

Chrysalis 161

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 161: The sweetest voice

Boy was I glad to sense Tiny had managed to arrive on schedule! My biggest worry had been the big moron would get confused or lost somehow.

[You managed to find me ok big guy?]

[No]

[It was hard? What happened?!]

[Walls]

[You got stuck behind walls?]

[Yes]

[How did get through?]

[Punched 'em]

.....

I wonder how many walls the Queen is going to have to replace...

Thinking of the Queen I could only shake my head internally. Are humans in this world penalised on Cunning or something? From the moment I captured her she had demonstrated her dislike of monsters at almost every opportunity. To think that such a person would actually hold to an agreement with one? I hadn't believed it from the beginning!

I mean, the Queen can't be entirely blamed for being outwitted. How could she have known that I was not just an unusually intelligent monster but an actual human reborn? Of course I know about treasuries, betrayal and have the unfair advantage of being able to understand human mannerisms or tone. It was simplicity itself to have the colony tunnel under the castle and poke about until we located the sweet, sweet, wealth.

Being the noble and upstanding ant that I am, I wanted to uphold my end of the deal as much as possible, so I went along and fought hard to restore the Queen to her throne. To be honest, it would have been pretty embarrassing had the Queen not actually turned on me at the end. At that point we had already connected the castle to several prepared Dungeon tunnels and emptied out her supply of cores!

Thankfully we managed to avoid that awkward scenario...

Tiny and I are currently racing down a separate tunnel we had prepared that hadn't been connected to the Dungeon itself so we are blessedly unobstructed by monsters as we run. I collapsed the entrance behind us so I doubt the humans will be able to locate us, they should be busy handling a flood of monsters right about now!

Gweheheheh.

The perfect crime Anthony, you genius you!

The best part of all? The sweet, gravelly tones of Gandalf that are still ringing in my ears!

[You have reached level 20, one skill point awarded]

[You have reached max level for your current evolution, would you like to access the evolution menu?]

[Monster core has reached capacity for your current stage of evolution].

[Piercing chomp has reached level 10, advancement available]

[Advanced Exo-skeleton defence has reached level 5]

[Pet communication has reached level 2]

[Shattering Bite has reached level 4]

.....

By the bushy, bristling facial hair of the bearded one! SO GOOD!

The notifications fell like rain in my ears during the final battle! Max level! Thanks to stealing the cores from all of the lamps I have maxed out my core at 100 mp! If I can take in a special core I'll be ready to evolve once more! My POWAH! It Grows!

Combined with this sack full of monster cores we swiped, the future is looking exceptionally bright! The skills I'll be able to train, the special evolutions I'll be able to secure for my pets and the colony!

We really hit the jackpot this time!

The unfortunate part is that we have to move the colony, quickly. The Queen is perfectly aware of where we are presently situated so we can't sit still. Only by relocating somewhere out of her reach will we be able to avoid retaliation. Thankfully such a place isn't too far away! To the south of these lands the wild and untamed monster infested lands are vast! It'll be easy for our colony to get lost in there, giving us plenty of time to develop and grow.

The only tricky part is making sure we have some form of Dungeon access since the Queen isn't able to sustain herself on the surface. We'll have to cross that bridge when we come to it. If everything goes according to plan then we will be able to build a kingdom of our own. For ant kind!

Hold on there Anthony, don't get ahead of yourself! For the moment you still need to focus on fleeing the country! You are the fugitive!

Even if I want to evolve reeaaaally bad!

It's addictive, evolving. Go to sleep and wake up as a better and more powerful you. There's an intoxicating quality to it. I must firm my will and resist. You can't evolve when you're dead!

Tiny and I continue to run through our emergency escape route as I chuckle gleefully to myself the entire way. There is a very real danger of me becoming conceited if I continue to celebrate my own success so enthusiastically.

When we finally burst out of the tunnel we find ourselves once more beneath the shady foliage of the forest. I breathe deep of the fresh forest air. Delicious! Freedom! I stretch my legs wide to embrace the trees.

This is the feeling of freedom, of liberty, of successful, guilt free theft!

Tiny looks at me as if I'm completely stupid.

Pah! You don't have the intelligence to appreciate the subtle nuances of this moment. You don't even realise that with that sack over shoulder you look like a mutated, evil Santa!

It takes another twenty minutes to make our way back to the ant hill. Seeing the large dirt structure, with its ever attentive guards, warms my heart. Home with the family once more!

Time to uproot and move them all again!

Skirting around the anthill I make my way straight to the farm, leaving Tiny to rest after his long haul. He might have power but stamina seems to be slight weakness of the big guy. Crawling down into the farm I see a familiar sight. The workers have continued to build a living layer of armour around their beloved Queen, essentially burying her beneath several layers of workers.

Once again I have to climb in and push my way through until the Queen's face emerges from the clutter right in front of my face.

"Mother! Hello! Have you been able to heal yourself?" I exclaim.

The Queen smiles, her antennae waving about until she manages to free one and give me a tap on my own, the ant high five.

"I am well child. I have healed myself".

"How does your core feel?" I ask.

Flipping on my mana sense momentarily I can see that once again her core is blazing with light. The density of mana in her core seems to have recovered to its maximum capacity.

"I feel fine" she responds.

This is great news! The Queen has made a full recovery. This means we can move immediately without endangering the most important individual in the colony.

"Hi-Hi!" a voice calls.

.....

I look at the Queen quizzically and she stares back at me calmly.

Was that... Who was that?

"Where did you go Senior?! You took so long!" the voice comes again.

The voice seems somewhat high pitched, squeaky almost. If it isn't the Queen then who the hell is talking to me in here?! I turn around and cast about with my antennae until I finally come face to face with a small worker carrying a conspicuously large black lump on its back.

"Vibrant?!" I exclaim.

"Hi-Hi!" she says, "I learned to talk, Senior! I have sooo many questions!"

Chrysalis

Chapter 162: The endless nightmare

It's been two hours now and the little worker just. Won't. Stop!

"Why is your carapace so shiny?"

"How'd you get so big?"

"Can I do the magicky stuff?"

"Isn't talking FUN!"

"What are you doin'?"

"What are you doin' now?"

"Do you like eating? I think it's the best!"

"Should we dig something? I love digging!"

And on, and on.

It turned out the little lump on her back was Crinis who seemed delighted to grab hold of my antennae and migrate onto my back. She even quietly spoke up, saying [Welcome back master] after she'd settled onto my carapace.

So polite! Her voice was very soft and reserved, not at all like the image of the full grown JellyMaw I remember.

All that effort I spent making her more intelligent seems to have paid off! It'll be nice to have a pet I can have a decent conversation with. Tiny is great at the whole silent companionship thing but isn't much for a detailed conversation. Only thing is the little pet seems extremely reticent, no matter how I prodded I wasn't able to get any more words out of her.

Maybe she's just shy...

Vibrant on the other hand.... Apparently the bizarre hatchling doesn't seem to struggle with this public speaking.

She won't shut up!

As soon as she could she climbed onto my head once again and practically danced with joy as she pelted me with endless questions, observations and random statements! I can seriously feel a headache coming on...

I tried my best to answer her at first but my responses became shorter and shorter the longer the conversation went on. Eventually I just had to shout "I need to talk to the Queen!" and started ignoring her for a moment.

Anything for relief!

The Queen seemed slightly amused by my predicament. I can only imagine that the Queen has been enduring Vibrant's endless thirst for conversation in my absence, seeing as she's the only other ant capable of talking back to the little thing.

My esteem for the Queen has risen to an even higher level. What saint like patience! What incredible tolerance for her own children!

Choking back my emotions I speak to the Queen. "Mother, we need to move the colony once more. We aren't safe if we remain where we are. The humans will come again, and soon".

Hearing of the creatures who killed so many members of the colony and wounded her, a faint anger can be felt from the Queen.

