

## Chapter 137

### Croatoan

#### Monday - Just After Midnight

It should come as no surprise that all eyes were on Alexa and her pack. The fact that by now everyone in her pack had completed their first dungeon run and everyone had their noted *Dungeon Runner* title, along with every member of the pack having a class unlocked all meant odd things for the pack.

What was the oddest part was despite everyone in the pack, save for Alexa, now having a Class and at least one title to their name, none declared themselves as full Supers. While declaring yourself as a full Super was a process that could never be undone, it was a bell that once rung, could not be un-rung as it were, but the ringing of said bell came with a lot of benefits, least of which being the ability to be picked up by some of the biggest organizations and government institutions in the world. The fact that everyone had not only fully awakened their class, but did so with a Title, one that apparently was shared by every member of the pack did not go unnoticed. In fact, many assumed that Alexa who had by far and away the most comprehensive list of Titles ever assembled found the key to earning titles and rather than hoarding it as most would in her position, she shared the information solely with members of her pack.

By this point it was clear that everyone was just waiting for the day that Alexa's slotted class would transfer over and finally become her permanent class. Not that anyone could read her class name, even the talented Mr. Mackie could only take Alexa at her word of her class not changing, as her class's rarity apparently exceeded the quality of his inspection skill. In fact, many of the numbers he had on Alexa had clearly changed, but he was unable to confirm any new Title increases, without getting Alexa to confirm them herself. This of course proved to be problematic for anyone wishing to be able to maintain discipline over a school of hormone driven teenagers, many of whom could hulk out at a moment's notice in what many would call a roid rage frenzy. Fortunately, Alexa's quirks made it so Mr. Mackie didn't have to deal with this set of problems from either Alexa, nor the increasingly powerful members of her pack. Even the Junior class member, who should be seen as a mentor figure for the group due to her age, was mainly only accepted due to her perceived close relationship with the undisputed alpha of the group.

All this was to say that everyone on campus had eyes on Alexa and her pack. It was getting to the point where Mr. Mackie couldn't even use his credentials as an inactive General to keep back some of the more serious probing attempts directed against his campus. Yet, despite all of this, he liked to think he managed to keep a fairly tight leash on what happened at his campus. The fact that Mr. Thyme, AKA Warder had died while on mission with Alexa had not gone unnoticed or reported on by multiple

agencies to him directly. Each agency directly asking for detailed updates on not just Alexa's mental state, but the state of her pack as well. While she had weathered the emotional storm quite well by all recorded responses, it was the fact of just how well she was doing that caused Mr. Mackie the greatest headache. Yes, by all accounts she was either a sociopath, or able to compartmentalize her thoughts and actions so much that she was able to move on as if nothing phased her. Either case had their own problems, but deciding which case was the correct one was not one he wished to make on his own. Instead, Mackie wanted someone else to make that decision. Which was why over the past few days, he had been allowing more and more people to install their own surveillance equipment on his school grounds. Nothing was more protective than his warding scheme, which if he had to admit was fairly impressive and likely impenetrable.

Still, despite everything going on, Marcus Mackie seemed to hate the way the entire pack had bonded as a whole. Granted the movie marathon as a personal wake for the twins was a nice touch, and having known Jim personally, Mr. Mackie couldn't have pictured a more fitting tribute to the man. The pack had watched movies until exactly midnight.

The mother, and widow had left shortly after *Breakfast At Tiffany's*, having no want to see the movie that came immediately after *Big Fish*. The pack themselves had no intention of watching said movie to its completion either, as they turned it off shortly after the mother left. Opting to instead watch *The Princess Bride*, making sure it ended exactly at midnight.

Given the state of things, Mr. Mackie had expected it to be an easy night, and for the most part it had been. The pack hadn't done anything stupid, no alcohol, no males left the common area. Other than a few choice movie options, everything had been cosher. All of that changed shortly before midnight. While the final movie was playing, the pack went about cleaning up everything. Any sign that they were there was gone by the time the credits started playing. Then as one they all moved, not making a sound, but somehow all of them seemed to be on the same exact wavelength.

