

Chapter 60: Assembled

“You all okay? You need any healing?” Riza hurriedly asked, looking between her party members with an anxious expression.

“Fuck, Riza!” Daven groaned, stretching out his back. “I don’t think that’s the most important question to ask right now.”

And, as if to punctuate his point, the colossal demon behind them roared, a shockwave emanating from each of its four mouths, shaking the ground beneath their feet like an earthquake.

“It’s-it’s-it’s-” Sanders was shocked to wordlessness, unable to tear his eyes away.

“Wh-what do we do? Can we even kill that thing?” Meren practically screeched, absolute fear in her tone.

“We can, right? We can do this?” Lefie, ever the optimist.

I don’t know I don’t know. Riza’s mind was a mess—she didn’t dare look back at the thing. It reminded her of old movies she had watched. *We’d need a whole army behind us to win, armed with tanks and fighter jets.*

Even in her panic, Riza still managed to spot the stirring of her horses, somehow having managed to survive the fall when many others hadn’t. A quick glance around showed that nobody has paying much attention to their little group, allowing Riza to quickly finish the animals off with her dagger.

I’ll need the extra essence.

The ground continued to reverberate after the roar, even as the colossal demon stayed as still as a statue.

“Oh- fuck me!” Meren groaned as small, white shapes began to trickle out between the rubble and debris. Beast demon after beast demons oozed through the pore-like gaps, darting to nearby corpses and pulling them back towards the hole.

But that was only the beginning. Greater demons quickly began to follow, their large forms climbing up between the colossal’s legs, expelling viscous, white smoke from their mouths that blanketed the immediate landscape.

Shit shit shit. There’s more of them!

Riza frantically whipped her head side to side, [Meditate] quelling her panic.

We need to tackle this now.

“Asum. How many people do you have?” Riza fired off a message towards the Protector.

Fuck discretion. I don't wanna die.

Meren was busy lifting up the broken remains of the wagon with amazing ease, fishing out hers, Daven's, and Sander's weapon from beneath.

“Riza? I won't ask how you have [Message]. Savin's dead, may Skaldur lead him, and the rest of my folk are injured. Dominion worse than the Chosen, but we're ready to fight. Skaldur knows we need you to as well.”

The message ended with Riza nodding her head, absorbing the information.

By now, with the flood of beast demons already picking off the close bodies, they had began to travel further from the hole and a few of the Chosen had ran out to meet them, slashing them with their weapons and a few even being pierced by arrows.

“We have to help them, right? We aren't going to run away!” Lefie pleaded, using her most desperate face on Riza.

If it was just the Dominion and the Chosen left, maybe Riza would think different. But it wasn't just them. Near the perimeter and, somehow, even near the centre, men and women and children had survived. They were sparse and running for their lives but they were alive. There was still a village left to save.

Riza nodded, looking at each of her companions in turn. Sounds of fighting grew louder, with blood-curdling screams sounding out.

“We'll stay to fight. Daven and Sanders, clean up any beast demons you see. Avoid any greater demons—you have too low health to survive—and use [Heal] on anyone that looks like they need it.”

“Understood.”

“Lefie and Meren, you-”

The colossal demon roared again, almost shaking Riza off her feet. Worriedly, she looked back at it, at the destruction. The greater demons hadn't moved but the fog spilling out of their jaws had covered a good bit of land. A few civilians hadn't managed to run away in time, screaming in pain as the toxic gas seeped into them, cramping their muscles and forcing them to the ground as they writhed in pain.

Between the legs of the colossal demon and the stationary bodies of the greater demons, a plateau of earth rose up from the sea of fog, tens of metres wide with fog rolling off it like a majestic entrance for a performer artist at a concert.

And, atop this massive plinth stood seven, pure white, humanoid figures. Four of them were as nude as the day they were born—or, rather, transformed. The remaining three, however, wore what could only be described as weapons and armour.

They stood larger than the unadorned figures with the tallest a good two heads taller than the rest. A dull, grey covering of metal or stone obscured its torso, arms, and legs as a giant, monolithic hunk of metal was stabbed into the ground before it. An angular, dark helmet covered its head, exuding a sinister and dreadful aura.

