

## Chrysalis 1071

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#### Chapter 1071: Demon God

*I am not, as you know, a religious man. The screeching priests and their endless droning on all matters 'Path' hold no attraction to me. I've no time for their words, elixirs or 'ideas'.*

*I don't care how many Levels I'd get.*

*Almost everything around us can be explained, we literally have a 'System' we can analyse, for goodness' sake. Just because we can't identify the origins of said System, doesn't mean we need to assume some form of deity.*

*The Ancients, though, are different. They are real, observed, named, experienced. One can study them, if you know where to look for the historical record. They are demonstrably, observably and materially as close to divine as a being can be.*

*It is foolish to consider them as simply monsters, they are as far from an average monster as a ka'armodo is from a gecko. We are ants to them. It's hardly surprising that such powerful beings would inspire worship. When you cannot run from them, and you cannot fight them, one might as well pray.*

*- Excerpt from the private correspondence of Illarion the heretic*

*Deep within the Dungeon.*

Arconidem dreamed. The Demon God had slept for so long, thoughts drifting slowly in and out of oblivion, away from the material world at times, then drifting closer again.

It was such a time now. Visions of demons at war flickered rapid-fire, one after another, through the Ancient's mind. Violence, fire and ash, over and over again, all types of demon battling against all kinds of foe. A never-ending battle of rage and chaos that wrapped around Pangera's core.

Such a pleasant dream.

Despite still slumbering, the Demon God smiled, then drew a breath.

In an instant, the mana inside the grand chamber plummeted, leaving those present gasping as their cores screamed out in pain. Deprived of the energy that gave them life, the God's attendants writhed even as their eyes turned with hope to the still form of their master.

Mana returned in a flood, rising from beneath them, an endless torrent of energy that they pulled greedily into their cores. The pain was gone, but still they watched.

Arconidem opened both eyes.

A moment later, the attendants were crushed under the weight of the Ancient's presence. The force of such a mighty being was intolerable, even to those who had experienced it before. Despite the difficulty and danger, in their hearts, they rejoiced.

The Demon God took in the chamber with a glance, two long arms tipped with enormous claws stretching and shifting, as if remembering how to move again.

Then the feet of the throne shifted, and the entire chamber rocked. Stone dust fell from above, showering all, even the Ancient in dust. Blazing magma began to flow, released from the stone after centuries of slumber, igniting the air which filled with suffocating ash in an instant.

Another breath, but this time a gentler one, the mana density dropping by half before it stabilised again seconds later. As each moment passed, Arconidem appeared more present, more alert than before.

Looking down at the attendants who now prostrated themselves before the living throne, the Ancient grinned a slow and menacing grin and tasted the air.

**[The cycle approaches its climax.]**

The thought crashed down on the attendants and pressed them to the floor. They trembled under its weight, even as their hearts soared. To experience first hand the progenitor's mind, this was a privilege only afforded to the strong!

**[The way must be prepared. Soon, my children, we will rise and taste that sweet chaos once more.]**

The gathered demons, crushed by the power of the Ancient's mind, trembled with elation. They were the chosen few who would fight alongside their God. As more mana poured from the centre of the Dungeon, they would climb up and impose Arconidem's will. Before then, the domain of the Ancient would need to be restored to its former glory. There was much to do!

A thread drifted into the chamber and brushed against the awakened monster's thoughts. Like a snake, the Ancient snatched it up, examined it, then wove a new thread and joined the two together.

Familiar thoughts, a familiar mind, one not felt for many years.

**[Good to see I am not the first, Carriflare. What of the others, do they slumber still?]**

Ever burning, blindingly bright, the other Ancient was a blast of light and heat that even the Demon God could not touch without being burned.

**[I greet you, Arconidem. The time draws near, the others stir, though several are already awake. Tarriflyx will wake any day.]**

**[What of Yarrum?]**

**[Sleeping still.]**

The Demon God stretched out to encompass the surroundings within its thoughts, then pushed further still, to touch the boundaries between domains. It was true, the mana felt sluggish in the neighbouring territory.

To know that it had stolen a march against its rival pleased the Ancient, though it was largely meaningless. Knowing that the Hunger would soon wake was an interesting morsel. One of two creatures with an appetite greater than Arconidem's.

**[What hope this cycle?]**

The important question.

**[Odren has hooked a few he likes.]**

The Father of Monsters was always hunting, which was good, none of the others could be bothered.

In that moment, both of them withdrew as they felt something shift beneath them.

A torrent of mana, more pure and dense than before, blew past them, rising up and rushing out higher in the Dungeon. Arconidem took a deep breath. It was intoxicating. The energy rushed into its core and settled there, bringing life throughout its monstrous frame.

A new wave had begun.

**[Time for chaos,]** the Demon God grinned.

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**Chapter 1072: Further Consumption**

**[You have slain level 37 Fortis Adamas Scolopendra (IV).]**

**[You have gained XP.]**

Stupid centipede! You dare oppose my glorious rise? You deserved what you got!

Although I wouldn't really call it a glorious rise, more of an imposing hover. I'm still working out the kinks, but it won't be long now.

Good thing I can direct and contain the energy produced by the wells to the degree I do. It took me a while to realise just what it meant to defeat the gravity of the planet with my own source. Logically speaking, if they affected each other equally, then the planet might well get ripped in half.

When you get right down to it, gravity is a really piddly force. It takes an entire planet of stuff to produce a level that isn't enough to stop an ant from wiggling about on the surface. Literally the entire planet Earth couldn't produce enough energy to squash a bug.

Fortunately, we have a nice little workaround on Pangera called mana. I have no idea how the stuff converts itself into... basically everything, but it sure as heck seems to be efficient at it. I can produce enough gravitational energy to lift my body up into the air with ease.

I actually need less mana than I thought to achieve it as well. When I properly focus and control the well, I can utilise the energy within much more effectively. This is the learning process and I am bringing nothing but A's.

**[Tiny! Stop laughing at me this instant!]**

The ape does not comply, pointing up at me and rumbling with laughter.

**[Don't be so disrespectful to the Master!]** Crinis scolds him, prodding her comrade in the side with a tentacle. **[Behave yourself!]**

Just because I'm hanging in mid air like a towel draped over a drying rack is no reason to laugh! Just because my legs are dangling like limp noodles? Is that so funny? It's comfortable, dammit!

