

## Chrysalis 141

### [Chrysalis](#)

#### Chapter 141: The Queen

Seeing that unwilling flicker of eye movement I'm reminded of the mysterious heat I'd detected a few moments ago. I still can't see anything occupying that space but even though one of my antennae is still in the process of regenerating, I can still detect that there is some random heat emanating from that space.

What the heck is it?!

In the heat of the moment I don't have much time to decide my course of action. Any second that mage is going to start casting her spells again! I refuse to be diverted and continue using almost all of my mental energy on the construction of my Gravity Bolt. This one happens to be inverse. We'll see how well this mage can cast spells when she's one thousand feet up!

In order to throw her off balance I still lunge forward with my mandibles, activating my shattering bite skill as I do so! The ethereal mandibles that are manifestations of my stamina lash out through the air, closing rapidly on the mage. The warriors might be able to resist this attack but I highly doubt a mage can! Not without some sort of barrier at any rate.

The old woman shocks me by nimble rolling under my strike, expertly tucking her staff flat against her stomach to avoid it catching on anything as she completes the motion and stands ready to strike at me, staff extended!

Yikes!

I hastily leap forward and narrowly dodge a lance of ice that materialises from the tip of her staff and streaks through the air like an arrow, smashing into the ground just behind me.

Close!

I can't help but note that when she made her dodge roll she managed to place herself in between me and the mysterious heat source. She is clearly trying to protect it! This only piques my interest. If she is willing to put herself in harm's way for that thing then it may be able to swing the outcome of this battle!

With a start I realise that my own spell is prepared! Have a taste of this delicacy, mage!

Ducking low as if I were about to pounce I instead fire the Inverse Gravity Bolt directly at the mage's torso. Caught by surprise she doesn't have time to dodge and her eyes flicker with shock as, instead of the wild leap I'd threatened, this bolt of magic has been fired at her.

Twitching her wrist around with incredible speed she places the tip of her staff in the way of the bolt and manages to catch it somehow! The Inverse Gravity Bolt remains pushing against the staff as the mage's face quickly becomes mask of concentration as she uses her staff and then her other hand to press back against my spell!

Is that even possible?!

Luckily I hadn't sat on my behind just in case this spell wasn't effective and I'm already on the move, rushing forward with my mandibles open to strike!

Shattering Bite!

Trying not to get too close in case she can do something ridiculous like rebound my own spell at me, I marshal my spirit and crunch down on the mage's leg, crushing it between my mandibles!

With a despairing cry she falls to one side, finally deflecting my spell into a nearby tree that immediately starts to pull at its roots in the ground, attempting to rise into the sky.

Now's my chance!

Dashing forward I rush towards the heat source that I can feel recoiling back from me somewhat like a person would? What the hell?!

I feel a tugging at my foot and realise that the mage has reached out desperately to grasp my leg in her hand. As soon as she grabs me ice begins to form on my leg, rushing up towards my body.

You are too persistent!

Shattering Bite!

[You have slain level 46 High mage]

[You have gained experience]

[You have gone up a level, one skill point awarded]

My freakin' leg feels like it has been put in the deep freeze! As I continue to move toward the heat source it directly shatters! I don't even care, keep moving, every second counts!

Behind me the battle has continued at its ferocious pace. Tiny and the human soldier are continuing to batter at each other and it is becoming clear that Tiny is gaining the upper hand. He still doesn't have a full tank of electricity but there is enough for him to wreath his fists in lightning and punch out against the shield.

Every time his fists batter against the shield lightning rips through it, leaping onto the warrior's body and shocking him with every blow. The warrior appears to have formidable resistance, but each mighty fist wears him down that little bit more.

Not that he hasn't been able to strike back. Tiny is sporting cuts all over his body, bleeding profusely where the blade has managed to flash out like a striking snake between blocks. The difference between the two is that Tiny isn't running out of strength, his huge frame is able to sustain this much damage, at least for now.

I really need to get the big guy to invest in a regeneration gland. His Might stat must be out of this world but I'm beginning to suspect his Toughness is in the tank. If he doesn't have much on the defensive side then the regeneration gland would really help him out in a situation like this where he isn't able to defeat his opponent in just a few strikes.

What really worries me is the warriors against the Queen and the rest of the colony. The scene is so chaotic over there I can't make out what is happening. I hope to heck they are ok over there!

Whatever this mysterious heat source is, it had better help resolve this situation. It has to be something good if that mage was willing to die for it!

The closer I get and the further my antennae regenerate the more clearly I can sense this heat source. It is starting to feel more and more like a person, on the ground, crawling away from me?

I can't see a single thing in front of me?!

Don't tell me ... Invisibility?!

Pouncing suddenly I leap forward and land over the top of the heat source. Whoever this person is they are collapsed beneath me now, I can sense their hands are raised to protect their face.

I don't think this person is very good at fighting.

A sneaking suspicion is starting to tickle the edges of my mind.

I can't hesitate, my family is being killed every second!

Using my antennae to rapidly tap here and there I manage to locate what I think is this person's neck and I reach forward with my mandibles, bringing them closed just enough that I can force this invisible person to move without harming them.

With this done I raise the invisible form up from the ground. Whoever it is, they 'aint heavy!

With the chaos battle ringing in my ears I turn back towards the fighting and shake my prisoner slightly. Thankfully, whoever I have hold of manages to get my message.

The invisibility falls away to reveal my mandibles gripping the neck of an elderly lady dressed in simple but elegant robes. Most importantly, her head is decorated with a seriously expensive looking crown!

Somehow, even with a monsters jaws gripping her by the neck this lady manages to maintain a solemn dignity, appearing neither upset nor fearful in this critical moment.

The solider battling against Tiny is the first to notice and screams something in a despairing tone, drawing the eyes of every human towards me. He tries to turn from Tiny and rush towards me but I flex my mandibles threateningly, holding my prisoner threateningly before me.

He seemed stunned by my display of intelligence and backs up, turning away only when Tiny attacks again, threatening his life.

"Everyone back off! Step away!"

[Tiny, back up a second!]

I shout at my allies until they accede to my request, giving both sides a little breathing room. The soldiers all turn to face me, their faces filled with panic and fear as I threaten what I can only presume is the life of their ruler.

What the hell are these people doing in this forest in the first place?!

When I finally get a chance to look, I can see that many ants have been destroyed by these warriors. Even the giant form of mother is listing to one side, heavily wounded.

Rage is ignited in my heart. These people will pay!

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 142: The path forward**

With the human Queen locked between my jaws there is little the soldiers can do to prevent me from giving her a fatal haircut if I so choose.

The power is in my hands/claws!

Unfortunately for these soldiers the rage in my heart is burning furiously after witnessing the damage they've done to my family. I have no idea how many ants have been destroyed by these invaders, the Queen herself has been wounded by their blades.

I demand vengeance!

The soldiers are talking amongst themselves now, faces tight with worry as they try to work out how to deal with this situation. I don't want to give them enough time to formulate a plan. If they decided to threaten the ant queen then we might end up in a stand-off instead of this situation where I have the clear advantage.

I step forward aggressively, the human Queen swaying in the grasp of my mandibles, her feet dragging on the ground as she tries to keep her feet under her. When the soldiers see me treating their royalty so poorly they react angrily, clutching at their weapons and yelling at me in their language.

