

New Eden 241

Chapter 241 Meeting The Guardian

On the way there, passersby and patrolling soldiers saluted Violette and Astaroth many times. Violette was getting highly uncomfortable with all the attention, and Astaroth was becoming annoyed.

When they reached the guild building, they rushed inside, both wanting to get away from the worshiping gazes and respectful salutes. Phoenix only laughed at the situation.

Many players would kill their families to be the center of attention like they were. But that went to show how well-centred their personalities were.

Phoenix and Violette headed to a counter, getting in line to grab a quest, while Astaroth went to the guarded staircase to the side.

When the guard stopped him, Astaroth showed him the S-rank card, and requested to speak with the Guild Master.

"I'm sorry, sir. The guild master is currently in a meeting with someone. You will have to wait before meeting him."

Astaroth was about to turn around, exasperated slightly, when a familiar woman walked towards him and the guard.

"Let him through. The guild master is expecting him."

The woman was the same one that had given him his card the other day.

"But ma'am. The guild master is already in a meeting."

"Did I stutter? Let him through, or I will have to tell the guild master you delayed his guest."

"No need ma'am! This way, sir!"

The guard changed his attitude as soon as his job was put on the line. The woman winked at Astaroth, before returning to the counter she was previously serving.

The player standing there had a look of anger and jealousy on his face. The woman had interrupted his service to fix Astaroth's situation, and it irked him.

'Who is that guy, anyway?'

Once Astaroth was guided to the staircase that led to the guild master's office, another guard replaced him. The players who saw another player go through thought the zone was suddenly unlocked to them, and tried going too.

When their paths were blocked, they protested and ended up getting kicked out of the building and banned for twenty-four hours. They later made many complaints on the forums, all of which fell on deaf ears.

The guard escorting Astaroth stopped before the wooden door to the office.

Knock knock

"Guild master. Your second guest, sir Astaroth, has arrived."

The door opened on its own, and from inside, Astaroth heard the old man's voice.

"Come in, young man."

Astaroth did as asked, lightly nodding to the guard on the way in. The guard closed the door behind Astaroth before going back to his post.

Inside the office, Euclesias was sitting at his big desk, with two chairs positioned before it. The chairs were slightly angled, forming a symmetrical triangle.

And from the door, Astaroth could see the profile of the other person present. He resembled what Kary had described to him earlier.

The man was lean and wearing fancy-looking clothes made of what looked like a high-quality material. His hair was blond, but the lustre to it was odd.

When Astaroth took a seat in the remaining chair, the man looked at him. His golden eyes locked on his own, with an intensity that almost gave him vertigo.

Within a mere moment, Astaroth already knew who this was, as this stare was not something he could forget. The slit golden eyes peered directly into his soul, as a powerful, invasive scan washed over him.

Also assaulting Astaroth was a mighty aura, one that resembled the red dragon they had slain a few days prior.

Astaroth was only under his pressure for a few seconds, but he was already sweating buckets. But his stubbornness didn't allow him to take his eyes away.

He withheld the gaze until the man before him averted his eyes. Astaroth felt the pressure immediately disappear as he started panting.

"Not bad, for a young mortal," the man said, looking back at Euclesias.

"Yes, yes. Indeed, he has great potential."

"Was that just a test?" Astaroth asked, palling.

It was Master Eustas that answered.

"Ahh, yes. Pardon his roughness. You see, lord Aurexiar isn't often in contact with our kind. He prefers to stay isolated inside his lair, at the peak of the mountain."

"The pressure you exerted... You are a dragon, aren't you?"

"Mind the way you address me, mortal."

"Ahh yes. My apologies, lord Aurexiar."

"Excuse his lack of manners, lord Aurexiar. He is still young and has much to learn."

After a moment of silence, the human-formed dragon nodded his head.

Astaroth bowed his in gratefulness.

"I would also like to apologize for provoking one of your kin, leading to his death."

"Think nothing of it," the man answered, not even batting an eye.

His answer slightly surprised Astaroth. Did the dragon not resent him?

"To answer your silent question, young Astaroth, dragons are very solitary. They don't socialize or befriend their kind as much as we do. And by the looks of it, that one was not a friend of his."

Astaroth nodded his head, absorbing the information.

"But remember this. You shouldn't assume that they are all like this. You could also accrue the hatred of another dragon if you killed its mated partner. And you don't want to be hunted down by an angered dragon."

Astaroth gulped, nodding his head again.

"Let us move on to the purpose of my presence here. I would like to return to my lair as soon as possible. It is too noisy to my liking down here."

"Ahh, yes. My apologies lord Aurexiar," the guild master said, nodding lightly to the dragon.

Then he turned his head over to Astaroth.

"Your presence, or lack of, in this situation, was greatly disapproved by the noble faction on the day of the reward ceremony. They have a bone to pick with you now."

"I apologize for that, guild master. I was hospitalized in my world, and could not make it."

The dragon frowned at his statement, but said nothing.

"It's too late to apologize now. Just be wary of the nobles in the future. They tried rescinding your right to a reward at the ceremony, but lord Aurexiar held them accountable."

Astaroth turned his head to the dragon, thanking him. Aurexiar only nodded in response.

"Since you weren't there to choose your reward, lord Aurexiar picked for you. I believe what he chose for you will be greatly appreciated."

The dragon materialized a strange shortsword and deposited it on the desk before Astaroth. Astaroth looked at the weapon curiously before looking at the guild master and dragon.

Both men nodded their heads, signalling he could take it.

So he did, scanning it at the same time. His jaw dropped.

'This... This is!'

Chapter 242 Ad Astra

Ad Astra (Short sword form):

Grade: Artifact

Attack Power: ???

Durability: ∞

Special Ability: ???

Description: Little is known of this ancient-era weapon.

Attunement required.

Astaroth's mind almost exploded.

'An artifact!'

His head turned to the dragon in human form.

"Lord Aurexiar. This gift is worth so much. Are you sure I can have it?"

"Young mortal, this isn't a gift. It is your reward for slaying a threat to the kingdom. And the only reason I picked out this one was that no one else present could have wielded it."

Astaroth frowned.

"What do you mean?"

"He means no one was compatible to start with. This weapon is ancient and has been lost for a long time. But it isn't something anyone can wield."

The guild master was staring at the weapon. Even though he couldn't wield it, he had a powerful urge to take it and hide it somewhere safe.

An artifact weapon was more than just a weapon, most times. Anyone wielding this would become exponentially powerful.

