

Chapter 81 Onslaught

Kate and Logan met up with the Union in Falstadt at nine. Not as they usually did at the Villa but in the old city hall. Kate looked up at the stone archway leading to the inner courtyard. Heavy stone, built not only to last but to impose, to show wealth, and power. The four story structure was one of the core buildings of the Falstadt old town. The bombings and subsequent fires had destroyed a lot, but the old city hall was still standing.

“Dispatch here. I see you’ve arrived at city hall. Welcome to the chaos.” Mehmet’s voice came from Logan’s and Kate’s radios. *“Make yourselves at home. Don’t forget to eat. Briefing at 10. It’s good to have you there. Dispatch out.”*

Logan confirmed and glanced to Kate right when Fred rushed up to the closed grates and started opening the various bike locks and chains. He wore riot gear reinforced with additional metal bits and pieces added to the heavy clothing. Shield on his back, he had a mace strapped to his belt. “The last to arrive,” he said, checking behind them and onto the street to make sure no undead were nearby. “Good morning, and welcome to city hall,” he said with practiced charm but Kate could tell when he was nervous.

Not much to get Fred Palmer to stress out but I suppose this is new territory, even for him, she thought and smiled. It both unnerved her and put her at ease. Fred had been a part of the brigade for ages before she’d joined, so he’d always seemed like a reliable relic of sorts, someone to trust and rely on no matter what. To see him now, like this, his eyes scanning the street, his hand shaking ever so slightly as he locked the grates again, it let her know that Fred was still human, like everyone else here.

She set down their supply delivery and glanced over to a few combatants in the courtyard that she didn’t know by name, all of them carrying different weapons, from polearms to axes to rifles, all of them equipped with personalized armor, made or modified by one crafter or another. Kate knew a few of those pieces had come from Allison as well.

She saw some of the mortars they’d gotten from the military stash, all of them being set up in the courtyard, three people checking where they were aimed. She hoped they were familiar with the equipment, though considering how calm they were acting and seeing how Logan only took a glance and didn’t go to offer any advice, she assumed her worries were unfounded.

She turned back to Fred as they made their way to the large building. “Holding up okay?” she asked, not expecting him to show his worry but she wanted to let him know that she was there.

He grunted, the look in his eyes as he grinned at her taking on a slightly darker tone. “No need to worry about me, Kate. We’re all doing our part.” He glanced at the large mace and the axe she carried on her back, looking at her for a moment before he spoke. “It’s good to have you two with us.”

Kate nodded, touching his armored shoulder. Her own scale armor lightly scraped his metal with the motion, reminding her that they weren’t just out on a job with the brigade.

“I’ll check with my artillery unit before I join you inside. Will take care of the gear you brought too. Up the stairs and to the left,” Fred said. “I’ll see you later.”

“Yeah,” Kate said, smiling to herself as she watched him join the group of fighters. She was glad to be wearing her helmet, her own excitement might unnerve some of the people she’d not talked to or fought with before. She knew there were plenty of rumors going around about herself and Logan. Of course nobody complained or offered any open criticism but having a Berserker around was certainly reason for at least some concern. She would think the same if it had been anyone else. Having a wild card present in any planned operation was a stupid risk to take but with what they’d planned for today, she was sure the Union would welcome anyone that fought on their side.

They went inside, walked through the entrance hall, and ascended the broad marble stairwell up to the first floor double doors, currently open. They found a central hall beyond. The benches, chairs, plants, and other furniture had been piled up near the walls, a few tables still present with some breakfast and steaming pots, likely magically infused food. Heated up, for sure. There were no cooks present, everyone here a combatant above level twenty.

Kate saw a few familiar faces nearby, Bastian checking his gear, his armor looking near twice as massive as the last time she’d seen him, the former police officer equipped with an assault rifle, pistol, riot shield, and his fire axe, now likely all enchanted. He nodded their way as they passed, a few others greeting them with gestures or curt words, the tension in the room palpable.

“Quite a fierce image,” Latia said when she’d turned from the food station and glanced at Kate and Logan. “The two Exterminators join the city hall. Welcome.” Her almost silver hair was hidden behind the modified steel helmet she wore, leaving much of her face exposed. A flute and harmonica hung from her armored jacket, two knives and a Glock strapped to her belt. “The food in the pots is enchanted, the bread and coffee isn’t.”

