

# BLAKE PUDDING

## CHAPTER 16

### MY CHAMPION

This was one of those wildly confusing moments.

On one hand, I was relishing a delectable feast, dissolving—or rather, disintegrating—a winged lizard. They call them a dragonkin, I think, and it's surprisingly tasty, if I do say so myself. On the other hand, there's this elf, Vanya, she was the one who offed that goblin kid, Wartie. Annoying little shit, I should probably thank her for that. Still regret bringing him back. Anyways! She just blew up, not herself, but this golden glittering protective sphere she had around her.

The explosion had hurled me right against the lizard I'm dining on now, splattering me across several bars and other captives the beastkins had in their catacomb slash sewer hideout—the place is a real shithole, if I'm being both honest and generous with the description. We're talking a refugee camp filled with hollow eyes and sunken stomachs, with the constant aroma of shit and death in the air. My kind of place!

Where was I? Right, I was melting into a screeching, winged gecko. The flavor—oh, my bad, Vanya, that elf, was marching right towards me. Luckily, I had Kaida, the undead woman, as backup—*wait, where did she vanish to?* I scanned the area and realized that the undead, false fetish bunny lady, had vanished. *Coward!* It's what I should be doing, but here I am, crawling at a snail's pace, slower than a slug. Well, that's a lie, I wasn't making a valiant effort to crawl away... I was having a food coma moment. What? The screaming dragonkin tasted way too good to run away.

*Umm, Dream... you might want to rethink your wording.*

*What? Oh. Oh! Right, my bad. No time to stop and taste the screaming man.*

...

The woman, whose husband's neck I had snapped with my tentacles, now loomed over me, her gaze filled with utter disgust and hatred. Thanks to my terrible eyesight and the absurdly low ambient mana, everything was a blur. But the she-elf before me was radiating enough mana, giving me hope for a few more surprises up my sleeve—or goo. So, I unleashed Blight, as my opening attack.

*Wasn't Phantasmal Surge our opening attack?*

*Doesn't count.*

You know those infrared videos of someone passing gas? That's pretty much how my dark miasma looked as it wafted out. Embarrassing, right? To top it off, the other prisoners' panicked cries halted, as if they were confused by my feeble attempt. Even the paladin elf looked at me, her eyebrow raised in surprise.

*Great job, Dream. She probably thinks we just crapped ourselves.*

*Not helping, but feel free to step in, anytime, Nightmare.*

It also didn't help that what little gas I did release was pretty much useless. What tiny amount there had been just brushed against Vanya, or more accurately, a slightly smaller shield than before. Picture a wheezy hipster coughing on his vape—that was me, utterly pathetic. And the look on that woman's face? Yeah, that was a big hit to my self-esteem. This day is definitely going up there in my top five worst days, just below that time I needed antibiotics because of Stiffler's mom. What am I saying? She was a wild ride, and I don't regret it one bit!

As I tensed, ready for Vanya's inevitable holy smite or some equally dramatic retaliation, a sudden, eerie silence took hold. In the cages, prisoners began to slump silently to the ground. First one, then another, their collapses were a silent, grim cascade. My gaze flickered to Vanya, her features blurred but her alarm unmistakable as her eyes darted around the room.

Darkness crept in, suffocating the light from the once-glowing crystals. Their light waned, flickering like dying stars. Then, a shadow danced across the walls, elusive and ever-changing. It slinked behind columns and cages, each reemergence a different form – now a child, now a woman, now a towering figure with the bulk of an orc. This chameleon-like figure prowled the edges of our vision, never approaching, yet its presence was an oppressive cloak over us. Around us, the cells lay still, their occupants stolen away by the silent predator that circled us, leaving only Vanya and me in a chamber of shadows, death, and silence.

The brief lull was shattered by Vanya's exasperated sigh. "Jörmun, do you mind?"

"You're not supposed to kill her," the shadow figure's voice emerged from the gloom.

"I wasn't... going to," she retorted, her voice trailing off.

Their exchange hung in the air, filled with an awkward pause. Meanwhile, I seized the opportunity. Grinning at my sudden brainwave and with their focus on each other, I silently cast [DEVOURER]. I had envisioned my form expanding to envelop the slowly dissolving corpse of the lizard man. Instead, tendrils erupted from me, shooting out like a web to wrap around the body. A sizzling sound filled the air as the tendrils began to retract, pulling the body towards me. It disintegrated rapidly, inch by inch, as it was consumed by my form.