With a wrench of Will, I shift the well above me and move it forward, causing my body to drift along under it. Eventually I reach a point on top of Tiny and let my legs, still hanging loose, flop onto his head.

[How do you like that! Huh? Feel the wrath of my noodle legs!]

I drift back and forth, aiming to whack him again, but he easily dodges out of the way, forcing me to float after him.

[Get back here! How dare you use your fancy feet for this? Receive justice!]

[Uh... Master?]

[One second, Crinis, I have to discipline this cheeky ape!]

[Isn't it about time we should be getting back to the nest? You said you wanted to check in with the others.]

Ah, trusty Crinis. I can always count on her to remember what's important. I'd give her a pat, but I can't be bothered lifting my legs, they're comfy where they are.

[You're completely right! Thank you for remembering, Crinis. Invidia? Where did you get to? Ready to head back?]

The little demon flutters into view. He effortlessly flies up in front of me and observes my form. It may just be me, but I detect a distinct lack of envy in the way he looks at me floating.

Just because you can do it so much better! My mass isn't stuffed into a pocket dimension, you damned imp!

And he's been flying for ages, I'm just getting started. I'll get a lot better at it than this.

[All right then, everyone, time to head back to the nest. Let's get going.]

Wait, I'm facing the wrong way.

[Just give me a sec, need to turn around.]

This has been a little tricky. I mean, do I rotate the well? Does that even work? I wobble back and forth in the air until Crinis extends a tentacle down from her spot on my carapace to the ground and uses that leverage to spin me.

[Oh, nice one. Let's go!]

Oriented the right way, I manipulate the well forward and begin my triumphant drift back to the nest. Just wait until the Colony gets a load of this! They'll be super impressed, I'm sure.

[Um, Master?]

[Yes, Crinis?]

[Do you think it may be a little... quicker, if you returned on foot?]

I mean, sure it would. I'm not very quick with this method yet, which is precisely why I want to practise it! Though, as usual, she may have a point. We've been out for a few days already, we need to get back and see how things are going on the third. Hopefully the demon situation is settling down a little bit.

[All right,] I sigh and lower myself back to the ground.

The well would fade when the energy within it ran out, but I can't exactly leave these pockets of gravitational potential lying around, so I break it apart before we leave.

[Thank you, Master,] Crinis says, sounding relieved.

[Well, you weren't wrong, we do need to get back in a timely fashion.]

[I also think you have a much more dignified appearance like this. It wouldn't do for the Colony to look at you being unsightly.]

I'm shocked.

[What? Unsightly! My majestic floating form?! That can't be right....]

I turn to Tiny.

[Do I really look that ridiculous?]

The ape looks puzzled for a moment, as if confused I would even ask, before he starts nodding vigorously.

That bad?!

[Invidia! Surely you were desiring of my grace and elegance floating in the air?]

The demon looks at me for a long second, blinks his eye, then looks away.

Holy moly!

It takes me a second to collect myself.

[Th-Thank you Crinis. I had no idea it was that bad.]

[I apologise, Master! I-it is quite bad, though....]

[No, you've done the right thing.]

I'll have to practise flying away from the Colony in the future until I've mastered it completely. If there's one thing I refuse to lose in front of my siblings, it's my dignity!

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### **Chapter 1073: They Do Good Work**

[Fortis Adamas Scolopendra: Strong Diamond Centipede (IV). These creatures are an advanced breed of a simpler species. A Living Diamond carapace and claws are their primary attributes, along with enhanced mana sensitivity and a potent mana toxin in their tail spike. Be warned, this monster hits much harder than it looks.]

Stupid system and your stupid favouritism! Straight up Living Diamond for a carapace, along with all sorts of other fancy bits and bobs only available to monsters born in the deeper sections of the Dungeons.

Meanwhile, most of the ants in the Colony are walking around with basic, first stratum bodies with nary a reset to be seen amongst them. This level of bias is unacceptable. Next time I see Gandalf, I'm going to give him a piece of my mind. I mean, I know he said that he's not directly responsible for this stuff, but he won't tell me who is, so he's the one who's going to cop it.

The journey back to the former termite nest is as smooth as one might expect when moving through territory controlled by the Colony. Already the patrols are out, marching along paths created by the carvers, culling the monster population and harvesting Biomass for the family.

When the mountain itself comes back into view, I can't help but clack my mandibles in appreciation. Those crazy ants, they really went ahead and did it. We've only been gone for a few days, but the work is basically done, as far as I can tell.

As expected, they've reformed the entire mountain into a giant anthill, the sides smoothly rising to the main entrance close to the top. It's not so simple, of course, the carvers can't help but add complexity to their designs. There are walls, parapets, towers, wrinkles and folds all over the place, somehow arranged in such a way as to be pleasing to the eye, even from this distance. This is a grand fortress even beyond what they constructed on the third stratum beneath the demon city of Roklu. Imagining trying to launch an attack makes my head hurt.

We head under the water, taking a reinforced tunnel that the Colony has created that connects to the neighbouring mountain we were hunting on. Basically an undersea highway. How on Pangera did they manage to engineer it to withstand the incredible pressure?

I won't even bother asking, there's no chance I'll understand the answer.

Wait a second!

I freeze for a moment and turn my many minds inward, sifting through the hundreds of thousands of strands of Will flowing into me. I thought I'd spotted something, something I've been looking for... there it is!

Finally found you! I seize the thread with delight and work out where it's coming from. Of course you'd come to this new fortress, so much space, so many walls for you to work on, it's basically a blank canvas, one that you could never resist!

Michealangelant! The rogue artist, with her gang of sculptors and painters, is here, inside the mountain! I've been wanting to catch her for ages, and try to get her to agree to stop making so many damn statues of me! Not to mention the murals! I don't even want to think about the paintings. Those are new and even more embarrassing. The Colony's continual absorption of new cultural artefacts from the various races we encounter has only accelerated with time, and the main way they seem to be applied is in finding new ways to depict me looking high and mighty.

I saw a vase with me painted on the side the other day.

A VASE.

What do we even need vases for?! We're ants, for goodness' sake!

Oh, no. I've got you this time. You won't get away without getting an antenna-full of complaints from the subject of your supposed 'works'!

I rush forward through the tunnel, excited, only to be held up at the massive, enormous, absurd gates the carvers have installed blocking the path. They're open a crack, just wide enough for a constant stream of traffic to move both in and out, but due to my unusual size, I don't fit. Tiny can suck in his gut and squeeze through, but I don't have the ability to shrink my exoskeleton.

