

Chrysalis 101

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Chapter 101: Storm Kong

It is well known that different nations and cultures hold different attitudes towards the Dungeon. That the Dungeon provides resources to be used is a common thread to be sure, but the manner of their use, the manner of their acquisition and the reverence with which they are treated varies greatly across the continents of Pangera.

The Legionem Abyssis's defensive attitude towards the Dungeon and restrictive policies towards it are well known to all major scholars.

The Church of the Path and those of the broader faith regard the Dungeon as a holy place, the battling of monsters and the harvest of materials from within a religious calling. The more fanatical branches of the church are rumoured to conduct all manner of rituals within the Dungeon and certainly encourage all members of the faithful to seek enlightenment beneath the earth.

The Cold Blades of Illirethil, the Wise Ones of Coggar Nothan, the Eastern Empire of Kallasar, all have their own traditions and expectations towards the Dungeon that they have cultivated over thousands of years.

Cultural study of Pangera and the Dungeon. Chapter 1. By the Magio Scholar Tarius

The large snake core glitters in my eyes as I pick it up and take it over to the rest of my cores. I can easily see that this core is powerful, but I'm not certain that it is powerful enough for my purposes.

Using my antennae, one placed on the large core and the other on one of the smaller ones, I activate the Core Engineering skill and try to combine the two.

Immediately I feel incredibly fierce resistance, pushing back against my mind until a pounding headache erupts between my temples. ARGGHH. These stupid cores... they think they're all that!!!

COME ON!

Forcing with all my spirit I mentally smash the cores together and hold them tightly, refusing to allow their energies to budge even a millimetre apart.

The larger core exerts far more force than the smaller one, pushing back with an almost irresistible pressure.

But my will is indomitable!

Surrender to me you damned rock!

HRRNKASSAFRAZ.

Eventually the two cores melt together, or more accurately the smaller core is pulled into the larger one and they fuse together.

With the sudden release of pressure I collapse onto the floor of the tunnel. Ugh. This is way too hard.

I don't allow myself to slump for long. Picking myself up I peer carefully at the massive core, my antennae tapping over it intensely and listening for the voice of Gandalf.

[Compatible core detected, do you wish to reinforce your core or reconstitute the monster?]

As if I would want to reconstitute the mess of a monster this core contains after I smashed another core into it! All I want is to try and manufacture a special core!

Determined, I grasp another small core and begin the process again.

HRRRRNNNNNNNGAPAAAAA!

Success!

Gasp!

So hard!

[Compatible special core detected ...]

Yes...

YESSSSSS!

MAUAHAHAHAHAHAHA!

I gleefully grasp the core in my mandibles and take it towards my trusting, unsuspecting pet Tiny.

[Tiny, use this core as well]

The bat faced Gorilla stares at me for a moment before shaking his head and tapping his chest.

[Full].

[I know buddy, but you can take in one more, just this one].

[Full].

....

BAM!

BAM!

Absorb the special core you disobedient ape! I just spent so much effort making this for you!

BAM!

Thwick!

Eh? What the heck is thwick?!

Retracting my mandibles I pull back from my pet to see what is happening, and my heart lifts when I see the core is stuck to the top of Tiny's head like a spherical hat and his ape face is scrunched in concentration and pain. I can see the energy within the core leeching out and into the suffering ape. As

time passes the core grows smaller and smaller as the suffering on my friends face becomes more intense.

I can totally sympathise with my poor ape buddy. I clearly remember the pain of having that special core push your own capacity beyond the limit. Endure it Tiny! This will unlock a whole new future for you!

As more time passes the expression on Tiny's face turns from one of suffering into a snarl. His broad shoulders heave and his powerful fingers claw deep trenches into the tunnel floor as he embraces the beast within.

You can do it Tiny! Endure it!

Finally the process is finished and the core has been fully absorbed. The poor guy is still growling, his fists clenching and unclenching.

I tentatively approach him and pat him on the head with my antennae.

I have to admit a strong feeling of guilt is rising in me. I really don't want to see him in pain, I raised him from when he was just a core after all! I try to firm up my resolve by reminding myself that this is for his own good.

[Evolve Tiny! You need to evolve and get stronger, then you won't hurt anymore!]

I don't think he hears me. His beady bat eyes are filled with anger and pain, his mouth is wide open, revealing his fangs but no noise emerges. Tension fills every line of his face.

[Come on Tiny! You've got to evolve! It's the only thing that will help!]

I move closer to my suffering pet to try and soothe him with my presence, stroking his head with my antennae and constantly talking encouragement to him, urging him to begin his evolution. I'm not even 100% certain that Tiny has reached his max level, given the ape's intelligence, it would be very hard for me to try and extract that information. I could have taken the skill that lets me see his stats but I'm reluctant to part with a skill point just for that. Any reasonably intelligent pet would be able to communicate that to me on their own, surely?

Even if he can't evolve, I'm living proof that a monster can live with an oversized core for an extended period of time. If he can't evolve right now then surely it isn't far away. The main point of my soothing is just to try and help Tiny calm down and adjust to the painful feeling of his new core.

Gradually Tiny is able to relax, his muscles unclenching and uncoiling one by one and his breathing goes from a whistling grunt to slow and even. Slowly but surely he grows more still until his eyes slowly close and he falls back to sleep once more.

Phew.

Poor guy, he really struggled with that process.

I don't know if he is evolving or just sleeping but I'm glad he's no longer in pain. Despite feeling terrible about inflicting such harm on my loyal friend I can't help but be excited for what the future holds for Tiny. I don't think many monsters are able to push their core beyond the limit and achieve a special

evolution in this Dungeon, after all, without a human like intellect how would they be able to recognise the benefits?

Perhaps such monsters, capable of a more intelligent reasoning are common deeper in the Dungeon? The rabid beast like monsters up here are certainly not up to that sort of thinking. If one of them managed to achieve such an evolution it would be by pure accident!

Hang on... What's that?

Despite having turned my back towards him I can still make out something going on with Tiny, a shift or ripple in my peripheral vision. Snapping back to him my heart leaps with joy!

The apes skin appears to be roiling with energy! It's an almost ghastly sight as the fur and flesh of my pet appear to balloon and flow like a liquid, or a sheet blowing in the breeze!

I've never seen it myself but I think this can only be one thing!

Tiny is evolving!

Before my very eyes the changes continue rapidly. Even as his body continues to shift like clay his fur is growing rapidly, going from short and bristly to silken, stubby growth to long hair in only a few moments. His body continues to change at a rapid speed, in some places sinking and collapsing whilst in others bulging out with rapid expansion!

As the process continues I can see that he definitely growing larger! Quite a bit larger! His hands go from a dark brownish colour to a brilliant blue in what seems like a split second. When I lean closer to inspect the change I'm almost fried by a sudden blast of electricity that explodes from his hands, spreading to cover his whole body!

All over him twisting ropes of electrical current appear and disappear every instant, sizzling with power and rising the temperature of the tunnel to a boiling point!

And still he continues to change!

I wait patiently, watching every shift and detail of the evolution, my heart pounding with excitement.

When the evolution is finally complete I stand silent and awed. Tiny has become twice his previous size, completely dwarfing me and the tunnel in which we sit. His massive form is hunched over, shoulders pressing against the roof.

His fur has grown, hanging down from his long, powerful arms. I can see some of the finer hairs rising from his body, hanging, almost suspended in the air. I suspect the electrical energy in his body is running a current through him constantly, causing some of his fur to rise like this.

Suddenly, he opens his eyes and looks around in confusion.

I hesitantly try to speak to him.

[You ok there Tiny? How do you feel?]

Slowly he swivels his beady eyes over to me and they gradually focus. Then, he grins a wide grin. His bat features split to reveal his glittering mouthful of fangs. Then he thumps himself on the chest with one blue fist.

[Tiny feel strong!]

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Chapter 102: The great dig!

He certainly looks damn strong!

The size of the guy!

I think it's fairly clear to tell that almost all of that evolutionary energy went into Might! Somewhat sadly. I really wish even a sliver of that energy had made it to buffing up his brain power.

Well, it isn't all bad I suppose. Since Tiny has me to help him do the thinking, and he can now receive my instructions, being as good as he can at fighting is probably for the best, especially when considering the upcoming crises we will soon face.