“Thanks,” Kate said, smiling at the bard. It felt to her as if Latia was putting on a performance. *Maybe that’s just how she copes with everything.*

The woman smiled. “I will be excited to see you two fight, if it gets to that at all.” She excused herself after and joined her team.

Kate couldn’t see Aathi or Reymond anywhere. She assumed they were already out in the city.

Looking down the hallway to the left of the central hall, it was clear to Kate why the building had been chosen. Its walls were old and built thicker than most modern structures, not necessarily made to withstand fire codes, earthquakes, and hot summers, but against a horde of undead creatures, its stone walls, broad hallways, and massive doors provided far more utility than most modern structures.

Kate found a printed out map of the city hall fastened to the wall. Checking it, she found the various hallways and doors listed, including where ammo and medical supplies could be found, paths to retreat into other sections of the building, and escape routes. The plan was quite simple. Something she welcomed, knowing how stressed people reacted to complex information.

When they reached the broad corridor to the west hall, Kate noticed one of the large machine guns set up and aimed down and into the hallway. She’d seen them in the military storage but hadn’t quite appreciated how big they were.

“M2s,” Logan said, as if that explained anything. “Fifty caliber rounds.”

Kate glanced at the ammo set into the heavy machine gun. “Big stuff?” she asked.

Logan nodded. “Yeah. Big stuff.”

She smiled, following the armored man through the lavishly decorated and now abandoned hallway. Nineteenth century history on the walls from when Austria-Hungary had still been a thing. She wondered if any battles had ever been fought in these halls, or if this would be the first.

It was clear why the west wing had been chosen as the main center of the fight. Kate could see out through the large windows of the first floor and straight onto the Marktstrasse below, one of the broadest and longest streets in the city, once lined with shops, cafés, restaurants, a cinema, and various other businesses, now abandoned or destroyed by the bombs or monsters.

Lining the windows were machine gun positions aiming out onto the long street, the same M2 heavy fifty caliber guns. Six of them in a row, one for every window facing the street below, each equipped with belts of ammo, teams of combatants checking the positions, those few who knew the weapons making sure everything was in order before they would be operated.

Much of the windows was boarded up with metal plates screwed into the stone, leaving enough room for the machine guns to be aimed and fired.

“Morning. Good to see you two,” Valery said, looking up from the map she’d had rolled out on a large wooden table. Her shield and spear were the same but her armor looked heavier, dark leather and steel, her helmet modeled after that of a gladiator from roman times. Alexander and Lewis greeted them, their equipment looking ready for a historical battle too, Lewis’ more so than Alexander’s, his gear considerably more heavy and plated.

“Logan, you’ll get the one on the right, fine with that? We’re putting everyone with enough strength and sacred or holy magic to work,” Valery said.

“Yeah,” Logan said. “Been a while.” He looked at the machine gun before he turned to Kate and motioned for her to follow. “I’ll give you a crash course too, just in case.”

Always with the guns, Kate thought. They’d been fighting monsters for weeks but seeing everything here, all the combatants equipped in metal, scale, and leather armor, axes, guns, and spears, seeing their faces, tense, but ready, the machine guns positioned, aimed out onto the snow covered street below, the fog limiting their vision, it felt like more than just survival. It felt like war.

The Union gathered at 10, everyone now in the west hall of the once central seat of governmental power in Falstadt. A historical structure that had been relegated to a mere office building in the last few decades, now perhaps about to witness yet another piece of history.

Kate glanced to her left and right, seeing the serious faces of the other fighters. People who’d survived the appearance of monsters in the Maar Valley, in Austria, and their world. People who had fought, for one reason or another, compelled to or feeling as if they didn’t have a choice. People who’d fought long and hard enough to advance in their newfound powers, everyone with their own personal history, their own fears, their own hopes, their own strength. Today they were all gathered here.

“Welcome,” Valery said. She stood before them, six heavy machine guns aimed out of the windows behind her. “I’ll keep this short. We all know why we’re here. Today we face an undead horde. I don’t want any heroics from you. I want you to survive. Keep your mind calm, focus on your tasks, and we will prevail. Your chosen leaders give the signals for when to engage, and when to retreat. Study the layout of these halls and the escape routes a few more times, it might decide on life or

death.” She looked at the clock on her arm. “Grab a map and get in your position. Dispatch will keep you informed on how things are progressing. Our lure team will start now.”

