

Chrysalis 821

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Chapter 821: The Ants Go Marching

"Are you sure this is going to work?" Sloan asked Cobalt tentatively.

"Sure? Of course I'm sure?! Did you think I sat around here crunching numbers between my mandibles for twenty hours just for the heck of it?!"

"All right! I just wanted to check, please, keep working," the general made a tactical retreat to where several other council members were standing at a safe distance.

"Gotta be careful around the carvers right now," Wills greeted her, "they are more than a little touchy."

"Can't really say I blame them," Sloan muttered, "considering how hard they've been working, and the constant threat of being dragged off for torpor."

"That reminds me," Bella chipped in, "didn't Cobalt get dragged away yesterday?"

"She did. The moment she woke up, she was back at it," Wills confirmed.

They all fell silent as they internally paid tribute to the incredible fortitude of the carvers, the great buildings of the Colony. To face down not only an insurmountable amount of work, but the torpor police at the same time, it took more courage than most soldiers would dream of claiming.

Wills took another look at the huge steel constructs being assembled in front of them.

"Just so I get this straight in my mind," she said, "they want to drop these down and drive them into the plate that holds the city so we can run down the cables in order to assault the city?"

"That sums it up," Sloan said.

"I don't know... that doesn't seem... nuts? To any of you?"

"It's a bit extreme," Sloan agreed, "but when you think about it, there aren't really any safe ways to assault the city from up here. You either climb down the pillar, an idea that I've ruled out since our enemy is likely prepared for such an approach. Although we doubt they expect a serious assault from above at all. Or, you make your own way down. We considered creating a unit of flying soldiers or scouts to secure a landing ground for us, but the evolutionary costs are prohibitive."

"We're looking at it as a possibility for tier six scouts," Wills said absently, still staring at the huge 'spears', "but that'll be a while off happening yet."

The number of tier five members of the Colony was slowly increasing, but there weren't many, barely more than a thousand, each and every one of which would be participating in this assault. To counterbalance that, the fact that the eldest had reached tier six had inspired the ants to reach for that next threshold. Indeed, another member of the Colony had already crossed it.

A level of strength that had once only belonged to the Queen was now being shared amongst a select few of her children. Hopefully soon it would be more of them!

"HeythereguysshowareyouallahwhoopsIdidn'tstopfastenoughnoooooooooo!!!"

A blast of pheromones washed over the small group before a detonation sounded from a nearby wall which raised a storm of cursing from exhausted construction workers. When the dust cleared the second ant to reach the sixth tier was revealed, upside down, her six legs flailing in the air.

"I'mnotusedtomyspeedyetheeeeeeeelp!" she laughed.

It took a few seconds for Sloan to translate what she could smell, only then did they move over and try to right the new arrival.

"Vibrant. I've told you before that we can't understand what you're trying to say when you talk that fast! You have to slow it down for us!"

"Kay-kay!" the soldier cheered as her legs started to flex the moment they were beneath her again.

From the moment she'd woken up after achieving her evolution there'd barely been a solitary moment when she hadn't been running. If her previous speed had been absurd, then at tier six she was practically lightning. If the ants who saw her didn't have decently mutated vision, she was nothing but a blur, if that.

"I'm moving so fast now that I just can't quite get used to it! I think I'll need to mutate my brain again before I'll be able to handle this much speed! Anyway, how are all of you doing? You look tired! Are you working too hard? Don't let the torpor police catch you! If you want to keep away from them, my advice is to be fast! The faster the better! Though it doesn't always help when Crin-Crin is involved, but it's better than nothing! Hey what are those huge metal things! They look amazing! Is anyone else getting a little bored standing here? I know I am! I might go for a run then, bye!"

Before anyone could squeeze a scent in edgeways, she was gone, accelerating so fast she left an afterimage in her wake.

"Damn it! I had questions!" Sloan grumbled. "I need to know what she's capable of now that she's evolved so I can factor it into our plans!"

"Good luck getting her to sit down and explain it to you," Wills laughed. "Best bet is you wait for the Eldest to get back. They can probably pin her down long enough to take a peek at her core and then let you know what the story is."

"That'll be *after* the assault," the general fretted, "I don't like having unknown factors in a battle, even if they're on my side. Maybe *especially* when they're on my side."

"Vibrant will be fine, you shouldn't stress about her," Wills brushed her concerns aside, "having more power on our side can only be a good thing, right?"

"All right, prepare for the drop! Make sure you double check your prescribed angles! We start tunnelling in ten minutes!" Cobalt called from the construction floor.

Looking back, Sloan could indeed see the last segment of the four giant spearheads had been slotted into place and the enormous kilometers long cables attached at the base.

"Oh snap! She's just going to start in ten minutes?! The troops aren't in place!" Sloan scrambled away, rushing to let the generals know what was happening.

"Do you need speed lessons from Vibrant?" Wills laughed.

Bella looked steadily at her sibling until the scout was forced to ask.

"What? Are my antennae crooked or something?"

"Don't you have to get your scouts into position as well? They're an integral part of the assault plan, are they not?"

"Ah... right."

In a flash, the scout was gone, rushing into the distance and calling to all scouts within scent range. Bella could only shake her head at this level of incompetence, *her* caste members had been in position for hours, expecting that something like this might happen. So she relaxed and watched as the carvers prepared for the final act. After all their meticulous preparation, the work progressed swiftly until Cobalt ordered the earth mages to begin work.

At the same time, they began to tunnel away the ground beneath the four spearheads even as other mages used the shifting ground to twist the colossal metal structures, forcing them to drill deeper as they fell. The ants worked under extreme pressure, the angle and amount of force required was precise, too much or too little could shatter the spearheads, or make them drop off target. Failure could not be accepted!

They grit their mandibles and focused their minds, working in harmony as they had practiced to work with incredible precision. Meter by meter, the huge metal blades drove down, shimmering with the hardening enchantments that had been lavished upon each of them.

All around them, the ten staging grounds began to be flooded with ants as hordes of soldiers, scouts, mages and generals rushed to get into place. Every minute, thousands poured into the vast staging area, silently watching as more of the cable vanished into the holes the spearheads had left behind.

"FINAL CHECK!" Cobalt roared.

A pause.

"CLEAR! DROP! DROP! DROP!"

With a final burst of effort, the mages forced the metal and dug away at the final section of rock, after which the steel constructs broke through, dropping with rapid acceleration to the city below.

The sound of the cables uncoiling and plunging through the hole was almost deafening, but the ants watched it unfold in silence, their eyes focused. The impact of the spears on the city couldn't be heard this far away, but the sudden stillness of the rope told the ants all they needed to know. A prepared team of mighty soldiers hauled, drawing tight the slack in moments.

"ADVANCE!" Sloan called.

Silent and with purpose, the first battalions of ants stepped forward, one for each cable. In short order they attached themselves and began to descend, followed by the next, then the next, then the next.

It was time for a new stratum to know the dominance of the Colony.

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Chapter 822: Sudden War

I knew that the Colony would make a move to conquer a portion of the third stratum, it's practically a requirement for us to grow enough that we will be able to survive, but I didn't think it was going to start this soon! Holy moly, they must have worked themselves half to death up there! Smoke is rising from inside the city already, I can only imagine that the fighting has begun!

