

Chapter 80 Strength

Kate and Logan stayed in the museum safe house for another twenty minutes.

They joined the fray again once Logan felt like his mana was in a good spot, the two of them supporting a few more teams throughout the night. Whoever struggled to fight their foes.

The Union took stock when the night had passed.

One man had died, caught by undead as him and his group were retreating to a safe house, several of them injured. Kate hadn't known him. An accountant from Falstadt. His name had been Henry.

Valery still declared the operation a success, hundreds of undead killed and dozens of levels gained between the various combat groups. Levels and experience, many of them with suggestions on how they could improve the next battles.

And the next battles came.

Several days and nights passed, the Union growing bolder, unlocking more skills, more magic, more stats. Many now bore gear enchanted at Keilberg Castle. There were more safe houses, the combat groups and their dispatchers getting more used to the city, the groups sticking a little closer to each other, each night focusing on a single district, gathering undead and clearing them out.

On the fourth night, they noticed that the undead were no longer moving in small groups but instead clustered similarly to what they did during the day. The hunts had lowered their numbers but there were still thousands of them left. And the hordes were far more dangerous, Overakar, Wyverns, Ogres, and the unknown giants walking among them.

Kate and Logan returned to Keilberg castle in the evening of the fifth day, taking with them a shipment of gear to be enchanted, coupled with monster parts, food, and supplies for the others. Tonight, they would not fight in the city, nor would the Union. They would meet early in the morning, to prepare for their next large-scale operation.

The castle was as they'd left it, the cold air barely noticeable to Kate as she jumped over the walls and into the courtyard. She landed in a crouch, and walked back up the battlements, throwing a rope over to Logan who started to fasten it to the net full of crates they'd taken with them. Kate had no idea how much it weighed but it felt manageable, pulling everything up as the others now joined her from the armory.

They left the wooden sled outside, Kate helping up Logan as the others started to open the net and take the crates.

"Like I'm Santa," she said.

"Not yet Christmas," Jon said with a smile. "Good to see you back."

"It does feel like Christmas, with all the interesting bits and pieces you return with every time," Eloise said.

"They bring plenty of work too," Allison said. "But I won't complain. As long as you return."

"I'd hug you but I don't know how comfortable that would be with my armor," Kate said.

“Yeah, a good rinse, then maybe,” Allison said.

They helped the others move the supplies, or the gifts, depending on perspective, before they gathered in the armory and shut the door.

It did feel like coming home, though Kate mostly still wore her armor, just in case. And she reacted to every strange noise or vibration she noticed in the vicinity. It felt good to be here but not yet perfectly safe. That was okay, she supposed, considering everything that had happened. She did feel a little guilty sometimes, knowing she sometimes felt more comfortable out there, fighting monsters, rather than staying here. Of course here, she saw the people that she could lose, a place that was warm, and good, that could be destroyed.

She could see how she was simply afraid, or haunted by what had happened to Ethan, Gray, and Bert. But knowing why she felt the way she did, didn't just solve everything. It made things a little easier, and it made her focus on the goals she had. To get rid of the undead, to help everyone improve and get stronger, better equipped, better able to fend for themselves, because she knew that she couldn't always be there, not for everyone. A fact that was very difficult to accept.

“Food,” Eloise said, emerging with a steaming pot from the cellar.

Kate smiled, smelling the hot curry. She shuddered, feeling the cold that had seeped into her very bones.

“Armor off, you need repairs,” Allison said.

She looked at the woman and blinked her eyes, noticing how exhausted she felt. She took in a deep breath and closed her eyes, feeling herself getting emotional. There was no reason to push it away, not here, not now.

“If you need a good cry, get your armor off first,” Allison said with a smile.

Kate wiped at her face and laughed. “Long days,” she said.

“And nights,” Logan added.

“Take off your armor. You're not sitting at this table with that blood covered mess,” Melusine said. “The same to you, young man,” she added, glancing at Logan.

He'd put away his weapons by now and took off his helmet. “Melusine, I'm older than you.”

She smiled. “Not here you're not.”

“That doesn't make-” he started but then just shook his head.

“No work until we've eaten,” Melusine said, eliciting an annoyed sigh from Allison, though the younger woman didn't argue.

Kate smiled, watching the scene, Jon reading a book in his armchair, Celeste watching everything with wide eyes, and Eloise preparing dinner.

Logan touched her shoulder. “Another good night. Let's try not to forget that we're not doing this alone, eh?”

Kate nodded, touching his arm. “Yeah.” She felt some of the pressure that she'd felt fade away. Some of the fear. They had a big fight coming tomorrow. But that was tomorrow, not today.

Today, they would have dinner, and maybe watch a movie or play a board game.

Kate went to get a shower, handed over her armor, and then sat down on the couch, enjoying the steaming plate of curry. Non magical, just curry.

The night passed without any attacks. Kate did eventually sleep in her armor. As nice as it felt to have some time off, the threat of a monster attack was very much real, and already having their equipment on and ready would give them another slight edge.

