

# BLACK 2 PUDDING

## CHAPTER 13

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Eldrathil Stormrune slouched in his seat, his disinterested gaze drifting downward into the arena as the latest round of lackluster applicants emerged from the portal. They were mere children, not even having seen their first century of existence. With a disdainful air, he couldn't help but wonder how many hopeful applicants would meet their demise on this day. Perhaps it was his perpetually pessimistic outlook on the whole affair, but then again, the last three trials had left each competitor so grievously wounded that not even the skilled healers could salvage them.

No, this was a cruel undertaking, one driven by the duke's insatiable desire to forge the greatest mages and outshine the prestigious institutions of the capital city. To what end? Eldrathil kept such thoughts carefully locked away, never uttering them aloud or allowing them to swirl freely in his mind. He knew better than to take chances, for one could never be certain who might be listening in this treacherous place.

Bored with the proceedings, Eldrathil shifted his attention to the drink he held in his hand. The glass flask contained a swirling concoction of vibrant blue and pink hues—a superior-grade mana potion. Oh, how he relished the taste of power, it promised, a sensation he held within his grasp. As he observed the flask, his reflection caught his eye, revealing a young dark elf man who had lived for over two centuries. Eldrathil often forgot his exact age, but his reflection displayed dark gray skin, soft white hair elegantly tied back in a ponytail, and piercing glowing purple eyes that emanated an aura of arcane might. Raising the flask to his lips, he savored the intoxicating taste and felt the surge of raw power coursing through him.

Eldrathil's fleeting moment of pleasure abruptly ended as Thalador, the head magus, embarked on his predictable speech, addressing the oblivious fools assembled below. The dark elf, well-versed in the repetitive nature of these speeches, quickly tuned out, allowing the words to fade into the background. It was always the same, a tiresome and mind-numbing spiel extolling the valor and potential enrollment of the victors. However, Eldrathil knew the truth that eluded the unsuspecting crowd—there were no open seats in the academy for this semester. Instead, those vacant spots had been shamelessly purchased by second-rate nobles for their entitled offspring. This whole event was nothing more than a hollow spectacle for those with wealth and influence. It was a despicable outcome, but Eldrathil resigned himself to his role as a teacher of Philosophical History of Magic, an inconspicuous position within the Academy of Arcane Knowledge. His class constantly teetered on the brink of being cut each semester, and it was only through his relentless efforts that he managed to cling to his job.

Casting a sidelong glance at the individuals occupying the seats, he observed an overflow of second-rate nobles and disgruntled mages, all harboring bitterness toward the prevailing status quo that forced them out of the capital. The dark elf couldn't help but wonder if they were plotting

some kind of uprising. Whatever dark schemes they were concocting, it was of no concern to Eldrathil. He was here to witness the impending bloodshed, though one spectator caught his attention—a gnome. On Yaddith, being a gnome should have granted him noble status, albeit a lesser one, yet there he was, clad in an unusual attire and metal trinkets, seated amongst the peasants' families and friends of the competitors. It was a peculiar sight, indeed.

“Very interesting,” Eldrathil murmured to himself.

The coliseum erupted with thunderous applause, echoing through the air as Thalador concluded his speech. The competitors scattered across the expansive arena, a challenging feat considering the sheer number of potential candidates present. Eldrathil couldn't help but feel a pang of sadness as he imagined how many of them would not be leaving the arena alive. It was a grim reality that he had grown accustomed to, but one that left a bitter taste in his mouth.

Unbeknownst to the common spectators in the peasant stands, their memories would be tampered with upon leaving the arena. Those in positions of power disliked the idea of the true nature of these events becoming public knowledge. It was a clandestine operation, kept hidden behind mind magic. Yet, the nobles basked in the bloodshed and excitement of the games as they brought substantial revenue to both the academy and, more importantly, the duke. And yet, as usual, the insufferable duke was nowhere to be seen.

Eldrathil's attention was drawn back to the peculiar sight among the commoners as he followed the gnome's gaze. It led him to a street urchin of seemingly no particular significance. The girl's disheveled white dress and matted white hair were a disgusting sight, and the length of her ears combined with her white silken skin hinted at a possible snow elf heritage. However, Eldrathil nearly choked on his drink when the girl looked up at him, her eyes infused with an otherworldly enchantment. Without making a sound audible to even his keen dark elf ears, she whispered something to herself.

