

## Chapter 54 Slaughter

Kate gripped the battle axe in her hands and listened. She heard the growls move closer, dozens of them this time around, more than she had managed to gather the last time. Looking around the tree, her eyes went wide. *Shit.*

There was an ogre at the very back of the group. She considered for a moment and then grit her teeth. They were here now, and the others could flee down into the cellar. They had killed ogres before, they could do it again.

Grabbing the pistol out of her holster, she moved out from behind the tree, aimed, and started shooting at the closest undead, the sounds cracking through the snow covered forest and up towards the overcast gray sky. She emptied her magazine, a few of her shots hitting the now running monsters, roars resounding as they once again focused back on her.

Kate put away her gun and started running. Up and along the slope towards the castle. Her breathing was steady, her steps powerful as she rushed through the forest, the high reaching snow not much of an obstacle now that she had only her axe, pistol, a few knives, and her radio with her.

She grabbed the latter and pressed down the button, holding it close to her face as she kept running, ducking when she heard something whistle past, the small bolt hitting one of the trees ahead with a dull sound. “East, dozens on the way, a few Eratur and an Ogre at the back!” She put away the radio when she heard one of the undead catching up to her. Using her Echo Location, she saw the blurred figure of a lean human closing in.

Kate kept running before she shouted, her voice reverberating through the forest. She turned, hearing the steps and groans of the undead as she tensed and swung her battle axe with the movement, vibrations running through the blade of the weapon as she cleaved through the arm and torso of the undead, the sound of slicing metal coupled with crunching snow reaching her ears as she finished the spin and kept running, the dead creature falling behind her, more of them catching up. *Not far now.*

She bounded past the tree line and smiled when she saw the castle walls in the distance, a single loud shot resounding in the same moment, coupled with a tiny flash of light from the east facing watchtower. She didn't see but heard a chest exploding somewhere behind her, the undead falling as more closed in now, screeching and moaning towards the sounds echoing outwards.

Kate rushed past the field of blood and corpses, slowing slightly now to not hit any of them and fall. More gunshots cracked now as the others started firing. She kept on running, right until she reached the trench. Reaper Jump activated as she felt the muscles in her legs tense up. She jumped with the spell and her momentum, arms out to balance in the air as she shot past the firing people and the wall below. Letting go of her axe, Kate braced herself and landed in a hard roll, gear clattering to the side until she came to a stop.

She grunted, tasting blood in her mouth as she forced herself up, collecting the knives and radio before she went to grab her axe. More shots reverberated. Kate checked the sky but just like since the blizzard, there were no Wyverns in sight. She walked up the stairwell leading to the battlements, hearing a roar from beyond. The Ogre must've made it past the line of trees.

Jon crouched low to reload, nodding her way before he pointed at the rifle set against the battlements. Kate heard the moans below, flesh ripped through as close undead impaled themselves into the stakes below. She grabbed the rifle and activated her magic, her world focusing down onto the battle alone. She looked up and dodged left when a bolt came flying her way. She tried to find the Eratur but a loud blast from the watchtower echoed in that moment, the small creature's head she had just found exploding into shrapnel and a mist of red. She aimed at the others instead, firing shot after shot just like the allies around her.

"Reload!" someone shouted, Kate seeing the large Ogre stumbling through the field of snow. She ignored it, knowing that her allies were more suited to deal with it. *For now.*

*Until it gets closer.*

She grinned, feeling the slight recoil of her rifle, hearing the echoing blasts of their weapons as they fired into the running undead, ignoring those still stuck and groaning in the trench below. She reloaded and kept firing. Kate looked at the Ogre once more, glancing up at the watchtower where her ally stood with one of the larger rifles. She saw a slight golden glow before the weapon roared, far louder than her own. A mist of red blasted out from the massive Ogre's back, the creature stumbling for a moment before it walked on.

