

Schwarz and the Bloat Beer

By: IndigoRho

The rain was coming down hard, just as it had been for hours. Schwarz cursed the persistent onslaught as he made his way down the dark streets of the aptly named city of Rainwood, talons splashing in deep puddles left and right. The crow had arrived in the city at nearly midnight and was desperate to find an inn so he could finally dry off and rest for the night. Unfortunately it was his first time in the city, and without anyone in sight to provide directions he was woefully lost.

A creaking sign blowing in the wind drew his attention, decorated with a painting of a round goat and the words "The Bleating Blimp" written above it. Schwarz could see light coming from within, and decided to enter in hopes of it being an inn. At the very least he'd be able to escape the rain for a moment.

Schwarz pushed the door open, water dripping all over the floor in his wake. The main room of the Bleating Blimp was spacious, with a glowing hearth, numerous tables, and an obvious bar. There was a second floor of what the crow assumed was seating above, but he couldn't see much past the railing in the darkness. The room was empty aside from a rotund goat stoking the flames of the fire, who offered a nod and a smile Schwarz's way.

"Welcome stranger!" the goat said. "Why don't you come sit over here by the fire before you drown in your clothes."

Schwarz happily accepted the offer. Being out of the rain only made him feel wetter, the crow actually able to take in just how soaked he'd gotten. The hearth was a welcome comfort, warming his matted feathers.

He looked down at the water he'd trailed in and gave an apologetic smile. "Sorry about the mess. I kind of underestimated the warnings of just how rainy it was here and didn't bring along any charms to deflect it. Name's Schwarz by the way."

"Glad to meet you Schwarz. I'm August, owner of this humble little inn." The goat tossed a couple fresh logs onto the flame. "The rains take a bit of getting used to, but they make the land bountiful and our bellies full. Some fuller than others obviously."

August gave his round gut a pat and laughed heartily. "Speaking of which, I'd love to offer you a drink, but everything's already been put away for the night. Well, everything but the bloat beer."

"Bloat beer?" Schwarz asked, his curiosity peaked.

August saw the hint of interest in the crow's eyes and his smile widened. "Ah, yes. It's a rather volatile brew that's more alchemy than booze. Incredibly carbonated and foamy, and once it hits the stomach it swells a good deal. Students at the local mage college enjoy daring each other to guzzle it down and see who can get the biggest."

"I like testing out new beers everywhere I visit, and I'm certainly not afraid of a little swelling," Schwarz replied, mostly truthfully. He actually adored getting huge. "Mind if I have a taste?"

"An adventurous drinker, eh? Of course you can have some, just don't be surprised if you end up rather round."

August stood and waddled over to the bar, pulling out a large mug and filling it to the brim from the largest keg in sight. Even if the brew was mainly meant for pranks and dares it must have been in high demand. Schwarz became even more eager to taste it. He could hear the fizzling over the crackling logs and August's hoofsteps, a bubbly warning the crow wasn't about to heed.

After a quick word of thanks to the innkeeper Schwarz brought the mug to his lips, sipping first the foam and then a small beakful of the beer itself. For a novelty brew it was rather refreshing. Not the best beer he'd ever had, but definitely something he could casually drink a few mugs of without realizing it. Considering the apparent side-effects, though, that could mean trouble.

It wasn't until the second full gulp that Schwarz began to feel the advertised effects of the bloat beer. His chubby belly rumbled and swelled, puffing up like a balloon. He poked the blue-black orb it'd

become, and was caught off-guard when the swelling abruptly increased for a moment in response.

"That's what I meant by volatile," August said, his gaze firmly on his guest's waistline. "If the brew's shaken up it'll hasten expansion, which can cause things to escalate quickly if care's not taken. I've seen people topple over with a gut full of the brew and blimp up in an instant, knocking over chairs and flipping tables. Tends to fill the place with laughter afterward."

Schwarz blushed at the thought. Going from slim to spherical so quickly, and all because of a mug of beer. "I'll do my best to not fill up the room, but I admit I could get used to drinking this beer every day."

