

New Eden 391

Chapter 391 Stone Bullet

At this distance, Genie could hear him clearly, and made eye contact with him.

A voice appeared in his head.

'Master Astaroth! You are finally back! Not a moment too soon, too.'

Astaroth was stunned wordless for a moment.

'You can talk now?!' Astaroth asked in his head.

But seeing as the fight was intense, and she was wounded, he brushed aside his question and dashed into combat.

Pulling out Ad Astra, Astaroth changed it to a sword-whip form, going for flexibility as he dove through the enemies, unsure whether the monsters that looked uncorrupted would attack him or not.

But the further in he pushed, slashing his sword in arcs, cutting deep wounds into the enemies, he was yet to get attacked by any monster not seething with demonic energy.

Astaroth thought his dance of arcing slashes would help the monsters beat back the corrupted forces. But he rapidly understood something.

Cutting deep into the side of a Giant Corrupted Bear, he watched as its health dropped a quarter down, before suddenly going back up to full a second later.

'What the fuck?!'

The bear he had struck turned around, locking its blood-red eyes onto him, before swiping with its massive claws toward his head.

Dodging the blow in extremis, Astaroth back-flipped away, before launching himself at the bear again. He swapped the form of his weapon, going for a greatsword.

When he was close enough, and the bear tried swiping at him again, Astaroth dropped to his knees, using his momentum to slide under the attack. Sliding under the bear, Astaroth kicked off the ground right under its neck, raising his weapon in a wide arc, using his Severing Strike.

His momentum, aided by the damage of the Ad Astra, as well as the skill and the weak point he hit, all came together to cause an insane amount of damage.

-68,273!!

·cθm The greatsword slashed cleanly through the neck of the bear, going all the way through to the top, as the head fell to the ground, the body soon following.

Astaroth scanned the bear before it disappeared into pixels, making sure the damned thing was dead.

Giant Black Bear (Corrupted)

Level: 40

Grade: Special

Health: 0/51,500 (Dead)

Mana: 0/1000

Seeing the zero in its health bar, Astaroth nodded once, satisfied.

Turning his head forward, he focused on Genie and her opponent, who were waltzing around each other in a dance of death. Genie was much quicker than the bear, allowing her to move out of reach for most attacks.

But the bear was not dropping dead, even after being battered so much. Astaroth could even see the wound on its throat sealing closed.

'She needs help.'

Astaroth calculated from the health bars of the corrupted monsters all around that they healed at around ten percent of their full health per second. Knowing this, any damage under that bar was bound to be useless.

And by the looks of the fighting, the monsters fighting against the corrupted foes were far from reaching that standard. The level difference, as well as their higher grades, made them mighty foes.

But this wasn't an issue for Astaroth.

All the monsters, corrupted or not, were weaker than him by entire realms, considering his melding with any of his companions. This effectively meant he could end this combat by himself if he joined either side.

Of course, he would never join the side of the corrupted.

Switching the form of his weapon to spell slinger mode, Astaroth sent a mental message to Genie.

'I won't be coming to help you right away. I think I should help all the other creatures that are still right in their mind. I don't know why they haven't attacked me yet, but I feel like they aren't the enemy. Will you be alright against the bear for a little longer?'

Instead of responding with words, Genie sent him a wave of reassurance.

That was all the confirmation he needed.

Astaroth thought hard about his next action. He needed a spell that would deal a lot of damage, and hit a wide area, but not hit any target that wasn't corrupted.

This wasn't easy to achieve, given his mana control or elemental affinities were not the greatest. But his mind stumbled on an idea.

'It might work...'

Charging a single stone bullet spell, Astaroth focused hard on the composition of the stone itself. He thought of a material which would match the idea he had in mind.

The stone bullet changed from simple rock, slowly to a darker colour, reaching a dull grey colour. When the bullet stopped transmuting, Astaroth was now left with a sharp-looking iron bullet, still in the shape of the stone bullet spell.

The next step required him to use an element he had never used before; electricity. The closest he had been to electrical mana was when Phoenix had channelled lightning through him, in their dungeon run, to create an underwater bomb.

He focused on that memory, recalling the feeling of pain, but also the unique 'flavour' of the electric mana. Recalling the intense pain he had been put through, he shivered slightly, but caught himself again, focusing back on the task at hand.

Using some of the neutral mana in the air and himself, Astaroth modelled it until he reached approximately the same feeling as electric mana had given him. Opening his eyes, a small spark of electricity was dancing over his hand, next to the iron bullet.

Spell learned!

Through experimentation, you have learned the spell Shock. Congratulations, player Astaroth!

Astaroth grinned at the achievement, but his plan wasn't over. He still had a few steps to do.

At the moment, all the surrounding monsters were strangely ignoring him, or blocking the corrupted beasts from reaching him. He was left alone to focus amid this heated battle.

But the tides were so rapidly going bad that he knew he shouldn't dawdle.

Using the dancing spark, he inserted it into the iron bullet, making the stone look like it was about to explode for a moment, before it went back to normal.

Astaroth held his breath for the next step.

Shooting the iron bullet at a corrupted monster, Astaroth watched as it penetrated the monster, the wound sealing shut behind it, leaving the stone inside. He then formed another iron bullet, before shooting it right next to the monster he had just shot.

As the iron bullet zoomed next to the monster, about to fly right by him, the trajectory changed, the iron bullet suddenly veering toward the monster and puncturing his body once again.

Spell learned!

Through experimentation of the Stone Bullet spell, you have created the spell Magnetic Bullet. Stone Bullet Mastery has reached level one. Congratulations, player Astaroth!

Astaroth grinned manically.

'Yes! Now the true damage remains.'

"Time for some science, you wicked beasts!" he shouted, grinning like a madman.

Chapter 392 Joining Genie

Using his new spell mastery, Astaroth shot magnetic bullets at every monster in his line of sight, hitting over fifty of them in a minute. Once he had hit them all once, he smirked.

Now came the actual damage.

Activating Thousand Thoughts, Astaroth recreated the process he had used to create the Cyclone of Blades spell. Firing his Magnetic Bullet spell repetitively, aiming them at the sky, he burned through his mana like crazy in the ten seconds of Thousand Thoughts.

·cθm Once the skill deactivated, he watched as the bullets flew upward for a while before losing their momentum. Now came the true test.

As the bullets fell back toward the ground, their magnetic property started pulling toward the foes Astaroth had hit previously, giving them a burst of acceleration.

They reached maximum velocity in mere moments, and when the hundreds of magnetic bullets reached their targets, it was like a mini-gun had rained hell from above, piercing holes in the enemies, and transforming them into strainers.