Honestly, I was kind of let down by the sluggish pace of my new skill, Disintegration. The best guess I had was that I'd been unintentionally boosting my system magic with ambient mana, and now without it, my system skills were underperforming. It was so annoying, devouring this stupid lizard was taking an eternity to eat. At least the she-elf-bitch above me hadn't taken the opportunity to attack. Surprisingly.

**NOTICE**

[DEVOURER] SUCCESSFUL

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>CONSUMED</u> [<b>DRAGONKIN</b>] [<b>DWARF</b>] [<b>DWARF</b>] [<b>DWARF</b>] [<b>HUMAN</b>] [<b>HUMAN</b>] [<b>HUMAN</b>] [<b>HUMAN</b>]</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>NOTICE</u> SKILLS ACQUIRED <u>SELECTABLE</u> NONE</p>

*WHAT?!*

*Did we just eat all the dead prisoners?*

Looking around, I realized I had indeed just devoured all the prisoners in the chamber with us. Unfortunately, Vanya and shadow dude were still unscathed, but it looked like I had managed to disintegrate most of the cages without even noticing it during my snack time. Oh, and Vanya doesn't seem as large as before. No, wait, that's not it. I'm the one who's larger! *Bwahahaha.*

*Were they all dead or just unconscious?*

*Hmmm...? Umm, don't know—wait—we didn't get any new skills for any of them!*

*You've got to be shitting me. Ugh!*

*Did you notice the system seems a bit different since Death restored our access?*

*It's not really that different.*

Taking another peek at the system notification, I caught a tiny difference, but it wasn't big enough to really matter, so I just let it go. Honestly, this whole system thing is getting on my nerves. If I ever get around to writing my own memoir, I'd probably ditch the system idea in a later draft. LitRPG is fun to read, but imagine writing it? Sounds like a total nightmare. And trying to adapt that to audiobooks? No way. I'm relieved there aren't any numbers to deal with, I can't even fathom keeping track of all those stats. And if you know me, I'd probably write the whole memoir like some mad experiment, throwing ideas around to see what works, then scrap it all and start over,

only keeping the bits I liked. Honestly, I'm too erratic and unpredictable to stick to any proper outline.

*You're getting lost in our thoughts... again.*

*Uh, oops. Where were we?*

*The she-elf-bitch and shadow guy...*

*Ah, right, back to business.*

There I was, splayed on the floor, having polished off my lizard feast and a few other prisoners as a bonus. A bit of a surprise to you and me both. The one thing puzzling me was why the elf hadn't just finished me off then and there. Honestly, with the usual flood of ambient mana missing, I was in a sorry state. From what I could gather from my system skills, all my magic depended on the surrounding mana for either casting or boosting. In simple terms, I was in deep shit. And yet, she still hadn't made her move to finish me off.

"Umm... Whatcha waiting for?" I managed to gurgle out in my half-lucid voice.

It dawned on me that even my ability to speak seemed tied to ambient mana. Heck, I had realized earlier that I couldn't understand what anyone was saying unless they were close by. It was the first time I grasped that nobody was actually speaking English, which threw me off, especially since their lip movements matched the sounds. Maybe it was the skill, Veil Polyglot, that I had unwittingly mastered without the aid of the system, affecting my brain rather than my ears.

*We don't have a brain—or ears.*

*True, but we could technically shape some up with shapeshifting. Still, you've got a point. Tough as it is to admit. Maybe it's linked to our souls?*

*Probably...?*

"It pains me to admit this, but I'm here," the elf woman hesitated, casting a glance at the shadowed figure lingering nearby, yet too distant to discern clearly. "I'm here to... train you," she finally said, her words forced through clenched teeth.

"You're what?" I exclaimed, bewildered.

*This must be our 'wax on' moment.*

*Oh, just be quiet.*

"You heard me," she snarled.

The shadowed figure interjected, adding to both my and Vanya's confusion, judging by our mutual bewildered expressions. "You must ask if she accepts," he suggested.

"Sure," I replied, a mix of amusement and nonchalance in my voice. After all, there was always the option of dealing with her permanently later.

"No," the figure's voice enveloped us, omnipresent. "She must ask, and then you must accept," he clarified, though it made little sense to me.

Vanya turned back to me, her voice dripping with contempt. "Would you like me to train you?"

"No, no. Vanya, ask her if you can serve," the figure corrected.

"WHAT?!" Both of us shouted simultaneously, her tone laced with horror, mine with excitement and amusement.

"The system needs to recognize the agreement for maximum benefits," he explained. "Now, ask her if you can serve."

The she-elf let out a resigned sigh, muttering "for Ezad" under her breath. Her shoulders sagged as she faced me, asking with a heavy heart, "May I serve?"

