

## Chapter 51 Choice

Kate and Logan hunted down another three small groups of undead until only fifteen minutes of Eloise's magic remained. The sky had darkened too.

Kate ripped her hammer out from an undead orc's head before she turned towards her ally. She saw him raise his shotgun and ran towards him, seeing the gray creature rushing past the trees.

The undead direwolf reached him first.

Her ally pulled the trigger, the deafening sound echoing through the forest, a chunk of the beast's snout and legs ripped away by the shotgun blast. The monster only slowed for a split second, rushing forward before it bit down into the large man's thigh.

Her ally remained standing. He angled the weapon down and shot again, twice with loud and wet impacts, until the beast stopped moving.

Kate reached him then and watched as he opened the monster's jaws around his thigh with a pained groan.

She listened for more monsters and deactivated her magic when there was nothing else to fight, and kill.

"We should head back," Logan said, touching his leg where the wolf had bitten deep.

"Wait with the magic," Kate said and got her pack. She cleaned the nasty wounds and disinfected them, then looked at him as he added his magic. Just enough to stop the bleeding. She then covered everything in a bandage and closed it tight. "Ready?"

Logan grunted.

"Ready," he said.

Kate looked at him, listening to the quiet and snow covered forest for a long moment. "Let's go."

They used the last bit of their heightened stamina regeneration to circle back and collect the two gray bodies of the small undead monsters they had faced in the first group. The others had been comprised of humans, goblins, and orcs, only this last one with a direwolf. Kate deemed its pelt unusable after the three close range shotgun blasts.

"Coming up on the gate," Logan said through the radio, the two of them climbing down into the trench they had dug.

Kate could feel the cold now. It had slowly seeped into her bones but she felt as if she could still fight. The undead had been easy to kill. Easy to hunt down, falling to their guns and weapons.

*But there were too many. Too many to stop.*

She breathed in deep. A part of her wanted to continue through the evening, through the night, to kill every last monster walking in her forest. In her valley. She shivered. And she knew it was unreasonable. They had to use every bit of preparation that they could. They needed food, warmth, rest, and ammo.

Jon opened the gate, his rifle slung around his back. "Come on in, food and coffee are ready."

Kate did a double take when only Logan followed her inside. She shook her head and went towards the armory.

She soon sat on the couch with a hot water bottle and covered in blankets, Eloise bringing them food while Melusine checked Logan's wound. Her hands glowed as she healed it.

"Won't get used to this itching," Logan murmured before he covered up his leg once more.

Kate looked through her messages and ate in silence, shivering from time to time as her body got rid of the remaining cold.

**'ding' 'You have defeated [Undead Human]'**

**'ding' 'You have defeated [Undead Goblin]'**

...

**'ding' 'You have defeated [Undead Direwolf]'**

**'ding' 'Omen of Vengeance reaches lvl 19'**

**Stat points +2**

**Vigor +1**

**'ding' 'Mindless Ferocity reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 6'**

**'ding' 'Mindless Ferocity reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 7'**

**'ding' 'Blood Frenzy reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 3'**

**'ding' 'Blood Frenzy reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 4'**

**'ding' 'Vengeful Charge reaches lvl 19'**

**'ding' 'Blood Rupture reaches lvl 7'**

**'ding' 'Blood for the Living reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 2'**

**'ding' 'Fury of the Unarmored reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 2'**

**'ding' 'Fury of the Unarmored reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 3'**

**'ding' 'Two Handed Weapon Fighting reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 2'**

**'ding' 'Two Handed Weapon Fighting reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 3'**

**'ding' 'Unrelenting Carnage reaches lvl 13'**

**'ding' 'Silent Striker reaches lvl 14'**

**Serenity +1**

**'ding' 'Bewildering Wave reaches lvl 5'**

*'ding' 'Aura of Silence reaches lvl 2'*

...

*'ding' 'Aura of Silence reaches lvl 4'*

*'ding' 'Heightened Hearing reaches lvl 16'*

*'ding' 'Hushed Presence reaches lvl 4'*

...

*'ding' 'Hushed Presence reaches lvl 6'*

Kate put her new two points into Vitality.

Allison had soft music playing through her phone, the small device connected to one of the solar chargers Kate had gotten from the electronics store in Keilberg.

