

New Eden 561

Chapter 561 Regrets

The lich quickly understood what Chronos was doing when one of his undead servants was suddenly plucked from his control.

On the other end of this battlefield, Chronos looked at the golden string in between his fingers, which he had just reached through the ever-stretching web of time, and smirked.

"No one escapes time. Not even death..." he muttered.

Snapping his fingers, the thread snapped, and the undead dropped to the ground, turning to dust. But this process would be a lot slower than stopping their timelines.

Chronos had to wrest control over the time thread from the lich, and he could only reach them through the time web since he could hardly waltz into combat and grab at the strings directly.

This made the process longer and harder. But not impossible.

Astaroth, with his senses still firing on all cylinders, noticed the mana presence of an undead vanish close to him, and he turned in half panic, expecting a sneak attack. But when he saw the undead turn to ash, he frowned.

'What the fuck just happened?' he wondered.

He didn't have enough time to stop and observe the surrounding battlefield, so he remained puzzled for a while. Until another one suffered the same fate.

Seeing the undead jerk, Astaroth lunged at him, thinking he could get an attack on it, but it turned to dust as he kicked through it, hitting nothing.

But he saw in the distance, some of the undead turning around to face the fey man in his party. He quickly did the math.

"Luna! Protect Chronos! Whatever he's doing, it's pissed off the boss!"

Right as he said that, a dark swirl of mist opened next to Chronos, and out of it came floating the figure from the throne.

From up close, the lich looked much more impressive, its ten feet high body towering over the smaller fey man, who looked up at him with a hint of fear.

In its husky voice, almost like an echo through a ragged canyon, the lich spoke.

"How dare you steal away from me the fate of those souls? They are mine. Mine!"

The last word came out as a shrill shout, the air around Chronos shuddering under the magic pressure it contained. But he looked mostly unfazed.

"You don't get to pluck threads out of the web of time freely, aberration of death. The web requires justice be rendered."

The lich made one mistake by getting this close to Chronos. And the latter was so immersed in the time web that it ordered him to pounce.

Reaching out his hand, Chronos grasped at the clump of threads attached to the lich's soul. Feeling this happen, the Lich reeled.

Screeching loudly, it shoved its hand forward, trying to plunge it into this impudent mortal who was trying to steal from him.

But just before the hand reached Chronos' chest, Luna came flying in, ramming the undead with her immense body. But she didn't feel any impact.

The lich had thrown up a shield in between them at the last second, and it absorbed the impact, leaving him unscathed.

But now, it was angry.

Screeching out in fury, making the players' ears almost bleed, the lich called all its remaining servants to its side. Luna huffed in response, raking her hooves in the dark dirt.

Around Astaroth, the undead all turned their heads away from him, ready to respond to their master's call. But he wasn't letting them leave him without paying a heavy cost.

"Turn away from me, and pay the price!" he shouted.

Transforming his Ad Astra into a pair of daggers, Astaroth went into a frenzy, stabbing heads, severing necks, and smashing bones. He used Sublimation, to boost his stats by double, still unsure he should use more demonic powers in this darkness-infested place.

And this alone was enough to make the newer players in his party understand why he stood at the top of the power structure of the guild.

Jaxx swallowed nervously, realizing he had been looking down on him until now, thinking Astaroth had gotten his rank through money, or connections. But now, his eyes opened to the truth.

His guild leader was a monster.

Jaxx's level was forty-five, and this alone should make him close to Astaroth in power. But he could barely follow the speed at which Astaroth was moving, and the damage numbers he was doing were not something he could accomplish without using powerful skills.

Of course, the equipment on Astaroth might be better than his, but it still wouldn't make this stark of a difference. This was raw power.

His earlier move had made him realize he wasn't a pushover. But now that he saw, Astaroth could crush him under his boot, like a bug, if he so wished.

While Jaxx looked away at Astaroth, his mind stuck in contemplation, he failed to notice a zombie lunge at him, mouth opened, ready to gnaw at his throat.

"Hey! Keep your head in the game, bro!" Meat-Shield exclaimed, intercepting the foe.

Jaxx snapped out of it, realizing the undead that had been ganging up on Astaroth were now running at them. Or, more specifically, at Chronos, who stood in the center of them.

He slapped his cheeks, regaining his focus.

'Come one, Jaxx. Get yourself together! You can still prove your worth!'

Although he doubted he could erase the stain of his previous behaviour. From his arrogance with Violette, his cowardice earlier, and now to his lack of focus in a dungeon run.

He had a feeling he was only digging himself deeper since they entered the dungeon. He needed to make himself invaluable.

Jaxx wasn't inherently a bad person. But since playing New Eden, and realizing he could be powerful here, he had changed a bit.

Jeanne knew him enough to know that her brother was usually the one who lacked power. He often got bullied as a kid, since he was smaller than the other guys.

This had led him to build up his body, thinking it would give him confidence. But it had only helped him not get picked on any longer.

But when they started playing New Eden, and he started using this newfound strength to push around smaller players, he had become prideful, arrogant and conceited.

She only wished it would stop getting worse before it affected him outside the game as well.

And this had only become worse when he found an A-grade legacy, which he still hadn't told the guild about.

'Come on, brother. Get back to your old self. No one likes you like this...' she thought, a bit of regret in her mind.

She had brought him into the game. And now she was regretting it.

Chapter 562 Strange Boy

After shrieking out horribly, the Lich started retreating behind its troops, where it could cast spells safely. But Luna kept blocking its way, making it increasingly angry.

"I will make you into the most subservient undead I ever did, you foolish animal!" it shrieked out.

But Luna was unimpressed. Opening her mouth slightly, she conjured another Moonbeam, smaller but more concentrated, firing it at the Lich.

The Lich brought up another barrier, blocking the spell almost entirely, as only residual energy washed over him, slightly singeing his robe. The undead already knew that the giant stag's magic was of the opposite element to his, which meant it could badly hurt him.

But the same went for him, as well.

Small orbs of darkness appeared around Luna, suddenly spiking outward towards her. Luna dodged out of the area of effect but still received slight scratches to her hide. Looking at the minor cuts, she could see the seething black mana oozing out of the wounds.

At this amount, it was harmless, but she knew she shouldn't take too many of the Lich's attacks in the long run.

Luna charged at the Lich again, intent on running him through. Although she had no success on her previous attack runs, she wasn't out of tricks yet.

The Lich floated up, reaching the height of her head, as he conjured the barrier in front of him once more.

"Such an animalistic way of fighting. I would expect nothing better from a simple-minded beast!"

