

New Eden 311

Chapter 311 Two More Victories

Silent Light wasn't the only one wondering about that same thing. And someone would eventually have to take care of it if they wanted to get rid of this siege.

But that was an issue for when they had a second to breathe at all. Right now, they couldn't afford to loosen up.

On the western part of the Bastion, outside the walls, the landscape had changed in the last few minutes, with craters now everywhere. Standing in the middle of one of those craters, a dwarf, towering over a battered woman with translucent wings.

Blue Peacock was on her back, her torso completely caved in, air becoming more and more difficult to take in. Standing over her, a huge two-handed mace in hand, Gulnur, with almost no health left.

He was out of breath, and his health was still steadily falling, now dangerously close to emptying out. Blue Peacock was one attack short of dying, too, but she was grinning.

"I guess you win this time. I will be back, though. This siege will only end when you take out our mobile graveyard."

Huff huff

"Why are you telling me? Isn't the whole point of sieging here so you can take this place? Why tell me how to break the siege?"

Gulnur wanted to end this quickly, since he was about to burst into pixels himself, but he somehow believed Blue Peacock was being honest with him.

"I couldn't care less about your base. I joined to know the layout, if I ever needed to come back in the future. It matters not who wins or loses today."

"Then will you tell me where the graveyard is?"

Blue smirked at him.

"I would never make it that easy for you. You'll have to find it. Until next time, little man."

Finishing her sentence, Blue Peacock lifted her Kama to her throat, and with one swift motion, slid the blade across. Gulnur watched her burst into particles as his own health reached zero, and his body did the same.

Silence reigned on this side of the Bastion, burnt earth, ashes everywhere, and craters dispersed everywhere. To anyone that would see this in the future, they would believe a rain of meteors had struck the ground at this spot.

Gulnur opened his eyes, standing in the graveyard, with everything in his vision grey.

"So this is what it looks like, to die in New Eden."

He sat on the top of a headstone, waiting for the timer to reach zero so he could go back to battle. While he waited, he sent a message in the guild chat about the info Blue had given him.

He didn't know when someone would have the time to go check it out, but knowing was better than not. He also wondered what the others were up to.

In front of the palace doors, chaos had ensued. Where stood previously twenty players, gloating over Phoenix's tired body, were now only ten people, running circles, as they dodged giant icicles hurtling at them.

The other ten players were encased in ice, slowly dying, or already gone into pixels, where splatters of blood remained of them, along with shards of broken ice.

Standing over Phoenix, a giant figure made of water, with its extremities icing up as she swung them around. Chunks of ice kept getting lobed at the assailants, who couldn't leave there, since a giant ring of ice had cut their escape route.

Phoenix was on her back, laughing her heart out, as Violette's massive form protected her from any projectile thrown her way.

The vice leader of the assailants got a notification, showing his leader had died, and his face became glum. He was expecting her to arrive at any moment and save them from this mess.

But now, he had to get out of here on his own. Infiltrating the palace was no longer a viable option, so retreat was his next best bet. So he issued the order.

"Retreat! Retreat!"

The last nine of his subordinates suddenly turned tail, trying to head to the nearest part of the ice ring. They slit up, trying to guarantee at least one would make it out alive.

But Violette was having none of it.

Her massive hand picked up Phoenix before her body elongated, reaching the lowest branches of the tree. As her form snapped up next to Phoenix on the branch, her body shrinking, she looked at Phoenix.

The same mouthless voice came into Phoenix's head as when she talked in her avatar of flames.

"Wait for me here. I won't let any of them escape. I promise."

The determination in her voice made Phoenix grin even wider.

"You get 'em, sweetheart. Show them who the greatest mages are in this game!"

Violette's watery head nodded before she stepped off the branch.

The drop was close to a hundred feet down, but Violette seemed to ignore that fact.

As she fell, her body once again expanded, twisting into a corkscrew shape, as she hit the ground, spreading thin. But she took no damage from the fall.

And as her body reformed, her arms were raised. From the ground beneath her, the land shook.

Geysers of water suddenly burst from the solid stone and compacted dirt, rapidly filling the zone she had closed off with the ring of ice. The players fleeing suddenly got swept up in rough waves.

They tried to swim to the surface, but only a few of them were good enough swimmers to fight the currents that were dragging them back to the center.

As they were all washed back to the center of the grounds in front of the palace, the gigantic water figure of the girl they had laughed at earlier watched them with her empty gaze.

It was hard to grasp any emotion from a featureless face. And given that even her eyes were only the shape of them, it was impossible to tell what she was feeling.

But with her raised arms slowly freezing, starting from the top, and going down her body, it was easy to guess her intentions. The vice leader knew they were all going to die.

Rather than let her get the Exp, he ordered all his men to commit suicide. Even though the penalty was higher for suicide, costing two levels instead of one, they obeyed.

They would rather lose time levelling, then give the Exp to the enemy. But Violette was faster than them.

Seeing them pull out their weapons, she didn't hesitate to slam her iced-up hands into the lot of them, turning them into paste.

And just like that, Phoenix and Violette had taken down fifty players, outnumbered one to twenty-five.

The water receded into the ground, leaving an exhausted but smiling little girl on the ground.

"I did it!"

Chapter 312 Taking Refuge

Phoenix was taking the time she couldn't move to read all the reports coming from every battlefield. It seemed that, for now, they were still keeping things under control.

But how long would this last? She had no way of knowing.

An issue would soon arise, since Astaroth warned her he had used Royal Protection too. That meant that in a few minutes, he would enter exhausted status, just like her, and be unable to move for five minutes.

She didn't know if Khalor could hold the north gate on his own, and she wasn't ready to risk that either. Another problem was the message Gulnur had sent her.

If this info about a portable graveyard was true, then as long as they didn't get rid of it, they would never win. It wouldn't matter how many players they could kill, if the numbers advantage never disappeared.

But she couldn't send anyone to look for it. They were under-manned and overworked, as it was already.

Even though Astaroth had greatly diminished the player force at the gate, if they just kept coming back, the battle would only end in their defeat. And Khalor could no longer summon his full army, for at least another day.

All these factors pointed to a gloomy possibility. Were they going to lose the Bastion already?

After just conquering it? Had they bitten off more than they could chew?

