

## Chrysalis 1001

### [Chrysalis](#)

#### Chapter 1001: Divine Speech

Hah!

Felt like something just walked over my grave. Can ants even shiver? That's weird! Almost as weird as having bones on the *inside*. I can't imagine how I ever put up with it.

Holy moly, I feel a weird. I'm jazzed up. Got the shakes. I've got so much energy, I just don't know what to do with it.

This must be what it feels like to be Vibrant. I feel like standing still is taking all of my focus! I will point out that I can actually manage it, unlike her.

With hundreds of thousands of ants pouring into the area to prepare for the assault, the amount of energy flowing into the Vestibule has become a literal flood. I'm absolutely inundated with impressions, sensations and thoughts of half a million individuals. What makes it worse is that all of *them* are pumped full of energy and impatience. They're eager to start the fighting and tear into the foul termite nest, the primal hatred of our eternal insect enemy raging in their cores.

And I'm getting all of it!

The tunnels under the Roots of the Mother Tree are so packed full of family members that I feel like I'm in a nest. A huge nest! There are ants everywhere I go, jammed into resting chambers, hanging on the ceiling, piled on top of each other. Thankfully, they're only going to have to wait a few hours before the fighting starts, otherwise we'd have to feed them all!

Trying to picture the logistics of feeding half a million diligent soldiers of the Colony... ugh. That's enough to make my brains give up on life. In the second and third stratum, we are establishing the enormous infrastructure required to feed the Colony, but it's hard work. A vast network of tunnels and expanses have been cultivated for this sole purpose, not to mention the transportation hubs just for moving all that food around.

And only half of the Biomass gathered by the Colony goes into feeding it, the other half is delivered straight to the queens to keep the family growing. If we continue to accelerate our growth, then we're going to need to find more solutions for this problem than just hunting monsters.

The aphids have done a lot up in the first layer of the Dungeon, more than I expected, really. But the quality of the Biomass they extract isn't that high, only suitable for ants up to tier three. We could try them down here in the fourth on the abundant vegetation, perhaps they'll extract something better down here? It's a thought.

The other thing I'm considering is the fungus the termites have grown. Various types of ant live by the practice of farming. In fact, ants were probably the first farmers in the world back on Earth. Leafcutter ants in particular are famous for the practice, rushing out of the nest in huge columns and returning with jaws full of juicy leaves. Some people think they eat them, but no, they use those leaves as fertilizer and food for massive underground fungal gardens.

There's no reason the Colony couldn't do the same. If we can get hold of some of this fungus and work out ways to grow it, or alter it into something that better suits our needs... it could help alleviate our looming food crisis.

I wander about the tunnels with Invidia, Crinis and Tiny, poking my head in to check on everyone, exchanging a few quick words with the ants as we wait for the battle to start. I've no doubt the majority of the council is down here somewhere, but goodness knows where. There's so many of us, I can't reliably use the Vestibule to find them.

I tried diving into that raging torrent, but quickly became overwhelmed.

The sheer number of ants, combined with their incredibly harmonised Will, is too much for me to handle right now.

I eventually do find someone I recognise and reach out with a mind bridge.

[Beyn! What the heck are you doing here?]

The one-armed priest snaps around at my mental contact and I immediately feel regret. The blazing fire in his eyes is almost enough to set me alight. This guy has no chill. None.

"Great One! I am honoured to be in your presence once more!" he gushes as he sprints up to me, his antennae-wearing followers close behind.

[What the -]

Hang on.

"What the heck? You can speak in pheromones now?"

"I can, Great One! Many of us now can. As we have advanced along the path you and the Colony have laid down for us, much that was once hidden has become clear!"

"You mean, you got a Skill or something that let you communicate through scent?"

"It is so. This is our path."

I mean... sure, why not? This may as well happen.

One of the followers draws a little closer and begins to extend a shaking hand toward my carapace, a powerful yearning on their face. I shut that down with a quick thwack of an antenna.

"Hey! Hands off the carapace. It's not easy to get it this clean and I want it to stay that way."

I achieved maximum shine after my nap and now you want to put your grubby fingers on it? No way!

Priest Beyn rounds on his wayward follower and they exchange words briefly. Beyn is clearly heated at the transgression, the other chap, a young-looking fellow, appears chastened.

"It's not a big deal," I say, reaching up with a leg to pat the poor guy on the shoulder, "we ants can be very fussy about our cleanliness. Something to watch out for."

That's true, we *are* very fussy about staying clean, but perhaps not to the same extent as me. Then again, no other ants are quite as shiny as me either.

I thought I dealt with that moment quite well, but when I see the looks around the offender change from disapproving anger to fawning jealousy, I can't help but try and shy away.

"Well... nice to see you all... I suppose... I might just... be on my way then."

"No wait, just a moment of your time, please Great One!" Beyn pleads with me, and the others all turn their wide eyed gazes on me.

Dammit! Guilt tripping me like this!

"Fine. What do you need, Beyn?"

"Ah. I was hoping you could speak to the followers a little? Many are nervous going into such a large battle and it would help a lot if you would inspire them."

The man clearly has complete and total faith that I can deliver, though I kind of doubt it myself. How the heck am I supposed to inspire these fanatical weirdos?

"Uh... I presume you can all understand me?"

They eagerly nod and lean forward to receive my wisdom. I scratch my head with one antenna.

"Well. Don't worry about it too much. We'll protect you. As long as I'm alive, you won't have much trouble."

Because the ka'armodo will obviously concentrate their fire on me. They don't seem to like me for some reason. However, Beyn appears to have heard something entirely different.

"There, you see!" his scent billows extravagantly as he roars to his followers. "So long as the Great One stands, you will be shielded from harm! The travails of this life will not touch you! The Great One shall face the storm in your place, and you shall emerge out the other side, unbroken and whole!"

As one, they turn and bow, slamming their heads into the ground before then backing out rapidly, bowing repeatedly as they go.

"Hang on..." I reach out one leg, fruitlessly, "I didn't... dammit."

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 1002: Calculating Greatness**

Fanatics aside, there's plenty of stuff going on and not much time in which to get it done. With so many ants furiously working, I decide the best place for me is out of the way on the surface.

Well, I say surface, obviously I'm not climbing all the way out of the Dungeon. I head up until I break through and find myself sitting under the shade of the enormous Mother Tree, her branches and canopy spread out above me.

The fourth stratum really is a beautiful place to be. The mountain islands that rise up out of the crystal blue waters tower impossibly high. In between, the floating islands, with their endless waterfalls, drift amongst the clouds. Clouds... this far underground...

It's a bit nuts.

