

Chapter 63 Progress

Kate and Logan continued to clear and map out the undead infested corridors. The rose like flowers they'd found were easily cut away, losing some but not all of their red glow when Logan put them into one of their bags. They found it much more difficult to cut off the antlers growing out of the skulls of the Emisaries but Logan thought it a good idea to bring some of the obviously sturdy and strange bone back to Allison and Eloise, their Crafter and Alchemist respectively.

They returned to the castle to rest, with fewer injuries than on the day before, bringing back the materials they had gathered. Kate told Eloise about the chemicals she'd collected but she'd chosen not to bring anything back yet.

Eloise, now with her Alchemist subclass, had received a skill to identify more ingredients, including the flower, finding it to be called *Rosa Veracileum*. A magical component, though she was not sure what to do with it as of yet.

Most of the Emisary antlers they'd collected went to Allison, the woman more than eager to work with a new material, glad as well that their gear wasn't quite as mangled as on the day prior.

The next day went much the same, the fighting even more efficient with the new second tier skill upgrades Kate unlocked along the way. Logan was growing at a steady pace as well, his sacred magic lasting longer, his meditation returning more mana, and his magic hitting just a little stronger with every level gained in each respective skill.

Their map of the dungeon was growing larger still and with every Celeavir and Emisary killed, it seemed like the red glowing veins growing throughout the white stone in the underground corridors were ever so slowly pushed back.

By now, Logan had run out of ammo for his rifle, mainly using his pistol infused with sacred magic at range, and his sword up close.

Kate sighed when they reached the castle once again. She jogged the last few steps before the trench and jumped, feeling the blood magic surge through her legs. A few seconds later, she landed in a deep crouch, just past the tree in the yard. She breathed out and went back up to the battlements before she helped Logan up.

Kate heard the others talk in excited voices before she even reached the door to the armory.

"Back in the castle," Logan sent through his radio. They had announced their arrival in the area but hadn't bothered to have the others come out and help them up the walls.

Kate knocked and then heard Jon starting to remove the orc swords they used to reinforce the door.

"You smell terrible, again," Allison said as soon as they had entered.

Kate sighed, shaking off some of the snow in her cloak before she put down her hood and set down her axe. "Are you going to say that every time we come back from fighting?"

“Yes,” Allison said. “But more importantly, it’s time. I got to level ten, and now it’s official.” She grinned and posed with her palms facing upwards. “I’m a smith. Now I can’t just fix up the minor damage on your steel, I can modify it, and make new stuff.” She crossed her arms. “At least in theory. The basic skills aren’t all that impressive. And I don’t really have the right tools.”

“Cool,” Kate said.

“That’s all? Cool?” Allison said, with mock or perhaps serious outrage.

“I got my subclass too,” Jon said.

“What did you unlock?” Logan asked.

The man finished setting the orc swords back into the makeshift handles before he smiled.

“Arcanist. Arcane magic, apparently the fundamental school of magic. I already empowered my pistol with a limited but permanent magical upgrade.” He tapped the holster on his belt.

Kate saw fine lines of blue tracing the matte black of the Glock. He no longer used his rifle either, now that Logan had used up all of the ammo.

She took off her jacket and sat down on the couch with a tired sigh, finding Melusine handing her a hot cup of tea with a smile before the woman returned her attention back to the pot she held in her hands, a small glowing orb floating above the dirt inside of the pot.

Kate looked at her, wondering if everyone had gone mad in their absence. She knew the healer had unlocked some kind of light magic but hovering it above a pot?

“I’m trying to get a specific subclass,” Melusine said. “There is no need to look at me like I’ve gone crazy. You’re the one going into blood covered and dark tunnels to slaughter hordes of undead monsters, not me.”

Kate lost focus and rubbed her eyes, then leaned back and smelled the tea. “Yeah. You have a point.”

“I have many points,” Melusine said.

“Any level ups to report?” Jon asked, opening his book.

Kate saw a few faintly glowing blue lines going over the leatherbound tome. She closed her eyes and sipped from the tea. *A plant mage, a wizard, a smith, and an alchemist. Maybe I’ve been down there for too long.*

She focused on the messages in the corner of her vision and then read them out to Jon.

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Undead Human]’

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Undead Human]’

...

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Undead Goblin]’

‘ding’ ‘Omen of Vengeance reaches lvl 28’

Stat points +2

Vigor +1

'ding' 'Omen of Vengeance reaches lvl 29'

Stat points +2

Vigor +1

'ding' 'Mindless Ferocity reaches 2nd lvl 19'

'ding' 'Mindless Ferocity reaches 2nd lvl 20'

'ding' 'Blood Frenzy reaches 2nd lvl 17'

'ding' 'Blood Frenzy reaches 2nd lvl 18'

'ding' 'Vengeful Charge reaches 2nd lvl 9'

'ding' 'Vengeful Charge reaches 2nd lvl 10'

'ding' 'Reaper Jump reaches lvl 15'

'ding' 'Blood Rupture reaches lvl 20'

'ding' 'Blood Rupture reaches 2nd lvl 1'

Active: Blood Rupture – 2nd lvl 1

Use your strength and up to 15% of your total health to slam the ground with a shattering force, creating a wave of blood magic in a 4.1 meter radius around you.

