

# BLACK PUDDING

## CHAPTER 14

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*Seriously? Again?! I found myself, once again, waking up in my liquid form on this delightful floor of the former Red Toad's boss chamber, only this time, every nerve ending in my black pudding body was set ablaze. I was so sure I had that fight in the bag with a freaking twenty-level advantage. Who wouldn't feel confident with that kind of advantage?! But no, I had to go and convince myself that I was unstoppable and ended up getting my ass knocked out with a single attack spell. Ugh, I'm such an idiot!*

*Haha, it's always the things you least expect that give you the biggest shock, right?*

*Ava, I hate you!*

*If I had to take a wild guess, Blake, I'd say that ass who took us down is probably getting some kind of divine boost from the goddess as well.*

While Ava and I had our post-combat debriefing, I got to work reforming my body. With Ava's training, I discovered that changing my shape without relying on Polymorph was surprisingly straightforward. However, no matter how hard I tried, I still couldn't figure out how to properly weave my silk face together – I wasn't sure if I ever could. I also made a few adjustments to my dress, showing off my bare shoulders. I said I made a few adjustments, but I meant to say Ava altered my dress. The finer details, like creating my silk face or adding intricate details of black writhing and squirming tendrils to my dress, were beyond my skills.

My goal was to learn how to cast Spells and use Abilities without relying on the system. It was a simple task but difficult to accomplish during the middle of combat. And, to be honest, I wasn't exactly sure why Ava felt it was important to do so. She just insisted it was better to not rely on the system. Some kind of exploit?

“You guess?! Don't you have her memories? How do you not know?”

“Blake, I've got all your memories. I only have a small sliver of hers, not the whole thing. What I've gained from her are insights into magic, the workings of the system, and some loopholes. Oh, and a smidge of knowledge about the social and political landscape. If you want a clear answer, you can try pissing her off enough that she uses me as her puppet again to yell at you! So, until that happens, my assumption is just that, **a fucking guess!**”

“Geesh, Ava, a bit touchy, aren't we?”

“Sorry, Blake, I know I can be a total bitch most of the time. I get that from you!”

“Ugh, I really hate you right now. **And will you stop that?!**”

“Stop what?”

“You know exactly what you are doing, using my mouth to talk! I look like a lunatic talking to myself.”

“But you are a lunatic talking to yourself.”

“I thought we established you’re not my split personality.”

“When did we establish that? I was literally created out of your memories mixed in with some of the goddess’s knowledge. But you know what, that’s fine! If you ask me, I’m not your split personality. I’m a better version of you!”

“Ugh, you’re such a bitch.”

“Yeah, I know you are.”

With a luxurious stretch and a delightful sigh, I finally managed to shake off the pesky lightning bolt’s lingering after-effects. As I worked out the kinks in my body, I couldn’t help but pleasantly surprised to find that my arms had unconsciously overextended to a monstrous length. This new development was just another example of the awesomeness that comes with being a slime monster in human form. Despite the initial jolt of being reincarnated as a black pudding, I embraced the new experience with excitement and joy. The freedom of being a shape-shifting monster filled me with elation. Yet, I knew that I had to be careful if I ever ventured outside the dungeon. I didn’t want to be caught off guard, revealing my true nature and being hunted down. If I ever got out of this damn dungeon, I wanted to remain hidden, concealed, unseen, unnoticeable, for I desired to be a creature of the darkness, a predator that haunts their waking dreams... *Holy shit, I am evil!*

“Oh, and I thought we agreed, Ava. The goddess’s name is Asswipe or Ms. Asswipe... Maybe Bitch Ass? I’m still working on it!”

“To be honest, Blake, I prefer not pissing off the goddess who can make both of our lives miserable.”

I gave her a mental shrug as I went to claim my prize... *What the hell?! My meal, the one I took all the effort to behead, had vanished into thin air! I could see the evidence of my work on the ground, the blood stains from where I had removed his head, but the candidate’s remains were nowhere to be seen. And to add insult to injury, the two undead goblins I took down were barely even left as scraps. Argh, this is just fucking fantastic!*

“Hey Ava, how long was I out from that damn lightning bolt?”

“How the hell would I know? I was unconscious right alongside you.”

“Wonderful...”

“Alright, so what’s the game plan, Blake? Are we going after them or just flipping the bird and doing something else?”

“Honestly, I have no clue. I thought having a higher level would have made that fight a walk in the park. What’s the thing with that?”

“Don’t let levels deceive you, Blake. Sure, they can give you an edge, heck, your Attributes do, but success ultimately depends on strategy, luck, and skill. Did I say luck? Even a lower-level fighter can surprise you with a lucky hit and take you down. Yes, high-level mages have more resources, but they’re far from unbeatable. The real advantage of levelers is how easy it is to learn new Spells and Abilities, but you need to take them and go beyond the system’s constraints. That’s what I’m trying to teach you, to fight as a sorceress unbound by the system. Once you can do that, cooldowns, stats, and all of the rules governing them will no longer apply to you.