So I'm stuck while they open it up a touch, a rather difficult feat considering the things must weigh thousands of tons. Another remarkable construction effort that I have no idea how they achieved.

Once I'm through and within the nest properly, I make to rush off, ready to hunt down that damned artist, but I'm held up before I get the chance.

"Hey there, Eldest! It's your lucky day!"

I look down at the tiny ant in front of me.

"Brilliant? Why are you here? What's lucky?"

"You're lucky, because you get to talk to me again! What an honour!"

THWACK.

"Stop being ridiculous and tell me why you're here," I tell her irritably. I need to get that damn artist!

"Ouch. That's not necessary. I was asked to tell you about the situation on the third."

Oh? My curiosity is piqued.

"Go on then."

"I believe they've started to sense the tier eights rising up through the layers. The fighting is getting more intense all the time. I think they're going to want you back up there soon."

Ahhhhh nards. Am I going to miss my chance? My antenna twitches and Brilliant vanishes in a flash, reappearing ten metres away.

"Easy with the antenna, I'm only delivering the message!"

"You won't get whacked for delivering a message," I retort, "but you will for getting too full of yourself!"

She has the gall to look confused.

"That's not even possible," she boasts, "I'm BRILLIANT."

"You're due for a thwacking, that's what you are," I grumble.

But she's gone, vanishing in another flash. Hopefully she's gone back to her lab. The sooner we can work out gate technology, the sooner I won't be reliant on a mad-ant to rip me through dimensions.

Sounds like things are really heating up in the third, which isn't good news. Going back up there is painful in the extreme, thanks to the hook lodged in my guts. I'll have to brace myself for it. I should track down Sloan or Victor as well, get an update on what's going on.

Damn you, Michaelangelant, you win this time....

A quick flash and Brilliant reappears.

"Oh, and there's another wave coming. Big one."

Then she's gone again.

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### **Chapter 1074: Rolling Waves**

Again?! I have to say, I've had enough of these waves. Each one is worse than the last. I mean, the Colony has been able to grow rapidly thanks to the injection of experience and Biomass, but the risk rises exponentially each time. This time, we'll be fighting across four strata at the same time!

What a nightmare.

At least, if we can find ways to block off the ascent of the monsters here in the fourth, we lessen the pressure on our territory above.

Ugh. I just realised that this means I'll have to take on more of those scum from the fifth. That poison is no joke! Countermeasures will need to be put in place... but I'll leave the thinking to the smarter ants. When they work out where they want me to go, I'll go and help as best I can. In the short term, that'll mean taking on multiple tier eight demons, which is going to suck, but that's the challenge I took on when I picked the evolution I did.

"Sloan! What the hell is going on up there?" I demand as I burst into the central planning chamber of the new fortress nest.

There's a swirling vortex of generals, mages, carvers and shapers centred around the council member in the middle of the space. The moment I burst in, everyone freezes, staring back at me, their antennae drifting slowly from side to side.

"Oookay," I say. "Don't let me... uh... interrupt."

"Bit late for that, don't you think?" Sloan said. "Welcome back, Eldest. I assume you're talking about the situation on the third?"

"Y-yes."

They're all still staring at me, like mice looking at a cat, hoping they won't be spotted if they don't move. It's unnerving!

"Uh. Brilliant popped out of nowhere and gave me a quick update, but I thought I should talk to you to get a clearer picture."

“Good idea. We’ve found that Brilliant is by far the fastest way to move information between strata, but far from the most reliable. She tends to miss details, or gloss over them, which is strange considering how intelligent she usually is.”

I shake my antennae. Brilliant? Intelligent? I’m not so sure about that. She’s a mad scientist. There’s a certain level of genius there, but there’s a whole lot of... gaps? She’s going to be an amazing help for the Colony, but she definitely needs us to put some rails in place to keep her on the right path.

Otherwise, she’s going to be turning herself inside out in some dumb experiment.

“In short, the situation is chaotic,” she tells me, “demons are fighting all over the place. Even some ‘settled’ tier six demons in the cities are going rogue and lashing out.”

“Are the cities still safe?”

“Relatively speaking, but we’ve had to increase our garrisons and lean on our demon allies to try and keep the peace, which isn’t easy because they might turn violent at any moment.”

“Any idea as to what’s causing it?”

If this chaos is stratum wide, then there has to be an underlying cause. If we can work out what it is, then maybe we have a shot at fixing it.

“So far, not a clue. We’ve been too busy making preparations and fighting up there to do much investigating. More to the point, I don’t think anyone knows where to look.”

Good point.

“And with a wave coming, that’s not likely to get any better....”

“Indeed. From what we understand, waves on the third stratum are especially deadly. The spawn rate of demon larvae skyrockets and the plains become almost impossible to navigate.”

How is it even possible for the spawn rate of those ankle biting little demons to get any higher? The entire floor of the place is a literal living carpet! I guess we just get several layers of carpet? Each trying to consume the other?

I guess we just abandon the plains and do our best to hold the cities. What a nightmare.

“And the tier eights?” I ask.

The general clacks her mandibles in irritation.

“Reports are mixed,” she says. “It’s hard for us to track them, considering the general insanity that’s going on. They don’t always move together, but every now and again, the three of them seem to gather for reasons we don’t understand. The general consensus is that they’re gradually rising, though that may accelerate as the mana levels rise. We just don’t know enough to be able to predict when or if they’re going to reach us.”

Such a pain. This is why they sent Brilliant to put me on notice. I could be called up any time.

“Alright. This is going to suck, but I think I’m going to head up through the Tree gate. We have to find out what’s going on if we want to have any hope of getting a handle on it.”

The general raises an antenna.

“You think you have a lead? Some source of information?”

“You could say that. You can call him Al.”

Next thing, we make our way over to the gate, and this time, Invidia and Crinis have to pitch in to help toss my tier seven bum through the gate. We do of course send someone through to warn everyone on the other side.

I crash to the ground and slide a little, already experiencing a sharp rise in the pain caused by the Call.

Ooooooooooof. Stupid Ancients. I *hate* those guys. This persistent, throbbing ache that just worms into my mind, demanding I go deeper in the Dungeon, calling me to descend.

It sucks. It seriously sucks.

