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Chapter 51: Royal Intervention

A hoard of workers surround her majesty, some of them even trying to pull her back into the nest to safety. She is so large she fills the narrow tunnel, easily able to resist any attempt to remove her from the battle.

Her intelligent eyes survey the field and I can see a glint of anger as she sees the invading monsters and her fallen workers.

She chitters angrily and gradually light begins to build in her antennae, growing brighter and brighter.

This is far more energy than she used when she healed me, exactly what is she going to do?

Her antennae have so much concentrated mana in them that my eyes hurt looking at them. Whatever this magic is, it's going to be powerful!

With a cry she releases the pent up energy and it floods into the tunnel. In an instant all of the ants are bathed in light, the magic pouring into their bodies like water.

I feel it instantly, the freezing numb sensation explodes as my body drinks in more and more of the magic. My injured legs have grown so cold they are painful and as I watch they begin to regrow before my very eyes! Slowly at first and then with increasing speed the flesh extends further and further down as I continue to greedily pull in as much healing energy as I can get.

All through the tunnel injured ants are staggering back to their feet and into the fight as their wounds close and limbs regrow with astonishing speed.

What incredible magic! I have no idea how much MP was required to pour out a spell like that but it must have been insanely high! I have to revise my opinion of just how advanced a monster a Queen ant is, she must have a seriously powerful core in order to fuel this kind of magic. Of course, she has the benefit of the workers bringing all of the resources they can to her but it is still extremely impressive.

Along with her healing magic, the mere presence of the Queen has energised the workers in the fight, they have redoubled their ferocity, perhaps driven by an instinct to protect the Queen at all costs.

From my perch on the wall I can see the workers pushing forward relentlessly, biting, spraying acid, not even serious wounds stopping them anymore.

My legs have almost fully regrown now and I can feel that my acid gland has also increased its production rate, enough for me to fire off two more shots!

I aim further back into the darkness of the tunnel and unleash two blasts towards the Berserkers at the very back. That distance is the very limit of my range and I can't be too accurate but hopefully the painful acid will cause them to strike out at each other, making my life a whole lot easier.

[Improved acid shot has reached Level 5]

...

Nothing?

Do I have to raise it to level ten before I can upgrade it now? Makes sense I guess...

I need to stop expecting the system in this world to make things easy for me.

Empty of acid and with my legs regrown it's time to get back into the fight.

Quickly glancing back I can see that the Queen is not advancing further into the tunnel, putting herself at risk, but staying back, watching her colony go into battle in defence of their home. I'm glad she isn't going forward, the tunnel is too narrow for her to fight properly in this place anyway.

I move onto the ceiling and start making my way back to the front.

With their deep set eyes being located relatively low in their bodies I don't think these monsters are able to look up very well, and this proves true as I manage to sneak my way past the front line. Beneath me ants are swarming over their enemies, their numbers too large for the distracted and raging Berserkers to effectively keep off. Workers are climbing over the walls, slipping under clawed feet and latching on with powerful mandibles, dragging the monsters down.

It feels like the tide is starting to turn.

I make my way further into the tunnel. If I can disrupt the enemy back here then life will get easier for the ants at the front as they make their way forward.

The acid attacks I launched have caused ample chaos already, several Berserkers are heavily wounded and others are shrieking, arm blades slick with gore after lashing out at those around them.

I choose my moment carefully and drop down onto the back of one of the monsters, directly behind its upright torso.

I've really never seen anything like these monsters. A horrible mishmash of parts assembled into an insane killing machine. Something like this could only be the product of this underground realm, I cannot imagine nature producing a creature like this, what terrible intellect designed this madness?

Time to put the infused mandibles to work once more!

Once again mana floods out of my core and into my mandibles, charging them energy.

Crushing Bite!

The charged mandibles shear directly through the creature's flesh, creating a massive wound directly in the monsters back. Ichor gushes out, coating my head in the horrible stuff. The monster shrieks with shattering noise and desperately tries to throw me off.

My grip won't be denied and I hold on to bite again. More and more crushing bites rip into the creature until it stops moving.

[Crushing bite has reached level 5]

[You have slain level 11 Four Clawed Berserker]

[You have gained experience]

[You have reached level 6]

So much experience! These creatures must be fairly advanced to have such high levels and to advance my skills so rapidly.

I don't pause, the monster behind the most recent victim is distracted, battling against its neighbour. When the creature swings wildly with its massive blades I hurl myself forward, running underneath it and ripping into its leg.

This time a piercing chomp!

My mandibles dig deep into the limb, the sharper parts penetrating right down to the bone.

The victim immediately rears up, stomping the ground beneath with its clawed feet but I've already move on towards its rear legs.

Chomp!

[Piercing chomp has reached level 2]

With two massive wounds on two legs the Berserker cannot properly maintain its balance and gradually falls to one side, slamming into the monster behind it.

That creature roars and begins lash out once again, rampaging amongst its own kind.

These creatures are really incapable of working together in group. More to the point they don't seem to be the type of monster that would work together in the first place, why the heck are there so many making their way up here?

Eager to get the experience I continue to bite into the monster until I can deal lethal damage.

[You have defeated level 8 Four Blade Berserker]

[You have gained Xp]

Not quite enough to raise my level all at once eh?

Complete chaos has swept through the ranks of the enemy at this point, they are killing each other almost faster than the ants can bring them down. Since the Queen appeared the battle has been one sided, the sheer numbers of ants doing enough damage to send the attackers into disarray.

I continue to run interference, chomping at a leg here and there to knock monsters over or send them into a frenzy.

I gain another level in piercing chomp as I do so and I manage to finish off one more of the beasts, giving me level seven before the madness finally ends.

The tunnel is filled with Berserker bodies, many ants have fallen as well, no nearly as many as I had feared at least. The Queen's healing was able to save dozens of workers who had been wounded right at the beginning of the fight.

Exhausted, I take a look around the tunnel.

Workers are already starting to harvest the incredible wealth of Biomass around us, picking over the food, breaking pieces off and carrying them back to the colony or devouring it then and there, filling their social stomachs.

In all there were twenty one Berserkers. Where they had come from or why they had advanced up this tunnel from down below I don't know. Where they forced out of their normal area and were seeking food and safety higher up? These guys were certainly high levelled, evolved monsters, not something I would expect to see here.

To tell the truth, I want to collapse this tunnel. If creatures like that can reach us by climbing up here then I want to put a stop to it. My only worry is that workers would just open it up again...

I hear a squeaking sound next to me and I turn to see Tiny, tugging at one of my legs.

Hey there little guy, glad to see you were able to stay safe!

He is looking at the food around us with greed lighting up his eyes. Actually, I think he's drooling...

C'mon man... There's no need for... just eat would you!

I push him towards his meal with one leg. When he looks back at me I just push him forward again and he seems to get the picture, leaping forward to consume the Biomass.

Actually, considering the sheer amount of Biomass here, this could be a massive boon for the colony. Many ants will be able to mutate, and the sheer amount of food will fuel the growth of the next generation.

Glancing back up the tunnel I can't see the Queen anymore. She probably retreated back into the nest and is preparing to lay a ton of eggs. The workers are going to be busy for a while.

Despite being completely exhausted I drag myself forward and start to eat.

I need to stock up on as much Biomass as I can.

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Chapter 52: R and R

Rest and relaxation, Anthony you hard working Ant you. Don't you deserve a break? Haven't you worked hard enough for the moment?

Why yes, me, I have to say your words are wise!

Time for a break.

Before I returned to the nest I packed myself full of Biomass and managed to gain ten points, a massive haul! Clearly the creatures were highly evolved, at least two evolutions for sure, for them to provide such rich Biomass.

Not to mention my level has risen to seven! I'm practically swimming in skill points!

