

## Chrysalis 1151

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#### Chapter 1151: Frantic

I skitter out of the way just before the ball of roiling flames detonates in a furious roar, scorching me on the back-zone rather badly. Despite sensing it coming, and despite using my empowered dash to basically teleport a hundred metres, I *still* got burned. That was one big kaboom.

Using the dextrous aim of my nozzle, I keep firing acid at Pyrixan to keep the pressure on her as I size up against Torrifex who looks like he's positively boiling beneath his skin.

A steady stream of heavy-duty stone spears still zips through the air toward him, but he's countered by enacting some variety of fire domain. As the spears draw closer to him, they twist, melt and warp, deflecting them from their path. He does occasionally get splattered with molten rock, but he doesn't seem to care.

Might need to rethink the stone strategy.

#### **[Your life ends here, little worm!]**

[You really need to learn the difference between invertebrates. *Especially* when you stand in the presence of the strongest kind there is!]

No matter how you slice the pie, ants are the king, or more appropriately, queen of the insect kingdom. Other bugs, to ants, are just food. After all this time running around on the third and seeing the demons swarming as they have, they are *seriously* starting to feel like bugs to me.

Torrifex rushes towards me, his huge frame displacing so much air his appearance *warps*, four savagely clawed arms cutting down at once.

Four separate sets of slashes formed by his Skill slice through the air towards me. At the point they meet, I can feel an indomitable might, as if the power from all four slashes has been concentrated directly at that point.

Luckily, my antennae are on the job and I had an inkling this was coming a moment before it did.

My nervous system fires with impossible speed and I'm moving the second the big demon's arms are moving forward, dodging to the right. As the cuts whip past me, they carve huge chunks out of the stone, digging a furrow as they travel, as if the rock wasn't even there.

I need to retaliate, but I have to be mindful of my resources. Everytime I get a good angle, I unleash a fresh blast of acid at Pyrixan, but she continues to sit still and pump out ash like a Victorian factory. Can we get some air quality controls in here?! Sheesh!

If she manages to reach a critical mass of ash, there won't be much I can do to slow her down. From what I can see, she can manipulate the stuff at will, which means she could chase me down and surround me unless I get far enough out of her range.

But I can't devote the time I need to prevent her manufacturing process because I've got Torrifex, a massive, unstoppable demon, up in my grille, *literally* trying to grill me.

Thinking quick, I pressurise as much water mana as I can before I unleash a torrential jet of water at the huge demon. The second it touches his fire domain, the water evaporates, but I continue to pour it on.

Soon enough, vast clouds of steam are billowing out everywhere, blocking my view of the target.

But he can't see me either, for the moment at least. Time to get Pyrixan!

I turn and *dash*, rushing the weird Ash-demon with my mandibles peeled back for another chomp. I've got a tiny window here, so I need to make the most of it.

### **VOID CHOMP!**

Empowered by the altar, the chomp is once again ridiculously overpowered, but my stock of altar juice is really starting to run low. Even mutated to this point, it can't keep up with the demands of these high level Skills, *especially* when it isn't getting refilled!

No matter. If I unleash all of my altar power, I refuse to believe it won't have an effect!

Surrounded by a growing mound of acid-coated ash, Pyrixan almost appears to have put down roots. She glares at me with her many eyes, but I'm resistant to her ire. What I'm not resistant to is the aura of destruction that emanates from her. Even without her ash cloud, it's eating away at me!

Thankfully, my body is composed of seriously dense materials. It's going to take you a while to chew through this carapace!

With a devastating roar, my mandibles slam shut once more, and I can tell she felt it that time. Without the same coverage from her cloud, she wasn't able to block all of the ridiculous amount of force my chomp applied.

Stone shatters and the floor beneath us buckles under the pressure as the almighty void chomp is unleashed, and Pyrixan reels back. That hurt her!

Unfortunately, this next bit is going to hurt me....

Like a bat out of Hades, Torrifex streaks out of the steam, smoke trailing behind him and a look of pure rage twisting his face. Although, it has to be said, he looks super mad pretty much all the time. This guy needs a massage or something.

I sensed him coming, of course, but I had to commit to putting the hurt on Pyrixan while I had an opening. Looks like I'm going to have to take a hit in exchange.

Sigh.

Once again, his four arms slash, this time directly onto my carapace. I do everything I can to minimise the damage, shifting the angle of impact to maximise my defence, dodging at the last possible second, even using a smidge of force mana to shield from the blow.

It doesn't help much.

Pain explodes in my side as I'm sent reeling through the air. Like an ant-shaped missile, I'm blasted away, flying hundreds of metres before I slam into a stone pillar, sending showers of stone and dust flying.

Holy moly! He just embedded me into the side of a mountain! Who does he think he is? Godzilla!?

Legs wagging, I pry myself out from the rock and drop down the plains below before I *dash* back toward the fight. I can't leave Al there by himself. He's been one on one with Somonax all this time, and as much as I'd like to believe he's holding his own, I really don't think that's the case.

My side aches fiercely and I don't hesitate to activate my healing gland to repair the damage.

It's not super easy to look at the side of my body, but I can tell he managed to crack the gravity compressed diamond, a super impressive feat. If I'd skimmed out and opted for a cheaper material, I may well have been cut in half in that moment.

Viva the spending!

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#### **Chapter 1152: Turn the Tables**

As it turns out, Al is *not* doing all that great. The amount of fire mana the eyeball can bring to bear is absurd, and the concentrated beams he produces would punch a hole in just about any monster I've ever seen.

But Somonax just doesn't seem to care. Whatever the hell those wires on her back are, she can work up some serious momentum as she whips her thousand blades about. As far as I can see, those sword-like appendages have a few effects built into them.

For one, they can obviously cut through mana with ease, since she's gleefully slicing everything Al sends her way. For two, whatever they and the wires are made from, it sure as heck isn't a material native to the third. I refuse to believe something that advanced isn't more expensive than what a demon is given naturally. Third, and I'm not sure how she does this, but she can clearly control them independently.

All thousand of them.

Luckily for me, they appear to only have a range of fifty metres or so, otherwise, she could probably be slicing up me and Al at the same time. If I were to hazard a guess, Somonax has a rather large chunk of brain matter hidden away in her demonic pocket dimension, similar to Invidia, but unlike Invidia, all that grey matter is devoted to whip and blade control.

It's an incredibly straightforward strategy, one I'm sure she's poured a ton of her evolutionary energy into. Many blade, blade cut good, more blade, more slashy.

It's like if Tiny were obsessed with swords instead of fists and muscles.