But the old man knew better than to cross the dragon sitting across the desk from him. Aurexiar was already staring at him with an unflinching gaze.

Astaroth tried equipping the weapon directly, but an error message popped up.

Weapon cannot be equipped yet. Attunement required.

He frowned again.

"Um. Excuse me. I can't equip this weapon. It says I must attune to it."

Astaroth's words snapped Euclesias away from his greed.

"Ahh, yes. Artifacts must always be attuned to their users. This binds the user and the artifact, so that no one can steal it so long as the wielder is alive."

"Okay. And how does one attune to an artifact?"

The dragon was the one to respond.

"You need to be in a place that is assuredly safe before you attempt it. Then you must reach out to the weapon with your soul to establish a bond. The process leaves you vulnerable to any outside intervention."

"Isn't here sa—"

"No. Someplace else. A place where you are sure you won't be bothered."

The insistence from the dragon almost scared Astaroth. But he could understand why he was being so assistant.

Astaroth could feel the greed oozing off the guild master. He knew nothing would happen for now, since the dragon was still here, but what of after?

Even if the guild master had protected him once, and given him political backing, that didn't mean he was a trusted friend yet. And greed was a nasty sin.

He decided to wait until he was in the inn room to attune. The inn rooms automatically locked when players closed them, meaning they were safe.

Astaroth stored the weapon in his inventory for now. Carrying it in the open would be asking for trouble.

When the dragon saw the weapon disappear, he rose from his seat.

"My business here is done. I will now go back to my lair. Good luck, young mortal."

Astaroth nodded as a flash of light enveloped the man, making him disappear.

Astaroth turned to face the guild master.

"I will take my leave as well, guild master. Thank you for arranging this meeting for me."

"It was my duty," the old man responded, his gaze slightly disappointed.

Astaroth bolted out of the room, closing the door behind him. He then immediately headed to the inn, messaging Phoenix and Violette on the way there.

'If you need me, I will be in my inn room. I have something to do that requires me to be safe and alone. If you aren't done with your quest when I'm done, I will join you then.'

The two girls responded shortly after, with Phoenix asking him what he had to do. Astaroth replied it was a secret.

He would prefer to show her once he was done, then spoil her the surprise already. As he reached the inn, a player that had seen him enter the side part of the adventurer's guild saw him.

The player, an adolescent, probably sixteen years old, walked in front of Astaroth, trying to block his path.

"Hey, you! How did you enter that blocked zone? Tell me, please!"

"Bug off, kid. I'm busy."

The player was angered at being called a kid and pulled out his weapon.

"Just tell me and I'll leave you alone. If you don't, I'll just PK you until you do."

He said the last phrase with a murderous grin. But Astaroth was far from impressed.

But before Astaroth could take out his weapon to teach the punk a lesson, someone else intervened.

A nearby patrolling soldier pushed the player down to the ground, holding him down with his shield. His comrades rapidly came to help as they arrested him.

"You are under arrest for threatening a Knight of Sunpeak. Resist and we will strike you down!"

Astaroth almost laughed at the turn of events.

'I guess this title has some benefits, at least.'

He nodded to the guards, who were now cuffing the player. The player wasn't resisting much, since he was scared of being banned from Sunpeak after being killed.

Losing a level scared him less than the loss of access to a major city. He stared at the leaving Astaroth with an angry gaze, as he was taken the other way, towards the prison.

Prison for players was bad. They couldn't teleport out or log out to be transported away. Even if they logged out, their body was still stuck in the cell, until their sentence was served.

This meant a tremendous loss of time for most, and sometimes even resulted in more trouble for others.

Some players acted up while in prison, taking even more time to get out, or straight up getting killed by other inmates.

But some rumours spread that going to prison many times unlocked other factions for players. Factions that generally ended up having you wanted by the law.

But right now, that wasn't important for Astaroth. He reached the inn he had a room at and headed upstairs.

As soon as the door locked behind him, he sat in the middle of the room.

'Time to see what this weapon is all about.'

He grinned manically as he stretched his soul out to the weapon. When he contacted it, he felt himself get sucked into the weapon.

He opened his eyes to a dark surrounding.

"Where am I this time?"

Chapter 243 The Next Phase

In another of the five cities of the Alliance, Aravelle; Windswept Kingdom

Another player was currently standing at the gates of the palace of Aravelle. This player was named Lancelot Pendragon.

His class was Swordsman, but he considered himself more of a Knight than a Swordsman. He liked to portray himself as a virtuous man and played video games as such.

In past games, it often led him into unfavourable situations, but that never changed his gameplay. In New Eden, it had yet to lead him into trouble.

He attributed this to where he had put his two starter points when he created his character. Lancelot played as a human, since the other races attracted him less.

He was a young man that liked to keep his appearance well-maintained, but didn't like to be too frivolous or flashy. This was reflected in his character's well-maintained short beard and shoulder-length hair.

Lancelot had dropped both his starting points in luck, and it had yet to lead him astray. He had already added an extra two points to this, making his total luck four.

This led to more and more fortunate encounters and situations that eventually led to where he was now. A royal guard eventually fetched him and escorted him inside.

He was escorted to the king, to be given a rank and title in Aravelle, for all his good deeds and excellent reputation. The nobles of the kingdom had pushed for this, as having an abnormal on their side would benefit them in the long run.

The military branch of Aravelle had already started recruiting some abnormals and giving them ranks. It was easy to see that this would become an increasing trend, as the abnormals became more and more powerful.

After a long and flashy ceremony, Lancelot was given the rank of Baron, and the title: The Juste. A world announcement resounded in the skies of New Eden.

Congratulations to the player Lancelot Pendragon on being the first player to attain a rank of nobility. This rank and the title accompanying it have granted him the reputation to reach the next phase of life in New Eden. Player Lancelot Pendragon is now the first player to reach the grade: Special!

Players across the world were in an uproar. They finally knew what reputation did!

But the uproar was only starting.

Inside the city of Garome; Kingdom of Garoma

Another player was currently sneaking into the palace of a smaller kingdom to the east of Aravelle. This player was named Shadow Scourge.

He was a player amassing infamy in this city by stealing and killing anyone and everyone he disliked. His class was Rogue, with a subclass Assassin.

All his deeds had brought him the attention of the underground world of New Eden, and a thieves' guild rapidly hired him. Accruing more notoriety eventually led him to get a quest from them.

One that he could hardly refuse, due to all the rewards it promised. Slay the king of Garoma.

