

BLAKE PUDDING

CHAPTER 17

TITANS OF OLD

The desert stretched on, vast, and unyielding, far from the comfort of any oasis. In this desolate expanse, the air began to twist and warp. This was no ordinary illusion of heat or a common mirage. What unfolded before the barren landscape was the emergence of a portal, a shimmering gateway distorting reality itself.

Emerging from the portal, two distinct figures stepped into the harsh expanse of the desert. The first, a high elf, exuded a regal grace that seemed at odds with the soul residing within. Her eyes, though puffy and bearing the weight of unspoken pain, maintained a dignified poise. Beside her stood an imposing orc, his large frame and commanding presence contrasted by an unexpected air of youthfulness that didn't quite align with his rugged exterior.

Unseen and unfathomable, another entity was already there, existing without the need for such mundane things as portals. This presence was older than time, predating gods, titans, and the eldritch. It was the embodiment of primal energy, the Primordial of Magic. Over the ages, she had been known by many names, but universally recognized as magic itself, or rather, Magic. To the rare individuals she interacted with of recent, she had whimsically chosen the name Circe, regarding these encounters with a detached superiority, as if dealing with beings as insignificant as insects compared to her ancient and vast existence.

Magic watched intently from her ethereal vantage point as the two figures stumbled out of the portal she had crafted, a portal she had led the orc to believe was a gift of his own skill. This deception was but a fragment of the myriad manipulations she had woven over countless eons. Her actions, driven by jealousy of her sister Life's creations, had led her down a path of chaotic creations, starting with the monstrous beings that brought terror to Life's creations.

Magic's initial experiment in creation, while later deemed a misstep, had unleashed monsters upon the realm. This, however, only propelled her further in her creative endeavors, leading to the emergence of the eldritch, beings rivaling the power of her sister's precious titans. A relentless war ensued between their creations, seemingly without end, until an unforeseen twist occurred—Life's union with Death, resulting in the birth of gods and the creation of the cycles of reincarnation.

Faced with the daunting task of battling both titans and gods, the eldritch, true to the cunning nature instilled by their creator, devised a cunning plan. In a stunning display of deception, they managed not only to deceive but also to banish Life and the titans to an unknown realm beyond the veil. This outcome was unexpected, even for Magic, who had set these events in motion.

The realization of what her creations had done hit Magic with a force that left her reeling. She was overwhelmed by a torrent of guilt and shame, finding herself mired in the aftermath of her eldritch children's actions. What had begun as a bold exercise in creation had quickly unraveled into a

chain of events with far-reaching and unintended consequences. Magic, once proud and determined in her creative endeavors, now faced the stark reality of her ambition, forced to reckon with the profound and unintended impact of her actions.

The victory of the eldritch over the Primordial of Life and the titans marked the onset of a relentless spree of devastation. They embarked on a destructive path, laying waste to the entire realm and leaving only a handful of gods in their wake. This era of chaos and devastation plunged Magic into a deep well of sorrow. Amidst this cataclysm, Death stepped in, resolved to put an end to the reign of terror wrought by the eldritch. She took decisive action, shattering the eldritch and dispersing their fragmented souls and bodies across the cosmos. This bold move effectively ceased their onslaught, but it came at a significant price.

In the wake of the catastrophic events, Death, stricken by the loss of her love, withdrew into the Realm of Dreams to mourn. Magic, meanwhile, was engulfed in grief and guilt. She became consumed by the conviction that her sister was still out there, somewhere beyond the veil of their known reality. Driven by this belief, she embarked on a relentless campaign, reaching across the veil to pull entire worlds from beyond into her realm, in hopes of finding any trace of Life.

Magic's relentless quest inadvertently introduced a unique form of stolen life to the realm. In the absence of her sister, the established cycles of reincarnation grounded to a halt. Engulfed in sorrow, Death ceased her role in guiding souls to the afterlife to await reincarnation, resulting in the survivors being trapped in an endless, ageless existence, while the lost souls of the dead often found themselves wandering into the Realm of Dreams. Without the creation of new souls, the cycles of birth and reincarnation was over, with the emergence of new souls becoming beyond rare, almost miraculous occurrences. In this altered state, the realm teetered on the edge of stagnation, facing the threat of slipping into the abyss of non-existence.

