

# BLAKE PUDDING

## CHAPTER 21

---

### MIST-VEILED

Sylvarie tread cautiously among the crumbled stones of the Beastveil Kingdom, his eyes scanning for the faintest movement, alert for any sign of a beastkin. Weeks had passed since the last encounter with those he deemed vile, yet his vigilance as the leader of the three-man patrol never wavered. He inhaled deeply, tightening his grip on the staff in both hands, ready to command. Beside him stood a knight clad in armor and a soldier who resembled a barbarian, identified by his scant clothing and the massive battle axe on his back, a weapon favored by his kind.

Like his brethren, Sylvarie was drawn to Nyxoria, one of Völuspá's moons, on a divine mission to purge the realm of the darker races and their malevolent influence. Though Nyxoria was not the most infested of the moons, it was the current focus of their relentless crusade, a testament to the ongoing conflict and their unyielding dedication to their cause.

Continuing his patrol, Sylvarie's grip on his staff intensified, the wood creaking under the pressure of his white-knuckled hold. His attention was sharply drawn to a group of feral goblins scavenging through a pile of burnt beastkin corpses, like vultures. Their wild, untamed behavior was unmistakable, even from afar.

“More goblins,” the knight muttered with a sigh of exasperation. “Why does it always have to be goblins?”

“They’re feral,” the soldier pointed out, as if stating the obvious.

“And?” the knight challenged; his tone laced with impatience.

Sylvarie, accustomed to the ever-changing composition of his patrol groups, rarely knew much about those under his command at any given time. This was a common practice across the various kingdoms within the Empire, spanning its numerous moons. The strategy was simple yet effective: by preventing familiarity, it discouraged thoughts of rebellion among the ranks. Consequently, Sylvarie's interactions with his current companions were markedly impersonal. In truth, he preferred it this way, finding a certain solace in the detachment it afforded him amidst the ceaseless shifts in his patrol duty.

Sylvarie's gaze shifted to the young knight, noting his naiveté. Barely into his fourth century, the knight's inexperience was evident, likely hailing from one of the moons already subdued by their forces. “Feral goblins reproduce at an alarming rate,” Sylvarie explained, his voice steady and informative.

The knight, whose skin bore a subtle blue hue, blinked in astonishment—some variant of human lineage, though Sylvarie rarely interacted with humans beyond necessary military coordination. The elf's eyebrows raised slightly as the knight blurted out, “How are they managing to reproduce

so rapidly? I've been trying for decades with each of my wives, and they've been doing the same with each of their husbands," his voice tinged with a mix of shock and curiosity.

Sylvarie's face returned to a mask of calm, but inwardly he couldn't help but be taken aback by the knight's stark ignorance. "Wives," he began, his voice tinged with a hint of inquiry, but he quickly stopped himself. He wasn't about to delve into the complex and often controversial marital customs that varied wildly among the races of the Empire, nor inside the current Kingdom of Slaethia.

As he turned his gaze back to the matter at hand, he resumed, "Feral species aren't subject to the same magical reproductive constraints as the rest of us." He paused for a moment, his keen eyes catching the flicker of confusion that danced across the young knight's face. With a slight tilt of his head and a more measured tone, he elaborated, "They lack souls. This absence renders them soulless, feral. It's this very lack of a soul that allows them to reproduce so prolifically, to spawn countless offspring."

He watched as the young knight's eyes widened slightly, a mixture of realization and unease settling in. "And that," Sylvarie concluded, his voice growing firmer, "is precisely why the Empire is relentless in its campaign to eradicate the darker races capable of giving birth to such soulless beings."

The knight pondered for a moment before speaking. "Isn't that sort of like, monsters?"

"It is," Sylvarie confirmed, his tone matter-of-fact.

"Ugh, feral orcs and trolls are the worst," chimed in the other soldier, a look of distaste crossing his face.

"Indeed," Sylvarie nodded, acknowledging the sentiment.

The young knight, his curiosity piqued, ventured another question. "What about vampires?"

Sylvarie turned his gaze back toward the goblins rummaging through the rubble and the remains. "What about them?" he replied, his voice betraying a hint of impatience.

"Do they ever produce a feral?" the knight clarified, his brow furrowing in genuine curiosity.

"No," Sylvarie answered, his eyes still fixed on the goblins. "But they have the ability to infect other races, including ferals, with their vampiric traits. That makes them far more dangerous."

The knight, lost in his thoughts, murmured, "Huh, back on my little rock of Vespera, all I ever dealt with were flying monster waves from Völuspá."

