

New Eden 431

Chapter 431 Letting Loose

ShadowFang watched as a large Honey Badger, with pitch-black fur, and eyes redder than a cinnamon candy, jumped at her. She had heard the rustling just a second before the lunge, and repositioned her body to roll out of the way.

Unfortunately for the Archer in her little group, he was the next in the line of attack, and wasn't fast enough to move out of the way. As the badger latched onto his back, it started ripping into his leather armor, teeth and claws lashing out violently.

Red and black steam was leaking off the badger's back, and ShadowFang could feel this wasn't a weak enemy. She did what she had read online during her recon session about New Eden, and focused on the animal, thinking hard about seeing its information.

A small window appeared in front of her eyes, and she smiled.

Honey Badger (Corrupted)

Level: 13

Grade: Special

HP: 2,500

MP: 180

The high health number was no joke. She was still level two, and her damage could never take down these monsters on her own. Counting in the ten damage her daggers gave her, she could do a maximum of twenty-five damage with her attacks.

Unless she suddenly developed a skill, as she had seen on the internet, her chances of taking down the enemies were close to nil. She needed the group of four to stay alive for now.

She rapidly went into action.

Lunging back forward, she reached the Badger and Hunter in a couple of steps. Hidden Arrow had already fallen to his stomach, panicking as he was getting torn to shreds on his back.

The Priest boy was casting heal after heal, trying to keep him alive, but the Sorcerer couldn't fire spells, the risk of friendly fire being too high. Blazing Heart was in a similar situation and hesitated to strike.

"Stop healing him, we can't help him! Just resurrect him after he dies!" Blazing Heart shouted.

But before the priest could obey, ShadowFang screamed a counter-order.

"Don't stop healing him! If he dies, you won't get the time to resurrect him! Blazing, turn around! There are two more coming your way. Balthazaar! On your left, two more!"

ShadowFang jumped on the Badger's back, plunging her daggers into the animal's short throat repetitively. The speed of her strikes, and their precision, were not something your everyday person could do.

This betrayed her experience and Blazing Heart, who was already facing the badgers at his front, suddenly felt like they had been played.

The priest kept healing Hidden Arrow, trying to keep him alive, while damage numbers rolled before ShadowFang's eyes.

49!

49!

98!!

...

She liked her damage, as small as it was, but this wasn't enough. She brought both her knives to the front, crossing them over the Badger's throat, before pressing them as hard as she could, and pulling them back.

490!!

A notification flashed before her eyes.

Skill Learned

Your experience has transpired into your actions, and you have learned a skill. Skill Learned; Throat Slash. Congratulations, player ShadowFang!

As she was reading it, the Badger started bucking, throwing her off its back, and it turned around towards her.

The Hunter hurriedly flipped over, crawling backward, his face a mask of utter terror. He thought he was going to die, and the piss staining his pants was a testament to that.

But seeing the look on ShadowFang's face, which resembled more a look of ecstasy, than one of fear, made his stomach drop all the way down.

'She's a maniac!'

He wanted to flee with all his might, but his party leader shouted at him.

"Hidden Arrow! Get up and help us, you buffoon!"

Blazing was his best friend, and he had helped him through thick and thin, so he would never back away from him.

Grabbing his bow from the ground, he rapidly turned to help their Sorcerer, who was having trouble casting even a single spell, since he had to move all the time, to not get killed. He started shooting out arrows.

Meanwhile, ShadowFang was watching the Badger with joy in her heart.

'I can finally break free again!'

Although the large cut she had done to the animal was already closing up, a bleeding effect had still taken a few ticks of health off of its bar. But the regen it was having was bad news.

She needed to apply higher damage, with more lasting effects.

'I'll just bleed him dry, then!'

Her smile widened, making her look like a madwoman, blood still splashed across her face.

She lunged back forward; the Badger did the same. But before the collision, ShadowFang jerked sideways, altering her course, as the Badger jumped forward, missing her entirely.

But ShadowFang didn't suffer the same fate.

Slashing and stabbing at the animal's side, she left him with four deep cuts before it passed her position. All four attacks had dealt regular damage, not hitting any weak points.

But that had not been Shadow's goal. She grinned, another notification in front of her eyes.

Skill Learned

Your precision, stemming from years of training, is shown in your attack. Skill Learned; Bleeding Strikes. Congratulations, player ShadowFang!

ShadowFang looked at the monster's health bar, and just under it, an icon with a little four on it was flashing. After a couple of seconds, the number dropped to three.

'So his healing takes away the bleeding effect., huh? I guess I'll just have to cut it up some more until it can't regenerate fast enough!'

Lunging back forward, her daggers at her side, ShadowFang was getting into a groove she hadn't felt in decades.

'This is fun!'

The combat lasted a few more minutes, with their priest wasting all his mana time and time again, restoring it through potions, and burning money like crazy. When it ended, the only party member that was still unscathed, by means the four boys couldn't understand, was ShadowFang.

They could see the monsters were faster than her, but by some unnatural means, she kept dodging their attacks, like she knew where to be. If they knew any better, they would have thought she was seeing into the future.

The four boys were close to death, their health pools being practically entirely empty. The priest was almost out of mana, and he could barely cast two more healing spells.

ShadowFang looked at her status screen. She had already gone up to level 6.

With her five free points, she boosted her agility, since it affected her speed and damage. She thought about putting at least one point into constitution, but left it for later.

Looking at the health bars of each of her party members, a devious grin flashed across her face.

But before anything could happen, Chronos snapped out of the visual, reentering his body.

"What an experience. That woman was frightening," he muttered to himself.

But his curiosity wasn't satiated.

He reached out to another thread, sliding his hand into it, as his vision swam.

Chapter 432 Old But Still Mighty

Re-opening his eyes, Chronos could now see himself walking into an adventurers' guild in a somewhat rundown town. As he walked up to the counter, he focused on the time vision.

Jack arrived at the counter of the adventurers' guild, a chill travelling down his spine like he was being watched. Turning his head around discreetly, he found no one looking in his particular direction, and ignored the feeling.

'I might be losing my touch.'

The young woman at the counter smiled at him with a typical customer service smile.

"Hello, sir. How may I help you today?"

Jack focused on the young woman. He was in a hurry, and he had no time to waste with possible tails on him.

"Hello. I was told this is the place to get registered as an adventurer. I would like to register."

Some people around him glanced at him, finding it odd for an old man to register as an adventurer, but it was none of their business.

"You have come to the right place, sir. But there are a few tests before you can register. Are you confident in your ability to pass them? Not to sound insulting, but we rarely get new adventurers with your... life experience."

Jac chuckled in response.

"No need to sugarcoat it, young woman. I know I am old. But I can probably give a run for their money to anyone in this room."

Some of the younger, more hot-headed adventurers in the guild were half tempted to try out the old man, to put him in his place. But some more seasoned folk held them in place.