But as Luna was about to collide with his conjured shield, she shimmered brightly before shrinking in an instant. This had for effect of her sliding under the conjured barrier, suddenly ending up right under the Lich.

Luna kicked off the ground with a grin, lighting one of her fists with lunar Aether, and slamming it in an uppercut under the Lich's chin.

The Lich's vision blurred momentarily as its teeth smashed into each other, rattling his brain. He immediately took another blow, this time a spinning kick to the abdomen, before he could react.

His body bent around the leg before launching away like a meteor, smacking into a nearby stone wall. As he crashed into it, the undead momentarily stopped attacking, their bodies suddenly twitching strangely.

This allowed every player to unleash a bit of pain on them, trying to reduce the monster count they had to deal with.

But the twitching was fleeting, and they resumed their attack, as the Lich came out of the wall it had smashed into.

It was giving off a death glare at Luna, who was still in her humanoid form, grinning at it cockily.

Looking around the arena grounds, the Lich noticed there were few of its servants left standing. Although it was constantly bringing back up the ones that it could, the additional threats were overcoming his army rapidly.

"I will not fall!" it screeched.

Raising its hands, a burst of dark mana blasted out of its body, exploding out of the building.

Feeling the surge of mana, Astaroth raised his hands across in front of him, resisting the pressure. But he knew the mana wasn't to push them back the moment it passed through him.

It had a different flavour to it. One of death and command.

In that slight moment, the barriers around the building weakened, just enough for his senses to extend past it. And his face paled.

Astaroth turned to his party, shouting.

"He's calling the ones outside! We need to kill him! Now!"

Of course, it wouldn't be so simple as to just hit him. Even with the hits Luna landed on him, his health bar barely wavered.

The Lich still had over ninety-five percent of its health and was not looking like it would fall soon.

Astaroth wished he had reached the Lich while he still had his mysterious boost from earlier. He had a feeling this would have dealt massive pain on an undead boss like it.

But wishful thinking wouldn't help their cause.

Shifting his attention to the boss was his only way now. But as he lunged forward, everything around him changed.

The dark arena ground made way to a white granite-looking floor, spotless of any dirt or grime. There didn't seem to be walls in this place, or a ceiling, for that matter.

But a few feet in front of him, a little boy stood. In the little boy's arms, a small toy resembling a wooden doll of a deer.

The little boy looked at Astaroth, his eyes filled with curiosity. His iris' shone golden, as his ashen skin and pointy ears looked like an Ash Elf.

But on the kid's back, a pair of bright white wings, which were folded around him slightly, almost protectively. Astaroth tilted his head curiously at the kid, the kid mimicking his movement.

It was like Astaroth was looking in a trick mirror, showing him a distorted version of himself, copying his every move.

Astaroth looked around, trying to see if they were alone, but when he looked forward again, the kid was suddenly right before him.

"Whoa!" he exclaimed, taking a step back.

The child's wings flapped nervously, closing a bit more around him.

"I'm sorry, kiddo. You startled me," Astaroth said, trying to reassure the child.

The kid stayed mum, his eyes still trailing Astaroth's every movement.

"Do you know where we are?" Astaroth asked.

The kid nodded his head, lips still tightly shut.

"Can you tell me?" Astaroth asked.

The kid shook his head slowly no. This made Astaroth frown a bit.

"Can you help me go back to where I was? My friends need my help."

The kid stared at Astaroth, not responding this time.

Astaroth blinked in confusion. But as he opened his eyes, the kid was right before him once more.

Astaroth's heart skipped a beat again.

'How is he moving so fast, without making a sound?'

But he wouldn't get his answer, as the child slammed his hand against his chest. Astaroth felt the hand burn into him like a searing red metal rod got jammed into his ribs.

Everything around him went completely white.

Chapter 563 The Garden

When Astaroth's vision came back, he was standing in a garden, with lovely trees filled with purple leaves. The stonework of the garden was a pristine milky white, the black earth in the garden boxes looking rich in nutrients and life.

Looking around, he noticed the blackness surrounding the edges of the garden. He could see stars in the distance, as well as above.

Curiosity took hold of him as he walked to the edge of the path behind him, reaching an abrupt end a few hundred meters away. And in front of him, the great nothing.

Space, wherever his eyes landed, filled with stars and distant flying rocks.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" a voice asked from behind him.

Astaroth almost had a heart attack, spinning on a dime, ready to fight. But that was when he noticed.

His arms, which were previously covered in dark brown leather armour, were now covered by a light fabric shirt, which he could almost see through. Where his weapon should have been, only a golden chord hung, holding the tunic on him tight.

A crystalline-sounding giggle brought his attention off himself, and he saw who had spoken to him.

"Nemus?!" he exclaimed.

The person before him, or goddess, to be exact, looked at him curiously.

"I do not know this Nemus you speak of, child. My name is Psyche. I don't know how a mortal got into my domain, but you are welcome to stay here if you wish. What can this humble goddess do for you?"

Astaroth frowned.

'Psyche? Isn't that the name Nemus used to go by? Why does she use it so brazenly?'

Psyche looked at Astaroth, observing his internal musings silently. This was her domain, and she could hear his thoughts clear as day.

She peered slightly further into his thoughts, curious about what he was thinking, and glanced at his memories.

What she saw there shocked her. She saw him, looking at her, with a slightly different appearance, and using a new name, Nemus. She listened to herself, recounting things that had never happened, and should never happen.

But Astaroth suddenly asked her a question that brought her attention to him.

"Do you not remember me?"

Psyche looked at him with a slightly tilted head.

"I have never met you, child of flesh. How could I remember you?" she asked.

She couldn't tell him she had peered into his memories. So she lied.

"What the heck is happening?" Astaroth said, confused.

"Maybe I can help you figure it out, young one. Tell me what you remember, and we will figure out together how you reached my domain."

Astaroth looked at her weirdly. But he could still feel the familiarity coming from her essence and knew he could trust her.

While he explained everything he remembered of the last few minutes, Psyche looked into his body, observing his soul. She saw the identical soul to hers, if much weaker, and wondered what had led her to do this.

She remembered creating every soul in the universe, but she couldn't remember having ever created a doppelgänger of her own. She peered into more of his memories, listening to Astaroth with split attention.

Astaroth did not notice the intrusion and kept talking until he was done.

"Hmm," Psyche hummed.

"Yeah. Hmm indeed. How do I get back to my friends now? They need me, and I'm in the middle of a battle..." Astaroth said, dejected.

Psyche smiled at him.