**NAME:** VANYA ANLYTH

**RACE:** HIGH ELF

**CLASS:** DIVINE PALADIN

TITLES

**CHAMPION OF JÖRMUN**

The appearance of the system notification caught me off guard. It seemed to be something akin to an appraisal of her. But it was the next popup that truly took me by surprise.

**NOTICE**

REQUIREMENTS HAVE BEEN MET

**JÖRMUN HAS TERMINATED HIS CHAMPION CONTRACT OVER [VANYA ANLYTH]**

DO YOU WISH TO ACCEPT [VANYA ANLYTH] AS YOUR CHAMPION?

YES / NO

I was torn between wanting to scream a resounding 'hell no', bursting into maniacal laughter, or slamming my metaphorical hand down on the "Yes" button, just to see how much of a nuisance I could be to the elf I had once sworn vengeance upon.

YOU HAVE ACCEPTED!

CHAMPION [VANYA ANLYTH] GAINED

**NOTICE**

ONLY ONE CHAMPION MAY BE CLAIMED AT ANY GIVEN TIME

It appeared that one of my two souls had slammed the 'yes' button, and the worst part? I couldn't tell which one had done it. One soul embodies my sarcastic, ditzzy side, while the other is more of my dramatic, bitchy aspect. But when neither trait is dominant, it's hard to tell who's in the driver's seat of my consciousness. Regardless, it seemed I had somehow acquired a Champion of my own, something I thought was only reserved for gods. If I had a physical face at that moment, it would have been split by the widest, most mischievous Cheshire cat grin.

However, my new 'toy' didn't share my excitement about this revelation. "You tricked me, you snake," Vanya yelled, whirling around to face the now fading shadowy figure.

"I did no such thing," he replied soothingly. "I will still honor my part of the deal. Protect, serve, and above all, train the little nightmare. Do this, and I'll restore your husband, Ezad," he concluded, before dissolving into thin air.

The chamber fell into a prolonged silence, both of us frozen in place. That is, until I couldn't contain myself any longer and burst into laughter. I mean, how could I not? It was just too absurd. I now had my very own Champion, someone I was going to thoroughly enjoy driving up the wall. Plus, I had two souls safely stored in phylacteries, waiting for bodies. They were mine to play with too. I was particularly keen on toying with Olin more than Nicholas—or was it Nikola? Anyway, I needed that former gnome for something. I just hadn't figured out what yet.

My laughter echoed through the space, much to the chagrin of my new Champion. She glared at me, her expression teetering between anger and contemplation, as if debating whether ending her newfound employment by eliminating her new boss was worth it. Oh, how I understood that sentiment! But my fits of laughter were soon drowned out by the sound of boots thundering against the stone floor.



A sphere of magic from one of the prisoners suddenly erupted in golden light, catapulting their unexpected ally, sent by the Crone in their time of dire need, across the chamber. Kaida watched in horror, her self-imposed illusion nearly unraveling as she dashed to rally the few fighters left. She had intended to reach the Black Pudding, their unlikely beacon of hope, but the blast had flung them in opposite directions within the prisoner-filled chamber.

With a heavy undead heart, Kaida was forced to leave behind their new ally, scrambling to find any help available—a task that proved dismally fruitless. Their resistance against the Kingdom of Slaethia had been a story of relentless defeat. Despite their efforts, they lost battle after battle. The Slaethians, favored by the gods with several Champions, seemed unbeatable. This stark contrast in divine support led many to feel abandoned, their spirits crushed under the weight of a seemingly forsaken struggle.

Kaida's resolve had never wavered. She had boldly stepped in during the downfall of the Beastveil Kingdom. Emerging from the shadows beneath the city, she unveiled the hidden dark underworld. Utilizing her mastery of illusion magic, she had cunningly faked the deaths of the Queen and her two children when one of the Slaethian Champions set the royal family ablaze. The King, in his

pride, had rejected the assistance of the undead woman, but the Queen, desperate to save her children, had accepted. To Kaida, even in her undead state, the significance of twins being born was not lost, recognizing them as a rare and precious occurrence of myths and legends.

The realm was undergoing a mysterious change, marked by a noticeable increase in births, the cause of which eluded Kaida. Her attention, however, was squarely on the immediate task at hand—marshaling any forces she could find. Recognition dawned on her only when the golden elf prisoner's armor took shape, revealing her identity as a Champion of Slaethia. Now, Kaida faced the daunting task of uniting the scattered refugees hidden in the underground catacombs beneath the ruins of what was once the proud Beastveil Kingdom.

