

New Eden 531

Chapter 531 The Huntsman

After ending this impromptu interview session, Jack still had many things to attend to, and that was in the little time he had left in the day if he wanted to get back online. The night was breaking in; the sun disappearing over the horizon of the east coast, and much of the streets were already emptying.

It had been a little over three months since the game launched, and already millions of players all around the world trekked its mountains and travelled its roads.

Be it explorers at heart, who only wanted to find every little nook and cranny in New Eden's vast world, or battle-hungry young adults who hunted down the biggest challenges they could, hoping to overcome their limits.

The player variety was widespread, all the way from older players trying to get into the political scene in New Eden, to curious inventors who played with all kinds of new concepts in this world of magic.

But through all these differences, all the players had one thing in common. The chance to have a different life.

Very few were the ones that went the same way in this new world that they had in their life. What would be the point?

Of course, some people still did.

In a forest of the light continent called the Danabor Forest, somewhere southeast of the kingdom of Themisca capital, Themiscus, a single player was stalking a beast. His latest mark.

The mark in question was a dark feline of a tiger's size, with a double-tipped tail, which it was renowned for, as it was its main hunting tool and fur of dark blue and black. This beast was called a Phaser Leopard.

Falchion, a dark-skinned Afro-French man, looking to be in his late thirties, had been looking for this feline for the last half-week, getting the bounty from Themiscus adventurer's board, and he had found it fast enough.

The problem was that he couldn't just pounce on the beast, as it was a level fifty elite zone boss monster, and its stats alone put it out of his league. But Falchion wasn't your average player, either.

In life, Falchion, or Emmerick Duplessis, of his given name, was a huntsman by passion, and a hunter's guide for rich folk by profession. He had hunted many animals, over the years, ranging from hard-to-kill rhinos to man-hunting tigers.

He had thought he couldn't find anything worth hunting anymore, but delight overcame him when he found New Eden. The animals here resembled the ones on Earth, but with some variances.

Some of them were much more dangerous and harder to kill, making them even more enticing for him. With this knowledge, Falchion had bought a gaming pod with his saved-up money, and set it up in his house, in Toulouse, where he was born.

He started playing not long after the first tournament, when a lot of images of different beasts finally caught his attention, and his hunt had begun anew.

Falchion's goal in life was to take down something no one else ever had before, and wouldn't repeat the feat for years to come. He wanted to etch his name into history as the greatest huntsman ever.

Starting small in New Eden, given the stat mechanic, Falchion had worked his way through the levels by taking increasingly more challenging hunts, and bringing them to a close. Monster hunting in New Eden was a well-respected, but very dangerous job, one that very few people took on the regular.

A single miscalculation in your target, and a monster hunter's life ended. But this didn't deter Falchion.

On the contrary. It enticed him even more.

Falchion loved living his life on the edge.

Nothing brought him satisfaction, like knowing his mark could have taken his life just as much as he could. It made the hunt so much more thrilling.

Eyeing his mark from a safe distance, Falchion smiled, slowly reaching for his gnome-built rifle. Falchion was playing as a human since he wanted people to recognize him, be it in New Eden or out.

He had to play a hefty sum to get this rifle, and it was only through his guild master's connection that he could get one of this quality since his guild master had effectively enabled the gnomes to build these rifles.

Falchion's class, Ranger, gave him access to skills in both range and melee combat, and it was perfect for him. He had seen a player in the tournament use this class, and had decided he would use it when he started playing.

With his last few days of tracking, the man had found out the beast's routine and set traps just outside its usual path, effectively forming a trap zone for the beast once the hunt began. Falchion knew he didn't stand a chance in a fair fight, so he intended to use everything at his disposition to take his mark down.

Starting with an extremely damaging first attack.

Setting his cheek to the rifle stock, and looking at the Phaser Leopard through the sights of his rifle, Falchion exhaled slowly, murmuring to himself.

"Heart-stopper."

A blast of gunpowder echoed in the forest as the bullet in the gnomish rifle started passing down the barrel. As it did, it passed many runic rings that started pouring magic into the bullet, accelerating it exponentially until it left the barrel at quasi-sonic speeds.

But as soon as it popped out of the tip of the barrel, a last ring activated a rune on the bullet itself, giving a last acceleration to it, sending it piercing through the sound barrier.

Bang!

The next moment, the bullet was piercing through the Phaser Leopard's chest, dealing a whopping hundred thousand points of damage, as it applied its hemorrhage effect, and the weakened status for five minutes.

The Phaser Leopard roared in pain and anger, looking in the direction the blast had come from, its eyes already locking on Falchion, hidden in the brush. The player dashed off, making his way toward his trap zone.

And with this, the hunt had finally begun.

Chapter 532 Pulled Inside Solomon's Domain Once Again

When Alex fell back asleep, he turned up in a familiar room with a white cloudy ceiling and raised dais, with its permanent resident resting on a comfortable sofa, a teacup in his hand.

When Solomon saw Alex appear at the foot of the dais, he looked at him in surprise.

"Finally, you come back. I was wondering when the effect would take."

Alex looked at him, confused.

"Effect? What effect?"

Solomon smiled in response, beckoning him up to have a seat across from him.

As Alex ascended the few steps of the dais, Amon materialized an additional cup, setting it in front of the chair on the table, and poured tea in it.

"I poured a lot of mana inside the ring, hoping I could pull you here and have a chat. But it has been days. I wondered why it wasn't working and was about to ask the demons to talk directly to you."

Alex looked at him with squinted eyes. If Solomon had tried summoning him here, shouldn't he have felt the pull inside New Eden?

Why was he back here as himself, and not his avatar?

"Why did you want to call me here?" Alex asked, curious about the reason.

Solomon looked at him incredulously.

"For an explanation, of course!" he exclaimed.

"Huh?" Alex said, baffled.

"Boy, do you not remember prying yourself out of the ring with a divine essence latched to you?!"

Solomon was getting worried. If Alex didn't remember, then there was a possibility whatever he released held nefarious intentions.

"I can't explain..." Alex said.

Not that he didn't want to, but he didn't know what had happened, either. He knew a goddess had hitchhiked on his soul to get out, but Nemus had said little to him, either, about the why or how.

As he was about to tell him what he knew, a feminine voice interrupted him.

"But I can."

Amon went into instant offensive mode, pulling out his sword, and lunging at the women that had just appeared in this supposedly impenetrable domain. But with a snap of her fingers, the demon marquis turned into a wisp, before flying into Solomon's chest.

