

CHRYSALIS

Chapter 8 Titus



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Titus sat heavily behind his desk. The desk was similar to the man in many respects, unadorned, rough even, and solid. Thick boards of stonewood he'd harvested himself in the second strata, made up the surface on which he worked. The desk had to be joined together since he couldn't find a nail that would go through the stuff. The wood was stubborn, unyielding, that's why he liked it.

Gripped in his thick, ungraceful fingers was a folded piece of paper, a letter, covered in angry and insulting scrawl. Another letter of complaint from the Mercenary Union, Tiria chapter.

Titus reached inside his Legionary coat pocket with his free hand, withdrawing a smooth metal box attached to his belt by a chain. Placing down the letter he used both hands to place his fingers just so, frowning when he needed four tries to position his thick fingers correctly, before the box opened with a snap.

From within the case a blue glow spilled onto the desk and briefly illuminated Titus' face as he opened the case and stared hard at the contents, then snapped it shut, placing the case back into his inner pocket.

He opened a draw, removed a fresh piece of paper, collected his pen and began to compose a reply.

"Corrin,

as stated in the initial announcement five days ago, ambient mana levels within the dungeon are climbing and continue to do so, it is the opinion of the Legion that a wave is likely to occur within a week, but AS YOU KNOW, these predictions can be inaccurate and a wave can break with very short notice.

In the interest of keeping YOUR MEMBERS ALIVE we have exercised our right to control Dungeon access in the city of Liria and will be undertaking aggressive action to ensure the safety of the citizens.

If some of your parties are unable to conduct their activities in the dungeon during this time, I regret to inform you that I DON'T GIVE A DAMN.

After the wave is finished or when ambient mana levels return to normal your members will once again be granted access to the Dungeon, not before.

Get stuffed,

Titus.

Commander, Legionem Abyssi, Liria"

Perhaps not his most diplomatic missive, Titus mused, but he was never very good at playing nice with idiots. One of the main reasons why he hadn't wanted this job.

Almost against his will, his eyes slid to the corner of his office where, tucked behind a cabinet gathering dust, was an enormous battle-axe leaning against

the wall. Almost six feet long from head to haft, the thick metal didn't look as if it had been polished in years.

Sighing, Titus once more turned to his letter, folded it, sealed it with wax and placed it in his mail tray for one of the auxiliaries to deliver later in the day.

As he reached for the next letter of complaint, this one from the Minister of the Path, he heard the sound of feet pounding on stone, growing louder as several figures approached his office.

Titus could feel the blood stirring in his veins. Perhaps he could avoid his paperwork today.

Ten minutes later he'd arrived at the forward garrison, blasting open the massive doors with a single hand, he advanced into the building like a storm. The soldiers on duty, Legionaries all, saluted respectfully as he passed by, fists crashing into armored chests and heads lowered wherever he went.

Without speaking the Centurions on duty fell into step behind him as he marched through the stone plaza towards the breach in the earth that was the Dungeon entrance in Liria city.

The opening was four metres wide and similarly tall, wide enough for supply carts and large groups to pass through on extended expeditions. The space around the entrance was flat stone floor for thirty metres in every direction then a circular wall three metres high surrounded it, manned by archers and mages at all times, creating an open killing floor for any monsters who surged out of the tunnel.

Titus stared at the rent in the ground for several long seconds before he stepped down, submerging himself in the darkness. He prevented himself from inhaling as deeply as he wanted to, bringing the Dungeon air and its rich mana into his lungs. Instead he trailed his hand across the stone, his thick skin scraping on the rock as he walked.

Down the steps he could see the first of several guard stations, each usually manned by two legionaries, was now fully complemented with a team of five. They turned to salute him as he passed but were disciplined enough to use the silent salute here beneath the earth, bringing their right fist into the open palm of their left in front of their heart.

Their commander gave them a nod before he moved forward passed the next three posts until he reached the first. Ten legionaries occupied the wall here, two mages took turns to maintain the flame that illuminated the tunnel.

As he approached, with two centurions still in lock step behind him he found the woman he was looking for inside the guard post, pouring over maps on the table with some of her soldiers.

She saw him approach and dismissed her people before saluting.

"Commander Titus".

"Tribune Aurillia".

Titus returned the salute before joining her standing at the table to glance at the maps. All maps of the first strata , passages and mana concentration points marked clearly with neat organised writing. Wouldn't those idiots at the Merc Union love to see this level of detail on their 'guides', they could triple their prices.

"What is the situation Tribune?"

"Commander, fifteen minutes ago the monster approached this guard station before fleeing, the guard team has signaled the Centurion on duty before pursuing into the staging cavern".

"Fled" Titus grimaced, it was rare for monsters in the first strata to show enough intelligence to flee danger. Far more common for them to charge forward blindly and fight to the death.

This was last thing he needed immediately before a wave.

"How are preparations for the wave defense going?"

"The defense is being readied on schedule commander, though I have taken the liberty of advancing the timeline in response to this recent incident".

Titus grunted. "Good. I'll be joining the suppression expedition this time".

Aurillia blanched. "With respect commander, perhaps you would be best deployed ...".

"We both know where I am best deployed Aurillia, something feels off so I'm going down with the expedition".

Aurillia slowly nodded and sighed, this stubborn old man was incapable of making life easy for himself. A whole legion of troops who would gladly plunge into the Dungeon for him but he still chose to go himself. She shook her head, this was why he was the best.

From down in tunnel movement could be seen as five people advanced out of the gloom at the darker end of the tunnel and into the blazing firelight. Two of the members were limping slightly, supported by their comrades, all of the soldiers were filthy, blood and bone, none of it theirs, covered their armour.

Titus stepped out of the guard building and went forward to greet his Legionaries. As they saw him approach they immediately stopped to salute, remaining still until he quickly waved them down.

"Stop that, what are your injuries?".

The five of them grimaced. "Nothing serious commander, we were taken by surprise and sustained minor cuts and poison status".

"Get to the medicus immediately, we need every soldier fit for duty. Tell me where you able to slay the monster?".

The soldiers paused before shaking their heads.

Titus clenched his jaw. Dammit. "Who were the two who first saw the creature?"

Two of the soldiers, one male and one female raised their hands.

"Come with me".