It felt so long ago now.

When all of this had started.

She finished her food and hugged her blankets close.

"Is Kate sad?" Celeste asked, the girl sitting down next to Kate before she snuggled into the blankets and hugged her arm.

"Yeah," Kate said after a while, touching Celeste's head before she ruffled her hair. The armory felt colder than before. Not because of the wood stove. It had just felt like they were fighting back, like they were surviving. And now. Kate didn't really know.

It just felt colder.

"The gear from these, Eratur you called them," Allison said. "It's all magical. The small crossbow and sickle are similar to the staff we have, they're magical but I can't tell in what way, or what it does. It feels like they're seeped in magic. The armor... the chest pieces are both damaged but their effects are better than the patchwork scale armor I made for you. Studded Bray Leather Armor, the quality listed is rare and it has two medium grade resistances, one against fire and one against cold. The pants are both common, each with one low grade resistance."

"It's all too small for us to wear," Jon said.

"I'm small," Celeste said.

"It's also damaged but we can clean it up," Allison said. "Point is, these little creatures were well equipped."

"Think they came here like that?" Kate asked.

"Most likely," Jon said. "The orcs and goblins had their armor too, and it's not been long enough for anyone to make leather armor, at least I don't think so."

"Maybe, maybe not," Allison said. "I got a level up earlier and a skill to cure and tan leather, with magic. I tried with a bit of direwolf skin and a saltwater brine and well, it's like the process is sped up a hundredfold, it even works without the brine but it's much slower. Still, this means I can simply skip entire steps when treating materials with just magic. If others out there or any monsters have similar skills like that or at a higher level, I'm not sure what is possible."

Kate imagined how Grey would fall into a monologue about all the new possibilities that opened up with Allison's revelation. Instead, they were quiet until Logan spoke up.

"I got to level fifteen. And I got my evolution. Most of the options weren't that striking, except for the one I chose. It's called Sacred Exterminator," he said.

Kate couldn't help but chuckle. *Near as silly as Omen of Vengeance.*

She sighed, the smile dying on her lips.

"What are the upgrades?" Jon asked.

"Everything costs less mana to use and keep up. Another change now allows me to use my magic on projectiles, like your spell," Logan said. "My group buff now also affects... anger and resolve. I don't think it's supposed to calm and focus anymore, instead it suggests it would rile others and myself up to fight. My ability to call enemies towards me suggests it would terrify them as well, forcing them into a frenzy."

"More focus on offensive abilities then," Melusine said. She opened her mouth again and closed it.

"My support Class leveled too. I unlocked an ability that lets me better resist getting stunned by enemy strikes, uses mana too, and a passive one that reduces the stamina needed to wear heavy armor."

Kate listened, making sure she wouldn't forget the various abilities he had. After all, they would go and hunt together again on the next day. Or they would fight, should monsters attack in the night.

Jon checked the radio frequencies again while Melusine set up a board game in the cellar and took Celeste with her.

Kate joined them soon. The food had helped but she still felt tired, more so emotionally than physically. She didn't shower that evening, crawling into her sleeping bag whilst wearing her gear and falling asleep a few minutes later.

She woke up late the next day, both herself and Logan once more preparing to hunt undead in the proximity of the castle.

Eloise provided food while the rest helped them where they could.

Kate and Logan found a few more groups of undead, methodically taking them out with their rifles and magical skills. Logan's new ability to infuse his bullets with sacred magic brought a massive change to their battles, coupled with Kate's Aura of Silence, the first few fights were over before a single undead even reached them. The largest group had Kate fighting and killing for several minutes, using her Reaper Jump and Vengeful Charge to avoid being overwhelmed. In the end, Logan stepped in with his sacred magic infused shotgun and his voice ability to call monsters towards him, Kate cleaning up the rear while the newly evolved Exterminator mowed down the front line of undead, first with his shotgun and then with his greatsword.

It was a bloody affair, corpses already littering the snow covered forest east of the castle. It seemed like most if not all undead had come from that direction.

They had killed enough of the creatures to award Kate another level in each of her Classes, bringing her main one to level twenty and her support Class to fifteen.