In response I flex my mandibles around her neck menacingly. In an attempt to communicate my demands I use one of my antennae to point several times at the ground.

Put your weapons down!

The soldiers look back and forth between themselves, confused by my gesture. I don't think they expect to be able to engage in any sort of dialogue with a monster and I don't really blame them. I get the impression that intelligent monsters do exist but the feeling I have is that those monsters wouldn't want to play nice with any creatures on the surface. From what I've seen of monsters so far I can only imagine they put that higher intelligence to the task of inventing ways to kill people more efficiently.

Clearly in this situation they don't know what to do.

Once again I flex my mandibles forcefully and point several times to the ground with both antennae this time.

Put your weapons down!

There is real fear in the faces of these soldiers. Not for themselves but for the life of the person I hold between my mandibles. They know there is very little chance that they can find a positive way out of this mess.

They talk back and forth for a few seconds before the soldier who had been battling Tiny shouts at the others and then lies down on the ground. Seeing his example the others reluctantly comply, lying face down on the ground.

....

Ok sure. That works too.

[Tiny, walk over to them and take their weapons and shields away]

With them lying down we can reduce them as a threat by removing their equipment, this will help bring everything even further under control. Perfect.

As I'm congratulating myself on my chess like moves I eventually notice that Tiny hasn't moved. Focusing my attention on him I realise that he's still standing still, looking at me with a confused expression.

[What are those?] he asks.

Oh boy.

[Take away the pointy metal things, like what that guy stabbed you with, and their big metal boards which he used to block your punches!] I try to explain exasperatedly.

He stares at me with incredible intensity, the thoughts ticking over in his mind with excruciating slowness. Come on man!

Slowly he turns and stomps towards the soldier he had fought with, probably the leader or captain of these men, looking at me all the while. Then he slowly bends down towards the nervous soldier and grasps the sword between two of his thick fingers, glancing back to me like a child wondering if they'd done the right thing.

[Yes! That is the sword! Good job Tiny!] I praise him.

His bat face splits in a wide grin and he picks the sword up and brings it to me, placing it carefully at my feet as if he were a dog playing fetch. Now that knows what he's doing he manages to go to each soldier and take their sword, bringing them back to me one by one before he tries to work out what the shield is. When he eventually figures it out he collects them one by one again, bringing them to me and completing his small pile of equipment in front of me.

It takes almost ten minutes for him to get it all done.

[Good job Tiny] I say exhaustedly.

He seems immensely pleased with himself. Just how low is your cunning stat, seriously?!

With all of the soldiers disarmed I feel a lot safer. With their incredible sword skills just how many of my fellow workers have been destroyed? I refuse to let them off.

Moving slowly I start to take the Queen towards the nest, allowing her to walk steadily as she matches my movement. The soldiers look on with worried eyes as I take their Queen away from their line of sight. When one of them tries to turn his head to watch me move I furiously point at him with an antennae until he turns back around.

As I draw closer the true extent of the damage that has been done in this battle has been exposed. As many as one hundred workers have been killed, their bodies sliced apart by the devastating sword light of their opponents.

These individual ants are simply too weak to fight against high level enemies like these. They aren't intelligent enough to use tactics and they aren't strong enough to push through the front. If there had been more numbers, say one thousand ants, perhaps they would have been able to swarm over the barrier and break it down. Then again, perhaps the mages would have been able to hold on long enough for these few humans to destroy thousands of my kind.

It isn't good enough!

This shocking occurrence has clearly shown that against high level opponents the colony will only be able to achieve victory at the cost of many lives. For a normal monster ant colony that may be fine, victory whilst throwing away the individual workers or treating them as disposable. If I have accepted that the workers of this colony are my family members, my siblings, then I refuse to let them die so simply.

This will be the last time.

[Tiny, I want you to bring that guy you were fighting over to the nest. Then I want you to come back out here and destroy the others].

The big ape nods, smiling happily.

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 143: Mind games**

Only now do I remember my two passengers that I'd thrown off in a rush. Poor Crinis! The little thing can't even see!

[Crisis! Crisis! Where are you?!] I frantically yell in my mental channel.

Turning quickly I unceremoniously drag the Queen this way and that until I notice some movement in the grass on the forest floor. Rushing over I see several little tentacles extended straight up, wiggling frantically.

There it is!

I carefully place one of my legs so that it is just touching the seeking limbs.

[It's me! Climb up!]

Moments later a much more relaxed blob is resting on my back and a very small worker has emerged from behind a nearby tree to climb up onto my head. Mini crew assembled I return, Queen in tow, to the scene of the carnage.

Surrounded by the remains of her own deceased children the Queen isn't looking good. A horde of workers are rushing about her, their anxiety is plain in their disjointed movements, darting backwards and forwards, unsure what they should do to help the situation.

The human Queen seems rather unhappy about being this close to such a massive monster but I hardly care. Her people are what caused this problem, if she gets uncomfortable I'll shed no tears. If she tries to harm the real Queen then she will very quickly regret it.

"Mother! Are you ok?!" I cry.

In my mind I hadn't imagined she could be injured this badly, she'd always seemed so indestructible that even if I worried about her getting injured, I hadn't really believed it would happen.

Her super hard carapace met its match in those devastating sword skills today, numerous cuts and gashes mar her body, some of them very deep.

"I will ... be ok" she replies, her usual calm voice strained to the limit.

"Can you heal yourself? Cast some magic?" I urge her worriedly.

She doesn't reply for a moment, her great body heaving as she labours to draw in air.

"No .... Strength" she manages finally.

No strength!? What the heck does that mean? She can't concentrate enough to cast the spell? Does she not have enough mana?! This is really bad!

Becoming more concerned every moment I start to tap up and down her wounds with my antennae almost without thinking about it, my ant instincts kicking in and overriding my more rational behaviour as I try to scramble for a solution.

Holy heck!

One of these cuts is way too deep! Right in the center of her thorax a deep and wide wound has opened in her carapace, within the wound I'm sure I can see something glittering.

Is that her core?!

A chill strikes me to the bone. Had that skill gone any further then it might have damaged the core directly, something I feel very confident would be immediately fatal to a monster. Just a few more inches and mother would have perished.

Appalled by the thought I turn on my mana sense and examine her core. Usually blazing bright, her core is more of a dim ember right now. Why is her core so weak?! It should be full of mana and packed with energy! Is this why she seems so weak? Is there something wrong with her core?

Desperate to make a difference I start pulling all of the mana I can out of my own core and sending it in a stream of mist towards the Queens. Without knowing if it will help in any way I persist until my core has almost been tapped completely dry of mp before I flick on my mana sense again and anxiously seek any changes.

There is a slight different I think? The response I get seems a little more energetic this time.

Is she not getting enough mana in her core?

"Take the Queen into the farm!" I shout as loudly as I can to all of the surrounding workers, "rush in there and destroy everything and then take mother inside and protect her!"

If she needs more mana then placing her inside the farm is going to be the best place we can find in the short term. If the workers pack in there tightly enough then there is practically no chance that a monster will be able to spawn and have a chance of hurting the Queen.

"As soon as you can you need to heal yourself!" I urge the Queen, "your injuries are very serious!"

I'm worried she'll start trying to heal the injured workers before she bothers to cast the spell on herself. She is usually selfless to a fault!

