

## Chrysalis 1222

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#### Chapter 1222: He's a Hard Man to Please

[Anthony,] Granin greets me shortly with a perfunctory nod.

Corun and Torrina are a little more excited, the former giving me a broad smile and the latter a more reserved wave.

[Well if it isn't the rock trio. What's been happening in your lives?]

[Trying to avoid mana sickness,] Granin says, [and this isn't helping much.]

The big golgari is a massive unit, almost tall enough to look me in the eye, even now, his granite coating shifting and folding as if it were truly his skin. I'm still not used to being bigger than him, to be honest. I've outmassed him since I met him, but being able to see the top of his head without climbing a wall is a new experience.

[How does it feel to be a midget?] I tease him, prodding his shoulder with an antennae. [Beside a mighty and enormous monster such as myself, you barely register on the scale.]

Granin, shockingly, actually laughs.

[You think you're a big monster? Compared to what I've seen, you're like a speck. Don't get too big for your carapace, you'll be dead before you can blink.]

[So... I'm immortal?]

[You know what I mean!]

Aaaand the grouchy is back. That didn't take long.

[Look, I'm sorry, I didn't bring you down here just to be annoying. I wanted to consult you about my pets and ask if you'd had any ideas about my progression. I'm ready for another round of mutations, got some Skill points to spend, so I thought I'd check in.]

Granin runs a hand over his stony head.

[I appreciate that. I don't mean to be so irritable. We've been trying to adapt ourselves to the higher mana levels so we can come down to the fourth more or less permanently, but it's been a struggle. This wave has produced the highest intensity of mana I've seen in my entire lifetime, and acclimating has been... problematic.]

[He means it's been extremely painful,] Torrina says, matter of factly. [Many of your human soldiers and priests are attempting to do the same, but it's proving incredibly difficult.]

[We were theorising that we may soon approach the theoretical limit of what an unmodified person can tolerate,] Corun chips in brightly. [People who were born this deep are better off, but if the waves keep increasing their intensity, we may reach a point in a few years where it'll be impossible for non-monsters to live in the fourth.]

Granin waves his hand to dismiss those words.

[It's just idle speculation, and regardless, it won't come to that. The people won't abandon their holdings down here, they'd rather drag the entire stratum up to the surface with their fingernails.]

[Do you guys even have fingernails?]

Granin holds up his hands.

[No, huh? That's weird. Do you have them underneath the rock?]

The three of them look awkward.

[That's... a rude question. It's like asking a human what they have under their clothes,] Torrina explains.

[I don't have clothes *or* a rocky exterior layer. You can cut me some slack. Now, let's get down to business. You guys said you had some good ideas for me, and surely you've cooked up something since then.]

Granin nods and Corun reaches into the satchel he's got strapped around his hip, pulling out what appears to be a thick ream of paper. Before I can run away, Torrina slaps his hand.

[Don't bring out the documents!] she hisses, mentally, for my benefit.

[Oh. Sorry. I worked hard on that,] Corun whines.

[He was about to run away! Don't show him the research.]

Granin coughs.

[Sorry about that, Anthony, you don't need to go over any of that, it was for our benefit. So, let me begin by talking about what approach we took.]

[This isn't like... a rehearsed presentation, is it?]

I can feel my legs creeping towards the exit already.

[No,] all three of them reply with a strangely rehearsed air of casualness.

I decide to trust them... for now.

[Your resets have focused on enhancing and building out the benefits of your unique gravitational mana, which we think is the right idea. It's a powerful ability which the System is clearly ready to capitalise on, given some of the options you've talked about. So we want to create a set of mutations and organs that will play to the strengths of your gravity mana, whilst also being generically strong. Overspecialisation has *always* been a flawed strategy in the Dungeon.]

I nod. I've always avoided the options which added a particular element to damage or resistance. It makes sense that there would be monsters who can counter gravity in the Dungeon, even if I don't know what they might be like. Ghosts or something.

[So Torrina had an idea for your acid which you might like. Torrina?]

[Yes,] she steps forward. [From what you told us, your acid gland hasn't been pulling its weight in a satisfactory way. Is that right?]

Sadly, it's true. Without investing heavily in mutations that increase the potency of the acid, the damage potential isn't quite there. Despite the small network of organs I have back there, I've been using my renowned commercial empire less and less here on the fourth as the acid just doesn't cut it against most of the monsters.

[You've built a fair amount of utility into your acid already,] Torrina continues. [It clings to the target, melts mana and propagates itself. All of that is independently useful, but with one more mutation, we may be able to help it synergise with your gravity spells. Is it possible to increase the mass of the acid?]

[The mass?] I ask, a little bewildered. [I'm... not sure. I don't think I've ever checked.]

[As you explained it, the higher the mass of your target, the more vulnerable they will become to gravity magic, is that right?]

[Pretty much....]

Even I know it's a little more complicated than that. More mass means more for the gravity to work on, but would you say a mountain is *vulnerable* to gravity, or a planet? Not really.

[If we focus on your acid's ability to cling, and its ability to propagate itself, then if we can use it to add mass to the target, you'll be able to make them heavier much more easily. Once you apply acid, it will stick to them, weigh them down, and then start making more of itself, which will in turn...]

[Stick to them and weigh them down more...] I chime in.

If I start pelting them with gravity bolts, or put them under the gravity domain, they'll suffer that much more from the pull. This is...

[I think that's actually a workable idea! What else have you got?]