

Chrysalis 391

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Chapter 391: Twisted Mind

I wove the bridge deftly and with incredible ease, the likes of which I hadn't felt before. The extra stats flexed their muscles here, the Cunning allowing me to comprehend and visualise the complex patterns with so much more clarity, the Will allowing me to handle the mana and direct it to my wishes much easier.

It's so nice!

When the bridge connects at last, my second Gravity Bomb has flickered out of existence and an extremely large, angry Crocodile is staring at me with pure rage in her eyes. Across her flank and toward her back leg there are chunks of flesh missing, carved out of her by the crushing force of gravity. The blood that leaks from the wounds sizzles into the vapour in an instant due to the incredible heat emanating from her body. Before I can try and speak to her, I notice her throat bulge impressively and I think it's time to motor.

"Vibrant! You still with me?"

"Yup-Yup! Ready to roll!"

"Great, let's move!"

DASH!

As I dashed away and tried to circle around the massive croc a huge gout of magma erupted from her mouth and landed behind me. HOT! Seriously hot! Lava now?! Is that the next level after flame? Weren't happy with the super-hot coloured flames were you? Needed to take it to the next level? Sheesh!

Garralosh began to twist her body with shocking speed and the pressure of her magma spray increased exponentially all of a sudden. Hot lave flew at my face and I had to jump! My legs push down hard and I fly into the air as the spray of magma hit the ground right where I'd been.

Yikes!

She's a lot quicker than she looks! I should have expected that, to be honest. She didn't live this long and get as strong as she did without having a couple of tricks up her sleeve... Scales... whatever.

[So how does it feel to get this old?] I ask her.

[KILL! HATE! CRUSH! KILL! HATE! CRUSH! KILL! HATE! CRUSH! KILL! HATE! CRUSH! KILL! HATE! CRUSH!] a deep and powerful voice raged in my mind.

Oookay!

Near bottomless depths of anger, fear and thirst for killing wash back against my thoughts through the mind bridge. Holy moly, her mind is a freakin mess. I'm not sure what I expected to find in there. A former human, thrown into the Dungeon and forced to live as a crocodile monster for over a hundred years, it would mess up a lot of people. But there is chaos in there. She's completely nuts!

[Uh... How's Crocodile life?]

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[DIIIIIEEEEEEEEE!!!!!!]

[So... not great then?]

I'm starting to think I'm lucky to get words of any sort out of her at all. Thank goodness for mind magic. Not that I thought talking her down would ever work, but I'm starting to think no communication at all is going to be possible.

Instead, I'll divert my energy to more standard tactics. My sub brains begin to craft horrible experiences and sensory tricks to send through the bridge and I devote my main mind to concentrate on the fight.

"Still here Vibrant?"

"It's hot, but I'm fine!"

She's way faster than me, no chance she gets hit.

"Stick with me but don't get too close, alright? It's going to get hairy!"

It may have been unfortunate what happened to you, Garralosh, but I'm not going to hold back just because you were a human once! I gather my strength and dash once more, this time I don't head around the enormous enemy, but straight toward her.

My nerves are firing on all cylinders and my antennae are blaring warnings at me. The glimpse of the future I can see isn't pleasant! My enhanced nervous system fires so fast my brain barely has time to register before my body has begun moving. So quick! I throw myself to the left just in time to avoid a powerful burst of lava from that cavernous maw in front of me.

That's one huge mouth! She could fit Tiny in there standing up! I shiver. Good thing I told my pets to hang back. Tiny would get carried away and eaten in about five seconds I think, and I doubt Crinis could do anything to this monster anyway. She's just too damn tough.

My legs scrabble beneath me and I throw myself forward again closing in on the beast. That last dodge has thrown me off targeting her wounded side, I'll have to make do with the healthy side. I zip past the open maw and slip past her front leg when my antennae blares a warning at me once more.

She's crafty!

To my mind's eye I can 'see' her middle leg rise, claws grasping to stomp down at my head. I roll left again, putting myself underneath her torso just as the claw stomps down, blasting a cloud of dust into the air from the sheer force of it.

BOOM!

If I got hit by that I'd be a pancake! I'd pop like a balloon! Just what are her stats like, anyway! I roll myself back the other way and spin my body to angle my head properly. I sure as heck hope that this

skill proves to be worth it. Rank four fused skill. The bite of destiny! Those searing scales burn before me as I make a small prayer to the pearlescent sheen of the great Gandalf's beard and activate my new skill.

OMEN CHOMP!

I worked so hard for this damn skill. Please be awesome, please be awesome.

The moment I activate it, I feel that something is different. My stamina depletes by a massive chunk all at once, enough to make me stagger as the drain leaves me light headed for a brief moment. But that doesn't stop the skill from executing. The jaws of light that would normally appear and extend my range do not manifest. Instead, the jaws are dark and full of foreboding. Two metres beyond the reach of my own mandibles, they extend outwards and appear as a horrific mash of all three of my old bite skills combined.

Sharp, for piercing armour, bladed for cutting flesh, and flat to crush and crack, they are a nightmare of different surfaces designed to do nasty things to places monsters would rather not have nasty things happen to. I plunge forward with my head and those mighty jaws close on the fearsome scales of Garralosh!

SCREEEECH!

Sparks fly as my mandibles grate along the scales, leaving deep trenches cut into them before halfway through my bite motion, the 'teeth' find a better purchase.

CRUNCH!

It's a special feeling, when the enemies defences crumble before the incredible might of your face hands. Even if my face feels like it's on fire, and my mandibles are starting to smoke, the sensation of the scales cracking and splintering before my might is a delight!

Not for Garralosh though, obviously.

"GROOOWWLLLLL!"

She 'aint happy.

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Chapter 392: Communal Will

I revel in my triumphant bite for a fraction of a second too long. Even the tingle of my antennae and a lightning quick response isn't enough to completely save me from the retaliatory sweep of Garralosh's mid leg. It's hard to twist an ant body. Hard in the sense that you can't do it. So she clips me on the way through and all of a sudden I find myself airborne.

Ouch! That stings!

How much HP did I even lose just then? Thirty?! She barely touched me!

THUD!

I land in a heap and quickly scramble to get back on my legs and running. I don't want to stand still with this massive Croc on my case! With Vibrant nearby, all my movements are that tiny bit sharper and that makes all the difference when Garralosh dashed toward me.

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Let me tell you. Watching something large move fast, is kinda weird. Tiny with his fancy feet, which he uses to move with a lightness and delicacy that an over three metre tall gorilla has no business moving with. Even that sight pales in comparison to seeing Garralosh dash.

The Croc must weigh as much as a truck, if not more. Even lying down she's absurdly taller than I am, and the sheer mass of her is ridiculous. But clearly she's been working on her skills over her long life, since she essentially teleports in front of me, her jaws flashing before my eyes.

DODGE!

HOLY MACKEREL, DODGE!

SNAP!

My legs explode with energy and I throw my body to one side so hard I can't even land and instead roll end over end before I can get my feet underneath me. So scary! She's so damn quick!

AH! AGAIN!

Without pause, Garralosh uses her dash once more to appear directly in front of my face!

MOVE IT OR LOSE IT ANTHONY!

I swear to Gandalf, if I check the menu later and realise there's a dodge skill I never bought I'm gonna kick myself right in the abdomen!

