

Chrysalis 121

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 121: Whoops

So caught up in the strange energy of the moment it takes a moment before I even realise what it is I've done.

Uh.... Whoops?

I mean, he hit me on the head with his stupid mace! What exactly did he think was going to happen?! I've been living a violent life in the Dungeon, some things are just becoming instinct you know? If you whack me on the head with your stupid mace then you can't really blame me for retaliating right? It's self-defence!

The priest seems to also take a moment to process these events. He looks down at his now severed limb before a new expression gradually takes over his face. He falls backwards clutching at his arm and screams loudly in horror!

This triggers the stunned crowd, who had been locked in place with shock to erupt with fear, people climbing over each other as they attempt to run for the door!

Oh boy...

This is not what I intended! Why the hell did we have to dig up into a freakin' human building anyway?!

Did they think the Dungeon had delivered some free xp to them as offering or something? You expected me to just stand there and get killed?! Even if I were to let you bash my head in with that ornate mace for half an hour it wouldn't have been able to damage my diamond carapace in the first place! All I'd get is a headache!

Since it has come to this I have to try and limit the damage, my plan was to have the colony hide somewhere on the surface so we could ride out the worst of the wave in relative safety. If we manage to draw a human army down on our heads then we may as well go back down into the Dungeon and try our luck! If these humans run away and bring back soldiers we'll be in a real pickle!

Think Anthony! You have to fix this!

Out of desperation I do the only thing I can think of to stop the people from running away.

I channel my gravitational magic and form the gravity domain.

I mean, it would stop them moving right?

With my increasing skill and familiarity with the spell I can form it much more quickly than before, in only a matter of seconds the powerful energy erupts from me, encompassing the church building. Thankfully I had enough presence of mind to dial back the strength of the gravity.

The moment the spell erupts the humans find themselves unable to keep their feet, the younger children immediately fall to the floor, completely unable to resist the force pulling them down. The adults are better able to cope but even they find themselves without the capacity to walk.

The priest himself is too busy shrieking and gripping his arm, holding it before his disbelieving face, he doesn't even seem to notice that he has been forced onto the floor by my spell.

In some ways I'm impressed.

I only leave the domain in place for a few seconds before I shut it off. In those few seconds the frantic escape of the congregation has been halted, almost everyone has been forced to the floor, unmoving.

I try my best to stare them down a little. It isn't easy to communicate "don't move or I'll turn it back on again!" with an ant stare but I do my best.

They seem to get it to some extent. Fear twists their faces as they have now realised that this isn't some religious experience but the enemy of their kind, monsters from the Dungeon, emerging when they least expected it in possibly the last place they expected.

Seeing the terror and tears on the faces of the children is quite a blow to me. It wasn't that long ago I was a human myself! I'm not that scary am I?

I mean..... A giant ant that can apparently control the force of gravity would be pretty damn scary when I think about it.

With the crowd subdued for the moment I decide to try and work out exactly where we are. I need to know a little more about this situation before I decide to bring the colony up to the surface or retreat down and come up with another plan.

Moving down the aisle towards the large double doors at the rear of the church I hesitate a moment before pushing them open with my mandibles and taking in the surface of this world for the first time.

A brilliant sunset is the first thing that meets my eyes, the alien sky dyed with intense reds and pinks. Lovely. Not much scenery to appreciate in the tunnel after all, causing this sight to hit perhaps a little harder than I would have thought.

Focus! No time to get caught up in a sunset! Shaking myself slightly I turn to take a look at the surroundings. The church appears to be situated on a hill, a cobbled path leading directly up to the doors. Spread before me looks to be a sleepy town, smoke curling from chimneys that poke proudly out of slatted roofs. In the distance I can see farming fields spread like a carpet that press up against a walled city.

Checking my tunnel map quickly I estimate the previous Dungeon entrance I had located seems like it would be smack bang in the middle of that city.

So... things could have been worse, I suppose.

In fact, if I focus my eyes carefully I think there is a fire in that city? Against the darkening skies I'm fairly sure a plume of black smoke is rising from somewhere inside the walls. Some sort of situation happening over there? I don't especially want to wish harm on anyone over there but this could be a chance for the colony to slip away without notice!

After turning back to eyeball the congregation again I scurry around the side of the church and take a peek around the corner. The church doesn't seem to be as large as I had originally thought it was, a sturdy stone building with a high vaulted ceiling to be sure, but it isn't exactly a cathedral.

It seems to have been constructed on the edge of this town, high on the hill overlooking the more simple homes of the people, many of whom possibly work farming the surrounding fields. On the rear side of the church, down the hill and over a few open paddocks a lush wood is spread, thick foliage creating a beckoning darkness across the forest floor.

Just the sort of place a colony could go and get lost in!

I might be able to salvage this after all!

I turn and head back inside where many members of the congregation have begun to offer prayers of a much different sort to the statue, hoping for salvation and survival rather than whatever the heck they had thought was coming their way before.

The priest is still clutching his arm, almost completely inert. I think the shock has hit him pretty bad. Poor guy. I can't help but feel a twinge of guilt, I mean, I did bite his arm off...

I head back to the hole in the floor stick my back zone through so I can talk to the Queen.

It's a little weird the pheromone conversation. We 'listen' with our antennae but we 'talk' with our pheromone gland which is positioned in the rear zone.

"Could you come up here and heal a person? I injured him, but I think it would be bad for us if he died".

I can tell the Queen is a little surprised but she quickly agrees with my suggestion and begins to chomp and push her way up through the floor, buckling the flat stones and forcing the wooden pews to scrape and scratch on the floor as she forces her bulk through.

If I'd thought the humans were fervently wishing for salvation before their efforts are redoubles with the emergence of the Queen. She fills the room with her majesty and abdomen, forcing the people to push themselves back against the walls, openly weeping in terror and this manifestation of the Dungeons evil.

The Queen doesn't seem much fussed. She channels mana through her antennae for a moment and then touches the priest on the arm. The light flares as it passes into his flesh and the wound rapidly closes over, the bleeding slowing to almost nothing in a matter of seconds.

I think with this his life will be preserved, at the very least he won't bleed to death.

With no way to communicate to reassure the people I decide its best just to hustle the colony out of there. Giving instructions to the Queen and the workers we gather up the larvae and pupae before marching out of the church towards the forest.

The eyes of the congregation are almost popping out of their head as rows of monsters ants pour out of this hole in the center of their church, marching past whilst totally ignoring them. I myself head down into the escape tunnel to help move and I'm shocked when a fat grub wiggles towards me, flopping about on the ground with glee.

Are you that energetic grub I saved from the brood chamber?! I shouldn't be shocked you survived I suppose, you do seem to have an unusual amount of spunk.

With that, Tiny, the colony and myself carry everything we belong and walk out, past the disbelieving and hopeful faces of the colony, out the front of the church, across the field and then beneath into the welcoming arms of the forest.

All the while the burning gaze of the priest follows me as I walk.

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 122: New home

I'd never thought that running through a field of wheat could be quite so thrilling. Perhaps everyone had been wrong on that front? As I hustled along, Tiny in tow carrying my precious monster cores in one large paw and the rest of the colony following along behind, I couldn't help but panic the entire way, worrying that we'd be spotted.

Who exactly was going to spot us crossing a farm field at dusk, the sun having fallen almost completely below the horizon, I'm not sure. Perhaps the Dragon Guards of legend would swoop out of the sky and smite me with a thunder hammer or something? I have no idea how things operate up here! For all I know there are wizards that could vaporize the entire colony from kilometres away.

Right up until the moment the last worker is safely under the cover of trees I keep stressing. When finally the entire workforce is safe and the Queen, surrounded by her dedicated cadre of ants has been escorted into the forest, I sigh in relief.

