

## Chrysalis 931

### [Chrysalis](#)

#### Chapter 931: Promise

The pain was beyond bone deep. Inside the communal bond, where once his servant, Issi, had been, was now a wound that tore into his very soul. Rasan'tep clamped his fangs together and forced himself to rise, despite the protests of his body. The air was still filled with dust, visibility was poor, but he began to move toward the echoes that rang through the bond. Powerful legs scratched at the rubble, and soon he began to unearth his attendants. The surviving ones.

What had happened? What *was* that?

No. He wouldn't allow himself to become distracted. The setsulah required his aid and the bond demanded that he give it, he could not do less, as their master. The mountain face above them must have collapsed, judging by the rubble, burying them all in tons of stone. He had survived thanks to his own shield, if not for that... it didn't bear thinking about.

After twenty minutes he had managed to excavate most of them, using only his legs. Even now the mental strain pounded in his brain, every touch of mana like a twinge on an exposed nerve. By the sands, he was tired.

"Mas... ter," Ammon'sil groaned as he was uncovered.

[Be silent,] the kaarmodo commanded, [you have numerous broken bones and I have not a speck of magic left in me. We will need to carry you inside the mountain.]

The leader of his servants closed his eyes and nodded wearily, his once pristine scales covered in dust, even torn away in places. His wife, Rapsep'sil crooned softly as she knelt by her husband and brushed her hand over his crest. Rasan'tep looked aside, it wasn't for him to observe such a private moment.

[What a disaster,] a mind touched against his own, filled with disgust and fatigue.

[Irion'tep. You have also survived?] he replied.

[Barely. You will have to answer to the mahaan for this failure, Rasan...]

Politicking already. He calmed his mind and sank his emotions under the dunes.

[In what way have I failed, Irion?] he said calmly.

His ally fell silent for a moment, though his rage practically vibrated over the mental link until he mastered it.

[Does that really need to be said?] Irion finally asked. [The evidence of your failure is all around us. I have lost two of my attendants in this disaster, directly as a result of your plan to lure the ants here with a false trail of pheromones.]

[And my strategy was a success. They were successfully lured, we trapped them and would have fed them to our termites had we not been interrupted. Are you really blaming me for not predicting the existence of a creature capable of such magic? Who could have known such a thing was possible?]

Unable to retort that yes, he should have predicted the existence of a super-ant with command over an unknown mana, Irion'tep could only fall silent as he dealt with the grief that overwhelmed all kaarmodo at the loss of their servants.

[Let us continue to retrieve those that can be saved,] Rassin'tep suggested, [these discussions can wait for later.]

The two fell silent as they continued to push through the rubble, searching for their allies and their servants amidst the rock. As they worked the dust continued to settle and the scale of the devastation gradually became known. It was absurd. In the face of the mountain, an enormous sphere had been carved that encompassed most of what had previously been the main entrance. That spell, whatever it had been, had ripped up the rock as if it were plain soil, tearing it from the mountain with ease. The trees in the distance, which had not long ago been coated in a layer of fungus, were now clear, but had been flattened, many uprooted and dragged across the ground, leaving enormous furrows in their wake.

If it hadn't been for their shield eating up so much of the spell's energy, or their efforts to break the spell down, the scale of devastation would have been far greater. How could one creature produce such an effect against the combined efforts of so many minds? The secret had to lie in that strange mana type the ant had used, something that Rassin'tep had never encountered before.

Indeed, a *very* promising prospect.

The life of a cultist was a difficult one, they endured thousands of failures in their mission to create the final ancient, yet each toiled through the centuries knowing that they only had to succeed once. For the first time in a long while Rassin'tep felt his heart quicken at the prospect of finally finding, *the one*.

This ant, this Anthony, already more powerful than an ant monster had any right to be, also possessed this strange power. With another evolution, possibly two, they would have a clearer picture, but any monster able to do something like this at tier six was more than a worthy candidate. He would have to report back to the other members of the Red Truth, things had escalated beyond what he was able to manage himself.

As the work continued, they found two of their fellow kaarmodo had succumbed to their wounds beneath the stone before more of their allies emerged from within the mountain to assist and provide healing. Below, the termites boiled out of the deep tunnels, responding to a perceived threat that no longer existed, only to find that their fungus gardens had been destroyed, which drove them further in a fury. It would be a day before they calmed themselves most likely.

As more kaarmodo emerged, discussions continued to evolve, next steps being considered, adjustments to the overall strategy, but Rassin'tep only half listened, he had other concerns to deal with. The largest issue being how to ensure that this promising ant survived the retaliation that may come as a result of this incident. His people did not tolerate the loss of their servants lightly, let alone two of their number. He tapped into the communal mind bridge to find his worst fears confirmed.

A divide had formed between those who wanted to directly intervene alongside the termites, a combined force of kaarmodo, setsulah and their controlled insects with no pretence of neutrality, to annihilate the ant force and take the fight directly to the tree, and those who simply wanted to increase the scale of the termite force.

He had wanted to apply pressure to the ant, but things could rapidly get out of hand.

[Master?] Ammon'sil approached his side and placed a hand against his scales after being healed.

[I am fine.]

He wasn't. He was tired, in pain and in desperate need of a scrub, the dirt between his scales rubbed fiercely, but he had no time to rest. He gathered himself before he made himself known within the discussion. With a little luck he could salvage this situation and ensure his precious prospect wasn't burned out before he had a chance to shine.

### Chrysalis

#### **Chapter 932: Shadow of Fear**

The orphans were playing in the street below and Enid smiled to see their carefree antics. One of the older girls caught her eye through the window and waved cheerfully, flashing a broad grin when Enid waved back. It soothed her old heart, watching the young ones play. Goodness knows she wouldn't be around much longer, but little moments like this were a reminder of why she worked so hard. Everything they did in Renewal was to provide a better future for the displaced people who had made a home here, and none had suffered more than the orphans.

She frowned. If only she could protect them from the shadow that now lay over the town. She'd seen it, that hesitation in the evenings when the tradesfolk were contemplating working for a few more hours. Or the wavering hint of fear in the eye of the farmer as they counted the hours of rest they'd had the previous night. So many had disappeared, vanished from their offices, fields or, somehow, even from the street in broad daylight!

She'd been talking with Mr Hollin the smith about the lacking supply of raw iron as they walked toward his shop, only to find the man had been abducted right next to her mid-sentence! The fact she hadn't heard or seen a thing only made the effect all the more chilling. She'd even taken several more steps, wondering why the usually talkative man would cut off so suddenly.

"They are causing havoc," she growled to herself.

"Who is?"

Enid jumped then realised her assistant had entered the room as she brooded on the emergence of these 'Sleep Police'. Her surprise only added to her growing resentment. They had her jumping at shadows!

"The sleep enforcers, whatever you want to call them," she grumbled. "People are scared of their own shadows, they record their hours of rest daily to ensure they remain above the threshold. It's a reign of terror is what it is!"

She slapped the desk in front of her for emphasis.

Jonathan watched her antics with an air of resigned amusement. It was far from the first time he'd heard this rant from the mayor and wouldn't be the last.