She begins to carry herself away, slowly and painfully moving towards the farm. Half the colony has assembled to help her, many workers walking straight under her and using their own backs to lift up their parent, trying to help her take the weight of her feet.

I watch her go, still very concerned.

I have other work to do right now though. I'll have to trust that my siblings will be able to complete the task they've been given.

Tiny is already on his way back to the battlefield to complete his task. He has already transported the officer to the top of the anthill where several workers have surrounded him, tapping him with antennae and taking the odd nibble as he resolutely lies face down in the dirt.

"Watch him and don't let him move", I tell the workers as I move past, dragging the human Queen up the side of the ant hill towards the opening at the top.

The trick now is going to be getting her down there.

Shrugging mentally I slowly lift my head until my captive is forced onto her toes. Eventually she reaches up to grab my mandibles with her hands in order to help carry her weight, rather than have all of her body weight hanging from her neck.

Once this is done I begin the decent. Fortunately we don't need to go far until I can stash the Queen in my own personal chamber near the top of the hill.

One inside I lower her to the ground and release my mandibles.

The second I do, a Titan-Croca smacks me directly in the brain!

At least that's how I feel! My mind rocks back and forth within my head as if it were a bell that had been struck by a hammer. Gritting my mandibles hard I try to shake it off. What the heck was that?!

**BOOM!**

Another one! I can feel my body physically recoil as if I'd actually been hit. Despite being disoriented I can tell that my body hasn't been hit. Something is attacking my mind! Darkness threatens to overwhelm me but I barely manage to hold on to consciousness!

It'll take a hell of a lot more than that to put me down!



It's pretty obvious who the culprit is. The Queen is sitting on the dirt floor of my chamber, fingers placed on her temples as she stares daggers at me.

I will never yield to you!

The rage I felt at watching my mother crawl away on the edge of death explodes in my heart and burns away the dizziness I feel. These damn humans have killed so many of us today, you want to try and take me out too?!

Pouncing forward suddenly I open my mandibles wide, threatening a fatal strike!

Before I can get close enough my mind is struck once more! Not a hammer this time, a drill!

Pointed, insistent pressure batters at the walls of my mind, trying to tear down my defences and invade my thoughts. I have no idea what sort of attack this is but I sure as hell don't enjoy it! Dammit if only my core wasn't so tapped out I might be able to push back with mana in some way.

All I can do is stoke the fires of anger within me and use it as fuel to endure the pain. As the drilling pushes harder and harder against my mind I push back just as hard, even as it intensifies the pain.

My vision has gone completely blank at this point, the pain in my mind is sending everything white. I flip on my mana sense, hoping I might be able to make something out. To my surprise I can. A glittering bridge like magical construct has been formed between myself and the Queen, the main difference being the part that touches me is less a friendly, welcoming path and more of a pointed needle.

Mind magic!

I redouble my efforts to push back. Who knows what might happen if she succeeds in this attack. She might just kill me or she might take control of me, I have no idea what mind magic is capable of!

God it hurts!

Our mental bout continues until I'm sure the torture will go on forever. My mind feels like its breaking apart at the edges!

Then, suddenly, the pressure evaporates!

My vision floods back and I shocked to see the human Queen stumbling to one side, surprise written all over her face and a tiny ant latched onto her ankle!

Vibrant!

[Chrysalis](#)

#### **Chapter 144: Talking points**

The Queen was just as mentally invested in our contest as I was. With the sudden bite of Vibrant she has completely lost her focus, freeing me from her mental assault.

I can't waste this chance!

I leap forward immediately, mandibles wide open, ready to deliver the fatal blow. I'd originally wanted to keep this Queen alive for a few reasons. Firstly, reprisals. If her death was somehow pinned on us, or

if people came following her trail, we could be in big trouble. At the very least we would have to pick up and relocate the colony again, something I'd rather not do if I didn't have to. Secondly, information! If I were to take this opportunity to try and develop my mind magic skills I could communicate and exchange the safe return of this Queen for information of this world and the surrounding area.

This is critical info for me. The knowledge I could harvest from one captive human about the surface society would be worth mountains of metaphorical gold. Learning about the locations of cities, the culture, about the Dungeon, magic, weapon skills, everything!

Information is king! When an actual person I can interrogate falls into my lap, I refuse to throw away the opportunity! Well, now that I know the Queen can assault my mind directly, I'll have to give up on it. Who knows what is possible when you dominate another's mind with magic? Not this ant!

Can't take the chance! I'll have to snip the neck zone and worry about the ramifications later. Perhaps there is still a chance I could get some information from the captain up above. Unlikely he would want to share after his Queen is trimmed but it'll be worth a shot.

[Hold, monster!] a desperate voice rings within my mind.

I freeze on the spot. My mandibles are mere inches away from the royal neck. It would take me a fraction of a second to complete the motion and bring my jaws together.

An uneasy pause.

We stare at each other, eye to compound eye. Flipping on my mana sense I can see that the Queen has managed to hastily construct a similar mind magic bridge to that which Formo the Sophos used to communicate with me. However, where Formo's bridge was an immaculate golden lattice woven with exquisite, intricate care, this one looks like the technique used to darn socks. Rough!

I shouldn't be too surprised since she did manage to construct it under duress. Hopefully she managed to make it so that works both ways. What the heck do I say though? This is a ruler, used to respect and deference. I should try not to be too rude. Then again she did try to stab me in the brain with magic, it wouldn't pay to be too polite.

[Speak! Or Die!]

I think I struck the balance there quite well. Good going Anthony!

Staring into the face of a terrifying Dungeon monster the Queen is managing to keep her equilibrium quite well, all things considered. With my words ringing in her mind she seems a little taken aback and pale as she ponders her next words.

[How is it you can understand me?] she eventually asks, sounding completely bewildered.

...

What do you want me to say? That I was actually a human in the past? That I was reincarnated into this body and have been making the best of my new life as a monstrous ant?

[You tried to speak to me without knowing if I could reply?] I ask.

[When you were able to resist my mind blade, I thought it was strange that a monster would have such strong force of mind. When the alternative was having my head cut off, I thought attempting to communicate would cost me nothing]

True enough. Perhaps most monsters wouldn't have been able to fight off that mind magic attack. Not that I was able to fight it off completely, rather I managed to not die until I was saved by Vibrant.

The little worker is currently still threateningly positioned near the Queen's ankles, clicking her mandibles savagely. Clearly she isn't satisfied with Queen's current state of not dead. I have to think of something else to say now. Dammit this hard. Try to stay polite!

[Why should I let you live?]

Nailed it!

The Queen seems slightly taking aback by that statement. It takes her a few moments to reply.

[What is it that you want?]

Gah! More questions? I guess it seems reasonable that she wouldn't know exactly what a monstrous ant colony would want with a living human Queen.

[You have attacked my family, injured my Queen and killed hundreds of my siblings. The first thing I want is an explanation for this invasion]

Not sounding too pushy I hope? Even in my last life I found it a little difficult to talk to people. I think I'm managing to strike the right tone.

[My soldiers and I were fleeing the ... city, nearby] she points in the direction of the city I'd seen from the church, [we ran into your ... siblings, by chance. At first there was only one but the further we pushed forward the more there were]

No need to remind me of the battle you started which resulted in so much ant death! If you'd backed away and gone in a different direction we wouldn't have this situation!

