

After a brief moment of silence, the group collected themselves, gingerly sifting through the remnants of Rob's body, grappling with the shock of his sudden demise. Amidst their search, they

couldn't help but ponder the existence of a hidden seventh candidate, a mystery that lingered in the air like an unanswered question. The walls of the chamber bore the scars of Jeremy's unleashed power, charred and blackened, a stark reminder of the unforeseen might he possessed. It was evident that he had kept this formidable spell concealed, perhaps as a means to wield it against one of their own. Despite the turmoil, destruction, and seeds of suspicion that sprouted among them, a flicker of pride ignited within their hearts. They had achieved something remarkable, a victory against overwhelming odds. Taking a moment to revel in their triumph, the surviving candidates basked in the glow of their hard-won accomplishment.

There were four...