Even if his level and strength looked more than average, appearances alone couldn't fool the older adventurers.

They could feel the aura of death around the old man. An aura that couldn't be obtained by farming for a lifetime.

This man had reaped enough lives in his life to form a natural pressure around himself.

Jack smiled as he noticed the older adventurers' actions from the corner of his eyes.

'A shame. It would have been excellent exercise.'

The woman at the counter felt the rise in pressure around the old man, and no longer doubted his claims.

"Right this way, sir. We will test you on the grounds out back."

Jack nodded his head, following her around the counter and through a door at the back of the room. The door opened out into a closed courtyard, with walls about eight feet tall.

The yard seemed unnaturally large, compared to what it looked like from outside the building, but he didn't care to ask why.

"What do the tests consist of?"

But before the woman could turn and answer, a rugged man walked toward Jack from the side of the yard. His brown leather jacket, coupled with his crop top haircut, as well as the eyepatch on his right eye made him look like a trained fighter.

Jack could already feel a similar pressure coming from that man as the one he exuded himself.

"I'll take it from here, Jacqueline. Follow me, sir."

Bringing to the back of the courtyard, the man kept glancing back toward Jack. Once at the end of the courtyard, he pointed to a small pedestal.

"Put your hand on this. It will gauge your strength through your stats and then assign you a testing course difficulty."

Jack nodded his head, walking up to the pedestal. He touched the top of it, and it suddenly showed his stats.

Of course, he was still level one, so all his stats were still level one, too. The trainer looked at Jack with a suspicious gaze.

Once the pedestal hid his stats again, Jack heard a notification ring in his head.

Adventurers' guild test started. Difficulty set. Level 1; Hard mode.

Jack frowned, but he expected as much. The pedestal saw his stats, but it most likely also checked many other things.

Turning to look at the trainer, he noticed the man had backed away to the wall. A small veil of blue separated them.

A loud gong noise brought his attention toward the middle of the courtyard. When he turned to look, he saw scarecrows had popped out of nowhere.

A message was shown in his sight.

Defeat the three scarecrows to clear the first phase of your test. Time limit: 1 minute.

As he finished reading it, the three scarecrows in question started shuffling around, at around the same speed a normal person would jog.

'That's it? I hope this test actually challenges me in some way, if this is the hard mode.'

Scanning them, Jack almost sighed in exasperation.

Training Scarecrow

Level: 1

Grade: Common

HP: 25

He understood that under normal circumstances, a level one player could only do around ten damage, with a standard starting weapon. But the weapons he had bought were a little more powerful than that.

His rifle, in particular, could deal thirty damage, flat, without considering his own damage in it. So he could theoretically one-shot them.

Noticing the timer had already started, Jack stopped wasting time.

Pulling out the rifle, he aimed and shot three times in rapid succession, hitting each dummy squarely in the face, dealing seventy points of critical damage on each.

The timer stopped, swapping out to a large 'Congratulations' message. As the Scarecrows disappeared, another set of them appeared, this time five of them, wearing ragged armour.

Jack also noticed they had higher levels, making them harder to kill. But they were still target practice, as far as he was concerned. He reloaded the three bullets he used and got ready.

Not a moment later, the timer started, showing only forty-five seconds, and he shot six times rapidly. All his shots went for the four scarecrows in the back, which were wearing cloth and leather armor.

He took out all four of them, his critical damage chewing them up quickly. But instead of reloading, he swapped out his rifle for the gun and dagger he had, and dashed forward.

Striking with the dagger on the metal armoured scarecrow, he was surprised when it raised its arm that had a shield on it.

'So it's not just for show. Good.'

He combo-ed a rapid succession of dagger strikes and gunshots, getting a few good hits in, but dealing much smaller damage than he had done with the rifle. But he still overcame the scarecrow promptly.

As they disappeared again, Jack turned around.

"Listen, sir. I can feel you glaring at my back. If you want to fight me that bad, step in here and let's skip this farce of a test."

The trainer grinned from behind the veil, walking up to the pedestal. After tapping it a few times, he interrupted the test.

He walked across the veil and pulled out a similar weapon layout as Jack.

"I was hoping you would say this. You are suspiciously stronger than your level shows. Are you a spy?"

Jack chuckled. He expected the suspicions, but he didn't expect the man to be so overt about it.

"I guess you'll have to beat the answers out of me."

The grin on both men's faces was that of anticipation as they charged at each other. But before the clash happened, Chronos was once again ejected from the time vision.

"Where are all these monsters coming from, and how do their fates tie to mine?"

He couldn't help himself any longer, feeling excited for the first time in so long, and he jammed his hand into another thread.

Chapter 433 A Known Person

Chronos re-opened his eyes, feeling something slide down his cheeks. He had trouble seeing, as his surroundings were blurry.

'Is this person crying?'

He focused on the vision, trying to make sense of it.

With quiet sobs, this person kept rubbing their eyes, drying up tears as she held someone's hand. Hearing the door behind her open, she turned her head tiredly.

"Miss Lagacé. I know you want to stay by your brother's side. But you haven't left the room in two days. You need to go home and rest. You also need to eat something before you collapse."

The person saying this was dressed in a white overcoat, wearing a clear blue shirt under it, with a grey and blue striped tie.

"Doctor. I can't just leave my brother here like this. We have no one else than each other. Who's going to watch over him?"

"Miss Lagacé... The hospital staff can take care of him. You need to go home. If you don't take care of yourself, you will end up in the same situation as your brother. We can take care of him."

Her stubbornness wouldn't allow her to get up from the chair she was in, though. She felt responsible for him.

Xavier had been living together ever since they left their parent's residence. Their bond was tight as could be, and never once did they let each other down, under any circumstance.

Even after her brother had dropped out of college to learn a trade, her respect for him had never waned. They both respected the life of the other, and their boundaries, cohabiting peacefully.

This was why it had taken her a full day to realise her brother hadn't pulled out of New Eden after the game shut down for its update. She felt responsible for her brother's situation, thinking if she had pulled him out of his pod sooner, he would have been fine.

But after a lot of coaxing from the doctor, accompanied by the threat to have her ejected from the hospital, she finally budged. Calling her best friend to come and pick her up, she went down to the lobby.

When her friend arrived, she looked at her with pity and sadness.

"Oh, Sonia. You can't let yourself down like this. I know your twin brother is a big part of your world, but what would he think if he saw you like this? You look like shit. Have you eaten anything since you came here?"

Shaking her head weakly, Sonia got to her feet, staggering her way toward her friend's car.

"All right. Then I'll take you to a great restaurant, that has the greatest soup you ever had in your life. That should put some energy back into you. Whadya say?"

Grabbing her friend's shoulders, she helped her to the car. Once she was seated and her seatbelt was on, Sonia's friend walked over to the driver's side and hopped into the car.

