

Chapter 132

Dragon Slaying

The giant mind dragon laid dead before Alexa and her throng of minions. Identical minions, except for the fact that they were all stronger, faster, and more capable of fighting than she herself was. Still, this was no issue, not for the moment, for now she had bigger things to finish. Getting jealous of her **Replicas**, would be the same thing as getting jealous of thinking people only thought of you because of a skill you possessed, or something you worked on. The **Replicas** were her, and were an extension of her own capabilities, every action they did, they did at Alexa's whim, at her behest. Each time they struck out, it was her mind guiding them, maneuvering the pieces into place, and then replacing them when the battle was over.

Alexa was tired, as she felt drained. This reminded her of the exhaustion she felt after her first full workout. The exhaustion that came pushing your body and mind to their limits and still holding on. She had begun the battle using six replicas, but found herself creating more and more that charged forward, slicing their way through layer after protective layer of the great beast, until nothing more remained.

The only reason she knew she was done, that the dragon had died was because of the system message that appeared, and the portal door opening next to her.

*Title Increased: **Dragon Slayer (23)**: All Magic abilities increased by 15% (345%). Magical effectiveness against all dragons increased by 50% (1,150%).*

Seeing the flashing message, Alexa paused, wondering if she should go forward. As it was, she felt her energy replenishing, though she didn't think she would have enough energy to go onto Stage IX of the **Trials of Ascension**.

While the entire battle had been relatively short, it had taken a toll on her mentally and physical, not that she was fully in her right mind to begin with, but now that the battle was over, she felt the dull ache of what was missing resting there in the back of her mind.

Realizing, this was likely her last time to improve her **Dragon Slayer** titles before finishing off Stage IX, she took in a deep exhausted breath, and cast a few magical **Healing** spells on her. This depleted her magical reserves even more, but gave her the mental stamina to continue going, to press on.

“Dungeon. Can you make it so my next stage is another **Dragon Trial**?” Alexa asked the dungeon using the Precursor language. There was a slight delay, before Alexa added, “please flash once for yes, or stay still if you don’t know what I mean.”

Flash.

At that, Alexa nodded. “Thank you.”

Flash again.

Alexa stared at the portal for a second, and after a second noticed the slight change in color. The portal that had a second ago been ready to take her to an unknown location, had shifted, letting Alexa go to the next dragon stage, where she would accomplish two goals, the first would be freeing another dungeon, and the last would be slaying another dragon.

On a whim, she waited, and thought about recalling the energy from her **Replicas**, while this would let her retain a good portion of the energy she initially required to create the **Replicas**, it would still add up over time. Thirty percent lost times twelve **Replicas** would mean that she would lose enough energy to summon three point six replicas per level. This was unsustainable, particularly if she wanted to complete all four remaining stages. To her credit, she wanted to complete the four stages, and then some. At least that was what she told herself. But really, she knew that eventually her second wind would stop, and she would need to hole up and rest. But she promised herself that she would finish these trials first.

On a whim, she sent her replicas forward through the dungeon portal exit first, then less than a moment later, she herself went through the portal. Holding her breath, she wondered if this would be it, if they would somehow dissipate or disperse while traveling through a portal. Fortunately they were still there, which meant that she either was capable of being separated from them for short periods of time, or they had a different tether that dictated when they would disappear. Logically she knew they wouldn’t be able to stay separated from her indefinitely, so maybe there was something to do with how much mana was used to create them, and then once that reserve of mana was gone, that was it? Regardless, there was a slight drain from her reserve as she reestablished her bond of dominance over the **Replicas**, but that drain was nothing compared to how much she spent creating wave after wave minions.

Once she was certain they were all here and would listen to her, Alexa mentally gave the command for the **Replicas** to charge forward and strike at the dragon. This dragon, like most of the dragons she had faced to this point was sleeping.

Wee-woo-wee-woo.

An alarm bell went off, instantly as the first minion crossed the threshold to enter the open chamber room that housed the slumbering dragon. At that, Alexa shook her head, remembering how she had come up with a way to bypass the alerting wards that were set up around the entrance to the dragon. Seeing that, Alexa just shook her head in disgust. She had grown sloppy, as she wanted to finish this as quickly as possible. Now her **Replicas** had to fight an uphill battle. Still there were twelve of them, and she could just create more if one fell in battle. This time, she gave them the command to not detonate themselves, unless they were severely injured and could deliver a deadly attack.

