

Chrysalis 201

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 201: The World Below Part 1

Mirryn awoke with a start.

Instantly wide eyed and alert she turned her head to look around her and her eyes were struck immediately by the austere white room in which she lay. She was lying on a clean bed in a small white chamber. On the roof a glowing crystal provided illumination, a clean white light that filled the space warmly. Just looking at that light nearly brought Mirryn to tears. She'd feared that she would die surrounded by the blue light of the Dungeon, seeping into her body and killing her slowly.

She couldn't remember much of her arrival to the Legion base in the Dungeon. After their long descent down the carved spiral staircase that the commander had referred to as Periclasus' stair. That journey had tested the trainees to their limits. It had taken long days of endless marching to reach the bottom, spiralling ever downwards into the depths and the lower they got, the sicker they became.

None of the trainees had been down in the Dungeon this deep, for this long. Without proper acclimation, the lower part of the first strata would normally be the first place that a Dungeon delver would need to worry about saturation sickness, or 'the blues' as it was colloquially known.

During this wave, which didn't seem to want to end, the mana had risen to ridiculous levels, the first strata was currently reading much the same as the second right now, the trainees were unable to cope. Every one of them was struck with the blues, quite literally turning a light shade of blue as the raw mana of the Dungeon began to pervade their bodies. Mana saturation sickness was an insidious killer and a truly messy death. Delves, mercs and every being who entered the Dungeon lived in fear of it, their bodies literally breaking apart cell by cell as the excess energy ravaged their bodies.

The trainees got their taste of it as they walked the endless stairs. They began to stumble, their legs no longer responding as they should. The further they got the more the symptoms became pronounced. Their vision slowly overtaken by a blue haze that made it difficult to see, their hands started shaking, then the whole body. The young, strong trainees began to experience the fear that was normally reserved for the aged, the fear of having their own body betray them and begin to fall out of their control.

Through it all they felt no pain, only a giddy, inexhaustible nervous energy. The blues didn't make people feel tired, as the name might suggest, rather the mana suffusing their body and brain numbed them and gave them the jitters, as if they'd been drinking five cups of coffee every hour. They couldn't sleep, couldn't rest, couldn't think clearly, they were both more exhausted than they'd ever been in their lives and completely unable to rest.

With the encouragement and support of their fellow Legionaries and officers they'd barely made it, the only other members of the party struggling as much as them was the prisoners the Legion had mysteriously brought with them on this expedition.

Less capable than the trainees many of them had to be carried towards the end, the soldiers taking turns to hoist the murderers on their backs as they battled the long march.

The last Mirryn could remember was arriving before a large stone door. She could barely see by that point, the door itself was nothing but a blur. The commander had stepped forward and done... something and the door had swung open, vague figures had rushed out, gathering the sick members of the party and bringing them inside. She had collapsed into the arms of the person rushing towards her and then woken up here.

Looking around the room some more she noticed a strange arrangement on the side of the bed. A tube had been inserted in her arm, surrounded by a glowing enchantment that had been drawn directly onto her skin. Nervously following the tube with her eyes she saw it was attached to another enchantment drawn on a nearby flat table. The center of the table held four softly glowing cores.

Mirryn stared at the strange setup, puzzled, after closing her eyes to try and feel if anything was different she noticed that her saturation sickness was significantly better. If she focused hard she was able to feel the flow of mana in her body, slowly inching down her arm being before being leeches out through the tubes and being fed to the cores on the table.

She was stunned, she'd never even heard of this kind of treatment before. Such fine manipulation of the mana in another person's body via an enchantment... How had they done it?

"I haven't heard anything Alberton but as soon as I do, you'll be the first to know!" the commanders voice penetrated through the door.

Soon after the tread of heavy feet could be heard as the Loremaster and commander continued to argue with each other.

"I just can't understand why we didn't make more of an effort to prevent Garralosh from reaching the surface. You know what will happen up there. That's my family dammit!"

There was a heavy thump, as if a fist had smacked into a wall.

"You think you're the only person with family up there Alberton? You think I don't want rip the head off that Croc and protect our people? Is that what you think?" the commander demanded quietly.

There a was a long pause and Mirryn began to wonder what was going on when she barely heard the Loremaster sigh and reply.

"I'm just worried".

"We all are, but we have a duty to get here to HQ and support the bulwark. As much damage as Garralosh can do, would you want the second strata monsters to rise to the surface? Do you know what that would mean? This wave isn't ordinary Alberton and you would should stop pretending that it is. The entire world could go up flames if we aren't careful".

Another sigh and a quiet "I know" before the door suddenly opened and the two top officers of the Liria branch Legionem Abyssi strode into the room.

"Ah, good to see you're finally awake trainee" Titus nodded.

Mirryn nodded in return but felt a little confused, this greeting didn't feel as positive as it should. Something about her commanders tone and posture was off, even Alberton looked somewhat downcast, almost not meeting her eye.

"Is this the HQ?" she asked.

"Yes" Titus affirmed, "you're in the medical wing. The mana saturation was much higher than expected on this journey, we had to perform emergency treatment to lower the mana levels in your body. All of the trainees received the same treatment, you're the last to wake".

Mirryn's head spun for a moment. So all of them had been in this place? Where were they now?

Alberton could see the question in her expressions. "The others are waiting for you. We have to move quickly" he said.

"Can you walk trainee?" Titus asked.

Mirryn tested her legs. "I think so, sir".

She rolled out of her bed and stood shakily on her feet. She was still weak from the blues. Titus didn't wait for her to ask and stepped forward to support her, carefully removing the pipe from her arm as he did so.

In silence the two old officers walked with her out of the room and down a long corridor. The place was strangely empty and quiet, Mirryn didn't see or hear another person as they travelled. They came to a heavy wooden door with a carved, enchanted lock on the door. Titus waved his palm in front of the elaborate carving and it immediately glowed with bright light before the door swung open to reveal a winding staircase carved in rock.

Not another one, Mirryn thought.

Not saying anything the three descended, Titus keeping a steady grip on her shoulder to help her navigate the steps without falling. At the bottom of the stairs was a small chamber with another door in it and gathered there were all of the trainees.

Mirryn felt relief when she finally saw other people. The feeling quickly faded when she realised that the air was tense in the room, the trainees were nervous, the officers solemn.

With the trainees tightly packed together in the small space, Titus took a position on the lower steps, placing him higher than his audience so they could see him and began to speak.

"Congratulations trainees. You have successfully braved the dangers and hardships of this delve and made it here to the headquarters of the Liria branch of the Abyssal Legion. I'm proud of you".

And he really was. Looking down on these young Legionaries filled him with pride. They were good people, strong people. They had sacrificed, fought, upheld the tenants of the Legion and proven their mettle. They gave him hope for the future.

The trainees themselves allowed themselves a small smile at the rare words of praise from the commander, but the serious expression on his face dampened the mood quickly.

"You represent half of the trainees inducted in your year. The others have been weeded out. Not dedicated enough. Not loyal enough. Not willing to sacrifice. Only those that we trust to keep the secrets of the Legion and do their duty make it this far. You have earned the right to become full Legionaries".

Excitement, smiles and joy lit the expressions of the trainees. This was what they had been hoping for ever since they enrolled. They had worked so hard for this!

Titus saw the looks on their faces and it acknowledged it with a nod even as his heart sank in his chest. This was always the hardest part.....

Chrysalis

Chapter 202: The World Below Part 2

Titus was a renowned Legionary above and below the ground. He was known for his strength, his iron will, his leadership and his willingness to put himself in harms' way to protect his fellows, he was a leader who never spared himself.

Most of all, he was known for his unyielding sense of duty. He had sacrificed over and over again in order to perform the role he filled and he would damn well do it again. He never hesitated, did not regret but often, he grieved.

Looking down at the eager trainees below him he felt sorrow grip his heart.

But it didn't stop him.

"You are about to undergo the final trial on the path to becoming full members of the Deep Legion" he announced.

