

## Chapter 131

### Redemption

Alexa sprinted forward into the dragon's chamber, followed by Alexa, and another Alexa, and still more Alexas. As they all charged forward, there was one that clearly moved slower than the rest, one that had been denied the attribute bonuses that the others had, one that moved at a glacial pace, compared to the others. Yet, the speed of the slowest one didn't matter, as the others all made up for the lack of efficacy with their sheer overpowering nature.

*Wham!*

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The first charged forward and slammed their mythical magical sword slammed into the quickly closing eyelid of the dragon. In seconds, the dragon was struck and forced to recoil back from the tunnel where Alexa and her **Replicas** could only stand two abreast of each other. The first one was the sacrifice, had the dragon moved, had it done anything other than stare at Alexa and her clones in contempt, then it might have been able to react. However the dragon was old, its magic was powerful, so powerful that it had long since forgotten what it was like for mortals to not listen to its commands. When it spoke, the universe listened. This was why it could only stare on in confusion at Alexa as she and her cloned minions charged forward.

The dragon had given the command, not once but thrice. With each denial, the dragon and its infinite greed only hungered for the human more. Long ago Kajimtal had heard of how some dragons had taken to choosing a bipedal form as a servant. He had heard how others of his kind often preened and would claim one of the minions as their own. Of course this was often frowned upon by the masters, as the masters would always get first dibs on who and what was claimed, particularly on a newly identified planet. Of course, the Precursors and their lost art of sending out dungeons to prevent invasions from happening was a hinderance, but one he and his kind had long ago outlived. He was a dragon, specifically bred and engineered to hijack dungeons, to take them over and where possible corrupt formation zones. He was allowed his spot in the dungeon trials, mainly to either weed out the followers of the Orcish and Elven armies, those that dared to fly too high. But few ever came to him, and of the few that did make it to him, their minds were like wax, burning away at the merest hint of an inferno and compared to most minds, his thoughts were an inferno. That was why he had grown so confident in his abilities, granted he lacked the fiery breath that others of his kind had, opting away from such petty forms of attack, and instead focusing on burning away the minds of his opponents.

Then once the protective layers were gone, he would feast from their consciousnesses, consuming their minds, thoughts, dreams, and aspirations. This too had let him climb high in the ranks of scouts sent out by the masters, the types of information he could pull from the minds of slain enemies was invaluable, he was the one who pointed out that the new waves of children first were too afraid to try dungeons at the hardest levels of difficulty, a measure meant to force the top warriors from ever crossing his path. Then as one would expect, with so few if any trying the red difficulty dungeons, the true purpose of dungeons, the fact that they offered a chance at the top knowledge and valuable skills of an area were also eventually lost to time. This information helped change the way the masters interacted with new worlds, as he was one of the many dragons who spoke of a new plan to attack newly integrated planets. The idea was to corrupt the individuals from within, at the beginning such ideas were tried and ultimately failed, as skill crystals offered up by the dungeons unlocked hidden skills to see the signs of corruption, and the classes offered were particularly capable of tracking down and killing such people.

There were other obvious signs that someone was under the corrupting influence of a Master, mainly the fact that they would never be able to be rewarded by a dungeon. The fact that they would be shunned and avoided by the dungeon, the stronger their corruption, the less rewards they would get, until finally they would receive nothing for completing a dungeon. Of course, many would overlook this, as the only true way to tell at first would be if they went down a red difficulty dungeon and didn't receive anything for their efforts. However their efforts to frighten off would be adventurers was paying off in a huge way, as more and more people refused to go down red difficulty dungeons, and even those who did had long since forgotten the true purpose for red dungeons in the first place. They long ago forgot the skill crystal rewards offered by a dungeon for completing its challenges.