The final thing I need to do is complete my mutations. With eleven points of Biomass to spend I'll be able to select a mutation advancement for my legs and then upgrade my Gravitational Energy gland twice.

I open the menu eagerly not even listening to the prompts of Gandalf. Lemme check out dem legs!

Ho boy! Look at all these juicy options!

So many selections that I can choose!

Let's see now.... Legs that stick to surfaces? Peh I can already do that... Legs with barbed spines emerging from them to stab enemies? Ouch! Legs with extra running speed, frictionless feet for sliding, legs with skin between them to allow for gliding? What the heck?

I'm tempted to take an option that just makes me faster or something plain like that but then my eyes fall on a choice that piques my interest.

[Absorption Legs, connects the core to the feet, allowing the monster to draw in mana from the surface it is standing on].

So, if I'm running around in the Dungeon, this option will let me draw in mana from the walls and floor?! If the absorption rate is decent then this could provide the missing link to my magic practice! If I can refill my core and the even more mana hungry Gravitational Energy Gland faster they will become much more useful!

I'll take it!

[Do you wish to select Absorption legs and improve Gravitational Energy Gland to +3? This will cost 11 Biomass]

Hit me!

FLANARGLE!

AHhhhH! The Itch!

Stupid thing!

....

Most of my preparation in this place is done for now. With Tiny's successful evolution it's time to re-join the colony and do our part to assist the digging efforts! I ask Tiny to bring along the remain cores and we leave the trap network, heading back to the main shaft before we make our decent to the main nest.

The tunnel walls have grown eerily dim. I haven't experienced this low a light level ever since I was reborn in this Dungeon. The change in condition is disturbing, making the tunnels feel much more threatening and oppressive. Shadows dance menacingly across the walls as Tiny and I pass through, the patterns of light breaking every time we move.

Tiny is squeezing through the tunnel, hunching his shoulders forward to the point he's almost kneeling himself in the face as he walks. In one hand he cups the remaining cores protectively against his chest.

We descend down the main shaft in silence. The absent workers and darkness press down on our mentality. The only sounds we hear are the echoes of our movements as we descend.

It seems insane that in a few short hours this empty place will become a monster filled death zone.

I'm almost pathetically grateful when arrive towards the lower end of the shaft and the noises of the colony reach my ears.

Being ants and incapable of any sort of speech, it isn't chatter that I hear but scritchng scabble of thousands of legs and grinding of dozens of mandibles as the colony hauls dirt, working at a ferocious pace.

Tiny and I finally descend into the Queen's chamber to discover the room is completely packed with workers, hundreds of them together. Other than a few workers tending to the brood almost all of the ants must be here in this tunnel.

They climb all over each other, some of them heading out and down to the lower tunnel with jaws full of dirt and others running back to collect another haul.

"Keep working children", the warm voice of the Queen sings out, gently encouraging the colony.

I honestly don't think the workers could work any harder! They are practically vibrating with energy, so eager to work at the side of the Queen as she digs.

[Tiny, go down to the lower tunnel and make sure nothing goes wrong] I instruct my ape friend .

He simple nods before lumbering off gently pushing his way through the bustling workers who mostly disregard his presence, some workers even start climbing over him, just walking up his arms and down his back as they move through, still clutching the cores in his hand.

Taking a breath I start to push my way through the worker frenzy, using my larger size to force aside the much smaller hatchlings and workers. So desperate are the others to contribute that I eventually have

to resort to quite vigorous methods, knocking other ants out of the way or climbing on top of others in order to get to the front!

It isn't annoying at all, these are the sorts of people (ants) you want working on your side in a disaster!

When I get to the front of the tunnel I can only be impressed with the progress that has been made. With the Queen working at the front, her enormous mandibles carving up the dirt and rock at a constant rate, combined with a veritable army of assistants carting off the dirt, progress has been rapid indeed.

But it still isn't enough.

The tunnel has already extended roughly two hundred metres away from the chamber, far from the several kilometres it needs to be! At the moment there probably isn't even room to put the brood and all the workers inside this tunnel!

And when I consider Tiny....

No way we all fit!

"Hey there Queen!" I say to the Queen as I start ripping into the dirt with a frenzy.

It's convenient to be able to talk without moving your mouth...

"Welcome child" she responds, similarly with her mandibles loaded with dirt.

The two of us attack the wall, our mandibles tearing away large clumps of earth which we then turn and fling behind us, allowing the smaller workers to do the job of hauling it away.

We aren't the only ones at the front digging. At any one time there are near to a dozen workers chomping away, extending the tunnel one mandible load at a time. Most of these ants gather up their diggings and cart it away themselves, creating a constant exchange of workers at the front.

The Queen and I remain constant, mandibles pumping like piston engines until my face aches from the sheer repetitive effort of it. Thankfully the feeling of ant zen returns to me once more, the indescribable feeling of doing what it is that you were born to do. My primitive ant senses are flooded with contentment as I dig.

I can't afford to waste any time though! I shake off the restful zen regretfully. Digging doesn't require much thought, so I should dedicate this time to practicing my valuable mana skills!

Surrendering my digging to my mechanical instincts I use my will to summon the mana from my core and begin my shaping practice. With the assistance of the sub-brain the mana is drawn out easily, wispy tendrils of strange energy that respond to my thoughts start to flow out and form into mystic patterns within my body.

I still have no idea what these patterns are for or what they represent. They were imprinted in my mind when I learned the skill without any sort of explanation. I'm guessing the only way to actually learn what each is for is by testing, which could be quite dangerous!

I'm resolved to try and begin the experiments away from the colony as soon as my skill reaches an appropriate level. I still find it difficult to form many of the shapes and my success rate, not to mention the speed I can form them, is far too low for practical use.

Practice and then more practice!

Let's do it!

Just like that, the Queen, me and the entire colony dig for our lives.

As only a colony of ants can, we dig desperately, endlessly, with the single mindedness only an insect can express.

I lose myself to the repetitive motions of my mandibles and the formless mana within me, my body and mind almost completely separate from each other.

After an indeterminate amount of time my awareness snaps back when my core has been emptied, not even faint mist of mana remains.

Quickly checking my stats I can see that my mana shaping has rising by two levels!

Now I just need to wait for my core to refill, hopefully my new legs will be able to assist with that.

The mana veins don't exist in this particular section of tunnel, since we've dug it so recently, so I don't feel any mana coming to me through my feet for the time being.

We've been digging for a while, I'd better go check how dark the nest has become anyway.

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Chapter 103: Rising Tide

Titus was worried.

It was hard to see, the weathered lines of his face were cut deep over years of campaigning, an extra furrow in his brow, a little more tension in his stare, were signs almost impossible to notice.

Tribune Aurillia had noticed. After so many years serving in the Legion she was able to detect the subtle changes in her commander. The tightening of his shoulders, the way he constantly thumbed the blade of his famed axe, testing an edge that he had kept razor sharp for the better part of thirty years.

It wasn't often Titus was worried.

"... suspicious activity on the part of the mercenary union and merchants guild, as well as a shift in the rhetoric of the Church of the Path have been reported over the last two weeks. Our strategists suggest that the possibility of a coup in Liria is rising by the day" Aurillia reported.

...

Titus nodded absently, his iron gaze never leaving the forest expanse that spread out before them from their vantage point on the camp walls. The forest was dark now. Very dark. Even the monsters seemed to sense that something was coming. The din of combat, constant over the last week had faded away to nothing.

There was a tension in the air, as if every living thing in the Dungeon was waiting, ready to spring into violent battle at a moment's notice.

"Do you have any instructions to relay to the surface? Commander?" Aurillia queried.

Her commander didn't respond, instead continuing to gaze pensively at the expanse, his ice blue eyes reflecting the dying light from the trees.

"What do you think the Dungeon was like before the Rending, Tribune?" he asked suddenly.

Aurillia was taken aback by this seemingly unrelated question. After a pausing to consider her response she answered.

"Nobody knows the condition of the Dungeon before the cataclysm commander. No-one even knew it existed".

Titus shook his head. "Of course I know that. I asked what you think it was like, use your imagination Aurillia".

The Tribune was confused. "I don't know commander. We know that the mana level on the surface rose dramatically, I can only imagine that the mana level underground surged to incredible levels."