"Well, I can get you back to where you need to be, now that I know where that is. If that is what you want."

Astaroth looked at her with a hopeful smile.

"You can?"

Psyche nodded her head slowly.

Floating closer to him, she gently tapped his chest, grabbing something Astaroth couldn't see, and whispered into it.

"I will need your help for this, Tyr, God of time. Send this child back to his destined place."

A surge of Aether erupted in Astaroth's chest, making him feel like he was burning up before everything went white again.

Watching him disappear, Psyche's smile slipped away, making way for a fearful frown.

"Gaius... What have you become? I cannot let this go on unchanged. I will send this child the help he needs, to bring you back on the rightful path..."

Psyche started pulling energy from the surrounding stars, moulding a ball of Aether that pulsed with power. She then reached into herself, making a magical imprint of her soul, and finishing her creation.

A copy of herself manifested, with more manly traits, darker skin, and large white wings.

The copy looked at Psyche, wordless, its eyes almost worshipping.

"I'm sorry I have to lock you away in time. If Gaius ever finds you, I would have wasted this power. Make sure the boy stands a chance.."

The doppelgänger nodded its head before curling on itself.

With a wave of her hand, Psyche conjured a cage of divine energy around the newly born soul. She made it so it looked like Gaius had done this, so it didn't tip off her future self.

Once the cage was done, she snapped her fingers, and it disappeared among the stars, bound for its next vessel.

"Now, my turn..."

Psyche sighed heavily. She dreaded altering souls once they were done, but she had no choice.

She reached into her body, delicately picking up her soul, and pulled it out of her body. She started sliding her fingers across it, making a magical formula on it.

She hesitated before her last stroke, knowing what came next.

"I can't keep this knowledge. If Gaius ever peers into my soul after locking me away, he will know. I need to ensure the soul reaches its vessel."

Sliding her finger across her soul, it snapped back into place. The memories of her encounter with Astaroth, and her finding out about Gaius' ploys, vanished from her mind, and then from her very soul.

Pain traversed her, lasting for a few minutes, before subsiding.

Psyche looked around herself, frowning.

"What was I doing again? Ahh, yes. Pruning the trees. But why am I so far from them?"

Turning around, she saw the trees fifty meters away from her.

"Hmm. I rarely lose focus. Oh well."

And she happily proceeded to her pruning, completely oblivious of what she had just done, or whom she had met.

A golden portal opened at the edge of her garden.

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

Chapter 564 Flushed With Power Once More

Opening his eyes, Astaroth was right where he had started. Surrounded by undead monsters, as they were lunging toward Chronos and the rest of the party.

He shook his head a bit, wondering what kind of weird visions those had been.

'Am I going insane?' he wondered.

But as he was about to lunge back at the enemies surrounding him, a soft, melodic hum echoed in his mind. Astaroth lurched to a stop, snapping his head around, wondering who had done this.

But it resounded once more, delicate, almost inviting.

Astaroth focused on himself briefly, trying to see if something was wrong within his body, and gasped in shock.

Inside his chest, where his soul was, floated a new little white orb, orbiting his soul slowly. When he focused on it, he saw the child, a hand extended toward him.

'Are you calling out to me? Who are you?'

The boy didn't answer, but only stretched his hand closer, a smile appearing on his lips. The most Astaroth didn't know what to make of this. But if this thing was inside him, it couldn't be an enemy.

Right?

He carefully reached out, grabbing the boy's hand, and his mind reeled.

Astaroth's body convulsed for a second, as it began glowing once more, this time more steadily. As the power filled him, he looked at his glowing body again, connecting the dots.

'So it was his power earlier. But where does it come from?'

Astaroth looked at his status and frowned. His stats had barely gone up.

Astaroth couldn't go check the stats of this new entity, as he could barely link to it, but the melding upgrade was abysmal.

Scrolling down through the window, only one thing stood out to him.

Divine Endowment

All your attacks are imbued with the power of divinity. This essence repels anything that is unholy. The power of gods is not something lightly given, chosen one.

All attacks now deal holy damage. The endowment can be shared with nearby allies.

Astaroth gasped at the last phrase. He looked toward his party, thinking about extending this glow to them, and watched as they started shining in white and gold, one by one, like light bugs.

The contrast with the darkness surrounding them was stark. Astaroth almost felt reminisce of the starry space around Psyche's domain.

Astaroth could feel the divine essence in the mana passing through his body. The feeling was the same as previously, and he knew he couldn't waste any of it.

Spinning on his heel, he caught a passing-by skeleton on the temple with his foot. Instantly, the skeleton crumbled to the ground, inert.

He observed for a few seconds, trying to see if any mana came back to animate it, but nothing happened. Grinning from ear to ear, he shouted to the rest of his party.

"It's time to go all out! If you were hiding some aces, use them!"

Phoenix and Violette, who were running on fumes, felt that every attack they delivered, even the slightest of water jets or firebolts, dealt much more damage than they should. The numbers showing up in their eyes remained unchanged, but the undead they hit reeled in pain or outright dropped, not to get back up.

Meat-Shield felt invincible, as the undead crashing into him suddenly started taking damage from the light glowing off his shield, and he cackled.

"Ke ke ke ke! Feel the light, you unholy motherfuckers! Die!"

He rammed his body through the tide of undeath that faced him, reaching further into the wave, before roaring powerfully. His roar shook the air, as the surrounding undead suddenly went against their orders to advance on Chronos, and turned their heads toward the dwarf.

"That's right, bitches! Look at me!"

This loosening of the onslaught allowed Galtion to click his heels together before bolting off to the side. He used his new boots for the first time, and felt exhilaration, as his acceleration didn't stop.

After going around the large arena twice, already close to breaking the sound barrier, as a wind funnel formed behind him, he arced back and charged toward the Lich.

Hitting it in the side, the Lich barely had enough time to conjure another barrier, as Luna was still harassing him constantly, to block the rushing lancer. When the light-coated spear slammed into the barrier, Galtion felt all his momentum disappear instantly, making him almost halt immediately.

But it wasn't wasted. The barrier stopped the initial charge, reducing the player's speed by ninety percent, but it shattered without blocking it fully.

This had for effect Galtion continuing forward, and piercing through the Lich, bursting through it and skidding to a stop before the stone wall.

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Seeing the damage number, Galtion gasped. It was the first time he dealt so much damage in a single strike, and he felt a renewed excitement.

"Now we're talking!"

He dashed away again, before the Lich could counter-attack him, and started circling the arena once more.

Jaxx watched as everyone around him fought with renewed enthusiasm, and couldn't let them have all the glory. So he used his hidden ace.