Somonax probably has more going on under the hood than just this, but I don't have the time for a more in depth examination, since Torrifex has spotted me again.

POW! POW! POW! POW!

Now that I'm in range and Pyrixan is *still* refusing to move, I oblige her by resuming my rapid fire bombardment of acid in her general direction. At this point, she's surrounded by a disgusting, bubbling mass of acid and ash, like a particularly noxious swamp. The acid approach was my best approach by far,

but I can tell that I'm losing the battle. The demon probably doesn't feel the need to move since she feels all she has to do is sit and pump out ash until she eventually has enough that I can't fight back.

As aggravating as it is, I don't have the time to devote to slowing her down, since Torrifax is about to blast me with another fireball of doom.

Give me a break already!

He doesn't. Real shocker there.

*Empowered Dash!*

I get my butt out of dodge and once again get singed on the backzone for my trouble. The area behind me is a scorched, still-burning crater after that shot. I mean, more than it was before. The third stratum generally adheres to a 'blasted wasteland' sort of aesthetic, but after being exploded by a gigantic fireball of doom, it has achieved a whole new level.

Well, my plan from the beginning was to unleash all of my resources as quickly as possible and this seems like an appropriate time to follow through.

I didn't spend those precious seconds running back to the fight idly considering how Somonax has mutated and evolved.

Well, I *did* do that, but thanks to having multiple mind-constructs I can do multiple things at a time. Like make two separate gravity bombs.

I line up the two demons and unleash the two bombs, empowering both for good measure.

**HOOOOOOOOOOOOWLLLLLLLLL!**

**HOOOOOOOOOOOOWLLLLLLLLL!**

These are obviously much smaller than the supermassive effort I started the fight with, but empowered by the altar, they'll do a lot of work if they connect.

Once again, Pyrixan doesn't seem to want to move, covering herself in her cloud to absorb the blow.

Torrifax, though... he does seem as if he wants to dodge, but having just unleashed his fireball, he needs a moment to recover. He'll be able to avoid the point of impact, sadly, but he'll be close enough that the after effects will be difficult for him to avoid.

Which is good enough.

The two bombs reach their destinations and expand, unleashing their full fury. Once again, we are treated to the shrieking wind and groaning stone as the forces of gravity run wild, tearing everything apart to sate an insatiable hunger.

Once again, I have to note that two bombs don't seem to play nice with each other. Everything caught exactly between the two spells is relatively fine, since gravity is basically balanced out there, but that's a razor thin line to tread. Everything else is just getting shredded.

**[PITIFUL INSECT!] Torrifax roars in fury. [I will REND YOU!]**

[You should focus on surviving. I would, in your position.]

With those two dealt with for the time being, I need to turn my attention to Somonax. I'm sure AI would appreciate the help.

I'm really starting to run low on resources here... that reminds me.

[Hey, Invidia! Have you finished laying the groundwork?]

[*The ground isssss alssso mine!*]

[I mean... sure? But are you done?]

[*Almosst.*]

[Fantastic.]

That idiot better be right about this. If not... I guess it won't matter if not.

[Alrighty, AI! I'm here to help! How are th-]

HOLY MOLY!

My antennae explode with sensation, and a tenth of a second later, a wall of swords descends on me. I whip all my legs beneath my body after throwing myself to the side.

WHAM!

Oof! That one stung. The force slams me down into the ground, allowing me to skip the 'stop' and 'drop' and getting straight to the 'roll'. Which I do. That was nasty! I think she managed to cut a chunk out of my precious carapace!

[AI? You still kicking?]

[I don't have legs...]

[That's not... never mind. Are you ali- well clearly you're alive. How are things going?]

[Not... well.]

[Great.]

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### **Chapter 1153: Overwhelmed**

Somonax's face is twisted into a permanent grin, her needle-pointed teeth as long as a man's arm flashing in the red light. From her back, the thousand wires spring, each connected to one of a thousand blades.

I've used almost all of my Altar energy to tie down Torrifex and Pyrixan for the moment, but I'm doubtful those two bombs will be strong enough to kill them, which means I need to make the most of this two-on-one time I have with this demon of endless slaughter.

[Alright, Al. If you've got anything left to give, you better give it now. I'm going to run in and see what I can get done.]

[I will try.]

I'm keen to give him a motivational talk, a bit of the ol' 'there is no try' stuff, but I don't have it in me right now. I knew running headlong into the tier eight demons was going to be tough, but right now, I feel like I've unleashed everything I have and they're just taking it. Once my Altar runs dry, they'll be able to squash me like a pancake at festival time.

Time to go for it!

Somonax grins... or... just maintains her normal expression, as I turn and rush directly at her, launching a barrage of compressed stone spears as I do.

Those blades make quick work of the projectiles, shards of stone go flying in all directions as each spear is detonated when cut. I knew she'd be able to defend herself, all I wanted to do was tie down at least *some* of her limbs as I made my approach.

*Dash!*

I lunge forward with all my speed the moment I pass within the range of her wires, and it's a good thing I do. From a dozen different directions, hundreds of those gleaming red blades slash down and the best direction for me to dodge is forward.

Even so, I get a few slices on the rear-guard for my trouble.

Seriously? Why always the commercial zone?! Doesn't matter, push forward.

The barrage of stone spears continue, and each one is expertly shattered by a slash from the demon. She's not even moving her body at the moment, because she doesn't have to. I can't hurt her unless I get closer, and doing so plays right into her strengths.

My future-sight antennae are on *fire* as I receive tingling warnings of hundreds and hundreds of individual movements at once. Even with so many brain constructs to process the input, I'm struggling to keep up!

I roll to my left, leap forward, drop low, then rush forward again, my claws gripping so hard I rip chunks of stone out of the ground every time I change direction. The closer I get, the faster and more concentrated the blade attacks become, until I feel I'm facing a storm of swords rather than a demon. She's basically making a solid wall in front of me! I can't push forward without getting cut!

Well, time to put the gravity compressed diamond to the test. I didn't harden my defences this much to shy away from a few little slashes!

Here we go!

Six legs blur as I rumble toward the enemy, my jaws pulled back ready to bite. Immediately, a rain of blades comes down on me, battering into my carapace a thousand times a second.

Oof!

I stagger, but continue to move. From behind, a concentrated hyper-beam of burning light erupts from AI, spearing toward the demon. Somonax tilts her head and gathers her blades, parrying at the last second, slicing through the mana.

A chance!

### **VOID CHOMP!**

The jaws of dark light manifest themselves and begin to close on Somonax, but the demon doesn't seem afraid.