Serious expressions overtook the trainees at the word trial. What would they need to do?

"You have experienced severe mana saturation sickness on the way here and we have done what we can alleviate the symptoms, but we have not cured you. Behind that door lies the greatest secret of the Legion. We will cure you of saturation sickness permanently, the process will also make you stronger, faster, smarter, more powerful than you currently are. When it is done you will be reborn".

A few gasps and disbelieving murmurs erupted from the youths in front of him. Was any of this even possible?

Titus pointed to the door behind them. "Beyond there lies the greatest secret of the Legion. It enabled the first Legionaries to perform the heroic feats deep in the Dungeon that helped end the Cataclysm thousands of years ago and it fuels us today. Every full Legionary you have ever met has undergone this process, including me".

The commander took a deep breath. No avoiding it.

"Let's go in and I'll explain further".

Titus gestured to Alberton who squeezed through the cramped chamber before unlocking the enchanted seal on the door and striding through. Titus waited on the stairs until everyone had entered the next room before stepping forward, closing the door behind him as he did so.

Of all the trainees Mirryn was the only one to note his actions closely and a sudden fear gripped her heart. The way they moved, it was almost as if they had been blocking the exit, making sure that it was impossible for someone to get past them...

Suddenly anxious, she cast her eyes around the room they now found themselves in. The room itself was unremarkable. Light was provided by glowstones embedded in the ceiling which illuminated a simple and unadorned stone chamber. The chamber itself was long, but narrow, with regular offcuts down the right side. Pushing past her fellow trainees, Mirryn saw that in each offcut a narrow basin had been chiselled into the floor, almost like a bath carved into the stone. Counting quickly under her breath she saw that there was thirty such 'pods', each with the same narrow basin that appeared designed to have a person lie down in it.

Closely inspecting the pod she realised the ceiling directly above each basin was not as simple as she had first assumed. Incredibly fine, intricate runic patterns had been carved into the surface, the lines so thin she almost hadn't seen them. In the center of the pattern a thin hole could be seen, perhaps for something to flow through and fill the basin? Even the basin itself was covered in intricate runic inscriptions. Just what were these for?

Her anxious musing was interrupted by a sudden clap from the commander. All of the trainees stopped gazing around and turned back to their officer, paying close attention.

"I will now explain the process to you" the commander said crisply, his eyes hard with determination, "listen closely as this will impact the rest of your life".

He paused there to ensure he had their full attention.

"Each of you will strip down and lie in a separate pod. From the ceiling above we will release pure, condensed liquid mana that will fill the basin until you are submerged. The fluid will be absorbed into your body, remaking it into something new. After twenty four hours it'll be done and you'll be a full legionary".

The trainees were staring at him as if he were insane. Liquid mana?! What the hell was that?! Donnelan stood with the rest, his mind flicking at lightning speed. If mana could be condensed into a liquid, wouldn't it be much more potent than the energy in the Dungeon? Wouldn't they just die?!

Titus could see their confusion. He did not move to reassure them.

"This process is exceedingly dangerous. It will be the most painful experience of your lives. Every cell in your body will become super saturated with mana, tearing at the seams. There are powerful healing enchantments built into the basin. You will be ripped apart and remade constantly for a day. One in five of you will not survive".

The deep, stern voice of Titus faded away and there was total silence as the trainees stared back at their commander in shock. They had been prepared for many things, but not this!

Alborton spoke from behind them, his voice weary with sorrow. "To defeat the monsters, to protect the civilisations on the surface the Legionem Abyssi decided that to be human was not enough. In order to overcome the Cataclysm, to make sure that it would never happen again, this was the step they decided to take".

His words fell on the young trainees like stones. This was real. It was going to happen. Fear gripped their hearts as they imagined the agony of having their very cells ripped apart for hours on end. Could they endure it?

Several thought fleetingly of running, of escaping this chamber and the insane ritual about to take place but they quickly squashed the thought. Who was that standing in the doorway, they thought bitterly. Commander Titus. He was a legend in the Legion. If all of them unleashed their most powerful skills at once would they shave even one HP from him?

"Nobody is forced to take the ritual" Titus announced grimly, bringing relief to the trainees. Before they could start to celebrate he pulled the short sword on his hip from its sheath and gripped it tightly in his right hand.

"But you cannot know the Legions secrets and not be one of us. If you wish to spare yourself the suffering, step forward and I will give you a quick end" he said.

Alberton found Titus staring at the wall outside the ritual chamber, as he always did once the trainees had begun their transformation. Once the process was done they would be remade into an entirely new species, no longer human, but Legion.

They could delve further into the Dungeon than anyone else could hope to, able to tolerate levels of mana saturation beyond what a normal person could ever dream. They would be able to take the fight directly to the monsters, able to chase them down wherever they chose to hide. That was what it meant to join the Abyssal Legion.

This had been done for thousands of years, all over Pangera. The secrets of the first Legionaries had been kept ever since those days. As Loremaster it was Alberton's role to keep the histories of those days and the determination, the sheer will of those men and women had remained within their spirit to this day.

That didn't mean they liked it.

The screams echoed through the chamber now. Down the corridors and up the stairs. On and on, endlessly screaming. Alberton could well remember what it had been like, he still experienced it in his nightmares, his throat ripping apart from the force of his shrieks only to be healed instantly, allowing him to scream some more.

Amidst the howls of agony a tap, tap, tap of chisel on stone could faintly be heard as Alberton approached his friend.

As he drew closer the memorial wall became clear, thousands of names had been written here by Legion commanders through the centuries since this base had been established. Titus knelt on the ground, his hands steady as he added one more name to the bottom of the list.

Alberton felt his heart twist with pain. The Legion did everything they possibly could to test their new trainees before they reached this point. Anyone they didn't think would be willing to undergo the Baptism had been separated, recommended to other forces, placed in the Auxiliary or other surface teams that were not required to delve. Even though the trainees didn't know it, they had been forensically examined for years before they reached this point.

The Legion didn't want to have the blood of their own people on their hands. Unfortunately no system was perfect.

Trelik had been unwilling to undergo the baptism, he had accepted Titus' offer.

Now the commander knelt and added his name to the wall, along with every other trainee who had not survived the final trial. Tomorrow, the baptism would be over and Titus would have to kneel here again.

It was impossible to converse with the horrific cries of their own people ringing in their ears. Instead Alberton walked beside his friend and placed a hand on his shoulder as he let his eyes roam over the names on the wall.

The Legion was the frontline against the Dungeon, none fought harder or delved deeper than they. To achieve this they had been called on to relentlessly sacrifice. None more so than Titus.

Alberton let his gaze rest on one name in particular. Romanus.

How must it have felt, he sighed, when the commander had carved his only sons name into this wall?

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 203: The World Below part 3

Her hands hurt like hell.

Mirryn leaned against the parapet of the Legion HQ and took in the view, resting her forearms on the stone.

"How are you holding up?" a voice came nearby.

Mirryn turned to see Donnelan approaching from along the wall.

"Couldn't sleep either, huh?" she asked him.

"Not a chance in hell" he muttered.

Neither of them wanted to talk about their baptism but they couldn't help thinking about it. When they had finally been taken out of the basin the trainees had immediately lost consciousness, their minds longer supported by the complex enchantments that had surrounded them.

Upon awakening they learned that three of their friends had died.

All things considered it wasn't a bad number. Below average. She could see the relief in the officers faces that they hadn't lost more. It seemed stupid, to be thankful of only three deaths but she understood their logic. Would the situation be somehow better if four had died?

No.

The commander and the rest of the Legionaries had been past to visit them in the days since. The trainees had been placed in a convalescence unit, comfy beds, good food, medical staff around the clock, counselling specialists, the works.

On the surface Mirryn would have been shocked to think of the cost of the lavish treatment, the Legion was legendarily thrifty, they made most of their own equipment, ate nutritious but brutally unflavoured food. It was a regular sight for the trainees to be seen cleaning their leathers and polishing their swords outside the barracks in the dawn light right next to their officers.