Truly, the power of mana makes anything possible. These impossible mountains, with their crags and cliffs, their forest-covered slopes with rivers and valleys. From who knows how deep to touching the roof of the stratum kilometres overhead, each one is absolutely titanic. And there must be thousands of them.

I can only see a few from where I stand, but I assume that they go all the way around the world. The size of the place is just ridiculous. The fact that the Mother Tree managed to take over a mountain for herself, basically consuming it, is utterly absurd. A feat that the Colony will soon have to replicate.

Our first priority on this stratum will be to establish our own nest, which means we'll need to conquer a mountain for ourselves! One that we can shape as we please, and fortify until it becomes an impregnable fortress of doom.

Luckily, I have a mountain in mind, and it isn't far away.

The termite nest will soon be available. Free real estate, as it were. We'll have the added benefit of living directly under the branches of the Mother Tree, cementing our alliance yet further. We don't actually know how this area is oriented with the rest of our territory, which isn't a huge issue, but it's nice to have all of our land vertically integrated.

Once we have our own functioning gates, it won't matter, all of our land will be one hop away from all the rest of it!

Gweheheheh.

Speaking of gates... I wonder how Brilliant is getting on with it all? She's obviously made great strides in her knowledge of dimensional magic. I don't yet know if she has the specific Skill for it, but I'm super impressed with her ability to sniff out the secrets that have so far evaded us. There's been a team of the finest ant mages trying to puzzle out how gates work for months, but the little champion has made more progress in a matter of weeks!

Good to know my naming sense hasn't weakened. I was worried she'd let me down there for a bit, but she came through in the end!

She should be back here soon enough, I'll catch up with her when she returns. Which reminds me, I really should check in on Sarah. I hope she isn't taking the fate of Jim too badly. It really wasn't her fault, and was totally out of her control, but it wouldn't surprise me if she was beating herself up over it. She's too kind to not try and divert blame from others and onto herself.

Hmm...

I think there's some movement beneath me. A quick dip into the Vestibule reveals that there is indeed a lot going on down there. Plans are being laid, hospitals built, for ants and for humans, strategy

hammered out. The scouts are having the worst of it. A wide scale skirmish is taking place as the ants push out into termite territory and start collapsing tunnels.

I can feel them now. Earth mages are straining to break apart the stone in a series of controlled collapses while scouts cover them with long-range fire. The scene is repeated in dozens of tunnels as the Colony seeks to enact this strategy before the termites, or more importantly, the ka'armodo, can react.

I try to keep tabs on the fighting beneath the ground for a while before a familiar face pops up not far away.

"Cobalt? What are you doing up here?"

The little carver sees me relax- I mean, working hard here and skitters over to say hello.

"Eldest, nice to see you contributing..."

"Watch yourself... I can put you back into training at any time I like."

"... contributing with such diligence and vigour."

"That's right."

I remember the twenty when they were just grubs. How dare they get so uppity with me! It's not like I didn't nearly get myself killed trying to save the situation down here.

"What's the story? Anything need building up here?" I ask her.

"Well, you did want us to magic up a gigantic bridge out of nothing didn't you?" Cobalt responds.

"Well... yes."

"Right. So I need to get measurements for the width and height so I can get an accurate estimate of the volume of stone required. Once I have that, I can work out roughly how much mana will be needed, which will tell us how many mages have to take part."

I stare.

"You can calculate how much mana is needed?"

That sounds... different.

She flicks her antennae dismissively, already looking out over the wide waters between us and the distant shore of the termite mountain.

"It's not that complicated. We know how much mana is required to create a cubic metre of stone, so if we can estimate the stone required, we can make the calculation."

"It's that simple?"

She clacks her mandibles.

"Well, no. Of course not. There are a number of factors involved that influence the result. Higher rank stone magic obviously results in a more efficient mana-to-stone ratio. Distance from the caster is another important factor, the further away, the more mana required. Not sure exactly why. Ambient

mana has an impact, local affinity has a strong effect, proximity to other stone. That's an interesting one, actually. Creating new stone near older rock is much easier, but making it near newer rock, like something we conjured, doesn't have much of an impact. Other elements are important too, for example, creating stone and soil near water is more expensive."

...

"Sounds, actually very complicated."

"It's not that bad...."

She already sounds distracted, calculating away in her head, which is impressive as hell. A few moments later, she clacks her mandibles again and starts to turn around.

"Alright, that's done."

"Already?!"

"It's just an estimate, I'm not being super precise. In terms of standard deviation -"

"Nope. Stop talking."

"Okay."

I sigh.

"I knew you'd all be smarter than I am, I just didn't expect the difference to be this wide, this quickly."

"Don't feel too bad about it, Eldest. We just want to make sure you can focus on the things you want to focus on."

"How long do you think it'll be until the attack is ready to start? I'm struggling to contain myself up here."

"You and most of the ants down there," she laughs. "Don't worry. In an hour, we'll be ready to go."

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 1003: The Swarm**

Under the soft light of the fourth stratum, with a soft mist rising from the glittering blue waters on the shore, the might of the Colony assembled. They had gathered in strength before, huge armies of ant soldiers, alongside smaller groups of human and golgari, but not quite like this.

Half a million ants emerged from beneath the ground and sorted themselves into neat ranks. They blanketed the shoreline. Between those inmoving chitinous frames, no trace of sand nor soil could be seen, they were so densely packed. In the lead stood a sparkling insect, enormous in size it loomed over the others of its own kind, a commanding presence that dominated the field.

Ten thousand support troops were spread amongst the ranks. Other races who had taken up arms alongside the Colony, ready to fight, ready to die, so that the ants would triumph. Within each group a robed figure walked, blessing each warrior and exhorting them to greater devotion in battle.

It was a terrifying sight.

Rassan'tep retracted his sight from the scrying array and sank deep into contemplation. That despite being so young, the Colony could already muster an army of this strength and size was worrying. Their growth was faster than even he had considered possible, and he projected it would only increase. To deal with this sort of power, the ka'armodo would need to commit a large force, thousands of their own number, with set'sulah War Dancer support and sand golems.

They had none of that here, only the termite Colony they had grown and fostered against all custom.

It was ka'armodo monster engineering against what a lone creature had been able to accomplish without training or assistance.

He wasn't confident that they would win. In many ways, it didn't matter. He was only interested in what Anthony would become from this moment on. Would the promising young monster die in the fighting, his rise to glory stopped tragically short? Or would he survive, and grow all the stronger for being exposed to the heat of battle?

He had to see.

[You seem excited, Master.]

The voice of Ammon'sil rang in his mind and the elder shifted slightly to better see his faithful servant.

[Is it so simple to tell? I would rather not have my emotions read so easily.]

[Not at all, Master,] the set'sulah smiled, [only those who have known you for many years would recognise that gleam in your eye.]

