

HOUSES AND HUMANS

By Jeff Dunne

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CHARACTERS

ANTHONY	An ant. He's set up as the "housemaster".
ANTONIO	An ant.
ANTONELLA	An ant.
ANTWON	You guessed it – an ant.
SANDY	Also an ant, but with a brain.

SETTING

A gaming room in an ant nest.

SCENE

(A group of ants – Antonella, Antonio, and Anthony – are sitting around a table covered in papers, dice, and other RPG paraphernalia.)

ANTHONY

Alright, is everyone ready now?

ANTONIO

Wait, are we completely healed up from the last encounter? I still have me as being down twelve hit points.

ANTHONY

Yes, Antonella healed everyone at the end of the last encounter.

ANTONELLA

Not everyone. I think Antonio didn't get healed all the way because—

(Antwon rushes in.)

ANTWON

Sorry, sorry! There was a big backup at the entrance to the nest. Antioch was trying to get this huge piece of—

ANTHONY

Whatever. Antonio laid out all your stuff. Did you remember your dice this time?

(Antwon pulls out and shakes a little dice bag as he sits at the table.)

Good. Okay, so I think we're ready to go. Now, the trail stretches out—

ANTWON

Hang on. I hope it's okay, but I invited someone to join us. I told her we had a game going, and she seemed really interested.

ANTONELLA

Was it Antigone? I know she was thinking about playing, but has tap lessons on Saturdays.

ANTWON

No, not her. It's someone I met while I was out marching. I think she said her name was Antsandy or something like that. I didn't quite hear...

(All the others have started groaning.)

What? What? Do you know her?

ANTONIO

Sandy? You're sure it was Sandy?

ANTWON

Something like that, but I'm guessing it was Antsandy and I just misheard.

(They're all staring at him.)

Is there a problem?

ANTONELLA

She's so—

ANTONIO

Weird.

ANTWON

She seemed alright wh—

(Sandy bounds in, the epitome of enthusiasm.)

SANDY

Hi guys! Thank you *so* much for— Oh, hey! I know you! Anthony, right? And Antonio, and... wait, don't tell me... Ant...

ANTONELLA

Antonell—

SANDY

No-no-no-no-no-don't-tell-meeee... Antonella, right??

(They all smile weakly at Sandy as she sits down at the table.)

Thank you *so* so much for inviting me. I've always wanted to trying playing Houses and Humans! This is gonna be sooo cool!

ANTWON

Here. I made a character for you. She's a ranger. Army ranger.

SANDY

A ranger. That's so cool!

ANTHONY

Anyway, as I was saying... the path stretches out ahead of—

SANDY

Wait! What's happened so far?

ANTHONY

You all set out from the nest closest to the big wooden post. You climbed up, and then over, and then up, and then over, then up, then over, then up.

SANDY

Wow! That's so cool!

(Anthony, Antonio, and Antonella roll their eyes.)

ANTHONY

Anyway, two of your party got trapped in a sticky web and eaten by a spider, but the rest of you are approaching a big vinyl wall. It's about five feet away. What's your marching order?

ANTONIO

I'll be in front.

ANTONELLA

I'll be right behind Antonio.

ANTWON

Then me, I guess.

SANDY

Can I walk next to Antwon?

(Antwon just looks at Sandy like she's an idiot as...)

ANTONIO, ANTONELLA, AND ANTHONY

No!!

SANDY

Huh. Okay, I guess I'll be last in line.

ANTHONY

Okay, Antonio. What do you do?

ANTONIO

So the big vinyl wall is like five feet away?

ANTHONY

Right.

ANTONIO

Okay, I guess I walk towards it.

ANTHONY

Suddenly a huge shoe comes down out of the sky. Roll a d20.

(Antonio rolls and...)

ANTONIO

Seventeen.

ANTHONY

You're surprised. The shoe comes down and squashes you. You're dead.

ANTONIO

Damn.