Feeling a little more comfortable I make my way to the head of our monstrous ant convoy as we plunge into unknown territory.

There is something faintly magical about this forest, it's old, even I can tell that much with my limited outdoors experience. The trees look wrinkled and wise beneath their broad canopies, stretching to the sun like the elderly doing morning exercise.

At this late hour a mist is beginning to rise from the damp litter of the forest floor, further concealing our movements as we rush further into these woods.

Wait a sec! Heat!

My antennae are constantly scanning and sweeping as we advance and eventually I detect a heat signature ahead and slightly to the left, as if some creature were waiting crouched in the growth as we approach.

I decide to continue to advance as if I had no knowledge of this interloper, wanting to see exactly what kind of action it would choose to take. Will it attack? Will it flee? I don't know anything about this forest or about the creatures who live here. Any chance to learn something should be seized. Knowledge is power to the monster!

My antennae continue to twitch about as I lead the trail of ants. The heat source has continued to remain still as I draw closer. I even adjust my path so that I'll be right next to the source as I pass but it doesn't twitch in response.

Eventually I move within only a few feet of it. I can clearly see the hiding place now, a dense shrub with thickly intertwined branches providing total visual cover. Sadly for this beastie my advanced senses are completely aware of their location.

My main worry in the event of an attack is the larvae I'm carrying in my mandibles. This feisty grub refuses to sit still, insisting on wiggling about as if admiring the view. You don't have eyes you little grub! What is the point of trying to get a better view?

If I'm attacked I'll have to ensure the grub remains unharmed, and somehow retaliate without using my mandibles, which are fully occupied with said grub.

Sure enough, just as I pass by the bush suddenly rustles and the creature attacks.

Thin, twisted flesh, furred sin, vicious fangs and a crude dagger are all I can see clearly as the creature emerges in a rush, bringing its weapon down in a vicious slice!

I've seen it all you chump! Curling slightly I present my diamond carapace to the weapon, shielding the grub with my body and rotating my face away from it.

The blade flashes down!

Ting!

The blade harmlessly pings off my carapace. The recoil twists the creatures arm on a terrible angle, possibly breaking it.

I'm not sure who is more shocked by the total lack of damage inflicted, the monster or me.

Better safe than sorry I suppose, completing my rotation I present the business zone towards this furry humanoid and blast it with acid!

POW!

Already wounded by the rebound of its own strike the creature howls pitifully as the acid blasts it off its feet and congeals, pinning it to the ground.

[You have slain level 9 Ille Feram]

[You have gained experience]

...

So weak!

Super Weak!

One blast of acid and you're dead? Are you kidding me? I'm pretty sure you broke your own arm just by attacking me!

This isn't a some comedy!

Disgusted by the weakness of this monster I'm not even sure that I want to eat it. Is this what monsters are like on the surface? Surely the difference can't be this much?

I shouldn't get ahead of myself. One skinny fur man in the woods isn't representative of all surface monsters, I should stay watchful.

Disregarding the remains of this creature the convoy continues to wind its way deeper in the woods. A long column consisting of hundreds of ants marches along in near perfect silence. After about an hour I halt the column and look about.

We have arrived in a small clearing in the wood. Strong trees surround us on all sides, the soil appears soft and rich beneath my feet. The lush undergrowth is pleasing on the eyes and indicates that this forest is vibrant and full of life.

Seems like a good spot!

We should be far enough away from human civilisation for the time being, at the very least I hope they won't be able to find us in one day. To be honest I'd rather be further away than this but I have no idea how large this forest is. If we keep marching there is a chance that we'll run clean out the other side and into more farmland, better to put down some roots and scout out the situation before we make any more moves.

"Wait here a sec!" I shout to the workers who waggle their antennae at me and tap my head as I wander past. Roughly in the middle of our convoy, I find the Queen, looming over her subjects as they escort her forward.

"I think I've found a place for us to build a nest, might be a good idea to get the larvae settled down and go hunting. Hopefully we can find a decent amount of Biomass up here."

The Queen simply nods her assent. I think she's a lot more tired than she's letting on. The only member of the colony to get no rest at all since the beginning of the wave is her after all. She probably needs some sleep more than the grubs do.

Ants being what they are it doesn't take long for the colony to begin construction on a crude nest. It's honestly a little moving to see them in action. Hundreds of ants swarming, tearing into the soil with relentless energy.

In a matter of hours there is a simple ant hill erected in the clearing, nearly as tall as the tree tops. Inside the colony has packed into a few simple chambers, tending to the brood, whilst the Queen has finally been able to get some rest, nervously watched by her defenders, right in the heart of the new nest at the bottom.

I myself manage to excavate a small chamber for myself and Tiny to curl up in, my precious monster cores nearby and the little grub I carried nestled in one corner.

I'm so damn tired. Please nothing happen at the very least until I get some sleep!

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 123: New territory

Since the cataclysm and the opening of the Dungeon to sentient surface dwellers, expeditions to the underground spaces for resources have been a constant in society. Not only for the abundance of

experience provided by the Dungeon monsters, far above that which can be attained above ground, but for the precious resources that can be found there.

Rare mineral types never seen before, underground trees whose wood contains incredible properties, gems infused with mana are all highly prized, but the monsters themselves have always held the greatest treasure.

It is well known on the surface that certain monster parts, when treated correctly, can be prevented from dissolving back into the Dungeon and then turned into miraculous equipment and tools that cannot be replicated using only surface materials. Although expensive to purchase, items crafted from monster parts can be found in almost any civilised town, often something as simple as a plough could be constructed using centipede fangs as the blade, or carved completely from the tough bones of a larger beast.

More sought after still are the precious monster cores. It isn't known exactly how or why monsters form cores, but what is known is that they constantly absorb and compress mana, giving the monsters a rich source of power within their own bodies, something no surface race has been able to achieve. Mages are able to perform their miracles by drawing on and shaping the energy found in the area around them or from specially crafted mana stores on their person, but none has ever achieved the internal storage that the core allows monsters.

What's more, the core of a monster retains these properties after death, constantly absorbing and storing mana. When combined with skilful enchanting techniques, cores, especially larger, powerful ones, can be used to create the most powerful weapons and artefacts, hence their incredible value.

Like a slumbering giant the colony rested that night. The workers had been pushing themselves hard, just as I had and almost the entire workforce sank into torpor with only a few guards patrolling on the ant hill outside. Over five hundred monsters, crammed into a small space, each as still as a ghost. Hundreds more larvae and pupae filled every corner of our new nest, the next generation of workers growing ever closer to their time of awakening.

When I finally shake myself out of torpor I feel refreshed in a way I haven't felt for a long time.

So good!

I can sleep as much as I want and I don't have to battle something to the death the moment I wake up! The lousy wave is in the rear view mirror for the time being and it is a massive weight off my shoulders.

I'm not so foolish to think we will continue to remain untouched by it up here, but at the very least I can enjoy this respite from the constant danger.

Looking around my cramped little chamber I can see Tiny curled up in a ball, still snoring away happily. Even rolled up he takes by far the most space in here, he continues to get larger as he eats. Exactly how big is he going to get?!

I'm also pleasantly surprised when I spot the other occupant of the room. Instead of the energetic little grub I saw when I'd gone to sleep in here, there is instead a thick cocoon leaning up against the wall.

A pupa! The little grub must have woven its cocoon whilst I was sleeping! Using my antennae I give a few light taps to the white exterior in order to inspect the pupa. This is the transformative stage of an ants development where they turn from a blind grub into a fully formed ant. This grub was so energetic before, I wonder how it'll behave as a worker?

Certainly the pupa seems a little different than those I'd seen before? I'm not sure I can put my finger on exactly why....