"I know a place where we can go that they won't follow. The problem is that you'll have to move across the surface if we are going to escape quickly enough. Do you think you can?"

Mother seriously considers my question for a moment before nodding. "I believe I will be able to sustain myself for some few days" she says, "I will let you know when the feeling of weakness returns".

"That's great! Make sure you tell me ok?! If you keep it to yourself again you really might get killed this time!" I plead.

The Queen simply acknowledges my words with a wave of her antennae and begins to mobilise the workers to return to the surface. As she makes her own way to the enlarged opening they created for her to enter the layer of workers around her just shuffles along, maintaining their defensive positions as she moves.

Vibrant had managed to hold herself in whilst I was speaking to the Queen but as soon as she begins to move away she pipes up again with her Squeaky voice.

"Where are we going?"

"To the south, we need to escape the humans".

She immediately became enraged. "Humans!? I will die to protect the colony!"

Why did this immediately become about her dying?

"You don't need to die or anything, we just need to move! If we can get far enough south they won't want to follow us" I say.

She seems a little mollified. "Ok then. But let me know if I need to sacrifice my life for the colony!"

"Nobody is asking you to die ok?! Its fine!"

She doesn't seem convinced and shuffles about on my head a little more before moving onto her next line of questions.

"So what are we doing?"

Oh god.

"We are going to get ready to move out. As soon as the colony is assembled we are going to leave" I answer.

"Ok!" "So why are your antennae so funny looking?"

....

Kill me.

Please.

Putting up with Vibrant's pestering I go to Tiny and get him moving. His job is obviously to carry our precious cores in the sack. Inspecting closely the sack seems to be of some sort of fine material. Is this velvet? Or a tapestry or something? Exactly where did he get this thing?

Doesn't matter.

Within ten minutes the colony has assembled, hundreds of workers carrying brood and eggs whilst others surround the Queen to protect her. All together in one huge mass with me and Tiny at the head we move out! The colony is on the march!

We march for two days straight, no rest, no sightseeing and strictly no deviation from the designated path.

Although I say no sightseeing, the pest on my head is completely curious about everything. Along the way I have to explain what a farm is, why they are necessary, the basic understanding of the human digestive tract, gut bacteria, bacteria in general and what a screaming mob of people running for their lives is.

The colony takes a day to make it out the other side of the forest and from there we mostly run into small farming communities on our way south. We skirt around the buildings, ignoring the people as we pass through. There is one instance where we come across a town in the night and rather than deviate we just power straight through, causing the small riot that prompted the little ones excited questions.

After forty eight hours of straight running we dig a temporary nest and almost the entire workforce goes into torpor, me included! I'm knackered after that run! Despite being so tired I spend a little time planning out my own immediate future path.

First, before evolving I need to try and get my mandibles around some Biomass! I'm painfully aware that the further I evolve the deeper I'll have to go into the Dungeon in order to secure a decent source of Biomass points. It'll be much easier for me if I can go on an eating tour of the upper level before evolving so I can be more efficient with my gains. Then I have a heap of skill points saved up. Whilst fighting

against weak monsters it'll be a great chance to build up some new skills. I was hugely impressed by the upgraded versions of the dash skills I'd been able to see for starters, I think I'll definitely pick that up. After that I'll have a look and see what I can find in the menu.

I absolutely want to use my newfound core wealth to train core engineering as far as I can. If get a good evolution that will buff my mental stats again I'll be even more effective when modifying cores, increasing my level up speed. The day when I'll be able to realise my dream project is becoming closer and closer.

I also need to pay attention to my pets, paving the way for Tiny to successfully evolve as well as stuffing Crinis full a few times a day until she can start to fight and level up.

The days ahead sure are going to be busy!

First we need to escape though.

The next day we assemble the convoy and move out once more. The journey is tough and we have to tighten our belts a few times, what little monster prey we find is fed to the young and the workers go hungry. Tiny seems to have lost several sizes, I've never seen him so trim!

After three more days we reach the border, the vast monster filled wilderness is spread before us, our safety, our future!

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 163: Those who descend, that which rises

Titus stood huddled with his advisor in the center of the cramped chamber his axe resting on its head on the dirt. Donnelan was afraid of that axe. It had even invaded his dreams. The thick, bloodthirsty aura that seemed to roll of it in waves was suffocating, and ever present. It had burst into wakefulness suddenly during the wave defence. The trainees had felt a strange stirring of the mana in the air before that aura had burst out, making them feel as if a demon had their throats between its teeth.

And that's how they had felt every moment of every day since.

The only blessing was that the beasts hated it as much as the trainees did. Ever since the axe had awakened they had ceased to attack the fort. Choosing instead to battle against each other, keeping their distance from the Legion. The line soldiers had been relieved that, even if they felt the spectre of death constantly, they no longer had to fight.

The endless tide of monsters that had clashed against their defences had claimed a few lives over the two week defence. For those young legionaries experiencing their first wave it was a sight they'd never forget. Thousands of monsters rolling forward like the tides. An endless sea of violence and death. Aiming hadn't been important, it was impossible to miss, no matter what skill was used. They fought for hours without pause, until their arms were heavy as lead, their vision blurred and their heads afire. Then they'd stumble to their blankets where they'd sleep like the dead before waking up to do it again.

It had been hell.

Up until the axe. Donnelan had seen the looks on the officers faces when it had happened. The monsters immediately fled the walls but the brass had been shocked. Shocked and worried. The commander had

raced to his tent where he'd left the axe and walked out with the thing slung over his shoulders and his eyes tight with worry.

Being a magician in training Donnelan had managed to puzzle out exactly why they were so unhappy. That shift in the mana, as if it were being sucked down a sinkhole. The axe had drunk it in like water, causing it to 'awaken'. Putting aside the idea of a sleeping or waking weapon, something that Donnelan had never heard of, let alone thought possible, the reason why it was so strange was that it should not have happened. Not up here. Barely a few kilometres down the mana should never be as thick as this. Not even close. It had grown so dense that it was enough for the axe to pull in and rouse itself, something none of the officers, certainly not the commander, had expected to happen.

That left Donnelan with yet another worry. Why was the mana so dense? Why was it still rising?! He could feel it coming on now. Saturation sickness. Extended exposure to mana wasn't natural for human kind. The diffuse levels of energy on the surface were normal for their bodies, they had adapted to it over thousands of years. The levels he was experiencing now were too high, he was getting sick. All of the trainees were getting sick.

If they didn't get relief soon, they would suffer mana poisoning. If they weren't treated then, they'd die.

They knew that, everyone knew that. So why were they going deeper?!

Whilst Donnelan chewed over his worries Titus was speaking to one of his specialist trackers. "Your certain of that Lisestus?" he asked.

The Legionary nodded. "That's what my Dungeon Sense is telling me commander. Many ants died here in the chamber, along with a whole lot of other stuff. No ant has died here in the last week or so. Either they were all dead by that point, or packed off somewhere else".

"What about the Queen? You should be able to tell if a monster that size was killed, surely?"

Lisestus' face twisted a little as he concentrated, employing the skills of his secret class. "I can't tell commander, she may have died here with the colony or not. Too many monsters have died in the meantime, I just can't pinpoint her".

"No worries man, thanks for trying" Titus clapped him on the shoulder and send him to rest. Dungeon Seers were a tremendous use to the Legion, able to detect the residual energies of monsters after they had passed away. Deploying those unique skills depleted mental energy at a rapid pace however. Lisestus' would need a brief lie down after sensing this spot.

Titus looked around the tight dirt chamber. This had been where the ant colony had lived, presumably after the Queen had fled here from the lower levels, either chasing the young that had been stolen or fleeing from danger once her first nest had been uncovered.

He'd managed to locate the nest, but either the colony had been killed by the wave or had escaped. If they'd managed to flee then Titus had absolutely no idea where they could be. The matter was out of his hands now.

