

## Chrysalis 251

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#### Chapter 251: The new Crinis

[Crinis, you look wonderful!]

[R,r,r,r, really, Master?!]

[Absolutely. What a wonderful evolution! Such an incredible difference! You positively radiate power and strength! Surely you are my most potent servant]

Crinis wiggles with glee in front of me.

[D, don't praise me too much] she says, embarrassed but also delighted.

[Nonsense. I insist you come over here so I can check on your core immediately!]

Buttered up by my words, Crinis makes her way towards me shyly.

She looks pretty much completely the same.

The only difference is that she has been promoted from tennis ball of infinite death and despair, to soft-ball of infinite terror and despair! To put that in other words, she's slightly larger.

On the outside, nothing else has changed with her, the inside is a different story.

However, after reflecting on my attitude towards Crinis, I reasoned that she would be nervous after evolving, so I thought I should try and praise her a little, put her at ease.

Practically vibrating with joy, Crinis allows me to place my antennae on her spherical main body and activate the Core Surgery skill.

When I finish piecing together her information, I get this:

Name: Crinis

Level: 1 (core)

Might: 78

Toughness: 65

Cunning: 34

Will: 32

HP: 130/130

MP: 210/210

Skills: Advanced Shadow Flesh Manipulation Level 6; Advanced Grappling Level 4; Expert Shredding Level 6; Enhanced Tremor Sensing Level 1; Brutal Dismembering Level 2; Greater Fear Inspiration Level 2; Mana Manipulation Level 3; Tentacle Walking Level 4;

Mutations: Durable Shadow flesh+5; Disintegrating Void Maw +5; Bottomless Dimensional Stomach +5; Dividing Tentacles +5; Ripping barbs + 5; Macabre Teeth + 5; Mana Sensory Gland, Shadow Magic Gland. Shadow Flesh Generator

Species: Special Death Ball

Skill points: 12

Biomass: 243

Yissssss.

Look at the power of my pet!

Solid boost to all stats, Crinis isn't a straight up hitter but a support fighter. Tiny can smash through the walls, I want Crinis to be a bit more flexible.

The two new organs I've selected, the Mana Sensory Gland and the Shadow Flesh Generator should be fantastic additions.

It was a bit weird, but none of Crinis' system built evolutions included any mechanism to take away her primary weakness, a lack of senses. She was supposed to remain sealed off from all senses except touch for the remainder of her existence, which just seems weird. It kind of feels like whatever decides the Monsters forms and paths loves to come up with a concept and then stick with it absurd extremes.

I did investigate simply giving Crinis some eyes but the cost is actually quite high. When I thought about it a bit, it does make sense. Eyes are complex organs and require significant brain matter to process the visual signals with any sort of clarity. So rather than use up the bulk of an evolution simply sticking eyes on Crinis, I instead opted to give her a different sense.

The mana sensory gland works much like magical sonar, or like a permanently active version of my own mana sense skill. She'll be able to 'see' and visualise mana sources near her, which will of course include monsters, who are filled with the mana generated within their cores. Combined with her tremor sense, she'll have a unique set of senses that are completely her own.

Then the Shadow Flesh Generator. Being a shadow beast, her body has a different make up than the beast type creatures and shadow flesh has its own properties. Malleable, strong, flexible, all good stuff, but it isn't that tough. Rather than try and make the shadow flesh more defensive, largely a waste of time, make it easy to replace!

With the increase to her Might and Toughness stats, Crinis has experienced a boost in her mass, meaning there is more shadow flesh packed into her. This gland will effectively provide a high speed regeneration option should she start to lose tentacles or have holes shot into her. It was the best healing option I could find for her after spending a heap of time mucking about looking through options.

The shadow magic gland is her own choice. It seems she may have been inspired by me a little and decided to go down the road of inherent magic produced in a gland and controlled magic utilising the raw MP from the core. She has a natural affinity with shadow magic anyway, so I think this is a smart choice.

Very satisfied with what I've found, I withdraw my senses from her core only to find Crinis hovering unusually still.

[Great job Crinis! I'm super proud of you. The choice of the Shadow Magic Gland makes a lot of sense. Great work!]

[HRCK!]

....

What?

Ah, she broke.

Looking closely I can see that she's gone into silent, vibrate in place mode.

Too much praise, she couldn't handle it all. I think I'll need to give controlled doses of positive reinforcement over the next week or so to try and build up some level of tolerance within her, because this is just ridiculous.

Sighing inside, I shift to another part of the cave and try to decide on my next moves. As I walk closer, Tiny looks across at me before settling himself back into guard position.

Suddenly one of his hands lash out and smash into the wall of the chamber, crushing a monster just as it was emerging from the stone. Without changing expression, the big ape grabs the biomass in one hand, shoves it into his mouth and then repositions himself on the other side of the room. He must have developed a method for sensing where the next monster will emerge from and when because he's gotten so damn good at being ready for it.

Not that I'm complaining. I can sense them perfectly well with my heat detecting antennae, but I don't want to spend my time cleaning up these small fry.

I have a heck of a lot more work to do. I think the next cab off the rank will be sorting out the humans. I think I get onto that relatively quickly and get it out of the way. After that, I have a list of things that I want to prepare regarding the setup of the nest in order to prepare for the next generation and then I need to get onto my skills training!

Phew... So busy.

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### **Chapter 252: Getting down to work**

It's time to get down to work and we have a long laundry list of things to do.

When Crinis revives, I put her on guard duty and take Tiny topside. The first order of business is to lend our muscle to the villagers as they struggle to make space for the growing number of refugees.

With Tiny's significant physical prowess we were able to fell trees and clear a wider area for the villagers to use. My own expertise in digging is also put to good use, flattening out terrain, digging foundations for a few larger buildings and my supreme +15 mandibles are tested for the first time cutting stone.

Turns out there's a decent layer of usable stone a few kilometres from the village. After clearing the dirt around the area I charged my mandibles with mana and utilised the incredible sharpness to cut out blocks that were then transported on rollers to be used in some more advanced construction.

Despite working fairly feverishly, I did notice the Morrelia had taken up the role of drill instructor, she had cleared a space outside the village as a rudimentary training court and was absolutely shredding the hide off a surprising number of grinning villagers.

Looking at the smiling faces of those men and women only reinforced my impression of these people further.

These villagers are crazy.

No matter how hard she drilled them, running laps, practicing sword strokes, spear practice, physical exercise, they enthusiastically threw themselves into it with seemingly boundless positivity until they fell over. At that point, another group of villagers would arrive, drag the victims into the shade, give them some water, and then jump into the training themselves.

When I approached a frazzled looking Enid about the puzzling behaviour, she was happy to explain it.

