

Chrysalis 971

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 971: Colony vs Colony pt 11

We fall into a rhythm as the battle progresses. Sarah rushes forward, unleashes absolutely abhorrent levels of devastation on the termites before she falls back to gather herself. When that happens, I step in, take the hits, push back against the wall of invaders while Tiny punches their lights out and Crinis instils deep, *deep* fear in them.

Seriously, any survivors of this battle on the Ka'armodo side are going to need therapy. Even the lizards in control of these poor hapless creatures are pitiable; having to experience such horrors, even vicariously, must be traumatising. I *hate* the termites, and even then I wince when I see them rendered down into chunks. It's nauseating.

Despite our prodigious level of firepower, the constant flow of attackers doesn't stop, or even slow. I can feel them through the walls, tunnelling towards us urgently, flowing through the distant caves and rushing to engage us. I can practically smell the eagerness of the lizards as they sense the mana rolling off me and my crew of powerful tier six monsters. They know who we are and even if they suspect a trap they have no choice but to come out and try to finish us off.

After all, we've advanced so far outside the area controlled by the Colony. They've already cut off our path of retreat. They might think they're being clever, but for whatever reason I can sense their movements so clearly today. I know they're holding back their numbers. They don't want to overwhelm us and force a retreat, that would just make it all the harder to finish us off and increase the chances of the Colony rushing out to our defence. Instead, they keep the fighting hot, but not boiling, nothing we can't handle if we stretch ourselves, whilst they completely encircle us from behind.

I feel everything. I know that they've almost finished enveloping us in a sphere of termite death, one that is growing thicker and more impenetrable every passing second.

Once they believe that we can't break through, they'll rush in with everything they have, even the Ka'armodo might stick their noses out and try to take a bite of us. With us four, well, five with Sarah here, tier sixes out of the way, it'll be that much easier to complete their assassination of the Mother Tree! Everything is here to play for!

Which is exactly what I'm counting on! The fools are dancing right into my mandibles... heh heh... muahaha... MUAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!!!

Do you really think you can pull these sorts of numbers down on my head without leaving yourselves vulnerable to the attacks of the Colony?! With the Vestibule, everything is laid bare. I know that the scouts are probing your siege lines even now. Generals are marshalling their troops, reinforcements are flooding through the gate, plans are being laid. The danger I've placed us in is very real, and I feel bad for exposing Sarah without explaining myself properly, but if the bait wasn't this juicy, the lizards might not try and chomp on it!

Sure enough, they've reached out and stuffed us in their mouth, but as long as we take too long to digest, the Colony will slice open the stomach and set us free! It's an all or nothing gamble, the only type of bet I know how to make!

Come and get it termites!

Time to turn it up to eleven. Maintaining my gravity domain I direct my other mental constructs to drop the force magic and begin to operate the Omni-Elemental engine I've held ready for this moment. Ten separate consciousnesses pump the metaphorical bellows and soon a steady stream of various elements begin to flow. Weave a little of this, inject a little of that, compress it all down.

[Sarah! Swap with me!]

[Oh! Okay!]

The giant bear pulls back as I leap forward, unleashing a Void Chomp to clear space in front of me.

[Retract any tentacles Crinis. It's about to get hot!]

[Alright!]

I give a full second for my terrifying pet to withdraw her limbs, compressing the mana further before I unleash it on the world in one glorious burst.

Dragon's Breath!

A combination of gas, air and fire come together to create the ultimate flame thrower. The roar of the flames is deafening, swiftly followed by the pitiful cries of hundreds of termites as they are bathed in the superheated fire. Maintaining a spell this complex is still difficult for me but I push myself to hold it for ten solid seconds as the temperature in the tunnel swiftly rises. The flames roast a full hundred metre long section of tunnel, forcing the swarming bugs that filled it to dive under the soil or cover themselves in rock to save their lives. When I finally release the magic, I'm met with the sight of superheated rock and flame baked termites all the way back to the corner.

My brains ache after an expenditure like that and I greedily suck in more mana from the air around us to replenish my core before letting them rest for a moment. I need to manage my resources carefully. Still, that bought us a little breathing room.

[Get ready,] I warn the others.

[I can see them,] Crinis tells me.

[Give them a warm welcome.]

[Right!]

The tunnel walls around us begin to bulge and collapse as the razor sharp mandibles begin to slice through the rock. They are met instantly by a swarm of tentacles that entangle and cut them, but there are always more coming in behind. The surround is complete and now the real fight begins.

[Get ready Sarah, it doesn't stop from this point on.]

Tiny grins broadly as he cracks his knuckles. He was waiting for this all along. Dirt rains down on us as the ceiling begins to fall in and Tiny unfurls his dark wings of shadow to cover himself before a powerful surge of electricity bursts out from his fur, covering the dozens of termites descending from above in

crackling electricity. With one powerful bound he leaps up; concentrating his lightning in his right fist until it becomes blindingly bright, he pulls back and then unleashes an apocalyptic uppercut.

KABOOM!

Thunder booms! Rocks crack!

His giant fist, easily the size of a car engine, detonates against the falling dirt, discharging an outlandish amount of electrical energy. The force is such that the already loose rock and soil above us, filled with freshly dug tunnels, can do nothing except collapse on our heads.

There's a brief rumble as the dirt begins to shift, then an avalanche of stone and termites rains down on us.

Tiny has such a smug grin on his face I almost want to slap him right in the face. Then it's hidden as the dirt hides him from view.

[Tiny you IDIOT!]

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 972: Colony vs Colony pt 12

The Colony really only had two speeds. Fast and breakneck, as the humans referred to it. The latter didn't make much sense to the ants at first, they didn't have necks after all, not in the traditional sense. What they could understand was the idea of moving so fast you ran a high risk of injuring yourself. The lecture the Eldest had levelled at them was a direct warning against this sort of behaviour.

The idea of breakneck pace had been rejected on a fundamental level. In its place came a new speed: slow.

Coolant liked slow. It was much more her sort of pace. Slow didn't mean taking it easy, slow didn't mean *slacking*, slow meant being careful, being patient, ensuring that each task was done perfectly before moving onto the next one. It appealed to an ant with a detail oriented focus like herself.

And in the end, what she found was that slow, wasn't slow at all. Slow was smooth, slow was controlled, which, as it turned out, was fast. No mistakes, no backtracking, everything progressing in its turn without clogging up the project further down the line. Coolant found that by working at a slow and deliberate pace, she got *more* done, not less.

