

## **New Eden 281**

### Chapter 281 Opening The Treasury

The pair descended from the tree, Phoenix in Astaroth's arms, as they landed before the main entrance to it. The normal members had restricted access to the inside of the tree base, since most of it was the ancient palace.

For the players who wanted a place to stay inside the guild base, Athena had already started managing the construction of barracks.

For now, only Astaroth, Phoenix, and Athena had access to the furthest part of the tree palace. And Athena had not yet ventured into it, wanting to wait on the guild masters.

Phoenix messaged her, mentioning that they were about to open the guild treasury. Athena instantly replied that she was on her way.

By the time the pair made it to the door, the elf woman came running in, almost out of breath, but excitement covering her face. She had been holding back her urges to look inside.

I'die had outright refused to know, since he didn't want to fall prey to possible greed. As for Gulnur, he cared little, probably because of his rich upbringing.

"Are we ready to open this baby up?!" Athena asked, out of breath."

Astaroth laughed.

He walked to the doors, setting his hands on them. Pushing with all his might, the doors slowly slid inwards.

An underwhelming interior revealed itself. The three players expected a room filled with gold, equipment, and rare materials, but the room was almost empty. In the center, four pedestals were raised.

On these pedestals, one ring each, glistening in the artificial light. Athena and Phoenix seemed rather disappointed, but Astaroth's smile only widened.

He knew from meeting with the guardian of Sunpeak that spatial magic was something that existed. And by how the system had emphasized that their rewards were plentiful, and only finding these four rings instantly brought his mind to that.

"Well, this is anticlimactic," Athena said, her shoulders dropping.

Phoenix also looked dejected.

But Astaroth was already walking to the pedestals. As soon as he grabbed all the rings, his eyes widened, and he burst into laughter.

"Ahahaha! This is great! It's like it's my birthday in advance!"

Phoenix looked at him weirdly, walking towards him.

"Are you okay? Did you finally lose your mind?"

As she asked that, Astaroth spun around, throwing one ring toward her.

"See for yourself!"

Phoenix grabbed the ring and frowned. In her eyes, the name of the ring appeared.

**\*Ring of Storage\***

No description other than the name was available. But by the name alone, she could guess what it did.

"Storage rings? What's so great about that?"

She looked at Astaroth weirdly again, unsure why he was so excited.

"Not the rings. What's inside. Focus on the ring, and think of opening it like your inventory."N/nêw n0vel chap/ers are published o/n n0v/e/(lb)i(n.)co/m

Astaroth lobbed another one at Athena, while Phoenix focused on the one in her hand.

Athena deftly caught the ring, doing the same as Phoenix.

A moment later, both women started screeching excitedly.

In Phoenix's hand, was a ring containing gold. An ungodly amount of it.

When she focused on it, the menu for the inside of the ring opened, revealing its contents.

**\*Storage Ring\***

0/60 items slots taken

10 million gold pieces

Athena, on her side, had a ring containing materials for the base.

**\*Storage Ring\***

4/60 item slots taken

10,000 uncut lumber pieces

10,000 uncut stone blocks

1000 iron ingots

1 million food units

Phoenix was in heaven. They could use this gold for so many things, including buying equipment or bartering with other cities for services they still didn't have.

Athena, on her side, was amazed at all the materials. She had been sending players and NPCs to gather the materials for the construction of guild buildings.

They wouldn't need to do it to bolster their defences quickly, now. And the food units meant they could hire NPCs to help defend the fortress if they wanted to.

Astaroth had other plans for the food, though. He wanted to use the promise of food, shelter, and payment, to attract NPCs to the fortress, further pushing his plan of founding a city.

But he didn't want only Elves. He would need to send someone to all the cities of different races, and try to get them to come here.

If he could make a multicultural city like Sunpeak, then they would rise quickly in this world. Which was his intention.

He had guesses about what world reputation gave, basing his thoughts on what normal reputation gave. But for now, those were barely speculation.

For now, he was still looking at the other two rings in his hands. These he was even more happy to have.

One of the two contained only a single item, which he almost cried in joy when he saw. Had he kept going on his plans without finding this, it would all have amounted to nothing.

**\*Storage Ring\***

1/60 item slots taken

Kingdom building Wright

He inspected the item, having a clue of what it meant.

**\*Kingdom Building Wright\***

This document means the world has recognized you as a possible ruler. It allows you to establish your kingdom wherever you lay claim to lands. This document means you can lawfully build your kingdom without having other rulers besmirch your claim.

Tears of joy almost slid down his cheeks.

The next ring was also good, but interested him less. It would be of great service to the guild, though.

Astaroth skimmed through its contents, seeing as it was full to the brim. It was filled with equipment of various types.

But the reason it was a good thing for them was that all the equipment inside this ring was of elite grade and higher! He didn't see a single piece of equipment under that grade.

It disappointed Astaroth not to have any rare materials, but the results were still great. Having all these rewards assured them they could go on with their current goals.

Astaroth kept the ring with the Wright in it and threw the other one to Phoenix.

"I'll let you handle all that. The last ring is better for me to hold on to."

Phoenix was curious.

"What's in it?"

"It's a surprise."

Astaroth winked at her. She frowned, but when she opened the other ring now in her hands, her frown disappeared.

"Oh, my god! We're fucking rich!"

## Chapter 282 Eating The Fruit

Astaroth exploded in laughter. Phoenix wasn't usually the type to have overreactions of the sort, but he understood that one.

After laughing for a few seconds, much to the displeasure of his girlfriend, he wiped away some small tears forming at the corner of his eyes.

"I'll let you two girls decide how we should use or dispatch these things. I still have something to do today."

Both Athena and Phoenix nodded in approbation, as Astaroth left the room, storing the storage ring in his inventory. He could have worn it, but he preferred not to.

If anything happened, the ring would be secure in his inventory. Wearing it exposed him to the hands of an expert pickpocket or thief.

He would rather not have the precious item stolen.

Reaching a staircase that went up a floor in the tree structure, Astaroth climbed it. The floor he reached was one with a large central corridor that did a full circle inside the tree.

The corridor connected to a large middle room and many smaller exterior rooms. If seen from a top view, the floor looked like the chamber of a revolver, but with many more exterior chambers.

But he didn't need to look for a specific room, since he knew where the person he was looking for would be.

Leaving the staircase, he directly walked to an enormous set of doors. He knocked twice rapidly before pushing the doors in.

This room was the new resting place for Leon, their possible soon-to-be kingdom guardian. Leon had all his trophies, skins, and clothes brought up to this room, since Astaroth chased him from the throne room downstairs.

