

BLAKE ²PUDDING

CHAPTER 29

CHOCOLATE STARFISH

Nikola stood amidst seven fallen corpses, each a Slaethian soldier. Thankfully, none were familiar from her time as a gnome, but the sight still pained her. Once a human from Earth, reincarnated into this reality, her loyalty now lay with those like herself, like Blake, another Earthling summoned to this world. Their circumstances might have differed, but their origins were the same. Slaethia, once her second home, had been a land of kind and wonderful people. Now, it was a nation with its hands soaked in blood and genocide against races not aligned with their gods. The transformation was revolting to Nikola.

She walked over to a whimpering Slaethian mage on the ground, missing a leg due to her crystal lock pistol. Most of her shots had been to the chest, leaving each of the seven corpses with fist-sized holes from pure mana—a force difficult to defend against. While many had shields and wards, alternating between elements, Nikola's weapons utilized pure, unadulterated mana, a feat challenging for most but not for her and, surprisingly, Blake. She pondered if this unique ability was linked to their Earthly origins.

“P-Please, don’t do this,” the mage begged.

Nikola sighed, “Would you have shown me any mercy? Have you ever shown anyone mercy?”

“B-But, they're vile beasts. Y-You’re a half-breed. A dragonkin! W-Why side with them?” the mage stammered.

Shaking her head in disappointment, Nikola replied, “The fact that you see everyone who doesn’t conform to your standards as vile is the problem.” Closing her eyes, she pulled the trigger, adding an eighth corpse to the grim scene. After completing the grim task, Nikola moved to holster her two pistols, but froze in horror as she realized her third one was missing. “What the hell?” she exclaimed, spinning around in a full circle. Her eyes frantically scanned the ground for any sign of the lost weapon, but there was no trace, no clue as to where it could have fallen, leaving her both baffled and alarmed.

Footsteps echoed from the decks above, drawing a groan from Nikola. She swiftly re-drew the two pistols she had just holstered at her hips. Steadying herself with a deep breath, she began her ascent, guns pointed forward, prepared to create more fist-sized holes in anyone daring enough to board her new ship.

A creak from the door leading down to her deck was her sole warning. Without hesitation, she pulled the trigger. Mana stored in the crystal surged out, traveling down the wooden body of her intricately carved pistol. It swirled around metal rune engravings before bursting from the barrel

in a torrent of enraged magical energy. This mechanism functioned like a wand with a trigger, but unlike a wand, it released all its mana in a single, powerful blast.

Recoil from the blast jerked the pistol back sharply, bending Nikola's arm at a forty-five-degree angle. Her other arm, however, remained steady, the second pistol aimed and ready. The crystal lock pistol she had just fired was now depleted of its mana. But Nikola, ever resourceful, was already channeling ambient mana into it, recharging it even as the surge of unbridled mana sailed towards its target.

A rodent-sized face peeked through the doorway at that exact moment, only to have its entire muzzle blown clean off. The ratkin toppled over, tumbling down the steps until it landed at Nikola's feet. She froze in horror, recognizing the victim of her hasty shot.

"O-Olin," she stammered, realizing she had accidentally shot her ratkin ally and fellow lich.

"Yikes, he's going to feel that one," a woman commented nonchalantly, poking her head through the doorway leading to the stairwell.

Glancing up, still in shock, Nikola saw two white bunny ears before her eyes met the woman's face. "K-Kaida? I-It was an accident," she managed to say, struggling to keep her composure.

"Oh, don't worry about him, he's a lich, he'll recover. Give him a few hours, and he'll be right as rain," Kaida replied with a chuckle. "Might sound a bit nasally, but he'll be fine," she added, dismissing the friendly fire incident as inconsequential. "How soon can we take off and get out of here?"

"U-Umm, if you say so," Nikola replied, her voice still shaky. She glanced around the vessel, observing the roots and branches still weaving around the wooden skeleton of the ship. "She should be fully formed in forty-five minutes, but we can take off in less than ten, though it's not ideal. Still, she can finish forming in the air if we no other option."