It was with this spirit that the Colony reinforced its position in the fourth stratum. Lines were drawn up, tunnels allocated, formations pre-planned before a single claw touched the Mother Tree's bark. When the ants began to stream through, everything was prepared. They were directed by the squad into their allocated places. Once each formation was filled, the final ant slotted into position, the entire group would march forth along their planned path to engage in the ongoing battles already underway.

No time was lost. No waste or inefficiency dragged the operation down, despite there being no unseemly haste. To Coolant's calm and unruffled eyes, it was beautiful.

"Why are we moving so slow?!" Propellant raged.

Coolant sighed.

"You *still* haven't embraced the 'go slow to go fast' philosophy? You're denying the evidence of your own eyes."

"It's nonsense!" the fire mage grouched. "You go *fast* to go fast! The very thought of going slow and steady makes my carapace itch!"

"It seems like your rotten personality is the issue at fault," Coolant observed. "With a little patience you might be able to proceed further with your fire magic."

"Bah! Patience isn't required to master fire magic! What's required is a burning hot spirit and guts!"

"If you say so..."

"Don't you two have your own places to be?" A new scent intruded on their well-worn argument. "Or do you have time to waste blowing pheromones at each other?"

"Victor?"

The general bustled up to the two mages, her antennae twitching with irritation.

"We're directing the mage battalions as they come through the gateway," Coolant assured the general.

"I was mainly discussing how smoothly the deployment is going. The planning and preparation this time has been impeccable."

"When we move hundreds of thousands of troops into the area over a single day, we better be organised or everything would go to hell," Victor grumped.

"You aren't wrong," Propellant replied, "I already know exactly where I'm going once the next wave is through. I can't wait to put some fire into these termite scum."

Coolant could practically feel the heat coming off the fire mage as she imagined setting the termite world ablaze.

"I'm being deployed on the west side," Coolant told the general. "Do we know if water or ice are effective against the insects?"

"If you can harden it enough to punch through their carapace, ice spears are effective. Other than that, they don't like the cold much, just like us. Cool them enough and they get sluggish, it might not seem like much at first, but it adds up over time."

"Be better if you just set them alight," Propellant gloated, "fire is super effective against these punks."

"Some elements work better against some foes than others. That's nothing to get excited about," Coolant responded... coolly.

"Here comes the next wave!" Victor pointed to prevent another argument. "You'd better get down there and direct them."

A steady flow of mage ants marched into the staging grounds next to the Bruan'chii village and the two council members rushed down to meet them. Thanks to the detailed planning they were able to direct their fellow caste members with little effort, finally able to tag along behind them towards the front lines.

"See you when the battle is won," Propellant gave a jaunty wave of her antenna, before turning and joining the back of the departing formation.

"Don't get overexcited and set our own soldiers on fire," Coolant replied.

"Hey! That happened *one time!*"

She ignored her sibling and turned back to the harried looking Victor.

"I'll be on my way as well," she said.

"Good, I need to get back to Sloan once I'm done here. Directing this battle is proving to be extremely easy and absurdly difficult at the same time."

"How so?" Coolant asked, intrigued.

"We are fighting on so many fronts at once, and managing such immense numbers. This is the largest battle the Colony has ever undertaken. The logistical work is a nightmare."

"The easy part?"

The general clacked her mandibles in irritation.

"The Eldest has pulled so many termites down on their head that we're punching straight through their lines as if they weren't even there. As a diversion, we couldn't possibly ask for better."

"Sounds like the Eldest is doing great work, as usual."

"I wish I knew if they planned it that way..."

"You'll never find an answer to that," Coolant laughed before she patted her sibling on the carapace and turned to catch up to her own battalion.

The ant troops were in extremely high spirits, their eagerness for the fight brimming over into constant bursts of "FOR THE COLONY!" that quickly rose into a deafening chorus before fading. Into the twisting tunnels they marched, underneath the colossal roots of the Mother Tree and past the myriad defensive layers that the ants deployed here had constructed.

All of that work would need to be done again once the termites were expelled from this mountain. The lines of walls and traps would have to be moved forward significantly, but that was an issue for the carvers.

Eventually, after numerous twists and turns, the column of ten thousand ants could finally hear the din of battle echoing from ahead. Immediately their pace increased as orders began to be relayed down the line. Scouts must have come back to communicate the exact situation and relay orders from the general managing this theatre.

Coolant and her mages listened intently to their instructions. As soon as they knew their role, they began to make preparations, drawing out mana and shaping it to their needs.

The moment they burst into the open ground they let their spells fly. A host of dense ice blocks arced through the air over the ants' heads before they exploded above the termite lines. Shards of hardened ice pelted the bugs, lodging into their joints and melting over their carapace.

"Freeze them all," Coolant directed, her eyes cold.

Chrysalis

Chapter 973: Colony vs Colony pt 13

I have no idea how many tons of material rained down, but it had to be a lot. Thankfully the integrity of things like soil and stone are more than a little 'iffy' here on Pangera. By all rights, the planet should collapse in on itself given the fact that it's largely hollow, but when we add mana into the mix things get weird.

So the whole mountain didn't collapse on us, which is a plus, but we were still rather squished.

In fact, it was Invidia that made the save. Acting as fast as thought, the green eyed demon is able to apply his prodigious mental powers and create an eight layered barrier over our heads. They don't hold, of course they wouldn't, not against literal tons of material, but they do enough that we aren't smushed to paste, slowing the falling rock to the point we are pinned rather than dead.

[Nice save, Invidia!]

[Givessss more praisssse!]

Can't be stingy considering he just saved our lives.

[You really made the five hundre-, one thousa, let's go with ten thousand IQ play! Great job!]

I keep revising my estimation of his brain power upward as I think about the sheer size of this dude's brain. Invidia chuckles evilly with glee and I can feel his satisfaction radiating over our mental connection. You can have all the praise you want champ. You do good work.

Alright, now what?

[Can anyone move?] I ask.

[I can, master.]

[I suppose you can wriggle through the cracks...]

[A little. Be careful!]

No sooner does her cry hit my thoughts than I feel a sharp pain in one of my legs. What the heck? I wriggle furiously and kick until I give up and start pumping earth mana through the omni-elemental construct. Once I have enough of the brown tinged energy I begin to try and create some room for myself.

Cautious of bringing down more rock on my own head, I soften some sections whilst hardening others, compressing the loose soil into rock pillars that can support the weight above me and creating a little room for me to look down.

And what do I find other than a damned termite clinging onto my leg, its beady, near blind eyes staring up at me hatefully. Why you little pain in the foot! Get off me!

I somewhat awkwardly try and shift my position but end up just gnashing my mandibles in frustration as I fail to reach my opponent. Eyes now filled with savage joy, the termite continues to gnaw off my leg, its sickle sharp jaws sawing away at my limb.