"Ha! I'm sure the city could find use for a creaking borb if that's what you want. Drape a sign over your middle and you'd make a good advertisement at least." August chuckled, though Schwarz wasn't sure the goat was entirely joking.

Schwarz's belly continued to fizzle and bloat as he steadily drank the beer. He unconsciously moved a talon to his middle and began to rub, disturbing the brew but providing a wonderful sensation. The crow was wider than his host, sporting a comically oversized ball gut that was expanding more and more as the seconds passed.

The bubbling tickled Schwarz's stomach, and suddenly the crow's cheeks swelled as let out a window-rattling *uorrrrrrrrrrrrrrp* that made him blush. The belch shook his belly and made it swell. A second smaller *braaaaap* followed.

"E-excuse—*urrrp*—me!" Schwarz apologized, though the burps kept coming.

"No worries, bloat brew always makes ya at least a bit gassy," August said. "And if you try to hold them in they'll only come out louder, which makes you bloat more, which makes you belch more, which...well you get the picture."

The crow answered with a burp. Schwarz's middle was huge, overflowing his lap and threatening to block his view. He doubted he'd be able to stand back up if he tried. The fizzing within him was drowning out the sounds of the fire, pleasant music to his ears. He reached for his belly to rub it, but it'd grown so large he couldn't reach very far.

"Why don't I help you with that."

August had clearly noticed Schwarz's attempts. A ghostly, floating hoof appeared in front of Schwarz, then another and another. Five in all, they stretched and rolled, dancing in the air as Schwarz watched.

"I happen to know a bit of magic myself, and my illusory hooves have proven to be rather useful for helping around the inn," the goat said.

The hooves dispersed, each finding a spot on Schwarz's swelling belly to attend to. They rubbed and squeezed and poked, prompting a steady stream of belches from the bloated crow. Schwarz could feel their acts making him inflate faster, but the attention and sensation of growing were as intoxicating as the beer itself.

Schwarz's eyes narrowed and he smiled, gradually getting lost in the chorus of fizzing, creaking, and belching. When an illusory hoof held his mug up and gladly opened his beak wide to accept the rest of the bloat beer, chugging it down. His arms, legs, and cheeks were getting puffy, the carbonated gasses within him searching for more room to fill. If Schwarz noticed he didn't care.

August slowly circled the ballooning bird, offering a few direct prods of his own in order to feel how taut Schwarz's hide had become. He admired the crow's immense size and willingness to expand, not hearing a single whimper or whine in complaint. It was always a delight to find another inflation enthusiast. Still, he wondered what Schwarz's limit was.

The creaks were getting longer, the burps louder. Schwarz's sides pressed into the table and nearby chairs, his boulder of a belly nudging away anything caught in its path. The pressure within him was incredible, but all Schwarz could think of was the rubs.

The crow's taut hide vibrated, heralding a powerful belch. August put some distance between himself and his volatile patron, sensing the inevitable was at hand. Schwarz's beak opened wide,

flanked by spherical cheeks, letting out a deafening *buooooooooooooooooooooooorp!*

For a brief second his eyes widened as he vaguely felt the first tear form. One tiny hole became dozens, then a series of rips, faster than the blink of an eye. A cloud of feathers burst outwards as Schwarz popped, followed by a wave of foam that combined to litter half of the bar. Schwarz's beak flew across the room and embedded itself into the keg of bloat beer right over the tap, as if eager to continue chugging. August shielded himself with magic, avoiding the foam but still having to brush a fluttering feather or two off his shoulder in the end.

August let out a happy sigh. He'd expected a boring, quiet night, but Schwarz had turned it into an enjoyable one. His regular patrons had gotten increasingly better at avoiding bursting, which tended to be the goat's favorite part of watching others expand. The illusory hooves regrouped—having been tossed in all directions by the blast—and set to work cleaning up the results of August and Schwarz's fun. Some gathered stray feathers while others grabbed rags. August himself relaxed in a chair.

Schwarz would re-form at one of the local temples sometime the following day, and August very much expected him to return to the Bleating Blimp for an actual night's stay. When he did show up August would have a fresh room waiting for him—and a complimentary case of bloat beer...