I scramble my legs beneath me again and push with all my strength and I nearly make it. One leg gets caught in those cavernous jaws and pain rockets up my front left leg as half of it is simply gone. Even as the pain rocks my head I can't sit still. I smash together a mental illusion with my sub-brains and slam it across the mental bridge and I blindly dodge once more.

I know she's coming for me, I can feel it!

It works! In the mind of the giant Croc, she gets an image of my dodging to the left but instead I fling myself to the right and she takes the bait, her indescribable jaws slam shut where I'm not and I take a moment to accelerate away to get some distance.

Gravity bolts!

Mentally I inspect the damage as my sub-brains try to slow down that stupidly fast monster with a few gravity bolts to help weight her down. My poor leg! It hurts like fire! Holy heck! Not to mention I'm already feeling tired from the constant dashing and the one use of my all new, all powerful bite skill. The effect was great but the stamina cost was real!

Actually... I'm not as tired as I should be?

Without the benefit of three sixty degree vision, it takes Garralosh a precious second to locate my new position and she rumbles with anger once she spots me.

[Had enough yet?!]

[CRUSHCRUSHCRUSHCRUSHCRUSHCRUSHCRUSHCRUSHCRUSHCRUSHCRUSHCRUSHCRUSH]

[Calm down! Sheesh!]

Her mind still boils with red rage. I can't get any sense of the human who was once inside, only a cruel beast of anger and hate. Only one thing for me to do... turn and run! Dash! I need to buy myself a little more time in order to figure this out.

Why am I not tired!?

In fact, my HP is also increasing?! What's going on?! Deep inside me, an outpouring of energy is happening. A continuous flow that seems to pour into both my stamina and my health, filling up my depleted stocks even as they start to drain. What's the source?

I can feel it. The whispers, the hooks, the tugging, the energy. It's all coming from the Collective Will Vestibule! The faith of the ants is being transformed into regenerative energy! It's flooding into me! It's still not enough to regenerate my leg in time...

Activate the regeneration gland!

As the gland empties itself and its healing fluids flood my system, my limb begins to regrow at a visible pace. Not to mention the cracks I collected in my carapace after getting hit start to close over. Then, to my shock, I feel the energy flooding from my Collective Will Vestibule and into my regeneration gland, refilling it at an insane speed!

Holy Moly! This is powerful stuff!

POW! POW!

My trusty sub-brains have been pumping out the Gravity Bolts and I manage to smack the big Croc with two more. Hopefully that can help slow down her insane speed!

The remarkable effects of the Vestibule are shocking to me. If it can replenish my stamina, refresh my organs and heal me, then can't I fight for... almost indefinitely?! And if the amount of energy I get scales with the number of ants... this could get out of control, real fast.

Have... Have I finally become awesome?! Well, defeating the giant Croc would be one way to find out... Let's have at it!

[Ready to surrender yet?!]

What comes back across the mind bridge couldn't really be described as words, but rather a psychic blast of a boundless hunger for violence. Garralosh doesn't seem to have had any chill time in the last hundred years. Her mind is a complete mess. I can sense that she is being dragged in many directions, pulled this way and that by the System, by her own mad desires and by the struggle to survive. It'd be nice if I could help her, but she feels way too far gone for that.

With me having put a little range between the two of us, Garralosh's throat bulges as she once again brings up magma from wherever the heck she is storing it inside her body. I only need ten more seconds for my leg to come back, I'll just have to hang on until then.

In order to facilitate my dodging, I start to weave together more mental distractions to torment my foe. I decide to take a slightly different tack this time, and I weave an illusion with elements from earth in it. Let's see how she reacts to this!

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Chapter 393: Attack the mind

Perhaps, somewhere deep inside the leathery hide and muscle bound physique, there still exists the person Garralosh was before she came here. Maybe I can shock her with an image, or sensation. It's been a heck of a long time since she came here, but it might get some response. If it distracts her for a couple of seconds, I'll be happy!

So as the mountain-like Crocodile prepared to charge me once more, I spun together the first sensation I could think of from my past life on Earth. Ice Cream. It's pretty universal, right? It's possible she never ate it, but maybe she saw it at least, or was aware of it. I gotta try something!

Dash!

Rumbling with anger, Garralosh dashed toward me her enormous jaws wide open to snap down on me. Those are some serious jaws! I swear she could snap a megalodon in half with one bite. Thanks to my antennae, and her avenue of attack being completely predictable, I manage to dash to one side. Sadly, I lose my balance due to not having all of my legs.

Yikes!

Quick! Hit her with the Ice Cream! My minds slam the prepared stimuli across the mind bridge and hammer it into that raging mind. The cold sensation on the tongue, the creamy rich texture, the curled sphere of a scoop. Every aspect of ice cream I could think of I bundled together and threw it at her.

And she froze.

NICE!

Dash! With Vibrant tailing behind me, I dash on an angle to try and get behind the beast. Anything to get me away from that mouth! Come on leg, how much longer! I can see the flesh extending down, the claw beginning to form at the end at a ridiculous speed. It itches like mad, but not nearly as terrible as mutating. A few more seconds and I'll be good to go!

But wait. She's still not moving? This could be a chance! A few moments have passed and Garralosh is still frozen in place, perfectly still. Since I'm this close, I might as well get a quick chomp in! I change the direction of my dash to bring me a little closer to her body and position myself near the base of her tail.

Omen Chomp!

Once more, my stamina drains precipitously and the dark mandibles of energy manifest themselves to tear into Garralosh's body.

CRUNCH!

And once more a wound is struck! Her scales are so thick that even with my extended mandibles, I can barely reach through them to the muscle beneath, but reach it I do. With a satisfying tear, I can see the damage has been done and immediately sprint away to get more distance.

GROOOOWWWL!

My bite has snapped Garralosh from her reverie, and she turns toward me, a glowing ball of raging fire in Crocodile shape. Luckily I have a few things going for me at this point. One, my leg has been reformed, and second, I have a new mental package to send her.

The speed at which my brains can weave this stuff together is truly incredible. Evolutionary energy well spent! All around us I see the battlefield had come to a complete stop. The Croca-Beasts in all their forms remain poised away from the wall. Growling they snap their jaws and flex their claws as they watch their mother fight. Hundreds of them stand together in this way, an intimidating sight, to say the least.

On the ant side, they have poked their heads up and I can see thousands of them staring down at me as I fight. Are any of them going to come down for the Queen?! Actually, what the heck is happening to the Queen?! I can barely see her now, it appears as if she's sinking into the ground! Oh, they're digging underneath her! Smart. She's already more than half underground at this point, a minute or two more and they'll be able to drag her deeper into the Dungeon to recharge her energy.

Other than that, the only ants near me are Vibrant and... is that Grant? Close to the wall but not quite in its shade, the soldier is hesitating, caught between her desire to help and the certain knowledge she would get in the way.

Get back to the wall you idiot!

But I don't have time to worry about the spectators, I need to worry about the ant in more direct danger. Namely, me.

[Not a fan of Ice Cream then?] I ask Garralosh.

[DON'T] she screamed back.

Uh.

[Don't what?!] I ask, confused.

[DON'T.]

Not sure how to take that. Let's discuss again after I hit you with this one. Before she can dash, cough up pure lava or do anything else that might snuff out my life, I smack her right in the frontal lobe with another Earth memory I have.