That hurts dammit!

This is so annoying! I don't want to make any large moves since I might bring down more rock on my own head! I'll have to keep reinforcing the area around me and creating space bit by bit until I can chomp on this fool.

Just you wait you damn termite! I'll get to you soon, then you'll get it!

[Be careful as you move,] I belatedly warn my pets, [you might make your situation worse. You hear me Tiny?]

The ape grumbles at me and I get images of him lying flat under a mass of dirt. His bones are too solid to break, but his muscles are certainly a little squished.

[Invidia, see if you can earth magic your way over to Tiny. Heal him up and then try to solidify sections of stone to bear the weight. Eventually you'll be able to get free.]

[Yessssss.]

[Master, I can sense the enemy all around us. There are thousands of them digging towards us.]

Not surprising. They don't have any reason to give up, certainly not now that we've been pinned. I'm sure some termites were killed when it all came down, but bugs like them and me are designed for this sort of stuff, our carapace can take a lot of punishment.

What follows is the most ungainly few minutes of my new life as I slowly and carefully wriggle my way around, eye locked with the hated foe who remains latched onto my leg with grim determination. Just, give it up will you!? No matter how hard you try you aren't taking my leg!

I eventually manage to dispatch my foe, but I swear to gandalf that even in death that damned termite is laughing at me, its mandibles still clamped onto my leg. I eventually manage to shake my limb free, applying a little healing magic to iron out the kinks, only to find the dirt beginning to shift around me.

I have a bad feeling about this...

Sure enough, a few moments later several termite heads push through the soil and try to bite me! With extremely limited room, it's hard to perform any sort of dodge but I manage to contort myself enough that I avoid the worst of it before leaning forward to chomp with my own jaws. A horrifically stilted melee erupts as we try to grapple with each other whilst dirt rains down from above.

My brains spin furiously as I pump earth mana and rapidly weave it to create some sort of structure around me.

This is such a pain in the thorax! Thankfully I have the brain power spare to do a lot of work. I've dropped the gravity domain (for obvious reasons) and my progress supporting the mess overhead is increasing. My issue is, the longer this all goes on, the more termites manage to dig their way towards me.

This terrain is well suited to insects like us, close quarters, covered in dirt and biting each other in the face. In fact, the whole area rapidly devolves into a seething pile of dirt and stone as we try to get our jaws on each other, or Crinis slithers through paper thin cracks hunting for victims. Tiny is forced to grapple and crush his foes, or use extremely short punches as he tries to get his feet back under him. Invidia is the hardest hit, the poor demon can't even think about using an explosion.

Bit by bit we manage to right the ship and create some space around us, but the wriggling, desperate fight continues as more and more termites force their way through the rubble. I swear I'm going to thwack that ape right on the scone when we get out of here!

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 974: Colony vs Colony pt 14

Life in the fourth stratum is considered by many to be the pinnacle of existence. The rich mana intensive atmosphere, the wealth and prosperity available to those who are strong enough to hunt the powerful monsters, the abundance for those who can pay for it. Many empires of Pangera have shifted their capitals to this layer of the Dungeon over the thousands of years since the breaking.

This has caused a strange environment to arise in the fourth, as it is, without a doubt, a place of tremendous danger. The monsters that populate the stratum are without a doubt powerful and vicious, many of them being intelligent creatures capable of great cunning, even communication. The great sky-wyrms, the most threatening of their kind, have roamed the mountains for hundreds of years; growing up to a hundred metres long, they are fearsome opponents and have caused the downfall of many a hunting party, or even cities.

Thankfully, the ingenuity of the sapient peoples is nigh limitless. In their fortified mountain cities it is possible to live an extremely comfortable, and secure life, though that peace has been bought, and continues to be paid for, in the sacrifices of others.

- *Excerpt from 'The Life of the Great' by Tiritus*

[Oh! There you are. Thank goodness.]

[Sarah?]

The great bear snout snuffs about before she shoves her head through the narrow opening and I spy her big bear eyes blinking at me owlshly.

[I've been trying to dig you out, the termites are everywhere.]

[Yeah, I noticed. How the heck did you manage to find me?]

[Bears are good diggers,] she says a little defensively, [I've got strong claws and a great sense of smell. Why wouldn't I be able to find you?]

Fair enough. I certainly can buy the part about the strong claws. Those things are beyond strong, they're terrifying. I've seen them cut the air.

[Tiny and Invidia are over that direction,] I angle my antenna to droop down in front of her face and then point to the side, [and Crinis is over that way,] another point. [Though she is also over this way. Her situation is a little complicated.]

She has plenty of shadows to work with, little pockets of darkness that she can saturate with mana and slip tentacles through.

[Where are the termites? Do we know where they are coming from?] Sarah asks me.

I rotate the ends of my antennae in a full circle.

[Like you said, they're coming from everywhere. From what we can gather, they're busy crawling over the rubble that Tiny brought down on us, digging their way through.]

Oddly enough, Tiny may have actually done us a favour with his reckless roof-punching. Right at the moment when the cockroach descended scum were aiming to flood us with overwhelming numbers, the big idiot literally brought the house down. I don't doubt he destroyed a large number of termites with that one punch, but more importantly, he succeeded in buying time.

After all, that's the whole point of this exercise. Unable to bring their numbers to bear against us, our foes are forced to dig through literal tons of material before they can put the bite on us. Still, it's only a matter of time, and not much of it, before they clear the rubble and get to us. In order to have a fighting chance, we need to get the band back together before that happens.

The issue is shifting all of this rubbish without dropping it all suddenly on our heads.

[Hold on a second, Sarah. I might have just had an idea.]

I pull a few of my mental constructs away from the constant manipulation of earth mana and put them back onto gravity duty, except this time I invert it. A reverse gravity domain. It's tricky as heck to pull off, but with that much combined brain power on the job, I figure it out eventually.

The purple sphere expands outwards from me, lightening everything it touches. Even compressed, the mana can't power the domain enough to lift the rock entirely, but it's enough to lighten the load.

[Is that you, master?]

[Yeah, I thought it might help.]

[It is! Keep going.]

[Right, let's try and meet up. Stay put, Tiny. We'll dig to you. Have you managed to solidify that area, Invidia?]

[Yesssssss.]

[Great. Alright Sarah, give me a second and I'll clear some space for you, then we can dig together.]

I have to move quick, the termites are wriggling all over the rock, thousands of them now. With a few great swipes of my mandibles I clear enough room for Sarah to squeeze through and then the two of us are squashed together in a very cramped area.

[Right! This way!]

[Okay!]