He had wanted to wait for the last boss of the dungeon, before revealing it, to act like the hero he thought he was. But circumstances changed.

Slamming his axes together twice, he uttered a battle cry!

"For glory! For Valhalla!"

His body grew in size, reaching seven feet in height, as his muscles rippled with power under his leather armour. His axes shone a blood-red glow, as tattoos appeared on his skin.

This was his Legacy Skill, Viking's Wrath.

Jaxx had picked up a Legacy, not long after he began playing the game, called Ironside's Legacy. It made him bigger, stronger, and much more resistant to damage.

He didn't know how he got it, and only knew that it had appeared on his list after a very gruesome battle he and his sister had fought. But he cherished it regardless.

Feeling his power swell, he jumped into action, bulldozing a path through the undead legion, and quickly reaching Meat-Shield's side.

"You aren't taking all these enemies alone, pal! Let me have some fun too!"

Chapter 565 Tightening Noose

The battle devolved into a race, to see who could reach their goal first.

Would the undead army on the outside reunite with the one here before they killed the Lich?

Or would Astaroth and his party wipe clean this abomination of undeath from the dungeon before getting swarmed?

The Lich boss quickly realized its undead were no longer answering his summons after getting struck by the now glowing mortals.

As if the servant of time's presence wasn't enough, who could steal away the fate of his minions from him. Now the pointy-eared summoner was blessed by the gods, and sharing it with his allies.

To make matters worse, the buzzing fly that kept running around his home and charging at him dealing some serious damage to it. It wouldn't even be able to land a hit, if it weren't for the monster in little girl's clothes, that kept harassing him from up close.

Astaroth, however, was having a great time. He fought furiously, taking out enemies left and right, slimming the undead troops as fast as three of his allies.

There weren't much of them left now, and he rejoiced.

Reaching the group's side, Astaroth aided SharpTusk in defending the casters from any melee threat. The pressure on him may have been great, but he seemed to have the time of his life.

"Leader Astaroth! Fancy you joining us here! I thought you would have rushed at the big bad!"

Astaroth chuckled at Tusk's words. The Orc wasn't wrong, in a certain way.

Normally, Astaroth would have gone directly for the boss, eager to fight a real opponent. But he had bigger concerns right now.

With every collision between Galtion and the Lich, or every strike Luna slipped through its defences, the barrier surrounding this place weakened. And right now, it was weak enough for him to stretch his senses outside the coliseum.

And things were about to get immensely worse.

"Phoenix, I know your mana reserves are running low. But can you block the entrances to the arena?"

Phoenix looked at Astaroth with a frown. She knew he wouldn't ask her something like this without reason, but this was a lot asked.

Looking about the arena, she could count four large entrances to the floor level where they were, alone. And that was aside from the large seating area, which had even more entry points from the exterior.

"I would have to close a dome around the arena, Astaroth. I'm running on fumes. There is no way I can achieve anything that meaningful right now."

Astaroth cursed under his breath.

"Shit. Fuck. Balls. Alright then. Then move to the center. This spot is about to get crowded."

Saying his piece, Astaroth blasted off again, making his way to Meat-Shield and Jaxx. Piercing through the ranks of undead to reach them, he stopped next to Meat-Shield.

"Meat-Shield! I need you to make your way towards the center of the arena. The rest of the party will head there, and they will need you."

Meat-Shield nodded his head, trudging forward as he kept fighting through the waves of monsters assaulting him. He had to throw out taunt after taunt, just so to maintain the aggro on them, but he was still managing.

Jaxx started following the Dwarf before Astaroth grabbed his arm.

"Not you, hot head. I need you on that boss monster. You deal good damage, and it needs to go down fast."

Jaxx almost froze in confusion. Most parties he and his sister had joined always sent him to tank adds, or clear trash mobs. He had only ever joined the boss fight once all the adds were cleared.

Having his damage recognized by the guild leader made him feel excited, but the sharp look in Astaroth's eyes also chilled him.

"Once this boss is dead, we will talk about your stupid behaviour," Astaroth added.

Jaxx gulped, nodding lightly, before taking off toward the boss.

Astaroth watched him run toward the Lich, who was now constantly on the run from Luna and Galtion's charges, and scoffed.

'If your sister wasn't redeeming you... Bah, whatever. I'll deal with you after.'

Calling mentally to his soul companions, Astaroth assigned them to form a cordon around the party's casters. White, Genie, and Morpheus accepted the command and quickly finished their foes before circling toward the center of the arena.

He let Luna on the Lich since she was one of the few who could deal with it as of now.

Phoenix took over command of the party once they regrouped, and put them into a more defensible formation, even ordering Astaroth's companions around. The soul beasts didn't mind, as they were used to this now, and obeyed her commands as if they were their master's.

As their formation was taking shape, loud screeching echoed into the arena. Coming from every direction, pervasively, the screeching filled the area, almost forcing the players to cover their ears.

"Get ready!" Phoenix shouted.

A moment later, the reason for their relocation became clear.

East, West, North, South. All four entrances started pouring out a torrent of undeath.

Along with this, above the arena ground, in the bleachers of the coliseum, zombies, skeletons, and ghosts of all kinds started trickling in through every smaller entry point. It was like watching a zombie movie of old, where the protagonists had cornered themselves.

The only saving grace for these players was that they could fight back.

Astaroth left the waves of undead to the rest of his party, and slammed into the Lich, not long after Jaxx had. Getting swarmed by two additional threats rapidly put the Lich at a disadvantage, and it was taking damage left and right.

Galtion's charges started hitting true, the Lich unable to erect barriers around him in time, with too many sides to this assault.

Feeling the noose tighten around its neck, the Lich went into survival mode.

Letting go of defence, it conjured up another portal through which it walked, reappearing in the sky, a hundred meters above the ground.

SHREEEEEECK!

Chapter 566 Unconventional Solutions

As the Lich cried out in distress, its minions on the ground echoed out its pain, and their eyes turned red.

Phoenix saw this and gulped.

"Tighten the formation! They're going into a frenzy!"

Astaroth clicked his tongue. With the Lich in the air like this, it would be harder to take out.

Aside from himself and Phoenix, he doubted anyone else could fly in his party. And if he melded with Morpheus, he would take away a precious ally on defence duty.

'Am I going to be forced to meld with a demon for this? Why am I feeling like it wouldn't be of help? What to do?'

But as he thought this, a soft melodic hum echoed in his head once again. Immediately after, Astaroth felt something push out his back, phasing through his leather armour.

