



Bloody Fingers: Book of Prologues

Chapter 1- Mother Malkin

D&D based novel by R Jon Matrim from the Echoing Worlds series.

Bloody Fingers Trilogy book #1: Book of Prologues

Chapter One: Mother Malkin

Location: Mycelial Mire

Year: -519

The baby had been born a disgusting aberration, so warped in form and nature that his mother's womb had rejected him. Her body pushed him out far earlier than it should, giving birth to a tiny malformed infant that was little more than skin and bones really. Even at birth, he had appeared starved. His hideous body looked stretched and thin. His nose curved down into a sharp point. His fingers and toes were longer than they should have been, more like an animal than an elf. And his skin was blotched and mottled with discoloration. He was corpse-like, and so vile that his mother couldn't bear bringing the little monster near her beautiful breast to feed. If she had been merciful, Maven Telabar would have cut his head from his shoulders and thrown his putrid remains into the compost pile.

But she was not merciful. She was not vapid or weak. She was a powerful and relentless Dark Elf. These Drow traits had allowed her to take full control of the Mycelial Mire Plantation from its infamous owner, the Maestro Telabar. It was her determination that had allowed her to hold that coveted position for most of her life. And it was her power and determination that gave her the courage to wrap the monstrous little body in its birthing sheet, pass him to her Goblin maid, and command her to care for it.

As a child, Maven had been taken from her family and given to Maestro Telabar by the demi-god Vhaeraun- a male concubine of the Spider Queen Lolth. Vhaeraun was a patron of male Drow with potential, and the demi-god often gave gifts and boons to his favorites. The Maestro was considered to be one of the foremost mycologists in the whole of the Eternal Night and thus was one of the most powerful and influential males in the Dark Elf society. Maestro built and expanded his plantation through his intelligence and creativity, developing strains of fungus that were more vibrant in illumination and more powerful in magical and narcotic effects. For more than three centuries the Maestro had dominated his child bride, but his physical and sexual abuse did not break the girl. Rather, the pain helped focus her rage and faith.

As her fury grew, it ravaged her soul and thus brought the young woman closer to the Black. The closer she came to death, the more her prayers echoed in the emptiness. Maven prayed fervently to Kiaransalee, the ghostly Revenancer- Lolth's demi-goddess of vengeance and the undead. Kiaransalee, however, demanded

far more than fervent prayers and a frayed soul. The undead demi-god wanted sacrificial blood as well. Maven, in a fit near madness, slit the throats of one hundred slaves and drained the filthy bodies into a muck grotto on the plantation. As the last slave bled out into the crimson mud, a ghastly body began to lift out of the muck and filth. The banshee's hunger had pulled her to the pools of hot blood. As a reward for her worship, Maven was given a boon of one hundred vials of the Revenancer's putrid blood- a tube for each of the exsanguinated slaves. The banshee's deafening whisper tore into Maven's mind, teaching her.

Maven followed the instructions of her undead goddess and fed a vial of that curdled blood to the Maestro by forcing it down his throat. He would often fall to sleep after raping her, and that habit gave her the opportunity to pour the thick liquid into his mouth. She wrapped her thighs tightly around his face, covering his nose and mouth with her body. She ignored his blows and his biting teeth, staying in place until he'd swallowed and then continuing to hold him as his body putrefied. When she rose, the man had been enslaved with a curse of disease and rot. His mind remained sharp, but his body was in a constant state of decay- now nurtured only by repeated feedings of the Revenancer's blood. Weakened and desperate from the poison, the Maestro was forced to transfer ownership of his plantation to Maven. He ceded to her all of his wealth as well as the secrets of his coveted fungal strains. Unfortunately for the Maestro, once the blood vials were all consumed- his mind and soul finally succumbed to the undead rot. However, rumors still follow Maven to this day; Whispers that she still keeps the Maestro's perpetually rotting corpse.