The drive to the restaurant was short, since Sonia's friend knew her way around town very well, taking back street after back street, circumventing traffic like it was nothing. Parking in an alley, she grabbed her friend out of the car and walked her to the restaurant.

Taking the closest empty table, she waved her hand at the waiter a few tables down. The young waiter, dressed in an open shirt that showcased his shaven chest, with the large crucifix necklace around his neck, walked up to the table.

"It is good to see you again, Bella Donna. What can I do for you, today? Mamma Mia! What happened to your friend?"

"I'm happy to see you too, Franco. My friend is feeling terrible. Family issues. She needs something to pick her back up. Can you make her your best Minestra Maritata? As for me, I'll take a bambino pizza. Authentic, please."

Glancing at the zombie-looking woman, with puffy eyes redder than the bench seat she was seated on, Franco nodded, jotting down the order and walking to the kitchen.

From the short distance, Sonia heard the man call out the order to the cook.

"Papà, una pizza bambino e una minestra maritata, carne extra. La donna sembra che stia morendo, povera ragazza."

Sonia didn't understand half of what the young waiter said, but her friend almost choked on her glass of water next to her.

"What did he say?"

After drying her mouth with the napkin in front of her, and catching her breath, Sonia's friend responded, "Nothing, sweetheart. He was just asking his father to make the soup extra hearty for you."

Nodding her head weakly, she went back to gazing outside the window next to them; her gaze half-empty. She couldn't get her mind off her brother, who was still in a coma at the hospital.

The food took a while to come, but the smell alone was enough to take Sonia's mind off her brother momentarily. Her stomach growled in hunger, finally smelling something else than cleaning products and the occasional winds of hand sanitizer.

Although her eyes were still as dull as before, her appetite still kicked in. The waiter dropped the food on the table, putting his hand on Sonia's shoulder.

"Bellissima, cheer up. Any issue with your family will resolve itself with time. I hope this food can help cheer you up, in the meantime."

"Thank you," Sonia replied, her voice still creaky from all her crying over the last few days.

As they dug in, Sonia caught her reflection in the spoonful of rich broth, and saw her pulled traits, as well as her puffy eyes. She looked like a wreck.

Chronos, who was still watching silently through her eyes, finally clicked on who this was. He had been thinking the name Lagacé was a coincidence, since there were many of them where he lived.

But the reflection in the soup, along with the fact that she had a twin brother, put the pieces into place.

'This is my sister, Sonia. Am I in a coma? When does this happen? Is it in the future, or is it now?'

He focused, pulling himself out of the vision and opening his interface. When he did, the multiple notifications about his IV being depleted suddenly assaulted him.

Soon after, the notifications that he had left his pod came next. His heart almost skipped a beat.

'Am I really in the hospital? I was wondering how I could play for so long without getting notifications. I need to get back out now.'

Climbing back down into his rented room, Chronos' curiosity was suddenly gone, as a feeling of unease was lingering in his mind. Would he be able to log out, since he wasn't in his pod anymore?

He lay down in bed before opening up the menu and tapping the logout button.

But instead of feeling the sense of being sucked downward, like he usually felt when logging out, he felt sucked up, instead. He passed through the ceiling, his body phasing through the wood and straw effortlessly, as he drifted into the stars.

He travelled extremely fast, as he felt himself pulled toward something with significant force. Then his mind snapped into place, and he lost consciousness.

When he opened his eyes again, he was staring at a white ceiling with a familiar beeping noise next to him.

He couldn't talk, but he groaned, trying to catch someone's attention.

A man's voice to his left shouted out.

"The patient is waking up! Get Doctor Beausejour!"

Chapter 434 Reaching The Leader

Reaching the kingdom of Elves closest to Bastion City, Khalor was surprised to see how relaxed the Elvish people were calm, given the invasion happening in their forests. But, with how many adventurers seemed to go to and from the city gates, he assumed something kicked them into action.

'They reacted earlier than last time. Was it because of Leon? Or the ambassador, maybe?'

It mattered little to him, but it wasn't bad. The more able-bodied people were still alive the actual invasion started, the better position they would be in to fight it back.

For now, the demon forces crossing over should still be minimal. And the larger kingdoms should have no issue beating them back.

The issue lay in the smaller kingdoms, and the ones still budding. It was a miracle that the kingdom they had just established before the ten-year time skip was still standing.

Landing his drake close to the gates, Khalor walked his way inside, not wanting to cause a commotion, if unnecessary. He needed to reach the kingdom of the Undead race as soon as possible.

The thought reminded him to text Astaroth. Normally, he wouldn't have bothered, since he was always left to do his own thing, anyway.

But it was better to keep at least him and Phoenix in the loop for the future. They were his allies, after all.

Texting both of them, he sent a brief message, saying the following.

I will be busy for a while, in the Undead lands. A large part of the invasion will happen from there, and I want to make sure I mitigate it as much as I can before it blows out of proportion. If you need me, send a message, but it might take a while before I can answer.

The first reply came from Phoenix, which surprised him, as he half-expected her to ignore his message.

If you need help, you can message us too. You are still part of the guild and an officer, even if you act like a disgruntled teenager.

He laughed at the answer. He wanted to rebuke her, but she was partly right.

Even though he wouldn't have used the insult, disgruntled teen, he knew he could come off as such to people. He was trying to do everything on his own, and was often rude and condescending.

'I really should include them more in my plans. But they are a variable I don't want to factor in. It's easier to do everything alone.'

Astaroth wasn't responding, but he just assumed the Ash Elf was busy. As long as he saw the message, it was fine, though.

By now, Khalor had reached the portal in the Elven city. He walked over to a guard and presented his adventurers' license.

The man gave a small nod, asking him, "Where to?"

Once Khalor had given him his destination, the guard stamped a magic sigil on the license and gave it back to Khalor. After which, the Undead walked into the large portal.

Once he reappeared in an Undead citadel, he breathed in the impure air of the dark continent.

'So much to do, and so little time.'

Across the ocean, in the Ash Elf territory, Silent Light and his little party were finally reaching the location Astaroth had given them. Walking over a small hill that gave into a large valley that looked like a huge natural bowl, Silent Gawked at the sight.

In the middle of the valley, a large tree, around the same size as the tree palace in Bastion City, stood tall, surrounded by the same wall-like rock formation. It was like he was watching a copy of Bastion City before they had conquered it.

At the foot of the walls, an enormous wolf was standing in wait, and that was the only thing they could see from this far. But Silent knew this wolf wasn't alone.

Taking the group down into the bowl-like valley, he had to tell them halfway to stow their weapons. The newbies were eager to fight the entity waiting next to the walls, not knowing it was an ally.

Once they had reached closer, Silent could finally catch sight of Astaroth, who was lying on the top of the walls, taking a nap.

