

Chrysalis 751

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 751: The Charge

It doesn't take long to organise my pets and let them know what we've been tasked with. What takes a little longer is explaining to them exactly what is going to happen as a result of the 'allies' that the Council has decided to dump on our laps. The heavily armoured soldier in front of me looks a little nervous, which is ridiculous considering she's a behemoth of an ant weighed down by hundreds of kilograms of metal.

"Are you going to make this painful for me, Leeroy?"

"No... Eldest. Just going to charge out and defeat... the enemy?"

"Why does that smell like a question!? What else were you hoping to defeat? You know what, don't answer that. I'll just make one thing perfectly clear, not a single one of you is going to die on this charge, alright? Not a one! In fact, I'll make it my personal mission that you all return with fully topped off health, not a single scratch on you."

She slumps a little, dejected.

"Alright, Eldest," she mutters, "have it your way."

"Why are you giving me this attitude, huh?!" I poke her with an antenna, "I'm talking about keeping you alive! Is there some reason you aren't happy about that, Leeroy? Anything you want to tell me? Hmm? You surely aren't going against the very first lesson I taught you, are you?! Because that might influence me to get you back into training with me for a little while. I might want to make sure you brush up on the basics..."

"No, Eldest! I treasure my life, and so do all my followers!"

"Wait," comes a scent from behind Leeroy, "we do?"

The council member studiously ignores her follower and stares at me, antennae twitching outside of her control. I sigh.

"Immortals... a fine joke. Alright, this is how we're going to do this. I'll go in front, you guys go behind. We mow them down and let Crinis and Tiny deal the bulk of the damage, we just need to use our mass to push them back and crush them against the next chokepoint. Clear? Any questions?"

I direct my question to the lines of armoured soldiers behind their leader and one enterprising individual raises an antenna.

"Yes, you at the front."

"Hi, Eldest... doesn't this plan seem a little safe?"

"You're at the very back of the formation now. I'll have shields and healing magic on you for the entirety of the mission. Anyone else?"

Predictably, none do. The ant in questions clanks her way dejectedly to the back of the line.

"Alright then, form up behind me, we'll push through when we get the signal."

[Tiny, you know what to do?]

He gives me an offended look.

[No, I don't need to ask Crinis, because she *listens*, and you have not answered my question.]

He grunts angrily.

[Good. I just have to check, alright?]

Touchy ape. He gets moody when we have a pre-fight briefing sometimes, too eager to get to the smashing. We file forward in two narrow columns as the sound of battle grows louder. Up ahead, the ants are defending the third chokepoint like a well-oiled machine, striking, dodging, moving and rotating like the gears in a clock. And who do I spy calling the shots out here, but Sloan herself.

"Ready to open up a gap?" I call to her, waving.

"Be ready for my mark!" she says, watching the battle unfold intently.

I do a final check over myself, making sure I have myself in top condition before doing the same for my pets, one by one. I keep a sharp eye on Leeroy as well, the closer we get to sallying out the more intense the energy I'm getting from her becomes. In fact, all of the immortals are starting to emit some eerie vibes. Beneath the line of their helmets, their compound eyes are filled with a strange light. It's almost as if they can only truly feel alive the closer they come to danger.

"Mark!" comes the call.

"WE SEEK!" comes an overpowering wave of pheromones from behind.

Holy smokes! I start dashing instantly, not because it's the plan, but because if I don't I'm worried I'm going to get run over by the morons behind me! I might be far larger than they are, but when put together they are packing a lot of weight.

[Let's go guys!]

"HUURRAAAAAA!" Tiny's reverberating roar of joy and rage shatters the air and pierces straight through the din of the fighting.

Sloan and her troops pull back from the opening and we lunge through. I go first and a veritable wall of enemies looms in front of me, ravenous and mad they claw at each other and anything else they can reach in their desperation. I've been slowly levelling my charge Skill and I utilise the information it gave me now, timing my run and bracing my body to absorb the impact as best as possible.

CRUNCH!

With a sickening noise I slam into the leading monster, my shoulder angled to drive straight into the creature, and I keep going, the weight of the Immortals behind me driving me forward.

CRUNCH! CRUNCH! CRUNCH! CRUNCH!

Head down, legs pumping, I push onward without stopping, running right over the top of the monsters as they fall before the combined might of our charge. Then Tiny is there, bounding forward and blasting all before him with concentrated lightning, roaring his challenge and defiance. Crinis rises from her place on my carapace, a nightmarish visage of three bottomless mouths set within an inky form of pure darkness. The two wreak havoc as the charge continues, driving forth all before it.

I can see why the Immortals and Leeroy get so hung up on these assaults. This is exhilarating stuff! Rushing forward into the enemy, running them down and motoring onward gives such a feeling of power, of strength! This must be why they got addicted to this sort of offensive. I did sort of say to Smithant that I'd get a set of armour when I evolved... I'm very, very reluctant to get anything that's going to cover up my magnificent carapace, but I could be tempted, if the right materials were found...

My legs do not tire, my muscles do not ache, thanks to the Vestibule, and I keep rushing forward, chomping with my mandibles and shoulder ramming every shadow beast and demon that dares to place itself in front of me. Gweheheheh! Nothing is going to stop us!

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 752: Something stopped us

Our charge continued unbroken until we reached the second defensive line, the monsters in our way were unable to stand before our might. Once we reached that point, I sent my three pets forward to defend the choke point as the Immortals and I collected ourselves. Unlike me, most of them were exhausted after the mad run and in need of a breather.

"Are you guys going to be alright for the second charge?" I ask Leeroy. "We can do it without you if necessary."

"We'll be fine!" she replied, her scent strong and confident despite her drooping antennae and shaking legs. "The Immortals will never give up a chance to fight!"

"Aren't you just anxious because they haven't been letting you fight for a while now?" I ask, sceptically. "Doesn't matter I suppose, you'll have some time to rest so recommend you all take a load off your legs and relax for a little while. We'll be heading out again in about half an hour."

Filled with relief at the chance to take a break, Leeroy and her followers collapse to the ground with a loud 'clank!' as their armour rattles against the hard stone. It's quite the amusing sight, especially when compared to how fired up they were before our charge started. A few minutes later, a detachment of defenders arrives on the scene, getting to work cleaning up and re-establishing their post here. Some things need repairs and a team of carvers jump to it, fixing damaged stone sections of the chokepoint and re-hardening the stone. When the soldiers move to relieve my pets of their job holding off the wave, I shake my head at them. Tiny and Crinis are still a little ways away from their evolution and this is another good opportunity for them. I'll have them make use of it to the fullest.