The demon's sword didn't follow him, as it clattered to the ground at the woman's feet. Solomon looked at her, stunned, recognizing her, but not understanding how she forced a demon away with a simple snap of her fingers.

Yes, gods were extremely powerful, but demons at a certain rank could rival the weakest of them. And Amon was no slouch in terms of power.

He might only be a marquis, but he could rival some demon princes.

Solomon rose to his feet, wary of the woman, ready to pull out the full might of the demons under his control.

"Sit down, Solomon, Great Sage of Souls. I mean no harm." Nemus said.

She walked forward a few steps, waving her hand as another sofa materialized, and sat down, reaching down for the teapot on the table.

Solomon looked at her, even more stupefied.

"How do you know that nickname? Very few called me this, and they are all long dead..."

Nemus looked at him with a smile as she poured herself some tea. When she brought the cup to her lips, taking a sip, she let out a content moan, her eyes closing in delight.

"You can tell the demon later that his tea is delightful. Divine, one might say. But let us get on to the explanation you wished."

Alex looked at the goddess, his eyes squinting.

"Can I ask you something before you answer his question?"

"I passed through you," Nemus said, smiling at him.

"Huh? How did you—"

"Know what you were going to ask? Child, did I not tell you we are one? Our bodies may be separate, but our souls intertwine. I can read you like an open book. And it is also how I can reach you, wherever you are, even in a closed domain like Solomon's."

Alex looked at her, dazed. Didn't this mean he could call on her for help, wherever he was, or whichever side of the veil he was on?

But Nemus' smile cut his thoughts.

"You won't be able to call on me. Not yet. I could only come here because Solomon warded his domain, shielding it from Gaius' prying eyes. A wise move, considering he wields the power of the one god, or goddess, I should say, that Gaius abhors."

Solomon snickered in response.

"That snake of a deity calls himself God, thinking himself above the others. But my mistress was ever more powerful than he was. Which is why he sealed her away ten millennia ago. I only became this powerful thanks to stumbling on works that described her powers."

Nemus smiled, her eyes flashing with a certain melancholy.

"But little people know of Psyche's existence, and I wouldn't expect a newly born goddess to know. Who are you, truthfully?" Solomon asked, his eyes locking onto her.

Nemus looked at him with a warm smile before taking another sip of tea.

But before she could even answer, Alex was the one that connected the dots.

"You told me they had locked you up for many millennia... Do you mean you are the goddess Solomon mentioned? Is your real name Psyche?"

Nemus responded to him with a wide grin, while Solomon choked on the tea he was drinking. His eyes darted from Alex, who had just said the most outrageous thing, to the goddess sitting next to him, who wasn't vehemently denying the words.

He knew gods were always vain about their identities. Calling one god by another's name was one good way to get cursed by the divine entity.

Seeing her smile at the kid's words, Solomon's mind reeled.

Waving his hands in the air, Solomon suddenly bolstered the defences on his domain, making it as impenetrable as he could. Saying her name aloud was already a risky business, but if Alex's words were true, having her here was dangerous.

Solomon had long since ostracized Gaius, and that was why he had hidden his domain from the god. If he had unwittingly freed her from her prison by tampering with Alex's soul, then he would assuredly become the target of the prick's wrath.

Nemus watched him draw magic glyphs with his hands and internally chuckled.

'Who knew the renowned great sage was such a cautious old man.'

Chapter 533 Showing Her Hand

After half a minute of gesturing in the air, mana suffusing the air, the white clouds all around them flashed a lilac colour. Solomon nodded once to himself before sitting back in his chair, turning his head toward Nemus.

"We may speak freely now. Let us all be honest."

Solomon said these words with gravitas, looking specifically at the goddess. Nemus smiled at him.

"But I have yet to speak a single lie, great sage of souls. Why the accusations?"

Solomon frowned at her words.

"I consider half-truths and unspoken facts lies, goddess. Now, answer my question. Who are you, truly?"

Nemus' smile wiped away from her face. She loathed being called a liar, and had this not been the domain of this mere echo of the once great sage, she was half tempted to teach him some manners.

But she wouldn't be able to exert the full extent of her already weakened powers. Not here, not now.

Alex sat to the side, wondering who would win if a confrontation were to break out. But no such thing would come to pass.

"Fine. I will show my cards, but I expect the same from you."

Solomon nodded his head, expecting such a condition. Truth be told, he had also been very vague with Alexander.

Alex put all his attention on them both, even though he was but a bystander in the conversation. There was an old saying that fit well in this situation.

Knowledge is power. And he had a feeling he was about to become infinitely powerful.

Far away from there, in a plot of dead space, with no stars in visible proximity, a small hourglass floated aimlessly. In this glowing hourglass, a divine essence thrashed about, trying to break itself free, to no avail.

On the inside, Tyr could see the space outside, like an endless night through the glass walls holding him captive. He felt weakened to such a point, he might as well be a mortal.

"Curse you, Gaius. Once again, you play a game with the lives of so many mortals, and imprison those that would stand in your path."

This wasn't the first time Gaius pulled something like this, and it would probably not be the last, was he left to his own devices. But most of the lesser gods, and a majority of the greater gods, refused to stand in his way.

Gaius may not be the most powerful of them, but the resources he had at his disposition made him the largest threat. He wasn't the god of creation for nothing.

His shrewd mind had led him to create artifacts of his millennia of existence that could threaten the essence of the other gods. When they didn't ply to his intentions, he either locked them away, like Tyr currently and Psyche, among many others, or ended them.

Very few gods had lost their lives since the dawn of time. And of the very few that did, more than half had perished at the hands and creations of Gaius.

Gaius' only true natural limitation was that he could not directly kill mortals. But that didn't stop him from causing catastrophes that would wipe out civilizations with a snap of his fingers.

He held no such limitations against his peers.

Tyr sat on the beach like sand of the hourglass, resting his chin upon his hand, perched on his knee, as he thought about his predicament. Tyr had been aware that Gaius had long since been looking for a way to neuter him, but he hadn't thought him capable of ever succeeding.

What he hadn't expected was for the demons he created to find a way. As his thoughts drifted to the demons, Tyr remembered the day of their advent.

"Lady Psyche, please teach me how you create souls! How can I be a proper god of creation, if I can't even create the essence of life?"

Standing in a lush garden, on a hunk of rock floating through the vast expanse, a cheerful-looking Gaius was looking up to a fairy-like woman, whose silver-white hair floated behind her. The woman smiled warmly at him before shaking her head.