Phoenix shook her head, washing away these negative thoughts. Her resolve hardened.

'We won't lose. I refuse to lose!'

She sent a message to Astaroth.

'Get back inside the walls before the exhaustion status hits. You will be unable to move for five minutes.'

It took a moment before Astaroth's response came.

'What about outside the wall? If you send Khalar back outside, there will be no one to empty out the stone bowl.'

'I have a way to buy us time. You just need to get back inside. So will everyone on the outer part of the wall.'

Phoenix promptly sent the order for everyone to retreat inside the wall. She was already opening her guild interface.

As soon as messages started pouring in that their members were huddling inside, Phoenix tapped the option on the interface to activate the rune barrier.

She promptly received a notification.

Caution! You have no mana reserves in the Bastion to fuel this option. Please provide the mana through other means swiftly, or the barrier activation will cancel.

She rapidly messaged Astaroth again.

'Astaroth, we need your insane mana pool. Touch the interior wall and pour all the mana you can into it!'

The man did as told, taking the last few seconds he had on his Royal Protection to dump almost all his mana into the walls. As he did, the runes engraved into the stony surface lit up in a bright golden colour.

As they did, they detached from the wall, suddenly rising over them, as energy expanded from every rune to connect them, and expanded into a bright golden bubble.

The bubble rapidly formed over the Bastion, going from the walls to the highest branch of the tree at its center. It was hovering just outside the walls, and seemed to go into the ground, as it had made a gouge into the ground where it had stopped.

Astaroth looked at it in awe, as his exhaustion status kicked in. Unfortunately for him, the status, combined with his close-to-depleted mana bar, drained him completely of his energy, and he dropped unconscious.

Phoenix, who was still laying on her back, on the tree's lowest branch, could still see the golden sheen through the tree's foliage. It almost appeared as though the entire base was basking in a heavenly glow.

The dwarf who had made this possible, Malador, was currently jumping in joy as he looked at the powerful barrier surrounding the base.

"Yes! It worked, hahaha! I'm a genius!"

He hollered happily, as the people in the building around looked at him through the windows. All the crafters were new to the guild, and barely interacted with each other, so they didn't know him personally.

But seeing him react like this to the completion of the barrier, they could guess it was his handy work. That left a good impression on their minds of the dwarf, who had previously seemed hostile and perpetually grumpy.

Khalor, after killing every player that remained in the stone bowl, mounted his drake. As he flew out of the enclosure, he saw the sprawled ash elf on the side of the tunnel leading out.

He clicked his tongue, disappointed in him a bit, but he still went to pick him up. Once the drake had him in its claws, Khalor messaged Phoenix, asking her where she was.

She asked why he wanted to know, and he told her he had a fleshy package for her. Wondering what he was talking about, she gave him her location.

When the drake flew up to the branch and flung Astaroth's unconscious form at Phoenix, she yelped in surprise.

"What the hell were you thinking?! If I hadn't caught him, he could have fallen to his death, you idiot!"

Khalor chuckled.

"I knew you would catch him. I wouldn't have thrown him otherwise. Also, it isn't my fault he was unconscious near the gate. That's his fault."

Phoenix was half tempted to turn Khalor into cinders right there, for his lack of empathy. But from what Astaroth had told her about him, she still understood his predisposition to be a dick.

But she still felt like he should have at least some modicum of respect for Astaroth, since he was the guild leader. But she doubted he cared about that at all.

"So. How long does this thing last?"

As Khalor asked this, a small whip made of water latched to the branch near Phoenix. Violette hauled herself up there with them, still smiling like a child after Christmas.

"Did you see Phoenix?! Did you see how I killed them all?! I was feeling so powerful!"

Phoenix laughed a bit.

"Yes, I saw. You did great, Violette. As for your question, this lasts thirty minutes. We better hope Astaroth is back on his feet by then."

"Hmm. Okay. I only wonder about one thing."

"And what is that?"

"I wonder where their portable graveyard is."

Phoenix looked at him in shock. Gulnur had sent her that info in private.

And she had told no one. And she hadn't told anyone.

Khalor wasn't supposed to know.

"How do you know about that?" she asked, warily.

"I have my ways."

Phoenix hated how Khalor always seemed to know everything before everyone. But it at least made him dependable in some fashion.

She just hoped he would always stay on their side. Making an enemy out of someone that has an uncanny way of knowing everything would be terrible.

Chapter 313 Discordance

Standing on the outside of the magic barrier, many players were smacking on it, trying to see if it had a durability bar or something. But even after hundreds of hits, it didn't even seem to dim.

Most of the smaller guilds started becoming displeased. Someone had baited them here with the prospect of a fortress from which to grow into bigger guilds.

But ever since the top ten guilds had stepped foot near this battlefield, they had taken control of it, and had used them as cannon fodder.

And now, they couldn't even enter if they wanted to. There was no way of knowing how long this would last, either.

The situation suddenly looked terrible for them. Their members had lost levels by the handful, and there was still no capture in sight.

When the first smaller guild gave up, it rapidly created a domino effect. One after the other, smaller guilds grabbed their members and supplies and left the battlefield.

But when Aces High tried holding onto the resources of one small guild on their side of the siege, conflict rapidly erupted. It spread like wildfire, with complaints and shouting suddenly happening everywhere.

Killi started hearing the shouts, and his face became sombre. He didn't even need to read the influx of reports in his guild chat to know where the trouble had started.

By the subject alone, he knew the culprit.

"This fucking kid, I swear!" Killi fumed.

He rapidly went around his zone, assuring the small guilds that no one would touch their supplies, even threatening some of the medium-sized guilds to back off, or else.

This caused a lot of grumbling, but the medium guilds knew better than to confront a larger guild like the Knights of the Sun. That was like signing a death warrant for their guild.

This assuaged the small guilds on the northern front, but the damage was already done for the southern part, where Aces High was situated. Fights had broken out, and pliers were dropping like flies.

Azamus was still comfortably sitting in a tree far behind the northern front. He hadn't ordered his guild to grab the resources of the small guilds, but he was quite happy they did.

These supplies consisted mainly of potions, health and mana alike, and ammunition, arrows, bullets, and whatnot. Aside from the potions, everything held little value, but the potions were much more valuable.