THUNK!

Two hundred swords come down together, concentrating their force on a single point as they attempt to stab through my carapace. The force of the strike sends my legs splaying wide and the underside of my carapace slams into the ground, but I maintain my attack.

For her trouble, the demon has managed to sink her weapons almost thirty centimetres into my carapace, almost enough to get through, but nobody wins a prize for 'almost'!

Eat mandibles, you grinning demon!

With a thunderous roar, my jaws slam shut, but I don't get the feedback I was looking for. What happened?!

I cast about wildly until I realise where the enemy went. She's above me! She *jumped* out of the chomp?!

Spinning in the air, Somonax pulls her thousand blades together, forming them into a gigantic point that she aims straight at my midsection before plummeting down with the force of a comet.

I still can't believe how fast that dodge was. Not only is she so crazy strong, she's *fast*. Dammit!

Well, I can be fast too.

*Empowered Dash!*

My Altar is gasping for energy at this point, but I zip from beneath the strike a half-second before the demon lands, smashing the rock and sending boulders and lava soaring into the air.

Holy moly! That was close....

Wait a second, is it getting dark out here, or is it just me? My minds spin as I try to keep up with everything happening and the sheer overload of sensory information, along with managing my constructs and spells as I cast for something I can use to my advantage.

The gravity bombs have burned out and expired, which means Torrifex and Pyrixan are free once more and I didn't manage to land so much as a mandible on Somonax.

Stupid demons, why do they have to make this so difficult?!

From behind me, a dark cloud rises into the sky and my poor ant heart sinks in my chest. What at first seems like a pillar, towering a kilometre into the sky quickly transforms into a tidal wave that curves down toward me.

I can hear the rushing sound as a wall of air is pushed back into me by the overwhelming ash cloud.

Where the heck did this come from?! Pyrixan was holding this back all along?! That's cheating!

My minds churn and I create a barrier of stone that wraps over me into a hollow dome that I frantically reinforce just before the ash breaks like a wave and washes over the battlefield, burying everything in a layer of ash.

Immediately, I can feel my defensive stone begin to collapse as the power of destruction consumes it like a potent acid.

My mind constructs burn as I pour every ounce of mana I can get my hands on into reinforcing the stone and thickening it. Anything to keep that damned ash from touching my shiny carapace!

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#### **Chapter 1154: Very Intelligent**

Hunkered down in my little bunker, I can't see much, or even sense much, with the surroundings filled with ash, so it's no surprise that Torrifex's fireball takes me by surprise.

A brief flash of powerful fire mana, followed by my stone barrier glowing cherry red then melting away is all the warning I get. Even my antennae don't give me enough of a heads up to do anything about it. All I can do is curl over like a pill-bug and hope for the best as the devastating fire erupts all around me.

Quite naturally, I'm sent flying by the force of the explosion.

My legs waggle in the air beneath me as I try to get my bearings and assess the damage. Firstly, HOT! That was a spicy meata-ball! I'm literally smoking, there is smoke coming off my carapace.

Stupid demons! How dare they sully my shininess with their pitiful magic? I'll make them pay! Or, I'd like to make them pay, but perhaps not right at this moment. Looking down, I can see the vast ocean of dense ash clouds waiting for me to land in them, and I'm not too keen on the experience.

Shield mana! Don't fail me now!

With so many mind-constructs churning constantly, I manage to create the shield beneath my legs just as I reach the peak of my arc, before I begin to descend.

Holy moly, I really got shot high up. I might be able to see my house from up here!

Of course, this means I'm stuck in plain sight, about fifty metres off the ground.

Beneath me, three tier eight demons glare upward with hungry gazes. Torrifex is so mad he's practically boiling, I swear if he gets any more red he's going to explode. Or maybe he's just preparing another massive fireball to detonate me in mid-air.

Yep, that's definitely what he's doing.



Please, Invidia, I hope to goodness you've finished your work. I also hope that *idiot* can do what she said she can do. Otherwise I'm going to thwack her right into the next century!

Torrifex launches his fireball, and at the last possible moment, I dive from my platform and freefall downward. Behind me, the fireball detonates like a miniature sun. A very angry, rage-filled sun.

My entire vision is filled with red, but I don't allow it to distract me. Sunk deep into meditation, I let my fears and worries slide from my thoughts and concentrate on what I need to do.

I'll only have one shot at this and I need to make it perfect.

My brains burn fiercely as I push them as hard as I can, sucking in mana, pumping it into the constructs I'm maintaining, and weaving the resulting mana into the spells I need. It's mind-meltingly difficult, but I need to get it done before I hit the ground.

Which is in about one second. Everything happens at once.

A wave of ash rises to meet me, followed closely by a thousand blades slashing upward, seeking to pierce me through. A great rushing sound vibrates along my antennae to the point I can't hear anything else.

I couldn't have asked for a better chance than this, all three of them, packed so tightly together. I can do this! All I need to do is survive, which... should be fine?

The thousand blades of Somonax crash into me at once, smashing me from every side simultaneously. A moment later, the ash cloud envelops me and I can't see anything but black, and can't feel anything but pain.

Somonax manages to cut massive grooves into my diamond carapace, but not enough to get all the way through. Not on that strike, at least. After that, the destruction properties in the ash take over and I feel like I've been dipped in acid.

It's very unpleasant.

My HP drops precipitously and continues to fall as time passes. When I finally manage to hit the ground, I'm down to half, which is worrying, but it's greater than zero. So I win.

Take this, you fools!

Doing my best impression of Pyrixan, a colossal burst of mud explodes outward from me just as I contact the ground. As if launched from a geyser, the brown, mucky substance rises like a tidal wave before it crashes down, carrying everything with it.

In that instant, everything around me is coated in a thick layer of mud, including the three demons.

FLASH HARDEN!

One moment, I'm surrounded by goopy mud, the next, it has frozen solid, hardening like concrete in the blink of an eye.

Of course, concrete isn't going to keep tier eight demons still for long. I think I have... one second?

[TINY, CRINIS, INVIDIA! LET'S GOOOOOOO!]

Quick as a thought, I summon my pets before I reach out to the nebulous connection I maintain with my most irritating student.

[Get your pretentious butt in here right now!]

There's a purple and pink flash, followed by a strange pop, and a little ant manifests directly on my head.

"It isn't pretentious if you're BRILLIANT!" she cries.

"No time for stupid! Do it!"

Thankfully, she doesn't waste any time on further words and I feel her mana swirling. Quickly, it resonates with the enchanted pods Invidia removed from his mouth and buried around the basin.