She heard her close by ally fiddle with the safety of his gun before a blue glow emanated from the barrel of his weapon. "Steady now," he murmured to himself, then held down the trigger as he stabilized his weapon, slight blue glowing traces rushing out and into the ogre's chest as his magically enhanced bullets tore into the enemy.

Kate dropped her empty weapon when another loud roar came from the watchtower, blasting through the right knee of the massive humanoid monster, bringing it down as it kept on crawling forward. She grabbed her axe and walked to the side of their small formation, moving herself over the battlements before she aimed and jumped off, axe reaching high before she brought it down into an injured undead orc, blood splattering her face as she split him down to his stomach, herself and the corpse falling in a tumble before she spit out blood and stumbled up, running at her next target.

Vengeful Charge activated, Kate swinging her battle axe in a horizontal strike that flashed through two undead humans. She turned and aimed for the next approaching monster, the kills having reset her Charge. She rushed forward, roaring her rage into the oncoming undead humans before she split the first of them in two, the second one crashing into her, clawing and biting as she held him back with her arms. Kate breathed in with a growl, fueling sound into her body, feeling the vibrations travel through her legs before she brought down her boot into a stomp, the ground before her shaking as the undead stumbled and fell, her axe brought high before she struck it down, cutting deep into the undead before her.

She saw two more of them getting up as she ripped out the axe, bullets tearing into the creatures a split second later. She crouched at the whistling sound, hearing and feeling the bullets fly past above. They stopped a moment later and she rushed forward to finish the injured undead. Turning around, she rushed back, most of the monsters dead now as more bullets struck down into the crawling ogre, leaving a trail of blood and guts in his wake.

Kate charged her sound into the battle axe before she listened for more undead. Not hearing anything outside of the trench, she raised the weapon, aimed, took two steps, and flung it straight into the massive head of the ogre.

The axe struck with a reverberating sound, lodging deep into its skull.

She smiled, the expression turning into a frown when the monster turned towards her, still alive.

Another loud roar ripped another chunk of bone and flesh out of the monster's head. This time, it fell.

Kate walked up to it, feeling new energy flowing through her, the feeling intoxicating. She grabbed the handle of her axe and tore it out of the bloodied and broken skull, ripping out bits of brain and bone with the motion. She whipped the heavy weapon to the side, getting rid of most of the gore before she walked towards the trench.

Her allies shouted something but there was more to kill. Or was there?

There was something.

She reached the trench and saw the flailing undead, trapped and ready to be butchered. She would oblige.

A small bag came flying at her but Kate dodged to the right. Why were her allies attacking her? Were they really her allies?

No.

They were.

But why?

Another bag came flying.

This one, she caught, the small bundle unfolding at the impact into her hand, brown powder exploding outwards, some of it hitting her face.

*Coffee.*

She stumbled back, deactivating her skills despite the monsters left unkilld. The contradicting thoughts made her head hurt, Kate wincing as she touched her brow, her breathing fast before she slowed it down again. *It's fine. It's fine. They will be killed. Just not by you. Just not by you.*

A part of her, she found, felt sad. Disappointed. Like a child hoping for a specific Christmas gift and receiving something else instead.

*To see my siblings getting what I wanted,* she thought, watching as Melusine, Allison, Eloise, and Jon fired down into the trench with crossbows, to preserve at least some of their gun ammo. They had used a lot of it by now but of course it benefited everyone.

She sighed, her body feeling frayed as the adrenaline and magic slowly faded. At least in this fight, she didn't have to drink any blood. The thought brought her into the moment, the stench of burnt skin, blood, and rot all around her. It felt more familiar now but she still found it disgusting, her own armor of course splattered with at least some gore.

*Jumping down like that. What the fuck am I even doing.* She couldn't help but smile to herself. It had worked after all. *Just wish they could've been here to see it.*

She looked up to the sky and made her way back towards the wall, Logan throwing her a rope she caught, Kate jumping over the moaning undead stuck below before she made her way up the battlements. It would take some time for the others to kill everything with their crossbows.