[This is a chance for them to change their lives. Most of these people were farmers, labourers, servers or cooks before they were forced to flee. With classes like that, they have little agency in being able to control their own destiny. Simple people like us are reliant on the more martial classes to protect us and as such we are always dependant.]

Turning her tired face towards the training fields, she smiled.

[Now they have an opportunity to step up and protect themselves, their families and strike back at the monsters who took their homes. Of course they are overjoyed. Not to mention.]

She turned back to me, a complicated look on her face.

[Everything they need just seems to fall into their lap ever since they started following you. There are weapons, metals, a smith has arrived and Beyn has been freely sharing his knowledge of classes and skills. Out of nowhere we have a monstrously strong trainer and you have agreed to assist them in levelling them. This is an opportunity that no one here could have dreamed of only a few months ago.]

I look askance at her for a moment.

[You aren't starting to buy into Beyn's rubbish are you? I am certainly not a divine messenger of any kind.]

Enid chuckles and brushes her near white hair back from her forehead.

[If you keep producing miracles at the rate you have been, I'm not going to have much choice am I?]

[Please, no. Just, no. If you started treating me like that I'd go nuts. Honestly, I probably wouldn't come back.]

That just made her laugh more.

[I'll try to keep any regard I develop for you to myself then.]

[You better.]

After talking with her, I kept a closer eye on the villagers and it was true that they did seem to have a large amount of pep in their step, and not only those training with Morrelia. All of them were working industriously and spent their time building, fixing, helping, discussing or throwing themselves into the millions of tasks that arise around any group of people.

Considering they'd just fled their homes and certainly lost family members over the last period of time they were almost comically chipper.

After a few days of solid effort, Tiny and I had cleared enough space, and provided enough raw materials to keep them going for a while yet. Those with construction related skills and classes were hard at work transforming our efforts into buildings and the sounds of hammering and sawing could be heard even from the anthill.

After retreating to check on Crinis and tickle the larvae some more it was time to take a few villagers into the Dungeon. Not before I chased down Vibrant to see what on earth she was up to. Turns out her little retinue of workers had swelled to nearly ten and they were madly dashing about above and below ground, rustling up food. They'd kept the grubs so fat they positively gleamed with chubby health and the Queen was already considering the next clutch of eggs.

Two hundred fresh members of the next generation had been lain the other day, workers already obsessing over them, and now she wanted to lay another two hundred!

I'd had to beg her to hold off at least a few days so that we had enough time to get the new ants up to speed and properly trained before another wave of hatchlings landed on my head. She reluctantly agreed but I can see that the joy of fulfilling her function after so long has been building in her.

Since just before I was born, the colony has been on struggle street, the nest raided, workers slaughtered, chased from their nest and it's only now that we have achieved the stability to grow the ant colony the way it was almost meant to grow.

I can understand her impatience. I really can.

The next day Tiny and I took the small group of villagers who had achieved a basic combat class after their harsh grilling from Morrelia into the shortcut.

Enid decided to tag along to make sure no accidents happened and to help me relay my instructions to the people. Curiously, Morrelia decided not to come, preferring to stay and continue training the villagers.

It was an uneventful trip to be honest. I sent Tiny ahead and let him smash everything that had spawned to the state of near death and then walked down with the villagers, allowing them to take turns last hitting the monsters and taking in the experience.

Judging by the looks on their faces and the repeated bowing, they were pretty happy with the results despite it only costing Tiny and I a couple of hours and almost no effort.

Still, the first power levelling trip was a success. I asked Enid to strictly warn them not to enter the shortcut, ever. It was for ant use and let directly deep into the first layer, meaning more powerful monsters could theoretically use it to approach the surface.

Not to mention, Tiny might simply smash a human to death before he even recognised them if he ran into one down there.

This was a very much 'for your own safety' sort of warning.

After agreeing to make another trip for the next group of villagers to achieve their class, it was time to turn my attention to the ant nest, specifically, the farms.

I'd been sending Crinis in there to clean them up periodically, but now it was time to take this farming simulator to the next level in order to provide the kind of oomph we were going to need to raise up strong workers quickly.

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#### **Chapter 253: Preparations continue**

It would be utterly ridiculous if the humans were to be working harder than the ants. That is a situation that could never be borne! Never! Ants are the hardest working, most industrious species on the face of the earth.

Never tiring! Never slowing!

Now it's time to show it!

Watching the humans feverishly working as if possessed by a spirit of madness has ignited a fire within my ant soul. I refuse to be outworked!

I mean ... the rest of the colony are working their guts out, as always, it's only me that takes breaks. The workers are either tending to the sudden influx of eggs, keeping them clean, keeping them the right temperature, shifting them between chambers to make sure the moisture in the air is correct, or tending to the larvae, feeding them, keeping them plump and happy. Not to mention that Vibrant has been racing about, followed by her own loyal posse of workers, at a mad dash, hauling piles and piles of surface monsters back to the nest.

According to her, the surrounding forest is starting to look a little thin of surface monsters so I recommended she take her group into the Dungeon farms and upper tunnels to beef up her helpers and provide some more Biomass rich material for the colony.

No sooner had the words left my mouth than she was off, dashing down into the Dungeon and soon enough she was back with her team, carrying large mandible loads of Biomass.

Naturally this means the Queen is getting ready to lay another clutch in the next few days. All of this Biomass has largely been funnelled towards her which means my own preparations need to step up a gear!

First!

The farms!

What's wrong with the farms? Nothing!

What do we need? MOAR FARMS!

We need to pump out Biomass and cores at a faster rate than ever before in order to kick start the growth of the hatchlings, and there are going to be a heck of a lot of them!

So the first thing I do is clear out the existing farms and chow down, no need to waste the food and I somewhat spitefully want to keep it from the Queen in order to slow down the rate of growth, if only a little.

This nets me a quick 30 Biomass, since they were relatively empty already due to Vibrant and Crinis' attention over the last few days. Then the excavation starts. Currently the farms are four , round chambers about twenty metres beneath the surface. In my grand expansion plan I add another eight chambers, the new ones roughly double the size of the previous.

Due to the size of the task I end up recruiting Vibrant and her gang when they return to the nest and we get our face hands stuck into the dirt.

Ah! The bliss! Ant zen, how I've missed you!

A huge digging project like this produces a heck of a lot of dirt and the villagers are treated to the sight of a steady stream of workers crawling about on the anthill, dumping loads of dirt and doubling the size of our visible home on the surface.

I'm almost curious to ask what they think we are up to over here but I don't need the attention, there's a ton more work to do after all.

Once the digging is done and I've collected two levels in my excavation, enough to advance it to the third rank, expert excavation, I need to do try and increase our core farming speed.

Unlike at our last nest, I don't have a convenient pool of mana charged water that I can siphon off into the nest, in fact, the closest water supply is the river on the other side of the village.

