

Chrysalis 1091

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Chapter 1091: Horde Trimming

Sometimes, a horde just gets out of control. It can happen to anyone, who am I to judge? Call in the professional barber service, give a little snip here, a little snip there, and voila! Your rampaging army of feral demons is suddenly that much more manageable.

We've cycled through assaults on the horde four times now, and it's honestly a bit of a laugh. There's no coordination amongst them, and they aren't quick enough to catch us when we try to run, especially not when I drop a gravity bomb on the frontrunners.

Now, there's no need to fear. I *know* that this isn't the majority of the demon army, or even a significant percentage. If it were, there would be tier eight demons trying to stomp on my head.

Where are the rest of them? No idea! But while this group is out here going wild, we may as well do our bit to reduce their numbers.

[How are you doing, Tiny? Ready to go again?]

He gives me a grin and a confident thumbs up. I'd expect nothing less from him. In fact, why the heck do I bother asking? If he had no legs and only one arm, he'd still give me a grin and a confident thumbs up!

[Invidia, how's the mana situation? Make sure you don't run low.]

[*I am taking it allssss,*] he tells me smugly.

Of course you are, I'm letting you recharge your core from the ambient mana, you eye-goof. Well, he's performed admirably so far, I won't begrudge him his little triumphs.

[Crinis, how's the shadow flesh stocks? No need to recharge?]

[I'm ready to go, Master!]

[Excellent. Make sure you eat at least a few of them every time we go in. It's important you keep yourself topped off. All right then, let's go get 'em!]

And we're off! With an explosive upper-cut, Tiny blows the top off the impromptu burrow we've been hiding in and we emerge to find the horde has moved yet again during our down time. They found a second city not that long ago, and we hit them twice during their assault. Now it appears they've moved on. Not to worry! Tracking a giant army of crazed demons isn't as hard as it sounds.

Just follow the obvious trail of wanton destruction!

It's a little depressing, though. When we do finally catch up with them, it appears as though they've managed to replenish their numbers from the city that they smashed. Clearly, the frenzied assault is followed by a vigorous recruitment drive. Hopefully, there weren't too many non-demons in that city.

I imagine there's a whole lot of folks taking gates and getting the heck out of here. Which is exactly what Arconidem is looking for, I suppose. If he thinks the Colony is going to up and leave, he's got another think coming!

[Right, now that we've caught up, go get 'em!]

Aaaand they're off!

Tiny in the lead, Tiny rounding the bend in first place, and it's Tiny taking the prize! What's he won? The opportunity to pound an entire army into submission, of course!

Not that these demons are likely to submit. I don't know what it is that their 'god' is doing to them, but they have gone completely loco. The intelligent, obsession-focused monsters are gone, replaced by these slaving hounds, desperate to enact his will. It's depressing if I'm honest. The demons might be a bit nuts most of the time, but I *like* them. They're weird.

Ah well. I entertain myself as usual, keeping to the background, grabbing some snackage when I get the chance while my three friends go absolutely nuts on these demons. As long as they operate at full firepower, it's too hard for the demons to surround them, but obviously, they can't maintain it for that long, hence our need to retreat.

I mean, I *wish* they were strong enough to fight an entire army by themselves, that would be awesome! Maybe after they've evolved....

Alright then.

[Just about time, guys. You've got about a minute left, then we'll retreat that way, through that other army over there.]

Nice.

Wait....

Something seems off about what I just said. The time? No, that's right, one minute remaining. Hmmm.

Ohhhh, the army. The *second* army.

When the blazing heck did they get there?!

[Holy moly, guys! Change of plans, we need to run... somewhere else. Uh, that way! Get cracking! I don't care if you have thirty seconds left, Tiny! Get moving, NOW!]

Ordered directly, they don't have any choice but to comply, rushing off between the two armies as they move toward each other.

Guess I'm going to have to be the bait to give them a little time to get ahead of the curve. I can manage that, this seems like as good an opportunity as I'm likely to find for a little testing.

Gravity mana flows from the gland deep within my carapace. A trickle that rapidly grows into a now familiar flood that curves and swirls down on itself to form my most devastating spell.

I've been flinging out pretty weak ones during our hit-and-run escapes. There's no need to go nuts after all. But with a second horde running at us, I think this moment calls for something a little more... spectacular. Condensing the mana as I go, I pack more and more in, letting my sub-minds take over my legs and running me away as I focus the bulk of my attention on cramming as much as I can into this

spell. At the pace I'm working, it doesn't take long until I've got quite a potent bomb ready to go, and rather than force every drop of mana I can into it, I let it fly.

Only *after* triggering the Altar, of course. This should be interesting.

HOOOOOOOOOOOOOOWL!

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Chapter 1092: That is Quite the Boom

It needed to be tested at some point, and what better time than now? I've increased Gravity Magic to the second rank thanks to all my stuffing about with Gravity Fields, and the bomb was always going to be on the list of things that I want to see how the Altar interacts with.

As it turns out, quite well.

As the spell is unleashed and I activate the Altar of Self, I'm rather startled to feel all of the gathered energy drain out of it.

All.

Not a single skerrick left. As it is usually wont to do, the Gravity Bomb soaks up every drop of power it can get, and when it does, it goes absolutely *nuts*.

HOOOOOOOOOOWWWWWWWL!

The air *screams*, and I mean SCREAMS. I didn't put anything like my full reserve of gravity mana into this thing, and it sounds an awful lot like some of the biggest I've ever cast.

I, of course, do the sensible thing and sprint away like my life depends on it, which it likely does. Despite the fear of my own mortality this spell always seems to invoke in me, particularly when I'm near it, I keep a close eye trained on the ominously dark sphere as it streaks away from me into the teeth of the oncoming horde. Hordes.

The two armies had been running toward each other, ready to fuse into an even greater mass of slaving destruction, but the flight of my friends and I has changed their trajectories. Like murderous puppies chasing a toy, the lead demons in both groups have angled towards us and led the rest of their fellows to follow in behind.

So it is that when the Bomb strikes, it detonates right in the faces of the frontrunning monsters from two armies, both of whom are leading their allies into danger like twin pied-pipers.

I'd love to be able to dump some more Will energy into a super-dash, but I don't have the juice! This far down, it'll take probably an hour to refill the Altar all the way, there just aren't enough ants nearby!

FWOOSH!

When it impacts, the dark sphere of the Gravity Bomb expands rapidly in the swirling vortex of nightmarish doom that I've come to expect. Except that it's larger. Significantly.

Holy moly!

Like a dark god brought to life, the bomb grows to its full, horrifying size and begins to do what it does best: drag in and annihilate everything it can touch.

