

Chrysalis 41

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Chapter 41: Follow the yellow brick ... Pheromones

Full of glee I head back towards the lake. My combat test run was a massive success! My newly upgraded acid worked better than I'd imagined and the power of my bite attacks has skyrocketed.

If I manage to get my mandibles to +5 I wonder what I'll be able to do then?

I'm at risk of getting a little carried away with myself again. Head in the game Anthony, your new family isn't going to find itself!

Once I arrive at the lake I make my way around to the pheromone trail, my antennae tippy tapping along the edge of the water.

The usual collection of monsters has gathered again, eyeing each other off and getting a good drink of sweet, sweet mana juice.

If I look at the water it appears more agitated than it did before. The strange formations within the lake are moving more rapidly and intensely than before, I swear the lake is also brighter. Ever since I arrived in this world things have been getting brighter...

Is this a seasonal thing? Are we coming out of underground winter and moving into underground summer?

Well, there's nothing I can think of to answer that mystery other than wait and see what happens.

Excitedly I pick up the trail and start following it away from the lake.

It seems like the trail has become a little weaker over the last day or so, which means no ants have come through here and reinforced it for the last while. In some ways I'm glad because it means that none of them have shown up here when I wasn't watching, which would have been depressing.

Even if the chemical signal is a bit weaker than before, it's still strong enough to be fairly simple to follow into the forest. This feels a bit exciting now, moving into new, unexplored territory!

The weird plant life in the forest continues to perplex me. I'm finding shorter trees in this area, probably only a few metres high but shaped like an inverted Christmas tree, wide at the top and narrow at the bottom. As I watch the different levels of foliage appear to be swaying in the breeze, but each level sways in a different direction.

Weird.

I then realise there is no breeze.

Out of curiosity I flip a rock at the tree and I swear the branches twitch to knock it away.

Ok then, staying away from that tree in future!

I have enough trouble with them more regular monsters, I don't feel any need to start tangling with the plants!

By relying on my stealth I'm able to avoid a few groups of monsters and stay on the trail as it winds through the forest. The trail doesn't follow a straight line but bends and curves, laid down in whatever path the first scout to come through here took as they wandered about.

Suddenly a powerful roar explodes in the forest not far away from where I am, the heavy impact of monster combat rings in the air immediately afterwards.

Yikes! Some monsters are getting serious over there!

I decide to investigate whilst keeping my distance, I don't want to be dragged into what sounds like a battle of the big boys.

Sure enough, when I creep close enough to see the action, two monsters I'm still unwilling to tangle with are laying right into each other.

First is the Titan-Croc, possibly the same one from the lake and second monster is the massive bat-faced gorilla looking creature I'd seen before at the lake.

Although this particular gorilla is significantly larger than that one was.

He's absolutely huge. The Bat-Gorilla king?!

The Titan Croc has stood up on its hind legs, the smaller and thicker mid-section arms looking slightly silly wagging in the air not able to do much. The Croc is still huge when standing, easily four to five metres tall, matching the Bat-Gorilla in height easily.

This is a battle of the freaking giants this is! I refuse to believe this massive things have evolved once, as I have. Surely this size is the result of at least two, maybe three evolutions. How could it fair otherwise? Eh Gandalf?!

The Croc is much slower on its hide legs but is able to swing its massive claws in devastating, wide swings, raking the sword like edges with tremendous force.

The Bat-Gorilla is far more nimble, ducking forward and back to avoid the swings but it doesn't look nearly as solid defensively, the Crocs' thick hide nullifying its blows.

BOOM.

In a fit of rage the Ape smashes both fists into the ground and roars with all of its colossal might, veins bulging under its skin. Electrical energy starts flashing, first around the shoulders and then streaming down the dark arms, faster and faster.

Those massive fists start to glow with the accumulated energy until loud crackling sounds are emanating from both of the clenched hands.

That. Looks. Awesome!

The dreaded lightning fist!

The incredible light show is dazzling, what on earth am I going to see next?!

The Ape bellows once again and runs forward, massive fists crashing into the earth before leaping high, bringing both hands above its head for a massive two fist sledgehammer attack!

The Titan-Croc stands its ground, coldly watching the ape approach before crouching, titanic energy amassing in its chest to be released from between those dreadful jaws in the form of a searing ball of fire!

With a shattering explosion the ape tanks the fireball with its leathery bat face before the sheer momentum carries it forward, bringing both fists down with the strength of a lightning bolt, discharging the rippling lightning through the body of the Croc.

Both combatants stagger back after this incredible exchange and I remember to start breathing again.

Holy moly!

That was hella impressive! At what point am I going to be able to do totally sweet moves like that Gandalf?

Launching fireballs out of the mouth? Channelling lightning into the fists? Maybe after my next evolution?

The two monsters eye each other with baleful glares. These two seem to seriously hate each other's guts. Something tells me these two may have fought before. After the last exchange the damage to both monsters seems to be equal and they continue their standoff, chests heaving.

Some might think I would take advantage of this moment to pounce on the injured monsters, peppering them with acid to take advantage of their weakened state and reap a fortune in experience and Biomass.

To those I would say: You must be out of your mind!

I am not going anywhere near these guys! Are you even seeing this?!

Wait a second....

What is that?

My eyes detect a flicker of movement on the other side of the titanic clash and I desperately turn my head to try and confirm what it was I saw.

I swear I just saw... Antennae.

There it is again!

What I see next causes my heart to leap with joy.

First one, then another, then ten more ants emerge from the trees, antennae furiously waving this way and that as they move around each other.

My people! My tribe! My clan!

I can tell from their colouring that these are definitely Formica ants! Just like me! I have found the colony at last!

Each of the ants is roughly my size though most are slightly smaller. I can also see a few hatchlings, just like I used to be, mixed in with them. Must be a group out of the colony to visit the lake, absorbing the mana to try and condense their mana cores. Good you guys! Give it all for the colony!

What I see next causes my heart to sink into a pit of despair.

The ants skitter back and forth for a moment, before as one, they raise their abdomens high and begin to blast the two massive combatants with acid.

YOU DID WHAT?!

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Chapter 42: My family needs more education

I can't believe my hundreds of tiny eyes. What are the heck are you guys doing?! Sure there are more than ten of you but those guys are freaking massive! The Titan-Croc by itself could snap all of you up in two minutes!!

Before I can even think, my feet are moving. I don't understand exactly why but I cannot let these ants get killed, not now, not after I've been searching for so long.

I will not let them die today!

Before the two massive monsters can react properly to the new threat I have charged forward, out of my cover and into the open. Digging in my feet I spin quickly to point my back at the two creatures.

Let me introduce you monsters to what is affectionately known as my business district!

POW! POW! POW!

I fire off three quick shots without aiming too much, all I want is the beasts to turn their attention to me, hopefully that way my colony mates won't be instantly crushed to pieces.

The three sizzling jets of acid streak through the air, impacting on the two massive beasts and immediately adhering to them, burning into their flesh.

Thankfully these guys are so large I don't have to aim too much in order to hit them, but it would have been better if I had been able to target my restrictive acid more carefully, hitting their joints would have reduced their ability to fight even if only a little.

My gambit pays off enough though, the two huge beasts turn their back on the approaching ant force and face this new threat with primeval fury burning in their eyes.

Uh...

Hey guys!

Any chance you two are pacifists?

These two monsters look like the absolute alphas of this place, I still remember how the Titan-Croc smashed an adult centipede into bits with a single swipe of its claws. Why on Pangera did my ant brethren decide to take on these things?

I seriously hope my ant brothers and sisters are not also suffering from an immensely low Cunning stat, because I deeply question the wisdom of this current course of action!

POW! POW!

[Improved acid shot has reached level 4]

Before they can charge at me I fire off two more quick shots, both aimed at the Ape. Hopefully the extra acid will restrict its movement somewhat since it is by far the faster of the two.

Practically all of my ranged ammunition has been expended now, I have only one shot remaining. Acid is a damage over time sort of effect however, hopefully we can all survive long enough to see the effects start to kick in!

My fellow ant kind are still bombarding with their acid, firing spray after spray, I seriously don't want them to draw the aggro so I'm going to have to do something I'll quickly regret.

I charge!

Witness me!