Maven promised large gifts to establish her land rights with the ruling council which held court in the Spider City to the north, the capital of the UnderDark. Without the Maestro's presence to counter her claims and documents- the Women of the Spire voted unanimously to approve the records and proclaim young Maven the true possessor of Mycelial Mire. With the last obstacle removed, Maven became the unquestioned master of the underground plantation with its many caverns and muck farms. However, with so few living slaves remaining and with her financial accounts drained from the bribes- her entire farming operation was on the verge of failure.

In a stroke of either luck or more divine intervention, the muck grotto that held the decaying bodies of the sacrificed slaves began to bloom a new species of mushroom. It was a deep red fungal growth that grew from a thick stalk crowned by a head of small bulbous mushrooms closely grouped together. The growth most closely resembled a man's brain if it was ripped from his skull and laid to rest in a pool of blood. The mushrooms could easily be ground into a mash. When distilled, that mash produced an oily essence that had some similar properties to the Revenancer's blood. In small doses, it provided a healing euphoria to a Drow. For other races, or when taken by Dark Elves in larger doses, the liquid would cause a necrotic rot to begin in the mind. The overdose was characterized by an oily blood-tinged pus that would drip from the nose. Ever fervent, Maven named the essence, Revenancer's Drops. The popularity of this new drug and poison quickly replenished the plantation's coffers. The surge in gold allowed Maven to purchase more slaves, and the blood of those slaves quickly grew more mushrooms. It was a simple and repeatable cycle. And it again made the Mycelial Mire one of the most profitable farms in all of the Eternal Night. It also made Maven the single largest buyer of slaves in the world!

Her success and wealth gave Maven comfort and confidence while in her own home, but the remnants of the abuse she had suffered still made her insecure and uncomfortable in most outside social situations. This recurring fear and agitation grew into paranoia, and Maven convinced herself that if outsiders discovered any flaws in her person or her business- the Women of the Spire would simply take everything from her. As such, Maven became obsessive about her perceived reputation among the wealthiest Dark

Elves. As the plantation operated like a clockwork, Maven's primary focus stayed locked onto her personal reputation management. She maintained a large network of paid whisperers throughout the Eternal Night, employing hundreds of spies to start or to kill rumors as needed.

Maven took lovers occasionally when her isolation took its toll, and perhaps she was naive, but she was still shocked when her red bloom did not come. Children were rare among elves, and even more so among the Drow- so a child's birth would become a moment of celebration for the entire community. Using her condition to her advantage, Maven's Whispers quickly spread stories about her pregnancy. The rumors spread far and even reached a point that two members of the Ruling Counsel had sent letters of congratulations. Maven held tightly to a true belief that she would give birth to a beautiful daughter. That confidence made her pregnancy the first truly happy time in the woman's long life. But Maven was a mistress of swinging moods, and as her pregnancy advanced that pendulum swung even harder. As happy as she was at times, the anxiety that she was unworthy of that joy could just as quickly fall over her. During the painful swings, the only thing that seemed to help was the Revenancer's Drops. And with her unlimited supply, Maven quickly developed a very strong taste for her Drops. Their euphoric sense of restoration could free her from even the heaviest worry.

It was difficult to be careful with Drops. The blood-like concoction clotted almost immediately when exposed to fresh air, and thus dosing was always a gamble. If the drop condensed and was too heavy, the consequences were severe. Her midwife had warned Maven about the risks, but Maven's dark hunger and fear still needed to be satiated. Perhaps it was her age. Perhaps it was her worry. Or perhaps it was the constant use of the necrotic drug. But in the end- her pristine dream of a perfect daughter was never realized. Instead, her body rejected a deformed little monster with a penis! Her shame was immense, but at the moment of his birth it was still hidden.

Maven had spread news of her pregnancy throughout Drow society. She had reveled in the attention and the praise that her condition had brought to her. To now reveal her failure would destroy her carefully built reputation. Her first instinct had been to kill the creature and destroy its deformed body! Maven's hand had squeezed the baby's throat even before the afterbirth was expelled from her body. However, a hellish whisper told her fingers to loosen.

"Stop!... There is still time. Noone expects the birth this early..."

"This is a disgusting beast. This is not my child." Maven answered the unheard voice.

