

## **New Eden 341**

### Chapter 341 Pieces Falling Into Place

Far away from the Bastion, and Phoenix's dealings with a goddess, the ten top guilds were still under massive strain. Even though some of their assailants had abandoned the attack once they heard the update notification, many small and medium-sized guilds just refused to quit.

One, in particular, was having a tougher time dealing with many more players than the others. Aces High's guild headquarters were currently filled with players fighting.

They had an industrial-looking building, so there was only a tiny yard outside where they could not contain the invaders. The fighting had rapidly moved inside, where the limited room blocked a lot of the fighting capacity of every player.

But one gnome wasn't as affected by this, as he ran on the roof support beams, shooting his gun at the players below, uncaring of the friendly fire he caused. Azamus was red with rage.

Seeing so many unwanted pests run around in his base was fouling his mood by the second. And all of this was caused by the resistance of one small, inconsequential guild.

"Die, scum! You dare invade my base?! No one is leaving here alive!"

In his rage-filled actions, Azamus also shot and killed many of his guild members. His reputation would take a massive hit when this was all over.

Other guilds also had this issue, with one guild being the least affected. Knights of the Sun were always for peaceful negotiations and win-win arrangements, so few guilds had issues with them.

The ones that did, were mainly angered by being poached their top players. So when the announcement came about the update timer, a lot of them backed off, almost completely ending Killi's battle for him.

The few guilds that remained were asking for compensation for losing their officers or power-pillars. Killi eventually settled with offering them all to join his guild.

The offer wasn't a bad one, and almost everyone accepted. This conflict resulted in him expanding his already massive roster again.

Killi wasn't all that angered by the results. But he knew the power structure for the ten top guilds would be forever changed after the update.

'This Astaroth is going to become a behemoth. I better try to stick on his, and his Paragon's, good side.'

Killi went to settle in his office, needing to make reports for all these recruits and all the war expenses he just used. His, just like almost all the other top guilds, were externally funded, and needed to be held accountable.

He couldn't fathom how a guild leader like Azamus was going to repay for all his damage caused. But another thought was haunting him.

'How is Astaroth going to fund his guild? No big company has claimed ownership of it yet. Is he not paying his players?'

He doubted the man had no plan for money, and since he had never seen him on the news or TV before, he doubted Astaroth was secretly a millionaire.

He figured he might tie an alliance with him if he made his Knights indispensable to him. Then again, he doubted Astaroth would need manpower for very long.

With the display of force from Paragon, they would get applications like running water soon. His other avenue was financing.

But he wasn't sure Paragons would be in lack of that, either. He could already imagine the number of sponsors lining up to reach the guild leader of Paragons to sign a deal.

'I'll find a way.'

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In an office, high inside the Evo-Gaming HQ, Constantine was looking at a timer before the forced log-out. The air about her was filled with nervousness.

She kept looking at her phone, like she was expecting a call. But when her phone did ring, she picked it up, before putting it back down.

Constantine sprang up from her office chair, walking at a brisk pace into the doors to her left. The doors led into a cozy loft, with a wide open space floor.

The decoration was sparse in this loft, and most appliances were top-of-the-line. In the center of her living room, a large gaming pod was hooked up to the building's power source and network.

But her pod didn't look like the top model the players could buy. It was more refined, with a streamlined profile, and red and black colours.

A green and blue light was flashing in the cracks of the open cover. Constantine hopped inside in a practiced movement, lying in and closing the top swiftly.

"Connect."

Her inlaid screen flashed white as she lost consciousness. But instead of appearing in a city in New Eden, Constantine appeared on a cloud, high in the sky.

Her body was covered in gold-plated armour, with a white single-shoulder cape flapping to her left. At her belt, a silver shining sword, with a handle made of gold, reflected the sun's light.

The sun seemed oddly close to where she was standing, and the air was thin enough to make experienced climbers wear their oxygen masks. But inside New Eden, Constantine didn't need that.

If anyone could scan her, they would understand why.

\*Paladina, Champion of Creation\*

Level: 100

Grade: Legendary

Class: Paladin

HP: ???

MP: ???

Paladina, Constantine's character, was created before the game ever came out. But it wasn't created like the other characters.

She didn't get to choose her race, starting stats, or even her class. This was all decided for her by the one who created her avatar.

Paladina stayed static, her face ice cold, and her body as immobile as a statue. If one were to glimpse at her right now, one would think she was a very well-crafted effigy, instead of thinking this was a living person.

But her wait would soon come to a stop, as a buzzing sound echoed behind her. Accompanying the noise, an enormous wave of Aether crashed into Paladina's back.

But aside from ruffling her hair and sending her shoulder cape flapping vigorously, she seemed unbothered. She knelt on one knee, lowering her head.

"I thank you for accepting to meet me, oh great one. I, Paladina, Champion of Creation, and Paladin to your grace, had something I wished to ask of you."

Stepping around her, a familiar yellow humanoid, devoid of facial features aside from black eyes, stopped in front of her.

"Speak, human. God's time is valuable and I wish not to waste it here. I have many things that require my attention."

Lifting her head, Paladina looked into the eyes of her interlocutor, Gaius, God of Creation.

Chapter 342 Marketing The Future

"Your grace, I wanted to know what would be added to New Eden, for you to lock the connection for a week. Would you be so kind as to tell me?"

Gaius looked at the woman with squinted eyes.

"Does it even matter, mortal? I don't remember needing to confer with you about how I manage the worlds I created."

Her eyes widening, Paladina quickly tried to fix the misunderstanding.

"No! Your grace, that is not why I asked. Please, I apologize if it came off that way. I wanted to know so I can advertise it. This way I can get more people to join the game after the 'Update' goes live."

The squint on Gaius' face disappeared. A humming sound grounded against Paladina's eardrums.

"Hmm. I guess that wouldn't be so bad. I'm not adding anything. I am moving the timeline forward. When you reconnect the two worlds, time will have moved forward."

Frowning, Paladina went into thought.

'How can I advertise that without outright saying it? This is going to be a tough one for marketing.'

Gaius left her to her musings. Time wasn't an issue for him, but he still wanted to be done here quickly. Unfortunately, rushing the woman proved to be quite unfruitful to his endeavours.

After a few minutes of pondering, Paladina found a convenient way to make her advertising, without spoiling too much of the mystery. She had banked everything on the mystic of New Eden ever since it had come out.

Now was not the time to change that strategy.

"I think I know of a way, your grace. I will not take any more of your time. Did you need me to do anything before I leave?"