Frank, Angellica and a few others who were not direct members of the pack left. While Alexa began leading those that remained on a walk through the campus. No one spoke the entire time. It was almost as if they knew they were being monitored, so rather than stating any of their plans or objectives, they all followed their leader.

Seeing their precise movements and strict adherence to radio silence, Mr. Mackie was impressed, as he had led elite divisions of Supers who had half the discipline that was currently on display. Yet the team not stopping for praise made their way to the dungeon entrance. Then as one they silently went to the guard shack and one by one handed two crystals to enter the dungeon.

This part, their going to the dungeon as a group was not strange, the group had done so many times. In fact, Mr. Mackie used to get nightly reports of how the girls were constantly practicing fighting stances against each other in the fields. So the fact that they all came together like this was no real surprise. It was odd how the core four, that being Alexa, Luke, Gina, and Julie, had gone to the dungeon. The last time any of the core four had gone to the dungeon entrance was Alexa and Luke, and this was just before she entered this dungeon, only to again reappear a few hours later in London. This was something else Mr. Mackie had been ordered to find out about. Somehow the twins had not only worked out a way to unlock titles and classes for everyone, but they also had a way of getting the dungeons to teleport across the planet, something that had been proposed as being possible, but had to this point been impossible to prove, until now.

Watching the group enter, Mackie turned his warding schemes to focus his sole consciousness at the entrance of the dungeon. This was something that he tried to avoid as often as possible, as often there was a magical feedback on having active runes too close to the dungeon entrance. Again, this was one of those odd things that no one had quite managed to figure out in the near one hundred years since the dungeons first began to appear around the world. Still, in this case, with all of Marcus' skill and talent with runes in place he managed to hear the moment someone from the group began to speak. It of course came as no real surprise that the only one to speak was Alexa. What was a surprise was what came after she began to speak. She didn't use real words, but rather seemed to sing in some oddly enchanting musical voice that sent chills down his spine. It was as if he was listening to an angel speaking the words of the divine into being. It felt oddly uplifting. The last thing he saw was the girl Gina seeming to look directly at one of the visual runes and then smile to herself, before writing on the wall.

"Vandalism." Mr. Mackie said, as he prepared to teleport to the area to stop the act immediately. This of course led to the second major incident that happened from Alexa interacting with the dungeon. Basically, the dungeon who had seemingly been the equivalent of a dormant volcano up until now first began to glow and then erupt with a surge of magical energy.

*BURST!*

*REEEEE!*

The runes that Mr. Mackie had so painstakingly assembled all over campus began to shatter and break right around the very core of the campus, right near the dungeon entrance.

*Pain.*

Unimaginable pain flooded Marcus Mackie's mind, as the network he so painstakingly put together, the one he wove his very consciousness into had broken apart and all but shattered. Focusing his will, he could see that it was still there, still somewhat intact, but now his protection scheme looked less like a dome and more like an open air astronomical observatory, where the telescope had somehow been replaced by a dungeon.

### *Sulfur and Copper.*

The thick taste of sulfur and copper filled Mr. Mackie's senses, as he felt a warm liquid roll down his face. Still, this was not the worst damage he had ever fought through. Focusing his will like it was a hammer, he staggered his way to his feet, then with a force of will, he teleported to the dungeon, or at least he got as close as his broken warding schemas would allow. Appearing a few dozen meters away from the guard shack he approached. He must have looked the sight, as the guards instantly saw him, and then seemed to come out and try to assist him.

"Everything alright sir?" Bigsly asked.

"Yes, tell me, did you notice anything odd a moment ago?" Mackie asked, trying to see why these guards could seemingly be so calm despite the surge of mana that had to have raced through the area moments ago.