At first, he had complained a bit, since the throne room felt more like a royal room than this one, but the size of his new room was larger, and that suited him, too. Leon was currently resting on a pile of different leathers.

Seeing Astaroth come into the room, his eyes immediately started glowing in anticipation.

"Did you succeed? Where is the fruit? Let me see it!"

"Calm down, sheesh!" Astaroth replied, pulling out the fruit.

Even though Leon wasn't a mage, his senses were still strong enough to feel the difference between the fruit's state from the day before to now.

Leon was already salivating, to the point of almost drooling. He wiped away the corner of his mouth, looking at Astaroth with intensity.

The latter chuckled. It was like he was holding a treat in front of an excited kitten.

"I don't know what will happen once you eat the fruit. So I will stand back when you do."

Leon nodded, slowly picking up the fruit from Astaroth's hands. He treated it like the most precious thing ever, carrying it back to his improvised bed, before sitting down.

Leon carefully lifted the fruit to his mouth before stuffing the whole thing down in one bite. Luckily, it wasn't a melon.

As soon as the fruit crossed Leon's esophagus, reaching his stomach, a burst of Aether exploded outward inside Leon's body. The beast-man immediately started howling in pain.

Astaroth took a step forward, wanting to go help Leon, but the latter lifted his arm.

"No! I can handle it! Aarrghh!"

Astaroth stopped in his steps, observing Leon with his Perfect Mana Sense. He could see the Aether in Leon's body rapidly smash into his organs and bones, trying to pierce through his skin and escape his body.

But with every collision, the Aether seemed to lose momentum and strength. But Astaroth could tell it would take a long time before Leon absorbed the entire amount of it.

He wasn't sure the beast-man would be able to tough out for that long, though. Leon was rolling around on the ground, screaming in pain.

The occasional roars of pain also escaped his throat, shaking the entire Bastion. Some players even thought they were under attack at some point, trying to charge into the tree palace.

Some of the wild Elves, as well as Athena, kept them out, knowing what was going on. When the first scream shook the base, Phoenix automatically expected the situation and asked Athena to stand guard outside the tree's entrance.

Phoenix, on her side, went to warn everyone in the tree palace to stay out of the second floor. She assumed it would be better if no one disturbed Leon's painful transformation.

Who knew what consequences a distraction could bring in this situation? It was better to isolate the entire floor for the time being.

And if something happened, she knew Astaroth would call for help.

The screaming, roaring, and squirming lasted for hours. When Khalor came back to the base, just as the coordinates for it were released, it was still going on.

But before he could go see what was happening, Athena blocked him out of the palace.

"I'm sorry, Khalor, but you aren't allowed to go in here. I would have to ask Phoenix or Astaroth, and both are busy."

"Tch!"

Clicking his tongue, Khalor left the premises. He could have barged inside, but causing trouble in his own guild base would be stupid.

He sent a message to Astaroth, asking for rights to the palace, but Astaroth wasn't responding for now.

Not long after, the screaming stopped. Not a minute after it stopped, a massive wave of mana, along with a roar that shook the heavens, resounded in the entire Bastion, going as far out as miles into the forest.

Astaroth, who was point blank inside the room where it emanated from, was knocked to his ass, the air blown out of his lungs. He took a moment to gather his breath before standing up while coughing.

Leon was standing in the middle of the room. His blond mane-like hair had turned red, and was flaring around his head. His body was suddenly more muscular than before, and his eyes were now entirely black, with specks of white in them.

Astaroth scanned him.

Nemean Candidate, Leon

Level: 100

Grade: Mythical (Zone Boss)

He had made it!

Astaroth quickly pulled out the Kingdom Building Wright. He had read the document's requirements while Leon was struggling to overcome his limits.

Most of them he already cleared, since they required him to be a leader of any kind, have lands to his name that passed a certain size, and have a structure that could be considered a seat of power.

The last one, the one he was hoping could come true, was to have a creature, spirit, or minor divinity of rank legendary or higher as a guardian.

And now that Leon had evolved, he matched that requirement. Plus, he had already promised to become their guardian if the fruit did as Astaroth promised it would.

Astaroth used the document in his hands, receiving a system prompt.

\*Kingdom Building Wright is being used. Do you wish to proceed and establish a nation?\*

\*Yes/No\*

Astaroth smashed the yes option.

A bright white light flashed across the Bastion, and the lands beyond, blinding everyone.

## Chapter 283 Choosing The Medium

Closing his eyes to spare himself from becoming blinded for the next thirty minutes, Astaroth grinned like a madman. Even if he was repulsed at the thought of ruling and managing an entire city and kingdom, the benefits far outweighed the drawbacks.

If he could grow it correctly, he would have clout against other countries and nations that might have snubbed him before. But with great power came insane risks.

Becoming a ruler in such a budding nation put him in the crosshairs of assassins across New Eden, be they Players or NPCs. But he was sure New Eden had countermeasures to protect its rulers, too.

He knew rulers had objects tying them to their guardians or kingdom spirits. It may be the crowns on their heads, or sceptres in their hands.

He guessed there were also objects even less conspicuous. He couldn't wait to see what his would be.

But for now, he had other matters to think of. Like how to keep all of it in the upcoming hours and days.

Once the flash of white subsided, everyone on the exterior of the tree palace saw something new. Carved into the surface of the bark, a new emblem was now present.

Khalor was the first one to see it, and his eyes gleamed in astonishment.

'Where did he get the wright?! There should be none available for a long time!'

The emblem carved into the tree bark was the new kingdom's crest. It depicted a large black tree under a bright blue star.

Inside Leon's room, Astaroth had a new menu window in front of his eyes.

\*Kingdom Name\*

A blank bar sat under the title. He didn't know what he wanted to call the kingdom, and would have preferred to discuss it with his friends, but he doubted he could close the window until he picked a name.

Astaroth knew his naming sense was terrible, but he couldn't get the window out of his sight, so he resolved to pick the name himself. After a bit of thought, he entered a name in the blank space.

\*Ding!\*

\*Name accepted!\*

\*New Kingdom's name shall now be recognized as Sellar Woodlands!\*

A world announcement blasted across the skies, announcing the new kingdom's name and formation to the rest of the players. At the same time, Astaroth got another notification.

\*You have been acknowledged as Stellar Woodlands' new ruler. Please pick an object to act as a symbol of your rule.\*

Crown

Scepter

Jewel

Skin Markings

\*PS. The markings will act as your connection to your chosen guardian, letting you tap into a part of their power.\*

Astaroth hesitated for a moment. A crown or a sceptre would be viable choices, but he thought of how easy it would be to steal them from him, too.

