

BLACK PUDDING

CHAPTER 2

Ah, the sweet satisfaction! I was not daunted as we plummeted down the hole into the infinite darkness that swallowed us whole. Nope, instead, I clung tightly to my quarry. My corrosive form enveloped Niamh's head, and her frantic clawing for release proved fruitless. Her dissolving fingers had become bony stumps, and a wicked delight twisted within me. It wouldn't be long until the rest of her hands succumbed to my touch, a thought I savored with perverse glee. Though I knew a hint of remorse should stir within, but the alluring taste of cherries and sex of her melting flesh overwhelmed any traces of my past morals.

Niamh's hands, barely existent now, still strained against me with tenacious resistance. She forged what remained of her digits into a fist, landing a solid punch to her face—effectively, to me as well. Waves of pain washed over me, yet her desperate tenacity commanded my admiration. *Isn't she quite the stubborn one?* Unwavering, she battered me with a barrage of blows, akin to a boxer striking a speed bag. *Ugh, isn't this just fucking delightful?* And then, in the blink of an eye, the assault... ceased.

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| You have defeated a [Succubus]. |
| <u>LEVEL UP!</u> <u>LEVEL UP!</u> <u>LEVEL UP!</u> <u>LEVEL UP!</u> |
| You are now level 13. Racial Skill Unlocked [Polymorph] |
| Do you wish to [Absorb] [Succubus]? Yes / No |

Pure ecstasy! An orgasmic wave consumed me as I received the level up notification, prompting my body to constrict Niamh's face even tighter. Just like a watermelon succumbing to an excess of rubber bands, her head erupted. How I longed to shriek in euphoria, but it appeared fate had other designs for me.

Numbness and gluttony had been my most loyal sensations since awakening as a Black Pudding. Yet, now they were usurped by unadulterated agony! The abyss's floor suddenly emerged, striking with the ferocity of an apocalyptic explosion! A sickening splash resonated as Niamh's remnants burst open upon the stone. My viscous form followed next, splattering behind her wake.

Ugh, they call this a trial? Every part of me throbbed with pain, despite my form being reduced to a quivering goo. Lacking limbs, bones, organs, or a brain, I found myself a mere pudding, smeared across the stone floor with traces of succubus intermingled. My gaze fell upon the notification, and Absorb seemed to hold promise. After all, my options were limited while my form sluggishly pulled itself back together. In the faintest of mental whispers, I conceded, “Yes.”

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| [Absorb] [Succubus] Successful. |
| <u>Selectable</u> [Astral Insight] |

Irritation surged within me as I glimpsed the single selectable within the notification. *Why only one this time?* However, there was little I could do. Every advantage was crucial since I had no idea what awaited me in these depths. *Maybe it's time to explore all these selectables.*

Painstakingly reassembling myself, it was disheartening to find no remaining succubus pieces of flesh. It appeared that my splattered form had no trouble devouring the remnants after she burst like a pulverized pumpkin. *Ugh, what's happening to me?*

With a mental shake of my non-existent head, I proceeded to scrutinize the selectable section of my status sheet. And in no particular order, I began reading the skills descriptions.

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| <u>Selectable</u> [Astral Insight] [Blight] [Fear] [Life Drain] [Silk Webbing] [Spider Walk] [Stellar Void] [Venomous] |
| [Stellar Void] Gain the capability to call forth a pocket dimension through inherent sorcery. <u>Type</u> Racial Skill <u>Activation</u> Cast |
| [Venomous] Acquire the power to inflict [Poison] upon anyone who encounters your touch. <u>Type</u> |

Ability

Activation

Passive

[Spider Walk]

Obtain the skill to effortlessly traverse any surface, defying gravity itself.

Type

Ability

Activation

Passive

[Silk Webbing]

Acquire the capability to generate spider silk threads at will.

Type

Ability

Activation

Cast

[Life Drain]

Obtain the means to siphon a portion of your foes' life force to heal your injuries.

Type

Spell

Activation

Cast

[Blight]

Acquire the spell to unleash a cloud of [**Disease**] upon your adversaries.