Birthday cake.

Flickering candles, cream, icing and the sponginess of a good cake. This one was a little harder for me, since I don't remember having my own birthday cake at any point, but I did eat a few when I was first in

school. The teacher would bring out a cake for each student on their birthday. Quite a shock to me, I'd never heard of anything like it, but the fun of it, the song and taste stayed with me.

About to dash forward, saliva dripping from between her gigantic teeth, Garralosh stumbles and her chest smashes into the ground. The Croca-Beasts watching from the sidelines fell silent as they saw the rare sight of their mother stumble, even the slightest. I'm sure that to those idiotic beasts, their mother, to them, must appear as an all-powerful existence. To see her fall must be quite the shock.

It's definitely getting to her! Who'd have thought that she would still have these memories buried deep in that skull of hers. I'm not going to let this chance go by. Once again with all six legs, it's time to dash!

Unleash the Omen Chomp!

As I position myself to deliver another savage bite, a blast of anguish smacks me over the mind bridge. Garralosh is screaming.

[DON'T MAKE ME REMEMBER!]

Uhh, what? Bit late for that I'm afraid!

CHOMP!

CRUNCH!

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Once more, the scales shatter and flesh tears as my mandibles dig deep into the body of Garralosh and she howls in pain.

[Remember what?] I ask.

[STOP IT!]

Don't think I have an option to stop, actually. In fact, I've got another one in the chamber and ready to go. This is something that I've actually missed from the old life. Something simple but I feel like it'll have an impact.

Bed.

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 394: It's getting hot!

Beds are wonderful things, don't you think? Especially if you have a good one. My family had never shown me affection in any meaningful way, but I did have decent stuff. At least, I did until the collectors got hold of me. My bed had given me the welcome and comfort that was missing from everywhere else in my home. Warm, snug, safe. My head resting on a soft pillow, the reassuring weight of sheets and blankets. It had been my sanctuary. A vessel that could carry me out of my life, away from the rejection, harsh words and angry eyes. How bad can life be when you have a comfortable bed? Probably terrible, but hey, I have my own policy.

I had to wonder if Garralosh had felt the same way, in her past life. Gandalf, the System, said that all of us were a little odd, in our lives, which was why we were chosen. Perhaps this would be a common thread between us. Or at least, increase the thread count... heh.

As the increasingly irate crocodile prepared to attack once more, I hit her right in the face with all of my most fluffy bed time memories. Sinking into a mattress, drowsy with sleep, cool sheets covering me and my pyjamas. Pyjamas! Damn I miss Pyjamas. Why the hell didn't I wear them all the time? Superior to regular clothes in every respect!

Ah!

I let myself get distracted by my own mental attack! How's Garralosh responding? The giant crocodile has faltered once more and I take the opportunity for another cheeky Omen Chomp! The mountainous reptile is missing a few chunks from various places and ichor is steaming off her still burning scales. The hiss and bubble of it is a constant background noise in the battle at this point.

CHOMP!

Take that! In fact, she still isn't responding, I'll take a chance and go for a sneaky second chomp, inflict some of that deep damage.

CHOMP!

The hit to my stamina is massive but the outpouring of energy from the Vestibule replenishes me. The Will of the colony is becoming my strength! Already my health is near full again and the regeneration gland is nearly ready to go once more. This is insane!

A wall of anguish slams into my mind, stunning me for a short moment. Awww snap. She's not happy!

[STOP BRINGING IT BACK!] she screamed and then promptly exploded.

Not literally exploded in the 'flesh flew everywhere' kind of way. But power and heat burst from her in a calamitous wave of rolling fire that blew me backwards and gave me a thorough roasting at the same time. I felt pain erupt all over my frame as my carapace began to sizzle, the organs and muscle beneath rising to a temperature they don't like to operate at. I'm a smoking ruin of an ant! She did that in an instant!

"Vibrant! Are you alright?"

"Fine-fine! I'm too fast!"

"HCK! Good for you..."

I cough and a small cloud of smoke is spat out of my mouth. I need healing! I activate my healing gland once more, the precious healing fluid that built up since my last use began to flood into my system once more. Only half of a full dose, but I'll take what I can get!

My vision is hazy as the wall of fire that rolled over me toasted my vision to a degree, but the mind bridge is painting a picture of what Garralosh is doing right now.

She is full of rage, thrashing and clawing at the dirt, snapping at the air. Tons and tons of reptile lashing out with all her strength is a heck of thing to be close to. Her anger is cataclysmic. The ground shakes and the air is filled with the sound of her fury. She's like a natural disaster made manifest, a titan, something primordial from before the gods were born.

All I can do is try to keep my feet and scramble back to create some distance as I heal up. I really need to thank the unshakeable faith the colony has in me at this point, as their energy continues to flood my body, healing me and restoring my reserves. I'm not sure why they have faith in me right now, I'm not sure I would!

My eyes come back into focus and I can see Garralosh in all her fury. Her eyes are mad with rage as she unleashes her terrifying strength in an uncontrolled frenzy. So strong is she that her strikes into the ground are causing shockwaves that are collapsing the colony's tunnels beneath us. Long sections of ground fall straight down to create troughs and trenches where before there was only flat earth.

She's not liking this! I would go so far as to say that she's really hating it!

...

I should keep going!

My sub-brains continue to churn out magic. The most powerful of them is maintaining and operating the mind magic construct on its own as the other two cooperate to weave together the sensations and illusions. It appears as if the Vestibule is also supporting my brains as even they seem to be holding up under the strain of constant spell weaving admirably well. The vestibule is the gift that keeps on giving!

The ground around Garralosh is destroyed, burnt and thrashed into a mess and she doesn't look like she's going to stop any time soon. With Vibrant behind me, keeping her speed aura covering me, I decide to go in once more. I need to take every opportunity to do damage!

As I dash forward I smack her with more memories from Earth. Cola. Fast food. Couches. Television. Sport. Anything I think she might be able to remember, anything that might disrupt her thinking.

As the barrage of mind magic slams home, I maintain a little distance, just in case she decides to explode again, but she doesn't. I'll have to take a chance. I dash in once again.

CHOMP! CHOMP!

At this close range I decide to take a risk and try something different. I raise my abdomen up and lower the front sections of my body to improve the angle and expose my business district! Even with just this position I can easily fire my acid straight forward thanks to my new additions!

POW! POW! POW! POW!

I rapid fire a few blasts of my new and improved merchandise straight into the wounds I just caused before I turn and dash as fast as I can away. I can see the ripple of pain run through the enormous frame of Garralosh as the acid begins to eat into her. Why isn't she healing herself? She must have a healing gland of some description, surely...

All the while I continue to send a constant stream of mind magic across the bridge. Any impression, any thought or sensation that might work, I package it up and blast it across. I can feel it impact against her

mind, also. Each time the magic hits home her thoughts shudder away from it, desperately trying to protect herself from remembering what her life had been like.

But then something changed. Her mind opened up, reached out across the mind bridge and seized hold of mine. I felt like a mouse gripped in the fist of a gorilla. What the hell is happening?! She battered me with her pain and fury, turning her madness into a weapon that she used to beat me right in the mind.

You want to play this way?! I doubt you know mind magic like I do! If she's going to open herself up to me like this, then I'm going to step on through!