The goblinette maid put a hand on Maven's shoulder to try and comfort her and then jerked her hand back at the angry hiss from her owner. "I'm sorry, Lady. Please forgive." The Goblin whimpered, burying her face in her hands.

"There is still time. Summon the hag." The silent whisper slammed into Maven's mind again, distracting her from the sobbing Goblin.

Drow carried their children in the womb for close to three winters. Maven had just passed her first. She had time. And she had resources. She had summoned Mother Malkin before. That creature had the ability to shape flesh with her magic. It might be possible to transform this waste into the daughter she actually deserved!

"Thank you." Maven whispered. "What is the price for your guidance?" There was always a price to be paid when bargaining with death.

"Thank you, Lady. Thank you." The goblinette spoke again, not understanding.

"STOP TALKING!" Maven screamed at the confused woman. "Any slave that befouls my body with their unwanted touch will lose that hand."

The female Goblin backed away into the corner of the room, cowering down with her arms covering her head and face. Quiet sobs and whimpers lifting from her huddled form.

"The child will bear the price, not you. Summon the hag as I command." The screaming whisper tore into Maven's mind again, and then the presence dissipated.

Maven laughed as joy and dark hope overwhelmed her. She had great wealth. She had access to dark magic and buckets of blood. The Revenancer herself provided boons! Divine favor could certainly polymorph the little beast into a proper child. Even if her undead patron asked for a thousand slaves to be drained, it was a price Maven would be happy to pay!

Maddened by circumstance, poison, and religious fervor- Maven tossed the tiny body across the room to the sobbing Goblin slave.

"Cover it. Let no one see." Maven commanded. "Bring it to the blood altar and wait there."

The frightened Goblin rewrapped the baby in its stained sheet and ran from the room. Maven was still laughing! The only thing that quieted her was when she tilted her head back and let a fat drop fall onto her waiting tongue. The magic tingled and warmed her mouth. The Drop healed her body, and its euphoria settled onto her mind. All would be well! She would be such a wonderful mother!...

The goblinette shivered in fear as the massive hag stood just steps from her position. Dark magic dripped from its breasts like clotted milk. Black viscous clumps fell onto the infant's body, steaming rising up from his gray skin. The old woman's monstrous hands rubbed the jelly into the baby's flesh. A green mist emanated from the small body and the stench of decay and corruption stung the Goblin's nose. The baby's flesh seemed to soften and swell. His screams were horrible to hear. The goblinette covered her ears to try and block the blaring sound when suddenly, his screams became moans and subdued whimpers.

The small Goblin shifted slightly to the side to get a better view. As horrible as it was, her eyes were still pulled to the abominable rite. The child's small and deformed body had become darker as if the entirety of its skin had been bruised. The hag's hands were pulling at the baby's flesh. She stretched the baby's bone, sinew, and meat- attempting to reshape its form like a potter working wet clay in her hands. Her magic had already melted the child's face into a twisted mass of flesh. No longer having a mouth or nose, the tormented child could only moan and twitch. The hag lengthened the arms and legs of the infant and then began stretching its hands and feet. She finally began shaping the face again, molding eyes, nose, and mouth- the infant gasping wildly for breath and then shrieking anew as those features were reformed.

The goblinette knew of this monster. The Lady would sometimes feed her slaves to this creature in exchange for magic. This aberration would sometimes melt their bodies as she had done the child, stuffing her mouth with handfuls of their softened yet living flesh.

Mother Malkin was a hag of immense age and power. Her filthy magic had transformed her into a vision of grotesque decay. Her skin, hanging loose over a frame enlarged by corrupted power, was a patchwork of mottled greens and purples, crisscrossed with deep, suppurating fissures that oozed blood and pus. Thick, greasy strands of iron-grey hair, interwoven with twigs and the bones of small rodents, hung down to her knees, obscuring but not concealing the gnarled, clawed hands that constantly kneaded at the air when they lifted from the body. Her face, a landscape of wrinkles and warts, was dominated by a beak-like nose from which sprouted coarse, black hairs. One eye, milky and blind, stared off into some unseen realm, while the other, a vibrant brown, followed every movement with unsettling intensity. From her toothless maw, a constant stream of foul-smelling saliva dripped onto her sagging breasts and engorged stomach. Her hips were massive and gave her a ponderous weight, so she moved in lurching steps. Her legs were bent and twisted, and her feet were huge club-like appendages. She went unclothed, completing the horrifying portrait of an ancient evil.

