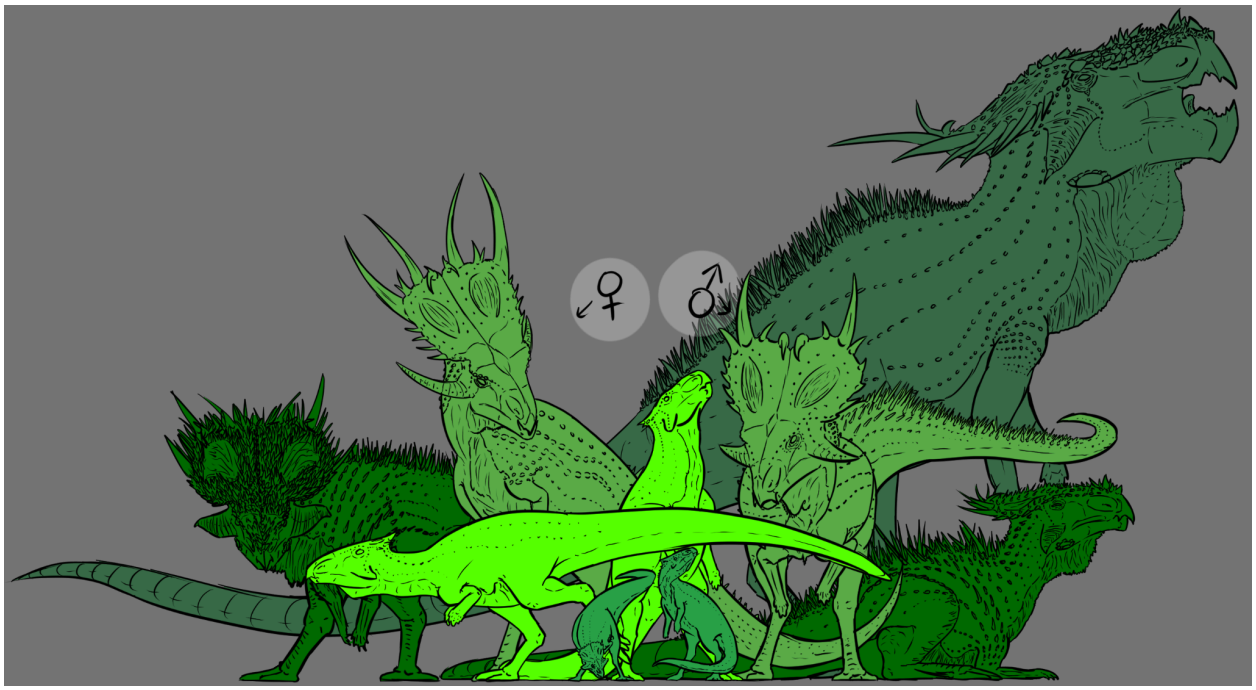
Homalocephale Ant/Termite Proposal

Made by Hypernova, Termite mound idea from Prefab structure doc



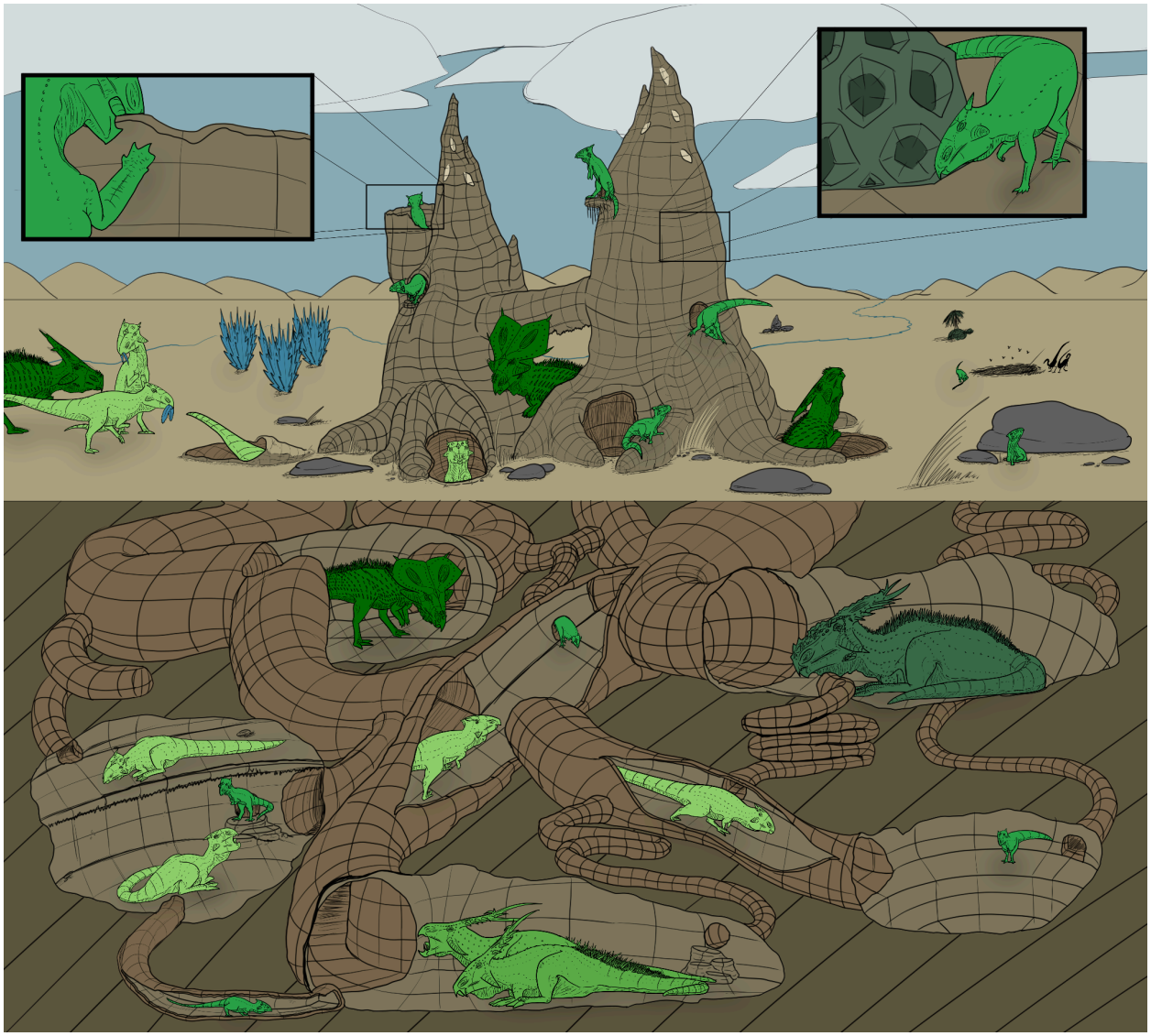
[Artwork by Hypernova]

Introduction: a dwarf pachycephalosaur

In The Isle, Homalocephalae is a tiny fossorial animal that seems to take after its larger cousin, Pachycephalosaurus, using its wide flat skull to fight that which it cannot outrun, or evade using its burrowing abilities. On its own, this seems like quite a fine niche to have, however, the presence of Protoceratops, a larger animal that largely does the same thing, leaves Homalo in a rough situation. To attempt to mitigate some of this pressure, I presented a Termite-analogous Homalocephalae in my document on Prefabricated Structures, the aim of this document is to revisit and refine that idea, by introducing one of the most defining traits of the analogue I chose, and eusocial insects as a whole, the caste system.

In the caste system, normal gameplay would proceed as normal, however heavy modifications were made to the elder system, allowing a player to swap from the role of their individual dinosaur to the role of the colony, taking control of key members throughout the establishment of a new colony, including the minor workers, the first majors, soldiers, and supermajors. This effectively allows the player to try 5 animals at once, with all of the original mechanics of the Homalo being preserved in the Alate caste, which is the primary role the player will take, being the end result of both spawning as a Homalo, and nesting in additional players.

Burrows & Mounds: Home sweet home



[Link to image]

