

## **New Eden 191**

### Chapter 191 A Trip Downtown

Violette tried both sides of the pizza, liking both and eating more than was reasonable for a kid her size. She chirped and hummed happily as she devoured enough pizza to put Alex to shame.

He could only laugh, as he watched her stuff her face full. He smiled, picking up his plate and cleaning it.

He never had siblings, so this was the closest he felt to it, and he had to say. He didn't hate the feeling at all.

"Urgh... I'm so full."

"Hahaha. You brought that on yourself. Maybe show some restraint next time? You were shoving food inside your mouth like a squirrel. It was almost comical."

"But it was so good," she whined.

"I know. Just make sure you don't get a tummy ache. To help, we will go take a walk around the block, make the food go down."

Violette nodded, her face full of pizza sauce.

"Come here."

She walked over to Alexander, who grabbed a soft cloth and washed her face. Violette's cheeks flushed, but she didn't fight back.

"Thank you..." she meekly said once he was done.

Alex only smiled. He finished cleaning up the kitchen, storing what was left of lunch in the fridge, and washing the dishes.

With that done, he grabbed a notepad.

"Here. Write down the food you like, and food you would like to try, and we'll go do some groceries later."

"Okay."

Violette took the pen and pad and started writing down some foods she knew she liked. Then she started adding meals she wanted to try.

Alexander read the things she wrote down and started sweating. All the meals she noted were high-class things that he had never made.

'What did I get myself into?' he thought with despair.

He hadn't thought things through by asking her that. Of course, she would like high-class meals.

She was raised in a rich family, after all. Her meals were probably always cooked by chefs.

Luckily for him, the ones she wanted to try were things that were much more common. Things he was more confident about cooking.

Violette filled the whole page out, before Alexander took the notepad away from her.

"That should be enough for now! We don't know how long you will be staying, so let's not get ahead of ourselves."

Violette smiled, putting the pen on the table. He looked up ingredients for a few of the meals on the list before telling her to get ready to leave.

The pair got ready for their short trip and entered the elevator together. On the way down, the girl was happily humming, while dancing in place a bit.

She seemed very excited to go see a part of the city. Yet another sign of how sheltered she had been raised.

They exited the elevator, Alex nodding his head at the receptionists as they traversed the hall, and left the building. He knew of a nice little grocery store not far away, and that was where he wanted to go.

He grabbed Violette's hand, her cheeks flushing again. But he was doing it for safety reasons.

This was the city, and you could never be too careful. A moment of inattention and she could end up in the street, or worse, kidnaped.

Alexander started walking up the street, dragging along Violette, whose head kept snapping in different directions, taking in all the hustle and bustle of the busy city.

It was barely the afternoon, so there was a lot of foot traffic. And paired with it, many street performers, trying to win their bread with their various skills.

The grocery was only three blocks away, and they made it there in minutes. It was a small local shop, with very little space in it, but the quality was always good.

Which also meant it was chock full of people almost all around the clock.

Alex grabbed a small handbasket and started walking down the aisles. He picked up some of the ingredients he saw from his earlier research, and others he thought might make a good meal too.

Violette occasionally asked the names of a few things she hadn't seen before and even asked to try some. The store owners were an old couple, and seeing her ask to try some fruits and vegetables, they happily said yes.

They found it adorable, but Alexander quickly understood their thought process. They probably thought Violette was his daughter.

He didn't want to contradict their thoughts, but it also made him slightly uncomfortable.

'Do I look old enough to have a child her age?'

He tried thinking about something else as they trawled across the store, grabbing what they needed before cashing out.

The old lady smiled at him while bagging his items.

"Your daughter is adorable, young man."

"Oh! She's not my daughter. She's my little sister," he lied.

"Well, that is even more lovely. It's quite rare nowadays siblings that get along this well."

"Thank you, I guess...?"

Violette stayed silent, looking at him from the corner of her eye, a grin on her lips. He noticed her face, and thought, 'Oh you little devil.'

After paying for the food, Alexander grabbed Violette's hand again before walking out of the store. They walked back to the penthouse, taking a different route this time, so she could see more of the city.

On their way, Alex gave her a lecture about how it was bad to lie to people, and that she put him in a tough spot that forced him to lie. She simply smiled at him wide, acting all innocent.

While they were walking back, Alex's phone rang in his vest pocket. He had his hands full with the bags in one hand, and Violette in the other, so he looked at the girl.

"Can you check who it is for me?"

He then twisted himself so she could reach inside the pocket. Violette grabbed the phone and looked at the screen.

"It's from Kary. Who's Kary?"

"I need to answer that. Can you grab the grocery bag for me?"

Instead of grabbing the bag, the girl picked up the call.

"Hello! This is Alexander's phone. Who is this?"

"Violette?!" came phoenix's voice from the other side of the call.

"Phoenix?!"

Violette turned to Alex with a sly smile.

'God dammit...'

## Chapter 192 Surprise Invitation

The building Alexander lived in was just around the corner at this point, and Violette took advantage of that fact. She yanked her hand out of Alex's before she started running towards it.

"Violette! Wait! Get back here!"

"Hihihihhi!"

She skipped away, like the little devil she apparently was, and Alex had to run after her. Violette beat him to the building entrance, almost getting stopped by the doorman, until he saw Alex running behind and recognized him.

She ran to the elevator that brought up to the penthouse and stopped in front of it. She couldn't get in without Alex's pass, so she had no other choice.

"Okay, bye!"

Alexander caught up to her in front of the elevator, where she was waiting for him, phone extended towards him. She was sporting a devilish grin as Alex took his phone back.

"What did she want? And more importantly, what did you say to her?"

"Nothing important!" Violette chirped.

Alexander clicked his tongue, reading the blatant lie. He resolved himself to call Kary back once he was inside his penthouse.

He stowed his phone away, before swiping his keycard to open the elevator doors. Once in it, he entered his biometrics on the pad and waited for the elevator to start moving.

Violette stood beside him, humming and rocking back and forth, seemingly proud of herself for whatever shenanigan she had just pulled.

"Please never run from me like that outside. The city is dangerous for a girl your size and age."

"Okay!" she answered, still smiling widely.

She obviously barely even heeded his warning, and Alex could only shake his head. He guessed this resulted from her suddenly having much more freedom than usual, and she was testing where the boundaries were.