The force it exerts is horrendous, as is the noise. The two demon armies behind me are immediately lost in the haze of ash and dust as the air fills with debris and demons. Monsters are being yanked off the ground and hauled into oblivion, I can see their shadowy forms spinning through the air before they vanish beyond the event horizon.

Only Gandalf could possibly know how many demon larvae are getting swallowed by that thing....

As I flee my brave little heart out, I marvel at the sight of the bomb. It's so large, I can clearly make out its slow revolutions, and the ash-filled atmosphere of the third stratum is allowing me to witness another new sight. I can clearly see the path the air is travelling as it spirals down into the heart of the void, a vast, sweeping descent that spins around and around, curling more and more tightly to the bomb as it descends.

[Keep running, Tiny! Don't look back for a second!]

I make sure to put that little extra emphasis that a genuine order gets as I yell at him. This is *not* a time I want him to indulge his curiosity!

The drag of the bomb, even as far from the epicentre as I am, is absurd. I grip the ground with my ant-claws with every step, cursing my immense mass.

Dammit, Anthony, why did you go and have to make yourself so damn chonky?! You'll have to be twice as far from every bomb from now on. No, three times as far!

My heart can't take this stress....

It's passing, though. With every step, the grip of the gravitational pull lessens, and several dozen metres in front of me, my friends must be well in the clear. I always feel a moment of panic when Invidia is too close to these things. He's so small, and not a particularly strong flier, it wouldn't take much for him to be dragged away and lost.

Just to be safe, we keep on running. Better to put all the distance we can between us and the demons for when all of this blows over. When the dust settles, I don't want them to have even a sniff of us.

Behind us, the high-pitched shriek of the wind has been joined by a dull roar as the bomb drags in everything it can touch and crushes it. The horizon behind us is looking dark indeed as even the light seems to be struggling back there. Such a horrendous power I've unleashed. What would happen if I put all of my Gravitational Mana into it as well?

I shudder to imagine. I mean, I'll have to try it at some point, but I shudder just the same.

Whatever the Altar has done to the spell, it seems to have given it more staying power to boot. We're kilometres away when it finally flickers and fades, the ensuing quiet all the more jarring after the din and terror unleashed by my spell.

I can't see what's left of the two armies, and I'm not too keen to rush in and fight out either. Judging by the sheer volume of notifications I've received from poor old Gandalf, I've chopped through thousands

of demons with that one bomb. I almost feel I should apologise to my pets. After all the effort they've put in, I've managed to get just as much experience as they have.

We find a large mound of stone jutting up from the plain and use earth magic to burrow into the side, sealing it off behind us as we settle in for a bit of rest.

[Right then, that was a bit of a surprise, I wasn't expecting a second army to just appear out of nowhere. Everybody alright?]

All three give me an affirmative and I nod appreciatively.

[That's good. I suppose we'll need to be more careful as we hunt around this layer, as it appears there are multiple demon hordes running about the place. We can tackle one of them quite safely, but if we get pincered by two again, it may not turn out as well as it did this time.]

[That spell was very impressive, Master. Won't you be able to do it again?]

Crinis sounds quite proud of me as she asks if I can replicate the feat, which leads me to brag a bit.

[Well, it was rather potent, wasn't it? Possibly the biggest I've ever cast. To answer your question though, nope, not for a while. And firing off a spell like that leaves me a bit vulnerable afterwards, considering the total loss of energy. As cool and amazing as it is, I'd honestly rather not have to do it again. An eye catching event like that might draw attention we'd rather not have.]

[As you say, Master.]

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Chapter 1093: Odin's Realisation

Marvel. Wonder. Architectural triumph. One of the great achievements of the age. The Twin Cities have been described in such glowing terms for over a millennium and truly they are deserving of their reputation.

Situated on the same mountain, Mt Atraem, they can be seen many kilometres away, glittering like matched jewels in the distance.

Dressed in peerless Soul Silver, the lower city gleams like the finest polished swords. Home to several million citizens, the Silver City is the beating heart of a great and enduring empire. Its six walls and twelve towers are so heavily enchanted with wards and protections it can be painful to look at them with the naked eye.

As impregnable as it is beautiful, visitors have so many sights to take in, one simply cannot hope to catch them all.

Yet it is above that the true vision lies. Carved from pure Heart Gold, the Golden City glows radiant from the upper reaches of the mountain, a glimpse of a luminescent heaven.

Palace after palace, castle after castle, each one a peerless work of art such that the finest carvers and builders weep to look upon them. The Scholars' tower, rising like a spear into the sky, a house of learning and knowledge unequalled in all the realms.

For those lucky few who are able to catch a glimpse, the Imperial Compound, home to the Child-Emperor himself, is a sight so rare, and so marvellous, as to be without equal in all Pangera.

The Twin Cities of Silver and Gold. Seat of the Emperor and Capital of the Atraem Empire. Truly a wonder of the modern age, may they stand forever.

- Excerpt from 'Travelogue of the Fourth Stratum - Sights to See' by Wandering Wallace.

Human life had been hard on Odin Malum, and he had learned to be hard in return. Carving a bloody place in the world had been his purpose and he had relished the challenge.

His rebirth had similarly been difficult. Yet this world had been much like the last, only the veneer of civilization was different. Kill or be killed. Fight to live, surrender and die. These were rules that Odin understood, and so, for the second time, he had thrived in difficult circumstances.

Deep down, he had thought that perhaps here, he might truly be free. Rather than kill for others, or to make himself useful, or defend that which wasn't his, in this world, he could kill and gain strength for himself only.

That had been a short lived dream. The vision of Arconidem the Demon God had robbed him of that illusion. Being in that presence, he couldn't bring himself to believe that he had any alternative but to obey. It was normal, in a dog-eat-dog world, for someone to be the alpha. Odin had bowed his head to power before, he would do it again.

And so he had fallen, fallen into the power of a being so much older than he, and had been lost for a time. The lure of Arconidem was so seductive, so powerful. His demon body craved indulgence, it needed to kill, to revel in death and destruction. The Demon God whispered to him constantly, urging him to let go of control, to succumb to his influence and enact his vision.

Odin couldn't recall the past week, not totally. There had been blood and death, ash and fire, of that he was sure. The great demons had been with him at times, at others, they had not, but even so, he hadn't questioned their mission.

Until now.

What the hell was that?! Some sort of Black Hole?

He'd very nearly died his second death. He could recall running along with the horde, but he had no idea what they'd been chasing. Then it had... appeared, booming into existence in front of him, a terrifying visage of the end-times.