Of course, he knew kings had legendary grades, mostly, but some smaller kingdoms had rare-grade kings. A kingdom the size of Garoma, for example.

He also knew he didn't have the damage needed to slay a king fast enough to get out after the deed. But he had a secret weapon.

The same secret weapon that had enabled him to kill many strong NPCs already. Shadow Scourge was a toxicologist in the real world.

He worked for the CDC in Brazil, and he specialized in natural poisons. When he started playing New Eden, he picked the race Elf, because he would most likely start in a forest, and that was the best place for him.

Being in a game, he decided he didn't want to be the goody two shoes he always was, and started doing evil deeds. He discovered so many new poisonous plants in the Elven forests; he felt euphoria.

This made him choose this class and subclass, and used his real-world knowledge to become a notorious man. And here he was now.

The daggers in his back were always coated in new versions of poisons that he created, and the one he had coated them with right now was his most powerful to date.

He knew the poison was a fast-acting one, and that he only needed one slight cut to make it take effect. He slipped in the shadows across the palace until he reached a closed door.

Across that door, his target was resting from a long court session. Shadow Scourge picked the door, before entering quietly.

He made his way to his unknowing target before quickly making a slash at the back of his neck. His dagger barely dug through the skin, but that was already enough.

The veins around the cut were already blackening at a visible pace. The king screamed for help, but before his guards could make it inside the room, Shadow Scourge had already vanished.

As he fled, the Elf saw the world announcement in the skies and grinned.

'I will be next!'

A few hours later, albeit with the healers trying to maintain the king's life as they searched for the poison's cure, he breathed his last breath.

As soon as he died, another world announcement shook the player base around the world.

Congratulations to player Shadow Scourge for attaining the Infamy threshold for passing to the next phase of living. Shadow Scourge is awarded the title Kingslayer. His misdeeds shall be talked about across the world!

The players that had just started calming down from the previous announcement went into a frenzy again. This was monumental news.

If a player didn't need to be good to achieve the Special grade, then all those evil players only had to redouble their efforts to reach it too.

This came with a wave of NPCs dying and kingdoms all over the world to tighten their security. The adventurer's guild everywhere in New Eden started handing out bounties on the nefarious players.

Khalor, who was quietly farming Exp for himself and his undead army, saw the two announcements and freaked out.

"No! No no no! This is bad! Players will all start fighting with each other. Someone will soon reach the level fifty bar. I need to hurry! Fuck!"

He was furious. This messed up all his plans.

But the worst was yet to come.

Chapter 244 Remnants Of A Past Long Forgotten

Meanwhile, inside Ad Astra

Astaroth was walking around in the darkness for a bit. He kept feeling this ominous presence brush against his senses.

He knew he was in some kind of pocket of space, because he still had access to all his skills and spells, but something greyed all his communication functions out.

After walking for what felt like half an hour, he finally hit an invisible wall. He put his hand against it and followed it down, trying to find something in there.

But after following it for a while, he wound up in a dimly lit cave tunnel. He was getting confused, but he kept walking.

The ominous presence kept brushing against his senses, the interval getting shorter each time.

The cave tunnel suddenly started widening into a large room. Sitting in the middle of the room was a slim figure.

All around this slim figure were bodies strewn about, blood dried around them. The bodies were almost all killed in the same manner.

Some sort of jagged blade had ripped their throat out. But the person sitting in the middle of the room had a sword in his hands, with a straight blade.

Astaroth started getting closer to the figure until it suddenly vanished from the center of the room. Astaroth's senses screamed danger as he rapidly equipped his shield, blocking a strike coming from behind him.

Now that he was closer, Astaroth could see the man's traits better. His skin was ashen gray, and his ears were pointy.

"You're an Ash Elf!" the man exclaimed, also seeing Astaroth traits.

"So are you. Why are you attacking me?"

"I thought you were another intruder. I've been fighting them off for so long that I lost track."

"Where are we?" Astaroth asked.

The question threw the man off.

"What do you mean? You found me, so you must know where we are."

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, buddy, but I do not know where we are. I started attuning to my new weapon and ended up here."

That's when Astaroth noticed the blade in the man's hand. It was a short sword, strangely identical to the one he was trying to attune to.

"Then you must have been teleported here. The way out is that way. I need to stay here and keep guarding."

When Astaroth looked to where the man was pointing, he sighed. The Ash Elf was pointing from where he had come.

He chose not to tell the truth to the man just yet.

"What are you guarding, if I may ask?"

"This sword," the man said, lifting his sword.

"Why are you guarding it?"

"Why? Because the forest Elves are trying to steal it to cut our power. This is common knowledge, boy. Do you live under a rock?"

"The Elves? Why would they want a sword?"

"Are you perhaps retarded? This sword is the Ad Astra. The weapon our nascent kingdom spirit produced to help us fight off the Elves. They are trying to exterminate us, so this sword is an obstacle to them."

"Then why are you here, instead of fighting on the front lines?"

Astaroth had caught on to what was happening. The weapon had most likely stored a copy of the man inside it to preserve its history.

This man had been long dead. The war he was talking about was a millennium ago.

"I'm here because I slew a few of the Elves' commanding officers. This should buy our armies some time to retaliate. But now the Elves are hunting me down like a dog. I can't go back home and risk everyone's lives."

The Ash Elf headed back to the center of the cave, sitting back down. He was looking in the direction Astaroth had come, his eyes like a falcon's.

Astaroth sat in front of him.

"What's your name, sir?"

The man hesitated for a moment before replying.

"Kela'ra."

"Kela'ra, how long have you been here?"

Astaroth wanted to be gentle with the man, given he had been dead for so long. The good part was that at least he had good news for him.

"I don't know, I told you I lost track of time. I can't even get a good night's rest, with all these assassins sent to take me down."

The bodies around the two of them suddenly started vanishing.

'The cycle is repeating.'

A few moments after the last body disappeared, the man's ears perked up.

"Here they come. Step back if you don't want to get hurt. These are trained assassins."

Astaroth did as he was ordered. He could have joined the fight, but he wanted to see the man fight.

It would give him a wonderful insight into how strong his new weapon was. A few moments went by, as the sound of footsteps got louder.

Until men started flowing into the cave, dashing at Kela'ra, one after another. Kela'ra swung his sword to his side.

What happened after that, astonished Astaroth. The blade of the sword started separating into fragments, with some kind of energy filament holding every piece together.