Damage numbers started appearing in Astaroth's eyes, passing by insanely fast as the damage piled up. Not a single creature he had hit survived the onslaught.

But another thing made him happier than just the Exp or the kills.

Spell Learned!

Your ingenuity has formed a new spell; Magnet Stone Storm. Stone Bullet mastery level gained. Congratulations, player Astaroth.

With this, his stone bullet was already at mastery level 2, and it made him grin.

All the monsters he hit with the spell received at least one projectile, as the smaller targets died instantly, with just one more bullet and the larger ones needed more hits. The aftermath of his new spell was immediately apparent.

So many monsters who were fighting the corrupted ones were suddenly free to attack other enemies. This tilted the tables in a more favourable direction for the regular monsters.

It also allowed Astaroth to focus on a more pressing combat.

Looking over to where Genie was fighting once more, Astaroth saw she was in awful shape. Her sides were drenched in blood, and two additional sets of claw marks were visible, along with a massive bite mark on her back.

Although Genie hadn't called out to him for help, he knew she wouldn't be lasting long. It was no longer a winning fight for her.

So he decided he had helped enough on the smaller skirmish, and dashed to the giant red bear.

Using Wind Steps, he arrived on its flank faster than it could react and morphing his Ad Astra into a giant hammer, he slammed it into its ribcage.

Astaroth felt something give under the impact of the weapon, and he was certain he heard some cracking, too.

6,554!

The critical damage was a surprise for him, since he didn't think the ribs would be a weak point. But given the strength of the impact he did, he guessed that was more pertinent than the place he hit itself.

The bear skidded sideways for a few meters, grunting in pain, before throwing the most menacing death glare it could. Astaroth scoffed in response.

He scanned his foe, wanting to know what he was against.

Giant Blood Bear (Corrupted)

Level: 49

Grade: Special (Zone Boss)

Health: 124,400/124,400

Mana: 1,740/1,740

Astaroth clicked his tongue in disappointment.

'That was some good damage, but it's already back to full HP... I'm going to need to hit it like I mean it.'

Genie stepped to his side, snarling at the red bear a few meters away. The bear seemed less crazed than the other monsters that were corrupted and looked at its new opponent with calculating eyes.

"I guess this one isn't like the other mindless monsters, huh? Good work on holding him Genie. But why are you fighting it on your own? I don't think you have the strength to kill it alone."

Genie huffed next to him.

'He would be dead if I could have a bit of time to channel my abilities. But every time I stop to charge an attack, he rushes at me and cancels it out,' Genie replied in his mind.

Astaroth was still acclimating to the wolf replying to him. Her voice was that of a mature woman, and it was destabilizing to have a woman's voice suddenly in his head.

But he would have to get used to it.

"In that case, I will buy you time. Show me how strong you have become in the last ten years."

Astaroth slid his hand on Genie's neck, passing his fingers in her damp fur. Genie closed her eyes for a second, enjoying the human touch, before locking her gaze on the foe again.

She had fire in her eyes, and was determined to show her master she hadn't lazed around.

'Yes, Master!'

Astaroth grinned as he felt mana well up inside her. He was ecstatic to see what new ability she had developed over the time he was gone.

The Giant Blood Bear, feeling the wolf charging up an attack, went back on the offensive, determined to not let her go through. But something jumped in its way, brandishing a massive hammer.

"Don't forget me, pal!"

Astaroth slammed the humongous hammer on the side of the bear's head, this time having enchanted the weapon with magic. The uptick in damage was visible.

He had used Enhance Weapon at maximum strength, giving the Ad Astra one hundred percent bonus damage, bringing the weapon to a staggering five thousand points of damage, plus his own damage of one thousand one hundred and seventy points.

11,019!

Although he critically hit again, and the bear seemed to lose focus for a second, due to having its brain rattled violently, the damage was still not enough to make a difference.

Astaroth knew that a second later, it would heal the full amount again. But he wasn't done.

He kept the hammer's momentum going with Propel, all the while using sky steps to reposition himself, changing the angle of the hammer mid-air, and slamming it down on top of the bear's head again.

11,019!

The attack did the same damage as before, but since it was done inside a second of the first one, the uptick of regen hadn't hit yet. But it didn't make itself wait much longer.

Scanning the bear again, Astaroth focused on its health.

Health: 114,802/124,400

He smiled.

'As long as I keep hitting it without reprieve, it will go down. I can do this!'

Chapter 393 Raising The Bar

There was no time to waste. He needed to do the most damage he could, as fast as he could, and constantly, if he wished to bring down this beast.

Astaroth immediately cast Ignite on the bear, causing its fur to light on fire, as it started taking damage continuously. Of course, Astaroth knew this damage alone would never be enough on its own.

That was why he had already thought of something else.

Luna's meld was coming undone already, and he didn't want to meld with White just yet. He thought it was best to have all his summons out to help fight the smaller corrupted monsters.

So he tried figuring out a way while he fought earlier to keep them summoned. And an idea occurred to him.

Astaroth recalled the process of summoning them, as he did so with Luna. He would inject mana into their souls, and that would conjure up a temporary body for them, allowing them to manifest.

But what if he put something stronger into their soul to start with? Would he be able to make them last longer?

He knew one point of Aether, was the equivalent of a thousand points of mana. And Aether was qualitatively better than mana, too.

Using Aether to summon his spirit companions would be incredibly more costly than mana. But what would happen?

He decided now was as good a time as any to find out.

Astaroth focused on the energy inside him and around him, quickly finding Aether particles in the air. Coaxing them towards himself, he sucked them in and pushed them into White Death's soul, which had just returned, as well as Luna's.

The souls shone brightly inside him for a second, before ejecting from his body. When their bodies formed, they looked a lot more vivid, and he could see their form were more tangible as well.

But from his mana sense, he could also see that the bodies were degrading at a fast pace. The Aether had broken down into mana inside their bodies, and was already leaking out.

He calculated they expended around five points of mana per second. But he thought of a way to counterbalance that already.

He tethered his mana core to their bodies, immediately feeling the mana drain from him to refill their forms. As he did that, he received a notification again.

Spell learned!

·cθm **Your knowledge of the greater energy, Aether, has allowed you to temporarily bend the laws of nature. You have given bodies to souls of the departed, at a high cost to yourself. Spell; Spirit Summoning has gained a mastery level. Spell gained; Soul Manifestation. Congratulations, player Astaroth!**

Astaroth could already feel the toll on his mana, that maintaining these two souls was costing him. But he didn't care.