Another large discovery was made also, I was able to recover two cores from the Berserkers! Whilst I'd been hoping that their cores would grant some sort of bonus they simply increased my maximum mana

when I absorbed them. They did, however, increase my maximum by four points each, which brought my new max MP up to 36!

I wonder how much further until I max out my core?

If my guess is correct, I'll be able to evolve again at level ten. I won't even consider evolving without a maxed core unless I'm forced into it. The best possible evolution, every time! That's my policy.

In celebration of my incredible wealth, and to let my nerves rest after coming so close to death, not to mention suffering the trauma of having two legs chopped off, I decided I would rest within the colony and not leave until my Mana Manipulation has reached level five so I can upgrade it and spend all of my skill points.

When Tiny and I awake in our empty chamber I practice my Mana Manipulation until my energy reserves are empty. I can practice a lot more now that my core is upgraded, hopefully it won't take long until I get the skill to level five.

Once that task is done it's time to spend my Biomass! So much to spend ... It's hard to choose! I could upgrade my carapace all the way to +5 and still have a point left over. This is an attractive option, helping me tank up and letting me pick a mutation advancement. I could upgrade my regeneration gland to +4, which would be nice.

Antennae could be taken to level four, which would leave three points to spend on other things...

Damn choices!

In the end I think I have to prioritise the mutation advancements. Each and every one of them has been a huge boost, I'm sure my carapace will prove no different.

[Would you like to upgrade your carapace to +5? This will cost nine Biomass]

Sure!

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

Once more the extensive list of possible mutations unfolds in my mind and once more I try not to be distracted by all the shiny choices.

Venomous carapace, cause poison to infect things that strike you? Spiked carapace, be covered in sharp barbs? Aerodynamic carapace, increased movement speed, what the heck?

There are all sorts of options that provide strange abilities and bonuses, like the sloped carapace which helps deflect piercing attacks by making the outer shell angled, or the flexi carapace which helps bounce back blunt force strikes.

What I really want from my upgrade is an all-around defence improvement. Something I can rely on to protect me. I have an image in my mind of a brutal armoured truck, bursting through the small fry, their small attacks pinging off the hardened armour.

I think I've found what I'm after.

[Diamond carapace, significantly hardens the outer carapace, increasing its resistance to physical harm]

It may not be flashy, it may not do anything exciting, but it's exactly what I'm after. The weakness of this upgrade is that it does nothing to protect from magical damage or any kind of status effect but from what I can gather it provides the greatest increase to physical protection.

I'll need to find other solutions to those other types of attack later, for now most the threats I face are physical in nature so this upgrade will be a huge help.

[Do you wish to confirm Diamond Carapace?]

Heck yeah!

Oh. Oh no.

NONONO DAMMIT!

Without the distraction of life threatening battle to divert my mind the mutation experience is completely torturous. My carapace covers my entire body and the entire thing feels like it is on fire. Hot barbs of maddening itch pierce through my body every now again, causing me to spasm and jerk my legs madly as I flop about on the ground.

Tiny watches the whole process with a curious look on his face.

Damn ape! Why do you get to look so relaxed!

Mind you, he is definitely getting larger.

Eventually the mutation is over and I take a moment to admire my new carapace. The colour seems deeper somehow, and here and there some parts of the shell seem to reflect the light brightly, shimmering occasionally in the gloom of this room. Don't tell me, there is actual diamond blended with my carapace?

Does this mean... My shell is now worth a ton of money?

I hope I haven't just put a huge target on my own back...

Next order of business is to snack up!

This time I was smart enough to shear off some food and transport it back to my sleeping space once I was full. Of course, to prevent my fellow workers from taking it away I had to bury it and sleep on top of that spot.

Merrily I unearth my morning Berserker snack. Tiny and I dig straight in, a little dirt doesn't spoil the food when you're a monster eating other monsters, it all tastes disgusting anyway.

After consuming this food I gain another two Biomass, leaving me with three points.

I immediately use them to mutate my antennae to +3. My offensive capability has increased, now my defensive capability has also increased, but I still want sensory superiority to be a focus. When I finally start to mutate past +5 I'll return to upgrading eyesight and then antennae. Deep down I always want to find the other monsters before they find they me.

After everything has settled down my status now looks like this:

Name: Anthony

Level: 7 (core)

Might: 31

Toughness: 22

Cunning: 25

Will: 18

HP: 50/50

MP: 3/36

Skills: Excavation Level 1; Improved Acid Shot Level 5; Grip Level 4; Crushing Bite Level 5; Advanced Stealth Level 3; Piercing Chomp Level 3; Tunnel sense Level 4; Mana Manipulation level 4

Mutations: Focused Eyes +5, Antennae +3, Restrictive Acid +5, Legs +1, Infused Mandibles +5, Diamond Carapace +5, Regeneration Gland +1, Pheromones

Species: Mature Ant Worker (Formica)

Skill points: 5

Biomass: 0

Such a quantum leap from how I was just after I was born!

I feel happy that I'm laying a solid foundation for future growth right now, getting all of my mutations up and focusing on my core and magic skills will surely pay dividends in the future.

Since I've reconnected with the colony there at least some level of safety that surrounds me. Unless we continue to get attacked...

All of my Biomass and MP spent I take Tiny out for walk around the nest. I can see many workers sporting new mutations today, some larger mandibles or longer antennae here and there. The colony must have consumed well over a hundred Biomass all up, it would impossible for the Queen to take all of it so the workers were able to reap some rewards.

Paying a visit to the nursery there are quite a few new Pupa along one wall. This is the final stage of infancy, after they grow in these cocoons the new hatchling workers will emerge. What's more impressive is the huge clutch of new eggs that have appeared in one corner. There must be hundreds of them!

The Queen really went all out...

If the colony can secure enough food to grow these guys into adulthood then the colony could double in size very quickly, which would in turn help secure my own safety.

We will rise together my ant brethren!

Tiny and I play with the larvae for a while and then pay a visit down to the royal chamber. Not unsurprisingly the Queen is taking a nap, resting after her exertions of the last few hours. She must have emptied out all of her mana to cast that healing spell and I can vaguely understand just how mentally draining it is to shift that much mana.

Quite a few workers are standing guard around the Queen, ensuring nothing untoward happens to the most important individual to the colony.

That is, the most important other than me!

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Chapter 53: Skill Up!

With my inspection of the goings on of the colony complete I make my way back to my own quiet sleeping chamber and continue to practice my Mana Manipulation until all of my Mp is spent and then I once again rest.

I haven't been able to be this lazy since my rebirth and it brings me a great deal of comfort to do so now. Perhaps my stress had been building up over this time? To be able to sleep and play without having to worry for a brief time seems like such a decadent luxury in this life.

If something isn't trying to rip your face off in that moment then you are probably the one trying to rip something else's face off. The never ending war for Biomass and experience rages throughout these caves, from the open spaces to the deepest, darkest tunnels. The monsters in this place are always hunting, hungering for more. Does it ever stop?

Where do all these monsters come from? And why? I still have so many questions about this world. For all of my success in surviving and growing to this stage, the thing I lack most is information. The kind of information a human society would have, history, geography, science. What in the name of all that is good is going on in this place?!

The things that seem so insane to me must make perfect sense to the civilisations that live here, if only I could find someone I could communicate with! Someone I can communicate with and that wouldn't cut my head off the moment they saw me...

The Queen is about the most intelligent and friendly monster I've seen but I can't exactly communicate with her. Perhaps if she evolves further or gains enough Biomass she will develop some capacity to convey information. Ant speak? Telepathy? Something like that.

Nothing I can do on that front except wait.

The cycle of rest continues for two more days. When I wake up I practice my Mana Manipulation until my MP runs dry and then bum around the colony until I get tired. By the end of the second day I could swear the Queen was throwing disapproving glances at me whenever I walked by, like a worried mother fretting about her useless child.

