

# BLACK PUDDING

## SECOND TOME – CHAPTER 2

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[Ava] As we trailed behind the rat-man, Razzle, who led us out of the chamber of our respawn, Blake and I exchanged glances, silently acknowledging our shared suspicion of the creature's concealed intentions. However, my attention was drawn to Blake, who delved into the depths of Stellar Void. Though we both remembered there was a technique to retrieve our desired items from this ethereal storage, the details of how to do it escaped us, likely due to our broken connection with Circe – quite frankly, a blessing!

I recognized that I was not the unique skill of Ava, also known as Dissociative, which had sought to manipulate Blake. Intriguingly, however, my consciousness perceived the division of my soul into two separate parts as if I were exclusively Ava. In reality, I was as much the true Blake as my twin. Nevertheless, I was grateful, Dissociative had vanished from my status sheet, now replaced by a new skill, labeled as Restricted. Its nature, though, eludes us.

With all that in mind, I remained uncertain about what Blake sought within the Void. Oddly enough, it appeared as though I retained a deep-rooted connection to her emotions as if our very souls communicated, yet I could neither delve into her thoughts nor engage in mental conversations with her, as I had previously done when we inhabited a single form. It was peculiar how inhabiting my own body left me with an unsettling sense of emptiness, as though a hollowness consumed my core.

While trailing behind Razzle through shadowy passageways carved from stone, I detected a surge of excitement from Blake. It was then that I observed what she had retrieved from the Void. Clutched in her hand was a baseball-sized sphere, its surface an abyss of absolute darkness, radiating an aura of necrotic magic. In a flash of comprehension, I realized that despite its shriveled state, the sphere was indeed one of the Chimera's nuts—a phylactery, to be precise, harboring Olin's soul. My lips curled into a sardonic grin, tinged with a twisted sense of delight, as I let my eyes drift back to our rat-man guide.

“So, enlighten me,” I drawled with a hint of amusement, the question directed at the unsuspecting creature. “Just how much farther until we reach the city?” My tone hinted at the mercurial thoughts and capricious glee that danced within me, giving the question an unsettling edge.

“My Nightmares, we stand amidst the mountains that loom over Thirion. Just ahead, you'll find the way out of the ageless sanctum. Once outside, lower your gaze, and the city will lay bare before you,” the rat faltered, his timorous tone filled with a palpable sense of dread. I savored the aroma of fear that lingered in the air, a heady perfume that only served to fuel my twisted amusement.

“Well, it appears your usefulness has run its course,” Blake cooed with a sly twinkle in her eye, the edge of frenzied anticipation in her voice.

“What?!” the rat squealed in terror, his body turning to face us with a jerky motion, his fear plain on his face.

[Blake] With a ferocious speed that left the rat-man no opportunity to react, my arm extended beyond its natural length, transforming into a menacing tentacle that ensnared his neck. The darkness within me stirred, tempting me with its sadistic pleasures, and the only dilemma I faced was how wide to stretch my grin. Raising the helpless creature with ease, I slammed him down onto the cold, hard stone with a brutal force, crushing the air from his lungs with a wheezing gasp, exacerbating my already wicked desires. Much to my surprise, the impact hadn’t snapped his neck. The little rat bastard was far more resilient than I had anticipated.

Ava’s sickening delight oozed from every word as she turned to me. “Well, well, well,” her voice laced with a sinister glee that echoed my own. “It seems Olin’s new vessel might just make it out with an unbroken neck.” Her eyes glittered with a manic light as we watched our victim writhe and squirm on the frigid stone beneath us.

“W-what are you doing?” he managed to choke out.

With a twisted pleasure etched on my lips, I spoke with a hint of glee that mirrored Ava’s, “Does a lich really need all of their eternal organs?” The mere thought of what I was about to do sent a thrill of excitement down my abdomen, causing my fingers to twitch with anticipation as I clutched Olin’s phylactery tightly.

“Hmm, I see no reason why a lich would,” Ava mused, her hand clasping her chin as though deep in thought.

With a voice strained and hoarse, the rat gasped, “P-please, I have a family,” but his desperate plea was met with deaf ears.



As the inky veil lifted, Olin’s eyes struggled to focus on the two towering figures before him. The grotesque creature his mistress held so dear was now before him, but his vision seemed tainted by some sort of horrific mirage. Two forms, one clad in blinding white and the other in deep black, seemed to blur together in his sight. The confusion in his mind churned as he struggled to remember how he had ended up here. Flashes of Bowen, or was it Blake, and the phylactery containing his soul swirled within his mind, followed by the strange sensation of being transferred into the body of General Anlyth. His memory then flickered to the ruins of Grotto of the Betrayed, exploding in a hellish inferno before everything went black.

Olin mumbled under his breath, “Where is Lady Aurelia?”

“Don’t know,” the hallucination in white responded.

“Why are there two of you now?” His eyes shifted back and forth between the figures dressed in black and white, both standing over him like vultures waiting for their next meal.

“We had our soul shattered into two fragments, and our dear mother thought it wise to grant us each a body of our own,” the figure in black replied, though her tone suggested a hint of uncertainty.

“Mother?”

“The Crone,” the other replied, her voice low and laced with a tone of reverence that made the fur on the back of Olin’s neck stand on end.

