

## Chapter 89 Breath

Kate woke up, her eyes opening wide as she grabbed for her weapons. She saw the dim light of headlamps lighting up a broad stone bridge and remembered where she was.

The undead. The fights. She closed her eyes. All she heard were people. Quiet conversations, whispered prayers, snoring, stirring sounds of restless sleep. And she heard quiet sobs, names whispered in the dark.

Her body ached. She'd gotten injured quite a few times today, had healed herself back and had fought on. She'd need a few days and nights to recover from this.

Kate sighed.

*That thing almost got me.*

She looked down at her hands and closed her eyes, slowing her breathing as best she could. It felt uncomfortable to move, so she stayed where she was and looked inward instead, checking her messages before she found the one she'd been looking for.

**'ding' 'You have defeated [Priest of Ceres]'**

*Priest of Ceres. Was that... the eye? Ceres? Or some concept or something else?* She put the thoughts aside, too exhausted to consider them now. They had killed the thing. The red veins were gone. Did that mean the end of the dungeon? The end of the undead? She checked more of her messages, ignoring the kill and level up notifications for now. She'd already applied her stat points in between the battles.

**'ding' 'You have defeated a source of unfurling death. You have unlocked the third tier of Class abilities and are rewarded a number of third tier points based on the difficulty of this endeavor, and your contribution towards victory.'**

**'ding' 'You have received [5] third tier skill points.'**

*A source. Just one of them.* She sat up slightly and leaned against the stone railing of the bridge. Someone had placed a backpack under her head. She opened it and found some water and a can of beans. She gulped down the water and found a spoon, then opened the can and ate the beans. Cold mush, but her stomach was calling for food, it didn't matter in what form it came.

She sighed, scraping the last of the beans out of the can before she set it down on the ground. Glancing over the edge of the railing, all she could see was an abyss.

"We'll check with the crafters. Wrap it all up and make sure not to touch anything directly." She heard the voice of Valery somewhere inside the cavern where they'd fought the supposed Priest.

A few people stood guard on the other side of the bridge but Kate couldn't feel any tremors from beyond. They were probably safe for now.

She sighed. She was ready to sleep away a dozen hours or more, but not here. Not now.

Instead, she read the rest of her messages.

There were of course the kill and level up notifications. She went over those quickly, her main Class now at forty-seven. Six stat points she had distributed during the fighting. Five into Endurance and one into Wisdom. *Guess I thought my Strength and Vitality were high enough during those fights.*

*I did survive, so maybe I was right.*

Quite a few of her skills had reached the second tier but there was something else that caught her attention.

***‘ding’ ‘For defeating [Priest of Ceres], source of unfurling death, you unlock one General skill.’***

***Available skills:***

***General: Undead haze – Lvl 1***

***Use mana to shroud yourself from the undead, becoming effectively invisible to their perception for a limited duration of time.***

***General: Darksight – lvl 1***

***Your eyes change to adjust to less light, letting you see even in almost utter darkness.***

***General: Blood Sense – lvl 1***

***You learn to sense the presence of living beings 10.5 meters around you.***

*General skills. Interesting. For defeating the dungeon? Or that monster specifically? The options all seemed pretty useful, though with Kate’s hearing and her want to fight the undead and not hide from them, none of them were massive. Using her limited mana to stay hidden from undead specifically may be useful to someone with mana to spare, but for her? She passed on that.*

Darksight and Blood Sense both provided additional perception, and both in the dark and to hear monsters in the vicinity, she could already use her hearing, tremor sense, and echo location. Which left her thinking on which one of the two would be more beneficial in the end.

*Seeing in the dark feels applicable to more situations. Hunting at night would become so much more effective, coupled with Aura of Silence and it’s second tier.*

She supposed that while Blood Sense could let her know something was nearby, even if it made no noise, it didn’t exactly help her fight whatever it was in the dark. And she assumed her other enhanced senses would pick up most living creatures. If they lived, they breathed after all. And if they had a way to shroud the sound they made, then who was to say they couldn’t shroud themselves from Blood Sense either?

***‘ding’ ‘You have unlocked the General skill: Darksight – lvl 1’***

Kate immediately felt the change as her eyes adjusted. It felt the same as if she’d gone into a dark room and waited for a little while, the bridge and her surroundings becoming sharper and a little

brighter to her eyes. If she hadn't known how dark this place really was, she wouldn't even have noticed. *Suppose a cat doesn't really know about how dark things are for a human when they themselves just see.*

She wondered what other kinds of perception this magic could unlock in a human. *Sensing living beings, being able to see in the dark, enhanced hearing.* She went on with her other upgrades, instead of lingering on the thought.