Dammit Mum! Just a few days off ok?!

The rest of the workforce never stops for a moment, endlessly running back and forth, venturing out to scout and find food then bringing it back, tending to the brood, cleaning up the nest, then entering torpor to rest before starting the whole process over again.

I honestly feel tired just watching them.

Tiny seems to be enjoying our vacation, lazing about on my back as we travel and sleeping at every opportunity. I can't help but think he'll get hungry if we keep slugging about much longer.

During my practice on the third day, the gruff voice of Gandalf finally comes through.

[Mana Manipulation has reached level 5, upgrade available]

AT LAST!

YOUR VOICE IS LIKE MANNA FROM HEAVEN TO ME O GANDALF!

How long was this stupid system going to make me wait!

How I've struggled, tempted constantly by urge to spend my precious skill points. I haven't even allowed myself to open the skill menu, lest I succumb and waste points that I may have needed to learn sweet magic skills!

But now. Now my time has arrived!

Eagerly I whip open the skills menu to advance Mana Manipulation.

[Mana Manipulation -> Mana Shaping, this advanced skill increases the ability to control mana into specific shapes and forms required for casting spells]

Ok! This looks promising, I'll upgrade that one immediately!

Now for the second step, looking at the complete list of available skills. I'm actually a bit nervous before I open it, I'm really hoping for something good!

When I do finally open the menu, a flood of new options have appeared, completely shocking me!

Skills I recognise from the beginning are still there but many others have joined them, combat skills, defensive skills, mental skills.

So many delicious goodies, I can hardly choose! Before I let myself get distracted I quickly hunt down any magic related skills in the list.

[Forceful Mana, increases the ability to release significant amounts of mana in a shorter span, with greater impact]

[External Mana Manipulation, grants the capacity to control and manipulate mana outside of the users' body]

[Mana Sensing, gives the ability to sense bodies of concentrated mana using the monster core]

These three skills are directly related to magic or mana in some way. Whilst I was hoping to be able to throw fireballs it looks like I'm still in the beginning stages. I'm a simple ant, when I see mana in the skill title, I buy it.

As soon as I confirm my purchases the now familiar sensation like trickling water over my brain. New knowledge flows lightly into my mind, pooling into the cracks and crevices, filling up the places that were lacking.

I have only a single skill point remaining but there are still so many fantastic skills to choose from.

Just as I'm agonising over which skill to take a name in the list suddenly catches my attention. I think ... I know what this one is about.

[Core Mechanic, enables the user to manipulate the structure of a monster core on a superficial level].

Even though this skill does nothing for me in combat, healing, scouting or magic I can't help but think that this skill could be key to my future in this world. I remember when I reconstituted Tiny from a core, the system suggested that some skills would enable the ability to customise the process, probably in a similar way to how I could somewhat control my own evolution.

Despite being unclear on exactly what this skill entails, I choose it.

Now all of my amassed skill points have been spent!

I'm somewhat disappointed that I can't start using magic immediately but still satisfied I was able to take every mana related skill in the list. Hopefully soon I'll be able to start slinging magic around!

Looking at Tiny as he lies sleepily on the floor reminds me of his adult form and the Titan-Croc engaging in battle. They were able to channel lightning and spit fireballs but it didn't seem as if they were using magic in any intellectual way when they did so.

Is there another way they were able to gain those abilities? Perhaps during evolution they were able to develop an ability to naturally perform some actions with their MP.

It bares thinking about, I may be able to shed more light on that when I evolve again, something I hope will be coming my way when I reach level ten!

Now that I have my new skills selected I want to take some time to get a feel for what they do. The knowledge provided when purchasing a skill gives a sense of how to use it but that doesn't really compare to consciously utilising it.

First External Mana Manipulation. This one is going to be a little tricky. Slowly I focus my mind, abandoning my senses and reaching out with my thoughts. Gradually my consciousness unfolds into the open space, a strange sensation to say the least. I feel light flows of mana around me, slipping through the air like fish in a stream.

Different than the concentrated, dense mana in my core, these thin, elusive trails of mana are far more difficult to grasp. After ten minutes of trying to direct the path of the mana and bend it to my will I have to give up as my head is aching.

That is seriously hard! At this point I'm not even sure what practical use such a skill will have but since it's there I'm going to attempt to master it.

Next is Mana Sensing. According to my understanding I need to use my core as a focus for this skill. Much like I did when I practiced mana manipulation I sink my focus deep inside, down inside the spherical gem that is my monster core. Inside, dense mana swirls and billows like hot fog. Rather than focusing on the energy itself, I let my mind expand to fill the space. Then I wait.

Gradually, the faintest echoes begin to register on my senses, as if a pebble had been thrown in a pool of water I'd dipped a finger in, tiny ripples lap against the edges of thoughts. Slowly the ripples grow larger and more pronounced, until I can determine a direction, then a sense of distance.

I actually think... this is the Queen?! It's difficult to interpret but I seem to be registering a strong concentration of mana very close, in the nest, below me somewhere. The only thing I can think of is the Queen herself.

Phew!

This skill is also mentally taxing. I'm flat out drained at this point, my poor ant head is pounding.

Still, one more to test.

For the final time I focus down on my core and extract the energy, directing it towards my mouth, as I've become accustomed to doing. However, this time, instead of releasing it immediately I bring up more mana, and then more, condensing it, compressing it into a tight ball of furious energy.

When I cannot compress the energy any further I finally allow it to be unleashed from my open mouth. Instead of a small puff of a cloud, the mana explodes from my mouth in a powerful blast of pure force. The energy howls through the air and smashes into the dirt wall with an impressive impact.

I'm completely shocked!

Was that.... The legendary shout?!

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Chapter 54: Back to work

I'm quite pleased with the display of Mana Force. With a blast like that I might be able to do some serious damage! With a few more levels I might be able to reduce the amount of time required to prepare such an attack to the point it becomes usable in combat.

With my mental energy largely exhausted I decide to take one more nap before diving back into productive society. The shut-in lifestyle isn't for me and no self-respecting ant could possibly be happy living that way.

We are workers! We need to work, for the glory of the colony! And in order to level up so I can evolve!

Maybe my motives are not as pure as my fellow workers but my results will be miles better. Let us see how an ant colony can prosper with a human intellect helping them out.

Tiny is starting to look a little disgruntled. His tiny bat-like face is a bit sad around the edges and he keeps looking around for something, getting and more and more dejected when his search comes up empty.

Getting hungry are you little guy?

One more sleep and then we'll be go out hunting ok?

As I settle down to nap Tiny reluctantly joins me, settling against my back as we snooze.

OK!

I shake myself awake abruptly, causing Tiny to jump awake with a small shriek and look around wildly.

Nice energy little fella, we've got a big day in front of us now!

The cosy confines of our own room surround us, the bustle of the colony largely outside our awareness here, we can rest peacefully. The soft dirt walls show the scratch or bite mark from when the workers carved out this chamber. I'm still not entirely sure why it was dug at all, considering the fact that the workers very rarely come in here.

I'm not too fussed though, since it works out to my advantage.

Blinking his eyes sleepily, Tiny climbs up onto my carapace and I rocket out of the room and into the tunnel. Workers are frantically running here and there as always and when I visit the brood chamber I see a large squad of workers fussing over the new eggs, ensuring they are kept clean and at the optimal temperature at all times.

The colony is going to need a heck of lot of food pretty darn soon in order to raise up this massive generation and I intend to make it happen.

The larger and stronger the colony becomes, the safer and more secure I'll be in this world.

Of course, I'll secure my own fair share of experience and Biomass whilst I'm at it.

Time to get to it!

With Tiny holding on I charge up the tunnel, frequently bumping other workers out of my way. I'm coming through guys, pick up the pace, we aren't driving Ms Daisy!

