

BLAKE 3 PUDDING

CHAPTER 1

IMPULSIVE JUMP

I was practically bouncing in place with excitement. Scratch that—I was indeed bouncing, completely engulfed in a whirl of anticipation. Several beastkin aboard the airship cast funny looks my way, but for some inexplicable reason, they continued to revere me. Jason's spiked-tooth glares? They meant nothing to me. If it came to it, I could toss him overboard without a second thought. It wouldn't even be the first time I killed him.

Heck, I could feel the little unicorn within me practically vibrating with excitement. Yes, you heard that correctly—I host a unicorn inside me, or more accurately, a pet Black Pudding that can meld its pudding-like flesh with mine. As for the unicorn form, she adopted the adorable shape I envisioned. Somehow, she responds to my mental commands; the mechanics of it are beyond me—it's just a pudding thing. Regardless, she exists as an adorable, plushie-sized unicorn, albeit one of murder and death. But, that's a detail for another time.

In just a few hours—yes, mere hours—I would be reunited with Aurelia. My feelings for her, an intricate blend of infatuation, lust, and love, defied all logic. I had spent barely any time with her, yet she had utterly consumed my thoughts since the day I first saw her, the day I was reborn—or more accurately, summoned, reincarnated?—as a Black Pudding. Well, technically, I'm an Eldritch Pudding, but as I've said a few times, I still identify as a Black Pudding. After all, if Jason of all people can identify as a man, even though I consider him a bastard, there shouldn't be any problem with my own self-image.

Whatever bizarre twist of fate granted me this second, monstrous existence made one thing crystal clear: my yearning for Aurelia was deep and fundamental, as if woven into the very core of my soul(s). That's probably why my mother declared her my soulmate. I wonder if she knows I'm hers as she's mine?

“Must you keep shaking your ass as you jump up and down like that?” came a sighing voice from behind me.

I turned around to find Vanya looking at me, her expression a curious blend of perplexity and annoyance. Honestly, her recent moodiness was baffling. Still, it was surprising that she was still speaking to me, despite having just found out that her husband, whom I may have killed, was somehow back from the dead. Sure, he seemed to now harbor a desire to kill her, but isn't that just part of the ups and downs of marriage? Besides, we were on our way to join more vampires and dark creatures in their lands, the very ones this elf woman, my Champion, had been her sworn enemies. If you ask me, her moodiness seemed quite unwarranted under the circumstances.

Flashing her a casual smile, I resumed what I was doing.

As for how long she had been fighting a war with the vampires, I couldn't precisely say. Years? Decades? Possibly centuries? Age is a tricky thing to measure in this magical realm. Once here, nobody seems to age, and those who appear old often arrive bearing the signs of age. As for children, I'm not sure if the same rule applies, but that's something I haven't investigated yet. Although finding a kid is absurdly rare, I don't think it does apply. Hmm, there are two kids aboard, so maybe I should ask.

Huh, Nightmare, do you think this reality is actually Neverland?

Don't be stupid, Dream. Everyone knows you've got to follow the north star until morning to reach Neverland. Not get summoned into the body of a monster.

What?! It's the second star to the right, and straight on till morning. Geeesh! If you're going to be a bitch about it, at least get the reference right.

I hate you.

Well, I am you, and you are me, we are Blake, so, I suppose that's fair.

Tch.

With my last few remaining hours unsure what to do with myself, I suppose now was as good a time as any to review all the changes I've undergone with my system skills. I had even gained a new selectable skill after defeating and devouring that Champion, Einarr the dwarf who kept manipulating gravity. It had been a fun fight, and honestly, I'm a bit disappointed it was the fucker Jason who stole the killing blow from me. I really should shove a corrosive tentacle up his belly button—

Dream! Belly button?

Yeah, the back end one, you know, his chocolate starfish, brown—

Oh, no, we're not doing this again! I swear, I believe you've got an anal fetish.

Yaaaah. Do you think Aurelia has one too?

...

How small do you think we can shrink our body? I'm thinking gerbil.

I... I hate you.

