

BLACK PUDDING

CHAPTER 7

Name: Blake Race: Black Pudding Class: Dungeon Monster Level: 20 <u>Titles</u> Hopeless Crusader		
<u>Racial Skills</u> [Absorb] [Corrosive] [Polymorph] [Thermalsense] <u>Spells</u> [Blight] [Mana Sight] [Necrotic Flame] <u>Abilities</u> [Burst] [Silk Webbing] [Veil Polyglot] [Venomous]	<u>Vulnerabilities</u> [Fire] [Holy] <u>Immunities</u> [Acid] [Darkness] [Disease] [Poison] [Sleep] <u>Unique</u> [Oracle] [Restricted] [Restricted]	<u>Selectable</u> [Astral Insight] [Fear] [Fortress] [Leap] [Life Drain] [Paralysis] [Shield Proficiency] [Spider Walk] [Spirit Vessel] [Stellar Void]

I thoroughly examined my status sheet, scrutinizing every detail on both sides. It seemed that I had uncovered most of its secrets, yet it became increasingly clear that I had merely scratched the surface. Unfortunately, Circe, the stuck-up deity that she was, was not particularly forthcoming with information. She seemed determined to guard her secrets closely, but I must admit, I found it rather amusing how effortlessly I could goad her into revealing a tidbit or two.

“I can’t seem to get Polymorph looking quite right,” I muttered to myself. “Hey, Circe, any advice on how to make myself appear more human?”

“*You are rather informal in your address towards me,*” Circe responded, her tone laced with a touch of superiority as she folded her arms to glare at me. “*I am one of the three Primordials, the ancient entities predating creation itself, and it would be appropriate for you to address me accordingly.*”

“So, in other words, you’re admitting that you don’t know how to do it,” I added with a smirk, intentionally averting my snail-like gaze from the annoyed goddess.

That’s right, I found myself still sprawled on the floor, a pile of goo with two arms sticking out, each hand clutching an orange glowing eyeball. I couldn’t help but chuckle at the absurdity of it all. However, as amusing as it was, I knew it was time to gather myself and Polymorph back into a more recognizable form. Frankly, I was growing tired of resembling a horror monster.

“How dare you!” Circe exclaimed in exasperation. *“It’s actually quite simple, even for someone with a feeble mind like yours. Magic is all about imagination and desire. Visualize the desired outcome of the spell, channel all your desire into the casting, and voila, you’ve unlocked the secret to magic.”*

“Wait, are you saying I could bypass skills’ descriptions with a strong enough imagination and desire?” I inquired, my curiosity piqued.

“Let’s just say that the descriptions of your skills are intentionally vague because the way they manifest depends on the imagination of each individual caster. I suppose that’s why I have such disdain for those absurd magical academies. They seek to standardize everyone’s imagination, thereby standardizing magic itself. Magic should never be uniform or predictable across all casters. Such a notion is a direct insult to, well, me,” Circe explained without hiding a hint of her frustration.

“Hmm, so it’s not solely reliant on imagination but also requires a strong desire to bring forth the manifestation of the spell as I envision it,” I murmured, reflecting on the revelation. “And the descriptions are more like guidelines that can be manipulated to cast the skill in my own unique way.”

Retracting my outstretched arms into the liquid pool that was me, I deactivated Mana Sight. I took a moment to visualize my desired appearance down to the finest details. With the image firmly in my mind, I channeled my magic into the [**Polymorph**] spell, feeling a surge of power as I rose out of the goop. Every fiber of my being stretched and reshaped, transforming my tar-like skeletal frame into solid muscle fibers. Though it lasted only a few seconds, the process felt much longer, as if time had slowed down. When the transformation was complete, I opened my eyes to see the world anew, with Mana Sight spontaneously igniting within my newly formed sockets. It was a seamless and intuitive process; harnessing the power of Mana Sight had become second nature to me.

Glancing down at my newly transformed self, I was taken aback by the grotesque sight that met my eyes. The image reflected back at me was that of a tar-coated zombie, its decaying flesh barely clinging to the skeletal frame beneath. It was a far cry from the magnificent vision I had intended. Frustration welled within me, exacerbated by Circe’s infuriating fit of laughter. I lifted a hand to examine it, only to be confronted by the skeletal appearance and the gaps in the fiber tissue that failed to manifest properly. With a heavy sigh, I couldn’t help but wonder where I had gone wrong in my visualization.

As I continued to ponder my failed transformation, my attention was unexpectedly drawn to a particular skill: Mana Sight. I realized that I had been instinctively utilizing it without the need for a system command, and it had worked perfectly. In fact, I had been employing a similar approach with Polymorph, albeit in a different manner, whenever I shaped my tentacles. A realization struck me like a bolt of lightning, and I couldn't help but exclaim, "Holy shit! I think I've figured it out!"