With the two of us digging together, and the load being significantly lightened by the domain, we make excellent progress, only having to pause a few times to squish a termite before we manage to make contact with Tiny. The big ape is healing nicely under the careful ministrations of Invidia, but the gorilla is looking a little crestfallen.

[Don't worry about it, Tiny,] I try to encourage him, [just maybe, the next time you want to punch something, think about whether or not it's going to fall on your head and maybe crush you. Okay?]

That's a lot of thinking to do before he applies his fists to something, at least for Tiny, but he nods morosely as he accepts the wisdom of my words. Perhaps not getting crushed under hundreds of tons would have been better. As a result, he hasn't been able to uppercut anything for almost ten minutes!

I can practically feel the thoughts turning over in my first pet's brain, but I refrain from thwacking him for the time being. I get the feeling that positive reinforcement works better than thwacks for Tiny. Besides, his skull is so hard now since his tier six evolution that hitting him is more likely to break my antenna than anything else!

[Crisis, are you here?]

[One second...]

The shadows around us deepen into blacker than black before a tentacle pops through, followed by more. Luckily they compress themselves down until Crisis herself emerges in the centre, squished into a volleyball sized shape with three little mouths hissing around her circumference.

[Alright, we're all on together again. Good work team. Now we need to figure out what to do next. Any ideas, gang? How about you Sarah? ... Sarah?]

The bear jumps a little.

[Oh. Sorry. I thought I heard something?]

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 975: Colony vs Colony pt 15

Interesting...

[If you hear something weird, let me know. For now we need to focus on not getting killed.]

[Yes,] the great bear shakes her head, [you're right, of course.]

With the crew back together we're in a better position to resist, but the pressure quickly begins to mount. Our opponents are digging constantly, creating tunnels to reach us under the rubble and I can feel that they have us completely surrounded. Perhaps as many as a hundred thousand of the filthy, soul

sucking insects are all around us, ready to rend my precious, shiny carapace and extract the juicy Biomass within. There must be as many as ten ka'armodo in the area to control and direct this horde. They must be extremely confident to put themselves out on a limb like this. The thought occurs to me that one gravity bomb right now would cripple the entire termite force and ensure victory for the Colony.

But unlike Leeroy, I don't think that way. I intend to win this war and live to mock every lizard I see. Even normal ones. If I see a gecko scurrying up the wall after this is all done, I'll give it a serve.

My minds continue to churn, heating up under the constant pressure applied from being used so hyper-efficiently. Each brain is doing the work of three or four thanks to the mind constructs and without the aid of the Vestibule they'd be just about cooked already. It's been worth it, we finally have some space in which to work, especially crucial for Tiny. Crinis and I are pretty happy fighting covered in dirt, we can handle it just fine, but without room to swing, the big ape is just a sitting duck. Invidia too can't be his usual explosive self in such tight confines. Truth be told, he still doesn't have enough room, if he starts letting the explosions go in here, he'll hit us just as much as the enemy.

[Let's form up,] I tell the others, [tight formation, but we need to keep working our way toward the nearest tunnel. It's about forty metres that way,] I point with an antenna. [It's already swarming with termites, but we'll have more room to work with.]

[I can sense more coming, Master!]

[Right, brace for impact people, this is going to get ugly.]

Seconds later the invasion begins in earnest as jaws begin to scissor through the hardened earth I'd prepared and the hate-filled eyes of the enemy soon follow.

Void Chomp!

As a small pack bursts through the wall just in front of me, I'm ready to meet them. My most powerful bite obliterates them but already more are dropping from above. Sarah rears up and swipes two straight out of the air and Tiny combos with her, delivering a devastating upper before they hit the ground. A satisfied gleam appears in Tiny's eyes as he lands his first clean punch for a while.

[Just don't bring the roof down on us again,] I warn him.

I really want to bring more of my new spells into play, but the situation is making it difficult for me. If we can last a little longer so I can manufacture the right situation then there might be a chance to pull some shenanigans. We'll just have to wait and see.

Tentacles erupt from the darkness around us as Crinis goes to work in the tiny tunnels the termites have dug. She does her best to limit the flow of reinforcements, but with literally thousands of bodies pushing their way in, there's only so much she can do to stem the tide. It almost feels like it's raining termites as they begin to burrow through all around us, leaping from the openings they create to dive down and attack us the moment they can.

The fight quickly disintegrates into a messy brawl. Even if we can dispatch the termites as quickly as they come to us, the Biomass has nowhere to go and our little chamber is quickly choked with it. I keep tunnelling to one side with my minds, recruiting Invidia to try and speed the process up, but there's only

so much we can do. More and more termites flood in, gnashing and biting with mad glee. I begin to get an idea of why it's such a pain to fight against ants.

Putting up with this is a massive kick in the nards! The numbers are endless and there's nowhere to go!

Biting, chomping, ramming and butting heads directly with the enemy are all I can do in the compressed melee as I desperately try to escape being overwhelmed. Out of sheer necessity I unleash multiple Void Chomps in close succession, clearing away space but dropping my stamina dangerously low. It'll take time for those reserves to replenish, time we might not have.

At least I buy myself enough room that I can turn to the new tunnel we're working on and start chomping my way through it with my jaws. When brain power doesn't meet the challenge, the only option that remains is to put my mandibles to the task!

[Everyone, this way!] I yell to the others and they pile in behind me, cramming into the small space.

Termites are already starting to chew through the rock to meet us from this new direction, but it doesn't matter. If they tunnel through, that'll just mean we get through all the faster. Which is eventually what happens. The termites dig to meet us as Tiny and Sarah fight a rear-guard against the enemies piling in behind.

The moment the tunnel wall breaks down in front of me, I'm ready. An enormous jet of Dragon's Breath roars forth, roasting everything in my path and superheating the tunnel in an instant.

[Let's go!] I call and dash forward.

It's so damn hot! My claws are instantly burning and I madly hop my way forward to avoid the burning sensation rocketing up my legs.

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 976: Colony vs Colony pt 16

The walls glow with molten light as the dragon's breath fades and we rocket through the narrow space. I can hear Tiny growling behind me as his hands and fur get singed by the rocks but we don't have time to deal with it.

He thinks he has it rough. I'm the one at the front, shoving the still boiling Biomass out of the way and trudging through flaming carapaces, breaking them underfoot. This is nasty! Fortunately the tunnel isn't that long, I can already see the next wave of termites rushing in to reinforce.

Well we can't have that!

My brains spin at incredible speed and mana churns inside me and in the air around. I'm pulling in a lot of juice right now, and have been for a while. I need to get my claws back into some regular tunnel so I can tap the mana veins there; don't want my core to be even approaching low on power.