With the biggest stupid grin he could muster, he looked at his companions.

"Go! Fight the small fry while Genie and I deal with this big fugly one!"

White Death howled to the sky, feeling his body coursing with energy, while Luna raked the ground with her hooves. Both of them could feel the difference in their states, and knew this was a form much more sustainable.

Astaroth let them go, while he locked his gaze on the red bear again.

The Giant Blood Bear was getting back to its senses, and its health had gone back to full again, with only the burning effect chipping at it while Astaroth had focused on something else.

But now that he got what he wanted, Astaroth could focus entirely on this beast. Genie was also done channelling whatever skill she was preparing, as the surrounding mana was saturated and swelling no more.

Through the status messages, Astaroth could see what skills his companions used, as well as the ones Genie used.

Genie used; Blessings Of The Forest.

Astaroth had no way of knowing what it would do until he saw it for himself, though. But he surmised that with that long of a charging time, it wouldn't be a useless skill.

As his thoughts erred that way, Genie's form started glowing slightly. So Astaroth focused on her.

The ground around her suddenly started shaking slightly, as vines and stone lifted off of it, wrapping up around Genie, and forming some kind of armour on her. Her body got covered entirely, and she suddenly looked like a stone and wood tank.

It was almost comical, if not for the fact that Astaroth could feel the density of mana in the armour she was now covered in. Her body had also grown in size slightly, making her as big as the red bear they were facing.

Astaroth wondered how long this skill lasted, but now wasn't the time for asking questions, nor was it the time for looking at her status screen. He had already wasted enough time watching her use it.

Locking his gaze back on his target, Astaroth grinned.

He ignited the bear a second time, just to have the extra damage per second, as he changed Ad Astra's form again. This time, he went for a long but thin sword, somewhat resembling an estoc.

Astaroth had in mind something different from just blasting the damned beast with damage, this time. But he snickered as he put his plan in motion.

Thinking of the next demon he was going to torture into melding with him, he mentally face-palmed. After fighting the demons to get the legacy, he learned all their names and ranks.

And he finally understood why Solomon had been so curious about his character name.

'Ironic that I will finally use the power of the one demon who openly attacked me while still under Solomon's control. And it just had to be him...'

He focused hard on the image of said demon, summoning him before him. The tall, slender, naked man, with a crown on his head, and feathered wings like an angel appeared.

His deep blue eyes locked on Astaroth's.

"You finally summon me, boy. Did you bring me out to let me feed on your soul?"

Astaroth sneered.

"Shut up."

Saying this, he shoved his left hand into the demon's chest, reaching into the soul, and sapping the essence out of it.

"I called you out to make you my bitch, Astaroth, Duke of hell."

The demon's face was neutral, but Astaroth could still feel the rage boiling under it, from his contact with the soul. And then they merged.

Chapter 394 Same Name

Merging with the demon that shared his name, Astaroth felt the disdain the demon felt from being fused so deeply with a mortal. But there was nothing the demon could do about it.

Astaroth could already feel his perception of reality shift as he melded with the demon. He had noticed every demon perceived reality differently, and it was usually associated with their powers.

The demon Astaroth's powers over illusions were closer to manipulating perception than actually conjuring illusions. This made his perception of the world one where nothing seemed quite right.

Right now, Astaroth was seeing the world in a shifting spectrum of psychedelic colours. His stomach turned, and he almost puked.

In his head, he heard demon Astaroth's snarky commentary.

'Kakakaka! Can't even stand to look through my eyes. How do you expect to use my powers, foolish mortal?'

Not ten seconds in his mind, and he already wanted to punch the damned demon in the face.

'Shut up, bottom feeder. I just need a moment to get used to it.'

Ptou

Spitting the acid bile that had gone up his throat, Astaroth steadied his body in an upright position again. He opened his eyes, taking in the psychedelic trip again, trying not to focus too much on one thing.

The shifting colours at least didn't affect the shapes of things or their position. Once he was able to unfocus and view only peripherally, his stomach stopped churning, and his head stopped spinning.

In the meantime Genie was already ramming her stone-armoured body into the bear, smacking it with her large paws and aggressively biting at its body.

Astaroth looked at his gained skills swiftly, to know what powers he had while melded with demon Astaroth.

Gained skills

Mirage dance, Kaleidoscope, Distorting Touch

He briefly opened each skill, fast-reading them to understand their use. Largely speaking, each skill bounced off the others.

Kaleidoscope was the perception state he was in, that had an actual use, other than making him dizzy. It allowed the user to see through illusions, discerning them as real or not.

Distorting Touch allowed him to transfer a part of that to a target, by direct touch or proxy touch, with a weapon, for example. The part that was transferred was only the colour-shifting vision, though, and not the actual truth-seeing part.

And last, Mirage Dance bounced off the target, suddenly seeing the world unusually, to overload their sensory input of view. This allowed the user of Mirage Dance to make the target believe they were everywhere and nowhere at the same time, effectively erasing their presence from the target.

Astaroth thought it resembled a skill he had seen a certain Fey player use in the tournament, months ago. With this, he could fight the bear on unequal footing, making their combat easier.

Of course, he didn't just gain skills from this meld. Demon Astaroth may be a small fry on the scale of demon beings in the ring, but that didn't mean he was weak.

Glancing at his stats, he was impressed. The demon may not be on par with Luna, but he wasn't far behind.

With the stats he gained, he assumed the demon was at least a rare grade and around level seventy or seventy-five. His stats had boosted a good amount.

Taking a step toward the bear, he reappeared right next to it. His agility was currently sitting at four hundred and forty-eight.

This effectively meant he travelled at a hundred and twelve meters per second. This translated to roughly four hundred kilometres per hour, or two hundred and fifty miles per hour.

Every time he took a step, he reached speeds you would see in a car on a lemans circuit. Even the agility-oriented players were far from reaching this speed currently.

Reaching the bear's side, he stabbed forward a dozen times with his estoc in hand. This happened in the blink of an eye, and the bear suddenly had twelve puncture wounds on its side.

The system couldn't register every individual attack, since it went too fast, but instead calculated as one instance of damage.

76,189!

The damage was much greater than Astaroth expected, and he almost coughed in surprise. Scanning the bear once more, he looked at its health.

Giant Blood Bear (Corrupted)

Level: 49

Grade: Special (Zone Boss)

Health: 44,847/124,400

Mana: 1,740/1,740

·cθm Even if the monster could regenerate at ten percent per second of its health, it was no match for Astaroth in this form. Demon Astaroth could read his thoughts while they were melded, and chuckled in his mind.