"I think the Rending was a wave" mused Titus, "I think it was just a very large, very long wave".

This wasn't an unheard of theory regarding the Rending, but no wave had ever come remotely close to replicating the world shattering effects of the cataclysm that had created this Dungeon age.

"You've read the reports from our neighbouring Legionary outposts?" Titus asked.

"I have" Aurillia nodded.

"The mana levels have been rising all around us, not just locally. The change has been even, no variation at all. Readings in Banron are the same as ours. I wonder just how far this wave is reaching? It may be covering the entire Perior federation. Perhaps even further?"

"Surely you aren't suggesting this is the beginning of a second cataclysm?" Aurillia scoffed.

The signs were worrying, but the cataclysm? The civilisations on the surface, humanity included, had almost been wiped out at that time!

A moment of silence descended as Titus stroked his grizzled chin with one hand, contemplating the dim light reflected in his eyes.

"I don't know" he said finally, "but I'm not sure. Something is different about this one. I just wish I knew what."

Another break in the conversation fell as side by side the two veterans spend some time lost in their own thoughts.

Eventually Aurillia felt compelled to speak.

"Do you have any instructions regarding the situation on the surface commander?"

Titus slowly nodded.

"I want every member of the Legion above ground to make immediate preparations to depart for our position within two hours. Not a single trainee or auxiliary is to remain behind. I don't care if they have to burn the Loremasters library to the ground, Alberton needs to be down here also".

"Everyone?" gasped Aurillia, "you're going to abandon the Queen? Do you think there won't be an insurrection?"

"There will be a coup and the Queen will be killed" Titus said.

"Then why?"

"The politics of surface kingdoms is of no interest to me, nor should it be to you Tribune. Our duty and our focus lies in the Dungeon" Titus replied firmly.

"But the Queen has been a loyal supporter of ours for decades. You're talking about Alberton's aunt!" Aurillia protested. She couldn't believe that Titus would be so cold hearted.

Titus paused for a moment, his jaw visibly clenching and a spark of anger igniting in his eyes.

"Listen to me Tribune" he said tightly, "we stand on the verge of an unprecedented disaster. The only thing standing between the city of Liria and a flood of monsters are these fortifications" he emphasised his words by slamming his fist down on the compacted earthen walls, "and the Legionaries who followed our orders to come here. The Queen has left herself vulnerable and I can't do a damned thing about that. I will protect my people no matter the cost".

Faced with the slowly burning rage in Titus' ice blue eyes Aurillia could only swallow her protests.

"It will be done commander" she assented.

Titus simply nodded and turned away from the wall to face the camp itself. Temporary buildings erected by Earth Mages were constructed in neat rows, dotted here and there with canvas tents and open built forges.

The men and women of the Legion who had joined him on this expedition were all present here in this camp, nobody had been allowed to venture out a centimetre since the light had begun to fade.

"I want you to send a message to Rixard" Titus suddenly said.

Aurillia was taken aback. "My son? Why?" she asked.

Titus dropped his chin to his chest for a moment before looking back up and continuing to speak. "I want him to pass a message onto the Mercs and Merchants".

Aurillia felt her heart grow still. "I'm not sure why you couldn't just send a message directly commander. My son is only a low level merchant in the city, they won't hold the message in any higher regard for being delivered by him".

Titus chuckled and shook his head. "Aurillia" a note of warning entered his tone, "don't play games. Not to me".

It was the Tribunes turn to drop her head as her commander continued. "I know Rixard has been passing information of our movements to the Mercenaries. Information he has been stealing from you. They will listen to him. Letting them know we were aware of their little mole will send another message also."

"How long did you know?" Aurillia whispered.

Titus snorted. "You didn't try to hide it Tribune, you wanted us to know. We found out years ago".

Aurillia gathered herself and saluted her commander. "I'm ready to accept my punishment commander".

Titus looked her in the eye for a moment. Her gaze never wavered. She had been prepared for this moment for a long time he supposed. To her astonishment he simply waved her away. "I'm the last person who will judge another for a wayward child Aurillia, the fault is not yours. Get Rixard to tell them we will hold here for two weeks. Two weeks only. After that they will be on their own".

"Where will we go commander?" the relieved officer asked.

"Down".

Clapping Aurillia on the back, Titus moved away from the wall and began to walk through the camp, having a quiet word with his soldiers as he passed by, a joke here and there, a bit of encouragement, the occasional stern word.

Wherever we went he was met with respect, determination and idolisation shining in the eyes of his Legionaries. He knew it was there, knew what they thought of him. As much as it was embarrassing he welcomed their hero worship so long as it led them to do what he asked. He could keep them alive that way.

He didn't feel much like a hero. His back hurt, his knuckles ached and the cartilage in his left elbow made a grinding sound every time he hefted his axe. It wouldn't be long now before the Legion retired him to the stone.

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Chapter 104: The roar that follows the dark

In attempting to leave the front of the tunnel I'm forced to push my way through the innumerable eager workers piled up behind me, ready to contribute to the dig. I slowly push my way out, letting my smaller siblings climb over the top of me in their eagerness to rush forward. At this point the walls and ceiling are also covered in workers assisting the dig. Truly a three dimensional work effort!

Eventually I make it through the worst of the crowd and begin to make better progress. I was probably only digging for a couple of hours but the tunnel has become much longer, perhaps doubling in size!

This is the power of the excavation skill! Not to mention being significantly larger and stronger than the rest of the workers....

Anyway! Progress has been made.

When I arrive in the Queens former chamber I'm shocked by what I see. Or rather, what I don't see

It's completely dark! I can barely see a thing!

The illumination caused by the mana veins in the walls has completely vanished, plunging this chamber, the entire nest and I can only assume the whole Dungeon into pitch black darkness.

It's a bit spooky.

Placing my fancy new feet here and there on the Dungeon walls I try to see if there is any mana for me to soak up and unfortunately I'm coming up completely empty! The mana veins are bone dry.

Thinking back to what Formo told me, that must mean the mana has completely receded. After which it would.... Come rushing back... like... a tidal wave...

....

Uhhhhh....

[Tiny? Can I get you to come back up here to the chamber?]

I can feel the ape's agreement in my mind without him having to actually form words.

Whilst I wait I continue to shift my feet about, doing an awkward ant dance as I try to sense the presence of mana returning.

Nothing at the moment.

Hang on, where is the brood? The larvae and pupae? I don't think we've secured the next generation!

Feeling about desperately with my antennae I make my way towards the heat signature given off by the newly dug brood chamber above Queen's room.

Dammit! The entire brood is still here in this room!

Inside the chamber no more than five workers are tending to the next generation of ants, shifting them about, cleaning them and ensuring they have food.

We have to get these guys out of here!

Rushing forward in a panic I can't think of anything better than to shout "we have to move them, it's dangerous here!" and grab the closest larvae in my mandibles.

The attendant workers seem stunned by sudden intrusion, antennae swirling in the dark as they 'listen' to my message. Remarkably, after a brief pause they too pick up a larvae and start running after me.

Thank Gandalf!

With a small wiggling grub in my mandibles I rush back into the Queen's chamber where Tiny has arrived, the enormous ape humming to himself contentedly as he rests on his backside.

[Stay here Tiny! There will be a fight soon!]

[Fight!]

Tiny visibly perks up at the prospect of combat. Small sparks of electricity start twisting and sizzling in the air around him as he stands up and looks around for something to punch.

[Soon I said!]

I roar at him as my small convoy of workers rushes into the tunnel after me. About one hundred metres in, before the crowd becomes too large I carefully place the young larva down and shout "the brood has to be moved to here!" as loudly as I can.

Having delivered this stirring speech I turn and run back to brood chamber!

The brood is the next generation of workers! There are almost five hundred of the little buggers! If they can survive to maturity then the colony will nearly double in size! I can't let them die pointlessly when the wave starts!

Rushing into the chamber I grab the first larva I can see. The small white grub wiggles in protest at being manhandled in this way but I don't have the time to be too gentle! Deal with it grub! I'm saving your life!

As I sprint back out of the chamber I'm relieved to see a flood of workers running in, roused by my crude summons. There are two things that ants will protect at any cost, the Queen and the brood! Both represent the future hope the family, nothing must be allowed to happen to them!