**'ding' 'Weapon Recall reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 1'**

**Active: Weapon Recall – 2nd lvl 1**

***You may bind two heavy weapons to yourself and recall them to your hands. This ability is limited to ten kilometers and the farther away your weapons are, the longer they will need to travel. Higher levels in this skill will increase the ability of your weapons to break through obstacles on their return to you. You may change your weapon bindings to other weapons once every three days.***

***2nd stage: You may bind an additional light weapon to yourself.***

*Nothing crazy. But useful.*

*Like a pistol maybe? Would that actually be more useful than an enchanted knife? That may actually be better, if I'm pinned down or something. Was hard to use the axe and mace against the Priest when I was on the ground. A knife coupled with some grappling might've been better.*

She liked the idea but would consult her friends about it.

**'ding' 'Versatile Throw reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 1'**

**Active: Versatile Throw – 2nd lvl 1**

***Use 5% of your stamina to enhance the throw of an object. Accuracy of all throws is increased by 15.5%. Any on hit effects from other skills may be applied on the throw. On hit effects will affect the first enemy struck.***

***2nd stage: Throws using this skill ricochet to one additional target, should you will it so.***

Kate raised her brows at that. *Now it actually seems like a magical skill.*

*What if the weapon gets stuck though?*

*Something to try out.*

**Active: Crushing Storm – 2nd lvl 1**

***Use 20% of your stamina to cleave through enemies in front and around you. The arc is limited to 390 degrees. If you hit at least one enemy with Crushing Storm, a consecutive use of the skill has its cost reduced to 15% of your stamina, then 10%, and finally 5%.***

***2nd stage: You learn to move forward in a steady pace while you are using Crushing Storm.***

*The arc is already at above a full circle. It did feel like the limit had been lifted. And I suppose with an attack that takes that long to execute, it would be useful to move around while I execute it.*

She pondered the thought for a moment.

*Can I chain that and just keep spinning in circles? She had to smile at the thought, her body enhanced by magic, spinning through hordes of undead. Like a blender.*

***'ding' 'Flowing Weapons Resonance reaches 2nd lvl 1'***

***Passive: Flowing Weapons Resonance – 2nd lvl 1***

***Spells and skills enhancing weapons are infused 45.5% faster and last twice as long. One enchantment can now apply to two weapons that are being wielded.***

***2nd stage: Limited weapon enhancements last for one additional strike.***

*That one seems pretty straightforward. Will save me some mana, which is nice.*

*Good changes. Nothing world changing but all of it very much welcome.*

As she looked around at the other people and the cavern walls and ceiling, she was glad that she had chosen Darksight. That change stood out so far.

She glanced back at her status page and saw the five available third tier points. *Let's see what that is about then.*

*Can I just...* she tried to fiddle with it using her thoughts and found that she could apply a third tier point to any of the skills sitting at the second tier and level twenty, so the maximum of what she could reach so far.

*So, to get more of those points, I'd have to fight and kill more sources of unfurling death?*

She put the thought aside for now and instead focused on which skills she would upgrade right now. Five was a lot but she had quite a few more skills than that. And she wanted to choose the best options. *Though I don't really know what I'll get yet anyway, so probably best to just choose the skills I use the most.*

The first skills listed were Mindless Ferocity and Blood Frenzy, and both of those skills felt like really good options already. Vengeful Charge, Reaper Jump, and Blood Rupture felt more situational. Blood for the Living felt like a great option too, the skill more or less why she'd been able to keep fighting and stay alive throughout the extended battles. The rest of the main Class passive skills felt like better options than her Charge and Jump abilities but they didn't feel quite as obvious.

*Three skills in my main Class. To stay in my berserking state and to recover both health and stamina.*

Her second Class active skills were her shout, the sound charge for her weapons, and Aura of Silence. Kate considered, leaning more towards the latter two. The charge was really strong but she felt like Aura of Silence could be a very interesting skill to enhance. Her passive skills were all about perception. Tremors, sound, and echo. If she had to choose one, it was sound, and she'd probably choose that one. *Which means four points already slotted.*

*Ah shit, they have to be at the end of the second tier anyway, which leaves only Reverberating Charge and Sound Perception as options.*

Her third Class had no skills yet at the end of the second tier, and Kate wasn't about to keep any of her skill points if she could get a little stronger now. They still had to get out of this dungeon.

She chose Blood for the Living as her first one, to see how the upgrading worked and how much of a difference it would make.