Satisfied, the great lizard shifted back and once more engaged with the scrying array. The grand sight of the massed ranks of ants, so neat they appeared to have been painted in place, once more appeared before him.

[What are your thoughts on the upcoming conflict?] Rassan'tep asked.

[It is not my place to comment.]

[It is, when I ask you to.]

[As you say. I worry for your kin, Master. They are confident in their abilities and in those of their creations, but I worry that they underestimate the foe before them. The Colony has shown that it will adapt, take risks, make decisions on the fly. Just because countermeasures have been prepared doesn't mean they will succeed.]

[You are speaking most carefully,] the ka'armodo noted. [You can come out and say it. Hubris. Overconfidence. Arrogance. Pride.]

Each word emanated powerfully from the ancient creature, an ocean of contempt behind them.

[The curse of the old races has shown its face again. Just because we ruled this world once, does not mean we don't have to fight for it now. The Colony is young, ambitious and rising quickly. My kin here think they are the same, but the difference is stark.]

He observed the ants carefully, noting the various castes and their disposition.

[The Colony is hungry, but for survival, not glory. They seek to build, not to maintain. The youths who were sent here... they see themselves as chosen, and special, instead of manipulated and abandoned. When cold blooded and logical thinking is required, they have allowed themselves to grow too heated.]

In the distance, there was movement. Thousands of ants stepped forward with unnatural precision. Mages, each and every one of them. Minds in perfect sync, they began to draw and shape the mana around them. With so many mages working together in perfect harmony, a vast amount of energy was able to be moved, a veritable storm of mana forming across the shoreline.

Rassan'tep watched carefully as the bridge began to take shape. It was crude in form, but well suited to the task, he had to admit. Sturdy, dense, compacted, the bridge was almost a kilometre wide. They even went to the trouble of anchoring it to the lake bed, extending pillars downward before the waters grew too deep. The great lizard hummed in approval. If they were nothing else, the ants were solid builders.

Gradually, the bridge extended and the ants began to advance in blocks, the mages at the front, along with Anthony and his small retinue.

At the current pace, it would take them little over an hour to complete the work, if they remained uninhibited. Of course they weren't.

Rising from the fungus coated forest, spheres of potent energy began to rise. They hovered in the air briefly, condensing, before they were suddenly fired in a high arc. Dozens of shots were fired at once, the combined efforts of nearly all the ka'armodo who remained on the mountain.

Of course the ants were prepared.

Shields sprung into existence, one after the other, covering the bridge for its entire length. Rassan'tep didn't even need to reach out with mind to see the spells of his kin were under assault before they crossed the halfway point, the mana being siphoned away.

The level of cooperation shown by the Colony was staggering.

With so many mages at their disposal, they were able to distribute roles and allow each ant to focus on just one task. That in itself wasn't impressive, but the way they worked so seamlessly together without communicating left him in wonder.

The bridge building never stopped, not for a moment. The shields continued to be created and reinforced, the moment one fell, it was replaced. There were even whole batteries of mages just reaching out with their minds and pulling in all the ambient mana they could, making it available to the others to utilise. Selfless, relentless effort. That was the defining trait of the Colony.

When the bridge reached the halfway mark, there was a pause.

The barrage from the ka'armodo continued, the ants held it at bay, but did not advance. A chance for them to replenish their energy? Allow the ambient mana to restore itself?

Perhaps.

He cast his eye across the field once more. Tens of thousands of ants now packed the bridge, but curiously, it wasn't full, not completely. A curious thing, he hadn't believed the ants would be concerned with overcrowding.



Then something changed. The massed ranks of ants split down the middle and stepped to the side, clearing a narrow pathway through the centre to the tip of the bridge, where Anthony awaited.

They were making way for something? Or someone?

From beneath the soil, amongst the gargantuan roots of the Mother Tree emerged a column of steel clad ants. Hundreds of them, each encased in powerful, ornate armour that shone with a mirror polish. With solemn and implacable steps, they marched steadily forward as Rasan'tep watched with keen interest. Then something different appeared.

Carried on the backs of ten ants came... a tomb? Four burning torches adorned it. Gold and precious metals covered it in elaborate filigree. Carved into the face of it in excruciating detail was the face of an ant, and though their expressions never shifted, somehow Rasan'tep felt a sense of overwhelming... relief, and joy, and freedom...

What in the name of the Demon God was going on down there?

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 1004: The Reliquary of Eternal Glory**

Cardigant, the one who fell, and in falling, achieved true immortality. Her existence, or rather, the lack of ongoing existence, was something amazing to the Immortals, something precious.

It was, Leeroy decided, something that could not afford to be lost.

She and her sisters had come so close to losing hope! They had come within an antenna's width of letting go of their dream. The rejection of their creed by the Colony, the ire and condemnation of the Eldest, the crushing failure of their tier six evolution, all of it had piled up to become a weight that was almost too heavy to bear.

Then Cardigant had done as they had done, she had gone into battle. But then she had done the miraculous. She had sacrificed her life, successfully!

It was a revelation! A confirmation! A resuscitation! All that Leeroy had dreamed of, all that the Immortals had dreamed of, it was still within their reach! They only had to stretch forth with their mandibles, grasp the sword of the enemy, and pull it into their own faces.

They would not lose their way again. She *refused* to let them! And so, something had to be done.

"Wait a second." Smithant lowered her tools and looked at the crowd of anxious, heavily armoured ants crowded around her anvil. "You want me to *what*?"

"It's very simple," Leeroy said impatiently. They couldn't afford to waste time! "We want you to create a permanent metal container to store the body of our beloved, fallen sister for eternity. That's not hard to understand!"

Smithant stared hard at the council member, observing the maniacal, fanatical gleam in her eyes.

"W-why?" she asked flatly. "I can make something like that, sure, but why should I? It's a waste of materials and a waste of my time. I'm supposed to be down here to help repair and upkeep your armour, not making elaborate boxes for you to store dead family members in. I'm terribly sorry for your

loss, I mourn this fallen sister along with you, but let it go. Let her return to the Dungeon and let's get on with things."

Leeroy was frustrated. She wasn't one for words, normally, and had no idea how she could communicate just what she wanted, just what they *felt*.

"Smithant, this might be hard to believe," she began, "but we aren't sad that our sister has fallen, we are *happy*. She wanted this, we all want this, but she *succeeded*. We want to carry her with us, always, so that we never forget that we can succeed too."

She stared hard at the smith, trying to help her understand just how important this was to them.

From Smithant's point of view, they just looked insane. They had compound eyes, they were always looking in all directions, it's not like they could actually stare at one thing. All Leeroy was doing was leaning uncomfortably close, to the point she might soon catch some red hot tongs in the eye.

