

CHRYSALIS

Chapter 7 Cohabitation?



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These are absolutely stairs right?

Tiny eyes boggling, I approach the cave entrance in order to closely examine these stairs.

It definitely appears as if these stairs have been carved directly into the rock. Now who exactly would be responsible for carving stairs into solid rock Anthony?

Why humans of course! Human civilisation! This is the first tangible evidence I've see that any sort of humanoid creature exists in this new world. Fantastic! I can't help but be excited and also a little nervous. I wonder what sort of fantasy like people live here? Will I see dwarves? Elves?!

The idea of voluptuous Elf ladies is almost enough to make me giddy!

This is getting more and more interesting. Why would they bother to carve stairs into this tunnel and not the others? The answer is almost self-explanatory, this is a very frequently used tunnel, therefore they have made it more convenient to travel down here. This means it's likely there may be more stairs nearby, but leading up instead.

Perhaps a path to the surface!

I quickly crawl down the wall and approach the stairs leading downwards. Wow! This is actually the first chance I've had to compare my size to an object I can relate to in my previous life! If we can assume that people in this world are roughly the same size as those in my old world then by comparing my size to the stairs I'll be able to make a rough estimate of how large I am. All I have to do is hop onto these stairs.

Hmmm.

I think I'm a little smaller than perhaps I first thought? Judging by the height and length of each step I can say I'm probably only tall enough to come up to

a full grown adults knee, and I'd be roughly as long as a full stride, so perhaps a metre?

But wait! That means all those monsters who looked to terrifying and massive to me, from a human perspective ... would actually be fairly small?! The wolf creature would be almost waist height, the thorny lizard is even smaller than I am, about the size of a badger, and the terrifying, enormous Croca-beast would be less than shoulder height?!

Are all the monsters in this area actually very weak?

Thinking logically it would be a great thing if they were, since I probably would not have been able to survive this long if they were strong. This does raise the possibility of there being much stronger, larger and more powerful monsters elsewhere in these tunnels.

I'll be doing my best to avoid those then! May our paths never cross.

Okay, since the more powerful creatures probably live deeper, since that's how it works in games and this world is so strangely game-like I will operate on the assumption that the safer places are closer to the surface.

I resolutely turn away from the tunnel and begin to move further into the cavern. Yes! I can see more signs of modification here and there. Every now and again there is a step carved into the floor to make passage more easy and I also notice carved areas at about human head height on the walls at fairly regular intervals. Are these perhaps for holding torches and illuminating this space?

In fact, the further I travel the more signs of civilisation I see. The ground is starting to slope upwards more and more as well. Perhaps the surface is actually very close?

Looking around I can see that there are very few tunnels branching off the main cavern at this point, not even small ones, also the pulsing veins of light along the walls are further apart and thinner, making the space a little darker than further into the cavern.

Perfect for a stealthy existence like me! I'll keep exploring!

My heart is pounding in my chest now. I might actually get to see a person from another world! I have so many questions. What do they look like? What

race are they? Do they know magic? Is there some sort of adventuring guild that goes dungeon exploring? Maybe I'll be able to communicate with them somehow, perhaps sign language or some form of interpretive dance will work?

This could be breakthrough in human/ant monster relations!

How often would they have seen a human mind trapped in a monster body?
Possibly I'm the first of my kind!

The cavern is becoming more narrow, the steps more frequent and the slope steeper the further I travel. Actually ... is that? I think it is.

Sunlight.

My antennae wave excitedly in the air as they get their first taste of dim, reflected sunlight. The surface must be extremely close now!

I continue scuttling forward, excited to get a taste of the surface air on this new world. Gradually I can see a source of light ahead, reflecting off the stone and diffusing into the cavern.

Oooo.

More human construction! It look almost like a wall of some kind. I shift my head to try and get a better view, my eyes seem to work even worse than usual under the effect of natural sunlight, I may need to get closer.

Yes, it seems like some sort of wall constructed against the side of the passage, there are small window slits carved into the stone, presumably so someone behind the wall can see and attack out.

This is perhaps a guard room? It would make sense if you think about it, they would put a guard room here so they can monitor the entrance to the dungeon and fend off any monsters that approach the surface. There is probably a guard in there right now.

Even as I'm thinking that a bright red light suddenly shines through the windows in the wall and I can hear rapid movements, as if someone is scrambling up from a chair.

Suddenly two people emerge from behind the wall, standing on a raised stone platform perhaps a metre off the tunnel floor. Its humans! Real humans! I'm slightly sad they aren't elves but hey, people! They appear to be wearing some kind of metal armour with black leather underneath. They both have swords at their waist and tight boots laced up their shins, also black. Judging from their figures it appears as if one is male and the other is female.

The female guard seems to be holding a crystal of some sort in her hand that is emitting a bright red light, perhaps that is how they detect monsters approaching? It looks as if they are searching the tunnel, trying to identify the threat. Must be hard to find me with my stealth on I suppose.

Suddenly the male raises both hands and incredibly, they begin to glow with a bright, burning light. He appears to close his eyes to concentrate as the light forms into strange shapes or runes that slowly revolve around his hands.

I'm stunned senseless. This is magic! Real magic! Holy Gandalf, Gandalf! Magic is possible in the world after all! Oh boy, oh boy, oh, boy, I wonder if these people could teach me?

After only a few seconds the guard thrusts both his palms forward and the cavern erupts in light. Great flames burst out from the strange sconces in the walls, bathing the tunnel with heat and chasing the shadows away.

The second guard holds the red crystal forward and the light begins to focus and illuminate the threat.

Which is

Uh, me.

....

WHAT THE HELL AM I DOING?!

The female guard rapidly slips the crystal into a pouch attached to her belt and rips a crossbow off her back whilst the male locks eyes with me and once again raises his hands.

He doesn't look friendly Gandalf!

RUNRUNRUNRUNRUNRUNRUNRUNRUNRUNRUN.

Anthony you stupid idiot, what the hell are doing waltzing up to monster guards when you are a freaking monster!

My six legs start pumping in overdrive as I turn start running like crazy to weave through the rocks further into the tunnel. The harsh lights from the flaming torches burns my eyes making it hard to see but I can't slow down at all, causing me to stumble and miss my footing.

I can here shouting and footsteps pounding on the stone behind me but I don't turn to look. A blast of heat explodes on my right and another on a rock just in front of me in rapid succession. These are fireballs right? Fire magic?! Have mercy on me I'm just a tiny ant!

I can only continue to run at max speed, weaving behind rocks and pillars in order to seek shelter.

Gogogogogo Anthony you moron! If I survive this I'll bathe myself in my own acid as punishment for this idiocy, I'll even drink from that damned pool!

A crossbow bolt slams into the stone directly between two of my legs as I run, spraying stone shards into my carapace. Holy moly! That lady can shoot! I need some help! I need a distraction or something.

Maybe?!

Running at this speed I've quickly made my way back to the wider cavern and smaller tunnel entrances branching off this main cavern are appearing here and there. As I run I try to pass close by and frantically wave my antennae to detect any scent coming from them.

Nothing from the first! Nothing from the second!! Come on you stupid.....
YES!!! From the third I detect the disgusting smell I'm looking for. Without

pausing I screech to a halt, turn my back zone to point deep into the tunnel and immediately fire off three quick bursts of acid. As I do so I take the chance to glance at my pursuers...

DUCK!

Shooting out my legs I flatten myself to the stone as another bolt zips just over my head, smashing the stone behind me.

This isn't looking good Gandalf!