The closer I get to the ant hill in the forest I start to notice a change in the walls of the tunnel. The glowing threads I recall from my time in the earlier tunnels are starting to appear, thin at first but thicker and brighter the closer I get to the open space ahead.

Are these pulsing lines ... growing down the tunnel?

I'm positive they weren't here just a few days ago!

I'm not sure why but I find it vaguely unsettling to think of these strange, branching vines of glowing light as a growing, living thing.

What are they?

I mentally shrug my shoulders, I don't have an answer now and I don't see how I can get one in the future. All I can think of is to keep an eye on the situation and see if I can learn anything as things develop over time.

Casting aside my concerns I focus once again on the mission for today. Securing food for the colony.

Emerging out of the tunnel and into the huge open space of the forest feels good. It's nice to be out and doing something again!

Holy Moly it is bright...

Significantly brighter than before...

Not to worry, we have business to attend to.

I can see a few workers here and there on the hill, keeping watch probably, or maybe waiting for a scout to return with news of food. Hold tight fellas, I have a feeling you'll be hearing about it soon.

Full of confidence I dash down the hill and under the cover of the trees and towering mushrooms, the multi coloured canopy shielding me from above.

The undergrowth seems to be more dense than a few days ago, as if feeding on the growing intensity of the illumination in the forest.

In fact, as I move between the tree roots and long white stalks I notice that the entire space seems to have to have come alive with activity, like a rainforest after a storm. The sounds of monsters surround me, growls, roars and the ripping, tearing percussion of battle.

The space has become packed with monsters.

When the monsters run into each other there is only one thing that will occur, a fight! Currently the area around me is filled with such combat, the strong consuming the weak, growing even more powerful from the experience and Biomass they harvested as a reward.

I don't know why this area has become so populated all of a sudden. Perhaps this is linked to the intensity of the light in the forest?

At any rate, this abundance of monsters is suitable for my purposes, if there is experience and Biomass to be gained then the colony and I will get our slice of the pie!

I climb a tree, hoping to spy an opportunity from the upper branches. Hauling myself towards the top I peer through the foliage at the area around me, making full use of my eyesight to scout around.

I can see a few mounds or hills that are likely to contain nests but they aren't exactly what I was hoping to see.

Maybe over this side ... Aha!

A larger tree bursts out of the canopy, standing taller and prouder than those around it. The large branches extend in a wide diameter, providing a tremendous amount of space and shelter within the embrace of those leafy arms.

Even from this distance I can spy the small shapes darting here and there high up in the tree.

I memorise the location and then descend the tree, making my way back to the ant hill. There are still workers positioned defensively, darting here and there on high alert, ready to pounce on any perceived threat.

Good work lads, keep up the good work!

After thinking for a moment about how to perform this task I start to lay down the pheromone trail for food, heading away towards the large tree I'd spotted in the distance.

After getting a hundred metres from the hill I return and lay the trail once more, strengthening it. Then I do it again.

Laying the same trail multiple times makes it appear more relevant and interesting to the workers, increasing the likelihood they will choose to follow it.

Sure enough my effort is rewarded with a few workers emerging from the nest and after 'sniffing' around with their antennae they start to follow along my path.

Well done my fellow colony buddies, I promise you most likely won't regret this choice.

I hurry off towards the large tree I'd seen, remembering to continue to lay my trail as I go. I should give some thought to spending Biomass on my pheromones. Now that I'm actually using them to influence the workforce it strikes me how useful it would be able to send better, stronger signals which would cause the rest of the ants to respond to my actions more quickly.

Even now after laying the trail three times I've only managed to draw a few workers along, if I had upgraded to +3 or +4 then surely I would receive a much more enthusiastic response.

It's so hard to decide where to spend Biomass in this place! All of the options seem so useful!

I move quickly so that I'm able to arrive at my destination well before those following behind me and it isn't long before that large tree looms out of the woods around me. Just as I'd seen from my scouting position, this impressive specimen is fully occupied by a huge number of those small monkeys I'd seen before, the spark chimps.

When they see Tiny and I arrive at the base of their tree the chimps immediately start howling madly, pointing with their little fingers and screeching at the top of their lungs, causing an impressive cacophony of sound.

For his part, Tiny seems completely unimpressed with his ape cousins up the tree, his only response is a low growl in the back of his throat as he watches the tree with hooded eyes.

You can really talk the talk you little apes, pretty soon we are going to find out if you can walk the walk!

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 55: Timber.

Looking at the thick trunk of the large tree before me I flex my mandibles cautiously. Hopefully these infused mandibles are up to the challenge.

Oh! Here we go!

I secure Tiny on my back and dash away from the tree, moving across the path of descent and turning my head so I can watch the show.

The huge tree, with all of its shocked occupants on board, slowly begins to lean over.

The apes become completely silent in horror as their world literally starts to fall around them, whilst they are still in it.

TIMMMBEEEEERRRR!

CRASH.

With increasing speed the tree tilts and then falls to the ground with a tremendous boom, the sound of whistling leaves and shattering branches resounds through the forest.

Followed by the indignant howls of hundreds of tiny apes!

The three workers stare silently at the bizarre spectacle of a horde of injured apes pouring out of the wreckage of their tree home like angry demons. Possible even to a monster ant this site is truly something fresh and original.

For the colony!

Gleefully I charge forward into the gathering throng of ape monsters, Tiny hooting and roaring on my back like an enraged knight, who is also an ape.

The small creatures are scattered by my larger frame, literally bouncing off my diamond carapace when they attempt to strike back.

My assault sparks the workers into action! There is a fellow ant in a battle! Fight! Food! Two of the ants immediately turn and sprint back towards the colony. I'm not shocked by this, they aren't running away in fear or anything like that, these workers know no fear, but are instead going to summon reinforcements from the nest with all the speed they can muster.

The final remaining ant immediately leaps into battle alongside me, latching onto the nearest ape with its jaws and engaging in deadly combat.

My mission now is to delay and keep this one worker alive until our brethren arrive for the battle!

The apes are screeching mad as they rush to slay the would be attackers, punching and kicking at me, some of them even picking up improvised weapons like branches and rocks to try and increase their damage.

Muahahaha!

Useless!

All of your efforts are for nothing!

My newly improved diamond carapace is the perfect defence against these sorts of impacts, my HP isn't even dropping at all! The small monsters physical strength is surely far beneath my toughness to begin

with, when the advancement of my carapaces against physical damage is also taken into consideration then there is very little that these chimps can do to me with their strength alone.

I rampage through their ranks joyfully, knocking them aside and sweeping them from before me with large swings of my mandibles. The anger and fury on the monsters faces only grows more intense as I play with them and they redouble their efforts, grouping up to leap through the air and bring their fists down on my head with all of the force they can muster.

...

Is that all you've got?

It barely tickles!

Whenever I see my lone ally starting to get surrounded I charge towards him clear away the swarm and draw the aggro back to myself. This is actually a lot of fun!

ZAP!

Ouch! Why you little!

So the little chimps have started to bring out their skills eh? Turning around I can see one of the apes drawing his fist back after punching me in the side, electricity still sparking off his arm. You little monsters can use your electric skills huh?

Checking my stats I can see my Hp has dropped by one. Tsk. When I evolved I was careful to increase my internal resistance as well as my external defence but against elemental damage like this my diamond carapace doesn't help at all. Even though I'm able to almost completely resist the attack it's still enough to break through my defences and drain my Hp.

Witnessing the success of this strike more and more chimps begin channelling electricity into their hands, tiny jolts of electricity sparking off their fur and the energy builds and builds.

I won't let you!

I start to rampage through their ranks even more vigorously than before, sending the apes flying before they can fully prepare their strike. Tiny is hooting and hollering from his position on my back, occasionally lashing out with a fist or foot whenever one of the apes gets too close.