Theoretically I could use my water magic to create all of the water that we needed but according to Beyn, materials created by mana don't quite have the same natural properties or capacity to hold mana quite like the original does. You can survive on mana produced water, for example, but it doesn't hydrate nearly as well as natures' own. This applies to anything made with mana apparently. You can make metals with some advanced classes of earth mage but they just aren't as good as what can be mined. So rather than settle for second best, I want a natural water source for the farms.

What does that mean? More digging!

With Tiny helping me, I get straight into digging out a channel that leads from close the anthill towards the river in a curved line that takes us around the southern edge of the village. Whilst we take care of the surface side of the equation, I ask Crinis to use her tentacles to burrow holes from the end of the channel that drain into the upper four farms, then create a pool in each of those farms that allows the water to drain off the top into further holes into the lower eight farms.

With my increasingly magnificent digging skills and Tiny's brute strength, we dig out a fairly sizeable channel in under a day. It takes a bit longer to make sure the banks of our channel are properly

squashed flat to prevent leaking and then to create a gate mechanism at the river end and at the anthill end. The last thing we want is to dump a river worth of water into the nest...

The thwacking I would get from the Queen. Yikes.

Our work didn't go unnoticed in the village and Enid came out to ask us what the hell we were up to. Once we manage to communicate the thrust of the project, the farmers get immensely excited and it isn't long before Enid approaches to ask if I can assist them with a channel system for their farms. In return they offered to forge up some proper gates for our irrigation system, something I was happy enough to accept.

No way I'm digging it for them until I clear my schedule though!

The ecstatic villagers were delighted to have a chance to help out their saviour the 'Great Ant' and they forged day and night to get the gates in place as soon as possible. So it was that a day later the final barrier between the river and the channel were cleared away and sweet, sweet water flowed to the anthill and down into our farms where it began to absorb the ambient mana in the air, drawing our own home grown, free range monsters to feast and hopefully form some cores.

Excellent.

With the major renovations to the nest completed, I can let the accelerated spawn of monsters during the wave take care of the rest and populate the farms. If we keep a steady drip of water going, hopefully in a few days we'll be able to harvest a nice haul of cores.

It had better be that quick. We reached another milestone whilst I was busy digging. At first just one but then all of the first twenty larvae started rolling about and spinning their cocoons.

In a short amount of time they had become pupae, the final stage.

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#### **Chapter 254: Check out my skillz**

I'm exhausted and my mandibles are aching something fierce after all that digging, but is it time to rest?

NOPE.

Those damn pupae are teasing me with their very existence. The twenty large casings are resting against the side of a chamber, taunting me with their stillness. Within them, the hope of ant kind is taking the final steps of their gestation, turning from a grub into something more, something incredible. The ant species to end all ant species.

At least that's what I'm hoping for. If they suck I'm going to be really disappointed...

It shouldn't happen though! I reinforce my own positive mindset. They are going to be great, I've put so much effort into creating them and into making sure they'll get a solid boost to start out their new lives, surely they'll be great!

The closer this project is getting to fruition the more stressed I'm getting.

Put it behind you Anthony, put all of it behind you!



Focus on yourself for a while, treat yourself. To what should I treat myself? To skill training, of course!

Not only me, Tiny and Crinis have been roped in as well.

After discussing things with Beyn and drawing on his knowledge, our knowledge of the system has greatly expanded and the weightiest nugget of wisdom to come out of that was the importance of skills.

Whereas I had been putting too much emphasis on evolution and the energy within my core, I was ignoring two aspects of the holy trinity of monster power! Evolution! Mutation! Skills!

All things must be in balance, so it is in nature, so it is within the monster. When one tree is watered over much, it does not grow properly, drowning instead of thriving, and the other trees wither. Only when the life giving succour is evenly distributed to all three trees shall the monster truly flourish in all aspects, mentally, physically, spiritually!

I've gone some way to addressing the shortcomings of my mutations but my skills are still lacking. When Beyn had found out that none of my combat skills was of the fourth rank he'd nearly slapped me out of sheer shock and in the process lost his only remaining hand. At least now with Shattering Bite advancing I have one fourth rank combat skill. Advancing skills, fusing them and taking them to their extreme ends is what the surface races spend most of their time doing in the pursuit of strength.

Therefore, the time has come to take part in that most sacred of all system related activities, grinding!

Gonna grind like there's no tomorrow!

The most important thing to grind? Of course its magic!

This was the most frustrating thing that Beyn had enlightened me of. I'd thought I'd made use of an awesome hack in using my free magical affinity gland on gravity mana, and in a way, I still had.

If I'd used it on fire, water or earth or something basic like that, it would have been a massive waste since I'm now able to produce those mana types now without too much stress. The problem is that having the gland doesn't give me access to what I really need to make use of it, which is the spell forms. I have the generic spell shapes that I've been using, but according to Beyn, every mana type has particular spells that make best of its attributes, the more advanced the mana type, the more specialised the spells will be.

Even though he'd never seen Gravity magic before, he was sure it was a particularly advanced form of mana, which means that the skill I want, Gravity Mana Affinity, will be deep in the skill tree somewhere.

In order to get access to it, I have to level up my basic affinities, which will unlock the next rank of affinities, and so on until I finally get to gravity.

According to Beyn, once I get water magic affinity to the third rank, the next wave of affinity skills will unlock. That is my most immediate goal. Apparently the exact types of mana that unlock are not necessarily set, and can vary from individual to individual. With a bit of luck I might even see Gravity Mana in the next rank but Beyn thought it was extremely unlikely.

There is apparently a powerful skill fusion available by levelling all of the basic affinities to the third rank and then fusing them to form the skill Elemental Mana Mastery, which gives powerful boosts to the basic elements. Most local mages aim for this elemental path apparently, but it seems like a waste to

me. The higher ranks of magic will surely also have potent fusions available, I don't want to waste my time on the lower level stuff anymore.

Rush to the top!

So Tiny, Crinis and I settle in to grind our skills, repetitively, endlessly, mind numbingly. For me, that means forming and releasing the ice mana construct over and over again, casting water and ice spells at everything I can see. The walls, dipping into the Dungeon and launching them at monsters, at Tiny once by accident, and the odd rock.

Using skills in combat situations against monsters gives a much faster boost than just hitting the walls but being as mentally exhausted as we are, I don't want us diving into frenetic combat. Keeping to the upper tunnels and picking on some plants is as much as I'm willing to commit to at this point.

Just like this, we grind, and grind, and grind.

Crinis is focusing on her tentacle skills, grappling shredding, dismembering. After much persuasion, I eventually get a mortified Crinis to attempt to use her skills on me, thinking that as a highly evolved monster she'd get more experience using her skills on me.

She was reluctant to say the least, which resulted in one of the stranger conversations of my life as a monster.

[Dammit, Crinis! Cut me!]