With the two brooding monstrosities looming over me I dash forward directly toward them. These two giants are seriously ticked off, drenched in stinging acid, some of it hardening and sticking to them, they are ready to pound these offending insects into a paste.

When they see me running at them they both react aggressively.

The ape responds first, its superior reflexes and speed on full display as it dashes forward to meet my charge. The ground thunders in response to the sheer bulk of the creature as its fists pound into the rock.

With its leathery bat face growing larger and larger in my vision I can really see with far more detail than I'd like the massive curved fangs protruding from the monsters maw. Suddenly the Ape gathers its strength and leaps high into the air!

I've seen this before!

With every ounce of strength in my body I hurl myself to the side just as those massive fists impact, shattering the ground with the sheer kinetic force of the strike. Every ounce of my being is shivering after witnessing that force up close.

Even the spray of rock and dirt from the impact is almost enough to damage me.

Just how strong are you, damn ape?!

Just as I 'm congratulating myself for my narrow escape I can see something flaring up in my peripheral vision. Is that....

Jump!

Springing out with all of the energy I can pump into my legs I feel a searing heat begin burn into me before a catastrophic explosion rocks the ground just beneath my feet.

That damned Croc launched a fireball at me when I dodged the ape!

Since when is your teamwork so good?! Are you the new Colossal Brothers Duo?

That one nearly cooked me, if I'd been one second slower I'd be roast ant at this point. Even though I was able to dodge I've still taken some damage and one of my legs is fairly wrecked, it was closest to the ground when the explosion went off.

I curse my bad luck, I can't afford to lose mobility!

I don't have much choice. I activate my regenerative healing gland.

Immediately an icy sensation explodes deep with my body before creeping down my veins and spreading throughout my entire frame. Yeeouch! That feels so weird! Almost as if my guts had been put in a deep freeze!

This must be the healing fluid I'd read about. In the span of a few seconds the freezing, numb sensation has swept through me entirely and as it recedes I can tell I feel better than I did before. Dings in my carapace have started closing over and my leg is almost back to full function after being a roasted entrée just a minute ago.

Checking my status I can see that I've regained five HP from what I had before.

It was a shame to have to blow it so early in the fight but the regenerative properties of this new organ are impressive. I'm very satisfied with this purchase!

All said and done I've only managed to buy about thirty seconds so far. I hope that acid is doing some work, otherwise we're all dead!

The two gigantic monsters almost seem surprised to see their much smaller opponent still alive after their combined assault. I suppose these guys don't usually have much trouble hunting in this place, I haven't seen anything else that remotely approaches their strength.

My fellow ants are still firing acid from above but some of them are starting to descend to enter into melee combat.

Are you guys frikken serious? You'll be torn to shreds!

Seeing several of the ants approach the two monsters turn to face them.

I can't let that happen.

My leg is as good as its going to get. Gogogogogo!

With my two enemies distracted and facing away I charge with all of my speed. Dammit, I should have taken that dash skill ages ago! I need to be faster.

Running up behind the ape I spring high with all of my legs, mandibles glowing brilliantly white.

Crushing Bite!

My mandibles close on the wrist of the Ape with audible *crunch*. If I can disable his hand it will be a huge reduction to its ability to fight!

The beast reacts with incredible swiftness, rapidly swinging its arm and flinging me off into the air. Fortunately I've had some practice with this lately. Tuck the legs aaand roll!

As I hit the ground I land onto my back, the hard carapace absorbing the impact and then I roll over and over, dispersing the impact and protecting my vulnerable legs.

When I slow down I get back onto my feet and charge straight back into the fight. I can't afford to let up for a second!

A few of my allies have reached the fight now, rushing forward suicidally to bite and latch onto the gigantic creatures, heedless of their own lives.

You idiots!

The Titan-Croc draws back one of its enormous hands, preparing to swipe down with its fierce claws.

Dammit!

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Chapter 43: Blood is thicker than ichor

Noooo!

Desperate to save my allies I turn on the spot and pray I have something still left in the tank.

POW!

Once again the sizzling acid streaks through the air. By some miracle my hastily aimed shot is right on the money, splashing into the Titan-Croc's face and then immediately begins to show its restrictive properties, turning sticky as it solidifies in an instant.

The Croc bellows in rage as it swings out with its prepared claw but thanks to its vision being impeded the swing goes slightly wide.

One ant is still caught directly in its mid-section and is instantly killed, torn to pieces by those terrible claws.

The survivors close in and start chomping at the Croc's legs, some of them even climbing up the monster's body to attack other places.

Why did I never think of that?!

The two massive monsters are still fighting fit however and I can't be everywhere at once, I've done everything I can for the ants taking on the Croc, I have to hope that they can survive on their own for a while. All I can hope to do is take this Ape out of the fight.

My bite seems to have had some effect on the monster, its hideous bat features are twisted in rage and pain. Its dark fur, now almost completely matted with burning acid is slowly being stripped away and the creature is carrying its right wrist, not willing to place its full weight on the limb.

This is my chance!

I run at the Ape posturing and snapping my mandibles, the monster equivalent of shouting 'one v one me bro!'

The creature screams, different from before, this high pitched shriek seems to wobble my insides and penetrate my mind, dizzying me and everyone else in range. This feels like some crazy echolocation attack! The soundwaves are so strong I can feel my whole body vibrating. After releasing this insane stunning effect the monster once again leaps high, looking to squash me flat whilst I suffer from the effect of the scream.

But. Its. Not enough!

Before he can land I leap once more, this time in a direction he couldn't expect, directly onto his body! Grip skill can also be used like this monkey brain! As the Ape comes down with shattering force I leap straight at him, clutching onto his upper leg with all of the strength my tiny claws can muster.

With my newly improved Might stat it's just enough to hold when the monster crashes to the ground.

Thankfully I didn't neglect to toughen up my inner resistance when I raised my toughness, otherwise I might not have been able to resist the effect as well as I did. If I hadn't shaken off that stun I'd be ant paste right now. Hopefully the other ants were able to manage ok, I don't have time to check on them.

Don't waste any time, bite!

I can feel the energy mounting in my mandibles as they glow brighter and brighter before I bring them closed with tremendous force!

Crushing bite!

[Crushing Bite has reached level three]

The Ape shrieks in pain and immediately starts slapping at itself to try and squash me or knock me off, much like a human dealing with a mosquito, but I'm already gone. Crawling around on the creature's other leg, preparing to deal another bite!

Chomp

How do you like that?

Not very much apparently as the monster has intensified its efforts to shake me off, but I won't go, I'm holding on with everything I can muster!

[Grip has reached level five, upgrade available]

Perfect!

[Grip -> Enhanced Grip, your feet become more resistant to effects that will limit their ability to grip, such as water, momentum].

I'll take it!

My claws into the Ape's furry skin even tighter as I skitter around on his body trying to avoid the deadly slaps of his meaty hands.

Eventually I clamber up to his neck and before he can react I dig in for a massive bite!

[Chomp has reached level 4]

So many levels! This is probably the effect of battling such a large monster.

The massive monster shrieks once again in pain and hunches its shoulders against my mandibles. Then I feel something strange building up on the Ape, my feet are, almost tingling.

Wait a sec....

JUMP!

ZZZZAP!

The tremendous electrical discharge flashes all over the Apes body, crackling loudly and blinding my eyes briefly.

Holy hell!

He turned himself into an electric bug zapper!

Arrghh. He fried two of my legs! That seriously hurts... I won't stop though, this Bat Gorilla is going to get it!

Thanks to my amazing peripheral vision I can sort of make out what is happening with the Croc, I think he's been pulled to the ground for the moment, reinforcements might have come judging by the number of moving shapes I can see.

I can't let myself be distracted though, if the two massive creatures were to join forces we'd all be toasted insects.

By this point the bat faced monster is seriously suffering. Drenched in burning acid he has very visible burns and wounds that must be excruciating. It should also be mentioned that the Ape isn't a bug type monster, shielded by a hard carapace or even like the lizards or Crocs, protected by a layer of scales. This Ape has dense fur for protection but under that is skin and muscle, my crushing bites have been able to inflict significant damage.

He must be teetering on the edge by now, he must be!

The ants here are my relatives, born from the same Queen as me, my brothers and sisters! I never had much of a family on Earth, rarely saw my parents and I had no siblings to speak of. Perhaps that is the reason why I want to protect these monsters.

