

## Chapter 53 Voice

Kate turned around with wide eyes as everyone present stopped whatever they were doing and moved closer to Jon who turned up the radio and fumbled for a notepad. She tuned out everything else.

*“... Lang, former company head of Schindler Streich in Falstadt. Our group of survivors has cleared and secured the facilities of the Bauernradio Graning in the town of Graning eight kilometers northwest of Falstadt. Our efforts last week had been halted due to the sudden snowfall. We are running on backup generators but will try to send out new information we gather at seven-thirty every evening. This current message should be recorded and sent repeatedly throughout the day but our knowledge on this facility is not yet established. We hope to improve in the coming weeks.”*

Kate assumed the woman was reading from a script but she spoke with conviction and without stutters. The voice paused for a few seconds as the radio crackled slightly, then continued.

*“If you are out there, surviving somewhere in the Maar valley or beyond, know that you are not alone. There are others who have survived, others who are fighting. We have lost many, and we have lost much but whatever the landscape of our country and our world now looks like, we are here, and we will remain. This is our planet and the monsters who have come to invade our homes, to kill our families, our friends, and our coworkers, will come to find that our species has not reached the apex of this Earth without reason.”*

The woman paused once more. Her tone was formal, as if she delivered a report but Kate could tell there was more, even with the radio quality. She could hear the tension, the weight this woman put into her words and yet she controlled her voice well, abstained from too much emotion. She was used to speaking.

*Company head, she said,* Kate thought when the woman continued. Lang was probably her last name.

*“If you have managed to stay entirely hidden so far, remain so for the time being. The Maar Valley has been firebombed by our military to reduce monster populations gathering within. A recent blizzard has dropped an average of one hundred and ninety centimeters of fresh snow, both making traversal difficult. If you have remained unaware so far, and I must stress that this is in no way to be taken as a comedic note nor a conspiratorial illusion, there are dangerous beasts walking our towns and villages, our forests, and swimming in our lakes. Focus on your own name and person to see the status we have all gained access to. It shows quantified values describing your abilities and it allows for the acquisition of Classes and abilities this system describes as magic. Our theories and knowledge on the true nature of this magic is as of yet insufficiently understood but real world applications are efficient and provide a way to fight against the various monster populations that have taken over these territories...”*

The woman went on to talk about the various stats and how Classes can be acquired in a general sense. She talked about skills and skill levels, about training, about combat and non combat Classes. All information that Kate and her group already knew.

*“We find that splitting combat groups into various roles leads to the best results, though individual performance will vary. Vitality is important for all Classes but if you have few people or are surviving alone, we suggest a Class that has at least some focus on defense or healing...”*

“What’s going on?” Allison said as she walked down the stairs.

Melusine shushed her and pointed at the radio.

Kate’s mind was racing. There were people from Falstadt who had survived. Of course there were. She just hadn’t allowed herself that thought. *Enough people to gather all this information, to clear a town or at least get into a radion station to send this message.* She shook her head and continued to listen. The woman listed more information that would be vital to anyone who hadn’t fought monsters already. Kate thought it hopeful that anyone had survived without any contact so far but she supposed not everyone would be that cynical.

*“While these Classes will allow us to survive and fight back, we do not currently recommend leaving your bunkers, cellars, or other types of shelters. Not until the situation is clearer and under control. Some time after the firebombing of Falstadt, both humans and beasts killed in the attack or otherwise deceased have started to rise as undead, unthinking but retaining some of their previous instincts and abilities. These monsters have now spread far into the Maar valley, fighting, overwhelming, and then assimilating other monster populations who have previously been observed.*

*“We see the undead as the current primary threat to our continued survival. Our efforts in the last few days have been focused on getting closer to Falstadt, learning to understand these creatures, and culling their populations as much as possible. Be aware that while they leave the city in numbers of one to several dozen, we have observed much higher populations moving within and without the city. Several hundred at least. Any higher intelligence acting to control or guide them has so far not been discovered. Many of them move in groups to hunt what seems like anything that is alive, but they do not seem to communicate with each other, learn, nor share information. We haven’t observed any change in movement or behavior due to our actions and small scale attacks.*