He had no experience raising children, so all he could do was improvise to the best of his abilities. He would try to keep her safe as much as he could.

As the elevator reached its destination, and the door opened, she zoomed into the penthouse, barely taking the time to take off her shoes at the entrance.

\*Sigh\*

'What did I get myself into?'

Alexander took off his shoes before carrying the grocery bag to the kitchen, where he unpacked it. And then his intercom beeped.

He wondered who it was this time, as he walked to it to answer.

"Hello."

"Hello again, Mr. Leduc. This is the reception desk. We have a delivery man here, with a delivery for you from a certain Richard Bellemare."

"Can you ask what the delivery is?" Alex asked, slightly worried.

After asking the delivery guy, the receptionist looked back at the camera.

"He says it is some sort of pod the kids use for gaming these days."

'So her father decided it would be an extended stay. Hmm.'

"Alright. Send it up."

After saying that, he hung up and waited for the man to reach the elevator with his oversized crate. Once the man was before the doors, he buzzed them open so he could come up.

What annoyed him was that the delivery man was alone. This pod was substantially heavy, and there was no way he could bring it upstairs on his own.

Richard had probably done this on purpose, as petty revenge for getting punched in the face. Alexander clicked his tongue, pulling his sleeves up.

He could have called a serviceman from the building to help, but the fewer people who came into his home that he didn't know, the better. Once the elevator arrived, Alex greeted the delivery man.

"It goes up the stairs. I will help you."

The delivery man looked a little surprised that such a rich young man was willing to break a sweat with little ol' him. But he didn't refuse the help.

After a back-breaking ten minutes, they finally pushed the crate up the stairs. They wheeled the dolly it was on into Violette's room, where the man installed the pod.

Alexander gave the man a hundred-dollar bill as a tip.

"Thank you for helping me, sir," the delivery man said, taking the bill with a wide smile.

"Sure thing. Have a good day."

The man shook Alex's hand before stepping into the elevator again. The apartment was back to two occupants.

Alexander went to take a quick shower. His little chase from earlier and the weight of the pod had worked up quite a sweat, and he felt sticky.

"Violette. I'll go take a shower. Your pod was delivered and installed in your room, but for now, do you want to watch TV?"

"Do you have the anime channel?" she asked, over excitedly.

Alexander chuckled as he set the TV for her. Of course, he had the channel.

He was an avid anime watcher himself. How could he not have that channel?

She almost aggressively grabbed the remote from his hands once the channel was set to choose her favourite anime. He laughed and let her at it.

He rapidly went upstairs, to his room's shower, where he was sure not to be disturbed, and went to wash up. While he was in the shower, he swore he heard his intercom ring, but only briefly.

When he popped his head out and screamed across the house, asking what it was, Violette shouted back that it was a false dial.

Alex frowned at the answer.

A false dial? in this building?

He highly doubted it. So he hurried up and finished washing and getting dressed again, with fresh clothes.

As he was getting dressed, he heard the elevator ding.

'Who the hell is coming in here? I didn't buzz anyone up.'

He only had a pair of pants on, but that would have to do for now. His still-wet hair dripping on his face and shoulders, he ran back downstairs.

When he got to the penthouse entrance, he came face to face with someone he wasn't expecting here.

Staring at him, mouth agape, was Kary. She was looking at him, shirtless, with his half-toned muscles twitching.

"Kary. I wasn't expecting you. Who let you up?"

The woman was completely silent, her mouth still cracked open, staring at him, her cheeks beginning to flush.

"Kary?"

Chapter 193 Confession

After calling her name a few more times, the woman finally snapped out of her trance-like state.

"Ah. Yes. You were talking to me?"

"Yes. I asked you who let you up. Was it, Violette?"

"Ahh. Yes, it was Violette. Did she not tell you I was coming?"

"No. Is that what you talked about while she ran away with my phone?"

"Hihi. I think we are both getting played."

Alexander scratched the back of his head. Now that the woman was here, he couldn't send her back home, right?

Plus, they still needed to have a conversation. He sighed heavily and let the woman inside his home.

"Violette is in the living room, just ahead. Make yourself comfortable, while I go finish dressing."

"Ok."

Alexander walked back up the stairs, heading back to his room, all the while thinking about what he had done to the gods to deserve this tricky situation.

In the meantime, Kary walked forward to the living room, looking around as she did. She was impressed by the home Alexander had bought.

It was simply decorated, as what you would expect from a simple man, but the penthouse itself was very luxurious.

'This place could use a feminine touch,' she caught herself thinking, before blushing again, as she made it to the living room.

"Phoenix!" Violette screamed happily when she saw the woman entering the room.

"Please, we aren't in the game. You can call me Kary."

"Okay!"

"How are you? Is Alex treating you correctly?"

"He's been acting like a great big brother!"

"Is he, now? Good. How long are you going to stay with him?"

"I don't know. But I don't mind, either!"

Kary chuckled at the little girl's enthusiasm. For a girl who was living with a man she barely knew outside a game, she was taking it quite easily.

Kary heard Alex's footsteps coming down the stairs and turned her head to look at him. He was wearing a semi-fitting shirt that still let her imagination picture his toned physique.

The last time she had seen him, he was in the hospital. The loose hospital clothes he had on were far from being revealing.

To add to this, Alex had kept up his training after leaving the hospital, and his muscles were defining by the day. Not that she had never seen a man's bare chest before, but his was especially alluring to her.

She snapped out of her thoughts when he asked her a question.

"Were you staying for dinner?"

"This charming little girl offered to stay the night for a sleepover. She said you had an extra bedroom?"

"Yes... I do... But are you sure you want to stay the night over?"

"I'll just treat it as staying in a fancy hotel."

After saying that, she smiled widely, making Alex's heart flutter for a second.

"Fine. I was going to make some steak with some asparagus and mashed potatoes for dinner. Is that alright with you?"

"I'll eat whatever you were planning on making. I'm not a fussy eater."

"Okay. What should we do until dinner time, though? It's still quite early."

Alex looked at the time, and it was barely three in the afternoon. When he turned his head back at Kary, she had her finger set on her chin, with her brows furrowed.

"Hmm. How about we have that conversation?"

Alexander almost choked on his saliva. He looked over at Violette, who was snickering, before looking back at Kary.