All four of my minds switched focus and my body grew completely still for a second as I spun together a spell of incredible complexity. When it was finished it appeared like a ship woven together of spider thread. I put myself aboard and launched it across the bridge, straight into the mind of maddened Croc.

Chrysalis

Chapter 395: The person within

I'd not attempted this spell before, but I'd known how to do it since my mind magic affinity skill had ranked up. Essentially, the spell allowed the wielder to invade the mind of the other. Garralosh had almost successfully done something similar with pure, raw emotion, but my attempt was more sophisticated. Since she had opened herself up by exploding across the bridge, I'd be a fool to throw away the opportunity. Matching the titanic croc physically was impossible, I needed to use other methods and this could be my silver bullet.

Borne on a gleaming craft of pure mind mana, my consciousness crossed the bridge and plunged deep into the turbulent waters of Garralosh's mind. It's a weird sensation, I have to say. My body fades away from my thoughts and I no longer receive feeling or sensation from it, the pains aches and general rush of sensory information is gone and the universe turns black.

Then like a diver knifing into water I pierce the barrier around my enemies thoughts and I'm beset on all sides by her emotions. Let me get this out of the way. She's nuts. It's madness in here! All around I sense violent, roiling emotions that smash into the spell that shields my mind. Flashes of memory appear and disappear with explosive speed, each one a shard that stabs toward me in an attempt to hurt and maim.

I see Garralosh, large and powerful, feasting on the broken remains of a gigantic, multi-headed centipede. Wounds cover her frame but the exultation of victory burns in her chest as she gulps down the Biomass.

A flash and then another memory surfaces.

Croca-Beasts quiver in fear as I look down on them through their mother's eyes. All she feels is rage, hunger and drag on her soul that never seems to cease. Beneath her front feet, pinned to the floor is a commander, heavily wounded. With a savage twist of her claws, its life is over and it's time to feast.

A human wields a massive axe like an extension of his own body, his movements powerful and fluid. He's impossibly strong and batters Garralosh away when she pushes close. Her mind is afire with hate and a desperate, frantic yearning. She's so close. The deep tunnels are just beyond her reach! With flash, the human vanishes from her sight but an explosion of pain shatters her mind and looking down, one of her limbs is gone.

I shove these memory shards away and push deeper, my spell plunges further into the recesses of her mind. I feel like a ship's captain sailing directly into the teeth of a hurricane. The further I go, the more her memories batter me and try to drag me down. But I press forward. If I can get deep enough I can seize her mind. In the best case scenario I'll be able to seize control of her body. She won't be able to move a muscle whilst I chop her down. It's risky, but any way of fighting her is risky!

Deeper still.

A giant lizard with attendants on either side stands fearlessly before her might. An offer is made, a bargain is struck. Garralosh can barely understand it, her mind no longer used to moving in such convoluted ways. She needs to eat. She needs to go deeper. That is all she can understand.

Deeper.

My perception grows darker as I descend, like a stone sinking to the bottom of a pond. More memories assault me. Endless scenes of hunting, of killing and feasting. I see Garralosh grow younger and younger as I go further back. Less evolved, smaller. Desperate battle after desperate battle flashes past. Her life an endless stream of fights where her life was on the line. She was wounded severely countless times, but always emerged victorious.

I can feel my vessel starting to crack under the pressure, but I don't think I can go back. Would the spell even make it? I don't know! Part of me is worried, but the other part has become fascinated by the incredible scenes I'm seeing. I want to know more!

Deeper still!

There are other memories beginning to surface now. Long buried, they are washed out and faded. Perhaps only my mental assault was able to bring these out at all. How long had it been since Garralosh thought of herself as a human? Perhaps at some point she had simply begun to imagine that she had never had another life, that she had always been a monster.

But deep in her mind, she remembers.

I see a girl, a young woman really. Perhaps in her twenties? There is anger and fear in her. She lashes out, a knife in her hand. Red splashes and she runs, laughing, crying. She doesn't get far, she's cornered. They're angry, but she doesn't care. She tries to push through. Black.

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Even further back.

She's younger now. It looks like she's in a school? I can see kids in uniforms, regular classrooms. It's confusing. It doesn't look as if Garralosh lived on Earth much earlier than I did. Things look outdated, sure. I don't see any computers. But it isn't as if it's the eighteen hundreds or anything. More like the eighties...

Yikes! Judging by that guys hair, this has to be the eighties. That's weird! Does this mean time flows differently between Pangera and Earth? Or perhaps our souls have been held by the System,

unconscious in a state of limbo until we get seeded into the Dungeon? Maybe I died and just slept for hundreds of years!

Focus Anthony. Got stuff to do right now. Have the existential crises later.

The world through Garralosh's eyes is grey, isolated and threatening. She flinches away from people. Except when they come for her, then she moves toward. I can see why Gandalf made her a crocodile. Her bite was pretty savage even as a human.... Yeouch.

The fatigue is real. It's been a desperate struggle to get this far and frankly, if it weren't for the support of the Collective Will Vestibule, still trickling energy into me, I'd be in far worse shape.

But I've made it. Hovering before me in the dark is a sphere of pure white. I reach out, and I seize it.

[You really should've spent some more points on Will.]

My advice doesn't seem to go down too well. The thing that embodies Garralosh in this strange blank space we find ourselves in, thrashes and twists like a mad thing in my grasp, desperate to rend, to tear, to bite!

[Steady now,] I command and bring my mind to bear to force her to be still.

She fights me the whole way. Even after I manage to get her still, she still writhes with rebellious energy. How long has it been, I wonder, since she wasn't in control?

[Let's have a chat.]

Chrysalis

Chapter 396: Dialogue

I'm not sure what I expected, honestly. Here in the base of Garralosh's psyche, I kind of thought I'd be talking to a person. Instead, her mind is represented by an amorphous shifting mass that is at any one time part human, part crocodile, part Escher painting.

[I WILL KILL YOU.]

Good start!

[You do a lot of that. Killing I mean. Why do you have such a grudge against the people up here anyway?]

[THEY HURT ME.]

When she communicates, it's like a psychic scream that punches into my mind with brute force. Unpleasant, to say the least.

[How the hell did a bunch of farmers and townsfolk hurt you? They could barely hurt me!]

[NOT THEM. OTHER'S. VENGEANCE.]

So.... To get back at the person who had chopped off her arm, she annihilated a kingdom full of innocent people. Yeesh.

[So, care to explain that dragging feeling I noticed in your memories?]

The second I mention it, her struggles double in intensity and my mind starts to ache under the strain of pinning her down.

[GET OUT OF MY HEAD!]

[No.]

Once again I'm able to master her, my will is superior. Neglecting her mental stats is proving to be a grievous error. I suspect the Karmodo has done a fair bit of mind magic on her and she doesn't even remember it. I can only imagine the Lizard Wizard would have magnitudes for control and finesse than I do. I barely know what I'm doing!

[THE PULL. I EVOLVED TOO MUCH. TOO FAST. I WAS CALLED TO THE CENTER. OTHERS LIKE ME. ALL DEEPER.]

Called? By the System? Or something else?

[You don't like remembering that you were human do you? Tried pretty damn hard to suppress it. Must have been part of what kept you... sane-ish. Even a cruddy life as a human was better than being a monster in the Dungeon I suppose.]

[DON'T WANT TO REMEMBER.]