When Kela'ra swung next, the pieces of the sword all arced in a smooth motion, whipping around, slashing everything it hit.

It was like Astaroth was watching a sword ballet, with the maestro of it all swinging his arm to put the dancers into motion. The assassins fell one by one, their throats sliced cleanly open.

It took a few minutes before the last assassin came in, and Kela'ra slayed him. After waiting for any other opponent, the Ash Elf walked back to the center of the room.

Astaroth now knew how strong the artifact was. He couldn't scan Kela'ra, but he could easily guess the man wasn't ultimately powerful, since he could follow his movements and block his attack earlier.

The speed at which he took down all these assassins could only mean one thing. The weapon was extremely powerful.

Astaroth went back to sit in front of the Ash Elf.

"You're still alive? Good. you should go back outside, while there is no one to see you leave. Return to the kingdom and help the war effort for our independence."

"Kela'ra."

"What?"

"I have something to tell you."

"Speak, boy."

Chapter 245 Trying To Reason

Astaroth took a long, deep breath before he started talking again.

"The war you talk about. How long has it been going on?"

"I don't know how long I have been here, but when I went into hiding, it had already been going on for years. Why?"

"Do you remember what year it was?"

"Yes. It was the year 286 after the final demon wave."

"And the Elves kept you as war slaves for so long before our people rebelled?"

"Did the elders teach you nothing? Why are you asking all these questions?"

Kela'ra was getting antsy. Almost like he thought Astaroth was a spy or something like that.

Astaroth sighed loudly.

"I'm just trying to establish your timeline, Kela'ra. I think I know what is happening to you."

"I know what's happening to me! I'm hiding from the Elven assassins."

"No, Kela'ra. This is all a memory, that you are reliving in a loop."

"What nonsense are you saying? You aren't making sense!"

The surrounding bodies started vanishing again, and Astaroth pointed at them.

"Look, Kela'ra. The bodies are disappearing. And soon you'll start picking up the sound of people running in this direction."

Right on cue, the Ash Elf heard some footsteps slowly getting closer.

"Get back, they are coming again!"

"Kela'ra, listen to me! This isn't real!"

"I said stand back, unless you wanna get killed! These are trained assassins!"

The man refused to listen to Astaroth. The latter was wondering if he could even get him to understand.

But if he couldn't get him to listen, then how would he complete whatever task he had to do to attune to Ad Astra? He needed Kela'ra to tell him, of that Astaroth was sure.

Astaroth examined how the assassins came into the cavern. It was the exact same way as the time before.

'Maybe I need to help him?'

Astaroth pulled out his shortbow, nocking an arrow. When he aimed at the assassins, not one of them reacted to his presence.

He loosed his arrow, letting it fly to the assassin nearest him. But where he expected a perfect hit, something else happened.

The arrow flew through the assassin, unimpeded, like he wasn't there at all. It hit the wall behind him, breaking on impact with the stone.

'They really aren't there. Then how did Kela'ra land a hit on me earlier?'

While he thought of this, he noticed Kela'ra was doing the same moves as last time, his attacks a perfect copy of the last fight.

'This really is a loop. But how do I get him out of it?'

He had an idea, but it required getting into harm's way. If Astaroth could show Kela'ra that the assassins were not real, only a figment of his memories, then he might be able to snap him out of it.

'Here goes nothing!'

Astaroth dove forward, pulling out his shield again, and blocking the incoming slash from Kela'ra's weapon. As he did, it launched him through one assassin, passing right through him.

As he passed through, the assassin puffed out of existence like it was just a cloud of mist. Astaroth impacted the cavern wall with a dull thud, and his lungs emptied of all their air.

By the time he was back on his feet, Kela'ra was done killing the remaining assassins. But he seemed angry about something.

As he stomped his way to Astaroth, weapon still drawn, Astaroth had a bad feeling.

"You protected one of them! You must be a spy!"

"What? No! Kela'ra, I'm trying to show you the truth!"

"Stop lying to me, traitor! How could you align yourself to the elves that kept our people enslaved for centuries?!"

Kela'ra slashed his weapon forward, the whip sword flying at Astaroth's face. Astaroth swiftly deflected the blades with his shield before pulling his falcata.

"Kela'ra, listen to me! Count the bodies, you'll notice one is missing!"

"Shut up! That only means you helped one escape!"

The man slashed out at Astaroth again. This time, the blade arced around in a circular motion.

Astaroth knew he couldn't block it, so he dove to the side instead, barely dodging the blow.

Astaroth could have melded with any of his spirit companions by now, but since he was trying to convince the man, and not fight him, he was holding back. But that was playing against him.

Even though he could follow Kela'ra and react to his attacks, anytime he blocked one or got hit, he took damage. And the damage numbers were not small.

His health bar was rapidly depleting, and Astaroth eventually had no choice but to get serious. He melded with White.

"Enough!" he yelled, as his hair changed colours.

"If you don't want to listen to me, then I'll beat you into submission until you do!"

Astaroth darted forward, the stone under his feet exploding with the force of the dash. His sudden increase in power surprised Kela'ra, but the latter was a trained soldier.

He rapidly readjusted his fighting tactic, falling on the defensive. Astaroth attacked relentlessly, but couldn't land a decent hit.

The man was constantly parrying, deflecting, and blocking his blows. It was easy to see this wasn't the Ash Elf's first fight against a stronger opponent.

The calmness on Kela'ra's face also showed Astaroth that he wasn't scared of losing. And it was clear as day why.

Even though Astaroth was overpowering him, after five minutes of fighting, his meld going on cooldown for White, he still hadn't taken him down.

Astaroth immediately melded with Morpheus next, trying to go for the debuff tactic. But it didn't seem to be any more efficient.

Astaroth was using hypnosis every time he could, but the effect just didn't activate. As for the dissonance effect, even though Astaroth could see the token under Kela'ra's name when he scanned him, it didn't seem to affect him at all.

Of course, it wasn't that there was no effect. Kela'ra had already noticed the difference in strike locations from where he saw Astaroth, and where the attacks hit.

But his highly trained battle instincts had already corrected the issue for him, using prediction instead of his eyes. And since his weapon had such a wide reach, he could keep Astaroth at bay.

After another five minutes of combat, the situation was still at a stalemate.

'Guess I'll have to go all in.'

Chapter 246 Getting Through

When Kela'ra saw the form of Astaroth change for the third time, his mind was in disarray.

'Is this kid just an illusion? Was he conjured by an elf mage to tire me out?'