[They were defending their home and their family. For the crimes you have committed against us we have executed all but two of you. Should you wish to survive and return to your people along with your sole remaining soldier you will cooperate and answer my questions]

[What questions?]

Oh, I've got a heck of a lot of questions. From that moment the interrogation continued for several long hours.

[Chrysalis](#)

## **Chapter 145: Flames rising**

The energy in the village was electric.

The events of several nights ago, when Beyn had led the villagers to heroically defend themselves from the feared monstrous ant invasion had stoked the fires within the villagers hearts to unprecedented heights.

The story had grown and been embellished with every telling, from one ant, to five, to fifty! The villagers had weathered a storm of devious spells through the righteousness of their spirit! By the strength of their virtue and power of their arms they were victorious! Just like the legendary first Dungeon delvers in the time of Rending!

By the next day the word had spread to the nearby villages and farming communities of the goings on in the town of Malgate. The Dungeon had opened within the church of the Path! Monsters had emerged but not harmed the villagers! Surely this indicates that the town was chosen for great things!

The Dungeon occupies a special place in the hearts of these townspeople. Outside of the cities and far from the entrances, most people outside the cities have never set foot in that place. Besides from a few retired veterans and mercenaries, none had any firsthand experience at all. Dungeon monsters were things of myth and legend to them. More powerful than any creature on the surface, more ferocious, cunning and deadly! The riches that flowed out of the Dungeons were as rare to these farmers and shop owners as real gold and diamonds! Unheard of!

But now? To hear of an opening appearing within a small town on the outskirts of the capital? To hear of villagers battling and killing Dungeon creatures? Absorbing experience and gaining levels, changing their fate. It was surely a gift of God! The god of the System!

The morning after the victory over the ants the first pilgrims began to trickle into Malgate. By that night there was a steady stream of them, filling the town to bursting, packing the inn. When there were no more beds available they set up tents and slept under trees. Young, old, farmers and merchants, they arrived, dusty and tired, old weapons or farming tools over one shoulder and the light of belief shining in their eyes.

In the middle of it all was Beyn. The priest was indefatigable. Without sleep, without pause, he preached to the people. He never tired in his relentless energy. His gestures were fierce and his stride was long. His voice never faltered, strong and powerfully he spoke endlessly, invigorating the crowd or exhorting smaller groups with the righteousness of the cause. As time passed, the respect in the eyes of the people gradually changed to something deeper and more fervent.

Through it all the battle against the Dungeon monsters was never ending. In ones and twos they crawled out of the hole in the church like demons rising from hell. In battling the Dungeon monsters the villagers were able to reap a rich harvest of experience. To them, the monsters were not demons but oven fresh meals! Dungeon monsters gave far more experience than the surface variety, giving the villagers a chance to raise their combat skills and give them a chance to change their class, an opportunity that was as rare as hens teeth to people such as these.

"You don't look that excited Mrs Ruther. Is something worrying you?" the maid asked.

Enid Ruther turned to look at the young servant with a frown on her face. The girl was pleasant enough but a little on the dim side. Finding anyone better was probably impossible in Malgate.

Suddenly Enid was struck by a thought. "That young chap you've been hanging around with lately, what was his name?" she asked.

Her young maid Lilly blushed and turned to the side. "Why Mrs Ruther, what are you implying? There isn't anything official between me and Burton" she said.

Enid rolled her eyes. What did she care for their trysts? "Has Burton been mixing with that bunch in front of the church?"

Immediately Lilly's eyes glowed with admiration. "You mean 'The Dungeons Chosen?'" she gushed.

"The what?!" Enid burst out.

Lilly turned back to her mistress, face slack with shock. "You didn't know? Father Beyn started preaching that name this morning and the villagers have all picked it up".

Enid stared slack jawed at her ditzzy maid before rolling her eyes. A few villagers were now legendary Dungeon warriors? What would Derrion say if he were still alive?

Thinking of her deceased husband filled Enid's heart with sorrow, as it always did. Leaving her still gushing maid behind her she walked to the other end of the reading room where a suit of armour was mounted on a decorative frame, a worn training sword pinned to polished wood framed on the wall behind it.

Derrion had always valued that training sword more than the expensive enchanted weapon he used when delving. When he had retired from his career as a Dungeon Mercenary it was this training blade that he wanted placed in the most prominent position on the wall. He had sold his combat blade.

Enid sighed. Those days had been the happiest of their lives. She had sold off her business in the city and they had moved here to Derrion's home town to open a market and live a quiet life. He had passed away just five years later.

"What would you say to these people to make them listen?" she whispered to his armour, "they sure as heck won't listen to an old woman like me".

Derrion had been a powerful figure in his prime. He had tirelessly practiced his blade techniques and raised his class to "Expert Swordsman" over the long years of delving. He commanded a premium price on expeditions!

When he spoke on matters concerning the Dungeon, nobody would dare say he was wrong!

Being married to a successful mercenary for so many years, how could Enid not have learned about the strength of Dungeon monsters? Her husband had never hidden anything from her, that was the mutual respect they had for each other. The danger he had experienced, the terrible beasts he had battled, she knew it all.

How could these villagers and farmers possibly have any idea of the horrors that dwelt in the world below? They may have heard the legends and stories from the old times, but that wasn't worth a pinch of salt compared to hearing it from someone who had seen it with their own eyes.

When those ants had emerged from inside the church she had thought they were all dead for sure. Instead, she had watched them heal the injury to the priests' hand and then march into the forest without even glancing at the terrified humans.

It defied belief. Even to Enid, who knew far more than most about the nature of the Dungeon, this behaviour had no explanation.

What she did know however, was that if these fools in the village tried to fight against those ants, or try to delve deeper into the Dungeon, they would all be killed so easily.

Enid wasn't a bad person, she wanted to save her neighbours if she could, but the fervour in the eyes of the villagers disturbed her deeply. What would they do if she were to speak against their new belief?

She had no confidence they would listen to her. Married to a mercenary she might have been but Enid was a merchant. Even if she had risen in class to "Prosperous Merchant" what sway did that hold?

None.

Enid let her hand trail over the cuts and grooves carved into the toughened beast hide chest plate in front of her, evidence of uncountable battles beneath the ground.

In order to save as many lives as she could, she would have to attempt the impossible.

### [Chrysalis](#)

#### **Chapter 146: The mini escapade**

Nothing was happening and Vibrant was getting hungry. Since she had snapped at the pink creatures ankle her senior and the creature had been very still, looking at each other for several Torpor worth of time.

The young ant worker could somehow tell that there was something happening though she couldn't say how she knew, or even what it was exactly that she did know. She simply felt that her powerful senior worker and the strange creature were engaged in some kind exchange that she had no way of participating in.

So she was bored.

At first she tried nipping at her senior, her mandibles scratching against the others tough carapace, but there was no reaction. Not to mention that the exercise probably hurt her face more than it hurt the other!

How did this ant get so strong?!

Vibrant had always been able to sense it, even as a larvae, that this individual was different, special. She could feel a powerful vibe from the other, something that made her want to follow and learn.

However, that didn't do much to alleviate the current situation. After deciding that nothing much was going to happen anytime soon, the little ant climbed up onto the seniors back in order to commune with her fellow traveller.

As a creature without any sensory input other than touch, Crinis had no idea what was happening. Everything was still and quiet, there wasn't any movement that she could sense and her master was close by. In her growth stage there wasn't anything else that the little creature could hope for.