2nd stage: You learn to better aim your magic, allowing you to send out Blood Rupture in a cone before you.

'ding' 'Blood Rupture reaches 2nd lvl 2'

'ding' 'Blood for the Living reaches 2nd lvl 16'

'ding' 'Blood for the Living reaches 2nd lvl 17'

'ding' 'Fury of the Unarmored reaches 2nd lvl 11'

'ding' 'Fury of the Unarmored reaches 2nd lvl 12'

'ding' 'Two Handed Weapon Fighting reaches 2nd lvl 16'

'ding' 'Two Handed Weapon Fighting reaches 2nd lvl 17'

'ding' 'Unrelenting Carnage reaches 2nd lvl 5'

'ding' 'Unrelenting Carnage reaches 2nd lvl 6'

'ding' 'Roaring Pursuer reaches lvl 25'

Brutality +1

'ding' 'Roaring Pursuer reaches lvl 26'

Brutality +1

'ding' 'Thunderous Shout reaches lvl 19'

'ding' 'Thunderous Shout reaches lvl 20'

'ding' 'Reverberating Charge reaches 2nd lvl 1'

Active: Reverberating Charge – 2nd 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: 21%].

‘ding’ ‘Sound Perception reaches 2nd lvl 7’

‘ding’ ‘Sound Perception reaches 2nd lvl 8’

‘ding’ ‘Echo Awareness reaches lvl 13’

‘ding’ ‘Tremor Sense reaches lvl 15’

Kate had invested all of her four stat points into Vitality, bringing the total number to thirty eight. She found that her equipment coupled with her current twenty five strength was more than enough to kill most of the undead in just a few strikes, many even with a single one. What she really needed, was more health to use with Blood Frenzy.

Her new addition to Blood Rupture made the skill far easier to use with Logan around. She didn't have to charge into the undead masses alone to use the skill anymore. She just had to aim it well. The percentage also meant that for each point added to her Vitality, the skill was more potent.

Compared to the second tier of Blood Rupture, the addition to Reverberating Charge felt far more basic, though considering her very low twelve points in Wisdom, Kate very much welcomed the mana cost reduction.

“Nearly at thirty,” Jon said. “Another level and you should unlock your second support Class.”

Right. That was the requirement when I evolved the skill.

She glanced at the ceiling, wondering what options she would receive.

Another day of fighting is probably going to do it, she thought.

“You're ready for the meeting with the Union tomorrow?” Jon asked.

“I don't think there will be any issues,” Logan said. “We have common enemies.”

“We do,” Jon said. “Just make sure to find out as much as you can. And don't be surprised if they show up with a few more people than last time. This might be the first official meeting they're having with another group of survivors as well.”

They had talked about it a few times. Jon was the only one anxious about the meeting, and he wouldn't even be present.

He suggested they offer trade, both in terms of information and supplies.

Kate assumed they had already made enough of an impression when meeting the group of survivors. They also got them out of a tight spot, so she didn't expect anything to go wrong. But then, she also recognized that people now wielded all kinds of magical powers, and the established governments and institutions were no longer around, which meant a lot of uncharted grounds. In terms of, well, everything.

So far, she was glad they hadn't encountered any aggressive survivors. The monsters were too present and there were still enough supplies to be found to go around, at least that's what she assumed would keep things between people somewhat peaceful. For a time.

The next morning came, Kate and Logan leaving early after their mana enriched breakfast. The two of them reached the industrial complex without any monster encounters, leaving some of their gear behind to go back into the dungeon.

It took a while now for them to reach sections of the underground labyrinth that they hadn't yet charted and cleared.

Back at the edge of the unknown, Kate breathed in deep and continued deeper into the dull red lit corridors, listening for any kind of monster. Her hearing coupled with her tremor sense and her enhanced echo location made sure she didn't miss anything that was hiding.

When they reached another broader hall, Kate slowed down. She pulled Logan closer and held one of his fingers, then tapped his palm six times, once for every normal undead. She then grabbed three of his fingers and tapped his palm once. One Emisary.

She heard the groans of the undead, the creatures not yet aware of the two intruders. Kate felt the weight of her axe, hearing Logan quietly set down his pack and weapons. She winced at the sound he still made but she would know the moment the undead heard them. In the dim red light, she saw Logan stand up with his high caliber sniper rifle, its scope removed to better use it at short to mid ranges.

Kate saw him aim into the darkness. She nodded his way activated her skills, the world narrowing as she heard her heart beat in her chest, heard every step and groan of the undead inside the hall beyond. She knew her ally would wait for the right moment, and so she gripped her axe tight and walked towards her enemies. She was quiet, as quiet as she could be, and still, the Emisary heard her before the undead did, the monster slowly turning her way, its gaze surely upon her. She didn't look back, closing the last few meters with fast steps before she brought her axe down into the back and spine of an undead orc, blood magic rupturing into the creature as she cleaved through leather, flesh, and bone.