[We need to get up there squad!] I holler at the others. [We need to hustle up the pillar!]

I immediately begin an all-out sprint in the hopes of joining the Colony in their fight as soon as possible. If they're going to take down a demon as powerful as Grokus, they're going to need the tier six firepower that my pets and I can bring!

[Perhaps it might be time that I offer my assistance?] Al breaks in, appearing beside me even as I sprint. [There is a faster way to reach the city. We can fly.]

[YOU might be able to fly,] I grate out, [but some of us aren't multi-dimensional beings of almost pure energy! I'm an ant who turned down wings when I evolved! Multiple times! I definitely cannot fly!]

The giant eye flickers.

[Ants can fly? *Fascinating.*]

[Not all of us and not all the time, but yes, there are ants that fly and IS THIS REALLY THE TIME?]

[Ah. It is not. I do not mean that you need to fly, but that I can create a force platform to carry us. I will likely need your pet demon to assist me to carry your combined weight, but I believe it will be possible.]

[The demon's name is Invidia,] I point out, [he's not just a pet.]

[As you say.]

I direct my attention to my green-eyed friend.

[Invidia, Al is going to make a force platform, or something, and he says you need to help him out. Make it happen so that we can get to the city and support the Colony, alright?]

[*It shal!!! be donesssssss.*]

I screech to a halt and the eyeballs confer silently for a few moments before a shimmering disc of mana solidifies in the air before us. Scanning it with my senses, I can tell a tremendous amount of energy has gone into its construction.

[Wow! You can manipulate this thing with your mind?]

[I can,] Al confirms, [although shifting it with so much mass standing on it will strain me greatly. With the assistance of... Invidia, I will be able to manage.]

[Alright then. On we go, Tiny!]

The big ape and I move swiftly and jump onto the platform which immediately sinks a little under our weight. I shouldn't be surprised, the two of us combined must be well above ten tons. In fact, I don't want to know how much I weigh, I feel like it would be hard for me, a former human, to accept that my body is now so massive that an elephant would run in fear if it saw me on the scales.

Not only am I huge by any standard of earth animal, I'm also significantly more dense, due to the System allowing monsters to pack their muscle fibers closer together than would normally be possible. If I ever reset my musculature, I can only imagine how tightly packed it'll all become. The weight to performance ratio will become insane. Well, even more insane. Honestly, the physics and biology of how an insect the size of me could possibly be running around isn't something that I remotely pretend to understand, such things were completely impossible on earth, so I'll just keep hand waving it away and saying mana is responsible.

Since it probably is.

With Invidia lending his considerable brain power to managing the disc, AI is able to lift us bulky monsters off the ground and the disc rises into the sky. Slowly at first, but with growing momentum, we float upwards towards the city above. It's a strange sensation and not a little unnerving to be honest. I can partially see through the disc, which doesn't help things. Luckily if I tilt my head back a little, I can barely see what's going on at my feet zone so I can distract myself and avoid thinking about the ground which is steadily vanishing beneath us.

It's a long ride up to the city, even though our speed continues to rise. The closer we get the more I can detect the acrid tang of a formic barrage in the air. Smells like the Colony has subjected the city to a massive bombardment of acid to soften it up for the full invasion. What's more, the number of ants within range of the vestibule continues to climb the closer we get. The energy of thousands, tens of thousands, begins to pour into me, washing away my fatigue, clarifying my mind and easing the ache in my tired muscles.

With this much power flowing through me, I'm unbeatable!

Or at least, it feels that way.

[Tiny, Crinis, Invidia. When we get up there, we have only one objective, help the Colony conquer the city as quickly as possible. That means going after the heavy hitters, of which we have two main targets. Grokus and Mongi... guy. Let's call him Mongo. Both are tier seven, which is higher than us, if I need to remind you. When facing either of them, we need to proceed with extreme caution. Gang up on them. Kick them from behind. Strike from the shadows. I don't care what sort of nasty tricks we need to use, we use them and get the job done fast!]

[I believe I may be of some help in this,] the detached voice of AI breaks into my mental communication.

[Oh?] I eye the big eye. [You really want to get involved? I thought this was exactly what you *didn't* want to get involved in.]

[On the contrary, this conflict could result in an outcome, the *only* outcome that will allow me to remain here in peace. Grokus dethroned and replaced by *not* Mongu'nin. For this, I will lend my support against

Mongu'nin, though I cannot defeat him alone. Against Grokus, my strengths will not be as effective, I will be of little use there.]

[Oh? How so?] I find that a little confusing.

[He is highly resistant to mana. Most spells will simply wash off his bulk.]

[That... is inconvenient. In that case, I'll send Invidia to team up with you, Tiny and Crinis can come with me. Divide and conquer.]

We wait out the rest of the ride in silence, the city growing larger before us each second. When we crest the edge of the city, a scene of complete chaos is laid bare before my eyes. A deluge of acid has poured across the city, causing steam to rise from every building as it's chewed away. From the four massive cables the Colony has embedded in the rock springs an endless swarm of ants that leap into the city, forming a boundless wave of gnashing mandibles and hardened chitin.

Filled with the vibrant call of their spirit, I leap down and onto the acid covered stone, my body overflowing with the Will of the Colony.

"FOR THE COLONY!" I cry, spreading the call of my pheromones far and wide.

Immediately I can scent the war cry echoed throughout Roklu as tens of thousands of individuals take up the call, soaking the rock in the indomitable will of ant-kind.

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Chapter 823: Battle in the Streets

Grokus had known that something was brewing in the stratum above. A pesky Colony of ants led by an unusually large specimen, he hadn't thought it would anything that he couldn't manage, but this! This was absurd!

The constant rain of acid had begun soon after the spears landed in the city, coating everything, including himself, in the burning liquid. It wasn't enough to damage him, but it was certainly enough to tick him off. How long had it been since he'd actually been attacked personally? A hundred years?! This entire situation was ridiculous! But it wasn't too late to turn it to his advantage.

"Where is that filthy human Alir?! Why has he not responded to my summons?" he demanded of the air.

He was in a bad position right now, but with the support of the church of the path, everything could be salvaged. He did not underestimate the strength that the church could bring, far from it, he had high expectations. As chaos reigned all around him, Grokus counted down the long seconds as he impatiently waited for news of the priest. With disaster looming larger and the demons falling into disarray in the city, he had grown irritated enough that he'd begun to stir himself at last, shifting the weight on his ponderous legs that hadn't seen daylight in over a decade. He was about to take his first step when a mind bridge reached out to him from across the city. Recognising the mental patterns of the human, he allowed the connection.

[It has taken you some time to respond to my call, priest.]

The city lord allowed his mind to rumble with the undertones of the displeasure he felt. He may be the supplicant in this situation, but he still demanded the respect a demon city lord was due. On the other

side of the connection, Alir Vinting rolled his eyes within the inner sanctum of his temple. Push had come to shove and now he wanted to beg a favour. The greed of a demon like Grokus was only to be expected really, considering what he was.

[Things have been rather hectic over the last ten minutes, as you might well imagine,] he responded dryly, not bothering to mask his dislike for the touch of the demonic mind against his own. [How might I serve you, O child of the path?]

