

# BLACK PUDDING

## CHAPTER 10

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The entrance to my next boss fight was a pair of rusted gates leading into an ancient coliseum that lay in ruins. Peeking through the iron gates, I saw three awe-inspiring herculean statues within the heart of the arena, looking as if they were poised for battle. From where I stood, I couldn't tell if they were made from granite or marble, but it didn't matter. I knew they were the bosses of this arena. Put my magic against any living foe, and I was a terrifying, unstoppable force of acid and poison, but that wouldn't do shit against stone... *I'll lose against them!*

*Oh, stop worrying. We can take them!*

"How? We can't poison a rock; I doubt acid will do much better against those statues, maybe if they were made of metal. All that's left for our offensive Spells is Necrotic Flame, and I don't think it's hot enough to melt stone."

Having a split personality to talk with, who could also manage my magic and abilities, was nice even if I refused to admit that to her—myself, whatever, but I was starting to believe she was the more delusional one if she thought we could win this fight. *Ugh! What I need is a spell that could pound them into rubble.*

*Will an ability do?*

"What ability?"

Without warning, my world shifted within me as if space were folding in on itself. I panicked at first as the memory of being torn in half came to mind! But, before I could react, a large circular shield popped out, followed by a massive five-foot cleave and a single hulking red toad leg.

"Where did those come from?"

*Bar—Blake, I stored the two item drops from the last boss fight with your storage Racial Skill, Stellar Void, and you fell asleep while eating, so I did the same with the toad legs.*

"Okay, but why pull them out now? I can't use those weapons, they're too big, and I'll dissolve them if I even touch them. And, while I'm not arguing against a snack right now, I would like to reiterate my question, why now?"

*Umm, yeah. These items are enchanted, Blake, so you can't dissolve them. But, I can easily turn off the acid passive if—*

"WHAT?! How long have you been able to do that?"

*When have you needed it turned off?*

"Well... That's beside the point. Anyways, what's with the toad leg?"

*Using Stellar Void used up a lot of our mana, and since Absorb is now tier three, we've got the added perk of replenishing health, mana, and stamina whenever you eat.*

“Can I see the new tier description? Doesn't my health and mana restore on their own with a little time and food?”

*We both know you don't actually want to read it. And well, yeah. You regenerate with food and a bit of rest, but now it does it much faster. Just eat the stupid leg so we can start this fight.*

Giving myself a shrug, I picked up the leg and let it dissolve in my hands. The wonderful taste of orange chicken washed into me as I melted the former dungeon boss's leg.

*Not like that, Barbie—Blake, use Absorb on it!*

My split-psycho activated Absorb on her own, and before I could protest, my arms reverted to liquid tar engulfing the leg. In a blink, my gooey arms returned to their human-like state. It was strange. I was starting to notice a pattern that none of my Spells or Abilities were bound by their descriptions constraints when my split personality was using them. Of course, she always has an excuse ready... Still, something was off, and I had a suspension cross my mind, but not wanting my deranged half to catch on, I crushed those thoughts before I could mentally voice them.

“You know what, I should give you a name. We really can't have both of us referring to ourselves as Blake. And while I enjoy calling you bitch, I should save that for special occasions.”

*Hmm... I hadn't thought about it.*

“That's strange because I had.”

*Oh, whatever, call me Alpha, and you, my Beta.*

“Fuck no! If anything, I'm Alpha, and you're my bitch! Pick something else, and I'm not changing my name.”

*Rude! Fine, let's go with Ava.*

“Sure, sounds like a swell name, bitch.”

*Ugh, why do I even bother with myself? Go pick up that sword and shield.*

“I don't know how to use those, and they're way too bulky for me.”

*Do you trust me?*

“**No!** When have I ever trusted myself with anything?”

*Argh, just shut up and go get them.*

“Fine!”

I stomped over to the enormous spartan-like shield and cleaver. The sword was a combination of a meat cleaver and a machete in the form of a massive ugly sword. It reminded me of a familiar

Final Fantasy weapon. Only move the hilt to the back edge and chop off the tip to give it a flat top, and you've got yourself Cloud's bastardized Buster Sword. *I already hated it.*

I wasn't sure if I could even pick them up, but to my surprise, they started to shrink when I grabbed hold of them.

"What the hell, Ava?!"

*They're enchanted, so, of course, they will adjust to your size.*

"And how did you know they would shrink like that?"