"Vespera? Isn't that more of a hollowed-out asteroid than a moon?" the soldier inquired, curiosity piqued.

"Yeah, that's where my people are from. It's quite a charming place, actually, nestled pretty close to the clouds of Völuspá," the knight replied, his face lighting up with a proud, beaming smile.

"Enough," Sylvarie interjected sharply, cutting short their conversation. His tone was firm, a clear reminder of the task at hand. "We need to deal with these goblins before they spot us. We can't afford to lose the element of surprise."

Just as Sylvarie began to draw upon his internal mana, intending to conjure a fireball, an unexpected change occurred. A dense mist, thick and enveloping like a heavy fog, rolled in swiftly. It blanketed everything in its path, obscuring vision and casting an eerie pall over their surroundings. The suddenness of the mist's arrival caught them off guard, forcing Sylvarie to pause his spellcasting as they all tried to adjust to this unexpected turn of events.

"What the hells is happening?" the soldier muttered, a sense of dread creeping into his voice. He hoisted his battle axe from his back, his bulging muscles tensing as he prepared to strike at any looming threat.

"I don't have the faintest clue," Sylvarie confessed, his voice barely above a whisper.

The three men exchanged uneasy glances, their breaths shallow, when suddenly a piercing shriek shattered the silence, followed by the frantic patter of rapidly approaching footsteps. They turned towards the sound, their hearts pounding in their chests. Out of the enveloping mist emerged five feral goblins, their faces twisted in sheer panic and terror, a sight that momentarily paralyzed the men.

But before they could react, something more sinister unfolded. From the depths of the mist, five black tentacles, darker than the deepest abyss, shot out with unrelenting speed. One encircled a goblin's head, cutting off its ear-piercing cry with a muffled whimper. Another goblin's breath was brutally squeezed out as a tentacle constricted around its waist. A third goblin was jerked backward, its neck snapping in a horrifyingly swift motion. The remaining two were caught by the legs, their desperate clawing at the cobblestones futile as they were dragged screaming back into the mist, reaching out in vain towards the patrol, their would-be executioners, now frozen witnesses to their grisly fate.

"W-What the FUCK was that?" the knight blurted out, his voice teetering between a scream and a bellow, shock evident in his wide eyes.

"I-I don't have the faintest clue," Sylvarie repeated, his tone betraying a hint of uncertainty. He glanced at the knight, who was clutching his raised shield like a lifeline. "You're our defender, go find out," Sylvarie instructed, strategically moving to stand behind the knight.

The soldier, observing the exchange, gave a firm nod of agreement. "The caster's right," he declared, falling in line beside Sylvarie.

"Y-You've got to be shitting me," the knight stammered, his voice trembling with apprehension. "I'm not going over there, especially not without a healer by my side."

"Don't be ridiculous," Sylvarie hissed, his patience wearing thin. "Healers are far too valuable and rare to be assigned to a patrol like ours. Now, enough with the cowardice. Shut up and follow orders."

The knight's throat constricted as he swallowed hard, his hand clenching the shield so firmly that red seeped from the gaps of his gauntlet. He took a trembling first step, inching cautiously forward. His eyes darted frantically, searching for any hint of movement within the obscuring mist. His sword quivered unsteadily in his other hand, betraying his anxiety. Silently, he prayed that Sylvarie, the caster elf, would be ready to set ablaze whatever creature lurked within the mist's enigmatic shroud.

With each hesitant step, the knight's senses heightened. The mist gradually revealed scattered pieces of rubble, strewn across their path. Most chillingly, upon the surface of these remnants, were the distinct claw marks of two of the goblins, evidence of their desperate struggle as they were mercilessly dragged into the unknown. The sight sent a shiver down his spine, but he steeled himself, knowing he had to press on despite the fear that gripped him.

The sudden, ear-piercing scream of a creature in its death throes—likely a goblin—made Caspian, the knight, jump and whirl around. His heart raced as he realized that both the caster and the soldier had vanished from his sight. With caution, he began to retreat from the source of the sound, his mind racing with uncertainty about the whereabouts of his allies.

In the midst of this eerie mist, Caspian's thoughts drifted to his life before the crusade. He hailed from a simple asteroid skirting the clouds of Völuspá. Answering the divine call to rid the realm of darkness, he had set out with pride and honor, despite the mixed feelings of his family. Three of his wives had opposed his decision, yet two of their husbands had stood by his side, embodying the intricate familial bonds typical of Vespera. In his culture, collective families were not just tradition but a collective hope, a shared longing for the rare miracle of parenthood.

