

CHRYSLIS

Chapter 6 Exploration is perilous



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Though many of the modern kingdoms bray of their triumph over the Rending and the manifestation of their grand destiny, the College views these paper monarchies as they truly are: children playing castle in the crumbling remnants of a much greater civilisation.

It has also become surpassingly clear over the years that the lasting effect of the Rending on the human psyche is fear. Our race may never be free of the terror that took root when the very ground beneath our feet became our enemy, the source from which our nightmares sprung to life.

Exert from "Legion College Record volume V: years 213-289AR

After a good rest, filled with the contented and happy feeling of being in my own enclosed space with a full stomach for the first time in this world, I awake refreshed and ready to (cautiously) approach my next challenge.

I need to further explore the cavern, gather more information on my situation and try to identify my next prey. Before that however, there is something else I want to try first. After eating, Gandalf informed me I had unlocked a basic profile of the Spineta Lacertos. I haven't yet tried to access this profile, it's time to experiment and see if I can learn something.

Unlock!

Access Profile!

Open Sesame!

....

Spineta Lacertos!

[Spineta Lacertos: Thorn Lizard, spines are sharp and contain mutated venom.]

Whoo! There you go! So the Spineta Lacertos is translated to Thorn Lizard and what is the rest of this information. The spines are sharp?! Contain venom?! Isn't that obvious the first time you look at the lousy thing?

Well, it's only the basic profile after all. Perhaps if I can hunt and consume more of them I'll be able to access a more detailed profile with more useful information.

With that out of the way it is time pursue the next task.

Emerging from my nest I make my way across the roof to the rock pool. A now familiar scene greets my eyes, a collection of monsters, types I have seen before, loiter at the waters' edge, warily guarding against each other whilst drinking from the glowing pool.

In fact, with my newly improved +2 eyesight the pool seems to be glowing slightly more brightly than it did in the past.

The curious thing to be about this situation is that all these monsters are here to drink, yet I have not, in the several days I've been here in this monster ant body, felt thirsty. Since I am also a monster, just as these creatures are, what compels them to drink the water from the pool when I feel no urge to do so? Is there something different about them, or me?

The next mission today is to investigate. I will take a bold, brave, possibly stupidly suicidal step in order to shed some light on this mystery. Continuing to move in my almost habitual slow method I creep across the ceiling to the nearest wall, make my way down it and onto the cavern floor. Then, slowly at first, but with growing confidence as each step propels me forward I approach the pool.

First to notice me is a lizard hound, the wolf looking creature with a long reptilian tail, there really is a large proportion of lizard-like creatures here in this place, the huge bipedal Crocadilic monster and the spiked lizard I hunted earlier have some form of reptilian features. Is this some form of pattern?

When the hound sees me it immediately begins to growl, shocking me slightly, but then something odd happens, as I continue to approach the hound begins to back away slowly and make ground for me, almost as if they were afraid.

I watch the wolf carefully and continue to approach the pool, as I step further and further into the light emitted from the pool another heaving mass of centipedes becomes aware of my presence, their reaction is very different!

As soon as they see me the slithering, clacking tangle of creatures begin to hiss furiously and writhe over each other with even more speed. One of the creatures emerges from the tangle and slithers forward on its spindly legs a few metres towards me. Then it begins to posture, hissing and clacking with sharp looking mandibles and claws.

However, it doesn't approach or attack.

Phew! I was terrified when they started heaving. There must be six or seven of the horrible things piled over there, if they tried to attack I would have to escape with all my might.

Luckily, the peace of the water source held. There is only one reason that the survival minded me would risk coming into the open here, only one reason that I would show myself in front of all these creatures who could kill me so quickly: not even one time have I seen a creature approaching, drinking or leaving the pool be attacked.

Not even once.

I saw and heard plenty of conflict during the two days I spent scouting the armour lizard but I never saw any conflict here. There is something important about this water source and I don't think it has to do with hydration. After all I still don't feel any need to drink. Monster physiology in this world does not seem to be simple.

I continue to approach until I reach the edge of the pool. The glow is so bright here up close, it's difficult to see into the water, even with +2 eyes. The pulsing lines on the floor of the cavern seem to converge towards the center of the water source, right at the bottom of the pool, and the most intense light originates from that juncture.

The water itself seemed to flow and move in strange, concentric circles, despite the lack of current or propulsion of any kind. Almost like a lava lamp, the pool seemed to have a motion and swirl all of its own.

Ignoring the continued hissing and posturing of the stupid centipedes I lower my mouth to the water and taste...

It burns!

Holy moly that burns! What is this, hydrochloric acid?!

A fiery sensation enters my mouth and flows straight through my three body segments to my stomach, from which the heat begins to permeate my blood stream until my carapace itself feels like it's on fire.

Yeeouch!

This is what you creatures have been coming here for? This painful, burning water of death?! What is wrong with all of you? Is this the cavern of masochists?!

The burning sensation gradually subsides and I can't help but stare at the other creatures around the pool incredulously. What the hell are you all doing here?! Many pairs of eyes stare back at me, I feel self-conscious now...

I once again examine the slowly churning water before me, the dense light seemingly suspended within, like jellyfish coils, see through and yet not.

Pausing, I carefully analyse my own condition. I don't feel worse in any way. I hurriedly open my status and check my health, no change.

Strange.

This is seriously weird. What on earth is the attraction these monsters feel to this stupid pool. It must be important, otherwise why would there be this unspoken truce at this place?

No answers seem to be forthcoming.

It isn't like my fellow guests at the pool are in a talkative mood!

Feeling more puzzled than before I'd tasted the water, I prepare to leave.

But before I do I can't resist one more sip.

Gah! It burns!

P-tooeey! Nyaaarr! Pff! Pff!

Ugh. Horrible.

Curiosity killed the cat, as they say.

I begin to leave by first backing away from the pool slowly, watching for any reaction from my fellow drinkers. Most creatures seem mildly relieved to see me go, moving to take up the space I abandoned and returning to their drinking. The stupid centipede is still snapping and posturing at me as I leave.

I can almost hear it flinging insults at me as it scrapes at the cavern and pretends to start charging at me.

Back at you, dumb centipede.

As soon as I reach the comfort of the shadows I spin and race to the wall, not slowing until I have achieved my most secure position, hidden in the deep shadows along the outer edges of the cavern roof.

Ahhhh, home.

I won't be leaving again any time soon I hope!

Now that I've (somewhat) investigated the mystery of the water pool it's time to explore this cavern further and begin to map this cave network using my new Tunnel Sense!

I continue to move in the shadows around the edges of the cavern, avoiding the more dense areas of light veins, weaving between pillars of dark stone

that stretched from the floor to the ceiling, as if spears had pierced through the ground or plunged down from above.

Following this pattern I move further from the pool and my own nest than I have before. Along the sides of the cavern I can see tunnels branching off into the darkness every now and again, some large and some small. I approach a few of them and feel strange air wafting through. Who knows what is lurking within these strange tunnels?

I move ahead for another ten minutes, making slow but steady progress. I can see the cavern has begun to widen further so that I can no longer see both sides at once. I start making cautious passages across the center to check both sides as I make my way.

Whoa!

A huge tunnel entrance appears before me. Perhaps thirty minutes travel away from the pool, this entrance is massive, spanning almost from the floor to ceiling of the cavern and just as wide. It clearly tilts in a downwards direction, heading deeper into the earth.

But there seems to something strange about the way the stone here is shaped...

Is that... stairs?!