"Here? Now?"

"We can go outside, for a bit more... privacy."

"Uh... Okay."

Alexander followed behind her, as she walked to the door to the balcony. Try as he might, he couldn't resist glimpsing at her taunting hip movement.

'No! Stop thinking like this, you dog!' He admonished himself mentally.

Once they were both outside, Alex closed the door behind himself, so they could talk without Violette hearing every word. They sat at the table, and they both watched over the horizon for a second, waiting for the other to talk.

Alexander was a confident young man, but not with women. He didn't know where to start, so he kept his mouth shut.

He had given some thought about this over the last few days, but he didn't know how to put it into words. Kary, on the other hand, was a lot more outgoing than he was.

When she noticed he wouldn't be the first to talk, she giggled and broke the ice for him.

"Have you given thought to what I told you inside the game?"

"Ahh... Yes. I have. I thought about it a lot, actually."

He then scratched the back of his head nervously.

"And?" Kary asked, a smile pulling the corner of her lips.

Alexander sighed and took the leap.

"I have never been much inclined to relationships, ever since my parents died. I always stay alone."

Kary frowned a bit at his words.

'Is he going to reject me?' she started worrying.

"But I can't lie to myself."

Her heart paused.

"Kary."

"Yes, Alexander?"

"I think I also have feelings for you. I don't know how deep they are yet, but they are there."

Kary smiled warmly at his half-baked confession.

"And so I would like to try this out with you. But I would prefer it if we can take it slowly. Is that okay with you?"

She stood from her chair, walking slowly over to him, before sitting on his lap.

\*Bathump! Bathump!\*

Alexander's heart was threatening to jump out of his chest.

Kary leaned in slowly, making eye contact with him, before closing her eyes and gently kissing his lips. Alexander almost froze up, but he returned her kiss, his hands sliding to her hips.

When she pulled back from him, she smiled.

"We can take this as slowly as you want."

\*Bong! Bong! Bong!\*



They both turned their heads to the glass door, where they saw Violette beating on it with an enormous smile. They could hear her muffled cheating through the door, and laughed together.

"I think she set us up," Alexander said, chuckling.

"I don't mind. Do you?"

"I don't think I do."

He leaned in again, fetching another kiss from her.

'I think I might take a liking to this.'

#### Chapter 194 Rollercoaster Day

After their discussion, they went back inside, trying to calm Violette, who was practically cheering like she was watching a sports game or something.

Alexander admonished her lightly, telling her that meddling was very inappropriate. Kary chimed in, saying that she didn't need it either, since she had already planned to hijack him, anyway.

This sparked laughter from the two girls, who looked at Alex's bewildered face. They then sat in front of the television, watching some anime that Violette had picked.

The sofa was large enough for six people, but that didn't stop Kary from cuddling up to Alex. He was uncomfortable about it at first, but quickly stopped thinking about it, as he started feeling warm and fuzzy inside.

Around five in the afternoon, Alex got up to cook dinner. It was nothing too complicated, and any abled adult could pull off steaks, asparagus, and mashed potatoes.

Kary offered her help, but he politely declined, saying she was just as much a guest as Violette, and that it was his responsibility as host. That didn't deter her from sitting across his kitchen island and watching him cook.

They talked about the game while he diced up the potatoes before dropping them into boiling water.

"I was thinking about joining a guild soon. Or maybe start my own. The advantages of being in a guild are quite profitable for top players, you know?" Kary said, tapping her fingers on the countertop.

"Hmm. I'm not sure if I want to be in a guild for now. I feel like it would constrict me from exploring freely the rest of the game."

"That solely depends on the guild you join, and how well you negotiate your terms. I'm pretty certain guilds would be very flexible for the current number one in the level rankings, and runner-up of the first tournament."

"I don't know. They might try to force me into leading them into high-level dungeons and raids all the time too..."

"Then start your own. Appoint someone you trust to lead it logistically, while you keep exploring as you want to."

Alexander stopped chopping for a moment. What she was saying actually made a lot of sense.

But then, who could he appoint to that position that he trusted enough? There weren't many people he trusted that much to start with.

And the people he did, well, he would hate to limit them in their freedom. This was quite the conundrum.

"I'll think about it," he responded, going back to chopping the tails of the asparagus. He dumped those into another pot of boiling water to blanch them before he pulled out a pan.

He put the pan on the stove, starting it at high, and drizzling oil in it. He then waited till the pan was hot and put the steaks inside.

He seared both sides of them before lowering the heat and letting them cook for a minute. Then he set them aside.

Next, he drained the water out of the asparagus and potatoes and mashed the latter into a nice puree. He took some on his finger to taste it, but Kary was quicker than him, sticking the finger into her mouth.

His legs almost gave up under him before she winked at him and skittered away.

"They're perfect," she said, as she was leaving.

Violette had caught sight of the act and was pulling a grimace.

"Eww! Get a room!"

Kary winked at her, giggling, and then sat at the table.

Alexander regained control of his legs before serving the plates. He also pulled out two wine glasses and a normal one for Violette, bringing it all to the table.

He served the girl some grape juice before taking a wine bottle out and pouring himself and Kary glasses.

The dinner passed by quickly, as they talked and laughed while eating. For an instant, Alex almost felt like he was having dinner with his family.

It was quite refreshing and soothing, in a certain way. Even Violette seemed to have forgotten why she was here in the first place.

After dinner, Kary helped clean up, even if Alex insisted she didn't have to. He stopped arguing when the woman was already elbow deep in the sink, washing dishes.

Instead of fighting it, he decided to be a little more forward, and came up behind her. Alex leaned in against her back, reaching his hands in the sink, too.

He helped her wash the dishes in that position, occasionally pecking her neck with a kiss. The woman was loving it.

Once the cleaning was done, they all agreed now was a good time to go play New Eden. But an issue arose.

"How are you going to play? Did you bring your helmet?"

"I... Didn't think about that."

\*Sigh\*

"I have my helmet somewhere, but I don't have an extra computer. You would need to be plugged into mine, which is next to my bed..."

"That's not a problem," she replied, winking.

Violette fake gagged before entering her room and closing the door.

"I'll be waiting inside the game!" she shouted through the door.

The two adults were left in the corridor, laughing at their situation. Alex figured they would be inside the game, so having her lay in his bed wasn't an issue.