Idly, the little monster tugged on the shining thread in her consciousness that connected her to the creature who had created her. A constant sense of distance and position came to her through this thread, alerting her about wherever her master happened to be, as well as the occasional words when she was spoken to.

Crinis felt she could probably talk back, but so far hadn't really felt any urge to. She had been tempted a few times, but eventually decided that she didn't have anything that important to say. At this stage of her life it only important that eat and grow so that she could become useful.

Suddenly the little monster felt a tugging on one of her tentacles!

What was it!? Out of reflex the Jelly like monster unfolded two more tentacles from her main body and lashed out with them. At her present stage of growth, this strike had almost no power behind it all, causing Crinis to feel a little depressed when she made contact but her opponent barely budged.

Vibrant was completely undeterred by this response. She'd worked out long ago that her blobby associate couldn't recognise what was going on, so the worker continued to extend her leg to prod at her companion, trying to get the little blob to stick onto her back.

Why? In Vibrant's mind, the two monsters spend so much time in proximity that they may as well continue to stick together. The human concept of friendship wouldn't apply to monsters, they simply didn't think that way, but comfort or companionship, these were things that they were fully capable of feeling towards a monster not of their own kind.

Eventually Crinis was able to work out who was annoying her and internally sighed. This pesky creature had interacted with Crinis before. The blob knew from experience that this irritating creature wouldn't leave her alone until she gave in. Crinis had no idea why the master tolerated this little pest to ride upon their person but who was she to argue?

After several more minutes of insistent prodding Vibrant was rewarded when the little blob reached out with its tentacles and gradually dragged itself onto her back.

Oof!

Vibrant was annoyed. Why was it that this blob was growing so quickly but she had to remain small?! Once again the worker pondered the words of her wise senior about mutation. She had frequently heard a 'voice' speaking to her when eating and she roughly grasped the idea of Biomass and spending it. Her instincts prompted her to spend her Biomass in ways without her really thinking about it and the seniors' words went against those instincts.

So the little worker had yet to spend any points on mutation at all.

As more time passed she was more and more interested in talking to the senior and asking questions. It probably wouldn't be long until she went against her instincts and purchased an upgrade.

With her passenger in position the duo set off! Scrabbling up the internal shaft of the nest and out into the forest!

Vibrant was excited but Crinis was much more subdued, after all the blob monster had no concept of where they were. She was comforted however by the faint awareness of the other like her.

Similar to the link between herself and her master but much weaker, she was able to faintly sense the other monster who shared the same kind of existence her. Right now that presence was close by.

Vibrant also naturally could see the huge monster who followed her senior around. Right now he was sitting on top of a creature who looked somewhat similar to the one inside their chamber. The smaller,

pinkish creature looked extremely uncomfortable being crushed by the much larger monster but Vibrant didn't have any sympathy. She even walked closer and snipped at the creature's hand with her mandibles!

Take that!

The creature swiped at her with the hand, knocking her back, causing her to snap her mandibles angrily. The giant monster reached down with one hand and knocked the creature lying beneath it with one fist, causing it to grunt in pain.

Vibrant was delighted, take that! She bounced back and forth a few times, still clacking her mandibles and waving her antennae aggressively! This creature needs to learn its place!

Crinis was disturbed by all the sudden movement and had to reach out with a few more tentacles to grip onto the shifting ant she was stuck to. What is this crazy thing doing?!

Both of them were distracted at the same time by the alluring scent of Biomass!

Where was it?!

Crinis was able to detect the presence of food through her skin. She extended a few tentacles and wiggled them furiously in the air, trying to pick up on a direction. She was hungry!

Vibrant noticed that the giant monster was chomping on something he'd been holding in his other hand. Biomass!

Moving speedily she climbed over the squashed creature's face and up onto the monster until she was staring him right in the eye, pointing excitedly at the food in his hand.

It took the big monster a while to realise what these two irritants wanted. Eventually he realised and pointed in a direction towards the tree line and Vibrant was off and racing!

It wasn't long before she found piles of Biomass on the ground, a few workers picking over it and dragging it back to the colony.

Food!

Both monsters were incredibly excited. Crinis had cast aside her earlier reservations and was now fully prepared to leap off and eat, she practically hummed with anticipation.

Vibrant was only too happy to place her comrade down on the food, guiding with one slender antennae before she started to chow down herself.

[You have consumed a new source of Biomass: Homo Sapien. One Biomass awarded]

[Basic profile of Homo Sapien unlocked]

Delicious!

The two small monsters continued to eat until they were full. Then Vibrant collected her associate and they slowly wobbled their way back to the nest.



## Chrysalis

### **Chapter 147: small fish, small pond**

It took hours to interrogate this Queen and the flow of new information left me staggering. Despite my pounding headache I pushed forward with all of my strength! Who knew what could happen in the future? This old lady might fall over from a heart attack, every ounce of knowledge must be extracted this very second!

By the end the two of us were tired beyond words. Not quite willing to trust the words of this ant killer up front I asked every question several times in different ways, attempting to catch her off guard. It's true that when communicating using mind magic, at least so far in my limited experience, it is possible to sense on a surface level the thoughts and feelings behind a persons' communication. However the quality of the connection clearly plays a part.

Formo's mind and honesty rang through like a clear bell tone as he spoke, no duplicity was hidden at all within his connection. The mind magic woven by the Queen is far from as clear, words and intentions becoming muddled or lost in translation, making me far more wary.

For her part the Queen seems to have answered everything faithfully to the best of her ability, it will impossible to know if there are any mistruths mixed in until I get the chance to ask these questions of another individual.

Even with this being the case I've been able to learn so much.

For the starters the Queen's own situation. This ruler is quite respected and admired amongst her people (so she says) and has been Queen of this small kingdom of Liria for decades, over thirty years of peace and prosperity.

Supposedly there has been a coup brewing beneath the surface, something about profit, corrupt merchants, outside forces and exploitation, I didn't really listen to this bit that carefully. The Queen got wind of the situation and attempted to bait the plotters out into the open but underestimated their strength, eventually her loyalists were defeated and she was forced to flee the city with her personal guard, moving out of the city at night before running into the colony.

I was fairly shocked at this point, this person is either not nearly as wise as they claim or just plain unlucky!

From there she told me about the class based leveling system of the surface races, what knowledge she had on the other races that inhabit the surface, she'd never heard of elves unfortunately, and some history of the kingdom

Apparently this kingdom is fairly young, less than two hundred years old. After being infested with monsters for a tremendously long time, only in relatively recent history had this area been purged (her words) and the monsters either defeated or driven into the Dungeon. So apparently this region is still considered underdeveloped and somewhat backward, a remote frontier of the surface world.

In fact, if we were to go south for a few days we would pass into lands that hadn't seen human occupation for thousands of years. Even now the people of this country battled to keep the monsters pushed back and occasionally they mounted campaigns to further push back the border.

At least there are somewhat strong monsters somewhere on the surface! I was beginning to think my surface cousins were completely useless!

Eventually I leave the Queen alone in my chamber and wander off to try and digest what I've learned. The question that sticks out the most in my mind is, what am I supposed to do now? I've got the apparently beloved Queen of the kingdom trapped inside my dirt chamber and the captain of her personal guard is....

... being sat on by my pet.