'Kakakaka. Relishing in the power you stole from me, mortal? Enjoy it while it lasts.'

Astaroth had almost momentarily forgotten this trash was inhabiting his mind space.

'Shut up. Remember that I beat you on equal footing. I'm still the better of the two.'

He felt a spike of rage in his body, which was reacting to his words to the demon's emotions. He wanted to laugh, but the body jerking in response was already a bad sign.

He knew he wasn't a hundred percent in control. Just like when Asmodeus had talked through his body.

'These demons may be under my control, but only barely...' he thought.

He needed to find a way to make his soul stronger, and soon. But in the meantime, he decided he was going to wipe the floor with every corrupted monster in the vicinity.

Ending the bear's life in another burst of flourishes, Astaroth dashed toward the smaller enemies right after, letting Genie go fight on her own, too.

As the monsters rapidly started dying to his incredible strength, Astaroth felt a few stings in his chest, like something was pricking him on the inside.

Once the last corrupted monster dropped dead, and he unmelded with demon Astaroth, he felt something hot go up his throat.

cough cough

Putting his hand in front of his mouth reflexively, Astaroth's eyes widened when he saw what came out of his mouth. Blood, and lots of it.

Feeling his vision become blurry, Astaroth called out to Genie.

"Take me somewhere safe. I think I overdid it..."

He didn't get to hear her response, as he fainted before she replied.

Chapter 395 Interrupting The Court

Across the world, players were logging back into New Eden. Many of them had logged out inside the safe walls of cities, with a few lower-levelled players logging out in villages.

Much to the surprise of many players, some villages that were logged out from no longer existed. The players that had logged out in those, came back to burnt and destroyed ruins, along with wildlife taking hold again.

For those who landed in villages still present, the eeriness of them was destabilizing. Almost like they were ghost towns.

The players respawning in cities also were welcomed by different views.

Some of the smaller cities were on lockdown, seemingly on a war footing. And the larger towns seemed to teem with more guards than usual.

These differences from when they logged out got the players curious and excited. They couldn't wait to see what the game had become after the update.

Some more insightful players could also spot other differences.

New buildings that hadn't been there previously.

Roads in poorer states or better states than before.

Familiar NPCs that seemed older than before.

When these players started asking around, the sudden questions surprised many NPCs. But upon realizing they were abnormals, the NPCs understood.

When the first information about the time lapse they had been gone for was learned, the player in question immediately posted it on the forums. Many players claiming the same thing later backed it.

But a specific guild had the biggest surprise of all.

Every player in Paragons reconnected, appearing in the guild base they had disconnected from, but facing a vastly different scene than before.

Instead of being met with the ruined city they had been in before, with just a few buildings back up, they spawned in a flourishing city, crawling with many people, from a variety of races from all over New Eden.

The officers, who had logged out of New Eden from the throne room, where they had their meetings before the update, were the most surprised when they landed in the middle of a court meeting.

Guards ran from the side, spears at the ready, surrounding the players. But a hand was raised from the throne.

"Halt! They aren't intruders."

Getting up from his lazed posture on the throne, a familiar beastman with a fire-red mane walked over to the group, stepping in front of Phoenix.

"Welcome back, my queen."

Leon knelt on the floor before Phoenix, shocking everyone present. The other people present eventually realized who he was kneeling to.

Everyone dropped to a knee or bowed in unison.

"Welcome back, Queen Phoenix!" they chanted together.

Only one person didn't bow his head, only smiling at the woman. Phoenix didn't recognize the young man, who sported the typical traits of the Ash Elves.

When the young man got up and walked over to Phoenix, he offered his hand to her. Phoenix grabbed it, confused.

"I salute you, Queen Phoenix, co-ruler of the Stellar Woodlands kingdom. I am Prince Nalafein Uuthli'vlos, son of Vhol'drokk Uuthli'vlos, King of the Ash Elves. It is a pleasure to meet you."

Phoenix almost reflexively bowed down to the prince, but he squeezed her hand when she twitched and she instead only nodded her head.

"The pleasure is all mine, Prince Nalafein. May I know the reason for your presence in our budding kingdom?"

Leon got back up before the prince could respond.

"I think this isn't a discussion for the court."

Turning to the other people in the room, he spoke up.

"I apologize for this intermission, but we shall reconvene soon. Court adjourned."

Everyone bowed once again before going to salute the queen personally and leave the room. Once everyone had left, the people remaining inside were only Leon, the Prince, and all the officers of Paragon.

The latter group did not know if they should stay or leave. The prince eyed them critically one by one until he felt satisfied.

"I assume it is safe to speak before your friends?" the prince asked, taking a seat again.

The throne room had hardly changed, with the only difference being a throne on the dais, where there hadn't been one before. The long rectangular table that had been used to plan their defence was still exactly where it had been, albeit a bit more worn.

Leon grabbed the throne from the dais, bringing it down to the tip of the table, where he gestured to Phoenix to take a seat. Phoenix sat down, nodding.

The prince was to her left, and Leon sat to her right. The rest of the officers sat at their usual spots.

Only one player didn't take a seat.

"Although I'm curious to know why the prince of the Ash Elves is here, I have things to do that are more pressing. If you'll excuse me?" Khalor said, turning his back to the table and walking out of the room.

Prince Nalafein frowned at the rudeness of the undead man, but seeing Phoenix stay silent, he remained quiet as well.

Phoenix turned her head to him.

"Forgive his rudeness, Prince Nalafein. I firmly believe he was never taught manners. The other officers of Paragons have better etiquette, I assure you."

The prince nodded with a light smile.

"Now, before you answer my question, there is another thing I want to address."

The prince dipped his head, motioning her to speak.

Phoenix turned her head to Leon with a slight frown.

"Who were all these people, and what do you mean by court? What happened while we were gone?"

Leon chuckled at her question.

"I expected this question. I believe it is better if I show you, after your discussion with the prince, my queen."

Phoenix's frown deepened.

"When did you become so polite? We leave for ten years, and suddenly you are a model citizen? What happened to you?"

Not that Phoenix disapproved of the change, since it meant he had been a better ruler than she originally thought he would. But it wasn't a change that she had expected.

Leon only smiled.

Not getting an answer from the beastman, she gave up and turned her head back to the prince.

"Since he won't answer my question, back to you I go. I assume you aren't here on vacation. What is the reason for your presence?"

"It's a long story, I'm afraid."

"I have time."

The prince nodded at her, leaning in on the table and crossing his hands.