So he pulled his helmet out of the closet it was stored in and plugged it into the computer. Kary logged into her account before the helmet reset its configuration for her use.

She then lay down on the bed and put the helmet on.

"Don't do anything to me I wouldn't do to you, while I'm inside the game."

Then she logged in.

Alexander sighed.

'I'm pretty sure that was an invitation, more than a warning...' he thought, as he opened his pod and lay in it.

He stared at the dark inside for a few moments, taking in how his day had been.

It had started not so well, and rapidly became worse, until things calmed down, and now it was ending on a cheerful note.

'I guess karma really exists.'

He tapped the game icon.

\*Launching 'New Eden'\*

\*Logging in\*

\*Welcome back player Astaroth\*

Chapter 195 Changes

\*\*\*Outside the game, close to Montreal\*\*\*

David was staring at a large dug-out pit. It was several stories deep, and all the way at the bottom, there were still machines digging deeper.

"Are your men able to dig any faster? We are weeks behind schedule."

"Young man, you are making me work with two other excavation companies already, so we can go faster. Do you know how hard it is to coordinate a worksite of this size?"

The man responding to David was an older fellow, with a white security helmet on his head and a dirty jacket.

"With how much I pay all of you, just to dig a hole, this should already be done. I had to push back my other projects because you keep asking me for more money!"

"Then you should have thought about this more. You pay me to dig, and I dig. It's not my problem if you ask for an unreasonable schedule."

David turned to face the man with rage in his eyes. The man was unfazed, having worked with hardasses all his life.

"Don't give me that look, kid. I've dealt with bigger fish. You can't intimidate me."

"Oh, really?"

David started walking toward the man, keeping their eyes locked, his steps reverberating around them. For a moment, his eyes went from their normal white sclera and blue irises to black sclera with green irises.

The foreman stepped back; the change taking him off guard.

Some shadows were extending behind David as he kept stepping toward the foreman.

"Tell me again how I can't intimidate you."

"What kind of dark magic is this?! How are you doing that?! Stop! Don't come near me!"

David stopped when he was standing a mere foot away from the now terrified man.

"You don't know what a real 'Big Fish' is, yet. Now get your men working faster. Before I cut the cash supply and force you to work for free."

"You can't do that. That's slav—"

David had grabbed the man by the throat and was currently lifting him off the ground with one hand.

"I can do whatever I want. Understood?"

The foreman nodded, having a hard time breathing. David released him, dropping him to the ground, gasping.

"Get your men and the other contractors moving faster. I want that pit done by the end of the week."

"Yes, sir." \*cough\*

David walked away before disappearing into the forest surrounding the place. Once he was out of view, he dropped to his knees.

He started gasping for air, suddenly sweating buckets.

"This world still isn't ready for any feat involving mana... I should refrain from using it for now."

The trick he had just used was an alteration of mana control, something that should only be doable inside New Eden. But David knew something no one else did.

The world had already started changing. The place he lived at was one of the hotspots, where mana had already started leaking into this world.

That's why he had picked that spot in the first place. So he could be the first one to use mana and strengthen his body with it.

His little hiding place wasn't far from there either, since he wanted to limit his movement and exposure to the rest of the world.

He quickly went back there, to rest and regather the mana he had just consumed.

"Soon... I will soon be able to use it freely here. Which reminds me. The day is coming fast. I'll have to call him so we can do what is needed."

David lay down on his bed, and he began slowly absorbing what little ambient mana he could.

\*\*\*Inside New Eden, Sunpeak City\*\*\*

Astaroth opened his eyes, looking at the nice wooden ceiling of the inn room he rented. He got up, before stretching a bit.

When he walked out of the room, both Violette and Phoenix were talking in the corridor next to his door.

"Took you long enough. Were you contemplating my vulnerable body?"

"Ew ew ew ew!" Violette screamed, slapping her hands on her ears and running down the stairs.

\*Sigh\*

"I was laying in my pod, thinking. Not that I wouldn't be tempted... but we are not there yet."

"Prude," Phoenix replied, giggling and walking away too.

Astaroth sighed again.

'Why is this woman so outgoing? Is it wrong to be a little reserved?'

After checking out, the trio parted ways in front of the inn. Phoenix had prior engagements she had to honour, so she couldn't play with them for now.

Violette felt a little downtrodden about it, but Phoenix consoled her.

"Don't worry, sweetheart. I'll play with you soon. Plus, I'm laying just a few meters away from you. When we wake up, we can go and have some fun in the city. What do you think about that?"

Violette perked up.

"Promise?!"

"Yes, I promise," Phoenix answered, ruffling the girl's hair.

"Hihihhi!"

"Then I guess I'll see you when we log out. Uh... take care, I guess?" Astaroth said, unsure what to tell her.

She looked at him, slightly disappointed, as did Violette, but they both said nothing. Just as Astaroth was turning around to leave, a hand swiftly grabbed his butt, making him jump.

When he turned around, Phoenix winked and hurriedly walked away.

"Bye!" Violette shouted.

Phoenix waved her hand in response as she disappeared into the crowd. Astaroth suddenly felt some hostile stares land on him.

When he turned to look at where he felt them from, he noticed a few male players looking at him with murderous glares. He even heard some whispers.

'Why is such a woman giving attention to a simpleton like him?'

'Yeah, I would treat her way better.'

'You? Try me, instead. I'm so much more manly.'

Astaroth felt a tinge of rage climb up his chest. He walked over to the men, who were looking at him with contempt.

When he got near, he leaned into them.

"What are you fucking looking at?" he asked, as he melded with White, fully exerting the presence of the alpha on them.

All three men started sweating profusely, suddenly trying to scamper away.

'Heh! Pussies!' Astaroth thought, smirking.

He didn't know why he felt proud of scaring them away, but he did. Words rarely affected him, but something about the way they talked about Phoenix irked him into action.

'Is this jealousy?' he wondered.

He turned around, cancelling his meld, and walked back toward Violette, who watched the scene with a grin.

'Serves those weaklings right. You should have beat one up, to assert your dominance!' came White's voice in his head.

Astaroth chuckled without answering.

## Chapter 196 Unfriendly Instructor

After talking with Violette and deciding what they were to do that day, the duo started touring the city. Violette wanted to first have a look around Sunpeak, since they had little time to explore it the last time.

