

## Chrysalis 71

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#### Chapter 71: Too effective?

The second trap is almost halfway done when I hear another crashing thud, followed by a furious roar.

Once again a visitor has decided to grace my humble hotel! Welcome dear guest! Manuel, take their bags! Gweheheh.

Chortling to myself I crawl out of my second pitfall and rush to the first. Tiny is standing up in his tree abode, excitedly staring down at the hapless monster caught in the pit. The little ape is practically drooling, he's become so hungry.

I get that you're hungry little guy but really?! Try to maintain a little dignity.

As much as I try to ignore it my stomach is also growling. After all of this work digging I've worked up quite the appetite.

Approaching the side of my trap I peer down to see exactly what monster I've managed to reel in this time.

Greeting me from the bottom of the pit is a particularly furious looking giant centipede. The centipede very quickly begins to right itself after falling into the pit, a mess of sticks and foliage tangling in its legs.

This guy again huh.

Where once upon a time I felt hugely threatened by the massive centipedes, I just can't muster the same kind of fear for them anymore. They might be much larger than the original claw centipedes but they remain fairly stupid with limited ways to attack. In fact, due to its increased size and reduced mobility, the most threatening weapon of the claw centipede, its poison spike, is rendered almost completely useless against me.

POW!

I dispense justice in the form of acid from my business zone down onto my prey before leaping directly into the pit to do battle.

There were several reasons why I thought pitfalls would be a safer way to hunt in the current forest, one of which was the ability to isolate the battle somewhere the sound and scent of the battle would be somewhat muted. Combined with the natural advantage of battling against a monster after it has fallen and become entangled this method seemed promising to my mind.

So far it has proven to be effective. I'll be very interested to see if I can finish this battle quickly enough without drawing any further monsters from the surrounds.

Just as the centipede is able to right itself my acid rains down, once again entangling legs that had only moments ago become free. Hissing furiously the centipede writhes and twists in knots as the pain and discomfort mounts. At this time I land directly onto the carapace of my prey, gripping tightly with my claws, pushing my grip skill to the limit.

Take this you lively bugger!

Piercing Chomp!

CRUNCH!

My mandibles pierce into the carapace like a hot knife into a refrigerated spread of some kind, savaging the internals of the centipede.

The monster shrieks in agony and attempts to use its body to slam me into the wall of the pitfall.

Slam!

Ouch! Damn centipede, receive my bite of truth!

CRUNCH!

My diamond carapace absorbed almost all of the impact so I received very little actual damage from that desperate manoeuvre, what I am concerned about is the noise attracting more monsters to the scene! So I quickly retaliate with another bite.

This time, having already punctured the enemies defences I utilise the Crushing Bite to inflict maximum damage, my mandibles ripping deep into muscle and organs of the centipede.

After this bite the centipede has lost most of its fight, unable to properly move the latter half of its body there is little it can do to avoid fatal damage.

[You have slain level 6 Adult Claw Centipede]

[You have gained experience]

Nice!

Quick as a flash I move to secure the Biomass, dragging it into my prepared side tunnel and out of sight. Then I crawl out of the pitfall to reset the majority of my screen, covering the hole in the ground except for one small section. I'm hoping that this will prevent the smell from escaping too much and also make my hiding place a little harder to find. Claws crossed it works out.

Having taken these measures I retreat back into the trap, bringing Tiny down with me so we can finally sate our hunger. Down in the dark tunnel the offshoots the pitfall we greedily chow down on the centipede, Tiny in particular showing his vastly increased appetite after going hungry for too long.

Yes. Eat my young ape, eat and grow strong. You'll pay me back in labour eventually, I'll work you like a slave! An adorable chimp slave!

After completing our meal I've gained two Biomass, which brings my current total to four. Just one more and I'll be able to upgrade yet another body part to +5. I'm quite excited to see what sort of upgrades I'll be able to choose from for the regeneration gland!

I think of Tiny at this moment. This little guy must have eaten something like fifteen, maybe even twenty points of Biomass since I reconstructed him. Where has all of those points gone?

The little ape notices me staring at him and stops wiping his bat face with the back of his arm, staring back at me curiously.

I can't detect any change to his fur or hands, his eyes look the same, no noticeable difference in his arms or legs. Has the Biomass been spent or is it all being saved up? Maybe he can't spend it until he matures to a certain point? He certainly couldn't be called anything like fully grown at this stage.

Well, not much I can do about it at this point. I'll just have to keep feeding him and see what happens.

We were undisturbed during our meal, something for which I am extremely grateful. I wasn't able to recover the mouse bait, I think the centipede dove on it and ripped it to shreds as it fell. So I finish resetting the first trap after making sure Tiny was securely positioned in his tree, it will probably take longer to get another sucker to slip into my pitfall so I'll get back to work on the second one.

Could we have saved some of the centipede to use as bait? Yes, yes we could. Did we do that? No.

We were pretty hungry though...

A few hours later I've managed to finish off the second trap despite a few interruptions. I had a gang of unevolved centipedes go through the area, a croca-beast and the elusive dog snake, which I'd only seen dead before. Sadly none of these monsters fell into my clutches so I simply hid myself away as they passed through, emerging once they'd passed me by and continuing my work happily.

I've also managed to achieve yet another level in excavation! It feels pleasant to gain levels without having to risk my own life for a change.

Once the second pitfall was completed, I didn't immediately cover it but instead added another off shooting tunnel. While I was at it, I decided to join the two tunnels together, I mean why not? This necessitated a lot more digging and effort, particularly when I ran into a rather stubborn block of stone which required me to use my infused mandibles to cut through.

Eventually however the two traps were joined at the bottom of the pitfalls by a somewhat winding tunnel roughly thirty metres long.

Holy heck that took ages!

Now I'm bloody starving again!

CRASH!

ROAR!

What the dickens?! Another customer?

I rush down my narrow tunnel to the original trap and I see a furious Croca-Beast thrashing and twisting its way out of the vines and branches I used to secure the cover over the pitfall. Success! Another visitor to the pitfall hotel, you can check in Mr Crocodile, but you can never leave!

Exploding out of the tunnel I utilise all of my speed to harness the element of surprise. A huge part of my trap strategy is to finish every battle as quickly as possible to avoid unnecessary noise!

Thankfully the monster hasn't had any time to survey its surroundings and hasn't even noticed the small tunnel dug into the base of the pit. The last thing this Croca-Beast expected to see was a worker ant rushing at it, mandibles shining with infused mana ready to bite!

Crushing Bite!

SNAP!

Closing my mandibles with ferocious force the mighty croc wails in distress as its leg is directly shorn through! Your scales may as well be Paper Mache in the face of the mana infused mandibles!

With one leg directly severed the Croca-Beast falls to the ground once again, the narrow confines of the pit making it extremely difficult for the monster to orient itself. For me however, this terrain is perfect. After my initial strike I sprint past the Croc and straight up the wall of the pit, trying to gain the high ground.

It's over now Croc!

I fire down a blast of acid at the creature, who by this time is surely wondering what it did wrong in a previous life to deserve this kind of treatment. Just an innocent Croc monster out for a walk in the forest and now this, down a leg and covered in acid at the bottom of a pit.

Not to worry monster, these circumstances won't be troubling you for long!

I fire down a second blast of acid, treating the beast to another helping of the restricting property. Unable to stand, covered in acid and completely furious the Croc has no choice but to succumb to my finishing bite!

[You have defeated level three Infant Garralosh]

[You have gained experience]

Standing over the defeated croc I really can't help but think to myself, isn't this working super well?

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### **Chapter 72: Finer things in life**

This time I manage to restrain Tiny and myself for long enough to save some bait for both of the traps.

Due to having to feed the stupid ape and reserve some of the food I only take a single Biomass for myself since it's enough for my needs.

With five points of Biomass now I am ready to once again select a mutation advancement! I cannot wait until I can look at my status and see every available body part has been upgraded to +5. What completeness, what symmetry, such a perfect being I shall become!

No I'm not a neat freak... I think.

After resetting my original trap and baiting my second I retreat to the underground tunnel with Tiny in order to select my mutation.

[Would you like to improve Regeneration Gland to +5? This will cost five Biomass]

Oh yeah!

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

Once more the list in my mind unfurls like a banner. A long menu of delectable choices laid before me, ready to peruse. The thing that kills me the most every single time I do this is I can only choose one!

Ok. Calm down and let's have a look.

Ooooo I can upgrade the number of Hp that gets regenerated, upgrade the speed of the regeneration, make it refill faster so I can use it more often, excess regeneration fluid can be converted into Mp, holy moly!

Slower working regeneration fluid for a greater boost over time, rapid response regeneration fluid stored in smaller pockets around my body that automatically heal wounds when they happen....

I could pick any of them and be happy!