I take a few minutes to gather myself, then put my feet under me and push myself up. Time to head to Roklu and see if we can find our old friend, the flaming eyeball. He always seemed to know more than he should, and if he hasn’t gone mad, then perhaps he can shed a little light on our current situation.

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### **Chapter 1075: Eye for the Future**

I’m tempted to utilise my new gravity wells to help lift me up to the plate city of Roklu, but I decide not to. I’ll be damned if I appear undignified in front of the entire nest built against the pillar.

So I climb instead.

For quite some time now, my ability to Grip hasn’t increased in line with my size. I’ve allowed my training to stall on this particular Skill and now I’m paying the price.

Now that my weight is up to multiple tons, I mean, I easily outmass an elephant at this point, maybe even a couple of elephants, the little claws at the end of my legs are struggling to lift that bulk. I’m too damn swole! I’ve got the muscle power to hold on, but seriously, I need to engage in some hardcore grip training. The idea of an ant who can’t hold on upside down indefinitely is absurd!

Eventually, I manage to haul myself up onto the plate, with maybe a little help from Crinis, and I immediately set off to try and find Al. The burning eyeball of doom is rather hard to find when he doesn’t want to be found. Rather, it’s impossible.

Fortunately for me, he seems to be in the mood for discussion, since we find him rather easily. His house is still standing in the outer areas of the city and when we check, he’s in there, floating, reading a book.

I didn’t even know demons could read....

I have to say, the picture of a giant eyeball made of fire hovering over a lectern is an odd one to say the least. A question immediately pops into my mind.

[How do you turn the pages?] I ask.

The book floats up into the air, snaps shut, then drifts toward a shelf where it slots itself into a gap between two other volumes. Of course, he uses magic.

[Second question, how many books have you set on fire by staring too hard at them?]

The demon turns to face me, although all he can really see is my eye peering in through a window.

[Curious. It has been some time. I see you have evolved.]

[That's right, Al. I'm the same tier as you now. BEHOLD ME.]

The burning eye glitters.

[You have become strong. Interesting. I hope that you are strong enough to survive what comes.]

That's a leading statement if ever I've heard one.

[Any chance you can get a little deeper into that?] I ask. [And also, can you come outside? I'm having to crouch quite low.]

He floats on out and I stand to my full height.

[You are certainly much larger than before,] he notes, almost dismissively.

[Hey, I don't have a pocket dimension to stick my organs in, alright? Those things are expensive.]

[I received mine for free.]

.... Demons.

[At any rate, is there a chance you can explain what's been going on with the demons lately? There's fighting all over the place, even in this city some demons have gone off the handle and attacked others at random.]

[I have some knowledge I can share. For a price.]

Heat rolls off the floating demon in waves at the mention of knowledge. This guy and his damn obsession.

[Fine. Where were we up to?]

I've been bargaining with him using information from Earth, feeding him plot lines of various shows and books in exchange for his wisdom. It doesn't even seem to matter that the info I give him is completely useless, his obsession demands that he learns new things, regardless of their utility.

[... so then they bricked him up in the tunnel, until he changed his mind and decided to be a good engine. The end.]

Al is burning so hot it's scalding even to me.

[**Excellent,**] he purrs. [I find this world of talking... *trains*... to be most interesting.]

[Next time, I'll tell you about the one where a kid throws rocks off a bridge and gets beaten by his dad.]

[Wonderful.]

[Now... the demons? What the heck is going on with you guys?]

Al falls silent for a moment as he ponders where to begin.

[How much are you aware of Arconidem?] he asks finally.

Ancients again? I'm so sick of those morons.

[All I really know is that Arconidem is an Ancient, one of the most powerful monsters in the Dungeon.]

Al flickers with bright flame.

[That much is correct, but it is the connection between Arconidem and the demons that is the root cause of the current strife. The title Arconidem took for themselves, is "Demon God", and there is a reason for that.]

[Is this Ancient like the Queen? Were you guys initially born from one monster before the floor started spitting you out?]

[No.] Flat rejection. [The connection between the Demons and the Ancient is closer to the one between you and your family.]

That flame burns smugly and it seems like Al can see a heck of a lot more of my status than he has any right to. I feel exposed.

[There is a link between the demons and Arconidem, *all* demons, whether we wish it were there or not. Some feel it more strongly than others, some resist it, others don't want to. I have no desire to engage in the wanton slaughter that the Demon God demands, there is no *knowledge* to be had, so I resist, though it grows harder.]

[Why?]

[Because Arconidem is awake.]

... Is that special?

[What do you mean? The biggest baddest monster in the Dungeon has been getting some shuteye?]

[The Demon God has been asleep for hundreds of years.]

[Oh.]

[All the Ancients have. But they are slowly waking as the mana levels rise. This new wave will cause even more to rouse themselves from slumber. When the mana reaches its peak, they will rise and hunt through the Dungeon, even reach the surface itself should they be able.]

Well that aligns pretty well with what Granin and company had to say. I should check in with them before I leave, see if they have any further insights.

[Right, so this big bad Demon God has woken up, and that's messing with you guys' heads? What does Arconidem want you to do?]

[Arconidem demands that we fulfil its obsession. Annihilate, burn and slaughter, endlessly. Eventually, they will come here themselves, and at that point, it will be impossible to resist. *Every* demon will succumb.]

[That... sounds bad.]

[Yes. It is.]

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### **Chapter 1076: Rock Law**

[Well, that sounds about right,] Granin rumbles. [I'm not an expert on Arconidem by any means, but what your friend has to say tracks with what I know. If you want more detail from a cult perspective, you'd need to talk to your ka'armodo buddy.]

[I don't recall having a ka'armodo buddy.]

[You know what I mean. Effectively, Arconidem has some sort of influence across the demons who spawn on this stratum. I don't know how or why, but I do know that it's true. In fact, it's not even a secret really, any demon who's willing to talk will tell you as much.]

[I thought the Ancients were like, secret or something. Isn't it the case that a lot of people don't believe they even exist?]

[You think just because some Pride demon says they live in service of the Demon God Arconidem, everyone will believe them? They just dismiss it as delusional monster talk. The Ancients themselves haven't been seen by mortal eyes in thousands of years, and almost no records exist from that time. They're legends to most, myths to the rest.]

[Except for you cult types.]

[Well, every cult was founded by a person who, according to our history, actually *conversed* with one of the Ancients during the Rending. It's hardly surprising that we know more about them than anyone else.]