I have no idea what was in them, liquid of some kind and a bunch of inscriptions, from the sense I got with them, but now that Brilliant is working her spell, I can feel an absolute torrent of power unleashed from them.

At the same moment, the three demons break free, but it's already too late.

Lightning flashes, my vision blurs to nothing.

Tiny, Crinis and Invidia reach my side just as we are ripped from our location in space and moved to somewhere rather different.

[Tiny?]

[Hrrr?]

[Were you always a cat?]

[HRRRR?!?!?!]

"My bad! One second!" Brilliant cackles.

Another flash and we are back in the third stratum. But not *quite* where we left.

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### **Chapter 1155: The Adoring Crowd**

I don't even need to look to know where we've landed. Before sight returns to my eyes, I heave a sigh of relief.

Through my Vestibule, a torrent of energy floods in. The Nave hums with power, and soon enough, the Altar begins to rapidly fill. That's not all. My fatigue washes away, my acid and regeneration gland replenish at absurd speed, allowing me to trigger another wave of healing that makes my body thrum with vigour.

That crazy little ant actually pulled it off. She told me she was getting close to mastering dimensional travel, that the Colony would soon have gates, but her ability to pop in and out of places was growing stronger all the time.

Before, she was able to take me along with her, but now she can bring along a few more for the ride.

Tiny, Invidia, Crinis and Al have all made it back safely through the dimensional jump. We've arrived back at the top of the third stratum, between two cities held by the Colony. Safety.

Of course, us five weren't the only ones Brilliant managed to bring back.

Not far away, Torrifex, Somonax and Pyrixan stand enraged and confused. I can't blame them for that, being whipped through dimensions is more than a little unnerving. Disorienting doesn't really cover it either. If I were to describe it, I'd say it's kind of like having your brain pulled inside out and then snapped back the right way. It's going to take them a moment to recover, and I'm glad for it. I need to get some HP back.

Of course, I'll be able to fire the regeneration gland every minute or so, considering how many ants are around. There are *millions* of them, and they aren't even that far away.

In fact, there's several hundred thousand arrayed all around us.

While I pull in energy as fast as I can, the ants waste no time in making their presence felt. I'm too far away to hear the command be issued, but in short order, the sky is filled with a barrage of acid quite unlike anything I've ever seen before.

In a wide circle, thousands and thousands of ants lift their abdomens, take aim, and fire. Huge jets of concentrated formic acid rise into the air, then hang for a moment, before they begin to descend. I wouldn't describe it as a rain of acid necessarily, or even a deluge. It's more like the sky became acid, and then fell.

Before the demons can orient themselves, megalitres of formic acid crash down on their heads, obscuring them from sight. Quickly followed by the second barrage, then the third.

If they had enough in the tank, the Colony could probably produce an ocean of the stuff here and now, but sadly, the scouts who specialise in this sort of long range bombardment can't keep it up for long. After the fifth shot, they're out of juice and the place the demons had been standing is literally awash with hissing, sizzling acid.

I watch all of this take place after scurrying to a safe distance, still hoovering in mana and churning it through constructs, preparing my next spell.

I think the acid welcome will certainly hurt the massive demons, but I don't think it'll be enough to destroy them. I need to be ready.

From deep within the newly formed acid lake, bubbles begin to rise as the dark liquid stirs ominously. More and more bubbles rise, and soon, the entire pool is a frothing, boiling mass.

From deep within, a sphere of pure fire rises, surrounded by a cloud of acidic gas as the fluid in contact with the shield itself is immediately vaporised. I can already sense the surging ash within the flames. The three demons aren't happy.

When the trio emerge into the open, their suffocating auras batter into me, even more intense than they were before. Things aren't going according to plan, and I don't think the heralds are all that happy about it.

The air itself seems to burn around Torrifex as he seethes with fury, his skin shifting and bubbling as the fire within him rages out of control.

Pyrixan has transformed into a column of pure ash, the aura of destruction emanating from her is so thick even the acid vapour is dissolved to nothing as it draws close to her.

Somonax is the most terrifying. Her bloodlust has become so thick the air around her has become tainted red. Each of her blades glows bright, twisting around her as if each has a mind of its own.

It's an intimidating sight, but the Colony didn't only bring ants to this party. From the encircling army emerges a host of demons, almost all of them tier six. These are the demons who live in Colony occupied territory and remain free from Arconidem's compulsion.

From long range, they unleash their fury, a torrent of fire and ash and rage that covers the three heralds once again.

Even at tier eight, being besieged by thousands of weaker monsters must be a massive pain in the backzone. After the torrid fight we've been through, they can't be in their peak condition, but even so, I know that this won't be enough.

As the demons pour out their firepower, I watch carefully for any hint of motion. My brains feel like they're melting, pushed to the limit, each of my dozens of mind constructs is frantically working to draw in mana and add it to the spell I'm preparing.

The spell itself is beginning to become hard to control as I pack more and more power into it. To provide enough power, I had to create a gravity mana construct, and that thing is positively humming with all the raw mana I'm pumping into it.

As I work, I keep one eye on the Altar, watching as the precious, precious energy refills rapidly. With this many ants around, I'm practically overflowing with Will.

All I need is for the three demons to be pinned down for a few more seconds!

**[ENOUGH!]** Torrifex booms, his mental roar so powerful it flattens many of the demons and ants flat against the ground.

**[The demon god commands you obey! AND YOU SHALL!]**

He glares at the demons who dared to attack him and his sisters, as if his eyes alone were enough to destroy their Will and force them to succumb to Arconidem. Perhaps he does have some method to affect them. Pity I'll never know.

[Arconibutt has got nothing to say until he can drag his sorry backside up here and say it himself!]

My own mental bellow isn't quite at the same level as the herald's, but it's enough to carry across the field of battle.

[Now get squished!]

Empowered by the Altar, I unleash the greatest, most concentrated Gravity Well I've ever made.

The demons are engulfed in a pillar of darkness from which not even light can escape.

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### **Chapter 1156: Crushed**

Honestly, even I'm impressed by the spell I've created. The Gravity Well is as dense and packed full of mana as I can make it, emptying out what was left in my gravity mana gland, as well as whatever I could gather and push through the construct.

Every drop of energy that had gathered in the Altar was also sucked into it the moment I opted to empower it. The new mutation gives even more power to gravity spells, really kicking the effect up a notch.

The end result is a pillar of pure darkness, crushing the three heralds with a truly mind-boggling amount of force.

All I can really do is stand and watch....