The poor fellow looks distinctly uncomfortable as Tiny has planted himself right on his back. Is that Crinis and Vibrant? The two little creatures are positioned curiously near the captain's face. Vibrant appears to be attempting to snip him on the nose with her mandibles whilst Crinis is repeatedly slapping him on the head with tentacles for some reason.

When the heck did these two climb up here.

["Stop mucking around you two!"] I say to both of them.

The two young monsters twitch in surprise, not having noticed my arrival. Crinis pulls the tentacles back into the main body and manages to give the impression of guilty silence despite being a featureless blob.

Vibrant doesn't seem at all fussed and simply climbs back onto my head happily. With a mental sigh I collect Crinis onto my back and make sure that Tiny knows not to kill his prisoner as we still need him for the time being.

What to do?

Try to think it through Anthony! What are the options?

I could kill the Queen and the Guard, forget any of this ever happened and move on with my life!

...

Rejected. I'm not so far removed from my former humanity that I'm quite that comfortable with cold blooded human killing. Taking my revenge on the soldiers for the damage done to the colony was about my limit for the time being!

Not to mention the possibility of reprisals if we were to kill a Queen loved by the masses and people were to find out about it.

Next I could take the Queen and captain to the nearby town and dump them there. This idea honestly appeals to me quite a bit, I get to wash my hands of these humans and the colony can go back about its business. The problem is that no matter how benevolent the Queen may seem, or how much she may promise not to seek reprisals against us in the future, I would have to relocate the colony completely, possibly back down in the Dungeon even, in order to ensure our safety.

So this one is better but still not ideal.

The third option is my least favourite and involves trying to keep the Queen and captain with the colony semi long term. We don't kill them, but we don't release them either.

I'm not really a fan of this plan. I leave myself open to mind stabbing at any moment! How could i expect two crafty humans to behave whilst being detained indefinitely?

My mind drifts back to the last thing the Queen had to say. I had disregarded it at first but the more I think about how to move next the more this idea keeps popping into my head.

[What do you want to do next?] I'd asked her.

She'd thought about it for a moment before responding firmly. [I want my city back. I refuse to hand the throne over to those motivated by greed and self-interest. I will attempt to rally the people around my banner and wage a campaign against the usurpers].

That all sounds very aggressive.

[This is presuming I allow you to leave this place alive] I point out.

I have to say my ability to stay smooth in communication is coming a long way!

[True] the Queen chuckled.

[But you know] she went on, [there isn't anything for you to gain from killing me, but perhaps much to gain from keeping me alive. Tell me, what is it that you want? Perhaps there is something I can offer you?]

Hmmm. How about two hundred of my fellow workers back to life eh?

I wouldn't get anywhere throwing that in her face.

[Biomass, experience, monster cores. These are the only things the colony requires] I told her.

She thought about it. [Well, I'm not prepared to offer you the flesh of my people, I hope you understand. The only way I could give you experience is to let you kill us, which I also am unwilling to offer, but monster cores I can certainly give you].

That perked up my interest. I really don't know how many cores I should ask for though. What would appropriate? I had to ask her to give me a figure, nicely of course.

[How many cores is your life worth?] I ask.

The Queen shook her head with a wry smile. [The question I think you should ask, monster, is how many cores is my kingdom worth? Would you be willing to help me? For a price, of course].

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 148: The risk, the reward**

One of the things I learned from the human Queen is the value of monster cores to their society. They use them for enchantments, magical engineering, powerful weapons, armour, training magicians, jewellery and more. Cores are an integral part of industry on the surface, their ability to absorb mana from the atmosphere and then channel it cannot be replicated. In wealthy circles cores could even be considered a separate form of currency, valuable everywhere civilised enough to conduct trade.

I was also disturbed to learn of the market for monster body parts, using hides, shells, claws and even organs to make equipment, potions or even building materials! Apparently the Queens throne room is buttressed by columns carved from several massive spines extracted from the monsters who dominated this region before their death.

Hearing about the incredible value attached to the body parts of my own kind made me somewhat queasy. I do have to admit that my diamond carapace would make a fairly cracking set of armour...

Don't think about it Anthony! Just because you're a monster doesn't mean you are going to wind up with your head mounted on some wall, your core hung around a duchess' neck and your carapace turned into a truly sweet set of defensive gear. They might get the Anjanath, but not this ant!

That shall not be the fate of me, or my colony!

If anything the conversation with the Queen emphasised again and again the danger of the surface people to me and my family. Truly, humanity is the real monster! I'm super reluctant to enter into any sort of deal with this kingdom. Packing up the colony and rushing into monster territory sounds like the safest and best place for us ants to go!

But... the wealth!

So... many.... CORES.

I could pump the core of all of my pets and myself to max, special cores included! I could do the same for the Queen! I could grind my core engineering to the next level easy.

Hundreds of cores are on the table here! Not two or three, hundreds!

It's almost certainly a trick in some way.

The Queen has no options available to her, that much is clear, but would a wise and savvy Queen really be prepared to hand a portion of her nations wealth to a marauding band of monsters?

Unlikely.

Is it really a betrayal if you know it is coming? Just because she'll turn on me at some point doesn't mean I won't be able to extract value. Is it risky? For sure. The reward though .... My mandibles are twitching as I ponder that sweet, sweet largesse!

I need to control myself. I better go check on the real Queen.

Leaving Tiny to enjoy his new seat I scuttle over to the farm and head down to check things out. What meets me at the bottom is a veritable seething mass of ants. Workers are climbing all over each other in a huge pile, those on the outside twitch their antennae and constantly bare their mandibles at the surrounding walls, daring any monster to poke its head out.

Here and there I can see a separate, smaller masses of ants and just when I'm wondering what is going on I see a few workers break off from their smaller groups and walk back to the main mass with chunks of fresh Biomass in their mandibles.

Clearly the workers are piling onto every monster the second it comes out of the walls, ripping them apart in their desperation to ensure the Queen isn't threatened.

The problem I have is, how am I supposed to talk to the Queen when she is literally buried beneath a protective layer of her own children?!

I know I said to keep her safe but holy heck fam! You've really gone all out!

Descending into the farm I can see that the workers have even made a carpet layer underneath the Queen, squashing their bodies low to the ground to keep a vigilant eye on the ground. If a monster were to burst out of the ground these workers would rather place their own bodies between the ravenous claws and their Queen.

There isn't anything for me to do except push my way through the workers until I manage to come face to face with the Queen.

Even Vibrant displays some concern when she come before her mother. The little ant sits up on my head and tries to sense her parents condition with her antennae.

"How are you doing mother?" I ask anxiously.

Her antennae twitch as she detects my words and she slowly shifts her head until she spots me amongst the throng.

"I am ... better" she replies.

Her voice sounds less thin than it did, some of the warmth that I remembered has returned as well as a little of her vigour. Flicking on my mana sense momentarily I can see that her core is more energetic than in was, no longer stuttering like a candle about to be blown out.

"Is it the Dungeon" I ask hesitantly, "Do you need to absorb more mana?"

The Queen looks at me blankly for a moment.

"I do not know, child" she replies.

I'm getting a sinking feeling that I'm right though. It's possible that the monsters with advanced cores, like the Queen, need to have constant exposure to concentrated mana in order to survive?

So ever since we came to the surface the Queen has been gradually leaking strength? Growing weaker every passing day?! And of course she doesn't say anything, she's too damn selfless!