[Nooooooooo]

[Don't you want experience? Don't you want some of these juicy levels?!]

[I do ... but!]

[Then hit me dammit! Get those tentacles on this carapace. I order you to try and carve my bum off!]

[WHAT?! I... NOOOOOOO!]

Unable to deny my direct order, a screaming and weeping Crinis was forced to attack and attempt to dismember me. Her sawing limbs and intense crushing strength were powerful, to be sure, but they couldn't crack my shiny carapace.

She did get a few levels out of the experience, but I decided the trauma it caused her wasn't worth the effort.

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### **Chapter 255: Grinding all day, Grinding all night**

The next few days pass in a blur. Crinis, Tiny and I continue to use our skills over and over again in the search of those elusive levels. In order to push harder, we forego sleep. No true training montage includes sleep!

This does mean things get a little hazy after a while

Tiny and I managed to take the next group of villagers to change their class into the shortcut in order to power level them through the transition. Supposedly this boost will help the most since they're switching from such weak classes to something that has a non-horrific stat gain, these first ten levels or so will give them the oomph they'll need to accelerate to the point they can fight monsters on their own.

After sending the humans back to their village it was back to the grind for us. I eventually switched grinding on my bite skills. According to Beyn it's highly likely that a fusion of bite skills exists if I can get them to the same rank. I have three bite skills at the moment, the highest being my Shattering Bite, then Splintering Chomp and finally Ripping Bite. If I can get all three of those to the same rank then the option to fuse them will likely come available. The higher I can get them before that point, the more potent the fusion will be. So I'm going to push and see if I can get them all to rank four, that would be the best outcome.

And all the while, those twenty pupae sit still, somewhere above my head, like ticking time bombs. It should take them roughly a week in pupal form before they hatch and I need to use this time to power myself up as much as possible.

So the next two days bring more grinding until Tiny, Crinis and I finally collapse in a heap, too exhausted to continue any further. Some sleep is in order.

Before we rest I check in with the others and my own status to see the fruits of our labours.

Tiny has gained four level in Ape Boxing, two in Brutal Uppercut, advancing the skill in rank to Severe Brutal uppercut, three levels in fancy feet, increasing in rank to dazzling fancy feet, his Smash skill has increased to Heavy Smash level three.

His punching skills have all levelled up, making his fists even more deadly in combat. I still have no idea what fancy feet does, but I suspect it has something to do with balance and footwork, as opposed to actual dancing. I have no proof though...

All in all a respectable boost to his strength, but Dr Anthony recommends further grinding.

Crinis has also reaped some fruits.

Her Advanced Shadow Flesh Manipulation was the main beneficiary as she was able to raise it to the third rank, Expert Shadow Flesh Manipulation level one. Advanced Grappling gained four levels to reach level seven, Enhanced Tremor sense raised two levels, her tentacle walking reached the second rank, at Smooth Tentacle Walking level one. Crinis has also shown her dedicated attitude by obsessively grinding her mana manipulation and has managed to take it to Mana Shaping level two already.

With her flesh manipulation reaching new heights, combined with her enhanced mass, Crinis is able now able to manifest a truly ridiculous number of tentacles and her control over them has grown impressive. Razor thin tentacle wires, tentacle nets, you name it, she can do it. As a shadow puppeteer she is without equal.

As for myself...

Heh... heh... gweheheheheh.

BEHOLD!

Mana Scrooge two levels up to level three! Cerebral Endurance, up three levels and advances in rank to Advanced Cerebral Endurance level two! Deep meditation up four levels to level six! Stamina up three levels and increases in rank to Advanced Stamina Level two! Mana Transformation up three levels to level nine! Shredding Bite up four levels to level five! Splintering Chomp up two levels to level six and Shattering Bite up one level to level twelve!

Most importantly, Advanced Water Mana Affinity up a whopping seven levels to ten and advanced to third rank! Expert Water Mana Affinity!

MUAHAHAHAHAAAA!

\*GASP\*

So tired!

....

Phew.

MUAHAHAHAHAAAA!

It nearly melted all of my brains together but I did it! How many thousands of water and ice spells did I have to cast? Don't ask! I don't want to think about it!

But according to Beyn, reaching the third rank should unlock the next set of magical affinities that will become available to me. No sooner do I spend the skill point to advance the skill do I pop open the menu and see what my options are.

Come onnnnn Gravity! Gimme that suction! That sounds wrong...

The menu reads as follows!

Mind Magic Affinity.

Mineral Magic Affinity.

Sound Magic Affinity.

Healing Magic Affinity.

.....

NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO.

WHY DAMMIT!?

My dreams! My hopes! All gone to ashes!

This means I'll have to select one of these and level it to the third rank before unlocking the next wave... Which means a heck of a lot more grinding... Ugh!

Well... which of the three options will be best? I'm guessing I unlocked mind magic do it being the construct I use the second most, mineral magic probably because of my digging skills and species as an ant, presuming it's a kind of advanced earth magic. Sound magic? Possibly due to my sneak skills? Healing I would put down to my emphasis on regeneration and possibly my exposure to healing mana from the Queen.

Sigh.

Perhaps Gravity is simply too powerful to become available so quickly...

Let's hope so.

Of the four options, I think I'll pick Mind Magic. It makes a lot of sense, since I frequently use it already and I feel like there is a ton of potential there for shenanigans. If it really is capable of reading minds and altering memories then I can do all sort of things with it.

After picking up all these skills and grinding my minds into dust, it's time for some rest.

Exhausted, the three of us collapse into sleep, having recruiting Vibrant and her posse to protect us as we rest.

As torpor gradually leeches through my body and the world grows still, there is one thought lingering in my mind: the next generation is only five days away.

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#### **Chapter 256: Time advances rapidly**

The next day I dedicated myself to digging out the channels for the village to use for irrigation. With Tiny helping we shifted a heck of a lot of dirt, very quickly indeed. As a side project we used the extra dirt to erect a nice and high bank for the channel network, as well as building up the height of the river bank. It never hurts to have a few extra layers of protection in case of flooding!

The villagers were only too happy to pitch in and their own tireless efforts spurred me on to work even faster. It was interesting to see the farms taking shape so quickly. Teams of humans have been churning out simple wooden fencing whilst other groups have been marking lines in the dirt and digging holes for fence posts. The planting is already happening on the land that we've cleared. People have been collecting seed and apparently some farmers had time to bring some with them on carts, all they were waiting for was a clearly delineated space and for someone to plough the new fields. Yet another task that was currently being seen to by dedicated groups of humans. Seeing the cooperative and coordinated groups in action put in mind of nothing but ants at work.

It made me curious enough to go and find Enid to ask where this industrious spirit of cooperation came from.

[It's partly that people need something to focus on in order to take their minds of the tragedy. After losing homes, family, their nation, these people are desperate for something they can work towards] she explained.