Mentally shrugging I turn to the other, precious occupant of this room, my cores! Wait..... Weren't there more of these before?!

Shocked, I rush over to my collection like a bird flying to defend its nest. Yes I'm sure of it! I'm missing two cores! I frantically check the remaining gems with my antennae. Phew! The Jellymaw core is still here, I have plans for that one.

Irritated I turn towards Tiny and slap him awake with an antenna. He must have absorbed them in his sleep this greedy ape! So you've gone from refusing to accept any cores to stealing them now huh!?

WAP WAP WAP!

Eventually Tiny is roused by my furious swiping and blearily unfolds himself. He seems completely unaware that I've been hitting him as he yawns and stretches before turning back to me.

[Food?] he asks.

....

Some things never change I suppose.

[Come on, let's go hunting].

The two of us make our way out of our home and up the main shaft of the nest until we reach the top of the anthill. The rest of the colony is similarly waking up, dozens of workers are pouring out of their chambers and getting busy around the colony, some heading lower in order to tend to the Queen, others checking in on the brood, most of which has transformed into pupa by this time. Soon the colony will go past one thousand workers!

That does raise a problem though.

We need food! Ants on earth have a voracious appetite, tearing through huge amounts of other insects and small creatures in order to obtain protein to grow their young. Mature ants on earth don't really need to eat meat themselves, they mainly rely on sugars to keep themselves going.

Not here on Pangera! The monstrous ants need Biomass to keep themselves kicking and growing stronger, just like the young. This means the monstrous ant colony has an even larger appetite when compared to normal ants!

Time to hunt! Already scouts are starting to pour into the forest, twenty to thirty of them darting off to try and locate something for the colony to feast on. More and more workers are massing on the anthill every second, slowly expanding outwards and pushing gradually into the forest, waiting for a signal to go and collect food.

Tiny and I drift off into the forest, moving in the opposite direction to the human town that we'd seen. I don't want to get closer to civilisation and I would love to know just how large this forest is. Something tells me that with a fairly major looking city nearby I shouldn't expect it to be massive. As long as we can hide out here for a week or two I'll be happy!

What follows is a fairly dull day of plodding through forest looking for prey. Tiny and I are more successful than most of the scouts, due to my enhanced senses obviously, but even so there doesn't seem to be a high concentration of monsters nearby the nest.

I run into a few more of those hairy skinny things, each of them wielding crude tools or weapons that heaven only knows where they got them from.

They go down with even less of a fight than the first one did, if that is even possible. Tiny punched one and the creature practically exploded.

Surface monsters are clearly not up to the standard of us Dungeon dwellers.

Which leads me to another conundrum. If I want to improve my skills I'll need to level up and gain Biomass. If I want to evolve or develop my core manipulation abilities I'll need a steady supply of cores and so far those appear to be thin on the ground up here.

As the day draws on I'm led more and more to the thought that even though we just escaped from the Dungeon we are still going to need access to it. Without Dungeon monsters to fight the colony and I can only stagnate.

I won't accept that!

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 124: Strange new life

Hmm. To tunnel or not to tunnel? And even in the event that tunneling does in fact occur, where to tunnel?

It isn't reasonable to expect that a largish city would be built on the very edge of some monster infested wild frontier, I can see that now, but I really did hope that there would be more monsters in here for us to eat.

Asides from those hairy scraggly things the only monsters we have encountered are creatures that are fairly close to regular forest animals on earth. The occasional slightly larger boar, some deer with sparkly horns, a few decently sized birds.

Enough to get a bit of food around but completely insufficient to fuel the xp and Biomass needs to power up the colony.

There is only one place to get what we need and it just so happens to be the place we only just escaped from.

Dammit!

I'm going to have to dig down to the Dungeon again!

The question is, where? I'm certainly not going to dig straight down from inside the new anthill, that would be completely stupid! Perhaps I could just create a new tunnel a few hundred meters away that Tiny and I could use for hunting, perhaps leading workers down there in hunting parties.

The other option is to head back to the existing tunnel which opens up within the church. Perhaps some monsters are even climbing out of there already, invading the surface. For his own sake, I hope that priest doesn't try to give those monsters his 'blessing' like he did me. He won't escape with only the loss of one arm if he tries to smack an Earth Bear Tyrant on the head!

Thinking about the human town causes a slight pang in my chest. I still don't know how to think about the humans of this world or how I should relate to them. Part of what bothers me most is how much less I consider them than I used to. Perhaps accepting the colony as my new family has drawn me closer to accepting my monstrous life. I mean, experience has now shown me that I have no hope of ever being part of human society again so perhaps my feelings are drawing away from them more as time goes on.

Still, I hope that by tunnelling into the middle of the town we haven't inadvertently caused the deaths of hundreds of ultimately blameless people.

I might have to sneak back there soon to see how things are going.

For now Tiny and I are continuing our first sweep through this forest. We haven't gone too far from the nest on the first outing, just in case of the unexpected, but so far the hunting has been quite mundane. The forest itself is lovely, old and lush, full the sounds one would hope to hear in an old wood.

There is a peaceful vibe to it that I'm quite enjoying! The place is so still compared to the Dungeon, especially since the wave hit.

Hang on a sec. I'm getting a heat reading from over near that tree!

Signalling to Tiny with my antennae I point towards the tree. This is my new system I've been working on with my ape companion, a few quick non-verbal signals I can make with my antennae only.

It's simple enough that even the big ape has managed to grasp it.

His eyes brighten at the prospect of prey and he quickly starts scanning for it in the direction I indicated. A frown almost immediately creases his face as he fails to notice anything and glances back to me with his hang dog/bat expression.

Don't look at me buddy, I can't see it either!

The tree in front of us is clearly old. Thick, gnarled roots curl around the base of the tree and twist their way into the soil beneath. The thick trunk isn't smooth around but rather covered in curls and knots, clumps of moss dappling the trunk and hanging from its boughs.

This is strange...

I can clearly detect that there is a source of heat only a few metres in front me but all I can see is tree!

This is curious! My interest has been peaked! Why is this tree giving the vibes of a creature? I mean, I know trees are alive, but they shouldn't be look this right?

I gradually approach the tree, my eyes agog at this strange mystery.

Tiny has grown bored and is sitting on his backside studying the hair dangling off his arm.

Dammit Tiny! Where is your sense of wonder?!

Eventually I've grown close to enough to the tree that my antennae are tapping it up and down directly.

I can clearly detect heat from this, something that no other tree has shown in the forest, just what is it about this tree?!

At that moment as my antennae are tippity tapping on the bark of this tree, something odd happens.

The tree giggles.

....

Uh

Tippety tappety tap

giggle

.....

tippetytappetytippetytappetytippetytappetytippetytappetytippetytappety

As my antennae go completely crazy on the trunk of this tree a section of wood starts to wiggle with laughter and detaches away from the rest of the tree before collapsing on the ground!

Before my eyes a strange woodish humanoid is rolling about on the dirt, thin root-like fingers at the end of gnarled mossy arms attached to a thin, branch like body.

When the thing notices that I'm no longer tickling it with my antennae it suddenly stops moving and I notice two deep green eyes staring up at me from what I can now tell is a gnarled bark face.

.....

tippetytappetytippetytappetytippetytappetytippetytappetytippetytappety

When I resume my antenna tapping the creature immediately resumes laughing and giggling as it rolls around on the ground like a small child.

What. The. Heck. Is. This. Thing.

Next to me Tiny has waddled over and is staring down at the creature with his beady bat eyes. I can tell exactly what he is thinking.

Can we eat this?

You know what Tiny, I'm not sure...

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 125: It all comes back to mana

For the time being Tiny and I resist the temptation to try eating this strange tree creature. After a few minutes of tickling I back away a few steps, making it clear that tickle-time is over and I wait to see how the creature will respond.