The Jewel option seemed a safer option, even though it was smaller, but he would limit himself in terms of what he could wear in terms of jewels after.

The last option seemed the safest, to keep it safe, but then he wouldn't have anything visual to show his rank to his new peers.

But then again, he could always have a crown forged or crafted. The other issue that troubled him about skin markings was what if he got wounded and the marking was affected?N/nêw n0vel chap/ers are published o/n n0v/e/(lb)i(n.)co/m

Would he still be able to tap into Leon's power, then? Or would he be stuck as just plain ol' him?

Also, how would he get the said markings? He contemplated his options, but no matter how he looked at it, the only option that was theft safe was the markings.

He tapped option four on his screen, prompting another notification.

\*You have chosen skin markings. Your selected guardian will be the one to confer on to you his power. Congratulations on your new rank of power, ruler Astaroth!\*

Leon was staring at him intently while he was doing this. Leon couldn't see the interface, but he knew by how Astaroth looked pensive that something was happening.

Once he saw Astaroth look back at him, he knew he was done with whatever he had been doing.

Leon kneeled in front of Astaroth.

"I thank you for the opportunity you have given me, Master Astaroth. I doubt I could have ever made it to the mythical rank on my own. I shall forever be indebted to you!"

Astaroth chuckled.

"Please, no need to be so formal. I'm only a king in name, for now. And I have a feeling I will overuse you shortly, anyway."

Leon kept his head low.

"Have you decided what medium you wish me to imbue my power into?"

"I have, although I do not know how you will proceed. I want skin markings. So what form will that take? A tattoo?"

Leon looked back up to Astaroth, his eyes wide.

"Are... are you certain? The marking process is not as simple or easy as the other mediums..."

"I doubt getting tattooed can hurt my body, or is difficult. What could make this more complicated than the other mediums?"

"Master Astaroth... The markings will be a medium to my power. That means I have to imbue my power directly into your body..."

"Okay. So, what? A mana mark of sorts?"

Leon looked at him weirdly.



"Of sorts... It needs to be a permanent mark."

"Okay. So what is the big deal, then?"

"My king... My element is fire... I will have to scar your body with my flames..."

"Oh... Oh!"

Realizing what the beast-man meant, Astaroth's face paled. He had imagined a tattoo or a magic sigil to be imprinted on his skin.

But getting his skin scarred by fire sounded much more painful. He was already regretting his decision.

'Couldn't the system have clarified what was implied here? I would have picked differently...'

Astaroth looked at the unsure Leon. But he had already decided, and he also doubted he could switch his choice now.

Sighing loudly, Astaroth took off his chest guard, as well as the shirt under it.

"I guess I'll have to grit my teeth. I've already picked, no use in changing my mind now."

Leon nodded solemnly, getting back to his feet. Astaroth turned his back to the guardian, preferring not to watch the process directly.

He suddenly felt a searing pain on his back.

"AAARRRGGGHHH!!!!!"

#### Chapter 284 Painful Process

Outside New Eden, in the private facility owned by Jack Boudreau, a nurse had been assigned to make sure their 2 VIPs were taken care of, as long as they stayed inside the game.

The woman had replaced their bodies a few times, making sure they wouldn't get bedsores. She had also changed their clothes, and the IVs that had been plugged into their arms soon after they logged in.

The woman had brought heart-rate monitors, as well as brainwave scanners, so she could do her job with ease. After setting herself up, she had a chair brought to her, as well as a small rolling trolley filled with supplies, so she could sit and take notes.

She had other duties to attend to, but had most of them dumped on another nurse. Mr. Boudreau himself had asked her to monitor them, and she would die before letting anything happen to them.

The nurse took notes of their vitals every half hour, making sure everything stayed within acceptable ranges, and for now, everything was rosy.

As she was checking the files of other patients she had, a monitor started beeping wildly. Lifting her eyes swiftly, she noticed the heart-rate monitor on Alexander Leduc's arm was spiking dangerously.

Soon after, the brainwave monitor did the same. Immediately after that happened, Alexander's body started convulsing like it was being electrocuted.

The nurse quickly jumped up, grabbed a rubber mouthpiece from her trolley, and shoved it inside the young man's mouth before he bit off his own tongue.

"I'll need help over here!"

Nurses and doctors came rushing to her side, some of the male nurses quickly grabbing onto Alexander's body and keeping it in place. If the young man dropped off the bed and got hurt, their heads would probably roll.

The nurse pinning the young man's shoulders on the bed yelled out in pain.

"What happened?!" another one asked.

"His back! It's burning up like metal under the sun!" the hurt nurse said, caressing his reddened hands.

The nurse that had been charged with monitoring him and Kary, frowned.

"Flip him over!" she ordered.

The men holding his body pinned to the bed swiftly complied. Once he was on his stomach, the woman grabbed a pair of scissors from her trolley.

"Keep him steady while I cut the gown."

The men nodded, but no one was willing to push on the young man's back. The nurse clicked her tongue at them before grabbing the hem of the gown around the neck and shoving the scissors down in a swift motion.

The fabric made way with a crisp cutting sound, revealing Alexander's back. What they all saw on it made them gasp in shock.

"When did that happen?! He was fine when he laid down!" the nurse asked, bewildered.

On Alexander's back, a burn mark covered his skin. The shape of it was quite distinctive, looking like a lion's head.

But that wasn't the issue. It hadn't been there at all, at the beginning of the day when he put the helmet on.

The woman would have noticed such a big and bad burn when she changed the young man. But his skin had been pristine.

'How am I going to explain that to Mr. Boudreau?!'

"Quick! Cover him with cooling blankets!" a doctor yelled.

The doctors that came rushing took over the situation, their expertise being more useful than a nurse's in this situation.

This situation went on for about thirty minutes, with Alexander's heart rate going on a rollercoaster ride all the while.

Inside New Eden, the situation was very similar.

Leon's hand was apposed to Astaroth's back, with a steady stream of vivid red Aether pouring out of it, and inside the Ash Elf's back. Astaroth was screaming bloody murder, his face contorted in a mask of pain.

He felt like his back was being seared by a giant, burning iron brand. Phoenix came rushing into the room after she heard her boyfriend's screams.

Seeing his pained face, as well as Leon's worried look, questions filled her mind.

"What are you doing?!"

Leon's eyes met hers.

"I'm branding him. He chose this as a medium for my power. I told him it would be painful."

Phoenix looked at Astaroth, who wasn't defending himself, and could deduce he was at least a willing participant in this torture. But she still wanted to help him.