[And the rest?]

[Beyn] she said simply.

[He preaches day and night about the benefits of cooperative work, that we should be more like the colony of saviours that have created this sanctuary and that by acting selflessly and working together, the people can give thanks and praise to the Great Ant.]

...

[Are you serious?]

[Perfectly.]

Stupid priest! Still, if the people are going to be more antlike in their behaviour, it should only work in their favour, they might actually get stuff done.

Speaking of people getting stuff done. Enid is looking tired. Her wispy white hair and weathered skin look even more lined and thin than usual. The woman is skinny as a wooden rake chewed by termites as it is, her current position as the de facto leader of this community seems to be weighing her down.

[You need a break Enid. The people can live without you for a day, surely. Go lie down or something. The village won't be better off if you keel over and have a heart attack.]

The old woman looks at me strangely for a moment before barking out a laugh.

[Your telling me not to work hard? Look at these people! I've never seen people working so much or so quickly in all my days. No. Just because I'm old doesn't mean I can't keep up the pace. If anything, these young people can't keep up with me!] she declared proudly with a glint in her eye.

She's tough as a stone formed from the fusion of other, lesser stones, that were themselves formed from the skulls of stubbornness record holders. She gives of an indestructible air and at times I have to remind myself that this person was an iron fisted merchant, tough enough to marry one of the highest level mercenaries in a kingdom.

[All right, fine. Just eat something would you? If a strong breeze comes your way, who knows where you'll end up?]

Enid smiles and nods, reaching out to hesitantly pat me on the carapace.

[Thank you for your concern. I'll make sure I eat more.]

[Anthony.]

[Sorry? What's that?]

[My name] I point to myself with an antenna, [my name is Anthony.]

A warm smile spreads across Enid's face and she reaches out to pat me again, more confidently this time.

[It's nice to meet you Anthony. Did you call yourself that because it has the word 'Ant' in it?]

[... you might not believe this. I've never actually noticed that before...]

All she does is laugh.

I'm not exactly why I told Enid my name, but it felt right to do so. Perhaps she'll eventually put two and two together and realise that an Ant monster really shouldn't have a name, or even need one. The leap from that fact to my actual origins is quite a large one though, not that I think it will make a difference to anything even if she does realise I was once human.

I am not human any longer. With every passing day in this new world I can feel my connection to the old me falling away. I like my new family. I like the new me. No longer powerless. No longer unwanted. I've made significant upgrades in almost every aspect of my life.

I mean, the senseless violence I could live without, also the distinct lack of pizza. But hey, you can't ask for everything.

I wonder how the other souls brought to this place found it. Gandalf seemed to suggest that he only brought 'damaged' people here, whatever that means. Perhaps they adapted well to life on this world and found their own little niche here. He did say that most of them just died. Makes you wonder why he makes the effort.

My idle musings were rudely interrupted by a rising dust cloud in the distance and the vague trembling in the earth.

Damn Crocodiles coming back again. They never learn.

Two hours later I'm standing amidst the broken wreckage of another Beast Monster swarm. If I eat any more of these damn centipedes I'm going to unlock the final profile for them, surely. I'm sick of the damn bugs!

Doesn't help that I'm covered in their ichor, there were a ton of them in this wave.

Although the village and the colony suffered losses in the battle, it was much less than last time. The humans were far better prepared, even though only a few days has passed. Morrelia was her usual violent self and her team backed her up well, but the people they have been training took part. The village was able to deploy some archers, as well as some properly armed swordsmen and women, the power levellers.

Although low level and without proper training, they were able to form and hold a rudimentary battle line, with the archers providing supportive fire over the top. With the mad priest Beyn in their midst, they'd fought with a relentless zeal, pushing them to battle on through injuries even a monster would balk at.

As for the ant side of the equation, the big difference maker for us in the battle was that Vibrant was here. The powerful soldier was a tank in the battle, crashing through the monsters and disrupting their attempt to overwhelm the workers. The workers themselves benefited from Vibrant's aura, giving them extra speed when they were her, but more than that, they seemed to act in a slightly more coordinated way. Acid was launched from the back of the battle line constantly and the ants just seemed to move more smoothly to engage their targets in outnumbered battles, pulling them apart quickly and then moving on to their next enemy.

Something is definitely happening there, I have to talk to that ant soon.

For my part, I brought Tiny and Crinis up and we rampaged through the horde, slowing and disrupting as much as possible. I personally took the chance to try and train my lesser skilled bite skill, Shredding bite. It's absolutely the messiest of all of my bite skills, hence the mess covering my shiny carapace.

The things I do for the grind.

### Chrysalis

#### **Chapter 257: The day draws near**

Still, it isn't as though my efforts have gone completely to waste. Rushing into the thick of the battle and chomping away certainly got me fairly battered, but the harvest of skill levels is still worth it. It's a bit unfortunate that these enemies are so unevolved but I suppose a large mass of monsters like this would be far too much for the colony and village to handle had they been more advanced.

Nevertheless I was able to gain another three levels in Shredding Bite and two levels in Advanced Stamina. That skill is really starting to have an effect at this point. The skill doesn't give increased stamina in and of itself, that's not how skills work. What it does do is provide knowledge and assistance in moving the body in such a way as to reduce the effects of fatigue, effectively making the stamina you have available last longer. Pretty darn handy thing to have in these battles.

I was also able to harvest another two levels in Expert Exo-Skeleton defence. Allowing hundreds of weaker monsters the chance to hit my incredibly shiny carapace is at least helping me boost this key defensive skill. I'll be a happy ant when I can get it to the fourth rank.

I spent a fair bit of time firing acid about the place in this battle, which was enough to gain three levels in Improved acid shot and another two in Precise shooting which allowed me to increase it to Advanced Precise Shooting level 1.

It really does seem that by focusing and concentrating on the skills they advance at a much faster pace than just doing it passively. Another piece of advice I should probably feel grateful to Beyn for. I just don't feel comfortable around that guy...

In the wash up of the battle I was able to secure some of the ... 'salvage' for the villagers to use, but the majority of it went to the colony, more food for the Queen to put toward another clutch of eggs I suppose. There's already four hundred of the things sitting in the colony. The first clutch of two hundred are due to hatch any day now and the needs of the colony are going to grow at a darn fast clip from there! Raising up two hundred larvae will be a big job, the colony will have to start hunting in the Dungeon a bit more actively from that point on.

Fingers crossed I can get the first twenty up and firing fast enough that they can help provide for the rest. I'm sure as heck not doing it all myself!

The other thing to occur in the wash up of the battle was that Morrelia and Enid approached me about the possibility of some defences for the village. The colony doesn't really need walls to protect us, if the enemies want to try and invade us and battle within the tunnels of the nest then they are welcome to, they'll get themselves absolutely ripped to shreds. I can however, see the value for the village. They lost people in this battle again. Not many, but still. After all of the loss that they've seen, losing anyone at this point really hurts.