The potions were useful, to keep his powerful members and officers on the battlefield longer. The model many guilds had adopted was that when their members were close to death, they would retreat, and heal up before going back in.

This had worked, mostly, against the side that didn't have Khalor and Azamus on it. It had been a success to a lesser extent to the west, too, before Phoenix pulled a scorched earth tactic.

But Azamus didn't care about the other guilds. Even if he was the last one standing, he was going to fight until he broke in and conquered the fortress.

He didn't even want to keep it. He just wanted to smear shit on the face of Khalor, Astaroth, and Phoenix, who had blatantly disrespected him on many occasions.

As he saw Killi trying to run around and placate the guild leaders, Azamus felt only disdain for the man.

'What a pushover. That's why he'll never be number one again. Who cares if people respect you? Power is absolute.'

Letting his emotions take over his judgement, Azamus locked his scope on Killi's head, looking at him spin like a panicked chicken, trying to have everyone make peace again.

His finger hovered over the trigger, wanting nothing more than to pull it. But as he rested his finger on it, a sharp object pushed against his carotid, making his heart freeze.

"Blue. What a displeasure to see you here," he growled.

"Are you trying to start a war, you childish idiot? You know full well that most guilds will align with the Knights. Don't be stupid, for once in your life."

"Don't threaten me with a good time, you crappy assassin. I could take all of you with my Aces High. And I still have my sights on Killi. I doubt you can one hit kill me, and I will get my shot in."

"Are you willing to test your theory out?"

Saying this, Blue Peacock's blade dug into Azamus' flesh a bit, making a trickle of blood form.

"Tch. Fine. But I'm keeping the resources I stole. They're mine now."

He lifted his finger from the trigger, resting it over it on his gun's body.

"I don't care about the animosity you garner with the small guilds. That is yours and their problem. But don't think for a second you can do the same with the ten top guilds."

Blue lifted her blade away, vanishing from where she stood. Azamus spun around, trying to lock his sights on her, but he couldn't find her.

"Hmph! Bitch! I'll have your head too, one day."

Returning to his crouched position, Azamus dragged his sights across the battlefield. He was half tempted to shoot the small guilds and their inconsequential members.

But he restrained himself, thinking them a waste of bullets. He was already happy with having taken down Khalor.

He never got a lock on Astaroth, who was moving around so much, and so fast, that tracking him was like trying to shoot a fly's wings off.

Since the large guilds shared a part of their info, he knew Phoenix had used a skill to boost herself, that had caused her to become incapacitated after. He was hoping Astaroth had used the same.

If that were the case, then the moment he would have slowed down, Azamus would have blown his head off. But that never came to happen.

Seeing him practically teleport back inside his fortress had put a big damper on Azamus' anticipation. He already thought of Astaroth as being a coward for being such a slippery bastard.

But seeing him retreat like that made him fume in anger.

"I'll get my chance, and you will go down," the gnome muttered, keeping his eye glued to the scope on his rifle.

Chapter 314 Rebuilding Their Strength

Inside the Bastion, Players were running around, trying to reach the palace. A message had appeared in the guild chat that had put all of them into a frenzy.

'Every combat-class player is to rendezvous at the tree palace's entrance. We will refund their levels right away. If the accumulated Exp permits it, we will also give extra levels.'

The prospect of maybe getting extra levels enticed every player to rush to the rendezvous point. The higher their level got, the harder it became to level up.

So no one would pass on possible free levels.

Inside the palace, the officers, along with the core members, of which Declan now was a part, were already gathered together. Astaroth had regained consciousness, and he was the one to order this.

He figured that getting his troops back up to peak strength was a good move to make, regardless of if they could level to level fifty after this fight. Khalor had grumbled a bit, insisting it was better for them to reach level fifty, first.

But Astaroth had brushed him off, saying the decision wasn't his to make.

"You don't get to complain here, since you were the one that put us in this mess. I would have preferred grinding my way to level fifty, instead of having to risk losing everything we got, just to take a shortcut," Astaroth responded to his complaints sternly.

Even if Khalor was obviously pissed at getting reprimanded, he knew he was partly to blame here, and kept his mouth shut.

Alienating the most powerful players in the game, and his allies, was not in his best interest. He needed them at the top of their game, yes, but he also needed them on his side.

Everyone present was given enough Exp to reach level forty-nine, as a preventive measure to keep the power balance on the core members' side.

Khalor grumbled a bit, saying he had already been at that level, and that this was only fair. But Astaroth and Phoenix ignored his complaints.

Once they were done, they exited the palace, heading to the main entrance. Outside the massive double doors, which Violette had to unfreeze so they could enter, every combat player was present.

The excitement they felt was palpable in the air. Phoenix started by asking everyone that had suffered a death to take a step forward.

Surprisingly, not as many of them walked forward as she thought would. Then, she noticed that most of them were either melee classes or the ranged players they had set on the walls on the eastern side.

It made sense, in a certain way, that the ones on the ground would have died more often. They were taking the brunt of the attacks, after all.

Even if they were assigned a healer, to keep them alive as long as possible, that didn't guarantee their survival. But all in all, she was satisfied.

Once this had been done, she looked at her interface. There were still hundreds of millions of Exp points left.

The carnage Astaroth, her, and Khalor had sown across multiple fronts, coupled with the average level of the assailants, made for a massive reaping of Exp.

She figured a reward for their members was in order.

"Alright. We still have quite a lot of remaining Exp. I want all the members under level forty to step forward."

Ninety percent of the players present step forward. Phoenix lightly chuckled.

She distributed Exp to every one of them, making them level up to level forty. This would allow them to have a better chance of survival.

Athena was not present during this, having already returned to the top branches of the tree, trying to scout out the enemy's movements. When she saw the carnage happening outside, she almost burst out in laughter.

She wrote a report to Phoenix, stating that many guilds had left, and that what remained were trying to plunder the ones still trying to leave.

Phoenix was still giving out Exp when she saw the message, and she grinned. After leveling every single player to level forty, she looked at the Exp reserves.

There was still over fifty million Exp left. She could have granted an extra level to a few of the players that were already level forty, but she held on to it instead.

Looking at the timer left to the barrier, another plan sprouted in her mind. There were about fifteen minutes left, and that would give her more than enough time to execute it.