Really, Nightmare? I didn't take you for being a prude. Besides, we share the same body, and I can tell you're getting our body all hot and aroused just thinking about it.

W-Weren't we going to check our status sheet?

Fine!

NAME: BLAKE

RACE: ELDRITCH PUDDING

<p>CLASS: PHANTASM</p> <p><u>TITLES</u> DESCENDANT OF THE END SCION OF DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES</p>		
<p><u>RACIAL SKILLS</u> [DEVOURER] [DISINTEGRATION]</p> <p><u>SPELLS</u> [PHANTASMAL DOMINION] [PHANTASMAL MIST]</p> <p><u>ABILITIES</u> [PHANTASMAL SURGE] [WEB OF WHISPERS]</p>	<p><u>VULNERABILITIES</u> [FIRE] [HOLY]</p> <p><u>IMMUNITIES</u> [ACID] [CHARM] [DARKNESS] [DISEASE] [POISON] [SLEEP]</p>	<p><u>UNIQUE</u> [BIRTHRIGHT] [SOVEREIGN HEIRESS]</p> <p><u>SELECTABLE</u> [ASTRAL GRAVITON]</p>

Seriously, I had become a beast, virtually invulnerable with all my immunities. Well, except for fire and holy magic—the two things my Champion, that delightful bitchy panties, excelled at. I probably shouldn't keep provoking her, but what can I say? Annoying her is just too much fun.

Anyway, where was I? Oh, right! I have a new skill option.

<p>[ASTRAL GRAVITON]</p> <p>MANIPULATE THE ETHEREAL FORCES OF GRAVITY TO CONTROL THE FLOW OF THE COSMOS.</p> <p><u>TYPE</u> SPELL</p> <p><u>ACTIVATION</u> CAST</p>
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Unfortunately, after I regained access to the system—thanks, Grandma Death—I found myself seriously nerfed... yeah, thanks again, Grandma Death. Now, I can only have two active skills in any one category, but, thankfully, this doesn't apply to immunities. If it did, that would've been a real blow. Here's hoping the “two-skill rule” extends to vulnerabilities. I'd hate to find something new added to that list alongside fire and holy magic. Where was I? Oh, right. I have to choose between deactivating Phantasmal Dominion and Phantasmal Mist to use Astral Graviton. Decisions. Decisions.

The good news is, once I learn how to use a skill without the system's help, I don't need it listed to use it. That's what happened with some of my older skills, like Blight, Necrotic Flame, and Corrosive—although, that last one's so similar to Disintegration, I might not actually know how to use Corrosive, I've just been relying on the new skill instead. But that's not the point.

I've also got my dimensional storage spell, Stellar Void. I might have tinkered with it a bit too much using the mana waves from the dungeon core stashed inside, and now it's kind of broken. Oopsies! Figuring out how to retrieve stuff from it is a problem for another day.

Plus, I have Mana Sight, which is basically how I see like a normal human now, though I'm probably not using that spell correctly.

Magic, it turns out, is all about desire, imagination, and will. But you also need to know how a spell feels; then you mix in those other elements. In other words, a spell's description is basically useless; it's more of a guideline. Like, take Silk Webbing—some might think it's about shooting spiderwebs from their wrists, and wouldn't be wrong, but others might envision knitting silk garments. As for me? It turns out, I'm in the knitting camp, which explains the lavish silk skin I often sport, masking my dark, sinisterly gooey black flesh beneath. Well, I may use that sinister flesh as my gorgeous gothic dress with cruel and at times wiggling tendrils as embroidery, but that's all part of my ensemble.

In terms of which spell to deselect, I'm leaning towards Phantasmal Dominion. I'm on the brink of fully grasping how Phantasmal Mist works, so it would be unwise to remove it from my active list now. Regarding Dominion, my current understanding of it is more like a power-boosting skill buff, which has become somewhat redundant since I can harness the ambient mana from the dungeon core. So, unless I either lose the core or come up with a new way to utilize Dominion based on different desires, imagination, and will, it's pretty much a wasted skill slot. For now, I'll set it aside and go with Graviton instead.