It had been so long since he was hiding, it wouldn't be the first time they used such a ploy against him. He wasn't sure if he should keep fighting or find the source of the illusion.

But when Astaroth's next attack connected, he immediately dismissed the illusion theory. Astaroth started shooting firebolts, icicles, stone bullets, and wind blades in quick succession.

The attacks connected with Kela'ra's weapon, and he knew by the pressure that these spells weren't fake. And it was well known that illusions couldn't fire proper spells.

This marked Astaroth as a very real opponent, and it terrified him. His mind immediately went to rogue experiments.

He had heard about Elven researchers taking ash elf slaves to experiment with wild magic on them. But to produce such a monstrous entity as this one was beyond unimaginable.

"Worry not, boy. I will slay you to end the misery the elves put you through!"

Astaroth wondered what the man was rambling about, but he had no time to indulge his fantasies. He could hear footsteps in the cave tunnel behind him.

If Kela'ra got stuck in his memory once again, he would have wasted all this effort for nothing. But then, Astaroth got an idea.

What if he forced the man to see the illusion for what it was?

Astaroth grinned as he thought of a way to do that. He kept launching spells at Kela'ra, slowly backing him into a wall.

Then, he fired a full salvo of fire bolts, covering the full area before him. This hid him from Kela'ra's sight.

He dashed forward, following the spells to get closer. When Kela'ra batted the magic away, it was already too late.

Astaroth latched onto him like a constrictor snake, locking all his limbs in place with his own. This dropped the two men to the ground.

Astaroth rolled into a position where Kela'ra would look at the cave entrance.

The assassins came rushing in at that same time. Kela'ra almost froze in terror.

"Release me, or they'll kill us both!"

"Shut up and look!"

As he shouted that, what Astaroth had been hoping for happened.

The assassins started fighting, dodging and attacking, something that wasn't there. Kela'ra's traits morphed into confusion.

"What is happening...?"

"They are fighting you. Or at least, you remember them doing that. Kela'ra. This is a memory and they are acting according to it."

"This makes no sense. Why would I have a memory of something that hasn't happened yet?"

"This has already happened. A long time ago. Kela'ra, I think you died in this cave, protecting the Ad Astra."

"Nonsense! I'm alive, right here in your grasp!"

"Remember what I told you when I arrived?"

"You said something teleported you here, while attuning to a weapon."

"Yes. I was teleported here while attuning to Ad Astra."

"That's impossible. The Ad Astra can only have one master. I would need to be dead for another to attune to it."

"That is what I'm saying. Kela'ra. You have been dead for more than a millennium."

Suddenly, the man stopped squirming in his grasp. Astaroth noticed the assassins were also fading into nothingness.

Astaroth knew he had made him see the truth. He released the Ash Elf, standing back up.

Kela'ra sat there, contemplating the cavern, trying to remember something he couldn't see. He then looked back at Astaroth.

"If what you say is true, then how did you find the Ad Astra?"

"I was not the one to find it. It ended up in the treasure hoard of a dragon. I slew the dragon in defence of a kingdom I'm staying in, with others like me."

Kela'ra looked at him in silence.

"Is the war really over?"

"Yes. We won."

"Are the Ash Elves living in peace now?"

"Almost. Sadly, the current king wants to send the kingdom down on the warpath again."

"What a foolish man."

"I agree."

"Did we eliminate our enemies, or did they surrender?"

"Neither. We started winning the war after a man killed many officers in the chain of command, I'm guessing you, and the Elves accepted the signing of a peace treaty."

Kela'ra looked satisfied at Astaroth's answers.

"Then I guess I can finally rest in peace. If the Ad Astra accepts you as its new master, then it is all yours."

"Thank you. I hope your rest is all you hoped for in life."

"One last thing, young ash elf."

"What is it?"

"Can you find where I died and give me a proper burial?"

After saying that, a quest notification popped in front of Astaroth's eyes.

Quest: Hero of old.

Description: You have spoken to a remnant of a hero of olden times. His memory is all that remains of his fight. Help find his remains and lay him to rest properly.

Objectives:

Find where the hero died

Lay him to rest honourably

Rewards:

Reputation with Kela'ra and his descendants +5000

Reputation with the kingdom of Ash Elves +5000

Title: Historian

Do you accept the quest? Yes / No.

Astaroth didn't hesitate. He tapped the accept button and smiled at Kela'ra.

"I promise I will try. I cannot guarantee you I will find the place of your death, but if I do, I will give you the burial you deserved."

"Thank you. That is all I ask for."

As he said those last words, his body started slowly vanishing. As he vanished, so did the surrounding cave.

Astaroth reopened his eyes, sitting inside his inn room. On his lap was the Ad Astra.

But something was different about it. He could feel the tether between himself and the weapon.

He could also feel a slow, pulsing energy emanating from the dark orb in the pommel. He hadn't taken the time to observe the weapon previously, but as he did, he noticed the pommel's jewel was special.

The orb was dark like the night, but when he looked closely, he could see specks of light swirling around inside it. He recognized the night sky, as he had looked at it enough times in the past.

It was the night sky that flew over the kingdom of the Ash Elves. A sense of nostalgia washed over him.

He knew the weapon had been used to fight for the freedom of looking at that same night sky in peace.

Astaroth smiled as he scanned the weapon, to figure out what was different this time.

His jaw dropped when he saw the new stats.

"Holy fuck!"

Chapter 247 First Signs Of Aggression

Ad Astra (Shortsword form):

Grade: Artifact

Attack Power: (Level 47) 1880 (All stats)

Durability:

Special Ability: This weapon doesn't have a fixed form. It can be infused with mana to change shape. Mana Cost: 1000 MP. No cooldown.

Description: This weapon originates from the start of the Ash Elf rebellion. It was used to fight for the freedom of future generations. Its power is enough to make even the strongest of people greedy for it.

Attuned.

The damage this weapon would give him was immense compared to any other weapon he had seen yet. And if he read correctly, the weapon would only get stronger as he did.

'Artifacts are way too powerful!'

Now he understood why the guild master was eying it like that. Then again, he didn't think the man could attune to it.

While he stared at his new weapon in adoration, his missed notification icon started blinking. He assumed they were messages and tapped on the icon to see who it was.

A series of notifications assaulted his eyes and ears, as he saw belatedly what every other player had already seen in the sky. His eyes widened.

"What the fuck! So that's what reputation is used for."

He knew there would be a race for any quests that gave reputation as a reward from now on. But as he continued to read the notifications, his eyes darkened.