“The ancients understood this, which is why leveling has become a rarity, a thing of myths. But people still view levelers as heroic figures of legend, an unstoppable force, because of the rate they learned magic. Something that normally takes years, even decades, to accomplish. Your Absorb spell takes that to a whole nother extreme, but don’t be fooled like them.”

“If levelers are so rare, why did the child goblin, Wartie, possess a status sheet, and how did Aurelia use Appraisal? I feel like everyone I come across is a leveler.”

“Don’t be fooled by appearances. Wartie wasn’t a leveler, but he had a spell that controlled beasts. He cast that spell on you, which resulted in the system evaluating him and presenting that information to you as a status sheet. As for Aurelia, she’s also not a leveler. Did you not bother to notice the ring she was wearing? It was enchanted with the Appraisal spell, most likely created by an ancient leveler.”

“First off, rude! I’m not a beast. And what about the goblins I tried to absorb? They didn’t have a class. Were they levelers? Also, I don’t remember Aurelia wearing a ring. So how do you—what finger was it on?”

“I have all your memories, so yes, I remember a ring. And, yes, it was on the dreaded finger that you’re thinking. As for knowing what it did, that’s thanks to having a fraction of the Goddess of Magic’s knowledge. As for the goblins, they may not have been official levelers, but they were once bound to a dungeon core, giving them characteristics similar to one. With their core stolen, the system recognized them as being without a class.”

“...You don’t think she’s married, do you?”

“That’s what you’re worried about right now, Blake?”

“Yes!”

“Huuhhh, same!”

“I’m still uncertain about our next move, Ava. While I typically embrace the idea of an unfair fight in my favor, but with one of the other candidates possesses a divine spell that levels the playing field, making me slightly hesitant to go on a full-on attack. Maybe gorilla warfare tactics, ambush one of them while they’re taking a shit? But, with everything you’ve told me about the ongoing wars, I don’t see the reasoning behind this dark champion trial bullshit. What do you think, Ava?”

“It may be a divine spell, Blake, but I can’t be sure. As for our next move, I like the idea of catching them off guard and striking them when they have their pants down. As for the trial, I honestly don’t

know why that coven of vampires and necromancers is doing it. It seems counterproductive to me as well.”

“Fantastic, we’ve finally figured it out. We’ll go all out and launch a surprise attack on anyone who’s lagging behind. That’ll show ’em who’s boss.”

I strolled over to the delightful goblin remnants, a real feast for the eyes. A few measly pieces of flesh, some entrails, two lonely left legs, who knows what happened to their counterparts, and a single hand. I elegantly knelt down, picked up a delightful chunk of guts, and bit into it, savoring it like a juicy sausage. Well, if I had any real teeth to bite, that is. But alas, they’re just for show. It was more like letting a delicious treat dissolve on my tongue. I considered simply stepping on it or whipping out a tentacle to dissolve it, but who am I kidding? *I’m not a monster. I’m a lady!*

“A lady?! **Hahaha!** Blake, you’re a delusional monster.”

*Oh, shut up! And stop using my mouth to talk, especially when I’m eating.*

Things had started off rocky between Ava and me, but after that oh-so-touching heart-to-heart after the chimera battle, I’m almost starting to trust her. Keyword: almost! I mean, I still wouldn’t mind getting rid of her, but at least I’m not actively considering offing myself to do so. I guess you could say things are looking up. She does have her perks, though. Being a walking encyclopedia on the world and its magic is pretty handy. And let’s not forget the fact that I need her around to have a face, which is surprisingly important to me, and no, of course, I won’t admit that to her. But hey, it’s nice to have someone to bicker with. Keeps things entertaining, you know? Especially since there’s no one else around, and if there were, I would have already killed and devoured them. So, all in all, I guess I’m stuck with this Ava chick. Lucky me!

“Blake, did you just deep-throat that goblin leg?”

*...No—stop talking with my mouth when I’m eating, bitch!*

“Why don’t you shove that other leg up your ass! I’m sure it will dissolve faster up there.”

*Oh god, I hate you!*

“Do you?”

*Hey, Ava, what’s happening to all this food? I should be a lot bigger than I am after eating that chimera—not that I want to be bigger or anything.*

“The chimera went straight to your hips! Some of it is being compressed down. Let’s just say you’re heavier than you look.”

*Hey, now, don’t be attacking my hourglass figure!*

“Hourglass figure? More like a black hole for food! The rest of it, I’ve been storing inside Stellar Void.”

*For fuck’s sake, Ava, stop using my mouth to talk while I eat!*