

New York Times bestselling author **MADELEINE ROUX**

D&D

DUNGEON ACADEMY

No Humans Allowed!



Illustrated by
TIM PROBERT



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HARPER

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DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®

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First Edition

*For Jason and Britt—thank you for
introducing me to D&D.*





Zellidora “Zelli” Stormclash tapped her boot impatiently, watching the slaad’s shiny eyelids click and clack as he blinked. Nobody was much pleased about the recent interdimensional exchange program that brought the slaadi to the school except the slaadi themselves, who seemed quite at home. Most of the students just wished they would take their slimy fingers and attitude back to their native realm, Limbo. But for the moment, Zelli took pity on this particular slaad. He was the smoothest frog kid in their grade, and that made him a target. No warts and no spines meant no intimidation, and that meant no respect. Nobody wanted to be the smoothest or prettiest kid at Dungeon Academy; they wanted to be the *scariest*.

Just a stone’s throw from the dusty bookcase they huddled behind, a table of warty, spiny,

smelly (and therefore respected) slaadi hunched over a book, pointing and gurgling with laughter. Slaadi stuff. Boy stuff, probably. Zelli didn't know and she didn't particularly care.

"Which one of these dummies is giving you trouble?" she asked, stuffing the urge to fold her hands together and crack her knuckles. That would ruin the element of surprise. Slaadi were generally big, very big, and Zelli didn't relish the idea of tangling with one.

Gixi, the slumpy, trembling slaad at her side, pointed a circular fingertip toward the biggest frog of the bunch. "That one. He's the worst of the lot. The *worst*. He never leaves me a-alone, not for one second. When they relocated to Faerûn, his dad remarried a lesser drake and now he thinks he's king of the school. He says he—"

"Calm down, Gixi, I don't need his life story." She tapped the slaad on his moist shoulder and flapped her hand, waiting for him to show her the goods. Payment. She wasn't going to intervene on this tadpole's behalf for free. Generally, she stayed out of trouble. Generally. But this was a special occasion. "Show me the ring again."

The slaad pulled a tattered velvet box, about the size of a fist, out of the leather satchel slung around his shoulders. He pulled back the top and

revealed a large silver hoop, dented and flecked with . . . something. Mud, she hoped. *Please don't let that be adventurer blood.*

"It's all dinged up!" she sighed.

"Do you want it or not?"

"Fine, you sneak. Wait here."

Zelli pulled back her head and stormed out from around the bookcase, plunging into the little library alcove. Above the table where the slaadi had gathered, a wrought iron chandelier dripping wax and grease illuminated the goofball fest below. Rolling up her sleeves, she marched right up to the back of the big, warty slaad who Gixi had pointed out and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Look alive, slimeball."

The razor-backed frog boy swung around, a strangled sound of confusion glubbing out of him before Zelli reared back, drew in a huge breath, and roared right in his face.

Behind the bookcase, she heard Gixi burble with laughter as his rival and bully went end over end, toppling out of his chair with a croak of surprise. His friends erupted in peals of laughter, holding their mottled bellies and pointing, almost falling on the floor themselves.

"You should see your face!" a short green one shrieked.



“She got you so good!”

Zelli smiled and crossed her arms over her vest. “Leave Gixi alone or I’ll be back to embarrass you again, and next time I’ll do it in the dining chamber, got it?”

She didn’t wait for a reply, the laughter going on and on as she returned to the gloating little slaad tucked safely behind the shelves. Before she could say a word, he thrust the velvet box into her hands, bouncing like the bubbling surface of an agitated slime. “Take it! Take it. You earned it, Zelli. You’re the best!”

He made his escape before the other slaadi could realize he was there, leaving Zelli to stare down at the box with the banged-up ring and sigh. “I’m not the best,” she murmured, making her own slow exit out of the school library. “I’m nobody.”

Still, she had gotten the first thing she had come for. On her way out, she swung by the circulation desk. The Dungeon Academy Library soared up six levels, a dripping cavern filled with overflowing tomes, scrolls, manuals, and tablets, a maze of ladders and staircases that confused even the fifth-grade students. Zelli knew all the nooks and crannies, all the ins and outs. She spent plenty of time alone in that library, probably *too much*.

She could just hear her mother’s growl of a



voice in her ear as she sauntered toward the circulation desk. *You need to make friends, Zelli. You need to try.*

Zelli loved her mother too much to point out that the reason nobody wanted to be her friend was also the same reason nobody messed with her much at school. The old winged, narrow-snouted kobold librarian, Shinka Bookbinder, stood behind the desk, reaching the edge of it by standing on four hefty tomes. She might have just used her wings to reach the desk, but she saved her energy for the times she needed to flap up to the highest recesses of the library to reach a book. Draped in musty linens, beads, and bits of scrolls tacked to her robe, the kobold peered over the top of her bent spectacles and smiled, handing Zelli the book she needed before she could ask for it. She immediately returned to her dusting, oh-so-lovingly handling a copy of *The Many Triumphs of the Waterdeep Dragons over the Dungeon Academy Flumphs*. It visibly sparkled, warded and charmed to protect against damage from the slimier students. To the right of Shinka Bookbinder was a mimic student worker who had transformed into a quill and dashed off late notices into an ink-splotched ledger.