After wiggling about on the ground for a moment, then giving me the puppy dog eyes for a little while longer, the strange branch monster eventually stands up. Now that it's standing on its own two feet I can get a better look at it.

This thing is skinny! Rather than a walking tree it puts me more in the mind of a stick insect. The body is more of a branch than a trunk and four humanoid like limbs extend organically, with little sign of joints. The monster doesn't have a head of any kind really, the face peeks out from the top of the torso, the wrinkles and grooves in the wood giving rise to surprisingly expressive features.

Tiny is radiating disappointment as he gets a closer look at the monster. I think he's sad at how thin the monster is, it isn't likely he'd be able to get much of a feed from it.

Blissfully ignorant of being weighed for Biomass the Branchie? The Branchie looks at the two of us with eyes twinkling deep in that weathered face before gesturing for the two of us to follow and walking briskly off into the forest.

I hesitate for a moment before I decide to follow. I've not seen anything in this forest that is a match for Tiny and myself at this stage, we should be fairly safe. Besides, I want to learn a little more about this walking wood stick if I can, it seems relatively harmless and is the only creature other than Formo that hasn't reacted with hostility upon seeing me.

So I follow along with Tiny trundling in my wake. It isn't long before we have to speed up though. The Branchie is fast! Despite being shorter than Tiny, so skinny a stiff breeze could knock it down and not having knees, the Branchie really motors along!

Could it be the lack of air resistance?

Whatever the reason Tiny and I have to quickly raise our pace and in the end we have to sprint along behind the Branchie for ten solid minutes before it finally stops when we reach a beautiful section of forest.

A small pond in the center sits perfectly still, ringed with spectacularly old looking trees. The air is so still here, as if nothing has drawn breath in this spot for a hundred years.

The Branchie smiles at us, the folds and twists of the wood curving to create the expression, before walking towards one of the trees and just, blending into it. I almost can't believe my eyes, one second the Branchie was there, walking, and the next it was just ... gone!

I can still detect it with my heat sensitive antennae though. As I wave my antennae about this section of forest I actually detect a few more signals from the nearby trees. Curious, I wind my way around the pond and I find more than twenty responses from the trees in the area. It looks like the Branchie brought us back to its community!

It doesn't appear as if they want to come out and greet us though. I get the feeling these are particularly shy monsters, hiding from their enemies by using their impressive tree melding skills.

There must be something special about this spot for these tree creatures to make their homes here. My attention turns back to the pond. Do I detect a faintly familiar shimmer to this water?

Out of curiosity I flip on my mana sensing and sure enough the pond lights up with a faint response. The water is infused with mana! Nostalgia comes flooding back as I recall the pond in the first chamber I'd entered after being reborn.

By drinking that water I'd taken the mana into my body which had expedited the formation of my core. This water probably has similar properties, the Branchies must have formed their community here due to the mana in this water.

Or perhaps they were formed from the trees here?! The trees drinking in this water with their roots may have been what created these tree creatures in the first place?

In the end it all comes back to mana. This mysterious energy that can be turned into almost anything, has a seemingly unlimited supply and can even create life itself! I can't help but feel that somewhere deep in the Dungeon the source of this energy resides. I have no evidence for that but it just seems right. I mean, it has to come from somewhere!

Actually....

It has to come from somewhere.... Right?

So how did it get into this pool?

With a thought tingling in my mind I retreat from the pool about thirty metres, Tiny trailing curiously behind me. Once I've created enough distance I start to dig! Furiously ripping into the dirt with my mandibles I make rapid progress.

Before too long I've managed to tunnel down ten metres, slightly angled towards the pond. Gasping for breath after my exertions I activate my mana sense and eagerly look towards the pond.

And there it is. Under the pond there is a thin tendril of mana that reaches up right towards the bottom of that pond.

It's the Dungeon!

It's extremely thin, just a tiny little thread, but it's enough to bleed mana out of the Dungeon and up into the waters of this pond. If I were to dig down further I would definitely be able to connect a small tunnel to the Dungeon and begin farming xp and Biomass!

This is excellent news! I'll have to thank those Branchies somehow, they've saved me a lot of effort!

This will also give me a place I can recharge my mana which will allow me to more rapidly develop my magic skills. Everything is coming up Anthony!

Not willing to wait a second I throw myself into my digging efforts, burrowing deep under the pond to try and avoid the saturated water I try to connect myself to that tiny thread of mana. As I dig down I can see it more and more clearly, extending deep into the ground.

All it all it takes a few hours for me to dig my way down to that thin tendril of Dungeon but when I do it is a glorious sight to behold.

The bright glow of mana shines in my eyes once more, the mana veins have wound their way up even in this space. To be honest I may have saved the Branchies and perhaps even the humans with this effort of mine. It may have been possible that the mana veins would expand upwards and connect directly to the pool, it may have even been possible that they would start spawning monsters directly on the surface!

As it is I'm delighted to see those mana veins start to extend out into my new tunnel slowly.

I'm assuming monsters didn't spawn in that thin crack since there wasn't enough space for them, as the veins extend deep into my tunnel the monster spawning will soon follow!

Mauahahaha!

Success!

Elated in the extreme I bring Tiny down my cramped little tunnel to help me dig and expand it out in preparation for the monster spawning.

After several more hours work we dug out a relatively open chamber with a more narrow opening that stands fairly high above the floor, hopefully preventing any monsters from escaping up the surface, except for those that spawn in the surface tunnel once the veins have extended that far but I want to limit the surface exposure as much as possible.

After digging out this huge space I'm pretty knackered. It might be time to head back to the colony and then come back here after a nap to see how things have progressed. With a little luck a lot of effort I should be able to create a nice monster farming network here, giving the colony a healthy shortcut to pump up in size and strength!

The only drawback is that Tiny and myself won't be able to strengthen ourselves much here. The monsters will simply be too low a level to provide enough xp and Biomass for us to gain much.

I shake my head, this is a problem for another time.

For now we head back to the colony where I drain all my mana practicing my shaping, getting myself to level nine before taking a well-earned rest.

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 126: Just so skillful

Two days pass quickly in our new environment.

So blissful! So peaceful! I haven't had anything threatening happen to me for over forty eight hours! I could go soft at this rate!

What's even more amusing is watching just how bored Tiny is, the big guy is almost catatonic, craving the stimulus of battle like a drug he's withdrawing from. Other than eating he just flops about sleeping or staring at the walls. He is so still that the workers just crawl over him as he lies there.

To be honest I feel a little bad for him. I can sympathise to some extent. Battling with your life on the line is terrifying but at the same time extremely thrilling, and the rewards provided give such immediate gratification that it becomes hard to resist the lure of combat. After spending time in those dangerous places, living on the edge constantly, our relatively peaceful environment here on the surface is a little.... Boring?

It's like our intense days were filled with shockingly vibrant splashes of colour but now our scene is far more muted and tranquil. Just like Tiny I can also feel the itching in my heart for action.

Unlike that dumb ape though, I know how to keep myself busy and getting stronger even without high level monsters to fight! I keep every day full!

Tiny and I spent most of yesterday down in our monster farming zone. I was pleased to see that the veins had rapidly extended and monsters had already been spawning by the time we got back, the familiar scenes of chaos a welcome sight in my eyes. I gave Tiny an order that he probably never wanted to hear and instructed him to disable the monsters but not kill them.

The horror on this bat face is amusing even now. He couldn't refuse though and reluctantly ran through the small chamber, smashing legs and crippling the monsters without landing the final blow.

It was a horrifying sight actually, all those monsters on the floor, unable to even crawl or defend themselves.

When that job was done I lay down a food trail for the colony and soon a flood of workers poured into the small chamber, finishing off the monsters and carrying their precious Biomass back to the colony.