Chapter 396 Hardships And Politics

Recalling the last ten years wasn't exactly comfortable for the prince, but he was here to look for someone, and he couldn't leave until he found him. Therefore, he explained his situation to the woman before him.

"My reason for being here stems from a long story. Are you willing to listen to it?"

Phoenix looked at the young man with a smile. He couldn't be older than eighteen, so she wondered how long of a story he could have.

Looking at Leon, he nodded at her.

"I believe I don't have pressing matters right now. I am all ears."

Prince Nalafein nodded his head.

"I shall try to spare you the boring details, still, while I explain my presence in your Kingdom."

Phoenix motioned him to proceed.

"The main reason I am here today is because I was banished from my homeland a few years ago. The reason for this is what the long story is.

"Ten years ago, an incident happened in my kingdom that changed my father's mentality, and ever since, he hasn't been in his right mind. Although he was already aggressive in his dealings with other kingdoms, it suddenly got worse.

"My father was already getting ready to expand his kingdom, and ever since that incident, he has been making moves on the nearby smaller kingdoms, slowly expanding. Although he already wanted to go down such a path, I believe the incident made him act sooner than he originally wanted."

"I'm sorry to interrupt you," Phoenix said, raising her hand. "But what incident are you referring to?"

The prince shook his head with a smile.

"Your question is no problem. A certain Abnormal came to the palace, along with people who my father had exiled, and after what I was told was a rough altercation, the spirit of the kingdom defended the abnormal.

"This has incredibly angered my father, and ever since, he has been incredibly volatile, bursting into anger at the slightest confrontation. All the officials in the palace that back him have gone along with this, acceding to his every unreasonable demand.

"This has caused a manhunt to begin in the kingdom, and beyond, which is why he has been invading the nearby nations so vehemently. He is still looking for the Abnormal in question, to this day, of that I'm certain.

"The Abnormal in question had been captured once, but after certain circumstances, he escaped, and this worsened my father's anger. It was also discovered that I aided the escape after a thorough investigation.

"And since my father cannot execute his own son, because the kingdom spirit intervened, he has since pushed me out of the royal family. He brought in one of his bastard sons, and after many shady situations, pinned on my back, I was finally banished.

"I have been looking for the Abnormal ever since. I have a feeling he can aid the situation."

Phoenix looked at the young man, taking in the information he gave her. She then asked a question again.

"This Abnormal. I assume he is one of your kin?"

Prince Nalafein nodded.

"Yes. He is a man around your age, with ashen hair and deep blue eyes. I believe you know him very well."

An image of Astaroth popped into Phoenix's mind. Was it possible it was that Ash Elf?

"I'm curious about this Abnormal, but I want to know what led to you being banished and why you came all the way here after it. From what I know, the Ash Elf kingdom is very far away from here."

The prince smiled.

"Indeed, it is no small journey from there to here. But, I have been travelling for a few years, braving many dangers, to get here. I was given information that the person I am looking for is here, in this very kingdom.

"As for my banishment, it came about from my half-brother's actions. He is a sly man, with nefarious intentions and thoughts."

The prince paused, clenching his fists a bit, as his eyes became cold momentarily. Then he went back to normal, his smile coming back.

"The moment my father brought him into the light, and proclaimed him as his legitimate son, my half-brother has been trying to push me away from the family. His claim to the throne was weaker than mine, since he was acknowledged after me.

"His age would normally put him before me in the line of succession, but his unknown mother's origins block that. But now that I have been banished, there is no other candidate."

Phoenix understood the politics behind this. She might not have been from a family ever connected to nobility, but this had been a sort of hobby for her, growing up.

She read a lot of books on politics in the middle ages and how lines of succession worked. Nodding her head, she urged him to continue.

"I don't know all the details, but many of his schemes eventually fell on me, and I was branded a traitor to my father and the crown of Tel'narel. This got me banished, and he got his succession lined up for him.

"This happened over the course of five years, and I have been looking for the Abnormal for just as long. I travelled to many kingdoms, talking to many people, and eventually got a trail that led me here.

"But when I got here, I was led to meet with the surrogate king, and he told me I had to wait here if I wanted to speak to him. Something about all the Abnormals being gone for a while.

"I assumed he meant you went on a journey. But with how you appeared directly in the room, I believe it to be a little more complicated than that."

Phoenix chuckled.

"You can say that, yes. We were away from New Eden for ten years. I believe your information should show that."

Prince Nalafein nodded.

"Our situation is a little complicated to explain. Now. About your Abnormal. I think I already know who it is, but could you tell me their name?"

Nodding again, Prince Nalafein opened his mouth. But before he could talk, Violette, who had remained quiet all along, just like the other officers, spoke up.

"He's looking for Astaroth. Astaroth once told me about his misadventure in the Ash Elf capital. It was just before the tournament began."

The prince looked at the little girl, who looked around the age he had been when he met Astaroth.

"That would be correct. Do you know him?"

Phoenix took over.

"We all do. He is the leader of the Paragons guild, as well as the king of the Stellar Woodland's kingdom."

The prince's jaw dropped open.

'He's a king now?!'

Chapter 397 Expanding The Circle

It took a while for the prince to regain his bearings. The man he had met in those cells was a commoner, and now he suddenly was a ruler, of a flourishing nation no less.

This made little sense. But at the same time, he wasn't surprised.

With how Lady Anulo had been vehement about freeing him, she must have seen something in the man. He composed himself once again and cleared his throat.

"Ahem. Then is there a way to speak with Asta-King Astaroth? I have something to ask of him."

Phoenix looked at him and laughed internally.

'I understand his reaction. Even I thought little of him at first.'

"I can try to message him, see where he is and how long it would take him to come back. But he might still be busy. He told me before we came back to New Eden that the position he would be in on this side would be less than ideal."

The prince looked confused.

"Queen Phoenix, I am not sure I understand what you mean by New Eden. That is the name the gods gave to our world. Yet, you keep referring to it as though it is something else."

Phoenix looked at him, perplexed. Khalor wasn't present, and he didn't want this information to become public knowledge yet, but she was in a situation where explaining the entire picture was easier than spinning around the pot.

So she made her choice.

"As you are aware, Prince Nalafein, us 'Abnormals', as you call us, are not from the same world as you. Which is the reason we become stronger, much faster than you natives."

"Yes. I am aware. But I still don't understand why you refer to our world so casually."

Scanning all the players around the table, which now had curious looks on their faces, Phoenix pushed through with her decision.

"The world we come from is called Earth. In our world, we connect here through the use of special technology. To us Abnormals, or players, as we call ourselves, this is all just a game. For most of us, you are considered characters, created by some game designer. Nothing more than lines of code in a program."