Maybe I'm just silly, but I don't want my idiot ant siblings to die.

Which means it's you and me Ape... Only one of us is walking out of here alive!

Red foam is dripping from the gaping maw of the wounded beast, mad fury burning in its eyes. You've got no chill ape, that's your problem.

My legs are still a bit shaky, that electricity zapped me fairly well, I don't think my regeneration gland has anything left in the tank. If I survive this fight I'm going to upgrade the heck out of that thing! Still no acid either, going to have to finish it with the mandibles.

Steadying my feet beneath me I begin to move towards the ape, circling around to side of its injured hand. The next move will decide the battle, I watch the monster like a hawk as it glares back, almost mad with pain and rage.

Come on you big dumb bat faced piece of Biomass. You've got a face not even your mother could love, come over here and let me tear it off.

Suddenly my injured legs give way beneath me and I stumble, my poor face crashing in the dirt.

The ape howls in glee and dashes forward maniacally!

You really are stupid...

Just as it reaches me, looming over with its massive frame, both arms raised for the final strike I propel myself with my legs and roll directly under it, dodging the deadly blow by inches!

Now!

I spring up next to the creatures legs and charge up my mandibles for a massive strike!

CHOMP!

Just beneath the creatures knee I rip into his leg, the crushing bite audibly crunching the muscle and bone as the chomp passive helps my jaws puncture through the defences.

The ape howls in pain and swats at me awkwardly, landing a glancing blow on my abdomen, but I'm not letting go.

Bite! Bite! Bite!

Slowly at first, my jaws begin to close further and further before they finally snap shut with a massive snap!

I've bitten clean through the leg!

My foe totters before completely losing its balance and falling to the ground with a crash. As it does so it lashing out with its injured hand, crashing a fist down directly on top of my midsection.

My vision instantly blurs as the impact rattles through my entire body. Even off balance and with an injured hand this monster is still so damn strong! I can feel my carapace crack in places as it absorbs the impact.

I hold onto consciousness desperately, I won't die now!

I still can't see clearly but I throw myself forward, hopefully at the monsters head. All you have to do is bite Anthony! Don't think of anything else just bite!

Chomp! Chomp!

I can feel my body being rocked by blows and my eyes get darker and darker but still I hold on.

Chomp! Chomp!

I'm not even sure where I am anymore, not even sure what I'm doing. For some reason though I know I just have to keep biting.

Chomp!

[You have slain level 13]

Black.

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Chapter 44: Something new

The origins of the Deep Legion are though lost to history. What is known is thought to have more basis in myth than in reality. Partially this is due to the lack of records that survived the great Cataclysm, particularly here in the Tiberial Confederation.

What is agreed is that at some point during that world shattering event, where monsters from the deepest reaches of the Dungeon roamed free on the surface, causing destruction everywhere they went, a group of individuals gathered to found the Deep Legion.

The organisation grew rapidly, recruiting from the populace and was able to strike effectively and well against the monsters on the surface as well as counter attack into the Dungeon. Nobody can explain why they were so successful where other human forces were not.

To this day, some three thousand years later the Legion persists as independent military organisation that regularly monitor and explore the Dungeon, in some places they are still trusted with a regulatory role, overseeing access to the Dungeon in their customary strict fashion.

Tribune Aurillia stared hard at the captive Mercenaries, bound hand and foot sitting on the ground before her. Two Legionaries stood guard on either side of the ragtag group, hands resting on blades, ready to execute their duty at any moment.

"So you are trying to tell me that a small acid spraying monster ambushed you, destroying your shield as you raided the lake and then followed you back to your camp, stealing a number of monster cores by digging under your wards".

Nystina, the mage, nodded vigorously.

"That's right, I never even managed to see the little bastard."

Aurillia massaged her temples. "For some reason I'm not even that surprised to hear about mercs getting outsmarted by a monster".

"Hey, screw you!" one of the larger men in the group shouted, "who ever heard of a monster that smart here in the first expanse?"

He did have a point, usually monsters in this area had exceptionally low cunning. There were a few evolutions that made for large and relatively dangerous foes but almost all of those sacrificed other stats to enable that size and strength.

"Putting that aside, you should have received the notification to vacate the Dungeon we sent days ago, why is your party still operating in the Forest Expanse against Legion instructions?"

The group immediately started shifting their posture and avoiding looking the domineering Tribune in the eye.

Aurillia cursed at them internally, what you guys children?

"Uh, I think our communication crystal malfunctioned" the mage finally offered, "we didn't receive any message".

"And when you noticed that every other hunting party had vacated the area you didn't find that strange? Or were you too distracted by the profits you could make having the entire expanse to yourselves?" Aurillia said sarcastically.

She turned to one of the Legionaries standing guard and nodded curtly.

The soldier immediately stepped forward, crouched and punched the mage viciously across the face before turning to the largest of the fighters and kicking him directly in the chest. The man fell backwards, gasping for air as he lay in the dirt.

"You can't treat us this way" another of the fighters protested, "we're registered members of the Mercenary Union".

"Noooo" Aurillia drawled, "you're idiot Merc scum who got greedy and are going to pay the price".

She turned to a Centurion awaiting instructions behind her. "Seize any materials from the Dungeon in their possession and confiscate their licences. Children who can't play the rules don't get to play at all."

Having passed her judgement she stared at each of the mercenaries in turn. "If they complain too much feel free to give them a little more Legion 'hospitality'".

Shaking her head the Tribune walked away. The mercenaries had been found a few hours earlier, retreating to their camp after farming cores at the lake. It wasn't unusual for the local mercs to try and push the Legions authority to the limit, in recent years the Legion had been making a special point of pushing back.

Of course, as soon as they did the Mercenary Union started crying foul to the Queen about the Legion abusing its authority. Just another thing for the commander to have to worry about.

She found Titus yelling at the trainees and directing them to the makeshift training yard they had established as part of their camp. The exhausted trainees began pairing up and sparring whilst the commander watched them sternly, barking out instructions when he noticed a mistake.

Aurillia joined him and explained the strange testimony she had received from the mercenaries.

"Doesn't this sound weird to you? Why would there be such an intelligent member of this species so high up in the Dungeon? Do you think this might be the same one the trainees saw close to the surface?"

Titus stood silent for a moment, chewing over the facts in his own slow and methodical way.

"I think it is" he said finally, "it seems like too much of a coincidence that there would be two of them. If we agree it's the same one, then how in the hells did this one ant survive our sweep of the tunnels to make its way here and then survive the monsters once it arrived. This monster has shown almost human levels of intelligence".

The Tribune nodded in agreement, "for a creature as unevolved as this to show such a high level of cunning is unheard of. Should we consult Alberton on this?"

The commander grunted, "he'd love to study a specimen like this but we don't have the time to waste. We need to clear out as much of the Expanse as we can and then locate the nest of these creatures. If our little smart ant has made it this far then there is a chance we'll find him there and we can exterminate him at the same time as the rest".

He paused to bellow further criticism at his trainees before continuing. "We've seen monsters with close to human intelligence before. Judging by the number of offspring in the area we should surmise that old prick Garralosh has been around here at some point recently. Make sure the hunting parties are on alert, he shouldn't be able to show his fat face this high up in the Dungeon but some of his higher level offspring might".

Garralosh and the commander had run into each other a few times deep under the ground, the titanic and ancient creature was known to be the oldest and most powerful monster under Liria. Monsters that old and strong were unable to come this high up in the Dungeon due to the mana up here being too thin to support their incredibly dense and powerful cores. Creatures like that were so old and had evolved so many times they had effectively received a name from the system itself.

There were a number of scars on the beast's thick hide from the very axe resting on Titus' shoulder at that moment. The old croc was clever though, and extremely cautious, slipping out of the traps they prepared for him without taking fatal damage.

"Something feels wrong" Titus disrupted his tribunes' wandering thoughts.

"Wrong, commander?"

He turned and nodded towards the forest below them. "I don't think I've ever seen the forest look this bright. Spawn points are spitting out monsters almost as fast as we kill them and the wave still hasn't broken. It doesn't feel like it usually does".

Aurillia reluctantly agreed, "it does seem to be building in intensity faster than usual. What do you think it means?"