"You can take over from us once we push out for the first line," I tell the waiting general. "For now just make sure the tunnel is clear and check over the Immortals for injuries, as you get situated again. We'll be here for a half hour or so."

Not tired at all, I wander this way and that, checking in with everyone and making sure that every ant has the help that they need to perform their duties before heading over to the chokepoint and lending a

hand to my crew. It won't do to tire them out too much, considering we have another stretch of tunnel to push through. Once we're done here, we'll have to move to another checkpoint and do the same thing. This lower section of the territory suffered the most during my absence and I'm determined to push back the wave in one fell swoop to make up for it.

After ten minutes, I make my way over to Tiny and Crinis to help them out, using my elemental magic to lob a few cheap shots into the crowd. That sweet, sweet combat experience is nothing to be looked down on! A cheeky level here or there and who knows, I might manage to rank up my omni-elemental magic sometime in the next century.

By the time half an hour is done, the ants have finished repairing the walls that we feel comfortable turning the defence over to their hands whilst we prepare for the next surge. I head to Leeroy who's still collapsed on the ground and nudge her with an antenna.

"What's the story, Leeroy? Are you rested enough or do you want me to do this one without you?"

Immediately, her eyes flash with an intense light that took me aback as she and the rest of the Immortals slowly pushed themselves off the ground, overtaken by a sudden and unnatural vigour.

"We are ready for this assault and a thousand more! The search is never ending!"

"Okay, chill!"

Yeesh. Immortals or Zombies? These siblings of mine are creeping me out.

"Then you have a little time, we'll form up and get ready to run out. One way ticket right up to the first defensive line."

"Sounds good," the revived soldier replies.

A quick check on Tiny and Crinis to make sure they're still prepared to bring the firepower that we need and then we form up ready to go.

"WE SEEK!" roar the Immortals.

"Let's go!" I cry, setting my legs and then we're off!"

Through the choke point and into the howling madness of the wave once more we go, putting mandibles and carapace to the test as we smash our way through monster after monster, once more forming that unstoppable landslide of the Colony's wrath. Nothing can stop us! Nothing can stand before us!

Except that.

I was the first to sense it, being at the front as I am. My antennae tingle with a feeling of *otherness*, something I'd never felt before. Perhaps if I hadn't reforged those delicate sensors with the Twilight Filament, I may not have noticed at all until it was too late.

"Hit the brakes!" I scream back at Leeroy.

[STOP!] I simultaneously roar at my pets.

But even as I yell it, I know that the heavily armoured ants won't be able to stop fast enough. With the weight that they carry and the momentum they've built up, it will be difficult for them to stop at all. Realising this, I ram my claws into the ground, Gripping for all I'm worth as I swing my body around, placing myself as a physical barrier between the oncoming Immortals and whatever it is I sensed. I brace for a split second before Leeroy rams into my side, followed by the dozens of her sisters.

Impact after impact rocks my carapace and rattles my mandibles as I hold on for dear life. So severe are the shocks that even my diamond carapace starts to crack from the sheer force. Every hit pushes me a little bit closer to that unerring sizzle in the air that I felt, and my antennae start to burn, sending ripples of pain down their length as they dip into something they surely don't like. Finally the last of the Immortals is brought to a halt as they run into the back of what must look like a ten car pile-up, ants on top of ants with tons of twisted metal to boot.

"Eldest? What the heck was that?" Leeroy groans.

"Shut up, I sense something bad. You need to get your sisters together and get the heck out of here."

"What? Why?"

"This isn't something you can deal with. Leave, now."

Saying my piece I turn away from her and face toward the monster now lurking on the edge of the gloom. A vile, poisonous energy ripples in the air around it, chewing into everything it touches. This is an energy that I've never felt before, something that not even the demons possess.

"You must be a long way from home, beastie... and I'm guessing you didn't come for a vacation? May as well give you a warm welcome... after all, it's a long way from the fourth strata."

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 753: The stench of decay

The monster in question cannot detect my pheromones, at least I hope they can't, so I'm not entirely sure why I bothered to taunt it. Probably to hype myself up for the fight, because just looking at this thing is intimidating. All of my senses scream that something is wrong and the closer I get to it, the more my body protests. My antennae ripple with the sensation of pain, as though the air itself had become toxic. To my mana sense it appears as if the energy surrounding the creature were being... infected, for want of a better word... changing from the familiar shadow and death mana to become something completely different.

As the flow of energy eddies and swirls, that pulsing green and yellow disperses the further from the source it gets, but even small amounts seem to be having an effect. Everywhere it has touched, the corals and other small living things that live here in shadows have started to die, wilting as if they'd been sprayed with weedkiller. It's a shocking sight, because I don't believe I've come across any type of mana that would kill with merely its sheer *presence*. From what I can detect, the monster itself hasn't cast a spell of any kind, it's simply exuding this virulent mana in a steady flow, and the mana does the rest...

Just what sort of mana is it? Surely nothing as simple as poison?

The creature itself is the next thing that catches my eye as it prowls in the darkness just beyond the range my eyes can see well. Its face is definitely frog like, but the mouth is too wide, and its eyes are far

too large. Beyond that, I can't make much out other than its limbs are thin and wiry, almost weirdly when compared to the size of its face. It's big though, possibly close to my own length, if not close to my mass.

My first encounter with a monster from the legendary strata of infection. I sure as heck hope that I don't catch anything gross from it.

[Invidia, I want you on healing and backup. Keep a close eye on the mana around the monster. I have a real bad feeling about it.]

[I sssshallll.]

[Tiny and Crinis, I want you two to pull back a bit. This is a tougher fight than you're ready for and until I know more about these monsters I don't want to risk you.]

[But, Master-!]

[GRRRR.]

[Absolutely not! I'm far stronger than you are so I'm the one who will bear the risk. And if you think I'm going to let you run in and get yourself killed after I've put in so much effort to keeping you alive, Tiny, then you are completely mad! Now move back! Both of you!]

Unable to refuse my order, the two retreat a few metres and I put them out of my mind, focusing all of my attention on the beast in front of me. I take a few measured steps forward as my considerable brain power starts to tick into overdrive. What magic should I use to counter it? How will it attack? Being able to fight against so many new foes recently has been a real treat after the endless varieties of shadow beast I've dealt with over the previous weeks, and this one promises to be special. A creature from a whole new strata!

Come on... What are you going to show me?