Gaius didn't even bother responding with words, only waving his hand dismissively at her. Paladina bowed at him, vanishing from the cloud-top.

Opening her eyes back inside her pod, Constantine smirked.

"Time for a marketing meeting. They will have to work overtime again," she muttered to herself.

For the next week, many of her marketing employees would cry about employee abuse, or ask for leaves of absence. But the threats of replacing them quelled their tempers relatively fast.

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Back inside New Eden, Astaroth was still exploring the mountain cave he had found. After walking inside for a while, he noticed that the ground had started inclining upwards.

He also felt like the quasi-straight line he traversed should have curved after a while, since mountains weren't infinite at this height.

But that never came to be. He kept walking straight and up, for as long as many hours, never crossing paths with anything other than rocks and eerie glowing patches in the wall.

He had tried inspecting one of the said patches with the system, but nothing came up. Only when he tried looking at it with mana sense, his eyes could see condensed light mana emanating from the wall itself.

Astaroth even tried breaking the wall at one patch to see if the glow came from behind, but despite his incredible strength, he barely made a scratch on the stoney surface.

So he resolved to keep walking up the path. Only, he couldn't see an end to it, and that even when using Morpheus' echolocation.

The echo just never came back.

Since the whole situation felt weird, Astaroth stopped advancing. He activated his mana sense full throttle.

He could see the mana particles around him move slightly upward every time he walked forward. Almost like they were following him.

No matter how fast he went, the same mana particles always clung to his surroundings. This was weird, and he didn't understand how to go past it.

He had a feeling like this was the reason he still hadn't found the end of this tunnel.

'It's not an illusion. The mana is too pure for that. A spatial trap, maybe?'

But he wasn't sure about how to break free from a spatial trap. He had never encountered one yet.

Astaroth tried running as fast as he could, even activating Wind Walking. Nothing changed.

He then tried firing spells at the walls and further down the tunnel. Still nothing.

Astaroth was growing weary. What if he was stuck here until the patch hit?

Would it kick him out, or would he be stuck inside this trap for a decade, until he found a way of escaping?

Astaroth stopped in front of the patch of glowing wall again. He tried hitting it again, in hopes of destroying the wall and breaking free.

This time, he changed Ad Astra into a great axe, before coating the blade in mana with Enhance. He swung at the wall with all his might, using his Severing Strike skill.

When the blade impacted the wall, a loud clang echoed all around him, almost deafening him. A chip of the glowing surface exploded out, lodging itself behind him.

Astaroth smirked at the results. But just as he did, the chip suddenly started healing itself.

In mere moments, the glowing part of the wall was back to normal.

"Fuck! Me!! Seriously?!"

Kicking and cursing, Astaroth threw a fit at whoever created the trap, cursing their ancestor and descendants.

In his fury, Astaroth even punched at the patch of glowing rock, hoping whoever created this trap might feel some repercussions. He had an inkling of doubt that this was the center of the trap, and what was holding it in place.

But he had no idea how to break it. Brute force wasn't working.

He couldn't outrun its effects, either. He was out of ideas.

In his fit of anger, Astaroth kept cursing and hitting the wall until he stopped. He failed to notice at first, but his body had innately infused mana into his attacks.

When he last punched the wall, the rocky surface seemed to ripple slightly. Almost like it reacted to his mana.

Yet, when he hit it with the Ad Astra, infused with mana, it did nothing. Astaroth coated his fist in mana, consciously this time, and punched at the wall again.

The glowing surface rippled visibly under his fist.

A smirk made its way onto his lips.

'Now that is interesting.'

Chapter 343 Drowning In Gelatin

Repeating his previous movement, Astaroth willed more mana to correlate around his balled-up fist. Upon contact with the wall, the glowing surface rippled again, this time more noticeably.

To verify if the strength of his attack varied the results, Astaroth simply apposed his hand on the wall, before infusing it with mana. This time, the result differed.

Instead of rippling, the wall this time seemed to bend inward almost like it was made of a taut fabric instead of stone.

Putting both hands on the glowing part of the wall, Astaroth pushed harder, infusing more and more mana into his hands, as the wall bent further inward with every ounce of extra mana.

At some point, he was halfway into the wall, with the surface still not giving in to him. Frustrated that his efforts weren't yielding more results, Astaroth gritted his teeth.

"Fine! You want to play hard to get? Then get a taste of this!"

Astaroth breathed in all the surrounding mana, condensing it within his Mana Lobe, until it reached a critical point. Then he sent it through his body, and into his hands, refining it as it went, transforming it into pure Aether.

He had yet to show anyone this technique, since he was still figuring out how to use it. But he had found out a little while ago, not long before the siege, that he could condense his mana into Aether.

But the ratio of mana to Aether was just abysmal. When he refined it, an Aether bar temporarily appeared on his status screen, so he could deduce the ratio from there.

But at a rate of a thousand MP for one Aether point, he wasn't willing to use that in combat just yet. Especially since his meld with Luna allowed him to channel Aether directly from the surrounding air.

This way was more beneficial to him, for now. But what if he could reduce the ratio?

Or if he could get a mana supply large enough that it no longer mattered. Or better yet, although far out of reach for now, what if he ended up being able to store Aether in his body?

How would that affect him? He wondered.

But for now, he figured it wouldn't be wasted, since he was stuck here either way.

When the refined Aether reached his hands, something changed.

The wall, which had previously felt like pushing into a trampoline, suddenly became fluid, sending Astaroth tumbling through it like falling into a lake.

Feeling the surrounding gravity suddenly become jumbled, Astaroth quickly started looking for a surface he could swim through. He hadn't caught his breath before plunging through this, since he hadn't expected it.

And now, he could already feel his lungs burning from lack of air. But, look as he may, he couldn't see any direction that looked like up.

He focused on the surrounding mana, which was so highly saturated that it looked like a wall of white, and could see the particles moving in one direction.

Bursting into action, Astaroth started swimming vigorously in that direction. But he couldn't see any change in scenery, and he was running out of air.

He did something risky hoping to extend his survivability. Focusing on the mana within his body, he forced mana into his lungs before forming a light wind spell inside his own body.

Feeling the rush of air expanding his lungs, Astaroth's body was already reacting positively. But there was too much air being generated.

Astaroth opened his mouth in his panic, letting a bit of the air escape. But he almost swallowed a mouthful of the gelatinous substance he was swimming in when the air suddenly stopped expanding in his lungs.

Nonetheless, he had bought himself at least a minute. And could repeat the feat if needed.

But he still couldn't see where the surface was. It was strange how the viscous material seemed endless, and how hard it was for him to swim through it.