When I return to the Queen's chamber my heart sinks as I realise I've felt something.

Something from my feet.

It is faint. It is so faint, but I'm certain of it. From the tips of my little ant claws the faintest sign, almost undetectable, a soft breath of mana is being absorbed.

Oh no oh no oh no oh no oh no!

It's coming!

We don't have long!

Hustle Anthony! Get your damn hustle on!

With renewed vigour I sprint to deliver my wriggly charge into the tunnel as fast as I possibly can, legs flailing with incredible speed.

"Let's go people! Danger coming! GOGOGOGO" I shout at the top of my pheromones.

[Tiny, it's coming!]

Receiving my warning, Tiny positively bounces on his feet, arms swinging with anticipation. I mentally sigh. The eager gleam in his eyes at the promise of battle surely hasn't changed about him from after his evolution.

As I sprint back and forth, aided by dozens of others the workers the panic in my heart grows with every step of my feet. My legs begin to thrum with energy as the light returns to the walls of the tunnel. The near complete darkness is gradually chased away as the veins that curl through the walls begin to glow, pulsing rapidly with mana.

I'm nervous Gandalf.... I'm really worried!

Fear pierces to the depths of my very soul when I think about what would have happened if I hadn't spoken to Formo. I'd be staring at the walls thinking how nice it was the light was coming back!

Even having spoken to him, I don't really know exactly what this wave will look like, which only adds to my anxiety!

My fellow workers and I continue to race back and forth, carting our protesting and uncomfortable young from their cozy brood chamber to the dirty and crowded tunnel.

Stop squirming you little ingrate!

On my fifth trip the light has risen back to the level it was before it began to fade, but still it continues to rise!

Then I notice something else.

I'm puzzled at first but eventually I figure it out and that realisation causes me to nearly trip and send my present charge flying from my grip.

There are heat sources coming from the walls.

All over the place. I can barely sense them but I'm sure of it. As the mana is coming back small spots in the walls have started registering to my antennae, with every second the passes they grow larger and larger.

Ohhhhh boy.

This isn't just one or two, there are dozens of them! My antennae start to spin wildly when I realise that I'm getting more readings from further away in the nest.

[Here we go Tiny! It's about to get hot in here!]

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Chapter 105: Kong Fury

Tiny can sense it too. I have no idea how, but he begins to stare hard at the walls, electricity crackling in his eyes alongside the rage. He really seems to be working himself into a frenzy!

Dropping off the Larvae I'd been carrying I return to the Queens chamber which is growing brighter by the moment, the light is nearly blindingly bright, my legs are soaking up mana so quickly the floor feel hot to me, as if I were standing on a hot plate.

So much energy! It's almost unfathomable just how much mana is rippling through the walls. Just what could someone do with all of this power?! If this scene is being replicated throughout the entire Dungeon, thousands of square kilometres... I just.... I can't bring myself to think where it all comes from.

There has to be a source, right?!

Unease and fear shift in my heart as I think of it. Something that is capable of a feat such as this....

With just a tiny fraction of this energy I can create an all devouring sphere of death.... With just the smallest taste of the mana that is thumping through the walls in just this one chamber.

I shudder to think what the expanse looks like right now.

As the heat signatures bloom all around me I can't help but turn constantly to stare hard at one and then the next, never knowing exactly when one was going to burst into life. The tight packages of blazing heat I can feel don't grow at a constant speed, one of them will flare brightly, making me turn to look only for it to fade back slightly whilst another suddenly explodes with growth, making me turn. Over and over it happens until I'm dizzy from spinning.

I almost feel as if I want them to start leaping out of the walls, just so I know it has started.

The ants continue their constant shuffling, bringing the brood into our escape tunnel before leaving and returning to bring more.

The escape tunnel itself remains blessedly dark, untouched by the veins of light the flare brighter and brighter each second.

Scratch *scratch* *scratch*.

What the heck was that?!

From one side of the chamber I can hear a faint scratching sound, like claws... or teeth... on stone. I can't be certain but... I swear that sound is coming from inside the wall.

Then:

Scratch *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch*
scratch *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch*
scratch *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch*
scratch *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch*
scratch *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch* *scratch*
scratch *scratch* *scratch* *scratch*

From every side, from up the shaft, from the brood chamber and from everywhere in the Dungeon the horrible scratching erupted into a cacophony of sound.

The walls are burning so brightly my antennae feel like they are practically on fire and my heart is pounding in my chest. This is almost more than one ant can take!

I clench my mandibles to stop them shaking.

... stupid dungeon... stupid monsters You ... you want some this?

You want to come.... You want to come in here and fight me?

COME ON THEN, SHOW THIS ANT WHAT YOU'VE GOT!

CRASH

Right in front of my eyes an arm punches out of the dirt, sending a shower of loose earth flying throughout the room and into my eyes. I flinch back instinctively and before I can recover Tiny is there.

One titanic fist blazes with electricity and his lips are drawn far back in a ferocious screech as the ropes of muscle in his shoulder shift and send that fist cannoning into the ground.

A shrill scream, rings out, muffled by the dirt, but Tiny isn't done.

Ripping his hand back out of the ground I can see he has gripped the monster between his thick fingers. The beast looks nothing like anything I'd seen before, ink black with long thorny tentacles growing from a torso that is more mouth than body, four thin, double jointed arms emerging at jarring angles.

This monster follows no natural design, I've never seen anything remotely like this on earth! What the hells is it!?

The newly born monster shrieks and writhes in his grip, tentacles and clawed hands lashing at Tiny's long arm. The rage in the great apes eyes on burns ever brighter, matching the glow of the current burning in his hand.

The lightning grows stronger and stronger until electricity is coiling around the monsters body like crazed snakes. The creature shrieks higher each moment until, with a sizzling sound it suddenly grows still.

Tiny....

You ... cooked it... With lightning?! That is so badass!

CRASH**CRASH**CRASH**CRASH**CRASH

More and more monsters start to explode out of the walls, hands, claws, scales, and fangs start to tear through the dirt all around us. Some ants get caught as they run with the newborn charges in their mandibles, limbs appearing from the walls and floor to tear and scratch at them.

Dammit!

Instantly I'm running. As the walls break to pieces around me the dirt explodes as thrashing limbs and gnashing jaws claw their way out all around us.

Crushing Bite!

Snap!

Without mercy I rush forward to an ant pinned down by another of the mouth monsters and bite down hard with my mandibles, shearing straight through the limb that had only moments ago prevented by sibling for moving towards the escape tunnel.

"Run to the tunnel!" I scream with all my might and I hope the ants are able to hear it amidst all of this chaos. Their antennae may be covered in dirt, which would interfere with their hearing.

I throw myself forward to the next trapped worker, desperate to free them all.

In my peripheral vision I can see that Tiny appears to have simply gone mad.

His body is so charged with electrical energy that his long hair is almost standing straight up, giving him an unearthly, almost demonic appearance. His long arms smash repeatedly into the walls as monsters emerge, the tremendous impacts sending shockwaves rippling through the soil.

I see him plunge one hand into the earth and pull it out again with a bizarre hooked worm creature wrapped around his arm, leechlike mouth grasping, restrained in the apes fist.

With a mighty bellow Tiny channels his electricity into his arm, roasting the monster in seconds before turning and flinging it into the face of another creature charging at him from across the room!

A scene of chaos!

As the monsters emerge they are not dedicated to fighting only us, or coordinating with each other. They rip and tear into each other just as quickly, even if they are the same species!

The entire Dungeon is supposed to be possessed by this madness!

The wave. It's crazy!

Chrysalis

Chapter 106: The endless battle begins

I run along the trail of workers, snapping and biting at everything that obstructs their path towards the escape tunnel. My main purpose isn't to kill these monsters but to try and get every worker I can to safety.

"Into the tunnel! Into the tunnel!" I constantly shout at my siblings as I snap at the claws and arms that threaten them as the monsters in the walls rip themselves free.

What is the state of the brood chamber in all this chaos? Did we get all of them out?

Worry pierces my chest when I think about the defenceless grubs that may not have been shifted in time.

I need to go and try to save them!

[Tiny, protect the tunnel!]