With both Kate and Logan's high Vigor stats, they were up again before dawn, checking and readying their equipment, Kate brewing fresh coffee.

"The enchanted guns haven't malfunctioned even once," Logan murmured.

"No issues with our other weapons either," Kate said.

"Allison did complain that repairing enchanted gear takes considerably more focus and mana," he supplied as Kate poured herself a cup, and then one for Logan.

She sat down on the couch and sighed, looking at the locked armory door, crude orc swords wedged into the makeshift handles to add some additional security. Fairy lights, a few flashlights, and some candles provided light. Now that the others were asleep downstairs in the cellar, the warm feeling of the home that they'd arrived to on the day prior felt like a distant memory. It was cold, though Kate barely noticed. A fact rather than a feeling of discomfort or something dangerous for her body.

"Remember when we sat out in the courtyard. Ethan and Grey testing their skills and magic," she said.

"Feeling gloomy today?" Logan asked, clicking a piece into his half-assembled sniper rifle.

Am I?

She shrugged and sipped from her coffee. "Not much more than usual. Maybe the lack of sunlight is starting to bother me."

"Yeah, me too," Logan said. "And the constant killing. Feels like we're just butchers at this point."

Kate pushed some air out of her nose. The thought wasn't funny, but she could relate. At least she had her berserker state, and when she was in the moment, she did find a lot of enjoyment fighting and killing dangerous undead. But he was right, the last few days felt more like wading through hordes of unending enemies. It was tiring. Necessary, but tiring.

"Think there will ever be an end to it? A day when we can have a drink outside in the sun, without fear of Wyverns or undead?"

"You *are* more gloomy than usual," Logan said and chuckled. "We've got a lot of work ahead of us, and who knows, there might be more around the corner. If I'm honest, I don't think we'll find a way to get rid of every single monster in the world. Or to turn things back. But I do think there will be times when we can sit out in the sun, and have a drink."

"What would you do?" Kate asked, leaning back on the couch.

"If things were more peaceful?" he asked, looking up from his rifle. He smiled. "Blast some music. I'd get the biggest speakers I can find, and blast some music through Falstadt. Taylor Swift probably."

“That sounds nice,” Kate said.

“What about you?”

Kate smiled. “I’ve wanted to do a kayaking course for years already. Never got around to it. Oh and skydiving.”

“Not surprising,” he said. “Why’d you never get around to it?”

Kate looked at her coffee. “I do wonder,” she said. “I guess I always felt too busy, you know? Another shift here, one there, birthday here. Always some obligation I suppose.”

“And now you’re on the front lines, fighting monsters,” Logan said.

“You know why too,” Kate said and smiled. Maybe he was right. Maybe there would be a time when she could squeeze in some kayaking. She’d just have to make sure there weren’t any monsters in whatever river she’d use.

She felt like reading too but she found it difficult to focus on it right now. She still felt stuck, here in this castle, here in this valley. Stuck not because she didn’t want to be here but because all of those monsters were threatening their space. Their space and their safety.

She instead emptied one of her pistol magazines and refilled it again. Until they were ready to go. Allison still had something new to show her.

Kate focused on her name the same as she’d focused on it after Grey had explained it to her for the first time.

Kate Lindgren

Unspent stat points: 0

Class: Omen of Vengeance – lvl 40

- ***Active: Mindless Ferocity – 2nd lvl 20***
- ***Active: Blood Frenzy – 2nd lvl 20***
- ***Active: Vengeful Charge – 2nd lvl 20***
- ***Active: Reaper Jump – 2nd lvl 7***
- ***Active: Blood Rupture – 2nd lvl 13***
- ***Passive: Blood for the Living – 2nd lvl 20***
- ***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 – lvl 18***

Support class: Roaring Pursuer – lvl 37

- ***Active: Thunderous Shout – 2nd lvl 9***
- ***Active: Reverberating Charge – 2nd lvl 14***
- ***Active: Aura of Silence – 2nd lvl 1***
- ***Passive: Sound Perception – 2nd lvl 18***

- **Passive: Echo Awareness – 2nd lvl 7**
- **Passive: Tremor Sense – 2nd lvl 6**

Support class: Unyielding Bruiser – lvl 22

- **Active: Weapon Recall – lvl 15**
- **Active: Versatile Throw – lvl 13**
- **Active: Crushing Storm – lvl 10**
- **Passive: Weapon Anarchy – lvl 11**
- **Passive: Heavy Warrior – lvl 12**
- **Passive: Flowing Weapons Resonance – lvl 13**

Status:

Vitality: 45

Vigor: 25

Fortitude: 15

Endurance: 24

Perseverance: 15

Strength: 40

Brutality: 22

Dexterity: 8

Versatility: 7

Intelligence: 7

Wisdom: 12

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: -

The only new thing she'd unlocked in the past few days was the second tier of Aura of Silence.

Active: Aura of Silence – 2nd lvl 1

Focus on your magic and remove all sound in a range of 10.5m centered on yourself.