"Good! I've got scouts and guards on their way here to help secure the airship. Umm... Olin was supposed to arrive ahead of them to help with that, but I guess you'll have to manage until more help arrives," Kaida mused aloud. "Anyway, I'll go give the queen the update and start directing all the beastkin your way," she added before vanishing into thin air.

Nikola stared at the space where Kaida had just been, murmuring to herself, "An illusion." Then, turning her gaze back to Olin, she winced in sympathy for the fallen lich.

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Honestly, I should start giving myself a pat on the back right about now. Maybe a tentacle or two is already on it. Catching that dwarf's hammer with just one hand? Easy peasy! Seriously, the real challenge was using all my self-control not to just drop the hammer—not because it's heavy or anything—but to stop myself from breaking into my ecstatic, giggly pudding dance. I mean, come on, I'm such a badass—ha!

Down below me lay Jason, that pesky little anglerfish-toothed dick. And right there in front of me was the damn dwarf himself, his face all kinds of confused as he glanced from his long, strong rod to my single hand gripping the head—ehw, the mallet part, or whatever you call the bashy tip of his hammer.

Get your minds out of the gutter, seriously!

Freaking perverts, every one of you. What do you think this is, a dirty smut novel?

Novel? Umm, Nightmare, I thought we were just internally narrating our escapades.

Same thing!

Realization flashed across Jason's face as he stared up at me, followed by a resigned sigh, "Ah, fuck, it's you."

In my best haughty tone, dripping with disdain, I greeted the nuisance. "You may call me mistress, you little bitch," I said, my lips curling into a dark grin. "Oh, and you're welcome, by the way. Now fuck off. I have dibs on this short shit," I concluded, my gaze sharply fixed on the dwarf.

I tilted my head back just enough to convey an expression of smugness, the kind one reserves for an insignificant insect. It was similar to the disdain rich people show towards orphans—not the cute foreign ones they often collect like trinkets for a tax write-off, but more like the ones begging for money on the streets outside their multimillion-dollar condos—that's the look!

Ah, I love that look.

Me too, we should give it off more often.

I'm not against that idea.

As for the dwarf, his eyes kept darting between his hands gripping the war hammer and my single hand effortlessly halting its descent towards Jason. This brief moment, lasting only a few seconds, allowed Jason just enough time to blink into awareness and for me to make my cheeky comment—yep, cheeky, definitely not stuck-up bitchy...

Jason quickly scrambled up to his feet, muttering, "Fucking psycho."

Before he could vanish into his usual shadowy escape, a tentacle from my hair shot out, snatching the fae by his neck and lifting him slightly off the ground. His feet kicked out in desperation, seeking the unattainable ground beneath him, as his hands frantically clawed at my tentacle. All the while, my gaze stayed fixed on the dwarf, who bore an expression mixing confusion and amusement.

"What did I just say?" I purred. "It's Mistress Psycho," I emphasized. "Now, say my name."

A gurgled sound struggled out of Jason's throat, eventually forming into a stammered, "Y-Yes, M-Mistress Psycho."

Nodding in approval, I nonchalantly dropped the pathetic man. “Now, be off, little bitch,” I said with a dark smile, still maintaining my unbroken gaze on the dwarf before me.

There was a grumble, a sound of disgruntled acceptance, before Jason vanished into thin air. Overall, I think I made it pretty clear who's the alpha in this scenario. Now, back to the matter at hand.

"Aye, that was rather entertaining," the dwarf finally spoke, his voice echoing with rough and earthy undertones. "Still, it be rather impressive ye stopped me hammer. How ye be doing that, I wonder. Ye be strong, aye, but there's something more I see," he mused, his voice trailing off into a thoughtful mumble. His gaze lingered on the hole in my chest, taking in the little sparks of orange lightning that jetted out and around me. Then, a moment of realization dawned on his face, his expression sharpening, and his eyes narrowed on me. "Ye be saturating the place with mana, interfering with me skills," he deduced. "Well, let's see how ye fare against me own magic without me wee tricks," he chuckled, his eyes twinkling with challenge.