Whilst he pondered the legions next move he idly stretched his old bones. With the axe Anima Sitio having awakened, he didn't need to continuously swat small fry. The weapon was constantly advertising

it's hunger, daring them to come. Only the stronger beasts would be able to step forward against that aura.

Titus froze and cocked his ear. Something was coming. He raised a hand to get the attention of his troops in the chamber with him and warned them "Hold yourselves!".

As the Legionaries looked at their commander quizzically they began to feel it also. As if the air itself had grown thick, the pressure upon them growing until it squeezed their insides.

They heard it then, rumbling up from the tunnels leading below . A low growl that shook the dirt around them like an earthquake and drove several trainees to their knees. Many soldiers were forced to brace their hands to the walls to steady themselves as their legs seemed to have turned to porridge.

The tremoring growl faded away only to be followed by a rising hiss that blew the air through the tunnels as if it were a gale. In the wake of that terrifying rush of air the Dungeon grew completely quiet around them, every monster having ceased battling where they stood.

The stillness was eerie after two weeks of endless din.

Titus face was grim. He stared down at his axe, seemingly lost in thought. To most observers he appeared calm, but as she burst into the chamber and took him in, Aurillia knew that in his eyes the thirst for battle was burning.

"Commander!" she hissed, "Was that what I thought it was?"

Titus slowly walked to his weapon and picked it up as he spoke. "Garalosh. That bastard is coming up".

Eyes wide with concern Aurillia pressed her commander. "What are your orders commander, will we move to intercept?"

Titus shook his head. "If we meet the old croc on the way down then I'll happily take another arm from it but we mustn't deviate from our mission" he turned to look his Tribune in the eye, "I know you worry about the situation on the surface but as bad as things are up there it is going to be ten times worse if we don't reinforce the bulwark below. You know this Aurillia, we have to go down".

Reluctantly the officer nods her head and leaves the chamber to organise the troops.

Donnelan shakes off the pressure that had nearly crushed his bones and approaches his commander. An action such as this would normally be unthinkable for the trainee, he loved to stay low key, but the panic rising in him overrode his judgement.

"Commander! Are we still going further down into the Dungeon?... Sir?" he stammered, rushing forward to clutch at Titus' arm.

The commander looked surprised to be accosted in this way but not irritated. "Donnelan isn't it? Our fine young trainee. We have quite a ways down to go yet".

"But the what of the mana sickness? What of the wave? It still hasn't stopped! The mana levels are still rising! We have to get to the surface! We have to help them, or the whole city will be destroyed, my family, my friends! What about us trainees? If we stay here in the Dungeon then we'll all die! You aren't

sick, I can tell, I can see it! But us? We're all falling ill, the saturation is too much! You can't let us die like this commander!" the trainee babbled.

Titus raised one of his thick hands and clamped it down on the young man's shoulder, trying to steady him.

"Easy there boy! Easy! We won't let you die of the sickness ok? You know I'm fine, the officers are fine, all of the full legionaries are fine. Once we get you down to HQ, you'll be fine too, but we have to hurry. I don't want to risk losing you to the saturation before we can get there. Now listen, we have a few days journey until we reach Periclasus' stair. That'll take us straight down twenty kilometers. From there it'll be a short hop to the city and you'll be right as rain".

Donnelans' head spun. "City?"

"You'll understand when you see it. We've done what we can for the surface, two weeks we bought them. From here out they have to manage their own defence. If they can't hold off the big croc then they'll have to flee. Once we reach the city we can see about contacting your family. We have ways".

Donnelan nodded, slowly calming himself down.

Titus clapped him on the back. "Hold it together a bit longer trainee. We've almost reached safety. Who knows? You might even get to see this axe take a chunk out of an Ancient monster on the way down".

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 164: Settling new lands

The Queen is holding up incredibly well. In fact, if I hadn't been sneaking the odd peak at her with my mana sense on I wouldn't even know that her core was leaking energy. The brilliant radiance of her core has already faded to half of its full lustre. After five days on the move the whole colony is tired and desperate for rest. It's almost a shame that we aren't a nomadic ant species like the army ants.

Mind you, those buggers are completely blind, so if I'd been born as one of those separate from the colony there is no way I'd have been able to survive until now. Also, the entire reason those ants are nomadic is because they are so numerous, and so ferocious that they strip the land bare of everything they can possibly eat, forcing them to move to a new location constantly. There is a lesson in that for our own colony going forward. We can't be so greedy as to strip the land bare, intake will have to be managed. Well, that's in the far future if we ever manage to grow enough to dominate our environment.

...

An ant can dream dammit! Don't look down on my humble ambitions!

All I want is for my family to rise! To be ascendant!

It's a lot for a few ants to take on but with a bit of grit and a heck of a lot of tunnel digging, I'm sure we can make it!

We have arrived in our new land! A blessed place full of monster infested nests and forests. Battle awaits around every corner and that means only one thing. Biomass!

This colony is hungry!

We need food!

Like an angry demon the colony as a whole swept forward over the boundary separating the lands of Liria from the untamed wild. Despite keeping a close eye behind us we never saw pursuit from the humans we had left behind, which surprised me a lot. Once we made it over the border the tension I'd carried inside, expecting an attack to arrive at any moment in retaliation for our grand theft core, evaporated. There is no way they'll be bothered to chase us into here, surely?!

The workers don't care. They dive right in, marching forward, antennae eagerly sweeping over every rock and plant in the hopes of flushing out a monster. Whenever we run into some surface monsters they either attempt to flee or leap out to attack! The former are shot with acid until they can't move and the latter are promptly ripped to pieces and distributed amongst the workforce.

Even I'm forced to eat some of it in order to force away my hunger. I get a bonus point for new source but nothing else. These creatures are so weak they provide nothing to myself and Tiny. We have got to get ourselves into the Dungeon quickly so we can mutate!

Unfortunately we can't set up a nest until we find a section of Dungeon close to the surface that we can occupy. The Queen absolutely has to be inside the mana infused air of the Dungeon in order to live!

The imminent demise of our collective mother puts a lot of pressure on us workers and we hustle here and there trying to find an entrance. After two days of desperate searching, when the panic in my thorax was reaching critical mass, we finally succeeded! A relatively narrow crack in the earth, occupied by some rather tough looking dog faced bipeds that I'd never seen before.

After annihilating them with sheer numbers, a minor helping of gravity magic and Tiny's judiciously applied fist the digging work begun immediately. With over a thousand workers getting their faces stuck right into the work we are able to tunnel down into the Dungeon and occupy it through sheer numbers. Up above, the hill is rapidly forming. Once the Queen is safely ensconced under the ground, calmly regenerating her strength, covered in a defensive layer of workers, the surface chambers are formed and the brood are nestled within.

Home at last! Tiny and I, with minimal help from Vibrant, excavate our own private chamber once again with the upper reaches of the ant hill. The cores are safely stored within the wall and the four of us settle down for a well-earned rest.

"Why are we resting?"

"Be quiet, Vibrant"

...

HIYAH! I'm up! I'm ready! It's time to take on a new day! So many things to go about doing I can't even decide where to start.

First things first, I rush over to Tiny and poke him with a leg until he wakes up.

[Wake up big guy! It's time to go and eat until we can't walk!]

When he hears of the feast to come his eyes snap open, blazing with a fierce energy. He hasn't had a good feast in over a week, this ape is desperate for a feed! What's more, he knows we aren't hunting on

the surface today but exploring a brand new stretch of Dungeon, if he's lucky then we might even find something tough to fight.

Personally I doubt it. One of the things I had learned from the human Queen when I interrogated her about the Dungeon was just what the environment down there was like. Apparently the tunnels, also known as the 'narrows' run in an almost endless web beneath the surface, main tunnels branching in all directions with smaller offshoots breaking off and looping back on themselves endlessly.