"Is there anything I can do to help? Maybe I can call a healer to soothe his pain?"

"A healer won't be able to soothe his pain. He isn't taking actual damage. Only the pain from it."

"Then what?! I can't just let him suffer like this for however long this will take!"

Leon looked at her insistent eyes and thought of something.

"There might be something. But it won't be pleasant for you, either."

"I don't care! Just tell me what to do!"

"You have a high attunement to the fire element. You might be capable of absorbing a part of the heat, reducing his pain. But it will transfer to you."

"Just tell me how!" she shouted, throwing herself in front of Astaroth.

Leon told her to form as much contact with Astaroth as she could, and focus on the feeling of heat coming from his body. If she could lock on to the heat, she should be able to pull it toward herself, reducing the burden on Astaroth's body.

But as soon as she did, her body temperature suddenly rose many degrees. Her body ignited on its own, sending her into her Avatar of Flames form, as she started groaning in pain, too.

Astaroth's screams assuaged, allowing him to gain a bit of a sense of what was happening around him. When he saw the burning Phoenix holding onto him tightly and grunting in pain, he panicked.

"What are you doing?! Let go! You don't need to suffer too!"

But the woman refused to let go. She hugged him tighter, siphoning even more heat into herself.

Soon, her form went from bright orange flames to an intense blue fire. Tears of liquid fire started falling out of her eyes as she grit her teeth to keep herself from screaming.

Leon's eyes widened. An idea crossed his mind, and he acted on it without consulting them.

"Both of you better hold on to your consciousness. This is going to hurt!"

Chapter 285 Double Marking

Sliding his left hand to the side a bit, Leon slapped his right hand onto Astaroth's back, too. He poured out more Aether into the new ruler's back, eliciting more screams of pain.

But this time, instead of coming just from Astaroth, they came from Phoenix too. The woman suddenly felt a surge of heat, transferring from Astaroth to herself, washing into her body like a burning tsunami.

Outside the game, where Alexander had just started stabilizing, his vitals spiked again. And to make matters worse, Kary's vitals spiked alongside them.

The doctors and nurses present were baffled by what was happening. When they went to check on her, she exhibited similar changes on her back to the young man.

They quickly reacted, throwing cooling blankets onto Kary's back, trying to bring her temperature down, while repeating the process on Alexander, again.

"What the hell is going on?!" one doctor exclaimed.

Inside New Eden, the couple was howling and grunting in pain. Astaroth was taking the brunt of it, being in direct contact with the burning energy coming into him.

But Phoenix wasn't much better off, as the residual heat kept washing into her. Her bright blue, flaming form was raging all over the place, burning a part of the floor under her.

Leon was sweating bullets, his body quickly draining of all its energy. His mind was in shock.

'How much Aether can these two take?! By any measure, they should have blown to bits by now!'

Just as Leon spent the last of his energy and collapsed to the ground, Phoenix and Astaroth heard a familiar sound.

\*Ding!\*

\*Marking of the rulers has been done successfully! Congratulations to the new rulers of Stellar Woodlands!\*

\*Ding!\*

\*Your body has been tempered in the flames of a star! New Passive is being generated.\*

\*New Passive generated! Passive Skill: Celestial Tempering has been added to your skill list! Congratulations!\*

\*Ding!\*

\*Marking of the rulers has unlocked a new Skill. Skill; Royal Protection unlocked!\*

Astaroth and Phoenix were physically and mentally spent, and they fell to the ground, gasping for air while holding each other as they did.

Astaroth was slightly mad that Phoenix had put herself in harm's way for him, but he didn't have the energy to rebuke her for now. As for her, she was happy she could help him tide through this process.

But Astaroth could guess it should have taken this long. The fact that Leon had started with one hand, and suddenly switched to two, told him something different had happened than what was originally planned.

But when he turned to ask the guardian, he noticed the latter had passed out, sleeping on the ground. Astaroth grunted, but ignored the issue for now.

He glanced at his status to see if there were any negative statuses affecting him and noticed something.

Status:

Name: Astaroth

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Race: Ash Elf

Grade: Special

Level: 48 (23,511,097/43,309,950)

Stats:

HP: 37,600/37,600 MP: 530/5,300 Stamina: 0/100

Physical Condition: Exhausted

Mental Condition: Exhausted

Seeing his stats suddenly be so high made his eyes widen in shock. The new grade option in his status window also caught his attention.

'When did I go up a grade?'

Astaroth didn't remember getting the reputation requirement to go up a grade. Neither did he ever get a notification for it.

His mind went to his new passive.

He opened it up, curiosity getting the best of him.

Celestial Tempering: You have tempered your body in the flames of a star or its equivalent. Your body has grown stronger from it. Grade raise: Common -> Special. Resistance to fire damage gained: 50%.

'Hot damn! As if the grade increase wasn't enough, I got a fire resistance bonus, too!'

Astaroth was stoked at this turn of events. Even though it hurt him like hell, the gains he made largely made up for it.

From Phoenix's exposed shoulders, he could clean some sort of change, too. The top of her shoulders, descending onto her back, were red and puffy.

Astaroth quickly asked Athena to Allow Silent Light inside the palace. Neither he nor Phoenix seemed in agony anymore, but he wanted to see if they could heal her back to normal.

He could guess his back was in the same state, and guessed he could use that too, if it worked.

It took a while for Silent Light to reach them, since he was already busy somewhere on the base. But once he entered the room, a wave of residual heat assaulted him.

He instantly started sweating, his forehead and back drenched in seconds. He walked toward his two guild leaders, who were still seated on the ground, next to the passed-out guardian.

The scene was almost comical, if it wasn't for the burnt ground under Phoenix. That made him curious about what had happened.

He resisted the urge to scan Phoenix and Astaroth, knowing both were capable enough mages to feel the action.

Sitting next to them, he looked at Astaroth.

"What happened here, and why is it so hot?"

"It's a long story. I'll tell you another time. For now, can you check her back and tell me if you can heal these marks, so they are at least no longer red and puffy?"

Saying this, Astaroth pulled Phoenix in closer, before lowering the back of her robes, exposing her skin to Silent Light. When the priest saw the markings on her skin, he paled.

Across the entire woman's back was the tribal representation of a lion, burned into her skin. Certain places had skin that seemed to have become crispy.

It was astonishing the woman wasn't howling in pain or crying right now. Silent went to work.

After casting a few healing spells, the skin unswelled, and the parts that seemed burned now looked healed up. He wasn't able to bring the skin back to normal, but Astaroth knew that was the point.

The markings were supposed to be permanent, after all. After getting healed, Phoenix fell asleep in Astaroth's arms.