For one brief, horror-stricken moment, he'd thought the world had simply ended. The howl of the wind, the groan of the earth, all things being drawn into the void, never to be seen again.

It had been enough to shock his mind out of the rut it had been stuck in.

Without the lightning fast reflexes he'd trained as a hitman, or the incredible capabilities of his new demon form, he would be dead, without a doubt. Lashing out with his blades, he'd latched into his own allies, using their flesh to lever himself away from the singularity.

It almost hadn't been enough. Before he could escape its pull, he'd been caught. In that terrible moment, he'd lifted into the air, losing his last grasp to the ground and began to fall toward the heart of the beast.

Thankfully, it had flickered and vanished before he'd come into contact with it.

Returned to his senses, the former hitman had stood on the plains, surrounded by the shell-shocked remains of the demon horde, bewildered. He had no idea where he was, or what he was doing, but several things were clear.

Whatever hold Arconidem had on him was temporarily broken. The whispers of the Demon God were still there, in the back of his mind, but for the time being, Odin was firmly in control. Secondly, his minders, the mighty tier eight demons, were not here.

He had slipped the leash.

Instantly, he made a snap decision and raced away, his lithe and powerful form making great distance in short order. He had to put distance between himself and the horde, lest he be found.

He needed to free himself. He would be nobody's dog, not this time.

Smoke and ash filled his lungs as he ran, like sweet summer air to a demon. One thought pounded in his head to the same rhythm as his feet on the stone. He'd thought the Ancient was invincible, that nothing could possibly stand up to a creature like that.

But something MADE that black hole. Whatever it is, I have to find it.

Any monster capable of such an incredible feat would be worth knowing, even if only so he could avoid it. Until he was stronger, of course. After all, if one monster could get that strong, then why not him?

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Chapter 1094: A Tour of Ash and Fire

Hello, dear readers! Once again, it is I, your friend Travelling Tolly, writing to you of my adventures in the lands of the Colony!

And such a grand adventure it has been. From the charming city of Renewal, to the wonders of Anthome and the incredible things these industrious monsters have created, I must say I have been positively delighted with my experience.

Also, it cannot be overstated, that the tea and biscuit service has been as fine as one would find in the Golden City itself. That is not something I say lightly, dear reader! But it is true!

So many people neglect the importance of the little things when going on tour. Yes, obviously, seeing wondrous marvels that cannot be seen anywhere else is important, but getting a decent cup of tea and a bikkie for dipping is what elevates an experience to the truly unforgettable!

That is my position and I shall not be dissuaded from it!

I must say that my guide, the wonderful Emilia, had been beyond patient. I had originally engaged her to tour Renewal and the nearby nest, and here we were, weeks later, about to descend to the third stratum. She was the soul of patience, and very accepting of my constantly shifting priorities.

"As long as you'll have me, I will be happy to accompany you throughout the lands of the Colony," she told me. Such a lovely and caring young lady!

She was very particular about our sleep schedule though.

So it was at last that we descended into the third stratum. Now, as you may know, reader, the third is not a popular destination for travellers. Abysmally hot, hard to breathe, and not much to look at unless you enjoy looking at millions of wriggling demons trying to poke each other in the eye.

Nevertheless! I have committed to exploring ALL of the Colony's territories, and so I shall!

On the day of our departure, my escorts and I gathered together with Emilia within the walls of Anthome. The three of us had been confined to a special "acclimation zone" for several days to allow our bodies to adjust to higher mana densities in comfort, a welcome innovation to say the least.

"Welcome Tolly," Emilia smiled, "I hope you rested well?"

"It was difficult to sleep with all the excitement - don't glare at me, girl, I rested! I rested!"

She is quite strict on proper sleep.

"I am pleased to hear it."

Once more, serenity settled over the face of our guide and she led us through the well appointed and wonderfully decorated tunnels of the ant nest.

The Colony had been relentless in its dedication to overcoming my expectations, so I was quite excited to see what they had in store for us in the third. I didn't expect the surprises to start before we even arrived!

"What's this?" I asked, a little wide-eyed.

"This is our conveyance deeper into the Dungeon," came the matter of fact reply.

We had been led to a fairly largish chamber, perhaps forty metres across, with a solid metal floor. There were other people gathered as well, standing in loose groups around the place, golgari, human, brathian, even a ka'armodo.

"We aren't taking a gate?"

"The Colony likes to be mana-efficient and gates are anything but. This chamber, and another nine just like it, were built to move people and cargo between the second and third strata. Moving this way, we will consume only ten percent of the mana than it would take for us to move via gate."

"But how long will it take? It's a long way down...."

"We will arrive in an hour."

"An hour!"

I was dubious to say the least, dear reader. However, I swallowed my doubts. The Colony had proven me wrong many times already!

It was a good thing that I kept quiet. As the room continued to fill with people, a bell chimed, loud and clear from somewhere overhead.

"Miss Tolly. Place your feet in through the loops," Emilia advised.

I looked down to see that small, metallic loops had been released from the floor at regular intervals. All around me, passengers were finding a place on the platform and slipping their feet through the strange material.

When amongst the Colony, do as they do! That's my advice, reader, and I am seldom wrong!

My escorts and I hastened to imitate the others and I found, much to my amazement, that the loops tightened themselves over my feet once I'd slipped them through. Quite remarkable! And comfortable enough, I might add. Nothing more than a slight pressure to the top of the foot.

"We will be going quite fast," Emilia told me calmly, "the straps ensure that you don't fly up off the platform."

"Off the... how fast will we be going exactly?"

"Very."

It started slowly, at least. The platform on which we stood gave a gentle lurch, no more than a slight dip, then it began to descend at a stately pace.

It was then I realised that we had been stood on top of a circular, vertical shaft. The walls were completely smooth stone, flattened to a degree that scarcely seemed possible.

We continued to accelerate, and continued, and continued, until the walls were a dizzying blur and that slight pressure on the roof of my foot had grown significantly.

Despite the obvious speed we were travelling, I felt remarkably comfortable, as if I were insulated from the wind pressure somehow. Looking around me, I could see some gentlemen were reading newspapers, and one old lady appeared to have fallen asleep!

"This set of shafts was dug almost ten years ago," Emilia informed me, never missing an opportunity to educate on the Colony's workings. "It was decided that moving personnel and material between the main nest in the second stratum and the third was much too slow and a more rapid means needed to be employed that used less mana than the gate. As you can imagine, the Colony needs to move tens of thousands of individuals every day, the gates were stretched to breaking point, so another solution needed to be found. The shaft runs for a hundred kilometres, straight down."

"And we will complete our journey in an hour?"

"That is correct."