Yet, through Magic's desperate endeavors to find her sister, she unknowingly prevented the realm from dissolving into nothingness. The stolen worlds she brought in not only provided a semblance of continuity but also introduced new variables and dynamics into the stagnant realm. It was a bittersweet irony – in her quest to find Life, Magic had become an unwitting preserver of the realm, maintaining a fragile balance in a reality that had lost its natural order.

However, as time elapsed, an extraordinary event unfolded. A titan's soul, against all odds, appeared in the realm, having been summoned and placed within the body of a vampire. Magic observed this soul with intense curiosity, perplexed about its origin. The situation became even more baffling when she discovered another titan's soul residing in a gnome, further deepening her confusion.

It wasn't until she witnessed the vampire delving into the study of summoning rituals that Magic was able to identify the realm where the titans had been exiled. This revelation marked a turning point in her quest, providing a crucial piece of the puzzle she had been tirelessly working to solve.

After uncovering the secluded domain to which the titans had been banished, Magic sensed a subtle presence of her sister Life still echoing within. The realm, known as Earth by the titans, was devoid of magic, and the full extent of Life's presence within it remained an enigma. Despite these

uncertainties, Magic was determined to bring Earth into the orbit of Völuspá. However, this mission was proving to be more intricate and challenging than she had anticipated.

The primary challenge lay in navigating a realm so inherently different from her own, a world completely void of the magic she was accustomed to. Adding to the complexity was the titans' apparent lack of awareness about their own origin. Their true nature remained a puzzle to themselves, creating an additional layer of difficulty for Magic as she endeavored to unravel the secrets of this unique and mysterious world.

Magic's method of world-theft was typically straightforward: summon a soul, use their internal mana as a beacon to locate their home world, and then draw that world into the orbit of Völuspá as one of its moons. However, the titans presented a unique challenge. Unlike other beings, they possessed no internal mana. Instead, they harnessed and manipulated the mana present in the environment around them. This nuance significantly complicated her usual approach.

In her quest, Magic focused on experimentation, seeking alternative means to achieve her goal. She now knew Earth's location, but connecting her mana to it was akin to reaching blindly into a dark hole. You know what you want is inside the hole, but you can't see and reach for it simultaneously.

Her task became somewhat easier when she discovered that the vampire was using a soulmate connection on the other side to create a bridge between realms during summoning rituals. As she observed these rituals, she marveled as she watched six titans came across, providing Magic with a vague path to Earth. However, the bridge the vampire formed was fragile and would collapse under Magic's attempt to use it.

Nevertheless, Magic was confident in her ability to fortify this nascent bridge. When the vampire summoned the last soul across the veil, she seized the opportunity. She transferred the soul into a nearby Black Pudding that the vampire was examining—a vestige of an eldritch abomination—with the intention of endowing a titan with its own internal mana. She even dedicated her precious time to refining the obnoxious pudding's skills, closely monitoring its use of both ambient mana and the system's mana.

Regrettably, the experiment did not produce the results she had hoped for. The Black Pudding failed to develop any internal mana of its own, leaving Magic's ambitious endeavor unfulfilled.

Faced with limited options, Magic found herself constrained to a singular course of action to fortify the bridge between realms, essential for the convergence to succeed. The unique nature of the titans, lacking internal mana and being unable to acquire it, presented a significant obstacle. It seemed to her that the only viable way to intensify the connection between the realms was through the shattering of their souls with a soul burst. This harsh reality placed her in a difficult position, as it involved a method that was as drastic as it was necessary, given the circumstances and her ultimate goal of reuniting with her sister.

In a state of desperation, she shattered the titan's soul within the eldritch, believing the final burst of a dying soul would strengthen the pathway to Earth. This dire act did yield results, leading her to initiate the convergence. However, it wasn't entirely successful, as the reality devoid of magic

resisted the convergence. A single soul burst hadn't been enough. This led to her continued experiments with the two titans currently before her. Though they didn't possess the typical forms of titans, Magic understood that titans were not defined by their physical appearance. Their essence lay in their soul and their ability to manipulate the surrounding mana. Yet, her continued pursuit brought forth another unexpected complication—Death.

With the awakening of Life's lover from centuries of grief, the complexity of Magic's plans increased significantly. The once-covert operation of shattering souls was no longer feasible. She found herself considering a new, more indirect approach: instigating the few titans in her realm to turn against each other, she would provide the means and cause for them to shatter one another's souls.

