

Cluny the Scourge sat upon his throne within his tent. He and his horde set up camp near Redwall Abbey. Unfortunately for him, not much has been happening. They did have a few attempts to overtake them; but things have been quiet ever since the tapestry was taken back. In the meantime, things were not exciting for the sea rat.

The rat leader was alone in the tent. He had yet to hatch any plans to overtake the Redwall Abbey. All he could do at the moment was rest his chin on his palm and furl his eyebrow. The Redwallers hadn't made any move against him either; in fact, he had heard no such signs of any activity. He looked around, noticing a pebble on the ground; he picked it up and threw it at some pottery in the corner. Perhaps he was trying to see if the impact would shatter it. Instead, it ricocheted off it. Cluny returned to his previous position and sighed hard. Was this all there was to life? Why isn't there anything to crush the warlord's boredom? Something had to give, or else he feared he'd go stir-crazy.

As if Cluny's desires had been heard, Killconey appeared from behind the flap of the tent. "Excuse me, sir. Some.....visitors would like to speak to you." He spoke slowly, unsure; almost like he couldn't believe it himself. Cluny sat up upon hearing this news with a raised brow. Who could possibly be wanting to visit him of all beasts and at this time? Killconey then lifted the flap to let Redwallers Basil Stag Hare, Jess Squirrel, and young Matthias in.

"Redwallers?! What are they doing over here?!" Hollered Cluny as he stood up. Then he locked his focus on the mouse. "You! You're the one who keeps getting in my way! Now that you're here, I'm-". Before Cluny could finish, Basil held his hand out; stepping in front of

Matthias. “Hold it right there. We’re here for a peaceful negotiation. We carry no weapons.

We’re not here to cause any fights. Aren’t you curious to know why we come to you like this?”

Killconey stepped forward as well. “Please, Cluny, Sir! Just this once? They speak the truth! We checked their persons and pockets, they had nothing!”

Cluny groaned and reluctantly sat back down on his throne. As much as it irked him to admit, he was deeply curious. Killconey left them to speak to Cluny on their own. Basil and Jess let the young mouse approach the warlord. He was growing up, becoming a warrior; and was most certainly old enough to speak for himself.

Matthias stopped a few steps away from Cluny. Staring up at the rat’s scowl, he couldn’t help but feel a bit nervous. Then again, he was already more brave than most others by doing this; being brave wasn’t about having no fear, it was having fear yet facing it anyway. Even most members of the rat’s hoard wouldn’t dare get this close to him. Basil and Jess had a close eye on them. Preparing to lunge forward and save Matthias if need be.

“Cluny. I’d like to propose a challenge.” Matthias boldly declared. Cluny folded his hands, confused by the request. “A challenge? What kind of challenge?”

Matthias spoke again. “A wrestling match...a Sumo match, to be exact.”. Cluny’s singular eye widened, leaning forward. “A...*what* match?” The rat knew of wrestling, but had never heard of Sumo before in all his travels.

Fortunately, Basil spoke up to explain it. “Sumo is a sport I learned from my eastward travels. It’s a foreign form of wrestling that requires strength and endurance. In that sense, it is quite similar to Pále wrestling.” Cluny’s still working eye widened, knowing of said form of wrestling and finding himself desiring to hear more of what was being explained. “You wear cloth coverings known as mawashis, similar to the waist-cloths that Pále wrestlers wear, while pushing and shoving your opponent out of the designated wrestling space. No weapons or armors are allowed, just sheer strength and resolve. Quite a sport, wot-wot? I taught it to the boy and he got the hang of it in no time.” Matthias then spoke up, “And it was *my* idea to challenge you!”

Cluny sat back while crossing his arms. “Ha! What makes you think a little fat abbey-mouse like you can beat me? Especially since you don’t have any of your precious weapons with you.” With a confident smirk, Matthias removed his robe; revealing his surprisingly toned, muscular body underneath. He was wearing a mawashi as well and nothing else. Cluny was surprised to see how much Matthias had changed since he last saw him.

“There are no armor or weapons in Sumo, or any wrestling for that matter. My arms and legs are now my swords. My belly and chest are now my shields. Yes, I’m smaller than you; but I make up for it with my well-shaped muscles which I earned from all the hardship I’ve faced. Above all else, I have accepted my creed as a warrior; fighting with my spirit as well as my body.” Matthias declared as he flexed his muscles.

This made Cluny muse with his hand against his chin. “I see...so, you’re not a weak little mouse anymore. Then maybe your challenge might be worth it after all.” The mouse stood

before him with narrowed eyes. “I hope you aren’t planning on backing out, after I came this far.” The rat shook his head. “Hell, no. I don’t back down from anything or anyone. Very well then, you happen to have another one of those so-called mawashies?” Basil reached into his pocket and handed Cluny a spare mawashi. Matthias and Jess exited the tent so the hare could help the rat put it on in privacy.

