

# BLACK PUDDING

## CHAPTER 3

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“Pssst!”

I spun around, trying to locate the source of the voice. It sounded like it was coming from inside my head, which wasn't exactly a new experience for me. But this was different. This voice had a sense of urgency to it. *Who the hell just pssst me?*

And then I remembered. [Thermalsense]. As the skill activated, I glanced around, searching for any heat signatures. That's when I saw it – a small, glowing square hiding amongst some rocks.

*What the...*

“Hide! They're going to see you!” The voice spoke again, urgent and panicked.

As I looked down at the group of five people below, I wondered why I was being told to hide. They couldn't even see over the cliff edge. But as a gooey, shapeshifting monster, I still hadn't quite figured out how to speak in my new form. So instead, I lifted one of the oily appendages that I guess was supposed to be my hand and pointed a tentacle-finger at myself. My current human form resembled a tar-covered slenderman, only I was small enough to pass for a child. And to top it off, I was completely bald. It was safe to say I was pretty disappointed with my shapeshifting abilities. But hey, at least I had some knowledge from playing video games – life should improve as I level up, right? So, no full-blown freakouts... yet!

“What?! Yes, you! Hurry! Hide!”

I gave the tiny cube a nonchalant shrug, strolled toward it, and was relieved to discover that I didn't feel a sudden urge to devour it. *Ha, maybe I'm not a complete psycho after all!*

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

I nonchalantly gave the cube another shrug and plopped down beside it, crossing my slimy legs as I did.

“What are you doing?”

I lifted my oily tentacle-finger once again, gesturing towards where my mouth should have been, then I pointed at the little hole on the cube's face. The five other candidates were still bickering in the distance, but who cared? This little guy was another slime, and he knew how to talk! If he didn't teach me how to speak, I could always eat him and see what my Absorb skill could teach me. *Would eating a slime count as cannibalism? Wait, hadn't I already resorted to cannibalism?*

Technically...well, technically eating Olin and Sophia doesn't count since I'm now a Black Pudding. And Niamh was a succubus, so everyone's probably had a taste of that... *Ugh, Blake, you're sick in the head!*

"Stupid pudding slime! What are you doing? Get away from me."

Pointing was not cutting it, and I wasn't about to take no for an answer. So, I took matters into my own... tentacle. *This should get my point across.* Without hesitation, I shoved my finger straight into what I hoped was the cube's speaking orifice. *Please let this be the right hole!*

[Acid] Resisted.
You have defeated a [Gelatinous Cube].
Do you wish to [Absorb] [Gelatinous Cube]? Yes / No

As I slurped on the remains of the poor little cube, I couldn't help but chuckle. *Oops, I guess that answers my earlier question. I am a cannibal! Oh well, no big deal.* After all, it's not like I could help being a Black Pudding. And hey, the little guy tasted like peanut butter, so it wasn't all bad. Plus, who needs to speak when you have tentacle-fingers, right? I guess I'll just have to find another way to learn how to talk. I glanced at the notification, and with a mental confirmation, I clicked, "Yes."

[Absorb] [Gelatinous Cube] Successful.
<u>Selectable</u> [Paralysis]

*Alright, another skill I can't use... oh, joy.*

"Er, you! You see Doodles?"

Glancing up, I spotted a child approaching me, most likely searching for the cube. Little did he know... Doodles had been quite a scrumptious treat. I attempted to shush him but remembered I lacked a mouth. Instead, I gestured with a tentacle-finger, mimicking the shushing motion where my lips should have been, hoping he'd catch on. Predictably, he didn't. *Good grief, kids can be so infuriating.*

"YOU LISTEN? ME TALKIN!"

*Oh, I'm so tempted to kill him as well! No, Blake, hold back; he's just a child. Ugh! Is it possible I still have a moral compass? Though, who cares if I ate his friend – pet?* In a panic, I hastily pointed toward the cliff edge where the other candidates were. Oddly, they had fallen silent... I deactivated Thermalsense and switched to the stomach-churning [Mana Sight]. I could see everything around me, enjoying a complete three-hundred-sixty-degree view – and I absolutely

hated it! While most of my surroundings were blurry, my focal point was at least clear. I spotted the child with his wart-covered green skin and large ears. But I couldn't focus on that for too long as a hazy purple fog started to appear behind me, and I saw a blade forming out of it. And then it swung outward... at my NECK!