Titus shook his head. "I'm not sure. I just know I don't like it. This wave is going to be a big one. We'd best be prepared for the worst".

Chrysalis

Chapter 45: My Mother is a giant monster

I can feel something under my head. It's solid, like, a rock? My legs are so heavy as well, how long have I been asleep? I try to stretch my arms out and can't for some reason.... Where the heck are my arms?

Wait...

I don't have arms anymore! Then it all comes flooding back. The fight, the ants, the ape! What the heck happened? Am I alive?

I try to spring up to my feet but a solid force is holding me down. What the heck?! Am I still under attack?

My vision swings wildly before finally settling and I can see an enormous monster above me, pressing me down with one large leg.

Wha!? What is this thing? Don't eat me! I'm not delicious!

It takes a moment for my head to settle down. I haven't been harmed I don't think? The force on my back is pressing me down but not harming me in anyway. I quickly check my status. I'm at about half HP? I remember being next to dead...

Err.. Where did these levels come from?

I've gained three whole levels? Is this from the Bat-Gorilla? I don't really remember how that fight ended...

And as I look closer at this massive monster above me... isn't it an ant?

Like, a massive ant?

Hang on a second? The QUEEN?

A truly enormous monstrous ant, easily four times my size is standing over me, pressing me down to the ground and watching me as I wake up. Slowly she leans forward and her antennae begin to glow brightly.

When those antennae touch mine I can feel a surge of icy energy sweep through my body. I'm shocked at first but then it reminds of something, my regeneration gland! Is she healing me?

Checking my status I can see that I've gained another ten HP. This is a bit of a surprise, the Queen knows healing magic?

Suddenly the pressure from my back is gone and I can stand up. The Queen turns away from me to pick something up in her mandibles and turns back, dropping a huge chunk of monster in front of me. I think this is... the apes arm?!

After dropping off some food for me the massive Queen chirps in a friendly manner before turning and wandering off around a corner, leaving me in a small dirt chamber on my own.

Ok Anthony, lets cool down and think about this.

growl

My stomach is seriously rumbling. Why the heck am I so hungry?! Let's think as we eat then.

[You have consumed a new source of Biomass: Pugnus Fulgur Simiae, you are awarded one Biomass]

[Basic profile of the Pugnus Fulgur Simiae unlocked]

[Pugnus Fulgur Simiae: Lightning Fist Ape, Brutally powerful but severely lacking in Cunning this monster has a strong affinity to lightning and can channel mana into electricity]

Not wrong about those electrical attacks, yeeouch! Quite the formidable monster but I do have to agree, it was very stupid. I would hate to run into a monster that powerful with some semblance of smarts, unable to trick it I'd be quickly defeated.

[You have gained one Biomass]

[You have gained one Biomass]

Two whole Biomass just from eating one arm? That is unheard of? Is it because it's an advanced creature of some kind? Possibly I was right and it was double mutated, so it provides more Biomass? It certainly gave me a heap of Xp, enough to level three times even after I evolved.

Although the pain of hunting them is real the benefits cannot be denied. If I was able to get a whole one to myself....

Whoa, snap out of it Anthony, you almost died fighting this one! No need to go planning to throw your life away already!

So, how did I end up here anyway? And where exactly is here?!

Since the Queen is here then that can mean only one thing! I'm in the nest! Since I passed out when battling, my allies must have dragged me back here to be healed when they brought the food back also, which means the Titan-Croc should have also bit the dust...

Go team!

I'm not sure how I feel... I've been through a lot and risked my life multiple times to try and get back to the nest of my colony. Almost everything I've seen since I awoke in this place has been trying to kill me, I just wanted to be somewhere I wouldn't have to be so cautious, so afraid.

Now I'm here! I'm pumped up to check it out!

Just as I'm about to rush out of the small dirt chamber I notice something else glowing softly on the ground.

What is this? A monster core? As far as cores go this one is massive! Easily the biggest I've seen.

I move closer.

[Compatible monster core detected. Would you like to reinforce your core or reconstitute a monster?]

Is this the core of the Ape? Did the colony leave it here for me? That seems... a little odd for a group of monstrous ants to do... was it the Queen? She does seem a little smarter than the others, did she leave this here for me as a reward?

You know, I've wondered what the reconstitute a monster option does. Reinforcing my core is hugely important since it will allow to increase my ability further when I evolve but, I really would like to know what the heck this option does...

Maybe I can just check it out without consuming the core...

[Would you like to reconstitute the monster?]

.... Sure?

[Manual Reconstitution is locked since requisite skills have not been acquired. Reconstituting monster]

Wait! No!

Before my eyes the precious core begins to glow brighter and brighter before it melts into a bright liquid that gradually reshapes itself. When the process is finished and the light recedes a small monkey looking creature is sitting on the ground looking up at me with its large eyes.

What. The heck. Is this...

The little simian has dark grey skin and tiny bat-like features as well as soft black fur growing all over its body. As I stare the small chimp starts to look curiously around the room, eventually standing up and slowly waddling around with an awkward gate, as if it hadn't quite worked out how to walk.

So my precious ape core is gone and reconstituting the monster literally brings it back to life as an infant, what is the point of that?! I could have used that core to reinforce my own, possibly getting some sort of bonus since it was a such a large one!

I'm lamenting, seriously lamenting here Gandalf!

Ignorant to my pain the chimp is still waddling about scratching at the walls before it eventually walks over to me

What do you want chimp? Wha- hey!

After hesitating for the moment the tiny monster smiles and clumsily starts to clamber up my abdomen, eventually succeeding and happily sitting on my back, hooting to itself in delight.

It looks so cheerful up there I decide to leave it alone. It isn't like he can do much harm. Perhaps he has some sort of loyalty to me since I reconstituted him? Gandalf didn't have much to say on the matter... although I can apparently learn skills to make the process manual? What does that entail?

The more I learn about this crazy system the stranger it seems to me.

With my new passenger on board I decide to go and explore the nest of my colony! Hopefully the other ants won't eat him...

Walking out of the small dirt chamber I enter a narrow tunnel that winds around some rock protrusions before joining up to a another slightly larger tunnel.

A few ants are making their way back and forth, moving up and down the tunnel, looking super busy. At first I react with shock, seeing a monster up close usually means a fight is about to happen, but these ants completely ignore me, hurrying about their business. It looks like they are able to recognise that I'm the same species and from the same colony as them?

It's kind of strange to think that this is my first chance to see what I myself look like. These ants really are just very large wood ants. Normally wood ants would create a large mound rather than digging into the dirt but I suppose their options are limited down here in these tunnels. Maybe they could make a mound in the huge cavern I was in before?

About half of the ants I see are still hatchlings, significantly smaller than I am, looking almost adorable as they rush past, their six legs almost a blur.

It seems safe, thankfully. Time to keep exploring!

I decide to head down and I see two more chambers, connected to this main tunnel by narrow paths. For whatever reason these chambers are mostly empty, just a few workers resting in them.

Further down however the action is really happening

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 46: The Colony

Further down my ape passenger, who is managing to hold onto my back very well, and I come across many more ants and it quickly becomes apparent why.

Dozens of small grubs and several larger cocoons occupy the space, carefully tended to and fed by more than twenty workers. The workers are constantly checking and tending to the white grubs, cleaning them and feeding them from their social stomachs similar to the way a bird will regurgitate food for its young.

This is the brood chamber, the next generation of ant monsters are being raised here. This is super cool to see! One of my favourite parts of my ant keeping hobby was watching the workers raise up the future workers of the colony, taking care of them until they were fully grown.

It seems that these monstrous ants follow a similar lifecycle to regular ants on Earth. First the Queen lays the eggs which hatch into a larva, a small grub that needs to be fed and cared for until it becomes large enough to spin itself a cocoon and become a pupa. Inside the cocoon the ant slowly takes shape until eventually it emerges, fully formed. After a brief period to allow for the exoskeleton to harden the new ant is ready to roll.

The ape on my back is making low noises of amazement as it watched the hustle and bustle in the chamber in front of us. There really is a lot of movement, these monstrous workers don't take their feet off the pedal for a moment.

If I look closely I can see a few unhatched eggs in the corner of the chamber. I guess that means that further down from here I'll find the find the Queen.