[Yeah, I know. I'm not minding it so much, you know. Then again, I've always sort of gone with the flow. The constant danger and the threat of death isn't great, don't get me wrong, but it's nice to feel like I have a purpose, you know?]

[NO.]

[Fair enough. So what was the plan in the end? You came to the surface, destroyed a kingdom, maybe two, and then what?]

[PULL THEM AWAY. BREAK THROUGH. KILL.]

[Always the killing with you. It's never, just 'kick back and relax' or 'vacation from murder', just kill, kill, kill. What about my colony then, huh? What about us? We never did squat to you!]

[KILLED MY CHILDREN.]

[They tried to kill me first, to be fair.]

[THEY ARE MINE. THEY ARE FOR ME.]

[In what sense? Wait, I'm not sure I want to know.]

I honestly thought the mind of Garralosh would be... more than this. She's super old! More than a century! Maybe even two! Where's the accumulated wisdom of the ages? I suppose, if you spend all your time sunk in a brutal, animalistic fog of fighting and eating, your mind doesn't exactly develop a great deal.

She's a mass of instincts and emotions. There isn't much left of the human inside. Just enough for me to taunt her with, basically.

As fun and interesting as the conversation is, and I do genuinely want to learn more about this once human turned murder lizard, it's mainly a distraction for the careful spell I've been weaving. Here in this place, time isn't passing on the outside, at least, that's how I understand it. I've been in Garralosh's head for a minute or two but probably only a few seconds have passed on the outside. My goal is to try and bind her mind from her body, to trap her awareness here in this mental space, so that I can inflict lethal damage before she manages to free herself.

Not exactly a glorious victory, but I'll take what I can get!

So even as I communicate, the careful weave of my spell continues. A cage. A prison of mind magic that will bind this weak mind from its decidedly not weak body. Mind magic is so damn useful, who'd have thought?!

[What happened to you, huh? You were a human being at one stage. I get you felt like embracing your new life here, I can relate to that, believe me, but mass destruction? Seems a little off the deep end, doesn't it?]

[NO ONE CAN STAND IN MY WAY!]

[Well... obviously, they can. It already happened.]

[I'LL KILL THEM!]

[Yeesh. Back to this.]

Distantly, I can feel my brains working that sweet, sweet mana with all the grace and dexterity they can summon. The cage is rapidly taking shape.

[I WILL KILL YOU. I WILL EAT YOU!] Garralosh began roaring at me, her words a psychic barrage of madness. [I WILL KILL ALL OF YOU. ALL OF THE INSECTS WILL BE CRUSHED BENEATH MY FEET. I WILL CONSUME THE HUMANS AND TURN THEM INTO MORE OF MY KIND. THEN I WILL DESCEND AND THERE WILL BE DEATH. I WILL SLAUGHTER EVERYTHING I SEE UNTIL I FIND THE THING THAT BROUGHT ME HERE AND I WILL KILL IT!]

Whoa there!

Along with her assault she once again tried to break loose from my control but I hold on for dear life. My mind strains to the breaking point, the very fabric of my mind coming apart at the seams as her desperate insanity gives the beast new strength. We fight a silent, mental war for a few minutes but I manage to subdue her once again. Come on, cage! I need you now!

[So you've spoken to Gandalf, then? Err.. The System I mean?] I gasp out.

[FOR WHAT I HAVE SUFFERED, I WILL KILL THAT CREATURE A THOUSAND TIMES.]

Holy moly. Got some serious rage issues here. Not entirely unjustified, I suppose. It doesn't sound as if Garralosh has truly enjoyed her second life experience. One out of five stars, wouldn't stay again. My spell has almost completed. Just need to keep her talking a bit longer.

[One quick question. I know you don't want to remember, but I can't help but be curious. My name's Anthony, by the way. I've kept that name from my old life. May as well, right? Do you remember your name? From ... before?]

I'm not sure what I expected from the twisting, amorphous blob of rage that is Garralosh's mind as a response. Perhaps she would fly off the handle again, or go nuts in some other way. Instead, she grows still. I can feel her searching. Reaching back into memories she'd long forgotten she had. It's as if, once I asked her, she had to try and remember.

Not that get an answer. Cage is ready to go! Finally! Enjoy jail!

BAM!

Wait. Why am I the one that's locked up.

[You have done enough here, insect.]

What in the jimminy's!? A new voice speaks from nowhere, shocking me right down to my commercial zone. Unlike the mind of Garralosh, which is shallow, but wild and unruly, this one feels still, and old, and strong.

[Uh. Mr Kaarmodo, sir, I presume?]

I get a chuckle out of it for that. Desperate, I attempt to free myself from its grasp, but much as I had held Garralosh, I am now held. How the heck did the wizard lizard even follow me in here! Did he craft a bridge to Garralosh and follow me in... or...

Oh snap.

Did he have a bridge connected to me the whole time and concealed it from me?! That's freakin' scary!

[So uh. Heck of a time to intervene in the battle. I really had her on the ropes you know... Any chance you'll let me finish the job? Fair and square and all that.]

I can feel a gentle probing from the alien mind as it considers my words and investigates my mental projection.

[You are like her,] wonder and confusion fills the voice, [you are not from this place.]

[Nope. 100% imported goods. Does that mean anything?]

[It means everything.]

A pause. That strange, powerful mind turns slowly as the Kaarmodo ponders. For my part, I'm freakin' out! I'm literally at the mercy of the Wizard Lizard! Stay cool, Anthony. Lizards can smell fear!

[I had decided that I would not interfere much in your confrontation with Garralosh. Should she emerge triumphant on her own, that would prove her worth. But when the opportunity came to take revenge on the creature who slew my Setsulah, I could not resist. Now. Hmmmm. I will let you go. I can say that I have aided Garralosh as I was instructed to do. That is enough.]

[Well that's great. Good choice! I'm behind this completely. Let us both out and we can go back to fighting, all even.]

[Not quite even.]

A cold flash of reptilian anger.

[I let her out a few moments ago.]

My awareness slams back into my body and the light returns to my eyes and I see a giant tail descend toward my face.

Well nards...

Chrysalis

Chapter 397: Sacrifice

That crafty leather faced lizard! He'd let Garralosh regain control of her body a few seconds before me! Now I'm deep in brown town! My enhanced neural network fires at a speed beyond what would normally be possible and I'm dodging before my brain can fully process what has occurred.

Synapses spark, muscles fire and I fly to the right as mountain crushing might of that tail falls down on me like a meteor. My eyes are filled with burning scales and all sound fades from my ears. Heat is all my antennae can sense and the brief glimpse into the future is giving me confusing signals. The tail is obviously my main concern but something is also coming from my left? I don't know! It does seem clear on one thing though.

I'm not going to make it.

Dammit, dammit, dammit! I can't fail here. Not now! That damned wizard lizard isn't going to get the best of me! Each of my four minds frantically spins to try and come up with something, anything that might get my oversized backside out of this predicament, but I come up empty.

BAM!

As the devastating tail of Garralosh is brushing against my antennae and about to crush my face, something, or somethings, smash into me. I get pushed twice, once on the side, and once from below, almost simultaneously. My carapace cracks a little under the strain and pain radiates out from the injury and I lurch to one side.

BOOM!