"You shouldn't try to encroach on the other gods' domains, young Gaius. You might irritate them and cause conflict. Fret not, though. Whatever life you create, I will gladly infuse them with my essence and craft their souls. Such is my duty."

Gaius' eyes squinted a bit, looking as disappointed as a featureless face could. He nodded his head, responding in a dejected tone.

"Yes, Lady Psyche. I'm sorry I asked."

The golden being opened a purple portal before walking into it and vanishing from the lush asteroid.

Fast forward many years later, the purple portal opened up on the domain of the goddess Psyche once more.

"Lady Psyche! Lady Psyche! I did it! I finally did it!"

The goddess turned her head slowly, looking at the younger god stepping into her domain so excitedly.

Gaius flicked his wrist, pulling out a wisp of red Aether, out of thin air, and showed it proudly to Psyche. But the look on her face became incredibly serious, teetering on the edge of anger.

"Gaius! What is this abomination you created?! I told you not to mess with things that are beyond your domain. Destroy that thing this instant!"

The excited look in Gaius' eyes vanished, replaced by surprise. He thought the goddess would be happy that he finally succeeded in his endeavour of copying her powers.

But she instead shunned him and ordered him to destroy it. Where had he gone wrong?

"But, Lady Psyche... I succeeded..."

"I said destroy it. This thing you created isn't a soul. It's an abomination."

As anger crept up into Gaius' body, the energy around him crackling, the wisp of energy in his hand changed as well. From its faint red glow suddenly darkened, blackening, keeping only tinges of red to it, as it turned pitch black.

But as it changed, Lady Psyche's eyes widened, before she waved her hand, sending pure Aether into the crafted facsimile of a soul, and destroying it.

"NOOOO!!!! My decades of hard work! You destroyed it!"

Gaius was about to erupt when, with a swift wave of her hand, Psyche teleported him out of her domain. That was the day Gaius became hateful of the other gods and vowed to get rid of the goddess of souls.

Chapter 534 Countermeasure

Snapping out of his thoughts, Tyr looked at the glass walls containing him again.

"He's gotten more vicious and craftier over the years, after that. I told Psyche she should be wary of him, but she still kept allowing him into her domain. Haaa... We should have acted the moment he sealed her up..."

But reminiscing and thinking of what-ifs was a waste of time, and he knew it. As he rose to his feet, walking up to the edge of the glass, a shimmer caught his attention.

'Is a star being born?' he wondered, turning his head to look.

A few hundred meters from where his prison floated around, a light began accumulating, forming a ball of glowing white Aether, as it changed shape. Tyr frowned, as this wasn't the formation of a star.

Then his mind snapped to an old memory, something he had done long ago, not too long after Gaius locked Psyche away. A countermeasure he had put in place.

Tyr remembered casting his Aether into the web of time so that if someone tampered with time to an extreme degree, a manifestation of the changed future would emerge. But he doubted his very little stint in the prison was enough to cause it to activate yet.

He hadn't expected it to activate for another century, at the very least. Yet, there it was, right before him, forming.

A small cat, with green, purple, and pinkish fur, the colours flowing freely around on its body, materialized in deep space. It took a moment to stretch its limbs, yawning wide, before it floated over to the hourglass.

From afar, it looked normal for Tyr, but as it closed in on him, he remembered he was currently in a hand-sized hourglass. The cat stopped in front of it, looking gargantuan for Tyr, as it looked at the miniature person in the glass bauble.

Tyr snickered to himself, thinking how the roles were reversed, him being used to being much larger than others, only to know getting looked at like this by a cat.

The cat tilted its head curiously as it examined the hourglass from up close.

"I doubt you are strong enough to free me. But if you appeared already, it means the timeline has already shifted so much it can no longer go back to its previous trajectory. It also means another person strong enough to free me has emerged. Go. Find him. You are the hope of trillions upon trillions of lives."

The cat looked at him, hearing him through the glass, but its head remained tilted. It suddenly extended its paw a bit, batting the hourglass' lower part, sending it spinning wildly.

"Hey! Stop this fooling around! Get going already!"

Tyr wasn't feeling any different from inside his prison, but he could see the cat spinning on the outside, and it was not a fun effect.

The cat stretched itself up once again, before stepping forward one step and disappearing.

Tyr was glad that his countermeasure worked, and that whoever Gaius had put in his place hadn't found it and stopped it before it activated.

"Let's hope it finds the person who can stop all of this from diverging too far. Messing with time is never a pretty thing, in the end."

Inside New Eden, a player was currently exploring the outskirts of Bastion City, accompanied by a group of players he had joined. A guild tag was now under his name, in his status window.

"Welcome to the Paragons, new guy! You are lucky! You joined the party of players who saved the guild leader's skin halfway across the continent. We are kind of big shots! Boahahah!"

Chronos looked at his party leader, a boisterous orc, with a large greataxe in his hands, and nodded his head silently. He had been but with these people on a probation period, until they could trust him to be part of the guild, and didn't want to mingle too much.

The orc was a newly promoted lieutenant, which didn't put him at officer level, but still put him over the other regular members. The guild vice-leader, a player named Phoenix, had created a new rank, just for people like him.

"The silent type, I see. That's okay! You'll open up to us in no time. We are such a pleasant bunch, after all. Boahahah!"

They trudged along, performing a patrol in the woods around the outer wall, making sure no monster nest suddenly appeared that could put strain on the city. As they did, Chronos felt a strange itch on the back of his neck, like he was being watched.

But, search as he may, he couldn't see anything in the boughs of the trees.

'Must be my imagination...' he thought.

On the dark continent, Khalor was stuck in combat with an army of corrupted undead, swarming the city he had entered when the game re-launched. The Demonoids had bolstered the city defences ever since he arrived, as he had given them enough leeway to perform upgrades on their walls and siege weapons.

The city lord had been so annoying about it, thanking him profusely, insisting he was the saviour of their little city, and that he should present him to his guild leader, as a man that could recruit such a warrior must be such a fine man himself.

Of course, Khalor had brushed away every attempt from the Demonoid to get more information on Astaroth. To the undead, the Demonoid knowing the guild and guild leader's name was already sufficient.

If he was a noble of some clout, he would already have found out more from his information-gathering forces. For now, all that mattered to Khalor was levelling up and clearing this tear before it got out of hand.

He looked at his calendar and clicked his tongue, as he batted away a skeleton oozing with black and red miasma.