Now that everyone had forgotten, and the chance of an embedded minion being exposed had been reduced Kajimtal, the mind breaker, helped to usher in the next wave of destruction. Now that even the great forces of the Elves and Orcs had grown so complacent with the current status quo that they would rather battle one another for future resources than continue to fight a unified war against the dragons and their dark masters, now is when Kajimtal felt it was time to begin his own next stage. He himself would create a minion, one who would bow to his will, one whose mind would be easily corrupted.

Given the level disparity between Kajimtal the mind breaker, and the pesky bipedal form, Kajimtal was certain his efforts would work. However, even when the little rodent got closer, and Kajimtal could feel the power of his attack squarely striking the small bipedal creature squarely in the mind, it just shrugged off the attack, three times.

Then to add insult to injury, the stupid creature had the audacity to talk back, then with a level of forgotten knowledge the creature had created a prison key. At the idea of seeing the lost magical art of the Precursors on full display before his eyes, Kajimtal felt a deep seeded hunger grow within him. This

monster would be his, he would take his pet and show it off, not just to the other dragons, but to the masters as well. It was known that there could only ever be one true master for any creature, that was the reason why the masters sent Kajimtal and his kind out, without any fear that they would be allowed to break free and turn on the hand that fed them. There was only ever one master allowed to forcefully take control over a soul. Just as Kajimtal had his soul claimed and had grown the skill and ability to see that very mark upon his soul, he, using that same skill, now found that this rodent of a creature had somehow made it to his lair and didn't have a marking on its soul. In fact, the soul on display was so bright and vibrant, that a deviant part of Kajimtal saw it as a new toy to bend and break, before truly claiming it for his own.

Yet, there was something wrong, the beast didn't stop. As it charged forward, the beast resisted yet another mind attack, this time Kajimtal sent a burst of **Mind Control**, at his new minion and uttered the word, "sleep."

Yet nothing happened. No, something did happen.

*Clang.*

The giant sword that looked to be little more than a toothpick to the great Kajimtal swung forward and struck against his eyelid. Out of reflex, a deep seeded instinct to protect himself, he closed his eye, even though he had up until a moment ago been mocking the feeble attempt. Even the recoiling of his head away from the entry way was more out of reflex than anything.

Yet, pulling away had been the correct course of action to take. For the moment it pulled back its massive head, a white hot pain filled its eyelid, as hot fluids began pouring out coating the vertical slits to get them to stay together.

*Blinking.*

The dragon blinked a few times, each blink causing stretches of hot goo to cling between the two eyelids. With a distracted twitch of its clawed hand, it tried desperately to rub away the offending blood. This of course was the exact instance the speedy **Replicas** had been waiting for, as they struck out like a swarm of angry ants. Ants that had all quickly moved into position, ants that seeing the exact moment, all struck down and bit into the thick scaled flesh at the same time.

Kajimtal was old, he was around when the elves were the first forces trained up by the accursed Precursors. He was around, when the battle of the heavens looked like it might lose due to the unending scores of new habitable planets that were all being linked and cultivated for resources. Resources that were all being brought to bear against the Masters. He was also around to see the moment when the seeds of doubt had been cast, the moment when the elves and orcs united as one to strike down the Precursors, to claim the universe for their own. He also saw the moment when the orcs and the elves both lost their ambition to end the Masters once and for all, opting to merely seal away the Masters from this plane of existence, content to let the Masters fight each other for spectral crumbs of magical energy.

Kajimtal himself had been able to avoid most of the greater battles of the wars, he had been one of the lead designers for the restraints used to bind the dungeons to the will of dragons. While the project was ultimately cancelled, the fact that he had been one of the dragons chosen for this plan was clearly able to be seen by all, due to how powerful his dungeon once had been. And how far it had fallen since its enslavement. Now it was a mere husk of itself, using every ounce of energy it created to feed him, and enhance his growth.

This was why the rodent and her clones were immediately seen and then dismissed by Kajimtal. While they likely were powerful for their size, there was little to nothing they could do to one like him, one who had existed for so long. He was an immortal mind dragon, one who could even turn other dragons to his will.