Bolts of pure kinetic force fly forward like the fists of a truly angry ant and slam into the leading termites, knocking them off balance. They emit an angry chitter and try to rush forward again, only to meet with another barrage, then another.

We're coming through!

The force mana flies as I literally pummel the insects backwards while I continue to run toward them, the rest of the gang following up behind me. When I get close enough I initiate a charge, dropping my head and digging in my claws for traction.

I can hear them sizzle as I do so, which is far from ideal, but I rocket forward like a magnificent, sparkling missile.

CRASH!

I slam into the growing wall of termites with all the momentum I can summon, sending tons of monstrous insect flying backwards. The impact sends a tremendous jolt through my entire body, to the point I can almost feel my carapace crackling like wrapping paper. A moment later I'm dropping down into the tunnel proper and I have to say, it's not a welcome sight.

The entire thing is filled with the enemy. Completely.

The walls are covered. The floor is covered. The entire ceiling is covered in termites! The narrow opening I launched through was half way up the wall on the right side and right now I'm suspended in mid-air with gnashing mandibles literally surrounding me.

Fortunately, this doesn't come as a surprise.

Look out below!

I tuck my legs in the traditional cannonball position and drop like a stone, but not before unleashing another blast of Dragon Breath. The flame rockets out as if fired from a jet engine, pure, hot and unbelievably loud. In the brief time it takes for me to land, I clear a small zone before I crash down into the now smoking hot rocks.

I unfold my legs at the last second and bury them into the tunnel floor, immediately absorbing a jolt of mana. Gimme that juice! I push my brains to the limit, even the main mind pitching in to draw and shape as much mana as I possibly can. The omni-elemental construct spins and whirls as I supercharge it, pumping in all the raw energy I can, a myriad of elements coming out the other end.

Moments later the others fall into the tunnel around me, Tiny crashing down with his surprising grace. Crinis, a dark mass of tentacles with no centre, squirms out of the small opening and drops down to land beside me, quickly followed by Invidia's slow descent and Sarah dropping like a boulder.

[I need a little time,] I tell the others, [Tiny, unleash the lightning. Crinis, help Invidia keep them away for a few seconds!]

[Got it!] they reply, except for Tiny who's too busy whooping with joy as writhing bolts of lightning ignite all over his body.

His fur begins to rise and his wings unfurl as the ribbons of electricity flash faster and faster all over his body and down towards his arms. As his hands begin to glow with unbearably bright light, he thrusts one in each direction and bathes the termite horde in sizzling bolts of energy.

Shortly after, detonations begin to ring out and shields pop into place as Invidia follows up on his elder's good work. With more room to work in, the two are able to deploy their devastating area-effect abilities

to inflict maximal damage. Sarah and Crinis circle in close, making sure that no stray bugs slip through the cracks as I push my brains into overdrive.

I intend to unleash a barrage of spells unlike anything I've produced before, pushing my new skills and the combined power of my brains to their limits.

My head is on fire, the collection of brains housed inside are working overtime and I can feel the load wearing away at them. We're in a slightly better spot now than when the roof fell down, but unless I find a way to get some separation between us at the termites so we can regroup, we aren't going to be able to last as long as I'd like.

That means dumping everything I have into one glorious burst of power.

[I'm ready!] I shout to the others. [Get in close!]

They immediately break off their offensive and rush to my side, then my work begins.

The moment the lightning and explosions stop, the termites rush forward, near-blind eyes filled with hate. Fortunately, I won't have to look at them for long. I weave magic deftly and a burst of mud erupts above my head, firing upwards and outwards before raining down, shielding us from view.

Now!

With a supreme effort of will, I finish shaping my second spell and unleash it with perfect timing. The mana flies out of me and soaks into the still flowing mud, flash hardening it in an instant. Hopefully I made it thick enough...

I grit my mandibles, my brains screaming in pain as I pour every last drop of mana I have into the construct, taking the threads of elemental energy as they pass out the side. Every mind exerts pressure to shape the final spell as best I can whilst the first termites reach my rock hard mud dome and begin chomping on it.

There!

The last thread falls into place and I immediately unleash the spell, directing it through the narrow gap above our heads and outwards. Scorching hot winds erupt above us as a storm of fire bursts into life, the flames licking down amongst us until Invidia quickly slaps a shield across the opening.

The flash hardened mud around us heats up quickly, the air inside becomes stiflingly hot as the five of us huddle together whilst the spell rages outside. The tornadoes twist in opposite directions, heading down the tunnel igniting everything in their path whilst I collapse inside the dome.

I don't even pay attention to the stream of System announcements flowing into my mind. Instead, I sink down into myself, allowing the meditation skill to wall my emotions away as I concentrate on recovering.

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 977: Colony vs Colony pt 17

"Move quickly! Push! Don't leave a single termite alive!" Advant blasted her surroundings with pheromones, not that the ants needed much motivating.

They'd been bottled up by the enemy for too long, unable to be aggressive as the termites frustrated them with seemingly endless hit and run attacks against their walls. Now, thanks to the Eldest, they were able to charge forward to their hearts' content. In fact, the largest problem the leadership was having during the offensive was holding their forces back.

Ahead of her, a clash was taking place as tens of thousands of ants rushed into battle. It was difficult to see what was happening as the soldiers of the Colony piled on top of each other at the front, creating a wall of carapace and eager mandibles that swarmed over the termite defenders, ripping and tearing. She might have felt sorry for a different enemy. This position had already been bombarded with acid and magic, softening the resistance for the final charge of soldiers, scouts and generals, but termites deserved no less than this.

To think they would attempt to slay the Eldest. The presumption of it was more than insulting!

Every ant felt fire burning in their core, flooding their limbs with strength. They knew that the Eldest, the most powerful and revered member of their family, was fighting against impossible odds in order to create this opportunity. They wouldn't let it go to waste! The harder they fought, and the faster they advanced, the sooner they could come to the rescue of the mighty ant.

"Mages forward!" she ordered and she could scent the order being relayed down the line.

She watched the fight with a critical eye, relaying orders to the generals and taking reports as they came back from the thick of the fighting.

"WHOO! This is a blast and a half, isn't it?" Propellant roared as she rushed forward ahead of her mage battalion. "Did you see us light them up? Haven't seen that much flame since we left the third! What now? What do we burn?"

The eagerness of the council member's voice was more than a little distasteful to Advant, as was the wild and manic look in her compound eyes.

"Calm yourself," she snapped, "I need you on sensing and recon, not burning. Get to it as fast as you can."

The fire mage lost some of her energy.