Astaroth tried using Sky Step to propel himself upward, but didn't feel like he was going up at all. And he quickly noticed why.

The air that should have formed under his foot, to use as a stepping stone, had only formed a bubble. And that bubble was now slowly rising next to him.

Or so he thought. But then he noticed something weird.

Air bubbles usually wavered as they climbed to the surface of a liquid. Yet, this air bubble was static as it rose next to him.

He found this incredibly weird. Even though the surrounding substance was thick, it should still follow the laws of physics.

Slicing his hand in the middle of it, he quickly understood why. The bubble, which should have separated into two parts, stayed in one full piece.

This meant the material surrounding it was thick enough to suspend it fully in one place. But then that brought up another issue.

That air fully consisted of mana. So wouldn't that mean the mana in this substance shouldn't be moving at all?

Yet, he could see the mana go up in one direction. It hardly made sense.

Then a dark dawned in his head.

The only other explanation was that it wasn't moving. He was moving down.

The thought of sinking deeper into this transparent sludge sent his mind into overdrive.

'I stepped out of a trap and into another one!'

Astaroth swam desperately in the same direction as the mana. He could only slow his descent, though.

He tried using Propel to push himself higher. Still no progress.

As his mind tried working out a solution, something started appearing in his view under his location. When he focused on it, what he saw drained the blood out of his face.

A few hundred meters below him, a pair of eyes were looking at him. The slit pupil in the middle of them, and their forward-facing position, signalled this was a predator's eyes.

'Can this get any worse?!' he cried internally.

And, as if fate was taking his laments as a challenge, it did.

A mouth suddenly appeared, opening right under the set of eyes. Once it was fully opened, a whirlpool started spinning in front of it.

'Fuck! It's sucking me down faster!' Astaroth panicked, as his body suddenly felt pulled.

'I am not dying here! Not like this!'

Chapter 344 Out Of The Fire, And Into The Pan

Astaroth immediately activated Thousand Thoughts, slowing down his perceived time, and giving himself time to think of a way out of this situation.

As everything slowed down around him, Astaroth started thinking of a way to escape this thorny situation. He had already tried using Propel and Sky Steps, both of which did nothing much for him.

He thought of melding with Morpheus, giving himself extra appendages to swim up, but he wasn't sure that would change anything.

But a thought occurred to him. What if he could give himself a boost?

Would the gelatinous liquid stop him or only slow him down? He had only one way of knowing.

But he would need more room to move than with just his Sky Step air bubbles. A mage like Gale would have no issue whipping up a tornado, or a massive air bubble, for him to breathe in.

But he wasn't that good with wind magic. Nonetheless, he had to try.

Since he wasn't good at conjuring massive magics of any element, he would have to make do with small ones in massive quantities.

Since he was still under the effects of Thousand Thoughts, Astaroth put his plan into motion. He melded with Luna, not waiting for the transformation to occur, only for the stats to boost.

Once his agility and intelligence shot up, he pulled out Ad Astra, changing it to spell-slinger mode. With the weapon now affixed to both his hands, he started firing air bullets everywhere around him.

Astaroth positioned his arms so that the firing's recoil would pivot him slightly, allowing him to spin on himself without effort. Before his Thousand Thoughts skill even ended, Astaroth already had fired hundreds of air bullets around himself.

This created a large pocket of air all around him. Which only grew bigger with every bullet fired. In next to no time, his air pocket was a hundred feet across.

He received a notification, but was too busy to look at it now, so he brushed it aside. He was almost inside the vortex created by the giant beast below him, but it no longer bothered him.



Concentrating all his mana under his feet, Astaroth used Sky Step, using both feet to launch himself, before switching to one foot at a time. He was using as much mana as he could to boost his acceleration.

By the time he reached the top of the bubble, he was already generating wind rings around his body, with the speed he was going at. And as he entered the gelatinous substance, he felt the resistance pull on his body.

But he kept using Sky Step, trying to maintain as much momentum as he could. Judging by the speed the particles of mana were passing next to him, he was relieved to see that he was ascending quite fast.

As he looked down, He could see the beast's giant eyes squinting at him. Seeing as it wouldn't get a meal out of the pointy-eared humanoid, it shut its mouth.

Smirking, Astaroth looked back upward. He was starting to see a difference up ahead.

The glow all around him was slowly getting brighter. Whatever was casting light through the gelatinous substance was getting closer, that much he could understand.

He never relented on his Sky Steps, making sure he always kept ascending, until he burst through the surface of whatever he was lodged inside.

Soaring in the sky, Astaroth noticed that the light all around seemed to emanate from the white walls that limited the room he was in. Looking above, he couldn't see the ceiling, but he couldn't see the sky either.

The bright white glow was too blinding to see where it stopped. But down below him, a small white platform, made of what looked like alabaster, was floating in the middle of the transparent gelatinous lake.

Sky Stepping his way there, he landed on the platform. He looked at his notification before he proceeded anywhere else.

Opening his notifications, he smiled like a kid opening a Christmas present.

\*Your Ingenious use of Thousand Thoughts, to maximize spell output on wind blade/bullet spell, has produced results. Mastery level 1 attained for Wind Blade. Congratulations, Player!\*

Astaroth hurriedly opened his spell list.

Wind Blade (Level 5/5) (Mastery Level 0/5 -> 1/5): You shoot out a blade made of condensed wind, at very high speeds, cutting through anything that stands in its way. Damage: 250% magic damage. MP Cost: 50 MP. Cooldown: 5 seconds -> 4 seconds.

Your ingenious use of thought acceleration has allowed you to find a way to fire many Wind Blades, without cooldown, creating a new spell. New Spell Created: Wind Blade; Cyclone of Blades.

Wind Blade; Cyclone of Blades: Using centrifugal force, you spin with a high velocity on yourself, launching an incredible amount of wind blades out. Channelled time: 5 seconds. Blades sent out: 100. MP Cost: 1000 MP. Cooldown: 5 minutes.

Seeing the new values to the mastery spell, Astaroth was extremely pleased. This was his second spell mastered, and all this was thanks to a simple pointer on how to do it from Morticia.

He took a mental note to thank her later, when he was no longer stuck in a weird cave. But for now, closing his spell list, Astaroth started looking around himself.

He did not know where he was, or if he was even still inside the dungeon controlled by Aces High. The only thing he was certain of was that this place was so chock full of mana, it wouldn't surprise him to find a legendary being or artifact nearby.