Type

Spell

Activation

Cast

[Fear]

Gain the spell to spread an aura of [**Fear**] amongst your foes.

Type

Spell

Activation
Cast

[**Astral Insight**]

Obtain the power to discern the souls of those in your vicinity.

Type
Ability

Activation
Passive

In a bizarre mix of fascination and revulsion, I found myself faced with the reality of magic alongside vampires, necromancers, and demons. To top it off, I had become some kind of monster! It had been less than an hour since I woke up from death, and here I was, plunged into the depths of an abyss. The uncertainty of what awaited me down here only added to my frustration.

I have always been an antigun advocate. Well, maybe not an advocate, more of a silent complainer. *Whatever!* Right this moment, what I would give for a pistol or assault rifle. It's hilarious how danger can realign your values. My moral compass? Completely scrambled! The next best thing, or perhaps even better, would be ranged magic! I scanned my list, slightly irked by the vagueness of the descriptions. Blight, Life Drain, and Fear were the only spells that seemed like long-range attacks magic. Well, rather, they appeared to be more like area attacks. From my gaming experience, two of them were probably debuffs, leaving Life Drain as a healing spell that siphoned life from others to restore my own. Yet, I lacked any strong offensive spells, and that's precisely what I needed. *If only I had a fireball or lightning spell or any spell with some serious kick!*

Glancing at the list of Selectable skills, I felt a strong desire to activate them all. Without giving it much thought, I impulsively clicked on Silk Webbing.

Would you like to select [**Silk Webbing**] as an active Ability?
Yes / No

A smirk flickered through my mind as I opted for "Yes," but when nothing seemed to change, I felt a touch let down. It was then that the next prompt materialized, fueling my mounting frustration.

Two out of four Selectable skills have now been activated.

Fuck! What was the first one I selected? Oh, right, Mana Sight. I did ignore a notification, didn't I... Now how the hell do I deselect Silk Webbing? In a fit of cursing, I sifted through the status interface, unable to unearth the elusive option to deactivate it. The nagging sensation persisted that it was there, hidden in plain sight, probably smirking at my futile attempts. The problem was the status screen's simplicity; it revealed information only when I mentally tapped a choice, leaving

scant space for concealed elements. However, I couldn't shake the suspicion that my incompetence was why I couldn't reclaim that precious skill slot.

Shit, now I need to be careful about what I pick. Casting my gaze back at the list, Stellar Void caught my attention. The prospect of having dimensional storage was alluring, but offense was my priority. I needed an attack spell. My best long-range options seemed to be Life Drain and Blight. However, Life Drain functioned as both an attack and healing, and, judging by my current state, I'd hardly need healing as long as I could find some flesh to consume. After all, I'd just survived a tremendous fall. It seemed that as long as some part of me endured, not much could bring me down. That's probably why Fire is one of my weaknesses.

Then there's Blight, which appeared to be a combination of an attack and a Disease debuff, but the information provided was rather scant. However, Blight might be superior to Life Drain, considering it could potentially serve as both an offensive and debuff spell... *Damn, that's right.* I wasn't even sure if Blight was an attack spell. *Damnit, I'm making far too many assumptions! What really is a cloud of Disease—damage over time, maybe?*

The allure of Venomous was undeniable, its description hinting at a touch ability akin to Corrosive. The tantalizing prospect of inflicting a twin payload of suffering on those foolish enough to make contact with me was too irresistible to ignore. So, I made a mental note to circle back to it. In any case, pairing up passive attacks seemed like an obvious choice, even if both abilities required close-quarters combat.

Honestly, I won't lie. I really wanted Spider Walk. I mean, it seemed like an excellent choice, especially given my current predicament. I might even be able to scale up the hole I was thrown into with that ability. But knowing the bunch of cult-like lunatics up there, they probably wouldn't consider that "completing the trial." So, I had to stay focused on offensive skills.

Now, Astral Insight has its merits, but who am I kidding? Seeing someone's soul would be absolutely badass, especially since I've seen enough anime to know how cool that would be. However, Astral Insight seemed somewhat similar to Thermalsense. Still, I hadn't even checked what all Thermalsense truly does yet. Nevertheless, it didn't seem necessary to acquire Astral Insight just yet.