Astaroth had no problem with that, since he also wanted to look around. He hoped to find some hidden quests if he searched deep enough.

Although, he doubted that would happen, since there had been players in Sunpeak for some time already, and they had most likely scoured this city from top to bottom.

So he and Violette wandered around for a few hours, looking at the markets, trying different food stalls, and even buying casual clothes.

The clothes they bought offered no protection whatsoever and were only good in terms of a fashion statement. But he preferred it this way.

Astaroth had been noticing the looks from the NPCs, and he figured two armoured and armed Ash Elves, inside Sunpeak, were probably a good reason for them to worry.

When the pair of them swapped to more normal clothes, the weary looks also lessened. Some kids even tried inviting Violette to play with them before being reprimanded by their parents.

After touring most of the city, aside from the parts where they were barred access, Astaroth proposed to Violette another activity.

"I hear cities have adventurer guilds, where you can sign up for monster hunting quests. Want to go try one out? See what kind of monsters roam around Sunpeak?"

"That sounds fun. Okay," Violette responded, her smile never wavering.

In their quick tour, they had passed before the guild building, so Astaroth knew where to go. It took them almost half an hour to walk back there, though, since it was almost at the other end of the city.

They entered the building together, eliciting some weird looks from the guards around the lobby, but no one reacted aggressively for now.

Astaroth walked to a free counter, with Violette in tow, and the woman behind it received them with a large smile.

"Hello. I am Claire. Welcome to the adventurer's guild. What can I do for you?"

"Hello, Claire. My little partner and I, here, would like to take on some monster-hunting quests."

"We have many quests with a variety of ranks. Can I see your adventuring license?"

"Ahh. We don't have one yet."

"Not a problem, good sir. Would you like to register and take the rank assessment test?"

"Do I need to take the test?"

"Well, it is not a requirement. But you would start as the lowest rank if you don't. And most hunting quests are for higher ranked adventurers."

\*Sigh\*

"Okay. Can I know what the test consists of?"

"Why certainly! The assessment test is just a short spar with one of our instructors to see your level of capabilities in combat. Do you wish to go through it?"

Astaroth almost hesitated for a moment. A combat test meant he would have to show these NPCs his fighting style, and that might raise alarms.

Aberon had warned him many times that Soulmanagers were revered but feared worldwide. If they glimpsed at his class, what would be their reaction?

Astaroth sighed again, before accepting to take the test.

"Very well. In that case, please wait a moment while I find an available instructor to test you."

"That won't be necessary. I'll test him!" An angry voice came from the side.

Astaroth felt some heavy pressure from the man, mixed in with a dripping murderous intent. The man hadn't been here when they entered the building, or he would have felt it.

"Ahh, Sir Clide. I don't think taking the time of such a high-ranking instructor for an assessment is necessary. I can find a more suitable instructor for them."

"I insist," the man said, glaring at her.

Astaroth heard the woman gulp.

"Very well. In that case, please follow me to the sparring grounds, gentlemen and young lady."

Astaroth and Violette nodded their heads, with the former never taking his eyes off the instructor.

'I have a bad feeling about him. Did I kick his puppy or something?'

They walked to the back of the building, where a door led back outside, in a closed-up fighting ground. The layout was very similar to the barrack's training ground back in his starting village.

Claire walked to the side, grabbing two small girdles, with orbs at their center, before walking back to Astaroth and Violette.

"Please wear these. They will measure your vitality, and put up a shield around you with the same amount of hit points. This is a security measure, so no one gets hurt."

"Once the shields break, we consider the test over."

"They don't need it. I will hold back," the man interjected.

Astaroth could feel the murderous intent oozing off him, and could tell that was a blatant lie.

"Are you sure, sir?"

"Just obey!"

But before the woman could take back the girdles, Astaroth grabbed the two of them. He handed one to Violette and threw the other at the instructor's face.

"Wear it, Violette. I don't trust him."

Violette immediately put the girdle around her waist. The instructor, though, had rage in his eyes as he caught the girdle in his hand.

"You mock me, dark skin?" he asked, seething in anger.

"No sir. I simply wanted to make sure you are safe too," Astaroth answered, grinning arrogantly.

The instructor threw the girdle back at Claire, almost frothing at the mouth.

"I'm going to enjoy beating you into a pulp!" he growled.

Meanwhile, somewhere inside the guild building, an old man was filling out documents. When he suddenly felt a surge in killing intent.



"Who pissed off Clide again?" the old man wondered in a husked voice.

The man closed his eyes and sent a powerful but discreet wave of mana all around the building, sensing everything and everyone as it passed through.

He located Clide in the sparring grounds, standing in front of a young man. But something was off about the young man.

He could feel more than one soul from him. Aside from that abnormal thing, another form caught his eye.

A small girl was also standing near them, and he shivered as he looked at her through the magic sense. Her mana signature was monstrous, for her age, on par with mages decades older than her.

When he read their essence carefully, he noticed their race and frowned.

'Ash Elves? In this part of the world? No wonder Clide is acting up. I better go watch this, to make sure no one accidentally dies.' the old man thought, as he teleported away from his office.

He reappeared on a balcony overlooking the yard and made his presence vanish.

'Let's see what they are capable of first.'

#### Chapter 197 Power Figure

Astaroth rapidly scanned his opponent, trying to get a good gauge of who he was up against.

Clide Bergar / Adventuring Instructor

Level: 62

Grade: Elite

Race: Human

Class: Battle Master

HP: 231'450/231'450

When Astaroth saw the amount of HP the man had, he sucked in a breath of cold air.

'So tough.'

That was the moment Clide dashed at him, sending his fist forward on a collision course to Astaroth's face. Astaroth barely had enough time to duck out of the way, but wasn't out of the woods.

A knee was rapidly rising toward his stomach, and he wouldn't have time to jump back. He did the only other thing he could, bringing his arms up in a cross in front of his midsection.

The knee hit his arms like a runaway train, sending him sliding back many meters, with the front arm broken from the strength of the blow.

'Shit!' Astaroth cursed in his mind.

"Your king's ambition killed my younger brother. You will pay for his sins," the man seethed, his eyes bloodshot.

"You think I like what king Vhol'drokk is doing?! Why do you think I'm no longer in that country?!"