She ripped out the weapon and jumped back as the monsters screeched and the large antlered creature rushed her way. Kate took a few steps back and turned on her headlamp, just in time for her to see a broad swing of the large spindly horror. She blocked, sliding a single step. Before the monster could even raise its other hand, a thunderous sound echoed through the chamber, a flash of gold crushing through bloodied skin and bone, the large bullet infused with sacred light shattering through the knee of the tall monster, its leg snapping to the side, most of its joint gone as blood and bits of flesh splattered to the ground and onto Kate's jacket.

She didn't miss the moment, pulling her axe back and striking at the unbalanced monster's arm. Kate rushed forward and past the creature when its other arm lashed out in an unbalanced motion. She impacted the first of the other undead, her momentum and raised axe handle slapping the human to the ground, its head striking the stone floor with a crack. She breathed in and stomped down, Blood Rush flashing out, her magic hitting all the monsters around her as she crouched and swung with a shout, her roar staggering the advancing monsters, her axe clipping three of them before she came to a stop, turned around, her headlamp illuminating the Emisary as it stumbled

closer with one arm and one leg on the ground. Another golden flash. This time the bullet struck the right elbow, ripping through the screeching monster's arm, the bullet tearing past and into its thin torso. Kate didn't slow, bringing her axe down again, screaming as she cleaved into the shoulder and through the chest of a monster, feeling the energy returned to her. She felt one of them strike at her back, its blade scraping past the scales that protected her. She turned her body and kicked, pushing back the monster before she swung at another. She stepped aside right after, turning and striking down another one. Kate saw the last standing undead rush at her, the screeching Emisary a few meters to her right.

She swung wide, putting her entire strength into the swing, screaming as she met the frenzied creature. Her swing didn't slow, cutting through the human with no resistance that she felt. She turned with her axe and slowed it, hearing the two halves of the undead falling to the ground like two sacks of meat. Again, she faced the Emisary, seeing it turned and focused towards her ally, its one working but injured arm pulling it closer to his position.

His headlamp was on now and he wasn't moving. He wouldn't fire again. This creature was dead. They just had to finish the job.

Kate flanked the monster, coming up on its back. She fueled her sound into her axe, feeling it thrum with power. Two steps and she jumped towards the crawling monster, high enough to reach its head. Swinging down from above and at a slight angle, she cleaved into its exposed neck, all her magic released with the strike, the sharpened axe biting deep, more than half-way through. Kate hit the monster's back and rolled off before she hit the ground. She staggered up, hearing its gasping breaths, gurgling sounds coming from its open neck as it caught itself from falling to the ground entirely, her axe still lodged deep.

She breathed in and looked at it, its dark abyss like eyes, black and hints of red intermingling into a gaze that spelled out death. She pushed against it, feeling her head throb. Kate heard her ally approach and reached out her hand. She sighed, feeling the handle of his greatsword. She liked her axe better but the sword was good too.

Stepping towards the monster, she prepared and listened. Right when she was in range, she saw the creature lunge forward, its one injured arm lashing out towards her. Kate swung upwards, cutting past its fingers and deep into the forearm. She ripped the weapon out and threw it back, then grabbed onto the axe, closer now as the monster tried to push itself up. She stepped past its mangled arm, pulled and ripped out the axe before she brought it down again. Two more swings and the monster's head came loose, falling to the ground with a wet sound, its body still a moment later.

Kate felt her minor bruises heal. She heard no other creatures nearby and forced herself to deactivate her magics. The air was stale when her senses cleared. Her axe was wet with blood, the handle too.

She Logan collecting his sword, giving her a nod.

"Clear," she said. Both to mean that she was back and that there were no other creatures anywhere close by. His rifle would've alerted anything for hundreds of meters anyway, though even the loud noise was lost in the labyrinth like dungeon.

"Injuries?" he asked.

"None," she said and walked to one of the undead, ripping off a piece of cloth with which she cleaned her hands and weapon. It wouldn't do if her grip on the handle slipped.

“Antlers now or later?” Logan asked, carrying his sword on his shoulder, sniper rifle and shotgun strapped once again to his pack.

“Later,” Kate said, shouldering her axe before she continued down the next hallway.

Several corridors later, Kate clicked her tongue, confirming what she thought she heard and saw. Closing the distance, she raised her fist and then clicked on her headlamp.

Her light shined down into the darkness, revealing steps of white stone, bloodied footprints and red veins leading deep into the earth.

Logan joined her side. “So it does go deeper.”

“Should we go down there?”

“Yes,” Logan said. “But not yet. I think it’s best to clear and map out these halls before we go deeper. Seems a little more safe. Agreed?”

Kate looked into the depths, hearing faint dripping sounds. She could feel it. The urge to go down there, to kill everything that was lurking in these tunnels. She heard her heart beat faster, the grip on her axe tightening, right until her ally touched her shoulder. She blinked her eyes, and glanced his way. “Agreed,” she said and turned away from the steps.