The trainees were learning just how many things they had thought they'd known had been an elaborate deception. The Abyssal Legion they thought they'd known, the Dungeon they'd thought they'd known, indeed, the world they thought they had lived in were so far from the truth.

"Did you ever think that something like this could exist?" Mirryn asked Donnelan as he joined her.

"Absolutely not" he answered flatly, "In fact I specifically remember being told such a thing was impossible".

Even though she was looking at it, Mirryn still thought it was impossible.

It was a city.

In the Dungeon.

A vast egg shaped cavern of impossible size, kilometres across and many more high, filled with people. The buildings covered the bottom of the cavern and then extended up the walls, carved into the rock face. A gigantic glowstone at the top of the space provided illumination in the day and faded at night, regulating the time for the thousands of citizens here in Raileh.

Through some mechanism she couldn't imagine the cavernous space managed to keep the Dungeon veins out. There was no risk of monsters spawning within the city itself. Such safety within the Dungeon felt weird to her. She'd spent every moment underground up to this point being completely alert. To be this relaxed down here felt, unnatural.

From her vantage point Mirryn could see the city bustling with activity day and night, the people moving like ants in the cramped streets below. Even now the light of thousands of lamps lit the city at night like a sea of candles in the darkness. It was incredible.

The Legion headquarters was about halfway up, a citadel that occupied a position of great standing, looking down over the rest of the city. She hadn't been able to explore much yet, the trainees were basically confined to recovery. Not the trainees actually... Full Legionaries now.

Mirryn had longed for that for so long...

"How's your hand?" Donnelan asked.

She glanced down at the heavy bandages that wrapped her forearms all the way to the tip of her fingers.

"Better" she said, "they've been healed but they're worried about damage to the bone so I'll be under wraps for a few days yet".

Donnelan's expression twisted a little. Unable to contain his curiosity he eventually asked "Is it true how they got injured?"

"What did you hear?" she answered.

"That you punched the commander in the face".

Mirryn shrugged her shoulders uncomfortably. "it's true".

Donnelan whistled his appreciation. "I can't... I cannot even imagine it. Did he say anything?"

He hadn't. The commander had visited each trainee personally upon their waking. When she'd finally opened her eyes and got her bearings he'd already been there. He didn't explain, or justify. He just sat there. On seeing the man that she'd trusted so much, almost like a father, who had done such an unspeakable thing to her and her friends ... she'd lost it. Rage and fury had exploded in her.

She'd been able to contain it at first... what would be the point of hitting him?

When she asked how many had died and he told her she'd leapt out of the bed and punched him right in the face with both hands. He hadn't resisted in anyway, willingly accepting her strikes, but, the end result was she broke both fists. She didn't think the commander had even moved.

She'd spoken with some of her fellow trainees, especially Donnelan. There were feelings of anger, of betrayal and of fear. Fear of the pain that kept them awake at night, fear of the never ending horror of it and deep down, fear that the Legion was right.

They could feel now. Ever since they'd awoken they could tell that something was different. Their bodies were absorbing mana out of the air, breathing it in and out through their pores. Mirryn felt stronger, healthier, her mind felt like it moved more quickly, with greater agility.

They hadn't even begun training or using their new bodies yet but they could already tell that they had been fundamentally changed. She didn't think it would end with just this either, she thought there would be more secrets to come.

She knew that her officers were good people. The impression she had of them from years of living alongside them weren't wrong. They were indeed the kind of hard line, duty bound hard heads that would put people they cared about through such torment, so long as they had good reason to.

The torment was over but Mirryn was afraid to find out why it was necessary.

The Legion had done this for thousands of years, why? What exactly are they fighting down here?

She turned back to Donnelan. "When do you think they'll let us out and into the city?" she asked.

He smiled. "Hopefully soon. After everything that's happened I could do with some leave. A few refreshments wouldn't go astray".

Mirryn shook her head. "A whole new world to explore down here and the only thing you care about is getting drunk?"

"Yes" he said.

After a pause they both laughed and turned back to the city spread below them. Growing up in an undeveloped frontier country like Liria had stunted them in many ways. They'd very rarely met members of the other races, didn't come into contact with the rare and powerful artefacts of the old empires. The frontier nations had been established in land that nobody had wanted by people with the grit to try and carve out a new life for themselves. The kingdoms, empires and alliances that had endured from the Cataclysm to today were far off legends to them. Here and now, looking down on the impossible city below them they felt as if those fairy tales they had heard were so close they could reach out and touch them.

A cough sounded behind them and the two jumped, turning quickly to find Tribune Aurillia behind them.

"I hope I'm not disturbing you, Legionaries?" the older woman enquired.

The two stiffened at being approached by their officer. It would take a long time for any sort of trust to exist between them again. Aurillia was not offended, or even surprised. She naturally knew how they felt, she'd gone through the same thing herself.

"The commander has called for you to assemble. It's time to find out if what you endured was worth it".

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 204: The World Below part 4

The rest of the new Legionaries were gathered together in a cluster at the end of their ward under the watchful eye of a few Centurions.

The young soldiers felt restless. They still didn't know how to feel towards the Legion and the seniors who had cared for and trained them for so long. The pain of the Baptism was still fresh in their minds, the scars still raw. Many of them felt a strange dual emotion towards the people they had once admired, equal parts anger and respect.

Aurillia stepped forward to address them.

"Thank you for gathering young Legionaries. You have endured the pain of the Baptism and suffered the loss of friends, as have we all" she looked each of them in the eye directly, letting them see that she knew of their pain, shared it.

"I'm sure you've felt it already, the changes in your body. You are no longer what you were before. Your very flesh has been infused with mana and this means a few things will change. Firstly, you can never live on the surface without regular doses of liquid mana to support your body. The mana there is too thin. Here inside the Dungeon you'll be fine but in the upper levels you'll begin to feel a bit weak".

Murmurs erupted from the new Legionaries at these words. Unable to live on the surface without liquid mana? If the Legion were the only ones who knew how to make it, isn't this just another way for them to be controlled?

"It also means" Aurillia interrupted their thoughts, "that so long as you are able to absorb enough mana you will be able to do things that you had never imagined possible before".

Now she glared at them. Impressing her will on them. All of them wilted before the strength she held in her gaze.

"I know that you are questioning the Legion, I did once also. When you have experienced the fight we are engaged in for yourself you will no longer hold any such childish notions! If you truly want to protect you loved ones from the horrors of the Dungeon, then you've come to the right place. The Abyssal Legion stands on the frontline against the true threats and for thousands of years we have done battle far beneath the surface, an unending war that few people in Liria have ever heard of".

She glared at them once more.

"Come".

So saying, she turned and pushed open the heavy wooden doors that separated their ward from the rest of the Legionary building before marching briskly through. The former trainees followed closely behind, trying to not stare at the bustle around them. Legionaries in their customary blackened leather armour stood in guard positions down every down corridor or passage they moved through, auxiliaries dashed about, delivering papers, meals, equipment or any of the million other tasks that the Legion needed done in order to operate. The new Legionaries were hardly spared a glance as they followed behind Aurillia, escorted by the Centurions who followed them.

The castle was carved directly into the wall of the space in which Railleh was situated. As with all things the Legion constructed it was built on very clean lines, straight corridors and square rooms, giving the entire structure a very austere feeling. It was easy to tell that the structure was old. Possibly too old.

Mirryn looked around and made a few estimations in her head before she came to the shocking realisation that this base, indeed, the city of Railleh itself, probably predated Liria by a considerable amount of time. The Legion had been here long before the nation of her birth had even been created? This whole city?

It didn't make sense. Why would the surface be so neglected that it was the last place to be developed, to be made habitable for people? She thought of her family and their humble history, working hard to carve out a life for themselves in the frontier kingdoms and the pride they had felt at what they achieved in such trying circumstances.