Umm... Nightmare, what's he talking about?

Fuck if I know.

“By the way, if I hadn’t said it before, the name’s Einarr, Champion, The Gravitational Destroyer, and all-around great feck,” he introduced himself with a cruel mischievous glint in his eye and a grin to match.

“Blake, Blake Pudding, Scion of Dreams and Nightmares, Descendant of the End, and all-around much greater fuck and thief of vampiric virtues and panties,” I retorted with a smile to match.

Funny how things pop back into memory at the most inconvenient times—like right now. I had completely forgotten about all the stuff I had stashed in my dimensional storage space. Among my prized possessions, I knew I had two phylacteries, a dungeon core, a ruined cock ring, some ring whose origin I couldn't recall, and my most treasured item. The one thing that really ticked me off that I couldn’t get to now that I had broken Stellar Void—a pair of Aurelia’s panties! I snagged them after she had worn me like a fancy dress during our battle together outside Elsternwick, and they mysteriously vanished when I returned her clothes. I plead the fifth on why she never got them back. But why am I just now remembering I had them, and why, oh why, were they now stuck in my dimensional storage, so tantalizingly close yet out of reach? *It's so unfair!*

"Vampiric virtues and panties?" Einarr repeated, his brow knitting in visible confusion. "What the feck does that even mean?" His voice carried a dismissive edge as he shook his head. Disregarding my flamboyant introduction, his eyes then sharpened, fixing on me with the intensity of a hawk zeroing in on its prey.

Oh! Oh! Nightmare! Nightmare!

What!

Let me narrate the next part, please!

Screw that, Dream. You always make us sound like airheads whenever you butt in. Besides, you've been hogging much of it already.

Oh, come on! It'll be fun!

We'll share the narration, like we always do.

Ugh, fine. But I'm starting it!

My grin stretched into an unnervingly wide arc, so unnatural it would dwarf even the infamous Crown Prince of Crime's manic smile in Gotham City. Einarr, unnerved by my unsettling grin, yanked fiercely at his hammer, desperate to reclaim it from my grasp. I bided my time, and right when he gave a particularly forceful pull, I let go, sending him staggering backward. That's when I lunged, seizing the opportunity his momentary imbalance presented.

Damnit Nightmare, I called dips on starting it!

That Batfleck reference and the dwarf pun weren't mine. Now, shush, Dream!

Batfleck! Oh, hell no! Wrong clown, Nightmare! Wrong clown!

As Einarr stumbled backward from my sudden lunge, my hair—or rather, a dozen tentacles that barely resembled hair—shot out towards him. I found it amusing that I was even maintaining a human form; I'd even given myself patches of silk-white skin here and there. Sure, it was meaningless, but it had become second nature to me. Sometimes I didn't bother, but that would require a conscious effort not to blend silk into skin. But back to the point—the tentacles!

The dwarf moved with a speed that was beyond superhuman, or should I say, superdwarf? He ducked and weaved, narrowly avoiding each tentacle I thrust at him. Amidst this dance of evasion, I could barely catch his muttered obscenities, largely drowned out by my own raucous laughter and incessant maniacal giggling.

Occasionally, I could sense Einarr's attempts to manipulate gravity. The ground beneath me felt as if it was receding, creating a sensation akin to walking on the moon. I mean, technically, I was walking on a moon, but you get the idea. However, his gravitational manipulations weren't particularly forceful; the pull was mild, and so was the light, weightless sensation when it suddenly inverted, barely increasing my weight. I couldn't tell if my strength was overpowering his efforts or if Einarr's grumbling about me saturating the area with mana was impairing his skills. Though, if I had to hazard a guess, it might be a bit of both.

"Now, let's see how ye handle me own magic," Einarr roared.