"This wouldn't have anything to do with the fact that you yourself were amongst the first to enjoy their hospitality?"

"Of course not," Enid snapped, "this is about the wellbeing of the people."

In truth, she'd felt more than a little embarrassed at being abducted from her home when trying to get some extra paperwork done. She'd been operating on five hours of sleep a night for weeks up to that point. If they were going to grab anyone, it was almost certainly going to be her. A warning would have been nice though! She doubted that Anthony had to put up with this sort of treatment within the Colony.

Her assistant sighed and began to roll out the same arguments he'd employed the previous day.

"It's hard to describe what's taking place as 'an attack on the wellbeing of the people' when they are literally being forced to sleep. Productivity is up. People report being happier and more content. Crime is down, which I didn't think would ever happen, given how low it was to start with. The number of couples falling pregnant has risen. Even the orphans are performing better in school. I have to say, the Great One was clearly onto something when they decreed people sleep more. The effect it's had on the place is incredible."

Despite the litany of benefits that people had been experiencing, Enid's scowl only grew deeper.

"But the abductions are causing people to be afraid. How secure can someone really feel when they are terrified of vanishing from their own home!"

Jonathan strolled over to her desk and dumped another handful of papers in front of her.

"Yes. People are scared of being abducted," he agreed, "but it's not nearly as bad as you say. You make it sound like they're getting murdered, when in fact they are getting a good night's rest, a cup of tea, a massage and a haircut. If it weren't for the disorienting experience of being nabbed, people would probably be lining up for the service. The teddies of the Great One are also proving to be exceedingly popular."

He flicked his eyes to the bookshelf in the corner where a plush and fuzzy ant with a fierce look on its face stood pride of place in the centre of the shelf.

The Mayor shuffled in her seat defensively.

"It's fluffy," she said.

"Of course."

"But that's beside the point!"

"I'm not convinced that it is," finally cracking, Jonathan placed his hands on his hips and levelled a weary glare at his stubborn boss. "The only question that really matters is this, do you want to live with the support of the Colony, or not?"

"With," Enid replied immediately. "We wouldn't enjoy anything like the prosperity we have today without them. Forget that, we wouldn't even be alive."

"Right. Then you have to be prepared to adopt some of their values. This sort of stuff happens amongst the ants all the time and they seem to operate just fine. In fact, they probably push the boundaries

harder than we do, which is likely why the Great One insisted on this rule in the first place. It was only a matter of time until they applied this rule to us as well. In their mind, they're *helping* us. And they are!"

Taken aback by her usually mild mannered assistant's direct speech, Enid finally slumped in defeat, a pose she was little accustomed to.

"I just wish they would have consulted us. At least given us a warning. There are so many things I have to deal with and then I had a hundred missing person reports show up in a week, after I got abducted myself!"

"I think it just goes to show that they really do think of us as part of them. This is something that they live by, and therefore so should we."

"I have to admit, that worries me slightly," Enid admitted slowly, "do we really know what it means to be part of a monster society? Are we really ready for everything that they will decide is good for us? They have been so, so good to us this far, and I trust them, but I worry about the future and what might happen after I'm gone. This time it was something small, sleeping requirements, but what about next time?"

Now finally the true concerns of the Mayor were brought to light. Her assistant shouldn't have been surprised that she was worried about what would happen in her absence. She always worried about that.

"It's too late now to worry about integrating with the Colony," he reminded her gently, "we are a part of them now. We just have to ride it out as best we can."

Enid sighed and looked out the window at the young orphans playing so happily in the street. At least they were free from such concerns, and the fear of vanishing overnight. As long as they were content and growing strong, then everything else was fine.

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 933: Tolly Tours**

*I must say, my dear readers, that I was positively giddy at the prospect of being able to interview the most celebrated individual member of the Colony. I had thought that speaking to Elizabant would have slaked my curiosity, but instead, it only inflamed it!*

*For a queen to be so deferential to this 'Eldest', the 'Great One' that the common people of Renewal held such reverence for. I have to say that the possibility of meeting such a creature set my heart positively aflutter!*

*I hadn't looked forward to a meeting so much since my much celebrated sit down with the Satrap of the Brathian Island conglomerate, a most influential and secretive individual!*

*Yet, my enthusiasm had to be tempered, dear readers, as my guide was only too quick to tell me.*

*"I must warn you Miss Tolly, an audience with the Great One will be all but impossible to arrange," Emilia said. "The Great One hasn't been seen by anyone from Renewal in years. I couldn't even tell what layer of the Dungeon they were on."*

*"Then who can?" I ask.*

*Always be problem solving, reader, that's the key to moving forward, no matter the project!*

*Emilia hesitated for a moment before she sighed and adopted a lecturing tone.*

*"Beneath Anthome, in the second stratum, lies the first and largest of the Colony's deeper nests. It's a very important site to the ants for historical and cultural reasons, and to the followers of the Colony like me, it's practically holy. There are frequent pilgrimages to visit the nest that thousands attend every year."*

*Well this all sounded positively wonderful!*

*"And there we will be able to find more information on the Eldest?"*

*"Perhaps. But we will need to follow protocols if we want to visit. The Colony insists that all visitors to the deeper layers undergo a mana saturation process to minimise the chance of sickness."*

*"How thoughtful! I don't suppose there is any way to skip it?"*

*I have delved deeply into the Dungeon over the course of many years, as you well know, dear readers! But alas, there was no slipping through the regulations of the Colony. Who would one even bribe?*

*My delightful guide stepped away to discuss arrangements with a nearby ant whilst I took a moment to speak with my guards. Neither of the two strapping lads were particularly fond of the idea of pushing yet further into the land of the Colony, but alas, the terms of their contract required that they accompany me. The poor dears. I wasn't unsympathetic to their position and a promise of increased compensation was enough to assuage their fears.*

*Then we were off! Deeper into the Dungeon once more, in the company of several rather imposing ant soldiers.*

*I have to say, in terms of excitement and danger, there really wasn't much to enjoy on this particular journey. I hardly saw a monster, other than the ants themselves, of course. We approached a well guarded building that contained several portals, each heavily trafficked. It was only thanks to the skilful negotiations of Emilia Cretherton that we were able to proceed at a reasonable pace.*

*"This portal will take us just inside the second stratum. While we wait out the mandatory wait time we can tour the farms, visit the smelting facilities, and see a few other sights. Is that sufficient?"*

*"That will be wonderful, dear."*

*Once through the portal, a process that took several hours of waiting, we were embraced by the dark mana of the shadow sea. It had been some time since I had delved to the second stratum, my lovelies, and it stirred the most wonderful memories of the adventures I experienced in my youth! Plumbing the dark depths, hunting for dark whales with the mariners of light beneath the grand pillar. All tales that you have no doubt read many a time!*

*So it was that I experienced a jovial mood as Emilia began to guide us through the darkness. Even here the Colony had gone to every effort to ensure our comfort, offering warm clothing and enchanted light globes to ease our passage. Even without such considerations there would have been no struggle at all, since the pathways were so expertly carved and well lit. One would think we were strolling through an avenue in a well-heeled city borough, rather than plunging into the depths!*