I can't even be sure the ape has heard and understood me in all of the chaos but I don't stay to check. As I run back toward the chamber I start channelling my gravity magic into my mandibles. As I see ants caught or stuck on their path towards the escape tunnel I immediately reach out to them with the gravitational energy, yoinking them towards me and closer to safety!

I get a few very startled looks from a few ants after they've unceremoniously flown through the air towards me. I'm not sure if it was the shorter distance or finer control on my part but the ants manage to land on their feet, the larvae they carry safe and sound.

Phew!

Most of the monsters I'd first sensed growing in the walls have emerged by now, snarling and biting, tearing into the first thing they see. So many of these monsters bear no resemblance to anything I've

seen so far in the Dungeon. Inhuman, illogical, unnatural creatures of darkness and shadow. Impossibly large mouths, limbs bent at insane angles and with more joints than they could possibly require.

These monsters look straight out of some nightmare!

I won't be distracted from my purpose!

When I see no more ants emerging from the brood chamber I charge along the wall and make my way inside, threading my way between the creatures, lashing out with my mandibles whenever I'm threatened.

Strange as they may be, they still don't like it when I chomp one of their limbs off!

Bursting into the brood chamber my heart drops low in my thorax. There are still dozens of larvae here, tiny little grubs that are completely defenceless against the nightmare horde that has emerged from within the very walls of their sanctuary.

Already I can see several young that have been destroyed by the conflict.

..... Dammit.

We weren't fast enough.

Little grubs they may have been, but they were members of my family!

They have become the first members of our colony to be sacrificed to the wave.

I'm instantly filled with regret. If I'd kept better track of time, if I'd been a little quicker, if I been a bit stronger. I could have saved them.

Hold on. One larvae in the middle of the room is wiggling furiously towards me as vicious beasts battle all around it. Just before it becomes stomped under the foot of an ignorant combatant I flash back to my senses and activate my mandibles!

YOINK!

The tiny grub flies through the air, rocketing out of the brood chamber and slamming directly into my face!

I didn't have much choice! If I tried to catch it in my mandibles I'm likely to injure the thing, they're so little and spongy!

Using my face to absorb the impact may not have been the most sophisticated of solutions but it seems to have done the job!

The lucky grub squirms with joy at its emancipation. This larvae seems unusually active and aware for a creature nearly without senses.

You ok there little one?

I couldn't save the others but I'll absolutely save this one!

With no more workers inside the chamber and hopefully none coming back I turn my back and leave, unable to do anything for those that remain alive inside.

Come on Anthony, get this little one to the escape tunnel. Save this one larva.

Then you can vent your rage!

My eyes are nearly blinded by my grief and guilt. I'm determined to see this one to safety however, so I lower my head and bull my way out. Monsters screech and scratch at me, one scythe-like limb stretches out of the darkness to scrape along my side, sending sparks flying as it scores my diamond carapace.

I don't respond, I can't respond. I won't risk anything until I can save this defenceless member of my family.

Before me a horrific monster rises up, twisted and broken like a spectre of death itself. I can feel the painful stinging of death energy roll over me as it draws closer.

No!

The hp drain might be something I can deal with but it'll be enough to kill this larva in just a few seconds. Dammit!

[Tiny! Kill!] I roar in my mind!

From the other side of the Queens chamber I hear a deafening shriek as Tiny unleashes his mind affecting vocal attack, causing all monsters in the room to shudder with pain as the sound scatters their consciousness.

Without ears the grub is sheltered from the attack but power of the sound waves vibrating through its fleshy body threaten to shake the poor thing to bits!

The nightmare beast before me reels backwards, disoriented from the blast and before I can even react a blinding flash of light erupts in my peripheral vision.

Turning my head I can see Tiny, still channelling electricity throughout his entire body looms over the monsters around him like an angry god, the current in his hand flashing ever brighter.

With anger contorting his bat features he throws forward his hand towards where I stand.

I have no idea what he is doing at first, but a moment after he thrusts his hand out a terrifying arc of electricity bursts forth, burning the monster before me into shreds!

Nice, Tiny!

Motor on!

Legs scrabbling in the dirt as fast as they can I stumble and lurch my way forward, sacrificing my balance to eke out every ounce of speed I can muster. Gogogogo Anthony!

Dive!

As I approach the mouth of the escape tunnel I can see that the workers have already formed a defence line, using their numbers to try and fend off their attackers.

Spotting a gap in the line I hurl myself forward through the air, leaping for the finish line!

A sudden, sharp pain explodes from my abdomen and looking down I can see a hideous beast, tremendous spikes on the ends of its limbs, climbing out of the dirt beneath me. One arm has been extended, the spike piercing straight through my abdomen and coming out of my back!

Holy crap that hurts!

My HP has plummeted!

Save the little one first, I'm so damn close!

As I thud into the ground painfully, terrible spike still piercing me from beneath I start to drag myself towards the escape chamber, little larva still gently gripped in my mandibles.

From behind me I can hear the sound of scattering earth and new limbs clicking as the beast emerges from the dirt.

I'm nearly there Gandalf! Just a few more feet.

This wound is excruciating!

Inch by Inch I move towards the tunnel, my blood staining the earth of the Queens chamber behind me.

Finally another worker notices me approaching and rushes forward, closing the gap between us in just a second.

Tenderly the worker takes the larva from me and turns, rushing deep into the tunnel. The last I see the little grub is limp in the workers mandibles, hardly moving at all.

I hope you make it little one.

As for the thing behind me....

You should never have stabbed me in the business district!

Taste my justice!

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 107: Counter Attack

The monster behind me has ripped itself free and is approaching its prey, already skewered in through by one of its limbs.

Unfortunately for you, standing behind me is not a good place to be!

POW! POW! POW!

Firing blindly I rapid fire three shots which, after turning my head I can see have splashed all over the unfortunate monster.

Ha! Take that moron!

Reeling in pain as the acid begins to burn furiously away at its flesh, the creature pulls itself backwards, simultaneously ripping the spike out of my body.

My mind completely blanks out for a moment due the sheer agony tearing at my psyche. Holy moly Gandalf! That one stings!

Activate the regeneration gland!

As the regenerative fluid begins to course through my body, hopefully closing over the holes I have above and below the abdomen I can finally turn to face my adversary.

Able to stab me straight through the diamond carapace this creature must have some serious chops!

What looms before me is truly a nightmare beast. Two enormous elongated, double jointed arms protrude from the front of the body, each limb tipped with needle points that glitter in the light. Suspended between these two limbs is a withered, tattered body with a curling, hooked tail that it drags through the ground.

Come on now monster! That doesn't even look practical!

My health, which had plummeted down to half after being pierced through is recovering rapidly as my healing gland does its work. One heck of a good purchase that!

Eyeballing my foe warily I feint left and right, trying to buy a few more precious seconds for my wounds to close. My enemy hesitates briefly before screeching horribly, tube-like mouth distending to ridiculous proportions before it raises one spear tipped limb and slams it down towards me.

Thankfully the restrictive acid is doing its work! The creature is so much faster than it looks. The fearsomely pointed arm flashes through the air and plunges deep into the earth, sinking deep into the dirt as if sliding into warm butter.

I was barely able to dodge that strike! Only by flinging myself to one side was I able to avoid it by the slimmest of margins! Despite looking so distorted this monster really means business. That speed and penetrating power are a real threat, able to stab straight through my sturdy defences.

If I continue playing for time I might just end up getting stabbed through the head! Go for the attack!

As the creature is retracting its arm I lunge forward whilst channelling mana into my mandibles!

CRUNCH!

Summoning my strength I bring my jaws down on the offending arm with a vicious crushing bite! I mandibles clamp down before the beast can retract the fearsome weapon. With satisfaction I can feel my mandibles ripping and tearing but I'm disappointed I wasn't able to cut straight through it. Not even the infused mandibles were up to that task!

The monster rears back, hissing sharply in pain

Ha! How do you like it?!

... Then it smashes down with its other arm!

Whoa there!

Flinging myself to my right I'm able to narrowly dodge once again! How is this thing so damn fast?! When I see the arm raised up I know I have almost no time to dodge because I've never seen the thing come down! It's like it just teleports in the ground!

This must be a skill or mutation of some kind. Even with my restrictive acid covering the creature it can still muster this level of speed, if I hadn't hit with the acid I'd probably be dead right now, speared through the head by a limb I never saw move!