The monster's lips draw back to reveal a horrifying smile that I can see clearly even through the shadows, given that its teeth literally shine in the dark, coated as they are with a thick, green slime. As I draw ever so slightly closer, the monster slows its own movement, watching my every move with two bulbous eyes. I hesitate. Should I try and communicate with it? Go all out on offense? Judging by the power of its core, this beastie is tier six for sure, there's no doubt that it would be intelligent enough to approach sentience.

Looking at the monster and the toxic atmosphere that surrounds it, I dismiss the idea of engaging in conversation. There's something about the way it's eyeing me that makes me think trying to talk to it wouldn't be wise...

If that's the case, if we're going to go for it, then I'm better served by going large early. The omni-elemental construct is prepared and I start pumping burning hot blue fire mana through it, weaving the resulting energy into a burning jet of flame that I hold at the ready. My feet continue to creep forward and gradually, piece by piece, the monster slowly draws nearer, the aura and stench of infection growing stronger all the while.

I draw my mandibles wide in a threatening fashion as we slowly start to circle around each other. The other monster is lithe and wiry, if it weren't for that head, I'd think it was well built for speed, but -

WHOOSH!

After leaning to one side and pausing for a brief moment, the creature suddenly blurs in my vision and vanishes. My senses scream in warning, my antennae burning with predictions of a dire future. My nerves fire and my large body darts to one side with deceptive speed, flashing out of the way of the slime coated jaws that snap shut in the space I had occupied only a moment before.

That was close! This guy isn't just fast, he's super fast! Reacting on instinct, I lunge forward, trying to catch the beast before it can recover. The muscles in my face release their tension and my mandibles slam forward as I activate my most potent bite attack.

DOOM CHOMP!

The jaws of black light manifest and chomp together before I even register the pain, but the moment I do, it's agonizing. I feel like my whole face is on fire! What the heck is going on?! My mandibles crash together and I find that the creature has almost managed to escape without harm, a jagged tear down the side of its body the only mark I put on it, but just being this close to it is causing me damage.

Burn it with fire!

A wave of blue flame erupts from between my mandibles. I unleash a raging gout of flame that wouldn't shame a dragon with its heat and size. Instantly, the frozen air of the shadow sea is filled with flames and everything before me begins to burn. Gweheheh. Crispy enough for you?

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 754: The first of its kind

Turns out that, whilst the fire was indeed crispy, the monster *did not* enjoy it. The only unfortunate thing was that it didn't not enjoy it sufficiently enough to immediately perish. Having missed its initial bite and then been bitten and burned, the toad creature snarls, its lips pulling back from those horrendous teeth and grinding out a sound like nails on a chalkboard combined with bones snapping. It's quite distressing.

I allow the flames to dissipate to get a better visual of my opponent and I find them lurking just out of the fire's range staring at me with baleful eyes. With this level of distance between us I feel confident taking a second to evaluate myself and I do so with one of my sub-brains. What I find is more than a little shocking. Despite not suffering an attack, despite only being close to the stupid toad for only a few moments, it's chewed through ten percent of my HP! How?!

[Invidia?! Can you check me for impurities in my mana?]

[Sssss. *It will be done.*]

The piercing green eye flashes with power as that immense brain goes to work and in only a few heartbeats the little demon has completed his work.

[*It hassss infected you. Your mana issss being tainted.*]

How in the hell?! Watching the frog carefully I use my sub-brain to turn my mana sense inwards, scouring through the mana channels of my own body and I'm shocked to find that Invidia is completely correct. It's small, but there are places where the creature's mana has somehow gotten into my system, and just as it's doing in the area around us, it is converting the mana it comes into contact with its own, spreading the damage further.

But that doesn't explain how it got in! Desperate to understand how I was harmed, I angle my body slightly so I can better see my own carapace and I'm shocked to see a few places where the glittering diamond has crumbled into a blackened mess. The spots are small, easy to go without noticing if I wasn't looking so carefully, but they are definitely there. It managed to break down my carapace so quickly? That's insane! I didn't even feel it? Except there was that moment of blinding pain when I drew close enough to bite it... that hadn't felt like it'd come from my back though, or anyplace in particular. It had felt like my entire body had been dipped in acid mixed with poison, with an added spoon of radioactive viruses and a sweaty sock.

Is it just an aura power?

The more I stare at the toad, the more I think I'm right. Somehow, the mana around its body is corrosive, infectious and replicates itself, and I think it can control that mana at will, as if it were an aura generated by a gland. It's the only thing that makes sense...

My musings are rudely interrupted as the frog decides it has had enough of sitting back on its legs and launches into action. With two leaps with its withered, twisted limbs it rockets around the tunnel, opening its mouth wide to deliver a blast of pure toxic mana in my direction.

Not good!

Nerves afire with panic I get the heck out of the way as that concentrated ball of pain splashes onto the rock where I'd been standing, dissolving it into a hissing mess in an instant. Holy Moly! That is intense! Keen not to get hit again I continue to move in rapid bursts, relying on my nerves and foresight to track the frog as it throws its body around the tunnel at Vibrant-pleasing speeds, raining hell on me from above, to the side and from any other angle it can find.

Dammit! This is making it hard to find a window to retaliate! If I want to get my mandibles on this punk, then I need to close the distance, which is hard when it's so much faster than me... Even though getting closer to it is a guaranteed way to suffer from that horrendous aura effect, but it's better than trying to hit this thing with spells from range as it zips all over the place, bombarding me with this sludge mana!

DASH!

Firing my legs in sequential bursts to stack up multiple dashes at once, I rocket forward, zooming in a straight line toward the point I predict the frog will have to land next. As I'd hoped, it doesn't seem capable of changing its direction in mid-air and is forced to complete its jump, which will place it right in range of my jaws. As I rush forward, another ball of sludge flies over my back to impact on the floor behind me. Mandibles wide open and locked in place, I close the distance between us in an instant.

The moment I draw close enough, I feel that burning pain return, except this time, I somewhat know what to expect. When I'm paying attention, I can feel it go to work, eating into my antennae, my

carapace, my eyes and my legs, everything that's exposed to it. I certainly don't want to put up with it for long!

DOOM CHOMP COMBO!

Using my new rapid-fire combo skill, my mandibles enjoy a massive increase in speed at a vast increase in stamina cost. In less than a second, I launch three rapid doom chomps, my entire body straining with the sheer amount of energy it takes out of me, but it's worth it. Put in a poor position to dodge, my toad nemesis is forced to try and evade my bites as best it can, but is not as successful as before. It manages to escape, but not unscathed, one of its legs is only a shadow of its former self.

How do you like that action, frog? Not going to be able to leap about quite as freely now, are ya?! Although, getting that close to the damn thing has eaten into my HP again.

[Can I get a heal, Invidia?]