That would have been a heck of a conversation. I wonder what these super old monsters had to say for themselves after massacring almost everyone alive. Must have been persuasive since people like Granin are still working for them after all this time.

[Any chance you'd be willing to share what that chat was about? Your founder had words with Yarrum, right? What did the worm have to say for itself?]

Granin just grins at me.

[That's secret cult business,] he says, then he shrugs. [I'm willing to tell you more if you accept your place as a candidate for the twentieth Ancient. Regardless of what you want, you're caught up in it now. You've been Called. That means they have their eyes on you.]

[Not interested,] I tell him flatly. [If I can find a way to rid myself of this 'blessing' as you call it, I will, instantaneously.]

[I kind of doubt you'll manage it. The Ancients are gods on this world, as powerful as it is for a creature to be.]

I kind of doubt that. Gandalf gives me severe 'in-control' vibes, and he doesn't seem at all impressed with the Ancients. In fact, he seems downright dismissive.

[Enough about all that,] Corun breaks in, [tell us about your new form? Is it working as well as you wanted? Were the reset options what you were hoping for?]

[You're looking strong, Anthony,] Torrina says. [This diamond you're coated with doesn't have the same shine as what you had before, but it seems thicker. I'm sensing a strange energy resonating within.]

Granin's two triumvirate members have been circling around me while I talk to their boss, poking and prodding at me, both mentally and physically. I'm flattered, in a way, but also embarrassed, and frankly a little annoyed at their antics.

[Oi, could you stop scuffing up the diamond, please? It may not be as shiny as before, but I'll fix that with mutations if I have to. And yes, it is thicker, and a heck of a lot heavier.]

[The density must be off the scale,] she continues, stepping in front of me and running a hand along one of my mandibles. Seriously? I just asked you not to do that! [It's not like anything I've ever seen before.]

[Forgive them, Anthony,] Granin chuckles. [It's rare for us to see a tier seven monster this close up, certainly one that isn't trying to kill us. When you throw in the unique and interesting glands and materials you've chosen, you're basically an irresistible treasure trove of monster knowledge to folks like us.]

His words help mollify me a bit, but it's still weird. They're poking at me like I'm a science experiment.

[Any chance you could share what material your carapace is made of now?] Granin asks, a gleam of excitement in his eye.

Dammit, Granin, you too? I shoo Corun and Torrina away with my antennae as I reply.

[Look, get off of me. I'll tell you if you leave me alone? Alright? It's Gravity Compressed Diamond. Effectively, a super dense, super hardened diamond. It's much, much tougher than the diamond coating I had before, and much heavier. More than that, it responds to gravitational energy, amplifying the effect. I expect to see some sweet mutation options in that regard.]

[How does gravity compression work?] Torrina frowns. [Can you give me some examples that occur in nature?]

Uh, I don't really want to go into how stars and planets are made, let alone funky System level stuff. The kind of energy that would need to be applied to crunch diamond down to something even more dense... I don't even want to try and think about how it was done.

[Look, gravity squashes stuff. More gravity, more squash. Let's leave it at that.]

[What about the rest of your resets?] Corun asks. [And your evolution bonus? We'd love to know what you got. It would help us complete our records on ant evolution trees.]

[I'll share that with the Colony,] I tell them. [I don't think you guys need to know.]

The golgari's face falls when he realises I won't spill all the beans and I feel a little bad. I feel even worse when Granin chips in.

[I hope you know you can trust us, Anthony,] he says, face serious. [We've thrown our fate in with yours to the point we can't go home to our own people anymore. We can't advise you about things we have no knowledge of. I know enough about evolution to know that whatever you got for completing this evolution chain took a huge chunk of the evolution's potential. Your bonus stats should have been much, much higher, but all of that went into the new organ you got. You don't have to share more than you're comfortable with, but don't forget that we're on your side.]

That stings a bit, and for a second, I'm severely tempted to tell them, but something holds me back. Ultimately, the loyalty of Granin and his apprentices is to the cult, and to Yarrum. Whatever they're trying to do here is in service of the goals that the Ancient set. I do trust Granin, Corrun and Torrina, I trust them a lot. However, I find it very difficult to trust anything that the Ancients are involved in. I don't know what they want or why they want it.

Well, I know they want another Ancient, the twentieth, but other than that, no clue. Until I learn that secret, I'm just not sure I'm ready to share with Granin exactly what I can do. I'm even more sensitive because the Altar of Self doesn't just affect me but also the entire Colony.

[When I learn a few more of your secrets, Granin, I'll share a few more of mine. Fair?]

The old golgari looks sombre for a moment, but he nods slowly.

[That's fair.]

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 1077: Free Demons**

After my chat with Granin and the team I say goodbye and head off onto the plains to gather my thoughts. Al tags along with us, it seems he's interested in seeing how the current dilemma is playing out around the stratum, so he wants to see it with his own eye.

From what we've learned, it's clear that the struggles experienced by the Colony here in the third are caused by an Ancient. Doesn't sound like Arconi-douche is even actively doing something. He, or it, or whatever, is just awake, which is apparently enough to infect every demon in the Dungeon with their nonsense.

It's ridiculous! I might have a connection with the Colony around me, but at least I'm not influencing their behaviour! At least, I hope to Gandalf I'm not. I certainly don't want to! If anything, I hope their responsible attitudes rub off on me a little. I've been blundering blindly forward for so long that it almost feels alien to try and plan ahead.

But that's what I've been doing now! Gweheheheh.

I've reset my carapace and mandibles, but I've yet to mutate them. I wanted to take out the new model and give it a spin before I tried to think about what I might want to do, mutation wise. There's a lot to

consider after all. I think the time is right to dive into the menus and have a good look at what's available, but before I do, there's something I want to confirm.

[Hey, Invidia.]

The envy demon flaps his little wings and turns that enormous green eye on me.

[Yesssss?]

[According to what Al over there and even Granin had to say, every demon can feel the influence of Arconidem. Does that go for you too?]

Say what you will about the little guy, he has one heck of an intense stare when he wants to.

[Yessss,] he confirms.

Hmmm.

[Did you know what it was? Where it came from? Or were you just getting a strong urge to blow things up without knowing why.]

He ponders for a moment.

*[I didssss not know. Orssss, I knew, but wassss not aware.]*

I can kind of understand where he's coming from. He knew instinctively what was going on, but didn't actively think about it.

[Is it getting stronger? Staying the same?]