Unlike the gravity bomb, there isn't a need to fear for my life, since the strength and force of the well is controlled by me, but it isn't like I can just throw stuff into it willy-nilly either. Goodness knows what would happen if I tried... certainly not me since I've never tested.

[How's it going in there?] I decide to fish for a mind bridge connection, but I don't find one, so instead I just broadcast toward the pit in which the demons are currently being flattened.

I don't get a response... so I assume they aren't feeling as talkative as they were a minute ago. I can still sense them in there, though, so I know they're still alive.

I have a worrying feeling that even this isn't going to be enough. My mind-constructs feel limp, as if they're all slumped over a table with their faces buried in lukewarm, microwaved curry, but I kick them back into action.

Stupid my-own-brains, we can rest later! Besides, all of your fatigue is being washed away by the pure energies of the Colony, and all the other weirdos who wound up in the Nave. Time to stop feeling sorry for myself and start pumping out more mana!

With so many ants around, even the Altar is refilling with power at a steady rate.

I quietly amass power and mana while I wait. Watching this happen is kind of cool, but also... sort of boring? It's not like the Gravity Bomb where the wind is howling and everything is going nuts.... The pillar of darkness just... stands there... and the demons are stuck at the bottom of it, being squished by the force.

After a while, I let my legs splay out and rest my carapace on the ground, idly triggering a fresh wave from the regeneration gland to patch me up. I've noticed the repairs from the fluid released by the gland take a lot longer to fix up my new carapace when compared to the old one. Presumably, the issue is with density. Thankfully, I have some mutations on the plating to help pick up the slack, but I may need to look at other solutions.

[Come on now.... How are things?] I broadcast again.

No response.

[Arconidem is a butt!]

**[YOU DA- Arrrrrgh!]**

Oho! Still kicking in there, just not enjoying himself very much. I almost feel sorry for the three of them, or I would if they hadn't come so close to turning me into Biomass.

[I put everything I had into that spell. You'll be lucky to make it out.]

**[But when I do, you are FINISHED!]**

[I guess we'll find out....]

Yup, all three of them are still kicking. I'm impressed. Also... when the heck is this spell going to end? Surely soon....

I better work a little harder gathering mana.

As I do, I decide to pick myself up and skitter a little closer to the pillar in order to get a better sense of the demons. The closer I get, the more the gravity sense in my antennae goes absolutely bonkers, which is a bit distracting, but I manage to channel it out.

All around, the thousands upon thousands of demons and ants watch from a safe distance, barely moving as they wait for the result.

I feel a little self conscious.

Probably, somewhere out there, a damned ant is already working on a prototype sculpture to capture the moment.

"No statues, dammit!" I roar with my pheromones, but there's nobody close enough to smell it.

Oh, the spell is ending. I can see it flickering a little at the edges. Over the next twenty seconds, the force of the spell drains away and visibility returns. As the last vestiges of the spell fade away, I tense, but I sense no movement from the three demons.

After another few seconds, I step forward and peer down into the hole created by the well.

About ten metres below me, atop a packed and super compressed surface of rock, the three demons glare up at me... from their positions wedged into the stone.

[You good?]

More glares.

They don't look all that good. The three of them may have survived, but not by much. I have to give it to them, they've been significantly tougher than I expected them to be. Good for them.

[Alright then, here comes round two!]

Well, the first spell lasted long enough that I've managed to put together another one. It isn't quite as dense, and I don't have the same oomph from the Altar, but it should do the job.

For funsies, I invert the direction of the force and extend the pillar all the way to the ceiling of the stratum.

After a few moments, the three demons are yanked from their sconces on the floor and then whipped upward with truly *shocking* speed until they slam into the roof.

[You have slain level 601 Unique Monster 'Torrifex']

[You have slain level 615 Unique Monster 'Somonax']

[You have slain level 628 Unique Monster 'Pyrixan']

[You have gained XP.]

[You have reached level... ]

[You have reached level... ]

[You have reached level... ]

[You have reached level... ]

[You have reached level... ]

Ahhhh. Precious levels. Haven't had such a rush of these in quite a long time. And three unique monsters? Even more delicious.

[You have reached level... ]

[You have reached level... ]

[You have reached level... ]

[You have reached level... ]

[You have reached level... ]

[You have reached level... ]

But that's... seriously a lot of levels....

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 1157: An Unexpected Visitor in the Nave Area**

A great sense of relief floods through me as the notifications continue to rain down. In the end, my overwhelming gravitic magic, empowered by my Altar, was able to be the difference maker, just like I hoped it would.

Honestly, the power I get from the Altar, and the unbelievable strength of the gravity spells, feels a little like cheating, especially when combined. It feels like it wasn't that long ago I was just a little, midget hatchling, scraping out a living hiding on ceilings and fighting for my life against the claw-centipedes.

With this evolution, I feel like I've finally tipped the scale. Now I can annihilate monsters even more highly evolved than I am!

MUAHAHAHAHAHA!

All I need is hundreds of thousands, preferably millions of my siblings standing around cheering me on, ambushing my opponents and helping me whip them through dimensions in order to set up perfect conditions for the fight.

Yesssssss. My strength shall shake the heavens! Or more appropriately, the depths!

Wait... what about the Biomass!?

When the Well fades away, I keep a keen eye out and manage to see the precious, precious Biomass falling from the roof of the stratum. Must collect! If it lands on the plains, it'll be consumed in an instant by a gajillion larvae, producing the strongest mini-demons this stratum has ever seen.

With a tremendous amount of effort, inverted gravity bolts and platforms, I manage to collect the food in one place and hold it floating above my head, away from the ravenous gremlins.

There must be thousands of points of Biomass here, I will not allow it to be wasted! I still have so much mutating to do!

[You have done a great thing here today,] Al says, connecting a bridge with me as he floats over. [The heralds would have stopped at nothing to purge your people from this place, and pushed all the demons into following Arconidem's Will. Here, at least, there will be some respite.]

Such a nice thing to say. Ever since I heard about it, what that Ancient bumface has been doing has rubbed me the wrong way. It's good to know that the demons in the Colony's territory will have a little respite at least.

[You're welcome,] I say. [I'm glad I could help out your people and keep my siblings safe at the same time. I suppose you still have to deal with the compulsion, but at least you won't have those big morons chasing you around and trying to force it on you. How is that going for you, by the way? Still holding alright?]

[It has been... difficult, to maintain my presence of mind, at times. The power of Arconidem has been growing as the mana levels continue to rise. Right now... hmm...]