I trigger the healing gland within me as well, unwilling to take any chances as I track the toad's movement. Despite the loss of the limb, the monster doesn't look too worried, still glaring down at me with those bulging, oversized eyeballs. They really are creepy now that I get a good loo -

Oh, snap!

As it retreats, the frog unleashes a wide spray of the corrosive mana from its mouth, more of a straight up wall of spew than a ball of the stuff. To escape this curtain of poison, I'm forced to leap backwards, which is when I realise I've fallen into the horrible creature's trap! What lies on the ground behind me isn't a safe zone of clean rock, as I'd thought, but a grotesque sea of green bile. All those shots I'd thought I'd dodged, the damn stuff doesn't go away, it just keeps spreading! Half the tunnel floor is covered in it now!

As I sail down to my inevitably painful landing, I can't help but flex my claws a little. This is probably going to sting...

Chrysalis

Chapter 755: Gravity has a mind of its own

... or at least it *would* be painful if I was going to end up landing in it.

[Invidia!]

Using his prodigious mind powers, the demon condenses a shield out of pure mana and air, snapping it together before I reach the ground. Placed horizontally, the barrier acts as a stable landing platform for my large frame and I grip the edges as I land heavily on it, ensuring I don't slide off.

How about that, frog-face!? Didn't expect me to have *this* sort of trick up my sleeve, did ya?! As Invidia has improved and ranked up his barrier magic, even something like this has become possible for him, although it drains quite a lot of mana and is more than a little taxing on him. To hold up my kind of weight in the air with nothing but air is... a challenge, even for the big brained demon.

Is my spell ready yet? Not quite. Despite their improvement, creating something like this is difficult for the sub-brains. As I carefully scan for my opponent, I lend the potent force of my main mind to the task. Drawing out mana and feeding it to the concerted efforts of my three weaker minds.

Ah, there you are, you disgusting punk. Clinging to the roof and looking at my position, standing on a shimmering plane of air, the beast has a somewhat quizzical expression on its face, as if confused that I haven't fallen into its pit of bile as it had expected me to. Alas not, mister frog, although the strategy was clear evidence of intelligence on the part of the monster. Once again, I consider attempting to make mental contact with this creature but dismiss the idea. For all I know, its thoughts are just as toxic as the rest of it and would taint my mana over the connection, I can't risk it.

[Masssster issss heavy.]

Oh, right.

[Sorry, Invidia. I'll move, just give me a second whilst I look for... somewhere... to.. stand?]

As I look around, I see that the horrific bile has continued to multiply and spread, consuming the shadow mana in the area and extending its tendrils into the air, flowing over the stone and running in little waterfalls into new crevices. Which conveniently has left me with very few places to stand. I flex my legs and launch myself toward the wall to my right, my claws digging deep into the stone to find purchase as I hang sideways.

It isn't comfortable. I'm not nearly as mobile as I used to be on surfaces like this due to my increase in weight without a corresponding increase to my Grip, but it'll have to do for now.

[Invidia and Crinis, I need you two to try and do something about this mana! Break it down, redirect the goop into a pit or something, I don't care what you do, but you need to do it fast!]

Spell ready yet? Still no! Damn, the sub-brains still aren't cut out for this yet? I thought for sure...

Whoa!

My antennae flare with warning as the toad once again launches its ball of hateful spew-mana in my direction and this time, dodging is more than a little difficult. Going to have to go for it! Dash! My legs fire one after the other as I try to maintain my grip on the wall but still move at speed and I find it much harder than I thought. I'm not going to make it! Thinking quickly, I split my legs wide and slam my claws into the stone, desperately trying to hold on as the horrific stuff sears my back, a portion splattering onto my carapace and burning with a harsh flare of pain. And not just burning, I can already feel the infection spreading as the green energy seeps through the wound, trickling into my body and trying to destroy my own mana.

Gah! Not good! My legs are shaking!

Spread wide from the body is not the natural state for ant legs and it's more than a little difficult to hold myself up. I need more power! For the first time, I fire up the new Vestibule, desperate for the strength boost that it will provide. I feel it almost instantly. The ever present Will that flows through the Vestibule and into the Nave changes direction and ... form. Instead of nourishing my body as a whole, a huge chunk flows directly into my muscles and tendons, infusing them with newfound power.

Holy Moly! My legs steady in a moment and I reposition myself, skittering about on the wall like a hatchling, my legs flickering and my claws gripping with a strength they have never before possessed. Wow! The effect is way more pronounced than I expected. In terms of raw stats, it feels like having an extra fifty points of Might tacked on for free! Maybe more!

How's that spell? Close! Super close! I think I might need to go for it.

The toad watches me with bulging eyes as I zip around on the walls with newfound speed, clinging to its own perch on the ceiling. With its long, razor thin limbs, I doubt the creature weighs much, it can probably hold itself up there indefinitely if it chooses to. I stay on the move and eye my opponent carefully, the next opening will be my chance to go for the kill and I refuse to miss it. This monster has been a royal pain in the business district to fight and I won't let it get away.

As I watch, I can almost see the thoughts flickering through the creature's head, until those two eyes gleam with sudden certainty. Is it coming? What's going to be next. My shock is almost total when the frog instead turns around and attempts to flee.

YOU WHAT?!

Monsters don't run during a wave, dammit! Get back here! It's fast, much faster than I am, but I'm fortunate in that this is a one way tunnel and it only has one direction to go. Let's go Anthony! DASH! Three pairs of legs infused with more strength than ever before flex then launch, propelling me forward like a rocket. At the same time I reach within and take hold of the mana that my sub-brains have been busy shaping for me during this high-octane fight and fling it forward.

The gravity bomb howls into existence as it always does, spinning forward as it consumes all in its path. Even the frog reacts to that terrible sound as the very air around it starts to get pulled backwards by the approaching orb. It speeds its flight, but I've launched the spell ahead of it, there simply isn't anywhere for it to go.

Suddenly no longer interested in running forward, I put on the brakes and screech to a halt, dropping onto a section of clear floor and holding on for dear life as my deadliest spell blossoms into life right in front of the monster's face.

[You have slain level 91 Infectio Venandi.]

[You have gained experience.]

[You have reached level 4.]

[You have reached level 5.]

Goodbye, frog-monster. You were disgusting and I will not miss you.

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 756: Clean Up

The gravity bomb finally fades away, leaving behind a compressed ball of ex-frog, stone and various other detritus, I pick myself up and let my strength boost fade away. The energy of the Vestibule and Nave once more returns to its normal cycle, nourishing my body and washing away injury and fatigue. Although it can't seem to do anything about that damned toxic mana eating away at me! Cursing irritably, I direct my exhausted sub-minds to get cracking breaking the stuff down and turn my attention to the rest of my body.

