

BLACK PUDDING

CHAPTER 5

“Pssst!”

That wasn't from one of them... *What or who was that?* I thought I had just heard someone, but as I turned, nobody was there. *Wait a minute, [Thermalsense].* My sight began to distort into an array of oranges, purples, and blacks. And to my surprise, I found the heat of a little square blob hiding amongst some stones.

“Hide! They're going to see you!”

Hide? But why, those five down there can't see over the cliff edge. I had yet to figure out how to speak in this new gooey body, so instead, I lifted an oily appendage that I considered my hand and pointed a tentacle-finger at myself. The [Polymorph] skill was still at tier one, so the best human form I had was a tar-covered four-foot-tall slenderman-looking thing. *I don't even have hair, ugh!* It was fair to say I was disappointed with the skill, but it was better crawling around as a sludge monster. Still, the description claimed I could shapeshift into any previous target **Race's** form I have used [Absorb] on. *Utter bullshit!* At least I played enough video games to know life should improve as I level, so I wasn't on the stage of full-blown freakout yet.

“What?! Yes, you! Hurry! Hide!”

I gave the little guy a shrug, walked over to it, and was overjoyed to find that I didn't have a homicidal urge to eat them. *Ha, maybe I'm not a schizo!*

“No, not next to me. Hide somewhere else!”

I gave the blob another shrug and sat beside him, crossing my thin gloppy legs as I did.

“What are you doing?”

Lifting my oily tentacle-finger once again, I pointed at where my mouth should have been, then I pointed at the little hole that kept appearing on the blob's face whenever it spoke. I could still hear the five other candidates bickering with one another off in the distance, but I wasn't too concerned. Besides, if I was right, the cubic little blob was another slime. Even better, he knew how to talk! And if the blob doesn't teach me how to speak, I'll just eat him and see what my [Absorb] skill can teach me instead. *Would eating a slime count as cannibalism? Wait, hadn't I already resorted to cannibalism? Technically... Uhm... Technically, eating Olin and Sophia doesn't count since I'm now a black pudding. And Niamh was a succubus, so everyone's probably eaten that... Ugh, Blake, your sick in the head!*

“Stupid pudding slime! What are you doing? Get away from me—.”

This should get my point across. I wasn't going to take no or don't of any kind for an answer. And pointing wasn't getting the job down. So, I shoved a single tentacle-finger into what I believed to be the orifice the blob was speaking from. I really hope this was the right hole! Mmm, he tastes like peanut butter...

You have taken 0 points of [Acid] damage. Current Health: 200 out of 200
You have defeated a [Gelatinous Cube].
[Venomous] upgraded to 2 nd Tier.
Do you wish to [Absorb] [Gelatinous Cube]? Yes / No

Oops! Well, I guess that answers my earlier thought, I'm a cannibal. Damn... Hold on, when did my health fill back up? You know what, whatever. I don't care!

[Venomous] upgraded. Isn't this the first time I've used it? No, it's passive, so I've been using it. Still, why didn't [Corrosive] upgrade first? It was my first skill. Whoever came up with the leveling and upgrade system clearly didn't know what they were doing. I wish there was a better way to know how or when something would level up. Oh, and yes, on [Absorb].

[Absorb] [Gelatinous Cube] Successful. New Status Bounces and Unlocks are Awarded.	
+ 0 Strength + 2 Dexterity + 0 Constitution + 4 Intelligence + 0 Wisdom - 5 Charisma	<u>Unlockable:</u> [Corrosive] [Paralysis] [Appraisal]
[Corrosive] upgraded to 2 nd Tier.	

Alright, another upgrade... Negative five in Charisma, but why?! If I ever come across another succubus, I'm eating them out for that plus twenty Charisma again, no questions asked... Wait, not like that! Well, maybe like that at first. Damnit, Blake, you're doing it again!

Another [Corrosive] and [Appraisal]? The free tier upgrade that [Absorb] gives me for duplicates is pretty nice. I had [Appraisal] already sitting in my Unlockable list, but I hadn't purchased it yet, which means it could or should be tier two. Let's check!