"Leader! We are here!"

He saw Astaroth lift his head and turn it toward them, before breaking into an enormous smile.

"You are just in time!"

Jumping down the wall, Astaroth landed next to Silent Light, catching him in a hug.

"Long time no see, buddy. I imagine your travel here wasn't too harsh on you?"

His guild leader's reaction discomfited Silent Light, but he didn't retreat from the hug. Once Astaroth was close, he whispered into the Priest's ear.

"Are they trustworthy?"

Silent was not quite decided on the matter himself, so he responded through private chat, while he talked about his trip here vocally.

"The trip wasn't much of a challenge. The zones we passed were mostly still normal, and what ones were overrun with corruption were in the lower levels."

"I'm not sure yet. They seem to be trustworthy, but I can't be the judge in the end."

Astaroth kept his smile, nodding in response to both messages, and turned his head to the new guys.

"I take it you guys are to thank for bringing him here in one piece. Thank you. But the mission isn't over just yet."

The Orc player stepped forward, flashing a wide grin.

"Guild Leader Astaroth! My name is SharpTusk, and I—"

"We can talk later, Tusk. As I said, the mission isn't over," Astaroth said, interrupting the Orc by raising his hand.

"How confident are you in your ability to fight off monsters in large numbers?"

The Orc player didn't complain about being interrupted, and kept up his smile.

"My party and I are quite capable, and I think we can handle a large group of monsters well. Our record was about fifty monsters of level 30."

Astaroth rubbed his chin, trying to calculate their skill level from that information. A group of five, taking on a group of fifty, even if they were ten levels higher than the monsters, wasn't a minor feat.

But they would have to do much better in the coming minutes.

"Alright, then you are getting challenged again soon. A horde of corrupted monsters is on the way here, and should arrive in about fifteen minutes."

"I will leave my wolf with you guys to make sure you stay alive, and there will be help from a powerful warrior, too, if needed. But me and Silent will be gone in the meantime. Is that ok with you guys?"

The Orc smiled, glad to prove himself to the leader, and nodded vigorously.

"We will not disappoint you, sir!"

Astaroth nodded, turning his head toward Genie and petting her side.

"Make sure they don't die too fast and fetch Kloud if the horde reaches over four hundred."

Genie nodded, and Astaroth grabbed Silent, melding with Morpheus, and launching off with the priest player in his arms.

Meanwhile, the Orc player was paling by the second.

"F... F... Four hundred? Was that a mistake? He's joking, right?"

Chapter 435 Going Around The Horde

Unfortunately for the small group of five, who were now left alone with the enormous white wolf that seemed capable of eating them on its own, Astaroth was not kidding.

He had grabbed Silent Light because, after a week of defending the small settlement, he had found out that there was more than one place from which the corruption was spreading now. That was also the reason Teraria and Arborea were weakening so much lately.

So he needed the Priest to close the tears. He left the defence to the small group. Hoping that they could at least be useful for a little while longer, with Genie and Kloud's help.

He had also finally found the time interval for the hordes, and he figured he had about another day before the hordes were too much to handle. By now, the hordes attacked about twice a day, nearing the three-times-a-day mark.

And it was still shortening. To make matters worse, the hordes were still becoming larger every time.

More and more of the monsters in the forest were becoming corrupted, and the result of that was that fewer and fewer normal ones were coming to help during the waves. Lately, there had been practically none.

It was common for the hordes to reach well over three hundred monsters now. This eventually pushed Kloud out of his slump when the threat of a stampede killing everyone he held dear was looming over him.

He was now back to his normal self, training the recruits every chance he had, and helping Astaroth defend the settlement as often as he was needed.

Astaroth had appreciated his help, since he was stretching thin, with the lack of proper sleep and nonstop fighting. Astaroth's power had improved over the last week.

Level-wise, he still hadn't moved, although the Exp he had gained was great. But he had made progress in other manners that weren't any worse than levels.

A lot of his spells now had at least one mastery level, if not more, and he was quite happy with his progress on that. But his biggest discovery had come through other means.

Through observing the corruption at work many times now, he had found out how it boosted the monsters' levels and stats. Of course, he couldn't replicate anything too similar, since there was no way the system would allow him to freely level up without Exp.

But he had found another use for this knowledge. With some practice, he could replicate the process of sublimation the corruption was forcing on the monsters, and gained a new ability.

He couldn't wait to try it in combat.

From a distance, Astaroth saw the horde of monsters making its way to the settlement. He lowered his head, shouting over the wind to Silent Light.

"I hope your escort isn't all talk. That horde looks quite vicious."

Silent Light looked at the horde of monsters, and his face paled, even though he wouldn't be fighting them. He had expected Astaroth to have said that to keep them on their toes, against maybe a hundred or two hundred enemies.

But now he saw the man had not been joking at all. From his estimation, there were over four hundred monsters in that horde.

Ranging from gigantic bears to wolves the size of compact cars, bats the colour of blood, and felines that looked like cougars or lynxes, the horde would send shivers down anyone's spine.

But Astaroth looked unfazed.

"I'm not sure anyone would be ok against that many enemies..."

"Nonsense. I have been fighting off hordes like that one, a smidge smaller maybe, for almost all week. They won't be alone, of course. Genie will help, and she has become plenty powerful. Plus, Kloud will also be there, and he is nothing to scoff at."

Silent Light did not know who Kloud was, but if Astaroth said his help was enough to help fight off a horde of four hundred monsters, then he had to be powerful. The fact alone that Astaroth said he had been pushing back monsters in these numbers for a week was already hard to swallow.

Astaroth took a long detour, to go around the horde of monsters, since he would not fight them this time. But once it was far enough, he hooked back to the right, and headed to where they had come from.

"I'll need you at your best, too, buddy. The tears I want you to close are no longer tears. One of them, I know for certain, is already a portal. I can also guess the others are like this, too."

"I estimate at least three portals, given how the hordes have been coming out faster and bigger, but it could be more. I also do not know if something will guard them."

"I'll do the fighting if there is any to do, but I will need you to focus on closing those portals as fast as possible. Their existence alone is a danger to this forest, and every inhabitant in it."

Silent Light nodded his head, his heart already beating fast inside his chest. The anticipation he was feeling was mixed in with angst at the unknown they were going to face.

What would happen if there were also hordes guarding the portals? Or worse, what if whatever lived on the other side of them guarded the portals?

Would Astaroth be strong enough to fight it back while he closed the portal? Would more of them come out and kill him while he was concentrating on sealing them?

Silent's palms filled up with sweat, as his mind started imagining scenarios, all worse than the previous one. Astaroth could feel the boy become agitated in his arms.

"Calm down, bud. I won't let anything happen to you. Have some faith in me, haha!"

Silent Light gulped down and nodded, trying to smile. But it resembled more a grimace than a smile, which made Astaroth burst into laughter even harder.