Despite my best efforts several more strikes land on my body, discharging their electrical force through my frame and my Hp drops by a few more points.

Maybe you chimps are going to get somewhere after all...

Kidding!

Regeneration!

The flood of icy sensation powers through my body, repairing all of the internal damage caused and brings my Hp back to full in a matter of seconds.

All of your efforts are for nothing, apes!

Checking on Tiny I can see that he remains completely unaffected by the electricity that is coursing through my body. Since he is actually an evolved version of these smaller chimps he is no doubt powerfully resistant to electrical damage to start with, I'm not sure if he has even noticed it to be honest.

In the middle of the melee I turn to check on my ally and notice that more ants have finally joined the battle and when I look in the direction of the trail more and more are making their way down and into the fight.

Now the real power of the colony will begin to show!

Chrysalis

Chapter 56: Anthony's colony growth strategy

More and more reinforcements appeared, plunging directly into battle without fanfare.

I was once again struck by the coordination and eerie silent aggression of the ants.

If a wave of soldiers were to appear, their gallant charge would be accompanied by shouted battle cries, faces adorned with noble expressions of sacrifice, determination and the thirst for victory.

This scene would stir the hearts of all who saw it, bringing tears to the eyes of elf maidens as they hastily composed epic poetry and songs about the dashing heroes who had so boldly, so heroically gone into battle that day, songs that would live on forever.

This moving scene would never occur when the colony advanced into battle however.

The workers made no sound, no battle cry, as they advanced on the enemy. As soon as the ants were close enough to detect the battle they simple ran forward to engage the foe, their cold eyes showed not a flicker of fear, hesitation, joy or triumph.

To me, this behaviour is heroic in another way. The ants are truly selfless, not considering preserving their own health, willing to sacrifice their life at a moment's notice to further the growth the colony. They needed no high ideals to do this, they were not seeking reward or riches, in the minds of the workers this was their task, their job, their purpose in life.

I appreciate you workers! Even if nobody else cares, I Anthony, am deeply moved by your single minded dedication!

Viva the workers!

Viva the colony!

It is for the sake of these workers and their growth that I have launched this anti-ape crusade. From the time I approached the tree and cut it down to all the time I spent charging through the horde of monsters and knocking them around I've been careful to injure the apes but never deal the finishing blow.

No, I have been saving all of this delicious Xp and Biomass for the workforce. After evolving and levelling up I doubt I'd be able to benefit much from these apes anyway. Instead of taking all of the resources for

myself I'll help the colony by creating opportunities for the workforce to develop its strength, absorbing Biomass and gaining levels, as well as providing food for the colony to grow the next generation.

More and more workers are flooding into the battle, as many as fifty of the monstrous ants have engaged in bitter combat by this time, gradually overwhelming the apes with their vicious mandibles and acid bombardment.

The scene has become increasingly chaotic as acid rains from the sky upon ants and apes locked in deadly combat. Everywhere I turn there are groups of monsters battling to the death, workers darting here and there, using their mandibles to savagely bite down on their enemies even as the apes scratch, punch and discharge their electricity towards the insects.

What a vicious melee!

I continue to run interference through the ranks of the enemy, scattering them whenever it seems like a worker will become surrounded or threatened. With all of these factors working together it isn't long before the entire horde of spark chimps has been defeated, becoming fuel for the powerful engine that is the colony.

Feeling tired and satisfied, I survey the battlefield. Workers are picking through the remains of the apes, some of them already eating, others picking up the food and beginning to transport it back to the colony.

The workers are smarter than they appear in many areas, they know how much food the colony needs and will be sure that any excess isn't wasted. Particularly since the first creature to eat a food source is the one to gain the Biomass from it, passing on food stored in the social stomach will cause the worker to miss out on nutrition but not Biomass.

Perhaps this is why the workers transport so much back to the nest, this way the Queen and the workers who are almost full time helping the brood are also able to amass Biomass points. Since we have successfully secured more food than the colony realistically needs to keep all of the members going today, the workers will take it all for themselves rather than let any of it go to waste.

In this way my goals have been met.

I'm sure lots of workers were able to gain levels during this melee, not to mention the huge amount of Biomass consumed will allow many of the ants to mutate and improve the performance of their bodies. This will make the workforce more effective in fighting and growing the colony which will in turn allow the workers to amass more experience and Biomass as they battle, creating a positive feedback loop that I have no intention of slowing down.

Oh no, get ready workers, there are no breaks on this train.

Heheheheh.

With all of this food lying about I make sure to take my own 'tax', as well as letting Tiny get his fill. My little ape friend is getting larger at an increasingly rapid pace at the moment, almost visibly growing with every passing meal. It won't be long before he doesn't comfortably fit on back and will have to get around on his two feet.

About time you slacker!

After filling up on the spark chimps I only manage to gain three Biomass, a long way from the wealth I accrued from the berserkers. Those points immediately go into Regeneration +2 and Pheromones +1. The regeneration gland has proven to be incredibly useful already and I'll stick to my commitment to prioritise its growth. If I'm going to be conducting more battles with the workers like this then I can see the value in increasing my pheromones, allowing me to direct the flow of the ants faster and with less effort.

Since the colony has been provided with ample food for the time being I'll wait until my next campaign and spend some time working on my magic skills.

I really have too much to do at the moment! In addition to fuelling the growth of the colony I want to find more monster cores so I can reinforce myself to the limit before evolution as well as level up all of my body to +5, get to level ten and find the space to improve all three of my foundation magic skills!

Anthony, you are one busy ant!

Before I leave the area I notice that there are a few workers who are being left behind by the others, struggling with injury. Despite my best efforts I couldn't be everywhere at once, some of the ants being injured was inevitable. I'm pleased enough that there were no casualties on our side but it still gets my heart down to see these workers struggling with their wounds. One hatchling in particular has suffered three injured legs and cannot walk effectively, feebly dragging itself along the ground towards the colony.

Even with half of its legs broken and unusable this little worker is still carrying an ape in its mouth as it pulls itself through the dirt back to the nest.

Now that, is some dedication.

Moving quickly I make my way over to the tiny hatchling and gently pick them up in my mandibles. No worries little chap, this trip is on me.

Tiny, completely stuffed by this point, painfully hauls himself onto my back where he flops listlessly. Is this a food coma? Perhaps he went too far this time..

With my small passenger in my mandibles, who is turn carrying food in their own mandibles I make my way back to the nest safely.

When I arrive I head straight down to the Queens chamber where I find mother already busy healing a few of the injured workers, tapping them on the head with antennae to pass on the healing energy.

Good on you Queen, keeping the workforce going full strength!

I deposit my fellow worker before the Queen and look up to her gazing down at me with approval twinkling in her large eyes. Before I leave she gives me a quick pat on the head with one foreleg and moves to heal the hatchling I delivered.

She really is smarter than the workers by quite a bit...

Time to go practice some magic!

Chrysalis

Chapter 57: Practice makes perfec

My new mana practice is a little more involved than my old one, since I now have three skills to train instead of one.

Mana shaping is fairly straightforward to train. All I have to do is draw the mana out of my core and then, rather than simply releasing it from my body as I'd done before, I instead hold the mana within myself and then attempt to create the simple symbols and designs that the skill in my mind suggests I need to learn how to create.

I can only imagine that combined with other skills these shapes will enable me to cast spells in some way.

External Mana manipulation is similarly simple to practice. All I have to do is extend my senses to grasp hold of the Mana in the air around me and attempt to shift it around. Sounds simple right?

Unfortunately the above two exercises are completely mentally exhausting, even more than my original Mana Manipulation practice. I'm so damn tired!

If I have to keep doing this every day for Gandalf knows how long I'll be totally flat mentally before I have a chance to out hunting!

