

## Chrysalis 20

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#### Chapter 20: Offence is defence

Quiet was something commander Titus had found very difficult to come across over the last few days. This expedition had come as surprise, well outside of the usual schedule and an endless number of things needed organising before departure.

The Queen providing her own personal Guards had been unexpected but helpful, the Legion had been expecting regular front line soldiers to plug the gaps, worthy soldiers to be sure but far from the quality and discipline of an outfit like the Guards.

With their assistance, most preparations were expedited the second they showed up in their burnished, decorative armour, polished to a mirror shine and started demanding things hustle along in the name of the Queen.

Titus brushed his hands along his desk, feel the smooth stone surface. Incredible stuff, stonewood, grew just a like a tree, straight out of the ground deep into the Dungeon, but was solid stone the whole way through. The flecked, dark texture of the stone had always pleased him, to the point he'd hauled this slab back to surface on his own back in order to fashion this desk.

His hand drew down to the underside of the desk, right next to the wooden draws that had been attached beneath the surface. He pressed for a moment and waited. There was a soft click and a small rectangular section of stone began to rise on the surface of the desk, its seams invisible just a second before.

Using one hand Titus lifted the section up to reveal a small fabric lined compartment beneath, inside were six small glass vials, capped with twisted silver carved with tiny but precise runes. Two of the vials were empty but the other four contained a brilliantly glowing liquid, the blue light instantly filling the dark office.

With a sigh Titus began to roll his sleeve up his arm, when the sleeve moved past his elbow, intricate script began to appear, stamped onto his skin. Concentric circles of strange symbols, not inked onto the skin but imprinted in some way that left them pulsing with a semblance of life.

Taking one of the vials, Titus placed the silver cap directly on the center of the network of symbols.

Slowly at first, then with growing speed the circular designs on his arm began to rotate and emit light. As they gathered speed the liquid began to drain out of the vial. Faster and faster they spun until the sparkling fluid was completely gone.

Unclenching his teeth, Titus returned the vial to case and fixed his sleeves. He then carefully returned the case to its compartment inside his desk and replaced the cover, which slowly sank into position until the seams were once more invisible.

The commander grimaced, hopefully he wouldn't need another one of those for a while. As always however, the injection lifted a weight off his shoulders that he hadn't quite realised was there. As if he'd been grinding his teeth and only now did he stop and realise just how tight his jaw had been.

Enough of these distractions, thought Titus, time to get back to where a good Legionary belongs.

Abruptly standing, he moved to the corner of the room where his oversized battle axe rested. Using a single hand, he hefted the huge mass of metal and threw the haft over his shoulder. He'd have to get the old thing sharpened today if he wanted to get it prepped in time for action.

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"Do you have any idea why they are bringing those guys down with us Mirryn?" Donnelan asked.

Mirryn shook her head. She was also puzzled as to why the ragged group of a dozen prisoners, each of them sentenced to death, were being escorted into the Dungeon by a squad of senior Legionaries.

The two trainees had finally reached level thirty in their respective jobs, Mirryn as a ranger and Donnelan as a Fire Mage. When a Legionary reached level thirty they were able to be promoted to full Legionary status, however the induction ceremony took place deep in the Dungeon.

Mirryn was excited to be finally inducted but also a bit anxious. None of the trainees had any idea what the ceremony was or why it had to be done deep in the Dungeon and the full Legionaries who did know never said a word.

Not for the first time she was struck by exactly how much common people didn't know about the Deep Legion. A private army that had existed for three thousand years, since civilisation had been brought to the brink of destruction when the Dungeon first opened, the Legion was something everyone had heard of, but knew very little about.

She firmed her resolve, soon the Legions' secrets would be her secrets, and she would keep them well.

The two of them were currently stationed in what the trainees liked to call 'noob cave'. The monsters that usually occupied this cavern were the weakest one could find in the Dungeon, making it the perfect learning ground for newcomers.

Many would be Dungeon mercs were still hurt here, no matter how many times they were told that Dungeon monster levels are totally different to monsters on the surface they would never listen. A level one monster down here could easily crush a level ten on the surface.

Those stupid jocks were a constant thorn in the Legions' side. Everyone wants to level up, hunt monster cores and valuable components for profit but spare a thought for the Legion rescue teams who had to constantly bail them out when they bit off more than they could chew.

Staging for the expedition had been going on all day and all night. Supplies had been brought into the cavern and lowered through a secret shaft in the wall. Donnelan had told her how the Earth Mages had undone their illusions and shifted the rock walls to reveal supply elevator, complete with rope pulley system, that allowed for materials and supplies to be lowered deeper into the Dungeon, to be retrieved at another concealed location when the expedition reached it.

"Are you prepared for the expedition, trainees?" a confident voice said.

Recognising the sound of Tribune Aurillia, Donnelan and Mirryn immediately snapped to attention.

"Our armour and equipment has been checked and polished Tribune!" Donnelan hastily reported.

The experienced Tribune chuckled in the face of his enthusiasm. "I wasn't talking about your equipment, trainee. Every Legionary keeps that in top shape at all times", her blue eyes flashed icily, any soldier under her command would quickly regret it if they didn't keep their gear in top shape.

"I was talking about up here" she raised one hand to tap her temple with one finger, "the Dungeon is a dangerous place, even for old hands like me and the commander. The reason we live to get this old is because we don't underestimate it. You two will be promoted when we get down below, that is a great occasion, one you'll remember forever, but don't let it distract you from our task".

"We won't Tribune" the two snapped out quick salutes once again.

"Tribune, how much longer until we advance into the Dungeon?" Mirryn asked.

The older woman shook her head. "Eager to get started are you? I don't blame you, I was young once too. Shouldn't be more than a few hours, then we'll start sweeping the upper area clean before we set up the forward camp in the Forest Expanse".