*[Stronger.]*

[And how do you feel about it? Can't be pleasant, having these thoughts and feelings injected into your head.]

*[I am notssss pleased. I wissshhh to control mysself. I will notssss have it takenssss from me.]*

His eye flashes bright with determination and I feel my heart bleed for the little guy. He doesn't want some big bad reaching out and messing with him from the depths of the Dungeon. He's his own chap, with his own goals and dreams.

How dare that Ancient sack of silliness try and take that away from my friend?!

[Well don't you worry,] I tell him, [we won't let someone take control of you. We'll go down there and kick him right in the backside. I'm talking a hostile takeover of the commercial zone.]

It might just be me, but I feel like I can see a glimmer of gratitude in the fluttering demon. He doesn't say anything, just nods his eye and floats over to rest on Tiny's shoulder.

Is he embarrassed? Awwwww.

[Alright then. Look out for me for a minute, gang, I'm going to do a little mutating. You might need to deploy the emergency screen, Crinis.]

[Roger!]

She's practised the manoeuvre numerous times, using her shapeable form to cover me in the event of an embarrassing itch reaction. Down here on the plains, who knows who might be able to see?

[If you spot any tier fours or higher, you can squash them for experience. Just don't go far.]

That last bit is for Tiny. He'd run off looking for something to fight if he got too bored. Best not to take chances.

Now then, time to jump into the menu!

I've got a lot of options for things to mutate, obviously every organ in my body needs to be boosted up to +35, which is going to take an absurd amount of Biomass. One hundred and sixty five for every organ I have. Thanks to the resets, I also have to bring a number of organs up from zero. My Nave and Altar both need mutating, as does my Carapace, Mandibles, Inner-Plating and Gravity Magic Gland.

Now obviously, the ultimate goal is to create *synergy*. My mutations and the materials my body are made of should work together harmoniously to create an effect greater than the sum of my parts.

I don't want to go too crazy right off the bat, so I'm going to stick to the carapace, mandibles and plating for now. I need more work with the Altar before I try to mutate that. I'm not yet sure what it needs to function better than it currently does. It feels completely overpowered to me already, what more could I possibly want from it?

I definitely need to upgrade it before I get into a fight with those tier eight demons, but it's too early now.

I jump into the menus and start flicking through the options for my carapace. It's almost enough for me to clack my mandibles with happiness as the nostalgia wave rolls over me. Look at these old options that I considered the first time I mutated my shell. Elemental resistance, thickening and hardening, even the spiky carapace mutation!

Diamond carapace is still here in the list. As if I'd want to coat my new exo-skeleton with a layer of inferior, if sparklier diamond. It's interesting that the option is even still there, considering how much of a waste it would be. Just goes to show that the system doesn't protect a monster from making inferior choices.

One is free to waste their mutations should they lack the foresight and wisdom to select the best options.

... I feel like a chill just ran down my spine. I lack foresight and wisdom! I lack them a lot!

I'm worried now. I need to double and triple check any mutations before I confirm anything. Deep breaths, Anthony. I can do this. Let's get to picking!

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 1078: More Gravity?**

These menus are always intimidating due to their sheer size, but I'm prepared to go the distance on this one, I can't afford to make a mistake and pick the wrong options. There'll be no reset after this one.

I suppose it's technically possible to do one, but that would be a criminal waste of evolutionary energy. Basically a punch straight into my own face.

So I have to be careful, no yahoo off the cuff stuff. I'm going to peruse these menus with extreme focus.

Focus....

Focus....

Zzzzzzzzzzz....

Hah!

Wazzat?! Curse these damn lists! Despite having so many brains and such a high Cunning score, how is it possible my attention span and capacity to look at fine details remain so terrible?

But I can't give up, I won't!

With renewed determination, I begin to scroll once more. Most of these, I'm not interested in, obviously. Long ago, I decided against using mutations for specific resistances. I want my improvements to be as broadly applicable as possible. Naturally, that means I have to settle for a *bit* of oomph in many areas rather than a huge shazam in one. It's the wiser tradeoff.

As I trawl the menu, I start to wonder more and more if I actually need to make myself tougher via mutation. I mean, my gravity compressed diamond is already hard as a brick. A brick formed from the heart of a neutron star, that is. Most mutations add a layer to the outside of the carapace, like my diamond mutation which coated my exo-skeleton in a fine layer of the precious gem. That worked great, since the outer coating was harder than my carapace and helped protect it from harm. What am I going to coat my new carapace in? Something even harder? There's barely anything harder than this, and what's the point of layering something ultra tough on top of something that's already close to ultra tough!?

I could coat it in a layer of magic resistant material for the ultimate defensive combo I suppose, but I've already invested heavily in solving that issue with my own mana skills. I can create shields to protect myself from projectiles, or use my many mind constructs to rip the spells apart as they approach me.

No, what I need is not even more defence. What I need, are mutations that will help synergise with what I hope to make my greatest strength: my gravity magic.

The gravity bomb captivated me the first time I saw it, and I've yearned to better harness that absurd power. The humble gravity bolt, welding my opponents to the floor, the gravity spear, or even the gravity domain, literally bringing my enemies to their knees.

I want to be a gravity ant! Now, finally, after all this time, I can make it happen!

As a material that already holds an affinity for that type of energy, it's only natural that there should be some specific mutations for it attached. I eagerly scroll through thousands of different mutation options, looking for anything that relates to gravity.

In the end, I find only three that are relevant to me.

[Gravity Regeneration: Harnesses gravitational energy to repair damage to the carapace.]

Now, this is *fine*. It's... it's *fine*. There's synergy there, sure. I want to use gravity mana in battle, which will generate gravitational energy, which will repair the damage I sustain in battle.

It's just... not what I'm looking for. I can use my inner-plating for something like this, or rely on my regeneration gland, which replenishes so quickly thanks to the Vestibule.

[Resonance Hardening: Absorbs gravitational energy to further compress and harden the carapace.]

Now this, I can get behind. It's not adding an extra layer onto my carapace, but toughening up what I already have whenever I use gravity magic, which I intend to do, all the time. I can already see myself floating gracefully through the air, carapace absorbing that sweet energy from the well, making me invulnerable to physical damage!

[Gravitic Magnification: enhances the resonating properties of Gravity Compressed Diamond to provide a boost to any Gravity Spell or field nearby.]

Oh ho! This one is also quite sweet. Turn my defence into offence! I can get behind it. The more I reinforce this mutation, the stronger the resonance will be! In fact....