"All right, all right! Back up a little would you, you moron! So, what, you want me to encase Cardigant in a... in a what? A box made of metal?"

The Immortals considered it for a long moment.

"A nice box?" one of them suggested from the back.

Smithant glared at them.

"A *nice* box?" she demanded. "Nice *how*?"

Another moment of silence.

"It should be decorated..." one of the giant, steel-clad ants offered.

"Maybe... it should look like Cardigant?" another said.

"Maybe some words of encouragement should be put on it? That might be nice."

"Oh! We could make it portable! We get sent to a lot of different places after all.... I wouldn't want to leave her behind."

There was a general chorus of agreement to this.

"Make it so we can mount it on our backs then?"

More agreement.

"Maybe some of those nice vine carvings? They look nice. You know the ones that curl around themselves?"

"Good idea."

"I like the vines..."

"Very appealing."

"Anything else?" the smith grated.

Another long pause.

“Maybe some scent baskets, so we can spread messages of comfort when we carry her.”

“Flowers?”

“Put her face on the front?”

“Make sure to include the armour in some way!”

“Oh, yes. The armour is important.”

The Immortals had grown attached to their metal shells after all this time. It was a love/hate relationship, to be sure.

“Some lights? Maybe? Something subtle...”

“It should include her core, obviously.”

“Obviously!”

“We can’t recycle her core!”

A hammer came crashing down on the anvil, silencing all with the resulting clang.

“You want me to *enchant* it?!” Smithant bellowed, her pheromones blasting away the others’ words in an instant. “Just how much time do you think I have to spare?”

She clacked her mandibles harshly.

“Even the raw materials needed would be *immense*. There’s no way!”

Leeroy leapt forward and banged her face onto the stone floor, followed by all the others. This was how the humans apologised, apparently.

“Please!” Leeroy begged. “We will help! We’ll source all the materials ourselves. If you do this for us, we’ll never complain about having to wear your armour again. We swear!”

“We swear!” the rest chorused.

Smithant looked out over the hunched forms of the Immortals, irritated beyond words. These idiots took up so much of her time, and were such a pain in her carapace, she almost took a savage glee in making their armour as durable as possible, just to ensure they would survive.

Which... come to think of it... gave her an idea.

“Alright, fine,” she said, “I’ll make your fancy box, with vines and smoke and all the other nonsense. I’ll even make it with the finest materials, the highest quality metal, *and* I’ll contribute cores to ensure the enchanting works flawlessly. In fact, I’ll do the inscribing myself.”

The Immortals looked up with overflowing joy in their eyes.

“Really?!” Leeroy said.

Smithant nodded.

“Really.”

And she did just what she said. The box she constructed took an absurd amount of effort. Her apprentices worked (almost) around the clock as the entire Immortal battalion scrambled to fetch everything they needed whilst Smithant laboured over an anvil.

The finest layered steel, shaped and decorated with her own expert mandibles. What she built was a wonder of engineering, a majestic feat of skill and craftsmanship that was, ironically, perhaps the finest piece of metalwork in her career to date.

When at last Cardigant’s body was laid to rest and sealed inside, every Immortal turned out to watch the ceremony. The lid closed and locked into place, never to be opened again, then Leeroy stepped forward and placed the celebrated ant's core in the elaborate mount that had been prepared for it.

The second the core clicked in, the enchantments came to life. The Immortals celebrated wildly as they felt the reassurance of their dear, departed sister wash over them.

Smithant snickered.

She just knew those idiots were going to carry that thing into battle. With the myriad of defensive auras she’d packed into the thing, she may just have ensured that none of them would ever get a big fancy box of their own.

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 1005: Face Off**

“WE ARE BATHED IN HER BENEVOLENT LIGHT!”

“**WE SEEK!**”

“WHERE SHE HAS LED, WE SHALL FOLLOW!”

“**WE SEEK!**”

“ETERNAL REST! ETERNAL GLORY! IT IS NOW HERS! SOON, IT WILL BE OURS!”

“**WE SEEK!**”

The column of Immortals continued to march through the ranks of ants who had parted for them. Towards the front of their formation, the Reliquary of Eternal Rest was borne upon their backs, its sacred smokes infused with pheromonal messages of hope and comfort.

“Death is near! Glory to the Colony! The end has come! Death is near!”

The waves of pheromones rolled over the ants to either side, who rolled their antennae and clacked their mandibles, unimpressed.

Leeroy continued to exhort her followers all the way to the head of the column. By the time they reached the end of the bridge, the Immortals had been whipped into a frenzy, their hearts surging with devotion to the Colony and eyes ablaze with a desperate need to lay down their lives.

The Reliquary had a multiplicative effect on the eagerness of the Immortals. They were so eager to fly into battle their armour rattled on their backs.

Of course, it wasn't possible. The bridge hadn't been finished yet.

The steel clad column came to a halt with surprising discipline and the Immortals sat, lowering their bodies down to rest, though, sadly for them, not permanently.

With their shock troops in position, the Colony once more got to work extending the bridge. Earth magic churned once again as thousands of minds linked together to work the energy that suffused the air. The bombardment continued as they worked, but it had become clear that the ka'armodo lacked the firepower to break the Colony's defences.

The bridge inevitably completed its journey, connecting to the termite mountain and terminating on the shore. The ants looked out over the unbroken fields of white fungus, but there was no sign of their enemy.

Which meant it was fire time.

Leading the fire mages, an ecstatic, almost rapturous Propellant stepped forward.

"Ant mages! Prepare to burn! Burn it all! ALL OF IT TO THE GROUND! AAAHAHAHAHAHAHA!"

Fire exploded in all directions, setting the fungal forest ablaze. Huge orbs of pure blue flame were lobbed further up the mountain, starting spot fires that rapidly spread. In a matter of moments a raging inferno blazed across the mountain.

The Immortals braced themselves, waiting for any response from the termites, but none was forthcoming. Which suited Propellant just fine.

"More fire! MORE! IT'S SO BEAUTIFUL!" she raged as she launched more and more flaming missiles deeper into enemy territory.

For over an hour the fire burned, sweeping over the fungus with breathtaking speed. Pillars of flame roared dozens of metres into the air, the ashes burning so hot they started new fires wherever they landed. When the fuel had burned itself out, all that remained was charred ground that still sizzled with remembered heat. In the distance, the smoke still billowed up into the sky, the fungus burning over the horizon.

But the silence was deafening. The Colony had expected to see the enemy boiling out of their tunnels to fight, filled with rage and ready to defend their precious garden. Instead, the mighty column of ants looked out over a barren field, devoid of the foe they sought.

Leeroy stepped forward.

"Let's go," she said.