**'ding' 'Blood for the Living reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 1'**

**Passive: Blood for the Living – 3rd lvl 1**

**Your anger knows no bounds. When you slay an enemy, you absorb 12.25% of their total health and stamina. Find and kill them, all.**

**2nd stage: You may drink the blood of those you have slain to absorb whatever life force remains in their blood.**

**3rd stage: You recover up to 2% of remaining magical power within the blood you drink.**

*Mana recovery? And the percentage on the first stage goes up again with the level up. Another hopefully twenty levels in the skill for more absorption. And I guess I'll have to drink blood more frequently.*

*So the third tier is an upgrade similar to the second tier. The base skills get stronger and there's a new addition. Which confirms that I should choose the skills that I use most often.*

**'ding' 'Mindless Ferocity reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 1'**

**Active: Mindless Ferocity – 3rd lvl 1**

**Tune out all but the sound of battle. Sacrifice what is not required to increase your resistance against pain, shock, and trauma from both injuries and enemy attacks by 25.5%. Auto activates when at 25% health (set value).**

**2nd stage: When active, Mindless Ferocity grants a low grade resistance against all mental attacks.**

**3rd stage: When active, you cannot be stunned by enemy strikes and magic. When active, you cannot be slowed by enemy magic.**

*How the fuck does that work? She hadn't encountered any magical effects that slowed her down but she supposed there would be spells like that. Would that eye... would that be a stun? Or is that a mental attack? Or a fear based attack?*

Even without knowing the specific differences, Kate very much welcomed more additions to her defensive arsenal.

She went on with the next skill.

**'ding' 'Blood Frenzy reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 1'**

**Active: Blood Frenzy – 3rd lvl 1**

**Give in to your rage and become one with the blood and pain of battle. You strike harder, increasing your damage with melee weapons by up to 25.5%, sacrificing up to 10 points of health for each attack. Your senses are focused on battle alone. Each creature you kill while Blood Frenzy is active returns 12.75% of your damage dealt as health.**

**2nd stage: Your blood surges and ruptures the insides of those you strike.**

**3rd stage: Strikes you deal that draw blood coat your weapon in blood magic, adding additional blood magic damage for a short while.**

More momentum, Kate thought and invested her next point.

**‘ding’ ‘Reverberating Charge reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 1’**

**Active: Reverberating Charge – 3rd lvl 1**

**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.**

**2nd stage: The mana cost for Reverberating Charge is reduced by 1% for each level in the skill [current reduction: 41%].**

**3rd stage: Reverberating Charge spreads outwards if you will it, affecting enemies near the struck foe or foes.**

That would’ve been useful with those undead hordes, Kate thought and invested her last third tier point.

**‘ding’ ‘Sound Perception reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 1’**

**Passive: Sound Perception – 3rd lvl 1**

**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.**

**2nd stage: You gain a medium [high] resistance to sound and sound magic damage.**

**3rd stage: You learn to fine tune your Sound Perception even more, making it simple for you to listen for specific sounds and tune out others.**

Kate read through the description of her last third tier upgrade.

*Hmm. Haven’t I been able to do that already?*

She tried it, focusing on breaths first. She had to tune it back a moment later, hearing everyone breathing nearby, as if they were right next to her. She instead focused on drops of water, hearing several dozen sources before she focused on one, tuning into it and hearing a single drop leaving the ceiling and hitting stone dozens of meters farther down. It felt laser focused. And easy too.

*Someone would have to have Aura of Silence to hide from me now, or a similar spell.*

She supposed it wasn't impossible. Humans would level up their spells and abilities, and Aathi wasn't the only one who would have spells to hide from others. *But if I know what to listen for? It'll be damned hard to hide from me.*

It felt good. All the upgrades. Her skill-set hadn't fundamentally changed but it felt more well rounded. *And next time I'll do even better against a creature like that Priest.*

She hoped it would be a while. Hoped that their efforts here, the sacrifices they'd made, would have an impact on everyone else in their valley, all the other survivors, the people that depended on them.

Only time would tell.

Kate stood up and walked into the cavern where they'd fought. She didn't have her headlamp on, her new Darksight more than enough for her to make out her surroundings. She wondered if everyone else had gotten a General skill too.

She stopped a few meters into the cavern, seeing the cloth covered corpses of those who had died. Six people. She knew who they were from the conversations she'd listened to. A few of them, she'd met and had talked to.

A few others were close by, grieving the dead, together. She breathed in deep and felt her blood pulse, closing her eyes for a brief moment. She felt tired, and she felt a prang of guilt. Kate knew that she was grateful nobody close to her had died. Not today. She didn't know if she could've handled it if Logan, Fred, or Lewis had been among the dead.

She breathed in deep, then moved on to a group of combatants standing near the dead Priest and the pool of blood, headlamps shining into the liquid.

It stank, Kate noted. Different than before. The blood pool had been fresh. Now, it was drying up, decaying. Someone shined a light on her and jumped.

"Jesus Christ, Kate," Niklas said, already halfway into drawing his swords.

