

# BLACK PUDDING

## CHAPTER 13

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The victory was mine and mine alone! I had defeated the chimera without Ava's puppeteering, who I was certain to otherwise be known as Circe, the Primordial Goddess of Two-Faced Lying Cunts... Or was it Magic? Let's just say it was a shitty revaluation, and what's more annoying, I was just starting to come around to the idea of having a split personality. *Whatever!* At least my body was melting through the undead, lich, beast, thingie now that his phylacteries were locked away within my pocket dimension, Stellar Void.

With a British-style breakfast of sausage and beans, I oozed my way back into the chimera's intestines and out of the hole in its abdomen. I was still in my true form as a black pudding and could have easily made a quick exit dissolving my way out from where I had just been. That said, the idea of leaking out of his nutsack, like the day I was first conceived, was a no-go. I was a girl with standards, after all.

I didn't bother forming eyes in my tar-like state, which left me running my Mana Sight at the full three-hundred-sixty-degree perspective. It's just too hard to ditch the eyes completely, but I needed the practice. However, as I seeped out of the chimera, I couldn't help but stare at the three statues... They were watching me!

*Blake, don't worry about them. If you want, you can leave right now. Look at the gate. It's open if you want to leave. The third round is the last one, but they won't attack unless you start the fight.*

I am at a crossroads as to whether I should stay for the final fight. The previous battle with the chimera was extremely nerve-wracking and way too close for comfort. For fuck's sake, I had to crawl into the thing's ballsack. Furthermore, I still don't trust Ava. The bitch has a tendency to lie. I can't move forward like this; it's time for her to come clean and provide some much-needed explanations. It's just frustrating not knowing what she's playing at. I need to weigh my options carefully before making a decision... What that decision is, I don't know. Hell, I don't even know if I have any options. *Ugh, I hate you! I think it's time for that explanation! How long can I stay here until that gate closes?*

*...As long as you want, the next round won't start unless you attack one of the statues.*

Before thinking what to say, I found my body shifting back into its human shape. I was still using Mana Sight without eyes, so I watched on as millions of tiny silk threads shot out of my head in every direction before curling back as they weaved themselves into the white silk skin on my face. It was an amazing sight to witness... However, Ava did it without asking! Also, how does she do it without using the command, Polymorph?

"Don't do that again without asking me," I snapped. I tried to hide it, but I couldn't deny the relief I felt being back on two feet.

*...Sorry, it's just that I knew it was what you wanted, so I sort of did it on instinct. We really are connected, you and I.*

“How are we connected?”

As Ava spoke, I started roaming the coliseum's arena, listening to every word as I collected the corpses of fallen undead. I was grateful Absorb had tiered up to the point the cooldown was down to sixty seconds. Between cooldowns, I indulged myself by slowly dissolving a corpse beneath my foot, relishing its flavor. It's funny how I don't find eating people's corpses gross or repulsive. In fact, I find it to be a pleasant sensation that I couldn't resist if I wanted to. The temptation was too great.

*Once upon a time, there was a unique skill called Dissociative that brought forth a perfect copy of a bitchy goth girl, and it was said that the copy's purpose was to work alongside the original in perfect harmony. This copy held all the memories of pain, love, first kisses, sexual conquests, laughter, betrayals, anger, and the time she got locked out of a hotel room in nothing but granny panties, just as the original did. But there was a bit more added, something special about this copy, making it stand apart from the rest. And so, the tale of the duplicated self began.*

“Ugh, you're such a bitch. What do you mean by a bit more?”

*You could say I'm a hot mess of your memories and a tiny sliver of the goddess's memories, or rather, just some of her scraps of knowledge. I'm not her, but I'm not exactly you either because of it. It's like I'm a mixture of a functional partial Dissociative copy of her and a completely screwed-up Dissociative version of you. That's why I have all your messed up memories and so few of hers. That all said, I hit the jackpot with her. Now that I deeply understand the magical landscape, the system poses no challenge, and I've uncovered some advantageous loopholes. To top it all off, I've gained a few keen insights into this world's social and political layout. Basically, I'm a mastermind.*

“Well, that's fucked up! I've got all sorts of questions now.”

*I know, right! Huuhh, ask away...*

“Why should I believe you this time? What's her angle? And exactly which of her memories do you possess?”

*Sweetie, lying doesn't do us any good. I knew how you would react because I have your memories. So, I did what we always do and avoided talking about our issues. But now the cat's out of the bag. Why hold back!*

“Don't talk down to me.”

*Blake, listen up! If I recall correctly, from the goddess's knowledge, there has been an ongoing conflict between the deities for a significant amount of time – thousands of years, to be exact, well, give or take. The goddess firmly believes in maintaining her neutrality and views the other gods and goddesses as nuisance children. The term, godlings seems to come to mind when thinking about it.*

“Why are you scared to say, Circe?”

**SILENCE**—*Shit, sorry... That wasn't me.*

“Then who was it, a devilish deity takeover or a bout of Tourette's?”

*It's like a safety mechanism she put in place so that if anything were to happen, her way of ensuring her meddling wouldn't be discovered. However, when it activates, I feel like I'm her, completely consumed by her presence. But then it fades just as quickly, and reality sets in, and I remember that I'm just a fragment of her knowledge, a piece meant to protect you, to give you an edge in the wars to come.*

“Like when you were fighting the zombies? But what about threatening to come down here and shove my ass, or soul, into a shit-eating slime?”