"Shut up! Your excuses mean nothing to me! I will settle this blood debt today!"

The man charged at Astaroth again, well intent on ending him as revenge. But Astaroth would not go down that easily.

He melded with Luna before summoning Morpheus and White Death. He pulled out one of his daggers with his still-functioning arms and dashed at his opponent.

His speed was now higher than the man's, making the fight suddenly a lot more balanced. Even if Astaroth was barely damaging him, at least he was healing back the damage he had dealt him.

Astaroth was already accumulating the Aether around him as he fought, hell-bent on finishing this fight before his meld ended. His lifesteal healed him back up to full rapidly, but his arm was still broken.

When the timer for his meld reached thirty seconds, Astaroth kicked the man away, and charged up his Moon Beam. He no longer cared if he killed the man, since Clide had been vying for his life, anyway.

But just as he fired the spell, the mana in front of him fluctuated violently, before forming a solid barrier. His Aether-charged Moon Beam collided against the invisible wall, stalling for a few seconds, before crashing through and washing over Clide.

Most of the damage had been absorbed by the barrier though, and what little was left only knocked the Human out. Then someone teleported right in front of Astaroth.

"That was a dangerous attack, young man," the old man reprimanded him, shaking his head.

"G... Guild Master!" Claire exclaimed, before bowing low.

Astaroth became weary at her words. If the guild master intervened, it was already a bad sign.

The old man had a smile on his face as he walked over to Violette. The girl looked at him wearily, her hands gripping her staff tightly.

"Don't you—" before Astaroth could finish his threat, the old man laid a hand on Violette's shoulder and disappeared.

"Violette!"

Not a second later, the man reappeared behind him, and touched his shoulder too, before the surroundings changed. Astaroth was now sitting in a chair in a nice office.

Next to him, Violette was seated in another chair, with her eyes wide. Astaroth turned his head forward, to where the old man was, seated in his own chair.

When Astaroth tried to stand, he was promptly pushed back down on his ass by an invisible force. And then he noticed he was stuck there.

"What do you want?!" Astaroth growled.

"Calm down, young man. What is your name?"

"... Astaroth."

"Good. And you, little girl?"

"My name is Violette," she responded, her voice slightly trembling.

The reason she was trembling was that she was using her mana senses on the man. Contrary to Astaroth, who was too angry and worried to think about it.

And what she was seeing was enough to scare normal people to death. The magic aura this man had around him was large enough to encompass the entire building!

When the old man felt her sense wash over his aura, he retracted it completely.

"Sorry, little one. I didn't know you could feel mana so well. That must have scared you."

Violette was sweating as she gulped.

His aura had vanished in a second, and now her senses showed an ordinary old man. The only person she had met that could completely seal their aura like this was Aberon!

Astaroth was still glowering at the old man when Violette put her hand on his forearm.

"I don't think he wants us any harm..."

"How can you be sure?"

"Because we would already be dead..."

Astaroth looked at her weirdly, before he tried scanning the old man.

Name: ???

Level: ???

Grade: ???

Class: ???

Astaroth gasped. This level of concealment was a testament to how strong this old mage was.

He could even hide his name!

"What do you want of us, then?"

"Nothing, really. I just wanted to take you away before they showed up."

"They? Who are they?"

\*Knock Knock Knock\*

"Them," the old man responded, still smiling.

The old man waved his hand at them, making them invisible, before they heard a voice through the door.

"Guild master! This is the council. May we come in?"

"Why certainly!" the old man answered, waving his hand again, opening the door by telekinesis.

A stuck-up-looking man entered through the doorway, wearing a set of purple robes with a triangle crest on it. Framing him were two sturdy-looking warriors.

"Hello, Guild Master. I think you know why we are here?"

"I don't believe I do. Pray tell."

"Tch. We felt the release of two powerful magic auras, not mere minutes ago. One of them was yours. Who was the other one?"

"Ahh, yes. I released my magic earlier. One of my instructors was acting out of line, and I needed to set him straight. I did not feel any other presence, though. I'm afraid I know nothing more," the old mage responded with a warm smile.

The younger mage did not seem convinced.

"You know the consequences of lying to the council, right?"

"Young man, I was once part of the council you serve. Don't think you can recite its rules to me." the old mage replied, his smile vanishing, replaced by a death glare.

The younger mage swallowed nervously, before scoffing.

"Hmph! I'll have my eyes on you, old coot!"

After saying his piece, the man and his two bodyguards left, slamming the door behind them.

The old mage waited a few minutes before waving his hand before him again, making Violette and Astaroth reappear.

"Now. Where were we?"

Chapter 198 Backer

What doubts remained in Astaroth's head were cleared away by the previous actions. Not only had the old man kept him from ending someone's life, but he was now hiding them from an authority he didn't even know existed.

"Ah yes. Presentations. Pardon my rudeness. I am the guild master of the adventurers' guild in Sunpeak. My Name is Euclesias Eustas."

"I'm not sure it's a pleasure to meet you, yet, sir Eustas. I would rather know why you intervened in my combat and why you hid us from those men earlier."

Astaroth didn't doubt the man had good intentions, but not knowing them still made him anxious. What if he was after his capabilities?

There was no doubt in his mind that a mage in this high of a position, and with this much power, knew a Soulmancer at first sight. And that brought him to his next question.

"What is in it for you?"

The old man grinned.

"For me? Nothing. It was but a passing thought and reaction from an old senile man. But for you? There is much to gain from associating with me, young man."

Astaroth had shivers from his grin. There it was, the signature grin of a shrewd person.

The same grin Phoenix had flashed him when she cornered him into signing that contract in the tournament.

Violette let the grownups talk, while her mind wandered off to what she had seen of the old man's aura. How long did it take a person to reach that kind of power?

It piqued her passion for magic and the miracles it could perform, as she wondered what kind of miracle this old man could do, with power this large.

She wondered if players could reach that kind of power at all. Even if their levelling speed was incredibly faster than NPCs, from what information she had, it still wasn't easy to reach this strength, of that she was certain.

While her mind wandered off into questions about the heights of magic, Astaroth was still trying to get a read on Euclesias.

"Sir. With all due respect, no one ever does anything for free."

"Hm. A skeptical one, aren't you? You are right. It wasn't for free."

'I knew it...'