She smiled in a tired fashion and nodded to the group.

"Took Darksight?" Lewis asked and nodded back to her.

"Felt like the most useful," Kate said. Not that she would've needed it to find them in the dark.

"With your hearing, yeah, probably," Lewis said. "Logan's back near the altar, if you're looking for him."

"Thanks," Kate said. "You all got a skill too?"

"Those who fought that thing, yeah," Lewis said. "Got a third tier point as well."

"That's good to hear," Kate said.

She didn't know what else to say, nodding once before she left them to their quiet conversation about the creature they had felled here. She wasn't particularly interested in its origin or background. Not right now. The only thing she cared about at the moment, was that the monster was dead.

Logan was with a few other combatants, setting up what looked like explosive charges around the altar in the back of the cavern. Kate glanced at the stone form and blinked her eyes, a shiver going down her back as a flash of terror went through her.

Valery glanced her way. She had no headlamp either. Her eyes were focused, her pupils larger than normal.

*She chose the same skill.*

“You felt it too,” Valery said, turning back towards the altar. “Something still lingers inside of that stone, or the symbols carved into it.”

Kate crossed her arms.

“We’ll have it gone,” Valery said. “The last of our explosives.”

“There may be Overakar and other large undead waiting at the entrance of this place,” Kate said.

“And we will be ready to face them. But here, I want to be thorough. Whatever this cursed being has brought here, it is not welcome,” Valery said. “You should rest still, we can take some time to recover.”

“Don’t think I can sleep more. Not here,” Kate said.

“I understand,” Valery said.

They stood in silence as the others finished up, then made distance.

Valery gave the command, bright flashes and echoing explosions ripping through the cavern and the stone altar a moment later, bits of stone landing nearby.

When the dust settled, Kate could see that the altar was cracked and broken, any semblance of symbols gone from the stone’s surface. She breathed in, no longer feeling the terror she’d felt when she’d looked at it before.

A part of her expected a monster to emerge now, some kind of divine retribution for their actions. And she felt that she was ready to face and kill whatever that entailed.

It felt almost disappointing when nothing at all happened. She heard the relieved breaths from the others standing nearby before Valery turned and walked towards the exit.

She didn’t glance back at them as she spoke. “Pack up. It’s time we leave this place.”

### ***Kate Lindgren***

***Unspent stat points: 0***

***Unspent third tier skill points: 0***

***Class: Omen of Vengeance – lvl 47***

- Active: Mindless Ferocity – 3rd lvl 1***
- Active: Blood Frenzy – 3rd lvl 1***
- Active: Vengeful Charge – 2nd lvl 20***
- Active: Reaper Jump – 2nd lvl 10***
- Active: Blood Rupture – 2nd lvl 16***
- Passive: Blood for the Living – 3rd lvl 1***



- **Passive: Fury of the Unarmored** – 2nd lvl 20
- **Passive: Two Handed Weapon Fighting** – 2nd lvl 20
- **Passive: Unrelenting Carnage** – 2nd lvl 20
- **Passive: Terrifying Presence** – 2nd lvl 4

**Support class: Roaring Pursuer** – lvl 43

- **Active: Thunderous Shout** – 2nd lvl 14
- **Active: Reverberating Charge** – 3rd lvl 1
- **Active: Aura of Silence** – 2nd lvl 4
- **Passive: Sound Perception** – 3rd lvl 1
- **Passive: Echo Awareness** – 2nd lvl 9
- **Passive: Tremor Sense** – 2nd lvl 8

**Support class: Unyielding Bruiser** – lvl 34

- **Active: Weapon Recall** – 2nd lvl 3
- **Active: Versatile Throw** – 2nd lvl 2
- **Active: Crushing Storm** – 2nd lvl 3
- **Passive: Weapon Anarchy** – lvl 17
- **Passive: Heavy Warrior** – lvl 19
- **Passive: Flowing Weapons Resonance** – 2nd lvl 1

**General skills:**

- **Darksight** – lvl 1

**Status:**

**Vitality: 50**

**Vigor: 32**

**Fortitude: 15**

**Endurance: 30**

**Perseverance: 15**

**Strength: 40**

**Brutality: 28**

**Dexterity: 8**

**Versatility: 19**

**Intelligence: 7**

**Wisdom: 15**

**Serenity: 15**

**Equipment:**

**Torso: Berserker Scale Armor [Rare]**

- Medium grade Acid Resistance
- Medium grade Fire Resistance
- Basic Enchantment

**Legs: Berserker Scale Armor [Rare]**

- Medium grade Acid Resistance
- Medium grade Fire Resistance
- Basic Enchantment

**Trinket: -**

**Food: -**