

A Thorough Sampling

By: IndigoRho

Nero spent a good minute staring up at the gently swaying metal sign above what he hoped was the entrance to a restaurant called Legion's Bounty. The charr had been given direct orders by his boss, the illustrious Evon Gnashblade, to sample what the restaurant had to offer and report back on his findings. While he appreciated being given the responsibility of such a mission, Nero still felt odd about the whole situation. First off, the Legion's Bounty was located in the Gladium Canton, a maze of metal causeways, leaking pipes, and questionable bars. Only the dishonored, dislocated, and non-charr lived there, and Nero wondered why his boss would be so interested in any food it produced. He also wasn't sure what to think of the restaurant's operators, the Gut Warband; the name was...odd to say the least.

Finally casting aside his doubts, Nero pushed through the heavy fabric curtain serving as the restaurant's front door. The interior was as bland as he'd assumed, a mishmash of tables, chairs, and décor. A small fire attempted to give off warmth, while a wide open balcony gave a commanding view of a sheet metal wall. There were two surprisingly obese charr sitting at one of the tables, though instead of eating they appeared to be gambling. Perhaps Nero's concerns had been warranted after all.

Inevitably Nero's presence was noticed, and the fattest of the duo hefted himself out of his chair, gut wobbling as he turned to face the new arrival. "You must be the sampler Gnashblade told us about, welcome!"

"Y-yes, name's Nero." The nervous charr tried not to stare at his host's black-furred belly, which was peeking out from under his shirt.

"Sounds about right. I'm Doomgut, and the cheating jerk over here is Gutseeker!" The still-seated charr growled a little. "Don't think I haven't noticed! Anyway, we've been anticipating your arrival for days, even closed the place down all for you. We don't get to have this kind of fun very often."

Nero wasn't entirely sure what Doomgut was talking about, but the phrasing didn't make him comfortable. "Thank you? I guess. Mr. Gnashblade didn't give me many details about what I'm supposed to be doing here, he simply said to follow your lead, whatever that means."

"It means you'll eat like a king!" Doomgut said with a bellowing laugh. "Now just have a seat over there, and we'll prove our cooking is exactly what Gnashblade needs."

Nero did as he was told, sitting at the front of what must have been the largest table in the place. The fact there was only a single chair at such an immense table barely had a second to cross his mind before Doomgut began nudging his band mate into action. Gutseeker hurried off to the back—the kitchen, presumably—where Nero heard faint shouts.

"Mr., uh, Doomgut. I'm not sure I've ever seen a warband running a restaurant before." Nero was hoping to start some sort of conversation just to break the silence.

"Well those of us who founded the warband were known for our hearty appetites, as you can see!" Doomgut gave his belly a hard slap and laughed, obviously not shy about his size. "Our peers tried to mock us by calling us the Gut Warband, but instead we embraced the name with pride and dedicated ourselves to cooking the best tasting food in the whole continent! Soon the same ones who'd insulted us were loosening belts as they indulged on our cuisine."

Nero tried to maintain a polite smile. "Well hopefully I won't be in a similar position today. I try to eat modestly, to be honest."

"That's what most of our patrons claim before they've had a bite." Doomgut seemed to be getting closer, his belly wobbling at eye level with Nero. "Then a couple months later they're easily meeting the girth requirements for our warband!"

"G-girth requirements?" Nero had heard of a lot of strange traditions amongst warbands before, but nothing like that.

"The humans in the Gladium Canton have a saying, one we've gladly adopted: never trust a skinny cook." Doomgut grinned. "Perfecting a dish requires taste-testing. A *lot* of taste-testing. Sometimes you need to fit the equivalent of the entire menu in your belly just to get the hang of a new dessert, and a scrawny chef will pass out long before that."

Nero didn't even think it was possible for someone to eat that much. "I, I guess that makes sense."

Fortunately for Nero, the conversation was brought to an end as Gutseeker returned with a large basket of fresh garlic bread. He was surprised by the sheer amount considering he was the only one eating, and guessed the basket could've served an entire party of diners. Nero didn't want to risk offending his hosts, though, thanking them for the food and trying out a slice. After a single bite, he froze. The bread was warm, but not uncomfortably so, the butter and spices some of the best he'd ever had in his entire life. Cheese topping the slice melted in his mouth, delighting his taste buds to an unbelievable degree.