Taking a deep breath, an action that surprised me, considering I hadn't consciously created lungs, I had an epiphany. *Wait, I did give myself lungs!* This revelation only strengthened my hypothesis. If Circe truly despised the standardization of magic, then it stood to reason that the system itself was not intended for practical applications. Instead, it likely served as a training aid for new magicians. The fact that I had formed lungs and cast Mana Sight without explicitly commanding it supported this notion. If my theory was correct, then relying solely on the system for combat would be a mistake. Instead, I should view it as a tool for learning new spells and honing my skills, ultimately aiming to transcend the metaphorical training wheels that the system provided.

Still fixated on my hand, I focused my imagination and desire, pouring them into the transformation. To my delight, I witnessed my hand shifting into a more familiar form, though it remained jet black, reminiscent of my Black Pudding nature. However, I desired a more recognizable appearance, one that resonated with my past life as a bit of a goth. In that life, I had a ghostly white complexion, as if allergic to the sun. I couldn't help but feel a twinge of envy toward those who had a legitimate reason to avoid the outdoors, unlike myself, who simply despised the scorching Arizona heat. I had always dreamed of living in a colder climate surrounded by snow. But for now, I refocused my thoughts on my hand, sensing that something was missing.

As I revisited my list of skills, my attention was captivated by Silk Webbing. When I employed the skill within the toad's mouth, it hadn't resembled the heroic scenes depicted in comic books. Instead, it had exploded in a chaotic eruption of cobwebs, filling the toad's gaping maw. Regrettably, it had failed to prevent the boss monster from tearing me apart. Nevertheless, I sensed its potential usefulness. This time, I visualized the webbing not as a sticky substance but as delicate silk threads. I imagined the threads tightly weaving themselves together, forming sheets that would serve as a protective shell for my pudding skin, coating it entirely.

Having only used Silk Webbing once before, I struggled to manifest my imagination and desire into the skill. I resorted to using the system command, [**Silk Webbing**]. Unfortunately, my initial attempt ended in failure, resulting in an explosive burst of cobwebs emanating from my hand. For the next three hours or so, frustration ensued as sporadic blasts of webbing erupted in all directions. The chamber transformed into a chaotic tangle of silk, resembling the dwelling of a colossal spider that had been weaving webs for years. Although the sight was somewhat intriguing, the webbing had no discernible pattern or artistry—it was a haphazard mess clinging to the walls, ceiling, and even myself.

Through repeated practice, I was gradually developing a sense of the skill. It was becoming apparent that it went beyond mere imagination and desire—it required a deep understanding of how it felt to cast the skill in order to manifest my desires into reality. Much like the subconscious activation of Mana Sight or the unintentional growth of tentacles, it was a matter of intuition and

instinct. With the knowledge of how both Polymorph and Silk Webbing felt, I closed my eyes once more and focused on the sensation. Instead of picturing the skills activating, I immersed myself in the feeling, allowing it to guide my transformation.

As I delved deeper into the transformation, I felt my body elongate slightly, my curves accentuated to the desired proportions, and my hair cascading gracefully down my back. But I didn't stop there—I craved more. With a clear image of my desired face in mind, I channeled my desire into the manifestation of silky skin. I could sense the silk coating my features, creating a protective shell that concealed my true nature. It wasn't perfect, and I knew I still had much to practice if I wanted to pass as a convincing human, but there was a sense of accomplishment as Circe began clapping, even if it seemed tinged with a hint of mockery.

With Mana Sight activated in my hand like some ridiculous selfie stick, I took a closer look at myself. I couldn't deny that my appearance was far from human, more akin to a female alien's. Yet, there was a strange charm to it, a creepy cuteness that I found intriguing. I donned a black dress, its shifting, and moving form gave me a demonic vibe. But I hadn't merely worn the dress—I had shaped my body into it. Every inch of me exuded a deep abyssal black, except for my white silk face, which had a sleekness that hinted at an otherworldly allure as if I had undergone one too many Botox procedures. I knew that the vibrant orange glow would further enhance my uniquely creepy beauty once I withdrew Mana Sight back into my eye sockets.

To my pleasant surprise, the facial features moved naturally, as if they were my own flesh. I could smile, frown, and even wink, experiencing the full range of expressions despite the tautness of the silk that formed my skin. It dawned on me that considering the silk as a mere shell coating would be a disservice. If magic operated based on my imagination and desire that is cast based on feel, then I needed to truly believe the silk was my actual flesh. Perhaps, molding it into any desired appearance would become even easier once I fully believed in its authenticity.