There was a slight shift in gravity once again, and I felt my knees barely buckle, causing me to pause for a brief moment. It wasn't as strong as what I had felt when he fought with Von Von, not by a long shot—actually, it was much weaker than that. But what I sensed now was different; he seemed to be layering his magic. My best guess? He was still using his system skills, which weren't having much effect on me, while also tapping into something else. It wasn't just ambient mana—I could feel that all around me—what he was doing felt more personal, like it was flowing directly

from him. That's it! He's using his own internal mana in conjunction with the system mana to reinforce his gravity manipulation.

Another surge of magic emanated from Einarr, and I felt the strain once again. With each burst of internal mana he released, the gravity acting upon me began to increase incrementally. It wasn't enough to significantly slow me down yet, but if he could keep this up, would he eventually be able to flatten me?

"Screw this physical crap!" I grumbled under my breath. "No shit, let's go scorched earth sorceress style!" I murmured, a hint of excitement in my voice as I added, "Oh, now we're talking!"

"Do ye always talk to yerself like that? Ye not insane, are ye?" Einarr chuckled, skillfully ducking under a swipe of my arm which I had morphed into a hook-like tentacle. With a fluid motion, I reshaped it back into a normal arm, all while considering his amusing question.

"Yep! I am most certainly insane," I nodded, before hastily adding, "Don't tell him that, shut up!"

What? It's not like he's wrong.

Well, don't tell him that.

Einarr seemed to stagger, more out of disbelief at my inner dialogue seeping out than anything else. Seizing the moment, I landed a solid hit with a tentacle to his ribs. Like a horizontal rocket, the dwarf went flying, crashing through several buildings in his path.

"Ha! How do you like that!" I bellowed with laughter, throwing both arms up in the air like I'd just scored a winning goal.

Umm... That's not how a sorceress fights.

Oh, right!



Propelled through an onslaught of buildings, Einarr clung to his hammer, coming to a halt amidst a heap of debris. Shaking off the dust, he grumbled unintelligibly as he heaved himself upright. The collision had been jolting, yet it hadn't subdued him. Training sessions with Galen, where lightning flitted and danced to the fairy's whims, often left him more rattled than this. But this adversary was in a league of her own. She inundated the air with mana, overwhelming Einarr's magic and rendering his skills as meek as a submissive kitten.

In this escalating battle of attrition, Einarr zeroed in on incrementally increasing the gravity around him. This maneuver, usually effortless for him, now pushed him to his limits, demanding his utmost concentration. His strategy unfolded on three fronts: first, to gradually amplify the gravity and slow down the monstrous woman; second, to conserve his own internal mana to boost his physical prowess; and third, to harvest the rampant ambient mana that his opponent was recklessly expelling. Her wasteful usage of mana presented an opportunity for him, potentially allowing him to amass enough power to rival that of a cultivator. As a Champion skilled in all forms of magical

arts—be it casting spells, self-augmentation, or absorption—Einarr was prepared to wield whatever tactic necessary.

A gleeful smile flickered between the strands of Einarr's red beard. Facing an opponent who could not only challenge him but also inadvertently augment his strength without succumbing to his hammer was exhilarating. This realization was what transformed the confrontation into a battle of attrition for him. The longer he sustained the fight, the more the scales would tip in his favor. His hope was that the woman would endure long enough for him to extract every ounce of benefit from her reckless mana expenditure.

His chuckling ended when a large wave of orange flames came roaring at him like a tidal wave. “Oh, bloody me sixth wife with me hammer,” Einarr swore.

The woman had strategically distanced herself, leading Einarr to believe that his gravity manipulation skill could be more effective. In a calculated risk, he hoisted his hammer, infusing it with more system mana than he normally would. His plan was to use a majority of this system mana to intensify the local gravity, reserving his own mana pool to boost his physical prowess for attacking. The urgency of the situation, however, compelled him to draw on the system's reserves.