Once again I must use my laser-like focus to hone in on exactly what it is that I want my regeneration gland to do! Which is quite a simple thing to do really, I can clearly recall my thoughts when I chose this body part to begin with!

This is my get out of jail free card! I chose it to help me out of a jam when nothing else was working, to help me sustain in the battle after I have received significant damage!

This means I don't need it to heal more Hp over a longer time, I don't need it to heal smaller wounds instantly. I need a big burst of healing in a short time, I need it to overcome a critical hurdle and put me back in the fight quickly.

When the Berserkers attacked the colony I was out of action due to missing legs. The memory of having to scabble about, unable to use my mighty weapons due to lost limbs is so painful. The regeneration was able to heal back some Hp and kick start the leg growth process but it was ultimately the Queen's healing prowess that put my six legged self back into the insect kingdom.

The upgrade I really want is this one:

Limb Regeneration Gland, rather than increasing the Hp that is restored, this upgrade greatly enhances the regeneration gland's capacity to restore missing or damaged limbs in a timely manner.

This is going to help out a lot!

It isn't as if the regeneration gland won't restore Hp at all but it will be able to restore missing body parts much faster than before.

Come to think of it, I've had legs chopped off, antennae cut off... Since when did I get so used to having parts of body removed and then grown back?

Spending time in this world is really starting to twist my perspective.

Well, it isn't as if I need to keep my human way of thinking, I'm not even a human anymore. It's only natural that a few aspect of my mindset would change. Here in this world for example, I have to directly

kill in order to eat, whereas I, like most humans, would never have had to slaughter my own food when I was on Earth.

I'm not sure if this makes me more respectful of life or less...

On the one hand, I have to kill a lot of monsters in order to survive, on the other, at least I'm not lying to myself about the lives that are sacrificed to sustain my own.

Something to think about another time, now it is time to mutate!

Confirm my selection!

Oh right the itch...

...

HUGARKAFLUDGE!!!

When the itch fades I am gasping on the floor of my narrow tunnel whilst Tiny watches with a faint tinge of amusement in those vacant ape eyes.

Yuck it up monkey breath, you'll get your chance to mutate and then just watch as I point and laugh at you when you writhe on the floor!

With my regeneration gland mutated my status has now come to look like this:

Name: Anthony

Level: 8 (core)

Might: 31

Toughness: 22

Cunning: 25

Will: 18

HP: 50/50

MP: 50/50

Skills: Excavation Level 3; Improved Acid Shot Level 5; Grip Level 4; Crushing Bite Level 7; Advanced Stealth Level 4; Piercing Chomp Level 3; Tunnel sense Level 4; Mana Shaping level 2; Forceful Mana Level 2; External Mana Manipulation Level 1; Mana Sensing Level 1; Core Mechanic Level 1; Exo-Skeleton Defence level 1

Mutations: Focused Eyes +5, Infrared Antennae +5, Restrictive Acid +5, Legs +1, Infused Mandibles +5, Diamond Carapace +5, Limb Regeneration Gland +5, Pheromones +2

Species: Mature Ant Worker (Formica)

Skill points: 0

Biomass: 0

Yessss. Only legs and pheromones to go before I have achieved the perfect all-round status of mutations.

In total I'm going to need another twenty six Biomass in order to max out everything.

...

Come on Gandalf, twenty six! It's so many! Mutations are so damn expensive! If we assume that I get another mutation advancement at +10, which may not even be the case, it will take

forty Biomass to take a single body part from +5 to +10. If I don't get the advancement until +15 then it will take ONE HUNDRED AND FIVE BIOMASS for a single mutation advancement!

Ugh.

Hopefully when I get stronger I'll be able to hunt prey that will provide more Biomass, it'll take me a hundred years to upgrade everything if I have to keep feasting on unevolved monsters.

CRASH!

Speaking of which, another customer!

Welcome to the business district!

Turns out a Lion Ogre has tripped into the second pitfall, lured by the faint scent of Biomass that lingered in the air due to my bait. I've been trying to use only the right amount of bait in my traps, not too much to bring in monsters from far away but not too little that it's impossible for the monsters to detect it.

Thankfully the balance seems to be about right.

I treat the Lion Ogre as a pretty serious opponent since they look like they can do some serious damage with their grotesquely over muscled upper bodies. After dosing the creature with a few shots of acid and launching a surprise chomp the monster doesn't get much chance to fight back before falling to my sneaky assault.

[You have slain level 7 Lion Ogre]

[You have gained experience]

[You have reached level nine]

Oh ho! Thank you Gandalf for your blessing! So close to level ten and evolution! Argh I can hardly wait. I'm so excited I'm basically dancing on the spot!

Whoops! Better stow away this food before anything happens.

Cover over the top of the pitfall, drag the prey into the tunnel. The Lion Ogre is so large at the shoulder I actually have to break it up in order to fit it all through. Tiny has woken up once again, ready to eat. I've noticed you always sleep when the work is happening but always wake up when it's time to eat, eh Tiny?

Despite my grumbling I don't begrudge my little ape his meal. Grow up nice and strong Tiny!

In fact, I don't take much Biomass for myself, just two points. The rest I use to rebait my trap and then let Tiny eat the rest until he's about ready to burst. Every time this little chimp eats and then sleeps he wakes up discernibly larger. I want to pack this little guy full of Biomass until it starts running out of his nose and then let him sleep to see if I can accelerate his growth. For some reason I just feel that he needs to be in fighting shape as quickly as possible.

Perhaps I'm just finally get sick of his slacking.

Predictably, after packing the food into his face until he can barely move, Tiny rolls himself away to a comfortable spot in the tunnel and then falls asleep. He didn't quite finish the entire monster himself but he came rather astonishingly close considering the relative sizes! Has he upgraded his stomach to include a pocket dimension or something?

With my own successful level up and mutation, as well as the prospective growth of my little ape friend, I'm certainly very hopeful for the possibilities tomorrow may bring!

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### **Chapter 73: Establishing the network**

Exploration of the Dungeon has been the task of all the civilised races who make their homes above the ground ever since the first opening was made known to us.

However a unified approach and the free sharing of information has proven impossible to facilitate. Each kingdom, church, organisation or private army or noble house than has devoted resources into plumbing the depths and secrets beneath our feet has withheld their own slice of information from the common perception. Hoarding slivers of information like family treasures.

There is much information that has been publicly confirmed, however, enough that all citizens have a reasonable awareness of the world below, the dangers and opportunities that can be found there.

Some the key information regards the various Strata, the levels, defined by both their depth and the concentration of mana found there.

The First Strata is generally accepted to lie from the surface to five kilometres deep. It is frequently referred to as the Strata of Beasts, since most of the monsters found there are exaggerated, terrible hybrids of creatures that have long existed on the surface.

As for the lower Strata, the second and below, information is much harder to corroborate.

From the 'Knowledge of the people, a series of essays' by the Magio Scholar Tarius.

I manage to pass a fairly profitable day in this manner.

During the quiet moments I manage to construct a third pitfall trap and add it my expanding network, excavating another tunnel to connect it all together and gaining another level of excavate as my reward.

My fairly crude traps have proven surprisingly capable, netting a consistent flow of prey that I have been able to finish off quickly and conceal within my tunnels, feeding the majority of the Biomass to Tiny and taking a little for myself.



Over the last day I managed to take four Biomass for myself, which I've stockpiled for the time being. I could take two upgrades to pheromones immediately but I don't particularly see the need. It isn't as if I'm cooperating with the colony at the moment so the pheromones won't help achieve anything.

I did start to feel a little guilty about leaving the colony to its own devices for this long. After digging out the third trap I decided to start the arduous process of connecting my small network of pitfall traps to the main nest by way of a rather long underground tunnel.

This particular project will take a long time to actually complete, particularly since I have to return to the traps to check on the situation every now and again, as well as making frequent, ever longer trips to transport the dirt and rock I've dug back to the surface.

Trying to discreetly dispose of all of this dirt is proving more and more difficult. I've had to travel ever further away from my pitfalls to find a space to dispose of it and the area around my traps is starting to look a little odd, with small piles of dirt and stone popping up everywhere.

Thankfully whenever monsters stomp through the area they tend to scatter the dirt and pound it into the ground, concealing my work to some extent.

The biggest change over the last day has been Tiny. My loafing ape friend has been living the perfect life of luxury, waking up in time to feast and then sleeping immediately. Every time he wakes up he's grown a little larger and after repeating this process four times across the day he's shown significant growth, basically equaling me in size.

Your springtime of youth is finally here Tiny! Entering the growth phase is an important time for any monster. Perhaps Tiny is now in his teenage size, all he wants to do is sleep and eat. I'm half expecting to find him in the tunnel scratching crude graffiti on the walls and listening to punk music.

Joke aside, the little guy is no longer that little. If I can continue to feed him up at this pace he'll be able to display some strength in combat fairly soon. I can already see his arms starting to thicken up!