Tiny and I took a little food to stave off our hunger and then set to digging, expanding the farm a bit further out.

Since Tiny and I are both double evolved monsters and the creatures spawning in our farm are base level, we get a greatly reduced fraction of the Xp and Biomass when we kill and eat them. It just isn't worth it for us to monopolise these resources, especially considering that we need far more experience and Biomass in total to advance when compared to the workforce.

To maximise efficiency I've decided to use the farm to power level the colony, I really want more workers to advance and evolve, then they could fight more effectively without me around.

Tiny and I will have to do something soon about our stagnating levels but what exactly I haven't worked out.

Still, after we expanded the farm and I asked the workers to leave so the monsters could build up again I put my mind to practicing my magic skills.

With the low level monsters popping out in the farm I had a few targets for me to practice my spells on! So far the only 'shape' I'd been able to put into action was the Gravity Domain but there are more tucked away in my head and now I have a moment to test them out!

The first spell I tried required me to shape an intricate ball that tapered to a point on one end. I failed quite a few times on this one I'll admit, but with my Gravitational Mana topped off I was in no risk of running out!

Eventually I was able to finish shaping the complex construction and powered it up. Once it was ready I instinctually aimed it and fired!

The ball like spell zipped through the air at blinding speed and impacted against the monster I'd targeted in less than a second! Once it hit the spell expanded out, encompassing the creature in complex, revolving shapes which collapsed inwards a moment later.

Hoping for something spectacular to happen I was a bit disappointed when the target simply slumped to the ground and lay still. It was still alive since I'd received no notification from him with the fluffy face, so what exactly happened?

After a moment I noticed one of the creature's claws twitching slightly as it struggled to raise it. Then I realised it had been placed under the effect of powerful gravity! So this spell allowed me to fire off a gravity effect to a target further away from me, as opposed to the Domain which only effects those immediately around me!

I called it, Gravity Bolt!

So pleased with that I spent the next hour zapping creatures with Bolts and watching them collapse on the floor, unable to lift a finger until the effect wore off. I found I could change the duration and strength of the effect depending on exactly how much I powered different parts of the construct, which led to my most impressive discovery!

Since I'd been able to identify the section of the construct that powered the effect.... Would I be able to make some changes to that part of the spell in order to modify the effect produced by the spell?

I mean, I was still using Gravitational energy, so the spell would still have a gravity effect, but what if rather than pulling the monsters down.... It pulled them up?

I mean, its gravity right? The force of gravity is produced by the energy in the spell, not the planet we are on... there isn't any reason it HAS to pull them down, right?

It took me ages to rework the spell, even though it was a relatively simple change. I wasn't changing the spell per se, but rather reconstructing one section of it upside down. I only succeeded once in my first practice.

I'd been getting frustrated after a few dozen attempts when finally things started to run smoothly, excitedly I poured my energy into the construct and blasted it towards a newly born centipede the moment it was ready.

Once struck a similar scene appeared, the bolt expanded into the revolving shapes that collapsed into the monster before it suddenly blasted towards the ceiling, impacting the roof with a sickening crunch!

.....

I think I put too much juice in that one....

Still, the effect worked! I was so pleased I did a little dance on the spot! I can really tap now that I have six legs, it has to be said.

If I could successfully remodel the Gravity Domain with the inverted effect then I'd be able to make every monster around me float, helplessly off the ground? I can't wait to try it!

The next day, after feeding the colony again and doing some more digging to expand the farm I got to practicing a second spell.

This shape was a little more demanding than the 'bolt' but eventually I was able to get it formed. Once formed, the construct looked like a spear with several rings rotating around the haft. Rather than the spear shape, those rings were the tricky bit, each one formed of many smaller rings assembled like a maddening puzzle.

When I fired the spear off it zapped out of my body and streaked towards my target. Once impacted the spear stuck in the monster's body whilst the rings expanded outwards, encompassing a small area around the creature before once again collapsing inwards.

The monster appeared rather shocked to suddenly see a spear poking out of its chest. Tentatively it tested the wound with one claw only to realise it wasn't wounded at all! I was a little crestfallen, what the heck does this spear even do?!

Then I noticed something. When the rings had expanded a nearby Thorn Lizard had been caught inside the zone and now that Lizard was being pulled towards my target monster irresistibly!

Eventually the little lizard couldn't resist the pull anymore and flew through the air towards my target, spikes first!

So this spell creates a powerful gravity field around the target monster, pulling nearby creatures towards it! Muahahahaha!

I shall call it.....

Gravity Spear!

....

It's fine!

These tests were not my only labours over the last two days either. Each night before torpor I emptied my core doing shaping practice for hours and hours. On the second night I was finally rewarded!

[Mana Shaping has reached level 10, upgrade available]

YASSSSSSSS! The power is MINE! I even high five myself using my antennae after Tiny leaves me hanging.

[Mana Shaping -> Mana Transformation. cost 1 sp: This skill guides through the complex process of changing raw, non-attribute mana into another kind. With increasing levels this skill will provide greater assistance and proficiency in the process]

Finally! Buy that!

When I confirm the purchase an overwhelming sensation flows over my brain as knowledge comes flooding in.

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 127: Embers

By the System it hurt. It had ever since he'd lost it in that one moment, where the shining picture he had painted of himself had been ripped away along with his limb. Even now, several days later, Beyn was at a loss to explain exactly what had occurred at that time.

The fear that had gripped his heart, when that monster had burst into the middle of his sermon, he could recall it perfectly even now. When the beast had remained so still, so accepting, that fear had been replaced with wonder. It was as if the holy System had been speaking to him directly, offering itself to him, asking that he accept the fruits of its blessed creations!

What joy! What reverence! In that moment Beyn had felt as if he had touched the foot of God!

The surging emotions that had blazed in his heart as he had brought the church scription down on the head of the offering had been so powerful he almost shook now just recalling it.

He had been so wrong.

His visions of a grand destiny, of being a prophet of the system had been torn away as that terrifying monster had darted forth, so quickly he couldn't even see it, and brought those serrated jaws down on his arm, shearing it away with ease.

Since that moment he had barely spoken, the haunting zeal in eyes had intimidated the townspeople to the point they couldn't meet his glare. They had taken him to the apothecary for treatment and left him there, speaking softly as they passed by his door. To be honest he needed no physical healing. The spell performed on him by the godless monster had closed the wound. To do better would require a powerful specialist in the healing arts to regenerate his arm.

Even in his dazed state, laying in his bed, Beyn was able to pick up bits and pieces of information from the nervous conversations he overheard.

There was trouble at the capital, fighting in the streets. People had been fleeing the city until the gates had been barred. The Queen was dead. The Queen was alive. It was a coup, it was an invasion, it was the Dungeon rising for a second cataclysm.

On the second day he heard that the town council had called a meeting to discuss the crises.

Slowly the blood began to stir in Beyn's veins. He couldn't lie here forever. The system, his god, was stirring, he could feel it. He must be a part of the events to come, and he would be! Casting off his blankets, stood and strode out of his room with purposeful steps.

As the wounded priest strode through the town the people subconsciously turned their eyes away, doffing their cap or offering a brief curtsy before moving out of his path. They could not bare to meet the righteous zeal ablaze in his eyes.

The priest marched through the town to the mayors house, sweeping open the door with his good arm and entering with long strides.

Inside a huddle of the town's dignitaries huddled around the desk of a beleaguered fat man, the livery of the mayor hung over his silk robes.

The mayor's eyes brightened when he saw Beyn enter.

"Ah! Look gentlemen, our good priest in the faith has arisen from his convalescence so quickly! This is cause for celebration, we should delay this meeting until after we have properly toasted this happy occasion!"