Turning his head, two large, white-feathered wings now adorned his back, their size matching the ones he had when he melded with Morpheus, although they looked less monster-like.

He grinned.

Launching into the air, Astaroth swapped his weapon's form again, making the Ad Astra into a long spear, with a cross-shaped tip. He charged at the Lich, picking up speed rapidly with every beat of his wings, aiding himself with some Sky Steps along the way.

It screeched in pain as the white light coming from this assailant seared its body.

The Lich, who had been focused on stretching its influence outside the arena some more, to get all of its army here, failed to notice the coming white comet until it slammed under him, pushing it off balance.

It screeched in pain as the white light coming from this assailant seared its body.

"You! Under which god do you serve?! Who sent you after me?!" the Lich questioned, fury filling it.

Astaroth smirked, beating his wings to stay aloft over the Lich.

"I serve no god, you hideous abomination. I'm only here to kill you and get stronger. No hard feelings, okay?"

The Lich screeched in anger, releasing a bolt of dark energy directly at Astaroth's face.

He jerked out of the way last second, but lost balance a bit. Tumbling a few meters down, Astaroth caught himself again, only to be met with another bolt of black magic.

He couldn't dodge this one, and reflexively closed his wings around his body, blocking the blow. This action protected him from the damage, mostly, but the impact sent him flying backward in a downward arc.

Catching himself before he slammed into the upper walls of the coliseum, Astaroth clenched his teeth.

'Flying with wings doesn't allow me the same freedom of movement as Sky Steps. I need to be more careful...'

He wasn't all that used to aerial combat, since he seldom fought in the air. But now was as good a time as any to learn.

again. But a ray of light coming from the ground caught its attention.

Beating his large white wings, Astaroth rose again, flying toward the Lich, spear at his side.

The Lich looked at the incoming Ash Elf and prepared to fire at it again. But a ray of light coming from the ground caught its attention.

Reacting on instinct alone, the Lich erected a barrier below itself. Not a moment too soon, either, as a bolt of moonlight slammed into the barrier, pushing the Lich slightly upward from the sheer force of impact.

Luna, who was standing on the ground, still in humanoid form, grinned at the undead. She then turned into her stag form, in which she had better control of those beams and their intensity, and started barraging him with attacks from below.

"Nice going, Luna!" Astaroth shouted.

The attacks could serve as distractions, at worst, and help him deal some damage if the Lich focused on him instead of her. This was a great way to help.

Of course, doing this meant Luna wasn't focusing on her own surroundings. But Jaxx started protecting her from harm, since he could no longer hit the boss, as she peppered the Lich from the ground.

'At least, he isn't completely stupid...!' Astaroth thought.

Galtion had gone to help his friends, charging into the waves of the undead like a high-speed drill. It was helping, but Astaroth felt like his potential damage was being wasted.

'How can I make him come up here?' he wondered.

Astaroth could deal with the Lich if given enough time, but this wasn't a viable option. He could feel the enemies outside the coliseum pushing into it, more and more, like an unending torrent of death.

They needed to end this fight soon, or his allies on the ground would get overwhelmed.

He typed into the group chat.

'Galtion, I'm going to cast something on you. Tell me how fast it makes you.'

Focusing his mind on the dragoon momentarily, Astaroth tried casting Wind Walking on him from afar.

He felt the mana leaving his body, but couldn't see from this height if it had achieved its intended goal.

But Galtion suddenly sped up, blurring across the entire arena in a single second, a loud boom happening, as he passed the sound barrier.

'Whoa! Whatever you did, it worked. I've never run this fast. But why do you need me to go faster?'

'I need you up here. Find a way to reach the boss. I won't be able to take it out alone. Not before it gets all its army inside here.'

Galtion understood the gravity of the situation and started thinking as he bulldozed through enemies. But his mind wasn't all that tactical, and he couldn't figure out a way up into the sky.

"The walls!" Jaxx yelled, beating away the zombies that were trying to nip at Luna's hide.

"Run up the walls like the scarlet speedster!" he yelled out.

Galtion's eyes widened in realization.

'Of course! I might run fast enough for this!' he thought, in ecstasy.

Galtion ran a full circle around the arena, picking up speed, before he sucked in a breath of cold, corrupted air, and jumped sideways onto the wall next to him, running along it.

He half expected to fall back down and tumble at mach one for a while, but the lightly rounded angle of the walls kept him pressured enough, through centrifugal force, that he stayed parallel to the ground.

He laughed in delight, realizing he was defying gravity. But now he had to figure a way up.

That would be much more of a challenge.

Chapter 567 Aerial Combat

As Galtion ran circles on the inner wall of the coliseum, slowly thinking about how to transfer his speed into propulsion upwards, Astaroth was having an aerial ballet with Lich.

At first, his manoeuvring wasn't as smooth as he wished, but he quickly got the hang of his flying capabilities and became an actual threat to the undead.

The Lich, as a result, had to make increasingly hard movements to dip out of Astaroth's attack fly-bys, and it could not focus on reaching out to the bodies of the undead outside its small domain.

Knowing it needed to treat these living flesh puppets more seriously, it stopped trying to spread thinner. Instead, the Lich snapped its hands together, blasting dark mana in every direction.

"Fine! You want to fight me that bad? Then I will respond to your challenge, you insects!"

The energy that blasted out of him suddenly congealed into hundreds of small black orbs. Astaroth recognized these orbs and turned to shout at the party.

"Stay away from the orbs! They'll stab at you!"

He was a bit late in his warning, as Jaxx, who was still defending Luna's surroundings, stepped into range of an orb. Immediately as he did, the Orb stretched out into a thin spike, stabbing him in the shoulder.

It would have hit his neck, had Astaroth not warned them, just in time for Jaxx to react.

But this was only the beginning.

The Lich started twisting its hands in a circular motion, to which the orbs responded by mimicking the movement. The battlefield instantly became a building-sized blender.

The spikes of dark magic attacked anything close to them, regardless of their provenance, and some undead got stabbed. But the Lich seemed uncaring that it was damaging its own troops.

Because it still achieved its target.

The party had to find a spot where there were fewer floating orbs and ended up clustering together. Which, in turn, made it easier for the undead to reach them.

Galtion, who was still running on the wall, was moving too fast for the orbs to stab at him, as their spikes planted in the wall behind him after he had passed. But he currently felt useless.

'How do I get up? If I don't do something soon, they are going to die for nothing...'

Astaroth redoubled his efforts to harass the Lich, attempting to make it lose concentration on its spell. But his attempt came short.