Determined, the Immortals began to march. With luck, none of them would return. The Reliquary of Eternal Rest marched with them, the peaceful gaze of Cardigant upon their every step.

With their heavily armoured shock troops in the lead, the rest of the army followed behind, flowing over the landscape like a natural disaster. The formation continued to be a tight column, the troops on high alert. This was not friendly territory; the ground did not belong to them.

Every lump of dirt, every rock, every smouldering tree could conceal a tunnel or cavern filled with termites. Mages extended their senses as far as they could, even going so far as to harden the ground beneath them as they marched.

Still, the termites did not emerge.

The ka'armodo clearly held their charges on a tight leash. They would hold their monstrous army at bay until the ants had been drawn as far forward as possible.

Despite knowing this, the Colony advanced. Their resolution did not waver. They would see the enemy destroyed here today, regardless of the tricks and stratagems. When the battle was done, one insect would reign supreme.

Tense and alert, the army marched all the way to the mouth of the termite nest itself. Although repairs had been made, signs of the damage caused by the Eldest could still be seen, the horrific power that they had unleashed had scarred the mountain itself.

It was here that the enemy finally made themselves known.

Massed ranks of termites, thousands upon thousands, filled the wide nest entrance. Blind faces and long mandibles rose high as the ants came close enough for them to scent.

On both sides the rage began to build, mandibles clacked with piercing force, the sound echoing off the rock. Neither side could tolerate the other. Neither side *would* tolerate the other.

When they were a kilometre apart, the Colony came to a halt, the long narrow column beginning to redeploy. Mages continued to firm up the ground and sense whatever they could of the tunnels beneath.

Results were sketchy, they weren't able to detect anything clearly. The ka'armodo had been busy, working against them to ensure they wouldn't know where the surprise attack would come.

No matter, this was also within their expectations. In this, the final confrontation, nothing had been left to chance!

The two armies faced each other across the open ground. The ants quivered with excitement, ready to unleash their wrath upon the termite foe.

At the head of the column, the Immortals quivered even more intently, to the point their armour rattled against that of the soldier standing next to them. The constant drum beat of metal on metal filled the air, a deafening din that set every antenna on the mountain to quivering.

"Damn it, Leeroy! Knock it off!" the Eldest complained.

Having completely lost focus at this point, the leader of the steel column took that as instructions to charge.

“LEEEEEEEEROY!” she screamed.

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 1006: Battle Begins**

Rassan'tep watched with cold, reptilian amusement as the armoured shock troops of the Colony dove forward, seemingly at random. He had hoped the stand off between the two sides would last longer so he might further study the ants and the disposition of their forces. Knowing what he did now about them, it was far easier to recognise the amount of thought and effort they put into all they did, and the selflessness with which they acted.

Even at rest, the column had been busily working. Vast flows of mana were constantly being channelled, energy sucked in to replenish the stores of mages who never ceased to manipulate the earth and stone around them.

Wary of ambush, they firmed the ground in stages as they had marched, the front ranks performing the initial hardening, the second condensing that, the third starting a new layer, and so on down the line. By the time the final ant had crossed a patch of ground, ten metres of compressed stone were left beneath them.

When they had stopped, face to face with the termite forces, the practice had only intensified; even now that the two sides were starting to converge, thousands of ants continued to work on the rock beneath them.

Despite the somewhat surprising initial charge, the rest of the ant column moved with incredible coordination and efficiency. All along the formation, large groups of ants broke off and advanced to a new position. The giant ka'armodo was fascinated to see some groups simply flow through each other and it took him a moment to realise the ants had simply climbed over each other without breaking stride, something his people would certainly struggle to do.

In fact, having even a single ka'armodo step on another would be such a breach of protocol the entire concept was almost entirely alien to them.

Before the armour-clad heavy ants had reached their target, a massive volley of acid and magic was on its way. The termites seethed with blind rage under the direction of Rassan'tep's people. He knew they wanted to attack, to boil out of the nest and destroy the insect army that had appeared before them, but he also knew they would be prevented from doing so.

Which of course meant that the rain of acid fell upon the packed ranks of termites, burning their carapace and causing them to twitch and clack their mandibles with intense anger.

The current breed had been protected against acid damage, but not completely, the Colony would still exact their toll.

And the firing was so disciplined!

Thousands upon thousands of ants in neat ranks, taking turns to fire. First the ants in front, followed by those behind, all the way back through dozens of ranks, separate volleys of acid rising high into the air and arcing down to fall amongst the termites.

The spray of loose droplets in the air painted an almost artistic picture, the sheer volume almost enough to summon a rainbow on its own.

From high in the mountain, Rassan'tep was able to magically extend his view across the entire field of battle. A top down perspective that gave him an enviable seat for the upcoming spectacle. Of course his role was to provide intelligence to his people in order to aid their efforts in directing the battle, but he largely left that to the set'sulah.

Unlike those who he reluctantly called his allies in this conflict, he was convinced the fight was lost. Indeed, his main priority in the battle was to witness a potential Ancient on the rise.

He leaned forward eagerly and turned his mind's eye to the collision off the two sides.

Despite their overwhelming numbers advantage and tightly packed ranks, the termites were not equipped to receive a charge as devastating as this. When the lead armoured ant rammed into the first termite, the latter was sent flying, soon joined in the air by the next in line. Chunks of chitin exploded into the air as carapaces were simply shattered under the force of the impact. It was thunderous, and it didn't stop there. Though impossible to consider, the steel ants almost *accelerated* as they threw themselves deeper into the enemy army. Despite the ferocity of their assault, they were still a narrow front, a blade that had stabbed deep into the body of the termite army.

Now the Colony's own acid barrage fell on them, so deep had they gone.

Rassan'tep was confused. Were they ever going to stop?

The answer, apparently, was no. Further on they charged until finally they ground to a halt, their momentum exhausted. Surrounded on all sides by enemies, there were now tens of thousands of termites between the armoured ants and their allies.

An interesting decision, and not one he could make much sense of. The ants must surely have a plan, all of their actions were so deliberate, yet what it was he could not fathom. Despite being so young, there were aspects to the Colony that the old one just couldn't understand. The strange, ornate *thing* the armoured ones carried with them into the heart of the termite army was another such thing.

But where was Anthony?

Along with his pets, he had not joined the headlong charge into the mouth of the nest, but had instead employed a more measured approach. Alongside a vast frontline of powerful soldier ants and sapient allies on foot, the massive, diamond covered ant strode forward without fear to engage the scattered termites left in the wake of that impressive charge.

When the two sides met, Rassan'tep had a good idea how it would go, and he felt as if his people weren't going to like it.

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 1007: Assault on the Nest!**

Having the collective Will of over a hundred thousand sentient creatures flowing through you at once is... heady stuff. When all hundred thousand of them are baying for the blood of their ancestral enemies... it's... difficult to stay level.