The sludge on my back did quite a number, eating into the carapace and multiplying itself along the way. I whip up a little water and try to hose it off my back with some small success. I think the only way to be

truly rid of the stuff is to break down the mana itself. What a pain in the backside! Literally! Other than that, I'm in pretty good shape, my health ticking back up toward full as the regeneration gland does its work.

Still, that fight was way more trouble than I expected from a single monster, even if it was from the fourth strata. Considering it was wild and more likely than not wasn't raised with perfect evolutions all the way through to tier six, I should have a significant advantage in overall evolutionary energy, but some of the things it was capable of... dammit. Is this the tyranny of the deeper layers?! They get *this* level of crazy advantages?!

It's a real shame I won't get a chance to eat the damn thing. I wander over to examine the remains, giving the unbelievably dense sphere a quick poke with one leg but swiftly give up. This thing is 95% rock, it'll be almost impossible to extract any Biomass from it, and the core is nowhere to be seen, possibly smashed to pieces by the spell itself. Dammit! This is why I didn't want to use the gravity bomb if I didn't have to!

I'm impressed at how well the sub-brains were able to put one together without the main mind kicking in to help. Since they can handle the assembly on their own, that means being able to fight whilst putting the gravity bomb together is a possibility at last! Muahahahaha! There will be no escape from my clutches! With my deadliest spell suddenly far easier to produce in the middle of a conflict, my offensive power has skyrocketed!

Overall, I'm satisfied with how things went, the only issue is...

Turning around I'm confronted with the oozing pit of slime in front of me which Invidia and Crinis are still working hard to try and break down. With a sigh, I head over and start chipping in, pitting my mind against the dreadful sludge and trying to rip apart the truly bizarre mana it's made of. This stuff is the real puzzle if you ask me. I have no idea what kind of mana it is, but the stuff is horrendous to deal with. It does damage, invades monsters' own mana-streams, persists in the environment, eats away at stuff like acid and replicates itself like a virus, feeding on whatever mana it touches!

This stuff is exactly as deadly as I wanted my acid to be, dammit!

Although the part where it spreads uncontrollably all over the place is a bit of a pain to clean up, I have to admit. It's massively draining to exert your mind breaking down mana, especially on a scale like this. After the first ten minutes, I've already devolved into something of a fugue state, despite the fact my energy is always topped up. It's just boring and taxing work. I can't imagine how Crinis is feeling right about now. When the greenery first starts to pop up in the tunnel, I don't even notice. It's only after a flower literally bonks me in the nose do I notice something is happening and look up to find the infected areas are now covered in a wall of greenery that reminds me of one specific being.

What in the heck is *she* doing growing in here?! This is the Colony's territory! I eye one particularly lush looking shrub with great suspicion and it has the gall to wiggle innocently in front of me. How dare you, shrub! My mandibles flex dangerously, but before I can do anything, the rest of the ants are there, moving forward to complete the assault and retake the outer defences now that the threat posed by the monster has been removed.

"Eldest? What exactly has happened out here?" Sloan asks, confused.

Still giving the shrub the stink eye I quickly explain what we fought and the mess it left behind, followed by the sudden appearance of the Bruan'chii's mother in leaf form.

"Do you think she's perhaps here to consume the mana?" Sloan ponders.

"You're suggesting that a tree is actually seeking out the stuff and *wants* to consume it?" I say, filled with doubt.

Still, I activate my mana sense and try to get a feeling for what is going on, now that my line of sight is blocked by a carpet of flourishing plants.

"Holy mackerel, I think you're right..."

Looking closely, it appears as if the offending mana is being drawn up into the plants which then trap the stuff somehow. I can feel little reservoirs being built up within each bush, flower and bud, pooling even as something starts to go to work on that energy, nibbling at its edges.

"I'm more worried about a monster from two strata down making it all the way here," Sloan says, her antennae drooping. "Monsters like that are too strong for us to deal with..."

"We'll need to work on strategies," I say, "but I don't think it's impossible. The unknown is always harder to fight than the known. Besides, this was always going to happen. The mana levels rising mean that monsters who need more mana to sustain themselves can start to climb strata. It's not odd that we would see one. I'm honestly surprised that there hasn't been a tier seven invader yet."

"Tier *seven*!?" Sloan goggles at me.

"Sure. I think the mana is high enough to sustain one here, so we shouldn't be shocked if one turns up. The idea of the mana concentration rising so a strata can support higher tier monsters than normal is the scariest thing about a wave, Sloan. Remember?"

"But how would we deal with something like that? We don't have a pool of tier six warriors we can combine to fight it..." the general mutters.

I jerk an antennae back toward Crinis and Tiny.

"What do you think I've been trying to do out here?"

"Right! You should get back to it immediately then!"

"I will, but first I want to drop by the Bruan'chii and ask a few questions. Catch you later Sloan."

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 757: Tree talk

[HMMMMMMMM] the big tree blinks at me slowly a few times, as if surprised that I still exist rather than focusing on the question that I asked it.

I wait patiently whilst he inspects me but my patience is quickly running by the time he finally gets around to talking again.

[You look different,] he observes.

[Obviously, I've evolved!] I explode at him. [Can you explain to me why your plant-based parent is sprouting willy-nilly and soaking up gross mana around the place?! Do I have to ask every question three times or something?!]

He blinks.

[No.] He says finally.

I take a breath.

[So why aren't you answering my question then?] I grate out.

He looks at me with an almost palpable sense of pity.

[Because mother finds it amusing and so won't let me answer.]

The leaves and flowers that sprout from every surface around us seem to wriggle with amused joy and I slump where I stand.

[This might not be diplomatic of me, Mr Grove Keeper, but your mother is a massive pain in the thorax. Is she always like this?]

The tree nods in understanding.

[She is always like this, and we know. I ask that you be patient with her. She hasn't had the easiest life on this planet.]

The leaves rustle angrily and the Grove Keeper holds up his hands.

[I will say no more, but I think I might be able to answer your question now?]

The bushes sullenly return to stillness and the giant tree dips his head in appreciation.

[Hmmmmmm. To answer your question in full, I will need to explain a little about mother, which may be why she is reluctant that I share, but I do not see the harm in a little truth. It is an extension of trust between us.]

[An olive branch? I can get behind that.]

The tree-man smiles wide, the bark on his face creaking.