*It was quite strange, but pleasant!*

*From there we spent several days touring the fields of the Colony and I must say what an impressive sight it was. Hundreds of acres of once wild and untamed expanse, humbled before the might of the Colony. Literally thousands of workers toiled without pause, tending to plants, delightful little aphid creatures and tea leaves, so many tea leaves!*

*"Not all of the expanse within the Colony's territory has been utilised in such a way," Emilia told us, ever eager to continue her role as guide. "Some are left in basically their natural state, mainly to provide hunting grounds the ants can use to secure experience, cores and Biomass. They have their own private areas in which they cultivate spawn points in an attempt to increase the number of monsters they can fight, but I personally haven't seen them."*

*"Can you explain those small creatures atop the trees to me, my dear?" I asked.*

*She was only too happy to launch into an explanation of the origins of the aphids, the progenitor of whom was apparently a reconstituted pet of the Queen herself! I do admit to some confusion when she first utilised the term, 'Queen'.*

*"Which queen?" I asked.*

*"The Queen," she replied, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.*

*"Aren't there many queens?"*

*"Oh, I see what you mean. When I, or any ant, says THE Queen, they are talking very specifically about the first one."*

*"You mean, the first of all the queens?"*

*She nodded solemnly.*

*"Indeed. Second only to the Eldest in terms of the respect afforded to them amongst the Colony and the faithful."*

*She must have seen the light flare up in my eyes, for she was quick to continue.*

*"Don't even think about trying to meet the Queen. It just won't happen."*

*I have to say, I was a little put out.*

*"Why would that be?" I enquired.*

*"The Queen has a reputation for risk taking and bold action, so the Colony is extraordinarily careful to limit her opportunities to put herself in harm's way. She famously still hunts for herself, refusing to allow the soldiers and scouts to provide her meals for her. The only way to see the Queen would be to fight through an army of tens of thousands of ants."*

*I let it go, though reluctantly. Very reluctantly, dear reader! The Queen, it needn't be said, sounded like a bold adventurer after my own heart!*

## Chrysalis

### Chapter 934: The Tally Man

"I'm telling you! We found a super, suuuper fishy scent trail and we decided to follow it!"

"How much of that was wanting to investigate a possible threat and how much of it was just wanting to keep running once you got your speed up?"

"Both-both! Running is fun! Investigating for the family is important!"

I mean. That's true...

"Just try a *little* harder not to run headlong into dangerous situations, alright? If I hadn't showed up, you and all of your followers would be dead right now."

"I'm sorry, senior."

And she actually looks like it, for once. Vibrant's grown up big and strong compare to that miniscule little grub that I saved way back when. Endangering herself and her squad wasn't something that she intended to do and I'm pleased to see her properly reflecting on her behaviour.

"Well... don't beat yourself up too much, it looks like the lizards set a trap and we weren't ready for something like that. If they can mask or somehow create scent trails then that's something we'll need to investigate. If they can manipulate our sense of smell then we may not be able to rely on our own trails. That's a nasty swerve."

"I'll go let the others know okay byeeeeeee!"

Unable to contain herself to a normal pace of conversation anymore, Vibrant blasts me in the face with words and then turns and dashes away, kicking up a wave of dust that further smacks into my already reeling mug. That wasn't necessary! Neither of those were necessary!

Ugh, whatever. Damn, I'm tired. It takes a lot to get me tired, but this whole escapade has managed it. The constant construction work, followed by a battle, followed by more construction, then the chase after Vibrant and *another* battle. Even ten thousand ants providing regenerative energy through the Vestibule isn't enough to fully soothe my fatigue. More to the point, I'm mentally exhausted after the many ups and downs. I need a snooze. Badly.

"Eldest! Vibrant has been running around telling everyone all sorts of things about a giant mountain nest and bombs and lizards. I'm confused."

Poor Sloan looks it too, her antennae twitching as she tries to make sense of what Vibrant had been saying as she roared past.

"It's not that complicated, but the implications are serious," I sigh. "Basically, Vibrant was lured all the way to the termite nest. Well, *a* termite nest. I suppose we don't actually know that there isn't more than one. Anyway. It seems that the lizards have managed to find a way to produce pheromones via mana in some fashion, so we'll need to be extra careful and not rely on our trails too much. When I turned up they had Vibrant trapped under a shield along with her crew. My squad and I broke in, caused a bit of havoc and then got them out. No problem."



"No problem?" Sloan doesn't seem convinced. "It doesn't sound like it was no problem. I'm guessing you've left more than a little of the story out of your telling."

I shrug.

"The details will get out there soon enough and aren't really relevant."

I'm not wrong, all of Vibrant's followers were there. The tale will be all over the fortifications before long.

"What *is* relevant," I continue, "is what the reaction of the kaarmodo will be after we spit directly in their face like this."

"What are your thought?"

My thoughts? It always boil down to the same few options in the end.

"They'll either back off or double down. If they reflect on what happened and conclude that they might have bitten off more than they can chew, they'll retreat, hit the pause button on their termite strategy. Or, they'll get angry at us and invest even further in the termites before they come after us with a vengeance."

"So we should start preparing then."

"Indeed. We probably need another ten thousand ants to come down here to be honest."

"I'll get the word out."

Out of the two options, is there really even a point considering which they might choose? When have the enemies of the Colony done anything other than come at us harder? It's predictable at this point.

"You do that. I'm going to go have a snooze."

And check my status, I haven't done that in ages. Me and four comrades pile into a separate chamber, out of the way of the main worker thoroughfares and immediately fall into a long session of torpor. Sarah waves us goodbye before we stumble in, not an easy feat with a bear paw, before she lumbers off to help with construction. When I awake, it's with a start as my insect body zaps itself to alertness once more.

HARRAZ! I'm up!

What was I going to do? Oh yeah! Status update. Man I haven't checked it in ages, there should be some juicy stuff in there. I don't know the exact number of announcements I got after that gravity bomb, but it was a lot. Hopefully I've managed to climb in levels at least a little. Come to think of it, I haven't really looked at it since my last mutation, which was over a week ago. So much hunting and fighting lately!