Sure enough in the chamber down below her highness is back to her usual work. Dwarfing all of the workers in the chamber the Queen is being tended to constantly by her entourage, bringing her food and cleaning her so that she can concentrate on laying and growing the colony.

Honestly I'm surprised to see so few ants so far. I don't think this colony is very old. A wood ant nest can have up to half a million workers in it, I don't think this one has more than a few hundred.

My antennae are constantly pinging in here, flooded with the scent of pheromone trails. Instinctively I'm able to understand what some of them mean, food over this way, brood are to go this way, and so on.

The trails are laid out so that workers know where they need to be going at any time, the more workers agree on a particular path, the stronger that trail will become.

The Queen has seen me looking around and walks towards me, several ants crawling on her are forced to come along as well.

I'm still slightly intimidated by the Queen, she is seriously massive.

Uh.... Hi ... Mum?

The massive monster in front of me is technically my mother here in this world, the fact that I'm here in the colony and not getting ripped to pieces is all the proof I could need. The Queen, that is to say, mother, inspects me carefully, checking if I'm still wounded before giving me friendly pat on the antennae and moving back into the nesting chamber.

Well, she seems nice?

Speaking of which I should check my HP. Looks like I'm up to about 41 since eating that Biomass. Nearly back to full, feels good.

Now that I'm finally here I'm not exactly sure what to do next. I don't have anything urgent that needs doing and thankfully I'm not threatened by anything right now, no humans chasing me down no enemy monsters. Such a relaxing existence.

I move out of the nesting chambers and out of the workers' way, heading up the tunnel and into one of the empty side rooms. On the way I pass two workers carrying a weakly struggling live centipede down towards the area we just left.

Why would they leave it alive? I think for a moment before I eventually realise why. In order to level up you have to deal the final blow, they are literally delivering Xp to Mother! She doesn't have to lift a finger in order to get experience and Biomass, the workers are just bringing it on their own!

What an enviable existence.

It makes a lot of sense, when I think about it. The Queen in an ant colony is literally the heart, the past and the future of the colony. Without the Queen the colony would never have existed and if she were to die the colony would cease to be. So it makes sense that to keep everything growing and prosperous the Queen should be as high a level as possible, as well as gaining Biomass in order to mutate and become stronger. She probably has an egg production organ she can upgrade as well, increasing the rate she can lay and growing the workforce faster and faster.

Since I have the time I decide to train my Mana Manipulation, forcing the energy out of my core and directing it out of my mouth. Every time the small puff of energy is released from my mouth the ape on my back goes crazy, giggling in delight and slapping at the cloud with his hands, dispersing the mana with his hands.

Cute.

Eventually I discharge almost all of my mana and by that time I'm getting hungry.

How about you little guy? Getting hungry? I can't actually communicate with my little passenger but I assume he needs to eat in order to grow? Since I've reconstituted him I feel at least somewhat responsible for making sure he can grow properly.

I'd better head out and get some food. It's time for Anthony to contribute to the colony! Making sure my passenger is secure I head back into the main tunnel and start sniffing around for the trails. I head further and further up following both the trail I'm pretty sure indicates 'food' and moving along with the other workers heading in this direction.

The tunnel branches a few times but I keep choosing the path that heads most directly up, I want to get back to the massive area I was in before since I'm somewhat familiar with that place, I'll be able to hunt much easier there.

After almost thirty minutes of travel through the narrow tunnel I eventually emerge back into the open space I had become familiar with. Looking about I can see that I'm standing on top of what is essentially an ant hill, a large pile of loose dirt that the workers had built up when they excavated the tunnel.

After all this time it feels quite strange to be emerging from a proper ant hill. A few workers are crawling up from the tunnel, each with their own varying level of mutation and evolution. I haven't seen any ants more evolved than I myself and honestly I haven't seen a worker quite my own size either.

It's probably a bit unusual for a single worker to amass as much Biomass and experience as I have. Considering that the ants hunt in large groups the experience would be spread pretty thin, since only the ant who delivers the final blow gets any experience at all. Add in on top of that the fact that they are probably taking everything they can capture alive back to the Queen then it must be very hard for an individual to get enough experience to evolve, let alone condense their core.

Not that I would really expect anything different from the workers, unselfish! Giving their all for the colony!

I also plan to contribute my share, but I certainly don't intend to be quite as giving as my fellow workers. With my human intellect I believe I can contribute my bit to the colony whilst also getting some experience and Biomass for myself.

Turning this way and that I can detect a few trails leading in a couple of directions. Just when I'm thinking about which direction I should go in I see a worker scurrying back to the nest as he approaches I can suddenly detect a new scent! My senses are telling me that this new scent is call for reinforcements! There is food this way and they need help.

Picking up the message I decide to concentrate for a second and try to use my own pheromone gland. Obviously it isn't easy trying to do use something you didn't even have in your previous life but just like

with the acid spray there are instincts packaged with my new ant body and I quickly work out how to use it.

I drop the same scent in order to relay the message further down the tunnel and it isn't long before more workers begin to climb up the tunnel, rallying to the call for aid.

This is the organisation that makes ants such a successful species on Earth, dominating the world of smaller creatures with their fearsome teamwork and relentless appetite.

With my message relayed I will go forth and render my assistance!

Chrysalis

Chapter 47: On the hunt with my brethren

As I run along the trail I decide to quickly spend the Biomass that I have in order to improve my abilities slightly. If I'm running into another massive battle against gigantic monsters then I want to be at my best. I'll leave the skill points until later, I'm really hoping that once I master Mana Manipulation I'll be able to purchase more magic based skills, but at the very least I want to quickly upgrade a few things.

With three points to spend I upgrade my regeneration to +1 as I'd promised myself I would do and then my carapace to +2. Getting a little tougher and more survivable seems like a good move.

Although I do want to save up and get my mandibles to +5 so I can choose an upgrade... I'll have to do that next.

Enduring the painful itching feeling of mutation I race off down the trail with other ants boiling out of the hill behind me and my cheerfully yelping mini Bat-Gorilla on my back.

Exactly how I'll be able to fight with this fellow around I'm not sure but I guess I'll figure it out as I go. Hopefully he'll be smart enough not to get himself killed. If he were to die in a stupid way it would double the pain of losing that monster core!

I intend to get some work out of you mini ape! You need to pay me back on my investment!

After we run along the trail I find that we've approached the wall on the outer edge of the space. Wow. This feels like it's a long way from the lake, exactly how far from the nest are these guys wandering, to get all the way to the center of the this place from close to the wall? I can see a small tunnel opening or cave in the wall and ants are bustling at the entrance, battling against something inside. It looks like we are raiding a monster nest? Judging by the size of the opening it shouldn't be anything too massive so I readily charge towards the opening, ready to assist my brethren.

As I approach the noise and din of monster battle fills my ears, growling, roaring and thudding impacts from our opponents but an almost eerie silence from the ants as they advance endlessly.

You guys seriously don't care about your own lives do you?

I can minimise casualties if I can get myself to the frontline quickly. Brushing aside my smaller brethren I bull my way forward until I come face to face with our foe, a pack of Dragon Wolf cubs that have made their home here in this cave.

There must be eight or nine of them in here! Several ants have already suffered severe damage from the fearsome impact generated by those scaled tails. I'm no longer scared of these unevolved monsters, particularly with an army of thirty ants behind me!

Charge!

Sensing the battle atmosphere the little chap on my back is no longer giggling but snarling and glaring at our foes, gripping my back with all his strength and keeping his down as he tries to intimidate the enemy with his squeaky, high pitched voice.

Maybe when you're a bit bigger they'll be frightened of you, but not yet little guy...

With my improved toughness and regenerative gland ready to go I don't care about taking a bit of damage and I immediately push into the enemy back, snapping and biting to draw aggro onto me.

A nearby cub tries to bring its tail around for a devastating smash but..

Crushing bite!

Reacting quickly I catch the offending tail in my mandibles! Take this! Chomp! My powerful mandibles tear through the thick muscle and sever the tail completely!

Ha!

I'm not like I was before! Some of the hounds turn to bite and scratch at me, inflicting minor damage but I shrug it off and continue to cause chaos in the enemy formation.

Bite!