Now, don't misunderstand me. I still had a long way to go and much more practice to master my newfound understanding of magic's uniqueness for each caster. However, I was starting to grasp the essence of what Circe meant. As for learning magic without relying on the system, I had yet to figure that out. I secretly longed to cast a lightning bolt, but no matter how vividly I imagined and desired it, there was no accompanying sensation to rely on for its manifestation. It seemed that I needed to experience casting spells with the system before I could even attempt to cast them without it. Moreover, I noticed a distinct difference in the sensations when using system commands compared to casting without them. One method seemed to tap into the ambient mana present in the surroundings, while the other relied on the internal mana provided by the system itself.

All this newfound knowledge buzzed in my mind, waiting for the right moment to be explored further. But for now, my twisted psyche yearned for a more immediate thrill—the next floor boss, beckoning to me with twisted fingers like a demented lover craving my demise. With each step through the newly formed chamber exit, I could almost feel the dark laughter of the ghost of this dungeon echoing in the twisted corridors, enjoying my descent into blissful madness.

Following Redtail's directions was child's play, or rather, playtime in a deranged nursery. The dungeon husk seemed to play tricks on my senses as if the darkness was whispering distorted

lullabies that made my skin crawl with a perverse excitement. “One, two, I am coming for you. Three, four, better lock your door. Five, six, grab your wands. Seven, eight, you better stay up late. Nine, ten, you’ll never sleep again.” I hummed to myself in utter glee.

But alas, the journey to the next boss proved disappointingly uneventful, as if the dungeon had forgotten its true purpose—to torment and devour. Instead, I found myself meandering through corridors that reeked of stale air and decaying hopes. As I continued to traipse through the lifeless dungeon, my gleeful joy turned to boredom.

A swarm of questions gnawed at the recesses of my twisted mind, their razor-sharp teeth sinking into the fragile fabric of my sanity. What kind of sadistic game were those necromancers and vampires playing? How did the other feeble candidates expect to level up in this empty pit? Were they as famished with excitement as I, longing for the taste of blood-soaked battles? Perhaps I should venture out and steal back that Dungeon Core?

The one silver lining of aimlessly wandering through the desolate husk of a dungeon was that I reached the next boss chamber with surprising speed. The steel doors leading into the chamber creaked open as if something had neglected to close them properly behind itself. Peering inside, I found a scene all too familiar—a chamber akin to the previous one. But to my surprise, there was no hidden ledge above the door in this room. I shrugged off the anomaly, my anticipation growing as I entered the chamber, fully prepared to unleash my newest offensive spell, Necrotic Flame. Yet, to my bewilderment, the chamber was empty, devoid of any boss or formidable adversary. It was a disappointing anticlimax that left me utterly disappointed.

As I ventured further along the path to the next boss chamber, I couldn’t help but notice the recurring anomaly. The chambers I encountered were all strangely vacant, devoid of any boss or challenge. It was as if the bosses had either been slain and couldn’t respawn without the Dungeon Core, or they had simply decided to pack up their shit and abandon this place. Whatever the reason, it presented a rather disheartening predicament—I couldn’t level up if there was no one to fight. Frustrated, I turned to Circe for answers, but all I received in response was a nonchalant shrug. I couldn’t discern whether she genuinely had no clue about the situation or if she was simply toying with me, withholding the truth like a sadistic bitch.

After enduring the desolate corridors, I finally arrived at the entrance of what seemed to be a grand boss chamber—a pair of rusted gates guarding the entrance to an ancient coliseum, now reduced to a crumbling ruin. As I cautiously peered through the iron bars, and at the heart of the arena stood three towering statues, their Herculean forms frozen in battle-ready stances. Whether chiseled from granite or sculpted from marble, their imposing presence was undeniable. A tingling thrill of excitement coursed through me. These statues, without a doubt, were the dungeon’s final bosses.

With an unnecessary breath, I pushed open the creaking rusted gate, revealing the entrance to the desolate coliseum. It was peculiar, for in my previous life, this moment would have invoked sheer terror. But now, in this twisted existence, I found myself inexplicably drawn to these moments of violence. There was an unsettling aura that permeated the air, sending shivers down my gooey spine. It wasn’t fear that gripped me, but rather, eager anticipation, as if I were on the verge of springing a devious trap. As I cautiously trod across the sand-coated floor, my gaze was drawn to

the heaps of collapsed pillars scattered throughout the arena, as if the very foundations of this place had crumbled under the weight of time. Sections of stadium seats were no better, with one segment entirely collapsed into a chaotic mess. The dome-shaped ceiling, however, remained intact, its surface intricately carved into the very fabric of the dungeon's cavern system. Yet, the sense of unease continued to intensify. And to my bewilderment, I couldn't help but notice a strange sensation—salivation.

My attention was fixated on the colossal statues that loomed in the heart of the arena. Perhaps "herculean" didn't quite capture their true enormity. They were nothing short of gargantuan! In comparison, I stood merely at the height of their upper thighs. As I drew closer, I couldn't help but notice the detail on these three sculptures, crafted from pristine what could only be marble, which stood as testaments to exquisite craftsmanship.