Grokus grit the teeth in both his mouths at the open mocking of the last sentence but swallowed his anger down to his belly where he allowed it to simmer.

[I had hoped that your hierarchy would have a response to the deal that I proposed,] Grokus opened, [it seems that the time is ripe for a harvest as the insects have delivered themselves to our doorstep, saving you the trouble of hunting them.]

Alir tried not to yawn in case it was somehow transmitted across the bridge.

[Well, the cardinals were unsure whether the burden of cost for using the gate would be-]

[I will waive the cost,] Grokus forced out, [quite the tempting offer, wouldn't you say?]

Even now, with a rain of ant acid dropping on his city, the massive demon was still trying to hold onto every scrap of advantage that he could. If Alir didn't detest the games and petty manoeuvring of demons so much, he might have found it impressive. Instead, he felt it was a pathetic show of false strength.

[Grokus. I know what has happened with Orpule. Right now, their forces are streaming towards this city and on top of that, you have an invasion from above to deal with. Your rule is hanging by a thread, and you come to me asking that the faithful deal with *your* problem like you're doing us a favour?]

[The ants are weak,] Grokus waved a hand, [you could sweep half of them from the city yourself. There are thousands of them coming, I can sense them already. Such a wealth in cores and... *subjects* you could *extract* from, would be nothing but a boon to you, don't you agree?]

[Right,] Alir grunted, noncommittally. [Except that I have a little information on these particular insects. Fascinating what can trickle down the grape vine if you squeeze it hard enough. They may not be quite as simple to deal with as you might imagine.]

Still seated atop his throne, Grokus guffawed, the mouth split across his belly spraying drool across the courtyard.

[Pathetic monsters of the first stratum? Surely you do not fear them? You really think they stand a chance against demons?]

Superiority between monsters was an idiotic concept as far as Alir was concerned, none were better than any others, they were simply all kindling. The only difference was how quickly they burned.

[They have earned the respect of the Legion, and anything the Legion respects is something that I fear,] he said.

That gave Grokus pause. The Abyssal Legion had swept through the third stratum once during his lifetime, leaving death and destruction in their wake wherever they tread.

[You cannot be serious...]

Grokus looked up at the four ropes descending from far above, each already bristling with ants marching down, spraying acid as they went. He was supposed to fear... *them*?

[The church has decided not to involve themselves in this matter. In fact, they have decided to recall all of the faithful from Roklu. You are a sinking ship, Grokus. We are getting off.]

The city lord was stunned.

[W-H-Do you really think you can get away with this?!] he raged. [You think I'll just allow you to walk out of my city and through the gate?!]

[No. Which is why we installed our own gate within the temple,] Alir sneered as he stood from his chair. He had delayed long enough, he was now alone within the temple, everyone else had already escaped. [Die well, Grokus.]

With that final word, he broke the bridge that connected him to the enraged lord and stepped through the gate, a wry smile on his face.

Next to the pillar, Grokus was infuriated. With a sweep of one massive arm, he shattered a score of statues that had been erected around his garden, scattering the pieces far and wide. Betrayed by a filthy human?! That damned bite sized larvae! In the depths of his rage, a cold, calculated logic settled on the gigantic demon. If he was to survive this situation, then he there was only one way he would manage it. He had to rally the demons of his city and fight his way out. The ants first, then the demon raid. He would either rise and stand victorious to gorge on the fallen, or he himself would become food, fuel for others growth.

With a mighty heave he *shoved* with his legs and raised his ponderous bulk off the ground.

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Chapter 824: Confronting Our Demons pt 1

My tour through Renewal had been just wonderful, but it was only a portion, merely half of the equation when it came to this remarkable place. The people I met were delightful, open and friendly folks who had pieced their lives back together after an unspeakable tragedy. I can't speak highly enough of them, really! On the other hand, I was yet to unravel the true mystery, that of the ants!

I was somewhat shocked to learn at just how open the insect monsters were to people. I'm honestly not sure what I expected, but it certainly wasn't what I found! When news of this strange place, where monster and human worked together in harmony first reached me, I pictured savage cultists feeding their children to the monsters to ensure their cooperation or something equally horrible. Instead, the people were just lovely, and the insects?

Well that's a story of itself now isn't it?

After completing the tour, I approached our guide, Emilia Cretherton, and asked what the chances were of gaining some access to the Colony. I was halfway to offering a bribe before the bright girl smiled widely and praised my bravery.

"Most people are a little hesitant to approach the Colony at first," she assured me as she took me by the arm, "but they're quite lovely, really. The hill is this way."

I don't think it's ever been this easy to talk my way into a dangerous place!

My two guards were far from pleased when they learned of our destination, but the two strapping lads had been well paid and Emilia was quick to assert that no danger would come to us. After all, had any of the ants posed a threat to us thus far? Clearly not! So persuaded, we made our way toward the outskirts of the city. Already I could see the massive anthill we had spied on our approach to the city from the air peeking at us between the buildings. As we walked, the human traffic didn't diminish, but rather thickened, as well as an increase in the number of ants moving to and fro.

Eventually we make our way out of the large gate on the western side of town and the second we are through it looms over us like a mountain. It's ridiculous to call it an 'anthill', such a word doesn't do justice to what I see before me. It's a castle! It's a fortress! It's a palace! It's a mountain!

So large it must stretch hundreds of metres into the air, if not a kilometre, the entire thing is formed of gleaming, polished rock that shimmers in the air, revealing its reinforced and condensed nature. A wide road has been built between Renewal and the hill, expertly constructed and lined on both sides with imposing statues of ants carved in such loving detail that each one appears almost lifelike. For a moment, I actually thought that they WERE alive, just preternaturally still but a quick question to Emilia relaxed my nerves.

She smiled and laughed as she gestured to the mighty edifice that rose before us.

"This is the first anthill that the Colony established after fleeing Liria during a wave. It was here that they took their stand and the Great One defeated Garralosh, ending her rampage and slaughter once and for all. The Colony doesn't name their nests, as such, they have a unique identifying scent, but that doesn't really translate into a name. For our part, we call this Anthome. Be welcome."

The battle raged all around me the moment I set foot in the city, a flood of sensory information flowing in and threatening to dazzle me with its intensity. Teams of ants roamed everywhere in the city, pouncing on any demon who showed a sign of resistance. Through the Vestibule, I quickly learned that there were two main pockets of resistance to be found, both of them unsurprisingly centred around the two tier seven demons remaining. It was an easy bet that Grokus himself was fighting close to the pillar near his palace. I could sense a huge concentration of ants in that direction, whereas the other clump was likely to be where Mongo had holed up.

[Let's split here!] I tell the group and immediately dash toward the centre of the city, my legs a blur of movement.

Gotta go fast! Drawing on my inner Vibrant, I channel the power flooding through my spirit nave and turn it into strength, filling my body with vigour and helping me run even faster! Aha! Behind me, Invidia and Al disappear as they split off to deal with another threat whereas Crinis and Tiny continue with me.

We race through the tangled web of buildings and any demon unfortunate enough to get in our way meets a grisly and sudden end. We don't have time to mess around! I can hear the roar of the fighting before I see it, the constant hiss of acid being released into the air along with the percussive impacts that rattle through the stone beneath my legs as spells are hurled from both sides. The smell of my family is everywhere, layered pheromones of commands, cries for assistance and battle cries that echo against my antennae.