This strategy was a desperate move in her desire to bring Life back and a means to strengthen the connection between her realm and the magicless one beyond the veil. Magic was determined to ensure the success of the convergence she had initiated, as its failure would irreparably damage the membrane between realities, complicating any future attempts.

In her quest to find her sister, Magic clung to a faint hope that Death might understand her motives and perhaps even offer assistance. Yet, she was acutely aware that Death shared many of Life's morals. Consequently, Death would likely not only refuse to participate in the shattering of titan souls—a necessary act to trigger a soul burst to strengthen the convergence—but might also actively try to thwart her efforts, particularly when it involved the first offspring of Death's beloved Life. Moreover, Death harbored deep-seated resentment towards Magic for the havoc wreaked by the eldritch, which had harmed not only Life but also led to the demise of numerous gods, the shared children of Death and Life.

So, for now, Magic quietly observed the two titans before her, delicately manipulating them onto a path that would set them against others of their kind, all for the sake of her sister.

"Where to now?" Yua asked the orc.

Rob glanced down at the teary-eyed elf and pointed off to the northern horizon. "Slaethia should be that way," he said.

Magic, observing from afar, rolled her eyes. With a subtle manipulation of the mana, she gently redirected Rob's pointing hand towards the east. Rob's body tensed at the unexpected guidance, but he chose not to mention it to Yua. He recognized that Magic, whom he knew as Circe, was directing him. In his trust of her guidance, there was a childlike faith, akin to the trust a child places in a parent, which Magic was ever grateful to manipulate.

"Are you going to use that Unique skill you mentioned earlier?" Yua inquired.

"Hmm? Oh! Yeah, I probably should use that now," Rob responded, recalling the Unique skill Circe had granted him.

Magic had effortlessly provided him with a Unique skill, a task made simple due to her ability to manipulate the system created by her sister. While the remaining gods had some level of access to the system, only the two Primordials, Death and Magic, held full administrative rights. Even the

ascended gods, who were essentially high-level beings within the system's constraints, didn't possess this level of access, much to their frustration. These beings were merely Levelers who had reached the system's maximum allowance.

Magic had granted the titan within the orc's body the capability to alter his appearance, enabling him to assimilate among the Slaethians, a crucial disguise for their journey. However, this skill wouldn't effectively hide their identities as Levelers from other Levelers, who could likely discern their true nature.

Moreover, the system generally allows only ascended gods, beings with a higher level of power and status, to create a Leveler, known as a Champion. This stipulation is why Levelers are a rarity. Therefore, the presence of two Levelers in Slaethia, neither of whom is officially recognized as a Champion, is bound to draw significant attention. Moreover, their unique status may prompt efforts from others, especially ascended gods, for recruitment.

Rob inhaled deeply, steeling himself before activating his skill. While he kept his intentions unspoken to Yua, Magic instantly recognized the transformation he had initiated. His green orcish skin gradually darkened to a rich brown hue, and his hair transformed into a black, braided style. His eyes shifted to a pale green, and two elongated ears sprouted from the sides of his head, completing his metamorphosis into the guise of a woodland elf.

As Rob's body shrank into the slimmer form of a woodland elf, his clothes became noticeably loose on his new frame. Without pausing to examine the full extent of his transformation, he hastily adjusted his sagging pants, maintaining his focus downwards. A hint of frustration colored his voice as he groaned, "Damn, I really wanted to keep the orc-sized one."

Yua, momentarily distracted from her sorrow, shook her head and offered Rob a comforting pat on the back. "Put your little guy away and let's get going," she said, her words tinged with a gentle humor. A soft smile graced her lips, though she wasn't quite ready to let laughter break through just yet.

Rob released a deep sigh, reflecting his own inner sorrow, before he hoisted up his pants. Unfortunately, he hadn't anticipated needing a change of clothes, so he was left with no option but to continue in his now oversized attire.

Magic watched the pair through the gaps between her fingers, having just given herself a facepalm. "These are the idiots I'm forced to use?" she groaned, after watching the former orc stare longingly down into his pants.

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Heather paced back and forth anxiously in front of Niamh, her stress visibly mounting. "Where did they go?" she muttered, almost to herself.

