

## Chrysalis 1227

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#### Chapter 1227: When Endless Battle Becomes Routine

The waves in the Dungeon are terrifying occurrences, really. I mean, monsters start leaping out the walls and floors, and it can be very difficult to determine when and where that's going to happen. Not to mention the strata become absolutely *flooded* with ravenous, crazed beasts, driven into a frenzy by the close proximity of other monsters and the never-ending violence.

I can only imagine what it's like elsewhere in the Dungeon, the various kingdoms of humans, ka'armodo, golgari, brathian and whoever else is out there bunkering down to weather the storm. Imagine being a civilian at a time like this! Knowing that there were billions and billions of monsters spawning each and every day, every single one of which would be able to gobble you up like a snack. Spooky.

The Colony has become a gigantic society of ant monsters with millions of members, but even for us, it's difficult!

As the hours pass and the fighting grinds on and on, I catch the scent of many conversations between the various castes, each with their own woes. The healers are still constantly stretched to breaking point, having to ration their healing fluid and magic. Many, many ants are sent to the hospitals with very curable wounds simply because Biomass and time will heal them just fine, saving more scarce resources for the seriously injured.

And there are lots of seriously injured.

The monsters of the fourth are unlike anything we've seen before. There's fewer of them, but they are much larger and stronger than, say, the average shadow beast. Dinosaur-looking things, elemental creatures of pure energy, rhinoceros covered in fire, snakes made of ice. I even fought a gorilla monster covered in a layer of liquid metal! What the heck is that!? I wish Tiny had seen it. If it impressed him enough, he might actually include some defence in his next evolution.

From one moment to the next, the ants have no idea what is coming for them, forcing them to adapt on the fly, and it isn't always possible to come out the other side in one piece. It actually scares me because these monsters, created by the waves, are low in level and rank. The real monsters are out there, feasting on the weaker prey, holed up in their own little pockets of territory. What might they be capable of?

The carvers are annoyed in a less direct way than the healers. During the wave, all of the Colony's mines, fields and harvesting locations are shut down, out of reach. The ants will dutifully serve the Colony with joy, of course, but they'd rather be crafting, building new nests, toiling away on major infrastructure or working on the millions of artistic projects that pop up all over the fortress than repairing the same walls and traps over and over again.

Even the core shapers are unhappy. It's hard for them to leave the nest during a wave, especially in the fourth, so they're trapped without a lot to do. Some generals are doing a great job folding them into their ranks, seizing on the flexibility that they offer, but others, not so much. So far, the Colony hasn't settled on a doctrine that includes the core shapers and implemented it Colony-wide, and that might be

a blind spot of Victor and Sloan. I'm pleased to see that Solant has leapt at the opportunity, working closely with a team of shapers to craft pets that suit her needs.

I'm keen to see what comes of it.

"How are you doing out there, Eldest? Need a rest soon?"

One of the soldiers holding the tunnel behind me calls out. I just finished off a weird smoke leopard thing, so I shift slightly to check the situation behind me. There's a small taskforce back there, a couple hundred ants, but obviously the generals have sent the bulk of the troops holding this tunnel to other locations to make better use of them. They'll need a bit of warning before I go and rest to defend this entrance properly.

"How long have I been out here?" I ask.

My sense of time is a bit fuzzy. I plonked myself here a while ago, and I've just been fighting and eating since then. With so many ants nearby, I simply don't get tired; my body feels as fresh as a daisy.

"It's been a bit over two days, Eldest."

"Two days?!"

Yikes. I had no idea. It's unlike me to work this hard without realising it! I quickly check my Skills and see that I'm getting Levels into the right places. At least my grinding is paying off, though some are harder to raise than others. My minds are constantly churning the mana around me, and every time I inject a monster with gravity, I strain to bursting in an attempt to weave it. With a little luck, I might hit those fusions before the wave finishes.

"Yes, Eldest. The generals were wondering if they should relieve you in this location."

It's not a good look if everyone else has to rest constantly but I don't. On the other hand, I'm the only one with my unique method of eliminating fatigue. Still, I should take a break, for appearance's sake.

"Tell them I'll need to be relieved in twelve hours," I instruct, and the soldier dips her antennae before relaying the message down the line.

I'm sure a full army will be here in less than half that time, which is fine.

It's amazing how quickly someone can get used to basically endless fighting. Life in the Dungeon is a struggle at the best of times, but right now, during a wave, struggle is the only thing you can do, there isn't time for anything else.

I feel a growing disturbance in the gravity around me and waggle my antennae a bit to pinpoint the source. It isn't easy to track it down—I'm not *that* sensitive to gravity, considering how weak a force it is, but I find the spot eventually.

Shortly after, the stone and dirt explodes outwards, showering me in it and scuffing my precious carapace. A writhing mass of fanged vines erupts from the ground, lashing out and trying to latch onto me but unable to find purchase on my exo-skeleton. I still have to rapidly shift my head to prevent my eyes from getting bitten, though, and tracking so many moving parts with my future sense is difficult.

Lousy monster. Get chomped!

I lunge forward, bringing my mandibles down and shearing through the newborn creature in a single bite, barely even listening to Gandalf reading out the notification.

It's going to be like this for a while yet. Weeks maybe. I sigh. May as well get back to it.