"Kaida, what's wrong?" a melodious, feminine voice called out as Kaida dashed through various corridors.

Abruptly halting, the undead woman turned to see the Queen hurrying towards her. "Your Highness," Kaida began, urgency in her tone, "one of the prisoners is actually a Champion in disguise. She's going after the one the Crone sent us. We need to act now," she implored, her plea laced with a mix of worry and determination.

The Queen, with a hint of hesitation in her voice, asked, "I know it's wrong, but is there any way you can animate some of the dead we have?"

Kaida's voice, filled with a mix of regret and concern, broke the tense air. "I can't do that, Your Highness. I'm not a necromancer; I'm an illusion caster," she clarified, her voice trembling under the gravity of their dire situation.

For a fleeting moment, her own illusion wavered, revealing a brief glimpse of decaying flesh – so quick that it could have been dismissed as a trick of the eye. But the Queen, privy to Kaida's true form, knew better. She had seen beyond the façade after the undead woman had not only saved her and her children but also supported their resistance. In Kaida, the Queen found an unparalleled ally, a guardian whose loyalty and strength she trusted implicitly.

The Queen's voice, laced with a tremble of despair, conveyed their bleak reality. "Then we're out of options. There are just a few malnourished guards at the front, but they're hardly in any condition to fight," she said, her voice heavy with resignation. "Our only choice is to evacuate and head to the darker lands eastward. But I fear that few here have the strength for such a journey." She hesitated, the fear evident in her pause before continuing, "Kaida, could you... could you buy us some time? I want to get as many of us out as possible. We might not get far, but at least we'll die trying," she implored, fighting back tears as one of her children, with cat-like ears, peeked around the corner.

"Mom, what's wrong?" the child inquired, concern etched on their face.

The Queen quickly masked her worry with a smile. "It's nothing, honey. We're just about to go on a little journey," she reassured, her voice a mixture of bravery and forced cheerfulness.

Kaida paused, drawing in a deep, steadying breath to quell her rising nerves. "I'll handle it," she finally said, her voice steady yet laden with the weight of the responsibility. "But I can't say for sure how much time I can buy you," she admitted, her resolve firming despite the inner struggle.

Though undead, Kaida felt as alive as anyone else in that moment, the instinct for self-preservation and the desire to live as potent in her as in any living being. The thought of what lay ahead was daunting, but her determination to protect those in her care was stronger.

Kaida wasted no time; she spun on her heel and sprinted away from the Queen, retracing her steps. As she ran, her thoughts reached inward, tapping into the internal spark of magic inherent to all beings. Oddly enough, she had noted that the enigmatic Black Pudding, sent as an ally, lacked this spark of mana, an anomaly that puzzled her. But there was no time left for pondering such mysteries. The urgency of her mission eclipsed all else; she couldn't afford to let her second chance at existence slip away now.

Drawing upon her inner magical spark, Kaida conjured a series of illusions. One after another, beastkin warriors materialized, their feet pounding against the stone floor — or so the illusion convincingly suggested. Though her magic lacked the power to give these illusions physical substance, the images she created were compellingly lifelike. As she continued her dash, these spectral beastkin seemed to run alongside her, a phantom army conjured from the depths of her arcane skills.

Kaida exploded into the chamber, swiftly cloaking herself in an invisibility spell that nearly drained her magical reserves dry. Yet, she clung to her power, her determination unwavering as her spectral beastkin illusions stormed in behind her, swords at the ready, though they were nothing more than a facade.

What she saw next completely took her by surprise. The chamber, previously filled with prisoners, was now eerily empty. A wave of fear washed over her at this sight, but logic quickly took over— if the prisoners had escaped, surely, she would have encountered them on her way back. But she hadn't. The mystery deepened when she noticed the Black Pudding, not only alive but cackling like a madman. The enemy Champion, a Slaethian, was slumped against a column, massaging her temples in apparent frustration and exhaustion.

This unexpected scene threw Kaida's mind into disarray. The chamber, once a place of imminent danger, now seemed more like the stage of some bizarre play, with the Black Pudding and the Slaethian Champion as its unlikely stars.



Aurelia stood surrounded by her gathered generals, a diverse group representing the various factions that had sought refuge and pledged allegiance to her cause against Slaethian oppression. Among them were a couple of vampires, their presence a testament to her influence within the coven. The others were a mix of different species, each with their own reasons for joining her.