Since all I have to commit is a few hours of Tiny's and my time, I think we can swing it.

So despite being completely exhausted, I found myself hastily throwing down as much Biomass as I could, another twenty points worth, before dragging Tiny over to begin shifting a heap of dirt in order to lay the groundwork for some rudimentary defences.

I don't have the time to dig all the way around the village, so I concentrate my efforts in an arc that starts close to the river and curves around the north side of the village, roughly two hundred metres from the closest buildings.

Nothing too technical needs to be done at this point, certainly not by me. All I do, with Tiny's muscular assistance of course, is dig a wide trench and have Tiny pile the dirt on the village side. Hey presto, rudimentary wall!

The villagers can do the rest of the work, levelling out the trench on the north side and piling the dirt on the south side. I'm sure they'll use some logs or something to reinforce it, drive them the ground. I'm not an expert, they'll work it out I'm sure.

When that's done I've managed to gain another two levels in Expert Excavation, and despite the soothing nature of digging, I'm wrecked!

Time to sleep!

Tiny and I drag ourselves back to the colony and collapse into a heap.

The sweet release of torpor!

...

Aaaaaand I'm up!

Whooo!

Gotta run at the new day with some energy! Since it won't be long until those damn pupae hatch and new hatchlings emerge, all shiny and new!

I've been able to tick a few things off my list of preparations but there is still a ton to do. Leaving Tiny on guard duty this time, I get Crinis to hop on my back and we do a final sweep of the farms. I let Crinis take the bulk of the XP and we allow the workers to come in and claim the Biomass. The Queen is still rather full from the other day and the workforce needs to keep up their mutations, they certainly aren't as well fed as my group.

Vibrant's little team is becoming an exception though. I've noticed that her followers are starting to show increasing signs of mutation lately. A gleaming carapace here, a razor sharp mandible there, it's all adding up to a picture of a powerful squad. I'm glad she isn't sacrificing all of the food to the colony and allowing her workers to grow themselves. The stronger they get, the less risk they experience in hunting.

The real purpose of clearing out the farms at this stage is to try and harvest some cores and in this we were successful. Twenty glittering new cores are added to my much diminished stash when we are done. Then I get some more water poured into the farms and it's time to move onto the next and possibly final set of activities.

I've done my best to empower myself over this last week, as well as build the capacity of the colony. I've done a fair bit of work for the village as well, but I'm hopeful that they might be able to reciprocate that assistance at a future point and aid the colony. I have a few ideas on that front but it'll have to wait a bit before that can play out.

What I need to do now is get back on the hunt and pile up another round of Biomass. I need to eat! The goal of +15 all around is still a long way away and it must be achieved before evolution can occur.

Whilst I'm at it, I'll probably get a chance to grind a few more levels of my skills.

[Tiny, Crinis, to the Dungeon!]

Only two days until the pupae hatch!

### Chrysalis

#### **Chapter 258: The feast, the grind, the spend**

There isn't much time and I still want to work on myself as much as possible. I have skills I need to grow and a whole heck of mutations I need to purchase to get myself in fighting shape.

I don't want to take my superiority for granted anymore. After losing half of my commercial district to a hostile takeover by the child of Garralosh, I know I need to wise up and get as strong as I can, as fast as I can. My family needs to be protected until it can grow large enough and strong enough that it can take care of itself.

At that point I can sit back and relax and let the colony take care of me for a change. Maybe take a holiday. How does an ant take a holiday? I'll work something out. Do some digging for fun or something.

Vibrant and her posse are already in the Dungeon somewhere, farming their little hearts out, so I let the Queen know that I'm heading to the Dungeon for a day and make my way to the shortcut. As we make our way out of the anthill and towards the shortcut I can see the activity in the village, feverish as always. They have so many projects on the go I can't understand how they get the energy. They're working on the wall, still putting up buildings and somehow there are more people doing weapons training than there were before.

Apparently there's another Dungeon entrance out there somewhere that Morrelia knows about and she's going to start taking her crew down on short expeditions. Apparently having had the first twenty combat classed individuals powered through the first levels is enough and now they can handle some short delves and power level their own people. With Morrelia and her people helping, I'm sure they'll be fine.

The shortcut is still spawning plant monsters and the odd beast. We smash our way through these freshly spawned beasts, barely stopping to eat until we reach the bottom and make our way into the expanse.

The scene here is very different to what I remember. The sound of vicious combat and the roars and growls of monsters on the hunt echoes throughout the space. Very different to the eerie lack of activity that occurred under the suppression of the Croc.

Needless to say I like it a lot more now.

Without the newly spawned monsters being sucked in by the oppressive aura and send out in marauding waves the expanse is suddenly flush with life, the enhanced spawn speed of the wave contributing to the vibrant atmosphere.

Perfect hunting ground!

Twelve hours later, Tiny, Crinis and I crawl out of the expanse towards the shortcut.

Why, why is it always so filthy!?

Once again I'm covered in a fragrant mix of dirt, ichor and swamp water. Tiny also looks quite ridiculous, his fur matted and wet, stuck to his body and covered in muck. Only Crinis is unaffected, a spherical blob of darkness, unsullied by anything unwanted.

How the heck does she do it?

The expanse had been full of activity, plants versus turtle hippos and various other monsters crawling out of the woodwork to battle. I checked in on the aphid population only to find them still relaxing, unchallenged on top of the foliage. It seems even in the aggression filled Dungeon, monsters won't bother killing a creature that will happily feed them so long as they leave it alone.

I also made sure to secure one Tiny armload of the mana infused wood that we found the last time we were here. I'd love to know if there is anything interesting we can do with it.

More to the point, if there IS something interesting that can be done with this kind of material, I wonder if the village can teach the colony what to do with it. I suspect that the more intelligent monsters, such as the Sophos, can make use of the materials they find in the Dungeon and if the colony is going to reign supreme, \*cough\*, I mean live independently then we need to harness every advantage we can.

Once more we ascend, crushing our way up the shortcut and I take a few moments to take stock of my own gains over the last hunt.

First up the 160 Biomass I gained is the most immediately relevant thing. That brings me to 246, enough for some serious upgrades. I was also able to grind some levels over the duration, naturally I didn't miss such an opportunity.

Mind magic affinity gained three levels. I used this nonstop during our stay in the expanse. Taking the skill gave me a slew of new mental spells I can use, most of which are variations of or more advanced techniques with, the mind bridge. I mean, it makes sense right? To effect another creature's mind, you need to make some sort of connection to give you access to their thoughts, ergo, the mind bridge forms the basis of almost all mind magic.