One of the statues depicted a woman, her figure both fierce and graceful. She held a massive golden circular shield adorned in shimmering rubies. At the same time, her other hand gripped a splendid golden spear fit for an archangel. The two male statues bore striking similarities, both emanating a sense of raw power. One clenched a golden claymore, its blade gleaming with intricate engravings and ornate decorations. The other brandished a double-ended battleaxe, its imposing presence only enhanced by the mesmerizing carvings that adorned it. Each weapon told a story, an intricate tale woven into every stroke of the sculptor's chisel.

I had become so engrossed in the visual spectacle before me that I had momentarily forgotten to rely on my other senses. And it was in that moment of neglect that I was assaulted by a putrid stench that permeated the air. Before I could fully comprehend the situation, the sandy floor beneath me erupted, unleashing a horde of rotting undead fighters. They emerged from the sand, their decayed bodies armed with rusted weapons, their hollow eyes filled with a hunger for battle.

A sinister thought crossed my mind as they charged toward me with relentless fervor. Their decaying flesh emitted an odious aroma that was strangely alluring. My senses were momentarily overwhelmed by a twisted desire, a dark craving. But I quickly snapped back to reality, reminding myself of the task at hand. I had to fight first, satiate my hunger later. *Blake, fight now, eat later!*

A horde of several dozen undead warriors descended upon me with savage intent, their tattered forms moving with an unnatural hunger. It seemed as if they were determined to overwhelm me with sheer numbers, as if wrestling me into a grotesque dogpile was their ultimate goal.

But I refused to become their prey!

Swiftly, I dodged the swing of a massive mallet aimed at my head, spinning out of harm's way with a grace that belied my appearance of an alien-looking woman in a dress. Tentacles sprouted from my arm in an instant, thrashing outwards with deadly force. With a sickening thud, one undead creature was flattened into the sandy ground, while another met a similar fate at the hands of my second tentacle.

Yet, the battlefield still teemed with enemies.

Unleashing a primal scream, the world around me was enveloped in a ghastly shade of purple. Flames of necrotic energy erupted from my being, consuming everything within a few-meter radius. The searing power of my command, “[**Necrotic Flame**],” swept around me, reducing the undead foes’ flesh to smoldering ashes. Their twisted forms collapsed before my eyes, consumed by the relentless fire of my dark magic.

For a few meters in every direction was engulfed by a swirling vortex of Necrotic Flame, a maelstrom of dark power that devoured everything in its path. Undead creatures emerged from the sand with relentless determination, their rusted weapons lashing out and their decaying bodies clawing and biting. It was a ceaseless onslaught, an unending cycle of decayed aggression.

Yet, amidst the chaos, I moved with otherworldly grace. My every step resembled a ballet dancer’s pirouette, effortlessly evading the clumsy strikes of my undead adversaries. Well, perhaps not as graceful as I believed. After all, everything that approached me was consumed by Necrotic Flames. Still, with each movement, tentacles sprouted from my form, lashing out with Corrosive and Venomous wrath. Though I had my doubts about the effectiveness of venom against the undead.

Amidst the battle, an unexpected sound reached my ears. It took me a moment to realize it was my voice, softly humming a familiar tune. Was it... *The Safety Dance*? A twisted sense of amusement welled up within me as I continued to dance through the decomposing ranks of the undead, my dark magic and haunting melody blending into a dark symphony of destruction.

Though all good things must come to an end, and as such, Necrotic Flames flickered and faded. The charred remains of the undead creatures’ flesh crumbled away, revealing a legion of skeletal warriors rising from the ashes. Their bony frames rattled with unholy fury, and their empty eye sockets glowed with an eerie green light.

With a surge of determination, I attempted to recast Necrotic Flame, channeling my desire into my imagination. But to my dismay, nothing happened. It seemed that my well of magic had run dry, leaving me defenseless against the wrath of the skeletal horde. Panic surged through me as I realized the dire predicament I was in. I frantically searched my mind for an alternative, a way to turn the tide of battle in my favor. But at that moment, I was left with nothing but a sense of vulnerability as I watched the skeleton horde regroup for another wave.

“*Silly child,*” Circe’s voice echoed out through the chaos. “*You have limits within the system’s constraints. Your mana reserves can only stretch so far. That’s why I advised you to learn to tap into the ambient mana around you.*”

With a quick glance at Circe, I acknowledged her words, the mischievous smile on my silk-covered face growing wider. Indeed, I may not have yet mastered the art of casting Necrotic Flame without the system’s assistance, but that didn’t mean I was left defenseless. Oh, no. I had a repertoire of tricks waiting to be unleashed. As I prepared myself for the impending second wave, a question gnawed at the back of my mind—when would the final dungeon bosses join the fray?