Several people in the chamber erupted in cheers whilst others sighed, heads falling into hands. The owner of the market, Mrs Ruther, attempted to protest the suspension of discussion but to no avail, the mayor had already called on his servants to go and fetch wine for his guests and be quick about it dammit!

Contempt flickered in Beyn's eyes but he quickly suppressed it. This idiot would do anything to get out of his responsibilities and drink. A few more years of soaking and his family wealth may just run dry, with the wine soon to follow.

"If it please my lord Ebruis, the discussion should not be delayed, it is for the purpose of conversing with you and the council that I have arisen from my rest" Beyn smoothly interjected.

The quivering intensity in his voice was unnerving enough that even Ebruis could not deny it.

"Oh... Oh very well. Are you sure you would not rather rest father Beyn? You do not appear to have even had a chance to change your robes" the mayor spluttered in a feeble attempt to put off his work.

"Do the robes of my faith, marked with the blood I have shed in the name of the System offend you, Lord Mayor?"

The fat man paled in fright before raising his hands and shaking them in protest. "I dare not father! I intended no such thing!"

"Very well then. If I may" at this Beyn took a vacant chair and gestured towards Mrs Ruther, "I would be grateful to you Mrs Ruther if you would appraise me of what has occurred in the last two days. Have the monsters threatened us?"

Somewhat surprised at being called on the elderly matron took a moment to gather her dignity before replying. "They haven't father. We've not seen so much as a leg of those ants since they marched into the forest after you were.... Attacked."

After saying this she quickly met Beyn's gaze before flicking her eyes away, as if scalded by the fire she saw there.

"More troubling than the monsters, as strange as that is to say is the disturbance in the capital. We haven't had a reliable message out of there all day. Fighting in the streets, the soldiers setting fire to the merchant district, blood on the steps of the castle. It sounds dreadful. The people are too scared to work, gazing at the smoke rising over the walls from dawn to dusk!"

With his good hand Beyn gripped his chair so hard his knuckles cracked.

"This disturbance in the capital is more important you say? More important than the agents of the Dungeon rising from beneath our very feet?" more than just passion, hatred now dripped from every word from the priest's mouth, causing those closest from him to draw away from him.

Mrs Ruther gathered herself before she retorted, "there hasn't been a single victim of those monsters in this town but we hear of hundreds dead inside the city. Most of us have family in there father, I'm terribly sorry for your injury, we all are but we've got more pressing issues than those ants!"

At this Beyn rose to his feet and burst out loudly. "For the first time in a thousand years the Dungeon has reached up and delivered its servants to the very surface and you are distracted by petty fighting in the city?! Do you not see the grander destiny that has been laid out before us?"

A few people shifted uncomfortably in their seats at these words. Mayor Ebruis attempted to calm the agitated priest. "You did say something similar at the church two days ago father, and, well, that didn't turn out... so well?"

Beyn turned his blazing righteous gaze on the mayor and then at the others one by one until all had turned from him and were silent.

"At first I believe that the great System had called on us, had blessed this town by delivering his greatest blessing, experience, to raise us up and forge us for a new purpose. I still believe that is the case! This!" here he waved the bandaged stump of his arm in the faces of the council, "was my misjudgement. I had foolishly believed that the System had delivered its fruit to us and all we had to do was pluck it but no, there are no gifts within the System, only rewards! Rewards that are rightly earned and so I was punished for my transgression!"

Ebruis waved his hands to try and relax the priest but it was to no avail.

"We have to take up arms, can you not see that!?" Beyn exhorted the council, "those hideous beasts, led by that demon ant shall return. Not only this, more will come! I assure you! Our trial is not yet complete! The people must be told. We must rise to this test!"

After these words Beyn strode forth, leaving the flabbergasted council behind. He marched to the town square where he began to preach with mesmerising power, stretching the limits of his Oratory skill to bend the hearts of the people.

A crowd slowly gathered, and that evening, when several monsters emerged from the hole in the church he urged the people to arm themselves and led the crowd personally in a great charge up the hill into the building wherein those creatures were defeated.

The people roared in triumph and celebrated their victory but Beyn was unmoved. He asked that a watch be put on the church and turned his gaze towards the forest.

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 128: Core farming

I need cores.

Like, super badly.

I need cores for me, I need cores for Tiny, I need cores for experimenting, I need cores to raise my skills, I need cores to fuse into more powerful cores for myself and for Tiny AND I need cores for my other side project!

CORES!

The number of monster cores we had extracted so far from the farm was a grand total of one! When Tiny and I went in there to cripple the creatures this morning we found a monstrous toad had already slaughtered most of the creatures inside. Tiny had excitedly rushed to engage it, charging up his lightning fist and exploded the foe with one punch.

Luckily he hadn't destroyed the core!

Still, one core every three days is not nearly enough to meet my needs! I refuse!

I just don't have a solution to this problem currently.

Tiny and I are currently resting in the nest. A contented bustle has come over the colony recently as the workers have been busy doing the things that workers love to do. Tending to the brood, expanding the nest, foraging for food. Our new anthill has become impressively large now, the top reaching towards the peak of the trees. I had to ask them not to make it any higher or we'll end up too easy to spot. Our main objective is to hide and ride out the wave after all.

I want no trouble, be it human or otherwise.

To my delight, the pupae have started to hatch over the last few hours, hundreds of new workers emerging to swell the ranks of the colony. When this generation finally emerges we will have reached the one thousand worker mark! A milestone in the life of a young colony to be sure.

This is nothing though. If we expand the farm a little and keep the supply of Biomass coming it won't be long until we reach two thousand, five thousand, one hundred thousand!

That was the other exciting thing to happen this morning, the Queen finally awoke from her rest. After a massive feed provided to her by the workers she got busy producing the next generation. Even as I rest I can hear the workers scurrying about madly with fresh clutches of eggs, stashing them into the egg chambers, fastidiously cleaning them and ensuring they are the right temperature.

This means I means I need to advance the schedule of my project even faster. For that though... I have to have cores!

As I clack my mandibles in irritation I'm suddenly distracted by a noise. Turning around I see that it isn't Tiny snoring for once, though he is asleep, thick meaty arms flung over his face like a hairy teenager. The noise instead came from the pupa stashed with us in our private chamber.

The cocoon has already begun to take on a distinct thin shade as the young larva inside has gone through its remarkable metamorphosis, transforming from a grub and into an ant. Still ghostly white and translucent as its carapace has yet to harden the almost complete worker has started to slowly move, twitching its limbs and stretching out for the first time.

I guess I'll help the little thing out. It is normal for other workers to assist newborns break free of their cocoon, cutting away at the threads with their mandibles. The very first workers in the colony will have this task performed for them by the Queen herself.

I think I can vaguely recall having to bite my own way out, but I don't really have any memory of my pupal stage, I really only became aware of myself after I had emerged.

At any rate, I cheerfully help out the new member of our colony, my sibling no less, break out of the casing by chomping away at the outside carefully, removing sections of threads at a time and clearing the way for the hatchling to emerge.

Gradually I see a little ant face poking out of the gaps and after a few minutes the brand new worker stands proudly before atop its own casing!

...

Small!

Why the heck is this worker so small!? She looks smaller than a normal hatchling by about a third, which makes her very tiny indeed! There is something else odd about her as well. I'm not sure exactly what it is, as a worker she seems a little, energetic? She is practically bouncing around already and she only just hatched!

I remember as a grub this one had a lot of pep but this seems ridiculous.

Before I'm even finished internally complaining about this high energy hatchling she starts wagging her antennae around before locking onto me and rushing in my direction! In a few short moments she has raced across the ground and scrambled up onto my back before triumphantly positioning herself between my antennae and thwacking them insistently with her own.

....

This.

...