As soon as he'd regained his senses he tore through the rest of it. "This...this is wonderful! Absolutely amazing, no wonder Mr. Gnashblade is interested in your services!" He couldn't resist snagging a second piece.

"You can thank Gutmaker for that one," Gutseeker finally spoke up. "He's the best of us, and he's running the kitchen hard back there."

"And believe me, this bread pales in comparison to nearly everything else he's prepping for you," Doomgut grinned.

The comments only barely registered with Nero, who was still eagerly picking away at the basket of garlic bread. Only one appetizer in and he was already hoping Gnashblade's plan was to hire the Gut Warband on as his personal chefs, if only so he could sneak a taste of their cooking now and then himself. Another fat charr—this one in an apron—waddled out with two large pitchers of water and a glass, placing all three on the table and retreating to the kitchen without saying a word. Nero doubted he was the mysterious "Gutmaker" he'd been told of, guessing from the faint nervousness on his face and his only modest girth he was a newer line cook instead.

Still obsessively grazing on the garlic bread, Nero stopped for a brief moment as plates of potato wedges and rice were placed on his table. Just like the bread, their proportions were excessive to say the least, and Nero felt a tinge of guilt it all wouldn't be eaten. Hopefully the kitchen crew would be rewarded for their wonderful work with a feast of the leftovers. Nero was sure they'd enjoy it, especially if they were all as wide as the handful of Gut Warband members he'd already seen. His thoughts faded as he eagerly tried a bit of each new dish, delighted to discover they were as incredible as the garlic bread was.

With three options to choose from, Nero was struck with indecision. He'd scarf down a slice of garlic bread first, then immediately take on a mouthful of rice, before grabbing a pawful of wedges. All the while his flat middle was gradually swelling outward. Nero's good tunic strained ever-so-slightly as it struggled to contain his growing gut, but the charr was too busy glutting to take notice. As Nero worked through the appetizers, Doomgut and Gutseeker watched on in glee, their eyes darting between the clearing plates and their guest's expanding belly.

Eventually Nero's paw went for more garlic bread, only to find the basket empty. He nervously gulped down the rice he'd been chewing on and looked at the basket in disbelief. Had he actually eaten *all* of it? Suddenly the charr was very aware of his tight tunic, and how close to being finished the other two dishes were as well. Nero's face flushed red in embarrassment as he tried to understand how he'd allowed himself to gorge so recklessly.

"Oh...oh! I can't believe I got so carried away, Gnashblade will have my neck if I only test out the appetizers!" Nero gave his little pot belly a disappointed poke.

"Don't be so glum, you've got plenty of room for the remaining courses!" Doomgut gave Nero a rough yet comforting pat on the back, causing the feline to belch a bit. "Speak of the devil."

Three new charr entered the dinning hall, each more blubbery than the next, paws filled with massive plates of food. Nero's eyes grew wide as he saw the feast heading his way. When the first whiff of sizzling meat reached his nostrils, though, his anxieties evaporated into hunger. Now he was truly overwhelmed. Of course he took a bite of every new arrival, his taste buds never disappointed, but after that he relied on pure voracious instinct. Concerns over the sheer amount of food he was eating were unable to remain for long, fading in and out at the whims of his senses.

He could hear the seams of his tunic creaking, the threads tearing one-by-one as his belly outgrew what had once been comfortable clothing. The old appetizers finally ran dry, and the first courses were promptly pushed closer to Nero for ease of reach. They too gradually emptied, their contents vanishing into Nero's steadily expanding gut. When he'd finally finished, Nero leaned back in his chair and groaned, more stuffed than he'd ever been in his life. His movements were sluggish, his middle pressing against the table's edge, taut. Nero wasn't sure he could stand back up on his own, let alone waddle out of the place.

"It was all so...all so—urrrrrrap—good," Nero moaned, rubbing his swollen gut with both paws. "I'll be full for days!"

"You can't be full just yet, friend!" Doomgut said with an overly sinister grin. "You've only tested a fraction of our menu, and the best has yet to come."

Again a group of cooks arrived, all laden in fresh dishes. Plate after plate were placed in front of Nero, till a quarter of the table was nothing but agonizingly tempting food. Though there was a tiny part of Nero who wanted to dig right in, the sensible factions of his mind won out, the charr knowing when he'd had more than enough.

"T-there's no way I can eat all this, I don't even think I could survive another bite!" Nero cried.