*“They are highly resistant to localized damage and will continue to move even with bullet holes in their heads, chests, or legs. Blunt trauma will not stop them nor will they wince at deep gashing wounds, however, enough accumulated damage will kill them. Melee weapons and skills have provided the best results in our battles so far. Magical damage is effective, however the undead seem highly resistant to any cold, ice, and water based spells. We are currently setting up a variety of traps designed by our few engineers, to test broader application against the undead. If you have a way to gain abilities mentioning faith, ki, spirit, sacred magic, or any other descriptor that could be identified as religious or spiritual, we have found that such abilities are highly effective against the undead.*

*“If you are a group powerful enough to engage the undead in battle, we recommend focusing your efforts on them, they are spreading faster and more aggressively than any other monster species we have observed so far, even the orc and goblin armies decimated in the firebombing.*

*“If you are on the northern slope of the Maar Valley, it may be possible for you to reach the train line leading into and through the Buchneit mountain. We are currently located near the Hein Pass, the closest station being Kruppenhof. The small village is secured, though due to fortification concerns, there is only a small scouting group based near the station. They will find you if you enter the post office opposite the train station but again, if you currently have shelter and resources to survive, we recommend you remain at your current location. While Wyvern activity has gone down,*

*likely due to the blizzard and subsequent cold weather, crossing the valley or any of the surrounding forests that haven't burned down remains highly dangerous."*

Kate knew the Hein Pass. It was a set of railroad bridges leading into the Buchneit mountain north of Falstadt. Kilometers of broad tunnels for mainly freight trains going north towards Germany. She knew the route was not as frequently used anymore due to the newer and faster route going through Mallnitz.

She remembered there were old military bunkers in those mountains too, from the cold war era.

*"Again, our current objective is gathering more information and resources, gaining more magical and technological power with weapons, armor, military, and medical equipment. Our current main threat are the undead as they do not seem to behave in comparable ways to other observed monster populations. All following information is speculative and not necessarily confirmed, however it may still prove vital to your efforts of survival. Valery Lang. We will keep fighting. Be vigilant and determined. Good luck out there."*

The radio was silent for more than ten seconds, nobody in the room daring to speak before the small machine crackled and returned static once more.

"She said there was more information to come," Jon murmured.

"Leave the frequency, they're probably figuring out the recording," Allison said. "Fuck me, Hein Pass? That's all the way through the valley, even past Falstadt. Nobody from this side will make that trip."

"There was no info on specific numbers nor their levels or equipment," Logan said.

"It's possible there are monsters who can somehow understand our language," Jon said.

"And use radios?" Kate asked.

"They appeared here out of nowhere, some of them wield magic, and some are more intelligent than others. The chance is low I suppose, based on what we've seen but you never know," Jon said.

"We probably can't trust every human either," Logan said. "Not with everything that happened. I think it's a risk that they even mentioned where others could find them."

Kate gulped. She knew he was right but she just didn't think that way. "If there was any way to contact human survivors, I would do it."

He looked at her for a long moment, then nodded.

"This is... fantastic," Jon said. "We will have to find a way to respond somehow. Maybe there's a radio station on this slope of the mountain too. To share information. How far away is this Hein Pass? Or Graning where the radio station is?"

"We cannot reach them," Logan said, snuffing out Jon's enthusiasm. "We don't have the numbers nor levels. Me and Kate are the only high level combatants and even with just the two of us, I would think it a high risk to make that journey."

Jon tapped the armchair with his index finger, his other hand touching his cheek. "I agree. It's annoying but I agree. But now we know there are others who are fighting as well."

Kate breathed in a deep breath. She could feel her blood flowing through her veins, the blood seeped with her magic. She balled her fist and looked at her companions. The stone armory she had come to call her home suddenly didn't feel quite as claustrophobic anymore.

*Valery Lang*, she thought. The woman knew what she was doing. A message to inform and to guide but most of all, to inspire. She could feel it herself and she could feel it in the others, the way they stood, the change she heard in their breaths and heart beats.

The radio static vanished yet again. A different voice speaking this time. While Valery had seemed focused, speaking with weight and determination, the tone of this man's voice seemed far less confident.

