

# BLACK PUDDING

## CHAPTER 4

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*I'm not alone!* My world still appeared in a landscape of thermal colors as my [Thermalsense] remained active. In the far corner, at the bottom of this dark abyss I've found myself in, was a silhouette of another human. *Blake, you're not human! Stop counting yourself as one. Shit, I'm right! Whatever, I don't think they've noticed me yet... I'm still pretty small—No, no, I am not. I've more than tripled in size. I had to be about the size of a golden retriever. I hadn't grown by much after eating the ghoul. Just how fat was that succubus? Doesn't matter. Focus, Blake!*

I flattened myself to the ground, which turned out to be pretty low and crept toward the hopefully unsuspecting individual. My assumption was they couldn't see in the dark, so they decided to remain perfectly still, hoping that whatever came crashing down here wouldn't notice them. This should be an easy kill.

*Wait, am I really going to kill some random stranger? Blake, what's wrong with you?! Self-defense is one thing, but am I capable of attacking and murdering the first person I encounter at the bottom of a hole, completely unprovoked? YES! Uh, I mean, if I don't, they surely will attack me... Am I right? So, yeah, that's a legit reason to strike first. Besides, I've seen enough movies to know a good defense is always to assassinate first! Am I right! Right? Ugh, I'm beginning to accept I've lost any resemblance to my past morals and sanity.*

My slime-low-crawl stopped at the figure's boot. This person still hadn't noticed me! I was directly in front of them, and to my surprise, they hadn't moved a muscle. *Huh, they really can't see in the dark.* That said, I had to admit they were dedicated to remaining silent and motionless. There was nothing, no movement as if they were made from stone, not even the rise and fall of their chest—*Hey, wait a minute, is that a hole where their heart should be? Well, crapola, they are already dead.*

*Damnit, Blake, stop feeling disappointed you weren't the one to kill them!*

With [Thermalsense] giving me a snake-like thermal vision, I should have realized that a body appearing black meant they were literally dead cold. I could only see the figure as a black silhouette, but as I wormed myself to their side, I noticed some curvature in the chest. *Was it a woman?* I couldn't tell their age, but I could tell they hadn't been dead for more than a few days. It was the odor. *Eww, let's not think about that any further!* The body hadn't decomposed enough to make me salivate. *Blake! What did I just tell myself?!*

Not wanting their stuff to go to waste, I decided to pull off a boot, but in my current state, I stuck to it like sticky goo, all while corroding it away. *Crap!* I released the boot before I did any further damage, but there was now a hole by the big toe. I was thinking like a human. I had no need for boots or gear. It wasn't like I could use them.

*Shit, I guess I have no other choice. Sorry, not sorry! Had it already been five minutes since I ate Niamh? I really could use a watch or a countdown for these cooldowns. I wasn't even sure if my [Absorb] would work on a corpse, notwithstanding a ghoul, but there's no time like the present to find out. Before I could second guess my decision, I threw myself over the woman's body like a sticky tar blanket, completely engulfing her beneath me. Since she was already dead, her body seemed to dissolve faster than one of my living victims. Well, not the spiders. They were almost instantaneous. I wonder if that has something to do with **Wisdom and Constitution**?*

*Mmm, she tastes like hot cocoa and mint.*

Do you wish to [Absorb] [Necromancer Apprentice]?  
Yes / No

I was over the moon to find out I didn't have to be the one to make the kill to use [Absorb] on a corpse. After doing a little squiggly pudding dance, I mentally cheered out, *yes!*

<p>[Absorb] [Necromancer Apprentice] Successful. New Status Bounces and Unlocks are Awarded.</p>	
<p>+ 0 Strength + 0 Dexterity + 0 Constitution + 1 Intelligence + 0 Wisdom + 0 Charisma</p>	<p><b>Unlockable:</b> [Soul Container] [Appraisal] [Necrotic Flame]</p>

*Huh, those attribute points are the worst ones yet. I wonder if it's because they've been dead for a few days. Hey, wasn't [Appraisal] the skill Aurelia used on me? It should be pretty useful once I unlock it. I'll look through those new spells and abilities once I have more points to spend—wait a minute! [Necrotic Flame]?!*

**[Necrotic Flame]** 1<sup>st</sup> Tier – Type: **Spell** – Cast: 50 Mana  
Gain the spell [Necrotic Flame] and unleash an inferno of necrotic flames.

Release an inferno 10 meters in any direction for 5 seconds.  
Targets hit by the flames will receive the following [Debuff]:

- [Burning] -5 health per second for 30 Seconds.
- [Necrotic Curse] -2 to **Wisdom** for 60 Seconds.

60-second cooldown between casts.

**Cost:** 3 Spell Points  
**Unlock?**  
Yes / No

*Just wonderful! I get a ranged attack the moment I finish spending all my points. Ugh! This world truly hates me!*

Without warning, everything went black, as if someone had turned off the lights. I about had a heart attack, but I don't have a heart anymore, both literally and figuratively. *Oh yeah!* With a thought, a spell snapped to mind [**Thermalsense**], and the world came back into full view in an array of oranges, purples, and blacks.

With my points distribution taken care of and the corpse in the room fully eaten, I was ready to get out of this stone chamber I had fallen into. But first, I was tired of creeping and crawling around. It was time to try out [**Polymorph**]. Mentally picturing the woman I had just eaten, the image of a human came to mind. Without instructions or a manual, I thought to myself, it's [**Polymorph**]ing time, and hoped for the best.

I began to stretch out, ripping, mending, and shifting like putty as I did. Tar-like strands, tendrils, and tentacles of all shapes of abomination to sanity twisted into threads of interwoven muscle fibers as I started to take form. I rejoiced! For the first time since awakening, I reached out of the black muck that had been me and toward the heavens with my hand open wide.