The players that received the Exp walked back into a messy rank, awaiting their next reward or orders. Which Phoenix didn't make them wait long for.

"Alright, people. I want you all to send screenshots of your updated levels into the guild chat, so we can keep track of them. There will be additional rewards at the end of this, if we win, but for now, that's it."

Some of them looked slightly disappointed, but they mostly kept it for themselves, not wanting to lose any chance at a reward at all. They did as ordered, sending the new screenshots.

Seeing everyone sending their updated levels, and awaiting the next instruction, Phoenix completed the plan forming in her mind. She cleared her throat before explaining the situation outside first.

"I received a report from Athena that the guilds outside had a falling out, and are currently either fleeing the scene or fighting over resources. That means the next bout of this siege will have fewer enemies to worry about."

The players before her beamed with joy. Fewer attackers meant less pressure on them, which in turn meant higher survivability.

Of course, most of them didn't take into consideration that the next wave would have many more high-level and experienced players in it.

But Phoenix didn't forget that detail. She had noticed how most top guilds had hung back most of their power pillars.

The numbers advantage might have suddenly shrunk, but the quality of their adversaries would jump. But her plan would level the playing field again.

"The next wave of enemies will be much harder to deal with. Up to now, we have fought mainly weaker guilds and players, acting as cannon fodder. The next wave will not be the same."

She let the info sink in, tempering their excitement a bit. She needed all of them to remain on edge.

Carelessness would only result in mistakes.

"The good news is that I have a way to counter this issue to a certain extent."

Seeing hope light up in their eyes, Phoenix knew she had their undivided attention. She explained her plan to them, getting many looks of admiration from even Declan's ex-military pals.

"This is going to work!" they all thought.

Chapter 315 End Of Respite

While Phoenix explained her plan, Declan's ex-battlefield engineer offered a bit of his expertise, polishing some details of her plan, which Phoenix appreciated. It took her five minutes to explain it, and that left them ten to implement it.

As soon as she finished, the concerned players went into action right away. They had a great deal of work to do and would need every second at their disposal.

Astaroth loved Phoenix's new plan, as it would allow him to shine the most. Aside from him, all the melee players were also thrilled.

Generally put, Phoenix wanted to form a new inner wall surrounding the tree palace, and the newly reconstructed buildings, leaving a large space between the outer wall and the new inner one.

But she also asked the druids to speed up the growth of nature in between the two walls, to make the thickest jungle they could. The more trees and shrubbery there were, the easier it would be for the enemy to get lost.

She also asked them to block out as much of the sky with the newly formed trees as they could, accentuating the disorienting effect.

Morticia had butted in at that moment, getting a dagger-filled look from Phoenix. But when the woman explained why she interrupted, Phoenix smiled widely.

Morticia offered her help on the disorientation part. She had a spell to do that already, and it could be used in many ways.

If used on one person, it would have maximum effect, but she said she could also cast it as a veil over a large area. When Phoenix asked her if she could manage the whole Bastion, Morticia smiled and said it was the best time to test her limits.

For once, Phoenix appreciated the woman's gutsy attitude. Now was indeed the best time to push their limits.

With this all in place, the guild would switch from siege defence to guerilla tactics. The tanks and healers would roam around in pairs, while the melee fighters would pull ambushes, doing damage and retreating.

With this going on, a player like Astaroth, or Khalor, would be like fish in water. With their high damage, they wouldn't even need to retreat.

Aside from those two, many players were also very excited to play this way. Even some of the ranged players wanted to join in.

But Phoenix wanted most of them to be high in the tree branches. Having as many of the ranged players there would allow them to not only give the positions of the enemies but also rain hell on them from above.

As the timer ticked out, the new inner wall was completed, and nature's growth had been sped up between the two barriers of stone. Looking at it from inside the protected zone, it almost looked like a much smaller fortress, with a thick jungle all around.

Normally, a castle or fortress would clear out as much of the natural hiding spots around their encampment, to keep enemies from sneaking up to the walls.

But that was not what Phoenix wanted. She wanted to have her enemies looking for them as much as possible.

This way, they, as defenders, would have the utmost advantage. The dwarven player that was previously under Declan walked over to Phoenix.

"Missus, this plan of yours is beautiful. It reminds me of an old war that was fought when I was still a child. The rebels were using exactly the tactics you are using now."

"Did this war end well for them?"

"Oh, they lost eventually. But not before costing the world so many men, their names were feared. For every one of them we killed, they killed fifty of us, until we switched to more devastating weapons that killed many innocents."

"Then let's see if we can beat that ratio!" Phoenix exclaimed, smiling.

If the man wasn't aware that she only wanted to protect their fortress, he would have thought her a madwoman, for talking about death so casually.

But then, there was also the fact that they were in a game, and death wasn't permanent. But then again, being on the side that was winning was all he cared about.

The dwarf grinned before leaving. He wanted to try something of his own.

Since they were going full guerilla, he wanted to make as many traps as he could while he still had time. He wasn't much of a fighter, even though he could manage on the battlefield.

He was always more of a supporting person, building structures, de-mining fields, and making sure encampments were easy to defend. So setting traps was the best use of his skills.

Over the ten minutes left on the barrier, he could only set up a few, but he would not stop until he got caught. Soon, the timer ended.

With the barrier fizzling out of existence, the fighting outside came to a stop. The ten big guilds did not know how long this would last, and now that the barrier dropped, they needed to get their ducks in a row.

Letting most of the small guilds finally escape, the top ten guilds brought all their troops to the gate and hole in the wall. The fact that no one tried stopping their advance put them on high alert, but they welcomed the first real advance they had in the last hour.

Reaching the gate, Killi noticed it was left open. This raised his level of uneasiness another notch. But even after entering the stone bowl, where many of his members had been torn to pieces, something was off.

First, no one was here to defend it anymore. Second, the previously empty circle of stone was now filled to the brim with trees, shrubs, and climbing plants.

It was like they had left the zone to nature for hundreds of years. But it made no sense.

The players that had been here previously seemed even more confused than him, since the sight had changed so much.

The other guilds that had entered through the hole in the eastern wall faced similar terrain. The few guilds that remained on the southern front climbed the walls, reaching the crest, before staring at the jungle in front of them.

They received attacks from the tree overhead and had to either quickly jump into the fortress or jump back out. The same thought popped into every guild leader's mind.