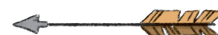
“Thank you!” Zelli called, ring box in one hand and book in the other. She was lucky to nab the

one and only copy of that human adventurer manual, hoping to crank out an extra-credit essay for Professor Gast. Somehow, she was managing to fail History of Horrible Humans, and it was easier to just do the extra credit rather than unpack why that might be.

“Of course, my dear. Anything for Professor Stormclash’s girl!”

The librarian had always had a soft spot for her, unlike every other professor at Dungeon Academy. Well, with one notable exception, and that was her next destination. Zelli dashed into the hall, casting a nervous glance at the giant swinging pendulum keeping time in the corridor. The pendulum itself was the old great ax of the Mad Smithy, a human barbarian who had tried (and mortally failed) to invade the school. The grand corridor ran the length of the central artery of the school, the ancient stone heart of the academy that housed the library, entrance, dining chamber, dean’s quarters, and training arena.

Zelli raced down the corridor, a flurry of bats rustling overhead. She was mindful of the traps and triggers littering the ground, some lurking under threadbare carpets, others right out in the open. A hundred swinging blades and poisoned darts waited in recessed alcoves along the walls,



never used but there just the same, protection against any unwise adventurers tempted to breach the crumbling, craggy walls of Dungeon Academy and threaten its young students. The corridor smelled of damp and rot, wax and char, the elixir of the delve, of the dark and hidden places where monsters seethed in the dark. There were few monsters in the dark here, for they all conducted their business right out in the open, the future denizens, horde-keepers, trap-springers, and creepy-crawlies of the most treacherous dungeons in Faerûn.

Nobody waved at Zelli as she hurried east down the corridor and toward the training arena, and she didn't spot any of the usual snitching hall monitors. Jizek, a dao who liked to skulk up and down the hall in the shadows, was a particularly nasty suck-up, and she derived real delight in tattling on any student who wasn't where they were supposed to be. Dao, of course, could detect both good and evil intent, so Jizek was just as likely to report truancy as she was a student committing an abhorrent act of kindness. Lend a helping hand? Jizek told on you. Compliment a goblin on their sweater vest? Detention. Offer someone half of your snack? Jizek would know and turn a sharp eye, and punishment could swiftly follow. A wave of sound surged from the wide-open double wooden doors leading to the

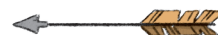
dining chamber as she passed it. She glanced over her shoulder at the pendulum again—just enough time, she decided, to find her mother, then shovel some gruel into her mouth in the chamber while finishing her extra-credit essay before next period.

Her mother's voice came to her again, this time even more exasperated. *By all the Nether Scrolls in Netheril, Zellidora Stormclash, do your work on time!*

Zelli didn't need to imagine her mother's voice just then as she slipped out the East Dungeon door and into the biting cold of a wintry afternoon. Professor Kifin Stormclash thundered across the Goreball pitch, her steps reverberating off the mountain stones concealing the academy from the wider world, echoing far across the field and stopping every student dead in their tracks. The reason nobody at the academy befriended Zelli or bothered her was standing tall and proud in the long grass, her horns curved and sharp, her tail banded with steel rings, her height and sturdy build giving her more the appearance of a statue than of a living, breathing creature.

"Pathetic!" Professor Stormclash bellowed. "Will you trip and fall over your own feet when humans come to invade your borderlands?"

She was busy drilling a dozen or so gnoll





students in the year above Zelli. They were all flea-bitten and scarred, shaggy and brawny, fanged and maned and mean, except when faced with a minotaur professor. A wet dog funk hung around them as they cowered before Zelli's mother.

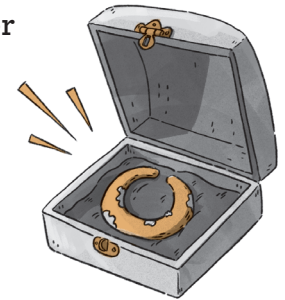
"Now prepare to spring upon your enemy again, and this time do not disappoint the demon lord Yeenoghu," Professor Stormclash was saying as Zelli approached. Her tattered boots whispered through the grass as she trotted up to the towering minotaur. A few of the gnolls sniggered at the sight of her, then thought better of it and settled down onto their haunches to practice their skulking. Zelli turned a harsh eye on them—drawing the ire of a minotaur was one thing; drawing the



ire of a minotaur mother was quite another.

"Honey!" Her mother noticed her and bent down to greet her. Zelli didn't know how they were fooling anyone—the fake horns on her head and tail pinned under her trousers didn't make her look anything like her adoptive minotaur mother. Then again, nobody had the courage to point that out to Professor Stormclash, who could pulverize them with one swing of her fist. Her tone turned sharp as she noticed the book tucked under Zelli's arm. "Doing our homework over lunch again, I see."