The trick I spent most of my time on was misdirection in battle, using the mind bridge to feed foes incorrect stimulus for a brief second during combat. The monsters would think they'd been attacked from behind, or think they saw a flash of movement in the corner of their eye, or hear the sound of a thumping foot next to them, all of which didn't exist in reality. At first it hadn't been as effective as I'd expected but with a bit of practice I was able to become more convincing and my timing improved so I had monsters leaping to dodge attacks that weren't there or putting their guard up in exactly the places I didn't want to attack.

This sort of mind control feels kind of evil but I can't say I don't like it...

Gweheheheh.

Naturally when using magic to this extent, my other magic related skills go up as well. Two levels in Mana Scrooge, one in transformation, three in Deep Meditation and two in advanced cerebral endurance. I felt like I was able to gain levels in these skills faster using mind magic than I was with water and ice, perhaps because the magic itself is more advanced? Might have to ask about that.

The other added benefit of using mind magic to distract and harass my foes was that I was able to simultaneously train my bite skills, so I was able to reap a small harvest there as well.

Two levels in Shredding bite allowed me to advance it to Tearing Bite, two more levels in Shattering Bite and three in Splintering Chomp. Now that Tearing Bite has reached the third rank, the goal of having all of my bite skills at rank four is suddenly within sight. Once I get them there I'll attempt the skill fusion and see what sort of skill comes out. I'm looking forward to it!

I haven't checked in with Tiny and Crinis yet, I'm sure they were able to make gains similar to my own. I'm too tired to battle Crinis and make her spend all of her points right now, I'll save that for later. I'm sure Tiny hasn't spent his points, just because he's too lazy to do so. If I had to guess I would assume he is still sitting on all of the points we earned for fighting the giant Croca.

Damn slacker.

Weary but satisfied, we crawl down into our little chamber beneath the nest and settle in. I'll have to spend my Biomass and perhaps clean my carapace, have time for a nap and then we will go into high alert, depth con five. The pupae should be ready to hatch!

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 259: The final preparation**

After slumping back into our chamber and putting Vibrant on guard duty, it was time for me to spend my newly amassed wealth. The last few days have been extremely productive, both for the colony and the village, not to mention the significant gains I've made within my own personal strength.

The knowledge that I've gained has proven itself to be valuable almost immediately, my skills have been rapidly levelling. It'll probably take weeks to get things to the point I'd be happy with it but at least I'm on the way.

The job I have now is to spend it up big!

I've got 246 in the bank and I'm ready to go!

At 60 apiece, this is enough to get three body parts to +15, not enough to complete the +15 body but enough to close the gap.

But what to mutate first? I'm not sure. I've hit the main points in the mandibles and carapace. I think I'll go with a bit of a mix of utility here. I'll upgrade the coordination cortex, my legs and my gravity magic gland.

That should be a good boost.

[Do you wish to improve your Divergent Combined Coordination cortex to +15? This will cost 65 Biomass.]

Yes.

[At this level you may choose to combine your mutations, or emphasise one. Which will you select?]

For this one I'm going fuse the two options. This should help the brains remain strong at both cooperation and individual spell casting.

[Do you wish to improve your Rapid Absorption Legs to +15? This will cost 65 Biomass]

Bring it!

[At this level you may choose to combine your mutations, or emphasise one. Which will you select?]

I'm less certain on this one. Moving fast is nice, absorbing mana through the legs is also nice. I don't 'really prefer one over the other to a large degree, but I'm also not certain that they will fuse to something worthwhile.

I guess for the time being at least I should emphasise the spell casting ahead of the quick movement. Absorbing mana through the legs has increased my MP regeneration by a ferocious amount. If I keep on using spells in battle, having that increased regen will be very helpful. So I'll emphasise the absorption.

[Do you wish you improve your Expanded Deep Gravity Magic Gland to +15? This will cost 65 Biomass]

Naturally.

[At this level your mutations will be reinforced. Do you wish to proceed?]

Since I've taken the same upgrade twice for the gravity magic gland then I naturally won't get the choice to fuse. I'll be interested to see how much capacity I'll have once this mutation is done.

Confirm all of those!

Hmm.

Humma....

HENG.

HANGARAMBA!

DAMMIT!

As the itch overpowers my senses I can only fall to the ground, twitching uncontrollably as my body no longer responds in the way I want it to.

I, I hate this.

Eventually it fades and I regain control of myself, averting my gaze from the judging eyes of Tiny. I can't help it man! It's not my fault!

With that behind me I can have a quick rest. After farming away in the expanse and mutating, I'm ready for a quick break.

....

I'M UP!

Back in the attack!

Getting my legs moving I quickly check out the situation in the nest. Phew! The pupae haven't hatched yet, but it isn't going to be long. Ominously, the next two hundred larvae have already hatched. Very small at the moment, so soon after emerging from their eggs, the little grubs are tended to by a small army of workers who diligently clean them and stuff them full of the food they'd been amassing for just this purpose.

As soon as the flood of eggs started hitting the nest, the workers, ever on the job, began to hoard food, storing it in their social stomachs and squirrelling it away for the young. Secretly, I'm hoping that this will slow down the Queen a little on her march to explode the colonies population. Even though the first batch of two hundred eggs has hatched, there's another two hundred waiting for their moment. In a few days they'll hatch as well and it'll be a hell of a job trying to get four hundred members of the new generation up to speed.

The whole point of creating this new breed of ant to be members of the colony is to give them a chance to fight intelligently, so they don't have to throw their lives away and die meaninglessly hurling themselves into the enemy. If I don't raise them properly and bring them out of the weak hatchling phase, then they might die as soon as something looks at them sideways anyway.

Since I have a moment of time I head over to the village and bring along a sample of the wood that we brought up from the expanse. I want Enid to take a look at it, since she was a merchant who specialised in Dungeony type stuff.

To my displeasure, she is otherwise occupied supervising a Dungeon delve away from the village and only Beyn is around to speak with me. Talking with the one armed priest is always... loud.

[OH GREAT ONE. I AM HONOURED BY YOUR GIFT OF THIS STICK!]

[Too loud! It's not a stick, we took it from the expanse below. Give it to Enid]

[I understand O Great One. I shall present your stick to the mayor as soon as she returns]

[Not a stick. Mayor? Enid has been promoted?]

Beyn shrugged.

[It was more just making formal what had already been in place. She's been running this place since we got here, may as well call her the mayor for her trouble].

Makes sense I suppose.

[Chrysalis](#)

**Chapter 260: First words of a new era**

With my delivery done I head back to the nest to await the looming emergence of my finest creations.

These ants could change many things. For one it would be nice to have more options for conversation. Vibrant talks, probably too much for my comfort, and mother has many responsibilities, not to mention many children, so I can't exactly monopolise her time, in good conscience.