I can't another wolf by the leg, crushing the limb and reducing the enemies mobility drastically. Shrugging off a few more blows I push past the line of enemies and activate my regeneration gland!

The freezing sensation immediately explodes within my body, spreading throughout my form within seconds, closing over my scratches and regaining my Hp. Now that I've pushed past the enemy they are perfect targets for my acid!

POW! POW! POW! POW!

At point blank range blast acid into the cubs ranks, sending them into a frenzy as the burning acid begins its deadly work. As soon as it impacts the liquid hardens, restricting their movement and slowing them significantly.

My reckless charge has forced the wolves to turn their focus onto me, exposing their backs to the rest of the invasion force who capitalise by pressing forward, literally climbing over each other to latch onto their enemies and bring them down.

The Dragon Wolves have been scattered and isolated, allowing the more numerous ants to maximise the advantage of their numbers.

I hover around the fights, lunging forward to deal the occasional bite but letting the rest of the workers do the bulk of the fighting. At least this way they get to level their skills. However, I need to be sure that I manage to secure my own reward...

Crushing Bite!

Dashing toward a heavily wounded Wolf I deliver the final blow!

[You have slain a level four Dragon Wolf Cub]

[You have gained experience]

And another!

[You have slain a level two Dragon Wolf Cub]

[You have gained experience]

If the workers are annoyed at me stealing the experience they don't show it, relentlessly going about their tasks without pause.

I quickly drag away first one and then the other bodies of my own kills, ensuring that I secure Biomass for myself. I don't expect I'll be able to get much from these guys, seeing as they haven't evolved yet but something is better than nothing.

Seeing the food before him the little guy cannot resist his hunger and immediately leaps forward, tearing into the food with his tiny fangs. I'm not too fussed, he can't eat that much and this food won't help me much anyway.

After eating I manage to gain two Biomass in total, which is consistent with my expectations. My assumption is that I gain only half the Biomass from a source that has evolved less than I have, that fraction may even shrink further if I were to consume a Dragon Wolf Cub after evolving again, perhaps down the one quarter.

Which means as I evolve I'll need to hunt tougher and tougher prey if I want to accrue Biomass at a decent pace. Which means I need to ensure each of evolutions is fully reinforced by a maximised Core so I don't fall behind in strength.

The little guy has finished up as well and scabbled onto my back once again. I'm going to have to come up with a name for this fella if this is going to continue. I'm not sure I can call him anything that would suite a small and cute creature like he is now if he's going to grow up and be massive like the Ape the core came from...

I don't know... Tiny?

Sure, why not. It'll be appropriate when he's small and ironic if he ever grows up to massive. It isn't like I can actually call him by his name anyway, this is purely for my own internal use.

With tiny on board and the work here in the cave done I decide to venture out in search of more prey. The rest of the workers have cleaned up the area, dragging the Biomass and any wounded ants back to the nest for healing. Looks like they are smart enough to recognise the Queen can heal their allies up until they are strong enough to regenerate their own health.

Quite the successful raid for the colony! The first of many!

With Tiny firmly on board I move away from the trail and start to take a roundabout path back to the nest, hoping I can encounter something on the way. I briefly consider putting my two Biomass immediately into upgrading my regeneration gland but I decide to hold on, upgrading my mandibles could give me a huge boost to my offensive abilities, it will be worth saving and finding out.

I can hear a lot of activity around me actually. There seems to be more than the usual amount of monsters moving around in the open, at least from my limited experience. I don't want to tangle with a large group of unevolved monsters, I'd rather find something that has evolved once so I get a decent reward in terms of Biomass.

And I have found just the thing...

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 48: Anthony and the giant centipede

Slithering through the underbrush is a monster I've not seen for some time, the giant centipede. It's quite clear from the sheer size of it that this monster doesn't compress its muscle at all during evolution, ramping up in size to get the highest Might gain possible.

However, I still think I can take it one on one, particularly if I can get the jump on it. Thanks to me not being quite so large and my advanced stealth skill, I'm going to spot these guys first nine times out of ten.

The monster is snaking through the undergrowth in the forest, clearly on the prowl for some prey. Little does it realise that there is an ant trail not far away. As soon as it came across one of those workers it would be done for, since reinforcements would quickly overwhelm it if it chose to fight.

Perhaps even more unfortunate, this particular centipede happened to come across me.

POW!

Directly from the commercial zone my acid blasts against the adult claw centipede, catching it across the midsection and a few of its legs.

POW!

Before it can react I hit it again! This time landing more on the tail section and catching a few more legs down the left side.

I'm not too worried about inflicting significant damage with my acid, although every bit of hurt I can put on my target helps, the real aim is to let the restrictive acid do its work hampering the big centipedes movement.

Aggravated by this sudden attack the beast snaps its jaws in rage and charges towards the source of the offending acid. I can already see its gait is a little awkward as a result of my sneak attack. The perfect start!

I move perpendicular to the creatures assault, forcing it to constantly turn as it runs. The claws on this particular specimen look especially mean, perhaps they've been mutated a few times? I'll make a note not to tangle with them too directly.

As the beast approaches I suddenly change direction, charging directly towards it, forcing Tiny to grip onto my back tightly, lest he fall due to the sudden shift in momentum. The little guy is completely fearless though, growling at our enemy with a volume of his minimal volume.

The centipede is quick to respond, flipping its back half into the air with shocking speed and stabbing downward with the vicious barb on its tail! I'm prepared for it, leaping directly forward with all six legs!

Whoosh!

The sting impacts heavily into the ground after rushing just over my head as my jump carries me over the centipede's head, between his claws and directly onto his body.

Haha!

Climbing on the opponent is my new special move!

Take this!

Crushing Bite!

I dart forward and deliver a powerful chomp directly to the midsection of the monster as it attempts to withdraw its tail. The body on this monster is damn thick I can't fit my jaws around it but the carapace crunches and cracks under my assault.

[Chomp has reached level five, upgrade available]

Oh ho! I'll take that right now!

[Chomp -> Piercing Chomp. cost 1 sp: The upgraded Chomp skill, an active skill that greatly enhances the ability of a bite attack to penetrate solid resistance]

Ok, so this skill is for piercing through solid defences whereas crushing bite is better for blunt force damage.

Let's try it out. Piercing bite!

Once again my mandibles are charged with energy, signalling the beginning of an active skill. This time instead being spread evenly across the flatter surfaces of my jaws the energy gathers on the sharper tips, glowing brighter and brighter until those points shine like solid diamond.

I lunge again, bringing my mandibles down with incredible force. This time the pointed areas of my jaws punch straight through the carapace as if it isn't there, ripping into the inside of the monster, causing it to shriek with pain.

The centipede writhes as a result of my bite, contorting its body into knots as it attempts to fling me off. I'm not letting go buddy! All of your weapons are useless against me as long as I stay here, no jaws, no claws and no tail sting!

Bite, bite, bite!

After three more piercing bites I've done some real damage and the centipede is reeling, working even harder to throw me off. Eventually it can't hold on any more, Tiny and I are sent flying through the air, eventually thudding into the ground several metres away.

Ouch! With the little guy on my back I didn't want to execute my patented rolling landing in case he was crushed so I angles my body to take all of the force of the impact directly on my gut. Turning my head slightly I can see the little dude is a bit dazed but otherwise unharmed.

This is going to be a lot easier when you can fight for yourself! After costing me a premium core you're now causing me all this pain... I hope he's worth it.

Whilst I grumble to myself the centipede is trying to get its feet working again in order to mount some sort of offensive. The restrictive acid has really gummed up quite a few of its legs and the internal damage I've caused it only hampering its movement further.

While you're trying to get your feet under you...

POW!

One more blast of acid smacks the centipede directly in the face, effectively blinding it and dealing even more damage.

Nobody said I had to fight fair! In fact, it would be stupid to do so.

With its ability to see almost totally destroyed it becomes child's play to move stealthily around the monster, biting at vulnerable areas and then retreating until it eventually succumbs to its wounds.

[You have slain level six Adult Claw Centipede]

[You have gained experience]

Phew! Didn't take much damage at all in that encounter. Goes to show that the largest and most threatening monsters in this area are actually fairly stupid and can be defeated with the correct strategy. They gained their power by evolving in an uneven way, abandoning the more expensive brain development in favour of brute strength. In this sense I really have cheated the system, having a proper human mind from the very beginning.