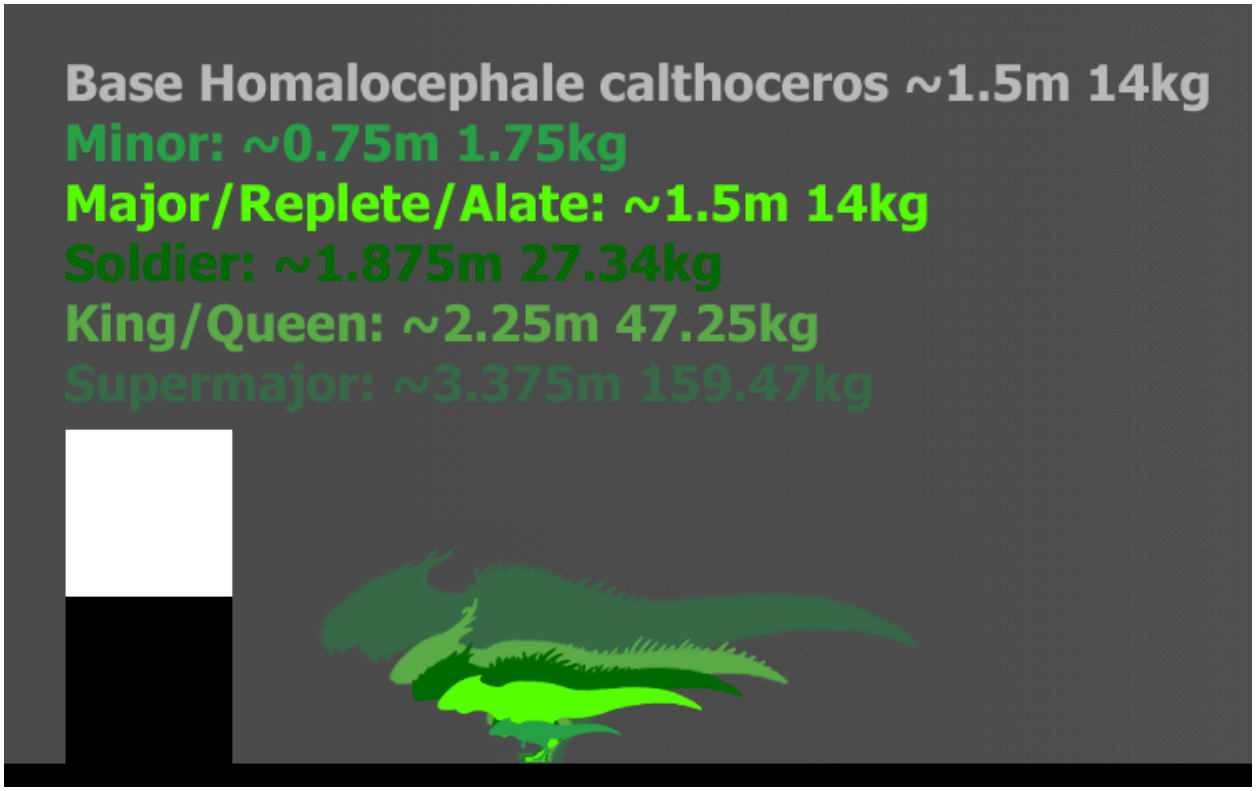
As a whole, Homalocephale is one of the most intricate burrowers in The Isle. Their large underground networks terminate in structures that resemble those of the famous Cathedral Termites and are composed of similar materials, primarily chewed plant matter. While their Mounds and burrows can be built anywhere that has an abundance of materials, they tend toward drier environments since the sandy soil provides a softer substrate, and the abundant dust and grit makes for an excellent natural cement. Temporary burrows are often just scrapped into the ground by wandering Alates, however, when a mature pair set about creating a colony, a more complex process is required. Construction being by gathering materials, since the more arid landscapes of The Isle house fewer trees, the little builders rely upon woody shrubs and other tough desert plants for the paste of their natural cement, though nearly any plant matter can work in a pinch. The storage of this material takes up a portion of their hunger meter, and the Homalo can regurgitate it at will should it need to feed.

The founding members of the colony begin by tunnelling deep into the loose soil, creating a massive tunnel from which they will rarely if ever, emerge. Once this initial tunnel has been constructed, a few eggs are laid, and the chamber and walls are reinforced with regurgitated plant pulp to harden them and increase the load-bearing capacity of the burrow. This tunnel will serve as the spine of the colony, with all future tunnels and towers connecting to it. After a short while, the eggs will hatch into the first sterile workers, who grow quickly and leave their parents to gather more materials for construction.

Once sufficient materials have been gathered, the Workers construct the first chamber of a future tower, a decently sized mound of their cement-like mixture of plant fibres, sediment and saliva. Laying down materials requires water, as well as the storage of the mixture in their stomachs. This makes construction for Homalocephale far more taxing compared to other burrowing animals, luckily the structures they build are some of the sturdiest on The Isle. Once the anchor point has been constructed, Homalo can use its strong skull to break tunnels into the anchor point and can expand outwards, or upwards. The taller chambers are reached through a spiral staircase that threads the interior of the tower. Tunnels reaching outwards horizontally are short and straight, allowing the colony to stay closely linked. Expansions and new entrances can only be created while the tower is still soft, once the mud and wood pulp hardens, not even a Triceratops can knock down the towers without a headache.