Like a mountain collapsing, the tail of my enemy crushes the ground, sending dirt flying into the air. My left side is still caught by the strike and my carapace explodes in pain as part of my body squishes in a very unpleasant way. My organs! My precious organs! And my legs? Forget 'em! Stupid stick-like ant legs!

Before Garralosh can recover, I throw my dignity to the wind, tuck what's left of my legs and roll like a tumbleweed, scrabbling to put some distance between us. My health has been cut in half by that one strike, even the diamond carapace not able to withstand the devastating power of that strike.

Her mind may be weak but her body is OP. Way too OP!

As I frantically discharge my healing organ once more, desperate to fix my legs and injured body, I notice Vibrant is caught up with me, sprawled on the ground by my side.

"Vibrant?" I sputter. Talking hurts. Everything hurts.

For once, the hyper-active ant is quiet.

Not far away, Garralosh appears to be going mad. She raises her tail and repeatedly smashes it into the ground in an uncontrolled frenzy, causing the ground to shake with her rage.

"You weren't moving! Both of you went still and we weren't sure what was going on! We tried to make sure you were okay, and then the fat croc started moving, but you didn't! We had to get Senior out of the way!"

"We?"

"..."

Where's Grant?

That stupid soldier had been down from the wall during the entire battle. She'd been wanting to help, I could see it in every line of her body. I'd hoped she would see some sense and retreat. She was supposed to retreat!

"Vibrant? Where is she? WHERE THE HELL IS GRANT?"

"Look out!"

Garralosh wasn't willing to wait for me. She cast her head around until she saw her strike had failed. A choking roar burst from her throat as she dashes madly toward me. Reason and thought are gone from her eyes, only insanity and rage remain.

At this moment, I can't bring myself to care about the human inside the monster. She's going down. At this point the mind bridge has outlived its usefulness. With Garralosh in a frenzy, she is sending waves of aggression and lunacy across, assaulting my thoughts every second. Even if I try to send distractions to her, I doubt they'll register. Time to drop it and move to more aggressive forms of magic.

The gigantic beast charges towards me in a mindless rage, any semblance of cunning or thought gone from her actions. Her claws tear great rents in the earth as she carves the ground apart to fling herself forward that little bit faster.

Need to dodge! Now!

Trying to match the timing, I wait until the last moment before I throw myself to one side. Without the use of all of my limbs, I can only get so far and Vibrant lunges forward to bite down on my legs and try to haul me clear. It's almost enough. I catch a battering from one of her legs as the giant beast barrels past me, snapping at the air like a wild beast. More HP gone. The Vestibule is helping with a constant trickle of healing energy, but it's going to take too long. I need to end this fight, and soon!

I'll need to slow Garralosh down if I'm to have a hope of lasting for that much time. It's time for some serious Gravity magic. I can only hope the Kaarmodo feels he's interfered enough to satisfy whatever reptilian sense of duty he has. I don't have the capacity to deal with both giant lizards at once right now.

All four of my minds devote all of their attention to the task. My Gravity Mana gland is suddenly seized by four separate wills and mana begins to pour out at an unprecedented speed. The mana is gathered together and then crushed, held in place by my indomitable will, fuelled by my grief and rage. I will not yield to Garralosh, the Kaarmodo, and I will certainly not yield to my own mana!

Crush! More mana floods out and I seize it and force it to obey. As if I were crushing a bowling ball with my bare hands, I grip the rapidly condensing sphere of pure energy and tighten my hold, crushing it smaller and smaller each moment. The mana roils and spasms in my grip, trying to break free, to escape my containment, but I refuse to let go. The sphere of energy grows darker each second as I push my brains to the limit.

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Naturally, this means I can't spare the attention to know when Garralosh is about to eat me.

Vaguely I sense the giant beast turn, her movements feral and wild, as she tries to control her momentum and direct it into another charge. Saliva sizzles in her mouth and boils on the ground where it drips freely from between her teeth.

"Tell me when to dodge, Vibrant!"

"Wha-what!?"

"JUST TELL ME WHEN TO DODGE!"

Perhaps it's stupid, but this is all I can do right now. Everything is being poured into this. Dammit! The mana isn't flowing fast enough! The Gravity Bomb isn't going to be ready by the time Garralosh reaches me. If I throw everything I have into preparing the spell, it might be ready before she gets to me the next time. It'll have to be. With a little luck, I'll be able to hit her before she gets too close and I get sucked in too.

This is no small Gravity Bomb. I'm going all out. Nothing else will satisfy my rage.

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 398: The Boom Times

Grant had always been a quiet one, even when I'd trained her. I wasn't shocked at all when she'd evolved into a Soldier, low-key dedication to the colony was always her way. As I watch Garralosh charge once more in an unthinking mad frenzy, I feel so lost, that such a bright and promising member of the colony, of the council, would fall to such a creature.

Former human? Who cares if she was a former human? Grant was my sibling, a member of the same family. Her life was ten thousand times more meaningful than that of this bloodthirsty crocodile.

The momentum that Garralosh builds is terrifying. All that weight, all that mass, when she's able to dash, she's like a freight train. The kinetic force must be out of this world. I'm only dimly aware of it.

Vibrant will tell me when I need to dodge, my focus is inwards. Within, the sphere of mana continues to grow in power. More mana floods into it every second and as each moment passes it fights harder to escape my control. I can feel my Gravitational Mana Gland emptying at a ferocious rate, a veritable flood of energy being directed into a ball that grows smaller and smaller as I tighten my grip.

To inflict real damage on Garralosh, it needs to be as strong as possible! The colour has already begun to shift, turning from purple and deepening to near black. The sphere of energy begins to revolve as its density rises, further threatening to escape my control. Dammit! I direct two of my sub-brains to holding the mana in place, relieving them of mana extraction duty. With that change I'm able to stabilise the spell and continue to condense it, my main mind and major sub brain directing more mana into it.

"Senior! Now!"

It only takes Garralosh a few seconds to cross the distance between us, her speed is insane. Physics tells me that a monster that size should tear itself apart if it were to move that quickly, but Pangera doesn't follow the same rules. The world quakes and trembles at the tread of her clawed feet, her jaws snap madly. There is nothing left behind her eyes but bottomless hunger and a hunger for death.

When Vibrant calls, I snap my attention back to my body for the split second it takes to fire my synapses and throw myself to my left as hard as I can. In that moment a terrifying sight flashes into my brain, the myriad sensations of the battle instilled into one moment that assaults all of my senses. The shuddering of the ground beneath my claws, the rolling waves of heat that sear the air around Garralosh, the maddened red gleam of her eyes and the light flashing from her curved crocodile teeth. With her mouth wide open I can see the back of her throat, something countless monsters must have seen over the last century. It's dark back there, her mouth is so cavernous.

Then, in a fraction of a second, it's gone. I fling myself away and her head tries to track me but she's moving too fast! Or is she! With her two front legs on her right side, she swipes out, her jagged claws cutting through the air with a vicious howl.

BAM!

The air is punched out of me as my diamond carapace crunches under the force of her claw. I tried to angle my body, but one claw, the last claw, spears home and pierces my abdomen. The momentum of my jump and the force of the blow send me tumbling through the air until I land with a crash, choking in the dirt.

I gasp in pain. My insides have now been introduced to my outsides, but it's not enough to shake my resolve. Even now, with a sliver of HP left, my attention is still inward. Nothing matters except for this spell. Regardless of how broken my body is, my mind is like a steel trap.