The hag turned from the child and moved towards a dark corner of the grotto. Her movements were ponderous. They created waves in the dark water and caused water droplets to fall from the cavern's ceiling with each impact of her monstrous legs. The infant still twitched and jerked inside the carved stone bowl at the water's edge. Its tortured screams a constant barrage.

"Soothe it..." The hag commanded. She didn't bother to look at the Goblin. The monster's attention was focused on a large bucket near the cave wall. The bucket moved, and its contents frothed and bubbled with agitation.

The goblinette crept forward. Her body's fear fought against her own movement, causing her limbs to twitch in jerks rather than step smoothly. Her own breathing came in gasps, and she whimpered- her sounds blending with the screeches and frantic mewls of the mutilated baby. Standing over the child, the Goblin's eyes darted back to the huge monster who had just reached the bucket. One giant twitching hand dipped into the bucket, withdrawing a large slimy eel. She lifted the flailing animal high above her and the hag's head twisted back at an impossible angle. Her mouth opened far too wide, her jaw cracking. A cackle escaped her hideous throat with the excitement of her impending meal. She lowered the eel's twisting body into that gaping mouth. Her jaw snapped shut, cutting through the snake-like body even without teeth. Blood and offal squirted from its body as her hand squeezed, covering her face and upper body with its wet entrails.

The Goblin turned back to see the child, whose eyes were wide and frantic. Blood vessels had broken in its eyes and under its skin and dark blotches spread over most of its body. The screams of pain were almost one single sound, broken only for the briefest moments by quick gasps. The Goblin reached into a pocket sewn into her blouse and withdrew a small glass vial. It was almost empty, but a red pea-sized drop was still clinging to the glass. She had picked this vial up from the floor in the Lady's bedroom the last time she cleaned it. The remnants of Drops were often discarded there, so this wasn't the first time she had pocketed the remains of a bottle. She normally hid them until she needed them. The goblinette had learned long ago that sometimes a little bit of poison was the simplest answer to a problem. And at this moment, she just needed the baby to stop screaming!

The Goblin checked the hag once more. The monstrosity was still intently focused on her meal. The Goblin's eyes returned to the baby. She shook the vial quick and hard; the agitation temporarily returned the potion to its liquid state. She then removed the cork stopper and tipped the glass tube over the child's face. The baby's mouth was stretched wide in agonized screaming, but the moment the red globule hit its tongue- the infant gasped for air and his eyes suddenly focused on the goblinette. His hands reached out in her direction, and she instinctually responded by reaching out towards the baby as well. They touched. His hands grasped her fingers. She felt those tiny hands squeeze hard as his entire body clenched and twisted in a spasm. The bruises covering his body dissolved and lightened in color back to the corpse gray of his natural skin. His arms and legs pulled back towards his body. The features on his face blurred and shifted. The child was malformed, but it was still Drow. A small dose of Drops healed the Dark Elves- and this drop had returned the child to its original disfigurement and simply erased the hag's corrupting touch.

The baby laughed, a sound which did not belong in this unholy chamber. The goblinette pocketed the empty tube and backed slowly away, her eyes fixed on the massive feeding hag. Mother Malkin turned slowly. Her gore-covered face tilted to the side in confusion. She began to move towards the pair, her elephantine feet crushing the gravel with her great weight.

"What did you do?" The hag's eyes were locked onto the infant.

"I..." the Goblin's mouth stammered with her fear. "I..." She couldn't get words out, just that one sound.

"*NOT YOU!*" The hag's voice was a wet sounding whisper, but each word hit with a physical impact. The Goblin was stunned, as blood began to trickle out of her mouth and ears. Her head was heavy on her neck and her eyesight dimmed as she fell forward onto the ground. The veins in her arms and neck swelled under her jaundiced yellow skin as her heart raced. The small Goblin couldn't move. She couldn't breathe. In her excitement, Mother Malkin had forgotten to soften the power of her command- and her words tore into the Goblin's mind like an arrow through a paper target.