When Leeroy rocketed off like an idiot it was all I could do not to race in after her. If I'd actually joined in on the predictably suicidal charge of the Immortals I might never have lived it down. The *last* thing I want is for more of my siblings to join that stupid death cult. I can't believe they carried their dead sister into battle... in a casket that spread pheromones saying "death is coming!"

I mean, that's just not appropriate. The fact that Cardigant probably wouldn't mind doesn't matter in my books. Where's the respect?

I keep a steady stream of nonsense thoughts buzzing through my head as the front line of troops steps forward to engage the termites. The flood of Will pouring into me feels like a hive mind right now, the intent is so unified. It's like an angry god is poking me right in the brain, demanding I kill termites.

I'm going, alright? I'm going!

Despite my best efforts to remain in control of myself, I find my mandibles quivering with eagerness. Resolutely I pull them back and lock them into place as we continue our steady march forward.

The termites wait to receive us, thousands upon thousands of them piled up in the entrance to their nest. Even without the ka'armodo controlling them, they would still be here ready to receive us, they know, deep down, what it means when the ants come knocking on the nest.

That's right you blind cockroaches, either you fight us off or we bring the whole thing down on your heads! The nest, the brood, the queens, none of it will remain!

Not the kings either, I suppose, though the idea of kings is just... *weird*. I mean... what for?

No, Anthony! Don't dismiss your own original gender as useless, even casually! Don't forget your essential man-ness. Just because male ants are effectively useless and die almost immediately after they pass on their genes doesn't mean you can throw away your inner self!

Bah! Like it even matters. It's time to fight!

The nearest termite looms large in my eyes, rage and hate burning in every inch of its carapace and I leap forward, jaws ready to bite. That's exactly how I feel about you, bud!

CHOMP!

My mandibles snap forward, filled with the anger of a hundred thousand ants and my foe reels back, or tries to, with the barbs of my jaws still stuck deep in its carapace.

Gweheheheh. No escape for you, my friend.

Which is when Tiny jumps over my head and lands on it, crushing the termite beyond recognition.

[Oi! That one was mine!]

[RAAAAA!] he bellows with his mind and body at the same time.

The light of battle is burning in the big ape's eyes already, no point wasting energy talking to him. I'll just move onto the next one to vent the fury of the Colony that flows through me!

Except when I turn and move around Tiny's giant frame as he begins to hop lightly on his feet and unleash his devastating fists, I find Crinis is busy stuffing termites into her mouth whilst she drills into the minds of others and turns them against their foes.

Dammit!

[What's wrong, master?] she asks innocently.

[... nothing.]

I can't really complain, it's a battle after all. I'm just overflowing with this energy and I need to get rid of it!

No problem. Tiny in front of me, Crinis on the left, I'll just turn to the right.

BOOM!

An explosion rings out right next to me, vaporising a host of termites right in front of my face.

[Yesssssssss,] Invidia purrs, pleased with himself.

I can see the little demon behind me, his one eye glowing bright green, curved with glee. That little goblin *knew* I was going for them and is extra happy because he got to take them from me!

Argh! I can't take it anymore!

[You guys fight here, I'm going to make sure that Leeroy is alright!]

[Wait, Master! That wasn't the plan!]

[Plans never survives contact with the enemy, Crinis. This is the wisdom of the ancients. BAI!]

So saying I clack my mandibles with glee, duck around Tiny and accelerate madly.

Gweheheheheh! They won't stop me now. Bring on the termites, I'm ready for them! In fact, I don't even have to reach them before I start fighting...

I quickly charge my mandibles with a burst of gravity mana and yoink a nearby termite straight into my waiting jaws.

CRUNCH!

I toss the Biomass to the side and burst headlong into the termite ranks, glorying in the scrape and clatter of their mandibles on my glorious carapace.

Yes! Bring it on, all of you! I'll take on ten thousand by myself so come and get it!

VOID CHOMP!

The foes gnashing in front of me are shredded in a couple of seconds as my most powerful bite is inflicted on them. Before that dreadful power, their meagre defences cannot hold.

My stamina takes a massive hit with the use of the skill, but in the blink of an eye it starts to rocket up again. The vigorous will of the Colony is flooding through me, it's impossible to be tired!

You termites are in real trouble...

Filled with vim, I begin to lay about me with mandibles and acid, tearing through the termites with wild abandon as they rush forward, biting madly. They try to latch onto my legs, to find the joints in my armour, or pull my antennae off, but I simply cannot be stopped. Every time they dig chunks out of my carapace, I repair them, the regeneration gland filling up so quickly I can trigger it with absurd rapidity. The small injuries they inflict on me just don't have time to add up before I can wipe them away, and I don't ever have to stop.

So long as the Colony is with me, I won't ever stop!

### Chrysalis

#### **Chapter 1008: Going Deep**

"Eldest! What are you doing up here?" Leeroy complained.

"Hah. Thought you had a nice final stand setup here, did you? You thought you'd run far enough from the rest of the Colony that we wouldn't be able to catch up and keep you alive? You should know better by now, Leeroy."

"But don't you need to rush deeper into the nest, Eldest?" she asks, hope still alive in her scent. "We can hold this position... against overwhelming odds, even! Yes! We can stay here, battling to control the mouth of the nest to protect you... until we fall one by one, tragically!"

Wow, she worked that up in her head quickly.

"No chance, Leeroy. I came up here strictly to keep you and all your followers alive. None of you are going to die while I'm here," I tell her firmly.

"Dammit."

"This sucks!"

"Ruining everything..."

"I was feeling good about today..."

"Hey! Shut up over there! You think I can't hear you? Don't make me walk over there!"

"Would you kill us if you did?"

"What? No!"

"Dammit..."

"... you people need help. I'm going to get on that after this battle, you've had your fun. Now get back to fighting termites already. You're slacking."

"... fine," the Immortals grumble and turn back to fighting, but it's easy to see that the fire has gone out of them, which is madness.

Here we are, deep in the entrance to the termite nest, their scent trails are all around us, along with literally tens of thousands of them all around us, climbing up the walls, and there are for sure thousands upon thousands more beneath us.

If you aren't pumped up for this then what the hell are you after?!

I mean... I *know* what the Immortals are after, but I can't *comprehend* it, so I can't understand their lack of gusto. It's not a problem though, I've got enough pep for all of us!

Let me at 'em!

Turning my back on the sulking corps of Immortals, I rush toward the outer edge of the formation and run right over the top of the armoured soldier in front of me, throwing myself into the waiting jaws of the frothing termite horde like a billionaire duck launching into a money collection.