As the rest of me ascended, I found myself laughing in self-gratification despite no sounds escaping. I had awoken in another world as a black pudding. I've done horrible things I could never dream of doing. I've fought spiders, a ghoul, and even a succubus. Not only did I win those fights, but I ended up eating all of them, including a random corpse, and enjoyed it. I should feel disgusted and guilty. And yet, I don't. I now stand on my own two legs, never prouder of myself.

*If only I had a mirror... Wait, I don't need one!* Holding out my hand as if I were taking a selfie, I had the wonderful idea to use the three-hundred-and-sixty-degree view from [**Mana Sight**] to look at myself through my hand. However, I had forgotten it was still pitch-black in the chamber, and [**Thermalsense**] wasn't quite cutting it. I looked like a glowing orange figure in a purple backdrop, but my figure did resemble a human, albeit a short bald, slenderman-looking one, but it was an improvement.

The first step with my new legs was a bit wobbly, but walking was a lot like riding a bike, and before I knew it, I was marching out of the chamber and into a long narrow corridor, my head held high. Thankfully, [**Thermalsense**] wasn't as annoying as [**Mana Sight**], and with everything still being too dark to even use the spell, I was surprised by the following notification.

[ <b>Mana Sight</b> ] upgraded to 3 <sup>rd</sup> Tier.
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*How do I keep leveling [**Mana Sight**]?* The leveling system did not make any sense to me. It had been too dark to even use the spell, yet it leveled. However, none of my other spells or abilities had leveled once. *I'm dumbfounded!* Still, [**Mana Sight**] had been a necessary evil, allowing me to see while also causing horrible nausea and motion sickness. The second tier upgrade was a much-welcomed relief, so I only hoped tier three would be an even greater boon. I just had to get somewhere with enough light to use it.

After my fifth re-incantation of [**Thermalsense**] wore off, I noticed a faint light ahead of me. It took around thirty minutes to approach the light, but I was relieved that the passageway had ended. Walking out of the corridor, I found myself upon a cliff edge that overlooked a massive cavern

with a large lake and a waterfall at its center. Despite the astonishing view, I found the lack of nausea to be the most miraculous.

[**Mana Sight**] at the second tier prevented most of the discomfort, but I was still prone to motion sickness, and glancing at things beyond the spell's listed radius seemed to cause me to go cross-eyed. At the moment, I had none of those issues. It was wonderful! The upgrades I received to [**Mana Sight**] were significant. My vision still wasn't the best, but I could now see up to ninety meters before things started to get fuzzy. Despite the blurriness in the distance, I managed a basic scan of the cavern system and spotted a few branching tunnels. However, nothing stood out as to which direction I should head.

That being said, about two football fields down the cliffside, I could hear five individuals argue with one another. I couldn't quite determine who or what they were, perhaps because they were too far out of [**Mana Sight**] range, but I could certainly hear them, and they were loud.

"Rob, I'm fucking tell you, we're not ready for the next boss!"

"Well, Jason. Maybe if you hadn't killed Sophia and eaten her heart, we might've stood a chance against that big fucker."

"Hey! Hey! We did not have a ceasefire at the time. Besides, it's not my fault that frog-faced freak stuck my soul inside this body. It's fucking hard to control these impulses!"

*Can't argue with that.*

"Jason, Rob, you're both right. Rob, this isn't a video game. There's no do-over! We need to grind some levels if we hope to beat that boss. Jason, we're in a life and death struggle, and if those freaks who threw us down here were telling the truth, only one of us will be allowed to leave alive. And the door out can only be found at the end of this shit-hole dungeon! So, no, I don't blame you for Sophia. We had not yet made any agreements at the time. However, as soon as we've cleared this shit-hole, all bets are over."

*Only one of us can leave alive? Well, let the Hunger Games begin!*

"Jeremy, w-what if we level up to the point the n-necromancers have no choice but to let each of us live?"

"You said it yourself, Heather. Your [**Appraisal**] showed their leader with four question marks. I don't see any of us getting a high enough level to make a difference to those fanged fucks, but if everyone here wants to try, I'll play along. I'm all for grinding levels. What do you say, Yuri?"

"It's Yua, and as long as you boys can prove you won't betray us, I'm willing to consider it, but I don't trust you three."

*Hmm, seems obvious those are five of the six champion candidates. I also suppose that makes the dead body I ate, Sophia. Sorry, girl! I had no idea how long they'd been down here or what level they were, and I was pretty sure they would kill me on the spot, even if I found a way to tell them I was a fellow candidate. Besides, I don't think I could stop myself from attempting to murder and eat them... Ugh, I've become worse than Jeffery Dahmer!*

“Heather, what was the boss’s level?”

“It w-was three l-levels above me, Rob, at level fifteen.”

“Three days of grinding, and I can’t believe you’re level thirteen already. That drow experience boost is so unfair! I wish that sick fuck who summoned me had put me into one. Instead, I got some screwed up looking beastkin.”

“S-sorry, Jeremy.”

*Level thirteen in three days? **What. The. Fuck?!** I haven’t even been in this world for two hours and am already at their level. Perhaps Aurelia’s confidence in me wasn’t misplaced. **Damnit**, I don’t want to be some evil champion! But I suppose it wouldn’t be that bad... If what they said is true, I’ll have to kill all five of them to get out of here.*

*If the other candidates are also at or near my level, I’ll need to do some serious leveling before facing them. I’m outnumbered five to one, and if there are two things I hate, it is one, being on the receiving end of a disadvantage. And the other is a fair fight! Eh, am I really plotting their murder? **Yep!** Holy crap, I think I’m a schizo—**Fuck**, my stepdad turned out to be right!*

“Pssst!”

That wasn’t from one of them...