"Not burning?" Her disappointment was total. She flicked her antennae miserably before she sighed.

"Alright, fine. We get this done then we can move on and burn more stuff."

"What are we burning, senior?" the mage battalion demanded as they arrived.

"Nothing," Propellant scowled. "Recon and sensing! Get to it, quickly!"

The mages grumbled but followed orders with alacrity, jumping to their task. Taking a lot of ground from a crafty enemy carried a great deal of risk, something which the Colony was deeply aware of. False tunnels, traps, fake trails, large pockets of enemies hidden in temporary caverns, ready to emerge behind Colony lines. The ka'armodo could have left any number of traps behind in their retreat and it was the job of the scouts and mages to work together to minimise the risks. That meant using their advanced mana senses to cover as much ground as they could, trying to find anything out of the ordinary.

With the mages dealt with, Advant turned back to the battle with a critical eye, but soon found Propellant on her left watching alongside.

"Surely they can finish them off faster than this?" the mage asked. "After the hell we rained down on them?"

Advant shifted irritably.

"Going face to face with the soul devouring termites is no simple thing," she informed her mage counterpart, "something that you wouldn't know much about, Propellant. Show a little respect to your siblings on the front lines."

"Oh, I wouldn't dare dismiss the efforts of the soldiers," Propellant waved an antenna, despite knowing full well that she frequently did just that. "I'm simply concerned that we won't reach the Eldest in time."

"We are *all* worried about the Eldest," Advant snapped before she calmed herself.

At that moment, the fighting appeared to die down and word soon came back that the enemy had been defeated and subsequently consumed. Teams of healers rushed forward to administer to the wounded as the ants sorted themselves into their separate battalions. All along the field of battle, the soldiers, generals and scouts rested while they cleaned their antennae, dragging them through the fine hairs in their elbows.

"The battle's over," she observed, "that means we can march to the next site as soon as your team is done."

"They work quickly," the mage assured her sibling, "they are positively burning with fighting spirit right now. It won't be long."

"Their spirit just wants to burn things, more like," Advant muttered.

The battalion of dedicated fire mages had certainly proven their worth over the course of their rolling advance, it was just their *eagerness* that bordered on mania the soldier didn't appreciate. Soon enough it was time to continue and Advant huddled with the generals and scouts, with Propellant peeking over her shoulder as they consulted on their exact path. With their destination identified, the column began to march forward.

It took mere moments for the ants to form their ranks, flowing into position with uncanny precision before they began to move at a steady pace. Advant watched her sisters march with pride, knowing how difficult it was for them to achieve. Each caste had to walk at their own cadence to achieve this even speed, given that their sizes varied so wildly. The smaller healers needed three or four steps for a soldier's one, and tier six soldiers had a longer stride than a tier five. Despite all these complications, they moved like a single unit.

Tens of thousands of them continued onward through the tunnels until they reached the next checkpoint, a small opening close to the service. The stink of termites covered their antennae and the moment the column stopped every single ant began to furiously clean them to wipe away the stink.

"Is this it?" Propellant leapt forward, her eyes shining with glee. "Are we ready to go?"

"Yes," Advant rolled her antennae. "When you're ready you can begin the bomba-"

"COME ON TEAM! LET'S GO!" the mage roared.

Quivering with excitement, the full complement of pyromaniacs raced forward, whooping with joy in an un-antlike display of emotion. Even so, the line was formed in a timely manner and shortly thereafter the temperature began to rise precipitously.

"LET IT BURN!" Propellant cackled.

Condensed balls of potent fire mana rocketed through the air before detonating with calamitous force against the target. When an angry force of chittering termites erupted from the walls to defend their position, the mages' joy was only intensified. Advant watched as the steady flare of explosions continued. Every now and again a truly large one would go off, the blast of hot air rushing down the tunnel and blowing her antennae back against her head.

When the target had been reduced to smouldering ruins, she ordered the mages back and they complied with visible reluctance. Then the soldiers were sent forward. Ordered ranks, thousands strong, stomped forward, Advant among them.

Eldest, we're coming.

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 978: Colony vs Colony pt 18

The heat continues to rise within the flash hardened shell that I'd created, to the point I create some ice just to cool us off. As an ant, I don't mind a bit of heat, but Sarah, even with her temperature regulating enchantments, can't handle this level. We are literally cooking as the twin fire-tornadoes roar throughout the tunnel outside.

If we're cooking in here, then I can only imagine what's happening to the termites outside.

Actually... I don't really want to imagine. That's going to be gross, not that I feel any sympathy. With a little luck I might even catch a ka'armodo who got too close, trying to lead the troops from the front, but as I listen to the notifications roll in from Gandalf, none come up.

A shame.

[Good job, Anthony!] Sarah congratulates me. [I can't believe you can cast magic like that!]

[I can, but it nearly emptied me out,] I say, [I'm running on fumes over here, as far as MP goes. So don't expect anything out of me for a while.]

[Oh. Is that so? Well, we should be able to hold them off until you recover, at least a little.]

My legs are buried in the floor of the tunnel, gathering up mana, but it's a trickle compared to the flood I would need to be full. A mutation or two for absorbing mana isn't going to cut it at the level of spells I'm playing with now.

[I'll try and draw in as much ambient mana as I can. If you guys do your best, we'll be able to hold them off long enough for the Colony to arrive.]

It's seriously cramped inside this shell. It's even more cramped when I think about the fact that Protectant and her squad are in here with us. Idly, I bump up against the wall and even though I don't actually reach the heated surface my brain doesn't seem to register it. We are bumping up against the guards all the time, but it's like our minds refuse to acknowledge it.

With the benefit of the Vestibule, I know they're in here, but without that insight I'd have no idea. The stealth organs these siblings of mine have taken on are absolutely insane. If they reach tier six they'll be even harder to notice, I have no doubt.

[This spell is going to last another minute, I would say,] I tell the others. [When it fails I'm going to dissolve the walls around us and we can take our final stand within this tunnel.]

[Should we try and use this time to tunnel down, Master? We might be able to create a more favourable battle ground?]

Independent thinking from Crinis? It brings a tear to my eye every time.

[It might be hard to tell with the storm of mana around us right now, but the termites are beneath us as well. Digging down won't help us escape. We're encircled.]

[S-Sorry, Master!] The blob that is Crinis tries to cover herself with tentacles to hide her shame. [I couldn't see clearly enough, I shouldn't have said anything!]

I reach out and give her a pat with one antenna.

[Not at all. It was a good idea, and how were you to know when it's so hard for you to see at the moment? I like it when you speak your thoughts to us. Keep it up!]

[I-I-I will!]

They grow up so fast!