Now that I think about it, this mutation actually melds quite well with the second I considered. Perhaps I should take both mutations and then fuse them in order to get the best of both worlds? My carapace makes my gravity magic more powerful, which in turn hardens my carapace, which in turn provides more energy.

I love it!

Happy with my decision, I punch in my upgrades all the way to +30, selecting Magnification at +5, Hardening at +10, fusing at +15, then repeating the process for +20, +25 and +30.

What results is: Intensifying Compression Carapace (Gravity Compressed Diamond) +30.

Satisfied, I lock that in and turn to my inner-carapace plating.

It's important that these two components work together, since that's their intended function.

I added the inner-carapace plating to help negate the weakness of an external skeleton by making it have a little more flex. The weakness of a tough armour is either a sharp stab in the joints, or getting hit with a hammer, cracking it like an egg or sending the force rippling through the armour to scramble the insides.

I want an omelette all of a sudden.

The plating does that job well, helping to absorb shocks before they get to my organs, just by default. I can mutate to increase that effect, which isn't a bad idea, but I'm sure there are other things I can find.

The Crystal Flesh I used to form the plating during the reset is already reactive to gravity, but I'm sure there's a way to capitalise on that aspect even further.

There's basically two things I'm looking for here, help healing the carapace, because I quite liked the regenerative mutation I used previously, but I also want something that might feed into the enhancing

of gravitic energy that I've leaned into already. Luckily, I find a mutation that closely mimics the regeneration I was already offered for my carapace, which will work well.

A tough carapace that rapidly heals itself is the idea. We're all about that effective HP around here.

I don't find something with the same resonant properties as what I found for the carapace, but I may have found something just as good.

[Gravitic Amplifier: increases the density of gravity mana in the vicinity of the plating.]

Nice.

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 1079: Moving On**

It's *expensive* taking something from 0 to +30. Four hundred and sixty five! Just imagine that number. It wasn't so long ago that I could barely imagine having that much Biomass ready to use.

As it is, after the hunting I've done with the gang and vacuuming up the food the others didn't need, I only have enough stored away to mutate these two body parts, and only barely at that. If we hadn't run into a few high tier monsters on our hunt, I would never have stored enough.

I do the same with the plating as I did with the carapace, taking the one option at +5, the other at +10, then fusing, and repeat the process up to thirty. Satisfied with my selections, I punch in the confirmation and await my fate.

Here it comes.

Oooooo, it's going to be a bad one. I can already tell.

AaaaaaaaaaAAAAAAAAAND HERE IT IS!

[Crisis! Cover me!] I howl as I immediately flop onto my back and start thrashing wildly.

Being as large as I am, the thrashing is all the more spectacular and I'd prefer none of my siblings were able to see it. Ugh, just horrible. Why is it that I have to put up with this dreadful sensation when I mutate? Nobody else seems to roll about suffering like I do. What's the deal?! I'll have to mention it to Gandalf the next time I see him. In fact, that's all the motivation I need to push for tier eight, forget about this stupid hook the Ancients stuck me with.

Eventually, the itch fades and I right myself quickly. I want to check my carapace as fast as possible! I look over myself, inspecting every detail. Surely I'm more shiny than before? There's no way my lustre was reduced even further, is there?

Thankfully, I believe I can detect a little more oomph to the deep purple shimmer that can be seen within the diamond. It isn't much, but I'll take it. I don't remember ever feeling vain as a human, but for some reason, I became quite attached to my glimmering carapace. It caught the eye and really lit up the room, in a literal sense.

[Is everything alright, Master?] Crisis asks as I continue to check over myself.

[Yes, it's all fine. Now that the itch is gone, I just wanted to see how the new mutation looked on the carapace.]

[You look as imposing as always, Master,] Crinis assures me.

[I just wish I didn't have to put up with this stupid itch all the time. Every time I mutate, it's like my entire body is on fire. I *hate* it.]

[Oh.]

[Do you feel it? What happens when you mutate?]

[Um, nothing, really. I feel a bit wiggly, that's all.]

Probably an advantage she gets from being a shadow creature. Dammit, how is that fair?

[At least you get what I mean, Tiny. The mutation itch is just ridiculous.]

The big ape looks at me and shakes his head.

[What do you mean, no?]

He pats himself on the chest and then gives me a thumbs up.

[You're totally fine when mutating? This is outrageous! How come nobody told me anything about this?]

Tiny shrugs.

[What do you mean, you did?! I think I'd remember something like that!]

Well this just won't do. I have to find Sarah and confirm this injustice right away. It's completely unfair that only us reincarnated folks have to put up with this. We need to commiserate together!

The question is, where do I find her? I haven't spoken to her at all since I evolved, not since the resolution to the whole Jim fiasco. I hope she's been able to heal her wounded heart, at least a little.

She's got a real family now, one that cares for her. Mandibles crossed, that'll be enough. Although it probably won't if she has to put up with this itch!

It doesn't take much asking around for me to work out where she is. Not in Roklu, as it turns out, but another ant held demon-town closer to the border we share with the lizard wizards. She's been assisting to suppress the demon shenanigans while patrolling with the Colony to help scare off the ka'armodo.

Truly, a hard working bear/killing machine!

It's on patrol that I eventually find her, out strolling along the border with a squad of a hundred ants, looking tough and intimidating. I run up to her with an urgent wave of the antennae, reaching out to her with my mind.

[Hey, Sarah!]

She sounds a mixture of surprised and confused when she replies.

[A-Anthony? Is that you?]

[What? Of course it's me! Oh, the evolution. Yes, I have become huge. But that's not important!]

[It isn't?] Now she sounds doubly confused, and I can't blame her. Evolution is important to us monsters, after all.

[No! W-well, I mean yes, but right now, no! I've just confirmed that my pets don't itch like mad when they mutate! And between you and me, I don't think normal monsters do either. It's just us! How unfair is that!?!]

The mighty bear staggers back under my mental word assault, looking left and right as if someone might be able to step in and help her out of this situation. No, there's nobody except me who can sympathise with this terrible state of affairs, Sarah!

[I should probably be focusing on my patrol,] she says, [are you to help out?]

[What? No! Although I probably should help while I'm here.... I just wanted someone to commiserate with. I've been putting up with this horrendous itch ever since I arrived here on Pangera. Every time I mutate, it's awful. The idea that only us reincarnated folk experience it just seems dreadfully unfair.]