Despite his relative youth by the standards of the realm, Caspian had always harbored a deep longing for a child of his own. But now, as he stood alone in the mist, the presence of an unseen, lurking creature nearby, all he could think of was a return to the safety and familiarity of Vespera, to the embrace of his wives and their husbands. The prospect of home seemed like a distant dream amidst the chilling uncertainty that enveloped him.

A few meters away in the murky distance, obscured by the thickening mist, the soldier stumbled over unseen rubble. Grorin, typically a man of few words, was known for his silent demeanor, a trait often appreciated by his comrades during patrols. Despite his bulky frame and thick beard, he was frequently mistaken for a human. In reality, Grorin was a large dwarf—or, more accurately, a half-dwarf. His mother was human, but he had been raised in the dwarven tradition and chose to identify solely with that heritage. Rather than discuss his mixed lineage, he preferred to keep to himself.

Nearing the mark of his second millennium since his home world became one with the Moons of Völuspá, Grorin had seen his fair share of battles, skirmishes, and conflicts. Yet, nothing in his extensive experience had prepared him for the peculiar, unsettling mist that now surrounded him. This mist was a phenomenon entirely foreign to him, wrapping his environment in an eerie, almost spectral shroud.

As Gorin navigated through this uncanny fog, a sense of foreboding clung to him, thick as the mist itself. The world around him, once familiar, now seemed alien and unpredictable under this veil of obscurity. This added a layer of uncertainty and apprehension to his mission, making the already challenging task feel even more ominous and fraught with unseen dangers.

Gorin stood tense and alert, his battle axe gripped tightly in his hands, ready to cleave through anything that dared approach him. Slowly, he rotated in a circle, his eyes darting through the mist, expecting the sinister dark tentacles to lunge at him at any moment. But, to his mounting horror, nothing happened. It wasn't that he desired an attack from an unseen enemy; rather, it was the anticipation, the suspense of waiting for an assault that often proved more unnerving than the combat itself.

His focus was suddenly broken by an unexpected sound—the melody of a woman singing. The notes floated through the mist, both haunting and beautiful. Gorin's head snapped in the direction of the voice, his battle-hardened instincts momentarily giving way to curiosity and bewilderment. In this shrouded, eerie landscape, the singing seemed both out of place and inexplicably mesmerizing.

*“Boys and goblins of every age,  
Wouldn't you like to see something strange?  
Come with me and you will see,  
This, my town of... me?”*

Her lyrics seemed improvised, faltering slightly as if she was uncertain of the words. Yet, there was an undeniable beauty in her voice, a haunting quality that resonated with the mysterious surroundings. The strange song added another layer of surrealism to the already bizarre and tense atmosphere, captivating Gorin despite his high alert.

“No, that was lame. It should be 'town of Halloween,’” she suddenly uttered out.

“No. No! They don't know what Halloween is,” the same voice countered, tinged with frustration.

“Well, they don't know who we are either,” she argued.

“Yeah, true. How about ending with 'town of nightmares?’” the voice suggested.

“I prefer 'dreams,’” she replied, her tone softer this time.

“You would,” it concluded with a hint of resignation.

Enshrouded in mist, Gorin listened intently to this peculiar, self-contradictory conversation. The woman's internal debate was as intriguing as it was unsettling, leaving him more bewildered than ever. This eerie atmosphere, coupled with her strange monologue, created a captivating yet unsettling tableau amidst the mist-veiled ruins.

The caster's voice suddenly boomed through the mist, authoritative and clear. “Soldier, knight, if you can hear me, make your way over to me,” he bellowed. Almost instantly, a flame ignited within

the shrouded mist, glowing brightly like a beacon in a storm, cutting through the eerie fog with its warm light.

In response to this sudden illumination, the mysterious woman's voice echoed from within the mist, her tone laced with a hint of challenge and whimsy. “Oh, well, if my Phantasmal Mist isn't enough, let's lay claim to this domain then, [PHANTASMAL DOMINION],” she called out.

Her words seemed to carry a weight of power, hinting at an unseen, magical force at play. The atmosphere tensed with anticipation, as if the very mist awaited her command, ready to transform or respond to her whimsical yet commanding declaration.

The woman's voice rang out again, tinged with surprise. “Umm... That didn't do shit,” she blurted out, her tone a mix of confusion and disappointment.

Then, almost immediately, she responded to herself, a hint of realization in her voice. “No, I think it did. Do you feel that?” she asked, as if discovering something unexpected.