He cautiously stepped forward on the small platform he was standing on, making sure with every step that he wouldn't suddenly fall back into the gelatinous lake.

But there wasn't much to explore around him. The platform spanned about ten metres by ten, with three steps leading to a small pedestal at its center.

There seemed to be something on the pedestal, but at the angle Astaroth was from it, he couldn't see it. Walking the few meters that separated him from the first step, and put his foot on it.

Once he was certain nothing would happen, he climbed the other steps. He was now standing in front of the pedestal, with on it, a ring.

The ring looked like it was made of a dark obsidian, with at its top part, a flat surface with a green gem inlaid.

Inspecting it visually, from up close, Astaroth could see etchings on the flat surface, and under the gem. It looked like a six-sided star, with a circle or runes around the star, another at the base of the gem, and a last one, extremely small under the green gem.

Whoever had etched on this ring had done so with extreme talent and attention. But what captivated Astaroth wasn't even the etchings.

From the gem, he could feel a familiar power that was calling to him. The power of souls!

It was calling out to him, like a soft chant or relaxing melody.

His greed got the better of him, and before even inspecting the ring with the system, Astaroth grabbed it in his hand.

It was only when everything around him disappeared, and became pitch black, that he noticed he had fucked up.

'Shit.'

#### Chapter 345 Meeting A Legend

But his troubles were only starting. The soul force he had felt before this happened was now reappearing all around him.

Small blue and black wisps were floating around him. Some even laughed sinisterly.

More wisps kept popping up, with the ones already present slowly getting louder, saying words instead of just laughing.

"Surrender."

"Embrace the darkness."

"Join us!"

"Die for me, yeehahaha!"

But through all these sinister calls, threats, and sweet promises, one voice resounded louder than the others.

"Boy! Who are you, and what are you doing here?!"

"Hmm?"

This voice somehow felt more peaceful than the others. Like it contained no malice.

He focused his mind on it. Before answering into the darkness.

"My name is Astaroth. I made the mistake of touching a ring, and I landed here."

After a few moments, amidst which the voices of the wisps kept trying to entice him to join them, or to kill himself, the other voice came back.

"A ring you say? A black ring with a green gem?"

"Yes! That was the one. Do you know this ring?"

The wisps got louder.

"Don't listen to the old man!"

"Join us!"

"Die for me!"

Then the old man's voice boomed.

"Silence, you evil spawns! Go back to your hiding spots!"

The voice affected the wisps like an electroshock, sending all of them reeling, as they shrieked in Astaroth's mind.

The high-pitched shrieks made his head thrum in pain, as blood started leaking from his nose. He closed his eyes, clutching his head with both hands.

"Argh!"

Then a soothing wave hit his mind. In a matter of seconds, the pain was gone, and he could open his eyes again, without feeling like they would pop out.

But he was no longer standing in the darkness. All around were now clouds and golden furniture.

Sitting on a luxurious sofa, an old man was reading an old-fashioned scroll. As Astaroth observed the man, he noticed a ring on his left hand.

It was the same ring as the one he had touched to reach here!

"That ring! So it was yours!"

The old man looked up at him before waving his hand at a sofa nearby.

Next to the sofa, a tall man, with skin blacker than the reaches of space, was standing at attention with a cloth over his arm. He looked like a typical butler you would see in rich families of the olden days.

Astaroth walked over to the sofa, taking a seat. When he sat down, he felt like he was sitting on a cloud that embraced every part of his butt and back to make him as comfortable as possible.

"What is this sofa? I need one for my home!"

The old man huffed a laugh, never taking his eyes off of his scroll.

The butler next to Astaroth opened one eye to sneak a peek at the guest. Astaroth caught his glance and looked him in the eyes.

His vibrant red iris was like looking into a blood well, and he instantly felt dizzy. The butler never broke eye contact, and Astaroth could feel something tugging at his mind, siphoning his mana at an exorbitant rate.

"Amon! Cease this right this instant! The young man is a guest, not a snack!"

The butler rapidly closed his eyes. As soon as the eye contact broke, Astaroth started huffing and puffing, his body sweating profusely.

"What in god's name was that?!"

Mentioning god, the butler lightly hissed at him, and the old man burst into laughter.

"Boahahaha. Better not to mention the capital G-word here, boy. The demons don't particularly like him, you see?"

"D... Demon?!"

It was at this moment Astaroth noticed the slim black tail flicking behind the butler. As he smiled, feeling Astaroth's gaze on his splendid form, Astaroth noticed the prominent canines in the demon's mouth.

Jumping back a healthy distance, Astaroth pulled out the Ad Astra. But with a swish of the old man's hand, his weapon disappeared from his hand, reappearing back in his inventory, locked.

"What in tarnation?"

"No use in being hostile. Amon here is the tamest of the lot. Although he remains a demon, he is civil enough to conduct himself as a gentleman. Unless I order him otherwise."

Astaroth heard a distinct tongue clicking and could guess who it came from.

"Sit back down, boy. I have questions for you."

"That makes two of us. The first one being, who are you? You just sent an artifact back into my inventory like it was a toy."

"Hah! Boy, I have seen artifacts much stronger than that toy you use as a weapon. And you are in my domain. I could turn you into a silkworm if I so desired. Now, sit."

Astaroth audibly gulped. The old man's tone was not one of bargain.

The confidence in his threat was also genuine. There was no doubt to be heard about it.

He reluctantly sat back on the sofa, his proximity to this demon, Amon, making him uncomfortable, despite the softness of the furniture.

"Master, shall I make some tea?"

Hearing the demon's voice, Astaroth almost did a double take. He was expecting the demon to have a screechy or even a cavernous voice.

But Amon instead sounded like a refined gentleman, issued straight from a drama show on royalty.

"Splendid idea, Amon. The same as usual."

Turning his head to Astaroth, he asked, "You drink tea, yes?"

Astaroth only nodded in response.

"Good. As for your question, I will answer it, but first, tell me your name."

Taking a moment to realize the old man was willing to answer his queries, Astaroth snapped his full attention to him, ignoring the demon in the background.

"Ah, yes. My name is Astaroth. To whom do I have the honour of talking to?"

"Hmm. Astaroth, you say. Quite an interesting name. Parent-given, or self-chosen?"

"Self-chosen, I guess? Does it matter?"

"It does to me. Any provenance for that name, or it just came to you?"

"I read it somewhere in a book once. An old tale about the great sage, Solomon. Why?"

"The great sage. Hah! I haven't been called that in a long time. I have had many other monikers since then."

"You were called that too, once? Did you know Solomon?"