All the jargon she used was quite unfamiliar to Nalafein, and his face morphed into a mask of confusion. But before he could digest the information, Phoenix kept talking.

"But a select few of us know something the rest of our world does not."

Violette stiffed up in her seat. She knew what Phoenix was about to say, but she was nervous at the idea of having it aired out so freely.

She trusted the people in the room in battle, yes, but she knew next to nothing about most of them. What if they talked about it outside after?

Phoenix could feel her nervous gaze and smiled reassuringly at her.

"What I am about to say may sound like madness for many of you in this room. But I assure you it is not. I believe this information wholeheartedly, especially after what I have been through recently, outside of New Eden. New Eden is not a game. It is as real as Earth. And they are connected. Which means the danger spreading in New Eden will soon spill into ours."

The officers started whispering amongst themselves. But, contrary to what Phoenix thought, none of them refuted her statement, or even spoke up against it.

Gulnur was the first one to react.

"I believe you. Too many things are happening to me outside of New Eden, that cannot be explained otherwise."

The other officers slowly started voicing their acknowledgement of her words. Even the rational Morticia nodded in agreement.

The prince was still taking in the information. It was common knowledge that other worlds existed, at least for the natives.

But to think that an entire community of Abnormals suddenly appeared in theirs, thinking this was nothing but a game. The implications of this truth were not without repercussions.

To them, if this was just a game, wouldn't that mean they wouldn't think twice about killing people, or monsters, without thinking of the repercussions to this world? Would it not make these Abnormals the biggest threat to this world?

But a hand landed on his shoulder, stopping his mind from spiraling downward. Looking up, he met Phoenix's fiery red hair and sky-blue eyes.

"I know what you are thinking, Prince Nalafein. But not all of us are inconsiderate enough to act on our impulses, even knowing it is a game. Also, I believe the truth on this matter will soon come to light, and people will readjust their mentality."

Turning her head to look at the officers in the throne room, Phoenix put on a stern face.

"This information cannot leave this room. Understood? If any of you ever peep a word about this to the world, Khalor will probably hunt you down. Violette."

"Yes?!" Violette snapped out of her torpor.

She was terrified at the idea of someone here telling their family or friends what they had heard, and the fault falling on her. But looking into Phoenix's eyes, she understood the woman was ready to take all the blame should it happen.

"Can you contact Astaroth? Ask him when he can come back to the base. Tell him our politics might soon require both him and me to be present."

"On it."

As the girl started sending her friend messages, Phoenix gazed at the officers one by one once more. Seeing all of their serious faces, she understood they would keep quiet.

She turned back toward the prince.

"I will try to get Astaroth here as fast as I can. But he was going back home to see someone, and he told me there might be issues where he was when we left New Eden. So he might not come back right away."

The prince nodded, his mind distracted by the mind-blowing information he had been told. But his brain came to an abrupt stop.

"Wait. Home? So he is back in the Ash Elf kingdom? This is bad. If anyone affiliated with the king finds him, he is surely going to end up getting executed this time."

Phoenix frowned. As she was about to ask why, a knock resounded on the doors.

Leon went to open the door, letting the person outside into the room when he recognized him.

Prince Nalafein frowned at the older Ash Elf.

"Gelum'vire. What is important enough for you to interrupt us?"

The middle-aged Ash Elf bowed slightly to the prince.

"Young Prince. News from the capital just reached me. There is a demon at the gates. The city is under siege."

The ice-cold tone the man said this with almost made everyone believe he didn't care. But Nalafein knew better.

Panic already started seeping into the young man. He might resent his father for banishing him, but he still cared about the kingdom and its inhabitants.

"What about the outside of the walls?!" he asked, his voice trembling.

"Decimated, your highness."

Nalafein's stomach dropped.

Chapter 398 Reaching The Haven

In the forests of the Ash Elf kingdom, Astaroth was waking up from his unconscious state. He could feel the ground moving under him, rocking at a steady interval.

When his senses started coming back to him, he noticed the ground was strangely warm and fluffy. At the same moment, a voice rang in his head.

'Master. You are awake. Are you alright?'

It took a moment for Astaroth to remember who the voice belonged to.

"Genie... Where am I? And why do I feel like someone trampled on my head?"

The rocking stopped as he sat up, Genie stopping her walk forward. Astaroth slid down her side, collapsing as his legs hit the ground.

He hadn't felt this weak in a long time. Feeling his head pulsing in pain, and his body heavy like lead, Astaroth wondered what had happened after he passed out.

Then his memory flashed through what had happened before, and he suddenly had an inkling of an idea of what had happened.

"Genie. Are we somewhere safe? I need to meditate for a while."

'We aren't safe yet, Master. But we aren't far from safety.'

Looking around himself, Astaroth noticed they weren't on the surface anymore. Although the light around him felt somewhat natural, it came from stones embedded in the walls of the tunnel they were travelling.

Looking further ahead, he could see the tunnel was turning at a steady angle, and it also seemed to go down. This felt like the staircase they had found in the tree palace, but going down with a much smoother pass.

Which prompted him to wonder where they were going.

"Where were you taking me? Wasn't your haven that tree above the ground we were fighting in front of?"

Genie shook her head.

'The ruins above ground were too troublesome to fix, given the constant onslaught of corrupted monsters attacking us daily. We live underground, under the tree. There is a cave under it, and it's safe.'

"Alright then. Take me there, but I will need to meditate before I talk to anyone else."

Nodding her head once, Genie grabbed onto his collar. Astaroth was still weak in his legs, but with her help, he could stand.

Taking hold of her side, he used Genie as a crutch, supporting his weight on her body. The wolf barely seemed to notice the added weight, which made sense, given she had been carrying him already.

Resuming her march forward, Genie led him down the spiralling hallway until they reached an opening. As she had said, they were almost there, and only needed to walk for one or two kilometres more.

The tunnel opened into a small cave, in which he could see a few wooden huts, built in a circular pattern, around what looked like a small pit fire. From afar, he could already hear the familiar sound of wooden swords clashing against each other.

"Let's stop here for a moment. I won't take long."

Genie brought him to the nearby wall, where Astaroth slid down to a seated position. She then curled next to him, albeit her humongous size compared to him.

She was now just as big as White Death had been before dying. But from her aura alone, Astaroth knew she was already stronger than he had been.

She had surpassed her genetic limits somehow, and he could sense she still had room to grow. Brushing aside his admiration for her new strength, he closed his eyes and focused.

He envisioned the ring on his finger and imagined going into it and into the familiar white room where Solomon was always lazing. Reopening his eyes, the blinding light assaulted him.