As Olin looked down at his body, he realized he was no longer in General Anlyth’s form. Instead, he was now occupying the body of a beastkin. A fact confirmed by the sight of a rat’s tail protruding from his backside. Glaring at the two girls standing before him, Olin struggled to rise. But as he stood up, he felt something strange. His legs seemed unusually bent and bow-legged, and his stomach felt oddly empty, as if something important was missing. He realized what it was when he reached down to pat his groin.

The one dressed in black shrugged nonchalantly, “We were famished, and we figured a lich wouldn’t have any use for its internal organs,” she explained with a hint of amusement.

“Or their testicles...and cock,” the other one chimed in with a hint of twisted pleasure in her tone.

Olin let out a weary sigh. “Just when I thought dealing with one of you was bad enough. Now, what am I supposed to call the two of you?”

Pointing to herself, the one in black declared, “Blake,” before gesturing toward the figure in white. “And that’s Ava,” she finished with a smirk.

“I see... And where exactly are we?”

“I believe the rat mentioned something about Yaddith,” Ava replied with a shrug.

Olin exhaled heavily. “Yaddith? I’ve never heard of such a place.”

The two girls blurted out in unison, “**What?!**”

Olin let out a groan. “There are hundreds of moons around Völuspá, and not all have been explored. And that doesn’t even begin to cover the planets accessible through the ancient gates.”

“Well, shit! Which moon did we come from?” Blake asked, her tone laced with frustration.

“Nyxoria,” Olin replied with a hint of weariness. “A small moon on the outer rim of Völuspá’s habitable zone.”

Ava looked at Olin with curiosity. “Habitable zone? What does that mean?” she asked.

As if explaining something to a child, Olin turned to her and went on, “The habitable zone is the region around Völuspá where the atmosphere is thick enough to support life. Most of the moons within Völuspá’s orbit are covered by its massive atmosphere, which provides breathable air and contains potent mana that becomes denser the closer one gets to the planet. This atmosphere and, more importantly, the mana allow airships to traverse the Moons of Völuspá.”

“So, we should be able to grab one of those airships and return to Aurelia,” Blake suggested.

Olin shook his head, “Völuspá is no small planet. It’s massive, dwarfing most suns in scale. Traversing its moons is a time-consuming process, and depending on their alignment, it can take months, even years, to reach a nearby moon.”

Blake’s words were a wild explosion of anger and frustration, and Olin couldn’t help but take a step back. “Damn it all!” she screamed, echoing off the cavern’s walls. “First, we’re blown to bits and separated from Aurelia, and now we’re stranded on this godforsaken rock! And then that filthy rat dared to spout some gibberish about a prophecy! What’s next, I wonder?” Her tone was infused with a sense of madness, revealing the dark and dangerous thoughts that swirled in her orange eyes.

Something Blake said caught Olin off guard, but instead of questioning the dark creature, he turned to Ava and asked, “What prophecy?”

Ava’s head tilted in contemplation as if struggling to recall a long-forgotten memory. “I think it was something about two daughters on an altar of Dreams and Nightmares,” she said hesitantly. “They devour all who try to steal the dreams and nightmares of those taken from unknown realms. And they consume flesh and bone, for they are the fearsome Daughters of Nightmares.”

Olin cursed under his breath. “Shit! Do you know what this means?” he demanded of Ava.

Ava shrugged, her face a mask of confusion. “I have no clue.”

Olin’s eyes widened with fear. “How long have we been gone?”

Ava shook her head, “I really don’t know.”

“This is not good,” Olin muttered, his voice thick with anxiety. “Prophecies don’t just happen overnight. They can take years, even centuries, to manifest.”

The only sound that filled the cavern was the guttural scream of rage that erupted from Blake’s throat. Ava’s face, already void of color, somehow appeared even paler.

Ava’s voice was barely above a whisper as she spoke, “This must have been why Mother apologized to us.”

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[Blake] I was filled with rage, wanting nothing more than to rip off that damn lich’s head for delivering such terrible news. My love was out there somewhere among the stars, and I had no idea if she was even still alive. How long had I been gone? If what Olin said was true regarding prophecies, it could have been centuries since I last saw Aurelia. I let out a furious roar, but I didn’t have any words to express my anger and pain, not even for my sister. Instead, I turned my back on them and stomped towards the exit, my mind consumed with thoughts of Aurelia and what we had lost.

As I stormed towards the exit, the snow-covered surroundings did little to calm my enraged mind. The opening was more like a natural cave, with jagged edges and no sign of human intervention.

But as I stepped out into the open, I was momentarily distracted by the breathtaking sight before me. A massive city lay below, built with sturdy stone and brick, encased by castle-like walls surrounding it. Despite its beauty, I could only think about tearing everyone in it limb from limb.

I stood there, mesmerized by the sight of the city below me as the snowflakes danced around me like fairies. The sound of Ava's footsteps drew closer, and I felt her presence behind me. It was a comforting feeling, a reminder that we were still together, lost among the stars as we were. It reaffirmed the truth that we were inseparable. We were both two-quarters of a single soul and a vow to do whatever it took to find our missing half.

"What do you think our next move should be?" Ava inquired.

Glancing up at the massive pink and blue planet looming above, I sighed deeply. "Let's find one of those gate thingies our eunuch lich mentioned and keep going until we either stumble upon Nyxoria or at least find a general direction of where it might be," I said to Ava.

Ava responded with a dark grin, mirroring my expression as we gazed down at the city below. "Sounds like a plan to me. But first, are you hungry?" she asked.

"Always!"