If they could my eyes would be tearing up! THIS is the sacrifice a real Queen makes! No schemes here, just loyal service. Not a kingdom, a family!

"Have you been able to cast any healing spells on yourself?" I ask.

She waggles her antennae in an ant nod. "My injuries are somewhat better".

"When you feel that you can you should cast it again to make sure you heal quickly" I urge her, "and eat plenty! It will speed up the healing".

She once again waggles her antennae to nod. I can faintly sense some amusement radiating off her tired frame, being fussed over by her children instead of the (in her mind) proper state of her fussing over us.

Satisfied that the Queen is on the mend I climb back out of the farm, letting the workforce do its thing. My mind is buzzing with thoughts and not all of them are pleasant.

I have to bear some responsibility for this situation. I couldn't have known that the Queen would suffer in this way when we came to the surface but the fact remains that we are here because of me. I also can't help a little self-recrimination. If I'd been a little more attentive to the Queen and less focused on my own growth maybe I'd have noticed that she was weakening.

Logically I know that it isn't my fault but the thoughts are hard to dismiss.

Returning to the ant hill, lost in my own head, I'm knocked out of my thoughts by a bustle amongst the workers on one side of the hill.

What the heck is happening now?!

Unbelievably, an old woman is walking slowly but purposefully out of the tree line and into the clearing, hands raised above her head and a determined expression on her face.

What.

The.

Hell?!

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 149: Desperate Times...**

Is this some form of ritual suicide now?! Offering oneself up as Biomass for monsters? Or have the people decided to cast off their elderly as a sacrifice to appease the mighty ant kingdom? The older people are the most scrawny among you! If you want to offer Biomass then at least throw in some fatties!

Wait! What am I thinking...

Seeing some workers descending towards this person, ready to defend the hill, I rush down to head them off. There is something about this old woman that's making my antennae twitch. The way she has approached, so deliberately and with her hands in the air. It's clear that she came here to find the colony, otherwise she would have run away at the first sign of us, surely? Raising her hands in the air is the classic sign of intending no harm, though how she expects a colony of monsters to know that is beyond me.

So the question remains, what does this human want to find and approach us for? Try as I might I can't come up with anything at all.

As she sees me approach and warn away the approaching workers she breathes a sigh of relief and her manner becomes a little excited. She was looking for me? Does she recognise me? Perhaps she saw me in the church... I don't remember her being there but I didn't spend a whole lot of time taking in the crowd.

Her face does seem vaguely familiar though...

When I draw near and stop the old woman also ceases her steps but keeps her hands in the air.

I stand still and watch patiently.

Taking a deep breath the lady seems to settle her nerves before she squares up to me and then ... begins speaking.

....

.....

I can't understand you lady! Can't you use mind magic or something!?

For several minutes the lady attempts to speak to me, earnestly pleading about something, gesturing passionately with her hands, pointing at the colony, pointing back towards the town.

...

You really came here to talk to a colony of monsters?! As in, just talk with your mouth?! Internally I'm shaking my head at this crazy behaviour. If I wasn't a reborn human this lady would have been ripped to shreds and eaten without getting her message across at all.

Thankfully I have a way to get around this.

Interrupting the monologue, I walk closer, frightening the old woman with my sudden movement such that she leaps back in fear, once again thrusting her hands high in the air.

...

I'm not going to eat you! Sheesh! People these days...

I move to her side and then use my antennae to tap the back of my carapace. She seems confused at first so I repeat the gesture. The light understanding dawns on her face and she resolutely places her hands in front of her and waves them back and forth. "No thanks!"

You don't really have any options here lady.

A little more insistently I poke the old woman with my antennae and then pat my back. When she doesn't immediately move I repeat the gesture even more forcefully.

She gets the picture this time. I'll keep going until she cooperates! So she may as well just cooperate.

Reluctance written all over her face she approaches my side and starts in fright when I lower my body down so she can climb on. At the last moment I remember to extend an antennae back for Crinis to grab and shift the little blob up to my head next to Vibrant, who chitters at my pet, unhappy with her space being cramped. Crinis simply waves a few tentacles around until she manages to thwap the ant on the head before settling in on her new real estate.

Once my new captive, I mean, guest, has been secured I head over to the ant hill, climb up the side and then descend into the main shaft. Worried that the old woman will fall as we start our vertical journey I

make sure to tilt my body as much as possible and extend an antennae for her to grip, two courtesies I had neglected to offer the Queen.

I stop near the entrance to my chamber and prod the human until she climbs off and then I follow in behind her.

I'm a little curious as to how this is going to play out.

When the old woman enters my chamber and sees who is inside she goes completely still with shock seemingly not believing the evidence of her own eyes. It's a fair response really, you wouldn't expect to find your Queen inside a giant ant hill normally.

The old woman speaks hesitantly and reaches out with a trembling hand towards my prisoner who speaks warmly to our new guest and clasps the old woman's hands between her own. Having her hands gripped by her own Queen seems to overwhelm my new guest and she falls to her knees and lower her head in respect before the protesting Queen who tries to raise her up.

Maybe she is as respected as she claims? Or maybe people just fear royalty in general in this socially primitive world.

Waving my antennae above my head to get the Queen's attention I point to the old woman's head and then at my own, repeating the gesture a few times until the Queen manages to take my meaning.

I want you to connect this person and me with mind magic so we can talk.

The Queen nods to say she understands but then shakes her head.

What the heck....

She frowns for a minute before I feel the familiar and crude touch of her mind on mine.

[I lack the skill to form a bridge between two individuals in this way. Connecting others is ten times as hard as connecting oneself. If you like, I can speak to this citizen myself and then communicate her words to you].

I ponder this. At least I'll get the message but I'm a little cautious the Queen might omit some details. Trust between human and monster can't be built so easily.

[Have her speak her story to me and translate in real time. If I believe information has been kept from me you both will be eaten] I state.

The Queen looks somewhat angered by my demand. [I am not used to having my honour questioned in this way, monster] she says forcefully.

.... Ok? But what does that have to do with me?!

[I care not. Relay my instructions]

A Queen you may be, but my Queen is a giant ant and her subjects are literally her own children. What exactly do you think we owe you?!



Shaking my head internally I turn my head towards my new guest and wait for her to start speaking. Once the Queen has passed on my instructions the old lady curtsies surprisingly gracefully towards her ruler and begins to speak, shortly after a steady stream of translation echoes in my head.

[This citizen of my kingdom is named Enid Ruther's, a merchant from the nearby town of Malgate. She was witness to your arrival in the towns church over a week ago and has grown concerned over the behaviour and ideas gripping the people since that time. The local priest has whipped the townsfolk into a frenzy, leading them to fight against the Dungeon monsters and even... but that's suicide!] the Queen breaks off her translation to shout in my mind.

She rapidly speaks verbally to Enid, shock written all over her face, the former replies firmly and the Queen just shakes her head looking appalled.

I reach out with an antennae and tap the Queen on the head. Oi, translate.

[I apologise, I was so shocked. The priest has even spurred the townsfolk to descend into the Dungeon and do battle there yesterday. Several people were killed and hailed as martyrs] her emotions bleed through as she speaks, sorry and anger at this foolish waste of life.

Enid continues to speak and the Queen continues to translate.