Name: Anthony

Level: 46 (Rare) (VI)

Might: 205

Toughness: 180

Cunning: 145

Will: 100

HP: 360/360

MP: 530/530

Skills:

General:

**Master Excavation (IV) Level 31**; Expert Grip (III) **Level 20**; Expert Stealth (III) **Level 10**; Tunnel Compass (IV) **Level 9**; Iron Mind (IV) **Level 40**; Master Stamina (IV) **Level 14**; Still Meditation (IV) **Level 21**; Snap Dash (IV) **Level 31**;

Mana:

Mana Craft (V) **Level 56**; Condensed Mana (IV) **Level 40**; Finer External Mana Manipulation (IV) **Level 31**; Mana Hoarder (IV) **Level 31**; Layered Mind Magic Affinity (V) **Level 24**; Directed Mana Sensing (IV) **Level 36** Expert Healing Magic Affinity (III) **Level 20**; Omni-Elemental Affinity (V) **Level 80**; Advanced Mana Masking (III) **Level 15**; Wood Magic Affinity (I) Level 1; Metal Magic Affinity (I) Level 1; Lightning Magic Affinity (I) Level 1; **Advanced Force Magic Affinity (III) Level 16**;

Pet:

Further Pet Communication (III) **Level 20**; Core Crafting (IV) **Level 18**; Pet Growth Speed (I) Level 5;

Defensive:

Grandmaster Exo-Skeleton Defence (V) **Level 45**; Master Dodge (IV) **Level 40**; Master Endure (IV) **Level 16**; Expert Grace (III) **Level 20**; Advanced Mandible Parry (II) **Level 10**;

Offensive:

Unerring Acid Shot (IV) **Level 26**; Master Precise Shooting (IV) **Level 38**; Doom Chomp (V) **Level 55**; Mandible Spear (II) **Level 8**; Advanced Chomp Combo (II) **Level 10**; Charge (II) Level 6;

Mutations:

Senses:

Sharpened Perimeter Eyes +25, Future Wave Sight Antennae + 30 (Twilight Filament);

Defence:

Thickened Complete Diamond Carapace +30, Fortified Healing Inner Carapace Plating +30;

Physical:

Hardened Rapid Absorption Legs +25, Mana Drenched Mandibles +30, Hastened Potent Regeneration Gland + 30, Loud Convincing Pheromone Gland +25, Vast Hungering Stomach + 25; Lock Hyper-Twitch Musculature +25, Coordinating Instant Transmission Sub-Neural Network +25;

Acid:

Propagating Mana-Feasting Bind Acid Gland +25, Guided Hyper Pressurised Scattershot Acid Nozzle +25; Thickened Draining Acid concentration gland +25, Exhausting Thickener Acid Stimulation Gland +25;

Mental:

Indomitable Coordination Cortex + 30; Condensing Gravity Main Brain +15; Mind Mana Focused Sub-Brain +15; Mind Mana Focused Sub-Brain +15; Mind Mana Focused Sub-Brain +15;

Mana:

Forceful Unending Gravity Magic Gland +30; Might Infusing Collective Will Vestibule +30 (Soul Crystal); High Purifying Communal Spirit Nave +30;

Species: Colony Paragon

Skill points: 57

Biomass: 653

Oh, shoot! That is a lot of levels! Up to level forty six already? This is already past the halfway point for my last evolution. Nice! I've also got a *ton* of skills that I need to rank up. I really should have checked my status ages ago.

Most interesting of all is the level of my omni-elemental affinity! All of my diligent practice has finally paid off! Muahahahaaaa! Better rank up these skills and see what happens!

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 935: New Toys**

Ranking up my elemental magic after such a long time is a nice milestone and one that I'm super pleased about. What sort of delicious new spells will I gain access to? I've only very recently seen what dumping all of my gravity magic into a bomb can do, and whilst it's obviously mega powerful, I can only shoot one of them! I need other options and that was the whole reason I worked so hard on the basic elemental mana skills!

As the trickling sensation blooms in my brain I eagerly reach for the knowledge that is being created there, grabbing it in drips and drabs as the skill upgrades.

Oho! Some juicy things indeed!

And so many spells! New combinations of elements that I couldn't perform before! More potent, more destructive, more awe inspiringly DEVESTATING!

Muahahahahaha!

Wait?! Is that the long suppressed resurrection of Dark Anthony? Down! Down you fiend! Back into the pit from whence you came!

Now. New magic, what can I do?

Bubbling away in my brain, new spell forms continue to take shape and I enjoy the process as they blossom into their final forms. Sometimes ranking up in magic just makes you better at it, helps you handle the existing spells and the construct better than you could before, but sometimes, like on this occasion, new spells come into play, but I didn't expect to see this many. I suppose it makes sense since I'm technically ranking up eight different skills at once.

Blue fire, Ice, Stone and Gas magic being the four foundational elements and their combinations making up the rest.

The first new spell I investigate is one that seems to hold a lot of promise in my mind. A blend of fire and air, it takes a lot of mana, but can devastate a wide area with what looks like a fire tornado. Nasty. A base of twisting wind, a sprinkle of combustible gas and a rip roaring fire, when mixed correctly will produce a towering pillar of wind that burns with a furious heat.

I'll need to experiment somewhere safe, obviously, but it appears as though it won't stay in one place either, moving over the terrain in a way that I may or may not be able to control. Going to need to keep an eye on that.

The second a rather unusual cocktail of water, gas and ice. This spell is also very resource intensive, which I'm starting to suspect they all will be, and requires forming a wide spray of water that is then frozen, trapping an unstable gas inside. The end result is a metric boat load of finger length, deadly missiles that well shatter with surprising force on impact, sending shards of magical ice all over the place.

Ouch. Probably not effective against more powerful monsters, but hey, with the sheer number of projectiles created with this spell, you never know. If I managed to compress the water mana before releasing it, the resulting ice may have more penetrating power than I expect.

I'll call it, Concussive Needle! Or something.

The next option takes me by surprise. A flash hardening technique that makes use of stone, mud and ice mana. Weird. Effectively allowing the caster to shape something out of mud mana, then harden it near instantly. Perhaps not as flashy as some of the other spells, but I can see a hell of a lot of applications out of combat and more than a few in it as well. I haven't made much use of mud in the past, mainly because I felt it would be fruitless to slap something with wet dirt. Now that I think about it, there's probably a lot more applications than I had considered. Turning the ground beneath an enemy into mud? That's a classic! But now I can take it a step beyond. I can bury an opponent under a jet of mud and then harden it around them before they can blink.

Come to think of it, if I hit someone with mud, I can turn it stone basically any time I want. Ooo I think this one's going to be tricky. Quick thinking in a fight hasn't been my speciality, outside of my reflexes of course. That doesn't mean I can't improve though.

What else have we got in here...

There's a rather deadly looking combo of gas, air and fire. This spell looks a lot like the flamethrower effect I can already pull off, but turned up well past eleven and closer to fifteen. With the combination of an air funnel and gas mana providing more oomph for the flame, it should burn hotter than I can make fire on its own.

I might call this spell Dragon Breath. It's going to look rad as hell. It probably only tickles demons, considering how fire resistant they are, but hey, I can see plenty of use for it.

And lucky last. This spell seems... different, to the others. Let's see here. Lava? Lava is cool as heck, I want to use more lava. And we combine it with, stone? It's already part stone. What do we do with it though? We create a highly pressurised pocket of lava underground. I mean, cool? Is that supposed to be some kind of lava landmine? But then why the heck does it require so much earth and stone mana? Like, a *lot*.

Wait a second.

Is this... a volcano? I think it is!

Once the pressure below ground reaches a certain point, the spell creates a massive shift in the ground, driving the pressure upwards, which should result in a massive up swell as the lava burst forth, sending flaming rocks and rives of lava everywhere. With enough mana investment, I could make an actual, full blown volcano. But... we are talking about a *ton* of mana. More than I could handle in a day, probably.

If we could tunnel underneath the termite nest... and somehow remain undetected, then I could gradually build up this spell directly underneath their mountain. I'd need help from other mages to conceal such a massive concentration of mana, but it could be doable.