*Slink, slash, slice.*

As one, the tiny ants struck out. But unlike ants, well unlike most ants, these ones stung. Their bites went deep, and instantly Kajimtal could feel deep reactions within his body. Turing his head to see the ants with his one good eye, he looked on with shock.

“Stop that!”

*Klink, clang, pop.*

This time the rodents cut deeper, slicing on the previous wounds. Each slice and cut cutting deeper, as wedge shaped holes began to appear and bleed. Worse, there was a slightly malignant component to the attacks, as each strike seemed to rot and corrode the skin away where they struck.

Of course, the impudent rodents kept moving, they kept striking. "I said stop that!"

With seven, even if one was immune, the others should at least stop. He had seen this before, where an elite squad comes through, in such cases there are generally at least one or two whose minds are able to be touched and molded. Those would then be used to help wipe out the remainder of the team, but in this case, everything was off.

Monsters weren't listening, but this made no sense. Even if they were deaf, they should still be able to interpret and feel his commands. These were living sentient creatures, at least that is what his senses were telling him. The fact that they all looked the same was nothing new, as the elves and orcs alike all looked the same to him, even wearing the same uniform only spoke of being a part of an elite squad. While they did take a while to appear in the dungeon with the first one was not really new, as this was a good tactic, sending in the scout first, before the rest of the team went through. Yet, these rodents would not listen.

**STOMP!**

Angrily, Kajimtal stomped his feet, trying to get the creatures to stop their attacks. At the very least he figured that with his large frame he would be able to trample a few. And he did, the stupid creature held up its toothpick sized sword and all but let him crush it; however, something went wrong.

**BOOM!**

It took Kajimtal a second to realize what had happened. One second it was stomping down, then the next thing he knew, his clawed hand was exploded. In horror Kajimtal looked down at its now nub of a claw that was missing two of the four talons. Even the two that were attached were not doing that well, as they done something.

Looking down to the attack spot, Kajimtal looked to see a dark blast silhouette. *They committed suicide, but how?* Kajimtal thought to himself, but before he could get too far into that thought, he felt more and more explosions. He had been standing still for too long, shock gripping his mind as he stared down at the nub of a hand.

**KAKABOOM!**

Multiple bursts erupted at once, each one sent jolts and waves of pain coursing through Kajimtal body. The first was in the back right leg, causing the leg and its weight to collapse on that side. Then the same happened on the back left leg. Then the right arm that had been used to hold him up was also struck down at the wrist.

“You kill yourselves, rather than serve me?” Kajimtal asked, trying to understand what was happening. It was all happening so fast; in a matter of seconds the battle was going poorly. In a matter of seconds, he had taken more damage than he had ever taken in his life. Still, they were now down over half of their fighting force.

“You know you cannot win, not with just the three of you.” Kajimtal taunted.

At that the rodents finally began to speak for the first time since they left the tunnel. “I guess he wants more.” One of the rodents cried out from the base of Kajimtal’s neck. Then in an act that completely shocked him, he watched in horror as the rodent charged forward, stuck its little toothpick of a sword into a part of its neck, then seemed to channel its entire body out of existence and through the sword, before causing the sword to burst and rupture in its neck.

*SPLAT!*

A jet of blood sprayed violently from the wound. Desperately Kajimtal reached up its stump of an arm and tried to cover the wound, but it was too much. Also, this just allowed for more of his vulnerable torso to become exposed.

“We should give him what he wants.” The second rodent said, as it too ran forward and proceeded to do the same thing to a spot in its torso.

*BUURSST!*

Another sickening pop was first seen and then felt by Kajimtal, as he watched the rodent charge forward and deliver another devastating blow to its torso. Nothing was truly fatal, at least not yet, even with the massive gouges in its neck, chest, and limbs, this was nothing he couldn’t survive from.