With a display of immense strength, Einarr brought his hammer crashing down. The resultant shockwave was colossal, cleaving through the advancing wave of fire, allowing it to split and flow harmlessly around him. As the flames parted, Einarr sensed something unusual about them; they were imbued with death magic. “Necrotic,” he muttered, a hint of concern in his voice as he recognized the nature of the fire.

As the wave of fire subsided, Einarr observed that the surrounding ruins and debris continued to burn with the necrotic orange glow of the flames. What happened next, however, puzzled the dwarf. A fog began to drift in. Initially, he mistook it for smoke from the residual fires, but he quickly realized this was different. It was a peculiar mist that seemed to grow thicker by the second.

In just a few moments, the dense fog had completely engulfed the area. The woman he had been confronting, a formidable presence just seconds ago, disappeared from his view, consumed by the expanding mist. Illuminated by the orange haze of the surrounding fires, the fog added a ghostly, uncertain dimension to the battlefield, transforming it into a landscape shrouded in mystery and apprehension.

“Murderer,” a soft, disembodied voice whispered eerily into Einarr's ear.

Startled, Einarr spun around, his hammer extended fully, ready to crush whoever had spoken. But to his astonishment, his hammer swung through empty air, finding no target.

“Murderer,” another distinct voice murmured into his other ear.

He twisted around again, hammer at the ready, but once more, he was met with emptiness. No one was there.

“Murderer! Murderer! Murderer!” The voices multiplied, each one echoing accusations as if speaking directly into his ears. They sounded hauntingly familiar, like echoes of his past victims.

Einarr, ancient and battle-hardened, had slain many over his centuries of existence. Now, in this bewildering fog, it felt as though each of those fallen souls was whispering to him, their voices a ghostly chorus of accusation and memory. The experience was disorienting, chilling him to the core as he stood alone in the thickening mist.

A woman emerged slowly from the mist, her form a hazy apparition approaching Einarr. He tensed, his hammer at the ready, but his stance softened as recognition set in. There she was, as breathtakingly gorgeous as the day he first laid eyes on her. She stood a head shorter than him, her figure voluptuous, the kind that once made Einarr fantasize about losing himself in her embrace. Her golden beard, a rare and alluring feature, stirred a deep, primitive longing within him.

This was the woman he had once coveted, who had rejected him upon learning of his other wives. Driven by a sense of entitlement as a Champion, he had forcefully taken what he believed was his due. To his vexation, she had chosen death over a life with him.

“Murderer,” she whispered softly.

Before Einarr could muster a rebuttal, another ghostly figure stepped out of the mist, one whose death he vividly remembered. The haunting apparition bore the same crushed skull Einarr had inflicted upon him. And then another specter appeared, followed by another, and yet another. Soon, hundreds, perhaps thousands of ghostly figures emerged, each a grim reminder of Einarr's violent past.

These spectral beings encircled the dwarf, a vast assembly of those he had slain. Each of them echoed the same chilling accusation in unison, their voices merging into a haunting chorus that filled the misty air.

"Murderer! Murderer! Murderer!" they chanted relentlessly, surrounding Einarr with the weight of his own cruel deeds.

Among the spectral figures, there were a few that stirred a flicker of remorse in Einarr, but for most, he felt nothing but indifference. With a chuckle, he bellowed out defiantly, "Ye think this will get to me, lassie!"

"Nah, but this might," came the monster's voice from behind him. Einarr's grin widened with anticipation, and he spun around, eager to confront her, hammer ready to strike. But to his surprise, she was nowhere to be seen. Instead, his attention was drawn to a second cloud that was beginning to envelop him, this one darker and more ominous.

As the dark cloud brushed against Einarr's hand gripping his hammer, a searing pain erupted, feeling like his skin was burning. Driven by a deep-rooted survival instinct, he dropped the hammer, shaking his hand in agony. To his horror, he saw boils and lesions, oozing with pus, rapidly forming across his skin.