Kate glanced at some of the people around, then glanced to Valery when nobody moved.

Valery rolled her eyes, then focused and smiled. “Union Fighters!” she shouted. “Get to fucking work.”

A few people cheered, others chuckled or made comments.

Kate shook her head slightly, smiling to herself as she looked at the CEO turned survival leader.

She watched how the group dispersed, most of them taking up positions at the machine guns or near them, those not firing the guns ready to reload or fire their own rifles at potential fliers that came too close. She herself stood a few meters behind one of the central guns, looking out onto the foggy winter street, hearing every bit of noise as the weapons and equipment were checked, the maps were folded, prayers spoken.

Valery stepped next to her, spear and shield on her back, a rifle casually held in her hands.

“Am I taking up your spot?” Kate asked. “I wasn’t assigned one.”

Valery smiled. “Not at all, Kate. We’re all here in this together. And your lack of instructions was very much deliberate.”

Kate nodded. “I’d thought as much.”

“Just do me a favor and wait with your magics until it’s necessary,” Valery said.

“Of course,” Kate said, the two of them remaining quiet for a few minutes as the others finished their preparations.

She blinked her eyes when she heard a distant explosion. *Here we go.*

The hall quieted. Kate could hear the breaths and heartbeats of the gathered fighters pick up. The snow covered street beyond was quiet once again. She breathed in deep, and watched.

A minute passed. Another explosion, this one closer but not yet in the street before them.

Kate heard music, narrowing her eyes. A faint noise, coming from somewhere far ahead. She felt tremors in the ground. Still far away. Heavy and slow. One of the giants.

“1812 Overture, Tchaikovsky,” Valery said.

Kate glanced at her, raising her brow.

“The music, to lure them in. The piece felt fitting, though sadly there’s only enough time for the last part of the finale,” Valery informed before her radio crackled.

“We have received confirmation of an undead horde heading towards Markstrasse. The first radios are engaged. The Lure team is out and will regroup and join the battle when ready. Good luck, fighters, Veronica out.” The voice came from several radios before it went silent.

Kate watched with bated breath, taking a few steps forward, feeling the vibrations in the ground now. Above and in the distance, she could see a shadowy silhouette, humanoid and moving closer. Below, she could feel the slight tremors in the ground. Hundreds, thousands, like running ants flowing down into the street they had chosen. A roar resounded in the distance, dulled. The distorted

challenge of a once proud beast, now mere undead, whipped onward to hunt and kill, by whatever force or instinct still present.

Kate raised her helmet and put it on, covering the smile on her face as she watched the silhouette of the massive creature come closer in the gray fog of the winter air. She heard another set of radios activate, closer this time, trumpets and bells joining the explosions sounding through the street to lure the monster horde closer.

“Hold,” Lewis said, the broad man not operating one of the machine guns himself but ready to reload.

The roars and moans grew louder and more numerous, closing in with flying creatures above, some landing on the buildings of the street with heavy impacts.

The last set of radios activated as the musical piece came to a crescendo, close now, and with it, the horde breached through the fog, a sea of screeching beasts, thousands of undead, limbs and teeth, flesh puppeteered onward without thought, unending tide of monstrosity.

And what stood against them, was humanity.

“Fire!”

The hall erupted with a thunderous sound, overpowering every other noise from beast and man alike, magically enhanced machine gun fire roaring out into the monsters that had taken their city.

The first rows of undead all but vanished, splattered through by the large caliber bullets without resistance, rows upon rows turned into red mist and chunks of flying flesh as glowing streaks of light tore into their numbers. Orcs, Ogres, and Overakar alike were torn asunder, the large creatures ripped apart bit by bit until they collapsed into the midst of the horde. More undead flowed past, stopped dead in their tracks as soon as they reached the line of fire.

Kate tuned out the loud sound of the machine guns then, simply watching as the horde was ripped apart bit by bit by the glowing bullets shot into their numbers, hundreds of creatures falling to the monotonous sounds of rattling machines. There was no cohesion to their movements, no formations, no thought, no cover. Mere beasts running to their deaths, pushing on with numbers, flesh, and tenacity. And they were torn apart, each and every one.