[Appraisal] 2 nd Tier – Type: Spell – Cast: 8 Mana Gain the spell [Appraisal] and reveal a target's [Status] to the caster. Reveal the target's [Status] from up to 40 meters.

The caster cannot reveal a [Status] from a target +20 levels above their own.

[Appraisal] does not reveal a target's, Unspent Points, Racial Skills, Spells, Abilities, and/or Unlockable.

50-second cooldown between casts.

Cost: 6 Spell Points

Unlock?

Yes / No

Six spell points?! I do believe I just got screwed. If I had had that ability already unlocked, it would have been a free upgrade. I'm pretty sure [Appraisal] had originally cost three spell points, but now I'm stuck paying for the initial cost and the tier two spell increase. I was just starting to believe [Absorb] was a cheat ability. If I get another [Appraisal] upgrade before I get the thing unlocked, I'll never be able to afford it. *Ugh, I wish [Absorb] also stole points.*

"Er, you! You see Doodles?"

Yeah, I just ate him! I glanced up to find a short figure jogging into view. I still had [Thermalsense] active, but this person appeared to be just a child, but unlike Doodles, who I assume was the one I had just eaten, this kid wasn't whispering. With a quick jerk, I snapped a tentacle-finger in front of my nonexistent lips, praying to whoever I could that he got the hint. *He did not...*

"YOU LISTEN? ME TALKIN!"

Oh my god, I'm going to kill him, too! I still sat where I had eaten his friend, pet. I snapped my arm out and pointed towards the cliff edge where the other five candidates..., were arguing? **SHHHIT!** My focus tore away from the kid as [Thermalsense] shattered, only to be swapped with the full force of a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree perspective from [Mana Sight], with no blurry edges. It was as if the skill had a mind of its own. Time seemed to slow down as [Mana Sight] took over my senses. It was like being on adrenaline but much more intense. *Do I have spidey senses? I should have read the tier three [Mana Sight] upgrade.* I had a panoramic view of everything, but there was no nausea. I first noticed the child's wart-covered green skin and large ears trying desperately to scamper away. Next was the purple fog gradually manifesting behind me and the blade forming out of it. That was swinging outward..., **AT MY NECK!**

Despite the adrenaline-high-like sensation, my body couldn't move fast enough. I still sat on the ground with my legs crossed, trying to duck to avoid an execution strike to my neck, but I was too slow, and the sword found its purchase on my throat. With my elevated senses, I was helpless as the sword sunk into me, and I felt fiber after fiber of my tar-like body snapping with the fluid motion of the blade. Before I knew it, the weapon had passed through my neck and out the other side, decapitating me.

You have taken 50 points of [Slicing] damage.

Current Health: 150 out of 200

I watched on in silent horror as my head fell into my lap. And yet, I wasn't dead. In fact, I had three-quarters of my health remaining.

At the same moment, a dentist's worst nightmare finished his manifestation from the purple fog, looking almost gleeful. He seemed almost human, but his mouth had a serious underbite problem. Within that elongated buckled jaw were thousands of razor-needle-like teeth. Notwithstanding that horror show, my concentration was split into three tasks. One, admiring the sight of watching my head melt into my thighs and crotch ... *Okay, not my proudest moment, but it's not the worst thing I've seen or done since being reincarnated as an acidic flesh-eating monster.* Two, the four others approaching. They were about a hundred yards out and closing fast. And finally, *my counterattack!*

“Oh man, I freaking love [**Phantom Slash**]. **Hell yeah!** I freaking can't wait until my next milestone at level ten. These racial skills are OP! I can't fucking wait to eat those four fuckers' hearts once we kill that fatass boss. Pfft! **Hey guys, the stupid thing didn't even know what hit it!**”

*The moron thinks he killed me! Worse, he was gloating and mumbling his plans to betray his comrades. What an asshole! If this fool is below level ten, there's a good chance I could kill him just by poking him with my [**Corrosive**] and [**Venomous**] touch. Unfortunately, I knew it hadn't been five minutes since I last used [**Absorb**] on Doodles. And there was no way I would waste killing a fellow candidate without getting something good out of it. Holy shit, I really have become a sociopath! Ah, the hell with it. They're trying to do the same to me.*