I stare at her earnestly with my eyes sparkling. Finally, I've put it out there. Finally someone else will express their shared loathing of this terrible inconvenience!

Instead, Sarah just shuffles and looks uncomfortable.

[Anthony... I have no idea what you're talking about. I've never experienced a dreadful itch or anything when mutating. It's uncomfortable for a bit, but that's about all.]

I feel like my world is crashing down around me. How can this be?

[You mean to say... it's just me?!]

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 1080: Mental Shock**

*Philosophants have long debated the reason the Eldest was so secretive about their mutations. There could be any number of reasons for it, though it's extremely difficult to find evidence to support or refute one in particular. We know that the Eldest didn't like to be seen when mutating, there are innumerable, reputable accounts of the lengths they went to in order to avoid being seen.*

*The guardians were frequently deployed to shield them from scrying eyes. The Eldest would frequently mutate away from the Colony entirely, a notable choice, given the greater safety within the nests.*

*Some postulate that the Eldest was engaged in experimental, dangerous selections, pushing the boundaries of what was known. This could well be true, given that the accumulated knowledge of the Colony didn't exist back then. Evolutions and mutation combinations were being discovered all the time, and many dead ends were found to the detriment of the brave ants who volunteered to explore them. Perhaps the Eldest wanted to shield others from following in their footsteps in case they themselves fell into such a trap, dooming those to follow.*

*But why hide the process itself? The Eldest was famously taciturn about sharing their status screen, which worked to hide their choices, but to go as far as to ensure that none could even see them mutate?*

*We may never know the full story.*

*- Excerpt from 'Choices of the Eldest' by Emmanuel. K. Ant.*

It takes me a bit of time to recover from such a devastating mental shock. All this time, I was the only one suffering from this itch?! That's... that's.... It's so ridiculously unfair! What the hell is going on here, Gandalf? I feel such rage, such frustration. This is absurd!

If that bearded charlatan were here in front of me right now, I'd give him a taste of my mandibles. Just what's he playing at, inflicting me with this awful sensation?

Perhaps this is the bearded bozo's idea of a joke. Has he been watching me roll around, legs flailing in the air all this time, just having a laugh? There will be payback. There will be justice! This travesty will not be allowed to stand!

[Anthony? A-are you alright?]

Sarah is concerned, her big bear head hanging low as she looks at me. Overcome with my despair and anguish, I've flopped onto the ground, legs splayed in all directions around me.

[No. Not really,] I reply. [I've just learned that someone out there really has it in for me, and I don't know why.]

[Is this about the itching thing? You itch when you mutate? It can't be *that* bad, can it?]

Oh, Sarah, you sweet, anxiety-riddled summer child. You have no idea.

[When I mutate my eyes, it feels like they're *bubbling* right out of my head.]

[Oh.]

[Yes, oh.]

I should note that I'm holding up an entire Colony patrol with my antics. A hundred ants are standing around, pointedly not looking in my direction as I flop morosely on the ground in front of them. The Will flowing from them is typically supportive, even if they are starting to wonder if I'm being lazy.

Well, nothing for it, I suppose. There's nothing I can do about this situation right now. I'll store up all my anger and unleash it on Gandalf the next time I speak to him. He'll be sorry he crossed me!

I push my legs under me and rise to stand once more. It's kind of weird seeing Sarah like this, now that I think about it. She's significantly smaller than me after my evolution, and I easily outmass the hulking pile of ursine muscle.

I look her directly in the eye.

She looks up at me.

[Heh,] I snigger.

I'll never get used to seeing a giant bear roll its eyes.

[Oh, very mature,] she sighs. [Congratulations, you're bigger than me now. What do you want, a cookie?]

[I'll never say no to a biscuit. I don't mean to be rude about it, it's just a new experience is all. Besides, I won't get to enjoy this for long, you'll be bigger than me again after your next evolution, which can't be far away.]

Sarah hesitates for a moment and then stares wistfully into the distance.

[I... I'm not sure I want to evolve again.]

Whaaaaaaaaaaaaat? What kind of monster doesn't want to evolve? Isn't that missing the point entirely!?

[You're worried about your rage and fear getting the better of you again, aren't you? You've been doing so well getting on top of that lately, don't even sweat it. Evolve, get stronger and crush the inner demon, as well as the outer ones, we've got issues in this strata, seriously.]

She shakes her head.

[I *have* been getting better, I know that. My control over the rage is getting stronger every time I fight, but I'm scared of losing that progress. Every time I evolved, it got worse and worse until I was completely lost. Now that I've finally taken steps towards mastering it, I feel like I'm becoming myself again. I'm terrified it'll get taken away and I'll go straight back to square one.]

Although her voice is calm and collected in my head, I can see her trembling. It's the fur. Impossible to hide your shivers when you have fur. Once again I'm reminded of the strange dichotomy of the Dungeon and reincarnated monsters such as us.

We are, according to the beardy-weirdy-one, broken people, placed into powerful, monstrous forms and let loose in a world that wants us dead. I've never really felt that it applied to me, I'm just fine, but Sarah has struggled, hard, for a long time.

I walk up beside her and give her an encouraging pat on the back.

[Things are different now. Back then, you were alone, but the next time you evolve, you'll have a family on your side. We won't ever quit on you.]

[So, you think I should evolve soon?]

I surprise her by shaking my antennae, no.

[Actually, I think you might be on the right track. Take some more time to get back to yourself. The jump up to tier seven is a big one, and I feel if you go into it afraid of what might happen, then it'll surely go badly. It's been a long road to get to where you are right now, it'd be a shame to go backwards.]

She calms herself as I continue to pat her on the back with one leg. I can almost feel her determination hardening beneath the surface.

[Thank you, Anthony,] she says, then straightens, and I give her a little room. [Well, I suppose I'd better get back on patrol. Can't be seen being lazy out here, can we?] she jokes.

[Oh, there's no fear of that,] I assure her, [there's a ka'armodo attack inbound right now. Scouts picked it up a minute ago.]

[There's *what?*]

[Oh yeah. They probably noticed I've been here rolling around on the ground and think they might as well have a shot at killing me. Since I'm the biggest ant, I probably have a bit of a target on my head.]

She brings up a paw and slaps it into her face.

[And somehow, you *still* think I'm crazier than you.]

[*What?* How do you know that?]

[I KNEW IT!]