There was a pause, turning his one good eye around the battlefield, Kajimtal finally saw what he was looking for, the last of the rodents. This was also the slowest one, at least that is what his senses were telling him. Seeing the last one, Kajimtal let out a slight sigh of relief, as he knew there was nothing this one couldn't do to him that he couldn't heal from. Even if it ran up on him, he was fairly certain that one good swipe with its tail that had been fairly useless thus far would be more than enough to knock it out. Even if it meant sacrificing the tail, it would be a minor loss. Something trivial to think about, while it planned on how to learn from this and improve in the future. The first thing Kajimtal planned on doing was practicing its ability to control the minds of others, no the first thing it would do would be to kill this last rodent. Then it would go about rechaining the dungeon, then it would force the dungeon to summon forth creatures that Kajimtal could then practice his **Mind Control** powers on.

"You can't win." Kajimtal said, this time trying to lace his words with subtle uses of power. "Surely you can see that. Your team is gone, and while they did a valiant effort, it was ultimately pointless as I will survive this and live on. I will heal and grow stronger, and for what, the death of six of your strongest? Six that could have served me. You should learn from their mistake."

At that the small rodent just nodded their head. "I did learn. I learned that if six wasn't enough, then I should try twelve."

Then with that the last remaining rodent, the one that had somehow crawled away began creating more of herself. With a start, Kajimtal realized that it hadn't been a team that had come, but rather **Replicas**, not just any **Replicas** either, as these were more powerful than the creator. For a moment Kajimtal, wondered how such a thing was possible, before he looked on in shock and horror as first three, then six, then nine, then twelve, then fifteen exact copies began to form and charge forward almost immediately. Seeing them, all form and immediately break out into an attack mode caused a wave of fear to form in Kajimtal, as it desperately tried to move away, but its now stumps for legs and arms didn't offer much. Worse, when he removed the stump from the spot on its neck, blood that had been staunched, began to flow freely again.

Of course, Kajimtal didn't care about the blood.

"Free me!" Kajimtal screamed, ordering the dungeon to save him.

*Flash!*

For a moment it looked like it had worked, despite the dungeon being free of its bindings, it looked like the dungeon would be able do this one last act. While it would mean Kajimtal ultimately failed in its

mission and would have to report back to its masters why it failed, this would be a small price to pay for living. At least that was what he thought, before he heard it, the one most beautiful word in the world. A word that caused something deep within his soul to shatter. A word that would forever change the course of his life, as short as it was.

**“Hope!”**

The word rang out, causing the mark upon Kajimtal’s soul to shatter. The mark that had forever bound him to his master since the time he was hatched was now removed. For a moment he was free, just as he knew that the dungeon he had bound to his mind was also free of his influences.

Kajimtal sat in stunned silence as he watched wave after wave of the bipedal rodents run up, charge at him, bury their tiny swords deep into his skin and then detonate time and time again.

He wanted to fight, he wanted to cry out about the unfairness of the universe. The fact that he had been offered freedom just seconds before his death was one of the ultimate ironies that he would never get to share. Still, being free did set his mind and soul at ease, as it meant that even when he died here, his soul would not be called to his master, as he unlike most of his kind never truly accepted the branding. He always kept his distance, claiming he never needed the strength that could be offered by the masters. That was the true reason he never had the fiery breath, the reason he had to rely on his mind and intellect to guide him. That was also the reason he let a smile fill his face, as this one rodent had somehow managed to kill him, as the twenty-second and then twenty-third **Replica** detonated inside him, this time one finally pierced through his neck, causing him to finally realize that he was going to die.

*“Thanks.”* Was the last word he sent out telepathically to his killer, and subsequent savior.

*“Huh?”* Was all the mind managed to respond back with.

Such an odd expression only caused Kajimtal to chuckle, as the last vestiges of life slowly faded from his body, causing his large body to sag and then drop into a lifeless heap.