ANTHONY

Okay, Antonella. What do you do?

ANTONELLA

So the big vinyl wall is like five feet away?

ANTHONY

Right.

ANTONELLA

I guess I walk towards it too.

ANTHONY

Okay. You take a few steps and then see Antonio's body all smushed on the ground. Suddenly a big shoe starts coming down from the sky. Roll a d20.

(Antonella rolls.)

ANTONELLA

A natural twenty!

ANTHONY

That's a critical success. You're not surprised, and can take an action before the shoe reaches you.

ANTONELLA

Huh. Let me think. How big is the shoe?

ANTHONY

Really big. Like a CR of at least seventy.

ANTONELLA

That's pretty big, I guess?

ANTHONY

It's eclipsing the sun as it gets closer. What do you do?

ANTONELLA

Do I still have my enchanted thorax chitin?

ANTHONY

I assume you wear that all the time.

ANTONELLA

Right. Okay. I'll keep going forward toward the wall.

ANTHONY

Okay. The shoe keeps coming down. It... *(rolling a die...)* hits. You take...

ANTONELLA

Wait. You said I was fully healed, right?

ANTHONY

Right.

ANTONELLA

Then I have... *(Looking at her character sheet, then...)* thirty-nine hit points.

ANTHONY

Right. And you take...

(He rolls a huge handful of dice. He counts, then rolls them again. And again. And again.)

Four thousand, seven hundred and sixteen points of damage.

ANTONELLA

So does that mean I'm unconscious?

ANTONIO

Uh, I don't think so. If you take more than twice your total H.P...

ANTHONY

Yeah, you're definitely dead.

ANTONELLA

Damn.

ANTHONY

Okay, Antwon. What do you do?

ANTWON

Are there any other shoes in the sky?

ANTHONY

Not that you can see.

ANTWON

Alright, then I'm going to make a run for it. I'll use all my movement, and I'll also dash to double my speed. And since I'm a monk that means I'll get to move... yep, forty ant-lengths this round.

ANTONIO

Forty! Holy crap. How do you—

ANTWON

Base movement is 10, then another 10 for dashing, and then I can use a bonus action to dash again for another 10, and I've got the Tarsal Claws of Climbing, which give me an additional 10 movement.

ANTONELLA

That's sick!

ANTWON

I know, right?

ANTHONY

Okay, you speed past Antonio and Antonella's dead bodies. You get about a third of the way to the vinyl wall, and suddenly you hear a loud hissing sound. What do you do?

ANTWON

Have I ever heard anything like it?

ANTHONY

Nope.

ANTWON

Okay, I'll dodge.

ANTHONY

Good choice. You get advantage on your DEX save. Roll against a DC of forty as a huge blast of wetness comes showering down all around you.

ANTWON

Forty?!?

ANTHONY

Yep, it's really big.

ANTWON

With the bonus from my magic claws I get a twenty-three.

ANTHONY

Not good enough. Now make a CON save with disadvantage.

ANTWON

What do I need?

ANTHONY

Hang on. Let me look it up.

(He picks up a book at starts flipping through it while muttering...)

Let's see... balrog... basilisk... behold— here it is. Black Flag Cloud. You need to get at least a... *(reading silently, then...)* fifty-seven. But don't forget that you get plus two for being level eight.

ANTWON

Can I use my inspiration?

ANTHONY

Sure. That cancels out the disadvantage.

(Antwon rolls a die.)

ANTWON

Nine.

ANTHONY

Plus two?

ANTWON

No, I already added that. I rolled a seven.

ANTHONY

Well, you needed a fifty-seven, so you're dead.

ANTWON

That sucks.

ANTHONY

Yeah, sorry. Okay, Sandy, what do you do?

SANDY

Wow. So they're all dead?

ANTHONY

Right.

SANDY

And what's around me?

ANTHONY

There's a big vinyl wall ahead of you.

SANDY

But what about to the left and right?