I try to act casually as I turn to Sarah.

[Have you heard anything strange again?] I ask.

The big bear tilts her head as if listening.

[No,] she answers finally. [Maybe I didn't hear anything in the first place. It was such a faint thought.]

[No worries,] I shrug, [let me know if anything comes up.]

We continue to wait a little longer as the walls around glow bright with intense heat. I wince. My guardians are going to have *very* sore feet. Eventually the tornadoes begin to peter out and I can feel the massed termite horde begin to move once more.

[They're coming!] I warn the others. [Seems like they're going to try and just bury us beneath their mass. I'm taking down the walls, be ready!]

After a brief pause, the dome I crafted around us crumbles away to nothing. It takes a second for my eyes to refocus and when they do what is revealed is a true wasteland. Crispy termite remains cover rocks that are blackened with soot and still glowing red. The flame tornadoes have ripped the place to

shreds, but even the devastation I've wrought isn't what captures my attention. To the left and right, in the distance, are masses of termites rushing forward like a cresting wave.

Seriously. They basically fill the tunnel on both sides from the floor to the roof. A heaving mass of cockroach descendants that writhes forward like an unstoppable tide.

[They aren't mucking around this time. They intend to end it. We need to bring the noise. Invidia, you take the left. Tiny and Sarah, you take the right. Crinis and I will hold the middle.]

Invidia practically radiates demonic glee as his eye glows bright with baleful green light. In fact, it's only getting brighter...

I take a tactical step to one side a few moments before the hovering eyeball demon unleashes the full power of his mighty laser. The incandescent green beam lances through the air before playing across the mass of termites rushing towards us. The sheer power of the laser is incredible and I've no doubt that hundreds of monsters are destroyed but it hardly seems to make a dent. There must be tens of thousands bearing down on us right now. There'd be even more, but the ka'armodo are limited by how many of their servant monsters will literally fit in the tunnel.

My brains are still on fire, even with the Vestibule soothing them, and the mana in my core still isn't anything like what I'd like it to be. I'm pretty restricted in what I can do right now, basically only things that cost stamina. Going to be interesting when they get here, that's for sure.

To the other side, Tiny and Sarah charge headlong toward the foe. The big ape charges up what remains of his lightning and blasts it toward the enemy before beginning to wind up his most impressive punch.

[Crisis, this is your time to shine.]

[I won't let you down!] she assures me.

The blob of shadow goop that is Crisis inflates once more to reveal her full majesty, a towering creature of tentacles and fathomless maws. The light begins to fade as she releases her shadow mana, infusing the air around her. As the area beneath her thickens to a pure dark she extends innumerable limbs and plunges them through the shadow gate.

I eye the dual waves of termites approaching...

For once I think she's not going to have enough tentacles.

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 979: Colony vs Colony pt 19

Staring down the barrel of tens of thousands of monsters is quite the sight. I mean, I've seen some crazy things since I've been here, my first meeting with the Queen comes to mind. Seeing a bus-sized ant is something that leaves an impression on you after all. Laying eyes on Garralosh was quite something as well. A crocodile monster that'd grown to be bigger than a t-rex was absolutely terrifying. I still can't believe I survived that encounter despite being outmatched in every way.

Grant, your sacrifice will never be forgotten.

Idly, I almost want to try and calculate how many tons of Biomass are throwing themselves at us right now. It must be in the thousands, surely. A tidal wave of carapace and mandibles, gnashing for my precious, diamond coated self.

No matter how much more powerful than an individual termite we are, there's no chance we can avoid getting buried under the weight of numbers. Almost like fighting against ants... at least now I can experience just how terrifying it is for our opponents...

"Protectant. I hate to do this to you all, but you have to get involved in this one. We need to buy as much time as we can for the Colony to get here."

"..."

"Really?" I sigh. "You think I have time to deal with your shyness right now?"

"I'm not shy!" comes the reply as my protector materialises out of thin air. "I'm trying to continue my mission! Exposing us to your enemies makes it harder for us to do our work!"

"Don't be arrogant," I warn her as I eye the approaching horde. "You aren't even tier six monsters. I highly doubt the ka'armodo can't sense you if they really try. Whatever stealth effect you have going on, it's not omnipotent. I'm not sure what you can do to help in this situation, but anything at all is going to be useful."

"This is certainly dire. We will do everything we can. You will not die while a single one of us lives."

My antennae quiver, on the verge of delivering my justice, but I control myself. I can't blame these twenty for their attitudes, they were basically brainwashed into it from the moment they were born. If only I'd gotten to them first and instilled my own brainwashing of self-preservation!

"As if I'd let you die first," I mock. "Just watch, I'll leap in slow-motion to catch a bite that was meant for you. It's going to be super dramatic, so wait for it."

Tiny and Sarah have almost reached the front of the wave. Their charge has gained momentum and the two of them are positively crackling with energy. Tiny still has enough juice in the tank to raise his fur and coat his arms in writhing bolts of lightning. Wings unfurled, he almost floats as he bounds forward, his fists aglow with power. Sarah is a rather more intimidating sight. The great bear almost looks bigger than normal as glowing red energy burns in her eyes and coats her claws. In the back of her throat, the endless roar has begun to rumble out, growing in volume every second.

More than anything else, the roar tells me that she has thrown herself completely into the rage. She knows she can't hold anything back right now. Even if she's buried beneath a mountain of termites, in that condition she'll just keep fighting through them until she literally can't move any more.

Just before the two sides slam into each other, Tiny peels back his lips and unleashes his ear-splitting scream. The sound is deafening; like a lightning bolt it shatters the air and overwhelms everything within range. Almost comically, the wall of termites rushing towards them freezes for a split-second, the monsters stumbling over each other as they lose momentum at the last moment.

Similar to ants, termites don't actually have much in the way of hearing. But just like us, they are *very* sensitive to vibrations. In fact, some breeds of termite are known to spread alarms by banging

their heads into tunnel walls, alerting their nests to potential danger. Their fine-tuned sense is now turned against them as Tiny unleashes his rage.

The two giant monsters crash into the wall of termites like an avalanche. His fist drawn all the way back, Tiny steps gracefully forward, his body rotating in perfect harmony to deliver the biggest right-cross of his life. A fist of pure energy materialises and drives into the monsters like the fist of god, crushing hundreds in a single blow. For her part, Sarah acts much as one would expect an enraged berserker bear to act. Without hesitating, she simply ploughs directly into the enemy, biting, roaring and slashing with her claws. In moments she is out of sight, literally buried under a mountain of termites.

We can still hear her though. Even where she is, the roar she emits never ends. Not to mention the truly horrifying sound of her claws as they rend everything in her path.