[Enid fears that the villagers will soon raise arms and attempt to invade the forest to hunt down your colony, believing you to be a sacrifice offered up by the Dungeon for their own enrichment and glory].

...

Even the Queen seems stunned by the stupidity of it. I personally have no idea what to say. A tribute!? Are these people alright in the head!? Tribute your grandfather!

[Enid's husband was an experienced Dungeon explorer and she knows that intelligent monsters capable of communication exist in the depths. When she saw you spare the priest and even heal his arm she was convinced that you were a highly evolved species and hoped to reason with you to spare the villagers lives. She knew it was a faint hope and that she would likely be killed but she could think of no other option to prevent meaningless killing] the Queen is getting a little choked up listening of this brave citizens sense of duty.

For my part I'm still stunned by the whole sacrificial offering thing...

Just how badly do these people want to get eaten?!

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 150: The case for cooperation**

I'm no longer human, I get that, but coming from my world, I understand things like the sanctity of life. Even those soldiers that were killed by Tiny, justified as I felt ordering their deaths due to the massacre of my family, my stomach still twists thinking about whether those soldiers had families themselves, children, wives, parents.

Mindless killing serves no purpose. These villagers may be misled, or just incredibly dumb, but I don't especially feel the need to massacre them because of it. They aren't a threat after all, I could probably fight a village full of farmers by myself.

Almost as if they could sense my thoughts, Enid and the Queen immediately turn to me to plead for the life of their associates.

[These villagers are misguided, monster, there is nothing to gain from their deaths. Won't you spare them?]

Well, I have no intention of killing them, but that statement isn't technically correct.

[The colony would gain Biomass and experience. Hundreds of workers have died recently, our numbers need to be replenished] I point out.

It's not like we would gain nothing, right?

The Queen's face falls and so does Enid's when my words are relayed to her. Enid looks even more despondent when she questions the Queen and her ruler has to reply, I think she's explaining just how my colony ended up losing hundreds of members. More specifically, how I lost hundreds of my siblings.

Grrrr.

Feeling crushed, the old lady falls to her knees and pleads with me, tears beginning to fall from her eyes. The Queen looks deeply moved and also kneels to plead with me.

[Enid begs you to spare the townspeople, they are ignorant but not malicious. She offers you her own flesh as payment, I too am prepared to offer my life in exchange. It is the duty of a ruler after all!]

Yikes, these two sure are keen on saving a pack of morons.

Still having humans bow down before my magnificence is refreshing, empowering even! Royalty, forced to beg me for favour is something I couldn't have dreamed of happening in my last life. What is the feeling swelling from within?! Superiority? Power?! Yes you puny humans, kneel, beg! If you wish for this great one to spare your pitiful friends then you must grovel!

Muahahahahaaaaa!

Wait! These are the words of Dark Anthony! Down, Dark Anthony! Down, you fiend! Back to the void from which you came!

I mentally shake myself free of the influence of the dark one. I mustn't allow myself to fall down the black path, I'll end up being some cartoonish supervillain who'll no doubt be killed whilst scheming for world domination or some such.

I have no intention off massacring these villagers but if I can extract maximum value from the Queen and protect the colony at the same time.... I totally will!

[There is no failing greater than ignorance. If you wish for me to spare these people, as well as to assist you in reclaiming your city, then you will need to be prepared to make fair exchange].

Yes, I'm preparing to try and make a deal here. If I can keep the colony out of it and only expose myself to the risk then I'm prepared to take it on in order to get those cores. With so many of the precious gems in my mandibles I'll be able to strengthen my entourage to the point where we will be invincible in

the top layer of the Dungeon. We could secure the colony for ages as well as accelerate the timetable for my most ambitious core modification project.

The Queen seems to sense that I'm leaning towards making an agreement. Her eyes narrow as her expression turns thoughtful. To spare the townspeople she will need to turn their fervour to a less suicidal cause. These people are afire with religious zealotry, simply saying 'no' won't be sufficient to turn them from their cause. She also needs to somehow return to the city and secure her throne.

We two start discussing ideas and eventually we hash out a plan. I'm not particularly a great fan of it, but I think it will work.

Just ... Why do I always have to get hit right in the dignity...

Two days later the preparations are nearly complete. The true Queen has almost fully recovered from her wounds and continues to rest inside the farm, defended by her loyal workers. Myself and a small taskforce have spent the majority of our time working towards the success of our plan whilst Tiny has been mostly sitting on the Queens guard captain and eating. The Queen herself spends her time with Enid, hashing out the details of what will happen in the town and then after that.

When everything is in readiness I finalise my plans, leaving behind Vibrant and Crinis, making sure they have clear instructions to stick with Tiny and not get into trouble, before collecting the Queen, then Enida and departing towards the town of Malgate.

When we finally arrive we are treated to a surprising sight. The town has become flooded with angry looking farmers, the crowd leading up the small hill to the church doors is easily ten times the size it was the last time I was here. There must be hundreds of these morons! Maybe over a thousand?! Where did they find all of this stupid?!

The pyre is still burning, even now in the early morning light. The charred remains of various monsters are scattered around the base of the roaring flames, causing me to wince. Such a waste! The priest is still there, standing before the energetic throng, his frenzied voice rising above the buzz of the people and reaching us even from the edge of the woods. This guy has some serious pipes on him. Good to know he has skills that don't rely on having two arms. Since... you know.

Mentally bracing myself, I step forward, leaving the shelter of the tree line and crossing the fields, drawing ever closer to the town. I make no attempt to hide myself this time, sneaking up isn't part of the plan. Thanks to our setup the crowd shouldn't attack me, but if they do I'm prepared to make like a tree and leave at a moments' notice! This ant knows not to overstay his welcome!

As we draw closer the tension in my chest grows tighter. Being this close to so many humans, totally exposed is super nerve wracking!

When the first person turns and notices us I physically flinch. A bearded man towards the rear of the crowd, brandishing a pitchfork in one hand, catches a glimpse of us and turns, his jaw falling completely slack at what he sees.

After a few moments he musters enough awareness to call out and point towards us. Gradually more and more people turn, disregarding the soaring voice of the priest to witness the incredible sight approaching openly and unhurriedly across the fields.

Like a ripple through a pond the whispers and calls spread through the crowd until, when I'm only ten metres away from the nearest person the entire crowd has turned its eyes towards me. People at the far side have stood on rocks and gone on their toes to try and catch a glimpse of the remarkable sight.

Eventually even the priest notices that his faithful have turned their attention elsewhere and his voice falters and fades until he too notices the focus of the crowd, then he falls completely silent, his voice stuck in his throat and eyes boggling at the sight.

My heart is pounding in my chest at this point and I watch the crowd through every one of my compound eyes but I see nobody moving. Their attention doesn't seem to be on me really, not even on Enid, their fellow townsfolk walking by my side, they seem more interested in what is on my back.

Before the stunned crowd of her subjects, the human Queen rises to her feet, standing on my glittering diamond carapace and spreads her arms towards the crowd before declaring with a sonorous voice, ["Loyal and blessed people of Liria! There is evil stalking our nation, threatening our peace and committing foul deeds within the Dungeon, stirring it against us! We have been chosen, you and I, by the System itself! Graced by the presence of its holy messenger from below, to restore the balance!"]

The Queen's powerful voice and imperious manner puts even the priest to shame. The people are visibly impacted by the force of her person.

Just in case, I brace my feet to run. This had better work!