And she was right. We chatted back and forth as the platform continued to descend at its absurd speed. I felt it begin to slow a full ten minutes before we reached our destination. When it finally came to a stop,

the passengers around me slipped their feet from the loops and began to make their way to the exit, a neat opening that now appeared on one side of the shaft.

"Here we are," Emilia smiled. "The third stratum awaits."

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Chapter 1095: A Tour of Ash and Fire pt 2

Before we departed our strange conveyance, Emilia handed each of us a small bracelet and urged us to put it on.

My escorts eyed the metal rather suspiciously, it was clearly enchanted, I could see the core set in the ornament with my own eyes. I couldn't help but look upon their reluctance with a slight amount of exasperation, dear readers. Only a slight amount! The two gentlemen, Arryn and Potamus, had done their job wonderfully well over the trip, but I had begun to wonder if being surrounded by monsters all the time was starting to send their danger-sense a little haywire.

If the ants wanted to harm us, they could do it anytime! We were surrounded by millions of them, constantly.

With a warm smile, I accepted my bracelet with grace and decorum, as one always should! Slipping it around my wrist, I felt the enchantment take effect the instant the clasp snapped shut.

"Oh, that is wonderful!"

"The Colony offers these free to visitors. I collected them from the rack on the wall just through the door."

"Well isn't that wondrous? Stop being rude, you two, put them on immediately!"

Arryn and Potamus eyed the slip of metal one more time before they shrugged and both placed them around their wrists.

"The third stratum isn't known to be comfortable for visitors, so the Colony created a number of these to help take the edge off. It won't keep you cool completely, but it will significantly impact the heat, as well as help purify the air you breathe."

Now, it's no secret that I like my creature comforts, reader, don't we all? I've worn several items with similar enchantments before, they are positively necessary to survival in some parts of the Dungeon, so I have seen such as these many times before.

What I haven't seen, is such expensive materials given away for free! It's complex enchanting and smithing to make things like this. I paid more than a pretty penny for my items!

"Of course, they aren't being given to you," Emilia seemed to notice my complicated feelings, "they are simply a loan. You can return them when you leave the third at a collection station on the way back up or down."

How lovely!

Exiting the docking station, we found ourselves looking down across the incredible vista that is the third stratum when viewed from on high.

I'd seen it all before, but I made sure to make appropriate noises of awe and appreciation. Never be a rude guest, readers, stand by this rule above all others!

Emilia led us down a walkway from which we were guided to another platform, this one formed of pure energy, which we used to descend further.

"Below, you can see the demon city of Roklu, the very first conquered by the Colony when they came to this stratum. You can see over there," she gestured with one hand, "the statue built to commemorate the victory of the Eldest over the demon lord who ruled here."

Well... Of course I could see it. It must have been a kilometre tall! A gigantic, majestic ant was carved on the pillar itself, posed above the city, looking down on all below with a superior gleam in its eye.

"How on Pangera did they manage to carve that into the pillar?" I asked, shocked.

"They didn't. The bulk of the stone is created magically, though I'm told it is somehow anchored to the pillar beneath."

An impressive feat nonetheless.

"Does the Eldest, the Great One, actually look like that? Would you say this is a fair depiction?"

There was just something about the way the enormous sculpture appeared. A certain debonair, a certain suave that exuded from every carved line. The pose, the curve of the carapace. Every inch screamed confidence and triumph. It was a magnificent example of the sculptor's art, doubtless another example of Michaelangelant's work.

For once, Emilia seemed to hesitate before replying.

"I would say it is a fair example of how the Colony views the Eldest."

An interesting answer! And one that held a secret nugget of information.

"Have you actually seen the Eldest yourself then, Emilia?" I asked, as casually as I could manage.

The young lady blushed at having been caught out.

"Once, when I was very young," she said. "At that time, it was still possible for the Eldest to move high in the Dungeon. Sadly, that is no longer possible. It is extremely difficult to gain access to them now."

I've no doubt about it, but that doesn't mean I was going to give up my exclusive! I'm as tenacious as an Evergreen Bulldogdragon when I want to be!

We descended down past Roklu, without stopping. The Demon City was gigantic, fully covering six wide plates that extended out from the central rock formation, each teeming with monstrous life.

"We will visit the City in time," Emilia assured us, much to the dismay of my escorts, "but first we need to present ourselves at the nest."

"There's a nest nearby? I don't see it anywhere."

"You'll be able to see it in a moment," Emilia smiled that little smile which I now recognised as hinting that I was about to witness something ridiculous.

I was on my guard, dear reader, don't think that I wasn't! Even so, these damnable ants managed to take my breath away once again!

When we cleared the last plate of Roklu, it became clear what Emilia had been talking about. The 'nest' that the Colony had built extended from the plains below, wrapped around the pillar, all the way up to the bottom of the city itself! We'd been too close to the plates to see it, but now it was revealed in all its glory.

It was enormous, first of all. Kilometres high, it towered taller than the greatest parapets of the Golden City itself. Thin at the top, it grew wider and wider as we descended, an upside down funnel of comical proportions.

Yet the sheer scale of the nest wasn't the most astounding thing, it was the majesty and grace of the construction. It was an architectural marvel. They could have left the form of the traditional anthill alone, nobody would have expected them to do otherwise, but the slopes were anything but smooth. Broad, intimidating walls with ornately carved gates. Towers as thin as spun glass. Roads, markets, houses, there was an entire city built onto the surface of the nest, each and every construction part of a grander, more harmonious whole.

It took me a moment to realise that the area I was looking at formed a pattern, then a moment longer to realise it was a leaf. Once that fell into focus, I could see it all, the vines, the leaves, the trunks and bushes and grasses that covered the entire surface!

The sheer scale of the planning! The unbelievable amount of effort!

"This must have taken a decade at least to complete," I breathed.

"Not quite as long as that," Emilia demurred. "The Colony is not afraid of hard work."

Chrysalis

Chapter 1096: The Third Goes to Hell

I don't know what's up with these demons, but they are seriously feeling themselves at the moment. Every now and again, we'll be out on the plains and some tier five Stab Demon will come sprinting at me from out of nowhere, leap ten metres in the air and come crashing down like a spear from the heavens... only to bounce off my carapace without me noticing.

Where is your sense of self preservation, idiot?! Life is precious, a miracle of mana and coincidence, don't waste it like this. Alas, monstrous life is as cheap as it gets on the third, and the price is currently crashing through the floor. In fact, I'd go further. It crashed through the floor, through the basement and burrowed deep into the earth where it found a portal to a new reality, the EvenDeeperVerse, where it continues to plunge to new, mind-bending levels of depth.