If it all came off, we could destroy the termites without even having to fight them, the spell would flood their tunnels with lava and shatter the mountain from the inside.

Not a nice way to go, but all is fair in war against termites.

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 936: Biomass Spending**

The delicious sensation of new and powerful spells is one thing, but now that it's done I have to turn to another experience, one that is perhaps less pleasant. Mutation time! Gotta improve that body and push my limits to beyond the... limit. Or something. I've managed to gather around six hundred Biomass, not a bad effort given the fact I've been at a higher tier than almost all my food. The penalty reduction from upgrading my stomach is definitely paying dividends right now. Imagine if I had to go against monsters as strong as I am constantly... no thanks.

It's nice to have a challenge every now and again, but for real, beating up on weaker monsters is by far the more relaxing way of levelling up. It just takes longer. Good thing I'm a very patient and restrained person.

...

I barely managed to keep a straight face when I said that and my face is literally part of my skeleton.

Where to turn now? I've actually managed to mutate quite a few of the big ticket items by this stage and now it's time to move onto the more niche things. My brains are still only at fifteen and they definitely need to go to thirty as a priority, considering how excellent my new magic is, any little bit of help casting will make all the difference.

So let's take a look at what we have going on right now. The three sub-brains are all specialising in mind magic, which makes perfect sense as it allows them to better utilise the mind constructs. The multiplicative effect of being able to focus on so many things at once is certainly a powerful feature and precisely the reason I was able to pepper my enemies with so many spells in the defensive battle against the termites. It also helped me rank up my elemental magic at such a prodigious speed since I've been practicing a minimum of three different elemental magics constantly.

The question is, do I go all the way to thirty with the mind magic speciality or do I slide something else in there to nestle alongside. Browsing through the options doesn't really help me, despite the absurd plethora on offer, since my focus has *finally* started to narrow down, the vast majority of options simply don't apply to me. Light or dark? Nope. Life? I guess now that I've encountered life mana it would make sense for the option to pop up, but nope. There's a ton of upgrades for better cognition that might come in handy. Better memory, faster thinking, more adaptive thought processes.

You really can just straight up make yourself a faster and better thinker through mutation. Almost feels like cheating.

But no. That is not my path! I have always left the thinking to the Colony and I shall continue to do so! I can be honest and say that even if I reset my brains all the way back to 0 and focused on nothing but pumping up my cognitive abilities, I'd still be less capable of making good decisions than the Colony as a whole. More brains is better, and even if I have four, there are hundreds of thousands in the Colony by now, probably. I'll put my trust in them. Besides, mutating my brains does provide a background improvement to all of their functions. Every +1 has a strengthening effect to the organ or body part being mutated. It doesn't have as big an effect as the big ticket mutations that land every five levels, but it adds up over time.

To take one of my brains from +15 to +30 is going to take... three hundred and forty five biomass... you can't be serious. Geez this is getting expensive. Damn you Gandalf! Does your greed know no limits?!

So I suppose that means I'm only going to mutate one brain up to +30, and if that's the case then it's obviously going to be my main one. I'm pretty comfortable mutating along the same lines that I employed the last time. Improve my handling of gravity mana, and improve my ability to condense mana. The last gravity bomb I threw out is all the evidence that I need to show the effectiveness of this strategy. I was able to pump just about all of the mana in my organ into that beast, though part of that was the spell literally pulling the mana out of me outside of my control.

So with that, my main brain goes from the Condensing Gravity Main Brain +15 to Crushing Gravity Well Main Brain +30.

Sounds like a black hole factory to me. I like it!

*With that done, and the massive cost involved, I can take two organs from +25 to +30 with what I have remaining. The stomach is probably a good option, finally. I'll pump that up to 30 and reap the benefits of further reducing the tier penalty.*

*Next on the list is musculature. Normally I'd want to mutate this and my nervous system at the same time, but unfortunately I can't bear the cost of that right now. Don't mind, nervous system, your time will come soon!*

As I check my status, I feel a warm sense of pride as I see my progress. The goal of +30 across the board is almost within reach and I look forward to the day when my body is once again pristine and maxed out, securing that sweet, sweet evolution bonus.

All in all, this is going to cost six hundred and twenty five Biomass, leaving me with very little savings. Ah well, let's confirm it!

BRAZZINATH!

Dammit! Why!? WHY?!

It takes quite a while for the itch to finally fade. The length of the mutation seems to take longer the higher up the tiers I go. I can only imagine what it must be like to go from +50 to +55 or something. Part of me hopes I'll never find out.

With that all done, I'm ready to emerge from my little hibernation chamber and with my friends by my side I emerge to find ants, so many ants, crawling all over each other as they rush about the place.

What the heck is going on?

Sharpened Perimeter Eyes +25 -> Focal Compound Eyes +30

Vast Hungering Stomach +25 -> Discerning Stomach +30

Lock Hyper-Twitch Musculature +25 -> Coiling Hyper-Twitch Musculature +30

Coordinating Instant Transmission Sub-Neural Network +25 -> Distributed Instantaneous Sub-Neural Network +30

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 937: Wake the Beast**

The door was shaking on its hinges.

A piece of Legion history, the door to the Consul Chamber had stood for three thousand years. Abyssal steel, forged during the Rending, formed the core of the massive doors, which stood over ten metres tall, covered in potent enchantments of hardening and regeneration powered by Mythic cores. Atop that unbreakable frame, layer after layer of compressed, living stone had been placed, bonded together to create an impenetrable bulwark that defended the highest officer of the Legion.

Intricate and detailed carvings covered the outer face. Legend had it that the hands of the founders themselves had held the chisel. The images were mirrored from one door to the next, the form of the ideal Legionary imprinted in glorious, expressive lines. A body of steel, weapon drawn, perfect form, eyes that blazed with determination and a heart that burned even brighter.

Despite its incredible density and weight, despite being a bulwark that could receive a blow from a battering ram without shifting an inch, it was shaking.

Outside the door, two of the finest soldiers the Abyssal Legion could produce, stood to attention. Praetorian Guard, armoured in the rarest of the rare, full Abyssal Steel Praetorian armour. The two stood an imposing four metres tall, weighted polearms held steady. Two veterans, they had earned the

honour of guarding the Consul Chamber through numerous campaigns in the depths of the Dungeon, fighting the worst enemies the sentient people of Pangera could face.

It could not be seen behind their visors, but sweat beaded both of their brows. The rolling waves of pressure that hammered against the door and bled through beat down on them. Lesser beings would be on their knees, blood pouring from their mouths, but within their coveted armour, they were safe.

Inside the chamber, it was far worse.

Idly, Commander Myriam began to wonder if this was how she would die. Not at the hands of an ancient, or some other terrible monster in the depths, but here in the heart of the Legion's strength, crushed to death by the rage of her own superior officer.

She felt blood well in her mouth so she leaned slightly to the side and spat in her helmet which she held tucked under her arm. It wouldn't do to stain the floor of the Consul's office.