Though he couldn't hear the words escaping her lips, Eldrathil's adeptness in the art of lip-reading allowed him to catch a glimpse of what was being said. The snow elf girl seemed to be employing a form of translation magic, and as he attempted to sync his own translation spell with hers, he was met with unexpected resistance. His own magic seemed to pale in comparison to the potency of hers, leaving him bewildered and intrigued. Eldrathil was aware that some translation spells were designed to protect against unwanted eavesdropping, but her spell surpassed anything he had ever witnessed, existing on an entirely different plane of capability.

Fixated on that moment, Eldrathil replayed the scene repeatedly in his mind, merging every translation spell he knew. It was an arduous process, but his determination paid off. At last, he managed to align over a dozen of his translation spells with hers, breaking through the barrier that initially separated them. Replaying that moment in his mind, the word spoken by the girl finally became clear to him, yet it only fueled the mystery.

“Oracle?” Eldrathil repeated the word to himself in morbid curiosity.

And then, in a split second, Eldrathil's eyes widened so dramatically that they almost seemed ready to pop out of their sockets. The girl continued muttering to herself, but in a strange turn of events,

whatever protections were in her translation spell seemed to intensify, causing Eldrathil's own magic to crumble and collapse inward. The sudden surge of magic backlashed in an overwhelming sensation in his head, throbbing with an unbearable migraine.



[Privacy Ward] has been activated.

“Privacy Ward? That’s not one of my skills,” I questioned, seeking an explanation for what I was reading. *Did she just give me a new skill?* Yet, in a typical fashion, Circe chose to ignore what I had said, as she always did.

“*What sort of mockery have you pulled me into this time?*” Circe groaned with exasperation as she surveyed the colosseum.

The elderly wizardly elf had finally ceased his never-ending speech. I had half expected it to continue for the rest of the day, given its prolonged duration. Glancing at Circe, I couldn’t help but roll my eyes at her usual haughty demeanor. True to form, she floated above the ground as if deeming herself too superior to dirty her feet with walking.

“We’re about to enter a battle for a spot in the academy,” I recited, focusing on the fragments of the speech that had managed to capture my attention. “They will be evaluating us not only based on our combat abilities but also on our mastery of magic and how we employ it.”

“*Please,*” Circe scoffed, her tone dripping with disdain. “*As if any of them truly comprehend the depths of magic.*”

“It doesn’t really matter,” I began to reply, but my words were abruptly silenced by the resounding boom of a colossal gong.

Before the echoing ring could subside, a searing arc of lightning streaked past my head, colliding with a fearsome beastkin that resembled a blend of a lion and a cheetah. The impact was cataclysmic, launching the creature into the air and propelling him several meters backward. As the magic crackled and surged through his body, the unfortunate beastkin was reduced to nothing more than charred ashes by the time he collided with the ground. It was at this moment I knew I fucked up.

In a breathtaking display, another contestant unleashed a massive fireball into the sky, capturing the attention of everyone in the arena. We paused momentarily, collectively glancing upward to witness the fiery orb explode, bursting into a magnificent display akin to a vibrant firework. However, our fascination quickly turned to horror as a deluge of flaming projectiles rained down upon us.

Since my rebirth in this realm of magic, fear had become an unfamiliar sensation to me. In fact, I seemed to revel in chaos and violence, a stark contrast to my past life. But as I witnessed the hailstorm of fire descending upon us, my sense of self-preservation couldn’t help but surface. Although we were all subjected to the onslaught, my concern centered solely on my own well-

being, causing a flicker of worry to ignite within me. I had two undeniable weaknesses—one being holy magic, and the other, of course, was fucking fire!

In a rare moment of unity, the chaotic skirmishes came to a halt as a collective realization swept through the arena. Manifesting above more than half of those present, shimmering domes of protective shields materialized, providing a temporary sanctuary against the impending inferno. Those who were unable to conjure their own barriers resorted to launching spells skyward, attempting to combat the encroaching flames. Amidst the chaos, the mischievous goblin responsible for the outrageous display of magic stood, arms wrapped around his waist, reveling in the spectacle. Casting a glance at Circe, I couldn't help but notice her air of indifference, seemingly bored by the entire situation.

“Umm, a little help,” I appealed to the goddess.

“*You can't be serious?*” Circe retorted over the cheers of the crowd.

“Well, yeah, I don't like fire!” I replied.