'This is a trap.'

Chapter 316 Reaching Mastery 1

Athena, from high in the tree, had partied up with all the ranged players, forming a raid party. Since she had a way of seeing without using her eyes, she was currently acting as the group's detection device.

Using her necklace of echolocation, Athena could see the enemy players without needing visual contact. Using this, she would relay their location into the group minimap.

This allowed the ranged players on Paragon's side to launch some clustered attack, or 'Tactical nukes' in some sense. The attacks were far from precise, but overload a small zone full of arrows, bullets, and spells, and you were bound to hit something.

Athena also pinned the locations of the spotted enemies into the guild chat, allowing the melee players to coordinate their guerilla assaults.

It took virtually no time for Khalor and Astaroth to start clearing out packs of invading players. It was like a game of cat and mouse for them.

Morticia's disorientation spell was stretched as far as she could, barely scraping the insides of the outer walls. But she didn't know how long she could hold on to it.

But Phoenix assured her it didn't matter. Only disorienting them in the early stages mattered.

Because then they would already be lost.

It made sense to the woman, but she still intended to keep her spell up as long as she could. And right now, that was taking all her brain cells to figure out how.

The spell she was casting required a lot of concentration, and she could not drink a mana potion while holding it. But she had no other way of regaining mana yet.

She knew that most of the core members in the guild, the ones that had been partying together for a while, had a way to regain mana as they fought.

She also knew that some other players had talked about methods to gain mana regen online. But there was never any concrete evidence or clear details.

It made learning this on her own a close to impossible task. And she could hardly break focus now, just to try something.

She was already pushing herself just to maintain her spell while it was spread this wide. Normally, she would only affect a radius of a few meters, or a few specific targets.

But this went beyond what she was used to. Morticia was sweating profusely, her mind in a constant state of overexertion.

She knew the basis behind the functioning of this spell. This was why she could start from a single target spell to an AoE one.

And now, she was basically using it like a massive zone spell. This was thanks to hours of practice, and her attention to detail.

As a psychologist, she appreciated the way the spell played with the psyche of players, leading them astray through a sense of confusion and self-doubt.

This allowed her to better control its effects and area of effect, and why she could manipulate it at all

But as she felt close to losing control of her spell, she felt something click in her mind. The pressure from the spell suddenly disappeared as a notification resounded in her ears.

She opened her eyes, feeling like the spell wasn't draining her at all. She opened her notifications, curious about what it was.

Dazed and Confused spell has reached mastery level one. Congratulations, your efforts have led you to better understand the nature of this spell.

She swiftly opened her spell list.

Dazed and Confused (Level 5) (Mastery level 0/5 -> 1/5): casting this spell throws a veil of confusion and doubt over the target's mind. This will put the target under the disoriented effect, making them unable to think rationally and direct themselves normally. Mana cost: 20MP/second -> 1MP/second/100-meter radius.

Mastery level 1 effect: Taste of the fey wild.

The mastery you have gained over this spell has led you closer to its source. The targets caught in your spell now get a taste of the fey wilderness, where it originated from. 10% chance of causing hallucinations to the targets.

The added effect was quite the addition, but for her, it was more about the now definite MP cost per range. That explained the sudden decrease in strain she felt.

Calculating that from the center of the Bastion, all the way to the outer wall, there was about a kilometre, the mana cost went from twenty per second to ten per second.

Looking at her mana bar, which was now about at a quarter full, Morticia smirked. The decrease in strain also had another effect.

She was now no longer having trouble holding the spell, which allowed her to think about other things. Like drinking a mana potion.

She rapidly messaged Phoenix, telling her there was no longer a time limit on her spell. Phoenix asked her how she managed that, but Morticia stayed secretive about it.

She would tell her later, but, for now, it was better to just focus on the battle at hand.

Screams of terror started resounding all around the Bastion, mixed in with the sounds of battle. Morticia smiled at this, knowing it resulted from her improved spell.

Although Phoenix was frustrated at the woman for keeping this type of info to herself, the screams of terror that now came from their trap zone assuaged her.

As long as it helped the battle in the long run, she would allow her to keep her secrets, if only for now. Any trick to make players stronger would benefit the entire guild, so keeping them to herself was out of the question.

But now was not the time for them to argue. Phoenix looked back down at the trap zone from up above in the main tree.

She wanted to blast the zones marked for enemy sightings so badly. But if she did, she would burn the forest to the ground.

And that would ruin all the effort they put into having it grow in the first place. So her next best option was to do precision strikes.

But she still wondered how she could do that, with fire in a forest.

'Should I just go down there in my armoured form, and fight like Gale?'

Chapter 317 Figuring Out Some Contingencies

As soon as the shield had lifted, Khalor had jumped into action. He knew their objective was to throw the enemy off as much as possible, so he thought of a way to help with that.

He sent both his drake and two-headed raven to fly over the trap zone. As long as they never passed over the same spot at the same time, this would keep the enemies on their toes, in a constant state of fear.

That, added to the confusion spell Morticia had thrown over the Bastion, would lead to the enemies constantly looking over their shoulders. If this didn't make them lose themselves, nothing would.

As for him, he kept with him his death knight, as well as a few high-level ghouls. This would allow him to move quickly and perform precise and deadly strikes.

As soon as Athena started pinning coordinates on the map, he took the closest group to him there was, and lunged in that direction. In a matter of minutes, he was onto them.

Khalor started combat by throwing in his bident like a lance, as his death knight lunged into the small party. Surprisingly enough, the disorienting effect was forcing the guilds to fragment as they entered the artificial jungle they grew.

This made it so that no large group ever stayed large for long. Players would wander off on their own, suddenly unable to find their allies anymore.

This played in Paragon's, as with smaller groups to confront, any melee fighter on their side could do proper hit-and-run tactics without getting outright slain. Of course, this didn't apply to Khalor and Astaroth.

The small party Khalor had honed on was composed of five players. One of which was killed in a single blow from the charging death knight.

The other four were suddenly assaulted by a group of ten ghouls and one fierce necromancer. Combat lasted a little under thirty seconds; the ghouls tearing each player into shreds so rapidly; the players didn't even know how to react.