The weapon tapered to a point with its flared base terminating in what could only be described as a very long handle. In other words, a sword.

The other two humanoid demons had no such armour, wielding a weapon with a long shaft and a giant axe head on the end while the other had a shorter sword but was accompanied by a thick slab of rock in its other hand—no doubt a shield, this time.

As if the day couldn't get any worse.

“You said you would fight a humanoid demon one-on-one?” Riza turned back to Meren. “Now’s your time to prove it.”

Riza turned to Lefie. “Take out the humanoid demons. Looks like four can use essence and three are physical fighters.”

“And what will you do?”

“I’ll figure it out. Now, go!”

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Feet slipping and sliding through the mud, the woman struggled to make ground as the gashing, smashing, clawing of the beast demons behind followed her every move. Patches of her dress had been torn off, caked in mud, and she slipped one last time.

Face down in the dirt, she could hear the monsters catching up as her limbs refused to move, burning with exhaustion. Legs already crooked from the fall, it was getting harder and harder to ignore the pain.

“Look at me, you fuckers!” She heard a shout from in front of her, closely followed by grunts of exertion and the sword of metal meeting flesh. She didn’t dare lift her head as footsteps ran past her.

A grunt of pain, thudding of wood, slashing of skin. It all happened so fast she could barely understand until, suddenly, two large hands helped her up from the ground and she came face-to-face with the man that had saved her.

“You okay? Are you injured?” He asked, the words fuzzy to her ears. She ignored them, looking slightly past him at the three demon corpses on the ground.

“Never mind,” He muttered. After the words left his mouth, in an instant, pain vanished from her legs, the burgeoning headache receded, and her feverish mind regained some semblance of clarity.

So stunned she was, there was no time to think of a response before the man patted her arm, turned around, and ran off towards another group of beast demons.

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“They’re relentless!” Carver shouted, thrusting his spear forwards in an attempt to catch one of the demons off-guard. Alas, it nimbly dodged out of the way, snaking past the polearm before being summarily cut down by the swift weapon of the person beside him.

They were maintaining a defensive wall as the demons closed in. Straggler after straggler kept arriving, cowering behind them as the swiftly encroaching fog kept forcing them to step backwards and backwards and backwards.

“Keep yourself steady!” Protector Asum shouted, holding a massive tower shield as he fought on the frontlines with them.

Wave after wave of beast demons rushed out from within the fog, scampering over the bodies of their fallen brethren only to be cut down once more by the same weapons. It was like there was an infinite number of demons and, sooner or later, the fog will be so close they’d be trapped against the steep walls of the crater.

“Argh!” A cry of pain rang out. Carvor risked a quick glance to his left, briefly seeing a demon get a good swipe in before swords and spears pierced it instantly.

Carvor couldn't let his focus slip, however. Almost immediately, a demon demanded his attention once more. He thrust forward with his spear, striking it firmly in the torso, followed by a few more thrusts. They were fast and precise, his skills shining through.

“Wha- Sanders?” A sputtered cough from his left. The name was familiar, a part of the group they were keeping an eye on. Was he helping them?

“Yo-you healed me?” That caught Carvor's attention. A healer?

His unasked question didn't go unanswered. A few seconds later, he too felt the revitalising life energy flow through him as his health ticked back up to max. In addition, his limbs felt looser and more energised as his stamina received a small boost as well.

“Thanks for that. We could use you here. There's a few injur-”

“What's that in the fog?” Protector Asum was cut off as one of the Chosen shouted, drawing all attention to the white miasma in question.

And, sure enough, rolling off him in waves, a strikingly tall demon with the shape of a person walked out. Calm, confident, no weapons.

Instantly, Carvor's heart began to beat rapidly as his eyes settled on the imposing form.

He swung his arm out in front of him, a barely visible frost coating the limb. The ground stretching from demon to Skaldian hardened instantly, the few demons left arriving slipping and sliding as they struggled to maintain their balance.

Carvor raised his shield, wary of what this thing could do.