[An olive branch? Yes. I like that.] He ponders the metaphor with a pleased hum that reverberates in his chests and sets all the plants to swaying before he continues. [The Mother tree is very sensitive to mana, her roots can sniff out changes from quite a long range, and her roots spread wide. When you stumbled into a tertiary root in this area, she began to expand her network in this area, this enabled her to detect the mana that you spoke of.]

[Wait, how much of the planet does your mother have roots through? And that massive thing I ran into was a *tertiary*? So it branched from a secondary that branched from the primary? How big is the primary?!]

The Grove Keeper chuckles.

[The primary tap-root of the Mother Tree is... vast. I will not bother attempting to describe it to you. As for your other question, I will not reveal much other than to say that it is likely less than you think. Our Mother is not a normal tree, but rather a monstrous tree, thus she does not follow the same set of rules you might think she does. To grow her network here, she needed to sacrifice root systems in other places.]

The bushes shiver in an accusatory fashion and the Grove Keeper once again holds up his hands in a placating gesture.

[An olive branch,] he says to both me and her.

The plants settle again but I can tell they aren't happy. Can a shrub glare?

[Okay. So what is it about this particular brand of mana, I don't even know what kind it is, that your mother finds so attractive that she would sprout up in our territory like that?]

[This... Hmmmmmm. Again, I do not speak overmuch. Suffice to say, Mother is an expert when it comes to containing and eradicating this particular form of mana.]

The branches around us creak.

[And she finds it delicious,] the Grove Keeper adds.

I raise an antenna.

[Delicious?]

[Yes,] he nods.

[I'm guessing the Mother Tree doesn't need water to survive, right? She 'drinks' mana?]

[This is true.]

[Alright then, I think I get it.] I take a look at the Grove around us, just as lush and vibrant as what I saw near the Colony during the siege, if not more so. What I don't see is nearly as many Bruan'chii. There are a few here and there, tending to the plants, engaged in what appear to be lively conversations with each other, but I expected to see many more. [Where are all your people, Grove Keeper? Has something happened?]

I can't imagine they were assaulted by the wave, it barely seems to affect them at all here. Their Grove falls outside the Colony's territory, but only just. We are more than likely taking the majority of the heat from the wave for them, but standing here, it feels like the madness in the tunnels is a mile away.

[Most have returned to the Mother to rest during this time of upheaval. When things quiet down again, they may return, or perhaps the Mother Tree will need them elsewhere,] he shrugs, [they will not mind regardless.]

Uh, what? They 'returned to the mother'. What the heck does that mean? Are they dead?!

[When you say, they returned...] I open cautiously, [are they... still alive?]

The leafy face looks at me curiously.

[Of course they are still alive.]

Phew!

[Just checking! I don't really know how... all that works.]

He just smiles.

[It is normal for there to be problems communicating between our peoples. There will be many misunderstandings, I'm sure. In time, we will know each other better.]

[Me too. Thanks for satisfying my curiosity and answering my questions. I'll be sure to come back and check in when the wave is done, just to chat and see how things are going.]

[You will be most welcome,] the keeper waves farewell and we turn to exit the grove.

I'm kind of surprised that I got as much information as I did, especially considering how irritating that damn tree is. I do kind of wonder about her situation and how willing she is to reach out to allies. To do the things she does, she must be what, tier nine or above? At that level of power, she still needs help? What the heck!? What exactly is threatening her? I'm also rather curious as to where her main body is. I wonder what strata she chooses to make her home?

The moment we leave the grove, it's like a light has been turned off. The environment changes in an instant from peaceful garden to shadow warzone. It's so abrupt that I'm certain there must be some sort of magical effect at work. My pets and I don't run into anything too challenging and are able to fight our way back inside the Colony's borders without much issue. With that mystery sorted, it's time to get back to charging forth and smashing the wave back to the outer defensive line.

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 758: Holding the line

It takes a day of near constant fighting to help the Colony shove back the wave to the outer defensive walls and once again the endless defence against the monsters continues. It's all worth it though. Every hour, the family is harvesting ridiculous amounts of Biomass and cores from the farm zones, and our savage, one sided tactics are ensuring that the frontline soldiers, generals, scouts and mages are getting a constant flow of experience.

The number of tier four ants is steadily increasing, with some rare individuals tipping over into tier five. These ants are the OG's, possibly born to the Queen before I was. If it weren't for a strange quirk making me the first of the Formica Sapiens, these battle hardened siblings would be receiving the sort of respect that I get. And they'd be much more deserving in my opinion! The 'Eldest' salutes you, brave ants! With her constant flurry of motion, Vibrant is rushing upwards in levels at a prodigious rate. I ran into her not long ago and she was almost the same level as Tiny, which was rather shocking. Despite lacking the ape's tremendous power, her raw speed and ability to go for days without sleeping is helping her mow through the enemy at incredible speeds.

I might have to arrange more rest for her... if she manages to reach tier six before my pets, it won't look too good...

After that point, I drive my pets even harder! More fighting! Less resting! We plough through endless hordes of shadow monsters, grind tier four and five demons into dust, and fortunately only run into one more monster from any deeper than that. I'm forced to step in and gravity bomb the creature into the next universe before it can spread its poisonous influence too far and we retreat back behind the lines for a quick regroup.

We push like this for a few more days and finally comes the time that I've been anticipating for so long!

Crinis is the first to reach the milestone, much to Tiny's chagrin, her ability to pulp weaker monsters like a blender is just too much for the big guy to keep up with, even if he scores more experience from higher tier monsters due to his incredible stopping power. Crinis is beyond excited to finally reach the milestone and isn't shy letting me know it.

[I finally caught up to you, Master!] she exclaims, leaping through the air to blob onto my carapace, giving me the quite comfortable, but surely horrendous looking 'thousand tentacle hug'.

[Well done, Crinis!] I praise her without holding back. [You've worked hard! I can't wait to see what your tier six form is going to look like!]

She preens as I pat her head with an antenna, bringing a pair of tentacles up to her blobby 'face'.

[This means I won't be holding you back anymore, right Master? You'll be able to start collecting experience again and push for tier seven!]

Tier seven?! I just evolved to tier six! Don't rush the process! I need like, three hundred levels before I can evolve again! But she is correct that once the two of them have evolved I'll be able to start prioritising my own experience and growth again. Not to mention we'll finally be able to remove the seal on Invidia. The poor demon has been basically forbidden from gaining experience from the moment I reconstituted him, just so that everyone could catch up. After this, he can finally start accruing experience for himself again as the long road to his next evolution starts.

[Yes, yes] I say to Crinis, [I'll start taking more experience again. For now, you need to act as Tiny's support so that he can reach level 80 as fast as possible.]