The pain had kept her awake, but now that it was gone, exhaustion overcame her. Astaroth lay her down, before turning his back to Silent.

Silent saw the back of Astaroth and almost threw up. The guild leader's back was twice as bad as Phoenix, his markings larger, and more complex, but also burnt to a higher degree.

He quickly started healing his leader's back, wondering how the man was even keeping quiet. By the time he finished, Astaroth had already fainted from exhaustion, too.

Silent left the room, closing the door behind him. He messaged Athena, telling her that the guild leader and vice-leader were fine, but that they shouldn't be disturbed for the next few hours.

'I hope they are back on their feet before the guilds start sieging us,' Athena thought, biting her fingernails.

## Chapter 286 A Weird Dream

After passing out, Astaroth had the weirdest dream he ever had. Floating among the stars, watching a tall woman walk next to a lion in the orbit of a blue sun.

From there, his mind then went to a transparent mirror. Peering into it, he saw the Bastion, from far overhead.

Countless people surrounded the base of so many races it was like he was watching a gathering of all the races in New Eden.

The Bastion was under siege, with people trying to push through the gate after going around an army of undead that numbered in the thousands. Players were trying to bore through the walls, others trying to fly over them, and some even trying to tunnel under them.

But when they tried infiltrating the base, something always killed them before they succeeded. Astaroth's mind skipped to another scene.

At first, Astaroth couldn't recognize where he was, but after a while, his memory was unfogged. He recognized some stands in the streets of the city he was standing in.

But the stands were empty, contrary to the first time he saw them. The air was thick with smoke, the smell of burnt flesh permeating the oxygen.

This was the capital of the Ashe Elves, Tel'narel. But something was off about it.

He couldn't see a single Ash Elf in sight. The first sign of life he got to see was from a winged red being flying over the street he was on.

When the red being noticed him, he screeched in a high-pitched voice, before throwing itself at Astaroth. But before they impacted, Astaroth found himself in another place once again.

'What the hell is this dream?'

Astaroth was now standing at the top of a building, overhanging a familiar city. It only took him a moment to recognize the city when he looked down, because he recognized the balcony a few floors below him.

'This is Montreal.'

But once again, something didn't fit with the scenery he should be seeing. The sky was orange, but it wasn't from a sunset, since clouds obscured the sun over his head.

In the distance, to his right, a large plume of black smoke rose. The apparent location of that plume of flames was in the more business part of downtown.

'This looks like the memories Khalor showed me...' Astaroth thought. [Visit no\(v\)3lb/!n\(.\)com for new novels](http://www.visitnovels.com)

The scene changed once again, and this time, he was in a cement tunnel. The artificial lighting above him suggested they were underground.

Astaroth walked forward for a while until he came upon a gruesome sight. Strewn across the floor, walls, and ceiling were the bodies of humans.

Something had mangled the bodies to a point where they were unrecognizable. The further he walked, the more bodies he found, all in similar states.

'What the heck happened here? It's almost like a giant blender was pushed through the tunnel while people were running away from it...'

Astaroth walked for a while, on a concentric, downward path. He eventually reached a large metal structure, bent inward, which he assumed used to be a gate.

'This looks like a nuclear fallout shelter. Who built this, and where is it?'

Before he could make it past the huge blast door, his mind snapped out of this place. He slowly woke up, feeling the cold stone floor under his face.

"Mm. Where am I?"

Phoenix's voice came from next to him.

"You are in Leon's room, inside our guild base. Or should I call it a palace, now?"

"Right. I lost consciousness as Silent Light was healing me. Where is he now?"

"He seems to have left us alone. Leon is still sleeping over there. It would seem he used all his energy to do whatever he was doing."

"Ahh, yes. Well, the good news is, it worked. More than I had expected, and possibly more than Leon had hoped too."

"I assumed as much, when I noticed I was now Special grade. I guess I'll say thank you, even if it hurt like hell..."

Astaroth sat up, wiping the dirt from his face. The floor in here was all but clean, and the specks of stone had almost fused with his face.

A bit further, Leon was indeed sprawled on the ground, rolled in a small ball, like a kitten. It was hard to look at him, and find him dangerous, when he looked like that.

Phoenix looked at Astaroth with a tired and worried look. When the latter noticed it, he turned his head to look at her.

"What's wrong? Something on my face?"

She hesitated for a moment before responding.

"You were talking in your sleep. It seemed like the dream you had was worrying you. You kept asking where you were, and what had happened."

"I... I don't remember. It was just a dream, anyway."

Phoenix didn't look satisfied at his answer, but she didn't pry any further. It wouldn't yield anything if he didn't remember, anyway.

"So. What's the situation right now? Have we been invaded yet?" Astaroth asked.

Phoenix went back to normal, giggling at his question.

"Why would we have been invaded already? The coordinates have only been public for a few hours."

"Hmm. I figured that would be enough to have at least one eager guild already knocking at our doors. I guess they are more cautious than I thought."

"Well, it figures. They only know we have a fortress. They don't know how big or how well-defended it is."

"Speaking of defences. Did you get news about our progress to set up defences?"



"Yes. Athena followed the plans I had made to the letter, and with new members continually applying to join, they have been busy. There is only one thing that annoys me."

"Hm? And what is that?"

Phoenix made a face of displeasure.

"Athena put Morticia in charge of vetting the new players applying. Something about her being able to read minds, therefore knowing if they are sincere, or simply spies."

"That's good, no?"

Phoenix glared at him. He then remembered the animosity between the two.

But she would have to get over it if it was for the guild's survival chances. Having spies in the guild, at this moment, would spell catastrophe when other guilds started pouring in their direction.

"Well, in that case, let's go have a look at our base, shall we?"

Phoenix nodded her head as they both got to their feet. They left Leon alone, while they went to another room.

Astaroth wanted to leave through a window, so they didn't have to go all the way down again.

Phoenix simply followed him.

#### Chapter 287 Touring The Base

They picked a room on the outer ring, walking to the window. Astaroth pushed the window open before melding with Morpheus.

As the wings grew on his back, he grabbed Phoenix in his arms and threw himself out the window. With a slight 'Eep' of surprise, Phoenix and he took off.

Astaroth didn't fly into the foliage of the tree. Instead, he razed close under it, giving himself and Phoenix a good view of the base from above.

From their vantage point, Astaroth could see many things that hadn't been there previously. On the top of the stone walls, he could see platforms made of wood that slightly went over the edges.

He guessed these would be used to fend off people climbing the walls or trying to fly into the base. There were also buckets on the platforms, but he couldn't see what was in them.