Slink, slash, clang.

While her twelve **Replicas** charged through, striking at the clearly confused dragon that got abruptly awoken from a deep slumber, only to start getting sliced and slashed by a dozen replicas, Alexa, the real Alexa was busy generating a three dimensional key that could be used to free this dungeon. This was a tough task and one that required all her concentration. Even now, after having created so many of these very keys, she still found that they took a lot of concentration. That or, it was just a sign of just how exhausted her mental faculties had gone.

“I offer freedom, for safe passage.” Alexa spoke in Precursor, holding up the key for the dungeon to see. There was a moment, as the dungeon clearly paused, before seeming to come to some form of conclusion about her and her motives. With a second, the dungeon began to pull away its outer layers, before revealing its chained core.

Tink.

There was a slight sound of metal scraping against metal, before the pentagonal key fit right into the odd lock of the chains.

Clink, clatter.

The chains fell off, after a slight tug, pulling the chains out from the soft membrane that had grown around the thick chains. Idly, Alexa wondered if she could take the key with her, to use it again, but it seemed that the key that she created was not only designed to unlock the chains, but to forever burn their way into the locking mechanism, basically making it so the lock was forever in the open position, and then fused into place. Honestly, Alexa wondered why she hadn't noticed this aspect of the key before. Though before she hadn't been so mentally exhausted. Even now, with her **Replicas** filtering part of their stolen energy into her, she still felt drained.

Idly she wondered how much longer she would have to wait, when she finally got the message she had been waiting for.

*Stage VII of the **Dragon Trials** Completed.*

*Title Increased: **Dragon Slayer (24)**: All Magic abilities increased by 15% (360%). Magical effectiveness against all dragons increased by 50% (1,200%).*

Then just like before Alexa saw the portal open up, she wanted to go home, but she already had her **Replicas** made. No wait, a quick count showed only eleven **Replicas**, with a pause she looked to see that there was indeed what looked to be an explosion at the torso of the dragon. Sighing to herself, Alexa let out a deep breath, and then focused her mind on creating a replacement **Replica**. This was still better than having to recreate them every time, but keeping track of twelve **Replicas** was taxing on her mind. Still, this was the easiest chance she got to power up. By now her magical **Replicas** were capable of doing all the work, so long as she could remain conscious and direct the **Replicas** to the intended target, she would be fine.

“Dungeon, for your assistance, please change my portal destination to the next **Dragon Trial** stage.”

There was no visual cue, other than the surface of the dungeon portal out changed slightly. Seeing the change, Alexa nodded and once again sent her minions forward.

For the next two times Alexa did this same repetitive thing, sending her minions forward to the new stage. She didn't know if her control could go back through a portal, and she didn't want to waste her mana on trying to test out a theory, not at this point. Instead, she decided to play the percentages better.

This time, when she arrived to see her minions waiting for her, she walked to the edge of the tunnel and instantly found a dense network of alerting and warning runes. Feeling the runes and their structure, she instantly found the powering runes, and directed the power from the rune chains directly into herself.

At the slight increase in energy, she did feel a bit relieved. The energy she gained was the equivalent of drinking a half cup of cold coffee, not exactly what you want, but close enough if you are trying to push your way through. With the entrance now clear of any hazards, Alexa sent her **Replicas** forward, while she once again went about freeing the dungeon. Once again, she gave the same deal, safe passage for freedom, a goal the dungeon readily accepted.

Then just like the last time, she received the system notification at about the same time she finished freeing the dungeon from the chains that bound it in place.

*Stage VIII of the **Dragon Trials** Completed.*

*Title Increased: **Dragon Slayer (25)**: All Magic abilities increased by 15% (375%). Magical effectiveness against all dragons increased by 50% (1,250%).*

This time Alexa was pleased to notice that her plan had gone flawlessly, as all of her **Replicas** had survived the attack. Judging by the location of the body, Alexa realized that her **Replicas** had taken advantage of their surprise attack and seemingly moved into position and began slicing and striking as one.