After killing a few more monsters I've gained the experience but I haven't managed to get that crucial level ten. Every time I finish off a monster now I await the pronouncement of Gandalf with all of my soul but he hasn't given me those sweet, sweet words.

I know patience is required but it's so hard when the goal is so damned close!

I should just dig some more, let the feeling of ant-zen wash over me and take away my worldly desires.

I return to digging out my tunnel, eager to connect my small network of traps to the colony. Gradually I lose my sense of time as I work, it's just so satisfying.

There is no need, no desires, or wants. There is only the soil and rock in my mandibles.

CRASH!

PREY! GETTEM!

Dropping the hunk of rock I'd been carrying I sprint towards my traps. So eager am I that I reach my next victim in merely moments.

Furiously scrabbling at the walls of the pit and tearing apart the branches that have fallen around it is a rather large, agitated rabbit.

Rather than the smaller rabbit I came into contact with during the brawl next to the ant hill this one is larger and more brutish, it's fur is thinner and patchy, almost as if the creature were sick. The thickly muscled limbs testify to the brute power of the creature which only makes it look even more silly with the small bunny ears emerging proudly from the top of its head.

As it thrashes I manage to get a decent look at the face of my prey, a more beastly and hideous face I haven't seen yet. A fetid, diseased pallor, fluid leaking from each eye and missing teeth are the first impression I get and further glimpses don't improve my opinion at all.

This rabbit, looks absolutely disgusting. The stench of death seems to ooze from every pore of the monster's body, filling the air and washing into the tunnel. I almost feel as if my whole body is pain just by looking at the beast.

Wait a second...

Quickly checking my Hp I quickly learn that I AM in pain! I'm losing health just by being near this damn thing!

How is it damaging me just by being nearby? I've never seen anything like this Gandalf!

The longer I delay I more health I'm going to lose, stop slacking about Anthony, get in there!

POW! POW!

Reaching the opening of the tunnel into the pit I present the back-zone to my prey, eyeball it over my shoulder and unleash two blasts of the restrictive acid, catching the monster across the chest and one front paw.

I don't want to take to many chances with this beastie so I give it two shots of the acid straight away to try and restrict its movements. Looking at the monster I'm concerned I may get poisoned or diseased if I were to be bitten or scratched during the fight, best to slow it down first before I tussle in close quarters with it.

I'd happily wait and give it a few more bursts before fighting but my Hp is dropping every second and I can't wait for too long. This thing needs to be finished as fast as possible.

As the beastly rabbit roars and groans, it's patchy fur proving little protection from the burning liquid that covers it, and then I hear a surprising sound behind me.

Before I can dash forward and apply the righteous fury of mandibles to this rotting rabbit, from behind me, screeching in fury comes Tiny. His bat face is twisted in rage as he hurtles forward using his knuckles and hind legs to propel him forward.

I can't even react before my ape friend has thrown himself on the much larger rabbit, punching and biting in a frenzy.

What the hell! All of a sudden you want to fight?! Why now you slacking ape?!

Hurriedly I charge forward after him, not wanting to see any harm to come to my friend/investment after all of this time.

The rabbit reacts aggressively to Tiny's assault, yowling in a high piercing wail that seems to drill straight into my ears and attack my mind itself. Not enough though! Shaking of the distraction I charge up my infused mandibles immediately.

You're not going to last long you damned rabbit! You and your death aura are not long for this world!

I use my crushing bite at the same time, maximising my damage and ripping straight into the nearest limb, the front leg on the rabbit's left side.

As my mandibles crunch home I can tell something feels off about the response I feel. The flesh of the creature feels thin and weak, ghastly juices and blood pour out of the limb, all over my face.

Oh. My. Gandalf.

What the heck is this disgusting stuff!? Ugh kalla frazzle! It's in my eye!

As soon as the liquid hits me I can feel a burning pain start resonating through my head instantly. Is this acid!? Has this stupid monster got acid blood or something?!

My Hp is dropping even faster now! If this stuff eats through my carapace and inside my head I'll be done for! Activate the regeneration immediately!

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#### **Chapter 74: Dead....er?**

This darned rabbit is one nasty customer! Standing next to it will cause damage and apparently biting into it will also cause damage!

What the hell!?

In the end I still have to finish it off as fast possible. As the regenerative fluid flow through my body I keep the mana pouring out of my core and into my mandibles preparing to take the damage and continue to chomp!

Shockingly this half-dead looking rabbit is still able to use the limb I attacked, despite a good chunk in the middle of it being crushed to bits. Since the rabbit is twice my size it looms over me as it finally manages to get its feet under it.

Tiny continues his rampage, thrashing the rabbit on its back, punching with his hands and tearing with his fingers, inflicting whatever damage he can. This is a completely new Tiny I'm witnessing here today, what happened to your chill little guy?

The rabbit lashes out at me with a paw swipe, claws dripping yellow, virulent looking fluid emerge from between the toes and lash at my carapace. I don't yield to this! Trust in the diamond carapace! Rather than dodging I brace for the blow and prepare my counter attack. I need to deal decisive damage in order to finish off this monster quickly, lest all of these damage over time effects drag me down!

**BAM!**

The paw smashes into my side, terrible claws raking along my hide. Those damn claws are sharp! Sparks fly as those disgusting claws rake across me, gouging into the carapace but failing to break through.

Phew!

Now receive this bite!

My mandibles, charged full of mana roaring out of my core, are ready to clamp down. I just need to maximise my damage potential!

Instead of trying to do attempt anything fancy, like reaching for the neck I lunge forward before the rabbit can recover its balance aiming directly for its mid-section. This is going to hurt!

Crushing bite!

CRUNCH!

With all of my strength I rip directly into the creature's torso, shredding muscle and bone, tearing into the monster's body. Immediately that disgusting ooze erupts again, coating my head and jaws, but I don't stop.

Bite!

CRUNCH!

The fetid flesh parts so easily under my assault, I'm not even sure I need to use my infused mandibles to inflict serious damage, but I won't turn it off. This thing needs to die! I can't even see Tiny now, my vision is blocked by this acidic fluid and the monster itself.

One drawback of having to attack with your face is that there is extremely little distance between my eyes and the enemies body. I'm basically getting an eyeful of suppurating rabbit flesh and fur right now. If it weren't for my compound eyes giving such a broad range of vision I'd be super disoriented doing this.

Bite more! Die you damn rabbit!

CRASH!

A tremendous force smacks me into the ground, causing my legs to splay instantly as the rabbit brings both fists down on my back in a hammer blow. The sheer mass of the creature adds force to the strike, knocking all of the wind out of me.

Guh! That one stung!

I hastily check my Hp. Thirty left! With this acidic fluid on me and the constant hp drain my health is rapidly shrinking. I need to finish the fight!

Shaking off my dizziness, I push myself back up before the rabbit has prepared it's next strike and dive forward once again. You. Will. Get. Bitten!

CHOMP!

Utilising the piercing chomp this time my mandibles rip into the wound I've already carved into the monster, the pointed edged of my mandibles tearing deep into the rabbit's chest, destroying it internally.

Under my assault the rabbit finally shudders and grows still. I hastily withdraw my face from the wound and retreat in time to see the foe slump to the ground defeated.

My face is still burning. I've never fought a monster that was more of a disgusting pain in the butt than this thing.

At least... I got ... the ... experience?

As the creature slumps forward, clearly dead, Tiny is standing astride its back, his right fist plunged deep into the monster's back and his arm crackling with blue electrical energy.

He slowly withdraws his hand, the flashing and arcing electricity fading slowly. There is a satisfied look on his bat face as he shakes his limbs out as if just finishing a draining workout.

I look from Tiny, to the monster and back to Tiny.

The monster is clearly dead.

Did you kill steal me you cheeky ape?! Unbelievable!

I've not heard the voice of Gandalf at all. This can only mean one thing, I didn't get the last hit!

Tiny jumps off the monster's back and runs towards me his face is shining with a pleased light, he honestly looks like a puppy. A bat faced, ape puppy.

You're lucky I like you, cheeky ape!

I can't be mad at him. I reach up with one of my legs and give him a pat on the head. You did good little guy, even if you stole my xp and delayed my evolution I'm not mad. Oh whoops, my claw might have been a little tight there on your head. Sorry buddy.

Well, what do we do know with all of the Biomass?

Is this stuff even edible?

After the burning of my face has faded I check my Hp to ensure my health isn't still going down. Thankfully it isn't, whatever was causing that constant health loss is clearly no longer in effect now that the monster is dead.

Remembering that nauseating feeling of biting into the creature I gingerly approach it. Hoarf! The smell is terrible! It smells like someone had a pet rat that died, was left in the cage for a week and then flushed down a full toilet. This here, this is a new low.