The energy that trickles into me through the Vestibule is yet to falter in any way. In fact, I think it's probably increased as the battle has gone on. Which seems to mean that the belief of the ants has increased the more broken and battered I've become. I'm not sure what that says about the colony, but it can't be good.

"Are you ok, Senior?" Vibrant calls to me, worried.

"Never better," I manage to sputter out, "has she turned around yet?"

"Just about! I don't think you can dodge again!"

"Don't plan to."

I can throw this spell at any time, but I want to pour as much energy into it as I can before I let it rip. The mana condensed into the spell is running wild by now, but still I pour more into it. Desperate to maintain control, I task my main sub-brain to assist in containing and compressing the mana. The Gravity Bomb itself has shrunk down to a tiny point, smaller than any bomb I've made. It's close to pitch black also. The spell revolves in silent menace within my mind as I recklessly rip out all the mana I can control and throw it into the violently rebelling spell.

A few more seconds is all I need!

"She's coming, Senior! She's about to charge!"

All of my focus is internal, I don't want to devote any attention to my eyes, I can barely spare a thought for my antennae.

"Which way is she?"

"Wha-Wha?"

"Point me at her!"

After a moment I can feel something push into my side which tears my wounds further, unleashing another wave of pain that I roughly shove to one side.

More. More. More!

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By far the most powerful spell I've ever formed is ready to be unleashed. The sheer density of mana is starting to play havoc with my body as the spell battles to unleash its energy. It's now or never! My three sub-brains are screaming in pain as they strain to their limits to contain the unimaginable energy that I've unleashed and I try to focus my eyes.

Garralosh is coming. Hurling herself forward, still in the grip of her mindless rage. You could have been so much more than this. You should never have come here and harmed my family.

You think your hunger is bottomless? See if you can match up to this!

Experience the fury of this Mega Gravity Bomb!

I push my body up with my shaking legs, open my mouth, and unleash a demon. The world goes dark, and then it screams.

HOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOWWWLLLLLLL!!!!

I swear I see a flicker of fear in the eyes of Garralosh as the spell rips into reality, but it's too late. She can't turn, she can't dodge. The spell slams home into her chest and all hell breaks loose.

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 399: The Beast Falls

Air, sound, even light itself seems to drain away as the Gravity Bomb tears its way through the space between us. Even deep in her frenzy, Garralosh has enough awareness to know that the dark, rotating sphere screaming its way towards her face is bad news. Her claws dig into the ground as she attempts to shift her momentum. It's an impossible task.

She's too damn big, even with her high level skills assisting, she can't possibly turn that ship around in time. The piercing wail of the Gravity Bomb drowns out all noise as it streaks towards the giant Croc and Garralosh barely manages to turn, getting her head out of the way, before the spell strikes her in the side.

Broken and leaking blood onto the floor, I watch the sphere slam into my foe and then expand. Like the eye of an angry god opening, the sphere flashes open in a split second and tears into reality. The sound is unbelievable. I'm sure that Garralosh is screaming, bellowing in pain, but I can't hear any of it. The ground is being ripped into the air and sucked into the spell. The air is being dragged in from over a hundred metres away. The flow of air causes the wind to rise which cascades onward until a raging storm has arisen, the gravity bomb in the centre. The wind circles and shrieks, so quick I feel as if it could cut me. Particles of dirt caught in the storm stab at my wounds as I struggle to stay on the ground.

My legs are so damn weak!

My wounds have really piled up, and the healing isn't coming through fast enough! I can feel my body trying to stitch itself back together, muscles knitting, carapace healing over, organs closing themselves. I need all the strength I can get to anchor myself to the ground. In desperation, I trigger my healing gland once more, a pathetic trickle of healing stimulant drains into my system. It's not enough.

My muscles are crying out in pain. My mind, no longer distracted by the formation of the spell are hit full force with the severity of my wounds and I struggle to cope. To block it out I sink deep into the cold embrace of the meditation skill. The needs and wants of my body fade slightly and I watch my work unfold with a detached curiosity.

The Gravity Bomb is pitch black. Even the light around has grown dim, the edges of the sphere are almost impossible to make out. It's hard to even see Garralosh, as she suffers the direct influence of the spell. It hangs in the air where it first expanded, motionless, whilst the rest of the world is destroyed around it.

CRACK!

With a snap that rings in my ears as it echoes from the distant trees the ground cracks and shifts. Directly beneath the miniature black hole I've created, the rock is being pulled upward. Great, jagged rents appear and extend in moments as Pangera, here in this place, begins to be pulled apart. Still the air is howling and descending in a twisting spiral. Dimly I'm aware that even the clouds overhead have begun to move, to turn as the winds reach even the atmosphere.

"Senior!"

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The pheromones barely register to my antennae before they are snatched away by the wind.

"Hold on, Senior! You aren't going flying today!"

It's Vibrant. She stuck close to me during this entire battle and even now she refuses to abandon me.

"Get out..." I wheeze, but she doesn't seem to notice.

"Sorry about this, Senior!" She chirps, irrepressible even in these circumstances, then I feel her bite down on my carapace and dig her claws into the dirt. Just in time. I'm holding on with all my strength, but my legs ... well... I don't even have all of my legs at this stage, never mind the state of the ones I do have. As a matter of fact, just the two of us might not be enough.

The pull from the Gravity Bomb is ridiculously strong. What Garralosh is feeling, caught in the middle, I can hardly imagine. Bit by bit, my claws begin to lose their hold on the ground. It also doesn't help that the ground around my feet is losing hold on itself, and is starting to break apart.

"Let go of me Vibrant!" I push out. "No point coming with me!"

"Nope-Nope!" Is all she says.

It feels as if the world is disappearing into that black sphere of death. Chunks of soil have begun to break off the eighth wall and fly through the air to vanish inside the ominous void. I hope the ants are safe! With a spasm, my claws give up the ghost, my muscles no longer able to sustain my grip. With a lurch I rise into the air only to be yanked back down to the ground by a force I can't see.

What the heck was that?

I shift my body and catch a glimpse of a darker than dark patch of soil beneath me from which a small forest of black tentacles have emerged to wrap themselves around my waist.

Crinis! What timing! Please tell me Tiny isn't going to come up here. I'm worried he might try and fight the Gravity Bomb if he were to see it.

Moments later I feel more chomps and bites on my extremities and carapace. Even as the insane drag of the spell tries to pull me into the air into its ever hungry maw, I feel more stable than ever. What's happened?! I take a risk and shift myself a little and to my shock and horror I see a forest of ants behind me, each of them gripping onto each other and the ground as those closest have gripped onto me. They've formed living chains that emerge from tunnels in the ground dozens of metres away to bind me back down to the ground.

That's insanely risky!

"You idiots!" I rage. Or at least, I attempt to rage. I don't have the energy for anything like raging.

"We've got you, Senior!" I catch a message, from Leeroy of all ants.

"How the ... heck are you ... still alive?!" I squeeze out, but nobody can pick up my message, or they choose to ignore it.

Pinned to the ground by my colony I have little choice but to flop in place as the two competing forces seek to rend me in half. I do have the time to look out across the field of battle to see that no such aid has been rendered to Garralosh. Her children have fled, even now they run to seek shelter behind the seventh wall, dragging themselves away from the Gravity Bomb on all fours, or sixes, for those with the extra set of legs. Fear is written in every line of them, but not one seeks to defend their parent.