DO YOU WISH TO REPLACE [PHANTASMAL DOMINION] WITH [ASTRAL GRAVITON]?

YES / NO

Without a moment of hesitation, I clicked "Yes!" and then felt a twinge of disappointment when no additional notification or popup appeared. It was rather anticlimactic, but then again, what more should I have expected? Regardless, Astral Graviton was now among my active spells. The next question was whether to test it out while soaring high in an airship, or wait until we've landed. Hmm... I admit, I tend to lean towards recklessness, but even I recognize some limits. Okay, maybe I'm usually that reckless, but I can't risk any mishaps now, not when I'm this close to reuniting with Aurelia.

“Are you just going to ignore me?” Vanya huffed.

Oh, right, she's been right behind me this whole time, hasn't she? Crap! It's not like I'm intentionally avoiding her. Yeah, I might have killed her husband, but he's back now, so that's a plus, right? Yaaay... Surely she's not still upset over that, right? Besides, it's not my fault he chose the side that's hell-bent on genocide. But then again, this does make me wonder if maybe I'm on the wrong side. No, no way, they're targeting my Aurelia, so switching sides isn't an option. Damn it! Why do they get to have all the fun?

"Oh, hey, Von Von, didn't realize you were there," I said with a smile—well, more of a smirk.

Vanya paused for a long moment, either gathering her thoughts or trying to calm herself down—it was hard to tell. I did notice her fingers tensing, as if she were resisting the urge to strangle me.

"We should—" she began.

"Oh, look there! Olin's up and about," I interrupted Vanya mid-sentence as I noticed Olin coming onto the deck. "Hey, Olin, how's my favorite rat bastard?" I called out, quickly diverting my path from the elf towards the ratkin lich.

Olin squinted at me, his expression of annoyance nearly mirroring the one I had just given Vanya. But it wasn't quite the same – my look was more about avoiding the current situation, a kind of petulant dodging. Olin, however, seemed to exude a deeper discontent, almost as if he resented his entire existence. Or maybe he just loathed and detested me? I can't see why, though. I mean, I'm freaking awesome!

Whatever the reason behind Olin's behavior, he just rolled his eyes at me and then turned, heading towards Nikola. She's our airship captain, helmswoman, ship designer, a steampunk Trekkie nerd, a lich, part dragonkin, and, oh yes, she's also from Earth—well, her soul is, much like Jason's and mine. Unlike us, though, she actually reincarnated here as a male gnome—a change she wasn't exactly thrilled about. I did manage to fix that when I resurrected her as a lich (it's a long, complicated story, and I'm not in the mood to retell it now).

It's not complicated. We found her soul wandering around in the Realm of Dreams, which is sort of like purgatory, and brought her back using a phylactery that Grandma Death gave us after we died from an exploding cock ring we stuck inside our hole.

Dream, there's a lot you left out, including context.

Am I wrong?

...

Right, back to the present. Unlike Nikola, most of us Earthlings had our souls summoned into these bodies. Now, where was I? Ah, yes! Olin seemed to have something he wanted to discuss with Nikola, his fellow lich. Technically, they're both under my control since I held their phylacteries. Well, I used to, before I messed up my dimensional storage access. I'll fix it, hopefully. Oops, getting sidetracked again...

Dream, you're rambling again.

Not like you're any better, now shush!

As my gaze drifted back to Vanya, I was met with her infuriated glare. Dealing with her was the very last thing I wanted at that moment. Yet, with a deep, resigned sigh, I slumped my shoulders and trudged back towards the elf woman. This whole situation was giving me serious indigestion—no joke, I actually felt a mild case of heartburn. Odd, considering I'm essentially a gooey blob wrapped in a sexy wrapper.

"Yo," I said, offering a faint smile. "So, what's up?" I asked.

"What's going to happen—" she began.

"DRAGON!" I blurted out, interrupting her mid-sentence as I pointed urgently towards the horizon. And there it was, a dragon in its unmistakable glory, soaring straight towards us. Inwardly, I couldn't help but think, 'I'm saved!'