“*Have you bothered to unleash any of your own magic yet?*” Circe countered, her voice laced with a hint of annoyance. “*Don't you realize how close we are to Völuspá?*” She pointed up at the colossal gas giant, although all I could see were the cascading streams of fire. “*This entire stadium is saturated with ambient mana, overflowing with it. The very sky is brimming with raw power. Use it!*”

I was taken aback by the unexpectedly helpful information Circe had bestowed upon me. However, it was already too late to take advantage before the fire engulfed the arena. The relentless onslaught of fire was closing in, leaving me with no choice but to act swiftly. With a swift lunge, I dove beneath a hastily conjured barrier cast by a random individual. My sliding momentum came to a halt right between her legs. The look of shock on her face was quite entertaining, especially since she resembled a salamander. Without missing a beat, I flashed her a mischievous grin and a casual wave before channeling my desire into casting Blight.

The salamander let out a piercing scream as putrid-filled boils erupted across her skin, causing the shield she had conjured to falter. My heart sank with a mix of stupidity and dread, realizing that my actions had inadvertently compromised her protective barrier that I was relying upon. However, to my astonishment, as the shield disappeared and the salamander collapsed into a quivering ball, there was no rain of fire that followed. The absence of the anticipated flames left me slightly perplexed and relieved. Though, by all the shouting and screaming, something else was at play.

“*Pathetic,*” Circe huffed. “*I can't believe all of you fell for such a simple illusion.*”

“That wasn't real?” I gasped in disbelief, scrambling to my feet in confusion. Though, I couldn't quite comprehend why everyone around me was screaming in terror if the fire had been nothing more than an illusion.

As I rose to my full height, standing over the trembling salamander beneath me, I surveyed the arena and came to a startling realization. None of my competitors were engaged in combat with each other. Instead, their horrified gaze was fixed upon me, their eyes darting to the putrid sores,

oozing boils, and festering wounds that covered the bodies of countless aspiring mages. The extent of my spell's reach caught me off guard, even causing a momentary flicker of surprise within me.

Inhaling deeply, I observed the startled reactions of a few individuals, who seemingly deemed me their primary target to overcome. It mattered little to me, as I relished being the center of attention. After all, there was a certain thrill in knowing that all eyes were fixated on me, anticipating my every move. A faint smile tugged at the corners of my lips, though I had to suppress my true nature. Oh, how I longed to reveal my eerie grin, stretching it back to my ears, but I had to maintain my facade. At this moment, I wasn't a Black Pudding but rather an aspiring sorceress, concealing the depths of my true abilities. And now, it was time to demonstrate to everyone just what real fire could do.

Drawing upon the magic swirling around me, I channeled my focus and intent into a spell of devastating power. My imagination ran wild with the manifestation of Necrotic Flame, a spell that held the potential to engulf the entire arena in its destructive embrace. A surge of exhilaration coursed through me, urging me to unleash my desires with an impassioned scream. Yet, I contained my excitement, releasing only a soft moan as the spell took form.

As the wave of Necrotic Flame surged forth, a cacophony of chaos erupted in the spectator stands. Screams pierced the air, cries of terror mingled with insults and pleas for mercy. Some attempted to flee, their panic driving them to seek refuge. My delight knew no bounds as I witnessed the spell collide with a barrier that materialized to shield the onlookers from my deadly creation.

Circe chuckled, remarking, *"You know, your spell was only effective because you were setting children on fire. Try that on a half-decent mage, and he would have blown you away."*

"Children? All of them looked older than me."

*"Yes, children,"* Circe stated with a playful tone. *"In most cultures, individuals under the age of fifty are often considered as such. As for myself, I have a tendency to regard anyone under millennia as a mere child."*

Ignoring the remarks from Goddess Debby Downer, I couldn't help but feel a surge of pride as my wave of Necrotic Flames continued to engulf the arena for the past two minutes or so. It was a spectacle to behold, and I loved watching the sight of a few stubborn individuals still standing, their protective barriers flickering as their own mana reserves dwindled. It became apparent to me that they relied solely on their internal mana, oblivious to the abundant mana that was freely available.

**"Enough!"** a bellowing roar echoed from above, and in an instant, my roaring flames dissipated into nothingness. Startled, I turned my gaze toward Circe, only to find she mysteriously vanished as well. I looked up, following the source of the commanding voice, and my eyes locked with the piercing glare of the bearded elf.