I'm coming!

We burst into the clear to find quite the scene before us. A literal wall of ants has formed, gnashing and spitting acid as Grokus himself, surrounded by a cadre of his most loyal demons, attempts to storm out of his compound. The city lord has undergone a hideous transformation, if that is even possible. The humanoid torso that sits atop his bulk is bellowing and cursing constantly, spitting a stream of abuse toward my siblings. The main mouth that splits the front of the body in half is off the ground for a change, revealing the wide elephant like feet underneath that crunch into the stone with every step.

The mouth itself is the stuff of nightmares, similar to Crinis' in that it appears less a mouth but more a portal to a separate dimension entirely reserved for suffering. His throat yawns like a void behind rows of needle sharp demon teeth.

The moment I burst onto the scene, a chorus of cheers rise from the assembled ants.

"The Eldest is here!"

"They've arrived!"

"Slacker! We've been working over here!"

"Stop being lazy! There's a job to do!"

"YEAH, YEAH! SHEESH!" I curse my own siblings as I rush forward to do battle. "Give me a break already. Nobody told me when you were attacking the city!"

My protestations are met with a chorus of boos and jeers which I have to admit is a little hurtful. Ingrates! Nothing for it though, time to get to work. My minds come together and forge a powerful mind bridge that I ram directly into Grokus' head before the huge demon can react.

[Hey there, big guy! Are you ready to dance?]

The moment I connect to him his smaller pair of eyes focus on me with laser-like intensity.

[DAMNED INSECT!] his voice rumbles in my mind, full of wrath. [BECOME MY FOOD AND I MIGHT FORGIVE YOU!]

[I don't think so. Look around, we've got a lot of mouths to feed in the Colony, so I think your Biomass is going to wind up in a good place!]

With nothing else left to say, I charge forward, my loyal pets by my side as we draw closer to the wall. The ants part before us, giving us a clear run and then surging forward behind us. It'll all get decided here!

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Chapter 825: Confronting Our Demons pt 2

As cool as he'd tried to play it, Isaac wasn't exactly pleased to be where he was. The ground beneath him felt like fire against his boots and the air itself scorched his lungs whenever he took a breath. Sweat fell in a constant stream from his brow and he'd stopped bothering to try and wipe it from his eyes. There was plenty more where that water came from, the ants had loaded them up with canisters of water before they'd come down and most of the human contingent had knocked the lot of it back before they'd even set foot in the city.

"HOLD THE LINE DAMMIT!" he roared as he furiously worked his spear, trying to hold the demonic push as far from his person as possible.

On either side his fellow soldiers roared along with him as they grit their teeth and dug in their heels, using micro dashes to slam their weapons into the demons whenever they found an opening. The constant drone of the priest behind him was a reassuring sound, since it meant that Isaac and his group wouldn't be without the powerful buff that was keeping their heads on their shoulders anytime soon.

"HOW MUCH LONGER?"

"Captain! Sir! I don't know!"

"THAT'S ABOUT AS USEFUL AS A BARREL OF PLOPS YOU DAMNED MORON! YOU REALLY THINK WE CAN HOLD LIKE THIS FOR LONG!?"

Isaac felt sure his mother would be less than impressed by his tone and his language but he had to say that the current situation was trying his patience something fierce. His squad had been flanking the demon position that surrounded the huge monster that was holding off the Colony on the outskirts of the plate when they'd run into a group of four moving to reinforce the suspected tier seven.

Naturally, he had to cut them off and prevent them from joining the main fight, but that left he and his small group facing against four bloodthirsty tier six demons, which wasn't a fight they would win, or come close to it. The last few minutes had been a desperate, all or nothing struggle to prevent his soldiers from getting eaten, an endeavour in which he'd been successful... so far.

Backed into a corner with spears forward, he didn't like the way the four demons were leering at him, as if they were considering what sides to serve him with.

"Come on. Come on. Come on. Come on. Come on! COME ON!" he screamed as he raised one hand to present a rude gesture to the four monsters.

He never did find out if they understood what the gesture meant. One moment they were there, about to charge into the blade of his spear and rip him apart, the next they were... gone. A fine mist all that remained of them.

"Uh, captain?" one of his men whispered with awe. "Was that you?"

Isaac turned to the poor fool slowly.

"No it wasn't me you idiot! If I could turn demons into mist whenever I wanted, you think I would have let them kick our arse all over the street?!"

"Probably not, sir."

The tension gone out of him, Isaac collapsed into the wall next to him.

"Probably not..." he agreed.

Still hidden from perception overhead, Allocrix looked down on the relieved humans with mixed feelings.

[You are certain that your master would wish these to be saved?] he asked his floating companion.

[*Their livessss belong to the massster,*] the envy demon hissed back at him, [*none shall take from him!*]

Allocrix took no offense at this, he was no stranger to the ways of demons, and the obsessions of envy were quite familiar. He dismissed the matter from his mind and continued to make his way toward the billowing mana of Mongu'nin, his recent rival. Allocrix did not yearn for combat, or vengeance, he was not built for such things. Instead, an insatiable flame that hungered for knowledge burned within him, a flame that Grokus and Mongu'nin had stifled and made difficult to feed. For that reason, they needed to be removed and he would lean on Anthony and his Colony to make it so.

Floating above the wreckage of buildings and the teeming ants, he saw the massive form of his foe rise out of the smoke. Mongu'nin might have been a more recent arrival to tier seven than Allocrix, but he was powerful nonetheless. A war demon was a force in and of itself. Tall, with an imposing physique covered in devastating spikes and deadly scythes attached to its hands, this particular species of tier seven demon was known throughout the third stratum as a creature not to be trifled with in a direct confrontation.

But with help... Allocrix was confident he could win.

[As long as you can keep him away from me,] he informed his newly found ally, [I will be able to defeat him, but it will take time.]

[*Doessss he regenerate?*]

[*Irritating.* Yes, the more wounded they become, the faster they will heal themselves. It is necessary that we apply a savage burst of damage as he weakens in order to finish him off.]

[*I can facilitatesss thissss,*] Invidia's eye gleamed.

The two of them fluttered over a scene of destruction, where thousands of ants formed a living barrier around Mongu'nin and a cadre of demons who had run to his support. Allocrix thought their decision to defend the city foolish, but could understand that the demons were not to know the ants may spare them. He allowed the veil to fall, revealing himself to all as he allowed his thoughts to roll over the assembled monsters.

[My name is Allocrix,] he stated evenly, his tone as unruffled as his emotions, [I have come with this ally of Anthony to slay this demon. Stay out of my way.]

In the centre of the mess, Mongu'nin raised his head to see his hated prey drifting closer of his own accord. Elation filled him as the hundreds of wounds across his body sizzled and slowly began to close.

"COME, COWARD! FACE THE BLADE YOU HAVE FLED FOR SO LONG!"

Those fearsome scythes flexed menacingly before the giant war demon launched himself into the air, face twisted in rage. The ants fell back, letting the huge demon through uncontested so that the new arrivals could deal with these enormous beast they had struggled to contain. Invidia flexed his immense mental prowess, grasping and shaping the mana in the air with effortless ease. In a flash he pulled it all together in the form of a barrier in front of the rising demon, which shattered into nothing when the war demon reached it.