The main hunting grounds for the humans isn't these tunnels but is instead the areas they refer to as the expanses. Every expanse is a cavernous open space beneath the earth of impossible size, full of spawn points, bizarre plants, rare minerals and powerful monsters. The area beneath Liria was called the 'Forest Expanse' and according to the Queen the entire reason the city had been founded in that location was to gain easy access to the expanse and monopolise its resources. The Forest Expanse isn't even a large one, its considered quite small amongst those known of even locally. It had the great benefit of being much closer to the surface however.

Tiny and I gather up Crinis and Vibrant, who pesters us with endless questions as usual and we eagerly rush past a dozing Queen and her entourage into the lower tunnels. A brand new Dungeon! Excitement boils up inside me almost without me even noticing. Finding new places and learning new things is something that has brought me endless joy in this new world. I can't wait to see what we find!

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 165: Green Thumb

The cool light of the Dungeon welcomes my small party home as Tiny and I follow the tunnel deeper beneath the earth, Vibrant and Crinis tagging along for the ride. The goal of this trip, and for the next few days is to absorb as much Biomass as I possibly can before evolving and pushing my evolutionary level penalty further and further. Every time I evolve, the less Biomass I'll get from creatures that haven't evolved as much as me. After my next evolution I'll be tier 4 monster, with three evolutions under my belt! Considering I started as the statistically pathetic hatchling worker ant, which has almost no strengths to speak of I can only say that I've come far from humble origins.

Not only do I require Biomass, Tiny also needs to eat, as well as gain xp to push him towards his next evolution. I briefly conversed with him as we rushed through the Queens chamber and he was able to communicate that he had not yet reached level 20, therefore he needs to be the one absorbing all of the xp.

Crinis and Vibrant have tagged along since they both need to eat and Vibrant needs to gain more xp so she can evolve. Considering she was born with a core we don't need to worry about using her first evolution to form one, so she can directly be promoted to mature worker ant. I still intend to have her absorb a special core and see if she gets any juicy options that I may have missed out on, since I didn't know that special cores and the extra evolutions they unlock even existed at that time.

Still, I wonder what monsters we will encounter! New section of Dungeon, hopefully we get to see something new, I really don't want to have to keep battling centipedes all the time. Ever since I was born there's been centipedes around every corner! Giant centipedes with spikes in their b-zone is not exactly something I want in my face all day, let alone actually having to eat!

If I see even one centipede I may call the whole trip off...

The tunnel we are following seems to be slightly narrow, most likely not a major one. I can feel monsters gestating in the walls, so apparently the wave is still not over but they don't seem to be coming out at all? To my senses they seem to be developing less rapidly than the monsters in the Dungeon we had encountered during the wave, those guys had popped out after a dozen minutes so, like donuts in a deep fry.

When I flip on my mana sense I can see a more powerful reaction from these sleeping beasts. It seems the monsters here might be slightly stronger or more complex? Requiring more mana for the Dungeon to form them? Or is the wave receding and the mana isn't sufficient to pump out the monsters as quickly as before?

Bit of a head scratcher.

The workforce already invaded this section of tunnel and cleaned it out when the Queen took up residence so we'll have to push a little deeper if we want to sate our hunger. With Tiny in the lead we eagerly rush forward, looking left and right for something to fight. After five minutes or so I notice something off.

Isn't it ... quite green in here?

Contrary to my normal Dungeon experience the stone here seems to have actual vines growing on it? And is that a flower I detect?! Since when the hell have there been colourful flowers like this about?

The flower in question is poking out of the rock on the wall, about halfway up, looking offensively harmless. A bright red in colour and with vivacious petals that really give a refreshing feeling of spring...

I didn't come down here to admire the flowers! I came for food!

However, as if mocking my expectations, the vegetation only grows thicker and more vibrant as we descend until the tunnel widens out and we find ourselves in a place that looks rather less like the Dungeon and more like a scene straight from a rainforest. I expect singing bears and man cubs to walk around the corner at any minute. Not only do I not get any sweet rhythms, I also don't see any monsters around here...

Vines string across the tunnel, dangling moss in our faces and the rock walls are barely visible beneath layers of leaves and shrubs. Here and there are truly MASSIVE flowers and ferns that sway with the breeze.

Hang on... we're underground. There is no breeze!

The lightbulb goes on in my head just as the many plants and vines start shifting and moving, almost unfolding as they reveal hideous plant mouths laced with razor sharp teeth.

God dammit Seymour, not this crap again!

["Watch out for the plants, they're monsters!"]

Tiny was already into it before I spoke, roaring with excitement the giant ape leaps forward to grab one of the ... plants? ... by the Throat? Before beginning to pummel it in the face with his massive fists, rocking it from side to side with devastating hooks.

All around me vines begin to whip through the air as they try to latch onto me, or simply lash me with their suddenly razor sharp leaves. Some fire magic would surely go down well right about now!

I'll have to settle for implementing the jaws!

Splintering Chomp!

Pouring forth my vital energy the mandibles of light manifest themselves. When I use the shattering bite the ethereal mandibles look like wide, rusty saw blades that close like a vice, tearing and compressing. For the more armour penetrating chomp attack they manifest as blades studded with long, pointed spikes.

Ripping my mandibles closed they slam shut cutting vines and stabbing wide holes in fleshy plants. For now they only extend about a metre in front of my face but as I level up the skill they'll get larger and more potent, at least that is how it's worked with the shattering bite skill.

With vines and leaves falling around me like rain it's time to employ another new skill I purchased, dash!

HIYAH!

[Dash: Increases speed over short distances but increases stamina drain]

With a burst of movement I motor across the room faster than I've ever moved before. Turning my head I can see Vibrant is clinging to my head whilst cackling madly and even Crinis has extended extra tentacles as her main body is sliding back.

Geez! Even at level one the increase is close to 30% of my max speed! Although I can feel the corresponding stamina drain is vastly increased, I'm actually extremely impressed with this skill so far.

Rushing towards the nearest plant I sprint through the vines, ignoring those that smash into me, trusting my defences to deflect the damage. Above me a giant, somehow angry looking plant is looming, mouth agape and ready to devour me whole.

Not today buddy!

Shattering Bite

I bring my jaws down on the stem of the plant. It's time to mow this lawn!

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 166: Combine harvester

Having severed the stem of the plant the huge flower on top topples to one side, its comically oversized mouth thrashing about, trying to bite me until the final bit of energy leaked out of its body.

[You have slain level 6 Flos Fame]

[You have gained experience]

Muahahaha! After smashing through the kingdom Animalia it's time to reap Biomass from Plantae!

There are dozens of plants scattered about the tunnel engaged in this battle, some of them attacking with vines, trying to cut and control their prey so they can bring to their cavernous mouths, whilst others employ different methods of attack. Towards the back I can see a completely different looking plant. A long tube like flower head sits atop a bulbous base, the tube on top seems to be rotating as if tracking the action. All of a sudden a huge jet of liquid erupts from the flower, gushing straight at me!

LEAP!

Pushing hard with all legs I jump upwards and to the right, narrowly dodging the spray that I can see is a very familiar sort of attack. Some of the fluid splashes over the creature I'd just killed and begins to eat away at the body at a ferocious pace. That is some serious acid!

The damned plant is aiming at me again. Quickly legs, dash!

["Hold on tight back there!"] I shout at my passengers as my legs once again fire into top gear, moving so quickly they completely blur out of sight.

"Weeeeeeee!" giggles Vibrant as the air pressure has her clinging onto my carapace with only a few claws, the rest of her legs dangling behind her in the air.

I thought I said hold on you moron!

Checking on my other passenger I can see that Crinis has also extended out of a few extra tentacles to let them be blown backward by the wind. At least she was sensible enough to not let go with any of her other limbs...