The spawn rate for demon larvae is getting so out of control, they're starting to scrape the bottom of my carapace when I walk over them. Usually this happens when one of the vicious little stabbers jumps too high, not from being stacked on top of each other!

The vastly increased number of larvae of course means a vastly increased number of higher tier demons roaming the plains. They hunt each other, or, if feeling particularly full of themselves, have a go at passing Mythic Monsters.

But something else weird is happening as well. Something I haven't seen before.

[Over there, Master. Another group.]

[Where?]

[Tiny is pointing at them.]

[Ah, so he is.]

Hmmm.

[It's still odd, no matter how many times I see it.]

[It is unusual, Master.]

[What do you think about it, Invidia? These are, at some level, your people after all.]

The eyeball blinks once, twice.

[It issss unnaturalssss,] he says with some distaste.

Oho. An usual amount of feeling was put into that, and he didn't even demand something! My boy is growing up. I feel a tap on my carapace and notice Tiny has sidled up to me and poked me on the side.

What is it? What does he want?

[Do you... want me to ask your opinion as well?]

The giant bat-faced gorilla shrugs one massive shoulder nonchalantly, but I can see his ears twitching in excitement. Ho boy. This is going to be good.

[Alright then, what do you think about it, Tiny?]

At being addressed with the question, he snaps his attention to me, a serious expression plastered on his face. He narrows his eyes and nods slowly, just the once.

[Odd,] he declares.

Then gives me a solemn thumbs up.

[Thanks, buddy. I really appreciate it.]

Still with his large thumb jutting proudly into the air, he nods again, pats me on the back and steps to the side. The air coming off him is insufferably smug, as if he just achieved something incredible.

I want to say something, but I can't bring myself to puncture this moment for him.

I've no idea what's going on in the pea-seed brain of yours Tiny, but, good for you.

The source of our confusion roams the plains in the middle-distance, a pack of tier five demons going absolutely wild on everything they see. This is extremely unusual behaviour for demons out on the plains. They're solitary hunters, preying on each other until they reach tier six, at which point they gain true sentience and seek out a city to take them in. Here we see a gathering that breaks that pattern. These demons should be trying to slice each other's faces off, but instead, they're out here pallin' around!

It's not natural.

And this isn't the first time we've seen this lately either. Ever since we broke off the assault on that demon horde, we've been creeping about hunting while looking for another horde to take bites out of and this stuff keeps happening.

My feeling is that these demons have become possessed by the will of Arconidem and are acting against their own natures. Should they come across a horde, they'll probably join it immediately.

Which leads me to a scary thought.

[So if these guys meet up with others who've banded together, just like they have, in order to do whatever the Ancient goonball wants them to do... will they just group together?]

[... Most likely, Master.]

[Does that mean hordes of demons can just form... out of the blue? Like, if enough of them get together, that's just a brand new horde that hasn't come into contact with any of the others.]

[... right.]

[Well... nards.]

So even if we smash every horde, kill the tier eights, and scatter the demon uprising to the winds... it'll never actually be over until Arconidem either catches these mandibles, or goes back to sleep? Things are going to get so much worse around here, aren't they?

[Well, let's go smash this group before they get into any mischief and then be on our way.]

Putting down a mob of tier five demons doesn't take long for the three pets to achieve. They are the crème de la crème of tier six monsters, after all. Strong Skills, excellent evolutions and potent mutations. They'll probably be stronger than me after they evolve, which will allow me to kick back and relax while they do all the hard work.

I mean, that's not what I'm aiming for or anything....

[Right, then, off we go! There has to be another horde around here somewhere.]

We set off again around the plains, trying to stay close to the area beneath the Colony's territory. I don't want to wander too far away in case they need me, and I certainly want to notice if one of the tier eights comes up and tries to go higher.

If I can intercept them here, then that's going to be the best scenario. Still in range for the Vestibule and without other ants nearby for them to threaten.

So we set off, the larvae continuing their eternal battle beneath our feet as they scatter out of the way, then roll back to cover the ground after we pass by.

Sure enough, we do find another horde not far away.

[I can sense some strong cores out there,] I warn the others, [so let's be a little cautious.]

Not strong enough to be tier eight, but there may be a few sevens in this group. This could be interesting!

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 1097: The Third Goes to Hell pt 2

Tangling with the big boys, wrestling with the top dogs, that's my job as the strongest the Colony has to offer. The first time I went up against a tier seven demon, it was Grokus, and he very nearly had me for dinner. The last time I tried it, I absolutely annihilated the opponent so quickly they didn't have time to pick their nose.

In fact, it was so fast I'm not even sure they had a nose.... In that instance, I had to go all out to protect the Queen, but here, I can be a little more discerning and test my limits a little more.

I've got enough Biomass stocked away for a decent mutation session, and I'd like to have a clearer idea of just what I need before I commit. This can be my chance for data collection.

The horde we find is several thousand demons strong, and rather worryingly seems to be heading towards the pillar behind us, which leads directly into the territory of the Colony. Considering how busy they've been, I don't think there remain many cities in this area that haven't been visited by the demon hordes. Any non-demon occupants have been excised, so now they need to go looking further afield for targets.

The time when the Colony is going to clash head-on against the demon uprising is fast approaching, but if we play our cards right, we can delay it just a little bit longer.

[Get ready, gang,] I tell the others. [We're going to commit to this one. Not a single demon in that horde is allowed to survive. I want you guys to peel away the weaker demons so I can have a crack at the tougher monsters in the centre.]

The three of them nod in affirmation, pumped up and ready to fight, but someone else pops up to spoil the positive atmosphere.

"Are you sure this is a good idea, Eldest?" Protectant pops into existence not far away, looking somewhat tired and bedraggled.

"Of course it's a good idea. We can deal with this threat here and now, and my comrades need precious levels to push them closer to evolution. There's so much winning involved, it almost beggars belief. What's your problem?"

The leader of operation: Silent Shield rubs at the carapace between her eyes with a foreleg, as if relieving a tension headache.

"There are multiple highly evolved demons in there, and thousands of enemies in total. Of course it's dangerous! It's also completely unnecessary. You know just as well as I do that if this demon army climbs that pillar, there is an entire fortress filled with ants waiting to greet them on the other side. They'll be annihilated! So why risk yourself?"

I mean, she raises good points, but there are other things to consider. For example: "Have all of you reached tier six yet?"

Protectant flinches slightly, giving the entire game away.

"*Still?*! This is getting absolutely ridiculous. I'm going to be getting up close and personal with tier eight demons soon. EIGHT. What do you think is going to happen to one of you if you're three evolutions behind? You'll be evaporated, that's what!"