The fiery eyeball trails away and I watch him in confusion. I don't think I've ever seen Al run out of words. He seems to be thinking... about something. In fact... I think he's going to close his eye!

[Don't! Stay with me Al, what's going on?!]

I don't want to look into that void again. Never again!

[I... am confused. The compulsion from Arconidem... I am not feeling it clearly at the moment. In fact, I am barely feeling it at all....]

[Huh. That's surprising. It's a good thing, though, right?]

[It is.... But I do not know *why*.]

Ah, I can see that's super bothering him. For a demon who wants to know everything, being unable to explain how something this significant has occurred must be vexing.



[Well, if you can figure it out, let me know. If we can get more demons to free themselves from the compulsion, that'd be great.]

I wonder....

[Hey, Invidia,] I say to my friend over our private communication channel. [Are you experiencing the compulsion from Arconidem anymore?]

The little wings of my favourite Envy demon flutter a little as he ponders.

[*It isssss gone.*]

Huh. Well, that's great news!

[That's fantastic! We should celebrate!]

I feel a huge weight lift off my carapace knowing that Invidia, for *some* weird reason, is free from the invidious grip of the big butt from below. I don't know why the Ancient is so keen on sending all of his kind on a rampage in the third, but I'm not a fan. If there was one demon I wanted to be free, it was Invidia.

[All right. Let's head on back to the nest and get some rest. It's been a long few days.]

Ain't that the truth. After the emotional rollercoaster I've been on, even I'm exhausted.

Under the watchful eyes of hundreds of thousands of ants and tens of thousands of demons, I gather up my team and we make our way back toward the nest. I bring the Biomass along for the ride, of course.

To make travelling easy, I utilise the gravity domain until thankfully, blessedly, we make our way back into the giant nest beneath Roklu without any further incident.

Naturally, we are the centre of attention as we wander through the gates. All the ants and, surprisingly, not a small number of demons come to check us out as we make our way inside. I can only assume word of our deeds has gone on before us and the news of the dead heralds has spread wide through the Colony already.

When we finally manage to get into a private chamber, the four of us, along with AI, slump to the ground. I'm too tired to even eat, despite the wealth of Biomass waiting to be consumed.

Well, I'd better get started on it anyway.

[Come on, everyone, let's eat and then get some sleep.]

[Are you sure, Master? We are fully mutated, we don't need it like you do.]

I wave an antenna to dismiss her concern.

[That's tier eight Biomass and you guys are only tier six. That's going to be a metric bum-load of points for you guys. I mean, I need the points, but it's more efficient to give it to you.]

We nom away at it, but end up having to stop halfway through. It's just too much food.

As I settle in for some nice, restful torpor, I decide to take a peek in the nave, have a look around the Colony before I sleep.

To my surprise, I see AI in there, staring at me.

What the heck?!

## [Chrysalis](#)

### **Chapter 1158: Ball Sports?**

After thinking about it for a while, I decide I don't want to think about it anymore and get some sleep.

I mean, there's humans in there already, why not some demons? Who cares, the more the merrier. All that good stuff.

There's *definitely* some serious ramifications to something like this, but I can't work out what they are, so I'm going to stop trying.

When we wake up, we consume the second half of the Biomass, and then go back to sleep again. When I awake the second time, I see I'm the last to get up; AI has already taken off somewhere while Tiny, Invidia and Crinis have just been enjoying each other's company, or so I assume.

To my surprise, someone else has decided to show their face.

"Sloan? Didn't expect to see you here. Don't you have some stuff to deal with? Like... the wave and such?"

The general gives herself a little shake and lets out a small laugh.

"You don't think *you're* important, Eldest?"

What a ridiculous question.

"All I'm doing is *sleeping*. There's nothing important going on here."

"And what about the powerful demons you took down to save the Colony on this stratum?"

"Well, that was yesterday. Don't live in the past, Sloan, it's the future that we need to be concerned with."

Another little shake.

"Well, it's good that I came here to talk to you about the future then. There's something I'd like you to look into, Eldest."

"Really? I thought I'd be heading down to the fourth as soon as possible to help relieve the pressure there. Things must be getting nuts down in the deep."

The little general nods her head.

"Oh, they are, but I'd like you to head up, to the second."

"To the second?! Why?"

She leans forward a little conspiratorially.

“We think we may have identified another *unique* individual.”

Ah, nards.

“She’s not as crazy as Brilliant, is she?”

Sloan hesitates.

“Nnnnooooo?” she says, extremely unconvincingly.

I stare down at her.

“She’s not like Brilliant,” the general assures me, “but she’s certainly not... usual.”

“Elaborate.”

“She’s some variety of general. A great leader, with unique and unconventional strategies. She’s been exceptionally successful. Her team is undefeated in every training exercise, including every Tunnel Ball match they’ve been part of. The fans are calling them ‘the Endless’ in honour of their win-streak.”

Interesting. A general this time, huh? I’m not mad about that. There’s something about the glint in Sloan’s eye that I find a bit odd.

“What’s the matter, Sloan? Not happy to be shown up in the strategy department?”

“Hmph,” the general flips her antennae haughtily. “Her tactics may be unexpected, but her grasp of overall strategy is still lacking.”

“For now.”

“Y-yes... for now.”

“So what do you want me to do, head up there and... what? Take her under my wing? Pass on my grand knowledge of warfare and how to lead armies?”

“No, of course not.”

That’s a little hurtful.

“I want you to beat her!” the general declares, clacking her mandibles with sudden passion. “Learning from failure is a key element in the Colony’s education, but she refuses to lose! Someone needs to put her in her place — I mean teach her a valuable lesson.”

I give her an even stare.

“You want me to go up to the second stratum to beat down on some ants barely out of training? And I should be doing this instead of going down to help our siblings on the fourth stratum?”

“You know it’s valuable to the Colony to ensure these individuals are raised as carefully as possible. So far, you’ve been involved each time and, as a result of your training, they’ve made great strides and contributions to the family. I’m sure this time will be no different.”

“Do you have any idea how painful it’s going to be for me to go up there? Being in the *third* isn’t exactly comfortable.”

“Your core is starving here?” Sloan asks, genuinely surprised.

I can’t be bothered explaining the Call. Who knows what the Colony will do if they think I’m under attack from the Ancients.

“No, it isn’t. But it will be up there! Is there a reason I need to go to the second? Why can’t you just bring this ant down to me?”

“Well... that’s where the stadium is.”

“The stadium?!”

“Yes, for Tunnel Ball.”

“You mentioned this before, I thought it was a training exercise or something. Why the heck have we built a stadium?”