I'm starting to reconsider my earlier opinion on having extra brain centers. During my next evolution I might take a look and see if it's possible to attach a sub brain to my core or somewhere else in order to help carry some of this mental burden.

I can't help but feel such an addition would make practice far less burdensome and therefore much more efficient!

What's an extra brain anyway? I've got six legs now where in the past I only had two and frankly, I have to say it's an improvement. There's no need to get so fussy about such a small thing as the number of brains one has!

Perhaps....

After exhausting myself and not receiving any levels for it I drag myself back out of the nest for the next part of my day, Tiny once again hitching a ride on my back.

How long is it going to take until he's actually going to be useful? He might be adorable in his mini form but I'd rather he was larger and a bit more capable...

He has been growing in size with every meal so far, to be honest he's actually nearly twice as large as he was when he was first formed out of the monster core, consequently he's been able to eat more food and grow even faster. At his current pace I think he'll probably be larger than me after four more days. How long it will take for him to reach his original massive size I have no idea.

As we make our way up the tunnel to the ant hill in the large open space I can sense some agitation from the few workers ahead of me. Is something going on?

When we reach the top of the tunnel and emerge into the open air I take a moment to quickly scan our surroundings. On the edge of the trees not far from the ant hill I can see the source of the workers unease, two massive wolf-like creatures, their powerful, draconic tails twisting and lashing the air behind them are prowling back and forth, watching the much smaller ants with greed in their eyes.

These guys are most certainly the evolved form of the wolf-dragon cubs that I'd encountered long ago in the upper tunnels. Compared to their smaller selves, these guys are easily twice the size, their fangs and claw are much larger, not to mention their most potent weapon that muscular tail. I well remember the shattering force they can exert when swinging that fearsome thing around.

In fact, when I study the two beasts more closely I can see the tail of one is significantly larger than the others, it also appears to glimmer in the light, as if covered by some kind of metallic sheen above the scales.

Could this particular monster have achieved a mutation advancement for its tail? I'll need to be careful...

I can't help but wonder why these two have appeared here and now ... are they related to the nest of cubs the colony raided a few days ago? Or are they simply eyeing off the tremendous amount of Biomass represented by an entire colony of much smaller and weaker creatures like ants?

Huh. If they try and raid this ant hill they are simply courting death! I'll easily rally the brethren and bring them down!

In fact, even as the much larger monsters are eyeing off the colony, I'm busy eyeing them off, greed slowly accumulating in my heart.

If I'm able to take down these two there might even be a full level in it for me, not to mention the Biomass! Between the two monsters I could expect five or even more point! Enough to possibly mutate my antennae and then perhaps another body part as well.

Once the thought enters my mind it is proving extremely hard to shake...

Get a hold on yourself Anthony!

Don't let greed push you to an unreasonable action! If I were to attempt to fight here there is zero chance that the colony won't get involved and I don't want any workers to die randomly due to my actions.

Does that mean I let these two stalkers go?

Absolutely not! Are you crazy!

Acting casual, as casual as I can act when I'm a giant ant monster, I join in a trail of workers drifting into the forest.

These guys never stop after all, even if I'm practicing magic or having a nap the workforce is always going to be out scouting and fighting in order to secure food and right now is no different.

Once I've followed the trail far enough that the plant life is obscuring me from view I immediately enter shark mode and stealth into the undergrowth, making my way back around until I eventually arrive behind the last position I'd seen the wolves.

Sure enough the pair of them are still there on the edge of the tree line, pacing back and forth as they watch the ant hill.

Going to take a bite out of the colony eh?

What if the colony were to take a bite out of you?

Chuckling to myself inside my mind I look around until I can find a nearby tree that I think will give me the view I need.

Finding a likely candidate I climb up and cast my eyes about. Yes, from up here I have a clear view of the two wolf dragons. Not only a clear view, also a clear shot.

If these guys want a taste of an ant, I'll first let them sample the products of my commercial plaza!

POW!

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 58: Hunger for Wolf-Dragon

The acid sizzles as it arcs through the air towards the two prowling wolf dragons. It's unfortunate that they had their backs to me and I wasn't able to aim for their faces, still, with a satisfying splash my first salvo hits just above the front left leg of my target.

Just after the first shot strike I launch my second!

POW!

Without time to aim carefully this shot isn't nearly as accurate, catching the second monster on the flank.

Both creatures immediately snarl viciously as the acid begins its deadly work, sticking and hardening even as it begins to eat away into their body.

I'm very satisfied with the first shot, catching the wolf dragon just above its leg will hopefully work well to restrict its mobility, something these monsters have in spades. The second is a little unfortunate but with the time restraints I wasn't prepared to take the risk and potentially miss completely so I aimed for a much broader area.

I don't want to underestimate these creatures, they look powerful and extremely fast, with their long legs and powerfully built bodies I'm sure they would outpace me on open ground. I'm aiming to use my acid to maximum effect by restraining their speed and getting early damage in before they close with me.

Once they recover from their initial shock the two monsters react quickly, springing apart and running into the woods even as they roar as the acid slowly bites into them.

Thankfully the first target I hit is already showing slightly reduced speed, that one leg not moving as freely as it could.

Even as they run the two monsters are constantly scanning their surroundings with all of their senses. Since these guys are part wolf I assume they have inherited a powerful sense of smell. I highly doubt they have those large snouts for nothing!

Fortunately my stealth displays its strength at this moment. I remain as still as possible, maximising the benefit of my skill and the two large monsters are unable to pinpoint my location, even if they have a good idea where the shots came from based on the impact they experienced.

Still as a harmless mouse I wait, perched amongst the branches towards the top of my tree. As I hide, I watch, like a hawk, as the two wolves slow down and start prowling. Rumbling growls are emitted by the two monsters as they stalk the area, hunting for my trail.

Haha!

Exactly as I planned.

Now that my enemies have been kind enough to slow down I once again take careful aim, looking over my shoulder to direct my acid as carefully as possible.

POW!

Bullseye!

The wolf dragon howls in agony as my acid splatters directly into its face, covering its eyes and nose before sticking and hardening, destroying its senses.

Take that you stupid dog!

Swinging its head in frustration the monster tries to swipe away the acid with its paws and when that fails it starts to furiously rub its head into the vegetation and dirt in a frantic effort to remove the hateful stuff.

Sorry wolf, my restrictive acid isn't so easy to get rid of!

My last shot has revealed my location at last and the second hound glares up into the tree, finally locating my form high up in the tree.

Hello down there!

The wolf bunches its legs underneath itself, preparing to leap but then it surprises me, lunging forward and swinging its tail with ferocious force. That strange metallic tail crashes into the tree, at the moment of impact I hear a tremendous crack and before my boggling eyes the trunk of the tree directly shatters.

Holy moly! Are you serious Gandalf?! He smashed straight through this trunk in one strike!

Not that I have time to think about that, I'm falling!

From my vantage point high in the tree I see the tail cleave directly through the trunk and immediately the tree begins to rapidly collapse to the ground. Before the tree hits the ground I throw myself clear of my perch, using all of my legs to push off as hard as I can. I can only hope that I manage to propel myself far enough that I make it clear of the crash zone.

Poor Tiny is thrown from my back as I hit the ground and roll, yelping in indignation as he smacks into the dirt nearby. Hopefully he'll be ok, I don't have enough time to worry about my small ape companion at the present moment since I'm terrified a rather large part wolf, part dragon monster may be about to pounce and smash my head in with its bizarrely potent tail!

However when I finally manage to right myself and take in my surroundings I am once again surprised.

Where the hell did these guys come from?!

Emerging from the forest are the most demonic looking rabbits I have ever seen or imagined. Bristling black fur, gleaming red eyes, savagely muscled frames and instead of the usual charming rabbit front teeth, vicious fangs protrude from a hungry maw.

What's more, there are dozens of them!