Part of me shudders in fear just thinking about that scenario. The terrors of the Dungeon really are innumerable. How is a humble ant colony supposed to survive Gandalf!?

Thanks to my compound vision I can see the colony hard at work in this moment.

They aren't advancing out of the escape tunnel, which is good news, but holding the line, two hundred workers strong, devouring any monster that dares to approach the wall of ant-kind blocking the entrance.

Good on you colony! Keep up the good work!

Tiny is continuing his rampage, his new form is fearsomely strong, blasting out electricity and using his sheer physical force to smash his opponents to paste. He can't keep it up indefinitely though, I can already see wounds cut into him and his electrical energy isn't inexhaustible. That blast he sent out across the room must have cost him dearly as the sparks radiating off him have dimmed considerably since!

The wave shows no sign of abating either. With monsters filling the nest to the brim, I can already sense new heat sources growing in the walls. This is truly going to be an endless wave of monsters! Formo was not kidding, if anything he might have understated the danger!

I have to deal with this tough enemy and see what I can do about the situation here in the chamber. If the ants can't keep digging we will eventually be overwhelmed. The colony has many numbers but not enough to fight a never ending number of these nightmare beasts!

Suddenly I switch the mana I'm channelling into my mandibles, flipping the switch and bringing out my gravitational energy instead. Before the creature has time to rebalance itself I reach out with the energy and latch onto it.

Why don't you come over and say hello at my kind of range, beastie boy?

YOINK!

Haha! Have I sabotaged your plans?

The monster freezes in shock as it suddenly rockets through the air towards me. Completely unprepared for such a sudden flight it's guard is wide open!

CRUSHING BITE!

crunch

Digging in my feet to arrest the momentum of the creature as it slams into me I bring my mandibles down directly on my enemies face. At this close range I can see the tube mouth is surrounded by tiny gem-like eyes, as if the body were studded with little rubies. Each of those dozens of eyes is wide with terror as my jaws clamp down harder and harder, crushing the flesh even as it cracks the bone.

Have another!

CRUSHING BITE!

With a horrific squelching sound the monster's flesh is compacted as whatever skeleton it had shatters under the force of my bite.

[You have slain level 1 Nocte Cuspide Vermem]

[You have gained experience]

Muahahaha! Take that!

Swiftly checking around me I can see that there isn't anything about to stab me in the face this very second so I take a chance and chomp down on a few mouthfuls of food.

I need to keep healing myself!

[You have consumed a new source of Bioamass, Nocte Cuspide Vermem, One Biomass awarded]

[Basic Profile of the Nocte Cuspide Vermem unlocked]

[Nocte Cuspide Vermem, Night-Spear Worm. This darkness affiliated monster has low mobility to a lack of limbs but compensates with extreme power and speed possessed by its two stabbing arms. Beware the piercing power of these spears, they are capable of punching through all but the toughest defence!]

Yeah, thanks for that Gandalf. I think I'd worked out that last bit for myself actually...

After a few more mouthfuls I gain another Biomass point but I'm forced to stop eating as more monsters come closer to my position, not necessarily looking to fight me but posing enough of a threat that I can't continue to leisurely enjoy a meal.

Rude things. No manners here in the Dungeon, none at all.

If I had one more point I could have mutated my gravity gland to +4! I'm not sure if that would have helped much right now but I'll take anything I can get at this point!

I need to try and settle this situation as best I can, but what I can do?! I can't blindly fire off gravity bombs in this narrow space, I could hit Tiny, or collapse the ceiling on myself, or get caught in the bomb myself!

What a death that would be, sucked into your own black hole of doom...

PASS!

I don't really have any other tricks I can use....

Ok Anthony, it might be time to experiment with the Gravitational Energy and mana shaping! Hopefully something good happens!

Chrysalis

Chapter 108: Experiments with gravity

There is so much mana flooding through the walls that, to be honest, it is almost intimidating. My absorbing legs feel like they are on fire, energy gushing through them at a ferocious rate, pouring into my core at a constant rate. Even though I've used some mana from my core and gravitational energy gland already I'm nearly topped off on both so quickly is my mana recovering.

Even the regular mana regeneration that I get from the mana in the air is higher right now, the air is so rich with the strange energy. If I can find more ways to apply my mana in a combat situation then this wave would be the perfect environment for a magic oriented ant like myself.

As fearsome as my physical abilities are, thanks to my investment of evolutionary energy and my many mutation enhancements, my current species is Mind Ant, and I've poured a lot of skill points, time and energy to developing my ability to use magical energy. If I'd had a little bit more time I'm certain I could have worked out some sweet attacks!

Now that the wave has hit I've no choice but to try things and see how it goes!

Thankfully this isn't a bad place to test it, the colony is holding the line at the tunnel entrance, refusing to advance forward and swarming anything that comes too close to them. So far this tactic is proving to be successful, any monster that dares approach the wall of ants blocking the entrance to the escape tunnel is quickly pulled forward by dozens of ants, dragged directly into the middle of the mass of workers and set upon, carved up and sprayed with acid before they can even ask for a cup of sugar.

I'm not exactly why the ants aren't suicidally charging into the fray as is their usual style but I'm extremely grateful for it. Perhaps it has something to do with the brood? With the future generations of the colony at stake the workers are refusing to abandon them, instead defending with all they have.

It almost brings a tear to my eye! Go for it workers, fight for the future of our family! Defensively though...

That will give me room to work!

Of course, Tiny might be hit but he's strong enough to survive, surely. I can't imagine anything I can produce with less energy than the Gravity Bomb would be able to hurt the big guy.

As battling monsters again encroach on me from every side, gaping mouths and elongated limbs lashing at each other, I reach deep within, stirring awake my sub-brain and grasping hold of the ethereal energy of this world.

Mana is a difficult to explain. How it feels, how it looks in my mind's eye, the way it moves, it's hard to find the words. Stored inside the mana sources of my body, the energy is dense, hanging like a thick fog over the ground, a haze or mist that can't be seen through, a low lying cloud of sparkling power.

When I ... reach for it ... the cloud stirs and shifts, like a living creature reacting to its owners voice. In equal parts I call to it and take hold of it, not roughly, like grabbing a cat by the scruff of the neck, but firmly, holding it by the hand leading it where I want it to go.

The mana doesn't fight against my control, exactly, it just feels ... heavy ... as if weighed down by an inertia that I must overcome by sheer mental effort. Even with my sub-brain the amount of willpower required to finely control the energy is no joke.

The more precise my control needs to be the more effort required. To move the energy in a certain direction isn't that difficult, but to move into an exact direction and form an exact shape is far, far more difficult.

Much like rolling a ball, to send it out in front of you is simple, even if the ball is heavy, but to roll it exactly five and a half metres with a ten degree spin to the right Hard.

This is where the mana shaping skill comes into play.

It helps to guide my hand, implanting in my mind the instincts and nous needed to understand just how much force is too much, exactly how to achieve that particular curve or when a mistake has been made.

The other aspect of the mana shaping skill is the patterns that I received when I learned it. All skills come with knowledge, it could be said that all skills are knowledge, but mana shaping contained more than most. Not just the control aspect, but also numerous specific shapes and patterns that I should direct my mana to form.

The only problem I have is that the knowledge of what each shape is for was not shared with me.

Well, that and the problem of the shapes being extremely difficult to form correctly. With my mana shaping skills improving as I grind, the work has become easier but it's still immensely difficult to achieve the precision required every time.

In my last round of practice I was able to get the shapes to form correctly only around 50% of the time, but I wasn't game to activate them, surrounded by workers and the Queen.

Right now I'm going to try and see what happens.

Cross all of your claws Anthony! Hope something good comes out!

Drawing out the dark purple gravitation energy stored within my body I begin to direct it into the first pattern I think of. This shape resemble a circle that loops in on itself, forming many concentric circles that eventually shift into a sphere. The extra difficulty comes in due to the fact you have to 'draw' the shape in two places at the same time, directing two streams of energy simultaneously.

The sub-brain helps immensely with the split focus but due to having to keep an eye on my surrounding I can't divert all of my focus to just forming the pattern. I've retreated myself to as close to the corner of the chamber as I can, hoping to avoid attention by remaining still and quiet. In a room full of frenzied monsters lashing at everything they see it isn't especially a reliable strategy and several times I have to shift my position or dodge out of the way of other monsters grappling each other.