After clearing this first party, Khalor looked at the map again. He noticed many new pings had already disappeared, with many new ones replacing them.

Athena was being as precise as she could, writing the group sizes when possible, or specifying group or single target next to her pins.

This made Khalor's and Astaroth's jobs much easier.

Spotting his next target, Khalor smiled.

'This is going to be fun.'

He dashed toward his next group, sending the coordinates to his flying undead, so they could harass the single players walking around on their own.

This way, they would accrue mental stress, and would be easier targets for the weaker ambushers in their guild. Although Khalor didn't care about them particularly, he still could be a team player when necessary.

As the besieging guilds poured more and more into the Bastion, many guild leaders and officers stayed outside, trying to coordinate from there. When they received the first reports of their members getting lost, it solidified their feeling of this being a trap.

But there wasn't much they could do. Every time they sent someone on the wall to get a better visual, they got shot at or killed before they could get a good look.

This wasn't going as planned anymore, and even the medium guilds were thinking of backing out now. The top ten guilds were slowly losing grip over them, and it wouldn't be long before they were left alone to siege the place.

Killi was standing outside the walls, one hand on his hip, the other under his chin, trying to figure out a way to get around this.

'Whoever is casting the disorienting spell can't hold it forever, I think. But even then, they are picking us out like small game.'

The idea of getting his members hunted like rabbits left a sour taste in his mouth. Killi did not want to give up on this fortress, but the way things were going, he wouldn't have much of a choice.

'If only there was a way of countering the spell. Running a straight line from here to the center of the fortress wouldn't be as hard, then.'

But wrack his brain as he may, he wasn't finding anything that could help. A guild thought about digging under the fortress, but as soon as they reached the zone affected by the spell, their guild leader and officers started seeing their ping on the map move weirdly.

They were no longer digging straight, and it almost seemed like they were sometimes trying to run from something. To prevent any accident from happening, they had their members pull back out, and abandoned that idea.

This was going to go from a constant pressure siege to a battle of attrition siege. And right now, the attackers were losing.

Inside this same forest, Astaroth was having a field day. His high mobility and high damage allowed him to run across the whole jungle, slaying enemies like swatting flies.

Not that the larger parties he crossed were defenceless. But even then, he would shred through them like nothing, because of their confusion and slow reaction time.

The spell Morticia was casting was making this guerilla tactic a charm. Players that were disoriented were so easily surprised that, with Astaroth's speed, he would have a few seconds of inaction every time, without fail.

After killing his fourth group, he decided to take a slight break and check on Leon.

'I wonder why he is still sleeping. His help would clear this siege much faster.'

Going back toward the palace, Astaroth crossed paths with Khalor. He stopped for a moment, wanting to ask him something.

"Hey! Wait up!"

Khalor skidded to a stop, wondering why Astaroth would suddenly interrupt him.

"What?"

"I was thinking about something. I wondered if you had any idea where I could find a legacy that would suit me."

Khalor looked at him with annoyance.

"Find your own legacy! Do I look like I know everything?!"

Without giving time to Astaroth to respond, Khalor darted back into chase.

"Sheesh. Calm down, you grumpy bag of bones..."

Astaroth brushed off his impatience and resumed his path to the palace.

Chapter 318 Elaina, The Fletcher

Reaching the inner wall was easy for any member of Paragon, since they had access to a functioning minimap, and the confusion spell did not affect them. This made for easy travel for Astaroth.

Jumping over the new inner wall, he landed inside what would eventually become their crafting area. A few buildings had already been rebuilt here, with crafters working overtime to produce combat supplies.

The blacksmiths were producing arrowheads for those who specialized in fletching. These arrows were all going up the tree through a system of pulleys that they had hastily built and installed.

The wild elves were burning through arrows at a quick pace, their accuracy through thick foliage frightening. This belied their experience at repelling monsters from a safe distance.

Astaroth walked to a blacksmith hut, where an enormous pile of wooden shafts was bundled outside the door. He gave two rapid knocks on the side of the door frame before entering.

"Hello? Anyone home?"

Astaroth heard some hubbub from the back of the blacksmith's hut, behind a closed wooden door. As the hubbub got closer, the door slammed open.

"Who in tarn—" the Elven woman started screaming as she scanned the intruder in her shop.

Astaroth smiled at her, Like a parent waiting for their child to finish their sentence.

"Oh, it's you, sir. I'm sorry. We are in the middle of a siege and I wasn't expecting anyone to visit me, you see?"

"It's ok. I assumed as much."

"What can I do for you, guild leader?"

I assumed by the pile of arrow shafts outside your shop that you are the fletcher. I'm going towards the tree palace, and since I already was next to here, I thought I might as well bring a batch of arrows there. Do you have some ready?"

The woman looked at him weirdly. She somehow assumed that her guild leader wouldn't waste his time on menial tasks like these, since he was one of the most powerful players in New Eden.

But as Astaroth kept waiting for her response, she snapped back to reality.

"Ahh! Yes, I have a few bundles ready. They are in the back. But are you sure you want to carry them? We have some players acting as couriers already. No need to go out of your way, sir."

Astaroth chuckled.

'What kind of image do they have of me?' he wondered.

He scanned her to get a name.

Status

Name: Elaina Reed

Race: Elf

Grade: Common

Class: Blacksmith (Specialty: Fletching) / Enchanter (Specialty: Projectiles)

Level: 9

Crafting Level: 1/5 Apprentice / 1/5 Apprentice

"It is no trouble at all, Elaina. Please give me what you have ready, and I shall deliver them to the tree palace on my way there."

The Elven woman nodded her head, dazed at the friendliness of the guild leader. She took a mental note to tell the other crafters about his nonchalance.

All the crafters had limited their interactions to each other and the players on the lower rungs, having one of them act as a medium with the officers. But they were reluctant to talk to the leader or vice leader.

Knowing that the guild leader was much less imposing than they originally thought would go a long way toward the future. After all, what crafter didn't have projects that required funding?

Elaina walked him to the back part of her shop, where she applied the fletching to the arrows that came from the other blacksmiths. A pile of finished arrows was waiting in a corner.

Astaroth looked around while Elaina gathered the arrows into a bundle. There were many tools and products he didn't recognize, and it piqued his interest.

"Elaina, tell me something."

She spun around, the bundle of arrows in her arms.