“Right men, behind me!” Protector Asum ordered. The ground crunched beneath his feet as he walked, shield first, to be centrally in front of everyone else.

The humanoid demon didn't move. The air around him shimmered for a second, a sudden, translucent armour of ice appearing to coat his form. Angular and reflective, the light shining off it made him hard to look at.

It was standing inside, albeit on the very edge, of the fog the entire time and Carvor was beginning to think that maybe it couldn't leave it. Maybe it couldn't actually fight?

Alas, that was not the case. With a wave of its hand, three darts of ice just materialised behind it, hovering in the air until, with the dripping formation of the last one, they shot out towards Protector Asum.

The man raised his shield impossibly fast, blocking all with projectiles as they shattered against the wooden tower shield.

The humanoid demon didn't react, didn't even flinch. Another wave of the hand, and three icicles as large as javelins formed instead.

They too shot out, impacting Protector Asum's shield with one tip even managing to get through it.

All of this happened in the space of a few seconds, Carvor's heartbeat jumping massively at the sight of the icicles embedded in the shield. They didn't disappear or melt, either.

"Eyes on me!" Protector Asum shouted, lowering his shield for just a second to achieve maximum volume. Finally, the humanoid demon reacted, shifting its head slightly. Its lack of eyes was eerie, like it was constantly watching you wherever you were.

By now, arcs of lightning began to impact the demon's form. Some were slightly off, barely missing, while others nailed it right in the head. The Dominion's own icicles too pierced the skin of the demon, although Carvor wondered how effective they'd actually be.

Protector Asum began to march forward, keeping firm footing as best he could on the icy ground. Three icicles quickly met him, followed by another three and another three. Not once did the demon have eyes on anyone else, giving Carvor a sense of security.

Even with the advent of a humanoid demon, that didn't mean the beast demons had taken a break. Some came running up to Protector Asum while others still charged at the mass of villagers behind them.

The shattering of ice and the grunted exertions of Protector Asum could be heard from in front. His sword swung out only to be blocked by a sudden, hovering wall of ice. The demon lunged forward with an icicle, only to have it batted away by the lightning-fast response of the shield.

Lightning and ice shot out whenever there was an opening. Carvor's fellow Chosen jumped onto the beast demons, killing them as quickly as they could. They had a job to do.

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Her heart was beating so fast she thought she would explode! A mixture of blood, fear, and excitement pumped through her veins as Meren ran towards the fog. The humanoid demons had jumped off the plinth and were somewhere in there.

For the first time, her body breached the viscous wall of fog. Up to her knees were covered and she felt nothing other than the very slight weight to her movement.

[Touched by Essence] was working; she could make out the mass of beast demons running and trampling over each other, albeit not very far. Spear in hand, she thrust out towards them, a single thrust being all she needed to kill them. Whether it was the head or the body, her powerful muscles rendered her spear an effective weapon of death.

The fog swirled around her as her swift movements kicked it up. It piled over dead bodies as she fought her way further inside like a whirlwind of destruction.

She was getting lost in the frenetic frenzy until, out of the corner of her vision, she saw something larger disturb the fog, barely managing to react in time as a sword came slicing right where she just was.

A humanoid demon. This was the one with the sword and shield.

For a moment, Meren's heart skipped a beat, her body frozen in fear, but she shrugged that off. She had said she could do this, and she would damn well do this.

The first attack was a surprise one. Now that Meren had a measure of her enemy, it didn't attack, opting to hold its shield up and observe.

Taking a step back, Meren pointed her spear right at it. Her feet were steady, stance firm, as she kept an eye on its movements.

Experimental thrust. Her arms shot forward as her leg carried her, the spear moving faster than ever before.

But not fast enough; the shield moved imperceptibly fast for something of such weight, slicing the air as the spear bounced right off it, forcing Meren to tighten her grip.

Mind whirring, she examined her opponent's movements. Many years had she sparred against her fellow patrol officers, multiple of which deigned for a shielded style.

She recognised the skill it used to move the shield. Fast, responsive, and automated. There were multiple ways to combat that: overwhelm it with multiple attackers, break the shield through sheer fucking power, or be too fast for it to respond.