Olin hurried over to the ship's railing, leaning against it as he intently stared at the approaching creature. "Did you notice that little shimmer of pink and blue?" he asked.

"Umm... No?" I responded, my voice carrying a hint of uncertainty. That is, unless you count the shimmering pink and blue aurora stretching across the sky overhead. We're in the midst of a double convergence, it seems. Currently, two new worlds are being drawn into this realm, on course to become one of Völuspá's moons. That's an entirely different concern, and frankly, I don't have the slightest clue about it to offer any meaningful insights.

The rodent seemed more absorbed in his own thoughts than in conversation with me as he mused, "It's something you often see in a dungeon during a monster respawn. How strange."

"Man the guns!" Nikola barked out.

"Oh! Oh!" I stammered, caught up in the excitement, only to glance at Vanya, who appeared noticeably annoyed.

"Not you, Blake," Nikola shouted over. "You too, Jaws," she added, addressing Jason. "I need both of you to recharge the mana crystals on the cannons after each shot."

"Awwwww!" I whined, feeling deflated. "We're about to have an airship battle with a dragon, and you want me to play battery recharger?" I grumbled, casting a begrudging look at the so-called cannons.

The airship was a marvel of wooden construction, grown from a dryad seed. Its branches and roots were intricately woven over a skeletal scaffolding, the brainchild of Nikola. To be honest, the first time I saw the airship in its skeletal form, I wasn't exactly blown away. But now, seeing it fully finished, it's rather impressive—and huge. The design reminds me of a massive arrowhead, complete with four nacelles at the back end, akin to the Enterprise's warp engines, only these were crafted—or rather, grown—from wood. Uniquely, this ship has no sails, a stark contrast to every other airship I've encountered. I've heard that the Slaethians have a single airship with this sail-less design, another one of Nikola's ingenious creations.

Did I mention how large this ship is? It's powered by a colossal mana crystal situated at its core, right where the seed was initially planted. The cannons, also organically grown—a hippie's Whole Foods dream come true—resemble traditional models but with a twist. Instead of a fuse, Nikola busily inserts baseball-sized mana crystals into each cannon. It turns out those of us from Earth can recharge these crystals with ambient mana effortlessly—a skill Nikola exploits for her crystal lock pistols. Oddly enough, this isn't something just anyone can do. Strange, right? I can't quite make sense of it myself.

Hey, Dream!

What, Nightmare?

Let me handle the narration during this battle.

What, why? I thought we agreed on sharing.

Because you never take anything seriously, and I want a chance to shine without your airheaded banter.

Screw you!

I'll let you exclusively handle Aurelia's back door.

...DEAL!

Amidst the chaos and magic swirling around the airship, I felt like a tempestuous force unto myself. The air around me crackled with an orange electric charge of mana, heavy with the scent of ozone and impending doom. Reaching up to my face, I ripped the silk flesh away. My transformation, shedding the silk façade to reveal the true essence of darkness, was more than physical. It was a stark manifestation of my inner turmoil, the duality of my fractured and tormented soul echoing in the depths of my orange glowing eyes.

I noticed Olin, the rodent-like lich, sensing the profound shift within me. His whiskers bristled, a physical reaction to the unease I stirred in him. His subtle step backward spoke volumes of the fear I inspired, even in creatures of undeath.

As the dragon neared, its wings beating furiously, the airship became a hive of frenzied activity. Nikola's sharp, desperate commands cut through the air. Beastkin scurried about, some to battle stations, others to the lower decks. Amidst this pandemonium, I moved with eerie calmness, drawn to the cannons as if by some unseen force.

My connection to the mana crystal transcended the ordinary; it was a profound communion with the ambient mana of the realm. As my hand caressed the crystal, I became a conduit, channeling the raw energy that flowed through the moon, Nyxoria, to the massive gas giant of a planet or pure mana, Völuspá, and beyond. The crystal responded, absorbing not my personal magic—for I had none—but the aura of magic that sparked and swirled around me, an embodiment of the realm's ambient mana bent to my will. Its glow shifted in color and intensity, mirroring the complex tapestry of my existence.