Leaping out of the woods the creatures are slightly smaller than me but still larger than a hatchling worker. Immediately they pounce upon the two wolf-dragons, gnawing and biting at the much larger creatures, I even see some jump with their powerful hind legs, turn in the air and deliver powerful kicks to the flanks of the monsters.

Hey! Those are mine!

It seems the sound of combat has drawn out more monsters from the woods to steal the Biomass out from under my very nose! I should probably have expected this. The forest is so packed full of monsters now that fighting almost anywhere is bound to draw more attention.

I'm not prepared to give up my hunt to these pesky poaching rabbits! No matter how evil they look!

Seeing the small horde of rabbits swarming over the larger hounds I know I don't have much time remaining before they manage to overpower the already weakened wolf monsters. I don't have much choice against these sorts of numbers, it's time to summon the colony!

Stopping only to pick up Tiny and make sure he is secure on my back I run back towards the ant hill, dropping a food trail the entire way.

I don't stop when I reach the nest either, I climb all the way up the ant hill and down into the tunnel dropping the trail the entire way. After running down the tunnel a ways I turn and run all the way back, laying down a second layer of pheromones to strengthen the scent, further motivating my fellow workers.

I'm hoping that by running down into the nest I'll be able to attract more of the workers who are deeper in, amassing a larger force more quickly. I need all of the ants I can get as fast as possible!

Bursting out of the top of the hill I sprint back into the woods, overlaying my own trail all of the way. A few workers have already begun sniffing about, making their way along the path but I breeze past them, running at full tilt with Tiny hooting in delight on my back.

Returning to the scene of the battle I see chaos before my eyes. The melee has continued in my absence and the two wolf-dragons are in bad shape, bleeding heavily from a number of small bite wounds all over their bodies.

The rabbits have paid a price though. These wolf-dragons are evolved monsters after all, they need to be respected. The broken bodies of several rabbits can be seen on the ground here and there, torn by claw and fang or smashed to pulp by the incredible strength of those tails.

I don't have time to hesitate, if I wait the rabbits might finish off the prey before I get a chance.

Charge!

I barrel into the fight like a tank, knocking aside the smaller rabbits with my weight and momentum I throw myself forward towards the most heavily wounded wolf monster. The beast is in a terrible state, my acid having burnt into its face resulting in it being almost incapable of defending itself against the predations of the nimble rabbits.

I'll put you out of your misery!

The monster hears me coming and turns to face my onslaught but there is little it can do. Without slowing down I hurl myself directly for the monster's throat, latching on with my mandibles.

Crushing Bite!

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 59: The first war of the hill

I can feel my crushing bite crunch down with sickening force directly on the poor beast's throat, destroying it immediately.

[You have defeated level 4 Crevit Lupus Draco]

[You have gained experience]

[Basic profile of Crevit Lupus Draco unlocked]

[Crevit Lupus Draco, Grown Wolf-Dragon, the evolved form of the cub, this larger, more powerful creature has a greatly increased Might, allowing it to strike brutally with its scaled tail]

Not enough experience to give me a level up but the low level of the monster makes me hopeful it might have given up an evolution and condensed a core, not that I have time to extract it right now.

As soon as I have dealt the final blow to the wolf-dragon I am immediately set upon by a definitively un-fluffy horde of rabbits. I'm not too worried about their assault since I assume that my shiny diamond carapace will repel their efforts, its incredible hardness is Gandalf guaranteed!

I am swiftly disabused of that notion as several rabbits bare their notably long fangs and manage to puncture my shiny hide ever so slightly. What the hell?! I'm supposed to be hard as diamond Gandalf? Is this false advertising?

Small stinging pains can be felt wherever the rabbits have bitten me and I quickly check my status to confirm exactly how much damage I've taken.

Phew!

Thankfully the damage is minimal, just four Hp, but I'm still fairly shocked to see that those fangs are able to defeat my sturdy carapace. This isn't good! Those little buggers are going to be able to rip right into the workers when they arrive!

My concern is a beat too late as lots of workers have responded to my pheromone trail and upon seeing the conflict they immediately throw themselves into battle, rushing forward to latch bite savagely at the first rabbit they see.

Damn workers! Can't you hesitate, even for a second?

Now I'm terrified that my actions here are going to put a significant number of my colony brethren six feet under, not in a digging sense but in a burial one. Dammit Anthony! Get in there and help out your people!

Ignoring the rabbit monsters who are literally hanging off me I turn and charge out of the center of the battle, making my way to where the ants have begun to fight. Tiny starts reaching out with his little fists and pounding the rabbits directly in the face with all the strength he can summon. He doesn't seem to be doing much damage but at least some of the rabbits are irritated enough to let go!

Nice assist there little buddy!

When I reach the side of the ants there I already a steady stream of reinforcements arriving from the hill, roughly twenty ants are here already, moving towards the nearest enemy and latching on immediately with their mandibles, causing many rabbits to shriek painfully and lash out with their powerful hind legs.

I see a few ant hatchlings sent flying before I even get in position to help.

I wince when I hear them crash into the ground, one poor sap even colliding with a tree. I hope they are able to last long enough for the Queen to heal them. I'll take them myself as soon as I'm able!

Once I reach the front line I start to lash out left and right with my mandibles.

Crushing Bite! Crushing Bite!

Two rabbits are immediately heavily wounded when my powerful jaws clamp down on them with vicious force, snapping bones and shredding muscle. I'll leave them to the others to finish off as the fight is quickly escalating. More and more ants are engaging the enemy and the black rabbit monsters are lashing out, causing savage wounds with every bite.

With a little breathing space behind me I turn my head slightly to get a quick look and then blast out another jet of acid, catching an advancing rabbit directly in the chest.

Trying to sneak up on me you little varmint?! Let my acid take a bite out of you!

My unfortunate victim begins to screech in a high pitched whine that immediately grates on my ears. I thought rabbits were supposed to be quiet creatures? Apparently they don't like acid, who knew?

I swear more rabbits have arrived since this combat began, at first I thought I'd only seen around twelve but there must be at least twenty as I hastily survey the field.

The remaining wolf-dragon is snarling a constant low rumbling growl as it continues to lash at the monsters around it with tail and fang. Since all of those monsters are demon rabbits I'll happily leave it to its business and turn my attention back to assisting my fellow ants.

More and more small puncture wounds appear in my carapace as I continue to charge through the combat, acting as a living shield to my smaller brethren. I'm starting to hope that these blasted fangs aren't poisoned or I might really be in trouble!

Crushing bite!

I manage to latch onto a rabbit right around the neck as it was distracted by other workers gathering around it. The creature struggles desperately, kicking out with its powerful hind legs directly into my thorax beneath my head. The impact of the kick rocks me backwards but the shock is readily absorbed by my powerful carapace and I manage to maintain my grip.

Say goodnight, bunny of the burning hells!

CRUNCH.

My two mandibles meet each other in the middle, having shorn through what had before kept them apart.

[You have defeated a level 3 Dens Sanguinem Leporis]

[You have gained experience]

Ignoring the fight continuing immediately around me I take a brief moment to chomp down on the rabbit I just finished off.

[You have consumed a new source of Biomass, Dens Sanguinem Leporis one Biomass awarded]

[Basic Profile of Dens Sanguinem Leporis unlocked]

[Dens Sanguinem Leporis, Blood Tooth Rabbit. This monster is known for its affinity to shadow and the powerful fangs capable of draining health from the victims of its bites]

Wait a minute Gandalf... likes shadows and dark places, long life draining fangs... are you telling me these are vampire rabbits?

I mean....

Really!?

Checking my status I can see that I have lost over twelve Hp so far in this battle, most of it to chip damage from the repeated punctures these damned fanged bunnies have inflicted. Engaging my regeneration gland I welcome the icy burst that washes through my body, closing over holes in my carapace and restoring my Hp to near full.