The second world notification sent chills down his spine. He knew many players in all online games ever liked to play the evil side. This notification gave them a reason to start wantonly killing NPCs.

But Astaroth always felt like NPCs weren't just bars of code. And now, with mana leaking into their world, he was even more certain this wasn't simply a game.

Khalor had been vague, saying the worlds weren't worlds but a single world. But that meant nothing to Astaroth.

The only way it could make sense was if something connected their worlds in some way. But then he realized something.

Mana! If mana was leaking into their world, didn't that mean they were slowly connecting?

It couldn't be a coincidence that there was suddenly mana appearing in their world. It had to hold some significance.

If he took Khalor's words literally, then that meant that whatever was separating their worlds was slowly dissolving. But that didn't explain the demon invasion Khalor was so scared about.

'I guess only time will tell. In the meantime, I better be careful of evil players that start to roam New Eden.'

He finally came upon another notification that angered him.

Guild 'Aces High' has started 'Guild War' mode. Starting now, the guild may attack any opposing guild and claim resources from them. Any guild they attack and their allies can also attack their guild base. Good luck, Aces High!

'That fucking moron!'

Even though Astaroth wasn't too keen on holding back his levelling, he had agreed with Khalor to hold out on reaching level fifty, so that more players could reach it or close to it.

But with what Azamus had just done, the levels of many players would grow, at the expense of many other players. This could mean a premature reaching of the first level fifty player.

As he silently cursed the stupid gnome player, his message notification pinged. He opened it and saw a new message from Phoenix, alongside a slew of others.

The most recent one read this.

'Astaroth! You need to respond! Violette and I are being chased down by players!'

His heart dropped.

He hurriedly responded.

'Where are you? I'm coming to you.'

'Finally, I reached you! We are running around in the mountains outside the eastern gate. About twenty players are chasing us, and they aren't average players.'

'Did you scan them?'

'Yes. We scanned them when they first approached us. Violette and I were doing a hunting quest in the mountains, and they surrounded us while we were busy fighting.'

'Who are they and what do they want?'

Astaroth was already running towards the east gate as soon as she told him their direction. There was no time to lose.

Even if Violette and Phoenix were talented and extremely powerful, a party of twenty players, ones with actual talent, could take them on.

'I scanned one of them when he approached us. They ordered us to join their guild. When we refused, they started attacking. I barely torched us a path through their encirclement.'

Astaroth had a bad feeling about this already.

'What guild?'

'Aces High.'

Anger clouded his face. Azamus had gone too far now.

He could guess that this forced recruitment was to bolster his troops now that they were in 'Guild War' mode. But to attack his friends?

That was a limit the man should never have crossed. Astaroth kicked himself into gear.

He melded with Morpheus, sprouting wings on his back, and launched into the sky. The guards that saw him pass over the gate as a winged missile jumped in fright.

They almost opened fire on him with crossbows, but a guard recognized his armour and told them to hold fire. Astaroth was gone from their sights faster than he appeared, disappearing into the mountains ahead.

He flew incredibly fast, creating a wind funnel behind himself, as players farming the mountain monsters saw him pass overhead. Some players were stupid enough to attack him, but no one hit him.

Astaroth didn't know how far into the mountains Phoenix and Violette were, but with how strong they were, he could guess they had pushed further than most.

That also told him that the players following them were skilled enough to fight their way into the same zones. As he zigzagged through the mountains, he crossed paths with a group of stone apes.

They tried throwing rocks at him, but he didn't have time to play with them.

"Out of my way, stupid monkeys!"

Astaroth pulled out Ad Astra, pushing a thousand mana points into it, and morphing it into the sword whip he had seen Kela'ra use. Although he wasn't used to such a weapon, he was using it so crudely that it wouldn't matter.

He spun it in front of him, sending the blade shards pushing through the stone apes' bodies as they splattered apart. His damage was high enough to one-shot them with normal attacks right now.

When he flew out of that canyon, all that was left were bloody walls and pieces of apes strewn about.

He flew upwards, trying to catch sight of his friends. He sighted them three mountains further, climbing up a plateau, as five other players chased them.

'Where are the others?'

As the girls reached the plateau, the other fifteen players Phoenix had talked about popped up from the other side of it. They were now surrounded.

"Not on my watch!"

Chapter 248 Deciding Fight

Astaroth dived toward the flat mountain plateau, gaining speed as the wind whistled in his ears. His melding was almost over, and he needed to reach the plateau before it ran out.

With a scream of rage, he pushed out almost all of his remaining mana to his feet, generating wind magic in a straight jet. The wind shot out behind him, pushing him forward with incredible momentum.

When he was almost at the plateau, his meld ran out, and he swapped to melding with White. The massive increase in stats would at least ensure his survival, as he collided with the stone ground like an air-to-ground missile.

He landed near Phoenix, cratering the plateau as he did. His eyes were bloodshot with rage.

He immediately used Alpha's Howl, sending almost half of the players into a fear effect.

"I'm going to kill you all!"

He summoned Genie back with his mind, adding an extra ally to the fray.

He did not want to waste time with pleasantries. Even if the players tried to threaten him into joining Aces High, he would refuse them.

So instead of having to blabber with them, he picked the easy way out. Kill the lot and be done with it.

As he was about to dash into the line of players before him, something caught his attention from the side. An enemy player was falling forward, his head flying up into the air.

Behind that player, a small-sized human was standing. His hand was extended outward, with shearing wind gales brushing off of it.

Astaroth started laughing.

"You're like your grandfather. You like to make an entrance!"

"Mr. Astaroth! You recognize me!"

Standing there, over the vanishing body of a dead player, was the kid Astaroth had met in the private hospital of Jack Boudreau.

Astaroth quickly scanned him to have his player name. He didn't want to call him by his real name in the game. That was bad player etiquette.

Astaroth only retained two things from the brief scan. The name Gale, and the class Arcane Monk. While he was talking to the kid, the leader of this bunch of scum snapped at his gawking men.

"Don't just stand there! Kill them!"

Astaroth's head snapped back to the man, now knowing who was responsible for this. Therefore, the one who needed to pay.

Astaroth immediately invited Gale to the party after receiving the invitation from Phoenix. Phoenix said nothing, since she trusted Astaroth.

In party chat, Astaroth typed this, 'Kill everyone, but keep the loud one alive. He's mine.'

With the odds now five against twenty, it seemed fairer. Although, for probable onlookers, the odds would look skewed in the five's favour.