“**Jason, what was it?**”

“What the fuck is Jeremy going on about? What was it...? How the hell am I supposed to know? **I haven't gotten the notification yet!**”

“**Idiot, it's not—.**”

With a mental grin, my mind transfixed itself on a single command, [**Blight**]. I hope he has more than five in **Constitution**, or there goes my future [**Phantom Slash**]. A pungent black mist wafted off of me like the plague. Pestilence and disease washed over this asshole like a miasma as visible sores, blisters, boils, and lesions burst along his flesh in a symphony of exploding pus sacks. He let out a pathetic, childish scream as he collapsed into a fetal position. *Wow, that's..., horrifying! Glad I'm not him!*

Despite being headless, I leaped to my feet and was about to make a mad dash but paused for a fraction of a second when I spotted the asshole's sword lying there. I knew my [**Corrosive**] touch would destroy it, but that was kind of the point. Scooping up the blade in one hand, I sprinted in the direction from which the last cubic slime blob had come. I had no clue if the loud little shit was still here or if it had escaped, but it didn't matter. I wasn't going to start searching for it. Besides, I couldn't stay here. I wasn't ready to kill the other candidates yet.

“**I call upon you, oh dark goddess, heed my plea, [**Darkness Arrow**]!**”

<p>You have taken 10 points of [Piercing] damage. You have taken 0 points of [Darkness] damage. Current Health: 140 out of 200</p>
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EEK, go way, notification, you're blocking my few! What I would give to have a skill that dealt with these notifications and upgrades for me! Oh no, they're catching up!

“From the gastral depths of my soul, I call forth, [Acid Ball].

You have taken 0 points of [Acid] damage.
Current Health: 140 out of 200

What are they doing? Are... Are they chanting out prayers and incantations, or is it something else as stupid? Seriously, what the hell, you five! You don't need to speak to use magic! Maybe I should just get this over with and kill them now! I threw the sword I'd taken at them in defiance, courage, whatever you call it. But as I gave it a hard toss, the hilt finally had enough of my acidic grip and crumbled as I threw it. The sword sailed through the air haphazardly careening off course before hitting the rocky ground and skidding over the cliff edge. Way to go, Blake!

At least, I tried...

Fuck, now I'm arguing with myself?!

Shut it, Blake. We need to get out of here.

Oh, god, I really have lost my mind!

“Heather, hurry up and use your [Appraisal] already!”

“S-sorry, Rob. S-suffer the eye of the seer, for none s-shall hide, [Appraisal]!”

A cold prickly sensation ran up my gooey spine and to my severed neck as one of the girls released their [Appraisal] spell upon me.

“It's a level t-thirteen and is weak to [Fire] and [Holy]! It's immune to a lot, guys, [Acid], [Darkness], [Disease], and [Poison]. That's n-not possible... Its attribute points are too high for that level! And it has t-three unique that are restricted. I-I've never seen that category before... I-I can't see what they do! We should pull back, n-now! It has to be a b-boss!”

Rude! I wish that girl would stop blabbering to everyone about my personal information like that! Damn it! Go help your screaming, crying, stupid friend!

“Damn, she's right. Let's go and help, Jason. We'll be ready for that boss next time!”

Oh, no, you won't!

They had gotten within ten meters of me, but watching them fall back was a relief. They seem to only have dark magic-like abilities and spells like me, but without my immunity. That all notwithstanding, my confidence got a significant boost! I wonder if that old man knew this would be easy for me before telling Aurelia to toss me down here. *I miss her... Wait! What? Blake, come on, she's clearly evil!*

“Pssst, over here!”

Ugh, it's that stupid goblin kid!

“Hurry! We go to Ockpool! Hurry! Hidden city! Deep below, safe! Quickly! Monster sanctuary! Quickly! Plot revenge! They kill Doodles!”

Monster sanctuary? Woo-hoo, level grinding!