"This isn't what we were discussing..." she protests lamely.

"Nonsense! We are out here strengthening ourselves for the trials to come, and that includes you twenty slackers! Get your mandibles ready, because you are charging into that horde along with the rest of us, and you're going to like it, dammit! Get all the experience, Biomass and cores you can, I'm going to be too busy to babysit you. Ready?"

"Not rea-"

"Good. Go!"

And we're off! Racing across the plains, my legs are a blur and the air pressure blows my antennae back against my carapace. Tiny whoops with joy as he rumbles forward like an avalanche, a grim-eyed Invidia latched onto his shoulder.

I can sense the twenty baby-sitters falling in behind us as we charge, forced to go along with the plan despite themselves. Gweheheheh. Masterful persuasion tactics, even if I do say so myself.

Up ahead, the demon horde is just as excited to see us as we are to see them. The lead demons go absolutely berserk, red eyed and frothing as they hurl themselves towards us. Once the front of the group gets moving, the rest soon follow, the mass of monstrous flesh soon stampeding in our direction, with those powerful demonic auras washing out from the centre.

Bring it!

The bulk of the horde are weak, mere tier four and five demons gathered from the plains, and I slam through them like they aren't even there. With every chomp of my mandibles or thrash of my head, I send the weaker monsters tumbling out of my way.

Of course, even as strong as I am, it isn't enough to let me run straight through a thousand demons, not without drawing on the Altar, at least. If I need to use it, then I will, but for now, I'll hold back.

"Get off me! I've got stuff to do!"

The moment my momentum stops, the demons pile onto me as quickly as they can, hacking and slashing, biting and punching. Thankfully, my carapace is more than up to the task of deflecting physical damage like this. Acting as the strongest possible armour, the weaker attacks simply bounce off me.

As nice as that is, I still have vulnerable points, namely my eyes and the joints between my armour segments, so I manoeuvre quickly in the confined space left to me. Guided by my brief glimpses into the future and acting with unnatural speed thanks to my enhanced reflexes, I can shift and deflect every strike that aims at my more vulnerable points.

Seriously, though, what's the most efficient way to get rid of these small fry? I can chomp them to death in an instant, but I don't want to drain my stamina. Acid? Probably not. I could use magic, I suppose, but the number of spells required. Ah, forget it, let's try this.

I draw deeply on my gravity mana, compress and form it into the spell I want before unleashing it along with a burst of energy from the Altar.

Taste my Gravity Domain!

The purple sphere of energy expands outwards with me at the centre, larger and darker than I've ever seen it. The moment it reaches full size, the air within the dome changes. All at once, hundreds of demons slam to the ground, no longer able to keep themselves upright as the tremendous force crushes them down into the ground.

All of a sudden, I find myself standing alone, surrounded by a carpet of monsters straining to rise from the floor. Empowered by my gravity mana specialisation and the energy of the Altar, the Gravity Domain has become so much stronger!

"Gweheheheh. That's right, get on the ground. You small fry don't get to stand in the presence of a king!"

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 1098: The Third Goes to Hell pt 3

Looking at all the demons slumped on the ground around me, it's a good feeling. A dangerous feeling!

The dark one is stirring... I can feel his hunger!

Yes! Kneel before me, you worms! Gweheheheheh! Hack! No... I must resist! I cannot allow the light to fall into the shadows. Not today, Dark Anthony! Your time will come, but it shall not be now!

I manage to push the glee I feel at seeing these weaker demons forced into the stone by my gravity domain to one side. There are tier seven monsters lurking about and I can't be taking them lightly. No matter how powerful I think I am, I need to remember that they're the same level of evolution as me.

Behind me, my comrades are going absolutely berserk. With the support of my twenty bodyguards adding to the chaos, the three of them are able to munch through huge numbers of monsters without being in much danger.

Protectant, Guardian and the rest are obsessed with remaining in the shadows to the point that they'd erase their existence entirely if they found a way to manage it and still hang around annoying me.

After seeing the Mythic evolution options and how crazy they got, I'm half worried that they'll all choose to turn into some sort of energy parasite and attach themselves to me. Or something even weirder, that only exists in the minds of those who wish me harm.

Shudder.

They would do it too. Like, they wouldn't even *hesitate*. Maybe I need to rethink whether I should push them to level up.... Some are tier six already, after all!

I know I can't, though. If even one of them dies on the job, then I'll never forgive myself. Forget bodyguards. I spend more time worrying about their well-being than I do my own.

Wait. *WAS THAT THE PLAN ALL ALONG!?*

Oooo that's clever. Seriously clever, dammit! I'll need to find out which of the Council came up with this idea. I'll congratulate them on the brilliant idea, right before I thwack them into oblivion.

All right, where are these demons... I've got a lot of anger to work out now.

With the domain active, draining away at my gravity mana and altar respectively, I can walk through the horde almost totally unimpeded. Some of the stronger demons can still move, though slowly. Even if they can reach me, the effort it takes to stretch an arm to hit me makes their attacks totally ineffective. A few brighter sparks start firing spells at me, but my battery of mind-constructs rip the more serious ones to pieces before they can threaten me. My efforts to beef up my defence through evolutions and Skills has brought me to this point, and experiencing the results, I have to say I've done a bang-up job.

Moving through the crowd of monsters in this way, it's easy for me to find the tier sevens, and when I do, I start to wonder if I've bitten off more than I can chew.

There are three of them, and they look like a rather intimidating trio. First, there's a big chunky boy, reminiscent of Grokus, though not the same sort of demon. Huge, flabby, and with a slaving, tooth-lined maw. The second is at least a type I recognise, a War Demon. Huge, powerfully muscled, with barbs and blades aplenty for engaging in its chosen obsession. Those types are intimidating beasts, to say the least. Last is clearly a mage type, lithe, with four arms and a surprisingly eyeless head, the monster looks like it means business.

In their enraged state, the three don't waste any time on pleasantries and rush toward me. Immediately, I can feel the difference between these and the other demons. The Fatty and War demon burst into my domain and barely slow down as they reach out to crush my insect legs.

Naive! You think I can't sense these moves coming?

My attackers grasp nothing but air as I react with preternatural speed. I slide to one side and lash out with my mandibles, employing my most devastating bite attack.

VOID CHOMP!

The two monsters are sucked into the centre of the strike zone before suffering the devastating power of the manifested mandibles. These two aren't as weak as the other trash around here. Big and tough, they can take a hit or two.

Zzzzap!

Taking advantage of me being stationary during the Void Chomp, a blast of magic flies through the air and bites into my carapace. Ouch! That sizzles a bit, was that a form of laser magic? Some sort of concentrated light?