"Know him? Boy, I am him."

"Excuse me?"

"My name is Jedidiah, the Great Sage. I was also known as King Solomon."

Astaroth could only stare in silence. His mind did a complete shutdown.

#### Chapter 346 Having Tea With A Legend

Seeing the young man's mind go into shock, Solomon gave him some time to do a factory reset. In the meantime, Amon came back with a freshly brewed pot of tea, still steaming at the beak.

Amon, waved his hand in front of him, conjuring a table out of nothing, before setting down the golden tray he had in his hands, on which the teapot, as well as three cups, were resting.

As he poured the cups, Solomon looked at the demon with a glint of amusement. He knew Amon hated seeing people drink tea without him, but he would not stop him.

He conjured a third sofa, on which Amon sat once all three tea cups were served. Amon kept his eyes closed all this time, displaying a grace and coordination that belied the use of eyes.

The inhuman elegance he displayed was nothing short of Oscar-worthy.

Astaroth snapped out of his daze around the moment Amon sat down, and noticed the cup of tea in front of him. He absent-mindedly grabbed it, before locking his gaze on Solomon.

"I see you have finally come back to your senses, boy. Good. Now on to my next question. How did you get here? And I don't mean this space. But the one where the ring is hidden away."

Astaroth took a moment to collect his thoughts before answering.

"I was exploring a dungeon, and found a cave that led into the mountain. The cave led me here through a few hardships."

"Hardships? Boy, the traps I set were so the ring can never be found. An infinite space loop, that pushes the trapped person out when they give up. A Gelatinous lake, that drowns its victims, or has them eaten by a giant devourer. You shouldn't have been able to set foot past the first trap."

"To be fair, the space loop was quite annoying. But you left the base of our trap out in the open. Wasn't that hard to figure out from there."

"In the open? It was supposed to be hidden. Hmm. It might have been so long that the trap degraded. But what about the lake?"

"The lake was tricky, since I was at first unable to swim up. But I found a way."

"My last question to you is this. How did you not go instantly insane when you touched the ring? Many other souls assaulted your soul, much stronger than a human soul, or Elven, in your case."

"Ahh that. Well, it wasn't my first bout of soul attacks."

To prove his point, Astaroth summoned his three soul companions.

Seeing the three soul animals come out, Solomon grasped how the boy resisted the demons' influence. His soul was already stronger than most.

"Hmm. A Soulmaner. I haven't seen one of you in ages. That explains a lot. But Why did you pick up the ring, then? It should have screamed at your senses."

"Hmm? Actually, it was calling out to me. Like a soft melody."

Solomon didn't have to wonder long who called out to the boy through the ring, because the culprit appeared and confessed on its own.

In a vortex of blue light, a winged being stepped out next to Solomon, before bowing down his head and kneeling.

Astaroth almost mistook the demon for an angel, as he fit the typical description people gave of angels. Wings on his back, tall, and handsome.

What belied his true nature was the colour of the wings, and the blackness of his eyes. The demon was kneeling toward Astaroth, not Solomon, which took the old man aback.

"It was I, sire. But I had a good reason. I had a vision, and this boy was in it. In this vision, he fought against legions of our brethren to restore balance to his world."

"Vassago. So it was you who called out to him? But why? You usually only appear to give prophecies. Why suddenly act out and call out to a mortal?"

"The massacre I saw in the vision goes against the justice and balance of the world. I believe he can help restore this balance if given the proper tools."

Vassago never once lifted his head, keeping it bowed down, still kneeling towards Astaroth. Solomon found the vehemence he professed to the boy to be incredibly intriguing.

"And you think the right tools are my seal and Legacy? I fear you are overestimating his capability to bear such a burden."

It peeved Astaroth to be left out of the conversation, and he interfered.

"Excuse me, but if you are going to talk about me, I would prefer you consult me. Don't I get a say in this?"

Solomon hated to be interrupted, and locked his eyes into Astaroth's, releasing his power in full display, wanting to make the boy understand his place in this domain. He sent a soul manifestation directly into Astaroth's soul.

But against his expectations, as he reached deep into his soul, he ran into a strong wall. This wall was formed of multiple golden chains, interlocking into each other, with golden energy between the gaps, glittering under the reflection of what it contained.

Behind that wall, was a nucleus of power, far stronger than what Astaroth had access to. This was the core of the boy's soul, and by how strongly it shone, and how it was locked behind a barrier, Solomon could tell this soul was as powerful as his, if not more.

But the barrier was not something the soul could produce on its own. Someone had set it up. Sliding his hand across the barrier, Solomon garnered its provenance.

"Hmm. Divine essence. Why is a god locking away his power?"

Solomon retracted his soul manifestation, coming back to his body, noticing that Astaroth had barely noticed the intrusion. This made Solomon somewhat wary of the boy.

If he gave his Legacy to the boy, would it unlock his true potential? Or would it simply corrupt him, and unleash a greater evil upon the world?

The risk was substantial. But, then, why would his demon take an interest in the boy if he was potentially evil?

Vassago had proven his good over the centuries. He rarely committed evil, and only did so to restore the balance.

"Vassago. Tell me more about what you saw. Hide no detail from me."

"Yes, sir."

## Chapter 347 Slip Of The Mind

Listening to the demon retell his visions, sparing no detail, Solomon stayed quiet. Not once did he stop the demon to ask a question, or to get further explanation for anything.

This went on for hours, and Astaroth had his cupped refilled many times by Amon during that time. By some sort of spell, the tea was always kept at the right temperature, and never changed in taste.

Astaroth casually listened, only taking in the broad strokes of the demon's visions. It wouldn't matter if he listened fully, anyway.

If the theories they had on time were anything correct, what he heard now would already not come to pass. Him having any knowledge of what was to come, already erased that possibility from the timeline.

He quickly became lost in thought, ignoring his surroundings, and thinking about how to get away from here soon. His thoughts lingered on his final destination.

He wondered how the warriors of the village were doing. He assumed Chris and Kloud were as hard on them as always, and it brought a smile to his face.

He remembered when he first logged into the game, almost losing his life in the first hour. He thought back to his first lessons about magic with Aberon.

The gruesome repetition the man put him through. Aberon had constantly told him he had the potential to be a mage, but lacked that true natural talent.

Of course, the old man always said enough hard work could replace that talent, but the road would be arduous. Thinking back to those days, Astaroth felt a bit of nostalgia.

For a moment, his mental defences slipped, and he felt like he had been transported back to those days.

"Astaroth! Focus, you young air-head!"