My first attempt finally collapses and fizzles out as I can no longer hold the threads of energy together.

Dammit! Who asked for magic to be this damn hard Gandalf!? All you had to do was shout a few words and wave a stick around, right? Any chance you could throw that ring my way?

...

Didn't think so.

Backing myself tightly against the wall I begin another attempt.

Even as the mana is being draw out of the gland, my feet, planted firmly against the walls, continue to draw in more energy. My core has been topped off already and now the excess energy is being fed into the gravitational energy gland, where it is converted to the new mana type over time.

Ok. Focus Anthony!

Once again I painstakingly begin to form the pattern within myself, controlling the energy to create every loop and whorl with as much precision as I can. I divert even more attention to the effort, allowing myself to be buffeted and struck by several monsters as I concentrate on the shape.

Slowly the pattern begins to take shape. I continue to direct two separate streams of gravitational energy with my mind, laying them down symmetrically in the three dimensional pattern of pure magic within me.

My mind begins to ache I draw to the final sections of the pattern. Every pattern that I've tried becomes more intricate towards the end of its formation and this one is no exception, the finest of circles spiral inwards and outwards, outlining the now spherical mana construct in almost invisible layers of energy.

BANG!

A powerful fist smashes into my side, sending my body reeling to the side but so engrossed am I in completing the construction that I don't even notice. So close! So damn close!

GOT IT!

With a sudden flash of energy that radiates through my body the pattern has been completed! A new awareness raises in my mind now, one that I've felt before every time I managed to complete the shape. What is required now is to hold the shape steady, using my mind to lock it in place and then 'power it' by pouring more mana into it until is ready to take effect.

As my body continues to be buffeted by attacks my focus remains internal, directing more and more energy out of the gravitational gland and into the construct I've formed inside me. I have absolutely no idea what will happen when this takes effect, but it better be good!

Mana continually flows into the pattern which glows more brilliantly with each passing moment!

At first I'm encouraged by the sheer amount of energy required to power this shape but as more mana is consumed I begin to grow concerned. What if the effect takes in the colony as well?! I don't want anything too explosive!

As the mana continues to flood into the shape I start to blindly run away from the colony skirting the walls, running straight into other monsters getting bashed away, just to create more distance.

I feel something click, like a block falling neatly into place or a switch suddenly flicking the lights on.

Then the Gravity Domain descends.

Chrysalis

Chapter 109: Something weighing on your mind?

When the construct is finally charged with a ridiculous amount of mana, almost 30% of my total gravitational energy capacity, it activates.

The sphere of intricately formed shapes and patterns begins to move, gradually at first, gaining speed like a locomotive, spinning and rotating in a breathtakingly elaborate dance. What is alarming is that the pattern continues to draw on my mana even though it is completed.

What's going on?!

In the next moment my question is answered. The outer layer of the sphere rapidly expands outwards, exiting my body and encompassing an area within a five metre radius around me in a flash! The core of the construct remains rotating inside me, pulsing with energy and continuing to soak up mana at a dizzying speed.

Ah! I don't even know what is happening! This mana field has expanded around me? What on Pangera does it do?!

Now that the construct has been completed and powered, for the first time since I activated it I return my awareness to the outside world, leaving the task of supplying the energy to power this spell to my sub-brain, which is more than up the task.

Ouch! I've been beaten and knocked around a fair bit! A few cracks and dings in my carapace are evidence enough of that! Thankfully I haven't lost too much hp, the diamond carapace proving its worth against these more mundane strikes from weaker creatures.

The battle continues to swirl around me, monsters throwing themselves into every fight in a wild frenzy, lashing each other with every available weapon. Yet more creatures are starting to emerge from the walls as the cycle of monster spawning continues without slowing, more meat thrown into the grinder!

The actions of the monsters close to me change the moment the sphere of mana expands. As soon as my spell is activated the creatures, moments ago engaged in furious combat, instantly slump to the ground as if smashed in the head with a brick.

What is this?!

There isn't any visible difference to the environment around me. I feel perfectly fine, whatever the spell is doing doesn't seem to affect me in any way. Five metres around me the spherical barrier of mana slowly rotates, a mystical pattern drawn with dark purple gravitational mana.

The creatures within the zone act strangely, as if they were pressed into the ground by an invisible hand. I stare at them, baffled. There is no force at all that I can feel? Maybe it only has an effect on others?

Nearby I see a monster aggressively swinging a claw close to the edge of my sphere. When the arm passes inside the edge of my spell it is immediately dragged down, pulling the monster's shoulder until it is slumped forward, trying to drag its arm outside of my range.

Could it be? Is this what I think it is?! The legendary gravity domain!?

Looking at the nearest monsters again they are painfully trying to push themselves back onto their feet, they appear as if weighed down with a ton of bricks!

It is! Inside the sphere the enemy monsters are affected by a powerful gravity field that pulls them down to the ground! Incredible!

This also explains why the drain on my energy is still ongoing at such a fast pace. In order to maintain such a strong effect over a large area you would expect to have to pay a heavy price in energy. At the current rate of consumption I'm probably going to run dry of Gravitational mana in just a few minutes!

That doesn't matter though, this is great! I almost can't believe my eyes as I take in the pitiful sight of these horrific monsters who, moments ago, were savagely fighting and tearing each other apart, now struggling to get their feet under them.

The Gravity Domain! So powerful!

I can't waste this chance!

Tentatively I approach the nearest monster. I intend to be cautious until I know a little more about how this new spell works.

The creature sees me approaching and snarls, using all of its strength to push its upper body up to attempt to swing at me. Once all of the body weight has been placed on that one arm though, the creature quickly collapses back to the earth.

....

Fearsome!

I'm not encumbered in any way! I guess I'll just dart forward and chomp down with a bit of a bite then shall I?

Crushing bite!

Crushing bite!

Crushing bite!

[You have slain level 2 Morsus Yog]

[You have gained experience]

It may sound cruel and inhumane, but biting down on that horrific mouth monster whilst it couldn't lift a finger to defend itself was Just so invigorating!

Muahahahahaha!

It's time for the feast!

Fully aware that this ability won't last for long I leap forward into action. Every monster caught in my field becomes weighed down by the irresistible force of gravity. Some are able to cope better than others, but even the hardiest monster in the room, suddenly finding its combat ability cut in half, is no match for me when I'm totally unencumbered.

Bite. Bite. Bite. Bite. Bite!

Every bite is a crushing one, don't stop just keep on biting!

[You have slain ...

[You have slain ...

[You have slain ...

Bite and bite some more! MUAHAHAHA!

Crushing bite!

Crushing bite!

[Crushing Bite has reached level 10, advancement available]

So delirious with battle am I that I hardly notice Gandalf's message at first.

What is this? Crushing bite has reached the level cap?!

Fantastic! Let's advance it immediately!

[Crushing Bite -> Shattering Bite. This advanced skill allows the user to manifest their bite as energy to extend the range of the attack beyond their physical body. Of course, attacking with the physical body will cause significantly more damage]

....

BUY IT!

Is this the type of skill used by those soldiers to fire blades of light from their swords and so on? I can extend a metaphysical set of mandibles to bite stuff?! Unreal!

I have to test it immediately!

Gleefully I approach another monster burdened by the crushing pressure of my Gravity Domain.

Activate Shattering Bite!

Immediately I can feel an immense drain on my stamina, weariness seeping deep into my already tired body. Holy heck the cost is high!

Invigoration returns to me immediately as my mandibles begin to shine with a brilliant light. Slowly the light becomes more intense and then expands beyond the limits of my mandibles, creating a ghostly set

jaws three times larger than my own that hover in the air, mimicking every movement of my actual mandibles.

This is sweet!

Test it. Shattering bite!

With one savage lunge I dart towards my struggling opponent and bring my ghostly mandibles down on the foe. They crunch down with vicious force, puncturing the monsters head and popping it like a melon.

...

Gross.

But also amazing! So powerful! Not to mention, for the first time I'm able to bite something a slight distance away from myself, which means when the beast was defeated and exploded everywhere, I didn't get all the goop on me!