The latter awarded Kate with quite a few messages in regards to an evolution, confirming that support Classes likely evolved in the same manner as the main ones did. They gathered anything useful they could find, then left the corpses behind and returned to the castle at noon so that she could have a moment in peace to look through her options.

***'ding' 'Requirements met for Class Evolution [Silent Striker] becomes [Sound Mage]'***

***The world shall tremble. You have used sound magic to aid you in battle. You have used ranged attacks to kill your enemies before they had noticed your presence. You have ruptured and healed your eardrums several times. You have learned to trust and integrate the magic of sound.***

***The Sound Mage wields sound in a more direct manner. Just as powerful as melee swings, your magic will tear through your foes at medium range. They command the battlefield, disorient and kill even the most powerful creatures with their will alone. Beware those who wield the might of sound.***

***Unique stat: Calm***

***Would you like to evolve your Class [Silent Striker] into [Sound Mage]?***

***'ding' 'Requirements met for Class Evolution [Silent Striker] becomes [Roaring Pursuer]'***

***Deafening rage. You have screamed to intimidate your enemies. You have laughed in the face of death. You have killed stunned and deafened creatures with a melee weapon. You have hunted down and fought groups of your enemies more numerous than your own, without fear, and without mercy.***

***The Roaring Pursuer is neither hidden nor do they hunt with deception. They face their enemies head on, no matter their overwhelming strength or numbers. Equipped with weapons imbued with sound, they shatter the earth and flesh of their foes alike. They find their prey no matter where they may hide. Enact your judgment, with utmost violence.***

***Unique stat: Brutality***

***Would you like to evolve your Class [Silent Striker] into [Roaring Pursuer]?***

***'ding' 'Requirements met for Class Evolution [Silent Striker] becomes [Unseen Enforcer]'***

***Hunt and slay. You have slain several enemies before they had noticed your presence. You have successfully sneaked up on several enemies before striking. You have hidden from enemy groups to prepare an ambush. You have ran and avoided your enemies only to strike back at them at an opportune time.***

***The Quiet Enforcer is not heard until their will is enacted. They use sound to misdirect, to conceal, and to hide. Minor illusions crafted from light itself help to perfect an unseen approach. They hear every movement, every shift of their foes. Ready to strike, they stalk their prey until a single moment of weakness is revealed. Do not be seen, huntress, and kill those who have wronged you.***

***Unique stat: Finesse***

***Would you like to evolve your Class [Silent Striker] into [Unseen Enforcer]?***

Kate supposed that Sound Mage was an option to shift towards a more magic based style of fighting. More utility at medium range while using mana to inflict damage, however that looked like with sound magic. She considered but quickly dismissed the option, mainly due to her lacking stat points in Wisdom. She had gotten used to her more direct approach and now that she fought with Logan by her side, she wanted to focus on a more resilient set of abilities. So that he could stand back and shoot as often as possible while she fought in the thick of it.

The Unseen Enforcer looked like a continuation of the Silent Striker, with more focus on concealment and staying hidden.

Perhaps if things had been different, she would've thought it a reasonable choice. Perhaps if she still held the notion that battles should be avoided, that they should consider their strikes well, then maybe she would've seen the use in illusions and staying invisible.

She no longer wished to hide away. She no longer wished to consider. She wanted to find the monsters walking in their woods. She wanted to find the cause responsible for the undead who had come to kill her companions. And she wanted the power to fight, and to kill them. With any means necessary.

Kate chose the only option that she felt she had. The only option that promised her what she wanted.

***'ding' 'Class change: [Silent Striker] becomes [Roaring Pursuer]'***

Kate closed her eyes and grit her teeth against the magic flowing through her. She could hear the breaths of Logan, could hear the clicks and shifts of mechanical pieces as he reassembled his rifle. She could hear the boiling water heated up by Eloise in the cellar below and she could hear the shifting pages of the book Jon held in his hands. And she could feel the floor shake ever so slightly at the tapping boots of Allison working at her table.

Kate breathed deep and felt her newfound magic settle in her mind and body. She opened her eyes.