Snapping out of his daze, Astaroth came back to attention. Only, the cloudy floor, and luxurious sofas were gone.

He was instead sitting on the cold hard stone of the cave under Aberon's abode. The old man was looking at him with a stern look.

"You need to focus if you want to wield magic. One instant of inattention, and you could hurt yourself, or someone else irreversibly!"

Astaroth frowned.

"Master Aberon? How did I get here?"

Looking around himself, Astaroth recognized every detail of the place. But his mind knew he wasn't supposed to be here at that moment.

"Did you hit your head, young man? You got here by walking as always. Now Focus on the spell. Before I send you back to Kloud to get some sense beaten into you."

"No. This isn't right. Master Aberon, I am not supposed to be here. I am miles away from here, stuck in a pocket space."

"What kind of disillusion are you living in, Young man? You walked here this morning, asking for more training on how to control your magic. You never left this village, let alone go miles away."



Astaroth rapidly understood what was happening.

"Really? An illusion? Is that the best you can do?"

Aberon stopped moving, his face stuck in a face of anger. But no words ever escaped his unmoving face.

Astaroth got up, as a cackle started resounding around him.

"I'm impressed you noticed so fast. Sadly, it won't change your situation. You are stuck here, and I will feast on your mana and soul until you wither away. Kakakaka!"

Astaroth snorted, which stopped the cackling being in his tracks.

"What makes you laugh, Elven boy? You think this is the time to be having fun?!"

"I'm sorry. I couldn't help myself. You thinking I am stuck here is just too funny. Pfft! Ahahaha!"

The cave started shaking.

"Stop laughing! Don't you understand you will die here?!"

"Ahahaha. Oh, I'm sorry. Ahahaha. Poor sap. Do you think I will stay here? I want to ask you something."

"I won't tell you how to get out! I will let you despair until you fane and die!"

"Oh, poor you. That wasn't my question. Do you know what that is, on the pedestal?"

"Of course, I know what that is! It's some kind of... of... Magic device? It doesn't matter! You will die here!"

"You are almost correct. A point for the effort. This artifact holds enough energy to blast this village and the mountain it is inside off the face of the world. Now. What would happen if I broke it?"

"Then you would explode with it! Kakakaka!" I wouldn't do that if I were you."

Astaroth smirked again, before walking over to the artifact. He had seen the shield artifact often when he lived in the village, and as soon as he looked at it from closer, he could tell.

He could tell that this held so little mana, it would barely cause his hair to flutter. So he reared his arm back, clenching his fist.

"Stop! You will explode and die!"

"Eh. So what? Better to die like this than have you sap my life away, right?"

Finishing his phrase, Astaroth punched the artifact with all his might. The shield artifact, which should have been able to withstand a lot of damage, shattered like glass.

But nothing else happened. No explosion, no blinding white light.

Only the sound of the illusion around Astaroth breaking away. He had a harder time escaping the illusions conjured by Aberon.

He smirked one last time, before everything crumbled and he reopened his eyes on the sofa he was sitting on.

Across from him, the table where the teapot had been resting, now lay on its side, the teapot shattered on the ground. Kneeling on the ground in front of Solomon, whose face was a mask of rage, was a naked man, with feathered wings and a small crown atop his head.

In Amon's hand, a long scimitar was raised, ready to strike down.

"For the crime of attacking Sir Solomon's guest, I, Marquis Amon, sentence you to death."

As the scimitar sliced down, a blue wavy sword came out of nowhere, blocking the blow, and keeping the demon alive.

"Please, Marquis Amon. No need to sully your blade on such a farce of a spell."

Turning his head, locking his red eyes on Astaroth, who was wielding the sword, Amon was almost in shock. Astaroth had readied his mind for the eye contact this time, so he was unaffected by the gaze.

The tension was palpable in the air, but laughter broke it in a mere instant.

"Boahahaha! You broke out of an illusion conjured by a Duke of Hell. Quite impressive, Elven boy! Boahahaha!"

"Come again?"

Chapter 348 Power Offered, But At What Price?

Amidst the laughter, Amon retrieved his blade, making it disappear, as he backed away from the naked demon kneeling before Solomon. Amon closed his eyes, again, as he returned to his butler functions, picking up the table and mess next to it.

The naked demon raised his head, his ocean-blue eyes locking onto Astaroth's figure. A smile crept up on its face.

"Kakaka. Thank you, kind mortal, for being so merc—"

\*Pah!\*

Astaroth looked at the demon, his hand outstretched next to him, as a red hand mark appeared on the latter's face, having been backhand slapped.

"That's for trying to trap me in an illusion. Also, your laugh is annoying, so, shut up will you?"

Another burst of laughter echoed out of Solomon's lungs.

"BOAHAAAAHA! You just treated a duke of hell like a cheap prostitute! Boahahaha! I like you, boy!"

"Sir, please stop laughing so loudly," Amon asked, from the side.

His squinting face belied the sensitivity of his hearing, as the old man laughed with abandon.

Even Astaroth thought it was too loud of a laugh. But he was hardly going to backhand Solomon too.

As for the demon, given the title Solomon said he held, Astaroth was surprised he didn't lash out at him. Was he weak, or simply too tame to care?

It was Solomon, who answered his silent question.

"Do not fret, boy. The demons are bound to my will, through the ring. As long as I don't give him an order, he can't do anything to you."

Astaroth nodded his head. He could feel the shame and anger the demon was exuding from his kneeling position.

But if the old man said there was no danger, he would take his word for it.

"Now, back to business we go. I understand why Vassago called out to you. But what made you pick up the ring? It was hardly his voice that was enough to convince you to pick it up, was it?"

Astaroth remembered they were still discussing that.

"Ahh, yes. No, that wasn't the only reason. I felt souls inside the ring, and I thought I could use them with my powers. That is why I tried picking up the ring."

"Hmm. Souls, you say? I guess demons could be called that, yes. In a sense, they are condemned souls. But your ability to sense them past my seal is quite remarkable in itself."

"My master said I have a great sense for everything that is energy-related. Be it mana, Aether, or souls, my senses catch them all."

"Hmm. A god's eye, perhaps? No. It has to be weaker, or you would have seen the seal, my presence, and even the true form of the demons through the ring. Do you have a name for that ability?"

"The sys—Ahem. The ability is called Perfect Mana Senses. But it catches on to any form of energy. Not just mana."

Solomon frowned at his retracting statement.

"You were going to say something. What was it?"

"Ahh. I doubt you would understand, sir."

"Try me."

Solomon leaned in, crossing his hands together.