"Anything's possible with a little encouragement!" Gutseeker sneered. "You just sit back and relax, and we'll make sure you clear off every last crumb."

Nero's heart began racing as he watched his two hosts grab and fill the nearest utensils. "W-w-wait, this wasn't part of the agreement! Mr. Gnashblade will hear of this!"

"Good, that's exactly what Gnashblade requested after all," Doomgut said as he flanked Nero. "We were told to cook the most fattening, most addicting food we could, to prove how big we could make someone in a single sitting. Honestly I'm impressed you had the fortitude to resist *this* much, but with our assistance you'll be back on track to meeting Gnashblade's weight quota."

"And to being big enough to join our warband, too!" Gutseeker added.

All the squirming in the world couldn't protect Nero from the incoming forkful of pasta. He whined and struggled in between forced bites, Doomgut and Gutseeker using their superior size to overpower their guest with ease. With every gulp Nero's desire to resist waned, the unrelenting need to consume creeping in to replace it. Soon he was back to clearing off the plates on his own, the two chefs with him merely pushing full courses into paw's reach whenever one was emptied.

Eating was all Nero cared about. There wasn't a single underwhelming dish amongst the endless bounty he was presented with, and he couldn't even begin to consider a favorite. They were all cooked perfectly, the sauces were impeccable, the seasoning never too much or too little, and the balance of flavors was unparalleled. More and more of his tunic shredded as the charr's gut ballooned out of control, a comically large dome of light gray fur that made his chair creak out in distress. Inevitably his girth won the fight, and Nero plummeted to the floor as his seat splintered apart beneath him, belching loudly upon landing.

The short fall dazed Nero momentarily, but not enough to quell his oppressive hunger. He rocked back and forth, immobilized by his massive belly, desperate to reach more food. Fortunately his hosts had prepared for such an occasion. With a quick crank Gutseeker lowered the hydraulic table, while Doomgut helped prop Nero onto his middle so he could continue eating. There was no thanks from the possessed charr, only chomping and gulping. New dishes continued arriving, main courses making way for desserts of every size and style. Pies, cakes, cookies...all gorged upon relentlessly as

Nero's gut grew larger.

Doomgut watched with pride and amusement. He'd always enjoyed seeing the effects of his warband's cooking on frequent customers over time, but he'd never had the pleasure of witnessing months of gluttony in a single sitting. When Evon Gnashblade had quietly expressed interest in just how fattening and addicting their food truly was, Doomgut had assumed it was a joke. He'd entertained the businessman, though, listening to Gnashblade's plan of opening small branches of the restaurant all across the continent, and how much money the venture could rake in. That's when he realized Gnashblade was serious.

The promise of wealth was nice, but Doomgut was mainly won over by impact the operation would have on the populace's waistlines. He wanted everyone to have a chance to waddle a few miles in his shoes, to embrace the wider side of life and indulge for once. If all went well, there'd be a wealth of hefty new candidates for the Gut Warband as well.

Nero's paw shook as he grabbed the last cookie on the last plate, nearly too exhausted to plop it into his open mouth. His bites were slow, but in the end, Nero had managed to eat everything he'd been given. The impossibly stuffed charr was resting on his belly as if it were a bed, his paws barely reaching the floor. He couldn't speak clearly, only able to groan lightly or burp. A deep food coma was fast approaching, and it took every ounce of energy he had left just to keep his eyelids open. Nero undoubtedly wouldn't be able to take in the extent of his gluttony until he'd finished a post-meal nap.

"I feel he deserves a prize for cramming one of everything on the menu into his gut!" Gutseeker laughed. "Maybe we should finally start hosting eating challenges, name the winner's wall in his honor."

Doomgut got a good chuckle out of the suggestion. "Sounds wonderful to me. I'm sure Gnashblade would approve of regular eating contests at all the branches of Legion's Bounty, good way to kick-start the local gluttony."

"Think our work will be to his liking?" Gutseeker asked, though he felt he already knew the answer.

"Once we roll Nero into his office I'm sure he'll be ecstatic!" Doomgut grinned. "Just think, we may be average weight for a charr a year or two down the road."

"Just an excuse to get a bit wider," Gutseeker said. "Gotta continue being trendsetters, right?"

The two cooks burst into laughter, bellies jiggling as Nero finally passed out, well on his way to being an unsuspecting member of their ranks.