*Honestly, a lot of what happened is fuzzy in my mind. It's possible that those actions were all her doing. I joked about her being a bored goddess, but that might not have been too far from the truth. However, I don't remember anything dealing with a shit-eating slime... Huh, that's a bit worrisome the more I think about it.*

“Worrisome?! Sounds like she has a little more control over you than you realized. But, okay, fine... I think I get it, but why did Cir—Asswipe do it?”

*Damn, now I'm worried about being her puppet. Asswipe?*

Peering around, I was done chowing down on this side of the arena but saw a few more morsels waiting for me on the other side. Letting Absorb gobble up those bodies gave me a boost of power like you wouldn't believe, and chowing down on the flesh was just the cherry on top. Normally, I would have been disgusted by my own behavior, but now I was humming with glee as I devoured my next meal. All the while, I was trying to get the truth out of Ava. But the sickening thing was I was starting to believe her. *Blech!*

“Well, if calling the bitch by her name is too much for you, we'll have to come up with a nickname. And I've decided on Asswipe. But seriously, why would she help me? I mean, I am pretty comfortable embracing my evil ways, and I enjoy it. I highly doubt a Goddess of Magic would want to be associated with someone like me, much less give her support.”

*Alrighty, so Asswipe it is... I mean, what a moniker. Not exactly the epitome of grace and dignity, but hey, it seems to fit the bill. However, I feel like I'm calling a piece of myself Asswipe along with her. Ugh, whatever! Let's return to the holy war that's been going on for centuries, like a never-ending opera. It looks like it's finally coming to a close, with one side on the losing end, and guess what? That side is yours. Asswipe, in all her supposed wisdom, doesn't want to see the balance of power upset. She wants the war to stay on the mortal plane, so she's been secretly lending a hand to those who can help keep that balance. It won't be long after the godlings' proxy war turns to the heavens, and they drop the proxy. Her goal seems to be keeping the war on the mortal plane.*

“So, let me get this straight... Keeping the crazy war down here, rather than up in the heavens, is a load of bullshit. And to top it all off, our dear ol’ pal, Asswipe, is choosing to lend a helping hand to the evil side? Fantastic.”

*Asswipe doesn't differentiate between good and evil. Numerous self-righteous asshats on the other side view themselves as morally superior because they have their gods' blessing. Blake, they're committing genocide on a grand scale, surpassing anything witnessed on this plane of existence. They're raping and murdering anyone who doesn't worship their gods. Not all of them follow the dark gods. And let's be real, what's worse than a crazed murderer who thinks they're doing it for a noble cause? At least we know we're killing for our own enjoyment and not some misguided sense of righteousness.*

“It sounds like you're trying to get me to murder them for some stupid noble cause.”

*Not at all! The idea of killing for a noble cause is as absurd to me as it is to you. Remember, I'm basically you, just with some of Asswipe's knowledge. I'm simply pointing out the hypocrisy of those who see themselves morally superior while committing horrific acts. They'll be coming for you either way. And don't feel too special. You're not the only one she's aiding.*

“She's not helping the other candidates, is she?”

*As far as I know, I don't have a full list of the individuals she's helping.*

“How much do you know?”

*That's about it. I have a solid understanding of the system and how to navigate its loopholes. Well, it's more accurate to say I know how to feel my way around the system exploits. I seem to have inherited some of your inability to articulate things clearly... I'm a shitty teacher!*

“I want to be mad about that and accuse you of lying... But you ain't wrong.”

*Sure, I may not be the best teacher material, your fault, but if you want to learn how to fend for yourself, I can at least lead you by the hand through each battle while we're in the dungeon. Of course, our options are a bit limited now that the dungeon core has been taken.*

“Why's that?”

*Haven't you noticed how barren everything is down here? None of the monsters or bosses are respawning.*

With the phylacteries safely trapped within Stellar Void. I went to work chowing down on all the decomposing undead bodies I could find, and let me tell you, it's been a smorgasbord of gruesome delights. Every last undead has been dissolved and absorbed, leaving only the chimera as the cherry on top of this macabre sundae. Absorb wouldn't do much for me. This feast is all for my own twisted enjoyment. I can't help but wonder just how strong I'll become after gobbling up all those ghastly corpses. Let's not forget about my Charisma; it's probably dipped down to demonic levels at this point!

*Don't worry. It won't fall past negative twenty.*

“**Negative twenty!** Fine, whatever, I get it. One last thing, how have you been bypassing the cooldowns on my Spells and Abilities?”

*That’s simple, I haven’t been using them!*

“What?”

*How about I give you a demonstration—you know what? Let’s head back to the chamber of the toad boss and have a little bit of fun while I teach you. I know of five weak opponents that would be perfect for you to practice on. Oh, and by the way, I think I’ve figured out how to utilize those phylacteries! But before we get into that, can you tell me what you know about internal and ambient mana?*

“I don’t have a freaking clue about internal and ambient mana! Why don’t you know this? I thought you were supposed to have all my memories, Ava. What the hell?”

*For fuck’s sake, Blake, will you relax already?! Can’t a girl build a little excitement and anticipation? I mean, yes, I’m aware that you don’t know shit, but can you at least let me have a little fun training you!*

“Hell, no!”