With Astaroth here to relieve the frontline pressure, and Gale doing a part of it too, as a hit-and-run melee, Phoenix and Violette could unleash their anger at their pursuers.

Genie was picking off easy kills, diving in and out of combat.

Running wasn't Phoenix's favoured solution, but the tables had now turned. In a matter of minutes, the plateau looked like a volcano had erupted, only to be contained by an ice age.

Half the plateau was burning, lava pooling at certain places, and on the other half, a permanent blizzard was raging, blowing icicles at the stray players that dared hunt them down.

Gale, who was still new to this trio, was shaking in his boots, and it wasn't because of the cold. He now understood why his grandfather kept telling him women were scary.

The rage the two girls in the party were displaying would make god cower in fear. Meanwhile, their main frontline, Astaroth, was running rampant among the players.

It was all over before his melding with White ended. They left only one enemy player standing, his feet frozen in place to keep him from fleeing.

Astaroth was walking towards the guy, his anger still flaring off of him as he stared at the man enough to peer into his soul. Big beads of sweat were rolling off the player's forehead.

"I'm sorry! Alright? I'm just following orders!"

"Whose orders was it to hunt down two fleeing girls, looking like a pack of rabid dogs?!"

The man gulped.

His orders were to invite everyone they crossed to Aces High, or scare them into not joining any guild at all. He had interpreted that as 'Kill them so they don't join anyone else.'

"The guild master was very clear about making sure the ones who refused didn't join other guilds."

"Good. The answer I wanted to hear."

"Please. Just let me go. I'll make sure no one in Aces High ever bothers you again!"

Astaroth was now standing right in front of the man. He kicked the ice holding the player down, destroying it, along with his ankles.

The man howled in pain.

Astaroth grabbed him by the throat, cutting his screams short. He lifted the guy before carrying him to the edge of the cliff-side.

"Please... Please don't kill me," the man squeezed out, his throat too constricted to talk clearly.

"Oh. I won't kill you. I wouldn't dare."

The man looked relieved for a microsecond before the grip around his throat clenched harder. He felt his body yank backward before jerking back upward.

Astaroth had thrown him into the air, hard enough that the player lifted for about thirty feet, before stalling. But his pain wasn't over.

Just as the player was about to scream, because his body was now falling freely to the ground, five hundred meters below, an icicle plunged into his throat.

Following right behind, a massive fireball the size of a miniature sun. The man didn't even have time to feel its heat as it disintegrated him.

Astaroth was already walking away from the ledge when it happened, not even looking at the man. He wasn't worth any more of his time.

"What now?" Phoenix asked.

"We're going back to Sunpeak."

"Are we going to forget this happened?"

"Most certainly not. We are going to the guild office. We make a guild and strike back. Azamus wants a war. I'll give him one."

Phoenix smiled at his attitude. That was the attitude of a pro player.

Violette was swinging on her feet a bit, humming to herself. She would join the guild even if he didn't ask.

Astaroth was like a brother to her, and she would follow him into hell at this point. She already had, according to many people.

As for Gale, he was about to walk away, a tinge of sadness on his face. His time playing with Astaroth had been so short, but he was too shy to ask to join them.

"Where are you going, kid? Don't you want to join us?"

The question immediately brought a smile to his face. He spun around, joy in his heart.

"Of course!"

Soon, the strongest guild in the world would be born, and it would hold this title for years to come.

Chapter 249 Easy Entry

They had gained a few levels from the massacre on the plateau, but not as much as Astaroth would have thought. A group of level thirty-five to level forty players, even in big numbers, were still not enough once divided into four ways to level up their high-level party.

The exponential Exp needed to level up slowed down the process massively. But he was determined to fix the issue soon.

As they walked back to Sunpeak, no one dared attack them. Some players had seen the action happening on the plateau, others even filming it with the streamer services available, and had warned the parties below.

This group of four and a wolf were not to be taken lightly. As they passed many groups, some players were brazen enough to scan Astaroth and his friends.

Even though it was impolite and a mark of hostility to most, the party had no time to waste with these bugs. They kept running forward.

Astaroth looked at the level rankings many times as they travelled, seeing a very noticeable fluctuation in rankings. Some of the higher-ranked players were suddenly dropping in levels, as others replaced them.

Many unfamiliar names appeared in the rankings, as they pushed the more popular powerful players down. It was easy to understand the PVP war Azamus had started, caused this.

Astaroth knew he had to do something about this fast. If he didn't, Aces High would have many players reach level fifty at the expense of other guilds, and it would affect the upcoming event.

Khalor had not been very insightful about what the event was, but he had stressed the fact that they would need the most level fifty and up players they could get.

As they kept running through the mountains, toward Sunpeak, Astaroth opened up the forums. He was looking for articles on guild wars.

He soon found what he wanted. Since many guilds were being attacked by Aces High, the information on guild wars was already flooding the net.

In one article, he found out how to end it. But it wouldn't be a minor feat.

The article stated that once a guild war was started, the guild base of both guilds would become flag points for the other. If one base was captured or destroyed by the other, the guild war ended for the losing party.

Many rewards came for the winning party; some materials from the losing guild's vault, all the gold stored in it, Exp rewards for the MVP players, and much more.

But one reward, in particular, explained why Azamus was so adamant about attacking as many guilds as he did. The losing guild had much to lose.

The system marked every player from the losing guild at the moment of loss. The mark taxed their Exp by ten percent for a week, sending it to the winning guild, to be stored in the vault.

The winners could take the Exp from the vault, at any given moment, given they had access to it, and use it to level up. And knowing Azamus, he would have locked the vault for anyone but him.

He was doing this to boost himself to the top of the rankings.

'Such a brutish method to become stronger.'

A good guild leader would use those points to boost their core members, making the guild stronger as a whole. But Astaroth knew Azamus was that kind of guild leader.

'ToB' had already proven that.

This gave an even greater reason to Astaroth to stop this madness. Khalor had once spoken to him about Azamus and how he had supposedly been in the past.

And the picture was not a pretty one. The man had used this same method, albeit after the event, to launch himself even higher and stomp other guilds into the ground.

Once his guild was head and shoulders above the others, he had oppressed every player not under his banner. It hadn't been good for the overall result.

Astaroth could understand why Khalor didn't want the same to happen. And he was willing to put himself into the line of fire to help prevent it.

Soon after seeing the posts that explained guild wars, Astaroth and his friends came out of the mountain range. They could now see Sunpeak in the distance.