2nd stage: You learn to pinpoint your Aura, reducing its cost as you silence only the sounds produced by yourself and tools that you touch.

The change effectively allowed her to become entirely silent. Just her. Others in the vicinity wouldn't notice that something had changed. Most importantly against the undead, the second tier use was far less mana intensive than using her full aura.

After breakfast and before they left, Allison came down the stairs, dragging something behind herself.

Kate raised her brows and smiled.

“You mentioned needing a new thing to bludgeon undead,” Allison said. “I’d prop it up but I can’t even lift the thing.”

It looked like a bunch of rusted scrap metal from the attic of the armory bunched up and welded onto the top of a long metal pole. It was crude, even for a mace.

Kate walked over and grabbed the handle. The weight felt good as she slowly lifted it up with one hand. Heavier than her axe, considerably so but she had hoped as much. Her axe, while still very much effective, didn’t exactly utilize her entire Strength anymore.

Allison smiled. “Good, you can use it. Scrap mace, enchanted. I call it Scroppie.”

“Kind of juvenile, isn’t it?” Kate murmured, looking at the vicious bits of rust that jutted out of the watermelon sized chunk of melded bits of scrap.

“Well, I made it. So take it or leave it, but the name stays,” Allison said, crossing her arms.

Kate grinned. “Sure. Scroppie it is.”

She wondered how effectively she could wield it with one hand but she supposed there was only one way to test. “Any chance of it falling apart with the first hit?”

“It’s essentially welded together. And it’s enchanted,” Allison said, then shrugged. “But you are very strong. Why not try it against a few trees and rocks outside?”

“I’ll do that,” Kate said. “Thank you, and to you Jon, for the enchantment.”

The man waved her off. “I’ve been enchanting things non-stop. It’s getting easier too. Speaking of which,” he said and set down a few magazines. “Seven-sixty-two, enchanted. More difficult than I’d thought and I’m not sure they’re worth it.”

Logan grabbed the sniper rifle ammo and looked it over. “I’ll test it, see if there’s a difference.”

Eloise set down a crate next to them. “Tinctures, for the Union.”

Kate and Logan packed their things, the net of gifts filled again, this time with enchanted supplies and potions for their allies. But she’d gotten a gift too, taking her new two handed mace towards the forest and slope of Steinwacht with Logan following behind, finding an exposed section of rock soon after.

She felt the weight of the large mace, the size of it alone quite ridiculous, nearly as tall as herself. The fact that she could even lift a chunk of metal that large was ludicrous, let alone with one hand. She checked to make sure Logan was standing several meters away before she took a swing, just like she would swing a normal hammer. The mace came down, a dull sound as metal struck stone, bits and pieces of rock pulverized from the impact, the enchanted weapon stuck in the side of the exposed rock.

Kate pulled on it but found it stuck. She put a leg against the stone and pulled again, this time ripping the weapon free. The metal was unblemished, missing bits showing on the rock instead.

“I think you’re good, as far as durability goes,” Logan said.

Kate turned the weapon around and held it with both hands. The weight felt well balanced, the solid steel pole necessary to achieve such, with the heavy chunk of melded steel on top.

“Yeah,” Kate said, using her Weapon Recall skill to bind the heavy weapon to herself, adding it to the battle axe she’d left in the snow nearby.

Throwing the mace aside, she raised both her arms and called for the weapons. She felt the weight of them slapping into her hands. Reverberating Charge flowed through her, into both of her weapons, their steel thrumming with sound. Kate stepped forward and activated Crushing Storm, feeling heat and power flow through her arms before she smashed the enchanted weapons into stone. Bits and pieces of rock were flung to the left, ripped out from the side of the mountain with her weapons and skills.

Neither axe nor mace looked damaged in the slightest.

Logan chuckled. “Yeah. I think you’re good.”

Logan himself had reached level thirty, gaining a new subclass related to metal equipment. Armor, bullets, sword, and knives, everything required less mana for him to channel his sacred spells through them, everything was slightly lighter, required less stamina to use.

And he wasn’t the only one progressing. They always required food and repairs. Coupled with the high demand for enchantments, potions, and other gear for the Union, everyone at the castle had their hands full. The fact that Melusine’s skillset was currently least in demand was only problematic in terms of her own skill growth. She’d instead focused on her support Class, experimenting with both normal seeds and soil but testing with the red roses too.

Kate surmised it was only a matter of time until Eloise could make her tinctures from locally sourced ingredients.

With her new heavy mace tested, Kate left her war hammer behind. Allison helped modify her pack to make sure she could carry the two large weapons without them getting in the way too much. The size was more the issue rather than the weight. And Jon had to enchant her pack to make sure none of the straps would tear.

When they were ready, Kate and Logan left for Falstadt, taking with them both another set of gear for the Union, and their own load of equipment, ready to face another long day in the city.

The Union now had had a few days to fight the undead at night, to bolster their levels and to get used to fighting their enemy. Today, together, they would face an undead horde.