“Huh, you're right. It feels like all the mana is converging here, doesn't it,” she answered, her own voice taking on a tone of wonder and intrigue.

As Gorin approached the glowing beacon, he saw Caspian already there, and they exchanged a nod, acknowledging each other's presence amidst the mist. However, their brief moment of relief quickly faded when they realized that Sylvarie was nowhere to be seen.

Elsewhere in the shroud, Sylvarie felt a growing sense of unease. He called out again, hoping for a response, but his words seemed to be swallowed by the fog. The flame in his palm flickered, casting an eerie glow but revealing no sign of his companions. “ON ME!” he shouted with increased urgency, his voice echoing through the mist. His heart raced as the silence persisted, the chilling realization setting in that he was alone, separated from his patrol by the dense and disorienting shroud.

Sylvarie's senses were heightened in the enveloping mist, every sound amplified in the silence. Suddenly, a faint whisper brushed his ear, “I'm already here,” a feminine voice murmured.

He spun around swiftly, his hand poised to unleash a burst of fire, but to his bewilderment, no one was there. The mist continued to swirl around him, impenetrable and isolating. He moved to step forward, but his foot caught on something sticky. Looking down, he noticed faint strands of webbing clinging to his boots. Though difficult to see in the mist, the more he shifted, the clearer it became that he was standing amidst a web that seemed almost ethereal.

“Ah, what's wrong?” the whisper echoed again, seemingly from right behind him.

Startled, Sylvarie whirled around once more, but this time the webbing ensnared his boots, causing him to lose his balance. He fell with a heavy thud, the ground below him proving to be a larger web that entangled him further. Desperate, he shouted, “ON ME!” hoping his companions would hear.

But then, a new, chilling sound pierced the mist. “Daddy,” a soft, childlike voice called out to him. Sylvarie's struggle halted abruptly as an eerie voice pierced the air—a voice he thought he'd never

hear again. It was a mere whisper, barely audible, like a chilling breath against his neck. “*Daddy, where were you?*” The words hung in the air like a haunting melody, sending shivers down his back.

His eyes darted around, searching for the source of the ghostly voice within the shroud, but there was nothing to see—just an empty, desolate space. Yet, the presence of his long-deceased daughter lingered, a specter from the past, refusing to be forgotten.

“*Daddy, it’s so cold,*” the voice whispered again, carrying a sorrow that cut deep into his soul. Sylvarie’s heart pounded in his chest, gripped by a mixture of terror and grief. He couldn’t comprehend how this could be happening; his daughter had perished centuries ago.

But the whispers persisted, as if from beyond the grave, and the temperature plummeted, leaving an icy chill in the air. “*Where were you?*” The question echoed hauntingly, a reminder of the fatherly duty he had failed to fulfill.

In a realm where the specter of ageless existence loomed large, and Death’s embrace came only through tragedy, Sylvarie, like all others, was ancient. The inexorable march of time had left him untouched by age, but not unscarred by loss. Many ages ago, a calamity had robbed him of his wife and daughter, a blow that had struck deep into his soul. The rarity of children in this forsaken realm, where they were nothing short of miracles, only amplified his grief.

This personal tragedy had driven Sylvarie to embrace the divine call, to join the crusade against the forces of darkness that plagued their realm. In his heart, he carried the belief that ridding the realm of those who spread corruption and shadow would honor the memory of his lost loved ones, and perhaps, in some small way, bring a measure of solace to his enduring sorrow.

The horror of his daughter’s voice, lost yet still haunting, left him paralyzed with guilt and fear. In this moment, Sylvarie faced the relentless echoes of his past failures. The cold, lifeless specter of his daughter’s voice beckoned him, and he could not escape the dreadful truth of his own inadequacy.

In a haunting whisper, his daughter’s voice pierced the air once more, “*Come and join mommy and me, we still need you.*” The words hung in the chilling silence.

Sylvarie’s gaze fell, heavy with shame, as he accepted the ethereal call of his daughter, a voice from the past that he longed to join. In this moment of vulnerability, his attention was drawn back to the almost invisible strand of webbing that entangled him. This was not a product of any ordinary magic. Throughout his extensive life, filled with encounters with the grotesque and the terrifying, he had never come across anything quite like this. It invoked a profound unease in him, a realization that he was now entangled in the manipulations of Mind Magic.

A surge of anger welled up inside Sylvarie, a fiery response to the realization of being ensnared in such a deceptive trap. Drawing upon his internal reservoir of mana, he released a ferocious burst of flame beneath him. The fire roared, a desperate attempt to burn away the insidious webbing, to break free from the unseen, malevolent force that was attempting to control and deceive him.