Thankfully, my carapace is thick and tough, so whatever they did wasn't able to puncture through it. I knew they'd hit me, but I was surprised they were able to throw out a spell potent enough that I couldn't tear it apart. That mage-type might be the strongest of the three....

"ROOAAAAR!" the War demon bellows in my face and I immediately have to reassess that opinion as the giant creature takes massive swipes, looking to take my head off.

Jeez. Even though I evolved, these guys are still an impressive size. I mean, it doesn't help that I'm so much longer than I am tall, meaning the War demon towers over me, despite being a similar mass. I guess I'll just have to bite your kneecaps off!

VOID CHOMP!

Another devastating bite, unleashed just after I narrowly dodge a dangerous strike.

CRUNCH!

The War demon definitely feels it, but this attack alone isn't enough to take powerful demons like these out of the picture.

Zzzzap!

Argh! Again! I was more ready for it that time. The beam moves so quickly, I have hardly any time to take it apart before it lances into me. Going to have to shift to another strategy.

Kicking my sub-brains into overdrive, I spin together an omni-elemental construct and start to pump out concentrated ice-mana. It's not at its best in this boiling hot environment, but if I condense it enough, it'll do the job. I know for a fact that demons hate the stuff.

The larger demon continually bellows in rage as it barrels towards me, gnashing at the air with its prohibitively sized jaws. I'm convinced the creature is just too damn slow to be a serious threat at this point, but of course it surprises me the exact second I start to dismiss it as a threat.

My antennae tingle with warning and I throw myself to the side in a graceless roll, flailing along the ground as something blasts past me.

What the heck was that!?

I right myself in a hurry, only to find the War demon positioned in front of me, ready to strike.

No you don't!

Dash! In fact, Charge!

Rather than move to the side, I rush full forward, slamming my carapace into the demon's legs and avoiding the worst of the strike. In the corner of my eye I can see what the Fatty had shot at me with such blinding speed. It was a tongue!

He'd shot it out like a frog and was now in the process of winding it back in. Disgusting! Even worse, I can see he's got more of the things in that maw. Who the heck needs more than one tongue?!

Mana at the ready, I unleash a blizzard of ice spears at the mage and Fatty as I untangle myself from the closest opponent. I didn't quite manage to knock the War demon down, but it was close.

These guys are a little tougher than I expected. I suppose I'll have to get serious as well!

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 1099: The Third Goes to Hell pt 4

When a monster reaches tier seven, and perhaps this is especially true for demons, they tend to get some fancy tricks up their sleeves. Grokus had that whole Biomass storage thing, which was a heck of a thing, if I'm being honest. War demons are in possession of a frightening frenzy aura, and grow even more powerful as they take damage, turning them into fearsome destruction engines when they're on the verge of death.

If I were to take a guess, I think the Fatty has something related to those tongues or his mouth. Perhaps a paralytic effect, or some special effect when he bites something? I'd best be careful and make sure I don't get hit. The Mage is a little trickier, but I wonder if she's accelerating her magic in some way. The speed her projectiles come out is way too quick, so fast I can't even dodge, and I know they're coming before she even shoots them!

With the Gravity domain running, I have a constant drain on both Altar energy and gravity mana, but I decide to keep it going. The domain is preventing the weaker monsters from piling into the fight, and it's slowing down the big hitters, even if they can mostly ignore its effects. Importantly, the drain on the Altar is *barely* more than the replenishment rate, so in practice, I'm still mostly full on energy. It's not like I'd be able to replenish enough during the fight to make a significant difference anyway. The longer this drags out, the more disadvantageous to me. I need to end it with what I have available to me now.

The first to go has to be the War demon, a decisive strike that finishes him in one go. Chipping away at their health is completely the wrong way to go about it.

I've already delivered a few Void chomps to this particular foe and he is loving life, raging more than ever before, limbs bursting with power. As the Fatty creeps closer, looking to fire off another tongue, and the Mage continues to lance me with lasers, the War demon stomps forward, eyes blazing with rage, slashing wildly.

This is getting intense!

So much is happening at once. My antennae buzz constantly and my muscles fire without me having to think about it. Strikes come and I slide left, or jerk to the right. Sparks fly as blades clash against my carapace, skidding off the diamond surface. My brains burn in my head as they work at full capacity, every mind-construct pushed to the limit as a torrent of condensed ice spears fly out, several every second.

Hooooooly moly!

I fling myself over the ground once again, desperately avoiding another rocket-like tongue fired from the Fatty.

That's seriously annoying! Keep your dang mouth shut for a minute yoooooooouWAYO!

A second tongue blasts from that disgusting maw just as I get my legs back under me. Forewarned by my antennae, I desperately cobble together a wall of ice in front of me as I try to push my body to the right.

Yikes and wowsers! I *knew* he had more than one tucked in there, but I wasn't sure he could fire both so quickly one after the other. I seriously don't want to get hit by that attack....

Might have to change my plans. I think Fatty has punched his ticket to the top of the list.

As everything spins so quickly around me, it's hard not to acknowledge just how much I'm enjoying the battle. I'd missed this! The intensity! Being pushed to the limit and beyond! My monster body is capable of so much, dozens of thoughts at once, impossible reaction speeds, the sheer size and power packed into my massive ant frame.

Flinging it all around, dialling it up to ten and fighting hard, something inside my monstrous body craves this excitement! Like a rocket engine desperate to ignite, every fibre of my ant-body is roaring at me to push them to breaking in order to smash the enemy!

Who am I to disagree?! Let's unleash everything this evolution has to offer. These demons think they can challenge me? I'm the Colony Paragon! My carapace is strong enough to bear the weight of my entire family, these punks won't even be able to scratch it!

I snap my six legs and flex them as the War demon bears down on me and the Fatty reels his two tongues in. I let my energy accumulate as I bring my mandibles back and lock them into place.

All the while, my endless barrage of ice magic continues, most of them shattering noisily against the Mage's shield. It's enough to keep her distracted, which is all I need for now.

Have a taste of the Will of the Colony!

Dash!

VOID CHOMP!

Both skills soak in the power of the Altar as I activate them. The world blurs, stretching out before me as I teleport forward, moving at such ridiculous speeds that the air feels like a wall.

The Fatty jerks back when I appear in front of him before lunging, mouth agape and ready to bite.

Too late, moron!

Activated during my dash, the void chomp is already manifested. Dark mandibles of pure energy, larger and more dense than normal, manifest alongside my own jaws, slamming shut on the void which sucks the demon into the perfect bite range.

CRUNCH!

For good measure, I shift the target of my magic forward, pounding the helpless demon trapped in my jaws with a veritable machine gun of ice.