'There is so little time left... When is that priest from the main Demonoid cities arrive?'

Khalor couldn't close the portal himself, and they were waiting on reinforcements from the king of the Demonoid country. But they were already many days late.

He had three days left to close the tear before it became a portal that would eventually become the first stronghold of demons on this plane. He was at a point where he was already thinking of getting help from Paragons.

"Two days. If that damned priest isn't here in two days, I'm calling for reinforcements of my own, and those stupid Demonoid nobles are going to regret it..."

Chapter 535 VIP Treatment

After their joust with the press, Kary and David had gone their own way, David in a hurry to go back into New Eden. He claimed he had things to do and was busy.

So Kary reentered Alex's room by herself, only to see him fast asleep once more. Guo had assured her he would send a team to get them in a few minutes, so they could get them to the private institute.

She sat down by the bed, looking at Alexander's resting face. He looked so innocent when he was asleep.

Yet, she knew his emotions were constantly unstable. She imagined the death of his parents, when he was a teenager, had a lot to do with this.

There wasn't much she could do to help him get those stabilized, aside from being there for him when he needed someone to lean on. But she would gladly be his emotional crutch if that meant he didn't lose himself.

The minor altercation in the tunnels, with the bums, had been close to blowing up, and she knew it. He would have slaughtered them without a second thought.

Looking at his peaceful face, Kary smiled warmly.

"Even though I'm sure you would have felt little remorse, I would prefer if you never have to kill another person who hasn't deeply wronged you. Murder should never be a simple choice..." she muttered.

Kary held his hand, which was one of the few places where there were no broken bones, and softly caressed it. Soon enough, as Guo had said, a small group of four men came into the room with a gurney, ready to move him.

In the group of four, Kary recognized two, one of which was the one that had fetched them off the streets in Montreal, when they had fled the bank with the unconscious teenager. The other was another man that had roughed Alex up in his penthouse.

"We cross paths way too often, little missus," the mercenary said, shaking his head.

"The feeling is mutual. Even if you work for Mr. Boudreau, I would much prefer not to see you either. You are lucky we are in a hospital. I might try to light you on fire, as a personal petty revenge, for beating up my boyfriend."

He raised his hands in a gesture of peace.

"Hey, I'm just doing my job. I get orders and execute them. And your boyfriend almost killed two of my friends during that scuffle, might I remind you? So, a little forgiveness wouldn't be so bad."

Kary clicked her tongue, turning her head away from him, focusing on the three men that were transferring Alex off the bed to the gurney. They lacked finesse in their movement, and she feared they might wake him up, but at least they didn't seem to hurt him.

As soon as they had him set up and strapped in, they started moving him out of the room. As they pulled out of the room, though, a reporter who had snuck back inside the hospital, lunged at them to take a picture.

The mercenary who had been talking to Kary swooped in, blocking the view for the man, and pulled open his jacket a bit.

"Uh uh. No, you don't. Back away, slowly, and no one gets hurt. Or I can have one of my associates teach you a lesson in privacy. Up to you."

The reporter became ghastly white as he saw the pistol in the mercenary's side holster. He took a few steps back, maintaining eye contact with the gun, before turning around and bolting out of view.

"Yeah, that's what I thought," the mercenary spat.

Kary nodded at him in thanks. It would only be a matter of time before Alex's identity became public knowledge, but if he could at least get time to heal before that happened, it would be a blessing.

"Don't thank me, missus. Just doing my job," the mercenary said, smiling at her.

She quickly understood that the man was most likely the type who did his job perfectly, but never went above and beyond. Such people weren't a bad thing, though.

She could respect that.

Wheeling the gurney to a service elevator, the four men and Kary boarded it alongside the patient and pressed the button for the underground parking lot. They had an ambulance ready in the lot for the transfer.

Kary would ride with Alex, while the four men would follow in an unmarked black military SUV.

Reaching the sub-levels, the elevator doors opened, and the paramedics took over the gurney. They quickly loaded it in the back of the ambulance, Kary stepping into the right, while one paramedic stepped in on the left, and the other stepped into the driver's seat.

They were off in a matter of moments, as the black SUV followed closely behind, visible from the back windows. The two vehicles made record time, leaving the downtown area and hitting the highway northbound toward the health institute under Jack's purview.

Once there, the paramedics quickly shuttled Alex into a private room, with a second bed and game helmets readily available. Jack had made sure their needs were all taken care of during their stay, which had almost become a monthly occurrence.

He would much rather they stay safe, but he wondered if that would even be possible in the future. Their future was looking rather bleak.

But as they transferred Alex to his new bed, the motion finally shook him awake.

"Hmm? Where are we?" he asked, noticing the different ceiling.

Kary smiled at him, caressing his hand reassuringly.

"We're in a safe place where no one will bother us. Jack made us a room in his private institute, on the top floor, this time. We are being treated like VIPs. Isn't that great?"

Alex chuckled, which made him wince in pain, as he felt one of his ribs rub on his expanding lungs.

"Oww. No laughing for a while. Got it," he said, trying to stay positive about his state.

A doctor walked into the room at that moment, noticing his pained expression.

"Mr. Leduc, I see you have awakened. If you are in pain, simply say so, and we will have pain meds delivered to you promptly."

Alex shook his head, regaining his comfort.

"I'm fine. Just laughed, and it seems broken ribs don't go well with that. I'll just be careful."

The doctor nodded his head, a playful smile on his lips. He read through the file on his tablet, taking mental notes and jotting down Alex's vitals, before closing the tablet and bringing it under his arm.

"Well, if you or your partner need anything, a simple press of a button will get someone in the room, ready to answer your wishes. You seem fine for now, and I would recommend rest. Although I doubt you will be listening to me, it would be better if you don't log in to New Eden this night, and have a proper night's sleep. But you can do so, if you so wish."

Alex nodded at him, locating the helmet on a table next to his bed, and he already had plans to log in. He could see what time it was on the monitors, and he was already late to log back in.

The doctor trailed his eyes on Alex's, and he laughed internally, knowing the young man wouldn't listen to his council.

"In any case, if anything happens, people will be in the room in seconds and will take care of you. Rest well, Mr. Leduc."

Saying his bit, the doctor pivoted on his heels and exited the room, closing the doors behind him.

Being alone in the room with Kary, Alex looked at her, before looking at the helmet.

"Want to give me a hand? We should get online soon. We have shit to do."