"Then what was the price we must pay?"

"That is where you are wrong, young Astaroth. The price for what I did today was paid a long time ago."

This threw Astaroth for a loop.

'What is he talking about? I've never met him...'

"I can sense the confusion in your mind. Let me clarify for you. I was simply repaying a favour for an old foolish friend of mine."

"What does that have to do with us?"

Well, you see, I recognize the staff in this young lady's hands. That is how I knew who you are associated with. That is also why I butted into your fight, and hid your existence from the council."

Astaroth looked at Violette's staff, and then it clicked.

"You know Aberon!"

The old man chuckled.

"I didn't think Aberon would teach a dense student like you one day, haha. Yes, I know Aberon. We were once very close friends."

"But that brings me back to what you said earlier. You said I had something to gain from this. Did you mean not being on this 'Council's' radar?"

"That is one thing you gained. But that is not what you will benefit most from. I have one other thing to give you."

A soft knock came from the door at that moment.

"Come on in, Claire."

The door opened slowly, revealing the woman from the counter. Her head was lowered, in respect and fear of the guild master, as she approached the desk.

"I had them made as per your instructions, sir."

"Very good. You may leave them on the desk and resume your post. Thank you for your discretion."

Claire nodded, glancing at the two youths before the desk. It wasn't often that people their age earned this privilege.

She deposited a small tray on the corner of the desk before turning on her heels and leaving the room, shutting the door behind her.

On the tray, two crystalline cards were laying. On them, it showed the names and classes of Astaroth and Violette, alongside their new adventurer rank.

Astaroth gasped lightly when he saw the rank. They were S-rank cards!

"Sir, this is too high! We will garner all kinds of unwanted attention!"

"You misunderstand the ranking system, young man. Contrary to common belief, S-rank is not the top of the chain."

"It... isn't?"

"Not exactly. Although quite a lot of adventurers with S-rank cards are considered the pinnacle of strength, that is not where their true value lies."

"I don't understand. Please explain what it means."

"The S-rank card doesn't stand for the pinnacle of ranking. It stands for special rank. It means you are an adventurer under the direct purview of a guild master. This card is protection from ill-intentioned parties."

Astaroth quickly grasped what the old man meant. The card didn't mean they were superpowers in the guild.

It meant a powerful figure backed them. This was basically saying, 'These seeds are mine, back off!'

It was a gift of greater value than he could have ever asked for. This would ease his passing into so many cities and situations around the entire world of the game.

A guild master from the adventurer's guild was sure to have some political clout, especially one that was apparently once part of the magic council in Sunpeak.

This was a 'Get out of jail' card!

"Sir... Can we even take those? I don't think we deserve such a gift."

Violette, on the other hand, was already grasping the card in her little hands. The curiosity of a child knew no bounds, and as soon as she saw the shiny card, she got up to grab it.

"Thank you!" She said happily.

The old man burst into laughter.

Astaroth was now almost forced to take his.

'This is a cursed gift if I ever saw one,' he thought, sighing.

"Thank you, sir."

## Chapter 199 Accepting A Quest

After explaining what the benefits of an S-rank card gave, Euclesias sent them on their merry way. Astaroth grabbed a monster-hunting quest at Claire's counter, since he didn't want to pull out the card in public.

The woman gave him the quest; her face still stoic, before the pair of Ash Elves left the building. The quest consisted of slaying at least thirty stone bulls that were invading the mines of Sunpeak.

This wasn't a quest readily available to everyone, since the mines were the property of the city itself. The quest rank was A-rank, and there weren't any players with that rank yet.

Since the quests weren't on a board visible to everyone, the players had no way of knowing what quest others took, making the stealing of them that much more complicated.

But there was another issue for Astaroth and Violette. The mines were located closer to the center of the city, between the royal district and the noble district.

Meaning they had to cross a checkpoint to get there. One where they had been refused access previously.

One which every player had been refused access to, as of yet.

When the duo walked up to the gate, which was almost devoid of any waiting line, the guards stopped them.

"People of your kind have no business beyond these gates. Turn back!"

Astaroth was tempted to punch him in the face, before slathering his quest paper on his face, but he refrained from it.

"We have a quest at the mines, from the adventurer's guild. Here are the documents."

He pulled out the scroll that came as a quest item and handed it to the guard. The guard seemed put off that an abnormal was taking a quest that would lead into the city center.

This was the first case he had seen yet. But the documents checked out.

"Wait here a moment. I need to check with my supervisor."

Astaroth sighed in response, giving a small nod.

The guard almost popped off at him for his arrogant display, but he refrained. If this abnormal was taking a quest of this rank following the rules, then rebuking him could lead to trouble.

The guard walked to the small office-like room tied to the gate before using the same device the main door had used to communicate with someone at another location.

The verification took a few minutes as the man conversed with an unseen participant, frowning from time to time. When he came back, his face had morphed from a stern look to one of indifference.

"Please have a pleasant stay inside the city center, sir Astaroth."

'How does he suddenly know my name? Meh. I don't care.'

"Thank you."

Astaroth took his document back, and the two were let through the gates. The guards were exchanging weird looks, but no one stopped them from crossing.

"I bet the guard at the city entrance would be eating his boots by now," Violette said, smiling widely.

Astaroth burst into laughter at her comment.

"Yeah, hahaha! I bet he would!"

The two of them walked in the mine's direction, which was pinned in their minimap.

This part of the city was much calmer and less crowded than their previous location. Most people were travelling around in coaches, decorated in many fancy trimmings and crests.

Astaroth and Violette could tell these were nobles and rich merchants. People that they didn't want to offend.

They stayed to the sides of the road as much as possible, making sure they weren't in the way of the rapidly passing vehicles. That kept them from not only getting into trouble but also from getting trampled.

The mountain was rapidly becoming bigger in their sight, soon to take most of their vision. Sunpeak mountain was by no means small, but being closer to it like this really pushed that point across.

To their left was a gate that led into the royal district. The guards manning that gate were equipped with much more luxurious and sturdy-looking armour.

To their right, another gate led into the noble district. Pompous-looking guards manned this one, and the armour they were wearing almost looked more decorative than practical.

And lastly, right in front of them, another gate. This led to the mining district, which was basically the center of Sunpeak's economy.