He noticed the gate to enter the wall had been reinforced, to the point where it almost looked like an entirely different gate. He imagined it would take a lot more to break through it now, than before.

But that wasn't the only thing he saw. Astaroth caught something in the corner of his eye.

Above him, in the branches of the tree, he could see elves running around, bows on their backs.

"Did you ask Athena to ask for help from the Wild Elves?"

"I didn't. Apparently, the wild elves offered their help when they noticed we were preparing for some kind of battle. They are scared that new tenants might push them out of here."

"Huh. Makes sense. But I'm still surprised they didn't just hide. They will fight against pseudo-immortal players, after all. This would be enough to scare many NPCs."

"Athena told me that these elves frequently hunt in the woods around the Bastion, where level forty to fifty monsters live. Not much scares them."

Astaroth could guess they would make good allies, if that was the case. They would act as an unseen repellant to flying enemies.

Which he expected to see much of. There was no way he and Khalor were some of the only players that could fly.

Phoenix could also fly a bit when she used her Avatar of Flames form, which, he was certain, would have reached a higher degree of power now.

So there was no way there wouldn't be foes that could do similar things, or had other ways of making themselves take flight. Plus, he had a nagging feeling that flying wouldn't be the only way enemies would try to break in with.

Astaroth noticed another thing next. On the ground below him, were some buildings which had been in ruins that now seemed to be in an almost pristine state.

He couldn't see what they were used for, from where he was, but the woman with him was less oblivious. Phoenix could see the curiosity sparkle in Astaroth's eyes.

She pointed to one building that had a plume of smoke coming out of its chimney.

"That one is our newly rebuilt forge. Some players found the furnaces inside still in good shape and rebuilt it. We have a few crafter classes that were quite happy with this building being up again."

"Do we already have some blacksmiths?"

"We have more than that. We have Weapon Smiths, Armor Smiths, Tanners, Seamsters, and many more. Surprisingly, when the word went out that we had a fortress, and that we were recruiting, many crafter players applied to join."

"Hm. And Morticia vetted most of them?"

"Actually, the crafter classes are almost all instantly accepted. When you said you wanted to make a city out of the Bastion, I thought getting the trade up and running was a priority."

"That is a good idea. If we get some market power already, it'll make it easier to build up this place. You really are smarter than me."

"Oh please. Flattery will lead you everywhere," Phoenix said flirtatiously.

"Anyway! We have other buildings that we rebuilt quickly, too. We found some barracks, which we prioritized, for the new players joining that want to stay here. There were also some stables, but we have nothing to put in them yet, so we have not touched it for now."

Astaroth flew around the base, Phoenix pointing out each rebuilt structure, and explaining what it was used for. She was like his portable tour guide.

As they finished their full circle around the center tree, Astaroth noticed something in the distance. He rapidly veered to the right, as he saw something glint in the sunlight.

As he did, an arrow whizzed past his chest, missing him by a hair. Astaroth was shocked for a second, since he couldn't see the shooter.

He was high above the ground, and the closest cover for an archer would be in the woods, which were hundreds of meters away from the Bastion's walls.

Phoenix had gripped him tight when he suddenly veered. But seeing his now focused gaze, she understood what was happening.

She rapidly tapped into the guild chat.

'The enemies have reached our lands. Everyone get ready for combat.'

Across the entire Bastion, Astaroth could hear cheers.

"It seems like they were getting impatient. I guess they will now get to release that pent-up aggression. Let's just hope we didn't recruit players that are just super aggressive, but can't think during a fight."

Phoenix giggled.

"I doubt we got many players that can't think on our side. Those players will mostly be on the other side of the wall."

"Let's hope you're right."

Astaroth had already dived, making his way back inside the palace. He would need to meet with the core members of the guild there before they headed to the battlefield.

Phoenix had already decided on roles for everyone, and the meeting would mainly be about reconfirming those, as well as touching up the plans.

She swiped open her guild interface, authorizing every core member into the palace. Otherwise, they would have to hold the meeting outside.

Phoenix took a mental note to finish organizing the guild ranks and permissions after this battle. Their structure lacked work, and it bothered her.

But for now, they had bigger fish to fry.

Reaching the throne room, where an enormous table had been brought, Astaroth and Phoenix sat down. Soon, all the others started arriving.

Once everyone was here, Phoenix got back up.

"Alright, let's begin this meeting."

Chapter 288 Setting The Pieces On The Board

Phoenix drew her gaze upon everyone present. Around the table, with her and Astaroth, were the founding members of Paragons.

She and Astaroth were at the helm of the table, and to their left were I'die, Gulnur, Violette, and Athena. To their right sat Khalor, Gale, Silent Light, and Morticia.

Death the Gnome had refused the chance to be an officer. He argued he was someone that loved to fight and hated taking decisions.

He rather be like a gun, and be pointed in the direction he needed to fire. Phoenix had respected his will, and left him out of the decision process.

But in case a fight broke out, she still knew she could count on him.

Looking each one in the eye, Phoenix knew she had their attention.

"Earlier today, Astaroth and I were inspecting the progress on fortress defences and building, and we were shot at by an archer who was standing out of vision range. This means the first members of a guild have made it to our territory."

Phoenix paused to see if anyone would say something, but silence covered the room.

"Since at least one person is here, we can assume more are, too, or that they are on their way. We have practically done our defence building, so we can say we are ready. But the actual fight will require more than just good defences."

"The players coming here are not just common players. The guilds answering our challenge will be filled with pro players, and players that can at least match them in power. Some of which will be higher level than us, or better equipped."

Khalor snorted a small laugh.

Everyone's gaze landed on him.

"Anything you want to say, Necromancer?" Phoenix asked him.

"I was just laughing at the prospect of someone being higher level than me, or better equipped. I doubt that would happen."

Astaroth frowned.

"Care to explain why they couldn't be better equipped than you?" he asked Khalor.

"Because it's impossible."

"Khalor," Phoenix interjected.

"I've seen your equipment. Aside from your weapon, everything you wear seems like special grade, at best. There are bound to be people with better gear than you in those guilds."

Khalor shook his head and clicked his tongue.

"You 'think' you have seen my equipment. Truth is, no one has seen my real gear yet. It'll be a surprise for everyone, and the reason I will maintain a big part of the attention during battle."

Phoenix looked pissed that Khalor had interrupted just to toot his own flute. But she brushed his arrogance aside, for now, and went back to the meeting's purpose.