Was it all a joke? There's an entire city down here! Long before her ancestors had even thought to join the expedition to the frontier.

As she muddled through her conflicted feelings the passage they were travelling through suddenly opened into a vast hall. Mirryn gasped, shocked out of her thoughts by the grand scale of the space they now occupied. A high arched ceiling, buttressed by powerful columns of stone and been carved straight into the rock, ornate, almost delicate supports stretched across the empty space to give strength and proportion to the stone.

Clusters of glowstones illuminated the room in bright light, causing Mirryn to squint against the sudden glare. Down the center of the room, between the columns stood two rows of stone statues raised on marble plinths. Each of the figures was a masterpiece. Incredibly detailed, perfectly proportioned. The level of skill that would go into making such a perfect piece of art boggled the young Legionaries minds.

Each of the statues was a Legionary. Men and women in full battle armour, weapons in hand, standing ready. Most of them were of advanced age, clearly senior officers or veteran soldiers. Scars criss-crossed their faces and arms and their expressions were hard, as if there was little they hadn't seen. So lifelike were they that it felt as if they could jump down from their plinths and stride into battle at any moment.

"This the hall of remembrance" Aurillia said over her shoulder, "here the greatest members of our branch have been immortalised in stone, preserved for history and for the battles to come".

She pointed to one of the figures towards the end of the room as they continued to stride through the hall. "Over there is commander Titus' father, Magnus".

Almost despite themselves the young Legionaries felt their heads snap around to stare at the statue in the distance. A tall, bull shouldered figure stood there, a great two handed hammer resting on the plinth.

and held casually in one hand. Even at this distance Mirryn could see that the statues features, broad chin, stern eyes and thick neck were the same as commander Titus.

Some of the trainees were somewhat surprised to learn the commander even had a father. They'd felt as if he'd walked fully formed out of a mountain side...

Once through the hall they were quickly brought into the armoury. Before a large ornate door stood the commander himself, a rare half smile on his lips as he watched his newest Legionaries assemble before him.

Oddly he didn't say a word to them. He simply turned and pushed open the door before indicating with his head that they should walk through.

Mirryn had somehow found herself in the front. Feeling somewhat nervous she stepped through the grand door and into the darkened space on the other side, cautiously letting her eyes adjust to the gloom before moving too far.

As her vision improved her footsteps slowed until she was completely still, dumbstruck.

Lining the walls on either side of the room where massive suits of armour of obsidian stone and polished steel. An endless network of enchantments webbed the plates, the glittering blue light of residual mana providing most of the illumination in the space.

'What the heck are these?' Mirryn thought in wonder.

The commander grinned. "Who wants to suit up first?" he asked.

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 205: The World Below Part 5

Titus didn't wait for the Legionaries to answer and immediately started calling names, lining everyone up before him in name order. The young soldiers were so accustomed to following his orders that doing as he said was almost instinctual.

In the dim light the commander looked as impressive as always. His solid frame and clear eyes were reassuring to everyone in the Legion, even if they didn't know how to feel about it at the time.

Once everyone was lined up appropriately Titus raised his voice to address them.

"Ladies and Gentlemen of the Legion!" he smiled at them warmly, a rare sight indeed, "welcome! You have endured the pain and come through the other side. It is time to add the finishing touches to your induction as full Legionaries".

He turned and gestured to the armoured suits that lined the walls. "What see here is more Legionary tech developed thousands of years ago during the Rending. Magical theory was highly advanced at that time and in their desperation the creators of the Legion experimented with hundreds of different ways to increase their strength to defeat the monsters and preserve the light of civilisation. The Baptism you endured is one such technique, these suits of armour are another".

He walked towards the nearest suit and knocked against the melded steel and stone plate. A hard clang rang out, ringing in the air. The armour was massive and bulky, impossibly so. Even Titus, as powerful

and broad as he was, looked like he would struggle to move when weighed down by the sheer mass of the suit.

Donnelan in particular was confused. He was a mage, used to wearing only light leather armour. Anything heavier would reduce his mobility to the point where it would be difficult for him to impact the battlefield where and when he was needed. The Legion didn't subscribe to the 'soft' mage approach of cloth armour and little combat training. Some forces preferred to have their mages spend all of their time in study. The Legion took a different approach and Donnelan had been forced to endure harsh physical training, maintain his own leather armour and equipment as well as learning how to defend himself with his staff or even bare hands.

But surely they wouldn't expect him to clunk around like a turtle inside one of these things?!

"This is Abyssal Armour" announced Titus, a touch of reverence coming through in his tone, "Even now we struggle to reproduce the incredible level of craftsmanship that was achieved during the Cataclysm but these suits have been made right here in Raileh".

There was unmistakable pride at that announcement. Was this Abyssal armour really that special? The former trainees stared hard at the oversized suits and struggled to see the value in them.

Watching them, Titus could only shake his head. It was hard to understand just what the Abyssal Armour could do until you'd experienced it for yourself. He didn't blame them too much for looking down it.

"Before you can test out the suits we have a little item on the agenda that needs to be taken care of first. Class change!"

Mirryn went wide eyed at this. Class change? Now?!

"Every single one of you has met the requirements for your class, we aren't stupid" Titus laughed, "I'll ask you to step forward one at a time and we will enact the change. I'll be the trainer for all of you".

He gestured for the first person to step forward and soon after the soft glow of the class change radiated from that persons frame. Titus pointed to one of the suits and the first person moved to stand beside it before Titus gestured to the next.

It was soon Donnelan's turn and he stepped forward nervously.

"Don't be shy lad, it's fine" Titus smiled at him.

Donnelan eyed the commander. It was rare to see the grizzled veteran in such a good mood. "I'm not done with current class though Commander" he said, "is it really proper for me to change right now?"

Titus nodded. "You'll understand in a moment. Step forward".

Donnelan took the final few steps to close the distance to his commander and Titus raised a hand to place it on his shoulder. As soon as he did so Donnelan received a system prompt within his mind.

[Would like to change class to: Abyssal Legionary?]

What?!

Donnelan was stunned for a brief moment. The Abyssal Legion was actually a class within the system itself?! This was almost unheard of.... The cases where the system actually changed to recognise organisations that existed in the world were so few you could count them on the fingers of one hand.

Yes! Donnelan hastily confirmed his choice. To inherit such a rare and unique class, who wouldn't be willing?

The familiar trickling sensation washed over his mind as the system imparted new knowledge and skills to him along with his new class and Titus directed him to stand next to a suit of Abyssal Armour towards the back on the left side.

Still somewhat shocked, Donnellan stumbled over to his designated armour. As he approached it he could see it was built lighter and more slim than the other designs, clearly more mobile and manoeuvrable than the more bulky versions. Judging by the size of it though there was still no way he could possibly move whilst wearing it.

Or... could he?

Donnelan quickly flipped open his status and took a look at his new skills. Sure enough, Abyssal Armour operation level 1 was there. As time passed and more of the new Legionaries undertook the class change, Donnelan was able to absorb more of the knowledge being fed into his mind until he reached the point where he was able to understand the suit next to him to some extent.

Even what little he didn't understand was enough to shock him. This wasn't armour! This was a priceless masterpiece! The enchantments, the crystal filament wires, the incredible alloys that made up the plates, all of it was insane!

When every trainee had changed their class and taken their place next to a suit the commander instructed them to suit up.

With the newly imprinted knowledge fresh in the minds they were still hesitant to follow the instructions within their head. It just didn't seem real. Donnelan decided to just go for it and stepped in front of his suit. Raising one hand he placed it on the chest plate of his Abyssal armour and waited.

....

Perhaps he could feel it?

According to the knowledge he now possessed the suit was powered by mana, not by his own physical frame. Without excessive use of incredibly dense monster cores, moving something like these suits of armour would be nigh impossible but the suits didn't use cores at all. Instead they drew on the mana infused within the bodies of the Legionary wearing it!