"It's just extra reading," she muttered, then thrust out the velvet box toward her mother. "Happy birthday."



"Oh, honey. You didn't need to get me anything." She glanced inside the box and smiled down at the nose ring, even though it was bent and dirty. "Zellidora, it's wonderful. You're such a ray of darkness. Thank you."

The minotaur bent lower, as if to plant a kiss on Zelli's profusion of springy black curls. Zelli ducked her head away and cleared her throat, eyes roaming pointedly to the gnolls peering at them from the tall grass.

"Very well, I won't embarrass you."





“Gotta go,” Zelli chirped, turning before anyone could notice her cheeks changing to a darker shade. “Reading, right?”

“And do not forget to eat! You will never grow to terrifying heights if you do not eat!”

Zelli waved off her mother’s concerns and backtracked across the pitch, plunging back into the drippy dank cool of the academy corridor, then taking a sharp left into the dining chamber. While Mavis, the towering fire elemental cook, scooped and scorched slop onto a counter along the eastern wall, the students sorted themselves into their respective cliques—the myconids, fungus folk (or “fart breaths,” as the bullies liked to call them), had claimed a table, puffing and springing away, a fine haze of pollen hanging above them like a sneezy cloud; the kobolds gathered around a long trestle table toward the back, cackling over dice and haunches of roast meat; the mimics had accumulated like a stack of miscellany near the door, appearing rather like an adolescent’s tumbled and rumpled room, though some chose to snack on the vermin prepared for them in their natural form, a gelatinous mass with nerves and a nucleus at the ooey-gooey center; the gnolls not currently terrorized by her mother feasted on raw and bleeding steaks in the northwest corner, with the slaadi contingent chumming

around not far away, giving a rousing, chest-puffed rendition of the academy's song:

We dwell! We're swell! We claw and roar and smell! We bump (in the night), we thump (with a fright), the DUNGEON ACADEMY FLUMPHS . . .

On and on it went, monsters, creeps, and creatures of all sizes, colors, and creation gossiping at full volume while a single human-as-minotaur slinked into the hall, swiped a bowl of burnt, flavorless porridge from Mavis, and found a tiny, empty, insignificant spot to mind her own business and dash off that last-minute, grade-saving assignment.

And that was exactly what Zelli intended to do, tucking into her lunch and elbowing open the torn and well-loved copy of *The Human Manual for Monsters and Dwellers*. A spurt of dust rose from the parchment as Zelli flicked the pages quickly, landing on the chapter that corresponded best to their current textbook reading assignment. The moment she did, she felt the gruel in her stomach drop straight to her toes. A portrait in inks and watercolors headed the chapter, an image of a fierce human woman who might have been Zelli's twin. Beneath her, the caption read: *Allidora Steelstrike, the Unyielding Blade*.

All the air, sense, and blood ran out of her. The

woman, posed with a tremendous sword nearly half her height (Zelli herself favored swords), had been depicted with an explosion of black curls piled on her head, dark skin, and catlike yellow eyes that even simply in a drawing appeared to twinkle with mischief.

My Zelli, never not up to no good, Professor Stormclash liked to say. *Eyes full of secrets*.

Zelli wasn't foolish enough to think herself a real minotaur. She had, for a while, but not once she grew up enough to see the stark and obvious differences between her and the two minotaur matriarchs raising her. Kifin and Iasme were as close to her as could be, and were wonderful mothers who she trusted and cared for. But a wedge had



dropped between them the night they sat her down and explained that she was not one of them, not a minotaur destined to haunt a deadly maze or hunt adventurers across a vast and unyielding desert, but that Iasme had found her while out foraging one day, a tiny *human* baby, pea-sized in their large eyes, helpless and frail, wailing in a basket behind a curtain of wavering reeds. A human baby. *Humans, the enemies of monsters everywhere.*

They hid her, of course, and dressed her up as a minotaur, and, with Kifin's respected position at the academy, had her enrolled. Nobody questioned one minotaur, let alone the will of two, and so life went quietly on for Zellidora Stormclash. Zelli had always wondered why her mothers hadn't been more afraid of taking in a human. Only once had she worked up the courage to ask, and Iasme had shrugged and said, "Your mother is not afraid of anything." But there was a look in the minotaur's eye that told Zelli there was more to it, and Iasme had looked so sad then that she decided not to pry.

"This is her," Zelli breathed, seeing herself reflected in the woman's eyes, her posture, her attitude. Her *name*. "This is my real mother."

And her real mother was the subject of her next class, History of Horrible Humans. She took a deep breath and tried to read, but her eyes had glazed

with unexpected tears. No. Nobody could see that. Crying during lunch was not allowed at Dungeon Academy. Wiping at her face, Zelli forced herself to shut the book and try to eat. Her hand shook, and she just hoped she was as invisible in that moment as she had always been at school.

The spoon was halfway to her lips when, with a shriek, an owlbear roughly the size of an outhouse crashed through her table, sending her, the porridge, and *The Human Manual for Monsters and Dwellers* flying across the room.