[That's the basic idea. Are you ready Crinis?]

[I will unleash everything that I have. Wish me luck, Master.]

[Of course! Make us all proud.]

With a final ripple of joy, Crinis sends her main body into the shadow, vanishing from in front of me. Then the forest begins to emerge. Crinis has a limited amount of shadow flesh, and under normal circumstances she reserves it to replenish her tentacles as they are destroyed. After all, despite its many advantages, shadow flesh isn't high on the toughness scale. Normally it isn't a benefit for her to use all of her reserves to manifest extra tentacles, but her dedication in learning tentacle-fu has paid dividends. Now that her control has reached rank six, she's able to handle more than ever before!

From the shadows around us an endless stream of writhing limbs emerges, twisting around each other before they extend, directly towards the onrushing termites! Despite Invidia's best efforts, the left front is still looking grim. His laser has been expended and needs time to power up, and though his explosions are effective against the densely packed termites, there's simply too many for him to handle alone.

The wave of monsters meets the forest of tentacles head on, and the result is a grind-fest that only a horror enthusiast could enjoy. Tentacles grapple and grind as the termites bite and chew, neither side willing to give an inch. In the midst of it all, Crinis emerges with her real body, her three maws feasting on every ounce of Biomass they can reach.

With a constant supply of Biomass, she'll be able to replenish her shadow flesh at a decent clip. It's a losing battle, she *will* run out eventually, but for now she can hold the line. I uproot my feet from the floor of the tunnel and shake out my legs.

"Time to get in there gang," I tell my defenders before I turn to observe the two fronts. "Now to pick which side needs my attention."

My mana might be dry, but I'm packed full of stamina. Time to chomp!

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 980: Colony vs Colony pt 20

To battle against so many is a difficult thing to. Constantly on the move, even within such a tight space, I work my mandibles furiously. Chomp, chomp, chomp! Occasionally I mix in a Void Chomp to clear away

space, each devastating bite is enough to disintegrate a dozen termites at once, more if they pack close enough.

If I could commit and go closer, I might defeat a hundred with a single chomp, but I would risk being surrounded and overwhelmed. I'm not willing to bury myself under an infinite number of termites like Sarah is, I need to keep hitting and running.

Speaking of the Asura Bear, I can still hear her roar. It builds and builds, even though she's literally covered in monsters. Not sure who I feel sorry for, I have no doubt she's getting torn up in there, but all that does is make her more mad. The *crunch* of her jaws when bites and the *slash* of her claws when she swipes give me shivers. No matter how thick the termite swarm around her is, the sounds just keep coming.

Every time I think I think I have good grasp on just how strong she is, I realise I've underestimated her.

Just how much physical strength does she have?! It's insane! The sheer weight bearing down on her is beyond counting, yet she's still fighting in there like nothing is happening? Hello? Sarah? Can you help me make sense of that for a minute?! I know it has something to do with her "Rage Engine" or whatever the hell organ turns on her berserk mode.

Despite how impressive it is, I keep in mind that she's also taking damage. The longer this goes on, the more she's going to get hurt and the closer she'll come to death. I knew this would be a dangerous, all or nothing type of gamble, but it was never my intention to put Sarah into the deep end. I'd hoped to be the only one who had to do that.

I should have known that she was too brave to back out when the chance arose. Once the chips were down, she threw herself in at the first opportunity. With Tiny fighting on that side with her, she should be able to hold on for a while.

The giant ape is in his element in this moment. His feet flutter from step to step, his powerful wings beating in rhythm as he floats from place to place. If I focus only on his legs, I would think he was performing an elegant, graceful dance. Those giant fury feet shift and turn so smoothly I could almost be convinced he choreographed the whole thing in advance.

Yet when I took in the full picture, when I looked at his hands, I knew this was no slow ballad. Tiny's hands moved so fast I couldn't see them, only the blur they left behind. Over and over again the giant fists of light slammed into the wall of termites, slowing its progress and almost driving it back. He won't be able to keep that insane level of output for too long though. Tiny has incredible stamina generation, which he needs to throw out the barrages of punches that he does, but even so there's a limit.

I'll need to take action before things to get that point

[I'm going to get cracking on a new spell. Try to buy me a little time!]

The others redouble their efforts as I begin to focus within myself once more, turning over control of my body to the sub-brains. The main mind dips down into the well of power that still remains largely untapped during this extended battle: the gravity mana gland. I used it for a domain a while back, but that's far from enough to drain this thing. I gave it several mutations upgrading the capacity and it holds a bum load of mana. My core might still be low on energy, but I still have this reserve to make use of.

My brains are still largely fried though, the extended period of concentration and effort required to weave those spells was migraine inducing. Of all my brains, only the main one is in any state to cast. So as I reach within and summon up the dark purple mana, I know that I'm going to be running solo on this one.

My body continues to duck, weave and fight as other brains pick up the slack, which is an odd sensation to say the least, but it's a comfort. If I sat still I'd be dead pretty damn quickly in this scenario.

There's only a limited number of things I can do with the gravity mana, without the specific spell constructs gained from the dedicated skill. Most of those won't be useful right now, so I have no choice but to weave the only thing that will have an impact. Time for the gravity bomb.

Now, is that dangerous? May do more harm than good? Absolutely! But desperate times call for desperate measures.

Another thing to keep in mind, is that I don't *have* to dump all of my mana into a single gravity bomb. I was able to cast a much weaker version of the spell immediately after I gained the gland after all. My mental powers and mana handling skills have grown in leaps and bounds since then. If I want to fire off a mini-bomb, I should be more than capable!

Under the potent guidance of my main mind, the mana leaps to my command, compressing and twisting in on itself as I begin to condense it over and over again. It doesn't take long for the ball of mana to coalesce into the sphere that I now recognise as the weakest form of the gravity bomb. I pump a little more into it before I tie off the spell and prepare to launch it.

[Crisis! Invidia! Prepare for a blast!]

My two pets begin to retreat from that front and after a beat I let the bomb fly.

It howls into existence, but in a much reduced form to what I've become used to. The sphere is so much smaller, its intimidating aura so much weaker, but it's good enough for the job at hand. The bomb impacts against the leading termites and enlarges into the swirling mass of death that I've come to know and love... and fear.

The termites are obviously less than happy with this development. Many of them are pulled into the black sphere, but the power of the bomb isn't enough to crush them instantly. These monsters are much tougher than the centipedes who were the first victim of the gravity bomb, after all. Despite the bomb, the termites are still able to push forward, creeping around the edges and hugging the walls to avoid the pull.

That's fine. The second one is almost ready to go.