Are you just gonna let the Biomass sit there Anthony? You have to at least try it man!

Okokok. Here it goes.

...

Oh my word. Oh heck. HRUUG. HURK.

[You have consumed a new source of Biomass: Quantum Mors Labor Tabes, you are awarded one Biomass]

[Basic profile of the Quantum Mors Labor Tabes unlocked]

HRAAANGUFARGUNNNNN.

Gasp!

Just... Just let me breathe for a sec.

Phew.

So then, monsters CAN throw up.

I mean, the taste, was very similar to the smell, so I shouldn't be too shocked but holy moly. That was next level.

Let's check this profile.

[Quantum Mors Labor Tabes: Decaying Death Rabbit, Evolved from the Blood Tooth rabbit this monster has adapted the shadow affinity of the base creature into a fearsome death affinity that manifests in a malicious aura that drains life from all around it, causing the monster to lead a very solitary life indeed. The body of this monster is filled with death energy at all times which will have several effects. ]

You don't say? You know what, if I was to describe the taste of a body filled with death energy this would likely be it. So, was this some form of zombie rabbit? Is that what you are trying to tell me Gandalf? Huh? Zombie rabbits now?

There is no way I'm eating the rest of this thing.

Even Tiny is looking at me as if I'm insane for trying it. Are you the smart guy now eh!? Just because you've grown a bit and can fight you're going to get all uppity with me?

What a waste. I'll guess I'll just have to wait and hope this place will reclaim this mess. I don't think I have to worry about monsters being attracted by the smell, since rather than the juicy allure of food I would more describe it as the horrific stench of the damned.

In fact, this thing might even discourage monsters from entering this area and make all three of my traps useless! Please just disappear you horrid mess!

While I'm waiting I will return to digging. Too many developments are happening here, I need to clear my mind. Thankfully the body of the death rabbit melts into the soil and vanishes about half an hour later, taking that reeking stench with it. A pleasant surprise is that after all of the remains have faded a small round gem is left lying innocently in the dirt.

A core!

Since I don't have a particular use for it I'll leave it partially buried in the wall of my underground tunnel for now where it won't be disturbed. I'll definitely come back and experiment with this later.

I reset the trap, minus bait and return to excavating my tunnel.

About an hour later I receive a pleasant surprise.

[Excavation has reached level 5]

[Tunnel Sense has reached level five, upgrade available]

Oooo. Tunnel Sense must have been levelling as I tried to aim this tunnel at the nest while digging! This is nice, haven't been able to upgrade a skill for some time!

[Tunnel Sense -> Tunnel Map. cost 1 sp: This upgrade improves the sense of underground direction with a powerful memory aid, allowing for the full recall of tunnel layout]

Sounds nice! I'll take it!

### [Chrysalis](#)

#### **Chapter 75: Reconnect with my people**

Once I confirm the upgrade that strange trickling sensation flows over my brain, like someone tickling my mind. When the feeling eventually fades I eagerly attempt to think about my tunnel sense and something shocking appears in my mind.

It's a map! It's a three dimensional map of all of the tunnels I've seen! This is insanely useful! Suspended in my thoughts like a picture for which I can suddenly recall all of the details I can see every tunnel I've been in, everywhere in the open space and the inside the nest connected together in one giant map.

I can even make out the marking I left in the tunnels when I fled the upper chamber, this is so good! I'll never be lost again no matter where I go underground, I'll always be able to dig my tunnels exactly where I want them to! I can already make out that my trap network has almost been connected to the nest, only a little further and a slight course correction are needed.

My Tunnel Map skill is level one though, which means it must be able to level up. I shouldn't think of it as perfect, there must be something to improve about it or it wouldn't gain xp, surely?

At any rate.

All praise the Tunnel Map and all praise to Gandalf!

Full of cheer I get back to digging my tunnel, I really want to reconnect with the colony so I can see how things are going and help out as needed, whilst my trap network can assist the colonies growth as a safe way to secure Biomass.

Once I've achieved this I'll keep hunting until I've evolved and then, fortified with my immense new strength (hopefully) I'll keep scouting, pre-emptively protecting the colony from danger whilst seizing whatever chances I can find to improve myself. At least this is the plan.

It takes another hour of digging to finally break through to the nest. My tunnel has connected to the shaft that descends from the ant hill about a third of the way down. I didn't want to dig further down, it would make the tunnel significantly longer and if I did connect to the brood chamber it would pose an unnecessary risk to the colony itself.

As I break through there is some dirt and rubble that falls down the tunnel, dropping down to the colony below. Oops, sorry about that! A few workers making their way up and down look at me oddly before going back on their merry way. Everything seems fine I guess? I might wander down and check how things are going.

Descending back into the nest I can see the workforce continues to be busy in my absence, food is being shuffled around and the nest being constantly maintained. Poking my nose in on the brood chambers I can see that the larvae are bigger now but don't look nearly so full. In the new chamber the many eggs that were stored there have hatched but the larvae look anything but full. We have a food issue.

Not to worry little grubs! I shall provide!

Straight back to the trap network I go!

Tiny is still sleeping when I return, slumped against the tunnel wall with both arms tucked under his chin. The guy is much taller than me now, which is an achievement for him even if I am much longer than I am tall. Gone are the days I could look down on his bat face.

Seems all of the traps are set but no prey thus far. Hmm. The colony needs an injection of food in order to keep the brood growing quickly. I could leave my trap network and risk hunting in the open, but that could get complicated very quickly. Best case I get into a nasty fight which may drag the workers in again, worst case I get myself killed, buried beneath a flood of monsters.

Reluctantly I decide to wait. The idea behind the trap networks is solid and has proven to be effective so far, allowing me to fight prey one on one and quietly dispose of the Biomass without attracting unwanted attention. With humans scurrying about above ground and the hordes of monsters swarming everywhere, discretion is called for.

If the trap network is not getting results quickly enough, add more traps!

Work on traps four and five begins immediately! Before they are finished a small group of Wolf-Dragon cubs tumbles into a pitfall and Tiny joins me in battling them. Between the two of us they are quickly dispatched, Tiny even steals one last hit from me! I won't mind that however.

I give one body to Tiny and use two others to ensure all of my traps are baited which leaves me one to donate to the colony. Gripping it in my mandibles I carry it back to the junction between my tunnel and the colony and drop it on the edge.

It isn't long before a worker spies the Biomass and grabs it, carrying it back down into the heart of the colony to be dispensed.

Good on you buddy!

Feels good to contribute to the colony again, even only a little.

Back to the network I go. I spend another day battling the soil and occasional monsters before my new traps are fully prepared and baited. Tiny takes a good chunk of the Biomass and I forfeit my share to the colony for the time being. Those larvae need feedin'. I'm so exhausted by this point that I fall into a very welcome state of torpor.

Feels good to nap!



Crash!

I startle awake to the welcome sound of snapping branches and rustling vegetation as another pitfall cover collapses under the tread of a monster. Hopefully not an unevolved centipede again, what is the point of fighting a single centipede, honestly?

I prod Tiny awake and scurry off towards the trap, six legs flickering with speed. Time is always of the essence when a trap is triggered, the faster I get there the more disoriented and tangled the prey will be.

ROAR!

An ear splitting, shattering roar echoes down the tunnel.

The sheer power of that roar hits me almost like a physical blow. I can feel the blood inside me running cold. What the heck was that?!

As I approach the pit I can see the head of a terrifying monster glaring at me down the tunnel. It seems this monster is too large to fit entirely in the pitfall, it appears to have stepped on the pit with its front legs and tumbled into the pit head first. I can only imagine the rear of this creature is currently sticking out of the pitfall above ground, its bum exposed to the air even as its face is ground into the dirt.

It would all be so amusing if it weren't for just how fearsome this creature looks.

It's a bear. A massive, massive bear. Thick dark brown fur streaked with green frames its brutal, furious eyes. Its snout opens wide to reveal its gaping maw as it roars again, stunning me senseless with the force of its rage.

Holy moly!

Two front paws, each the size of my midsection, scratch and shove at the ground as the bear tries to push its massive body out of the hole. On the end of each paw, long claws gouge into the ground, raking long grooves into the dirt walls of the pit.

You know what. I don't have to fight everything that drops into my traps, right? Not sure if ant vs bear is something I want to experience, could just let this one go, right?

As I'm wavering in my decision, watching this enormous bear, almost blind with rage as it struggles to right itself, I hear a shuffling noise behind me and my heart just drops.

Please don't.

Just...

Not now.

My silent pleas go completely unheard on this occasion as Tiny dashes past me, his eyes alight with the joy of battle and his body radiating enthusiasm for the fight.

I mean... I ... fine.

FINE!

You may be dumber than a stump that has been uprooted and carved into the shape of a smaller, less intelligent stump but nobody could question your courage Tiny.

Or are you just too stupid to understand odds?