Even before I land, the dark purple mana expands around me, the gravity domain revolving into existence to pull the termites down before I even land. With plenty of brain power to spare, I pour all of my mental energy into compressing the mana as tight as possible before I release it and it's pleasing to see the insects beneath me wobble under the additional pressure.

And then I'm there, crashing into their lines, my jaws snapping and crushing as I raise my business district high and blast the surroundings with a healthy dose of the Colony's finest produce.

Eat acid you suckers!

As much as I want to let rip with my elemental magic, I have another use for that, but I won't get the chance this soon in the fight. I'll have to get a bit deeper before I can extract maximum value from those spells.

For now, it's up close and personal termite squashing action.

An exterminator is required and I am here to answer the call! Unrestrained, I unleash all of my pent-up rage upon the enemy, channelling the intent of my entire family into my mandibles as I rip my way through the bugs in front of me.

With the sheer volume of energy flooding through me I can void chomp regularly, every bite enough to smash ten termites at once. In the distance I can see the rest of the Colony pushing forward, grinding down the enemy and rolling them back towards where the Immortals and I are fighting.

I don't understand quite why the ka'armodo had their slave monsters build the entrance to the nest so wide, the wide path and high ceiling only narrow deeper in as the opening fades into darkness. Down there somewhere are the queens and brood chambers and we won't leave until they are naught but ruins.

I bite and bite as the termites throw themselves against me, climbing atop one another to take their shot, but with a hundred thousand members of the Colony in the area, I cannot be denied.

No matter how long I fight, I don't tire, and no matter how many small wounds they manage to pile up, I can heal them. In fact, the more I fight, the more energised I feel as the Colony seizes the upper hand and triumph surges in every member of my family.

As I chomp, I keep one brain sifting through the impressions I get from my siblings through the Vestibule and I can tell that the battle is one sided so far. Against the might of this many ants, supported by their loyal militia of sentient buff givers, our enemy is completely out matched.

This is the Colony in its strongest form, you wood chomping morons! Did you really think you could stand against us?

Muahahahahahaha!

I keep merrily throwing myself into the thick of the fighting, as the main Colony force continues to draw closer. Just when I think I'll have another five minutes to keep chomping away, I turn around to find a large pack of ants have arrived nearby.

"Wha- where the heck did you come from?" I demand, surprised.

"OhheyEldest! Hi-hi! Howarethingsgoingoverhere? Wethoughtwemightpopovertoseehowyou'redoing?"

"Wait, what? I thought you came over because it was part of the plan, I was just shocked you managed it without me noticing."

She stares at me. I stare back.

"You... are here because of the plan... right?"

"OfcourseIamSenior,don'tevenjokeaboutitanyway!mgoingtofightssomemorebyeEEEEEEEEEE"

"How do you manage to accidentally follow the plan?!"

I shake my head in despair. I worry about this family sometimes. Most of the ants are straight down the line, but every now and again we get a completely nuts one and they lead a heap of others astray.

It would be great if I could find the root source of the issue and stop it from happening anymore, but no matter how much I think about it, I just can't identify where these nutters are taking their lead from. The leadership at the top of the Colony is rock solid... for the most part.

Could it be mother? She is a bit of a weird one... perhaps she's passing on those strange instincts to the eggs?

I should ask her next time I see her. For now I have a battle to win.

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 1009: Titan's Fall**

Sloan watched the fighting from the backlines, though she desperately wished she could surge forward to battle alongside her siblings. As the general in charge of the field, she couldn't afford to be so selfish, but with the hated nemesis of the Colony so close, it was hard to hold herself back.

Her mandibles itched to crush the termite foe.

Alas, she was more in control of herself than some idiot like Leeroy. Her fellow generals had to bake a reckless charge from the Immortals into every plan. In fact, it was getting to the point that if they *didn't* dash forward blindly, the entire battle plan would be ruined.

Luckily they'd timed Vibrant's assault to bail out the heavy armoured ant brigade before they were in too much danger. Even the Eldest had rushed forward to ensure they wouldn't come to harm, another show of just how much the most powerful ant cared for even the dumbest members of the family.

With a flick of her antennae, the general pushed such thoughts away and focused on the struggle.

The front continued to advance as the Colony and their allies pushed into the jaws of the termite horde. The enemy packed the entrance to their nest, uncounted thousands of them and more arriving from the depths every passing moment. However, it didn't seem to matter how many termites arrived at the front, the concentrated power of a hundred thousand ants was simply too much to be overcome.

Overlapping auras from the generals supported the frontline troops who utilised their well drilled techniques to form an unbeatable wall of mandibles. Frontline healers kept the troops fighting in top condition, or pulled the heavily injured back for emergency treatment.

Teams of mages and scouts laid down an irresistible barrage of fire support, a rain of spells and acid that wreaked havoc deeper into the nest. In the second row, the humans with their spears and the robed ones who accompanied them spread their buff across as wide an area as possible, reinforcing the Colony's advantage in quality over the enemy.

Protected in the heart of the ant formation, a dedicated core of carvers, the most expert earth mages in the Colony, worked tirelessly to reinforce the ground on which the ants stood, burning through mana at a furious rate.

"I like what I see," she announced to the team gathered with her in the command post. "We are grinding the termites down quickly enough, we should hold the mouth of the nest within the next thirty minutes."

Despite their superiority in weaponry and tactics, it would be foolish to rush in and overextend themselves. The disciplined ranks of soldiers were making steady ground, shoving back the enemy and gaining ground one metre at a time.

"What are our concerns? Threats?" she demanded of the others.

"Assault from the flanks," one general offered.

"The formation can absorb it," she refuted the suggestion.

They weren't so foolish as to leave the weakest ants in the centre unprotected.

"Tunnel collapse," another said.

"How are we looking?" she turned to her chief carver advisor.

"The stone is holding strong," Tungstant replied. "They would need to collapse half the mountain to destabilise the ground we stand on. They don't have the minds for it."

She nodded, satisfied.

"Anything else?" she asked.

"Magic assault from the ka'armodo."

“Shield batteries standing by?” She turned to Coolant.

“Ready and waiting,” the mage replied, calm and collected as ever.

“Unseen termite variant?” another offered.

“Can’t be accounted for at this time,” she said.

When no other suggestions came forward, Sloan nodded to herself and turned back to the fighting. Of course, each of these ideas had been hashed out extensively during their planning, but it helped to try and poke holes in the strategy as the battle continued. There was a chance they might spot something they had missed now that they were here watching everything unfold. If they detected their own weaknesses before the enemy did, it could be a turning point as they resolved issues even as their opponents sought to take advantage.

The grind of war continued unabated as the minutes ticked by. Two hundred metres in front of her the soldiers ground on, biting, shoving, grappling, taking hits and giving them right back.