In a state of frantic panic, Einarr realized the gravity of his situation without his hammer. Desperately, he reached back into the blight-infested cloud, searching for his weapon, but it was nowhere to be found. The lesions spread rapidly, covering him from head to toe, as he groped blindly in the darkness. His hands swept through the cloud, but his hammer seemed to have

vanished, leaving him vulnerable and exposed to the malicious entity that had created this dark, diseased mist.

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Suppressing a giggle, I hastily clapped both hands over my mouth, desperately hoping Einarr hadn't heard me. Panic surged through me as I accidentally dropped his hammer doing so, the loud clang of metal striking concrete—or whatever cobblestone is made of—echoing ominously through the area. I froze, struggling to contain my laughter, barely managing to catch my breath in the tense moment.

Dream, cobblestone is made from stone.

Huh, the more you know.

Relief washed over me as Einarr, lost in the disorienting effects of my Web of Whispers skill, seemed oblivious to the additional noise I had inadvertently made. I moved around him, alternating between cautious tiptoeing and using Phantasmal Surge, hiding myself from his perception within Phantasmal Mist.

The amount of mana emanating from me was so immense that I didn't even need to resort to using Phantasmal Dominion. My magic and skills, supercharged by the abundant energy, made me feel invincible. I reveled in this overwhelming sense of power, ready to capitalize on Einarr's confusion and vulnerability.

I say we end this twat-waffle here and now.

You don't want to toy with him a bit more?

Nah! I want my necklace.

Hey! Nightmare, I called dibs on a new jump rope!

Ugh, fine.

My right arm morphed into a long tentacle as I stealthily approached the man who was blindly searching within the Blight for his hammer. A sinister smile crept across my face, ready to thrust this Disintegration-infused tentacle right down his throat.

Umm, Nightmare... I say we go through the bellybutton.

The bellybutton? Why the bellybutton?

No, no, not that one—the backend bellybutton!

Backend bellybutton? What are you—

You know, the brown star, brown-eye, chocolate starfish, Hershey highway, cornhole, bumhole, rear entry, the old tailpipe...

Dream?! What. The. Hell!

What's wrong? It's just—

Forget it! Here I thought I was the twisted half. Seriously, I'm just going to just end him now.

Sporting my most sinister dark grin, I thrust out with my tentacle aimed right at his—

Dream!

Tee-hee!

Before I could impale the dwarf with my long, thick tentacle, Einarr reacted with startling speed, reaching back and grasping it. His palm sizzled upon contact, but he showed no sign of pain. Instead, a smile, grotesque with pus and boils, spread across his face.

“Ye toyed with me too long,” he chuckled, a menacing glint in his eyes as he added, “My turn.”

“Oh, shit,” I breathed out, a wave of dread washing over me.

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In the distance, still unnoticed by all, a small figure cloaked in pink and darkness continued to observe Blake, shaking her head in disappointment. She idly toyed with an unusual wand she had “found,” her curiosity piqued by its peculiar design. The crystal at its base glowed oddly, pulsating with an almost overwhelming amount of mana. Even more intriguing was the strange metallic lever positioned on the wand.

Peering intently down the barrel, she pulled the lever, her eyes widening in fascination as a burst of rare magic shot up from the depths of the wand, erupting straight into her open eye. The magic washed over her harmlessly, leaving her unscathed. Unfazed, she accepted that had it been anyone else, the outcome would have been most lethal.

Still intrigued by the wand's peculiarity, she decided to stow it away for the time being. It was a curious artifact, brimming with potential power, and she contemplated its future use, possibly gifting it to someone of her choosing on a day yet to come.

For now, her attention was drawn back to the troublesome girl she was monitoring. If not for her favorite child's claim over this girl, she might not have cared much. But in these days, where she found so little else to engage her interest, this girl, Blake, provided a rare distraction worth her attention.

"Ugh, Duskara will never forgive me if I let that girl kill herself," Death whined, absentmindedly digging her toe into the dirt beneath her. She abruptly stopped when she noticed that the plants around her had begun to wither and die.