How could I let Tiny risk himself and not assist? Obviously I cannot! This action will not stand! Onward Anthony, to battle!

I kick the motor into high gear and hurl myself forward as fast as I can. I want to try and reach the bear before Tiny does so I can draw the aggro and protect my ape friend.

You haven't finished paying me back yet Tiny, you're not allowed to kick the bucket!

### [Chrysalis](#)

#### **Chapter 76: I can't bear i**

When Tiny notices I'm running forward, about to overtake him, he speeds up!

Stop it you stupid ape! I'm trying to save your damn life!

Oblivious to my good intentions, Tiny is sprinting with all of his ape might, grinning from ear to ear and screeching out his simple minded lust for battle.

Bless you, you idiot.

Gritting my mandibles tight I exert every ounce of my strength into my legs, moving them so quickly they flicker in my eyesight. Is this the legendary shadow step technique?!

It's enough. Triumph surging in my heart I pass my ape companion at the last possible moment and break out of the tunnel and into the open pit.

Ha ha! Take that Tiny you slug!

Oh right, the bear.

Before I have a chance to throw the breaks on I smash into the bear, effectively head butting it rather close to the eye, quite hard due to my impressive momentum. The bear of course is extremely impressed by this action and attempts to repay me by levering its face out of the dirt and biting my head off.

Duck!

The massive jaws snap shut directly over my head. Thankfully I've learned from past experience and remembered to pull my antennae down when I ducked, I'm not losing my antennae this time!

Ok. Now I'm face to face with a truly terrifying and enormous bear monster. Now that I'm closer to it the scale of the monster is even more impressive. This thing is probably the same size as Tiny or the Titan-Croc, but is most likely even more massive. I suspect this thing weighs even more than Titan-Croc, it's carrying some serious heft.

Watch out! Paw!

Leaping back I manage to avoid a fearsome swipe of the beast's paw, the claws whistling past my face.

Thankfully the monster is considerably restrained in this pit, it's massive upper body and head occupy almost all of the available space, making it rather crowded in here now that Tiny and I have joined the fray.

It would be nice if I try and build up a mana ball to blast this thing but since Tiny has decided to engage in melee with it

In these narrow confines I can only make use of my finest ant-like qualities to make the best of this situation.

Scrabbling up the wall I make my way out of the reach of those fearsome teeth and begin to charge up my infused mandibles. Waves of mana flow from my core, streaming through my body and charging my mandibles with vibrant energy.

Hope you're ready for this, bear!

Crushing bite!

THUNK!

Holy bristling eyebrows of Gandalf, that is tough!

When I snap my mandibles down on the bear's hide, right on his flank, it feels like I'm digging into a tree trunk with a knife! This bear is ridiculously tough! Tougher than anything I've come across so far in this place, I can't bite through it, even with my infused mandibles!

The bear roars indignantly in response to my attempted wounding and struggles even more violently to free itself from the trap, finally pushing managing to push its paws under its face and start to lever his head out of the dirt.

I'm not sure were Tiny has got to, no doubt punching the bear in the eyeball or something else horrifically dangerous. In order to keep the monster distracting I keep biting, hoping to eventually carve through this creatures ridiculously thick hide!

Using the piercing chomp this time I bite again at the creatures side.

THUNK!

What the heck is this bear made of!?

His hide feels as tough as nails. My mandibles, aided by the bonus penetrating power of the piercing bite are able to dig deeper than before, but I still don't feel as if I'm getting meaningful internal damage to this monster.

This guy is tank!

From the other side of the bear, above the constant grunting and growls as the massive monster tries to free itself, I can hear the chirping crackle of electricity. Clearly Tiny has warmed up his fists and is ready to go to work!

There comes a thumping noise and the entire body of the bear flashes with electrical light. The bear groans and slumps momentarily as the potent energy rips through its body.

Nice, Tiny! I'll give him another chomp!

THUNK!

Dammit!

I think I was able to bite a little deeper that time but this bear is a tough nut to crack! I try to pull more mana from my core, drawing it out faster and faster before it packs into my mandibles, causing the light they give off to be more intense each passing second.

As the bear is making more headway in extricating itself I decide to jump off the wall and clamber onto its back. Pushing off I latch onto the beasts fur with all six of my claws, holding fast even as I'm rocked back and forth. I can see from here that the hind legs of the bear are getting a decent hold of the ground outside the pit, allowing the monster to pull itself out more effectively, it won't be long now and this guy will be free!

If possible I need to deal some damage before then!

I pour more and more of my mana into my mandibles, causing them to be crackling with intense power, I swear my face feels like it's on fire. I don't think this is particularly safe...

Taking care not to hit Tiny who continues to fling lightning punches into the bear's side I aim and quickly fire off some rapid acid shots!

POW! POW! POW!

How do you like that?!

...

To be honest this bear doesn't seem to mind all that much at all. The restrictive acid is doing its job, hardening and sticking to everything that it hit. I can see it sizzling and biting into the creatures hide on it's right side and front leg, but the bear doesn't seem to respond in any meaningful way.

I think he's too damn strong for the restriction to be effective and his hide is too thick for the acid to deal meaningful damage to him...

If this bit doesn't work then I hope I can grab Tiny in my mandibles and drag him into the tunnel where the bear can't follow because me might be snowed!

My last ditch effort might have to be the forceful mana shout but I'm not sure I can fight this creature head on and condense enough mana to do meaningful damage...

Whatever, just bite now and worry about the rest after!

Piercing chomp!

CRUNCH!

Snapping down so hard the muscles in my head positively creak my mandibles gouge into the bear meeting the incredible resistance that had frustrated me so far, and then they keep going, biting deep.

Finally!

[Piercing Chomp has reached level 4]

This time I get a reaction!

The bear bellows in outrage and violently twists itself left and right, redoubling its efforts to extract itself. Pushing hard with its front legs and lowering its back it finally manages to lever enough momentum to drag the top half of its body up, pressing its paws into the pitfall wall to prevent falling in again.

Time for one more piercing chomp!

CRUNCH!

Every part of my face is screaming at me and I'm not sure if it's because I've focused too much mana or that I'm on the verge of pulling a face muscle but once again my mandibles bite home, ripping through the bear and lacerating muscle and bone.

The bear roars furiously and slumps down slightly in response to my assault, giving Tiny just enough time to ready himself in the bottom of the pit. He charges himself up with electricity until it crackles over his arms like writhing electric eels before leaping and delivering a two handed punch directly to the belly of the bear!

I have two thoughts at this moment, first, good job Tiny that looks so awesome! Second, don't you dare steal the last hit from me you cheeky ape!!!

As the electrical attack zaps straight through the beast, stunning it and causing tremendous internal damage I pull everything I can from my core, desperate for one last strike!

The place where I've bitten the bear twice now is looking quite rough, the bears brown and green hide is torn and punctured, offering far less protection.

This will be the last strike, I really don't think my mandibles can take any more mana, I swear they are starting to give off smoke!

Crushing Bite!

Tearing straight through the monsters defence my mandibles exhibit unparalleled crushing force, tearing through bone and organs without mercy. I ram my face straight into the wound, giving myself a truly unpleasant eyeful but also allowing my mandibles to reach as deep into the bear's vitals as possible.

This had better work!

Finally my mandibles can take no more and the flow of mana from my core slows before stopping entirely. I've spent almost all of my mana on these few bite attacks!

But it worked.

[You have slain level 14 Ursus Terra Tyrannos]

[You have gained experience]

[You have reached the level 10]

[You have reached the level cap, evolution menu available]

...

Take that Tiny! The XP is MINE!

### [Chrysalis](#)

#### **Chapter 77: Crossroads**

I've finally done it.... FINALLY!

I played the patient game, minimised my risks, limited my exposure and it slowed me down for sure but I've finally reached this point. I've been so tempted! Gandalf knows how tempted I've been! I could have just dashed out of the tunnels and into the forest, battling monsters with reckless abandon!

It would have been glorious, a sea of battle and endless challenge. Only a true monster would be able to rise above that struggle to evolve, this the choice of the brave, the bold and the courageous!

Also the choice of the idiot!

I, Anthony, am not an idiot! The proof is in the pudding! I am alive and I have reached level ten without drawing unwanted attention to myself or putting the colony at risk! Who could possibly argue that I made the wrong decision?

Bwahahahaha!

Honestly I'm extremely delighted right now.

Tiny is giving me a look of betrayal, as if I'd stolen candy straight from his hands. Are you that addicted to kill stealing from me you cheeky monkey?!

Cheer up Tiny, we are going to have plenty of Biomass for the moment!

As pumped as I am to evolve we have to deal with everything in order, things must be in their proper place before evolution can occur. For now we have an enormous bear worth of Biomass that we need to deal with.