I have to wonder why that is the case. I guess my soul was brought here to this world after I died on Earth but why? For what reason? And if my soul was put into an ant monster then why wasn't that ant monster just the usual, stupid one? Why does this body have an advanced brain capable of properly housing my human mind?

It doesn't seem to make sense.

Whilst I stand still ruminating, Tiny has already leaped off my back and started chomping into his next meal.

Hey! How can you be so hungry already?! You haven't even done anything! That's my food!

I rush forward to join him at his meal.

Om nom nom.

I'm determined to consume as much of this massive centipede as I can fit.

Between the two of us we manage to finish off just over half of the centipede and I gain four more Biomass. Evolved creatures really do provide more Biomass per pound.

Not wanting to waste the food I start to lay a trail as I make my way back to nest. When I get back to the ant hill I stand around waiting until a worker comes up and starts to sniff around, detecting my trail.

Come on guy, head over this way.

I lead the way a little, laying down the trail again to strengthen it until he starts to head off on his own. Eventually he'll find the rest of that centipede and come back for reinforcements until they can bring the whole thing back to the colony.

Job done!

Good day for me, good day for the colony! Time to spend this Biomass and keep practicing my Mana Manipulation!

Crawling into the nest I make my way down, checking in on the little larva crawling about and their attendant workers before retreating to one of the more empty chambers.

Once there I spend all of my regenerated mana and I'm finally rewarded for my efforts.

[Mana Manipulation has reached level four]

At last! Now I just need to keep pushing through until I get to level five. The dream of being able to use magic is getting closer and closer.

Now for the mandibles.

[Do you wish to improve Mandibles to +5? This will cost 5 Biomass]

I'll still have one left over, I guess I'll save that for now...

[At this level you may choose a mutation advancement, select from the menu]

The menu unfolds in my mind and once again I'm staggered by the sheer variety on offer. All sorts of elemental upgrades are here. Thunder mandibles? Dealing electrical damage sounds rad as hell.

Savage mandibles? Berserk mandibles, each consecutive bite deals more damage? Vampiric mandibles, draining health from enemies with each chomp?

So many cool options! My eyes are boggling out of my head. I feel like I'm in a candy store. Dammit Gandalf, are you sure I can only choose one?!

I need to settle down and consider my options carefully. With my acid I chose a utility option rather than a direct damage increase when I upgraded, for my mandibles I want something that makes my bites a more lethal weapon.

Once again, I'm hesitant to take an elemental option, even though they sound extremely cool. There are a few options that do what I want but there is one that grabs my eye.

Infused Mandibles, allows Mana to be channelled through, increasing the damage of every bite.

Chrysalis

Chapter 49: Nest Assault

I have high hopes for this upgrade. At the moment I can't use my mana for anything other than practice, it serves no offensive purpose, and I can't help but wonder if I'll eventually be able to manipulate my mana into different elemental types eventually. If I'm right then this could be a massive advantage, even if it is a long way off.

For now, this upgrade will give me what I want most, which is a rounded offensive boost.

Choose Infused Mandibles!

ooooOOOOHHHHHHHHH GOD!

MY FACE!

MY PRECIOUS FACE!

Once the mutation begins my entire face erupts with painful itching. It almost feels as if wires are tunnel through my head, connecting my mandibles and my inner body.

This is the WOOOOOOOORST!

It takes a long time for the mutation to end. When it finally stops I feel like crying in relief and once again I'm forced to remember that ants have no tears.

But my heart, my heart is weeping.

Getting stronger is an amazing feeling but the process completely sucks. Having spent my mana and my Biomass it is time to rest up. I still have skill points to spend but I'll keep holding them for skill upgrades and potential magic skills.

Time for a nap!

Without further ado I flop onto my side and begin to drift into the dreamless state of torpor. Tiny scratches around for a while before leaning himself against my back. Before my senses finally fade away I can hear him snoring softly behind me.

Aaaand UP!

With a jolt I shake myself awake, ready to take on another day of challenges! Since there isn't really any hurry I make sure to spend the mana I accumulated whilst resting on more manipulation practice.

I try something different this time, inspired the Queen, that is to say, mother, passing on her healing spell through her antennae. Using my mind to control the flow of energy in my core I direct it out, into my body and up through my antennae. Eventually the mana is released as a brightly glowing wisp of smoke, drifting from the tip of each antennae.

After completing my training I wake up Tiny, who is still snoring happily (is it just me or is he a bit bigger today?) and wait for him to jump on my back before heading down to the nesting chamber.

There isn't really any rush to get started quickly today so I felt like taking some time to play around with the brood.

The little white grubs don't have much going for them at this stage in their development, no eyes or ears of any kind. They are totally dependent on the workers to care for them until they are large enough to spin a cocoon.

The little things are cute though. I try tickling them with my antennae and they start wriggling around happily, rolling away to escape. This starts a new game where Tiny and I take turns to roll the little guys back and forth as they wobble and wobble in delight.

Heheh.

Well, enough playing around, time to go and secure food for the next generation!

Wait, I smell something...

I rush out of the chamber and into the tunnel to see the workers rushing about, extremely agitated. It doesn't take long for me to work out why. The scent I detect in the air is the pheromone for emergency, all the workers are rushing down in response to this distress call!

What in the heck is going on down there?

Being larger and stronger than the other ants I push my way forward, Tiny in his customary saddle on my back, rushing down to the Queens' chamber.

Once there I can see the Queen pacing around agitatedly, as many as thirty workers clustered around her defensively. There is one other tunnel leading further down in this chamber and workers are streaming down it at the moment, that is the source of the emergency.

Curious and alarmed I charge forward, bursting into the tunnel and following my fellow ants.

What the heck is going on guys? Tunnel collapse? Food located? Are we under attack?

After a few minutes of running down the tunnel I get my answer, the sounds of brutal impact and flesh being torn are ringing in my ears.

We are under attack!

Defend the colony!

Roaring in my mind I double my speed, I'll reach the front line and smash our enemies to bits! How dare they raid our colony!

When I eventually make it I'm horrified by what I see. Broken and sliced bodies of my fellow workers litter the ground already but as soon as more arrive they throw themselves into the fray.

However, their sacrifice doesn't seem to do much to deter the invaders.

Distorted, bizarre looking creatures loom before me, walking on four legs that end in strange clawed feet, their hunched upper bodies are grotesquely bulked with muscle, with almost no head or face to speak of. From the center of their chest protrudes a hideous beak. Instead of arms, four glistening

blades, made from bone or steel, I can't say, extend from their torso attached to short limbs that allow them to slash and hack with brutal force.

What the heck are these things?!

Have they climbed up here from further down below? They look like they mean serious business!

I don't have the luxury of waiting, workers are being slaughtered as I wait around. I have to throw myself into the fray!

Bullying my way to the front by shoving and dragging workers out of my way I put myself at the forefront of the reinforcements. It's difficult to see how many of these insane creatures there are since the narrow tunnel only allows two of them to fight at a time but I can the tunnel is packed with the monsters behind the leading figures.

This is going to be a tough fight. I don't want to take Tiny into the middle of this. I quickly shake my body left and right, like a wet dog, until I dislodge the little guy. He cries out in protest but there is no way he will be able make it through this battle on my back.

I can't do any more for him than this.

Come on then you freaks, let's dance!

Before the rest of my colony start climbing over me to reach their immediate death I charge, drawing the attention of our enemies directly to myself.

Slash!

I duck under the first strike but already there are more coming!

Slash! Slash! Slash!

With two of the monsters in front of me there are eight blades creating a wall of steel I can't get through, each slash forcing me to duck or retreat.

Well, Anthony, if you can't close in without getting hurt... You'll just have to get hurt!

Dodging left and right I dive forward, trying to slip past the deadly defence of these malformed creatures. The second I move the two monsters in front me react, sweeping their weapons down and around to cut off any chance of escape.

Come onnnn!

Thunk!

Agony blooms from my back as one of the edges cuts deep into my carapace, piercing and cutting into the muscle below. I grit my teeth and continue to press forward. You'll have to do more than that to stop me!