But he suddenly stopped laughing, becoming serious again.

"Hang on tight!" he yelled.

"Wha—"

Before Silent could end his phrase, Astaroth suddenly dropped toward the ground, sending all of Silent's organs upward inside his body, making him instantly nauseous.

He almost threw up when Astaroth suddenly jerked back straight again, hitting a high-G turn, making Silent Light almost faint.

The teenager wondered what was making him do all these maneuvers until he saw something explode in the air where they were headed previously.

A fireball the size of a small building engulfed the skies, tainting everything around in an orange glow.

"What the fuck?!" Silent Light shouted out loud, losing his facade of a cool person.

"We're here. Get ready."

That was the only answer Silent got from Astaroth, as he landed in a blast of dust and ash.

Chapter 436 Guarding Demons

Astaroth dropped Silent Light on his feet, before dashing out of the dust cloud towards the hill that had once been his home. At the entrance of it, standing proudly, were four demons.

'So they were waiting before setting out. This isn't good.'

He had no way of knowing if there were more of them inside the cave, but these four would already be an enormous challenge. He scanned them to know what he was against.

Demon Scout

Level: 50

Grade: Elite

HP: 96,600

MP: 2,310

Demon Escort Guard

Level: 50

Grade: Elite

HP: 191,250

MP: 2,310

Demon Escort Mage

Level: 50

Grade: Elite

HP: 96,600

MP: 9,725

Demon Reconnaissance Leader

Level: 60

Grade: Elite

HP: 93,300

MP: 13, 265/14,265

Their health pool alone wouldn't be easy to take care of, and Astaroth knew that. But what worried him more was the fact that, unlike the scout, the others seemed to have equipment.

The taller one standing in the middle, the leader, was especially well-dressed. The small sheen on his armour told Astaroth this was special-grade armour.

And his weapons had that same glow.

'This will be an excellent test of my new skills.'

Sending a private message to Silent Light, who was still in the dust cloud behind him, Astaroth dashed into the enemy group.

I'll distract them. You go inside the cave behind them and find the portal. Close it as fast as you can, and then stay hidden. I'll get to you once I'm done. If there are enemies inside, tell me and I'll come get them.

Silent Light didn't respond, but Astaroth knew he would follow his directions.

Although Silent Light was an extraordinary healer, and could sub in as a combatant, that was not his strength. At best, he would make a wonderful distraction for these demons.

At worst, he would be a hindrance to Astaroth. And that was not a result either of them wished for.

As he dashed forward, the demon guard jumped in front of Astaroth, shield raised, ready to intercept him. The guard was decked in some heavy leathers that looked to be of common grade, but still looked sturdy enough.

Astaroth estimated they would cover him for ten to fifteen percent, at most. The shield in the demon's hands was also a standard one and was no bigger than a pot lid.

Astaroth pulled out his Ironbark Shield and switched Ad Astra into sword whip form. His current speed was greater than the demon guard's and so was his strength.

When the two collided, he immediately pushed the demon guard back, as the latter dug his heels into the ground, trying to resist the force of Astaroth's charge.

Astaroth swung his sword wide, trying to strike the leader to gauge his strength. But the seven feet tall demon swatted the sword aside with his, like it was nothing, his eyes not even locked on him.

Astaroth followed his gaze, his eyes eventually landing somewhere just outside the dust cloud he had kicked up upon landing.

'He's looking for Silent Light!'

Astaroth knew he couldn't let them find him, as it would defeat his entire purpose of charging at them. So he kicked into second gear, summoning Luna and White Death through Soul Manifestation.

White's strength wasn't up to standard for this fight, but he could hound the scout and mage, while Luna targeted the demon leader.

He had yet to be able to summon the demons to fight for him, and he could only ever summon them for very brief moments at a time, which he used to force their souls into melding the first time.

If he could, this fight would turn into a slaughter, faster than the demons could cry for help. For now, his options were still limited on the matter.

Astaroth took his attention back to the guard, who was trying to push him back, only for him to notice the scout was gone from his place.

But before he could turn his head to find the fast bugger, it popped next to him, stabbing at his side with both blood daggers. But White Death jumped into action, ramming into the demon head first, and pushing it away.

The leader was forced to look at his new assailant, Luna, who was now the size of an adult doe, even though she lacked antlers still, her two cute nubs still growing on her head, as she started lunging at him, and pelting him with lunar beams.

This would let Silent Light sneak into the cave. Or at least, that's what Astaroth thought.

Until the demon leader opened his mouth.

"There is still one sneaking around. Magus, keep your eyes open."

'Shit.'

Astaroth needed to pin the demon mage down, too. His only way to do that would be to swap melds to a demon in the ring and get Morpheus into the fray.

But then, they would still be grossly underpowered. Morpheus and White Death's levels were too low.

He had to power them up soon, or they would never be up for the fights to come. But for now, his hands were tied.

'I guess I'll just have to use everything I got, and take down this leader first. Then I'll help them take out the trash.'

Astaroth kicked the demon guard's shield, sending him hurtling away, and with the time he bought himself, he changed meld to one of the more powerful demons that obeyed him and summoned Morpheus.

Feeling himself grow taller and larger, two horns sprouting from the side of his head, Astaroth grinned. He had formed a certain relationship of respect with this one, through a few scuffles with the more prideful demons.

Seeing him as a hard-headed, battle-hardened mortal, this demon prince had acknowledged his grit. So when he first summoned him, there was no hiccup, and the demon let him use his soul to form a bond without issue.

Gäap was a pure fighter demon whose power of destruction was only second to King Bael. But Astaroth still could not bend the latter to his will, so he used the next best thing.

He could have melded with Asmodeus, but he noticed that melding with demon kings was not worth it yet. Their power was too much for him to handle, and Solomon held it back almost entirely, making the stats he gained from them smaller than what he gained from the weaker demons.

Astaroth had to beg Solomon to let him have full reign over Gäap's power. He eventually granted his request, when he interrogated the demon prince in length, to make sure it had no nefarious intention.

But Astaroth still felt Gäap in his mind, like a looming guardian, watching over his every action. It was unnerving, to say the least.

But the surge in power felt amazing, and would be more than enough to contend with these weak enemies.

Punching his fists together, which were now coated in metal from Ad Astra's change of forms, Astaroth grinned.

"Luna! Target switch!"

Chapter 437 Impenetrable Defence

Astaroth looked at his stat window, glancing at his current stats.