Gulping audibly again, Astaroth complied.

"I was going to say the system calls it Perfect Mana Senses. But I doubt you understand what I mean by the system."

"I know the word system, boy. But the way you use it differs from mine. Perhaps your meaning differs, too? Enlighten me."

Astaroth wasn't sure how to explain a game system to a man who had lived in a time of legends and demons.

"Well, to make it simple, the world appears to us players through the help of the system. To us, this world is nothing but a game. Even though I know better, the word system still comes naturally."

"I see..."

Solomon leaned back into his sofa, his face pensive.

'I hope I didn't confuse him.'

But after a few moments of silence, the old man opened his mouth to speak again.

"You say you are players. So there is more than one of you?"

"Ahh, yes. We are many, from all around our world."

"From another world. Hmm. So you are abnormal?"

"Yes, many of the natives call us abnormal. I imagine the term applies to any person not from your world."

"Indeed, that is the word we use for inhabitants of another world. We had some when I was still alive, too. Though most of them became legends and minor gods."

"I see. Well, I wish we become strong enough to be at that level someday. Because what is in store for our world would require as much power."

Astaroth was thinking back to Khalor's promise of an invasion, and how Vassago had confirmed it through a vision he had. If those things were to come true, then only power equal to legendary heroes would save them.

"Boy. What if I were to help you? Offer you power enough to help your world survive. Would you take it?"

Astaroth wanted to jump and scream yes. But the underlying tone worried him.

"It all depends on the cost. I know power always comes at a cost."

"Wise assumption, for someone your age. The cost is steep, but I believe you can handle it."

"And what is it?"

After a pause, Solomon locked his gaze with him before answering.

"If you can bear the burden to your soul, my power can be yours. All seventy-two demons under my command can become your allies. But if your soul turns out to be too weak, they will devour it and set themselves free into the world. And that world will most likely be yours."

Astaroth's eyes widened. He couldn't imagine what seventy-two demons, some much more powerful than Amon or whoever the naked one before him was, could do to his world.

But the prospect of commanding a small army of demons, all most likely stronger than him, was an incentive that was hard to refuse.

From what he understood here, Solomon was holding their power on a leash. That would explain why both Amon and the naked demon did next to nothing to him, willingly or not.

If their leashes were to be transferred to him, would he be strong enough to hold them, or would he fail, die, and release them into his world, quickening the incoming end?

But Astaroth was ready to take that chance.

"What do I have to do?"

## Chapter 349 Final Moments

An hour remained before the update timer's end. Most players had finished their undone quests, and any untied loose end had been dealt with.

The guilds had recalled all their players to their headquarters, so everyone restarted in one spot. The fighting around the top ten guilds had died down completely.

Very few players could be seen wandering around the cities and villages, which felt weird to the natives. They had gotten used to the abnormals' presence over time, and suddenly losing sight of them was unnerving.

Across the three continents of New Eden, and even on the many islands spread across its seas, players everywhere were getting ready to log out. Some would wait until the last minute, but most logged out preemptively.

Among all the population of players, very few would get logged out forcefully by the system. But amongst all these, one player was still unaware of the update that was about to happen.

Inside a cave, affected in weird manners by time, a single Fey player was still meditating on a rock in the middle of a small pond. This player, Chronos, had no one to remind him that the update was coming, and could not receive world announcements.

His mind was so hooked on learning new magic that he never even thought about looking at his interface clock. The alarms about his pod needing new IV bags didn't reach his interface, as the cave was sealed from any outside interference.

Tyr was looking at his intense focus, and with his ever-seeing eyes, he could see the boy was affecting, if ever so slightly, the time threads around him.

Tyr was the god of time, which meant he was aware of what was coming and what had happened in every timeline that ever existed. His eyes saw the past, present, and future at the same time.

So when he met Chronos, he was already seeing things the man would do later in his life, and what had already happened in a changed timeline. This boy had found him in his last timeline, too.

But things had been different. Looking at the broken threads of time attached to Chronos, he could read exactly what had happened.

'That timeline needs to cease to exist. It can never come to pass.'

The atrocities Tyr could see in the threads of time that connected to that timeline were not something that should ever befall any world. He didn't understand how he, in that timeline, didn't do something about it.

Although gods were strictly forbidden to alter time, Tyr believed that ending a world meant losing any part of that world that came from them. This implied that they would lose power.

And from what he gleaned of that forlorn timeline, nothing much would be left of the world. He couldn't understand how the gods didn't react before that.

From those visions, he could see who had led this to happen, and anger rose inside him. The same god who forbade everyone from intervening in mortal lives and their future was the one to lead to their end.

'Gaius. You loathsome being. How did we let you become so conceited that you think you can break the rules you implemented millennia ago?'

Tyr couldn't break his word to Gaius, so he would still force time forward, as he had sworn to the god, but he loathed the control Gaius had over things. He could feel his intentions were off.

Looking back to Chronos, the god sighed silently.

"Young Fey. I have something to do. I will be back in a little over an hour."

Chronos only nodded once, trying to keep focused on his senses.

Silently hoping the changes in the timeline this time were enough, Tyr disappeared from the cave.

Reappearing on the top of his mountain, Tyr grew in size again. A web of gold and blue lines appeared over the mountain.

Raising his hand to the sky, a single thread lowered itself down to him. From this thread, Tyr started weaving a complex array, connecting multiple points, making the complete piece he was weaving look like an endless spiral.

Once he was done, he gently tapped the bottom, sending it back to the web. As it reconnected with the web of time, the spiral stretched out, grabbing countless amounts of threads, and attaching to them.

The contraption Tyr had weaved out of time itself, served as a highway, of sorts. It connected points in time together, allowing the flow of time to happen at a faster rate.

This would allow the ten-year period that Gaius asked to pass in a much quicker fashion to those outside of it. Of course, Tyr could guess that the only people outside of that were the abnormal and their world.

Already getting visions of events bound to happen in the next ten years, a single tear of blood escaped Tyr's eyes.

'So much bloodshed. All of this, for what purpose?'

Tyr sat on his throne for a while, to watch his work go into effect. It was too late to change things now.

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Far away from the mountain floating in the sky, in another mountain on the ground, Astaroth was now heavily panting, his breath a staccato. Large beads of sweat were dripping off his entire body.

But amidst his heavy breathing and his clearly exhausted body, the Ash Elf was smiling.

Astaroth let himself drop to his back, looking at the bright white ceiling, and letting out tired laughter.

His mind was wracked with intense pain, and his heart felt like it was about to explode. His soul was still reeling from what he had gone through, but the smile never left his lips.