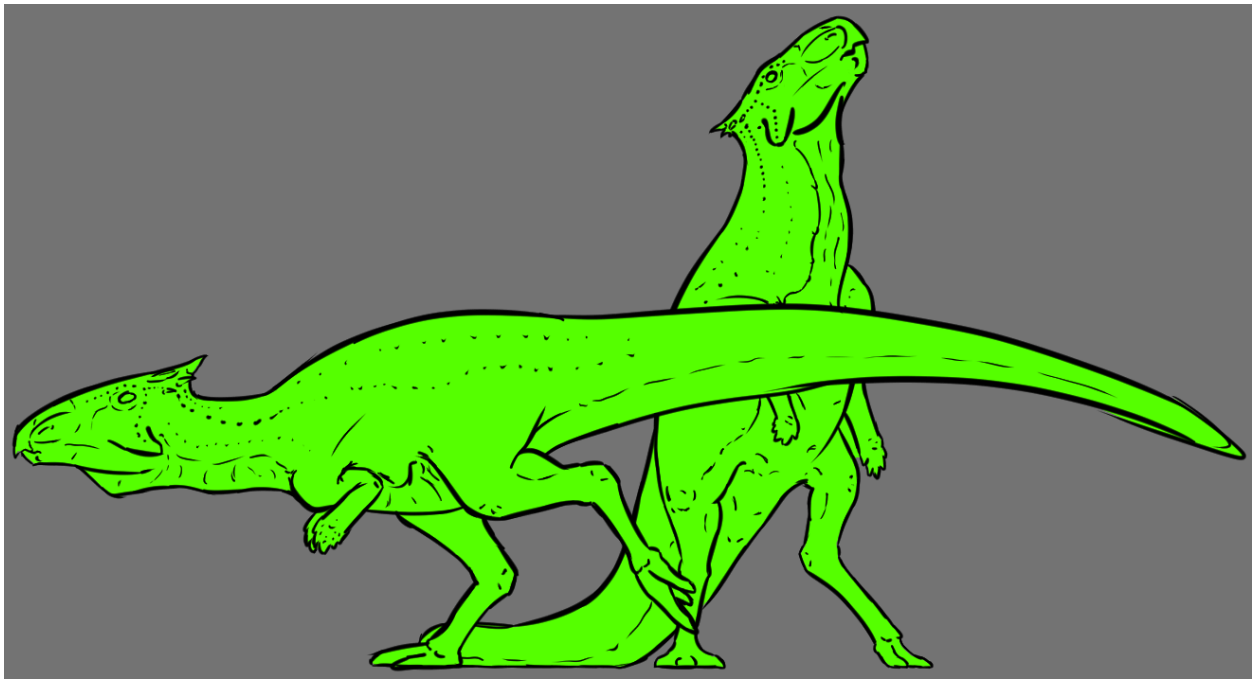
These towers will be incredibly important to the future of the colony, as they house the fungal gardens which the colony depends upon for food. Without a tower, the colony is forced to spend most of their time exposed and scavenging for food, a fate the newly emerging Minors, who tend to the gardens, are fatally ill-equipped for. The fungus is cultivated from various plants which grow around the colony. The sterile members of the colony lack the needed digestive microbes to derive nutrition from these hardy plants, but the fungus breaks it down, providing a nutrient-rich and easy to digest flesh for the colony to harvest, in exchange for a constant supply of new food, and regular pruning of dead or sick tissue. To maintain the gardens, workers are regularly forced to venture from the nest and take in foliage, which they do indiscriminately. These foraging parties are often accompanied by the soldier caste, which begins to emerge in time with the growing needs of the colony as their fungal gardens begin to grow. The waste, both unconsumed food, and harvested fungus must be disposed of to keep the crop healthy, so workers will establish a refuse pit near the structure. The refuse gives off a pungent smell if not properly disposed of, which will easily draw in carnivores from miles around.