"Ahh. I see you have come on your own, young man. You are learning fast. What did you want to come here for?"

Turning toward the voice, Astaroth faced Solomon, still seated on his enormous sofa, enjoying some tea.

'Does he sometimes eat, too?'

Shaking his head, and pushing the stupid question from his head, Astaroth walked toward the other free sofa that Solomon had already conjured. Amon was already pouring him a cup of tea.

"I am sorry to bother you, Solomon. But something happened recently, and I believe you can shed some light on it for me."

"Hmm? Pray tell. I will help if I can."

Solomon looked intrigued already.

Taking the cup of tea, and sipping on it slightly, Astaroth enjoyed the taste momentarily before lowering it again.

"I have slowly started using the powers of the demons living inside the ring, and something happened earlier today that hadn't happened yet. I have fused with Asmodeus, Zepar, and Ipos, without issue, but something happened when I fused with Astaroth."

Solomon nodded his head, curious about what may trouble him enough to come here willingly.

"I tried using the powers of Astaroth, earlier today, and albeit successfully, when I undid the melding, my body suddenly suffered some backlash. I coughed up blood and passed out. Even now, my body is still weakened."

Solomon frowned. He had never had this issue, and wondered what could have brought it upon the young man.

"Hmm. I have no answer for you at this moment. But I believe asking the demon responsible for it may yield some results."

Solomon raised one hand, snapping his fingers. A naked man suddenly appeared before him, his head already lowered toward Solomon.

"Lord Solomon. How may my lowly self serve you today?"

Solomon smirked at the demon.

"Cut out your false respect, Astaroth. Why don't you salute your new master instead of my old self?"

The demon slightly turned his head, noticing the Ash Elf seated behind him, and clicked his tongue. He turned around, only slightly bowing his head, and with his most sarcastic tone, saluted Astaroth.

"Master."

Solomon looked on as the demon openly loathed the young Ash Elf. His mind already understood what had happened.

"I believe I have an answer to your query, young man. But I think it would be best if the offender admitted it himself. What do you have to say for yourself, Astaroth, Duke of hell?"

Meanwhile, Elven Astaroth was already seething at the lack of respect the demon was showing him. Was he not his master now?

But before the demon could open his mouth to speak up, Astaroth felt a pulling force on his soul, suddenly yanking him out of the ring. He opened his eyes, and before him stood old man Aberon.

"You come into our new home, and instead of coming to say hi, you sit in a corner and meditate? It seems I will have to beat some manners into you, young man."

Astaroth felt tears form in the corner of his eyes.

"Aberon. It is so good to see you."

Chapter 399 Out Of The Ring

The old man looked at Astaroth, seeing his eyes tear up, and his anger washed away.

"Aye. It is good to see you too, Astaroth."

Astaroth got up, with some difficulty, and hugged the old man tightly. But not long after he did, he suddenly felt a huge drain on his mana, his legs becoming weak again.

Astaroth used Mana Siphon, which he rarely used, just to sustain the sudden immense draw on his mana. He could feel the mana all rushing into his ring, and even Aberon felt it.

The old man frowned at Astaroth, wondering why he was suddenly sending all his mana to the ring on his hand.

"What are you doing, young man?"

"It's not me. Something is wresting control of my mana from me."

Astaroth felt that the mana he had just siphoned was still not enough, and used Mana Siphon a second time, already feeling his stomach churn. He hated using that skill for this exact reason.

Feeling his mana finally stop draining, Astaroth trembled a bit, feeling the whiplash on his body for using so much mana in one go. Aberon grabbed onto his shoulder, getting ready for whatever came next.

Feeling a surge from the ring, both when looked on as a bright figure suddenly burst out of the ring, standing a few feet away from them. Aberon used his telekinesis to back them up a few meters, almost reaching the edge of the settlement.

As he landed, Aberon was already charging up a powerful spell, since he could feel the crushing aura of the unknown person who had just appeared. But just as it finished charging, and the person finished materializing, the spell fizzled out.

The old man that had just appeared waved his hand, as a thin barrier expanded from him, englobing both Astaroth and Aberon, as the old mage paled.

When the thin barrier washed through him, he instantly felt all his mana disappear. It was like his connection to mana itself had been severed.

It was the first time in an extremely long time that Aberon had felt so powerless. But Astaroth next to him sighed in relief when he recognized the person who appeared.

"It's alright, Aberon. He isn't an enemy."

Aberon had a hard time believing that a man who just washed away all the surrounding mana wasn't a threat to him. But he trusted Astaroth enough to listen to his words.

"Then who is he? And why did he drain away your mana to manifest?"

"Forgive my sudden intrusion," the newcomer said, giving an apologetic head bow.

"Let me introduce myself, if you don't mind, young man."

Astaroth nodded to him, letting him speak for himself.

"I go by many names, some calling me the great sage. My close ones called me Jedidiah. My most common moniker is King Solomon. It is a pleasure to meet you."

Giving a half bow, Solomon finished his introduction, while Aberon stood motionless, his mouth agape.

Seeing as the old man was still speechless, Solomon looked at Astaroth.

"Excuse my abrupt use of your mana, young man. Our conversation was not finished, you see? I also have the answers you seek. I spoke with Duke Astaroth after you disappeared, and he confessed completely."

Astaroth's eyes lit up.

"Then what happened?"

Aberon finally snapped out of his daze.

"Wait wait wait. Did you say Duke Astaroth? As in 'Duke of Hell' Astaroth?"

Solomon nodded his head.

"You still have control over those powerful demons after being dead for millennia? How is that possible?"

Solomon laughed at the old man's question.

"Young mage, when you lived as long as I did, and became as powerful as I, holding demons bound after death becomes much easier than you would think."

Aberon hadn't been called a young mage in a long time, and it almost offended him. But remembering who was talking to him, he understood that to his standards; he was indeed a young mage.

"But why would you ask questions to a duke of hell on Astaroth's behest? What do the two have to do with each other?"

Astaroth answered that question. Raising his hand, he showed the ring to Aberon.

"This. I am the one currently in control of Solomon's Signet Ring. I am theoretically the new master of Solomon's seventy-two demons."

Aberon looked at the ring in horror. He despised demonic magic, or anything related to demons at all.

Seeing his disciple wielding possibly the strongest source of demonic power ever created was a shock to him.

"Why did you accept that power? I specifically told you to never use demonic magic. It will corrupt your soul and turn you into an evil being."

Solomon raised his hand.

"Aberon, was it?"

Aberon turned his head to Solomon.