Something like this could never be done by someone that hadn't undergone the Baptism. The Legionaries' very flesh was infused with mana and they absorbed it from the Dungeon at an accelerated rate. Thanks to the incredible magical engineering within the suits they were able to supply enough power to move it themselves.

Gradually Donnelan became more aware of the flow of mana from his body into the suit. As time passed the flow increased and the thousands of tiny enchantments carved into the ornate surface of the

armour began to glow with the light of mana. The light spread throughout the suit, starting at the breast plate he had his hand on and then flowing throughout the suit until the entire thing was powered.

Gradually the armour began to float, piece by piece, onto his body, the various plates clicking into place around his arms, chest, neck and then legs. He had to lift his feet to allow the oversize boots to snap together around his ankles. Once the helmet had settled into place and locked onto the pauldrons it was done.

The feeling was strange, almost like being locked in a tomb but at the same time, the armour felt like a second skin, as if it were connected to his body and mind. It moved so fluidly and naturally. It just didn't seem real.

"Get yourselves accustomed to the feeling Legionaries," Titus said, "we are going to be training in these suits for next few weeks until you advance your skills to the third tier. This is how we fight down here. Welcome to the World Below".

Chrysalis

Chapter 206: New Dawn

There they are. Look at them. Peacefully sleeping for now, awaiting the day when they awake and take their first steps into the world. Shhhhhh little ones. You don't know it yet, but the world will be your oyster. Yes it will! You will roam wherever you wish and bring prosperity to our family. Our enemies will flee before your strength and become food beneath your mighty mandibles.

Yes they will! You adorable little things!

[Master]

WHA?! What now?!

[Crisis, why are you interrupting egg time?!]

[I'm very sorry Master but I believe I have detected another wave approaching from the tunnels below]

Haaaa. These stupid monsters just won't stop! I'm going to have to work out a solution for this problem before the time approaches. These waves have caused no end of headaches and significant losses to the colony over the last week. Those Crocs down below are going to get what's coming to them, the sooner the better.

[I'm on the way Crisis. Tiny wake up! Time to fight]

[oh? OHHHH! FIGHT!]

.....

Reluctantly I turn away from the twenty small, white spheres occupying the egg chamber. They are in fact, the only occupants of the egg chamber and the workers have been caring for them diligently but I can't help coming up to take a look at them every now and again. When I think of the future that these little eggs could bring for the colony I get so excited I just can't help myself.

I put in a lot of work to create those eggs! I deserve to be a little happy now that they've finally arrived dammit!

Just three days ago the Queen managed to gather the Biomass necessary to lay this small clutch and it'll take a few more days before they hatch and then two weeks for them to complete their time as larvae and become pupa, then a little longer for them to finally eclose and take their place under my tutelage.

It's soooo loooong!

I know it's my own fault for extending the development time of the workers in order to squeeze more stats into them but I'm so frustrating right now. I feel like kids probably felt at Christmas when there were presents waiting under the tree. I didn't get to experience that during my human life but I think I finally grasp that emotion now. The wait is torturous!

Grumbling to myself I descend through the main shaft of the nest, through the Queens chamber and into the area my pets and I have made our home. It's been somewhat expanded recently, mainly to accommodate Tiny and allow us a little more space in fighting of the Dungeon monsters that have swarmed up the tunnels periodically over the last week.

My pets and I have been training our skills, using our shortcut to venture deeper into the Dungeon and harvest Biomass for ourselves and for the Queen. We've seen significant gains in pumping up our new skills and our overall combat effectiveness has risen as a result. I'm quite pleased that my pets now have properly allocated skill points and mutation advancements, even if it took way too much effort to finally get them there.

We ran into serious trouble twice during our escapades. When Tiny and I ventured down, leaving Crinis on guard duty she had to fight off a wave on her own. Thankfully the ants from the chamber above became aware of the ruckus and rushed down to support her. By the time Tiny and I returned it had been cleaned up and casualties were at the minimum. We were a bit more cautious after that and tried to make sure no monsters were able to slip past us.

Still, the second time they managed it. Through some twist of tunnel one of the waves managed to find an alternate access point to the surface. We had no idea they up there until the colony had engaged with them and started calling for reinforcements. When the Queen's guards in the chamber above started moving out we were alerted and rushed out with them. Eventually we were able to find the monsters and defeat them but not before a significant number of workers had been killed in the engagement...

The human refugees had almost been caught up in it. When the battle raged the fighting had gone right to their doorsteps. Being saved by the colony seems to have driven their affection for ant monsters to even greater heights. When workers wander past their growing encampment they bow respectfully and cheer. It's getting a bit unnerving.

We've been even more careful since then.

I would've rushed straight into the Dungeon and shoved my mandibles through those stupid crocs faces if I could, but I wanted to make sure the colony was safe first. That was a few days ago now, we've been quietly building our strength since then, getting ready to launch our invasion and claim the marsh expanse for ourselves!

Nobody messes with my family and gets away with it!

Entering the chamber I see Crinis and Tiny ready for action. Crinis has extended her tentacles down the tunnel for more than a hundred metres, stretching her strange flesh to the limit in order to detect vibrations down the tunnel.

[Bring it all back Crinis. Time to get ready to fight]

[Yes Master]

The little tennis ball of boundless hunger begins to retract the thin, wire like tendrils she had painstakingly extended down the tunnel back into her body. When the task is done she inflates herself back to her combat ready size, ready to unleash destruction upon our foes.

Tiny has long been ready. His hands clench and unclench repeatedly as if he can't wait to allow his fists to go to work. The silver hair on his arms is already beginning to rise as electrical current begins to flicker across his body.

Ever since advancing his skills Tiny has become even more obsessed with fighting, if that were even possible. I think that now he can advance his skills again there is even more relish to be had in the thrill of battle for him.

Actually....

Where the heck is he going?

Unable to contain himself anymore the ape dashes down the tunnel, whooping with delight!

[Damnable ape! Let's go Crinis!]

Rushing after him Crinis and hurtle down the tunnel ourselves. In front of us I can see Tiny moving with impressive speed, hands and legs flailing with a strange grace as he propels his massive frame forward like a hairy, overweight gazelle.

I should never have told him about the dash skill...

With us hurtling down and the monsters rushing up it doesn't take long for the two sides to crash into each other like speeding trucks.

Boom!

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 207: The boys and girls are back in town

As Tiny smashes into the front of the monster wave I can hear a voice calling from behind me.

"Hey-Hey! Wait for me senior!"

Vibrant....

As Crinis joins Tiny on the front lines the little ant motors down the passage behind us to quickly catch up and I sigh internally.

It isn't that we've been ignoring the little thing lately, or trying to leave her behind. It's more that she's become a little too reckless, flinging herself forward to into combat and trying to get her mandibles dug into the flesh of our opponents. The result of such behaviour is that she nearly gets smashed by Tiny or eaten by Crinis as they rampage. It's not as if Crinis has any way to communicate with the little worker. As friendly as they are with each other they don't share the same bond that Crinis and Tiny do. I've confirmed with Crinis multiple times that within a certain range she can sense my location as well as Tiny's, this prevents her from ripping into Tiny as they fight together.

"Vibrant! You need to wait here with me for a second" I said.

"Whaaaaat? I want to fight!" she complains, "look at big 'sis Crinis! She can fight so well already. I want to be like that!"

Sigh.

This is the source of the problem. Her former partner in smallness, Crinis, is all grown up now and wrecking faces whereas she has yet to evolve, still a superior hatchling, not really capable of contributing to tough fights like these.

"Tell you what. You go up to the ceiling and fire acid to get some skill points and we'll save a good chunk of monsters for you to finish off. After all this time your fairly close to your next evolution. If we can manage it you might even be able to evolve today!"

"Yaaaaay!" she cheers like a happy child and rushed up to the ceiling to begin raining acid down on the horde of onrushing monsters.

....