[I will!] she says, wiggling happily.

When we return to fighting, Tiny goes at it with a vengeance, his armour taking a beating as he throws his considerable weight around, making a mess of everything he can get his fists on. It's quite the impressive display and despite the fact he routinely exhausts himself, his levelling speed picks up significantly and in less than a day, he too has reached the milestone.

[There you go, Tiny!] I cheer for him. [You've finally made it! This is your chance to get even more massive!]

The big ape flexes his trunk-like arms and beats his fists onto the chest plate of his armour, grinning all the while.

[But first I'm going to have to chip away at your bulk in order to make you less stupid.]

The giant bat-faced ape loses his grin as he curls his arms protectively around himself, as if trying to protect his beefy arms from my depredations.

[Don't sook about it, you'll get back everything you lose and more when you evolve. Sheesh!]

With our goal achieved, the victorious party makes its way back into the territory of the Colony and then all the way into the nest. After a bit of fussing from the Council, at first wondering why we weren't out fighting, then wondering why we weren't hurrying to evolve, we finally manage to make it into the same chamber I evolved in, where we can finish feeding the last of the required resources into the two pets. Rare evolutions for both of them this time around. I have to say, I'm almost as excited for them to evolve as I was for myself. It's a really good feeling looking at the monsters I've raised grow alongside me. Tiny was my first pet, I can still remember when he was just a little baby ape riding around on my back, getting into trouble. Crinis came much later, but she has quickly become an important member of the group, and her adorable antics are always good fun, even if her actual form is nightmare inducing.

[I'm really proud of you two,] I say to them, feeling a touch emotional, [we've come a long way together and getting to this point has been difficult. It's going to be so nice to be able to run around the Dungeon together at the same tier again, and I won't have to worry about it as much.]

Surprising me, Tiny walks over and wraps his furry arms around me in a big hug, prompting Crinis to extend her tentacles and do the same. It's very nice, but then I spot Invidia, floating by himself off to one side, watching us with his green eye.

[Come on, greedy-boy,] I tell him, waving him over with an antenna, [get in here.]

He hesitates for a moment before fluttering over and before he knows it, he gets snatched out of the air by Tiny and brought into the group hug.

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 759: Do the evolution!

The other predominant theory is that the demons' very nature, their demonic disposition, if you will, is what causes them to embrace conflict. It's true that the demons are generally untrusting, aggressive, greedy, short tempered, perpetually unsatisfied, possess an inflated opinion of themselves or all of the above, but the question I always come back to is: why?

It's not enough for a scholar to say 'they're born that way' and have done with it. When we observe creatures of nature and the traits they are born with it is possible with study and reason to determine the purpose of those traits. Why do some sorts of insects cooperate? It increases their chances of survival! Why do wolves operate in packs? Why do geese flock together? Why do lions move in prides? Why do bears hibernate in the winter? We can make educated guesses as to the purpose of all of these things. So, in my opinion, it stands to reason that we can do the same for demons.

When viewed in this way, the answer becomes apparent rather quickly, though I have failed to convince many of my contemporaries of the veracity of this hypothesis. Demon society is embroiled in a constant state of conflict, at almost every conceivable level, because it produces stronger demons that way.

There is no such thing as resting on your laurels, for a demon. No such thing as a happy retirement. If one of their kind manages to rise to the top, they need to continue to rise, lest they be overtaken and cast down by others more worthy. It's a brutal, single-minded approach to community, but one that suits them rather well. Though many have tried, there are none who have managed to subdue the monsters

native to the third strata for long. They can be reasoned with, to an extent. Bargained with, to a point. But they are so, so difficult to conquer.

- *Excerpt from 'The Demon Below' by Axelgesis*

Warm and fuzzies out of the way, it's time for the big moment! We max out their cores, but before anything else can happen, I need to make a few adjustments to Tiny's core.

[Get over here, dammit!] I yell at the ape as he attempts to run away. [It's not going to hurt! All I'm going to do is transfer some stats from might to cunning.]

He flinches as if I just told him I'm going to shift his bones around.

[Tiny...] I warn him. [Get over here right now or I swear I'll switch half your muscle mass into neurons. Maybe then you'll be smart enough to stack one block on top of another.]

He gives me a wounded look as if to say 'that was a little excessive. I'll have you know that I put *two* blocks on top of another, thank you very much!'

[Alright, I'm sorry. Okay? Just come over, I'll make you smart enough to use the manual evolution and that's it.]

Reluctance still evident in every part of his body, Tiny makes his way over, running his hands along his biceps and bulging shoulder muscles with a mournful look on his face. I do my best to ignore his pleading expression as I bring my antennae forward and activate core manipulation.

With the sheer mental power I bring to the table now, it's way easier than it ever was before to adjust cores and I get to work making the necessary changes. In order to keep things in balance, I do my best to ensure the loss of Might is generally applied across his whole body and not concentrated on any particular place. That way he won't become ungainly in some way that might negatively affect his evolution. When the job is done, he's become noticeably less bulky in places, but now has enough cunning to be somewhat less dense. Speaking of which.

[Just exactly how thick was your skull man?!] I demand. [There wasn't enough room up there for additional mass, half of it's sitting in your neck!]

It's true, his skull was remarkably thick, which might explain how he's managed to avoid severe brain injury from all the beatings he's taken over the weeks and months. I knew he was thick, but didn't realise it had quite gotten to this level. After making this change, it's off to see Granin for a final appointment.

[Finally got there did you?] Torrina welcomes us with a smile as we park ourselves outside the Golgari offices. No chance we all fit in there... [I'll get Granin for you.]

A few moments later and the surly old rock trundles out to greet us.

[Now it's your turn eh?] he turns to Tiny and Crinis with a broad grin. [Tier six! The big leagues! Jeez, I can't remember the last time I heard about a shaper walking about with three tier six pets. That's a literal fortune in cores being invested right there.]

[Rare cores this time around,] I boast, [only the best!]

Corun rolls his eyes.

[Obviously rare cores. You think they deserve worse than you got?]

[No!] I protest. [I'd give them better if I could!]

[Oh, Master,] Crinis wiggles about in her spherical form on my back.

Granin just grunts.

[All right then, I'll talk to these two one at a time and give them a few guidelines and try to set some expectations so they know what they're going into. Tiny should get something along the same lines you did in terms of reset, although the weird shadow mana infusion he got does complicate things a little. Crinis on the other hand... it's a little more up in the air. Do you want to sit in on the conversations?] he asks me.

[Absolutely,] I say. [They're my friends and I want to help as much as I can.]