"We'll see about that when the shit hits the fan. For now, let's focus on important matters. Like the fact that we are still grossly under-manned for what area we need to defend. Now. I have looked at our numbers and made sure everyone can do their part. But since the Bastion is so big, and we don't have the manpower to defend all around it, this will be a tough siege."

Phoenix looked at I'die, who nodded his head.

The following second, I'die raised his hand, waving it over the table. On the center of the table, a replica of the tree palace and the stone walls surrounding the Bastion grew out of the center.

This impressed Astaroth. His Perfect Mana Senses picked up the minute movement of mana, as well as the extreme control I'die had exercised on it.

Once the replica of the Bastion was done growing out of the table, I'die also made small stone figurines of the people sitting around the table. Phoenix picked up every figurine, positioning them on the replica.

"Now, keep in mind this isn't to scale. But it will be enough to explain my plan."

Everyone nodded before focusing on the small tree on the table. Phoenix knew she had little time to explain her entire plan, since enemies were already at their doors.

But she still wanted to make as many details as possible clear to the people here, since she wouldn't have time to guide all of them on the battlefield. Phoenix would already have to lead a small portion of their players.

She spent the next hour explaining the plan in as much detail as time allowed her, while answering questions that popped up as she did. Phoenix was like a teacher, guiding students on a group project.

She wanted to give them as much agency as she could, as long as they respected their assigned roles.

I'die was given a simple role. He was to go around the base as needed, building blockades or cinch points, so they could focus the enemies on smaller points.

Their lack of players meant they had to fight that much smarter. Limiting the zones where enemies could try to enter the base from would improve their odds.

I'die quickly understood what he needed to do, and had already started forming some plans of his own in his head. Once Phoenix saw he understood his role, she switched to the next person.

Khalor had already decided what role he was going to play, so when she went to him, he just told her to skip him. Phoenix almost smacked his face, but she clenched her fists and contained her anger.

Going over each one of their roles, Phoenix ended with Astaroth. He had the hardest role, with the simplest function.

He was the shredder blades.

"Astaroth, you will be inside the Bastion wall. I will have I'die form a closed-off area, spanning from the open gate, to look like the bottom of an hourglass."

"So all I have to do is mow as many of them down as I can?"

"Yes. but you also need to stay alive without getting healed. I can't assign a healer to you, since they will be needed elsewhere. Is that okay?"

"Yeah, I'll make it work. I just need to fight with more prudence."

"And if we ever need you outside that zone, we will need you to clear out the hourglass, close the gates, and become mobile. Can you do that?"

Astaroth thought for a moment, but in every scenario he thought of, he wiped the floor clean with any amount of player he would be up against.

"Easy peasy. I doubt any player will overpower me. That isn't on our side already."

Astaroth gave a side-eye to Khalor, who simply chuckled.

"Alright then. Meeting adjourned. Let's catch some rest while we still can. When this battle starts, it will end in either our victory or our defeat."

Everyone got up and left the room. They could feel the tension in the air, and their excitement was obvious to the eye.

## Chapter 289 Last Preparations

As every officer of the guild went their separate ways, to either prepare more or rest, Athena had already set some players on watch on the walls. She had warned them to stay low, since they knew there would be long-range shooters waiting for the occasion to take a pre-emptive kill.

Phoenix had read up on the rules of guild wars, whenever she had some time, and noticed one important function that she thought it good of activating before the fighting started.

There was a delay Exp function, where she could forcefully send any Exp made during the guild war into the guild inventory, and redistribute it at the end. This gave her an idea.

She quickly sent a message in the guild messaging tab.

'I will activate the delayed Exp function in a few moments. For anyone that dies and loses a level during the guild war, we will return your Exp at the end from the pool we gather from defending. Make sure you send a screenshot of your levels in the guild chat before the fighting starts, so we can know what level you are. Those who don't send a screenshot will forgo getting their levels back.'

As soon as she sent that, she taped the delay Exp icon, toggling it on. Messages started coming in the guild chat, with clear names and levels. Visit [www.v3it.no\(v\)3lb/!n\(.\)com](http://www.v3it.no(v)3lb/!n(.)com) for new *novels*

Phoenix smiled.

'At least the players we have can follow simple instructions.'

But the next moment, she received a message from Khalor.

'Phoenix. I did not agree with this. You will stunt my levels by doing this. Turn it off.'

The woman smirked before answering back.

'Khalor. I don't have to pass any decision through you. You may be a guild officer, but I'm the vice leader. If you aren't happy, leave the guild and join the forces invading us. We will get to see who is stronger between you and the guild guardian.'

She stood in place, awaiting his answer. After a minute, and what she thought was a distant scream, Khalor's answer came.

'Fine! But you better not cheat me out of my fair share of Exp!'

Phoenix giggled.

'Of course not. Don't forget to send a screenshot of your name and level in the guild chat, so we can cover your loss if you die.'

No reply came this time, and neither did Khalor send the required screenshot. Phoenix shrugged him off.

It was his problem if he died. If he refused to follow the instructions, then he would have to make do with the Exp they gave him at the end.

She started walking again, heading to her's and Astaroth's room in the palace, wanting to rest a bit before the fight. But another private message interrupted her.

This one was from Silent Light.

'Phoenix. I have found a cathedral on the base. It has a graveyard attached to it, but it seems inactive.'

'Is there a question that goes with that statement?'

'Ahh, yes. I don't think we have enough time to rebuild the cathedral before the fighting starts, but I could start re-consecrating the graveyard.'

Phoenix became slightly confused.

'Is that necessary?'

'Well, not really. But the guild has no respawn points as of right now. If we die when the fighting starts, the players who die get teleported to the nearest graveyard. And that is outside the walls.'

Phoenix finally understood why he wanted to re-consecrate the graveyard. The idea was great, but if she had known this before, they would have prioritized that sooner.

Brushing the small discontent away, Phoenix gave her answer to Silent.

'How long will this take, and can someone else do it?'

'I believe it shouldn't take over four hours. The issue is, I'm the only priest in the guild yet. The other healers in the guild are druids or shamans, as well as other less common classes. So I don't think they can do it.'

Phoenix frowned. She understood the implications here.

If Silent was busy when the fighting started, they would be missing one powerful healer. But if they pushed this issue to after the war, they would bleed players on every death, sending them outside the walls, where they would be slaughtered.

Phoenix decided it was better to lack a healer for a few hours than to lose players during the fight.

'You can proceed. As soon as it is done, you will need to rush to your assigned position.'

'Yes, Ma'am!'

Phoenix opened up the guild base tab, waiting a few seconds, before a new tab popped up.