Chapter 536 Duties To Attend To

Kary helped Alex get his helmet on, making sure she didn't move him too much as she did. She didn't want to hurt him, but she still needed to lift his head a few inches from the pillow to get the helmet on.

Alex toughed it out, like a good little soldier, gritting his teeth, not saying a peep, until he rested against the bed once more.

"The doctor said I was healing fast. That just doesn't feel like the truth. I feel like Mike Tyson used me as a punching bag."

Kary giggled at the analogy. With all the broken bones in his body, it would be more accurate to say Mike Tyson tried making ground beef out of him, but it was still comical to imagine.

"You can tell that to Clark when you recover enough to go back to the gym."

Alex's face paled.

"Fuck... I forgot about that. He is so going to tear me a new one..."

Kary slid her hand across his cheek gently.

"Don't worry about it. I already called him and told him you were in the hospital again. He was wondering how you kept getting into accidents, but he understands."

Alex frowned from inside the helmet's visor.

"I should tell him... He still hasn't reached out inside the game to me. Either he barely plays, or he is just enjoying himself too much to remember to call me. I was waiting for us to meet in there, to explain the whole thing..."

Kary hushed him with her finger.

"Don't worry about this right now. We can tell him everything once he reaches out. For now, we need to focus on finishing our immediate duties, so we can get back to levelling up."

Alex pursed his lips together.

"You're right. We have already taken enough time off. You especially. Let's get back to busting some monsters up. See you inside."

Alex logged in the next moment, reappearing inside his royal room. But he surprised Coral, who was rearranging the bed a little after most likely having changed the bedsheets.

She yelped a bit when she turned around, and King Astaroth was suddenly standing at the foot of the bed.

Pressing her hand to her chest, she took a deep breath, calming her heart.

"My king, you surprised me."

"Yeah, sorry about that. I'm usually already up and about by now. But there's been... complications, on the other side. Phoenix should be—"

Before he could even finish his sentence, Phoenix appeared right behind him, still wearing her clothes from the previous day.

"And there she is. Coral, would you mind giving us the room a few minutes so we can change?"

Coral bowed her head slightly, acquiescing to the demand, and left the room, closing the doors behind her.

Once they were alone, Astaroth stretched his limbs, smiling to himself.

"This is more like it. Being bedridden sucks."

Phoenix giggled at his words, already undressing from her luxurious robes.

Astaroth stole a quick peek, as he started taking off his shirt and pants as well. They quickly got dressed in the clothes that were moved from the bed to the dressers on each side by Coral.

Phoenix had a magnificent magenta dress prepared for her, along with accessories of gold and emerald, making them pop against the purple backdrop of the dress. She rapidly twirled her hair into a bun before planting two hair sticks through it, to hold it in place.

On his side, Astaroth was looking at his outfit, frowning a bit. A pair of black leather pants was on the dresser, set next to a shirt in the same colour as Phoenix's dress.

The colour looked amazing on her, but he somehow was reluctant to wear the same colour. He was more comfortable in black and white.

Phoenix finished dressing, and he was still standing there in his underwear, looking perplexed.

"Come on, love. It's just a shirt. It won't bite you," she said, coming up behind him.

"I know... But why this colour? Won't I look super effeminate?"

The look of uncertainty on his face washed away when Phoenix started sliding her hand across his thigh, lasciviously. His eyes almost rolled back into his head in pleasure.

"It's just clothes. It won't make you any less of a man. Come on, get dressed. We have matters to attend to before we head out."

Astaroth cleared his throat, trying to hide his budding erection as he slipped into the leather pants. He winced one last time, as he threw the shirt over his head, but didn't dally any longer.

Phoenix was right. They had a busy day ahead, and they were already keeping people waiting.

He took the necklace back up from the dresser and slid it on. He had never been much of a necklace person, but he somehow felt like this one belonged around his neck.

He pulled it over the shirt, in plain sight, and smiled. He then tried repositioning his ostentatious member, which was tight-fitting in these leather pants, before walking out of the room.

He wasn't shy, but he wasn't an exhibitionist either. There was no need to expose his girth to the guards in the hall, and even less to the maid, Coral.

It finally calmed down enough to become just a bulge, which he couldn't do anything about, and Phoenix smiled at him as she hooked her arm into his.

"Let's go, my king. We have people waiting."

Astaroth nodded his head as they lock-stepped their way to the door. Pushing the doors open, the two guards on duty slammed their feet on the floor, saluting their sovereigns, and Coral gave a curt bow.

"Your majesties!" the guards shouted, almost too loud for Astaroth's taste.

But the two players nodded at them before heading off toward the throne room, where Prince Nalafein and Killi were most likely already waiting for them.

Astaroth tried his best to look dignified as they walked, but he couldn't match Phoenix's level of elegance. He wondered where she had learned to act and walk like this.

They quickly reached the throne room, where a guard rapidly entered it to announce their arrival.

"The king and queen have arrived! All rise for the sovereigns!"

Chapter 537 Activating The Portal

Stepping inside the room, Astaroth and Phoenix saw four people. Rising from the table, Prince Nalafein and Killi both bent into a curt bow, while, behind them, Gelum'vire and Killi's vice guild leader bowed their heads.

Astaroth and Phoenix could have walked over to their throne, where they would normally hold this little meeting. But Astaroth clapped his hands together loudly.

Clap!

"Alright! We have already wasted enough of your time waiting. Instead of all the theatrics and explaining, how about we walk to where I will send you away from, and save us all some time?"

Killi smiled widely, agreeing that they had wasted a lot of time. When you were a pro player, every minute counted, after all.

He couldn't fathom how bad Phoenix must feel with all that wasted time managing this place. It kind of made him happy his guild wasn't yet as expansive.

The abruptness of it took Nalafein aback. The little prince wasn't used to plans changing spontaneously before him.

He was about to protest, and insist that explanations were in due here, first. But Gelum'vire put his hand on his shoulder, shaking his head lightly.

Killi turned his head to the prince, whom he now served under, and awaited his decision. But the prince quickly nodded his head before backing away from the table and walking toward Astaroth and Phoenix.

"Then we shall follow your lead, King Astaroth, Queen Phoenix."

Killi immediately joined their impromptu delegation, and Astaroth turned on his heels, immediately walking out of the throne room. He took a left, heading toward the portrait that hid the staircase down under the throne room.

It didn't take very long, and when he stopped before it, he turned to look at Killi.

"If this location ever gets public, I will know it came from you, and New Eden, or Earth, for that matter, won't be big enough to hide you from me."