***'ding' 'Skills changed by [Roaring Pursuer]'***

**Active: Frightening Growl – lvl 6**

*Use sound magic to produce a growl. Enemies who can hear the growl may find their minds and bodies stricken with fear. The nature of this spell makes it difficult to locate its source.*

*[Frightening Growl] becomes [Thunderous Shout]*

**Active: Thunderous Shout – lvl 6**

*Stun your foes with fear. Rupture their eardrums and go forth to kill your enemies. Shout your rage, shout your fury, and empower your voice with deafening sound.*

**Active: Bewildering Wave – lvl 6**

*Produce a wave of sound magic with you at the center, disorienting everyone around you that can perceive sound. Higher levels allow for a more targeted use.*

*[Bewildering Wave] becomes [Reverberating Charge]*

**Active: Reverberating Charge – lvl 6**

*Fuel your magic into a charge of sound, flowing through your body or weapon before you strike your enemy or unleash the power held within into the ground, to create a wave of shattering force before you.*

**Passive: Heightened Hearing – lvl 17**

*Your ears are far more sensitive to the sounds around you. You learn to focus on what you are looking for, to tune out unnecessary sounds, and to be alerted by creatures long before your other senses may pick up on their presence.*

*[Heightened Hearing] becomes [Sound Perception]*

**Passive: Sound Perception – lvl 17**

*Your perception of sound is heightened tremendously. You may focus on what you are looking for and you may tune out unnecessary sounds. You learn with focus and mana to deprive yourself of all other senses, for a time, and for a purpose, to tune yourself to sound and sound alone.*

**Passive: Echo Location – lvl 5**

*Your ability to orient yourself with the help of echoing sound is increased dramatically. Use sound waves to find your way. You may deactivate this effect if needed.*

*[Echo Location] becomes [Echo Awareness]*

**Passive: Echo Awareness – lvl 5**

*You may use the echo of sound to orient yourself and to perceive your surroundings. You learn to adjust the frequency of sound produced to more easily penetrate through walls and trees, through stone and metal. Little you may see but you will find your prey, hiding in the dark. You may deactivate this effect if needed.*

**Passive: Hushed Presence – lvl 7**

**Your movements become softer, all of your actions producing less sound in turn, should you will it so.**

**[Hushed Presence] becomes [Tremor Sense]**

**Passive: Tremor Sense – lvl 7**

**You learn to perceive even the tiniest vibrations in any surface that you touch. Hunt that which you cannot see.**

Kate read through the changes in silence. She notified Logan when she was done and felt ready to leave again. With only an hour left to their current increased stamina regeneration rate, she wanted to focus on testing her new abilities while they didn't hunt but reinforced the castle. Her battle axe at hand, Kate and Logan went out into the forest and began to cut down trees.

**Kate Lindgren**

**Unspent stat points: 0**

**Class: Omen of Vengeance – lvl 20**

- **Active: Mindless Ferocity – 2nd lvl 7**
- **Active: Blood Frenzy – 2nd lvl 4**
- **Active: Vengeful Charge – lvl 19**
- **Active: Reaper Jump – lvl 7**
- **Active: Blood Rupture – lvl 7**
- **Passive: Blood for the Living – 2nd lvl 2**
- **Passive: Fury of the Unarmored – 2nd lvl 3**
- **Passive: Two Handed Weapon Fighting – 2nd lvl 3**
- **Passive: Unrelenting Carnage – lvl 13**
- **Passive: Terrifying Presence – lvl 7**

**Support class: Roaring Pursuer – lvl 15**

- **Active: Thunderous Shout – lvl 6**
- **Active: Reverberating Charge – lvl 6**
- **Active: Aura of Silence – lvl 7**
- **Passive: Sound Perception – lvl 17**
- **Passive: Echo Awareness – lvl 5**
- **Passive: Tremor Sense – lvl 7**

**Support class: Locked**

**Status:**

**Vitality: 30**

**Vigor: 5**

**Endurance: 20**



**Perseverance: 15**

**Strength: 21**

**Dexterity: 8**

**Intelligence: 7**

**Wisdom: 10**

**Serenity: 15**

**Equipment:**

**Torso: Patchwork Scale Armor [Common]**

- Low grade Acid Resistance

**Legs: -**

**Trinket: -**

**Food: Sweetened cinnamon porridge [Duration 1 hour]**

- Stamina regeneration +10