The old golgari pauses for a moment when he hears the word 'friends' but otherwise just nods.

[All right then,] he says, rubbing his two hands together as that familiar enthusiasm takes hold of his frame. [Who's first?]

As long as I live in this world, I'm sure I'll never see another sapient as enthusiastic about evolving monsters as this guy. It can't be healthy.

Chrysalis

Chapter 760: The Apevolution

The master spoke long with the stone people and Tiny did his best to pay attention. What had been done to his core seemed to help his concentration, and he was able to follow the conversation better than before, but he still felt a little itchy all over, but there was nothing nearby for him to hit. All that he could do was sigh and flex his fingers into his favourite shape: a fist, lamenting the noticeably less bulging muscles in his forearms as he did so. He just had to be patient, he comforted himself, soon he would be larger and more bulgy than ever before. Then he would hit things harder than ever before!

[In terms of resetting body parts, I highly recommend going with bones,] the rock man was saying.

Bones? Tiny snorted. If he was going to make any part of him more powerful, it would be his muscles!

[Why the bones specifically?] the master asked, [I'm pretty sure Tiny is going to want to make himself stronger more than anything, so wouldn't his musculature be a better idea?]

Tiny felt a small bloom of joy within his chest. It was nice having a master that understood him so well, even though they did keep Tiny from fighting all the time.

The stone man frowned and shook his head.

[Why do you think we have bones in the first place?]

[To hold you together? I honestly can't even remember what it felt like to have bones on the inside. I'm probably not the right person to ask.]

[Look. Muscles need something to attach to, that's true for you as well. When our muscles flex and contract...]

Tiny knew about flexing! He hunched his back and brought his arms forward to accentuate his chest and arms. The other two ignored him.

[... they are moving something. And that something is your skeleton. Or carapace.]

[Right. I'm still not getting why the bones need an upgrade before anything else.]

[If he resets his muscles to a better material, then spends a ton of his evolutionary energy on Might...]

[He will,] master assured him.

He would.

[... then it's entirely possible that his strength will be greater than what his skeleton can withstand. He either won't be able to use his Might properly, or he will literally shatter his own bones when he fights.]

That... didn't sound good. Tiny frowned. Not being able to hit things hard was bad, the worst! It sounded like he would need to make sure his bones were strong enough to withstand infinite power! Because he wouldn't be satisfied until his punch could make a mountain explode!

[I hope you got that, Tiny,] the master said, [you're not punching anything with busted arms.]

Tiny nodded to show how seriously he understood the point, then decided to give a thumbs up for emphasis.

[It's actually weirding me out having you be smart enough to listen this well,] the master observed.

[I'm really interested to see what he evolves into,] the rock man said, [Lightning Fist Apes just don't live this long. I'm amazed you pulled it off.]

[It wasn't easy,] the master grumbled, patting Tiny on the arm with one antenna.

Tiny smiled and flexed a little to show the master he appreciated his care. He felt *really* twitchy though. He glanced around a little then slumped. Still nothing to hit.

[Alright then, Tiny. Off we go,] Tiny started and realised he'd missed the end of the conversation. Still, he'd done well! He'd listened and learned a few things, like how to make sure he punched harder! He turned around and followed the master out of the chamber and back to the space in which they were to evolve. The whole way there, his master pelted him with reminders on what he was to do, and what he *wasn't* to do, when evolving.

[No matter what,] he was told again, [you aren't allowed to reduce your Cunning below twenty, got it? I want you alive long enough to reach tier seven, not running up to an ancient and trying to punch it in the eye. Keep in mind what Granin said about the bones, and... just make sure you're happy with your choices I guess.]

Tiny reached out with one, displeasingly thin arm and hugged the master to his side.

[Aww, I appreciate it you big lug. Just make sure you use the manual evolution, alright? I know it's a pain and there are *so many* options, but it'll be worth it in the long run.]

Tiny nodded, gave another thumbs up before he settled onto his backside and leaned against the rocky wall of the chamber. If he was going to be evolving, he'd need to make sure he was comfortable. With a thought, he activated the System menu, a broad grin stretching across his features. He would grow bigger! Stronger! And when things got in his way, were annoying, threatened his master, or whenever he felt like it, he would hit them! Way harder than before!

[Would you like to use the evolution menu?]

[Congratulations on reaching the maximum level for your current species. Evolution will allow you to 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.

Your evolution options are as follows:

- Mighty Puncher
- Kong Boxing Champion
- Winged Thunder Fist (special)
- Dark Lightning Kong (special)
- Lightning Fist Emperor (rare)
- Thunderstrike Mountain Kong (rare)

Tiny had been explicitly told to ignore the basic evolution, so he reluctantly passed over the Kong Boxing Champion and moved straight to the rare choices. He knew enough about himself to understand he didn't have the patience to trawl through each option, his new intelligence gave him at least that much self-awareness.

[Rare Evolution: Lightning Fist Emperor (rare). -5 bonus to Cunning, +5 bonus to Will, +200 bonus to Might, +50 bonus to Toughness. A fusion of impact and lightning, the Lightning Fist Emperor is a creature capable of shattering the sky with a single fist. The skin, particularly focused around the fists, will be transformed into Bluesky Mithril, an exceptionally hard material that is both conductive and has a multiplicative effect on lightning mana. In addition, a Lightning storm generator will be added to both lightning mana glands.]

Tiny thought about this option and he decided he liked it. He liked it a lot. He would get stronger and tougher and he would be able to shoot lightning out of his hands even better than before! If there was one thing Tiny liked as much as hitting things, it was hitting them with lightning on his hands at the same time. This evolution would help him do that and then some! What about the next one?

[Rare Evolution: Thunderstrike Mountain Kong (rare). -10 bonus to Cunning, +10 bonus to Will, +220 bonus to Might, +75 bonus to Toughness. As enduring as the mountains themselves, the Thunderstrike Mountain Kong is the physical embodiment of where the earth meets the sky. The bones will be remade

to Earthblood Basalt, a self-healing, flexible and tough material and will allow the Mountain Kong to endure extreme forces. In addition, a Lightning Ignition Gland will be added to both Lightning mana affinity glands, allowing the Kong to release larger bursts of lightning in a shorter time frame.]

Tiny's eyes, widened! The bones? This was exactly what he wanted. He was a little sad to miss out on the metal infused skin, but he supposed having rock infused bones would be just as nice. Also, he got even more Might! He happily selected this option and then frowned while a whole new set of windows and menus popped up, filling his vision. Anger stirred in the chest of the great ape, but he smothered it with a sigh as he started flicking through the lists, ignoring his growing headache. This would take a while.