The battle continues to rage around me. More and more ants are arriving at the battle, perhaps as many as fifty now and the rabbits are finding themselves pressed back as the sheer swarm of the colony is providing more targets than they can comfortably deal with.

Haha! You damn demon rabbits of hades! Behold the power of colony!

Turning I can see three hatchlings battling a rabbit together, each of them latched on with mandibles and pulling at the rabbit, pinning it down and restricting its movement. The three smaller ants are desperately holding on, their legs splayed and claws dug hard into the ground as the stronger rabbit monster thrashes in a wild attempt to set itself free.

I'll help you younguns'. I leap forward and bring my mandibles down on the rabbit in a vicious strike, biting deep into the monsters hide.

[You have defeated level 2 Blood tooth rabbit]

[You have gained experience]

The three hatchlings don't even spare me a glance, let alone a friendly wave of the antennae in thanks before they turn and rush off in search of another target to attack.

I shouldn't have expected any different I suppose...

At this moment, as all around me monstrous insects do vicious battle against large black, red eyed rabbits I had to think that something was truly odd going on in this world.

It is also at this moment that, from the surrounding woods a veritable flood of centipedes breaks into the battle from the surrounding woods.

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 60: The first war - War never changes

What is this madness Gandalf?! Why on earth are these damnable centipedes barging in here?!

I guess it makes sense when I think about it though, the sounds of monster combat have been ringing through this area of trees for quite a while now, not to mention the powerful smell of the freshest food is permeating the area, filling the air with the rich and delectable scent of Biomass.

This place is basically the underground monster equivalent of a supermarket, its shelves laden with heaped goods, the most ripe produce, delivered direct from the farm, fully organic and ready for consumption.

It's hardly surprising that when the forest is, for whatever reason, packed to bursting with monsters the chaos would attract poachers, frenzied by the very idea of experience and food for the taking. Somewhere nearby there must be a centipede mound, similar to the one I'd preyed upon earlier, because there must be at least thirty of the horrible things here now, slithering and climbing over each other in their desperation to feast.

Perfect, just perfect. All I wanted was to snack on some part wolf part dragon monsters and here we are in some ridiculous melee.

What worries me the most is that this escalation of the battle will only increase the noise and draw even more monsters into the area. The only thing that could possibly make a monster turn a blind eye to this banquet is if a creature with overwhelming strength were to seize control of the field, scaring away competitors with its presence.

If that happens then the colony will miss out on this golden opportunity!

This is feast even larger than what we are able to harvest from the spark chimp tree. The sheer wealth of Biomass and experience on offer would fuel the workers to hundreds of mutations, possibly even evolutions! The workers would benefit tremendously, growing in strength and sharpening their skills. Not to mention the food would allow the colony to raise hundreds of new ants.

Greed is exploding in my heart as I take in the sight of the monsters doing ferocious battle. Every single one of them is a bag of Xp and Biomass and I want it all. I want every bit of it.

There is nothing as ravenous as a colony of ants. On Earth regular, tiny ants are so abundant they represent almost 20% of the mass of all animals on the planet. There is no other creature that that consumes more of the world's tiny life forms than ants, they are the terrors of the undergrowth and all things are their food.

Here, in this world, we are larger, capable of feasting not only on the smallest of lifeforms, but on all of them. Every single one of them.

I can almost feel a heat rising in my body as I ponder the possibilities. Is there really anything that can match us here in this world? If my colony is able to grow and reach its full potential, is there anything that could resist us?

The colony right now is only a few hundred ants, only a single Queen.

What if there were five, six Queens. What if there were hundreds of thousands of workers? Millions? Billions?

We could sweep these caverns clean. An unstoppable wave of monsters that would carry all before it.

I'm not really a violent person, surely I wasn't in my past life, but now that I'm an ant and the colony has become my home I want them to survive. Not just survive, but to thrive, to reach their full potential. It could start here, right now.

As the centipedes crash into the back of the conflict, sandwiching the unfortunate rabbits between them and the ants I start to drop the emergency pheromone all around me. Instantly the nearby workers pick up the signal and start to copy me, blanketing the area with the scent. My antennae immediately explode with sensation as the same signal pounds into my senses over and over again.

Emergency! Battle! Defend the colony! Summon the workforce! Emergency!

The entire area is saturated with the message, I even see workers disengage from the battle to run back to the ant hill, spreading the trail all the way back to the top of the hill and down into the tunnels. Every worker will pick up the message, even those tending to the brood and the Queen. The Queen herself might even appear, much as she did last time.

It's definitely a risk if she were to come here. If she were set upon by gargoyles from above or even a giant bruiser like Tiny was or the Titan-Croc, I'm not sure if she would be able to survive, I've no idea how capable she is in combat after all.

But it's worth it! If we can win here and take all that is on offer here it will explode the colonies strength and supercharge its growth! We need to roll the dice!

Invigorated by the incredible opportunity that has dropped itself into my lap I return to battle with renewed purpose. The ants on the fringes of the fight have begun to unload their acid bombardment over our heads, targeting the newly arrived centipedes on the other side of the fight. Blast after blast of sizzling acid streaks through the air, falling like rain on the centipede horde.

The rabbits are in a frenzy, pinned between two hostile monstrous swarms they have no option except to fight their way to survival and they battle with renewed ferocity, biting savagely at ant at centipede alike.

In the midst of the fray the remaining wolf-dragon continues its rampage, completely surrounded by smaller monsters that bite and pull at it, trying to drag it to the ground, the larger beast responds with vicious swings of its tail, sending the unevolved monsters flying through the air with every swat of its tail.

I charge back into the swirling midst of the battle, ants climbing over each other and on my back at the frontline constantly bite, pulling at the rabbits and dragging them down. I lash out to my left and right every time I see a target, using my crushing bite exclusively.

Since these rabbit monsters have no hard external defence the crushing bite is definitely the skill that will yield me the most damage per bite. Every time my mandibles clamp down, biting deep into soft flesh, the rabbits howl and screech but their pleas fall on deaf ears as the unstoppable tide of ants continues to push forward.

Every now and again the xp notification comes through, the gruff yet soothing voice of Gandalf letting me know that one of victims was finished off by my strike.

As I continue to press forward and bite I can gradually feel my stamina being drained away, making me more and more tired. Ever since I first saw my mandibles glowing with power I wondered where that energy came from, if there was some sort of cost associated with my active skills.

It seems I was correct to think so but only now biting dozens of times in such short succession have I been able to directly feel the energy draining out of me. It's my stamina! With every snap of my mandibles I can feel myself getting more and more tired.

But I won't stop! Until all of this Biomass has been claimed for the colony I refuse to stop!

[Crushing Bite has reached level 6]

[Crushing bite has reached level 7]

Dammit! Just how many of these stupid things are there!?

The rabbits have been defeated, their beady red eyes are all lifeless on the ground as the centipede and ant armies continue to clash over the top of their remains. At the rear of the battle ants are extracting wounded and dragging them back to a temporary holding pile at the base of the hill, waiting for transport down to the Queen.

Some of the wounded are so desperate to fight they try to drag themselves back to the front with whatever limbs they have left, one nearly legless hatchling I saw trying to pull itself back to the battle using only its mandibles!

The emergency pheromones have summoned almost all of the workforce to the fight, over one hundred monstrous ants have answered the call, emerging from deep in the nest to do battle in the name of the colony.

Every time fresh recruits arrive at the scene they immediately unload all of their available acid onto the enemy before they advance to the front lines. Due to their assistance we now outnumber the centipedes significantly, almost two to one. The fighting is so hot and close that the centipedes are struggling to utilise their most deadly weapon, their poison sting. With the two sides pressed so close together, climbing over each other to fight it's too hard for them to raise their tail section high enough to strike forward, giving the ants yet another advantage.

We can win!