I can't wait until these troublemakers are too large to ride on my back. Not long now Anthony, hold on a little more!

Somehow the tube plant is able to track my movement and fires several short bursts of acid towards me as I race toward it, forcing me to zig and zag to throw off its aim. I can almost smell the fear of this aggressive vegetable as I close in, mandibles slowly opening wide!

Splintering chomp!

Being careful to only penetrate the plant with my ethereal mandibles and not my own physical ones I crunch down savagely on the bulging sack at the base of the plant. As I expected, the moment my jaws puncture through the soft flesh of the plant, massive gouts of acid begin to spray out everywhere as the internal pressure forces the fluid through these new outlets.

The plant sways violently like a drunk as it's precious acid leaks away but it hasn't taken any fatal damage. Aiming another shot at me, from point blank range I can almost feel the plant screaming at me "Damned meat bag! Take this!".

But I've already raced away. The usual jet of fluid doesn't materialise, instead a rather sad dribble of acid pours out of the tube. Without sufficient pressure it seems this particular flowery foe has lost its bite.

Gweheheheh.

Just like this I start to race around the cavern with my two passengers having way too much fun, disabling the plant monsters by trimming their leaves, chopping at their vines and puncturing their weak points. Tiny continues his berserk rampage, ripping plants apart with his bare hands, smashing their main bodies to pulp, even shoving his arm into the gaping mouth of one plant and pulling it inside out.

.... Disgusting. I mean, was that strictly necessary Tiny? You could have just punched it in the face, but no, pulling it inside out from its mouth. That's an image I have to live with now, thanks.

In short order we manage to cull this particular section of tunnel, handing most of the experience off to Tiny and letting Vibrant take the last hit on two of the plants to pump her levels a little bit.

Now time for the feast!

After eating meat and squishy internal organs for most of my new life I'm ready to try something new, a bit of leafy greens, essential fibre!

Starting with one of the big mouthed flowers I start to chow down on this new cuisine. Hmmmmm. Chewy, rough, extremely fibrous, almost like eating a rope... and oh! .. The internals are quite.. Squishy and..... Horrible. This is just as bad as eating centipedes. Dammit!

Come on Gandalf! When are we going to find a monster that is basically a nice pie on legs?! Or a monster that fires roasted chicken out of its face cannon? Surely there is something in this damn Dungeon that tastes good?

I should have had Tiny rob the kitchen at the castle as well as the treasury...

Tiny, Vibrant and Crinis don't seem to particularly care as they rip into the Biomass with gusto. I'm still confused at how Crinis, despite being so much smaller than me, manages to have a bigger mouth than I do...

Oh well.

[You have consumed a new source of Biomass: Flos Flame, you are awarded one Biomass]

[Basic profile of the Flos Flame, unlocked]

[Flos Flame: Hunger Flower, A basic type monster of the plant kingdom, the hunger flower uses heat sensitivity to track its opponents, attack them with sharp vines and drag them to its mouth for consumption.]

[You have consumed a new source of Biomass: Acidum Ollam, you are awarded one Biomass]

[Basic profile of the Acidum Ollam unlocked]

[Acidum Ollam: Acid Pot, This base plant type monster uses a powerful jet of acid to attack and defeat its foes. The main body of the creature is actually mobile, allowing it to drag itself towards the remains of its victims in order to feast.]

[You have consumed a new source of Biomass: Vinea Bestia, you are awarded one Biomass]

[Basic profile of the Vinea Bestia unlocked]

[Vinea Bestia: Vine Beast, The vine beast is a curious cross of both plant and animal, being a mobile vine nest that doesn't have a distinct main body but spreads its vital organs around its network of vines. Whilst this does make the creature difficult to fight, with no central target to strike, if you can identify a key organ in one of the vines it can be defeated quickly]

...

I'm pretty sure Tiny just ripped the vines of the wall and flattened them until they stopped moving...

"What level have you reached Vibrant?" I ask the little worker, still stuffing its face with food.

To be fair, I am as well. We don't need our mouths to speak after all.

The little worker waves her antennae at me as she eats. "The voice said that Vibrant has reached level four! Am I strong yet?"

"Ah, no. Not at all"

"Boo!"

"But you'll have a chance to get stronger really soon! Once you reach level five you'll be able to evolve into a stronger monster".

"Yay!"

"But I want you to wait ok? If you wait until we can reinforce your core then you'll be able to evolve into something even stronger!"

The little ant seems to think about it for a while.

"Ok! But what should I spend my Biomass points on now that I have a +5 pheromone gland?"

I sort of shrug with my antennae, still eating. "Whatever you like, try to get every body part to +5 as quickly as you can. Just pick the mutations that seem interesting to you".

After our brief conversation, Vibrant turns silent for a time, a rare event indeed. She might be going through the menu perhaps, looking at options. I watch her carefully as I eat, hoping to see some sort of debilitating sign of mutation itch occurring but ... nothing.

Dammit!

I myself gain four Biomass, three from bonus points and one from snacking, before I stop. I don't want to fill up on this weak stuff, I need more powerful evolved monsters to eat. Crinis and Vibrant don't need to fight, so they should stuff themselves now, then again later to maximise their benefits.

Time to go deeper!

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 167: The finer vegetation, compressed.

We continue to progress further into the Dungeon, ensuring we stick with the larger paths at every opportunity. Even though we walk passed dozens of smaller tunnels we ignore them all. If we want to

quickly progress downwards or locate an expanse then by far the best way, according to what I've learned from my interrogation, is to stick to the larger passages. The bigger the better.

Not wanting to hand about too much and waste time I let Tiny smash his way through the various plant creatures that fill the tunnel on the way. Able to pulp these vegies with one fist the big fellow doesn't even appear to be getting tired when we start to encounter some more nasty looking creatures.

It really does give a different vibe these plant filled sections of Dungeon. Used to seeing cold stone, dark earth and waves of beast or insect type creatures its almost refreshing to have such a leafy environment. Never mind the fact that such plants would obviously normally require access to sunlight in order to survive. I presume that since they eat Biomass like everything else in the Dungeon there really isn't any need for them to photosynthesise. That being the case then, why are they still so leafy?

After an hour of pushing through the riff raff and following the many bends in the Dungeon we finally encounter some creatures that I suspect have evolved once.

Larger flowers with mouths, a bushy plant that actually rushed about on its roots as if they were legs, even a bizarre reed type creature that cast water spells at us, great jets of water blasting out of thin air.

Tiny punched all of it to heck and we even collected a core from the magic one.

Every now and again I continue to flick on my mana sense to inspect the creatures growing within the walls. They are clearly still there and growing. Every now and again we see a plant monster push its way out of the wall and fly at us in a rage.

What's curious is that the regular plant type monsters we find don't seem to attack each other much. I can only presume they feed on something else that comes this way that just isn't present at this moment in time.

Constantly doing this has thankfully levelled my mana sense up to level 5. With every level the range and sensitivity of that strange sense becomes sharper and more useful.

Eventually we reach a wide tunnel space filled with greenery and vegetation, large plant monsters dotting every surface with other more mobile creatures wandering about seeking prey. I can see some fairly nasty looking individuals in here, this might be good enough.

Quickly checking my Tunnel Map I can see that we stuck to the plan and roughly descended down beneath were the colony has settled. In terms of lateral distance we have moved about one kilometre despite rushing into the Dungeon for two hours.

This is the spot.

[Ok! Tiny, this is the next feast zone. I hope you're hungry]

Tiny nods his head rapidly as he stares at the monsters before him. You'd think he hadn't eaten in days.

[Tiny ready to eat!]

[Go get 'em!]

Unleashing a fearsome bellow, Tiny leaps forward with shocking speed, raising both fists over his head and bringing them down with a tremendous crash! That's one mashed veggie...