The ninth stage was much the same. She made sure to take the time to disable the alerting runes, then she went about setting the dungeon core free, at the same time her **Replicas** set about striking the slumbering dragon. The only difference this time being that her **Attribute Increase** title had also increased.

*Stage IX of the **Dragon Trials** Completed.*

*Title Increased: **Dragon Slayer (26)**: All Magic abilities increased by 15% (390%). Magical effectiveness against all dragons increased by 50% (1,300%).*

***Attribute Increase (16)**: All Attributes increased by 10% (160%).*

With those titles, she could feel her energy coming back to her. She was still drained, just because her Attributes increased by ten percent didn't mean that that ten percent was regenerated with the acquiring of the next stage of the title. She would still need to wait for that energy to refill, but it meant that when it did refill it would be a lot higher than what she had currently.

“Dungeon, as per our pact, I wish that you send me to the final stage of the **Dragon Trials**.”

With that request, the dungeon seemingly heard and understood as once again, just like the previous times, the dungeon exit fluctuated and rippled in a new color, and then disappeared. Just like every other time, she sent her **Replicas** forward, not wanting to deviate from a strategy that seemed to be working to perfection.

Of course, there was something odd that happened the minute the first **Replicas** went through the portal. Within seconds of their passing, the pressure that had been on Alexa's mind, the pressure denoting her trying to control and operate too many complex spell designs ended. At first she was too relieved that the pressure was not there anymore to truly notice. It was only once the next few sets went through that even more of the mental strain that had been on her mind began to dissipate that she realized that something was wrong. Unfortunately, it was too late as there was a slight delay from the relief filling her mind, to her being able to understand what was likely happening. Regardless of what happened, Alexa tried to grab her last **Replica**, to pull it back to save it, but all that happened was Alexa felt herself being pulled forward as the vast power of transportation magic, mixed with the increased strength of the **Replicas** meant that Alexa was powerless to stop their forward progress.

Whoosh.

Within a second, Alexa felt herself being hurdled through space in a matter of seconds, only to appear in a giant tunnel. The **Replica** that she had been hanging onto appeared for a second, Alexa watched as the being became solid for a second. Then she watched in shock, as waves of energy pulsed from the walls and sent out a tingling wave of energy.

Instantly Alexa realized the burst of energy for what it was, a dense vibration spell of some kind. Then in shock, Alexa realized that the vibrating spell managed to sink into her last **Replica**, and vibrate the woven strands of magic apart. This caused the area directly around the portal entrance to be filled with dense pools of mana. Pools that were being absorbed to first recharge the disruption runes, but also send off warning and alerting runes.

WHAAA! WHHHAAA!

Flashing Lights.

Alarms and lights both went off, as Alexa realized that this dragon, the last one, set up disruption runes right at the entrance. Then in a stroke of genius used the energy gained from the released mana to set off warning alarms. Seeing everything, Alexa couldn't help but feel slightly impressed as to how well she got played. Mentally she chastised herself, as she felt she had gotten complacent, but still kept pressing through, not wanting to stop, especially as she was so close to completing her goal.

"HAHAHA! You have fallen into my trap, as so many before you have. Come little witchling, show me what you can do without your precast charms and bobbles working."

Hearing that Alexa paused, as she looked over her shoulder, to see her sword and realized it was still there. Well the base was, but every piece of magic that made the sword great was gone, dispelled in a wave of magic disruption wards.

Holding up the sword, Alexa could only thank her earlier self for making sure that she actually **Created** matter for sword. It seemed that **Creation** magic was something that disruption magic could not affect, this was good to know, and something she intended to investigate further, but first, she had a main boss to deal with.

Rather than feel tired, or exhaustion, she felt joy. For the first time since she entered this set of the **Dragon Trials**, she felt like it would be her chance to test herself, to see how far she herself could go. Also, with her **Replicas** gone, the headache she had been battling for most of the night was finally gone. Realizing her mind no longer ached, she felt relief fill her and flood her as an all too familiar smile filled her face.

Grinning maliciously, Alexa responded to the wide-awake dragon that sat patiently waiting for her to come out from the tunnel, "let's do this."