*How could I not? You—we've played enough MMOs to know enchanted weapons should scale to our size.*

"Uh-huh... Yeah, of course, silly me."

Trying not to let myself question... Myself... I lifted up the two dropped items. I was impressed with the shield. It was now at a dimension someone my size could wield, still a little bigger than the Star Spangled Man's, as this one covered me from shin to chin. The ugly sword had shrunk in length and was now three feet long. Still an oversized weapon for my height. What impressed me was that I didn't feel over-encumbered by either of these two items. I felt like I was holding foam cosplay props as I gave a couple practice swings and thrusts.

"I think I'm ready, but I still don't believe we can take those three."

*We've got this. Just trust me.*

"Easier said than done," I grumbled.

*Why are you so pissy?*

"Oh, I don't know. I'm about to fight three boss monsters made of stone. Doubt any of my spells will work on them, and most importantly, I can't eat them. Hell, I don't even know if Absorb will work on those statues. And to top things off, you've got me going in there with a stupid sword and shield. So, I think I've earned the right to be a little pissy."

*Geesh, sorry, but don't worry, we've got this.*

I continued to gripe to myself as I pushed open the rusted gate into the ruined coliseum. There was an eeriness in the air that left me feeling unsettled. As I moved across the sand-coated floor, I couldn't help but notice all the collapsed pillars lying in heaps throughout the arena. Sections of stadium seats were no better, as one segment had completely collapsed. However, the dome ceiling still remained, probably chiseled into the cavern system of the dungeon. But that sense of eeriness continued to grow. And worse, I couldn't explain why, but I was salivating.

*Don't worry about using the full Mana Sight. I'll keep an eye out for both of us. You just focus on whatever's in front of us.*

My attention was squarely on the three hulking statues in the center of the arena. I may have been wrong when describing them as herculean. They were gargantuan! I stood in height, close to their upper thighs. All three were beautifully carved nude marble statues. One was of a woman holding a shield similar to mine, only hers was golden, and in her other hand, she held a golden spear suitable for an archangel. The two male statues weren't too dissimilar from one another. Only one held a golden claymore, and the other a double-ended battleaxe. All three's weapons had exquisite engravings and elaborate decorations carved into them.

I had gotten so used to having my sight that I had neglected my other senses, most importantly, my sense of smell. Before realizing what I was dealing with, it had already happened. The sand floor throughout the arena rippled before exploding out one after another in a symphony of chaos. Rotting undead fighters were leaping out from the sand, carrying rusted weapons of all types, seeking a fight as they charged straight at me. *Oh god, they smell divine! Calm down, Blake. Fight first, eat later!*

Several dozen undead came charging at me, looking as if they intended to wrestle me into a dogpile. Before I knew what was happening, I spun out of the path of a mallet swing aimed at my head. I brought my cleaver down and chopped another undead from head to ass in half. At the same time, my shield took a spear strike. Then the world around me for ten meters in all directions turned purple!

Necrotic Flame surrounded me as more and more undead lept out of the sand in a neverending cycle of rusted weapons, teeth chomping, and rotting claw slashes. And yet I found myself dancing through the decomposing undead with the grace of a ballerina. Where ever I went, my cleaver found bone and flesh. All while, I could hear myself humming... Wait, am I humming, The Safety Dance? I was a goddess of destruction... And it scared me, for I knew it was not me doing all of this, but my so-called split personality, Ava.

Ava continued with her trail of carnage as I bore witness, a mere passenger along for the ride. A shield bash here, tentacle leg sweep there, and a double head slice over here. Watching what she could do with my body was a magnificent, terrifying sight. If she wasn't me, as I was beginning to fear, I didn't know how to stop her. Worse, I had to do everything I could not to let these thoughts leak out into my own head, for not even my thoughts were safe from her. I needed to bury these fears and not think the words aloud.

*Holy crap, Ava. You're a beast!*

"Hahaha! Thanks, Blake! I can't remember the last time I'd had this much fun!"

*...The last time...*

Before I even knew it, the last undead had been dispatched. For some reason, I felt disappointed. I had expected something more, an epic grand boss battle, but in the end, it was a simple mob skirmish against two hundred or so undead. What's worse, I hadn't done a thing. Ava had soloed it on her own and made it look simple.

“Don’t feel too disappointed, Blake. That was only the first round. You can do the second round all by yourself if you want.”

*Gee, thanks...*