The blatant threat only elicited a chuckle from Killi, who shook his head.

"I would never divulge secrets of my allies. How untrustworthy do you think I am?"

Astaroth smiled at his response, his threatening gaze gone in a flash.

"I trust you. I just wanted to remind you, that's all."

Saying this, he turned around, sliding the portrait aside, revealing the passage and staircase. Nalafein's eyes widened.

He knew every castle had secret passages, as it was common practice to build them into the structure, in case the royals needed a quick escape. But this passage seemed much too big to be used as an escape tunnel.

As they went down into it, Phoenix lit their way down with a small fireball she held aloft over her head by willpower alone. The vice guild leader of Knights of the Sun tried to one-up her.

A large globe of pure white light lit up behind them, making her small fireball utterly useless as she glanced over her shoulder. The vice guild leader looked at her with a smile, not saying anything as his globe of light flew above their heads.

Phoenix wanted to show him what it was like to 'Shed some light', by turning herself into a miniature sun, but Astaroth put his hand on her arm, a whisper coming from his lips.

"Don't bother. He knows you are stronger. He only wants to taunt you."

Phoenix side-eyed Astaroth, wondering when he became the voice of reason for her. But she knew her man was right, so she extinguished her fireball, turning her head forward, chin raised.

The vice guild leader, seeing her ignore his attempt, he pouted lightly. Killi laughed internally at the exchange, making nothing of it.

They descended for a short while, until they reached a large open room, with walls of compacted dirt and stone, exposed roots webbing the ceiling. In the center of the room, a large upraised dais stood, the sole occupant of the otherwise empty room.

On this dais, the previously built portal, a large empty loop covered in runes of a language unknown, lay dormant. Killi found its construction reminiscent of an old TV show he had seen as a kid, and he huffed lightly.

Astaroth climbed the steps to the dais, stopping next to the ring. On the right part of it, a square-shaped protrusion, about two inches thick, adorned the ring.

When Astaroth stepped in front of it, the protrusion lit up in a light purple, with strange symbols dancing on the screen for a while, until they translated to English, and he could read them.

Please enter the destination's coordinates. The Portal will take a minute to lock onto position and activate and will stay open for only a minute. Aether cost: fifty Aether points.

He hadn't looked at this the last time, and he sucked in a breath, the price surprising him. Fifty Aether points was a massive cost for something that only stayed open for a minute.

But then again, it was a portal that could go anywhere without causing too much of a disturbance. And it wouldn't be activatable by just anyone, given Aether wasn't so easy to use as he made it seem.

Focusing on the panel, Astaroth started circulating his mana internally, converting it to Aether and slowly pushing it into the ring. After pouring ten points of Aether into it, it started humming with energy.

Gelum'vire was looking at him intensely, his eyes barely believing what he was seeing.

"This brat has learned how to use Aether?! Aberon couldn't have taught him that. It's not something you just learn. I thought he was just a meathead... Who knew he had an exceptional talent in magic, as well..."

It took Astaroth about a minute to push out enough Aether from his body to fully activate the portal. Once he did, he was already sweating profusely, using much more than his maximum amount of mana.

He had to use Mana Siphon twice, and that was considering his high mana regen, as well. But his mana was already climbing back to an acceptable level.

While he panted, the portal pulsed in a purple light twice, before a blue matter came from the inside of the ring, rushing toward the center, before collapsing on itself and pushing outward, and settling back into a flat surface.

It was like a basin of water had suddenly filled from all sides, and the water crashed on itself in the middle, before resting back into the basin.

Once the blue matter settled down, a notification rang in his ear.

Portal locking on to coordinates, please wait.

He turned over to the waiting delegation.

"While we wait, let us discuss something."

Chapter 538 A Proper Send Off

Nalafein had his eyes locked on the portal, not recognizing its construction. Teleportation magic may come in many forms, but most of them were already in use commonly.

But this portal was completely unfamiliar to him. When Astaroth spoke up, he snapped his attention back to him.

Killi, meanwhile, wasn't so easily impressed, given it looked like something he had already seen. It made him wonder just how much of their world's technology of fiction this game had plagiarized.

'Have these game creators no shame?' he thought.

If he had known that nothing on this side came from programming, his mind would turn in an entirely different direction, but he was still in the dark about this.

"I would want to talk about your destination," Astaroth said, climbing down the stairs.

This drew a few curious gazes and frowns, as most of the delegation thought they knew what they needed to know about it.

"Is there anything more we need to know?" Nalafein asked, not liking surprises.

"Yes. There is one last thing. At the top of the tower or tree, whoever you want to call it, there is an entity of great power. I would ask that you not try to go see it or force yourself on it, under any circumstance. The fewer people know it is there, the less trouble will befall the lands you now own."

Nalafein was slightly worried about the revelation. An entity that needed to stay hidden was never a good omen.

"And what if we decide to try, anyway?" Killi asked, his curiosity rising.

Astaroth locked eyes with him.

"It will be at your own risk. The entity in question can wipe you from this world in a heartbeat. Better to leave it alone."

Killi's curiosity levels rose even more. Who wouldn't want to try his hand at such a challenge?

But Astaroth looked serious about this 'wipe you from this world' thing. He wasn't sure he would risk it himself.

But maybe he could send a few expendable players?

But it was a matter to consider later. For now, it was primordial to focus on his guild's development.

With their fresh territory and endless possibilities, there would be much work ahead.

Astaroth received the notification from the portal and smiled.

"Well! You are now all set to go. The portal only stays open for a minute, so if you have anything else to say, now is the time."

Nalafein snapped out of his thoughts and took a step closer to Astaroth, extending his hand.

"Thank you. For everything. The Ash Elves will never forget what you did for them."

Astaroth grabbed the extending hand, smiling warmly.

"Prince Nalafein, think nothing of it. You freed me when I needed it most. Without you, I could have hardly become what I am now. Consider this only as a favour repaid."

The prince smiled back. Words may not mean much in the grand scheme of things, but these words echoed within him.

He pulled his hand back from their clasp and started stepping up the stairs. Gelum'vire stayed silent, only nodding his head toward the abnormal.

Astaroth returned his nod as the mage followed behind the prince.

Killi stopped in front of Astaroth and Phoenix, saluting them both.

"Even though there are so many strings attached, that I feel like a puppet, thank you for this opportunity. I will make the most of it and become the largest guild in New Eden. That much I promise."