Mind constructs spun as Invidia drew on more mana, he pulled some from his own core even as he reached out to grasp more energy in the air around himself. Another barrier, another and another flickered into existence, layered on top of each other and these too broke all too quickly.

This was when AI stepped in. With a concussive blast that impacted the air with a visible wave, he condensed a ball of pure fire down and let it detonate right in Mongu'nin's face. The heat rolled over all of the assembled monsters as the massive form of the war demon rocketed back down to the city before he smashed into the stone below. The two of them, Invidia and AI, hovered over the rising cloud of dust and ash as they watched for movement.

"HAAAAHAAAAAAAAAAAAHA! I CAN FEEL IT!" the giant demon rumbled from below them.

Invidia set his minds to spinning once again. This would be a difficult battle.

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 826: Confronting our demons pt 3

Say what I will about Gokus, he's an intimidating sight when he's up and moving. However much I weigh in my tier six body, the demon has me massively outclassed. Not only is he taller, but his girth is also considerably wider. And if I were to hazard a guess, his demon flesh and musculature is far denser than my own. Even with a portion of his body stuffed into a pocket dimension, he literally makes the ground shake with every step that he takes.

The two massive claws that sit on either side of his ravaging maw scratch furiously at the ground as he drags himself toward us, screaming and bellowing at the top of his lungs.

[Whatever you do Tiny, don't get caught by those hands,] I warn the big ape. [One second and he'll have you stuffed into his mouth and there won't be any coming back.]

The bat-faced ape's face is alive with joy and rage as he bounds toward a worthy foe, but I see his ear flicker and know that he heard what I had to say.

[And Crinis, you need to play it a little cautious as well. Go to work, but don't try and connect to his mind, I think he'll be far too strong for your tendrils to work and they might backfire on you.]

[I'm not sure that they can, Master.]

[I sure as heck don't want to find out,] I tell her firmly. [Play it safe and chip away from the shadows. I'll stand up front and take the heat so you'll have plenty of chances.]

I can sense her hesitation, but I give her clear orders and finally she concedes.

[Very well. Be safe, Master.]

[Of course!]

I'm not aiming to throw my life away, I'm gonna play it cool. Rather than charge directly into Grokus' teeth, I skirt the edge of his range, avoiding his grasping hands with swift steps. He's a hell of a lot quicker than I expected, but the tingling of my antennae gives me the warning I need to dodge away. Time to check if AI was correct in his judgement that Grokus is heavily magic resistant. Not that I doubt him, but it always helps to verify.

My mind constructs spin independently to pull together Ice Mana that I quickly shape into a barrage of spears. The huge demon lumbers toward me and I continue to bait him forward, allowing Tiny the space to move to his sides. The moment my spells are prepared, I unleash them, a flurry of hardened projectiles made from ice flash through the air and burrow deep into the demon's flesh.

Aha! He doesn't seem that impervious to me!

Except that he isn't hurt. I hardly expect that a few puny ice spears are going to bring down a demon of this size, but before my befuddled eyes the ice just melts away to reveal smooth flesh underneath. He wasn't injured in the slightest. If Ice magic doesn't work, then I have others...

Tiny approaches from the left, his fists sparking with electricity as he dives forward, seeking to deliver a heavy strike. Before he gets the chance, the demons behind the city lord surge forward to block his advance, engaging him in a brawl that quickly drags him away.

[Crisis! Help Tiny and make sure he survives, without Invidia around he's a much more vulnerable target!]

He might have incredibly hard bones, but the rest of him is as soft and spongy as ever. It's unfortunate that he hasn't been able to collect his new armour yet, but hopefully he'll be able to pull through with the incredible power that he's pulled together since evolving.

As for Grokus, it looks as though I'm going to have to go one-on-one for now. Not exactly what I want, facing off against a demon a full tier stronger than I am. For his part, the city lord continues to lunge toward me, his wide arms sweeping out to grasp at me, threatening to snatch me up and throw me whole into his slaving gullet. Again, he moves faster than I expect and only my preternatural reflexes are able to keep me skittering free of his clutches.

My mind-constructs spin with desperate speed, operating the omni-elemental construct with greater skill and rapidity than I ever have before to pull out mana of every variety. I throw it all at the hulking city lord, to no effect. Fire, earth, lava, ice, air, nothing! All of it washes off the massive demon as if I were showering him with pure spring-water. How is this possible?! Is he naturally resistant to any form of mana?! That seems ridiculously powerful! I don't believe it...

If I'm going to inflict damage using my magic, I'm going to need to go a little louder than just base elements.

In the meantime, I'll have to try and resist him with just my mandibles and shiny, shiny carapace. Snapping my jaws together, I brace myself to go toe to toe with the big guy as my minds fire themselves into overdrive. Deep within my carapace, gravity mana begins to flow, in a trickle at first, but then in a

great flood as multiple constructs draw on it at the same time, compressing the mana together in the beginnings of a gravity bomb. You're resistant to mana huh? Let's see if you can resist this...

Unwilling to put all of my eggs into the one basket though, I keep a few of my constructs free to form gravity bolts which I fling at the city lord as soon as they're done. If they have any effect at all it should be significant considering how much raw mass the demon has. Slowing him down would be quite a help, considering I can't get close to him without risking getting grabbed.

[WHAT'S WRONG INSECT? DO YOU FEAR ME? COME CLOSER AND LET ME TASTE YOUR COWARDICE!]

His repulsive mind booms against mine suddenly and I'm caught off guard by the sheer force of his hunger. All of a sudden, the demon's aura expands and rolls out from him in a wave, suppressing the ants caught within range and forcing them to grow still. What's more, I feel a maddening hunger take hold of me, a boiling pain erupts from inside my carapace, as if my stomach were attempting to eat my body from the inside out.

A quick glance at my status confirms that I'm actually taking damage from this effect, whatever it is, and the pain is horrendous.

"Back away!" I command the thousands of ants scattered around us, "you can't fight this!"

[I'll give you a taste alright, a taste of these mandibles!]

I draw deeper on the energy that flows from the Colony and into me, letting it replenish my body and fuel my strength as I *dash* closer to the huge monstrosity. One of his arms rises to snatch at me but the warning of my antennae gives me the time I need to leap at the perfect timing, rising above the grasping claw as my jaws lock back into position.

Omen Chomp!

I don't want to get too close, so only the black mandibles of my manifested energy strike home, but they do, biting deeply into the girth of the city lord. Even so, the feedback I get is strange, as if I bit, but also as if I didn't. Using my legs, I spring back from Grokus before he has a chance to grab at me again and I look at the wound. Except it's barely there at all! Is this guy indestructible?!

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 827: Confronting our demons pt 4

[How's it going over there Tiny? Crinis?]

[We'll win, but it's going to take time!]

[Take care and make sure of it, we don't need to rush!]

I don't think... although, looking at Grokus as the massive demon looms over me, that I'll be able to finish this quickly. If the gravity bomb doesn't manage to inflict massive damage on him, then I have no idea what will! I pull back a little from the city lord, giving myself room to plot my next manoeuvre. The area where I bit him has already healed, if I damaged him at all.