The Caste system: Divide and conquer



[A chart displaying the disparity in size between the castes]

Reproductives: Colonial monarchs



Alates: The player character

Mature Length: 1.5m [Grows into King/Queen]
Mass: 14kg
Reproductively viable members of the colony which undergo dispersal, this is the caste which the player controls. Upon spawning, you play as a juvenile Alate which has reached the age of dispersal, completing a relatively short growth period, before your primary objective shifts from simply surviving, to establishing a colony of your own. Alates are visually identical to Majors and Repletes, however, they serve a unique purpose, being the only stage capable of establishing a new nest.

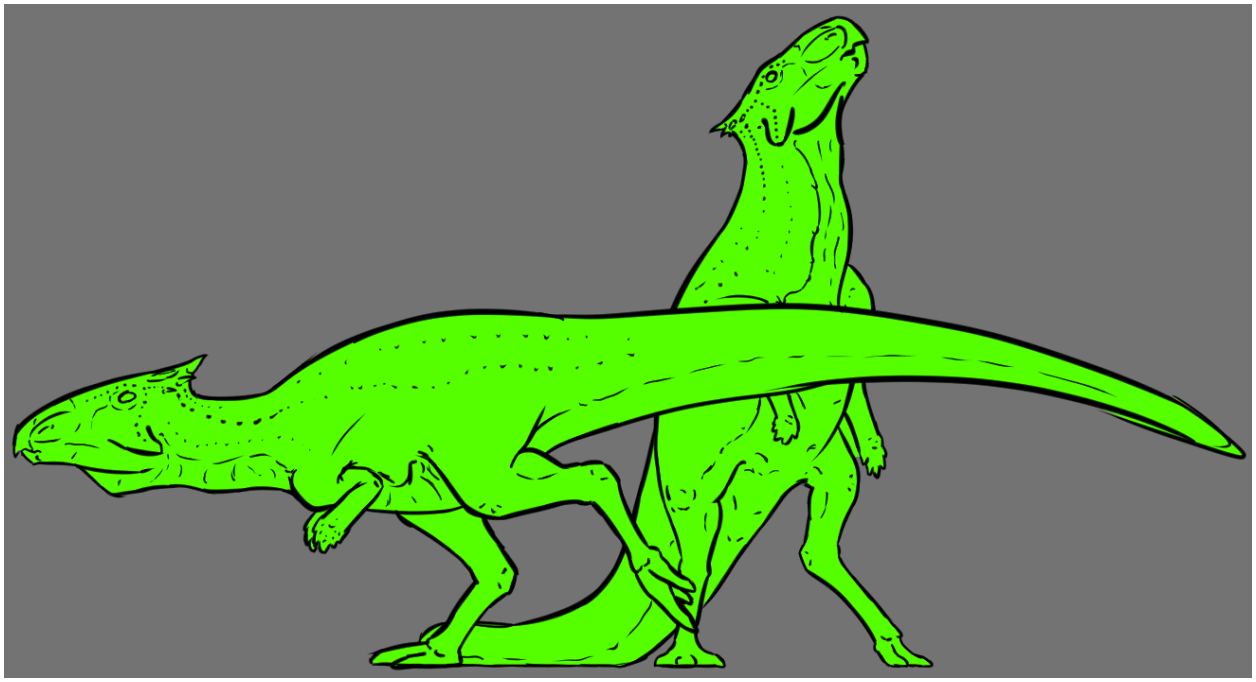
Kings & Queens: Elder Alates

Mature Length: 2.25m
Mass: 47.25ekg
Serving as a unique shift in gameplay, the elder stage of Homalocephalae has your dinosaur take the role of a reproductive within a budding colony. Rather than wasting away until your inevitable demise, the goal of an elder Homalo is to establish your colony. This is accomplished by taking control of the various non-reproductive members of your colony, beginning with the birth of your first workers, the minuscule Minor caste. The colony is considered established with the maturity of the first generation of Supermajors. At this point, the player is able to abandon their animal in a manner similar to the dirt nap of the other elder animals. After a player completes the elder stage, the colony will convert fully to Ai, and will persist in the overworld for a time, despawning either after a set duration, or when the reproductives within the colony are killed off.

Non-reproductives: Help comes in many sizes

Minors: Diminutive housekeeping

Mature Length: 0.75m
Mass: 14kg
The smallest caste, scarcely larger than a fresh spawn Alate, Minors are responsible for maintaining the nest, digging new chambers under the ground, and expanding or creating entirely new towers. Minors are additionally vital to the reproductive success of the colony, tending to the fungal gardens which nourish the reproductives, and serving as the primary caregivers for the eggs and hatchlings. Once a fungal garden has been established from supplies gathered by the reproductives, the colony will begin to create Majors and Repletes.