It was quite a thing to see, the legendary berserker rage of the Consul. This was the power that had given her the ability to rocket through the ranks, ascending all the way to the highest office atop the bodies of innumerable monsters.

Minerva drew deep steadying breaths as her fists clenched and unclenched. If she'd had her axe in hand, goodness knows what might have happened, thankfully it hadn't come to that.

*Breathe in. Breathe out.*

The overwhelming pressure that filled the room pulsed with every exhalation of the Consul, causing the reinforced stone that formed the walls to creak and groan.

Blind, overwhelming rage filled her mind, blanketed her vision with red and flooded her body with strength. Containing it was difficult, just standing still was a trial. That power *yearned* to be used. It thrashed and coiled and whispered in her ear. She could lash out, she could strike, she could *kill*. Anything to let it out, set it free.

*Just breathe.*

Head down, eyes closed, the Consul went to war with herself in a way she hadn't done for decades.

*I'm in control, not you.*

She grit her teeth and slowly unwound her fists, allowing the tension to drain from her muscles one by one.

Commander Myriam leaned to the side and spat once more as the pressure slowly began to ease. It looked as if she wouldn't die today after all. The next time she came to report to the Consul, she was coming in armour, no matter what it looked like.

"I apologise for my lack of control," Minerva eventually ground out as she finally managed to force down her anger. "Your words took me by surprise."

"I can't imagine why," Myriam replied dryly.



The radiating aura that had been so crushing only moments ago receded to a more a more tolerable level, though it remained, simmering beneath the surface.

"Those damned lizards. They choose to flout the laws that have stood for thousands of years *now*? Which idiot thought this could possibly be a good idea? I'll wring his idiot, scaled neck..."

Minerva stopped pacing back and forth behind her desk, a habit she had unconsciously fallen back into, and breathed again. It wouldn't do for the rage to emerge again so soon after she had put it away.

"I communicated to the Mahaan that you would be displeased, Consul. I also noted that the gathered clutch were predominantly younger and untested."

"Throwing away disposable pawns so they don't have to taint their own claws," Minerva grunted, a mannerism in which she was almost identical to her husband. "The whole enterprise reeks of cowardice."

"I suspect that they believed our own disagreements with the Mother Tree would lead us to look the other way as they instituted this program. I tried to warn them, Consul."

"Too stupid to listen. Pride will doom this world a second time. I will not carry water for these fools."

She slammed her hand down on her desk and the shockwave blew Myriam's hair back. Remarkably, the table held.

"Send in the scribe!" The Consul roared and the massive doors opened a crack.

The scribe entered in full armour, gleaming with enchantments that protected the wearer from outside influences. The commander nodded. A wise play. Except the Consul's face darkened at the show of weakness. She stomached it, for now.

"Withdraw all forces from the lands of the Ka'armodo, on every strata. End all joint exercises, training and missions, immediately. Close all diplomatic channels and make preparations to relocate every base and training facility that falls within their sphere of influence."

Myriam was staggered.

"Are you sure, Consul?" she asked, her voice steady despite her shock. "Some might see this as a grave overreaction. Certainly the Ka'armodo will not look kindly on us abandoning them in the face of the coming disaster."

"Us? Abandoning *them*?" Minerva sneered. "We did not turn our backs on three thousand years of tradition. *We* didn't spit on the memory of those who died in the rending. *We* didn't break the taboo and create self-sustaining monsters to do our bidding and fight our battles for us. *We* have held fast, fought the good fight and stood firm in the face of the worst this world has to offer for the good of its people. A sand baked hunk of lizard meat thinks to test *our* resolve? This is the Abyssal Legion and we are unmatched beneath the surface. We have battled since the cataclysm to preserve this world and I am not going to stop now."

The Consul stood straight.

"Some lines you only have to cross once. There is no going back. They will tell us it was only a rogue element. They will tell us it was done without knowledge or approval. They will tell us we are too hot blooded and need to calm down. They can get stuffed. From this day forward they are poison and we have cut them out."

She glared at the scribe who quivered in his armour in the face of the most powerful human in the world.

"I have spoken," she ground out.

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 938: War Resurgent**

*My father, and even at this early juncture I must apologise for every one of my writings circling back to the man who raised me, was the first to ever mention the fifth stratum to me.*

*He described it as a world of endless and profound noxiousness. A place where every particle of substance that filled it had been bio-engineered into a vehicle for death. A single breath could kill. A single touch, lethal. He spoke of rivers of poison that flowed through the air. He talked of lakes filled with bile so virulent that reality itself was infected by it.*

*At the time, we lived in the fourth, within the temple city of Artas, home to the grand cathedral of the path, as I'm sure you know, and the idea of such a place existing within such relative proximity had me waking in screaming fear every second night for months. I cursed that old man, (silently within the recesses of my mind, for I wholly lacked the fortitude to face him directly) for sharing such horrific visions with me, a mere child. For many years I resented him for, wondering why he had never watered down his experience for me, not made it more digestible for a youth.*

*When finally I decided to face my fears, one by one, as an adult, it eventually came time for me to visit the fifth. I needed to dispel the horrific image of my tormented childhood and replace it with the firm reality which could not possibly match the terrors conjured by the imagination of a child.*

*I was wrong. He kept so much from me, when I was child. What I saw was so, so much worse than anything I could have imagined. How could a good world possibly stand for such things to exist?*

- *Excerpt from "Recollections of my Father: Child of the Iron Fist" by Ingtin.*

It's become something of a habit to poke into the gathered Will of the Colony whenever I want to know something about what my siblings are up to but I've started to think that might be considered something of an intrusion. I mean, it might not be the same thing as peering into their minds but it's adjacent! Instead of resorting to this more intrusive method of enquiry I prod one of the rushing workers with an antennae and fire off a quick question.

"What's going on? Why the rush?"

"Eldest! I didn't expect to see you there... resting."

I rear up to my full height, which is rather impressive now, over three metres at least. I certainly tower over this presumptuous carver!

"I fought two battles back to back and hadn't slept in days! Are you suggesting that I *shouldn't* be taking torpor?"

"Ah... no."

"Are you saying that torpor and rest are *unnecessary*?"

"No!"

At my words the shadows within this stretch of tunnel darken precipitously as a cold wind blows against our antennae. The rush of ants continues past us, even quicker than before, every individual avoiding paying any attention to the unnatural darkness or the ant I now loom over. I eye the suddenly nervous carver.

"Just one more question... when was the last time *you* had a rest?"

The question strikes the poor worker in the heart and she physically recoils, her antennae flailing wildly as she fails to control her panic.

"I - I - ... I've been busy!"

So shouting she runs down the tunnel, only to be swallowed whole by the darkness that rises to embrace her. In a blink, everything has returned to how it was before, the workers streaming down the trail, no ominous living shadows, no bitter cold wind, and no carver.

*Good work*, I sign to the air.

Then I poke another of my siblings.

"Hey, what's going on?"

"Eldest! I didn't see you there! I certainly didn't see anything that I shouldn't speak of..."

"Good. Any chance you can tell me what's going on? Why are there so many of us around here? Is there an emergency?"