The general shifts a little uncomfortably.

“I’m not exactly sure how it happened, but the humans grew interested in Tunnel Ball, so we got more interested, and now the Colony has learned of the surface races’ interest in ‘sports’. So Tunnel Ball has been adopted as the Colony’s official sport. There’s a league and everything.”

I mean... what do I even say? I know I told the ants to learn from the humans, taking their wisdom and culture and making it our own, but BALL SPORTS?! FOR ANTS?!?!?

I heave a sigh. No point worrying about it now, what’s done is done. What harm can a bit of sport do anyway? If anything, it’s nice for the ants to have developed a distraction, something they can engage in other than work.

“Right. So I’m going to the second stratum to beat down on a young ant at sports to teach them a lesson about... losing... or something. And I’m doing this mainly because you’re sick of this new general winning all the time...”

“That’s not the reason!”

I glare at her.

“It’s... not... the *main* reason....”

“Fine. I’ll guess I’ll start making my way up then. The sooner I get it over with, the better. Might be nice to see the old nest again. This might be the last chance I get to head up there.”

“Oh, we’ll have Brilliant take you. That’ll be faster.”

“... Great.”

“You don’t sound very grateful, Eldest!” the little mad-scientist declares as she pops into existence nearby.

I'm going to have to find a method to prevent that from happening. I've no doubt there are monsters who could just teleport themselves inside my carapace. Yuck.

"I'm grateful for your help with the demons, that worked incredibly well. I'm not going to pretend that dimension-hopping travel is all that comfortable, though. It sucks! How far are we from a functional gate?"

"Closer than you think. Speaking of which, I'd like to get back to my lab, so let's get moving!"

"... Fine."

## Chrysalis

### **Chapter 1159: Shaking Things Up**

[What do you think of the season so far, Peter?]

The farmer smiled as he scratched idly at his chin. He still wasn't used to talking so much, especially in public, but on the subject of Tunnel Ball, he could wax lyrical for hours.

He leaned forward a little to make sure he was speaking into the small, enchanted gem on the table in front of him.

"Well, Commentant, I could talk about the tactical advances in the game, the general shift from running plays to a Soldier/Mage grind-it-out setup, the once mighty teams who've fallen into the relegation zone, including the Pink Blitz, one of my personal favourites, but that's all to the side of the real story."

[And what would that be?] Commentant asked, as if she didn't know.

"The Endless," Peter said simply. "We've never seen a team this coordinated, this determined, and with such an unorthodox approach to the game. When other teams want to play low to the ground, they go high. If the opposition wants to fight up close, they're elusive like ghosts, if the opposition wants to run, the Endless bog them down with impeccable timing. The strategic way they approach the game is so far ahead of the competition that it's like they aren't even playing the same sport."

He shook his head, bewildered, as memories of recent matches flickered through his mind.

"I think we are seeing a revolution in what is possible on the pitch."

[Not an evolution? That's a term many of our listeners are more familiar with.]

"No, no," Peter said firmly. "A revolution. Orthodox ways of moving the ball from one end of the pitch to the other are being challenged every time the Endless step onto the field. They're playing games with the other team's mind. The Bulwarks last week...."

He shook his shaggy head.

"By the time the match was done, they didn't know up from down anymore."

[I have to agree. Watching that match, I felt as if the Endless were reading their thoughts. Of course, the officials checked the cores of everyone on the team and we are assured that no mind magic was employed.]

“Well that’s both a relief, and somewhat scary.”

[Indeed.]

“All that tells us is that they don’t even need mind magic to know what you’re going to do.”

The small crowd gathered in front of the table the two sat at laughed appreciatively. Not many came out for the live recordings of ‘Weekly Tunnel Ball Roundup’, but would listen to the ‘playback’ being created even as he and Commentant spoke.

The wonders of ant technology, and the speed of change, never ceased to amaze him. Nor the hunger and appetite for Tunnel Ball news. Many on the surface were clamouring to get down here, to the second stratum, where the Stadium had been constructed. This was now the home of the sport, and there were teams on the pitch every other day, as well as matches happening at smaller venues all over the nest.

[Truly, the growth of the game has been incredible,] Commentant seemed to sense his mood, possibly over the mind bridge connecting them. [I would never have imagined my sisters would be quite so hungry for... entertainment? We are in our first year of the five division league, and passions are running so high we won’t be stopping for anything, not even a Wave, apparently!]

“Although, it has made scheduling a little difficult. With so many of your siblings required on the front lines, we are having teams rotated out of the schedule constantly.”

[That is a concern but there’s nothing that can be done. We must be accommodating of the situation.]

“Are you heading out there anytime soon, Commentant?”

[The Colony has decided I am best serving the family by continuing my activities here,] the mage said simply.

“Well... it’s good to know you’ll be safe at least,” Peter mumbled.

He’d grown fond of his ant-coworker.

[That’s very nice of you, Peter. Well, folks, it’s almost time for us to wrap up the conversation and get this episode off to the people! We have just a few minutes left over for audience questions. You know how this works if you’ve been here before. Come stand here at the front, make sure you speak, scent, or project your thoughts directly into the recording device so the audience can hear your lovely voice. Come, come, who’s first?]

A small ant scuttled to the front quickly, beating the others out for the first question.

[Uh, yes. Hello. First time here at a live recording, thank you for having me.]

“Thank you for coming,” Peter said sincerely.

[Yes. Uh. I was wanting to get Commentant's thoughts on the recent discussion as to whether Tunnel Ball practices and matches should count as ‘work’?]

Commentant shifted a little uneasily.

[I don't like to comment on questions like that. I'm sure the Council, or possibly the Eldest, will be able to decide. I'm just a simple fan of the game and I'd like to see us come to a resolution that best suits all parties.]

Surprisingly, a human was the next up at the spot, a young woman with "PINK BLITZ" stitched onto her coat.

"This question is for both of you," she said loudly, "what are your thoughts on the Blitz so far this season?"

Peter jumped right in.

"It's been a difficult past couple of weeks for the Blitz, and they've gone 3-8 in that time. Teams are doing such a good job shutting down runners on the flanks, using big bodies or mages to block the lanes, and hard-running, agile teams like the Blitz have been slow to adapt. How do you see it, Commentant?"

[I basically agree with your assessment, Peter. The Blitz are a good and strong team, we know that from last season, but they need to find a way to make their gameplan work or change it up over the next few weeks. I would hate to lose them to relegation.]

Next was a general.

[There's been a lot of talk about the Endless and their current win streak, which sits at 31-0. Do you think they will lose at all this season?]