Jess nervously looked down at the young mouse. Her maternal instincts took over as she crouched down to his level and spoke. “Look, I’m proud of you for this. It’s very brave and warrior-like...but are you sure this is what you want? No one pressured you into this. I...I just don’t want you to get hurt. Cluny’s big and strong...and he usually doesn’t play fair.” Matthias just smiled at her. “It’s okay. This is what Martin would do. Besides, it’s better than one of us to waste each other’s life in a sword fight.”. Hearing these words come out of someone so young made Jess shed a tear. She pulled the mouse into a motherly hug. She continued to remind him how proud she was.

A few moments later, Cluny exited the tent in his mawashi. He sighed as his exposed muscular body hit the outside air. “This is...actually not bad at all, feels kind of nice. I usually wear so much armor that I’ve forgotten how nice it feels to dress lightly.” He rolled his shoulders, bulged his biceps, braced his thighs, and bounced his pecs; enjoying the freedom they had now. “This...mawashi truly feels good on my body. Perhaps I’m starting to see why Sumo is so treasured in its homeland...even though I’ve never heard of or seen it myself.” Jess didn’t want to say anything, but seeing Cluny’s muscles exposed and in motion excited her.

The sight of Cluny in a mawashi also caught the attention of his hoard. The rats, stoats, weasels, and ferrets all crowded around their leader. They eyed his now unusual attire, now so scant and revealing. They were eager to know what was going on. Cluny took notice and spoke up. "Attention! Matthias of Redwall has challenged me to a wrestling match! I invite you all to watch as I embarrass the little shit!"

Basil led them to a large patch of dirt, the ideal area for a Sumo match. He drew a large ring in it, this would be the space where Matthias and Cluny would wrestle. The hare explained to them that the winner would be determined by whoever is the first to win three rounds; that one would lose if he fell outside the ring or landed on anything other than their two feet. The rat and mouse took position on opposite ends of the ring. Basil, Jess, and all of Cluny's horde crowded around them. Eager to see what was about to unfold. Matthias performed his Shiko stomps with Cluny observing it carefully before managing to replicate it himself, and then both got into position. On Basil's cue, they lunged at each other!

As they met each other in the center, Cluny immediately tried to reach over Matthias' shoulder and pull his mawashi in an attempt to make him lose balance. However, as he tried that, the mouse struck him rapidly in the chest and belly with a flurry of Sumo slaps all over his face and chest. This caused the rat to stumble backward as the barrage kept up until he tripped out of the ring, landing flat on his posterior. Matthias stood victorious, having won this round.

"W-What? Impossible! How? How did you beat me? How could I have lost to you?" An already frustrated Cluny crossed his arms and turned away. "This was such a stupid idea!"

Matthias rolled his eyes. “Oh come now. You’re really giving up *already*, Cluny?” The rat turned back to him, uncrossing his arms - gripping his fists - and glared back. “Hell no! I’m not ‘giving up’, but I don’t understand what I did wrong!” Now Matthias was the one crossing his arms. “Remember what I said? Sumo is about muscle and spirit. You need to have strength in both. If you wish to understand that then face me again.” With that, they got back into position in the ring.

Again, on cue, they lunged at each other. This time, Cluny was taking Matthias more seriously. He put more effort into the fight. He even began slapping Matthias back. Then the mouse began ramming and tackling his larger opponent. Cluny began doing it back at Matthias, but the mouse was still hard to beat. Before Cluny could realize it, he had stepped out of the ring. Matthias won again.

The rat’s hoard was angry. They were yelling at their leader for not being able to beat his opponent, but Cluny wasn’t angry. He pulled Matthias in and whispered in his ear. “You know, you actually are a worthy opponent. It appears that I’ve underestimated you.” Mathias smiled. “Exactly. You underestimated me out of the ring as well. That’s why you never could win. Don’t let your overconfidence get the better of you. If you were truly invincible then you would never have lost. That’s why you always fail.” Cluny then ruffled the boy’s hair. “Oh, it’s fine. I believe I know what to expect from you now...but there’s only one way to find out! Now, let’s see if I can defeat you this time!”

With that, Cluny and Matthias took position in the ring again. They start wrestling on cue. Both put all their strength into pushing the other to the edge of the ring. As Matthias nears the edge of the ring, he breaks free from Cluny's grip and delivers a volley of Sumo slaps to Cluny's chest. Enduring the pain of the barrage, Cluny returns it with his own flurry of strikes. The two exchange blow after blow in the center of the ring, practically a stalemate. Then, taking a deep breath before letting out a roar of exhilaration, Cluny manages to ram into Matthias and throw him out of the ring. Cluny won, but is covered in sweat and panting deeply.