Tiny and Crinis aren't the best conversationalists either. Tiny barely has the brain capacity to speak and Crinis has a few hang ups that make talking to her, somewhat difficult. Perhaps if I ever work out a way to free them for their pet status they might be a little more engaged, and not quite so respectful.

Obviously having a decent chat isn't the reason why I embarked on this project. I wanted to fill the colony with smarter, deadlier workers. Ants with the capacity to reason, to communicate, to think cooperatively and most of all, to fight strategically and tactically. No more suicidal charges, no more throwing their lives away. Instead, teamwork, some self-preservation instinct, planning and loss minimisation.

An ant colony that is capable of all the tactical thinking of a nation. That is what I wanted. And now, here I stand, on the dawn of a glorious new ant era!

My new siblings will soon be born and I'm willing to bet this world has never seen anything quite like them. Smart monsters exist, sure, but not like this. Ants are different, ants are special. They cover the earth, the combined mass of ants is estimated to be the same that of humans, assuming one million ants weighs the same as one person. That's seven quadrillion ants. On Earth, ants were tiny little insects, unable to increase too much in size as their bodies are unable to support that kind of mass.

Here on Pangera? This world has magic and all sorts of crazy stuff. Ants the size of large dogs? Sure why not? What if we get seven quadrillion ants the size of large dogs? What if we get that many and all of them are as intelligent as a human?

We'd be unstoppable!

I have to admit though, as I crawl into the nesting chamber where the twenty pupae are resting against the wall, tended to by a small team of workers, that I also have some worries. Fundamentally, what makes an ant colony so successful is the cooperation between each individual member, to the point where the colony can be considered one creature, each ant a single cell of something greater than itself.

Where humanity on earth is riven by strife, within nations, within cities and within families, an ant colony is unified, singular in mind and purpose.

By elevating their intelligence to that of a human, have I introduced those chaotic impulses? Will the new workers exercise free will? Tearing the colony apart from within?

Once I give space to doubts they begin to scale out of control. Will there be civil war? Will ant fight against ant within the colony, pitting sibling against sibling? Will a tearful Queen be forced to put down an uprising of her own children?

That would be horrific!

It isn't as if I HAD to cooperate with the colony. I, as a human reborn as monster, could have chosen to do whatever I wanted. I decided to embrace the colony, to support and help it, to depend on it and

thrive alongside it. Someone else might have chosen differently. Perhaps they would instead feast on the colony, killing workers who wouldn't fight back, harvesting them for experience and Biomass, growing fat on their supposed family before moving on in the Dungeon as an independent monster, leaving behind a destroyed colony in their wake.

Is that the kind of thing we'll have to deal with now? Selfish ants? Who ever heard of selfish ants?! Such a thing doesn't even make sense! It's not a concept that should exist in this world or any other. It goes against the very nature of ant kind! Ants are selfless! I mean, they are also mostly brainless, but that's beside the point!

My mind is filled with the tragic image of my siblings ripping each other apart in the tunnels of our nest over a stupid and petty justification. Will the unity of the colony be destroyed by the new generation?

Have I undone the very fabric of ant society with my evil experimentation?!

WHAT HAVE I DONE?!

Wait.

I heard something.

Silence.

I'm sure that I heard it. It was the pupae!

I rush closer to the cocoons, pushing my way amongst the suddenly buzzing workers. Yes! There is sound coming from within.

They're breaking out!

The newly formed ants within are starting to break out of their cocoons and the workers on the outside move to assist, peeling away the layers with their mandibles and helping to free the emerging workers.

Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy, oh boy.

I'm excited, but also nervous! Making intelligent ants, was it a mistake? Will this be a moment of triumph? Or of failure?

It's too late for regret now, the fruits of my labour are being released into the world before my very eyes!

I almost feel like a mad scientist watching his creation come to life. I played with these ants when they were grubs but it's often hard to put them together in my mind as the same creatures. Looking at the vague shapes pushing against the inside of their cocoons, I feel as if I'm seeing them for the first time.

My heart is pounding within my chest. I'm light headed. I need to breathe. In, out, in, out. Relax Anthony, its fine. You've either elevated your colony to the peak of the world or doomed them to collapse is savage internal strife that pits sibling against sibling.

So no stress.

MAH GAWD I CAN'T TAKE IT!



The workers swarm over the pupae now, cutting into the fibres of the cocoons and tearing them open, gradually the still soft and pale workers within are being revealed. They are smaller than normal hatchlings. Hatchlings were already quite small but these are noticeably smaller. I had to sacrifice a lot to get their Cunning and Will stats up and their bodies are even weaker than mine was when I was born on this world.

That'll change once they start to evolve though. The early part of their lives will be tougher, sure, but the payoff will be there after a few evolutions and they start to specialise.

The other thing I gave them is a fully developed Language Pheromone Gland. These little workers are able to talk the moment they are born. I wonder what they'll say? A declaration of war against the Queen?!

Surely too soon for that.

Perhaps they'll declare their independence? Will they complain? Protest? Will the anguished cries from their very souls will resound throughout the chamber any moment?

Just how much of their nature is inherently ant? How much of it depends on the mind they are born with? This is a whole lot of questions I should have answered before I embarked on this project...

I have a deep seated fear that these ants are going to do something one day that I'm going to regret.

Oh! That one is almost free!

So is that one!

The workers make faster progress as the outer layers peel away and the ants inside start to be able to move more, their new bodies stiff and unresponsive. Soon the cocoons are torn open and the twenty members of the new generation are lying on the chamber floor, slowly becoming accustomed to their new forms.

I watch apprehensively. I've worked myself up too much, I don't know what to expect.

Then one of them speaks.

"D.... Death."

What?

"M... mah.... My death."

You want to die already?! Are you like Frankenstein's monster?! Do you yearn to be free of your tormented existence?!

The worker in question wiggles its limbs more vigorously, growing in strength with each passing moment.

It speaks again.

"My death.... For... the colony!"

Then another speaks.

"My ... life... for ... the colony!"

And another.

"My .... Existence.... for the colony!"

As the workers gradually put their feet under themselves and stand, they all begin to cry out, their voices weak at first but growing stronger each second.

"I will give my life in the service of the Colony!"

"For the Queen I shall die!"

"I will be the first to sacrifice myself my the glory of the colony!"

"I will be the one to throw myself upon our enemies, letting myself be torn apart for the colony!"

"For the colony!"

"For the colony!"

"FOR THE COLONY!"

The small ants begin roaring as one, the fervour in their voices matching the burning fire in their eyes. I've seen it before, this passionate heat that seems to radiate out of them, filling the air of the chamber. I've seen it in the eyes of my sibling, the workers, as they throw themselves into battle.

Now I can hear what it was they were thinking.

The new generation might have the intelligence of people, but they are ants through and through.