Someone rushed up behind Commentant, distracting the mage as she engaged what looked to be a scout in a vigorous bout of antennae slapping, so Peter stepped in to fill the gap.

"It's hard to believe they've won so many games in a row, but the way they've done it is even more shocking. Comfortable victories, demoralised opponents, utter domination. I won't ever say they can't lose, no team can be perfect all the time, but they sure do look impressive every time they hop into the pit."

[O-on that note, I've just gotten word of an upcoming showmatch,] Commentant interjected. [The Endless will be playing against a special entry team who has decided to put them to the test!]

There was a murmur amongst the crowd as this surprising news was digested. Peter blinked.

"Well, that *is* interesting. Do we know who is on the challenging team? Any notable ants we may have heard of?"

[Oh, you've heard of them,] Commentant drawled, but she was still clearly shaken by the news.

"Who is it?"

[I would like to invite all our listeners to pay very close attention, because I am only going to say this once. The strongest team in the history of Tunnel Ball will be challenged in just *two days from the time of recording*. You don't want to miss this match, so make sure you get your tickets early.]

She paused for dramatic effect.

[A one-ant team has come to test the mettle of the Endless. That's right, one versus ten on the pitch, but I don't think it's going to be enough. In two days, get yourselves to the Stadium for a once in a lifetime showdown! The Endless, versus the Eldest!]

Stunned silence.

A pause.

Absolute pandemonium.

"That's all the time we've got time for!" Peter croaked into the recorder. "See you next time at this time!"

### [Chrysalis](#)

#### **Chapter 1160: The Golden Path**

"What's the plan, Solant?"

Of course, the responsibility for determining the strategy of the team fell to her, and she embraced it. Even under these circumstances, against this level of odds, she welcomed that pressure.

"I'm not sure yet..." she said, "I need some time to think on this. There are many unknowns and we must plan for them all."

The others nodded. They knew her abilities and trusted in her judgement, just as she trusted in them. Without that harmony, they would never have been as successful.

*Trust your leaders, trust your followers.*

She nodded to herself. That was wise. She should add it into her growing list of precepts. She didn't have a name for the manual she was constructing yet, but it formed the basis, the guidelines, of her approach to strategy and battle.

The Depiction of Fighting.

... didn't seem right.

The Symphony of Battle.

Better... but not quite it.

She shook her head. Useless thoughts, these didn't matter. The Endless had just been challenged to an unprecedented match, one that threatened to derail their win streak and take the shine from their aura of invincibility.

It couldn't be allowed to happen! Not even against the Eldest could she bring herself to yield without a fight!

The rest of the team stood around her, confident she would have an answer.

"We must ensure we properly understand our advantages," the small ant began slowly.

"We outnumber the Eldest," the scout Scipiant pointed out.



“There’s something to that, though it likely won’t matter much. A broad formation should prove to be more effective. What else?”

“The rules of Tunnel Ball?” the soldier, Attilant, pointed out. “In a direct confrontation, we wouldn’t stand a chance, but in the game, both we, and the Eldest, are constrained by the rules.”

“That’s an excellent point,” Solant agreed. “Tunnel Ball allows for direct confrontation, but that’s not how you win. It’s possible to lose the fight, but win the war, so long as the ball reaches the other end.”

The group continued to huddle, brainstorming ideas.

“The Eldest is likely to underestimate us,” Washingtant, the mage suggested. “We are evolutions behind, and pose no threat of actually harming them. This could give us an opening.”

“True, but dangerous to rely on the possibility,” Solant mused. “Are we aware of any weaknesses of the Eldest?”

The ants shifted, nobody volunteering any information.

“I thought as much. There just isn’t that much which is *known* about the Eldest. With certainty, I mean. It will be difficult to win if we are unable to know our enemy....”

It had been easy to collect information on their Tunnel Ball opponents. Solant was able to watch them train, watch them play, engage them in discussion about the exercise. In an afternoon, she could dissect an opponent’s strengths and weaknesses with laser-like precision.

This particular opponent, however...

“Leonidant!” she snapped.

“Yes!” a scout stepped forward.

“I need you to try and do some reconnaissance. We need intelligence on the Eldest, whatever we can get. Going into battle blind is the worst possible way to do it.”

The fearless scout nodded grimly and turned to leave.

At that moment, a crushing weight suddenly pressed down on them as they felt an indomitable presence appear somewhere in the nest. The power that emanated from that monster shook their legs and rattled their carapaces.

“What on Pangera is *that*?” Washingtant snapped, her antennae waving wildly.

Solant brought herself under control.

“I believe our opponent may have just arrived in the nest....”

The others stared at each other incredulously, and then, suddenly, the oppressive weight faded until it was gone, as if it had never been.

Solant’s eyes gleamed.

“This could be our greatest triumph. We must do *everything* to prepare. Leonidant, go! The rest of us will begin to workshop our tactics and drills. We will *not* go down without a fight!

YEEEOUCH!

And I mean that quite sincerely. Both the YEE, and the OUCH! The moment I arrive in the second stratum, I’m unceremoniously deposited in the nest by Brilliant, who doesn’t even have the good graces to say goodbye, instead just vanishing back into the squiggle dimension or wherever the heck she goes en route to her lab.

Of course, the Call immediately kicks up a fuss and I feel like my soul itself is being yanked out of my business district. The pain... is bad. Really bad. I cannot *believe* I agreed to come up here just to crush some hatchlings at Diggy Ball or whatever they called it.

I should never have agreed to this!

But then... champions are such an important part of the Colony’s development. Vibrant is the strongest soldier in the family, with her own battalion of speedsters wreaking havoc wherever they go. Brilliant is... a pain in the thorax, but is also the most fearless and unique mana researcher in the Colony! We need them! This Solant will prove to be just as valuable an asset, and if the best way to make contact is to get up here and to the sports, then that’s what I’m going to do.

Except it hurrrrrrrrrts....

Wait, why the heck is everyone looking so wobbly?

Lousy Brilliant wasn’t accurate enough to drop me in some nice, isolated area, instead I’m in the centre of some major thoroughfare, and when I look down, I realise I’m perched atop a statue of myself! Just how big is this thing?!

Oh, right, the ants are getting rocked by my aura.

Most of the family around here are tier four or five; being exposed to the emanations of my superior grade, tier seven core is too much for them to handle. I quickly restrain myself, pulling it back in so everyone can continue going about their business.

Speaking of which. I need to work out where the heck I’m meant to go. I haven’t been up here in *ages*.

“Uhhhh. Directions? Anyone?”