[You're actually a tough nut to crack, aren't you Grokus?]

The huge demon swings his body around to face me head on.

[Food is strength in this world. How can anyone be stronger than me? I've been consuming hundreds of Biomass a day for longer than you've been alive, and you want to challenge me? You're weak! Just another snack!]

[You think Biomass is enough to make you invincible?] I scoff. [Why don't we find a tier eight demon and you can impress them with how much you've eaten over the years? I wonder if they'll be intimidated.]

Piling up an endless amount of Biomass is completely pointless without something to spend it on. I've no doubt that his mutations are all maxed out, but imagine if he'd spent all that time practicing his Skills instead of sitting on his backside eating. He'd be so much more powerful, pushing his abilities to a new rank, training new Skills that might help him in this fight. Instead all he can do is endlessly brag about how much food he's consumed. Such a waste.

[You can rejoice soon,] I taunt him as we once again draw closer to one another, the ground shaking with every step, [all that food that you've wasted will be going to a better cause soon enough. How many thousands of ants will we raise from what you threw away?]

[Why don't you come over here and we can see if I wasted it or not?!]

His two enormous claws flex in the air as we circle one another neither one willing to make the first move. This suits me down to the ground, every second that passes makes my gravity bomb stronger, it's already growing dense enough that he must be able to sense it. That much concentrated mana is fairly easy to detect from this close!

With a roar that rips from both of the city lord's mouths he rumbles closer, once again moving with that deceptive speed. I lower my centre of gravity and prepare to dodge, waiting for my antennae to tell me how he's going to reach for me. The closer he gets, the sharper the pain in my stomach becomes, the acid boiling away as thoughts of food swim in my head, threatening to drive my consciousness away and turn me into a ravenous beast. I resist it, but I can tell that the longer the fight drags on, the harder it's becoming.

Closer he comes, closer. I wait and wait, watching his approach and refusing to move until my antennae give me the glimpse that I'm looking for. I hold off until he's almost on top of me, only then do I realise, he's not going to grab! That's why I can't see anything! The moment I make the realisation I shift my weight and *dash* to the side, putting all of my force into my legs. The moment I move, my antennae blare with alarm and I can sense the hand coming for me before Grokus has moved.

My nerves explode as I react faster than is humanly possible, shifting my direction by digging my claws into the ground. Shifting directions for a mass of my size isn't easy and my muscles and joints scream as I push them to their limits as that giant hand reaches for me, growing so large as to almost fill my vision.

I barely make it, Grokus' claws scratch down my left flank as he snatches at the air I occupied only a moment ago. It's only a glancing blow, but deep grooves have been cut into my diamond carapace. This is first stratum versus third after all, I can't expect too much. As close as it was, this is still an opportunity. With his left arm extended, I have a chance to slip closer to his body and unleash my jaws on him, which I won't waste.

Flexing my legs again, *dash* closer, ducking low under that arm and locking my mandibles into place. Hopefully *this* will leave a mark!

OMEN CHOMP COMBO!

My energy drains away rapidly as I pump my jaws with insane speed, snapping them shut five times in a second before I jump away, not giving the huge demon a chance to recover his balance and grab at me again. The five chomp combo is just about as much as I can manage at the moment. Luckily I have so many ants within range of the Vestibule in order to top me off, otherwise I'd be just about done for this fight. Grokus rights himself and I take a moment to inspect the damage that I've done, only to find that there's practically nothing there at all!

What in the heck is this guy made of?! He might be a tier above me, fine, but there's no way he can take FIVE omen chomps and be undamaged!

[Have you realised your place yet, insect?] Grokus practically purrs in my mind, [if you're smart, you should crawl back up to where you belong. This is the land of demons. You're beyond foolish if you think you can thrive here.]

I flinch as the stabbing pain from within flares once more and I quickly check my health. This isn't good, it looks as if the rate of damage is accelerating. Luckily I have plenty of options when it comes to repairing the damage. With my mind constructs occupied, I instead trigger my healing gland, almost sagging in relief as the healing liquid floods through my system, wrapping around my stomach and regenerating the internal wounds. Even better, I feel the energy of the Vestibule dive towards the regeneration gland, replenishing it at an incredible pace.

If Grokus wants to see who will be the last monster standing, he picked the wrong opponent.

[Demons? I have to say, so far I haven't been impressed. If you're so powerful compared to me, why am I still here making fun of you? Huh?]

I taunt the huge monster and he responds much as I expected, with rage.

[YOU'LL REGRET YOUR WORDS FROM INSIDE MY STOMACH!]

[Don't think I'd regret anything, I'd be dead, moron!]

With a wordless bellow, Grokus charges toward me again and I prepare to dodge. Come on gravity bomb! I need you now!

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 828: Confronting our demons pt 5

Invidia and Allocrix hovered above the fray and looked down on the wreckage below them. In the midst of the billowing clouds of dust and smoke stood Mongu'nin, the massive demon's frame covered in wounds that already showed signs of healing.

"AHHHHHHH!" the mighty demon roared to the heavens with a feral grin plastered across his face. "I KNEW YOU WOULD BE WORTHY ALLOCRIX!"

A flicker of emotion ran through Invidia, a faint whisper which so rarely occurred that he looked at it, paid it attention. There was more than just a burning desire to possess the kind of regeneration that the war demon displayed, along with a background need to have everything he could see. That was a constant for him. Instead, this new feeling that welled up expressed a different sort of need, the need for greater strength.

Once again he drew on the vast powers of his mind and drew forth the mana that rested within his core, weaving and shaping it into a series of detonations that ignited mere centimetres from their opponent's body. The concussive force of the explosions was enough to rock the massive demon from side to side, but not enough to cause any major damage to him. His toughness, regenerative speed and strength were simply more than the envy could surpass.

Allocrix was less limited in his offence.

The burning eye pulsed with mana, the sheer volume of energy that radiated from him was enough to force the air around his form into an indistinct haze. Invidia felt a surge as Allocrix compressed and shaped the mana in an instant, causing a concentrated beam of pure fire to lance down onto their foe. The moment it touched the war demon, an enormous ball of fire erupted, the burst of heat rolling through the air and forcing Invidia to blink lest his eye dry out.

Even the ants below were forced to draw back another ten metres. In a few seconds they had reformed their lines almost a hundred metres away and resumed the long range acid barrage that had rained down on Mongu'nin almost constantly from the moment the battle had begun. It still wasn't enough. Though the force was enough to send the giant form of the war demon sprawling back, he recovered and planted his feet beneath him again. Invidia watched closely at the claws of his opponent as they began to glow bright, a sure sign of a Skill activation. He went to work the instant he saw it, forming barriers around Allocrix and himself as fast as he could.

With a vast roar that shook the air, Mongu'nin slashed out with both hands, his claws rending the air itself and sending crimson waves of energy towards them that screamed of wrath and ruin the closer they came.

[Hold firm,] the calm voice of Allocrix rang within Invidia's mind.

[*Of courssssee,*] he hissed back.