For starters, this bear is so damn big we can't just drag it down into the tunnel in one piece so the unpleasant task of butchery falls to me. Thankfully now that the monster is no longer alive its unnatural toughness is somewhat reduced, so despite being rough going I eventually manage to get all of the food down into the tunnel. Then I take a few more moments to reset the cover for the pitfall.

Down in the tunnels Tiny is already drooling all over himself, ready to start cramming his face. There is so much food down here it is taking up an inordinate amount of space. No way we finish all of this in one go.

May as well get to it!

Om nom nom.

[You have consumed a new source of Biomass: Ursus Terra Tyrannos; you are awarded one Biomass]

[Basic profile of the Ursus Terra Tyrannos unlocked]

[Ursus Terra Tyrannos: Earth Bear Tyrant, This monster is known for its extreme toughness and strength. Surprisingly fast, this beast is ferocious and easily aggravated. Known for its affinity to the earth and natural environs this monster has powerful regenerative abilities.]

It was damn tough alright. Not sure I was able to witness these regenerative abilities though? Perhaps Tiny zapping him with electricity was mucking up his internals?

At any rate, he's food now.

By the time Tiny and I are groaning and full I've managed to stow away seven points of Biomass from the bear, which takes me up to 15. Despite this, we've only eaten half of the damn thing!

Before mutating and having a nice nap I start transporting the remainder down the tunnel to the colony. On the third trip I'm met on the way by a fellow mature worker ant. There seems to be more of these guys around at the moment, perhaps the experience harvested by my earlier actions has been successful as I'd hoped?

When we pass each other we do something I've seen a few times but haven't experienced much myself. I have seen ants do this a lot in the wild and also in my own pet colony when I was a human. When two workers meet each other they frequently inspect each other using their antennae. Communicating in some strange way, checking the scent of the other ant to ensure they are of the same colony.

So as this worker comes towards me, it approaches me head on, stops, and then we engage in a short moment of slapping each other about the antennae.

To me it feels almost like an extended high five. I'm not precisely sure what information is communicated, but I get a vague feeling we are generally pleased to see each other and then off he goes, exploring down the tunnel towards the traps, probably following the scent of the Biomass I've been carrying.

I pass the same worker on the way back to the traps, apparently they had little trouble finding the rest of the food and has started transporting it back to the colony. I can probably leave the rest of that task to the workers who will no doubt show up after following the trail.

Looks like my trap network will officially become colony territory soon as I've no doubt these workers are going to start laying down food pheromone trails leading here. This could be a good thing in the end as I may not even need to be here for the traps to provide food for the colony. If I set and bait the traps and leave, there will probably be some workers hanging about looking for food due to the trails. When a monster falls into the pit, these workers will immediately attack and call for reinforcements, with which they should be able to take on most monsters without my help.

This could work out much better than I thought!

With the rest of the bear taken care of it's time to take care of the next order of business. I need to spend my Biomass!

I need twelve points in order to take my pheromones from their current +2 all the way to +5, which will leave me with three, enough to take my legs from +1 to +2 and have one point left in change.

It's a shame I wasn't able to fully upgrade everything prior to evolution, I don't think it would make much difference to anything but for the sake of completeness I'd been hoping for it.

Don't be too choosy Anthony! Be grateful for what you've got!

Ok, here we go!

[Do you want to mutate pheromones to +5 and legs to +2? This will cost 14 Biomass]

Yes!

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

There must be some juicy choices for this one!

The menu in my mind doesn't fail to impress, an almost extravagantly long list of possible upgrades to choose from each with its own pros and cons. Longer lasting pheromones, wider range pheromones, mind affecting pheromones?! Sensory manipulation pheromones?! Poisonous invasive pheromones!?

Holy crap! There are so many ridiculous options! Control your saliva Anthony! Preserve your dignity as the highest levelled worker in the colony!

I continue to scroll down and there are more and more juicy choices appearing every moment. Who would have thought the pheromone gland would have such a wide variety of directions to choose from? Offensive pheromones? Defensive pheromones? Manipulative pheromones? It's all here!

Then I see an option that I'm not sure I can turn down.

[Pheromone Language. Vastly increases the variety of pheromones produced and increases the sophistication of the pheromone release system, creating a more robust way of communicating using pheromones].

....

So... I could .... Talk?

This would actually give me the ability to talk? That is fantastic Gandalf! I've been living inside my own head this entire time, it would wonderful to be able to talk, even if I'm just talking to myself! I don't have vocal chords, the best I've managed so far is to snap my mandibles at things in an attempt to express mood.

I'm not exactly sure who I'd be able to talk to... I mean, the workers can sense pheromones but without this particular upgrade they wouldn't really be able to talk back. Would they be able to understand what I'm saying anyway?

Even if there is nobody in the colony I can speak to, so far this is the only method I've come across that gives me a chance to communicate at all. If I pass it up who knows if I'll be able to find another option? Perhaps at some point telepathy will come up as a brain upgrade or a type of magic I could learn, but how far in the future would that be, if it even happened?

No. I'm not willing to let this chance slide, I will seize it!



Select the Pheromone language upgrade!

HUGRACHAFLUZZZ!!

Time to writhe on the ground again!

...

After a few minutes, when the mutation is completed I stand up and inspect my status.

Name: Anthony

Level: 10 (core)

Might: 31

Toughness: 22

Cunning: 25

Will: 18

HP: 50/50

MP: 50/50

Skills: Excavation Level 4; Improved Acid Shot Level 5; Grip Level 4; Crushing Bite Level 7; Advanced Stealth Level 4; Piercing Chomp Level 4; Tunnel Map Level 1; Mana Shaping level 2; Forceful Mana Level 2; External Mana Manipulation Level 1; Mana Sensing Level 1; Core Mechanic Level 1; Exo-Skeleton Defence level 1

Mutations: Focused Eyes +5, Infrared Antennae +5, Restrictive Acid +5, Legs +2, Infused Mandibles +5, Diamond Carapace +5, Limb Regeneration Gland +5, Pheromone Language +5

Species: Mature Ant Worker (Formica)

Skill points: 1

Biomass: 1

So this is it. This is me before my second evolution!

### [Chrysalis](#)

#### **Chapter 78: The actual evolving situation**

Biomass has been spent, food has been dispensed, traps are taken care of and Tiny is happily sleeping off his food coma.

The time is ripe!

There is something so exciting and freeing about being able to become a completely new creature via evolution. A human changes over their lifetime also, going from baby to toddler to child to teen to adult but the process is so slow that the change doesn't always feel meaningful. Only in hindsight can you appreciate the different stages of your life.

I didn't even make it to adult in my life as a human! After more than ten years!

I've not even been in my new world of Pangera for a single year and I've already reached my second evolution. If I were to line it up with the stages of human life, then I've been a baby monster, currently I'm a toddler monster and I shall promote myself to child monster!

Considering how weak the ant species is individually, these analogies actually feel pretty accurate to me.

Ok, no more stalling Anthony, time to go for it!

[Would you like to use the Evolution menu?]

I would!

[Congratulations on reaching the maximum level for your current species. Evolution will allow you change your form and increase your stats as a monster.

Warning: evolving will make securing XP and Biomass more difficult as fewer rewards are given for preying on creatures less evolved than yourself.

A special core has been detected, by advancing your core beyond normal limits special options may be available.

Your evolution options are as follows:

- Juvenile Queen (formica)
- Soldier (formica)
- Monster Worker Ant
- (Special) Command ant (formica)
- (Special) Mind ant (formica)]

What the heck!? So many choices?! I only had two last time, and one of those involved changing my species! Ok.... Let's slow down and not prejudge. Take the options one by one and let Gandalf explain each one.

[Juvenile Queen (formica). A young queen of the formica species, this evolution includes wings and an egg laying organ allowing the new Queen to begin her own colony.]

Ok. Wings! Egg laying! All very Queen like stuff. Just one problem... one little query that I have... I'm a boy! Why the heck do I have a queen option?!

Wait.

I remember now... How could I be so stupid? I've known this for ages. All workers in a colony are female!

I'M A FEMALE ANT!

DAMMIT GANDALF!

Is it funny?! Huh?! Taking someone who was a boy and stuffing them into a female monster body?! Is this your hobby? You lousy bearded buffoon! May your robes be ever grey!

Grrrrr...

Look, when I calm down and think about it, being a male ant wouldn't be that good. Male ants basically mate with a Queen and then crawl away to die, acting like disposable fertilisation machines who are then frequently eaten by the colony. In this world I'm not even sure male ants exist at all. The queen seems to be doing just fine without mating, laying eggs at a steady rate. I'm not really sure monsters in this place procreate in a normal way at all.

So I guess gender isn't all that important to a monster. But still! I'm annoyed.

Not really sure I want to be a Queen anyway, to be honest. The wings sound awesome but I don't really want to be stuck inside the colony laying eggs all the time. I mean... I may be moving away from my humanity but laying eggs out of the business district just doesn't sit right with me.