"Not as such," the general rubs her head with one antennae as she ponders the question. "I came in as part of the third wave an hour ago and received a short debrief before I was directed to the front. Apparently the south east quadrant is seeing elevated enemy activity and fortifications in that region are only sixty percent complete as of last reporting."

Hang on... what?

"The three main fronts of concern are still the central, eastern and north eastern of course, the fighting there is intense I'm told. There was a counter offensive launched down the main tunnel thirty minutes ago which eased the pressure but they had to pull back to avoid supply lines being cut by tunnelling forces. The counter tunnelling efforts are draining a huge amount of antpower, but if they keep the termites off of our carapace' then it's all worth it of course. Anyway, thanks for the chat Eldest, I really need to get going."

With a quick and unnecessary salute, the general is gone, whisked off and vanishing into the endless blur of ants rushing past. Fighting? Counter tunnelling? *Three* active fronts?

[Crisis... how long was I asleep and mutating for?]

[Around six hours, master.]

Holy heck! In just six hours the Colony has brought in a further *two waves* of reinforcements and the termites have assaulted in numbers? I expected things to escalate, but not before I'd finished my nap! Dammit!

I spread my awareness out amongst the ants within range, dipping my awareness into the steam flowing through the Vestibule and letting the impressions of thousands of individuals wash over me. It's true, many ants are fighting, many others are still building, working, fortifying.

[We need to get out there guys! Things have gotten intense in the last little while!]

I keep half a mind on the Vestibule as we rush back to the front once more, trying to get a more complete sense of what is going on, and what happened while were sleeping. It looks as if the Colony has continued to reinforce in waves of ten thousand, as there are roughly triple that number within range of me right now. Across an area that covers dozens of square kilometres, ant and termite are clashing, in tunnels and behind defences, on open ground and buried beneath tons of soil.

A constant stream of termites seems to flowing from unknown sources to contest the Colony, but not as foolishly as they had before, running headlong into our defences. The termites are being more cautious, smarter, probing and testing, rushing in and then pulling back, as if they were being controlled by a more potent intellect.

Which of course they were...

Damn these lizards! They really can't stand being beaten, huh? All that's going to happen is they get beaten worse! That, I can promise.

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 939: I'm Home pt 1**

"She did *what?*"

"She cut ties between the Legion and the Ka'armodo, completely."

Titus nodded with a satisfied expression on his face as he confirmed the news whereas Morrelia could only sigh and bury her face in her hands.

"Isn't that, a bit, extreme?" she pleaded with her father. "Isn't everyone worried about a second cataclysm? Isn't the Legion being pushed on multiple fronts because we are undermanned and undersupplied? This seems like a poor time to be turning our backs on allies..."

"I agree with you. We shouldn't be turning our backs on allies right now."

"Then you agree?"

"No. By creating a race of subservient monsters to wage war on their behalf, the Ka'armodo have shown themselves to be no allies of the Legion. Your mother has only made formal the arrangements their

attitudes deserve. Now our Legionaries will not have to fight and die to protect those who would stab us in the back."

His arms folded across his chest, Titus was an imposing figure. A stern expression was carved into his features, as usual, and the steely glint of absolute confidence could be found in his eyes. Seeing it, Morrelia began to doubt her objections until her head began to swim. She brought both hands up and scratched her head furiously.

She didn't like dealing with the politics and the wider implications of what the Legion did, but lately she had forced herself onto the path of leadership and so she'd done her best to pick up everything she could. Even so, decisions like this made her knees weak. The repercussions of what her mother had done would resound throughout all of Pangera for decades, possibly centuries!

Titus chuckled and clapped his daughter on the shoulder. Not that long ago she would have been rocked to the side when he did that, now she withstood his hand with ease. Her levels were accumulating rapidly, the training was working.

"Don't think on it too hard, I guarantee your mother didn't. Her role as Consul is to faithfully follow the founding principles of the Legion, not to engage in petty politicking. We aren't sophisticated enough for that. We don't compromise, we don't bargain, that's it."

"Don't we have deals with demons in the third stratum to operate in their territory? Pretty big compromise if you ask me," his daughter pointed out.

"True," Titus agreed, "we did try to eliminate demons completely but gave up after five hundred years. The final decision was that the effort was totally fruitless, killing them only makes them spawn faster. Trying to block or disperse the spawn points doesn't work, since they spawn everywhere. In fact, by focusing so many resources on a single front, the Dungeon quickly became hazardous in other areas. A further three hundred years of campaigning were required to settle things down again."

"Dad, enough history, please. I know about the five hundred year war."

"Then you know why we compromised with the demons," Titus raised a brow as he looked down on his daughter.

Only very recently had she started to call him 'Dad'. He would never admit it, but that simple fact brought him great joy.

"Not that I'm unhappy to see you, but why are you here anyway? I thought you were campaigning with your new Legion. You... didn't go and fight the Colony again, did you?"

"No," Titus frowned. "I asked to be deployed back to the second along with four full Legions to run a proper extermination but was denied. Again. We did a snap tour of the third instead. It went well."

The commander shifted his stance slightly.

"The Colony, as you call it, has been put on the back burner for the time being. We have so many fires to put out that a group of monsters who are actively helping sapientis rather than eating them is hard to commit resources to. As long as we can stamp them out before the mana gets too high, it should turn out alright."

Morrelia hesitated, but eventually spoke her mind.

"If the ants aren't hurting anyone, and are in fact helping people, then why stamp them out at all? If monsters have to exist, then isn't that the type of monster we want?"

This was a sore spot between the two and she searched her father for any sign he had relented on this point. There was none.

"What the Ka'armodo have done, creating a race of monsters to do their dirty work, has been done before, even as far back as the Rending. No matter how hard you try, no matter what restrictions you place on them, eventually the monsters go wild. Every time, no exceptions. Even worse, the Ancients had the ability to dominate monsters that came anywhere near them. The servants that had been so carefully reared turned around and decimated the fools who had raised them by the millions."

Morrelia blinked.

"I'd never heard that," she said quietly.

"Talking about anything from that time is sensitive. You didn't have the clearance for it, before now."

"Great. Any other perspective shattering secrets you want to drop on me?"

"Heaps," Titus smiled, "but now isn't the time. I didn't come here for that. You'll learn all of it in time."

She stepped back from her father and sat on her cot in the confined resting domicile they were standing in.

"As happy as I am to see you, Dad, why *have* you come now? I'm sure you have a ton of things that need doing. Is there something particular happening now, or are you just bored?"

The last was said as a joke, but true to form Titus did not laugh.

"You don't remember?" he asked.

He didn't sound mad, but rather slightly amused, which only confused Morrelia further.

"Remember what?" she asked slowly.

The room rumbled slightly.

Titus glanced toward the door and nodded to himself.

"That should be it now."

The walls shook.

Morrelia looked around carefully, her hands reaching for her weapons as she rose back to her feet and took a fighter's stance.

"What's happening?" she demanded, the snap of command entering her tone.

It filled the old campaigner's chest with pride.

"I'd put the weapons down," he advised, "they won't help."

The shaking was constant now, a steady vibration that only increased with every passing second.