Time for this ant to get into the fight! I've been getting bored watching Tiny smash his way through the Dungeon with ease. Charging up my mandibles with gravitational mana I try to test their effectiveness on a large, dark purple flower on the opposite side of the tunnel.

YOINK!

...

Or not?

The creature is pulled from the wall and clearly distressed but it's many roots cling tenaciously to the rock and soil. Even that might not have been enough had the plant not lashed out with its vines and grabbed hold of any rock pillar it could reach to hold itself in place.

I cut off the flow of mana to my mandibles and release the pressure on the plant. Looks they can hold on tight enough to stop me pulling them out of the ground...

Let's try something else then.

I quickly begin to fashion a gravity bolt in my mind. Constructing the mind bending shape with threads of mana at a much faster speed than I could manage originally. Behold the effect of my daily practice! Every moment I get the spare time I've been practicing my shaping skills, becoming more and more familiar with these basic spell shapes. How many thousands of Gravity Bolts have I constructed, only to let the shape dissipate and start over again? Not even I can tell you!

The practice is paying off though. Although I still need to focus and push my mind to manipulate the mana, the extensive training has made the process more reflexive and faster. Where it may have taken me a minute or more the first time I used the spell I can now slam one together in about six seconds!

Gravity Bolt!

Targeting the same plant on the wall I fire off the gravity bolt and keenly await the result of this experiment. I've been wanting to see something like this for a while now, a creature able to resist my gravity to some extent.

The gravity spell strikes home easily since, after all, a plant can't dodge too effectively. Once the magic takes effect the purple flower, which is rooted in the wall roughly halfway up, begins to feel the powerful force dragging it towards the tunnel floor.

Once more the plant digs in, literally! Every root and vine, every available fibre is tasked with keeping the flower firmly attached to the wall but even so the struggle is real! If plants could sweat this tunnel would be underwater by now.

Still, the flower manages to hold on, leaves and petals drooping with exhaustion yet somehow emitting a triumphant feeling, the plant creature has held on against my spell.

Good!

Time to bust out the big guns.

I've been thinking on the forceful mana skill for a while now. Is its purpose really only to create devastating bomb spells? The skill description says that it is used to compact mana, so thinking logically, that compacted mana ought to be able to be used in any way that mana can be used right?

Time to test!

Once more I quickly construct a bolt spell. Shimmering inside me and pictured within my mind the spell is a three dimensional shape of dizzying intricacy build wholly from gravitational mana. Now the tricky bit.

Slowly I begin to draw out more mana from my gravity gland, the deep purple energy responds to the direction of my will and begins to drift towards the construct. This time however I don't simply pour it in, filling up the shape.

I begin to condense it.

Shoving the mana against itself and pressing it down I squeeze it into the construct and then pack more in after it, compressing the mana as much as I can. My mind begins to shake with the effort of controlling the fluctuating energy as it roils and shudders within me.

Gritting my mandibles I double down on my control, both brains straining to the limit.

This spell is literally being formed within my body remember. If it explodes or something.....

Let's not think about it.

Carefully I continue to condense and force the mana into the construct. Over time the shape I had built seems to be straining, struggling to contain the sheer density of the mana within it. Easy now Anthony! If it pops, you likely will too!

On the other side of the tunnel, forty metres away, the purple flower is slowly recovering from the fright it had earlier, blissfully unaware of the nearby ant straining to test a new spell on it.

Rest up flower... once this spell is ready I want to see exactly how well you can hold up!

If I manage to finish it....

The mental strain is doubled since I'm not even sure if this is going to work. I'm handling the mana with every bit of care I can possibly manage whilst simultaneously crunching it with my mind.

Slowly.... Carefully.... Condense it!

Done!

Finally the spell is fully charged with condensed mana! Beholding the unstable looking, shuddering construct with my mind I can't help but shiver. That was cloooooose. A little more and the construct wouldn't have been able to hold.

Not willing to wait around I quickly aim my spell at the flower and unleash it!

The gravity bolt streaks through the air! It doesn't look much different than the normal version of the spell so far, perhaps a little darker in the shade of purple...

The bolt strikes home against the flower and the magic field takes shape.

The plant seems to sense what is about to happen and once again digs in with its roots.

Then the force takes hold.

RRRRRRRRRIIPP!!!

In one second the plant is torn out of the ground, vines and roots flailing madly, even tearing the rocks it had gripped straight out of the ceiling! They crash to the ground with a boom!

Against the floor of the tunnel the flower is being savagely compressed as the crushing force of gravity presses down on it like the foot of a titan.

I can't believe how well it worked.

Good stuff!

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 168: Salad ala carte

[You have slain level 13 Venenum Flos Caligo]

...

Seriously?

The spell was not only powerful enough to rip the plant monster from the wall, it also crushed it to death on the floor of the cavern?!

Forceful mana is no joke!

By compressing the mana used to fuel the spell it completely supercharged it! What would happen if were to do the same for the Javelin... or the Domain?!

My mind is boggling! It's boggling right out of my head Gandalf! If it boggles even a little bit more it's going to join my eyeballs on the floor!

My control is still lacking though. It took over a minute for me to carefully charge the spell, almost as long as it would take to make a charged gravity bomb. Hopefully with practice I'll be able to get quicker at forming the charged spells.

....

As impressed as I am with the effects of this spell, I can see Tiny is currently battling on his own, getting drenched in acid and what appear to be poisonous fumes whilst I diddle about playing with magic.

Mind you, he seems happy. Roaring at the top of his lungs, fists crackling with electricity as he lashes out with wild abandon even as the wounds pile up on his body. I swear, with his unquenchable thirst for battle and reckless fighting style this ape is like a protagonist from a generic novel.

Chill out big guy! I'm coming to help!

Once again, dash!

"Weeeeee!"

It is SO hard to keep my mind focused on fighting with that going on!

[Dash has reached level 2]

Weeeeee!

....

Level ups bring me a lot of joy... don't judge me!

Rushing forward I engage in the vicious melee that is swirling around my giant ape pet. The plant type monsters we are engaging now are significantly more threatening than those we encountered earlier.

The purple flowers are shooting blasts of pollen or gas that I suspect may cause some sort of poison effect, I'm not too game to find out so every time it's aimed at me I dash the heck out of there. Sizing up the creatures firing at us from range I decide to present the commercial district and allow them to sample my wares.

POW! POW! POW!

Blast after blast of acid is fired off, immediately gumming up the pestering plants and eating into their fibrous bodies. Take that you flowery foes! In all I fire off six shots of acid, nearly emptying my tank but it's worth it if it keeps those poisonous flowers off our back.

Suddenly I feel myself being bombarded by savage lashes! What the heck?! In my peripheral vision I can see that the vines I'd seen lying on the ground and creeping up the tunnel walls have come alive, whipping through the air so quickly all they leave are blurred afterimages as they strike me over and over!

That stings dammit!

My Diamond carapace is extremely tough, able to absorb most of the impact with only slivers of my HP being drained, but the pain of having the continuous impacts roll through my body is still there.

Stupid Vine Beast! Turning to face my new opponent I notice this isn't the same tangle of vines we'd run into before. The individual vines are thicker, more dextrous and amongst the web of vines I can see several thick clusters where numerous vines have tangled together in thick clumps.

I brighten up seeing this. I must be facing an evolved Vine Beast here. Excellent! This should yield a decent amount of Biomass!

Posturing left and right I start constructing a Gravity Bolt which I fire off in a matter of seconds. I targeted one of the vine clumps hoping to see how debilitated the creature becomes when they are affected.

To my surprise the plant monster blocks the spell, thwipping several vines in the way to disperse the magic before it can strike home. Interesting!

The struck vines immediately succumb to the gravitational pull, slumping to the ground despite their best efforts. The rest of the creature seems curiously unaffected though, the gravity pulling down on only those vines that were struck by the spell.

Hmmm.