My desperate lunge has brought me next to the monsters legs, their bulk and the narrow tunnel makes it difficult to turn and bring their weapons to bare on me now and I certainly am not going to wait around to give them a chance.

Crushing Bite!

Mustering my strength I crush my jaws down onto the closest leg, the dense muscle in my head powering them to close tighter and tighter.

Snap!

My mandibles meet each other, shearing directly through the limb, causing the creature to roar in anger as it loses its balance.

Since these monsters are soft limbed I decide to attack with the crushing bite, the additional penetration of the piercing bite would be wasted on these fleshy targets.

I turn to the other monster and latch my mandibles directly onto its midsection, ripping a deep wound into body. Not satisfied I bite again! Then again!

[Crushing Bite has reached level four]

My jaws are dripping with ichor and the monster is writhing in pain. The leading two monsters are sufficiently distracted to allow the rest of the workers to close in and get to work. Some of them are still injured by the furiously flashing blade-arms but with their numbers the ants begin to grip onto the limbs, pinning the creatures down.

I've already lost twelve Hp from that one slash! Right behind the monsters I just attacked there are two more, and more behind them!

I hope their aren't too many!

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 50: Storm of blades

I have a little breathing room whilst the workers deal with the monsters next to me and I decide to use it for maximum effect!

Turning on the spot I present my famed commercial plaza down the tunnel. The enemy are only meters away so aiming isn't really necessary, once in position I unleash my acid!

POW! POW!

Two blasts sizzle their way through the air before impacting directly into the massive torsos of these horrendous threshing machines. The acid immediately begins to hiss as it burns into their flesh, hardening and sticking as soon as contact is made.

Hopefully I've managed to slow their blades down a little!

Enraged, the two monsters start to bull their way forward, slashing wildly with their limbs, even cutting into the rear of their two still struggling allies!

When the blade slices through the air and impacts into the monster to my right I seize on this chance and rush forward! If one of the weapons is stuck in that poor guy then it won't be able to be swung at me! This should create an opening.

I burst forward and then cut immediately to my right, running directly under the lodged blade and up onto the wall of the narrow tunnel and then directly onto the roof. The ceiling isn't high enough to be out of reach of those sharp limbs but of the four blades only the upper two will be able to reach, cutting the number of worries in half.

I also have to consider I won't be quite as nimble upside down but I feel like it's my best chance.

Crash!

The monster in front of me rips its blade out of the grievous wound it has caused its own ally and shift its entire body to throw weight behind the strike it directs at me, slamming the gleaming, hard edge directly into the rock in front of me.

Go!

Instinctively I leap, avoid the blade and landing on the powerful arm from which the cutting blade emerges. My feet scabble to grip on the shifting flesh of the creature before my claws manage to arrest my momentum and dig in, allowing me to run over the shoulder and onto the creature's back.

POW!

I take the chance to fire another shot and the blade monster next to this one, splattering the beast across its flank with stinging acid. The creature turns as much as it can in the narrow space and I finally manage to spot the eyes above that savage beak, tiny red orbs that seem to burn with hate.

Shrieking loudly the insane creature brings its upper two blades down on me with terrible force, the sharp edges whistling as they cut through the air.

Desperately I roll to the side, almost succeeding in dodging the strike!

Crunch!

The two blades smash down into the body of the creature I'm standing on, mortally wounding it. I lose two legs on my left side as collateral damage, the limbs sheared clean off close to my body.

The pain is intense! I didn't think they'd be so crazy as to smash down on their own ally like that! They caught me unprepared.

Instantly I activate my regeneration, welcoming the explosion of freezing cold within. I won't be able to get my legs back properly but it will surely help a little.

Moving is excruciating but I scramble forward desperately, climbing onto the blade arms before the monster can retract them for another strike. The limbs from which the blades extend are powerful, thick with ropes of dense muscle. If I want to cut through this it's going to be difficult, time to find out how my infused mandibles will go.

As I open my mandibles wide I activate my upgraded mandibles with a thought. Instantly I feel mana gushing out of my core, flooding through channels and directly into my mandibles. I engage Crushing Bite at the same time and my mandibles begin to glow brighter and brighter, as the mana builds in them they start to release blue steam.

Take this!

SNAP!

Infused with the mana I've managed to regenerate since my last practice, my mandibles shear directly through the monster's limb, cutting it directly off!

Holy Cow! That was effective! But it used half of my remaining mana, I'll only get one more of those.

My foe roars in pain as one of its deadly blades has been removed and I desperately scabble with my remaining legs to claw my way onto the monster's back, a place of relative safety. By this time my regeneration has done all it can for me, restoring eight Hp but it's not enough to completely bring my missing limbs back, two small stumps have emerged from the remaining sections of the missing legs. I can wiggle them a bit but they are a long way from a complete leg.

More of these vicious monsters are crowding in the tunnel behind, trying to shove forward, their razor beaks shrieking as they slash wildly into the air. How many of these stupid things are there?!

I need to finish this one off and then retreat to get my bearings back.

Crushing Bite!

I bite into the creature's back over and over again, tearing into the muscle until my enemy collapses, but I don't stop there. I keep biting until the voice of Gandalf echoes in my mind.

[You have slain level 14 Quator Ferrum Saevisimus]

[You have gained experience]

[You have reached level 5]

...

Nards! I was hoping I'd be able to evolve, which might have really helped me in this situation. For now I just have to retreat back to safety. Climbing over the body of my defeated enemy I make my way back towards the frontline where my fellow workers have finished off the first two monsters and are swarming over them, consuming them and pressing forward into the tunnel to continue the fight.

My eyes light up when I see the Biomass available in front of me. My regeneration gland is empty but if I can snack up for a few minutes I might be able to gain some more Hp back. I won't be able to regrow my limbs in such a short time but every little bit helps.

Staggering forward I push aside a few workers and start wolfing down food.

[You have consumed a new source of Biomass: Quator Ferrum Saevisimus, you are awarded one Biomass]

[Basic profile of the Quator Ferrum Saevisimus unlocked]

[Quator Ferrum Saevisimus: Four Blade Berserker, This monster has four bone-metal compound blades on its upper body and enters a furious rage when in combat, increasing its strength but causing it to struggle to tell friend from foe]

The profile makes a lot of sense, these monster are certainly berserkers, hacking into each other without a second thought!

Workers continue to arrive at the fight, some of them climbing straight over me as I eat, rushing forward to fight. I have to eat quickly and try to get back in there, these ants won't be able to handle such dreadful monsters, no matter how much they outnumber them!

Fortunately the enemy is having a tough time climbing over the bulky bodies of their fallen comrades, the narrow confines of the tunnel hampering their movements. The ant reinforcements make use of the distance to begin an acid bombardment, launching salvo after salvo of the burning substance at the foe.

[You have gained one Biomass]

With three Biomass collected I immediately upgrade my carapace to +3, any little boost to tank up against those savage blades is welcome. I don't think it will make much difference but any assistance is welcome at this point, this upgrade could be the difference between death and living on one Hp.

Due to the current situation the mutation itch that explodes all over my body barely registers in my mind. I have more important things to worry about than a stupid itch! The colony is under attack!

More and more workers are flooding down the tunnel at this point, there must be almost a hundred of them now, fully half of the workforce. The rest of them are probably protecting the brood and the Queen, which is a good idea!

With these numbers we may have a chance!

Painfully, I drag myself towards the wall and manage to crawl about halfway up. I still have some acid in the tank and I want to use it to support the rest of the worker in the front lines.

I can see a swirling maelstrom of combat down the tunnel, the first four Berserkers have been dealt with but more are crowding behind, their mad shrieks filled with bloodlust and the urge to kill. Workers are clambering over the dead, fearlessly charging forward to engage in greater and greater numbers.

I take a moment to aim carefully before firing.

POW!

The berserkers are fairly large targets and thankfully for me, the area I want to hit is directly in the middle of their chest.

POW! POW!

Three blasts of acid arc through the air, hitting three separate monsters, splattering over their faces and beaks. I may not have been able to get their eyes since they are so recessed, set deeply into the chest but the hardening, sticky acid burning into their face drives the creatures completely insane and they start to swing wildly with their four limbs, cutting into their own allies.

Take that!

Just as I rejoice I can hear a commotion behind me and I turn to see what is going on.

Is that.... The Queen?!?