Astaroth started reaching out to all his other friends, making sure they were safe on their end. I'die and Athena said they had a group of players approach them, but they intimidated them into backing off.

Silent Light said no one had approached him yet, but he was staying safely inside a city, just in case. Gulnur was playing with a bunch of new friends, and the group was large enough to scare away most undesired company.

Astaroth didn't bother asking Khalor, since he didn't think anyone was crazy enough to attack him. The safety of his friends reassured him, for now.

He explained to them what he was about to do and asked if they would like to join the guild once it was established. They all agreed.

Astaroth smiled as he closed his friend list. At least they would have some clout as a guild to start his plan.

He discussed his idea with Phoenix, since she was a better planner than him, and they bounced back and forth, coming up with different strategies. By the time they had the start of a plan, they reached the gates to Sunpeak.

Astaroth stopped in line, expecting to wait. But a guard soon walked toward him.

"Sire. Why are you waiting in line?"

"Huh? Don't I have to get identified?"

The guard looked at him in confusion.

"You are an honorary Knight of Sunpeak, sire. You need not wait with the masses to enter the city. And anyone accompanying you can enter alongside you."

Astaroth looked at him wide-eyed for a second before Phoenix elbowed him in the ribs.

Astaroth coughed lightly, stepping out of the line to walk toward the gates. Not a single guard stopped him, even saluting him as he passed.

'Huh. I guess this rank has some benefits, after all.'

They entered the city swiftly, heading to the guild registration building. It was time to get things into motion.

Chapter 250 Expanding Player Base

Constantine Levesque's office, EG Headquarters

Constantine was watching a live feed from inside the game, as she did every day, to keep herself appraised about events of note.

When she found something interesting, she would have the data logged and used as promotional material. She had already done so with many things ever since the game had come out.

Sometimes it was players discovering a new zone, with amazing vistas, or terrifying monsters. Other times, it was spontaneous events.

They had logged one such event, just the week before, when a dragon went rampant to the west of Sunpeak. That footage was already being edited by many marketing agents, to get it out as soon as possible.

This was in-game footage that could draw new players in like moths to a flame. Who wouldn't want to slay a dragon, after all?

And now Constantine was getting even more excited. A guild, led by one of the top players, had declared war upon all others, and the sheer amount of PVP going on was on a scale that she hadn't expected.

Instead of pinning the data and emailing her server managers, she directly called the director of marketing.

The ringtone resounded once before a screechy male voice answered the call.

"Yes, chairwoman? What Can I do for you today?"

"I know it's late, Vincent, so I will make this quick. There is a guild war happening right now in New Eden, and the scales are becoming bigger than larger than expected."

"Ahh, yes. Someone already appraised me of it."

"Good. I want you to broadcast on every platform you can as soon as possible. I want this to be live until it ends. Make sure you get the most combat action as you can."

"I thought you might ask this. I have already reached out to many net news platforms. Many of these have given us green light to use their platform for streaming. I just needed your authorization."

"Ahh, very good. This is why you have this job, Vincent. Get in touch with the geek squad. I want as much screen time as we can on this. Hire streamers that play the game if you need."

"I will get right on it, Ma'am. Anything else you need my services for?"

"One last thing. How is the progress on the other promotional material?"

"We are on the last rendition for the video, Ma'am. It will be ready when we pause the servers for the update."

"Good. That is all, then. Keep up your good work, Vincent."

"Thank you, Ma'am."

After hanging up on that call, Constantine looked back to her screen. She didn't like that the players had resolved to mass PVP to level up, since that was never the point of New Eden, but stronger players were still a good thing.

'Azamus is also a much easier person to control, too. I would prefer him, rather than Khalor,' Constantine thought.

Her screen shuffled between the many players she had marked ever since the game began. There were many of them, most of which she had marked during the tournament, a little while back.

But some other players were more recent additions. She could tell New Eden had reached a more diverse player base, as some players now joining were not youngsters or standard players.

She was seeing more and more tradecraft players, or merchants. She even occasionally found some martial arts teachers.

That last category surprised her the most. Martial arts teachers usually cared more about their training, body, and students than about playing video games.

But she was fine with it. She needed to get as many players as she could.

That had always been her aim. It didn't matter what circle of work they came from.

'It's going faster than I had expected. But this should still be within my worst-case scenario parameters.'

Back inside New Eden

Astaroth and his group had reached the guild administration building. They were currently standing in line for a desk.

The number of players swarming the place was insane. It was like standing in the middle of a swarm of bees on alert.

The situation easily explained the frenzy, but it was still annoying for Astaroth. Players kept bumping into him and his friends, and he could see it made the two younger ones uncomfortable.

A fight even broke out between two groups of players, as they argued about who was there first. Astaroth was about to lose his shit when a squad of guards in heavy armour entered the building.

The guards made quick work of the defendants, arresting them and taking them away. Some players that had been pushed and tossed from the altercation were cheering for the guards.

It soon came Astaroth's turn. Some dimwit tried squeezing himself in front of him, with a larger group following behind him.

"Thanks for keeping my spot, man!" the player exclaimed.

But before he could even turn himself to the counter, he caught fire. Phoenix contained the blaze to him, but the flames' heat was washing off all the nearby players.

The player turned to ashes in an instant, disappearing from his spot. Phoenix lowered her extended hand, her face like stone.

Before the players part of the burned man's group could even react, the squad of heavy guards entered the building again. The players in the other group smiled smugly, expecting the guards to arrest the woman that had burned their friend.

They were rapidly disillusioned when they noticed the guards walking towards them. Everyone heard the protests as the ten players were bundled up and brought away.

The young man at the counter bowed before Astaroth.

"I am terribly sorry for the wait, Sir Knight. And I also apologize for your friend having to dirty her hands. I will make sure we properly compensate you for the trouble."

"No need. I don't mind waiting and I doubt her actions bothered my friend."

Phoenix grinned at his statement, sending shivers down the man's spine.

"Very well then. In that case, I will make sure my service is enough compensation. What can I do for you today?"

"I am here to form a guild. But I would like to do this in a more... quiet environment, if possible."

"Of course, Sir Knight. Please follow me this way, to some private chambers."

While they were taken away, a tall woman looked at the small group from atop a balcony, with the eyes of a falcon. The woman walked away from the balcony, smiling to herself.

'An interesting guild is about to be born. I wonder how they will benefit the kingdom and the world.'

The woman disappeared into an office; the door shutting behind her.