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| <p style="text-align: center;">[Thermalsense]</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Obtain the power to visually detect thermal differences and uncover the unseen.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Type</u> Racial Skill</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Activation</u> Cast</p> |
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With Venomous as an obvious choice for my third selectable, I found myself torn between Life Drain and Blight for the fourth. I contemplated the best decision, considering the possibility of saving that slot for a better option in the future. But the risk of missing out on an opportunity to

increase my lethality was too great, and I needed to maximize my chances of survival with my current abilities. I had to make the most of the options I had right now. And whatever happens, do not regret it later.

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| Name: Blake Race: Black Pudding Class: Dungeon Monster Level: 13 <u>Titles</u> None | | |
| <u>Racial Skills</u> [Absorb] [Corrosive] [Polymorph] [Thermalsense] <u>Spells</u> [Blight] [Mana Sight] <u>Abilities</u> [Silk Webbing] [Veil Polyglot] [Venomous] | <u>Vulnerabilities</u> [Fire] [Holy] <u>Immunities</u> [Acid] [Darkness] [Disease] [Poison] | <u>Unique</u> [Restricted] [Restricted] [Restricted] <u>Selectable</u> [Astral Insight] [Fear] [Life Drain] [Silk Webbing] [Stellar Void] |

As I perused through my updated status sheet, my attention was drawn to a new racial skill that wasn't there before my fall. Polymorph. I couldn't believe I had forgotten about it until now. But then again, I had a lot on my plate, like pulling myself back together after going splat. While scanning my list, I realized I hadn't checked what Absorb did either. Though I didn't care much for examining Corrosive, it was already pretty self-evident after encountering the spiders. *Also, why were Corrosive, Thermalsense, Polymorph, and Absorb already active? Whatever! Best not to complain when broken shit works out in my favor.*

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| [Polymorph] The capability to transform into any shape or form. <u>Type</u> Racial Skill <u>Activation</u> Passive |
| [Absorb] |

The ability to absorb the skills of your prey and make them your own.

Type
Racial Skill

Activation
Cast

I found myself disheartened by the sparse details regarding my skills, especially Absorb, the erratic nature of my thieving prowess, and why the succubus gave me only one new skill. Yet, I lucked out with my initial brush with the arachnid menace. However, I was left with only one mystery remaining.

[Restricted]

The conditions for unlocking this skill have not been met.

Type
Unique

Activation
Locked

Well, shit! My frustration with the restrictions dissipated as quickly as it had arrived. I surveyed my surroundings, or at least what I could make out in the pitch-black chamber. It dawned on me that I had been so engrossed in my status sheet that I hadn't even realized the absence of light. But now, I had the perfect opportunity to try out [**Thermalsense**].

The world erupted in a psychedelic display before settling into purple, orange, and black shades. It took me a moment to get my bearings, but then I realized I had Predator vision or maybe snake vision? *Who cares about labels!* I couldn't help but wonder if this is how all Black Puddings normally see. It was a racial skill, after all. Either way, I was relieved to find that it was much easier to use than with Mana Sight. *No nausea, sweet!*

I found myself in a dimly lit chamber chiseled out of solid stone. The walls were adorned with mysterious engravings, possibly hieroglyphs, though the details were difficult to make out. The only discernible feature was the slight variation in temperature between the etched surface and the rest of the walls. Most of the walls were a deep shade of purple, with random black splotches interspersed with the carvings. Orange speckles and smears littered the floor, probably remnants of Niamh's explosive demise. The wonderful taste of her blood and flesh still lingered in me, and the image of her obliteration refused to fade. *Therapy might be in order.*

As I scanned the chamber with my thermal vision, a black figure caught my attention in one corner, at least twenty meters away. Either my ability was failing me, or there was a person in the room with me. *Yay...*

I'm not alone! My world still appeared in a kaleidoscope of thermal colors as my Thermalsense remained active as I stared at the person in the corner. I couldn't tell if it was human or not, but I doubted they had noticed me yet. I mean, I was still pretty small... wait, scratch that. I had tripled in size since consuming the succubus. *Just how much fat was that demoness storing in those tits? Wait that 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. The silhouette in the distance remained motionless, likely relying on their lack of visibility to evade detection. *Foolish.* I could see them clearly thanks to my Thermalsense. *This will 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 attack first! Am I right—right?* I'm beginning to accept I've lost any resemblance to my past morals and sanity.