Well at least she's happy. Vibrant has been something of a restraint on our strength since she isn't really powerful enough to wade into situations like this and come out alive. These shadow beast monsters are simply a cut above the kind of prey us ants would normally have to deal with.

If she can evolve again then perhaps she'll be able to hold her own. She's certainly had enough Biomass to upgrade all of her body points to the limit by this stage since we've been pumping her full of food for so long. Considering the regular feasts that have been delivering themselves to us on a regular basis, as well as our own farming activities, I've managed to pile up 114 point of Biomass that I need to spend.

This will be the last upgrade before our assault on the marsh expanse so I need to make it count!

Whatever the Crocs can do, I need to do better!

Charge!

Eager to continue training my skills I rush up the wall and begin weaving my magic.

[Make sure you guys save a lot of monsters for Vibrant to finish off ok? We want her to evolve today if possible]

[Yes, Master]

[Grrrn]

You're that unhappy about only being allowed to punch the monsters mostly to death, huh, Tiny? Get over it man!

Moving onto the ceiling where Vibrant has already taken up a position to hurl blasts of acid down into the fray, I take a moment to size up the situation.

The tunnel is packed with onrushing shadow beasts. These guys are almost entirely low tier monsters that are yet to evolve, but due to their nature as monsters from a deeper level of the Dungeon they cannot be compared to centipedes and coral slugs in terms of their lethality.

Their claws are sharp, their teeth are deadly and the strange elastic shadow stuff that makes up their bodies is both strong and malleable, allowing them to twist and contort themselves to an alarming degree. Not quite to the same level that Crinis can but stretching out their arms to attack a few extra feet is easily within their capabilities.

Tiny has no issues wading into the battle. With his skills upgraded he can clear his way through the mobs with more vigour than before. Particularly since his fist skills have reached a new tier.

"Raaaaaaah!" Tiny roars as his fists begin to glow with bright light.

Thrusting forward one massive fist, Tiny unleashes his strength in a colossal blow that smashes the monsters directly in front of him. But it doesn't stop there!

Boom!

When the fist stops moving the light continues forward as a mighty ape paw, scattering monsters ten feet away from Tiny as they suffer the impact of his tier three boxing skills.

As the monsters begin to try and swarm him Tiny swivels on his heel and unleashes a devastating hook that blasts an arc of light around him, smashing the smaller creatures around him to the ground.

Haha! Didn't see that coming did you?!

Crinis has also improved her abilities. Her limbs reach out further than before and with greater agility to snag monsters from the crowd, lifting them up before entangling them with more tentacles and crushing them.

Nice!

By purchasing a few skills and mutating her body the tennis ball that devours all including hope has increased her skill at manipulating her tentacles as well as their strength and flexibility. All in all she poses a much larger threat than she did before. I honestly can't wait until she evolves, it'll be exciting to see how she'll grow!

Not wanting to waste any more time I hastily whip up a water construct and start feeding mana through it. The entire process is much more fluid than before, the transformation construct being pieced together with practiced ease. I've made thousands of these stupid things recently! It would be impossible for me to not improve!

Not only that!

Immediately I start weaving water bolts with both of my sub brains, flinging into the crowd and knocking monsters down with each fierce impact. With my main mind I start to work on something special.

Operating the transformation construct carefully I split off a third stream of water mana and begin to condense it, crushing the mana down under the weight of my mind. Gradually I begin to outline a water bolt frame made entirely of condensed mana.

I really have to grind down my focus to achieve this but it's one thing I've been practicing lately and the results are.... Interesting.

As the battle rages I spend precious seconds assembling my spell. With Tiny and Crinis in the front line I'm not worried. They could handle this wave on their own, I'm just here for the xp.

Once the frame is finished I begin to power the spell with condensed mana. With the shape of the spell formed of condensed mana the construct holds up much better when filled with the volatile stuff. When it's finally powered and ready to cast I take careful aim to ensure that I allow plenty of leeway so my own pets aren't caught in the blast.

Fire!

The water bolt, a deeper and darker blue than the others, almost as if it were formed of the water from the deep ocean, materialises above my head and rockets forth.

The monsters don't have time to react before it impacts amongst them.

BOOOOOOM!

Like a crashing wave water explodes amongst the monsters, blasting them into the walls and crushing them into the ground. The spray from the impact is so strong it cuts into their bodies, leaving gaping wounds and in some cases severing limbs.

Yikes!

Condensed spells are really no joke!

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 208: Compression obsession

As the rather explosive effect of my compressed water bolt faded and the monsters began to recover themselves as more flooded into the narrow tunnel to trample over the fallen I took a little time to reflect on the success of the spell.

Better than I thought, I had to say.

After witnessing the effects of forceful mana spells, using the compressed mana to fuel a spell had such an explosive effect, I began to experiment with forming an entire spell from compressed mana. The structure, from beginning to end, weaved with threads of compressed mana, then the entire thing filled with compressed mana right to the top. My test results were ... promising, to say the least.

However, this was my first time putting the spells to use in actual combat. I wanted to test them in a controlled situation and started with the most harmless of all my spells, the water bolt. The little testing

I'd done with gravity spells had been somewhat alarming, I wasn't quite ready to put them to the test just yet. Maybe in a more open space.

This first test is a rousing success! Not only was the primary target completely pulverised but the splash effect had a vicious cut to it as well, increasing the area of effect potential of the spell.

I'm really quite excited for the next one...

I stop my sub brains from casting spells and begin to focus all of my mental energies on my next task. Dividing the labour between my minds I begin to stockpile compressed mana as best I can whilst simultaneously weaving the forceful water cannon. The shaping of the spell I handle myself as it's by far the most difficult task.

Beneath me Tiny and Crinis continue to battle away, smashing monsters all over the place but making sure to leave them on a sliver of life as much as possible. Tiny has a lot of issues controlling his strength and is just as likely to knock a monsters head clean off by mistake but Crinis has far finesse. Like lightning her limbs snap out to pluck up a monster and she rings it out like a soggy cloth before dropping it on the growing pile of severely wounded monsters behind her.

Perfect.

Nearly there now.

Eagerly I begin to fuel my constructed spell. The trick I found in my test run is that I can't quite transform mana and then compress it fast enough to keep up with the demands of the spell. Meaning I ran out of juice and the spell failed only a few seconds after I cast it. Those few seconds had been enough to drill a hole three feet in the tunnel walls though so I'm expecting good things.

To prevent the spell from such a premature failure this time, I've been carefully amassing a stockpile of compressed water mana as I go. Judging by the rate of consumption I think I have roughly fifteen seconds or so for the spell to operate.

I'm looking forward to this.

Forceful Water Cannon! Fire!

Just above my head an ominously blue glowing ball flickers into existence for the water cannon starts. What comes out is less like a water cannon but rather a water beam. The monsters hit by it are less damaged but rather... dissected. It cuts straight through them! As the water blasts straight through the monsters it impacts against the tunnel floor and a vicious hissing noise fill the air as it starts boring a hole through.

Hastily I direct the spell to zigzag its way up the tunnel and delight in the chaos caused.

[you have slain ...]

[you have slain ...]

[you have slain ...]

[you have slain ...]

[you have slain ...]

Ahhhhhh this spell is ridiculous!

Some monsters are able to hold on for a moment, resisting the stupidly potent pressure of the beam with the strength of their bodies, but eventually it tunnels through them, boring a hole directly through their shadow flesh.

Then the mana runs out.

.....

The entire tunnel is littered with monster bodies and a truly insane amount of water. The spray has gone everywhere. The walls are coated with it, the monsters are saturated. Tiny is also saturated. Crinis ... doesn't seem to care but I can sense a smouldering discomfort emanating from the big ape.

He really hates getting wet.

In order to vent his frustration he channels lightning into the onrushing monsters who charge directly into the soaked section of tunnel we occupy and are promptly burnt to a crisp.

You were supposed to save some for Vibrant...