Matthias slowly got back to his feet, ignoring the Horde's cheers for their leader. The mouse is surprised to see the warlord smiling down at him. Amidst the cheers of his hoard, Cluny whispers into Matthias' ear again. "You know, as much as I hate to admit it, I'm having fun right now! I'm actually enjoying myself! I can't even remember the last time I've ever felt something like this..." Cluny's head hung at this realization. Perhaps he had finally realized that wrestling could be much more fun than constantly seeking out blood on the battlefield and waiting for the next. "I understand, Cluny. Just so you know though, it's never too late to change. Like now, you still have a chance to win the match." reassured Matthias. This boost of confidence made Cluny retake his position in the ring. "Then...let's even the score!" Before Matthias takes position, he notices Basil giving him a thumbs up.

With that, the two square off again. They are locked in the center of the ring trading jabs and strikes. Both are motivated by the cheers of their respective parties. Using all their strength and strategies, there is not much leeway between them. Upon realizing that he is nearing the edge, Cluny thrusts forward; bumping Matthias back with his solidly muscled belly. It takes a

second for the mouse to regain his balance. He wasn't aware of that technique. But before he can react, the rat does it to him again, repeatedly this time. Matthias is knocked closer and closer to the edge as Cluny's belly and chest ram into his face. Needing to do something, Matthias begins slapping Cluny more rapidly than ever. Yet all it takes is one more precise strike to the mouse's head, and he steps out of the ring. Cluny wins again.

Cluny helps Matthias back up. "Looks like I'm getting used to using my arms and legs as my swords and my belly and chest as shields, eh?" The rat laughed as he proudly flexed, even in spite of his panting and sweat-covered fur. "I think you got the most use out of your 'shields' if anything!" Matthias chuckled. Jess stared at Cluny's glistening, sweaty muscles; doing her best not to faint. "Now we're tied. Up for a deciding round?" Asked Matthias. "I have just enough energy, I think." answered Cluny. Matthias takes position back in the ring. "So do I...now, let's finish this!"

They begin their final bout. The two slam into each other, grappling while gritting their teeth. At this moment, their respective sides are forgotten; their grudges against each other are put aside; their ranks and roles being the furthest things from their minds. Right now, they saw each other as fellow wrestlers who wanted to challenge each other in the ring. No holds were barred, no quarter was asked for or given, they were going all out. They went from grappling to slapping, from ramming to tackling, and pushing to shoving. They seemed equal now. Their bodies were covered in sweat as their muscles flexed and bulged masterfully. The light of day made their bodies glisten and shine. This sight excited Jess even more. She could hardly take her eyes off Cluny. Even Basil was in awe of the power clashing.

The two were caught in a grappling stalemate in the center of the ring. Cluny began bumping Matthias again with his washboard belly. However, the mouse was expecting it and countered a few of them with strikes. He even attempted to bump Cluny back with his own body. Only it wasn't as effective. This is when they noticed that they were right at the edge of the ring. At that moment, mustering up all their remaining strength, they shoved each other with all they had. Both toppled out of the ring while still locked in a struggle-like embrace. It was a tie.

The hoard cheered for another round, but Cluny and Matthias were too tired. The rat ordered them to go back to camp, stating that the match was over. They disappointedly obeyed. Jess and Basil walked up to them as they lay on the ground, panting. "That was a jolly good match! And ending with a tie, wot-wot!" Exclaimed Basil. "Cluny.....um, the both of you did amazing! And I'm still very proud of you, Matthias!" said Jess to the side, who was eyeing the rat.

Cluny and Matthias sat up. "You know, I feel I've changed a lot in the past hour than I have in years. I enjoy just....having fun for once." Sighed the rat. "It's a good feeling, isn't it?" Matthias responded. "Now, Matthias...this might be a bit of a strange question, considering everything we've been through...but do you think there's a chance for us to not be enemies anymore?" Matthias smiled. "In the past, I might have brushed it off...yet after tonight, I'd like to think that anything is possible." With that, he leaned forward and hugged Cluny. The rat didn't know what to think at first, but he didn't try to pry him off. After some hesitance, he wraps his arms around the mouse. "Thanks for the match, Cluny." Says the tuckered-out Matthias.

“Look at that, two enemies became good chaps before nightfall, wot-wot!” Chuckled Basil. “What do you think of that, Matthias? Oi, Matthias!” Said Cluny as he nudged the mouse. He then realized that he fell asleep in his arms. With almost uncharacteristic care, the rat gently lifts the mouse and hands him to Basil, who wraps him up in his robe. As the hare walks back to Redwall with the sleeping mouse, Jess steps up to Cluny. “Let this be our little secret!” She says before kissing the rat on the cheek. Cluny blushes, frozen as she turns to catch up with Basil.

Had this changed Cluny the Scourge for the better? Now that he has connected to his rival and captured the heart of a Redwaller. Is a Sumo match all it took to take the Scourge out of Cluny? Regardless, this is a new beginning for the once-tyrant rat.