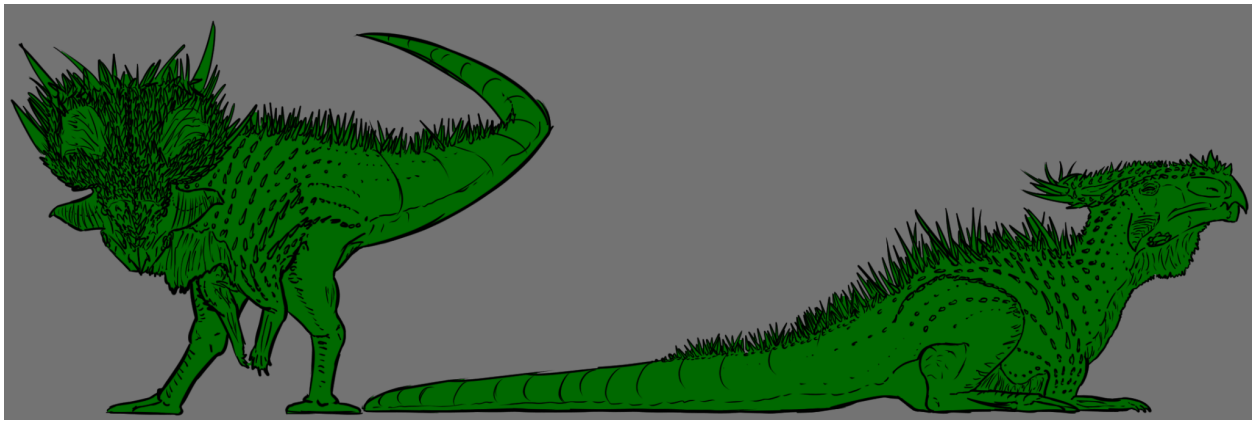


Majors: Foraging expertise

Mature Length: 1.5m
Mass: 14kg
Visually identical to the alates, and the main caste responsible for leaving the colony and gathering resources, Majors are larger workers that move in groups to cover more ground and thwart small attackers. When push comes to shove, however, they often rely on the aid of the larger Soldier caste, as despite their feisty temperaments, most carnivores are simply above the paygrade of these tiny herbivores. Upon delivering each nutrient, and water, to the repletes, the colony will begin to produce combat-oriented soldiers.

Repletes: Living storage

Mature Length: 1.5m
Mass: 14kg [Increases to 20kg when the crop is full]
A subset of Major workers which have the ability to store an increased amount of food or water within their crops, Repletes are responsible primarily for maintaining a steady supply of water to nest-bound castes, as well as storing any particularly rare nutrients, which can be distributed to the juveniles. This caste remains primarily within the nest and is supplied by regular foraging trips conducted by the Majors and Soldiers. As the second most valuable nonreproductive caste, the Repletes are often found alongside the young in the depths of the nest, performing relatively few maintenance tasks.



Soldiers: The best defence is an overwhelming offence

Mature Length: 1.875m
Mass: 27.34kg
This caste is in charge of defence, capable of Phragmosis, where the soldiers use their broad skulls to block tunnels from intruders. In terms of overall size, the Soldiers are larger than the Majors they accompany on foraging parties. Typically these parties contain 3-4 Soldiers, which run interference to make sure their resource carrying Majors can make it to the Repletes. Should the nest fall under attack, however, the full force of the colony will pour from the nest, with an average colony possessing up to 20 soldiers. Colonies possessing multiple reproductive pairs can have far more, with each pair more than doubling the total soldiers. After the first generation of soldiers has reached maturity, the reproductives will produce their first supermajor.

Supermajors: Heavy artillery

Mature Length: 3.375m
Mass: 159.47kg
The largest caste in the colony, Supermajors have difficulty navigating the more restrictive towers, and reside near the surface in underground chambers, fed by repletes, and conserving their powerful strength for defence from anything large enough to threaten the colony. Requiring a significant amount of resources, this caste is few in number, but make up for it with overwhelming power, each super major worth more than its weight in soldiers. Upon the maturity of the first generation of Supermajors, the colony is often so well established that few substantial threats remain.