Next option.

[Soldier (formica), a larger, more combat oriented worker, this evolution includes +10 might bonus to size].

Ok. So if I was to avoid the Queen route then becoming a larger, fighting oriented worker would be the choice. This selection seems to come without any free body upgrades but instead a significant boost to the might stat all of which is dumped into size. With all of the energy in my core I could probably take my might score up another ten or fifteen points easily, making me a seriously strong ant!

This seems interesting but let's move on.

[Monster worker ant, losing the species formica and becoming a generic Monster worker ant, this selection allows two free body part choices as compensation].

This selection is back. I would lose my species, but this time I would get two free choices of body part. Is this because my species would change but generally everything else would stay the same?

As nice as two free new body parts would be, I would be forced to abandon the colony and go back to leading the solitary monster life. I guess I would still have Tiny with me but I'm reluctant to take this choice. I like staying with the colony, it's almost like having a family, something I didn't get to experience as a human.

Just having a place with other creatures in it who won't attack me is a nice feeling.

I don't think I'll take this choice.

Now for the real juice. Let's see if the special evolutions meet my expectations!

[(Special) Command Ant (formica), this special evolution unlocks a new evolutionary chain a formica commander. With this evolution comes a +5 bonus to might and a choice of aura gland which would be tuned to affect nearby monsters of the same species].

Oooooohhh. Special indeed! This choice completely lives up to the hype! A new evolutionary path of commander ant eh? The might bonus is nice but I'd get a free aura effect to buff nearby workers?! That is super sweet!

So when I fight with the colony all of the workers would be stronger? Oh boy, that is tough to pass up!

One to go.

[(special) Mind Ant (formica), this special evolution unlocks a new evolutionary chain, a formica mind ant. This evolution grants a +5 bonus to cunning and a free magic affinity gland]

Ohhhhhhhhh baby.

This is also tasty! Cunning was freakin' expensive for me to upgrade last time so a free boost is pretty damn attractive. Not to mention the magic affinity gland, would that let me produce one kind of force naturally? Like how Tiny can make lightning or the Titan-Croc spits fire balls?

As expected of the special evolution choices. They really do live up to the billing. I definitely plan to choose one of the special options, they both give me options that are extremely tempting and hard to come by, with the added bonus of not removing my formica species tag, so I don't have to risk expulsion by the colony.

But which one to chooooooose?!

The command option is obviously more fighty, and the aura bonus is so tasty, the idea of being an incredible ant general, leading troops into battle is so appealing my heart is thumping just picturing that scene!

Whereas the mind ant, magical ant supreme, fast tracking my development as a magic monster user, giving me a free affinity to boot. I could be spitting fireballs or lightning, or goodness knows what?! I don't even have a clue what the extent of the possible choices could be.

Gah!

This is hard!

I mean, the commander choice obviously makes me much stronger when acting together with other ants, since the aura will be able to show its full effect only when I'm with the rest of the workforce, whereas the mind ant will be more suited to a lone ant style, although that isn't to say I wouldn't be effective when fighting together with the colony due to my increased magical prowess...

The Queen may even have a magic affinity organ for healing magic... making her the ideal support mage. I could do something similar possibly, or I could just max out on damage...

I just can't decide!

I need some time to think.

It would be so nice to have someone to consult on this...

I only just gained the ability to talk and I've yet to test it out. Maybe I'll go and try to chat with a few ants, see if the Queen is awake. I doubt they'll be able to understand me but I might get some inspiration during my trip.

After quickly checking on my traps and making sure Tiny is still sleeping soundly I make my way down the long tunnel towards the colony. Whilst I'm walking I try to get the hang of my new pheromone gland.

Using it before was extremely easy, my ant instincts were able to discern which scents could be released and there only about eight to choose from. Post upgrade I can tell that the number of scents has dramatically increased and the organ itself has improved the complexity at which it can release them, blending them to create an even wider variety of signals.

As part of the mutation process my innate understanding of the gland has improved but I still need a little practice properly controlling it. After all this time being unable to speak it feels really strange to be communicating, even if it is by a sophisticated scent language.

Let's try this...

"Hoi!"

Er...

"Happo!"

Nope.

"Hello!"

Ah ha!

A passing worker suddenly stops and gives me a few friendly taps with the antennae before moving on.

...

What the heck? Was that ant responding to my greeting?!

Just to check I wait for another worker to move past and I try again.

"Hello!"

Again, the worker stops, turns to face me and engages in what I'm increasingly feeling is the ant high five before moving on.

This is working! They can't really talk back but at least they are able to detect the friendly nature of my communication.

I could almost cry. It's so nice to speak!

[Chrysalis](#)

**Chapter 79: Chatterbox**

Now that I know I can talk to my colony members, even if they can't talk back, I don't hold back and start to throw words at every worker I meet on my way into the nest.

"Hey, how are yor?"

Still needs a bit of work on that one.

"Hoos that work goging for yar?"

So close!

"Blice to see you ablarn".

Nearly had it!

As I wander about cheerfully greeting the ants around me they typically respond in the same way, by turning and tapping me about the antennae before going back on their way.

I'm not really fussed by the lack of response to my blather, just talking and getting the hang of my new mutation is reward enough for me.

Checking in on the brood I can see the little grubs are looking a little larger and a little less sad than they were before, pleasingly plump and growing they'll become new workers soon enough.

After shouting "See you flater!" to the workers I make my way down to the Queens chamber. By this time I've gotten used to saying whatever is on my mind to every ant I see so when I walk in front of the Queen, who is standing still and accepting a grooming for her attendant workers I give a friendly wave of the antennae and say "Hey there! How's it hambing Queen?"

The enormous ant turns her head slowly and ponderously before looking down at me with her large, unblinking eyes.

"Hambing?" she said.

....

"Uhhhh".

.....

She can talk?

The Queen continues to look down at me quizzically as I stare dumbfounded.

"Hambing?" she asks again.

This sensation of talking and listening using scent is very different to what I'm used to. When the Queen speaks I'm finding my antennae are not only able to distinguish the words she is speaking but also the difference in tone and voice. Her voice sounds patient and warm.

I concentrate harder to try and not make a mistake in my words.

"I uh, misspoke, your, uh, Queen.... Ness".

"Ah" she said, before turning away and once again becoming still as the workers continue to groom her.

I'm still a bit stunned! So the Queen can use pheromone language too? Did she choose this as a mutation advancement or is it something that she gets for being a Queen? Does it really matter? I have someone to talk to!

After a moment I try to strike up the conversation again.

"Hey Queen, uh. How are you?"

This is apparently the best I can come up with.

Once more the Queen troubles herself to turn back and face me before replying.

"Well. Are you well?" she replies.

I'm almost giddy. A conversation! An actual conversation!

"Oh... uh, I'm good! I mean, well!"

"I am glad" she says, before beginning to turn away again.

"Could I get some advice?" I blurt out.

The Queen once again looks back to me, patiently waiting for my words. Actually talking to a giant monster ant is a little more difficult than I expected it to be, much more difficult than say, having a chat with your school friend, not that I did much of that...

It seems kind of obvious, but I need to keep in mind that the Queen isn't human and unlike me, she never was. I'm not exactly sure how her mind works, what it is that is important to her. She's probably not even that old, I mean, technically in this world I'm less than a year old! Not that it really matters to monsters I guess.

"I'm uh, getting ready to evolve! I just wondered if you, uh, had any advice on what I should choose?"

The Queen didn't respond for a long moment and I was starting to think I might need to repeat the question when eventually her antennae reached down and tapped mine before tapping me on the head.

"I sense a strong core in you" she said.

"Uh.... Yes?" I respond.

"You have fought well for our kind. Choose as you wish, and continue to use your strength on behalf of your family".

"But I'm not certain what evolution is best!"

I can sense a faint amusement in the words of the Queen as she responds to me.

"All paths lead to greater strength and greater strength will improve the lives of our people. To the colony, it matters not what you choose".

Having said that she decisively turns away, giving me one last pat on the head with her antennae. I think I've gotten all the help I'm likely to get from her majesty at this time.

Turning around I start to make my way back to my trap network.

Putting aside the buzz I'm getting from having my first conversation in months, I have to say that what the Queen had to say makes perfect sense from the colony perspective.

Every evolution makes the monster stronger, the colony itself doesn't give a rats ass which one you pick, as long as you use your new power to assist the growth of the colony.

So in the end, it just comes down to my personal preference.

Do I want to be a commander or do I want to be a magic ant.

A general or a wizard.

I mean, when I think about it like that.

It has to be wizard right? Like, this is magic we are talking about... MAGIC. I could lord over the battlefield like a friggin' god if I can throw fireballs and lightning bolts around! Even what little magic I've seen has been super powerful!

I want to be a magic user for sure!