My pudding-low-crawl came to a halt at the figure's boot. To my disbelief, they remained oblivious to my presence, even though I was directly in front of them. It appeared that they were completely incapable of seeing in the dark. Nevertheless, I couldn't help but admire their steadfastness in remaining silent and still. There was no indication of movement from them, not even the rise and fall... of their chest. *Well, crapola, they are already dead. Damn it, Blake, stop feeling disappointed you weren't the one to kill them!*

With my thermal vision, I should have realized that a body appearing black meant they were literally dead cold. As I slithered myself to their side, I noticed some curvature in the chest. *It's a woman!* It was difficult to discern her age, but I could tell she hadn't been dead for more than a few days. A slight scent of decay was in the air, and despite my best efforts, I couldn't help but feel a twisted sense of hunger. *No, no, no, stop thinking like that, Blake!* The body hadn't decomposed enough to make me salivate. ***Blake—what did I just tell myself?!***

I couldn't resist the temptation of not letting their belongings go to waste, so I attempted to pull off a boot, but my current slimy state caused me to stick to it like a gooey mess, slowly corroding it away. *Damn it!* I let go of the boot before causing any further damage, but a hole had formed by the big toe. I was thinking like a human as if I needed boots or gear. It wasn't like I could use them.

Shit, I guess I have no other choice. Sorry, not sorry! I wasn't even sure if Absorb worked on a corpse. Well, notwithstanding a ghoul. Still, there's no time like the present to find out. Without further hesitation, I threw myself over the woman's body like a sticky tar blanket, completely engulfing her beneath me. As she was already dead, her body seemed to dissolve much faster than the succubus had during our fall. *Huh, she tasted like hot cocoa and mint. Delicious!*

Do you wish to [**Absorb**] [**Necromancer Apprentice**]?

Yes / No

I couldn't help but do a little squiggly pudding dance of joy upon realizing that I didn't have to be the one to make the kill to use Absorb on a corpse. My elation was through the roof, and I mentally cheered, "Yes!"

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| [Absorb] [Necromancer Apprentice] Successful. |
| <u>Selectable</u> [Spirit Vessel] [Necrotic Flame] |

Huh, sweet, two new skills! I was pleasantly surprised I had gained two new skills this time, but I wasn't sure how Absorbed worked and why it was so inconsistent. *Wait a minute—Necrotic Flame?!*

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|---|
| [Necrotic Flame] Acquire the arcane magic to unleash a deadly inferno of necrotic flames. <u>Type</u> Spell <u>Activation</u> Cast |
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Just fucking wonderful! I finally filled all my open skill slots, and what did I get? A fucking badass ranged spell! I know what I said, I wouldn't regret it, but fuck, I now regretted filling all my slots!

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 racial skill snapped to mind [**Thermalsense**], and just like that, my world came back into full view in an array of oranges, purples, and blacks.

After consuming the corpse in the room, I grew weary of crawling around the dark, dank chamber. I decided it was time to try out my latest experiment, Polymorph. I closed my eyes and imagined the woman I had just devoured but with a few modifications of my own. Taller, curvier, and alluring – a perfect creature!

I hoped to see my new, alluring form as I opened my eyes. But, to my dismay, I was still the same slimy, grotesque creature. I tried to remember if there were any instructions or a manual, but I was left to my own devices. *It's Polymorphing time!* My mind raced with the possibilities. But still, nothing happened. There was no transformation or escape from this goo form. It was almost laughable, in a sick and twisted sort of way.

Instead of mentally shouting it out, I mentally clicked [**Polymorph**]. Suddenly, 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 newly formed hand open wide.