They both paused, "no sir?" They said as they then turned to each other for confirmation, but seeing the confusion mirrored in each other's faces, they turned back to Mackie and both shook their heads no.

"Very well." Mackie said, not quite surprised that these two guards didn't experience anything, the only guards who were really magically aware were on the day shift. There had been talks about getting more powerful guards on night shift, but that had been a line item that had been deemed unnecessary as part of the school's annual budget. Maybe recent actions would change this, but that was an argument for a different day. At this point, it was likely best that these two weren't magically aware, lest they try to come up with a frivolous lawsuit against the campus. What the lawsuit would be about he had no clue, then again, the fact that a dungeon had seemingly gone active for a moment, long enough to break his runic warding system might be grounds to say that the lawsuit, if filed, would have been legitimate. As it was, Mackie himself felt that he had grounds for a complaint, at the very least. Still, he had to check on his current mission objective, namely the status of the entire pack. The most coveted patch of raw recruits ever assembled.

Mentally dismissing the group of guards, Marcus hobbled his way forward, his ears still ringing and causing no end to the amount of disorientation he was still feeling.

As he entered, he found the cavern completely empty, that much was not a surprise. What was a surprise was the fact that his runes that had been painstakingly carved into the side of the dungeon walls were gone. The only sign that they had even been there were the small black charred markings on the walls.

Pulling out a light source, he made to inspect the walls, only to find that everything was gone. Hours of work that allowed him to eavesdrop, teleport, and observe the area right in front of the dungeon entrance were gone. Now nothing remained, not the fabled pack, not even a sign that they had been here. No, there was one thing, mentally thinking to himself he looked around the cave, trying to find the wall where the vandalism could still be. Then finally finding the angle, that his visual rune came from, he turned around towards the rune and then was able to find the graffiti that had been left for him.

There in large blocky letters was a word that instantly sparked a sense of unease and dread to form in Mr. Mackie's gut. Yes, everyone knew that he had his eyes and ears everywhere, but this was proof that Alexa and members of her pack had not only known, but had gone out of their way to circumvent the protections he had laid out. There before him, was a word that sent shivers down his back, as he tried to understand what the crazy predictive analyst had meant by the word of warning she left behind.

For there on the wall was one word, that could be a warning, a clue about where they would go, or a sign of things yet to come. There on the wall was a word as infamous, as it was unmistakable.

*"CROATOAN."*

Looking from the word carved into the wall, and then the dungeon entrance that still seemed to be awake and active, Marcus entered the dungeon, only to find himself in the standard entrance to the Tier II dungeon. A quick scan of the entry room showed that none of the pack members were still here. Focusing quickly, a feeling of dread washed over him, as he wondered if the pack had done something truly stupid and gone through the red challenge dungeon. He knew logically that Alexa had, as her numerous Dragon Slayer titles and the fact that she was clearly marked as being on the **Trials of Ascension** noted. But this was odd, the others all had their classes, which meant they shouldn't be bound by the **Trials** anymore, but was that necessarily the case. With a rising fear growing in his gut he charged forward, into the red tier difficulty, trying to save the pack from a stupid and likely costly mistake that would only be afforded to the young and reckless, those who had never tasted fear. Then with a start, he realized that this might be exactly what he would have done at this age if he found out his own father had died in combat while on a mission with him. For all these reasons, Mr. Mackie charged head

first into the red difficulty dungeon, only for him to be met with a message that caused his stomach to do flips, as he realized two things. First, he was too late to join the pack on their mission, and secondly it was exactly as he had feared, as the system messages flashed before his mind, at first.

***WARNING: There is a 1 in 1,000,000 chance of summoning a dungeon with a dragon as the sole boss.***

Only for the trailing zeroes at the end of his warning to slowly get whittled away, until he was left staring at a final message that spoke to a supreme challenge before him.

***WARNING: There is a 1 in 1 chance of summoning a dungeon with a dragon as the sole boss.***