I hate thiiiiiiiis.

Why the hell is this ant so attached to me?! Why is it so different than the others?

I honestly don't know what to make of this behaviour.

This worker is just so odd. Out of sheer curiosity I flip on my mana sense and extend my mind out of my body. There is a faint concentration of mana in a place that I did not expect. Right on top of my head.

Are you kidding me Gandalf?! This little midget was born with a core?! Tell me it isn't true!

I struggled for that core, I worked hard for that rock! Now you're telling me that a monster ant can just flat out be born with a core? Tell me, swear on your pointy hat and rad staff with the shiny crystal on it that it isn't so!

Despite my protests my new passenger remains stubbornly clung to my head, core on board.

Sigh.

I will have to investigate this later.

For now I poke Tiny awake and make my way out of the nest, tiny hatchling excitedly riding on my scalp the entire way.

Trying to put the distraction out of my mind I try to turn my mind back to most pressing issue.

Cores!

Damn worker on my head... No! Don't get distracted!

From what I know a monster can form a core when they are sufficiently saturated with mana and then sacrifice an evolution in order to form it. How the freeloader on my scalp managed to get enough mana before she was even born, not to mention the evolutionary energy acquired by amassing levels. I'll have to put this exception to the rules to one side and focus on what I know!

I myself increased my mana concentration by drinking mana infused water, which judging by how the monsters were addicted to that stuff it isn't an unusual way for monsters to get dat mana.

Soooo. If I can introduce a source of mana water to the farm it might have an effect in increasing the number of monsters able to form a core?

Worth a shot!

Fortunately I created the farm right next to a source of mana water! So convenient...

When we return to the pond I see a few Branchies standing in small groups but they quickly scatter and hide after we arrive. I swear there are a few new young trees growing near the edge of the pond. Have they been planting baby branchies here?!

Hmm. I'll have to be careful not to disturb their local environment. For all I know the branchies require this pond to sustain their lives. Better to be cautious.

In the end I excavate a shallow channel that leads to the farm tunnel and I get Tiny to line the bottom with stones that he smashes flat. We then head down into the farm and disable all of the monsters before hollowing out a small pool directly under the tunnel entrance.

Hopefully this works!

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 129: Transform and roll ou

After digging our narrow channel to the farm tunnel I get Tiny to place two large stones to act as the dam before we dig out the last of the soil and the water begins to flow. I notice a few branchies have poked their heads out of their trees, watching our activities. I think perhaps they may worried about us interfering with the pond.

I try to give a reassuring wave of my antennae but I'm not sure that will be enough to allay their fears. I guess we can only show that we mean no harm by executing the plan and letting them see how harmless it is.

Workers have started coming over to the pond in the last few days in order to drink the mana water. With the farm nearby it isn't surprising that the scouts have managed to forage their way over here. Naturally once one ant finds something good the rest will soon know about it. I was a little concerned that there might be conflict but for the most part the ants have simply ignored any branchie they've found, probably not seeing much, if any Biomass in them.

I'm quite excited though. This will help more workers form their cores which will in turn cause them to grow even stronger when they evolve.

When everything is in place Tiny picks up our damming rock and the mana infused water flows down our channel before eventually falling into our pre-dug basin within the farm. After a minute or so Tiny drops the rock back into position with a splash and the water ceases to flow.

The branchies, who had seemed a little alarmed when the water was flowing out of their pond, relax and move back towards their trees, quickly melding out of sight.

I head straight over to the farm to see how the monsters within have reacted. Sure enough, those who have just spawned are immediately attracted to the water source. No water truce to be seen here though. They rabidly fight over it, shovelling the water into their mouths as quickly as they can.

I retreat back up the tunnel. I'll lead the workers down to collect the Biomass later, hopefully we will have a core or two to show for our efforts.

With this job done it is time to turn my attention back to my new skill and its applications. After maxing out Mana Shaping I gained Mana Transformation, the much anticipated and eagerly awaited skill!

After reading the description and then slowly digesting the dump truck of knowledge and instincts the skill dropped in my brain I've been gradually building an understanding of it.

This skill will finally allow me to change the raw mana stored in my core into other, useful types, without relying on the short cut of having an organ do the job for me. Only issue is, changing the mana into a specific type is painfully complicated!

I'm still nibbling at the edges of what was placed in my brain. This skill was by far the biggest information overload I've had from a single purchase.

If I were to use a metaphor, transforming mana into a specific type is like learning an instrument that is so intricate that it requires the use of both hands, both feet and your face to play it. From what I understand so far you need to be shifting the mana in complex patterns through multiple dimensions in order for it to change!

Dimensions!

It only gets worse though. If you manage to master that obscenely complex instrument well enough that you can efficiently transform the mana into the required type and THEN use that mana to shape and fuel a spell, that is only for one type.

If you want to transform your mana into another type, there is an entirely new fiendish instrument to learn and this one requires you to play it with your butt cheeks as well!

Not to mention, I've only been looking at the techniques required for relatively simple mana forms, like water or fire. When I tried to think about what I would need to do for space magic I nearly passed out just thinking about it.

This only reinforces my confidence that the gravity magic organ was a good choice. Not only is the complicated process of transformation handled for me, it is done well before any spell casting takes

place. This also goes a long way to explaining why the magic organs are priced so highly. Getting a free choice just goes to show how potent the special evolutions really are!

This all leads to the unfortunate reality of what I have to do next. To my mind it is quite obvious what I have to focus my transformation learning on, mind magic! I need to be able to communicate just like Formo and the Sophos do! This will bridge the final hurdle in being able to universally speak to anything that I can come across if I'm able to pass my intentions on directly from mind to mind!

Only problem is that mind magic is a fiendishly complex transformation. At least three or four times harder than doing something like fire.

But it must be done! I have my gravity magic and a reasonably powerful physical body already, at least, powerful enough for the time being. Once I've achieved mastery of mind magic I'll be able to focus my efforts unilaterally on pumping up my firepower!

The other thing I need to do is spend some time on manipulating my cores and grinding levels in Core Engineering. An ants work is never done!

I'm excited though. Even if I'm not gaining levels, my strength is improving and I'm able to spend time on critical skills that I wasn't able to before. This will prepare me for the time Tiny and I descend into the Dungeon once more to fight!

We return to the nest, my impatient passenger included, and I spend time laboriously shifting values in my cores until I cannot force further changes before tossing them to Tiny to absorb.

He's finally learned enough that I don't have to beat his head in before he realises what he needs to do. Progress! After I've finished with one core and slump forward with mental exhaustion the little hatchling on my head excitedly leaps forward to touch the core with her antennae. With a brief flash and a pop the core vanishes into thin air!

...

Oi.

Who said that was yours!? I use my antennae to give the worker a gentle thwack on the head but she seems non fussed, happily wiggling back and forth as she enjoys the sensation of her reinforced core. After a few moments she happily climbs back up onto my head.

...

I guess it doesn't matter that much. Since she was born with a core already this one is probably worth spending the resources on to raise up strong. In fact, wouldn't she be able to perform a special evolution for her very first change? That is something even I wasn't able to do! Hardly my fault since I didn't know about it but still, this little worker could end up being very strong if I invest some energy.

Although this just increases the need for cores even further.

Dammit!

Since I'm exhausted anyway I take Tiny back to the farm and we disable all of the monsters in there. I make sure to practice using my magic and fire off a number of Gravity Bolts, trying to increase my familiarity with the spell.

This time, instead of taking our food and leaving I tap the little ant on my head with an antennae to get her attention.

"Climb down off there and go finish some of the off".

The workers seem to be able to understand the pheromone speak even if they can't speak it so I'm assuming this one can too. Sure enough, after hopping back and forth indecisively the little worker jumps off my head and savagely attacks with her tiny mandibles.