Astaroth chuckled at his words.

"You are no puppet. I said we wouldn't take advantage of you, and I promise we won't. Consider this more of a favour owed. When the time comes, I only want to know you will answer our call."

Killi nodded his head. He always repaid favours.

He looked at Phoenix, smiling at her.

"You did it, ember girl. You finally burn brighter than anyone else. Congratulations on reaching the top. But don't grow complacent. New powerhouses rise every day."

Phoenix smiled softly at the words.

Killi had been one of the first pro players that had acknowledged her, and hearing him say she had made it filled her with glee.

"Thank you, old-timer. But New Eden is where you can make your comeback. Don't waste this chance."

Killi chuckled before spinning his heels toward the portal and walking away.

Phoenix waited until he and his vice leader were almost across it before calling out to the vice leader.

"Hey, Cardinal!"

The vice leader heard his name and turned around.

Phoenix ignited her entire form, lifting off the ground a few feet, as fire came out of her, making herself look like a star in the cosmos, completely eclipsing the light from the player. His eyes went wide, the display of power taking him by surprise.

But before he could accept her challenge, Astaroth used telekinesis and shoved him through the portal.

Phoenix slowly landed, as the flames extinguished, and giggled at her boyfriend's action.

"You know, he wouldn't have been able to one-up me this time. You didn't need to push him through the portal."

Astaroth smirked.

"I know. But imagine his frustration, when he appears on the other side of the continent, unable to try his hand at it at all. At least until you meet again."

Phoenix could indeed imagine his face, as he lost his occasion to prove himself, and she brought her hand up to her lips, laughing.

Alex spoke up in his mind, trying to send a message to Nemus, while Kary laughed.

'I don't know if you can hear me, but I sent over the new proprietors of the tower. Please treat them well, and try not to let them see you. I warned them to leave you alone, but I doubt they'll listen.'

A response came soon after.

'I know. Don't worry. If I don't want to be found, no one on this planet will find me.'

Her answer satisfied him, and he focused back on Phoenix.

"Alright. Let's get Leon back in charge and get back to levelling. We've wasted enough time."

Phoenix nodded her head, and they both headed back up the staircase. They had much to do, still, before they could go out of the kingdom.

Chapter 539 An Unexplored Dungeon

On the distant outskirts of Bastion City, a small group of six players were finishing their patrol rounds when they encountered a strange phenomenon.

The group, composed of SharpTusk, Food Goblin, Chronos, Twinxie, Peaceful Grove, and Galtion, was the party that had escorted Silent Light to the Ash Elf kingdom, Chronos excluded.

What they stopped to investigate was an enormous tree trunk, in which a hollow gap was shimmering lightly. This caught their attention immediately, as they recognized something they had encountered before.

A dungeon entrance!

SharpTusk ordered their group to stop.

"We need to investigate this. If it is indeed a new dungeon, then the higher-ups will want to know what's inside, the level of the dungeon, and possibly what the first boss is."

When scouting a dungeon, three things were of importance.

The level of the monsters inside, the environments and type of monsters encountered, and last but not least, the power of the first boss. That last information could help most strategists deduct the rest of the dungeon's power scale.

The party became ecstatic at the prospect of exploring a new dungeon. This would not only be good on their Exp, but it would also net them a solid amount of brownie points with the higher echelons of Paragons.

However, one member felt unsure about this course of action.

Chronos looked at the shimmering portal-like entrance, and his body shuddered. His eyes suddenly flashed to a different perspective.

He was standing in the corner of a large oval clearing, with ruins around him. Close to his side was Food Goblin's corpse, mutilated beyond recognition, with only the head intact, stuck in a permanent rictus of fear and pain.

Further in front of him, he could see a bisected body with wings, and an Elven woman, impaled in a stone structure with a large spear. The spear looked familiar, and spinning his head, Chronos saw the dragoon who usually wielded it.

Galtion was holding SharpTusk by the throat, the latter's face already turning odd shades of purple, before the head popped, splashing blood all over Galtion's armour. When the dragoon turned his head to Chronos, the sight he saw shook him to his core.

Galtion's helmet was half melted on the right side, and in its stead, the burning face of a demon, with the largest grin he had ever seen, was looking at him. When Galtion, or whatever was possessing him, darted forward, Chronos saw himself grab the golden string attached to his soul, and yank on it, before his vision became normal once more.

Standing in front of the shimmering portal-like entrance, Chronos' eyes widened.

He turned to look at his party leader, showing the first bit of emotion to the man ever since they had met.

"Tusk, we cannot go in there. If we do, we will all die. And I'm not sure some of these deaths will be something we can come back from..."

SharpTusk looked at him, his forehead creasing.

"Chronos, what are you even saying? This is a game. A few deaths are bound to happen. There is nothing to worry about."

Chronos couldn't tell them what he had seen. He simply knew they wouldn't believe him.

He hadn't been entirely transparent with them about what his class entailed, and the powers he wielded. What Chronos had told this party was that he was a mage with light temporal capabilities, like slowing an enemy, or hastening an ally.

He hadn't told them the true extent of his hold over time, because even he wasn't sure how much he could control it. This was the first time he even had a vision like this, from his own perspective.

But the members of his party quickly brushed his uncertainty off. They were jubilating too much to even stop and wonder why he was acting this way.

Only one person hesitated longer than the others, and that was Twinxie, the spirit user. Her pixie started buzzing nervously ever since they found the portal.

But Twinxie was much too shy to voice out her concerns.

As they made preparations to enter this dungeon, SharpTusk sent a message in the sub-officer chat, which currently only contained him. Their vice guild leader, Phoenix, had set up this chat as a drop box for messages from the lieutenants that the officers could go check when they had time.

Since SharpTusk was currently the only lieutenant, she hadn't assigned him to an officer yet. She would wait until there were a few more, before separating them under the officers and start forming divisions.

SharpTusk sent his message about their finding and its coordinates, before sending another message stating they were going in for reconnaissance.

Figuring they were all set, he beat his chest in anticipation.

"Alright! Everyone, stay on guard and check each other's six. We don't know what kind of enemy or what level they will be, so we have to be cautious. But we can do this!"

Then he walked into the portal, followed by Galtion, and Peaceful Grove. Twinxie hesitated for a moment, as did Chronos, but they soon followed as well.

Inside Bastion City, on the second floor of the palace, Astaroth and Phoenix were currently arguing with Leon.

"But it's not even been two weeks!" Leon whined.