The Lich dodged the attacks it could, while maintaining its spell, and took the others that it couldn't dodge. Astaroth had hoped for the damage to make it falter, but the Lich only cackled at his strikes.

"I am death, insect! I do not feel pain! Your attacks, even coated with divine energy, do nothing more to me than damage this physical vessel."

Of course, its words were only half true, as the divine energy from the attacks was hurting its very essence. But it was hardly enough to make it worry.

Astaroth needed something that hit a lot harder if he hoped to make this enemy drop.

He could have damned all his allies on the ground and committed to a high-impact spell. But he refused to throw them under the bus.

That was why he had wanted Galtion to use his speed to deliver a heavy blow to the Lich. But Astaroth could do nothing more to help him get into the sky.

'I need to get the Lich down or get Galtion up. But neither are easy feats...'

To make matters worse, the Lich had now restarted expanding its sphere of influence outside the coliseum, and more undead were responding to its call. The domain enclosing the arena grounds stretched outside of it, reaching the few streets around the immediate vicinity of the building.

The Lich began floating higher as the dome over the coliseum expanded outward.

'Someone get Galtion on the Lich!' Astaroth typed into the party chat.

The party members were all busy trying to stay out of harm, which made them unreceptive to Astaroth's demands. But Peaceful Grove had an idea.

'Sir. We can't do much in our situation. But would a ramp be enough?'

Astaroth looked at her response and was about to reply when Galtion beat him to it.

'Can you angle it toward the Lich? Like a bike ramp?'

Astaroth frowned.

How would a ramp help if the Lich was too high to hit with a simple jump?

But Peaceful Grove replied, 'Yes.'

'Do it!' Galtion said.

Peaceful Grove had to focus on her spell, which meant she started taking some attacks from passing orbs of darkness. But she gritted her teeth through the pain.

In the seating area of the coliseum, the stonework started shifting. Over the next few seconds, it rose and shaped itself, taking the appearance of a crescent ramp, as you would see in a bike or skate park.

Galtion had to reach the area, which meant he would have to crest over the wall he was running on and spin into the seating area, which was infested with undead. But he grinned like a maniac.

'Thanks, Grove!' he said in the party chat before his blurry form rose on the twenty-foot wall.

He crested the edge of the wall slowly, changing his running angle back to normal, before activating a skill he hadn't used in a while.

"Reckless charge!"

He seldom used this, as it had so many downsides, for its one only use. A yellow glowing spiral formed before his now outstretched spear, and his body sped up again.

He vaporized the undead that barred his way in contact with the mix of impact strength and holy essence as he kept dashing forward.

During Reckless Charge, Galtion couldn't stop, or be halted, for five straight seconds, and any enemy that wasn't killed on impact would get thrown aside. The skill ended in his legs losing strength, and him tumbling uncontrollably, but it wouldn't matter.

As his skill reached three seconds, Galtion reached the ramp. On the four second mark, he was already launching skyward, his speed maintained in a straight upward line.

On the fifth second mark, right before the spiral of yellow phased away, Galtion struck the unsuspecting Lich right in the torso.

The impact caused a blast of black and white that blinded everyone present.

Chapter 568 Airborne Dragoon

Being the closest to the point of impact, Astaroth was the first one to feel the shock wave that blasted off of the Lich, as Galtion smashed into its body like a meteor. The wind pressure sent him tumbling backward in the air, struggling to regain his balance.

When he did, the sun was peeking into the arena grounds, the black smog-like barrier closing it up, dissipating.

Astaroth looked up toward the Lich, but couldn't find it. But he saw something else, though.

And that was a rapidly descending Galtion, who, after rising toward the sky for about two thousand meters, had lost all his momentum, and gravity reasserted itself over him.

His heavy metallic armour made him go much less high than he had expected, but still significantly higher than he should have gone.

Now on a free fall, Galtion was screaming his lungs out, as he watched the ground come up on him fast.

Astaroth was hearing him, distantly on the wind, as he saw only a black dot in the sky, rapidly growing in size. Reacting without thinking, Astaroth flew up to meet it, as the screaming became louder.

"aaaaAAAHHHH!!!!!"

Whack

Astaroth smacked into Galtion, taking damage from the collision, but only caring about stopping their now-conjoined descent.

The collision had taken away a lot of the fall velocity, and Astaroth tried opening his wings to get some gliding going, but Galtion's armoured form was quite heavy.

Their fall slowed down but didn't stop.

"Ahh!!! Do something!" Galtion screamed, seeing the ground still approaching.

"Shut up! I'm trying!" Astaroth shouted back.

But try as he may, he couldn't slow down their descent anymore. They weren't going fast enough to kill them on impact; he thought.

But as the ground got closer and closer, Astaroth closed his eyes.

'This is going to hurt!'

In a cacophonous concert of metal-on-metal impact and a cloud of dust kicking up, they crashed into the arena ground.

-14,103

Astaroth's air shot out of his lungs on impact, his eyes bulging at the amount of damage he took. It took him many seconds before his body allowed air back into his lungs.

Gasp! *Cough cough*

Laying on the ground, eyes toward the now open sky, Astaroth gasped for air, coughing through the floating dust they had kicked up, and thanked the gods to be alive.

'Dying like this would have sucked...' he thought, as he coughed out more dust.

Next to him, Galtion was wheezing through his helmet, his armour crumpled on his chest. His thorax was being constricted by the armour, making it hard to breathe, but at least he lived.

He used all the focus he could muster to open his status screen and unequip his armour.

As soon as he did, he felt his chest expand, no longer stuck in the dented metal can his armour was feeling like.

He gasped and coughed, joining Astaroth, before they both started laughing it off.

A few meters away from their impact site, the rest of the party was watching as every undead monster fell to the ground, unmoving. They could hear the laughing coming from the two men's crash site, and felt relieved, if a bit worried, they were laughing.

Phoenix stumbled her way toward the crater both men had formed on impact and stopped right before the cloud of dust.

"You two alright in there?"

The laughing went unabated, both of them still having a hard time believing they survived.

As the cloud of dust subsided around them, the clear skies shone upon them, as a notification rang in all of their ears.

Ding

Second boss; Aspect of the Undying, defeated.

Astaroth waited to see if they would get some special rewards again, but nothing more came with the notification. Already, in the middle of the arena, a treasure chest had appeared.

'Well, that's disappointing. We worked hard to take this motherfucker down, too...'

Looking a bit to his side, he could see Galtion looking at the sky, his Astaroth lied there for a few minutes. His body was hurting all over, and he was feeling extremely weak.