A twisted smile tugged at the corners of my new face as I ascended, my laughter echoing in the darkness of my mind. It was a joyous madness, an intoxicating rush of self-gratification. Here I was, reborn in another world, transformed into a creature of pure darkness and instinct. I've done unspeakable things that would make my former self shudder in horror. I've battled spiders, ghouls, and even a seductive succubus, all of whom I devoured with delight. But it wasn't just them – I couldn't resist sinking my corrosive flesh into a random corpse as well. *And the taste... oh, the taste!* It was like nothing I'd ever experienced before.

I should feel disgusted, guilty, and perhaps even traumatized by my actions. *But I don't.* Instead, I stand tall on my own two legs, feeling an unprecedented sense of pride and satisfaction. It's as if my new life as a monster has unlocked a hidden part of me, a part that revels in chaos and destruction. As I bask in my newfound freedom, a flicker of doubt crosses my mind. *Is this who I really am now? Am I truly a monster?* But the thought quickly dissipates, replaced by a surge of adrenaline at the prospect of new prey to hunt and consume. Yes, I am a Black Pudding, a creature of chaos, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

A chuckle echoed in my mind as I held out my hand like a vapid Instagram model, eager to admire my new form. I had the perfect idea of focusing [**Mana Sight**] through my hand to get a good look at myself. Unfortunately, my excitement blinded me to the fact that the chamber was still shrouded in darkness, and Thermalsense wasn't enough to show me the goods. All I saw was a glowing orange figure against a purple background, and it wasn't quite what I was hoping for. Sure, I looked vaguely human, but more like a bald, short version of Slenderman than anything else. Talk about a disappointment. *Where the hell are the curves and alluring features, I had envisioned for myself?*

As I took my first wobbly steps with my new legs, I couldn't help but feel the joy return at my newborn freedom of movement. Walking was easy, like riding a bike, and I felt a sense of power surging through me with each step. The long narrow corridor before me seemed to stretch on forever, but I strode forward confidently, my head held high. Well, that may be an exaggeration. I honestly looked like a wobbling toddler waddling down a dark hallway. *Whatever!*

Thermalsense was a relief compared to Mana Sight, but its orange glow was still far from perfect. And, I had to admit, I still preferred Mana Sight over this snake-like perspective, but sadly everything was still too dark to even see with the spell. After my fifth cast of Thermalsense dissipated, I noticed a ghostly luminescence with Mana Sight taunting me from afar. With half an hour's pursuit, I finally reached the elusive glow, and oh, what an exhilarating reward awaited me.

As I emerged from the confining passage, an expansive cavern unveiled itself, a precipice gazing down at a sprawling abyss. I could now see the entire cavern system. A colossal lake held court in the chamber, accompanied by a cascading waterfall, yet I marveled at my newfound tolerance.

Hallelujah! No more nausea. It's about time my body embraced Mana Sight. I might not have enjoyed perfect clarity, but the eerie splendor of the landscape lay exposed before me. Alas, no path announced itself as the obvious choice. But lo and behold, a good two football fields beneath

me, a squabbling quintet disrupted the silence. *Listen to that delightful racket!* I strained to discern the identities of those bellowing beings, but their true nature remained cloaked in mystery. Yet, their raucous clamor was music to my ears.

“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. I’m still learning about my own dark impulses.

“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 would 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 off.”

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 three 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 the three of you.”

Hmm, seems obvious those are five of the six champion candidates. I also suppose that makes the dead body I ate, Sophia. Sorry, not sorry! 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, 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 dark fae.”

“S-sorry, Jason.”

*Level thirteen in three days? **What. The. Fuck?! I already match their prowess after a paltry two hours in this realm? Maybe Aurelia's faith in me wasn't entirely unfounded. Ugh, who wants to be some evil champion, though? On second thought... it might not be the worst fate.***

*Suppose the other candidates are also at or near my level. In that case, I'll need to do some serious leveling before facing them. I'm outnumbered five to one, and there are two things I hate: 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 am a schizo—**Fuck**, my stepdad turned out to be right!*

Suddenly, an unexpected hushed voice emanated from my rear, “Pssst!”

Who the fuck just did that?!