"I don't want to get thrown into the slog again! Not yet, please. Let me rest a bit more. I did this for ten years, and you've barely come back! I deserve some rest."

Astaroth chuckled at his teen-like reaction, while Phoenix admonished him.

"Leon. You must do this. We can't get stronger if we are stuck here. I know you understand this."

Leon grumbled as he slammed his face into his mountain of pillows.

"I won't either, if I'm stuck here."

Astaroth chimed in.

"Leon, you haven't gained a single level in ten years. What makes you think you can even get stronger? We are still on the lower level of things. Now is the perfect moment for us to go out a level up."

More grumbling came out, muffled, from the pile of pillows.

Phoenix walked over to him, pulling on his ear like a naughty child.

"Come on. Enough of this childishness. You swore to uphold this kingdom, and that vow still holds. Get on with it. We won't be gone for ten years this time. Only a few days."

Leon pouted, as he sat on his ass, unbothered by his ear getting pulled.

"Fine! But only for a few days. Your job is boring, and I want to sleep."

Astaroth laughed and Phoenix clicked her tongue, but they had at least got him to agree.

Now they could finally get some levelling done, before the entire gaming community surpassed them.

Chapter 540 Urgency

As they left the Beastman's room, the pair headed to their room to get changed. After doing so, which only entailed undressing from their formal clothes and re-equipping their armour, the pair felt more at ease already.

Phoenix noticed a flashing notification in her message interface and opened it. She saw that their only lieutenant had left a message, and skimmed through it.

Her eyes went wide, as did her smile.

"I found us something to do!" she exclaimed as they left their room.

The guards saluted them, a bit surprised by their combat attire. They knew the monarchs were combat-capable, but they weren't at war, or anything.

It was rare that sovereigns would willingly go place themselves in danger if there was no need to. But they would come to know, over time, that their monarchs were all but regular king and queens.

Astaroth looked at Phoenix, his eyebrow rising.

"Hmm? What is that?"

She grinned widely.

"A group of our players have found a new dungeon in our territory. By the coordinates, it's not far, too. If this dungeon doesn't collapse after one completion, we should have an additional source of power-levelling for our recruits, and our officers."

Astaroth frowned at the mention of collapsing dungeons.

"Collapse? Is that a thing now?"

Phoenix looked at him with a frown.

"I forget you've been too busy to keep up with the forums lately. Yes. Players have found dungeons across both continents, that collapse once someone has completed them once. Although the rewards for those are much more plentiful than normal ones, their collapse after one clear is annoying for the guilds."

Astaroth scratched his chin. He could imagine how such dungeons would annoy guilds.

A possible enormous source of income on items, gold, and experience, suddenly vanishing from your grasp, was indeed quite troublesome.

"I imagine guildless parties completed a few of these, too," he said out loud, as they walked toward the palace entrance.

"Actually, it's surprising how little often that happens. Those collapsing dungeons are also much harder, so unprepared parties struggle to get through them. It has happened, though. And the guilds who claimed them were very angered and disappointed."

Again, he could imagine. A guild claiming a dungeon, while the first party was still clearing it, wasn't a rare occurrence.

But having the dungeon disappear, ejecting your players as it did, while they hadn't even reached the last boss, could be quite angering. He imagined the players who did this were most likely bullied into surrendering their loot before they could leave the area.

He had no intention of doing the same if it ever happened to him. He understood that luck was also a part of a person's skills and that clearing a dungeon, even by luck, was something to be respected by others.

After reaching the palace entrance, Astaroth got ready to meld with Morpheus and fly off, but Phoenix stopped and frowned.

"What's up?" Astaroth asked her, stopping as well.

"A new message came in. The lieutenant, SharpTusk, is asking for backup in the dungeon. He insists it's urgent, but doesn't say why."

Astaroth frowned.

"The only reason he wouldn't say why would be if he's too busy to think clearly, and can't send the message properly. I would understand the urgency then. But how long ago did they go into the dungeon?"

Phoenix looked at the time stamp on the previous messages.

"It's barely been half an hour. They would have reached no further than the first boss room by now."

Astaroth's frown deepened.

"You say it's SharpTusk's group?"

Phoenix nodded.

"I had a glimpse at their combat ability. They shouldn't be in trouble so early in a dungeon. Unless it is a very high-level one."

Phoenix shook her head.

"Even then. I assigned them a recruit to test. The man looked like he had a lot of potential. His application mentioned he had a special class, called Chronomancer. He shouldn't be weak by any measure if he got a special class."

Astaroth looked worried, suddenly.

"I can only think of one other reason they would need backup so urgently... But it wouldn't make sense..."

Phoenix tilted her head at him.

He looked at her, his forehead still creased.

"I'm not sure if it has happened yet, but what if it's a corrupted dungeon? The levels in it would be a complete mess, as the uncorrupted monsters would be significantly weaker than the corrupted ones. And a dungeon boss, corrupted, would be a terrible opponent."

Phoenix frowned as well.

"I guess we will only know when we get there," she stated.

Astaroth nodded his head, melding with Morpheus. There was no time to lose.

Corruption was bad if it affected players. And a corrupted dungeon was bound to affect at least one player.

As he blasted off from the palace stairs, Phoenix combusted and lifted off behind him, leaving a large streak of flames behind her.

The guards patrolling the sky around the palace wondered why the queen was leaving in such a hurry, but their duty to patrol kept them from going along. They also noticed the king, in one of his strange forms, and their curiosity level rose.

"Have you any idea why they are in such a hurry?" one patroller, a large birdman, asked another.

"No clue. Maybe they are excited to go fight something. I heard from another guard that the monarchs were quite the warriors," the other man, a mage flying on a broom, answered.

Astaroth and Phoenix reached the coordinates in a few minutes, landing before the large tree where the dungeon entrance lay. Astaroth looked at it, and with his Perfect Mana Sense active, he saw what he had feared, confirm itself.

Around the shimmering portal, a large amount of demonic mana particles floated around. For someone who couldn't distinguish the mana essences, this would seem normal.

But he could tell.

"This dungeon reeks of demonic mana. Either it's corrupted, or it leads straight to their plane. We need to get in, and fast."

Phoenix already had her interface open. She was messaging SharpTusk to invite them to their party.

They would only enter a new instance if they entered now. They needed to be part of the same party to help them.

An invitation came soon after, for both Phoenix and Astaroth, and when they accepted it, they could see the party status. Seeing it, their faces dropped, and they both lunged into the dungeon portal.