A woman's voice rang out in alarm as Sylvarie unleashed his fiery magic. "Oh shit! Fire bad," she exclaimed, her footsteps hastily retreating from the flames.

But as Sylvarie continued to pour flames over the webbing, he realized with horror that the webs were impervious to the fire. Instead of burning away the trap, he had inadvertently set himself ablaze. His screams echoed through the mist, a harrowing symphony of agony. Despite withdrawing his magic, it was too late; his robes were engulfed, and the burning fat beneath his skin fueled the relentless smoldering. His pain was indescribable, an unending torment.

From the mist emerged the woman, stepping forward with a cautious yet morbidly curious gait. Her appearance was otherworldly: ghostly pale skin as if woven from silk, glowing orange eyes, and long, tendril-like black hair that seamlessly blended with her abyssal black dress. As realization dawned upon Sylvarie, he understood she was the source of the tentacles.

She tilted her head, observing the scene with an odd fascination. "Huh, it looks like my Web of Whispers skill is flame proof," she mused, seemingly pleased. "I think it has something to do with the ambient mana," she continued, conversing with herself in a way that only added to Sylvarie's confusion as he lay dying.

Suddenly, another figure approached—the Paladin Champion Anlyth, a beacon of hope in Sylvarie's fading consciousness! As she neared, her sword manifested in holy light, as if ignited with divine fire. Relief washed over Sylvarie; rescue was at hand, and she would surely vanquish the monstrous woman.

Anlyth raised her blazing sword, her voice resolute. "Forgive me. I shall end your agony," she declared. Sylvarie welcomed the promise of release, believing she would strike down the dark figure before him.

But as Anlyth's sword descended in a swift, decisive motion, the woman in black protested, "Hey, he's mine!" In that final moment, as the sword neared, everything for Sylvarie faded to darkness.

Just a dozen meters away, Grorin and Caspian were jolted by the harrowing screams of the caster, which abruptly ceased, leaving a haunting silence in its wake. Strangely, there was no visual cue in the mist from the caster's self-immolation, nor could they discern the direction of the screams; it was as if the cries enveloped them from all sides. The floating fireball that had been their guiding light began to fade, snuffing out completely with the caster's demise. The two men exchanged nervous glances in the dimming light.

Then, the clink of armored footsteps approached, coupled with the sound of more hurried, panicked steps. A woman's voice, tinged with concern, called out through the mist, "Hey Champ, w-what are you doing?"

Another woman's voice, sharp and exasperated, replied, "Ending this horrible game you're playing."

Caspian, still gripping his shield tightly enough to cause a trickle of red from his gauntlet, exchanged a worried look with Grorin. They braced themselves, uncertain of what was to come. Then, a figure emerged from the mist: an elven woman with golden hair, clad in silver and golden armor, wielding a sword radiating divine, holy magic.

"That's the Paladin Champion Anlyth," Grorin whispered in awe.



Trailing behind Anlyth was a frantic-looking woman dressed in black, her pale face and glowing orange eyes the only parts visible through her dark attire. “Vanya,” she whined, “don’t kill them for me, I wanted to do it,” her voice filled with childish disappointment.

“I will not be a part of your training if your only desire is to torment everyone,” Anlyth declared firmly, raising her sword.

Grorin and Caspian exchanged a glance, fraught with uncertainty. Before they could react, Anlyth unleashed her magic. A blinding golden pillar of light enveloped them, and as darkness overtook their senses, the last thing they heard was the outraged scream of the woman in black, before everything faded to nothing.



Vanya stood amidst the mist, a sense of satisfaction washing over her as she brought the cruel game of the creature she now served to an abrupt end. She had not only halted the vile plans but also granted a merciful release to those who had inflicted so much suffering upon the beastkin. Turning to face the pudding in human form, she paused, her eyes widening in surprise at the sight before her.

The woman, with her arms crossed in a pout, presented a jarring image. Half of her silk-like face was seared away, revealing the damage beneath. Her right side appeared grotesquely affected, as if it had been subjected to intense boiling and burning, the Black Pudding flesh bubbling and charred.

“Me no likey holy,” the woman complained, her voice tinged with both pain and petulance.

Vanya could only manage a stunned “Oh,” as she took in the extent of the damage. The contrast between the woman's childlike demeanor and the severity of her injuries was stark, leaving Vanya momentarily at a loss for words in the face of such an unexpected and unsettling sight.