He had used Sublimate early in this fight and wondered how the exhaustion hadn't hit him earlier. But he would take any positive point.

Looking a bit to his side, he could see Galtion looking at the sky, his body contorted strangely.

"You alright there, buddy?" he asked him.

Galtion raised his right arm, making a thumbs up, before letting it fall back down.

Astaroth shrugged in response, making a sharp pain go down his spine.

At this time, a woman in clerical robes leaned in over the crater, and a soft golden glow washed over both him and Galtion. The light felt like bathing in a hot spring in the middle of winter.

Both soothing and refreshing.

Astaroth saw his health bar going back up, the passive regeneration kicking in, confirming he was out of combat. He sighed loudly.

"Let's just take a few minutes here to relax and heal up. Okay?" he asked Phoenix, who he saw crawling into their crater.

She didn't respond, simply plopping down beside him, making him grunt in pain as she dropped her head on his chest.

"Oof. Careful, I think I have broken ribs."

Phoenix chuckled.

"Serves you right. What was the great idea, crashing into the ground like that?"

Astaroth wanted to chuckle, but even breathing hurt.

"Hey, it's not like it was my goal. Galtion over there is much heavier than I thought. And with my normal stats, I wasn't strong enough to carry his ass and mine safely to the ground..."

Galtion, hearing this, snorted.

"Sorry, leader. But thank you for not letting me turn into meat paste. That would have sucked..."

Astaroth laughed, making his eyes water up in pain.

"Sure thing, bud. We need you to proceed, anyway. I couldn't just let you die yet."

As they spoke, the rest of the party amassed around and in the crater, plopping down to their knees or asses, exhaustion catching back on them. No one even cared for the loot chest at the moment.

All they wanted was to wind down. Even Jaxx, who was worried deep inside he was going to be in trouble, plopped to his back, letting his form return to normal.

His sister dropped next to him, punching him in the ribs lightly.

"I hope you didn't cost us our place in Paragons, dumbass. You okay?"

Jaxx chortled, nodding his head slowly.

"I'm sorry. I'll make sure you don't get kicked out, sis," he replied, looking at the beautiful sky above them.

Chapter 569 Crappy Loot

After relaxing, the party pulled themselves back up before making their way toward the treasure chest. But before reaching it, Astaroth stopped and pivoted toward Jaxx.

"Before we divvy out the rewards, I have a bone to pick with you."

Before Astaroth could keep going, Jaxx dropped to one knee, bending his head toward the floor.

"Sir. I know I was less than ideal as an ally until now. I know I made questionable decisions and acted out of line more than once.

"I will take any consequence on myself with dignity and leave the guild without a fuss if that is your wish. But please. Let my sister stay.

"She deserves to be a part of this strong guild you are building. Jeanne is an exceptional player, and a formidable healer and asset. Kicking her out because of my actions would be a great mistake.

"I implore you, let her stay amongst Paragons!"

And with his last phrase, Jaxx slammed his fist into his chest, right over his heart.

His eyes closed, Jaxx waited patiently as the silence became heavy around him.

Not a sound left Astaroth's mouth, as he looked over at the warrior with a smirk. Jaxx waited, his eyes closed, body unmoving, for two long minutes.

He started squirming uncomfortably, the silence weighing on him like a boulder on his back.

Peeking up, Jaxx opened his mouth to beg once more.

"Sir, I—

But when he met Astaroth's gaze, the words escaped him.

Standing right in front of him, Astaroth flicked him on the forehead, leaving a red mark.

"Lovely speech, dipshit. I wasn't going to throw you out. You redeemed yourself enough with your actions in this fight that I was only going to give you an earful. But your self-reflection, and how you care about your sister's future, changed that."

Jaxx gulped loudly.

Had he worsened the situation by insisting so hard?

"Listen, I'll be frank with you. From Violette's attitude alone against you, and the arrogance you showed at the start, I don't like you very much."

"Understandable sir. But—

"Shh. I'm not done talking," Astaroth interrupted him.

Jaxx lowered his head once more.

"I don't want Paragons to be a strict guild, where even the slightest mistake gets you thrown to the curb. I want my guild to feel more like a family.

"And a family has disagreements. It's how we get through them that counts. Prove to me you can be more than just a loudmouth and a dickhead, and your place amongst us will be assured."

Hearing Astaroth's words, it left Jaxx speechless. He looked up at the man, eyes wide and mouth agape.

Jeanne walked over to him, slapping him behind the head.

"Thank you, Guild master Astaroth. Your generosity and lenience will not go to waste. Jaxx may be an idiot, but he has great potential."

The rest of the party stood to the side, looking away, trying to act like they weren't paying attention.

But Phoenix smiled at Astaroth's words. He was showing the kind of attitude that made a great guild leader.

Violette walked next to Jaxx, shooting a small stream of water into his ear, while he was still wordless.

His ear suddenly filling with water, Jaxx twitched, his head snapping toward the culprit.

"Hey! What was that for?!"

Violette smirked at him.

"You had dirt in your ear. Just trying to help."

And she walked away.

This caused the bystanders and Astaroth to laugh, which Jaxx and Jeanne eventually joined.

The situation had resolved peacefully and with haste, making the tension in the party slowly vanish.

Astaroth walked over to the treasure chest, kicking the lid open, too tired to lean into it.

"Alright! Let's see what this angry skeleton left behind for us!"

It disappointed him that no Exp came with its defeat once again. But he expected as much.

A list appeared before his eyes, with the contents of the chest.

Boss Reward Chest

- 1) Potions of Purification x 5
- 2) Scroll of Resurrection
- 3) Robes of Dark Desires
- 4) Skillbook; Darkness Domain
- 5) 50,000 Gold
- 6) ???

**

Scrolling down the list, Astaroth looked disappointed again. There was nothing really worth it for their party in this.

But the last item caught his attention.

'A mystery item? Let's have a look.'

Pulling it out, Astaroth had a scroll appear in his hands. He opened it, curious what it would contain.

Jestal's Last Will

Unrolling the scroll entirely, Astaroth saw what was a long letter, with, at the bottom, just over the signature, a series of numbers.

'Those look like coordinates. But why would a will contain coordinates?' he wondered.

He figured now wasn't the time to read this, as they still had a dungeon to complete. So he stashed it away in his inventory.

He wasn't sure if he would hand it out as a reward, or keep it to himself yet. That decision would have to wait.

He shared the loot list with the rest of the party, since there was nothing much interesting for them.

"I think this set of loot should go into the guild treasury for later use if it becomes useful to someone. Unless one of you wants something in here?"