Mind ant is the only way!

I rush back to the trap network and find everything much the same as I left it. Tiny still sleeping and the traps are prepared but without any prey for the moment.

Excellent.

Waste no more time on your doubt Anthony! Commence the evolution!

Select Mind Ant!

[Your monster core has been formed and enhanced, it will provide bonus energy to your evolution]

[Manual evolution is active]

As it did the first time my consciousness is pulled into the evolution space, with dizzying menus and options available to customise the process of my evolution.

The first that strikes me is that I have far more energy to spend this time around. My core only contained 10mp when I first evolved and that provided a significant boost to my stats. This time I have five times that amount, I can't wait to see what I can do with it.

The first order of business that I need to take care of is to select my magic affinity organ.

[Magic affinity organ - this body part will attach to the core and drain magic power from it, converting that magic power into a specific type of energy to be used by the owner. This shortcuts manual energy transformation and makes the selected type of magic much easier for a monster to use. When the organ is filled to capacity the drain on the core will cease].

Ok then. So basically the organ takes mp from core until it is full, converting it into the type of energy I select when I choose the organ itself...



Alright then, let's see the list!

...

Holy mother of Gandalf! Why is this list so long?!

All the usual elements are here: fire, water, lightning (clearly Tiny has this one), air, earth, poison, metal, wood, light, dark and more. Then there are some more far out ones: death, mental, space, entropy, time, healing, creation, illusion, chaos and on it goes!

There are so many!

What the hell am I supposed to choose, Gandalf?!

Okokokok. Seek calm, seek calm!

Imagine digging! Digging away at the soil one mandible load at a time, tunnelling into the earth for ages and ages...

Phew.

Think through the process logically. Firstly, we will put aside all of the natural elemental choices. Why? Because they are boring! I'm sure they'd be powerful and effective, but they sound so simple! Shoot fire or ice.... Its simplistic. Who is to say I won't be able to just learn that magic without the aid of an organ? I've seen humans casting fire spells and I'm fairly sure they aren't drawing on special body parts or monster cores to do so!

If they can cast that magic, then, as a former human, I can cast it as well!

It would be a waste to select something plain like that for my one choice organ!

Nonono. I'll have to choose something more wild, something more strange and difficult, something that would be much harder for me to learn on my own!

But which should I choose?

### [Chrysalis](#)

#### **Chapter 80: Birth of the Mage.... Ant.**

So which magical energy type to choose?

Death sounds awesome, an unstoppable tide of undead ants would be cool but my own family would need to be killed first! Plus there may be a chance I'll end up zombified like the death rabbit! No thanks!

Time? I mean, time would be amazing but how the heck would it work? Stopping time? Speeding up time? Travelling through time?!?! Maybe too complicated.

Entropy? Perhaps a bit too grim and macabre.

I want something I can use in a fight but also something that has some utility to it, something I can make use of outside of combat in a significant way.

I will always choose the all-around option!

No weak points is my motto!

Perhaps it is wasteful to think this way but I just don't like the idea of something that has only one purpose. I want options dammit!

Illusion? Too artsy. I was always terrible at mental imagery and drawing.

Space? Could be amazing but I'm not certain it'll be fighty enough.

Healing is tempting but won't help me out much when I'm on my own.

Chaos? Sounds a little.... Unpredictable?

Mental would almost certainly allow telepathy of some kind... I'm not quite as starved for conversation now that I have the pheromone language though... There is always a chance I'll be able to gain this ability another way without spending this precious selection on it. I'll pass on this for now.

Maybe.... Maybe this one?

Gravity.

I feel like it has potential!

What does Gandalf have to say about it?

[Gravitational energy allows for the creation and exertion of push and pull forces beyond natural limits].

Soooooo. What would happen if I used my forceful mana ball and made it out of gravitational energy? Would I be able to push monsters away even more powerfully?

Could I lift them into the air and then drop them?

Could I make myself float?

Could I crush my enemies into the ground!?

Could I even squash them in on themselves, squishing them into a tiny little ball?! Compacting the Biomass into a super dense bite sized snack!?

I like it! I like it a lot Gandalf!

I'll pick this one!

Ok with that selection out of the way I need to decide what to do with the remainder of my evolutionary energy.

I've got cash to spend and I'm gonna make use of it!

The first thing is my +5 bonus to cunning for choosing Mind Ant. With my cunning already so high the cost of five cunning is extreme, much higher than spending on might. Just by my feeling I estimate that +5 cunning would cost as much energy as +20 might.

After all, the might stat is effectively just adding more muscle, bone and sinew whereas making changes to cunning involves creating and connecting millions of neurons to form new and better brain matter.

I've decided to use my bonus and some of my reserve to do what I didn't dare consider in my first evolution. I shall create a second brain!

Normally, creating new brain matter would be a rather complicated matter I don't doubt, but thankfully it is relatively simple for me. The evolution menu assists and guides my thoughts as I try to shape what I want. A small, additional brain to help bare the mental load of shifting and shaping mana. Practicing my mana skills been so mentally demanding that the rate of progress is too slow. In addition, practicing these skills leaves me so tired that I can't reasonably be levelling these skills and doing something else at the same time. To raise my skills all the way I'd have to become a recluse in the colony, letting the rest of the workers feed me and never leaving, I'm not about to become a sponge!

Hopefully with this second brain I'll be able to reduce the strain and be able to practice my magic skills whilst also being out hunting and levelling. Maximum efficiency!

In the end I use a significant amount of my energy finalising my new brain matter, resulting in an overall gain of +7 to my cunning. There isn't any point investing in this brain if it isn't able to perform its job properly so I gave a significant amount of extra kick in there to make sure it can take the load I'm going to demand of it.

There really isn't enough energy left to consider going into the body part menus, idly I take a quick look at the aura organs and their cost in energy is simply staggering! For a moment my heart twinges with regret but I push it to one side. The organs are in the menu so there is still a chance I'll be able to purchase one someday in a future evolution down the road.

The focus for this evolution is building the magical foundation!

I briefly consider putting more energy towards cunning but eventually dismiss the thought. The cost is simply too high and there is lower hanging fruit to pick. I turn my attention instead to the Will stat. This one is also costly but I feel that boosting the strength of my thoughts and my mental defences will only serve me well in my pursuit of magical excellence.

After weighing the gains against the costs I spend a good chunk of energy on my Will, raising it by +4.

About thirty percent of my evolutionary energy is left to spend and I apportion it evenly to might and toughness.

To get more bang for my buck I reluctantly decide to emphasise size over density, going for a 3 to 1 ratio. This will make me significantly larger than before but gives a higher raw stat boost. For toughness I make the split roughly the same, increasing my external defence over my internal by a 3 to 1 ratio.

Anthony is tanking up!

I was already able to fight reasonably well against most creatures in the forest and hopefully with these upgrades I'll be physically capable of holding my own against most monsters before my magical abilities can level up and show their true strength.

After every last drop of evolutionary energy has been spent I take a step back and have a look at my stats.

Name: Anthony

Level: 1 (core)

Might: 41

Toughness: 29

Cunning: 32

Will: 22

HP: 50/50

MP: 50/50

Skills: Excavation Level 4; Improved Acid Shot Level 5; Grip Level 4; Crushing Bite Level 7; Advanced Stealth Level 4; Piercing Chomp Level 4; Tunnel Map Level 1; Mana Shaping level 2; Forceful Mana Level 2; External Mana Manipulation Level 1; Mana Sensing Level 1; Core Mechanic Level 1; Exo-Skeleton Defence level 1

Mutations: Focused Eyes +5, Infrared Antennae +5, Restrictive Acid +5, Legs +2, Infused Mandibles +5, Diamond Carapace +5, Limb Regeneration Gland +5, Pheromone Language +5, Gravity Magic Gland;

Species: Mind Ant (Formica)

Skill points: 1

Biomass: 1

Ok. This seems satisfactory to me. By focusing more on size I've been able to gain a solid ten points of might but I'll be increasing my size significantly as the trade-off. I'll probably need to focus on increasing my muscle density in a future evolution so that I can regain my balance between size and strength.

With my increased external toughness and my diamond carapace I'm more confident than ever before in my defence. Despite the relatively smaller stat changes my gains in cunning and will are the big ticket items in this evolution. The numbers may be small but I'm sure the results will be impressive.

Checking over my body parts I'm still annoyed that I haven't managed to get all of them to +5. The long neglected legs will be next, followed by my new Gravity gland! I can't wait to advance both of them. It'll be harder though, since after this evolution my ability to take in Biomass will be penalized yet again. Even a Titan-Croc will provide half the Biomass it did before, since I'm now actually further evolved than it is!

Bwahahahaha! Feels good!

Ok. Confirm the evolution!

Once again my mind starts to spiral away, like water down a drain when the plug is removed and before long, everything has sunk into black.