"Yes, sir?"

"I saw in your info that you were also an enchanter. Are these tools for that?"

As he asked, he waved his arm at the panoply of brushes, sharp-tipped pens, and small burins on a worktable. All of which were lying down next to different glass pots, with powders and liquids unknown to him.

Seeing his interest in her work, Elaina became excited.

"Ahh, those. Yes, they are indeed tools for my second profession. I wanted to specialize in making the best projectiles in New Eden, so I started as a blacksmith. But when I heard enchanters could apply wonderful effects on practically anything, it enthralled me!"

Astaroth looked at her sudden enthusiasm and smiled. He let her keep talking.

"Since enchanter was better suited to make powerful projectiles, I took it up too. But making arrows myself, which can become these works of magic and art, was so attractive to me, I never dropped the blacksmith profession."

Astaroth took a seat next to her worktable, leaning on his hand.

"I have yet to produce a work that gets me my Journeyman rank, but I feel I'm on the cusp of it. I hoped that joining Paragons would give me access to materials that could lead me further on this path"

Elaina had been talking for about three minutes before she realized there was no answer back to her. She spun to face Astaroth; her face red in embarrassment.

"I'm sorry I took up your time, sir! I got carried away!"

Astaroth laughed.

"Don't worry about it. Passion will be a great drive for what you want to accomplish. There is no reason to feel embarrassed."

"But I'm sure you need to head back out to the battlefield, sir. I shouldn't have taken so much of your time. I apologize!"

Astaroth rose from his seat, walking up to the woman. He put a hand on her shoulder, smiling warmly.

"I've been looking at the reports all this time. My presence is not yet a necessity. There is nothing to worry about. But I am curious about one thing."

Keeping silent, Elaina looked at him.

"Do you have any of those finished enchanted arrows? I am sure Athena would appreciate them, even if you think they don't have a use."

Elaina looked befuddled. She hadn't expected the guild leader to ask for her unrefined products, which might be utterly useless in this crucial battle.

But she wouldn't dare hide them from him.

Walking to a corner of her shop, Elaina pushed aside a heavy work table before kneeling down. She pulled a plank out of the floor and extracted a box from beneath the floor.

She got up and presented the box to Astaroth. When he opened it, he smiled widely.

"She is going to love these," he stated.

Chapter 319 Waking Their Guardian

Inside the case in his hands, four arrows, displayed on a velvety cushion. Astaroth had just scanned them, and the four of them had different enchantments.

Stun Arrow

This arrow has a stun spell engraved on its arrowhead. On impact, the arrowhead will shatter, dealing reduced damage, but stunning its target for three seconds.

Alert Arrow

This arrow has a magic stone inlaid inside that has an Alarm spell stored within. When the magic stone is lodged inside an enemy, the alarm spell activates, producing a shrill sound that can be heard from far away.

Vine Burst Arrow

This arrow has vines carved into its shaft, with strange runes etched into them. The arrowhead also contains a strange seed in a glass encasing. On impact with anything, the glass case shatters and the seed embeds itself in the surface hit. The runes on the shaft then nourish the seed for explosive growth. Can form restraints, a vine wall, or a single high vine.

Silence Arrow

This arrow has a silencing effect enchanted into it. It makes it practically untraceable by sound, and when it hits its target, it transfers the effect to it. Can also limit spell casting that requires a chant.

Astaroth inspected each one, grinning as he did.

"These are great, Elaina. Why haven't you had them brought to Athena yet?"

"Sir. They deal no added damage. How could they be of any use in a fight?"

Astaroth looked at her weirdly, before lightly conking her on the head with the wooden case. Elaine rubbed her head, looking at Astaroth with wide eyes.

"There is more to fighting than who deals the most damage. As a gamer, you should know that."

Elaina looked at him with reddening cheeks.

"I... I'm not much of a gamer..." she muttered.

"Come again?" Astaroth asked, with confusion on his face.

"I said I'm not a gamer. New Eden is the first game I play..."

Silence permeated the room, as Astaroth was at a loss for words.

Coughing to clear his throat, he shoved the box into his inventory.

"Ahem! In that case, keep it in mind for the future. Sometimes, the weirdest effects are the most valuable in combat. Now, I'll head to the palace and deliver all the arrows on my way there. Remember to send all your new experiments there too, from now on."

Astaroth grabbed the bundled-up regular arrows and shoved those into his inventory, too. He turned tail and walked at a brisk pace out of the shop, before Elaina could tell him something to make him feel bad about reprimanding her.

As soon as he was out of the blacksmith's hut, he blasted away, quickening his steps with wind magic. Elaina stood in the back of her workshop for a while.

She was conflicted about how to feel. Should she be happy he validated her work, or insulted that he bonked her head for being inexperienced?

She eventually shelved her confused dilemma away, getting back to work.

Astaroth reached the tree palace in record time, heading to the newly built lifting platform. He set the arrows down on it, next to the case, and wrote an interface message on the case to deliver it to Athena.

The players acting as couriers for the materials had found out this option, and relayed it in the guild chat. Astaroth found it quite useful.

After activating the lift mechanism that worked on counterweights and gravity, Astaroth walked into the palace. He immediately directed himself to the second floor, where the rooms were.

Arriving there, he pushed open the doors to the center room where Leon was now living. Instead of finding Leon sprawled on the ground where he had left him, Leon was now balled up cozily in his bed.

Astaroth briefly scanned him to see if the exhausted effect was still present, but found no sign of it.

"Tsk."

Clicking his tongue, Astaroth walked up to the bed, kicking its side with vigour.

"Get up, you lazy cat. We are besieged. It's your duty to defend this place now, remember?"

"Mmm."

Leon grumbled before turning to the other side.

Astaroth looked at him with anger.

"That's why I prefer dogs."

Astaroth used telekinesis to lift the beast man off his bed. Once he was high enough, he suddenly let go.

Leon started falling back down, and his eyes popped wide open. He caught himself back, landing on his feet, looking at Astaroth with anger.

"Hey! I was having a delightful dream."

"We are under attack and you elected to sleep instead of helping us."

"I was going to help when you needed me the most. I know I have a job to do, but I didn't want to take away the fun for you."

"Tch. Just give us a hand now. How about that? I don't need you on the battlefield just yet. But I would appreciate a little help."