There are still dozens of vines thrashing through the air, lashing out frequently to batter my carapace. Even Vibrant is forced to be vigilant and shift left and right to avoid getting clapped by a vine. I certainly don't want to have this promising worker get squished on top of my scalp! I'll have to do this a little more directly.

Dash!

Revving up my speed I rush forward and spread my mandibles wide.

As the vines whip towards me I cut them with my chomp!

Slice! Slice!

Julienne veges, like a pro!

A rain of sliced vines fall around me but still they keep coming!

I can keep going!

Slice! Slice! Slice!

As the vines keep coming I keep chomping! The ethereal mandibles slashing through the vines at record speed until I arrive beneath one of the clumps. Rearing back with my head I unleash my longer range bite.

Shattering Bite!

CRUNCH!

The mandibles smash shut, grinding the knot of twisting vines to paste. As I do so a number of the connected vines fall limp, falling to the floor drained of their strength.

Interesting, perhaps each of these dispersed clumps is in control of a number of vines. This monster having its vitals spread across the network of vines make it rather a pain in the butt to deal with quickly.

I continue to slash my way through the endless vines, crunching each clump as I reach it until the entire creature finally falls still.

[You have slain level 8 Vinea Trames]

Finally!

Puffing, I feel exhausted. Constantly using the advanced bite skills is super draining on my stamina. So much effort for a creature so much weaker than me!

At least I gained a level on both skills.

What's Tiny doing?

Turning my head I see Tiny is holding a plant in one hand that he has uprooted whilst punching it fiercely with his other hand. Around him is a veritable farmers market of deceased plant monsters. Looking more closely I think the plant he's holding is already dead, which he should know, since he would have heard the announcement...

He's just punching it.....

[I think it's dead there big guy]

He turns to look at me before slamming his fist into the very deceased plant one more time.

[Annoying] he grunts.

[The poison effect?] I ask.

He just grunts.

[You going to be ok with that?] I wonder. Does he need healing?

[Ok, I fix myself] he affirms.

Fair enough. He must have some way of healing himself by now. Good purchase Tiny!

Since he's cleaned up most of the monsters we settle down to eat.

NOM NOM NOM.

The crunching sounds of four monsters filling themselves to stuffed echoes through the tunnels of the Dungeon.

I don't stop eating until every stomach is so full I can barely walk, my gigantic shopping district dragging on the floor behind me. Tiny is in similar condition, looking comically round with a massive distended belly.

I gained 10 Biomass from that feast, plus three for new species! It feels so good to finally get some points!

And I don't plan on stopping here! With Tiny's reluctant help I excavate a small chamber out of the side of the tunnel, digging in a slightly diagonally upwards direction. Once I've created enough space I seal the entrance and the four of us settle in to sleep off our meal. When we wake up I'm going back in there again!

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 169: Stairway to Biomass

HOOPAH!

I snap to alertness hours later, ready for action. Vibrant and Crinis are still slumbering whilst riding on my back, the little ant using the ball like JellyMaw as a pillow.

Before resting he had dug into the wall to create a resting chamber. I'd estimated how far the veins of light would be able to travel whilst we rested and made sure we had a bit of buffer. I didn't want dumb plant monsters spawning on our heads while we rested from eating dumb plant monsters. I wouldn't have been able to take the irony.

I have a huge wealth of Biomass saved up at the moment, more than I've ever had before but I don't want to spend it yet, I'll pile up as much as I can before heading back to the surface. This is a long term pre evolution feast fest bonanza! There aint no brakes on this eating train!

While I'm at it I'll pump my pets full of Biomass at the same time. Tiny will be ready to evolve soon so he need as much Biomass as I do, whereas Crinis just needs to keep on growing until she's ready to fight.

Vibrant on the other hand is getting a prime opportunity to supercharge her growth, she'll be swimming in Biomass points by the time we're done down here, getting all of her organs to +5 should be a piece of cake!

The second part of our mission here is to create a path back to the surface, a staircase if you will. I don't want to have to follow winding tunnels hither and thither every time I want to come down into the Dungeon. If the colony is going to settle here long term then a shortcut to the deeper Dungeon is absolutely in order. After I evolve I'll have to go even deeper than this to get a decent amount of Biomass. At that time the shortcut will have to be extended downwards.

["Time to get up you slugs!"] I shout at my lazy crew.

As usual, Tiny requires a few extra pokes until he's ready to get up. He waves me away, even reaching over with one massive hand to push me as he tries to cover his eyes.

Teenage rebellion?!

["There'll be food..."]

The apes' eyes snap open like lightning and he leaps to his feet, purposefully flexing his fingers, looking every inch alert and ready for action.

Damn ape! Have you no shame at all?!

Vibrant jumps into action quickly.

"Morning Senior! Are we eating again today? Will there be dashing?!" she asks.

"There absolutely will be dashing!" I declare, I won't miss a chance to train my skills.

"Yaaaaay!" Vibrant cheers, even Crinis extends a few tentacles into the air and wiggles them happily.

What is this scene? Are we on a family vacation or about to engage in slaughter and gruesome feasting? Or is it both....

Who cares!

Onwards!

Descending back down our newly dug tunnel we do indeed encounter a few newly spawned plant creatures which we destroy as an appetiser, feeding the last hits to Vibrant. Then we step out into the main tunnel once again.

Chaos!

Fighting!

We haven't even started yet?!

This is very different to the scenes we saw yesterday! Everything was surprisingly chill with the plants until we started to rumble with them, but here are engaged in what looks like all-out war!

Up and down the tunnel there are plant monsters doing ferocious battle with other creatures that we hadn't seen before.

At first glance they appear to be like heavily muscled pigs or boars. On closer examination there is something strange about their hides. They seem to glisten, or shimmer in the light. It's almost as if they're ... metallic? Are these metal pigs?

Indeed, all around us the plants are engaged in a fight to the death with these pigs who tear at them with fierce tusks or charge them into the ground before ripping into their plant fibres with their teeth.

On my right, further back and surrounded by plants I can see a giant pig, the mega pig! Easily twice the size of its smaller pig brethren this specimen is obscenely muscular, almost grotesquely bulging with mass beneath its thick, gleaming hide.

Well if these guys have metallic properties to their skin... electricity ought to go right through them right?

[Tiny, go punch up that giant thing over there. I'll take care of the plants and small fry].

He acknowledges my instructions with a nod and grunt combo, unusually communicative for him in a fight. I can only presume he agrees with these instructions. Bearing his fangs he trundles forward, building up momentum gradually until he's flying at full speed, the ground trembling beneath the impact of his massive fists.

As he charges electricity ripples along his arms and shoulders, gathering in intensity like a storm. Finally he bursts through the crowd of plants cornering the massive boar and roars his challenge, smashing out with one mighty fist. Electrical energy flashes through that fist and lights up the piggy like a Christmas tree. The victim bellows in pain, thrashing wildly with its body and throwing the ape back with a titanic crash.

Holy moly!

I do NOT want to be caught in the middle of that... Still, it seems my hypothesis on the metallic skin being weak against Tiny rang true. I think I saw that monsters' skeleton.

Those two big bruisers can go at it, my job is serve the greens on the side. Dashing madly about with my cheering hangers' on clinging to my back. I fire acid at the annoying ones and move quickly to snip apart

the most dangerous plants. Any pigs I come across are ground into mince by the relentless application of my infused mandibles and shattering bite, metallic skin or no.

Their defence is quite hefty I have to admit but these particular pigs either haven't mutated it or need to further evolve before it matches up to the Earth Bear Tyrant. I do get smashed in the side at one point by a charging pig but the diamond carapace holds firm!

Idiot pig! Out of metal or diamond which do you think was going to be superior!?

Muahahaha!