He continued to weave defences even as the first layer he had formed was cut like it wasn't there. The deadly attack sliced through the shields he erected the moment it touched them but still he continued to put more layers into place as those dreaded claws grew larger in his eye. If he were here by himself, then he wouldn't be able to stop this strike. It would cut through all the barriers he could muster and he certainly wasn't fast enough to be able to dodge it. Though he remained calm, Invidia couldn't help but feel irritation rise within himself. Not being strong enough was not something he had ever known. The master had defeated him, a previous him, he was aware of that, but thus far nothing had challenged him like this. He felt... inadequate.

[Hmmm,] Allocrix rumbled.

The eye of flame rippled before a sphere of force expanded from within. As it grew it crushed the shields Invidia had prepared before it impacted against the claw strikes. There was a calamitous *boom* in the air

that forced Invidia backwards as the air pushed against him. Flaring his wings, he halted his momentum and cast his senses wide to see what had happened. He quickly identified his ally, still hovering in the same position nearby but realised that the war demon had vanished from his previous position.

Mind constructs spun in a dozen different directions and he instantly began to prepare for a number of scenarios. Energy began to be focused in his eye even as he wove shields and detonations that he held at the ready to deploy the moment he needed them.

[*Where?*] he grated to Allocrix.

[Above,] calm the flat reply.

It was true. Far above them the war demon hung in the air like a horrific idol of destruction, claws aglow once more. He must have leapt to that height somehow after using the claw strike and Allocrix's response as cover.

[He has sensed that he has reached the peak of his strength and seeks to end the battle in one decisive strike,] Allocrix advised.

[*How isss thiss possible? Hiss strength hasss peaked now?*]

[A war demon grows stronger the more they are wounded and the longer the fight draws on. They hunger conflict and draw power from it. We have pushed Mongu'nin to the brink, but it is more accurate to say that he has allowed himself to be pushed to the brink. Now that he believes he has reached the apex of his strength, he seeks to end our battle with one decisive strike.]

[*Thisss isss our chance!*]

[Just so. We must draw out all of our destructive capabilities and finish him before he can unleash his blow. Hold nothing back, little one. Any amount of power could tip the balance.]

The two of them communicated at the speed of thought and in an instant they had coordinated their plans. No defence. Invidia cast away his prepared shields and put all of his brain into charging his eye. The dozens of mind constructs he supported drew on each other to reach out and seize as much mana as possible from within his core and the surroundings, converting it all to the pure energy he required to power the eye of envy. Green light erupted from within as he drew on everything that he could. More. He needed more!

His vision blurred, becoming washed out with green as his eye absorbed every ounce of power that he could give it but still he needed more. Above them the titanic form of their foe reached the peak of his leap and began to fall, hands ablaze with an unfathomable light. It was if Invidia was staring into the face of death itself, but still he was unmoved.

Your life. I will takkess it!

When he felt as if his eye would burst, as if his brain would melt within its pocket dimension, he finally unleashed it. His eye flared like a green sun as a beam of pure energy burst forth, piercing through reality itself as it lanced into the sky. It was impossible to miss the demon as he fell and he struck right in the chest. Mongu'nin laughed as his flesh was burned away and felt his body energise even further as he

drew yet closer to the brink of death. The power in his claws leapt higher still and his body fought to regenerate the damage even as it was done.

"COME!" he roared, heart soaring with joy and rage. "COME ALLOCRIX! GIVE ME YOUR ALL!"

Far below the falling war demon, the eye of fire pulses once before a catastrophic wave of mana is unleashed. Invidia feels half his body seared with pain as the world becomes flame.

[Chrysalis](#)

Chapter 829: Confronting our demons pt 6

That's right dear readers! I ventured where so few have dared to tread! Within the heart of the nest itself! Of all the exotic locations I have plumbed over the years, all the dangers I have braved and risks I have taken, I have to say that this, this was not like those.

A part of me wants to say it was anti-climactic, in a sense, but another part of me wants to say that it was anything but. Here I was, on the brink of stepping deep within a nest of ravening monsters! How many thousands of them made war within the Dungeon just a few hundred metres beneath my feet? It was exhilarating to think about and my two guards were so tense their impressive muscles threatened to bulge right out of their armour.

On the other hand...

I was accompanied by a smiling tour guide who laughed and chatted with the townsfolk on their way to the Colony, on the road just as we were. We passed by a young mother and her small children on their way, the little ones running and cheering as their mother tried to keep them both in line as they dashed toward the impossible fortress that loomed ahead, bristling with monsters.

"What reason would this young lady have to take her children into the nest?" I leaned toward Emilia and whispered.

The old rumours came back to me in that moment. Where these children about to be sacrificed to slake the insect hunger for flesh!?

"The Colony runs a day care program for young children twice a week," she smiled gently, "mothers can come and spend time with each other as their children play with the hatchlings and take lessons from the brood tenders."

"Brood tenders?" my curiosity seized hold of my imagination before I had to process the idea of insect child care.

"They are the caste of ants specially bred to raise the young and teach. They are hyper-specialised in this field and provide heavy bonuses to anyone under their tutelage. Raising the young of the Colony makes them immensely busy, but for two days a week the Colony allows children from Renewal to take advantage in order to benefit the children."

"And how does this benefit the Colony?"

"A stronger Renewal means a stronger Colony," she smiled, "our citizens work with and for the Colony. Our guards take tours of the Dungeon side by side with them, we trade with them, they trade for us. There isn't an alliance or any such thing between the Colony and the survivors of the frontier kingdoms.

Though they have never demanded anything from us, we are essentially one and the same. They have never failed to help us when we asked, and they help us constantly without us even having to ask. If we have any honour at all, then we have no choice but to do the same."

Do you understand me now, dear reader? A fearsome den of monsters this nest may be, but it is also a location for schooling children. My feelings were very mixed.

[Do you really think you can outlast be, INSECT?!] Grokus gloats as he swept toward me again.

I'm beginning to realise that despite how threatening and surprisingly quick his charges were, they are not really intended to hurt me. All the massive city lord was doing was keeping me dodging and hopping out of his way whilst he waited for his insidious aura to eat me from the inside. Obviously, if he *did* manage to catch me and stuff me in his maw, that would be a bonus.

[I think you'll find it a little more difficult than you think, big guy,] I say.

And he will, but I'm not as confident as I should be. My mind constructs continue to churn, drawing out and compressing my gravity bomb as my main mind remains free to manoeuvre my body. The spell is growing within me at a tremendous pace, but I dare not release it half baked. I need this spell to turn the tides on Grokus and I've already seen how resistant he is to spells, shrugging off all the damage I can do with basic elements without breaking a sweat. If the gravity bomb isn't enough to hurt him, I'm going to be in big trouble.

One thing going in my favour is that Tiny and Crinis have finished working on the other demons with the help of the Colony. Spells and waves of acid along with attacks from the soldiers closest to the front have been enough to tip the battle in their favour and my two pets are free to help me take on the big guy.

[Be careful!] I warn them, [his aura will cause damage over time. Make sure you don't stay close to him for any length of time. Use your lightning Tiny, and Crinis just try and chip away from range. If you get caught up in his area of effect I'm not sure how long you'll last.]

I might be in a position to endure for a while but neither of them have the kind of reserves I do when it comes to healing. Tiny in particular has very little going for himself in this department, which means he won't be much use for the fight. Still, he does what he can and as I continue to dodge away from the demon, bolts of lightning come arcing over to stab into the city lord along with barbed limbs that emerge from the shadows to start slicing at his legs.