Kate saw the three machine guns on the left stop firing, waiting for the right to empty. She saw a group of Wyverns fly down from an angle, one of the guns aimed towards them before it fired. Wings were clipped, chunks of scales torn out in an instant, three of them mangled and falling mere moments later, impacting down onto the street now colored red. The other combatants had started firing their rifles at the stray undead that had gotten through, orcs, humans, goblins, and other smaller creatures, each taken out with bullets cutting through their forms, falling long before they reached the walls of city hall.

“Right side reload!” Lewis shouted. “Left side, fire!”

Kate watched as everyone got into motion, the three machine guns on the left resuming their fire as the right ones were reloaded, the first set of gunners exchanged for others, their sacred magic too low to continue. Logan stepped back too, helping with the reload as another combatant took over.

The monsters tried to push on now, fewer guns firing into their midst, and still, she saw they found it difficult now to get through and over the mounds of flesh, past the downed Overakar and Ogres, like islands in a sea of monstrosities. The groups that managed to push past were nothing more than chunks of falling flesh when the reloaded guns were firing once more.

Minutes passed, the gunners switching out as Lewis commanded them, the undead now blocked and funneled by the mounds and larger beasts lying dead among their numbers. And still they pushed forward. Minute upon minute, a sea of blood and death.

Kate gulped, seeing the horde finally thin out, the street painted red as more of them still approached, slipping on the blood or tripping on the dead piling up.

“Hold your fire!” Lewis shouted now. “Assault rifles, now! Take out the undead!”

Bullets roared out of the hall, the small groups pushing through taken out with bursts of assault rifle fire.

It was then that the towering monstrosity of the undead stepped out from the fog, chains and rusted bits of armor covering the form that towered above even the very structure they were in.

Valery raised her radio. “Artillery unit, prepare to fire.”

Kate glanced at her, then turned back to look at the massive creature. She felt her hands itch, looking at the violence, the carnage. She looked at the one remaining eye of the massive creature, large wounds showing on its body, its skin a pale and sickly white, a slow moving humanoid, large enough to crush through half a building with a single strike of its fist. It dragged a chain behind itself, each link as large as a car.

She wanted to go out there.

The creature took another step and Valery gave the signal. “Fire, and keep firing until I say stop.”

Seconds passed before the fist shell struck the monster, tearing into the metal on its shoulder with a blast. Another shell struck its arm, the next ripping into its head. Three more missed but hit the nearby undead instead, the explosions sending limbs and bodies flying to the sides. The next salvo ripped out metal and flesh on the massive creature, the monster stopping its advance as it pulled on its chain, roaring before a shell slammed into its head, the explosion making it slowly stagger back.

“Right side, aim at its legs and fire!” Lewis shouted, the freshly reloaded machine guns resuming their fire a moment later, splattering through the running undead before they focused their fire into the broad and armored trunk like legs of the massive creature, the bullets tearing through with wet and splattering impacts.

Kate heard the monster roar, its legs giving out as more shells exploded on its head and chest, much of it gone as it tried to raise its chain, the movement sending a few links into the store fronts next to it, before it slowly toppled down and fell, crushing all the undead still behind it.

Cheers resounded for a moment before Lewis shouted for them to focus, the machine guns stopping their fire as the combatants shot out onto the street with their rifles. Another few minutes before the undead slowed to a trickle.

Now, Lewis didn’t interrupt the cheers, joining them instead.

Kate only watched, narrowing her eyes when she felt more tremors still. “It’s not over,” she said.

“Fighters. We just got confirmation of two more hordes moving in on your position. Northwest and South. Valery, how should we proceed?”

Everyone looked to the woman, a few of the combatants firing more bullets out to kill the last remaining undead.

Valery raised her radio. "We hold position. Tell the lure team they should try to use explosives and radios to delay the southern horde." She looked at the people around her. "Reload your weapons and prepare to retreat if the undead breach city hall." She raised her fist. "One horde down!"

Kate nodded along before Valery turned her way.

"Exterminators, if the courtyard and southern entrance is breached, take the artillery team and hold position for as long as you can."

Kate smiled, taking a few steps away before she collected her weapons. She saw that Logan was already waiting.

"And make use of the gun in the hallway," Valery added before she turned back to the others.

"How's your mana?" Kate asked as herself and Logan made their way through the hallway.

"I should keep the rest for my buffs and healing, in case I get injured," he said.

Kate nodded when they reached the machine gun standing in the hallway. She looked at the young woman sitting next to it and smiled. She strapped her weapons to her pack and grabbed on to the heavy gun, and raised it up. "We'll be taking this."