"No injuries?" Melusine asked, glancing over as she strained to reload the weapon.

Kate walked over and helped them, pulling back the heavy strings with smooth and single motions. She saw that Jon had gotten the hand crossbows taken from the few Eratur they had killed in the past week as well, the small bolts at least as dangerous as the larger ones fired from the old human made weapons.

Allison had found out that the smaller crossbows were enhanced by magic, not adding any stats or anything, just far more resilient and powerful.

“Don’t think so,” Kate said, handing another crossbow to Melusine.

The woman received the weapon with a slightly worried look in her eyes. “I’ll check up on you later,” she said and leaned over the battlements, aimed, and fired, another one of the moaning creatures silenced.

“Sky is clear. Forest is clear,” Logan’s voice came from everyone’s radios. Except for Kate’s.

*Shit. Broke another one*, she thought with a sigh. Her berserking self didn’t exactly care much about the state of her equipment.

She wondered if Allison could some day add magic to the radios, to make them sturdier.

Kate leaned against the battlements and sighed, finding a nearby pack before she got a bit of water and a cloth to clean her face. She scrolled through the messages from the past week and frowned. Only two level ups in her main Class, despite the dozens of undead they had hunted down. At least the others were making good progress, though Logan hadn’t leveled much either.

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

**‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Undead Eratur]’**

...

**‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Undead Ogre]’**

*At least I contributed enough for the Ogre kill to count.*

**‘ding’ ‘Omen of Vengeance reaches lvl 24’**

**Stat points +2**

**Vigor +1**

**‘ding’ ‘Omen of Vengeance reaches lvl 25’**

**Stat points +2**

**Vigor +1**

**‘ding’ ‘Mindless Ferocity reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 14’**

...

**‘ding’ ‘Mindless Ferocity reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 16’**

*'ding' 'Blood Frenzy reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 11'*

...

*'ding' 'Blood Frenzy reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 13'*

*'ding' 'Vengeful Charge reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 3'*

...

*'ding' 'Vengeful Charge reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 5'*

*'ding' 'Reaper Jump reaches lvl 11'*

*'ding' 'Reaper Jump reaches lvl 12'*

*'ding' 'Blood Rupture reaches lvl 13'*

...

*'ding' 'Blood Rupture reaches lvl 16'*

*'ding' 'Blood for the Living reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 9'*

...

*'ding' 'Blood for the Living reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 11'*

*'ding' 'Fury of the Unarmored reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 6'*

*'ding' 'Two Handed Weapon Fighting reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 10'*

...

*'ding' 'Two Handed Weapon Fighting reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 12'*

*'ding' 'Unrelenting Carnage reaches lvl 17'*

...

*'ding' 'Unrelenting Carnage reaches lvl 20'*

So close to the second stage on *Unrelenting Carnage*, Kate thought.

All of the skill upgrades definitely made her feel more and more in control, all of it flowing into each other to make her more efficient.

She wondered what to do with her *Terrifying Presence* skill, the ability not leveling in the slightest against the undead, likely because they just didn't feel any fear.

*'ding' 'Roaring Pursuer reaches lvl 20'*

**Brutality +1**

*'ding' 'Roaring Pursuer reaches lvl 21'*

**Brutality +1**

*'ding' 'Thunderous Shout reaches lvl 11'*

...

*'ding' 'Thunderous Shout reaches lvl 13'*

***'ding' 'Reverberating Charge reaches lvl 12'***

...

***'ding' 'Reverberating Charge reaches lvl 16'***

***'ding' 'Aura of Silence reaches lvl 15'***

***'ding' 'Aura of Silence reaches lvl 16'***

***'ding' 'Sound Perception reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 2'***

***'ding' 'Sound Perception reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 3'***

***'ding' 'Echo Awareness reaches lvl 7'***

***'ding' 'Echo Awareness reaches lvl 8'***

***'ding' 'Tremor Sense reaches lvl 11'***

***'ding' 'Tremor Sense reaches lvl 12'***

Her four stat points she had put into Endurance and Strength, two for each.