Niamh, trying to mask a hint of hurt in her voice, responded, "I thought you weren't interested in that elf." As a succubus, she felt it was odd to be annoyed that Heather was concerned about someone else. Yet, confusingly, that was precisely how she felt.

Heather sighed, her voice trembling slightly. "I was never interested in her romantically. She developed an infatuation with me from the moment we arrived in this world, but she was still my friend. Do you think she left because of what's happening between you and me?"

Niamh reflected on her experiences in the realm. "People here are very possessive. I've had to tolerate it from that ancient one who did something unforgivable. I pretend nothing's wrong to avoid banishment. But in this realm, possessiveness seems more intense."

Heather stopped pacing, a worried look crossing her face. "Do you think he'll do something if he finds out about us?"

Niamh grinned darkly. "Probably. But don't worry, I'll handle him. Besides, with what I've seen happening in the sky, I doubt he'll be able to banish me for long."

"What did he do to you?" Heather asked, momentarily shifting her focus away from Yua and Rob. She sat down beside the succubus, reaching out to clasp her hands in a gesture of comfort.

The succubus hesitated, her teeth grazing her lower lip. To Heather, they resembled a vampire's - not quite fangs, but elongated canines. After a moment of silence, she finally spoke. "He took away someone very precious to me and replaced them with someone I don't recognize," was all she could muster, her voice laden with unspoken pain.

Heather, not fully grasping the situation but sensing the depth of her pain, softly whispered, "I don't understand, but I'm sorry you went through that." She gently brushed a tear from the succubus's cheek. The fleeting display of grief surprised even the demon, who found an unexpected solace in the presence of the Priestess of Dreams.

Niamh offered a tearful, soft smile as she looked up at Heather. "All I can do is bide my time, play the role of a pet, and wait for my opportunity for revenge," she said, her voice taking on a darker tone as she spoke of her plans for retribution.

Heather, in contrast, was of a gentler nature. Her heart wasn't filled with hatred; instead, she exuded kindness, innocence, and compassion. Niamh found herself unexpectedly drawn to these qualities, not realizing how much she needed them. Heather, on the other hand, was attracted to Niamh's lust, passion, and the deep-seated pain that cried out for healing. In a moment of emotional connection, the two leaned in and shared a gentle kiss, a symbol of their mutual attraction and the complex emotions they were navigating together.



Jeremy's sword arced through the air with lethal precision, striking the side of an advancing vampire. In a fluid motion, he spun, his fist connecting squarely with the face of another assailant. The crisp, unmistakable sound of a breaking nose echoed through the chamber. A third vampire lunged, aiming a kick at Jeremy's ribs, but he surged forward, his knee meeting the attacker's groin with brutal accuracy.

The third vampire crumpled to the ground, hands desperately clutching himself. "Fucking dog-faced ball-licking bastard," he wailed in pain.

"My nose, you dick," another groaned, his voice distorted by the injury.

"I can't breathe," hissed the other, clutching her side in agony.

Jeremy looked down at his sparring partners, a triumphant smile playing on his lips. He had won another duel. His disdain for the vampires, fueled by their past actions of imprisoning him and his friends, made every victory in these training bouts particularly sweet. He relished these moments, seizing every opportunity to outdo them in combat, savoring the small humiliations he could inflict upon them.

Jeremy hadn't been officially declared a Champion, but he trained with the intensity and dedication of one. He had made a vow to himself never to be at the mercy of others again. This particular day of training, however, was fueled by more than his usual determination; it was driven by a deep-seated need to vent his frustration. The abrupt departure of two of his friends had left him reeling, their decision to leave without informing him only adding to his irritation.

Had he known about their plans to leave, he would have insisted on joining them, and he would have likely persuaded Sophie and Heather to come along too. As for Jason, Jeremy's feelings were mixed. He saw Jason as an insufferable jerk at times, but he was their jerk, a part of their unlikely group. This mix of emotions—frustration, loyalty, and a sense of betrayal—fueled Jeremy's every move in training, each strike a release for the tumultuous thoughts swirling in his head.

Sophie had become somewhat of a rarity for Jeremy to see these days. Among their group, she had the least formidable class, but as an acolyte, her time was largely consumed by learning from various necromancers. Intriguingly, Jeremy had heard that Sophie was taking her skills down an unconventional path, and he was genuinely curious to see how her abilities had evolved. However, any reunion with Sophie would have to wait for now, as Jason was tasked with retrieving another member of their group—someone Jeremy didn't hate, but rather feared.