Ten minutes later we finish mopping up the wave and start chowing down. I decided not to test anymore spells lest Tiny get even more irritated. I should try and work out a solution where I'm not going to get him soaked. I'll be hitting the front lines soon enough, it should be fine.

The first thing I do after the fighting is done is call Vibrant down from the ceiling and get her to finish off the stragglers that we saved for her. Thankfully after she spends a lot of time chomping away at them she cheerfully announced she was able to hit level ten! Not even the news that another special core was coming her way was enough to dampen the little ants mood as she danced about whilst chowing down on Biomass. Even Crinis managed to find her and toss her in the air a few times to celebrate as the Vibrant laughed hysterically.

Tiny just ignored the proceedings and munched his way through a mountain of food.

I'm with you buddy. Time to embrace the food coma!

OM NOM NOM.

When all is said and done and we can barely walk any longer I've managed to amass 129 Biomass from my week of feasting and practice. The four of us waddle/roll/limp our way back up the tunnel to our little chamber and I call down the workers.

We weren't able to eat all of the food, not even close. Hopefully, when the Queen has consumed a good chunk of this the next generation of new workers might be locked in and ready to go.

Settling in we all prepare to finalise our spending in order to make the final push for excellence as we prepare to advance into the Marsh Expanse. I hastily whip up an advanced core after withdrawing a few small cores from my stash and feed it to Vibrant. Once absorbed, she somehow managed to both gleefully and painfully waddle to one corner to settle down and evolve.

Tiny and Crinis have already begun the process of mutating, I can see them vacantly sitting, unmoving, pawing through menus already.

Ok. Time to do this. I'm gonna spend up big!

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 209: The state of play

Muahahaha! With over a hundred points to spend, I'm feeling slightly giddy. What to go for first?

Currently I've upgraded eyes to +7 and acid to +6, so I may as well finish those off first, that'll take a significant chunk out of my points already.

[Would you like to upgrade Focused Eyes to +10 and Restrictive Acid to +10? This will cost 61 Biomass?]

Sixty one?!?!

Even if I already knew it, feels bad to hear Gandalf actually say it out loud.

I still have sixty eight Biomass to play with so I need to get spendin'. Once I've upgraded these two, I'll still have legs, Gravity mana gland, Regeneration Gland, Pheromone and the two newest editions to go before I reach a complete +10 state.

Arrrgghhh! This is so frustrating!

Just how much do I have to eat before I can upgrade myself all the way?! Is it my tiny ant stomach that's the problem?! I have two stomachs and I pack them both full every meal!

When I consider that my current level of evolution supports upgrades up to +15 I can only feel depressed. The goal of fully mutating everything before my next evolution seems like a long way away. Work hard stomachs! I'm counting on you guys!

Since I'll be striding forth into battle after this round of upgrades I really want to ensure my combat effectiveness is at its peak, not only on the offensive but also the defensive. I'm thinking that the regeneration gland could use a boost, just in case things turn south and I get bitten in half or something.

[Would you like to upgrade Focused Eyes to +10, Restrictive Acid to +10 and Limb Regeneration Gland to +10? This will cost 101 Biomass?]

Yikes!

Only eighteen left?!

I guess that'll be it for the full upgrades to +10... Enhancing my senses has never been a poor choice. I'll upgrade my trusty antennae next. With 18 Biomass I can upgrade them to +7 and have five points in the bank.

Ok then!

[Would you like to upgrade Focused Eyes to +10, Restrictive Acid to +10, Limb Regeneration Gland to +10 and Infrared Antennae to +7 ? This will cost 114 Biomass.]

Let's do it Oh bearded one.

[At this level of mutation you may select a mutation advancement, please select one from the menu]

First, I jump into the acid menu.

My acid is the OG. When I was a weak and helpless ant, all alone without my colony to support me, it was the acid that became my trusty sidekick. Every combat would entail the acid attack playing a key role, letting me deal damage from range before closing in to finish the job.

Since the rest of my body has been enhanced, as well as my magic growing to the point that it's a credible ranged threat, the acid has become outshined. I don't really need it to do damage, what I want is more utility out of it. The restrictive properties are great, if that could be enhanced I'd be interested, for sure. Let's see what the menu has for me.

Hmmmm.

Wait a sec.

Wait. One. Second.

[Magic eating Acid. Acid becomes able to dissolve magic it comes into contact with, including barriers and constructs].

...

Done!

I don't need to see any more! In fact I refuse!

This is the sort of utility I'm talking about! Able to eat through magical barriers or constructs? Hot. Damn.

Acid is back in town, in a big way.

Already giddy with delight I shift over to the slightly more pedestrian eyes. Hopefully there'll be plenty of boring options that'll calm me down after this excitement.

Flicking through the menu I can recall seeing most of this stuff before. Upgrading to +10 will already give my compound eyes an around quality upgrade, and honestly, ever since I took the focused mutation I haven't really suffered in the eye department since I can basically see like a human can directly forwards.

The rest of the lenses, pointing up, sideways, backwards and so on, are still poor in comparison to human vision, but they do well enough to get me by. My default option would be just to enhance the focused upgrade to further improve my forward vision but another options catches my attention.

[Omni Focused Eye. Enhance key lenses to improve the long range focus of the compound eyes in all directions, instead of only forward]

I like it!

It bears repeating sometimes that I don't have a neck. In order to face sideways I actually have to turn my body in that direction, hence the compound eyes helping out a lot. Being able to see in almost all

directions without shifting my head at all is obviously a great advantage. The drawback of each individual lens in my eyes being quite crud is something I've just had to put up with. From the sounds of things this upgrade will go some of the way to increasing the distance I can see in all directions, not just forwards!

Along with the quality increase I get from taking the eyes from +7 to +10 I can expect a tremendous improvement in my all around eyesight. Nice!

Two upgrades out of the way it's time for the regeneration gland. When I first selecting an advancement for this organ I was quite concerned about how less well defended my legs are compared to the rest of me, being relatively thin and unarmoured. Being able to rapidly regenerate those limbs has helped out on a number of occasions and I'm quite satisfied with the results.

Flicking through the menu for the regeneration gland I can see that most of the enhancements that increase on the limb regeneration aspect feel a little unnecessary, basically regenerate them faster or more frequently. Not interested. What I want from the regeneration gland is to make it better at what I originally purchased it for, that is, healing me when I'm injured.

I have the regenerative inner bone plating to help heal my carapace, and that's fantastic, but it doesn't do anything for my internals, organs or muscles, that might get damaged. The regeneration organ definitely still has an important role to play.

[Rapid Regeneration Organ. Allows the regeneration organ to refill more quickly, meaning it can be used frequently to heal damage and restore HP]

I like this choice. Especially considering the campaign that is right ahead of me. Diving into dangerous, croc infested marsh lands to battle for supremacy and eject the horrid things? I might need a whole lotta healing by the time we're done...

With that all of my selections are done. Time to mutate this ant!

[Would you like to confirm these choices?]

Awwwww yeah!

...

Wait a sec.

nnnnnnnnOOOOOOORRRRFFLETABINNNNNN!!!!

Building rapidly is the most extreme itch I have ever experienced! The eyes! The eyes are so bad! Not to mention the organs inside my body but holy mackerel the eyes!!!!

I CAN'T TAKE IT!

The only blessing is that the others are so occupied by their own menus that they can't see me scrabbling and rolling about, desperately clawing at the dirt in a frantic attempt to alleviate the itch.

My dignity is preserved at least!

From up above I see a giant ant head poke down into the chamber to see what all the fuss is about.

Dammit Mother!