Despite her enemy being a blade tailed mouse that has been completely crippled it take almost a minute of biting before the poor creature finally falls still and the little ant poses victoriously atop her victim.

"Yes, yes, very impressive. Now onto the next one".

All in all she is able to finish three monsters before tiring out. That much should be fine for a start. Her bite skill should have increased and at least one level, maybe two with that much experience.

Next I flick on my mana sense and I am so pleased to see that there are two creatures with cores in here! Two!

Compared to before this is a massive increase! If I can get two cores a day I'll be dancing with joy! The basin of mana water has decreased by about a quarter so I may need to refill it in a few more days, hopefully that won't strain the pond supply up there at all. If it does we will have to pull back on the operation but for now, cores ahoy!

Filled with delight I crunch those two monsters and dig out their cores before Tiny, the worker and I retreat back above ground to enjoy our feast as a team of workers advances into the farm to claim their experience and Biomass.

These few days have been so productive and peaceful, I'll have to enjoy it whilst I can. If my experience in this world has taught me anything it's that the good times won't last.

ANT TALK

There were a few questions in the comments after the last chapter where I referred to the little worker as 'she' and a few comments about ant reproduction so I'll get a little sciency and answer them here. The authors note section doesn't allow for long messages so I'll pop my response here instead.

Technically all of the workers in a colony are female. This includes Anthony. I didn't really want to make a big deal out of his gender but I did want to be accurate, so I thought it would be funny if he only realised he had changed later on. His physical gender isn't going to be a big deal going forward in the story but he will change it in the System if he gets a chance! For those worried that the story will turn into some kind of ant harem story... no need to worry on that front. He's into elves anyway.

As for ant reproduction. Male ants have wings, just like young Queens. For a few weeks a year the Queens and males will go on a 'nuptial flight' where they meet up with Queens and males from nearby colonies and mate with them. The males will then crawl off and die whilst the Queens will land, rip off

their own wings and dig a chamber for themselves to start their own new colony. For most species of ants, this is the only time the Queen will mate in her life. The genetic material she collected on that one flight will last her entire life, which can be decades.

The Queen in our story doesn't need to mate at all, as she is instead a special monster spawned from the dungeon that is able to spawn new monsters in turn.

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 130: Whispers in the dark

After spending time eating and attempting to train mana transformation, my small crew have a snooze and awake to work once more! Since we began napping in the afternoon it's now solidly night time. The forest is beautiful and ethereal in the moonlight, only made slightly less so by the trails of monster ants wandering about.

After assisting the colony farm once more, and returning with another core, I decide it is time to pay a visit to the town from which we had rather spectacularly made our entrance to the surface world. I hope that guy who's arm I accidentally separated from his torso is doing well. I mean, life goes on with a single arm, right?

Although we won't be able to see that much in the dark I don't want to risk showing up in the day and potentially being spotted. It'll be best to minimise the potential for future limb removal type misunderstandings.

As we travel, Tiny the little ant and I, no time is wasted as I practice my gravity spells as we travel. I might not be able to grind shaping levels anymore but familiarity with the spell still counts and casting on the move is so much harder than casting standing still.

My magical skills grow with every passing day!

Eventually we come to the edge of the forest and I ask Tiny to remain in the trees, his hulking form isn't suitable for slinking through the wheat fields and staying unnoticed. With my little passenger on board I utilise my vaunted stealth techniques to creep through the farm fields towards to the buildings in the distance.

When we arrive at the town darkness has fallen over the land like a blanket. As we draw nearer to the town however, I'm gratified to notice it is surprisingly well lit. actually, its strangely well lit.

As in, what the hell is with this enormous fire!?

In front of the church a massive bon fire is blazing surrounded by what appears to be a lively crowd of people. They are all holding crude weapons in hand and even at this distance I can see that they seem possessed of a fierce energy.

Relying on my impressive stealth, I creep closer until I'm less than thirty metres away from the edge of the buildings and then I hunker down still to maximise the passive stealth bonus. In the dark, with my skills and nearly black carapace I'm going to be almost impossible to spot, surely. I'll just have to keep my claws crossed they don't have monster detecting gems here.

Actually, with their faces illuminated by the red glow of the crackling flames, pitchforks and rusty spears clutched tightly in their hands, they look a little demonic over there. Then I notice a voice rising above the background noise, filled with conviction and energy.

Just in front of the church I spot my old pal the priest. At this distance it's a little hard to tell but I think he's still wearing the same bloodied robes he was wearing when I first... met him. He is standing in front of the church's main double doors, one good arm flung to the sky as he exhorts the people below. Every now and again his voice rises to soaring crescendo and the people shout and roar back to him, shaking their weapons and pumping their fists in the air.

I mean, seems lively over there at least. Just, what the heck is going on over there?!

Then the doors are pulled open and a group of villagers emerge from within carrying something between them.

The men approach the bonfire as the people fall silent and fall back out of their way. With a mighty heave they throw their burden onto the leaping flames and the crowd roars in approval as the fire roars and flickers.

...

I'm pretty sure that was a monster corpse.

It's nice that the village is safe and they are able to take care of themselves but they seem a little too into it? Perhaps this is just a very civically minded town?

Being able to defend themselves for now is nice and all but my worry is that these people will end up taking on something they can't handle. If another Jellymaw crawled up out of that hole in the ground would these townspeople and farmers be able to handle that? Shouldn't there be some soldiery looking types here by now? Dedication is all well and good but do they really think a rusty pitchfork is going to do the job against the real Dungeon monsters?

Scanning the faces of the people they all look determined and passionate, it seems like they are all in fending off the Dungeon monsters, which seems fine, I guess?

Towards the back I spy an older lady who doesn't look quite as pumped up as the rest. If I were to try and describe her expression I would probably have to say 'concerned' or 'worried'. Her hands are tightly gripping her skirts and she stares down at the frenzied crowd.

Perhaps she shares my concern that the townspeople may be getting a little ahead of themselves.

Perhaps she isn't a bonfire person.

At any rate, approaching a frenzied mob any closer than this doesn't seem advisable. Time to retreat.

Just as I'm turning to leave I notice that my head is feeling a bit breezy. Did someone open a window or something? Have I gone bald? I'm fairly certain I never had hair in the first place.

Wait.

Where is the little one?!

Using my antennae I slap my head and back before turning to scout through the surrounding wheat. Where the heck did that little scoundrel go?!

Panic is starting to rise in my chest. That is a promising young ant! Where the heck is she?!

The core! She has a core! Quick as a flash I flip on my mana sense and reach out with my mind, desperately seeking that tiny mana source. There it is! Threading its way between the wheat stalks I spot the little gem.

The problem is that its heading directly towards that roaring flame!

What are you a moth!?

You do NOT need to run towards any flame you see! Like a gazelle loose in the fields I spring after my curious sibling, all thought of minimising noise lost!

Even they spot me I can get away but she'll be squashed for sure!

She has managed to creep within just ten metres of the people towards the back of the crowd. My heart is thudding with my chest, if they spot her there could be serious trouble here tonight. It's one thing if they try and bash my head in, the little one is a different story, they'll cave her head in easily!

And if that happened.... I honestly don't know what I'd do.

Come back here you little trouble maker!

I keep flicking my mana sense on and off so I can track the back and forth movements of the mischievous little ant. When I finally draw close enough, after what feels like years I dive forward, six legs extended behind me and mandibles wide.

I GOT YA!

As gently as I can I snatch up the escaped worker in my mandibles, a situation she protests by wiggling fiercely.

"Stay still you trouble maker! They'll kill you if they find you!"

Fortunately I can shout as I much as I want in pheromone language, I don't make a sound.

I quickly glance about.

Hopefully we weren't noticed?