I hate having to clean monster guts off my antennae! This skill is the best!

My Gravitational mana gland is starting to run low, I can't afford to waste any more time. Unleashing my inner beast I begin to go on a rampage, smashing my way through the Queen's chamber, and crunching every monster I can see.

The next happy discovery occurs when I leap forward on a monster only to find it is the beast that Tiny is fighting.

After jumping onto another of these nightmare creatures back I find myself staring face to face with my faithful ape companion.

Tiny is looking fairly beat up, but the savage gleam in his eyes and fearful snarl on his face tell me he is enjoying himself pretty well in the opening stanza of the wave. His electricity seems to have run out, only a few small sparks zap off him here and there but his lethal fists are still plenty weapon enough.

It takes a moment for me to realise it but there is something else strange about him.

...

[Tiny, do you feel heavy?]

The giant ape is standing smack in the middle of my Gravity Domain but appears to be completely unaffected. I know he's strong but I don't think he's so strong he could stand there without any visible sign of difficulty under the burden of this potent gravity!

Tiny just stares at me confused for a moment before looking down at himself and patting his stomach slightly. Looking a little hurt he raises his head and firmly shakes his head.

...

I wasn't calling you fat you ape!

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 110: Temporary Reprieve

Since it appears that my pet does not suffer under the debilitating effect of the Gravity Domain, Tiny and I working together are able to make fairly quick work of the first wave of monsters in the Queen's chamber before retreating back to the entrance of the escape tunnel and the welcoming horde of ants there.

Despite having mostly cleared just this one room, there are still more monsters growing within the walls even as I try to catch my breath. Tiny and I are spent forces. My Gravitational Energy gland is completely tapped out and my repeated use of the Shattering Bite skill has caused my stamina to drain away to the point I'm physically exhausted.

Tiny isn't in much better shape. Whatever the source of his Lightning he is running on empty, a number of wounds have been made all over his body. By throwing himself so willingly into the fray he has had to pay a price and although I'm sure his gains in levels and skills have been high the poor ape is in desperate need of a rest for the time being. Even as I look at him his chest is heaving and blood is trickling from a number of cuts, matting his long fur.

He doesn't look miserable though. If I were to describe the look on his face I would have say he looks ... satisfied. This battle hungry ape! He'd probably jump straight back into the fight if I gave him a chance!

I too was able to harvest a few levels from the fight but for now we need to take care of the most important resource during this wave.

Food!

Although it might seem as if the wave would make procuring food a simple affair, the opposite is true. Even if there are monsters fighting everywhere, that also means that there are monsters fighting everywhere! There is food all over the place but it is going to be so difficult to actually get the space to collect and then safely consume that food!

Not to mention we need to procure enough Biomass to sustain not only myself and Tiny but the entire colony including the larvae and the Queen!

Right now the entire Queen's chamber is full of Biomass waiting to be harvested, but from everywhere else in the nest I can still here the roar of combat as the endless battle continues. We only have a limited reprieve before the fighting starts again. My heart grows cold as the true terror of the wave becomes apparent to me.

Tiny and I are completely exhausted and have to rest already, we may have won a reprieve for the colony but for how long? Five minutes? Then the chamber will once again fill monsters and the battle will continue, except Tiny and I will be in no state to fight.

Only ten or so minutes has passed! Already reduced to such a state.... This is going to last for at least a week!

I sure hope we can dig our way out...

"Everyone gather up the food and bring it into the tunnel! As fast as you can!" I urge the defensively positioned workers.

The workforce have been doing an excellent job of blocking entrance to the tunnel, even hanging off the roof of the tunnel to completely bar entry to hostile monsters. I think their desperation is borne out of their instinct to protect the larvae sitting in the tunnel behind them at all costs.

The ants have already caught and consumed a number of monsters, snatching up anything that came too close and bringing it down through sheer numbers before dragging their victim deeper into the tunnel to be consumed.

Thankfully the workers respond to my urging and mobilise, moving into the chamber and hurriedly begin to drag what Biomass they can back into the tunnel. As tired as we are, Tiny and I contribute as well, the colony usually allows us the space to collect and consume our own food anyway.

The few monsters that emerge in the chamber during these few hurried minutes of work are set upon by the workers before they can even fully emerge from the ground and subdued, adding their own Biomass to the collection.

For a few frenzied minutes we scabble around the chamber, hauling as much of the precious food back into the cramped tunnel as we can, even as more monsters begin to approach the chamber from the connecting tunnels above and below, drawn by the scent of Biomass.

Three minutes later Tiny and I are resting behind the defensive wall of workers blocking the entrance to the tunnel, on the other side are more workers, teaming up to break down the Biomass and distribute it to the brood just beyond them and the workers digging at the tunnel end further away.

This wave is seriously deadly.

I won't be able to fight for a few hours probably, inside the escape tunnel I'm unable to absorb mana through my feet which will greatly slow the recovery of my gravitational energy. My core is full, to be sure, but it takes time for the energy drained off to the gravitational gland to be converted via whatever voodoo takes place in there. Even if the ambient mana level is high, it will take time for me to get back to a full tank.

Not to mention I'm freakin' tired! My stamina is completely drained, every one of my legs is aching. The only cure is to eat and sleep, if I push too hard I'm only going to collapse in the middle of a fight, where would the colony be then? Actually, what would happen to Tiny, my pet, if I were to be killed?

I glance over at Tiny as I think of him and he is already stuffing his face, his large bat mouth stretched wide to shovel in the food as quickly as he can. Noticing my look he freezes for a moment, one hand drifting down to his stomach, perhaps to check just how flabby it is.

.....

Nobody is calling you fat.... Just eat!

When I turn my head away Tiny pauses for a moment before he seems satisfied that I'm not watching and begins stuffing his face again.

...

I can still see you ...

Shaking my head I turn back to my own food, speaking of which I'll have to start eating if I want anything left to me.

[You have consumed a new source of Biomass, Dentes Umbra. one Biomass awarded]

[Basic profile of the Dentes Umbra unlocked]

[You have consumed a new source of Biomass, Luminare Imp. one Biomass awarded]

[Basic Profile of the Luminare Imp unlocked]

[Dentes Umbra, Gnashing Shadow. This many jointed mouth on limbs is a base level monster of the darker reaches of the Dungeon, its fearsome maw and deceitful nature are its main weapons]

[Luminare Imp, Lesser Imp. The weakest and most pathetic of the demonic monsters the lesser imp is still a significant threat when underestimated. It has surprising reach and claws that are capable of inflicting a nasty curse]

As I eat I investigate the profiles of the monsters I've defeated and much as I'd suspected the enemies we had defeated do not belong to the normal categories I would expect to fight in the Forest.

It seems the higher levels of mana caused by the wave are not only causing such high numbers of monsters to spawn but also to cause more dangerous species to appear, species that perhaps would not normally have been seen this high in the Dungeon.

Hooray.

If the mana levels continue to rise over the course of the wave then the monsters that spawn will become increasingly dangerous as time passes. This makes it even more clear that fleeing the Dungeon altogether was the correct choice. I can't know just how powerful the monsters will become if we stay down here.

Even though the Gravity Domain is strong I can't be trapped into thinking it is all powerful. A monster with a powerful enough physique will be able to withstand the pressure and fight. If I overestimate myself I'll only get killed foolishly.

After the first brush with the wave my status looks like this:

Name: Anthony

Level: 8 (core)

Might: 41

Toughness: 29

Cunning: 32

Will: 22

HP: 50/50

MP: 50/58

Skills: Excavation Level 6; Improved Acid Shot Level 5; Grip Level 4; Shattering Bite Level 2; Advanced Stealth Level 5; Piercing Chomp Level 5; Tunnel Map Level 1; Mana Shaping level 6; Forceful Mana Level 3; External Mana Manipulation Level 1; Mana Sensing Level 2; Core Engineer Level 2; Advanced Exo-Skeleton Defence level 2; Pet Communication Level 1;

Mutations: Focused Eyes +5, Infrared Antennae +5, Restrictive Acid +5, Absorption Legs +5, Infused Mandibles +5, Diamond Carapace +5, Limb Regeneration Gland +5, Pheromone Language +5, Gravity Magic Gland +3;

Species: Mind Ant (Formica)

Skill points: 4

Biomass: 11