Notably, there was an older warg among them, a being who had endured great suffering under the rule of vampires, a regime that Aurelia had overthrown when she took the duke as her husband. Rumors circulated, however, painting a different picture—whispers suggested that the duke was more of a hostage than a husband, his execution merely a matter of time, orchestrated by Aurelia and perhaps even at the behest of her true, yet undisclosed, lover. These murmurs of intrigue and conspiracy only added to the complex tapestry of loyalties and motives in Aurelia's court. Each general, each ally, brought with them their own history and their own reasons for standing with her in this time of upheaval and conflict.

Aurelia leaned intently over a large, round table in the grand hall, her palms pressing down hard on its surface, her nails digging into the wood. Spread out before her was a map, detailing the strategic plans they had laid out in anticipation of the inevitable invasion from Slaethia. She was confounded by Lord Demidicus's decision to bestow such responsibility on her. It wasn't that Aurelia doubted her capability to rise to the occasion, but her disdain for her supposed father was no secret—and he was well aware of it. Yet, there he was, somewhere out there, expanding an empire under her name, her rule.

Despite the growing number of followers who pledged their loyalty to her, Aurelia harbored doubts. Could they truly stand against the formidable Slaethian Champions? The question weighed heavily on her, a shadow cast over her every strategic consideration on the map. This war was more than a clash of armies; it was a test of her leadership and the loyalty of those who now called her their lord.

Aurelia's concerns were further compounded by an extraordinary event unfolding in the skies. A dual convergence, an omen of significant change, was taking place. Two unfamiliar planets were drawing closer to Völuspá, destined to join the collection of stolen worlds that orbited as new moons. This celestial event was something Aurelia had never experienced. While her body maintained a youthful appearance, her soul told a different story. She had been brought into this realm through a summoning, her soul taking the place of the one that originally resided in her new body. Now, nearly two centuries later, she was witnessing her first convergence, a significant and grand cosmic phenomenon playing out above.

As the cosmos above shifted and churned with the dual convergence, the relentless campaign of genocide waged by Slaethia persisted unabated. Their mission to cleanse their world of those who neither shared their faith nor belonged to what they considered superior races was executed with brutal efficiency. This thirst for dominance and purification was all too common among the powerful, and Aurelia had been intimately involved in such endeavors. Her own immense power had led to her being named an Elder much earlier than usual, particularly after her devastating assault on Slaethia, where she engulfed the land with an unending tide of undead.

This act, while not a source of pride, was a calculated strategy, a necessary step towards her ultimate objective. This grim chapter of her history underscored the lengths she was willing to go, not for personal gain but for a love that bordered on obsession, known only to a select few. Aurelia, though skeptical about the concept of soulmates, was driven by the memories of her past life and her love for Bowen, now reincarnated in this realm as Blake, a creature known as a Black Pudding.

Her actions, while seemingly ruthless, were fueled by this deep, enduring love that transcended lifetimes and forms.

Her attention shifted as she caught sight of her supposed father's favored consort striding into the grand hall, her succubus hips swaying with characteristic grace. Close on her heels was the dark elf, a summon from Earth, entering the expansive chamber. The pair made a feeble attempt to disguise their romantic entanglement, but within the close-knit confines of a vampire coven, rumors and gossip were as pervasive as the shadows themselves.

Aurelia, aware of the precarious nature of their relationship, found herself concerned for the dark elf's safety. She knew all too well the wrath of Lord Demidicus, especially when it came to matters concerning his preferred companions. The thought of his potential reaction when he discovered his favored 'pet' had found solace in another's arms was troubling. Aurelia silently vowed to do what she could to protect the dark elf from the inevitable storm that would follow once their secret tryst was brought to light. In the complex web of vampire politics and passions, such alliances were fraught with danger, and she understood the need for discretion and the importance of allies in unexpected places.

Aurelia caught the succubus's glare, sharp and piercing, cutting through the air between them. Despite their longstanding mutual loathing, the demon's eyes fixated unusually on Aurelia's right hand, flickering with a tumultuous blend of pain and anger. This particular focus of disdain remained a silent enigma in their already fraught relationship.

Her contemplation of this mystery was abruptly interrupted by the arrival of Heather, the dark elf recognized as the Priestess of Dreams by the Crone. Heather's approach, marked by an unusual air of concern, caught Aurelia off guard.

"Heather," Aurelia acknowledged with a nod, carefully concealing her piqued interest behind a veil of calm. "What can I do for you?"

"Can we talk in private?" Heather's voice, tinged with urgency, betrayed the gravity of her request.

"Of course," Aurelia replied, her voice even, as she intuitively grasped the seriousness of the matter.

Heather's fingers intertwined and twisted, a visible manifestation of her inner turmoil. She paused, gathering her thoughts, before finally voicing another concern. "Also... have you seen Rob and Yua?"