ANTHONY

What do you mean?

SANDY

You know, what's around to the left and right?

ANTHONY

I'm not following.

SANDY

Well, going forwards seems like certain death, so I'm wondering if maybe I can find another way into the house.

ANTONELLA

The house is in front of you.

ANTONIO

That's the vinyl wall, stupid.

SANDY

I *know* it's the wall, but going straight ahead is suicide. So I want to see if I can maybe sneak in through a window or something.

ANTONELLA

(To Antwon...)

See? This is why we didn't want her to play.

SANDY

It just seems like—

ANTONIO

She goes forward.

ANTHONY

Is that what you do?

No, I don't. I—

SANDY

Yes she does. You do, right?

ANTONIO

I just think—

SANDY

She goes forward.

ANTONELLA

But I just—

SANDY

Sandy!

ANTONIO AND ANTONELLA

This is how the game is played. If you don't want to play, then don't play.

ANTONELLA

So is that what you do?

ANTHONY

Apparently.

SANDY

You walk past the bodies of Antonio and Antonella, and then come to a big wet spot with the body of Antwon in the middle.

ANTHONY

Huh. I guess I go around it.

SANDY

Around?

ANTONIO

Around?!

ANTONELLA

That's...

ANTWON

That's...

ANTONIO

ANTWON, ANTONIO, AND ANTONELLA

That's brilliant!!

SANDY

Thank you!

ANTHONY

Okay, you go around the big wet spot and reach the vinyl wall.

ANTWON

Nice!

ANTHONY

At the base of the wall is a little dome, and you can smell something very tasty inside.

SANDY

Tasty? Like how tasty?

ANTHONY

Like even better than honey. Or poop.

ANTONELLA

Grab some!

SANDY

I don't...

ANTONIO

Definitely grab some! That's treasure!

SANDY

But what is it doing outside when—

ANTONELLA

Who cares? Grab it and run!

SANDY

I don't think so. It's too easy. I bet it's a trap.

ANTONIO

Don't be an idiot! Grab the treasure.

SANDY
(To Antwon...)

What do you think?

ANTWON
I don't know, Sandy. Better than poop? I don't see how you can pass that up.

ANTHONY
So what do you do? Do you grab whatever's in the dome?

SANDY
I don't kn—

ANTONIO, ANTONELLA, AND ANTWON
She does!

ANTHONY
Do you?

SANDY
I—

ANTONIO
Yes. She grabs it.

ANTHONY
Sandy?

SANDY
Well, I guess if everyone else says I should...

ANTONIO, ANTONELLA, AND ANTWON
Yes!

SANDY
Fine. I reach in.

ANTHONY
Inside you find a mystic, white granule. It smells absolutely amazing.

SANDY
I'll take a tiny, tiny taste just to—

ANTONELLA

No!! No, don't be stupid. You need to get it back to the nest as fast as possible.

ANTONIO

Right. You never eat it right there.

SANDY

I wasn't going to eat it. I just thought I should take a taste just to...

(She fades off as she notices the others staring disapprovingly at her.)

ANTHONY

Well?

SANDY

I guess I take it back to the nest.

ANTHONY

Alright, you turn arou—

SANDY

Being careful to go around the wet area.

ANTHONY

Right. Okay. You take the granule back to the nest. Other ants greet you outside, and everyone carries the granule to the queen. Who eats it and dies. *(Beat.)* Including you.

(There's a long, awkward pause as they all stare at each other, then suddenly...)

ANTONIO

Alright. Great game tonight!

ANTONELLA

Defs. Had a blast, Anthony.

ANTWON

Same time next week?

(Anthony, Antonella, Antonio, and Antwon all grab their stuff and start exiting as Anthony says...)

You bet! ANTHONY

'Kay. See ya! ANTONIO

Bye all! ANTWON

Later! ANTONELLA

(Sandy just stands there, confused, watching all of this in silence. Lights out.)