My body was tingling with adrenaline, but it was no use. I was still sitting on the ground with my legs crossed, trying to avoid the sword that was aimed at my neck. But who was I kidding? The blade found its mark in a split second, and I felt my tar-like body give way with each fiber snapping apart. I was helpless as the sword sliced through me like a hot knife through butter. The sensation was unpleasant, to say the least. And before I knew it, I was decapitated, with my head falling into my lap. *Well, that's just fucking fantastic!*

As the purple fog dissipated, a dentist's worst nightmare materialized before me, looking almost giddy. He appeared mostly human-ish, except for the serious underbite problem that revealed thousands of razor-sharp, needle-like teeth. But my attention was divided into three tasks. First, I couldn't help but marvel at the grotesque sight of my head melting into my thighs and crotch. Not my proudest moment, but it's far from the worst thing I've seen or done since becoming an acidic flesh-eating monster. Second, I saw the other four candidates approaching from a hundred yards away and closing in fast. And finally, the most important task at hand – planning 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 wickedly strong! I can't fucking wait to eat those four fuckers' hearts once we kill that fat-ass boss. Pfft!” My assailant muttered to himself before shouting at the others, “Hey guys, this stupid thing didn't even know what hit it!”

*He believes he's actually killed me!* In his arrogance, he was openly reveling in his plans to turn on his allies. The nerve of this guy! If he hasn't yet reached level ten, a mere brush with my Corrosive and Venomous touch could end him. Sadly, his companions were closing in. There was no way I could absorb him and face my fellow candidates in my current state. *Goodness, have I truly morphed into such a cold-hearted monster? Well, I guess it doesn't matter. I mean, they are trying to do the same to me, after all.*

“Jason, what was it?” Another person, sprinting toward Jason, called out.

“What on earth is Jeremy talking about? What was it...” Jason muttered to himself before shouting in response, “How am I supposed to know? I haven't received the notification yet!”

“IDIOT, it's not—.”

*Oh, this is going to be delightful!* My thoughts focused on a single command, [**Blight**]. I secretly hoped he'd survive this ordeal; after all, I wouldn't want to lose my future Phantom Slash. A foul black mist emanated from me, reminiscent of a deadly plague. The stench of sickness and decay engulfed him, and soon, visible sores, blisters, boils, and lesions erupted across his skin in a grotesque symphony of bursting pustules. He emitted a pitiful, childlike shriek as he crumpled into a fetal position. *Yikes, that's... horrifying! So glad I'm not in his shoes.*

Despite being headless, I sprang to my feet and dashed in the direction the green child had appeared from. I wasn't sure if the noisy brat was still around or if they had managed to slip away, but it

made no difference. There was no point in searching for him. After all, I couldn't linger here. I wasn't prepared to face the other candidates just yet.

"I call upon you, oh dark goddess, heed my plea, Darkness Arrow!"

*Ouch! What the hell was that?!*

[Darkness] Resisted.

*Eek, go way, notification, you're blocking my view! Oh no, they're catching up!*

"From the gastral depths of my soul, I call forth, Acid Ball!"

[Acid] Resisted.

*What on earth are they up to? Are they reciting prayers and incantations or something equally ridiculous? Honestly, what's wrong with these five? They should know that verbalizing isn't necessary for casting spells! Perhaps I should just end this charade and take them out right now. Hold on, Blake. I need to escape this place, grow stronger, then kill them! Crap, 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 chilling, tingling sensation traveled along my viscous spine and up to my severed neck as one of the girls unleashed their magic on me.

"It's a level t-thirteen dungeon monster. It's weak to Fire and Holy! It's immune to a lot, guys, Acid, Darkness, Disease, and Poison. We should pull back, r-right n-now!"

*How rude! I wish that girl would quit broadcasting my personal details to everyone like that! Ugh, stop pursuing me and tend to your wailing, whimpering, ridiculous friend instead!*

"Shoot, Heather's correct. Let's go help Jason. We'll be prepared to face that monster next time!"

*Oh, no, you won't.*

*Phew! They had closed the distance to within ten meters, but seeing them retreat brought me a sense of relief. They appeared to possess dark magic-like abilities and spells similar to mine, yet lacked my immunity. Despite everything, my confidence soared! Could it be that the old man knew this challenge would be a breeze for me before instructing Aurelia to throw me down here? Nah! Though, I am missing her... Hold on! What am I thinking? Blake, she's obviously evil! But, oh, so incredibly enticing.*

"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!”

*They killed Doodles? Oh, he means the cube! Sure – I can work with that. Wait... monster sanctuary? Woo-hoo, it's level-grinding time!*