Not enough? I've got more!

With the constant flow of gravity, my carapace is singing, enhanced by the energy that pours out of me. My whole body resonates to the strange thrum of gravitic energy. It's strangely intoxicating.

VOID CHOMP!

Unempowered this time, my jaws slam shut once more.

[You have defeated....]

One down!

The War demon slams into my side, tons of brutal monster moving at high speed. The kinetic energy would be enough to crumple a truck into a pancake, then throw that pancake into a hydraulic press until it was an atom thick, but I endure.

The carapace and inner-plating absorb the force, transferring it through my legs and into the ground. I buckle, but I don't break. The demon bellows its war cry, shockingly loud, and I snap my mandibles angrily back, the sharp SNAP sounding like a thunderbolt.

Idiot demon, I have the power of gravity at my command and you want to knock *me* down? There's no chance!

I stop the ice barrage and put all my minds to work on a new spell, drawing deep on my gravity mana as I spin together my latest technique: the gravity well.

Let's see how you like this!

Driven into a mindless rage by the Will of Arconidem, the hapless demon can't do anything but attack without thought, rushing forward again and again. It's all too predictable and I'm able to position him between myself and the Mage, limiting her opportunity to strike until I'm ready.

When the spell is complete, I unleash it immediately, triggering the Altar again.

To my surprise, the Altar practically empties, dumping a huge amount of energy into the spell.

Placed beneath the War demon's feet, the well is shaped to apply its field only to the demon, and he feels the effect immediately... but not for long.

Filled with all the gravity mana I could spare and empowered by the Altar, the well roars into life with dramatic effect. It reaches out, seizes hold of the War demon... and crushes it.

Yikes! That... wasn't pretty. Oof. I have to admit, that's taken my appetite for the fight and put a bit of a downer on it.

Even the Mage demon seems a little off-put by witnessing such a scene, despite the compulsion burning in her mind.

Look, I didn't know it was going to be like that, alright? I haven't tried it before. I mean... I hope there's some Biomass left.... Probably not.

[You have defeated...]

Yeah, obviously.

Well, one to go, I suppose.

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 1100: The Third Goes to Hell pt 5

I turn to the last demon, the mage, and immediately resume my icicle barrage in order to give myself a little time and space.

Holy moly! I'm tired. That took a fair bit out of me, but so long as the Colony is close enough, I will never truly tire. Sure enough, as Will continues to flow through the Vestibule, my brains are soothed, my muscles restored and my stamina replenished.

This is the power of family! Gwheheheh!

With my siblings helping me, I need never fear a tier seven demon ever again!

Having said that, the Altar is looking a little forlorn. The attacks I've used so far have taken a huge chunk out of it, and with the gravity domain active, it won't gain any power either. I'll have to finish this last tier seven without it.

I mean, I could turn off the domain spell, but then I'd be swarmed by the masses of weaker monsters. No thanks. I'd just get bogged down and lasered in the face a bunch of times. I'm not in the mood for a ranged battle against a specialist spell demon. Fighting Invidia once was enough for me to swear off that for the foreseeable future.

My ice spears rocket through the air, shattering noisily against the demon's shield and filling the air with a frozen mist that quickly burns away. Eyes burning with mindless rage, the mage hisses in agitation, returning fire with more lasers that sear across my carapace.

That spell is so damn fast!

Unfortunately for my opponent, it may be able to hit me, but it doesn't pack enough punch to inflict lasting damage to my carapace. With gravity mana constantly flowing, my body is humming at max capacity and the inner-plating is doing its job repairing my exo-skeleton before any weaknesses can really appear.

What I don't want to do is wait around and find out a more powerful version of this spell exists that melts through me, so I need to keep moving and distract the enemy.

As I start to circle around, I decide to change my magic based attack mode. Mind mana, a constant requirement to maintain my constructs, begins to flow brightly as the mana in my core is converted. Experts at handling this particular flavour of mana, the sub-brains and the constructs they work with leap on the energy and begin pumping out mental-attacks.

I've not grown to specialise in these methods, but that doesn't mean they aren't useful. Against Garralosh, the mental-attack was extremely effective, and defending against this method is also important.

Woven with incredible speed, hundreds of strands of mind magic zip through the air, rushing toward the demon. My sudden shift in tactics causes a moment of hesitation, which nearly proves disastrous, before her mind reaches out and begins to shred my mana before it can touch her.

Ooo, that was close. Still, that might keep her more busy and prevent her from firing that -

ZAP!

Yeeeouch! Apparently not. Ah well, at least if my opponent tries to go harder on the offensive, I'll immediately gain ground in the mind war, which is one that she really can't afford to lose.

I pick up speed and circle closer and closer, shortening the distance between us and increasing the pressure of my mind attack. The demon is far from helpless and fires back repeatedly with burning lasers that sear into me and at one point threaten to slice off a leg.

Thankfully, I manage to get myself out of the way before the laser can cut through.

The ol' legs are still my weakest point. I really need to chunk them up at some point, especially the joints. Now that my carapace is truly difficult to penetrate, the go-to tactic of aiming for the joints and legs is going to come back, I can already tell.

Except, it isn't enough to prevent me from descending on this hapless mage.

The pressure of my mental attack continues to build until a few different bits and pieces begin to slip through. Random thoughts, false sensory impressions, sounds and sights that bewilder and confuse. Once it begins, there's nothing the demon can do, and I arrive within chomp range quickly.

Naturally, at that distance, this type of demon is no match for the barrage of physical attacks that rain down.

Holy moly!

I jump back after delivering the final chomp as an explosion of guts and brain matter projects out from the mage.

YUCK!

I always forget that these slimmer demons, and truthfully, even some of the larger ones, are packing a heap of their organs into little pocket dimensions.

[Master, are you alright?] Crinis calls me.

[I'm fine! Just... cleaning up the mess, I suppose.]

I look around at the field of battle and sigh. I've defeated my three opponents, with surprising ease, I might add, but there are still thousands of weaker demons about.

Just so I don't have to bother with them, I let the gravity domain continue as I stomp around, kicking the demons off of my precious Biomass and dragging it all together in one pile. One of the demons is flattened into... I'm not sure what word I would use to describe it, but at least the other two left something behind that I can feast on. This is a rare treat. Tier seven monsters don't grow on trees!

I begin to stuff my face, racking up the points as the weaker demons stumble and crawl on the ground around me. Further away, the battle rages as Tiny, Crinis, Invidia and the bodyguards do their best to fight through the entire horde.

From where I sit, it looks like it's all working out splendidly. They should be finished right about the time I'm done eating!