A giant chunk of rock was sturdy, and she was all alone. Meren grinned as she remembered one of the skills she had taken.

Her spear shot forward a few more times, the demon's shield repositioning, but she pulled it back each time just before contact. With the length of her weapon, all it took was a minor adjustment of her wrist and the spear tip darted in an entirely different direction.

A few times, the humanoid attempted to bat her spear away, taking a rushed step forward as she took one back, continuing with her flurry of thrusts.

[Flurry of Thrusts]. With each attack she made, her spear sped up ever so slightly. One low, one high. The shield flashed to reposition itself even as Meren had already launched the next attack in sequence.

Finally, the tip scraped against the sword-wielding forearm of the demon before it could react. Almost immediately, the shield pushed the spear away but it was too late; the damage had been done.

Meren waved her spear in a circle, thrusting it multiple times per second as the demon struggled to defend itself, even resorting to swinging out its sword but, alas, that was much too slow.

She managed to sneak in a couple more slices, raking its skin with lines of blood.

The demon was growing frustrated, opting for a new tact. Raising its shield in front of it, it rushed forward, even as Meren got off even more attacks against its legs.

A spike of fear shot through her as her spear bounced off the rocky carapace, the shield swinging out and knocking her weapon off course.

The sword sliced through the air with unnerving speed. She had no opportunity to dodge as the thick slab dug straight through her armour and into her skin, sinking down to the bone in less than a second.

She howled in pain as the sword ripped itself out of her, blood arcing through the air.

The demon was right next to her. She had no room to move. The sword came swinging again, Meren's eyes flashing with recognition at the skin. It was impossible to dodge.

Straight across her torso, the mail tearing apart from the slash as it lacerated her chest. Her scream of pain was strangled by her coughs as she desperately tried to back away.

The fog rolled around her as she tried to duck down under the next slash but it deviated with preternatural precision, twisting the wrist as her collarbone cracked under its weight, another hefty chunk of health gone.

She could only take two or three more of those attacks before she was done for.

Now on her arse, she had dropped her spear, scrabbling back with all her power.

The fog dripped from her form as she fell out of the encroaching wall, finally feeling the rain once again pound down on her. Her vision burned as she looked at the dangling sun, wondering if that would be the last thing she would see.

An ear-piercing crackle defeated her for a second, a blinding flash of light shooting past. Three arcs of lightning impacted the demon, one in the head and two in the torso.

A concussive blast rang out, blowing Meren's hair as the demon suddenly collapsed backwards. She scrambled to her feet, taking as many steps away from the body as she could.

Your level cap increased to 27

Her eyes adjusting from the sudden flash, she could see the demon's head was blown completely off. A gaping whole right above the neck stump.

Its torso was barely even there, two massive holes shot through it. Blood seeped from inside, rapidly pooling around the body in a gruesome display of gore.

“Are you okay?” Lefie’s voice echoed in her head with perfect clarity.

“I-I-I-” Meren was speechless. She looked at the body wide-eyed, ignoring the growing feeling of disgust and nausea. “I need healing,” She finally managed to send back.

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Deep breath. Fingers tightened, bow aimed up, the trajectory was calculated in his head perfectly. Eyes trained on the humanoid demon in front of him, he waited for the right moment.

There!

The arrow released perfectly, arcing through the air and being met with an arc of lightning right at the apex. A spherical area around the arrow darkened for a moment, like an impossibly deep shadow suddenly formed before disappearing. Both the arrow and lightning were gone.

He didn’t knock another arrow, quickly jumping out of the way as a massive spike of rock jutted from the ground right where he was standing.

Earth skills were much harder to deal with. He could get rid of the controlling essence but the earth was still there afterwards. Thankfully, that demon was occupied, only able to attack him infrequently.

Heavy attack dealt with, another barrage was incoming. He couldn’t handle the multitude of bolts this time, jumping back to behind the rock as he glanced at the demon, catching the sudden bolts fly.

They crossed the distance in what felt like an instant, pummeling the stone spike with immense power but thankfully not destroying it entirely.

He did have to be wary of falling debris, the sharpened tip crashing to the ground beside him.