This moment was more than harnessing power; it was a poignant reflection of my journey, a physical manifestation of my soul's tumultuous history. Torn apart and shattered into dust by the Primordial of Magic, my soul was rebuilt, reforged, and reborn as the Scion of Dreams and Nightmares. As the crystal pulsed with the realm's mana, each throb was a reminder of my losses and transformation—a being intimately connected to the realm's essence, yet forever marked by the cataclysmic events that shattered my existence.

With each pulse of the glowing crystal, my hatred for the Primordial of Magic resonated through the airship, a deep undercurrent of wrath and vengeance. My two souls, each a shadow of their former selves, now stood united in purpose, albeit still fractured. The impending clash with the

dragon was more than a battle for survival; it was a step in my odyssey of retribution and self-discovery.

Ugh! You're such a drama queen!

Silence, Dream! We had an agreement.

Fine.

The dragon's approach was both awe-inspiring and terrifyingly beautiful. As its massive form drew nearer, I could make out the intricate pattern of its scales, a fearsome tapestry of black and red weaving a story of ancient power and untamed fury. Unlike the ornate, almost elegant horns I had seen on creatures like the succubus I vanquished and devoured, or the hybrid elegance of the half-dragonkin woman commanding our airship, these horns were something else entirely. They radiated a primal, demonic terror that sent shivers down the crew's spines.

Twice!

What are you talking about, Dream?

We've killed and eaten the same succubus twice. Well, not... eaten, but you know what I mean.

...

Anyways, Nightmare, get back to it. I'll shut up now.

...I hate you.

Beneath this crown of darkness, the dragon's maw gaped open, a cavernous abyss flickering with the ominous glow of fire. This was no wyvern, no lesser creature mistaken for a greater threat; this was a true dragon, a being of myth and legend. Its vast and imposing wings were designed not just for flight, but to cast a shadow over all hope, to blot out the sun itself with their immense span.

But it wasn't only the dragon's size or fearsome appearance that captivated me; it was the magic that seemed to radiate from its very being. An unknown, potent force glowed within each of its massive arms, a mystery beyond my comprehension. And its tail, lined with lethal spikes, promised pain and destruction.

Standing there, watching this leviathan of the skies draw closer, I felt a mix of hunger and exhilaration. This creature was the embodiment of the wild, untamed magic of the realm, a force of nature challenging the limits of my understanding and power. I yearned to devour it, to bathe in its blood.

The dragon's approach was a spectacle of primal fury and arcane might. As it drew near, its taloned hand, not its fearsome maw, became the source of our immediate peril. A fireball, swirling with the ominous hues of black and purple magic, hurtled towards the airship. Nikola's roar to brace for impact reverberated through the deck, a command laced with the urgency of impending doom.

But the anticipated chaos of shattered wood and beastkin hurled into the abyss did not come. Instead, a barrier of magic, shimmering and ethereal, rippled into existence with the purple

fireball's impact. It was a protective dome that absorbed the dragon's magical assault, shielding us from what would have been certain devastation. The dragon's response to this thwarted attack was a roar of rage that set the sky ablaze, its breath a burning maelstrom that painted the heavens with flames.

"Fire!" Nikola's command was a thunderous call to action, a rallying cry that galvanized the beastkin into a coordinated response.

The cannons on the starboard side of the airship, magical constructs of wood and arcane energy, were pointed towards the massive beast. With a collective heave, the beastkin unleashed their counterassault.

The air was filled with a mesmerizing display of plasmana, a spectrum of colors that streaked across the sky, trailing glittering sparks in their wake. The sight was almost beautiful, a deadly dance of light and magic. Most of the cannon shots missed their mark, a testament to the dragon's agility and the difficulty of striking such a powerful foe. However, two shots found their target, erupting upon impact into a spectacular explosion of colorful clouds. The force of the blast jerked the dragon sideways, a brief but telling sign that it was not invulnerable.