Stats:

HP: 2,181,250/2,181,250 MP: 81,100/81,100 Stamina: 100/100

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

Strength: 1,174 (1,449) (+235) (+40)

Agility: 752 (932) (+150) (+30)

Constitution: 753 (939) (+151) (+35)

Intelligence: 330 (396) (+66)

Wisdom: 330 (396) (+66)

Attack Power Str: 7,245

Attack Power Agi: 4,660

Magic Attack Power: 1,980 (2,475)

Healing Power: 1,980

Natural Defense: 25%

Armor Defense: 14%

Luck: 1 (Stat unaffected by Level up and free points)

Astaroth was grinning from ear to ear, thinking about all the damage he could dish out with this meld. But he knew it was only temporary.

But looking at the bottom of the list, he saw something new. He had gained one luck point.

He did not know when he gained it, or what it did to his gameplay, but he knew it wasn't too old. He had checked his stats relatively often recently, and this was the first time he saw it.

A lot of speculations online about luck points and their effects were roaming around. But no one had found definite explanations, and EG was mum about the subject, stating only that it was a surprise stat.

But Astaroth couldn't be bothered any longer about it. He lunged forward, creating a funnel of air behind himself, as the air was pushed aside, and slammed into the demon leader.

He wanted to land a clean hit, but apparently, the demon had been expecting him. The grin on its face annoyed Astaroth.

"Let's see how long you can hold that grin!"

Astaroth started pummeling the demon, going for a boxing stance, as his fists rushed forward in a flurry. But something strange was happening.

Astaroth was hitting something, as he could feel the solid impact, but the demon was not losing health. Activating his mana vision, Astaroth quickly understood what was blocking him.

Mana kept corrugating in front of his fists, forming dense layers on itself, and blocking the entire impact. This kind of mana manipulation, or mana shielding, was something he had never seen before.

There was no shield proper in front of the demon, but there was a thin layer of mana all around him. That was what was folding on itself, constantly blocking his punches.

The technique impressed Astaroth, and he mentally noted it, promising himself to try to emulate it later. But for now, he needed to find a way through it.

Astaroth kept punching, getting ready to make a move, waiting for an opening, but the demon only looked at him with its wide grin. Both of them were locked in this exchange, waiting for the enemy to show an opening for almost a minute, before Astaroth lost his cool.

'This is going nowhere.'

From the back of his head, he heard Gäap chuckle in disappointment.

'You are still far from reaching a level where you could fight against the true warriors of hell. This demon may be on a lower level and rank, but his talent alone is enough to make him duke material.'

Astaroth loathed the words he heard. He had beaten a duke before, and felt insulted that a demon of equal power was holding him in place.

'I can't punch through his defence, even with your strength added to mine. What else am I supposed to do?' he asked the demon prince.

'Tsk tsK tsK. If you can't power through it, then tear it apart. I thought you were smart.'

Astaroth almost fell in shock at the response. Gäap was apparently well-known for his bull-headedness and lack of refinement, from what Solomon had told him.

Him insinuating that he was stupid hurt Astaroth's pride. But the advice he gave was not wasted.

Astaroth activated Thousand Thoughts, sending his mind into overdrive. As the surroundings slowed down, he kept punching at the demon's mana defence, trying to find a way through.

With his perception sped up like this, he was able to see a flaw in the defence. When it contracted and folded, the mana, which looked more like a veil than a bubble, stretched thin everywhere else.

Astaroth could guess that it wouldn't fare well against an attack from all sides. But he also had another idea.

His mind flashed to an experiment he and his father had done back when he was in elementary school. They had done an experiment about gravity and orbits for science class, and his father had shown him a neat trick.

They had stretched out a bedsheet on a metal frame, and then put a rock in the center to emulate the sun in our galaxy. Then he spun beads around it, to show the gravitational pull of the sun, and how it affected the orbit of planets.

But when he tried fetching the rock back, the weight had finally torn the bedsheet, and the rock fell to the ground. His mother had torn his father a new asshole about it, as he apologized profusely, all the while laughing.

Looking at the veil of mana protecting the demon leader, his mind was reminded of the similarity with the bedsheet, and he found his solution.

Grinning like a madman, Astaroth jumped back, changing the shape of Ad Astra again.

The demon looked at him, laughing loudly.

"Rakakaka! Giving up already? Changing your weapon won't change the outcome. When I saw you change into the shape of our brethren, I had expected more from you. But it seems you are still just a mortal."

Astaroth ignored his rant and focused his mind on the skill he was about to perform. He had learned this through experimenting with many skills with different weapons and mana effects.

Astaroth jumped into the air, bringing Ad Astra down toward the demon, now in the form of an immense two-handed hammer. The demon was still laughing.

But that changed rapidly, when the mana started concentrating on the face of the hammerhead. The air itself seemed to bend around the strike, as it came down toward the mana veil.

"Crushing Blow; Gravity Well!"

Chapter 438 Overload

The hammer collided with the mana veil, as the latter contracted and folded, standing firm in the face of the attack. But the demon could tell something was different in this strike.

The surrounding pressure was already rising at an alarming rate, and he could feel his mana veil pushing inward.

Astaroth was pushing down with all his might, his oversized body exerting its full weight downward too, but he wasn't budging.

'Is this not going to work?'

But as he thought that, the ground under the demon started caving in, inch by inch, and the veil he was pushing against also seemed to give way, slowly, bending inward.

Astaroth saw the demon behind the veil sweating, his brow already wet, and lifted his sword up in a guarding position.

'Why isn't he striking at me? I'm completely static. I thought he was being arrogant earlier, but is it something different?'

The demon looked at him with a mix of anger and wariness. Then came to pass what Astaroth had been waiting for.

A loud tearing sound echoed around them, as the veil of mana ripped apart, pushing into the demon leader, as the demon finally moved.

It angled the sword in its hand, pushing the hammer strike to the side, the strength of the strike pushing it away many meters as it skidded to a stop. But the skill hadn't ended yet.

When the hammer smacked into the ground, it sank into the hard rocky ground, like it was hitting a piece of soft bread. The rock compressed before exploding outward, sending shards in every direction, hitting friend and foe alike.

Astaroth was already receiving mental complaints from his companions, as they took damage from his attack. He apologized swiftly, cutting the messages out of his head.

He still needed to focus.

Raising his head from the hole he had dug himself into, he jumped back onto level ground.

He looked in the direction the demon had flown and waited for the dust cloud to settle down.

He knew the demon was still standing there, as he could still see its mana signature.

As the dust settled, a grin found its way onto Astaroth's face. Even Gäap, inside his mind, slowly clapped at the results.

Standing about ten meters away from him, the demon leader was riddled with holes, bleeding on all parts of his body, as an expression of pure unbridled rage graced his face.

Astaroth also felt like the sword arm of the demon was bent in a strange direction, almost like it had broken from the pressure of pushing him aside.

'Serves you right. You should have dodged, you arrogant prick.'

But the demon looked down at its arm, and with its gloved hand, pulled on the wrist holding the sword. With a defined pop, the arm took a normal shape again.

It took a step forward, opening its mouth to speak.