The demon could attack far faster and far more often than he could but that was fine; he was trained for that. It was reassuringly familiar, no different to a rogue mage, in fact. Perfect.

He held two arrows in his hand, nocking one and then peaking around the pillar.

He loosed as an instant flash of light shot before him. A small bubble of shadow appeared during which he nocked the other and loosed it as well, following in the trail of its brother.

He was an expert shot. The arrow landed centrally in the demon's chest, joining all the others. The white skin was riddled with lacerations and dripping blood. He didn't dare look any further, the amulet hanging around his neck vibrating violently, pulling towards the other magic demon.

The tip traced a straight line from it to him as he made distance from the spike, another large spike jutting up from the ground beside it.

Deep breaths. Patience was the name of the game. He could do this.

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Barely catching herself in time, huge lines of dirt were clawed away as Adewyn slid to a stop, finally losing her momentum. She grunted as she picked herself up. The armoured demon could pack a punch.

Wasting no time, the ground cracked concentrically around it, immense power rushing through its legs as it leaped into the air, fog rolling off it like a fish jumping from a river.

Adewyn pushed herself away as it landed, the ground smashing beneath its feet. She hurried to her feet, raising her greatsword once more.

A shadow eclipsed the ground, swallowing the ashen dirt in a murky, black darkness. She only dared a single glance above, seeing a white fist hanging in the air and ready to plough down at any moment.

She hurried out of the way of this attack too, as the giant demon slammed down on the air. A concussive blast of air shot out, knocking Adewyn onto her arse as a miniature crater formed from the impact.

The demon spared no time, immediately running under the hand as it began to ascend again. She was too close to the fog, in reach of the monstrous thing.

She couldn't keep dodging out of the way, avoiding all hits.

Foot back, stance strong, she raised her blade, clamping down on her breathing. A rush of energy filled her arms, tightening her muscles, as she mentally activated [Tremendous Cleave], slowly lifting her sword up into the air.

One strong hit. That's all this was.

Her eyes danced after the quickly incoming form of the demon, watching its speed, direction, trying to predict where it would be.

The sword was getting heavier and heavier in her hands, arms vibrating as the energy built to a crescendo until, finally, her arms came crashing down, the sword making contact with the suddenly-appearing form of the armoured demon.

The blade cut through the rocky armour like it was cheese, her rapid interception slicing at a downwards angle. The blood barely had any time to leave the wound, her sword digging a good few inches into the skin before the immense energy transferred itself to the demon, sending it cratering into the ground and digging a trench tens of strides away.

Deep breaths. She finally landed a solid. Maybe this won't be impossible after all.

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Fuck fuck fuck. Seven humanoid demons. And this? What is this shit? What is happening?

She shook her head, focusing on making out the chaos around her.

Her eyes shot towards the fog, feeling movement from within. Sure enough, walking out of it were two humanoid demons, one unadorned and the other with a great, big axe.

"Two for little, ol' me?" Riza sighed. Instinctively, she reached for [Leech], focusing on the big fellow but before she could make that mental connection, a sudden blanket of fog wrapped around the demon like liquid armour.

An identical blanket whipped out from the fog behind them, wrapping itself around the legs, then arms, and finally torso and head of the other demon, coating both of them entirely in a pure white, obscuring void.

Again and again and again she tried [Leech], one after the other, but none of them worked.

Shit. Looks like they've prepared some countermeasures. Looks like I'm not the only one who invested in air skills.

Riza raised her hand, not knowing what to do but plans rapidly began to form in her head as she looked over her surroundings, her skills.

The axe-wielder began to move, taking a few, tentative steps forwards, quickly breaking into a sprint.

Riza waited, heart rate spiking as she dropped her [Meditate], playing a fatal game of chicken.

With incredible strength, the demon *leaped* that last bit of distance. It shot forth like a cannonball, a sudden and inexplicable burst of speed propelled it.

Riza winced, bending her knees in anticipation of the strike.

A deafening boom destroyed her hearing, a giant axe slicing through her torso, cutting through the clothing with supreme ease and draining her health by the hundreds.