Name: Anthony

Level: 13 (core)

Might: 41

Toughness: 29

Cunning: 44

Will: 35

HP: 50/50

MP: 220/220

Skills: Excavation Level 8; Improved Acid Shot Level 6; Advanced Grip Level 3; Shattering Bite Level 7; Advanced Stealth Level 5; Splintering Chomp Level 4; Tunnel Map Level 6; Mana Transformation Level 6; Forceful Mana Level 6; External Mana Manipulation Level 2; Mana Sensing Level 5; Core Surgery Level 3; Advanced Exo-Skeleton Defence level 7; Pet Communication Level 3; Rapid Dash Level 1; Advanced Water Magic Affinity Level 2; Stamina Level 2; Pet Growth Speed Level 1; Mana Miser Level 4; Cerebral Endurance Level 3; Mediation Level 4; Precise Shooting Level 2; Ripping Bite Level 3;

Mutations: Omni Focused Eyes +10, Infrared Antennae +7, Mana Eating Restrictive Acid +10, Absorption Legs +5, Savage Infused Mandibles +10, Hardened Diamond Carapace +10, Rapid Limb Regeneration Gland +10, Pheromone Language Gland +5, Deep Gravity Magic Gland +5, Divergent Coordination Cortex +5, Regenerating Inner Carapace Plating +5;

Species: Dispersed Mind Ant (Formica)

Skill points: 16

Biomass: 5

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 210: The Ant team

Eventually, the horrific itching fades, and I scramble back to my feet and cast my eyes about to see who was witnessing my fervent rolling. Thankfully it appears that mother retreated once she was sure all of the noise wasn't related to some threat or danger of any kind, and my pets are too busy with their own mutations to have time checking on me.

Phew!

Since that is the case, I can relax. I really need to make sure that I'm on my own or somewhere that I can't be seen when doing significant mutations like that. I don't know what it is, but the sensation of my own body shifting and changing as the surging Biomass roils through my body is just..... ITCHY.

What even is Biomass anyway? It can't be the raw material since that gets dissolved down in some way within me. It isn't as if my stomach continually feels full until I spend my points, as time passes I feel the

food getting digested, and then I start to feel hungry again. Perhaps monsters extract something from the food they eat? Some sort of... concentrated.... Stuff? The higher the evolution of the monster the more... stuff ... they have in them?

Maybe?

I don't know! I just eat things!

Considering that nothing comes out my business end barring acid and magic consuming justice all of that food must be going somewhere...

I've already resolved to investigate all things stomach upgrade during my next evolution, but internally I double down on that resolution. The mysteries of the Biomass need to be unlocked!

Quickly cleaning my antennae and running a keen eye over myself I double check my status before spending some time adjusting to my new vision. I wouldn't say I can see as well as a human can in all directions, but it indeed is significantly better than before. My forward eyesight has somewhat improved, but all other angles are dramatically better. I'll need to wait until I get somewhere a little more open before I can thoroughly test my eyes' ability to focus at a distance.

I start practising my water transformation and compression skills as I wait for my fellow team members to finish their work. Vibrant appears to have completed her work with the menu and has settled down to evolve. If she doesn't finish by the time the others are ready, we may have to carry her down with us. I wouldn't want to leave her behind, mostly because she would just run down the tunnels on her own and probably end up dead.

Still, I'm interested to see what she can evolve into, considering she was a superior hatchling up to now. From a superior hatchling into a ... superior worker? That wouldn't be too exciting...

Maybe she'll go straight into being a juvenile Queen? For some reason, when I think of Vibrant's personality, I just can't see it happening. Sitting around the nest being motherly all the time? Vibrant?! Not a chance.

Time passes, and Crinis is the first to complete the process. She takes a long time to fiddle through the menus since she has such anxiety about making incorrect choices. Tiny takes longer, but I think that has more to do with his comprehension speed.....

[How'd it all go Crinis?] I ask cheerfully.

The little ball freezes momentarily before slithering over to me on a few tentacles.

[I hope I made the right choices Master...] she says somewhat miserably.

I sigh internally. [Just pick whatever you think is right! You know more about how you want to grow and fight than I do! You're the best one to make these decisions!]

[But you are the best person to decide what it is that YOU want Master!]

Gah! Getting her to be more independent is going to be a long project.

[Just ... come over here, and I'll have a look at where you're at. I want to see how everyone is going before we set out] I say resignedly.

[Of course Master!] she bubbles.

.....

Bringing my antennae forward I activate the core surgery skill and gradually piece together her general status.

Name: Crinis

Level: 14 (core)

Might: 68

Toughness: 55

Cunning: 24

Will: 22

HP: 110/110

MP: 205/205

Skills: Advanced Shadow Flesh Manipulation Level 1; Grappling Level 3; Expert Shredding Level 4; Tremor Sensing Level 3; Dismembering Level 2; Fear Inspiration Level 3; Mana Manipulation Level 1; Tentacle Walking Level 1;

Mutations: Shadow flesh+3; Void Maw +3; Bottomless Dimensional Stomach +5; Dividing Tentacles +5; Ripping Spines + 5; Macabre Teeth + 5;

Species: Blind Shadow Hunter

Skill points: 5

Biomass: 6

....

Why is that all her skills and upgrades sound so intimidating? How the heck did she even get Fear Inspiration?! From what I can see the skill educates the user in ways to act more intimidating or cause fear in foes...

I'm not sure that's going to be a problem if she keeps levelling up Dismembering...

[Ah! I see you picked up Mana Manipulation] I say.

[Yes Master.... Is that ok!?] she sounds mildly panicked.

[Of course! You have a reasonable Cunning and Will stat. With practice, you'll be able to start slinging some spells like me! I think that was an excellent choice]

....

Instead of replying the little ball holding itself up on a few slender tentacles just becomes exceptionally still. Wait. That's not quite right. With my improved vision, I can make out that she's not still but actually vibrating slightly in place.

.....

That happy to be praised, eh?

I can only shake my head internally and leave Crinis in her own little world as I move over to Tiny. The big guy is gradually opening his eyes and shaking himself awake. I want to check his status as well before we get moving.

[How'd it all go Tiny? Finished?]

[Hmmm. Finish] he manages to grunt his reply even when speaking mind to mind.

[Let me have a look big fella]

He amblers over in my direction and I once again activate the core surgery skill. I'm determined to ignore the quivering tennis ball behind me.

Name: Tiny

Level: 12 (core)

Might: 154

Toughness: 42

Cunning: 7

Will: 15

HP: 84/84

MP: 210/210

Skills: Expert Ape Boxing level 3; Brutal Uppercut level 2; Enhanced Leap level 3; Smash level 5; Advanced Athletics level 1; Grappling level 5; Potent Crushing Blows level 4; Fancy Feet level 4; Advanced Dash Level 2;

Mutations: Overwhelming Explosive Enhanced musculature +10, Iron Bones +5; Springy Impact Legs +10; Piercing Heightened Sonic Enhancer +5; Compressing Lightning Mana Affinity Gland +5, Compressing Lightning Mana Affinity Gland +5, Energy Conversion Gland +4;

Species: Dire Lightning Storm Kong

Skill points: 15

Biomass: 3

Things are looking good! He's way stronger than he was before he started spending his points properly, just look at some of these powerful sounding upgrades! Overwhelming Explosive Enhanced musculature? That sounds destructive!

Actually just looking at him he seems more built than before. Not in a rippling muscle sort of way but more in a Solid... sheer size sort of way. His shoulders and arms are definitely a size larger than they were before. I'm guessing he had to upgrade his bones just to stop them snapping like twigs when he throws a punch.

Overall I'm pleased with his choices. I'm especially impressed he followed my advice and took the same upgrade for both Lightning Mana glands. Naturally, it may have been more optimal to take different upgrades for each to increase versatility, but I figured Tiny would just get confused. Better to find one that works well and use it for both. I think he mainly took that advice, so he didn't have to think so much.

I like the compressing mutation as a choice as well. Tinkering around I worked out that it applies a mild compression to the mana inside the gland, increasing the potency of the mana but slowing its recovery speed. Since he has the conversion gland already, he doesn't have to worry about that so much and can enjoy more potent lightning for free.

Ok then!

Vibrant is still sleeping for the moment. I'll head topside to alert people as to our absence, and then we'll be off!