In that moment, amidst the cacophony of battle and the display of elemental fury, there was a palpable shift in the air. The beastkin's spirits lifted slightly, a flicker of hope ignited by the successful strike. Yet, the battle was far from over. The dragon, now aware of our capability to harm it, would undoubtedly retaliate with even greater ferocity. I braced myself, ready to channel the ambient mana once more, for the next phase of this aerial duel.

Jason and I found ourselves in a dance of urgency and purpose amid the cacophony of battle. We moved swiftly to each cannon, our palms pressing against the depleted mana crystals. In these moments, we became more than just warriors in a fight for survival; we were conduits, channels through which the realm's ambient mana flowed. The crystals, drained from the previous volleys, hummed back to life under our touch, recharged in mere seconds before we hastened to the next.

Our rhythm was precise, almost mechanical. As we moved from cannon to cannon, the beastkin operated them with disciplined haste. Each cannon unleashed a burst of raw magical power, the crystals expending their newly acquired energy in a single, devastating blow. The air was filled with the sounds of firing cannons and the roars of the dragon as it swooped and spiraled around the airship, a serpentine dance of fire and fury.

The dragon's relentless assault of fire and magic was a terrifying spectacle, but it was met with a resilience that surprised everyone on board. The ethereal barrier, a shield of arcane energy that only rippled into visibility upon impact, remained steadfast. It did not falter or show any signs of fatigue, absorbing each attack with a resilience that seemed almost otherworldly.

A quick glance towards Nikola revealed the source of this enduring protection. Like Jason and I with the cannons, she was focused on maintaining the barrier, channeling her own energy and prowess while helming the vessel. Her concentration was intense, a clear testament to her strength and control. In this battle of fire, magic, and will, each of us played a crucial role, a cog in a

machine of survival and defiance against the draconic onslaught. The airship, a bastion of resistance, soared through the sky, a testament to the resilience and determination of its crew.

Seriously, Nightmare, you're the undisputed empress of drama! It's not as intense as you're making it sound. We've just got a flying lizard zipping around us, hardly doing anything as we open fire at it. There, that's the end of it!

Will you, shut up!

The battlefield, a swirling maelstrom of magic and fury, shifted in a heartbeat. Amidst the cacophony, Vanya stood, a beacon of holy retribution, her sword aglow with a light so pure it seemed to tear through the fabric of the realm itself. When she unleashed her power, a wave of holy magic surged forth, a radiant tsunami that was both awe-inspiring and terrifying. The wave of sanctity washed over me, searing my flesh with its purifying agony—an unwelcome reminder of the power of light against darkness.

The dragon, a creature of shadow and flame, could not withstand the holy onslaught. Its roar, once a sound of fury and defiance, morphed into a pained shriek. One of its mighty wings, a pillar of its aerial dominance, snapped under the weight of Vanya's power. The beast's assault came to an abrupt halt; its attempts to stay aloft became desperate flaps of its remaining good wing. But it was no use; the dragon began to plummet, a falling star doomed to crash.

A sudden, instinctual panic seized me, an emotion as raw and fierce as the battle itself. Yet, it was not fear that drove me but an insatiable hunger, a primal desire not just to witness the dragon's downfall but to claim it. Without a moment's hesitation, and ignoring the screamed protests of the crew, I leaped overboard, diving into the abyss after the descending dragon. The wind howled in my ears, a wild symphony to accompany my descent.

I was not merely chasing a fallen foe; I was pursuing an opportunity—a chance to employ Devourer on such a magnificent creature. The thought alone fueled my descent, a mix of anticipation and hunger. This was not just a dive; it was a leap into legend, a moment that would forever define my existence. The dragon, in its spiraling fall, was not just prey but a potential source of power, an unprecedented feast for Devourer.

[DEVOURER]

THE POTENTIAL ABSORPTION OF A RANDOM SKILL FROM A FORMIDABLE FOE YOU'VE EATEN.

TYPE

RACIAL SKILL

ACTIVATION

PASSIVE

Umm... Miss Drama Queen?

What?

Which one of us just had the impulse to leap overboard?

...I'm not sure.

Yeah, umm... I don't know how to put this delicately, but we can't fly.

...