She would surely be bisected by this attack but in the very same instant, her hand reached out and *grabbed* the fog from the demon's chest, revealing the pasty skin underneath right as [Leech] went off.

Flung like a ragdoll, Riza travelled tens of metres before coming to a stand-still, somehow intact. Her health was down but only lowered by the rolling and sharp rocks, the axe-attack negated by her healing.

Hunched over and looking winded, the demon didn't instantly follow up the attack, instead staring at her body.

That was fine by Riza. The moment it came back into her view, its death was now inevitable. Keeping eyes on it, by the time she had clambered to her feet, it had fallen onto its knees before finally collapsing, dead.

She spat out a little bit of blood that had coated her mouth, accidentally biting down on her tongue from the impact.

One down, one left to go.

Her final target was still coated with fog and since she hadn't trained [Manipulate Air] up at all, she needed to get within 2 metres of the thing.

So, she ran.

Straight into an invisible wall, knocking her head hard against whatever it was, a little disoriented.

Taking a step back, she reached out with her hand, feeling something utterly alien. It wasn't solid, unlike anything she had felt before. No temperature, but a force resisted her.

She could see the humanoid demon walking closer, hands by its side. Was it doing this?

Another wall of force began to press up against her back, sandwiching her. She tried to lift her arms but only found them constrained by two more walls.

She began to sweat, feeling hotter and hotter inside her clothes. Blinking rapidly, it was like a haze was clouding her mind.

Deep breaths grew more rapid, turning into gasps as her mind began to panic.

Somehow, she managed to sink back into [Meditate], clarity returning somewhat.

It's hot. I can't breathe. I'm trapped by invisible walls. I need to leave. The walls have to be air.

Staccatic thoughts directed her towards using [Manipulate Air] again. She had managed to use it first try earlier, basing it off her own understanding of essence and Lefie's many explanations of her own water skills.

But nothing happened. The invisible wall slipped out of her grasp like butter.

Why why why? Why won't it work?

Panicked, she thought about what was different now—it wasn't fog but normal air. Chemical composition, material properties, origin, distance from controller. Too many variables.

But she could narrow this down; she had enough experience. Lefie needed to see the water to manipulate it so maybe that was it?

Trying something, Riza bit down hard on her tongue again, drawing blood, and spat.

Sure enough, the viscous liquid splattered onto the invisible wall. It moved rhythmically, like the wall was breathing, but she couldn't think about that; the blood dripped down and coated the surface. She tried [Manipulate Air] again, focusing on that bloodied portion.

Yes! The floating blood dropped to the ground as she felt the essence flow out of her. Now, to spit on the rest of the wall.

However, before she could go any further, the ground moved beneath her feet, not like the violent shakes of the colossal demon but something unfamiliar. The hard, rocky surface suddenly became very flat and smooth

and slippery and then, before she knew it, she was being raised up off the ground.

Fuck fuck fuck!

The cage she was in shrank even more as she was lifted and tilted, falling onto her hands and knees as the ground grew to be several metres below her.

The humanoid demon, still coated in fog, was many metres away, Some fog caked the invisible tips of the box as it looked back at Riza, then to the foggy centre of the crater.

Activating [Heal], Riza made sure her health was good. She was suffering from oxygen deprivation, either from being in an air-tight cage or through conscious exhaustion of air by the demon.

She needed to act fast. What else could she do?

Riza spat again but, just like last time, the broken chunk of the wall was quickly replaced with more air.

She had one last air skill she hadn't tried yet. [Intrinsic Tank] required [Manipulate Air] so reasoning that it likely functioned the same way, she followed through the same steps to activate.

Focusing on her hands, feeling the pressure of the air push back against her, she imagined the air being sucked up like a vacuum. She focused on the essence, her internal reservoir, running through multiple envisionings until the floor just disappeared from under her.

The demon seemed to sense this, turning around as she fell and catching her with another invisible platform.

But Riza was ready this time. She expelled the air in her tank, consuming this floor as she fell to the ground.

The demon's head whipped around looking almost confused, if they could even feel emotions.

Wall after wall shot up in front of Riza as she ran at it, effortlessly vanishing into her tank.