It doesn't do much, but every little bit helps at this point.

He charges my way again and I leap to the side at the last minute, avoiding the swipe of his claw by the barest of margins and ducking in to unleash another chomp combo that doesn't seem to do anything to the massive demon.

[You think you can hurt me, pathetic creature?!] Grokus laughs. [Just accept your fate!]

[I got a feeling that you might be changing your tune soon enough,] I say as I hop away.

[Your spell? I can feel you charging it. I'm looking forward to the moment you unleash it and realise that it hasn't worked. Perhaps then the despair will grip you firmly enough to surrender to your fate.]

[You wanna eat this one? I think you might find it gives you indigestion...]

Is that damn spell ready yet!?

[I fear nothing that you are capable of, LITTLE THING.]

It's close. I'm packing the gravity bomb with every ounce of mana that I possibly can. It's an ominous ball of near perfect black hovering in my awareness, just begging to be unleashed on the world. All I need is a little space and I'll let him have it!

Chrysalis

Chapter 830: Confronting our demons pt 7

In desperation, I turn the final stages of forming the gravity bomb over to my main mind, the only brain I have that specialises in handling gravity mana. I can immediately feel the difference, but I still need the support of the sub-minds to keep things flowing as I continue to piece together the biggest bomb I've ever made. When I let this go, it's going to get messy around here...

"Back off a little more!" I warn the Colony, "make sure you get a solid grip on something!"

After a moment I add.

"That goes double for you, Protectant! Create some space and hold on tight!"

I've no doubt that my defenders have been hovering closer than they should be against a foe like Grokus, and the odds are that they've taken a good chunk of damage from his aura effect just trying to stay near to me. Claws crossed they take my warning seriously, it'd be a massive waste of the Colony's resources.

[Unleash your spell!] the city lord taunts me as he rumbles forward, each step causing the very rock beneath our feet to crumble. [I almost hunger for it! I hunger for your despair!]

Enough of this guy's freaking mouth already! Sharp pain stabs through my insides as I skitter out of the way of his grasping hands, prompting me to activate my healing gland once again. The soothing liquid regenerates my missing health in short order but the rate of decrease is continuing to ramp up. Eventually I'll run out of juice and be eaten up from the inside out. This is one heck of a nasty power!

But I won't have to worry about that... I hope. My gravity bomb is ready.

A nervous feeling wells up within me as I behold the condensed ball of mana that I've created. It practically pulses with dark light, the only thing in the stratum with a larger appetite than the tier seven demon in front of me. Let's hope he enjoys it! My brains strain to contain the unstable construction as I suddenly Dash backwards, triggering three separate dashes with each pair of feet to create maximum distance.

[If you're that hungry, chew on this!] I yell as the spell is unleashed.

The moment I release it, the world fades to black and I hunch my body low to the ground, clinging to the rock with my claws as hard as I can. Even so, I feel my weight lift for a horrifying second as the spell travels away from me, trying to draw me after it. A second later the terrifying noise of it reaches my ears.

HOOOOOOOOOOWWWWLLLLLLL!

The air rushes towards the ball as it flies through the air toward Grokus' waiting maw, creating a gale that shrieks from every direction. The light itself dims to almost nothing as the gravity bomb passes near, sucking away everything it can. Bounding forward to close the gap when I launched the spell, the city lord grins wide as he sees my spell unleashed. Sensing the sheer volume of mana packed into it, he folds himself up in a defensive curl, wrapping his arms around his head to put as much meat between the sphere and his body as he can.

I had a feeling he might do this, he wants to take the spell head on and come out standing on the other side, relying on whatever strange resistance and regeneration he has to pull through anything I can throw at him. Somehow I get the feeling he isn't quite expecting this...

The moment the bomb hits, time seems to slow down. The ball shrinks into a pinpoint of darkness before it expands into a raging sphere of destruction almost twenty metres in diameter. The pull is horrendous, dragging stone, ash, fire and anything not nailed down toward the centre of the bomb where it will be crushed completely. I can't even see how Grokus is handling it, the sphere itself blocking out all light at the point of impact.

HOOOOOOWWWWLLLLLLL!!!

Far worse than before, reality itself seems to scream as the ground shakes, the air shrieks and light fades away. All I can do is bury my head and grip with my claws for dear life as I resist being dragged into the mass and destroyed.

Come on. Give me the notification. Give me the experience notification! There's no way he survives this! I don't care how much of a chonk lord he is with a resistance to magical effects, there's no way you can eat a gravity bomb this size and be standing on the other side of it. I can't even imagine what it would be like in there for him, and frankly I don't want to know.

Time drags on as the spell rages. What seems like long minutes is most likely just several drawn out seconds, but eventually the spell fades and the world returns to normal once more. I spring back onto my legs, ready for anything.

I don't know how or why, but I know that my opponent isn't dead. Without the notification from Gandalf, he must have survived and I need to be ready for anything.

What greets my eyes is not a particularly pretty picture. Grokus is alive, but he probably would rather not be. What remains of the city lord is a twitching mess with a rather large hole chewed out of the middle. I find it shocking that he's actually still living in that condition. A few chomps ought to put an end to him. I approach cautiously, but without much concern, he doesn't even have a mouth anymore, what sort of harm can he really do?

That's when I see something truly bizarre. It happens so fast I almost can't believe my eyes. Starting at the base, but shifting rapidly up the body, the entire form of the city lord begins to regrow, flesh and bone and sinew appearing out of thin air and stitching together faster than I can see.

[Pour it on!] I yell at my two pets. [Hit him with everything! He'll be back to normal in a few seconds!]

Taking my own advice, I run forward, locking my mandibles into position and unleashing my most powerful bite.

OMEN CHOMP COMBO!

Locking and unleashing in rapid succession my entire face aches as my stamina rapidly depletes toward nothing. From my left comes Tiny, the big ape leaping forward and smashing his fists out with blinding speed, the powerful concussive blasts rippling through the demon's body every time his fists land. Crinis goes all out, unleashing all of her limbs at once and wrapping them around the entirety of the city lord's body, sawing and rending as fast as she can, trying to overcome this truly monstrous level of regeneration.

[That was more than I expected from you... I see that I did underestimate you in the end,] the taunting voice of Grokus rings out in my mind once again.

Looking up, I can see that the demon is almost whole once more. His arms are still regenerating but his mouth has returned, along with the human torso that sits atop his bulk. A sharp pang in my gut brings back the realisation that the aura effect hasn't gone away. The ravenous hunger that has been chewing me out from the inside is still there, worse than ever! I trigger another wave of regeneration fluid but the relief is very temporary. The moment my HP tops off, it once again starts to fall.

[Back away from him!] I order my pets and they are forced to obey, unable to go against my direct command.

[You are weak!] the once again whole demon laughs at me, his entire body shaking with the force of his mirth. [I must admit that you gave it your best, but the time has come for you and your kind to submit to the superior monster.]

His mouth opens wide and his tongue lolls out, as if inviting me to obediently walk into his belly.

As if that's going to happen! There's no way he can infinitely revive himself... There's always a cost to any ability in the Dungeon, I know that much, the trick is, what is the secret to his? Then I notice his arm... one of his claws... is it... still damaged?