"We had received reports of mortals being stronger now than in the past. But I thought it was all an exaggeration. It seems there was some truth to it, after all. But now it ends."

Sucking in the surrounding air like a vacuum, the demon absorbed all the corruption miasma lingering around them before ballooning like blowfish. Astaroth had a bad feeling about this and wanted to stop the demon in its tracks.

But before he could step forward to attack, Gäap shouted in his mind.

"Get away! He's overloading!"

Astaroth did not know what that was supposed to mean, but if a prince of hell told him to stay away, he wouldn't have to say so twice. Astaroth rapidly gave a retreat order to his companions, as he ran back, plowing through their targets, to give them time to flee.

Astaroth messaged Silent Light.

If you have a skill to protect yourself, now is the time to use it!

In a matter of seconds, they were hundreds of meters away. A deafening explosion resounded in their backs, as a gust of wind caught up to them, pushing them to their stomachs, as debris from trees and stones flew above their heads.

Astaroth received three notifications as the explosion occurred, and he glanced at them.

You have killed a Demon Scout (Elite) (Lvl 50). 50,000 Exp awarded.

You have killed a Demon Escort Guard (Elite) (Lvl 50). 50,000 Exp awarded.

You have killed a Demon Escort Mage (Elite) (Lvl 50). 50,000 Exp awarded.

'What the fuck?! It killed its own troops!'

Gäap responded to his confusion.

'Demons don't treat subordinates like you mortals do. They are considered disposable if needed. Some high-rank demons even eat their subordinates in combat, to boost their strength temporarily.'

This made no sense to Astaroth. What kind of person would slay their allies just to get stronger?

Then again, he couldn't ascribe normal logic to fiends and demons, now, could he?

A wave of mana crashed into him, snapping him out of his thoughts. A roar immediately followed it.

"WHERE ARE YOU HIDING, MORTAL?! COME MEET YOUR END!"

Astaroth gulped. If he read the mana signature correctly, the demon leader was no longer just an obstacle.

But he couldn't just hide. Silent was still trying to close the portal.

Picking himself up, and nodding to his soul companions, they dived back into combat together. The demon in Astaroth's mind was guffawing and clapping his intangible hands, while complimenting Astaroth.

'ROAHAHAHA! Now that is some spine! Good! Fight until your last breath if you need to, Astaroth, chosen of Solomon. Show me you deserve to use my full power!'

Astaroth wasn't sure how to take the compliments, if he could even consider those taunts compliments. But it didn't matter.

He had to fight, no matter what. He couldn't just leave and abandon Silent Light.

He received a message as he re-arrived in the now much larger clearing around the cave entrance.

I have reached the portal. Starting to seal it.

Astaroth nodded to himself.

'I guess it's all or nothing now. Let's do this!'

Chapter 439 Immortal

The demon saw him run into the clearing, and a wide grin appeared on its face.

Astaroth, on the other hand, was less than enthused when he scanned his opponent.

Demon Reconnaissance Leader

Level: 60

Grade: Elite (Zone Boss)

HP: 365,550

MP: 55,680

Astaroth looked dejected for a second.

'Any damage I had done to it is now gone. Freaking demons, I swear.'

From the back of his head, he heard Gäap's rebuke.

'Hey. It is not our fault your kind is weak of body. Blame your genes for not blessing you with similar physiques to us demons.'

Astaroth wanted to face-palm so hard right now.

But now was not the time for an internal dispute with a prince of hell. Astaroth already had two minutes of melding with Gäap gone, and time was still ticking.

His next best option was to use the spell he had wanted to try out for a while. The reason he hadn't yet, was that it came with a massive drawback.

Just like his Royal Protection, this spell came with a weakness effect at the end. But its effect was no less useful, although weaker.

The spell he had composed was a copy of the miasma's effect, only purer.

Glancing at it one last time before activating it, Astaroth silently wished he could end this fight before it ended.

Sublimation: Playing with Aether and its many applications, you have found a way to temporarily boost your body's power through raw power. This comes at the cost of extreme fatigue following the spell's end. Duration: 5 minutes. AP cost: 50 AP. +100% physical capacities for the full duration. Weakness effect: 5-minute duration after spell ends.

He gained power for five minutes but subsequently lost all ability to fight for the same time. This was definitely a double-sided sword.

He only wondered if the effects of this and Royal Protection could stack.

But that was a test for a later date.

Taking in a deep breath, Astaroth took almost all his mana and converted it to Aether. He had gotten better at this process over the last week, and it happened almost instantly.

Sending the Aether into his body, making sure he pushed into every part, he pushed the Aether into his skin, muscles, nerves, and veins, all the way into his very cells.

His body suddenly started giving off steam, as it was sent into overdrive. He was burning up, but he could feel the change all over his body.

Astaroth felt like he could punch a mountain out of existence right now. Of course, most of that power came from Gäap, but he still felt exhilarated.

Grinning at the demon, who was frothing at the mouth, Astaroth decided he had played enough. It was time to get serious.

His current magic power was not much, so he only used enhancements on himself and his weapon, keeping the rest of his mana to keep his summons fueled up.

Even if his mana regen was high enough to compensate for all of their expenses, he would still rather keep it, in case he needed to blast damage all at once, toward the end of his sublimation.

But for now, he was better off duking it out in melee range. Dashing forward like a bullet out of a gun, Astaroth pierced through the sound barrier in a single step, practically teleporting into the demon's face.

Astaroth had swapped his weapon again, going back to the gauntlets from the beginning. As he reared his arm for a punch, the demon copied his move, and they punched each other's fists.

This was the most powerful fist bump history had ever recorded, and the echo of it was heard miles away, as both contestants skidded backward. Of course, this had not been an equal exchange.

Although Astaroth was pushed back by the force of the impact, his hand was fine. The demon, on the other hand, was far from fine.

His arm, from the hand up to the middle of his biceps, was gone, blood pouring out like a waterfall.

But the demon only grinned, like he couldn't register the pain. His arm regrew out of his bleeding stump, looking like new in a second, and the demon charged at Astaroth again.

The fight was mostly one-sided, in terms of damage, as Astaroth's power was way beyond the demons. But the damned thing wouldn't stay down.

And Astaroth was feeling uneasy about something, too. He was dealing a boatload of damage with every hit, yet the demon was not falling.

Every time he checked its health, it ticked back to full. It was like it was suddenly immortal.

Astaroth punched the demon in the chest, making a hole the size of a soccer ball in it, and the demon barely stumbled backward for a second before stepping forward again.

24,713!

He knew this wasn't even ten percent of the demon's health, but he punched at a pace much higher than one hit per second. And yet, he couldn't drop his foe.

'Why won't it die?! My melding with Gäap is almost over, and yet, this freaking demon won't fall!'

The demon prince in question chuckled in the back of his head.