"You do not need to worry. I still hold most of the control over the demons' powers. Your disciple has only barely touched upon the surface of what the ring can truly bring about. However, he has the power to unlock all of it in due time."

Aberon was in shock. He looked at Astaroth.

'Him? Who barely had any potential over magic? He couldn't possibly have the soul power to control so many powerful demons, could he?'

"Now!" Solomon said, clapping his hands.

"I have little time, as holding this barrier consumes a lot of mana. Let us get to the reason I came out, Astaroth."

Astaroth looked at Solomon, eager to hear the answer to his earlier question.

"The reason Fusing with Duke Astaroth took a toll on your body was because he tried wrenching control from you when you unmelded. That is because he does not respect you. He still thinks of you as a weak mortal."

Astaroth frowned.

"But I beat him, like I beat every other demon in the ring, fair and square."

Solomon shook his head.

"He believes it was not a fair fight, since he was lowered to your level of power. He believes for it to be fair, he should fight you with all his power. Which is why I have come out here. I want you to fight him again. Show him you are still stronger than him."

Astaroth looked at Solomon with a worried look. Wasn't that extremely dangerous?

Chapter 400 Accepting The Challenge

Solomon could feel the angst building up in Astaroth's mind already and raised his hand toward him.

"Do not fret, young man. I won't let anything bad happen. Should you accept to fight him under his conditions, he agreed to swear eternal fealty to you. Should you back down... I recommend never using his powers again.

"Whether you win or lose, nothing bad will happen to this place or anywhere else. I will rein him in before that. But winning against him under his terms also has its good points. It will serve as a good show of strength to the other demons who might still have their reserves about you."

Astaroth listened to the sage, weighing the pros and cons at the same time. It wasn't a simple decision, since he would have to fight against a powerful demon, while having his strength still slightly weakened.

But winning against him almost guaranteed good results for the future. He wanted to take that bet.

"I'll do it."

The response from Astaroth took Aberon aback.

"Are you mad, boy?! I know you are confident, but this is a duke of hell. The difference in strength is not something confidence alone can overcome."

Solomon was already smiling.

Astaroth got to his feet, still wobbling a bit. He could feel Solomon had already retracted the barrier that pushed out the mana.

He used Mana Siphon once more to top up his mana reserves and converted a bit to Aether.

He still didn't have a way to keep Aether in his system, an issue to which he needed to find a solution soon, so he used the Aether immediately, spawning White and Morpheus next to him through Soul Manifestation.

As the mana drain already started affecting him, he melded with Luna. He took a deep breath, absorbing the latent mana around him, without using Mana Siphon.

He focused on cycling the mana in his system as fast as he could, trying to boost the production of natural mana as much as he could. To his surprise, although he had been doing this for a while now, without results, this time was different.

Ding

Mana Breathing has reached level 3

Astaroth grinned at the development. He hurriedly opened his passive skills window.

Scrolling down a bit, he read out the changes to Mana Breathing.

Mana Breathing (Level 2 -> 3)

Through constant practice, you have learned how to force your own mana reserves to cycle and produce faster, resulting in a qualitative change. Mana regen: 5/second -> 1%/second in combat, 25/second -> 5%/per second out of combat.

Although it seemed like a small amount, one percent was enormous. Without melding, his mana was at five thousand and five hundred points already.

This translated to fifty-five points per second already. But when melded with Luna, who had the highest magic ability in his soul companions, that amount exploded tremendously.

Looking at his mana bar, he saw the current amount was over sixty-six thousand, and that his spent mana was already back to full, thanks to the upgraded regen. He grinned.

Looking forward again, he noticed the Duke of hell was already out in front of him, stretching. A large smirk was on its face as it looked at Astaroth.

"If you think this is going to be enough to beat me, mortal, you are gravely mistaken. This will only delay the unavoidable truth of your weakness."

Astaroth chuckled in response.

"I know your strength well, hellspawn. I've been melded with you, remember? Unfortunately for you, I have little time to waste on pleasantries. This will be over in under five minutes."

The demon seethed in rage at being underestimated. But his opponent rapidly changed an additional time.

Astaroth had no intention of losing against the demon who kept calling him names and underestimating his strength. The last he fought the duke, he didn't have access to this skill, because of cooldown, but this time was different.

"Royal Protection."

His body underwent a second transformation, shifting from his small slender form to a bigger, much more muscular form, as the burning pain washed over him again. The pain was much more manageable this time around, but it still sucked.

The demon watched on in horror as the man in front of him grew two feet taller, bulking up in muscle, and suddenly releasing an aura on par with some princes of hell. He gulped.

Astaroth scanned his opponent, wanting to know exactly how much hurt he had to dish out to get this over with.

Astaroth, Duke of hell

Level: 75

Grade: Rare

HP: 387,000

MP: 46,260

He smiled in satisfaction. Looking at his own stats, he almost laughed at the difference.

Status

Name: Astaroth (Fused to Solara)

Race: Ash Elf

Grade: Special (Legendary 9:58)

Level: 50 (324,000/98,209,950)

Stats:

HP: 1,723,200/1,723,200

MP: 199,780/199,780

Stamina: 100

Mana Regen: 1%/second in combat, 5%/second out of combat

Strength: 178 (414) (+196) (+40)

Agility: 178 (404) (+196) (+30)

Constitution: 237 (530) (+261) (+35)

Intelligence: 298 (626) (+328)

Wisdom: 298 (626) (+328)

Attack Power Str: 2,070

Attack Power Agi: 2,020

Magic Attack Power: 3,130

Healing Power: 3,130

Natural Defense: 25 %

Armor Defense: 14 %

Luck: 0 (Stat unaffected by Level up and free points)

Available Stat points: 10

Available Skill points: 9

Physical Condition: Normal

Mental Condition: Hyper Stimulated

Looking at the demon before him, he could already feel the fear rising in him.

'I'm as dangerous as a boss creature right now. I could most likely fight all of Khalor's army without a problem.'

"Are you ready to lose, hellspawn? This time you face me on 'equal' footing, like you wanted."

Stressing the word equal, Astaroth grinned at the demon. Hurting its ego was only a bonus.

Busting him up and showing him who was the strongest between the two was his true goal. And, right now, he felt like that wouldn't be much trouble.

Duke Astaroth wanted nothing more than to squish the mortal under his foot, but he had a feeling this was no longer a thing he could achieve. But his anger at being looked down upon erased his fear and logic.

"You got bigger. So what?! I'll still squash you like a bug!"

He then dashed at Astaroth, his estoc pulled back, ready to sting.