Heather had recently brought back news from the goddess she now served: Blake, their once-fallen comrade, had returned. According to Heather, Blake hadn't come back from the dead in the traditional sense, but rather from the Realm of Dreams. This was a place all too familiar to Jeremy and the others, as they had each experienced it firsthand after dying at Blake's hands. The prospect of Blake's return stirred a mix of emotions in Jeremy, ranging from apprehension to a cautious sense of anticipation.

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"This is utter bullshit!" Jason muttered under his breath, frustration boiling over. "Why am I the one being sent? I'm not some errand boy for that vampire, I'm the bloody Champion!"

The Priestess of Dreams, having learned of Blake's return and her intended emergence point, quickly relayed the information to Aurelia. Acting discreetly, she dispatched Jason, the Champion under her command, to locate and bring back their fellow Earthling. However, Jason was a problem

in himself; he harbored a deep-seated loathing for both Blake and Aurelia. Truthfully, his disdain extended to nearly everyone.

Jason's internal struggle was compounded by the constant mental urgings from the goddess who had named him Champion. Left to his own devices, he would have indulged in a spree of murder and heart-eating with sadistic joy. But the Crone, his jailer slash goddess, restrained these urges. In his mind, he felt like a hound tethered by a short leash, fueling his resentment towards everyone around him, especially the 'vile frog-faced freak' who had summoned him into this reality. This seething undercurrent of rage and rebellion made him a volatile, albeit powerful, ally in their cause.

"What's wrong, lover?" Vorigan's voice, smooth and teasing, floated from behind Jason.

Jason's fury boiled over as he whirled around to confront Vorigan, the 'vile frog-faced freak' as he had scornfully labeled him. His words were laced with venomous rage, "Don't you ever call me that! Do it again, and I'll rip your heart out from your ass after I'm done skull fucking you!"

Vorigan, the frog beastkin vampire, reacted with a peculiar mixture of emotions. His eyes widened, not with fear but with a bizarre excitement. "Yes please! We can do that right now. Right here in the woods if you want," he croaked, his voice dripping with an unmistakable lust.

The trek from the vampire's stronghold had just commenced, with an unlikely duo at its helm: Jason and Vorigan. The mission was initially meant to be a solo endeavor for Jason, but Vorigan, the frog beastkin vampire, had an irritating habit of shadowing him at every turn. This unwanted companionship perpetually enraged Jason, driving him to various attempts to eliminate the bothersome vampire.

However, Vorigan proved to be an exceptionally resilient nuisance. His regenerative abilities were unparalleled among vampires. Regardless of the method—whether stabbing, burning, beheading, chopping, or dicing—Vorigan always recovered, much to Jason's dismay. Jason had even subjected him to prolonged torture sessions, but to no avail. Vorigan always returned, his amphibian eyes gleaming with a disturbing mix of resilience and desire. This bizarre dynamic only added to the complexity and frustration of their journey, as Jason grappled with the reality of being stuck with an indestructible and unnervingly enthusiastic vampire for company.

Jason trudged forward, muttering every curse under the sun. The journey to what was left of the Beastveil Kingdom promised to be a long and arduous one. The most daunting challenge, he reckoned, would be sneaking past the Slaethian army, currently positioned somewhere between them and their destination. Making matters worse was the constant presence of Vorigan, the moaning, masochistic vampire, whose continual trailing presence made Jason question the feasibility of their stealth mission.

On the second day of their seemingly endless journey, Jason's frustration finally found a voice. "Why couldn't we use an airship or one of those portals?" he grumbled, addressing the grinning frog.

"The Slaethians have an air fleet far superior to ours, which is, well, non-existent," Vorigan replied matter-of-factly. "As for portals, they require much more power than we have access to. The last

time we managed to open one, we used a dungeon core. Those aren't exactly lying around everywhere... lover," he added, his voice dripping with a mix of amusement and provocation.

The last word was barely out of his mouth when Jason, pushed to his limit, spun around. In a swift, fluid motion, he drew his sword and decapitated Vorigan. The frog's head tumbled to the ground, a smirk still playing on his lips as Jason dropped his trousers.