There were fewer guards at this gate than the other two, but they were mounted atop the walls and stationed next to very dangerous-looking cannons.

You could easily tell that the ruler of this city knew that without the minerals, their economy would collapse. This showed the ruler wasn't a narcissistic prick who thought he was the core of the city.

'Smart politicians are the ones we should be most wary of, though,' Astaroth thought.

He and Violette walked to the gate, where a single guard was standing, verifying the people coming in and out of the mining district.



They waited for their turn, as the man was being extremely thorough with every person he checked. There was a single case of someone being pulled aside, where they searched him and found hidden ore on his person.

The offender was quickly brought away to what Astaroth guessed was jail. Soon came their turn.

"Next!" the guard shouted in a stern voice.

Astaroth and Violette walked forward, the former pulling out the quest documents. The man took the papers handed to him without looking up.

He checked them and then handed them back to Astaroth.

"Your query is in the fourth level in the eastern part of the mines. If you've never been here before, you can head to the office next to the mines and purchase the services of a guide."

Astaroth thanked him with a curt bow, which the guard didn't even notice since he was already eyeing the next group of entrants.

"That was fast..." Astaroth said, looking at Violette.

The little girl shrugged, not interested in these kinds of things.

Her mind was still mostly preoccupied with how she could make her magic power as strong as the guild master. The rest was mostly happening around her without her caring.

This made Astaroth shake his head a bit.

'I hope she snaps back into focus before we reach the monsters. Distractions in combat lead to mistakes.'

## Chapter 200 A Walk In The Park

Astaroth led the girl to the office building near the tunnel entrance. Inside the building were a bunch of desks in a hectic layout.

He walked up to one and asked for guide services, and the man sitting at it rudely redirected him to another desk.

The desk he was sent to was manned by a woman dwarf. She didn't have a beard as the males did, but her muscles seemed denser and the tattoos covering her arms were almost menacing.

Her hair was adorned with beads that looked to be made of rare gemstones and metals. It should be impossible to keep her head upright with all this weight on her hair, but it seemed totally fine for her.

'Dwarven women are scary...'

"Wow! You look so strong, missus!" Violette exclaimed from the side.

This garnered the attention of the dwarven woman, who looked at the pair with critical eyes.

"You have good eyes, little girl," the woman replied, her face softening.

"Um. Hello. I was told to come here for guidance services inside the mine."

The dwarf looked up to Astaroth, sizing up his build.

"You seem rather... bulky, for a pointy ear. I like it, hah!" she said, slapping her desk.

Astaroth heard the wooden surface creak under the pressure of the hit.

"Name's Brylniss. Brylniss Mountainheart!" she exclaimed, extending her hand forward for a shake.

Astaroth grasped her thick hand, expecting a normal shake, but his hand almost snapped. He had to rapidly adjust the strength he put behind his grip, lest she obliterate every bone in his hand.

The woman laughed heartily at his reaction.

"Good! Hahaha! Not a terrible grip! There might still be salvation for you! Hahaha!"

'Urgh... This is going to be a long day.'

After explaining his situation to the lady dwarf, she smiled and accepted to guide them. Her fee was nothing to scoff at, but it was still reasonably priced, considering the money he would make from the reward.

After signing a plethora of papers, stating they were hiring her for guidance only, and that she was not responsible for their safety or her own, they shook hands again and were on their way.

They made their way into the mines, now with the certitude they wouldn't get lost, and quickly found what they were looking for.

Astaroth asked the dwarven woman to stay hidden, so danger wouldn't befall her, and melded with Morpheus. The lighting in this part of the mines hadn't been refuelled in a while, since the monsters had made their nest here.

So the wall lamps were all shut, and light was a scarce resource. Melding with Morpheus fixed a part of this problem.

Violette used her mana sense to sense the monsters in the cave, closing her eyes to focus on that. The dwarf, seeing the little girl close her eyes, was mildly impressed.

It wasn't every day one would see a mage confident enough in their sixth sense to fight without their eyes. This showed her the calibre of the little girl instantly.

As for the young man, when he started tearing into the Stone Bulls like they were normal ones, she nodded and smiled. Stone bulls were not called that way for anything.

Their entire exterior was coated in a solid layer of granite. This meant one needed a lot of strength to pass a blade through it.

But it seemed like little more than a detail to the duo of pointy-eared adventurers. Brylniss had seen parties of proven dwarven warriors get beaten into a retreat by a horde of stone bulls.

The speed they were dealing with them with a simple duo was outstanding. Of course, she expected as much from adventurers with an A-rank.

It took no longer than ten minutes for the duo to clear out the nest. That was a total of forty-five Stone Bulls, all of which were normal ones.

Astaroth was almost disappointed there was no stronger opponent, but he was still happy with their results. With all the walking they had done today, and all the walking they still had to do, completing this quest rapidly was no luxury.

Once they were done collecting the monster cores, and what little other loot they dropped, they signalled to their guide that they were ready to leave.

The dwarven woman brought them back to the surface rapidly, and they signed off the termination of the contract, paying her the fee. She motioned them to wait before leaving.

"The miner's guild would pay a handsome price for those stonehides you collected. Would you be interested in selling them to me?"

"That depends. How much are you willing to pay for them?" Astaroth asked.

The dwarf pulled out a ledger, flipping through the pages, until she stopped on one.

"Hmm. Market price last week for them was around ten silver per hide. I know the guild would offer more. I also know they won't trade with foreigners. So I'm willing to offer fifteen silver per hide."

Astaroth peeked at how much the hides would go, according to the system. They were priced at eight silver a piece.

From what the woman was saying, the prices probably varied according to who you sold to. The system prices were most likely the minimal value.

This showed how knowing your markets could rapidly make you rich in this game. But that held little interest to him.

The fact she was offering almost double value for them made him entirely satisfied.

"I'm okay with it. I can't speak for Violette, though."

He turned to the little girl, who looked at him with wide eyes. She knew next to nothing of market values and such, so she was a little lost.

"Uh... If you say it's a fair offer, then I shall agree too."

"Then it's a deal!"

The dwarf snorted and spat in her hand. Violette almost gagged at the move, but Astaroth copied it and shook her hand.

The duo sold their stonehides to Brylniss, making a nice profit off of them, and bade her farewell before leaving the district.

They travelled all the way back to the guild to complete their quest.