As I clean out the smaller creatures Tiny continues to dominate the big pig, smashing it about with his powerful lightning fists. Each time he connects a ringing boom bursts out like a thunderclap, telling of the immense force behind each swing.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The pig is reeling at this point. Staggering from side to side, desperately swinging its head to try and gouge Tiny with a tusk, but it isn't going to happen. The ape smartly backs off a touch as he watches his prey intently with his bat eyes. Finally he seems to sense weakness and opens his mouth wide to unleash his sonic scream!

SKREEEEEEEEEEEEEE!

Holy crap! That is only getting louder!

With my firm will I hold on but all around me plants and pigs are drooping to the ground, stunned by the shattering noise! On my head Vibrant has gone completely limp, flopping like a wet towel, even Crinis is looking more like melted jelly than her usual self.

The pig was taken completely by surprise, the point blank sonic attack has blasted it senseless momentarily and Tiny takes advantage by winding up a massive two handed hammer. Leaping into the air to unleash the full weight of his frame the ape collects a ferocious amount of lightning in his fists, causing them to glow so brightly I can barely stand to look at them.

BOOOOOOM!

Both hands collapse like a falling mountain on the head of the unfortunate pig, the discharged electricity rippling through its body and roasting it from the inside.

I'm determined not to get my hopes up. This Dungeon will surely find a way to make even roast pig taste disgusting.

With their leader the rest of the pigs and the battered plants aren't able to resist us for long. Within twenty minutes we are once again seated, feasting without rest, without remorse!

OM NOM NOM NOM!

I gain another eight Biomass from this meal, plus one for the new species. My wealth is amassing! Not to mention a few skill level ups I achieved in the fight!

[Dash has reached level 3]

[Shattering Bite has reached Level 6]

With plenty of energy left since we only recently woke up the gang is set to digging the shortcut again, carving a more direct path back to the colony through the Dungeon. After several hours of dirt shifting labour we rest once more.

Chrysalis

Chapter 170: Field trip ends, itching begins

Our field trip lasts for four more days before we finally complete our shortcut tunnel and return to the surface. I was able to utilise my Tunnel Map to avoid crossing over any existing tunnels, though we did draw close a few times. With accurate planning and tunnel engineering we were able to break through only a few kilometres from the site of the anthill. Now the journey that took us several hours through twisting and turning passages has been reduced to a twenty minute jaunt.

I mean, we'll have to fight our way through anything that begins to spawn in there but we would have to do that no matter which way we went.

I am pleased! Very pleased with this result!

After eating my fill over and over again an unprecedented amount Biomass has been stored! I may have developed some kind of permanent stomach pain but it was worth it! I haven't got nearly enough to upgrade every single part of my body to +10 but that'll take ages. I'm just not sure I can wait that long.... Evolution is beckoning to me! Like the song of the Siren it tugs at my soul every moment I'm awake!

The Mind Ant has been a fantastic species but I feel as if I'm pushing at the boundaries of what I can do, I need to take the next step! Push my stats to a higher limit! Then I'll really be able to flex my magical skills to the maximum!

Although my ultimate goal is to be an all-rounder, with powerful physical skills as well as magical prowess, I feel as if I'm right on the edge of being able to use magic the way I want to. With a boost to my Cunning and Willpower, some extra juice in my sub-brain, the currently daunting and impractical task of transforming mana could be shifted within reach. With some practice, I might be able to master a few transformations and then I could cast fire or water spells to round out my complement of offensive magic.

Then I could double back and pour my resources into physical strength on the subsequent evolutions. It shouldn't take too long for my body to catch up with my mind. After all, if the pattern holds true then the next evolution will require me to reach level 40 and buff my core to 200 mp.

My crew track our way back to the seemingly even larger anthill and its contingent of defender ants. The colony is getting back into a regular groove it seems, with trails leading off into the surrounding territory and workers scurrying back with food in their mandibles. I'm not too worried the workers will be challenged by the surface level monsters, unless there are some very old beasts lying about unseen I haven't noticed anything capable of tackling a swarm of workers up here.

Descending into the colony I find the Queen is happily recuperated, resting in the warm glow of the Dungeon light. As monsters spawn in her chamber they are instantly covered in a pack of manic workers, protecting their Queen as well as supplying the much needed Biomass.

Curiously I don't notice too much new brood in the nest. Those that we had before have mostly hatched, bringing our numbers back to over a thousand but it seems that since then there haven't been many new ants born. Perhaps the Queen was on break whilst she was healing up?

Never mind, I'm sure it'll kick into high gear again after we settle in. Once I've trained my skills I might even be able to finally activate my long held plans for ant supremacy!

Taking the gang back into our own little chamber we add the cores we were able to harvest on our field trip to the established hoard. Compared to what we stole from the Queen it's a drop in the ocean but another fifteen cores is always welcome!

As Tiny retrieves that sack of cores from the wall my eyes light up with the precious gleam and glitter of the small spherical gems. Wealth! Precious wealth! If I'm a dragon then this is my hoard!

"Senior, why are you drooling?" Vibrant asks.

Gah! I hastily wipe my mouth on a foreleg and attempt to regain my dignity as the senior ant. Did Tiny see that?

The ape is standing in front of me with a curiously blank look on his face as he holds the sack open. Pretending he noticed nothing eh.... Good work Tiny! Now you won't have to be smacked in the head with cores!

Quickly estimating I think we have around four hundred cores on hand. With these I'll have to make sure my pets and Vibrant get the perfect evolutions they deserve as well as train my Core Engineering skill to the peak.

Before that though, time to consider what to spend all of my Biomass on!

Through repeated cycles of eating, digging and resting I have amassed 72 Biomass!

It sounds like a lot but when I consider how much is needed to get every organ to +10 it isn't nearly enough.

My mandibles are at +8 already, so they'll be the first thing upgraded. I still don't know exactly what will happen once an organ reaches +10 but I'm hoping for another mutation advancement. Perhaps I'll have the same menu as before, or perhaps new more potent options?

Time to find out!

Excitedly I ring up Gandalf and get this show on the road.

[Would you like to upgrade Mandibles to +10? This will cost 19 Biomass]

[Yes!]

[At this level you can choose a mutation advancement. Please select from the menu]

YASSSSSS!

The now familiar long list of options appears in my mind and I instantly start scrolling through looking at the available choices.

Hmmm.

Yes, I see.

Indeed!

It seems as if the list of options is basically what I thought. There are the same options I had before, a few new ones and several related to the Infused Mandibles I chose before. A familiar headache starts to develop, just what to choooooose?!?!?

To start with I try and pick out a few choices that I like.

The Vampiric mandibles are still here, draining life from my foes and healing myself as I bite sounds awesome. Except I already have the healing gland, what worries me more than not having enough healing is not being able to break through the defence.

Berserk Mandibles which increase the damage the more I bite the target also seems good but I'm worried about spending that much time chomping on one monster, this doesn't seem useful in a swarm situation.

Let's check on some of the Infused mandibles upgrades.

Potent Infused Mandibles, increases the speed of mana flow into the mandibles? I guess this will help me wind up for a big chomp faster but I'm not sure that is really needed badly right now.

Efficient Infused mandibles. Provides a greater effect for less mana, increasing efficiency in mana consumption. This is ok but it doesn't really excite me. Since I will have more uses for my mana shortly, an increase in efficiency sounds great, but I want something a little more offensive...

Frustrated I continue to scroll through the options, looking for something that meets my needs. My focus for my mandibles is to simply to have the most powerful bite that I can. It's my bottom line, when all the fancy skills and magic are stripped away, what I want is the most damage I can get with my face hands.

So in the end I come back to the most basic of all of the upgrades.

Savage Mandibles. Increases the size and density of the mandibles to directly increase penetrating power and compression force.

Bigger, badder mandibles. Nothing more, nothing less. Combined with infusion, my offensive bite will receive a huge boost.

[Do you wish to confirm your choice?]

Gimme!

.....

ARRGH!

MY BEAUTIFUL FACE!!!!!!