Sidebar

The Solare fire ants are one of four main insectoid Awoken clans. the others include the Terrestra stag beetles, the Keraunos lightning bugs, and the Brumata frostmoths.

Uneasily, the Appenendats venture down into the cave system that the Solare fire ants brought them to. As the group descends, the sound of busy colony life echoes through the sandstone.

“Uh, Rakesh?” Vik asks as softly as he can manage. “Is this part of the plan? I can’t say I had meeting with an ant queen on my to-do list.”

Rakesh smiles warmly back at Vik, holding up a paw to ease the boy’s tensions. “Queen Solare is a nice lady. She will not delay us long, I assure you. If anything, it does one well to have allies in less friendly places, yes?”

“Yes, I imagine so.” Vik continues on, carefully observing his surrounds as best he can in the low light of the tunnel.

A few short minutes later, the tunnel opens up into a sprawling cavern of cut stone, with lamps of glowing orange lighting the space. Hundreds of ants scurry about in perfect lines, each one playing a role in the greater colony. However, even from this elevated position, the movements in the ants below are obviously charged, as many a soldier prepares for battle.

The scouting team brings the Appenendats down further into the colony, until they come face to face with a large specimen of an ant, surrounded by freshly laid eggs. She chitters at the scouts before they depart.

“Fuzzy one. Bigs. Why you stomping around? Why come to ant land?” The queen clicks, and even through broken Common, her words are clear enough to understand.

Omara motions to Rakesh to take the lead. Not only is he an Awoken as well, but his previous comments allude to a working knowledge of the Solare clan. In her mind, he is the obvious choice to handle discussions with a beastfolk monarch such as this.

Rakesh takes a half step forward, lowering his head in respect. “Queen Solare, as welcoming as ever. These Bigs seek passage to Rakesh on their way to the eastern mountain. They mean no harm to you or your people, I assure you.”

The queen clicks, silencing the room. She shifts upon her throne of shells and fresh eggs. “You not working for frostmoths? You better not.”

Rakesh tilts his head slightly. He looks back at Omara and the others, who all shrug. “No, your majestic self. I haven’t seen the frostmoths in months, and the Bigs are new to this land. Whatever your fear, we are not with them.”

The queen chitters for a moment, some much smaller ants rushing in and carrying away some of the eggs. “If you say. Maybe you help us?”

At that, Omara steps forward. She looks back at Eryk, giving him a look that says ‘sorry’. “We would be glad to help you, Queen Solare. What do you need us to do?”

The queen raises her head, an echoing screeching booming through the tunnels. She turns back to face the group, her long mandibles flexing angrily. “Kill frostmoths! Take water for Solare!”

A chorus of chittering rings out through the colony, wave after wave originating in the throne room. Whatever crimes the frostmoths have committed, the Solare fire ants seek blood.

Vik glances around nervously, not wanting to get involved in an Awoken political scheme. Allura clutches her holy symbol with a firm fist, having no desire to spill needless blood. After a moment of glaring at Omara, Eryk cracks his knuckles. Any fight is a good fight in his book. And Omara stands at the center of the cheers, a group rallied at her words. That ever-present itch for adventure tickles her brain, welcoming the chance to explore.

“We should learn what is happening with these moths before we slaughter them, Madam Omara,” Allura says with a forced sense of calm.

“We will, I promise. We should gather info from both sides. But for now…” Omara turns back to Queen Solare. “If you seek frostmoth blood, we need to know what they did to wrong you. Then we will take care of your problem for you. You have our word, your majestic self.”

Queen Solare stops her chorus of cheers and battle cries, looking down at the Appenendats. Her antennae flick at them, studying them as alien creatures. After a moment passes, she speaks once more. “Frostmoths hold water, keep from others! You kill, you take! Larvae need water to grow! Many sick, many die. Frostmoths killing Solare! Death to hoarders, death to Brumata!”

Omara nods, turning to her friends. “Lives are at stake, and it falls to us to make right. Let’s go save some kids!”