Suffering the horrific forces unleashed by my spell, Garralosh struggles alone. And struggle she does, for she isn't dead. I've been paying close attention in the hopes that the gruff voice of our noble system wizard will resound in my ears, but no luck so far.

We stay like for far too long. I watch the Gravity Bomb devour and consume everything that it can until it eventually flickers and fade away. All at once the nightmare I unleashed is over. The howling wind, the circling clouds, the groaning earth. All of it fades away and the light returns once more.

Garralosh is alive. But only just. A full third of her body has been carved away, eaten by the void.

"Heal me, quick." I say.

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 400: The Conclusion, The Feas

As Garralosh lies, heaving in pain, her aura diminished almost to nothing, I receive healing from a team of hastily summoned ants. Though the battle has drained them to the point of exhaustion, they manage to squeeze out enough healing mana that I'm able to push my legs underneath my body and stand up once more.

"Eldest." Victor speaks up as she approaches from my right. "Is it over? Do you think Garralosh can still fight?"

"I don't know. I'll go and sort it out. Get the colony back to safety. If the Croca-Beasts come back, we could have trouble."

I see her hesitate for a brief moment.

"Are you sure? We can send a team of soldiers."

I must look like absolute hell. Truth be told, I feel that way. The healers have done what they can, but even then I'm barely together. The cracks and holes in my carapace are in the process of closing over, and my organs are back on the inside of my body, which is a win. The pain is still incredible though, and to be honest, I'm desperate for a nap. But I won't risk anyone else, not after what happened to Grant.

"I'll go. Stay back."

With that, I begin to pick up my legs, one at a time, and walk toward my fallen foe. Even most of the way dead, Garralosh is still mighty in appearance, her enormous frame dwarfs me as I approach. The pure madness is gone from her eyes now. Instead of rage they are filled with pain and anguish. Which isn't surprising. The Gravity Bomb has taken a massive chunk out of her. From her left shoulder to her mid-section, part of her body has been perfectly carved away where the sphere of the spell touched her. What's incredible is that she was able to prevent the rest of her body from being dragged in, even though she was so close. Being that strong has its upsides, I guess.

Shudders ripple through her as her nerves are afire with agony. To think, she wouldn't have ended like this if she hadn't chased after a few hundred survivors and me. Hundreds of years of fighting in the Dungeon, reduced to this. I can't find any sympathy in me, can't find much emotion at all, to be honest. I'm just tired.

My brains are collectively fried, but still I push myself and spin together a mind magic construct as I slowly approach. It takes time. Both to arrive at Garralosh's exposed neck, and to form a mind bridge between the two of us. I can feel something drag me forward. The Collective Will Vestibule is whispering to me, even as it trickles life giving energy back into my body. A thousand tiny voices that urge me to one action. Not that it would have mattered. I'd have done it anyway.

As I approach, I see her eye track me, barely focused.

[This could have gone better for you,] I observe to the fallen crocodile.

[... My... My...]

She struggles to speak as I draw closer to her, my mandibles opening wide. She's alone in this moment, her children have abandoned her, even the Kaarmodo appears to have retreated in the aftermath.

[... Name... My Name... was...]

[Her name, was Grant.]

CHOMP!

[You have slain level 132 Unique Monster 'Garralosh']

[You have gained experience.]

[You have reached level 2, One Skill point awarded.]

[You have reached level 3, One Skill point awarded.]

[You have reached level 4 ...]

I let the voice of the system fade in my mind as the air flows out of Garralosh like a bellows. After a moment, it's done and she lies inert. After a life of senseless violence, she is just Biomass now. Nothing more, nothing less. And if I'm not mistaken, quite a lot of Biomass. In fact, there are thousands of monsters worth of Biomass waiting to be collected... this is going to take ages to clean up.

I stand still a moment, to try and take it in. I'd wondered how it might feel, to be in this moment, to exist in this place, but I can't explain it. I feel relief, I suppose. Damn, I'm tired. I slept for so long, and I'm tired again already. The workers will give me hell for it if I go back to rest now!

Speaking of which, the colony has begun to gather around. Those who had emerged already, those who remained behind the walls, even the core shapers and their pets who had hidden underground, all emerge and make their way towards the fallen titan.

In moments, almost the entire colony is gathered around me. The Queen is still resting in the Dungeon, of course, defended and guarded by a watchful contingent. The Brood Tenders are doing their thing, I've no doubt, but just about everyone else is here, it seems.

The silence and stillness are heavy. Not many creatures can do silent watchfulness like a huge crowd of ants can. They don't move, they don't speak. They physically can't blink. Not even a whisper of pheromone in the air either. What do they want? A speech?

What would I even say? Oh boy. I'm getting stressed. I don't know how to deal with this level of attention. If someone could give me a level of direction here? Some instruction? No? Think for a second Anthony! If you were a giant ant monster who'd just achieved a long sought after victory, what would you want to hear? Wait a second. I am an oversized ant monster who just achieved a long sought after victory! Just tell them whatever is on my mind, and it should be fine!

Here goes!

"Ah. Hello."

Nice start! Smooth.

"Today, through the efforts of every member, the colony has emerged victorious in our battle against Garralosh and her children. The mother of crocs is dead, her children are scattered and the horde has been smashed."

I give my audience a quick eyeball to judge their reaction. It's not helping, they don't have one. Thousands of blank ant faces stare back at me. Even their antennae don't twitch. The air is perfectly still now. After the chaos and calamity that has occurred here, the silence is bizarre, almost otherworldly.

"We.. Uh..." I stumble there a bit, I can admit it, keep pushing forward! "We lost many members of the family today. It's important that their struggle isn't forgotten. They were not soulless creatures who served unthinkingly, that was what the horde had been. Our fallen served their family with all of their strength and gave everything they had, willingly."

As the Will of the colony trickles into me, I grow stronger and I grow more confident, my pheromones reaching far and wide.

"I want all of you to remember this. This is the kind of family I wish for us to be. It is right, it is ant, for all of us to give everything for the colony."

I can feel the flicker of agreement in their eyes as I say that. It's natural, of course. The colony should be placed above all. But I'm not done. That alone is not enough.

"Remember. If you do that. The colony will give everything for you in return."

Hmm. I've lost them on that one. I don't think they understand what I mean. Never mind. I'll teach them and they'll learn in time.

"We've achieved victory today. Don't forget it! For the colony!"

"FOR THE COLONY!"

Their response is so intense my antennae freeze up for a second as the wave of 'voices' smack into me all at once. And it keeps going, on and on and on.

"FOR THE COLONY! FOR THE COLONY!"

Only when I raise my antennae high does it stop.

"There is an enormous amount of work to do. Stop slacking! The Biomass here will birth ten thousand new siblings! Don't waste it!"

And with that, the crowd dispersed. All at once every ant began to move in a different direction and within seconds there were teams everywhere, carving up the Biomass and trails of workers form to haul it seemingly from thin air. Everywhere I look the battle field teems with ants, the battle seemingly forgotten, intent on their work.

Except behind me. The body of Garralosh lies still and untouched.

[Tiny, Crinis. I need you two up here. No chance I'm going to be able to eat this all on my own.]