'The overload must have activated a bigger regenerative ability. You hurt it, but it'll never be enough. Erase him.'

'Erase him? I would need to deal fifteen times more damage than now, in a single attack. Unless you have a hidden ability in your sleeve, this isn't happening.'

'Hmm. Maybe not in a single attack. I doubt his regen ticks as often as before, but it is much stronger. If you can hit him with enough attacks in rapid succession, it should work fine.'

Astaroth wanted to strangle the demon prince. He was already hitting as fast as he could. What did the demon take him for, a UFC champion?

But Gäap could hear his thoughts, and it only made him laugh again.

'Fret not. I do have an ability for you. But for you to use it, I will have to take control. For now, I can't teach you this and will have to perform it myself.'

Astaroth was immensely unsure that this was a good idea. Even if Solomon had assured him that the prince had no nefarious intentions, that meant little if he was suddenly completely released.

But he was falling short in the options department. His melding time had less than a minute left, and this fight was going nowhere.

'God dammit. Fine! But if you don't go back into the ring after, I will haunt for fucking eternity!'

'Roahahaha! I wouldn't want that for my worst enemy!'

Astaroth closed his eyes, pulling his consciousness back inside himself, making a protective shell of willpower, just to be sure, and he left control to Gäap.

When his eyes re-opened, they were pitch black, and no trace of his soul remained.

Gäap smiled at the demon leader and cracked his knuckles.

"I get to play with you for a bit. Let us both enjoy this!"

The demon leader suddenly looked hesitant. His instinct was screaming at him to flee.

But he had been fighting this mortal for so long, and it couldn't kill him, so he discarded the feeling.

That was his last mistake.

"Thousand Punctures of the Iron Maiden."

Chapter 440 Two Dogs, One Teen

When Silent Light entered the cave where Astaroth had told him to go, he was expecting a natural cave, with tunnels and the such. He hadn't expected ruins of what used to be a village.

As he walked further into the cave, he rapidly noticed the gaping maw of a chasm, where a destroyed house lay to the side. He could sense the evil coming from in the pit and knew that was his query.

But just as he reached the edge of the hole, a growling noise came from his left. Soon enough, a second one came from his right, as well.

Turning his head slowly to each side, he saw two dog-looking monsters, fur-less, with wrinkled red skin dripping with blood. Silent was unsure if it was theirs, or the blood of a fresh kill.

Their small bodies oozed of red mist, as they stepped closer, slowly, in a menacing way. Silent Light could hardly move in any direction without either falling into the pit or heading right toward them.

The dogs were already closing in on him.

Looking over his shoulder, Silent wondered if it was a better outcome to jump into the bit gorged with miasma. But the fall would be a steep one.

Unfortunately for Silent Light, the dogs before him decided for him.

Lunging at him, while growling and snarling, Silent had no choice other than to fight or fall.

Pulling out his mace, Silent decided he wouldn't go down easily. He reached into his priestly vestments and pulled out a recent addition to his gear.

Just before the game had gone offline, Silent had completed a class quest in the capital he had come from, Themiscus. The church he was under was located there and revered a god of the sun.

This class quest had upgraded his class from Priest to Bishop, and it came with a panoply of new spells and a few pieces of equipment. This new piece in question was a holy symbol, in the shape of a burning sun.

It boosted his holy power spells by fifty percent, but also had an added benefit. With it, he could cast a new spell that would save his life in this situation.

"Holy Grounds!"

A golden shining aura radiated from Silent Light, slamming into the two dogs, pushing them back for a few feet, as they sizzled in contact with the aura. Once the circle around Silent Light reached a ten-foot radius, it stopped expanding, as the ground under it started glowing.

Silent snickered as the red dogs on the outside snarled at him from outside its radius.

"Not so impressive now, are you?" he taunted.

But he had to work fast, as this spell had only a fifteen-second timer. Scanning the monsters, to see what he was up against, Silent clicked his tongue.

Hell Hound

Level: 40

Grade: Elite

HP: 39,840/41,250

MP: 2,190

Hell Hound

Level: 40

Grade: Elite

HP: 38,430/41,250

MP: 2,190

Holy Grounds was a spell that did many things. One of them was to heal for a hundred percent of his healing power per second, for the full duration.

And given the damage these Hell Hounds had taken, with how little they were hit, he assumed that they not only took damage from his holy healing but also doubled it. This made him grin.

He was half tempted to run after them for the fifteen-second duration, cremating them with holy damage. But the Hell hounds had other plans.

Their throat started glowing red as they opened their maws, revealing a flicker of flames at the back of their throats.

"Fuck!"

Shielding his face with his arms, Silent Light took the brunt of their attacks with his body. He doubted he could dodge it, anyway, given the creatures looked smart enough to follow him with the attack.

-781

-781

...

Silent Light felt like he had been thrown into a kiln for five seconds, taking the fire damage constantly. Ten ticks of damage burned him, taking away a massive chunk of his HP.

Luckily for him, the passive healing of Holy Grounds kept him alive.

Looking at his health pool, he gulped.

Silent Light

HP: 1,065/5,350

He opened his interface, reaching for the messaging tab, but stopped before opening it.

'No. He's already taking four much stronger enemies outside. I can't bother him for two adds.'

Silent looked at the two Hell Hounds, who were now snickering like hyenas, probably laughing at how pitiful he was. Anger rose within him.

'I'm not letting two mutts get the better of me. I'm an officer in the strongest guild, for crying out loud!'

Silent Light screamed in rage before lunging forward, his mace pulled backward, ready to strike at the Hell Hounds. But he could not catch them.

The little bastards kept getting just out of his reach, almost like they were taunting him. His Holy Grounds spell was following him, but it was quickly nearing its end.

He was already back to full health, thanks to its healing, but he couldn't use the most important function of it. The blessing.

Holy Grounds blessed the friendlies inside it, giving their attacks a hundred percent boost to damage. It was an incredible boost, even if it was only in a small radius.

But he was wasting all of it because he couldn't get into range. He wanted to try casting a healing spell on the Hounds, to see if it would hurt them, but even then, his range was very limited.

The fifteen feet radius of Holy Grounds was larger than his ten feet range on healing. This made him wholly useless.

Silent Light wasted the mana in a rage and tried, anyway. He still hadn't learned any mastery spells. Even though his imagination was wild, it was inherently aimed toward useless scenario thinking.

His powerlessness was grating on him, and he no longer cared how stupid he looked. He fired healing spell after healing spell toward the Hell Hounds, hoping one of them would hit.

He almost emptied his mana bar, even with the regen he had gained, and was getting desperate. His Holy Grounds was about to end, and he needed results.

"Come on! Reach! God dammit!"

A bright ray of golden energy launched from his hand, hitting one of the Hell Hounds squarely in the head, sending it yelping as its face started searing off.

Spell Learned

'... I... I did it...'