"... yes... yes, I said I'd do it, didn't I? Just... can you close the door at least?" Jon turned up the sound, then turned it down when a crackling resounded.

"Too close to the microphone," Allison said.

Kate saw her rolling her eyes.

"Right, so... I guess hello?" the man said and was quiet for a few long seconds. Then they heard a loud gulp. "Ah man, shit. This sucks. I mean I guess it sucks for you as well, out there. If there's anyone else out there at all. Or just monsters." He laughed. An awkward and cynical sound.

"Better than fighting those nightmares, I suppose. I mean, yeah, you heard Valery, stay in your fucking bunkers or whatever if you want to survive. I have... sheets of notes here. Stuff we found out, specific numbers, evolution requirements, Class requirements, stuff like that. Guess it's my job to figure out what to talk about first... holy shit. I was just a student, man."

The radio was quiet again.

"Fuck."

"Yeah, no shit man," Allison said.

Kate grit her teeth. She didn't have time for this. *They were fighting, and this... clown.* She hissed and turned away. "I'll get my shower."

"I'll take notes, will let you know about anything useful later," Jon said.

"Radio?" Logan asked.

Kate tapped the device strapped to her bloodied winter jacket.

"Alright. You got this. Okay. Let's try this again. I'm Maximilian Reiter, former student of the most important, trusted, and highest paying field of academics. Journalism. That was... a joke, maybe not the right time for this, eh, but hey, when has humor really been misplaced? But I'll stop wasting everyone's time now, let's see. If you're still alive, you've probably figured out the basics, and you've probably already locked yourself into some random Class. Wondering if there is someone out there fighting with a magically enhanced vaccum cleaner, you go suck em up, big guy. So, monsters I suppose. World's teeming with em now and our info isn't perfectly accurate but I'll keep you posted. Suppose this is my job now," the radio host said, a sigh coming through the speakers.

Kate went to find a fresh set of clothes down in the cellar, finding dinner in the middle of preparation, Eloise listening to the radio upstairs with the others.

"The green guys first. Orcs, goblins, chances are you've already met them. Let's start with orcs. Size is similar to an adult human man, strong but not ridiculously so, estimated Strengh is sitting at

*around ten to thirteen, we haven't encountered anything ridiculously higher so far and it's unclear if they can level up or gain Classes like we do, early theories are leaning towards no. Green skin... what is this formatting, sorry, this doesn't make any sense, let me quickly change this. Let's go with that. Alright, preferred weapons..."*

Kate went back up, prepared her hammer, and listened, tuning out the radio and the others before she started taking out the orc swords blocking the door.

She stepped outside and heard the door close. Her radio crackled and she heard Logan do his check.

She answered, breathing in the fresh winter air. It shouldn't have been winter yet but she supposed a lot of things were not quite the same anymore. The gray sky had turned to be just dark but with her hearing, she didn't really feel like she needed quite as much light to figure out her surroundings. Occasionally clicking her tongue, Kate made her way over to Bert's house and went inside.

They hadn't been there in a while, hiding away in the armory and its cellar. She stood in the dark living room. Both the dinner table and sofa had been moved, leaving the room rather empty. She thought back to when Celeste and Bert had played chess, to when she had checked through the dvd collection of the old man. Kate smiled. *I thought the military would come and clear all of this up. Or did I? Maybe I was just in shock, taking the next step without stopping to think.*

A lot had happened. Her lips quivered and she could feel her eyes getting teary. Kate wiped at her eyes and sighed. She'd had time to think and she knew that they would have more.

She thought of Fred, thought of how he usually talked after they had seen some shit.

*A lot to process. He used to say. Take your time and don't be too hard on yourself. Feel, even if it hurts. It should hurt. That means you're human. And don't you forget that, Kate.*

She smiled, wondering if something had fucked up in her head to imagine Fred as some kind of personal coach in her mind. *He would probably say that I shouldn't be so hard on myself,* she thought and grinned. *Fuck off, Fred.*

Kate made her way up to the shower and set down her weapons in easy to reach spots. She locked the door and undressed.

The freezing water should've shocked her, should've made her gasp but she just found it mildly cool. She was glad for the lack of light, not interested in the blood and grime pooling below her feet. There would be more than enough to come by tomorrow.