Kate saw Logan come out of the watchtower, the sniper rifle held by his side.

"Nice shots," she said.

"At least you hit something with your jump this time," he said as he joined them, his eyes kept towards the sky just in case they attracted Wyverns. Not that they had seen any of them in the past week. Something that Maximilian confirmed through the regular radio broadcasts, even from the other side of the valley. The Wyverns were mostly gone, having retreated or having moved on, they didn't know.

"Doesn't really matter with the resistance I get during the jump," Kate said. Landing in the yard of the castle would've at least broken her legs without it. Now, she had just been slightly bruised.

"Oh!" Jon exclaimed, setting down his crossbow. He looked lost in thought, likely reading a message he had received. "Now this might change things," he said with a smile.

"What did you get?" Logan asked.

"A spell to send out a short message to... warriors of my keep, or those closely related to the keep," he said.

Kate glanced at Logan and nodded. They had already been considering scouting farther away from the castle. Everyone had agreed with their more recent endeavors to lure undead closer with that goal in mind. The others would get fighting and weapon experience and hopefully a few levels as well so that they could defend the castle better without Kate and Logan there.

But even with all that in mind, Kate hadn't exactly felt comfortable with the idea, the only reason she had considered it was the fact that the undead were still coming, and it didn't look like they would stop anytime soon. Something had to be done.

Other than the simple lack of defenses and fighting power in the castle, the main limiting factor was the range of their radios. If the castle came under attack, there was no real way for them to notify Kate and Logan if they were farther away.

Now, they had the trench and wooden stakes, and the group had gotten far more used to the rifles and pistols, enough ammo still around for it not to become an issue in the coming weeks.

“Try it,” Kate said. “With both of us.”

“I can only contact one person apparently,” Jon said and squinted his eyes. “Only one way too.”

“*Hello, Kate? Can you hear me?*” Jon’s voice echoed in Kate’s mind, as if it was her own thought.

She touched her head and raised her brows. *I can hear you, yes*, she tried to answer but Jon didn’t react.

“We’ll have to test its range,” Logan said. “Let’s do that tomorrow.” He sounded determined.

Kate felt it too. Hunting undead in the forest wouldn’t solve the issue itself. They had to find the source, and destroy it, same as they had done with the orcs and goblins coming from the cave near Keilberg. They were still gaining reasonable levels from their fights but the undead had grown more numerous. Waiting here and defending only, it made her feel stuck and exposed.

If Jon’s spell worked at higher distances, Kate knew she would be able to go out there with a massive weight lifted from her shoulders.

“We’ll have to think of ways to reply, for testing purposes,” Jon said.

“Do we have any lasers?” Logan asked.

“Maybe in the pile we got from the police station,” Kate said. “Not sure if I saw any.”

“Aren’t they illegal?” Jon asked.

“Only the stronger ones,” Logan said. “But that’s the kind I’d want. We could even send messages back, with the castle being stationary. Difficult but it should be possible to hit the watchtowers. Do you know morse code?”

“I’m afraid, I don’t,” Jon said.

“I’ll write down some instructions this evening,” Logan said and sighed. “Hope I still have that stuff somewhere in my memory.”

Their radios cracked, Celeste’s careful voice resounding. “Are all the monsters dead?”

Kate didn’t hear any of the undead anymore.

Jon glanced at Melusine. “Are you sure about this?”

Melusine sighed. “I’m not, dear. But I don’t think we can hide the state of the world from her forever. I’m surprised she hasn’t sneaked out by herself so far. At least this way, we can talk to her and explain things.”

He sighed and nodded. “We’ll do it together.”

Melusine smiled, then glanced towards the armory, a serious look in her eyes.