Lifting his arm tiredly above his head, Astaroth looked at his middle finger. Sitting at its base was a beautiful black ring with a gleaming green gem.

He could already feel his soul connecting to the ring, and all of its inhabitants. The surge in power felt incredible.

Letting another fit of laughter escape his mouth, Astaroth exclaimed victory.

"Hahaha! I did it! I beat every single one of you!"

Coming from his right, the voice of Solomon sounded.

"What now, boy?"

After a moment of thought, and a glimpse at the update timer, Astaroth responded.

"Now, I'm going home."

Fifteen minutes remained before the forced log out.

Chapter 350 Legacy Stolen

Astaroth looked at Solomon.

"Can you tell me the way out? I can hardly return home if I don't know how to leave here."

"Boy, you aren't truly here. We are still in your mind, or rather, should I say mine."

"Huh?"

"The ring brought you here. Now that it is yours to control, it can take you out. You can come back here anytime you want, to get some directions from me if you need them. But to leave, you only need will so."

Astaroth closed his eyes, trying to do what Solomon said, and sensing nothing different, he re-opened his eyes. But instead of the cloudy room he had been in, he was back on his back, on a white alabaster floor.

The small platform he was on, still floating in the middle of the gelatinous lake. But something differed from before.

Where the glowing ceiling had been earlier, there was now a much less bright stone ceiling. It looked more like a crystal ceiling than anything else that was reflecting the light from the outside.

'That would explain why it was so bright earlier. The sun was at its zenith.'

But this meant that he had a way out if he so wished. He didn't know how thick the crystalline wall would be, but he was about to find out.

Melding with Morpheus, Astaroth flew up to the ceiling, pressing his hand against the crystalline surface. Sending mana into it, he could replicate seismic tomography, giving him the approximate thickness and density of the material.

And the results made him grin.

Flying back to the platform, Astaroth crouched down. After focusing all his strength on his legs and wings, he burst upward, using Sky Step to speed up his ascent even more.

Pulling out the Ad Astra, and morphing it into a two-handed hammer, Astaroth swung with all his might and momentum, crashing through the crystal as if it was simple glass.

He beat his wings a few times, taking in the air from the top of the mountain. Even though it was thin in oxygen, the air was crisp and cold, enough to focus his mind.

Astaroth thought of using his Royal Protection skill, and changing his meld to Luna, or Solara in this case, but another idea came to his mind.

Bringing his right hand to his head, he touched the gem on the ring to his forehead. By doing this, he could connect to the souls of the demons locked inside the ring.

"Asmodeus, come out."

In a swirl of Dark Purple energy, a tall and slim man came out in front of him. Asmodeus was wearing a smoking suit with an untied collar.

In his pocket, a dark purple handkerchief. His eyes were black as the night, and, despite his almost human appearance, two black horns grew out of his forehead.

"Master Astaroth."

Calling out the master's name, Asmodeus did a small half-bow, bringing one arm to his chest, and the other behind his back.

"I noticed while fighting you that you can teleport. Could you teleport me somewhere precise if I gave you the coordinates?"

Bringing his hand to his clean-shaven chin, Asmodeus looked pensive for a moment.

"I don't believe I could teleport you very far, with my current access to your mana supply, Master Astaroth. If you would be so kind as to offer me your mana, then yes."

Astaroth looked at him with mistrust. Even if he was their master in name, he still felt like he didn't yet have their respect.

"How much mana are we talking about?"

"Hmm. A paltry sum should do. Fifty thousand mana points."

Astaroth almost choked on his saliva, hearing the demon say that amount was paltry.

"That much is no paltry sum! You are asking for way too much!"

The demon smiled slyly.

"Master Solomon could have given me as much in his sleep. I don't think you are ready to use my powers yet, Master Astaroth."

The little edge of distaste that Astaroth caught in his tone irked him. So he tried another method.

"What if I were to merge with you? Would I gain access to your powers, then?"



"Merge with me? Do you mean me possessing your body? I would gladly do that!"

The demon looked excited at the prospect, taking a step toward Astaroth, even though they were high in the air.

Astaroth snickered at him.

"No. Not possession. Melding."

"Melding? I don't und—"

\*Schluck\*

Looking down at his chest, Asmodeus saw Astaroth's hand, with a metallic claw covering it, embedded inside his chest, near his heart. He could feel Astaroth's hand grabbing at the soul inside his vessel.

Feeling his soul get wrenched from his vessel, and sucked inside Astaroth's body, the demon grimaced. His vessel disappeared as soon as the soul was extracted from it, and Astaroth was stuck in the air, his head dropping, as his mind and soul assimilated the demon's soul.

Asmodeus felt helpless suddenly, being unable to control what his soul was going through. It was a terrible feeling for him to be helpless.

The proximity of Astaroth's soul was so tempting to him, but he couldn't do anything to it because of the ring on his hand. Soon enough, the process was done.

Astaroth looked up again, a smile on his lips.

He changed his meld from Morpheus to the new tenant next to his soul. The wings in his back disappeared, but instead of falling to the mountaintop, a platform of purple energy appeared under his feet.

Astaroth had closed his eyes, focusing on the changes in his body, making sure the demon couldn't attempt anything dangerous during the melding process. But everything went as normal.

Opening his eyes again, they had become pitch black, and two horns now adorned his forehead. Astaroth looked a lot more savage than the elegant-looking Asmodeus like this.

But he cared little about looks right now. Only five minutes remained before the forced log out.

He could feel the new power coursing through him, but didn't have the time to look at his status screen. Only two things mattered to him.

The gained skills, and making it to his starting village.

\*Skills acquired from melding: Spatial Magic, Sense Intentions, Ultra-space Vision.\*

He didn't read through the skills, since he had no time, but he could already understand what two of them did. Focusing his mind on the starting village, his eyes transcended space and he could see the entrance to the village.

And by focusing a bit more, he could feel a connection to the space there. A grin appeared on his face.

He could guess it would take a lot of Mana to teleport there, but at least he could tell it was possible. So with a thought, he did so.

Inside his mind, the demon finally reacted to being stabbed by his big hand.

'Ow. You could have asked for access to my soul. I can't refuse, anyway. But there still exists a concept of consent. I thought you mortals loved that concept...'

'We can talk about this later. I have other matters to attend to.'

And with that thought, he vanished from over the mountain. Just in time to miss the dungeon announcement that resounded.

\*Congratulations to player Astaroth for clearing the hidden quest; Legacy of the Great Sage. The quest is now no longer available.\*