\*Graveyard re-consecration\*

\*Estimated time: 4h 31m 54 seconds\*

She nodded, closing the interface. It was a bit more time than Silent had estimated, but not much more.

'Let's just hope the fighting doesn't start too soon,' she thought, heading to her room.

Over the next hours, reports kept coming her way, as most officers knew she would handle them better than Astaroth, and defaulted to her opinion over his for now.

Questions about defensive structures were asked and answered. Reports about more and more guilds and players arriving outside their walls.

Tension was slowly mounting, making everyone in the Bastion nervous. Even the crafting players were feeling pressured, as their work was getting more and more important.

One crafter, in particular, kept getting pestered by Gulnur, who was in charge of this part of the defences. The crafter's name was Malador.

Gulnur was the one that recruited him, as they were from the same race, and hanged in the same city a lot. He was a crafter that was specific to the Dwarven race.

Malador was an Engraver.

In the Dwarven cities, they revered Engravers as much as blacksmiths. The reason for that was that Engravers were the ones carving the runes into their equipment, making them magical.

Engravers could carve runes into any surface, giving it the ability to channel natural mana, allowing whatever the runes were carved into, to act as a catalyst to magic.

And right now, Gulnur was working Malador to the bone. Recruiting Malador had been easy since the man had a foul temper and many guilds turned him down.

The man kept demanding a safe place to practice his trade and not be disturbed. When Gulnur recruited him, the Dwarf thought he had struck gold.

He promised Malador a safe work environment, as well as peace. But that was dashed mere hours after he joined the guild when Paragons went into guild war mode.

It was too late to leave now, though. Malador was stuck inside the base already.

'I should have known a non-merchant guild would do this...' the Dwarf grumbled, while he engraved sigils into a part of the outer wall.

Chapter 290 The Awaited Foe

Gulnur stood behind Malador, closely inspecting his work, more by curiosity than duty. All the sigils he was carving formed a beautiful band that stretched across the base of the outer wall.

Since he was stuck inside the base, Malador offered to beef up its defences. Might as well make it safe while he was here, he thought.



The runes he was engraving into the wall were something he had been working on as a side project. The master he had learned under, in the Dwarven city of Krag'mine, had taught him many things about runes.

Malador was a carpenter outside of the game, and he already had great attention to detail. He also loved to carve when he had free time.

His house was filled with sculpted figurines, or handmade furniture with odd shapes and patterns. When he saw online that New Eden had playable crafters, he bought a helmet, as well as a copy of the game, so he could explore new possibilities.

Exploring his options on character creation, Malador was able to extract some info from the NPC guiding him, a snotty elf man, and finally rested his choice on Dwarves.

All his choices had led him here today, carving out runes on a stone surface, hoping his calculations were correct. But the child staring at him, working, was grating on his nerves.

Malador finished another rune before spinning around abruptly.

"Listen, kid. I accepted your invitation to this 'guild' in exchange for a safe place to master my craft and some peace and quiet. You have yet to respect either of those conditions. If I wasn't stuck here, I would leave right this moment!"

His sudden aggressivity startled Gulnur. He had noticed the man was grumpy, but he hadn't expected an outburst.

"I'm sorry, sir. I was just fascinated by the runes you are carving. I saw some runes similar, in a pit trap a while back, and was trying to figure out what these do... I'm sorry if I'm bothering you."

Malador looked at him with annoyance, but couldn't shoo him away. It was the most gratification a crafter could get when someone was interested in their craft.

He was no exception.

"Whatever. Just stand further back. You are making it hard to concentrate!"

Gulnur smiled widely, taking a few steps back, and going back to observing the sigils on the stone surface. He had been following him for a few hours, and they were almost back to their starting point, the gate.

While the older Dwarf kept carving away, a message that came in the guild chat distracted Gulnur. A guild had just arrived, that they had been waiting on.

Aces High.

Gulnur grinned. Their arrival meant that the battle would soon begin, and he could feel excitement crawl under his skin.

Phoenix had stationed him outside the walls, since he was a tank, and the prospect of fighting off hundreds of players at once made him giddy. With Astaroth around, it was always difficult to act as a tank, since the man kept stealing aggro and taking hits.

This battle would allow him to prove to his friends he was growing as a player, too. I'die had already prepared his zone for him, creating a large funnel of stone, shrinking the closer to the wall it got.

Gulnur took a last look at Malador's work and knew the man could finish faster if he wasn't breathing down his neck. So he left Malador alone to work.

There were just a few hundred meters left for him to reach the other side of the gate, anyway. Gulnur only wondered what closing this enormous band of runes would do.

Somewhere far above the young Dwarf player, another player was looking toward the newly arrived guild.

Khalor was standing on the same branch Astaroth had been on the night before. His drake was summoned, perched on a slightly larger branch behind him.

Hatred was present in Khalor's eyes, as he was scanning the crowd, searching for something or someone. He couldn't yet find his query, and he clicked his tongue.

'Figures. I knew you wouldn't show yourself until the battle was raging on. Still as cowardly as ever.'

The undead drake behind him reacted to the feelings emanating from Khalor and roared to the sky. The ghastly roar sent shivers down the spine of almost everyone that heard it, allies included.

It was like the wail of a banshee has echoed inside the drake's roar. It was almost pulled out straight out of a horror movie.

A familiar death knight walked out of Khalor's shadow.

"Master. What are my orders?"

Khalor kept his face forward while answering.

"For now, stay hidden. When the battle is at its highest point, Azamus will show his stupid face. When he does, I want you to go after him and tell me where he is. To succeed here, he will need to die as fast as possible."

"As you wish, Master."

The death knight melted back into Khalor's shadow, becoming unseen again. Khalor was boiling with impatience.

He couldn't wait for the guilds below to move. There was no point in him going out now.

He wanted to have the biggest impact on them as possible, and for that, he would need to be right in the middle of them. That was where his apparition and his army would have the most impact, both in battle and in their minds.

Inside the palace, Astaroth was currently resting from his marking ceremony. His mana had been almost entirely drained, and he was meditating to reabsorb some.

He also tried advancing his mana breathing to the next level, but it didn't seem like that would happen for a while. He had been stuck at the cusp of reaching level three on that passive, but something seemed to elude him.

He thought he might have to go visit Aberon to get some pointers. But that would have to wait until after the guild war, and most likely the update, too.

Whether they won, or lost, someone in this mass of players would reach level fifty before it ended, or right after. There was no escaping it.

He only wondered how much time they would have from that point to the update time. Khalor had been vague about it, only saying there would be some time.

And Astaroth was tired of asking him without receiving more info.

'I'll know when it happens. No use in bothering Khalor about this anymore.'