"What did you do?" The hag spoke the words again, finally coming to a stop as she loomed over the stone basin with the child. "Resilient little beastie, hmmm? There is more to you than I expected." A croaking sound came from the monster's throat. A horrifying grin-like grimace stretched her lips, showing her blackened and bleeding gums. It was a terrifying display.

The baby was trembling but still quiet. Its eyes were closed tightly. The hag towered above it, considering but taking no real action other than twitching. The behemoth's lips and gums smacked together wetly. Her long fingernails clicked against each other as her huge hands constantly grabbed and clawed at the empty air. Her good eye closed, leaving her corpse-like eye open. A buzzing sound came from her chest. It was something between a cat's purr and a swarm of locusts in flight. The only other sounds in the room were the frequent drops of moisture falling down from above and a soft moaning emanating from the goblinette on the floor. More moments passed, and the Goblin's body began to twitch and kick as a seizure began.

This scratching and thumping finally drew the attention of Mother Malkin from the infant. She reached toward the Goblin, her arm extended. The shadow of the hag seemed to stretch and flicker in the dim light of the enclosed cavern as it lengthened. The smoky arm extended in a line along the cavern floor until it reached the fallen Goblin. The shadowed hand hovered over the body for a breath and then seemed to sink through it. The small body of the Goblin jerked upward, its limp form hanging down- one leg pulled up into the air by the shadow's grip. The hanging body was ripped towards the great hag, flung into her

massive legs and impacting with the sound of cracking bones. One twitchy hand shot down and plunged into the Goblin's abdomen before it could fall again, lifting the body towards the hag's face and mouth. The goblinette gasped with the shock of the attack and then screamed in pain- her eyes opened wide. The shadow drifted away, dancing again with the flickering light. Its job was done.

A baby's cry broke the silence and the hag's face twitched back to the infant as it began again to scream in earnest. The hag lifted the Goblin above her. It was hanging limply. A wet crunch and a sharp crack, and the Goblin screamed. Her left arm now ended at a bloody elbow. The hag continued to crunch down, grinding the flesh and snapping the bones with her jaw before an exaggerated swallow downed the wet pulp. The Goblin's struggle lessened and her screams weakened. The hag shook the suddenly limp body with one hand, and it flopped back and forth without resistance. The blood flow increased again, pouring anew from the amputation. Mother Malkin put the bleeding nub into her mouth and sucked at it, drawing the delicious blood into her throat. She pulled back, smacking her lips again with pleasure. A blistered tongue extended from the hag's maw, licked the wounds at the arm and abdomen- and the blood stopped flowing as the skin sealed over. Losing interest in her snack, the hag dropped the Goblin's body back onto the floor and refocused on the crying infant.

"Do you have magic in your warped body, my ugly Drow... I smell the pestilence of necromancy, but I also smell your fresh flesh." The hag's phlegmy whisper echoed in the cavern. "I can smell the magic on your breath, but I can't see it inside you. How are you hiding your magic self from me, Vous Deux?". The croaking laugh returned. "I will find your magic self and I will eat it. Delicious magic can't hide from Mother..."

A massive, clawed hand plucked the baby from the basin. Another hand reached down and lifted the Goblin's body, bringing it back up towards the hag's face. The goblinette whimpered weakly but did not resist. She was powerless against the hag.

"You will tell the Lady that the yelp was not strong enough." A green mist blew from the hag's mouth into the Goblin's face, sinking into her yellow skin. "You will tell the lady that her child is dead."

The Goblin's limp body was tossed aside again. Mother Malkin stomped forward into the dark water, a red stained foam twisting in circles behind each step. The infant still cried, but the hag's hand enveloped its body completely and the sound was muted. The hag waded up to her waist, and then slowly sank down into the rancid pool. The monster and the infant disappeared beneath the water, froth and foam the only evidence of their passing.

The child had a name. And he had a new mother now... Mother Malkin...