Once she got within range, running forward far faster than it could walk backwards, she *ripped* a patch of fog away from its body, just like before, and planted her hand firmly on its chest.

It stumbled backwards, blades of air slicing into Riza, trying to knock her away.

Alas, two seconds was all she needed. Another dead humanoid demon.

Panting for air, Riza kept up a steady combo of [Meditate] and [Heal], restoring the stamina and energy she had lost from that whole ordeal.

At least she got some skill levels from it.

Now, she was right up to the fog. She could feel the greater demons expelling the vile substance, and the zoo of beast demons that continued to ascend from the hole.

And the colossal demon too. When she looked up, a giant fist hanging in the air above her suddenly crashed down, flattening Riza against the ground.

She could feel her lungs burst, bones break, as indescribable agony subsumed her for but a second, the fist lifting up as she peeled off it. [Meditate] carried her through the pain, letting her activate [Heal], knitting her body back together.

It was like inflating a balloon, the pain quickly vanishing as well.

The demon was already rearing up for another strike, Riza could tell. When she was ready to run, she did, dodging another meteoric punch.

Thankfully, it didn't attack her anymore, even though she was sure she was within reach.

Catching her breath, it was the first time in a long time she felt a lull in this whole ordeal.

"Hey, Lefie. How are things going with you?"

"Er... good? Two humanoid demons are dead, no deaths on our side. Asum and his people and clearing up the beast demons," Came the report.

Checking in with Adewyn, Riza learnt they still had humanoid demons to deal with but assured her they were under control.

Which left only two targets: the greater demons and the big fucker.

The greater demons were strange in that none of them had moved since the beginning. Their sole purpose seemed to be adding to the fog, which was problematic; Asum's group had been steadily pushed further and further

towards the edge of the crater. It was too steep to climb freehand so they'd be trapped eventually, not to mention all the villagers behind them as well.

However, that led to the problem of how to deal with the greater demons to stem the tide of fog. They were near the epicentre of it, with a sea of fog between them and Riza. Some were half covered while the shorter ones only had their heads above fog level now.

There was simply too much for Riza to move with [Manipulate Air] at far too great a distance.

But then she had an idea. With all the use of [Intrinsic Tank] it had climbed to level 3 and with [Maximise Mastery], that meant she had 42 cubic metres of air she could store at once.

[Intrinsic Tank] (3/10) - Learned

Store and release up to 42m³ of air inside you

6m radius

Cost: 105 es

Requirements: [Manipulate Air] (1/10)

Approximating the volume of a hemisphere was pretty easy: if she just multiplied 4 by the radius cubed, then divided it all by 2, she'd get her answer. In order to not have the fog get in the way, she'd want total annihilation in her area of effect, which meant she'd need a much smaller area.

However, each metre reduced increased the volume by 20%, so it was a whole jumble of annoying maths.

Having no time to optimise, she settled on a radius of 3 metres. The volume of the hemisphere was smaller than her total intake which meant complete absorption in that area.

Plan in place, Riza ran right up and into the fog, focusing almost entirely on her senses to avoid beast demons and navigate towards the greater demons. The first one wasn't too hard, although she was accosted by some demons requiring her to clear the air and kill them beforehand.

When she made it within reach, the creature actually reacted, turning and clawing for her. Unfortunately for it, the moment the fog around Riza blinked out of existence, it was already dead.

The first time this happened, upon the greater demon collapsing to the ground, a massive white fist met Riza's face again, killing her for but a second.

This was just the beginning. On her journey to the next greater demon, the punches never stopped. She had lost multiple parasites before managing to put the next one down.

Now that she was within the fog, within its domain, it felt free to attack her. One time, a punch came for her sideways, sending her flying across the crater and crashing into another creature demon which she quickly put out of its misery.

Again and again and again she was attacked by this thing until, finally, with parasites to spare, the final greater demon was dead. She welcomed the next punch that cleared her from the goal, smashing into the crater wall itself.

She was becoming disturbingly used to being a meaty sack of broken bones.

Peeling herself out of the Riza-shaped hole, she flopped to the ground, utterly exhausted.