The humans stepped forward, spears in hand to thrust into the gaps and inflict whatever wounds they could. In truth, their presence was far more valuable for the aura provided by the priests, but even so, they were stalwart warriors who did not flinch in the face of the enemy horde.

Sloan and all her generals watched intently as the battle continued, the flow continuing to be in their favour. Indeed, the command post had to be moved forward a hundred metres in order to keep up with the troops as they pushed deeper.

In fact, the Colony had been so successful at claiming ground they had driven the termites deep into the mouth of the nest, the bulk of the fighting now under the shadow of the mountain. The leading ants had already set foot below ground, starting to advance into the first of the enemy tunnels.

At that moment, something changed.

A deep, resounding crack was heard, setting every antenna to wiggling with vibrations. Sloan’s head snapped to the mountain from where the sound had reverberated.

Another crack, so loud it sounded as if the world itself was being snapped in half, followed by a profound rumbling. It was difficult to see what was happening at first, and the ants packed into the command post strained their eyes to see what was happening.

It was difficult to spot, since the movement was simply so large. Eventually, it became clear what was happening. The mountain itself was shearing in half. In mere moments, millions of tons of rock would fall, not only on the ants, but on the still battling termite forces as well.

“Countermeasures!” Sloan roared and the ants around her scrambled to obey, the orders rippling through the army in seconds.

The rumbling grew deeper and more intense as an entire mountainside began to fall, the tip leaning precipitously forward as it tore away. In the mouth of the nest, a hundred thousand ants looked up to see a literal mountain collapsing on them, yet none moved to run or flee.

Instead they waited, as thousands of mages strained their minds to breaking point, the mana whipping through the air like a hurricane.

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 1010: Hold the Line**

Overhead, the rock face of an entire mountain rushed down to meet them, the roar of tearing stone deafening to all in the mouth of the nest. Advant looked up, her mandibles set in grim determination. What happened next wasn't up to her, but she would believe in her sisters.

"Ignore the mountain!" she spread the message with confidence. "Drive the enemy back into the nest! Push!"

As good as her words, she dove back into the conflict, mandibles snapping. She used her mass and thick carapace to bully and shove at the termites, breaking up their line and knocking them off balance with sheer strength.

Even blind as they were, the termites could still detect something was wrong, Advant could see it in the way their antennae twitched frantically. The air was thick with rival pheromones as they blasted each other. They wanted to rebel against the control that lay over them, wanted to defend their nest, protect their queen, repair the damage, but they couldn't. The lizards wouldn't let them.

The Colony general almost felt sorry for them. The termites were little more than slaves, denied their natural patterns of behaviour and forced to throw their lives away in an attempt to bring down a superior insect.

Of course, there was no pity for the termite scum. They had to be eliminated, there was simply no other choice.

Up and down the line, the ants continued to push forward, heedless of the collapsing mountainside dropping on their heads. Bite, push, charge, pull back, bite. They fell into the repetitive pattern of insect warfare, willpower and grit were more important than skill in this contest.

**BOOM!**

She heard a mighty eruption, followed by a colossal shower of dirt launching into the sky at several points behind her. She didn't react or turn, but her range of vision allowed her to see the enormous spires rising into the sky.

As a front line soldier, she hadn't been party to the full plan, but she trusted her siblings. There was no way that Sloan hadn't accounted for something like the lizards trying to drop the mountain on them.

Fuelled by thousands of combined minds, eight spires of condensed stone grew upwards, rapidly sprouting trees of rock that raced into the sky. As the frontline pushed ever deeper into the falling mountain, the huge rock projections of the Colony's mages drove straight into the falling mountain.

Advant ignored it all. The stone screamed above her head, sheared stone began to rain down as splintered chunks of rock broke off from the main body. Anything large enough to damage the ants fighting beneath was deflected with shields or broken apart with other magic. All the while the pillars continued to expand and push deeper, seeking to hold up the mountain.



“Push!” she roared at her troops and they responded admirably, driving into the teeth of the enemy. They were inside the nest now, the path sloping down sharply, plunging into the dark below where thousands more termites awaited them.

Above, pandemonium reigned as the Colony mages strove to hold back the heavens. It was more than an avalanche, overhead it seemed as if the sky itself were falling.

But they didn’t waver.

Down came the wall of rock, impaled upon the mighty pillars the mages had erected, still it fell. The closer it came, the slower it fell, but still it fell.

Until a vast field of purple light flickered into existence around the Eldest.

It quickly expanded, overtaking the already deployed gravity domain, which faded away, rising high and encompassing the falling stone in a heartbeat. Immediately, the speed of descent slowed, their imminent crushing held off a moment longer.

Time that the Colony put to good use.

More pillars thrust upward from the ground, stone taking shape in seconds to rise and support the mountain further. The existing structures branched out and expanded further, desperately seeking to hold the weight.

Advant felt her heart lighten as the Eldest acted to save them, deploying their own mana to hold back the mountain.

Or perhaps... her whole body felt light?

She was caught in the field too! In fact, if she didn’t grip the ground tightly, she might just lift into the air!

“Eldest?!” she demanded, worried.

“I can’t direct this all that well!” the large ant called back. “But they better hurry up, I can’t hold it for long!”

Despite having no talent for magic — she didn’t even have the mana sight skill — Advant could *feel* the vast rush of energy channelled by the Colony. An invisible tornado of raw power whipped around her and the other soldiers, who did their best to ignore it and focus on the fight.

The humans weren’t so dedicated, but she appreciated the grim determination on their faces, even if their faces had turned pale and their eyes wild. Just like the ants, they held the line as the world came crashing down above them.

An ocean of mana swept around them, manipulated by sixty thousand mages working in perfect harmony. Formed and shaped with the will of the Colony, the energy flooded into the ground, strengthening the pillars and branching out within the collapsed stone above.

The rock came lower and lower, so low that Advant had begun to crouch unconsciously as she shoved and bit at the foe in front of her.

Then it stopped.

With a lurch that could be felt in the ground beneath her feet, the falling mountain crunched, creaked and then stilled. A few moments later, the energy of the Eldest vanished as the giant ant slumped to the side.

“Eldest!” Advant called.

“Hey, no worries,” the Eldest wheezed back, “give me a few seconds and I’ll be right as rain. Just cooked my brains a touch. That was rough.”

Somehow, her siblings had done it. Even dropping half the entire mountain on them hadn’t been enough to stop the Colony from advancing. Pride and triumph surged in her heart. When they worked together, nothing could stop them, there was nothing that they couldn’t achieve.

“PUSH FORWARD!” she roared once more. “Their tricks will not avail them!”

“Let’s go again! LEEEEEROY!”

“Damnit Leeroy! Not you!”