"Dad, seriously, what is happening. Are we under attack?" Morrelia demanded, increasingly worried as the room shook all around her.

"In a way," Titus shrugged.

"A monster?!"

"Oh definitely."

"You aren't helping!"

"I'm not really trying to," he grinned.

There was something about that smile, so strange to see it on her father's face, that triggered a memory in her mind. There was only one thing that made him behave like this. Her mind raced. What day was it? Her training had been so intense, time was a blur. She didn't know. In fact, what *week* was it?!

All of a sudden the reinforced bulkhead that was her door bulged on its hinges as the reinforced steel buckled under a tremendous impact. The metal warped and twisted like mud as some inhuman force ripped into it from the other side.

"I knew she'd come here straight away," Titus confessed over the screeching sound of tearing steel. "So I thought I'd be here for the reunion."

Suddenly an arm punched through the door, the jagged edges doing no harm to the hand or arm as it pulled back through. Rather, it was the *metal* that bent as the skin brushed against it.

With horrifying casualness, those hands grasped the edges of the hole they had punched through and widened the gap, the metal screeching in protest.

Then a face appeared, grinning wide.

"Hello daughter!" Minerva said. "Give your mother a hug!"

Her term as Consul had finally come to an end.

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 940: I'm Home pt 2**

*Death.*

"Minerva, you're gripping too tight."

"Oh, damn."

The pressure eased just enough for Morrelia to gasp down a breath of air. The darkness receded long enough for her to raise her hands and pat her mother on the back.

"Nice to see you too, mother," she rasped.

"Aww, it's great to see you too kid."

With one final bone crunching squeeze, Minerva released her daughter and Morrelia fell on her heels. She absent-mindedly rubbed at her arms. Just how strong *was* this woman?

Minerva stood taller than her daughter by a few inches, but in many other respects the two looked much the same. The same dark, wavy hair, the same squarish jaw and the same muscular build. Even their eyes were the same steely grey. Having not been this close to her for so many years, Morrelia was shocked at just how alike they were.

"It's wonderful to see you two together again," Titus smiled, an unusual expression on his generally stony face.

Minerva was quick to remark on it.

"Don't smile, husband, you look strange."

Then she laughed.

"By the flame I am happy to finally be out of that office! Now all the pencil pushers will have someone else to bother and I can get back to campaigning. How about you, daughter? Ready to join me in the field."

Minerva flashed a wild grin as Morrelia gaped at her.

"I'm still in training! I'm supposed to be meditating in my pod, isolation to reflect on my gains. Not that I can do that now I suppose," she gestured to the ruined door.

"It's good to be patient and think carefully about how you want to proceed," Titus approved, "believe it or not, your mother had to go through it as well. Don't mind her attitude, she's just excited to see you."

The former Consul eyed the commander through narrowed lids as she pondered violence but Titus just spread his hands. Finally she sighed and sat on the bed.

"Of course I'm excited."

She gestured vaguely.

"I've been glued to that desk, sending others out to do the fighting and the dying for far too long. I want to be with my family and start making a difference again."

"You were the Consul, mother. I think you were making a difference."

"It's not the same. I think you know exactly what I mean, Morr."

She did. Much like her more short tempered parent, Morrelia much preferred to get her hands dirty.

"Is it really alright that your final act as Consul is to break a thousands of years old alliance?" she asked.

"That? Forget about that," Minerva dismissed it with a wave. "That's not worth worrying about."

"You can't be serious."

"I'm deadly serious. They broke the alliance with their actions, I simply made it formal. Enough of that, I want to hear about what you've been up to here in this poisonous hellhole."



Morrelia shrugged.

"Probably exactly what you'd expect. Getting adapted to the training armour. Working on skills. Hunting monsters. Trying to survive the environment. Leadership exercises. They keep us pretty busy."

"Of course they do," Titus rumbled, "if you're going to lead your own Legion someday, you need to be prepared. The soldiers won't follow someone they don't believe in."

"Are you saying that someone wouldn't follow her?" Minerva growled. "She's more than ready to handle her own Legion."

"Mother, you have no idea what level I am..."

She only just got here!

"Nonsense! I've been getting weekly reports from your instructors. I know exactly how far you've come."

Morrelia turned to her father.

"Isn't that an abuse of authority? Can I report her?"

"Obviously not. What are they going to do? Strip her of the role? Her term already finished."

"As if they'd do anything to me anyway," Minerva said, her eyes sparking with the faintest hint of her famed rage. "They wouldn't have had the guts."

The three fell into a comfortable silence as the bulkheads around them groaned and shifted under the pressure they were subjected to. The absence of her brother was a painful hole that each felt keenly but wouldn't talk about. There was no need. His memory was too large to fit into a few words, it felt as if he would be diminished if they were to try.

"How are you finding the praetorian training?" Titus was the one to break the silence, curious about how Morrelia was handling the heavy warsuits of the Legion.

Morrelia slumped.

"Exhausting," she confessed. "The mana demand is so extreme I can barely keep it active for ten minutes at a time. The power is incredible, but I'm worried I'll never be able to get my operation time high enough to qualify for a proper suit."

"It just takes time," Minerva assured her. "The more you demand of the mana channels in your body, the more they can do. The rest is down to your determination and ability to handle bucket loads of pain."

"I'm guessing you did well then," Morrelia said wryly.

Minerva smiled.

"I still hold the record for the training course," she boasted.

"And second is not close," Titus shook his head.

"You would know."

"You'll never let that go."

"Of course not."

Titus turned to his daughter.

"Don't bother comparing yourself to this outlier," he jabbed a thumb at his wife, "she also holds the record for the longest exposure to the air outside without a helmet. Mainly because nobody else was dumb enough to try it."

"A full minute," Minerva laughed when Morrelia turned a wide-eyed stare at her. "Almost died for it though."

"That's longer than most monsters from the fourth will last out there..." Morrelia muttered.

"That's what I mean. Don't compare yourself to someone as abnormal as your mother."

"Your tone is getting on my nerves, Titus," Minerva growled.

"Are you going to do anything about it?" he countered.

The two glared at each other but under the surface level of simmering anger there was something else that Morrelia did *not* want to explore.

"What happens if I continue to widen the mana channels in my body? The amount of mana I can handle goes up, but what about acclimatisation? Wouldn't there be powerful side effects?"

Both parents turned towards her but it was Titus who answered.

"In short, yes. If you manage to pilot a praetorian suit, you'll never be able to walk normally on the surface again."

He held up a hand before she could interrupt him.

"Obviously your mother and I were able to return to the surface, but there were several key conditions. First of all, the process to reacclimatise to low mana environments was... extreme. Secondly, even after that extended process we needed to take liquid mana supplements to keep us alive. Once your body has gotten used to having that much mana inside it, there really is no going back."

Morrelia absorbed this in silence. She'd suspected just how difficult the process of returning to the surface had been for her parents, and the more she learned the more she understood how hard, and how rare an act it was that they had done.

"Why did you do it?" she finally asked. "You could have raised us in the fourth if you'd wanted. Why did you put yourselves through it?"

It was Minerva who offered an answer.

"Children should grow up under the sun," she shrugged. "That's all."