As he said that, he shared the gold equally amongst everyone, divvying up six thousand gold pieces to each person present, including himself.

The party members looked at the loot list now available in the party chat, and most of them shook their heads negatively.

The skillbook seemed interesting to a few of them, but no one was that keen on building themselves into dark mages. So he just sent everything directly into the guild treasury through the interface.

As the loot disappeared, some disappointed sighs echoed around him, and he chuckled lightly.

"I know, right? That was the worst loot chest ever. The six thousand gold each wasn't too bad, but the rest was just no good for us," Astaroth said, shaking his head.

But he wasn't too worried, either. Sometimes, some loot was better off sold or traded than wasted on the wrong user. And the loot that the chest had could very well sell at a high premium in the auction house.

Looking around, Astaroth couldn't find the portal that would lead them to the other zone, and he frowned.

'That's strange. We got the notification... Where is the portal?'

Chapter 570 A Short Talk

"Does anyone see the portal to the next zone?" he asked, turning around to face the rest of the party.

But shaking heads was his only response.

Activating Sky Steps, Astaroth took to the skies, trying to locate the portal. They could hardly proceed forward if they couldn't get to the next zone.

From up there, he stretched out his magical senses again, trying to cover more ground than his eyes could. And he quickly spotted a hotspot of concentrated mana, not too far from them.

But something strange made him frown.

It was right under them.

Using only his mana senses, he could feel a swirl of natural mana, right under the arena grounds. But he couldn't see a way to it.

Astaroth skipped his way back down to the ground, still frowning.

"What's with the strange look?" Phoenix asked him.

Astaroth pointed to the ground.

Phoenix followed his finger, unsure what he was trying to communicate with her.

"What? Why are pointing at the dirt?"

"I'm pointing at the portal. It's a hundred meters that way..."

Phoenix started frowning as well.

"Underground?" she asked.

"Seems like it..." Astaroth replied.

"Are we supposed to dig our way to it?" SharpTusk asked, pulling out his greataxe.

Astaroth shook his head.

"I doubt that. But the truth remains, that it's that way."

A murmur spread through the party.

Astaroth scratched his chin, wondering what the plan was here.

He turned to Phoenix, who had led the party here.

"Did you see any strange underground entrance while coming here? Or maybe an entrance to an underground part of the city?"

Phoenix shook her head no.

"We were busy staying alive and not getting cornered. There wasn't much I could investigate on the way, because of that..."

Astaroth scratched his chin again.

"Aww, man. I really don't want to search for this. We beat that thing, and now we have to search for the portal? That's bullshit!"

Phoenix put her hand on his shoulder, trying to calm him.

"I think it's a reminder from the dungeon that just killing the enemies isn't always enough. We have to use more than just physical might to beat this one. It's a good sign. It means some other part of the dungeon might be a puzzle instead of just a boss and monsters."

Even though Astaroth agreed with her words, it still pissed him off. He hated puzzles.

Puzzles were for people with patience. And that just wasn't him.

"God dammit. Alright, then. Let's split up and cover as much ground as we can. The quicker we proceed, the quicker we leave this damned stage."

Since half their party was casters, and the other half were melee players, he and Phoenix tried splitting their forces into six pairs of equal power. This was easier to say than do, given the wild spectrum of strength their party varied across.

But after a bit of thinking and discussing, they split the party.

Astaroth insisted on being paired with Chronos, even though Phoenix thought he would be better off with Peaceful Grove or Twinxie, given their lower mana reserves and power output. But he didn't care.

Astaroth wanted to talk to Chronos. Something about this player made him curious, and he wanted to talk to him about it.

After splitting up, each pair left in a different direction, extending out from the coliseum, covering as much ground as they could, as they inspected every building, alleyway, street and merchant cart. This had become a treasure hunt, of sorts, and the first party to find the entry point toward the portal would call on the others.

As they left, Astaroth turned to Chronos, who was busy looking at merchant carts and inside buildings.

"So, Chronos. Tell me. What's your deal?"

The fey man turned his head toward Astaroth, tilting it a bit to the side as his face remained placid.

"Hmm? What deal?"

Astaroth squinted his eyes.

"Come on. Don't play coy. You know what I mean."

But Chronos remained poker-faced, his head tilting a little further.

"I'm sorry. I don't know what you mean, guild leader Astaroth..."

Astaroth waved dismissively.

"Just Astaroth is fine. I want to know about your powers, Chronos. What's the deal with those?"

Chronos squinted a bit, wondering why he was asking this.

"Listen, man. I can sense mana in all its forms, as well as its essence. Your magic isn't regular magic. I've seen debuff magic before. It's often white magic or black magic. Yours is different."

Chronos looked at Astaroth with caution. He stopped investigating his surroundings, giving all his focus to Astaroth.

"And what about it?" he asked.

Astaroth smiled.

"I just want to know how a player got to wield magic with a divine essence, that's all. Divine magic doesn't run about the streets. Tell me how you got it."

Chronos slid his hand on his wand, wondering why Astaroth was so curious about it.

"Relax, dude. I'm just curious," Astaroth said, seeing his hand close in on his weapon.

Chronos tensed up a bit.

"Do I have to tell you?"

Astaroth pouted a bit.

"No. I would love to know, but your secrets are your own. If you don't want to share, then let's get back to searching."

Astaroth turned around, heading to a blown-out window, to look into the building.

"A god... taught me." Chronos said, feeling like he could trust him.

With their current proximity, Chronos could see the threads of fate connecting them. As well as all the other threads that seemed to link to Astaroth's.

It was like watching a golden sea anemone, with its threads hovering outward into the world.

Astaroth stopped his movement, turning slowly toward Chronos.

"A god taught you? That doesn't sound right..."

"And yet, it's the truth," Chronos replied.

Astaroth thought about what Nemus had told him, about gods not acting on mortals, lest they accrue the wrath of Gaius. If a god had taught a mortal their magic, it would certainly cause them to be punished, wouldn't it?

"Do you still take lessons from that god?" he asked, curious.

Chronos sighed.

"Not since he dropped me back near Bastion City. I haven't been able to sense him, even in the web of time, ever since. It is like he disappeared from existence itself."

Astaroth frowned.

Was that even possible? But then he thought of how Gaius had imprisoned Psyche and locked her away from the universe, and he nodded to himself.

It was very possible.

"I won't pry more. I just wanted to satisfy my curiosity. But if you ever talk to that god again, I would like to meet them."

Chronos nodded his head.

Both men returned to looking for the entry point below the city in absolute silence.