Leon looked at him with a moody stare.

"Fine."

After giving his response, he sucked in an enormous amount of air.

Astaroth saw the mana in the air get sucked along, and Leon suddenly shone brightly in his eyes. The next second, Leon roared mightily, shaking the tree palace and the Bastion's walls.

The roar reverberated all across the forest in every direction. The players attacking the Bastion stopped in their footsteps.

After a few seconds of silence, a few weaker roars echoed back in rapid succession.

Leon smiled, turning his head to Astaroth.

"There. I got you some reinforcements. Is that good enough for now?"

"What do you mean rei—"

As he was asking, Astaroth received a report from Athena.

'Leader. I have some rapid movements coming from every direction. Whatever is coming, it's big.'

Astaroth frowned. Looking at Leon's smirk, he felt uneasy.

"What reinforcements?"

"I challenged every other zone boss in the vicinity to fight me. They should trample on any abnormal standing in their way while they come here."

Astaroth took a second to register what the guardian had said. Then he snapped.

"You idiot!"

Chapter 320 Finding The Linchpin

"Hey! I'm helping. What's wrong this time?"

"Use your head for a second. What other abnormalities are on the way here?"

"What do you mean? There is only the enemy and yo—oh. Ohhhh... Oups?"

Leon shrugged his shoulders, realizing his mistake. But he didn't look remorseful in the slightest.

Astaroth kicked the ground next to him, before opening his guild chat.

'All fighters in the inner wall trap zone need to retreat. I repeat. Retreat now.'

His message confused many of the players at first, but when they heard the sudden howl of monsters coming closer and closer, combined with screams of pain and terror coming from out the walls, they obeyed.

Athena, still perched up at the highest point of the tree, saw various monsters rushing out of the forest in all directions. Scanning them, she noticed all of their grades and gulped.

She hurriedly reported back to Astaroth and Phoenix.

'I see five zone bosses, from all directions, most of them at the elite grade, one at the rare grade. What is happening?'

Astaroth pulled his face down in annoyance. He turned his head to look at Leon.

"You better make sure they don't reach further than the trap zone we built. Our newly constructed structures are inside those walls. Don't let our efforts become wasted."

Leon scratched the back of his head.

"I'm sorry. I thought this would help. I'll stop any of them as soon as they are in the trap zone. Although, I'm sure this will put the invaders in a bind, too."

"It better," Astaroth replied, grumbling.

Athena kept observing the movement of the monsters, and from the reports she sent, Astaroth was at least partly satisfied. The sieging guilds all tried to stop the monsters from plowing through their zones, taking heavy casualties, as well as losing resources.

Now, it would depend on how Leon could contain them, if they would also pay a price. He hoped the guardian was strong enough to contain them, with his new strength.

Because it would hurt them even more if he failed to contain even one.

Deep in the southern forest around the Bastion, Azamus was repositioning himself. After the trap zone had been confirmed, and all the action had moved inside the walls, his spot at the north wasn't good anymore.

So he moved back to behind his guild forces, close to where the mobile graveyard was set. From there, he could see his new target better.

As he aimed his rifle at the top of the tree and peered through his scope, he locked his gaze on an elf girl who was scouting out the area. He grinned as he adjusted his distance and height readers.

Since the tournament, Azamus had changed his scope, so he could get more accurate measures as he aimed. It was common for snipers in the military to have spotters with them, but Azamus didn't want the hassle of having a player tag along with him.

So, instead, he modified his scope. He had brought it to an enchanter in the gnome kingdoms that could engrave a distance scanner and a topographical measurer.

With this, he could have accurate distance and gravitic readings that would ensure a more precise shot. He also crafted a little gizmo that resembled a wind spinner, so he could have readings of wind speeds and directions.

With all this, he was making his very-long distance shots much more accurate. Azamus was an incredible shot, by many measures, but shooting a target miles away was not something just anyone could pull off.

But with all the right tools, it made his job much easier. After adjusting his scope with all his new calculations, he was certain to hit.

He breathed in and was about to breathe out when a low growl disturbed him. Holding his breath, Azamus turned his head slowly.

In the branches of the tree next to his, a pair of green eyes were staring at him. Attached to these eyes was a massive black puma, easily the size of a car.

'Fuck,' he mentally cursed.

The puma was already in a pouncing position.

Azamus knew he had to act fast. Trying to spin his gun and aim the puma, the beast lunged at him.

Azamus managed to fire one shot, hitting the beast in the abdomen, but that was too little too late. Nearby, the players respawning in the graveyard heard screams of pain, as the gnome was being torn to shreds in the forest.

But as they were about to run back to the fortress, a large black form jumped in between them and the battlefield.

Looking at it, many of the freshly respawned players pulled out their weapons. But this graveyard wasn't populated only by respawning players.

Inside a mausoleum in the middle of it, two players were kneeling in front of a large stone cross. Hearing the screams, one of them opened his eyes.

"I'll go see what's happening," he said to the other.

Rising to his feet, he walked out of the mausoleum. He came face to face with the large feline.

Gulping loudly, he realized where the screams came from. Remnant pixels were still rising from the ground, where pools of blood could be seen.

The player rapidly pushed the stone doors shut, sealing the mausoleum, before pulling out a small red gun. The puma jumped on him, starting to bite and claw him.

As his health was rapidly zeroing, the player shot the gun in the air. A ball of bright red flames shot up into the sky, before exploding in a red flash.

Athena, from her scouting spot, could easily spot the flare. She used her sonar ability and rapidly determined where that came from.

With a wide grin, she pulled out a wooden case from her inventory. This case had arrived not too long ago, with a message specifying it was for her.

Opening it, she pulled out the arrow that had a red tip. She nocked the arrow, opening her messaging interface for the officer chat.

'To all free officers, you soon will hear a loud whistle. The provenance of this whistle is the reason the siege is still ongoing. Find it and destroy or capture it.'

Sending the message, Athena closed her eyes. She honed in on the structure her echolocation had pinpointed and loosed the arrow.

It disappeared from in front of her, reappearing right before the mausoleum doors, before the arrow shattered on the stone.

WHEEEEEEE!!!

Three officers snapped their heads in the whistle's direction simultaneously.

'There you are!' they all thought at the same time.