

New Eden 611

Chapter 611 Separating The Troops

Half an hour passed, with Astaroth's party throwing the war's balance out the window, before a roar so powerful and primal shook the battlefield, causing everyone and everything to freeze.

Astaroth felt his soul shiver inside himself, the tidbit of soul corruption he had lingering in there reacting to the roar. Whatever had roared elicited a primal and instinctual reaction from anything evil.

And it wasn't a faint reaction on the demons' end.

All the demons on the battlefield suddenly howled in unison, as to answer the roar's call, and their eyes shone bright red.

Astaroth felt a pulse of mana brush through the battlefield.

Once.

Twice.

And again a third time.

As this happened, the demons suddenly reorganized themselves slowly while battling their enemies. It was like someone had just taken control of them and was guiding them from a bird's-eye view.

"What the fuck is going on? Did we go after these low-level officers for naught?" he mumbled.

Astaroth was about to keep hunting them, for good measure, when he saw his entire party grey out in the party list. Only his name remained lit up.

He snapped his head toward where they had been and saw an enormous black dome suddenly covering a part of the battlefield where they had been.

He was about to fly there, to check what this was, when everything around him became black as well.

Astaroth spun on himself, his senses telling him he wasn't alone. And they weren't wrong.

Floating in the air thirty meters from him was a demon whose magical aura erupted as they made eye contact.

'Such a heavy aura!' Astaroth thought as he felt like someone had dropped a sandbag on his shoulders.

But he wouldn't be outdone.

Astaroth saw some demons on the ground below him, looking up at him with a wild rage and a tinge of hunger. He couldn't see any other troupes from his side.

'Someone tried to separate us from our allies, to get rid of us. Unfortunately for them, they misjudged my strength,' he thought, grinning.

Astaroth called back his soul companions, who appeared under him, a few meters away from the demon regiment. Luna was at the forefront in her little girl form.

She grinned back like a wildling at the demons when they noticed them.

"Let's have some fun!" she proclaimed, her smile widening.

Astaroth unmelded with Morpheus, calling him out as well, before melding with his new companion.

'I'm sorry to cut your rest once again, Shegror. But I need your strength. Plus, you will get to take a bit of revenge on the ones that caused your previous infection.'

The dragon grumbled in his mind, but still allowed him access to his soul.

As he melded with the black dragon's soul shard, his ashen grey skin took a tint darker, as it became scaly. The wings he had on his back from Morpheus changed shape, going from bat wings to dragon wings.

He scanned the demon as his power surged.

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Demon Captain Olmaned

Level: 75

Grade: Elite

Health: 239,550

Mana: 24,650

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'Just an elite? *sigh* I thought I would have some more fun...!' Astaroth sighed mentally.

The demon glanced at him, a look of eagerness flashing in its eyes. But it waited for the mortal to make the first move, trying to gauge its power.

It wouldn't have to wait long before Astaroth charged at it, ribs bulging and throat glowing.

The demon captain raised a magical shield in front of itself, as Astaroth disgorged a breath of acid on it, making the mana of the shield sizzle and melt. He couldn't stay behind it for long, or he would receive the acid next.

Taking a single step forward, the captain reappeared behind Astaroth, launching many small bursts of pure black mana at his back through a skull-tipped wand in his hand.

But Astaroth's wings folded on himself, blocking a large part of the incoming damage, while he kicked the air in front of him to change direction.

"So you want to play a game of magic tag?! So be it!" Astaroth shouted as he bounced off the air.

With a sudden acceleration, he almost appeared in the captain's face, his foot extended in a kick.

But the mage was experienced enough to see through this age-old trick. Another shield appeared next to it, blocking the kick with a loud gonging noise, as he stepped away once more right after, dodging Astaroth's claw swipe with the Ad Astra.

But Astaroth wasn't done.

He followed the mana trail with his eyes, as it left the mage first, before taking him away, and as the captain disappeared, he swapped the Ad Astra into spell slinger mode and fired two wind bullets toward the captain's arrival spot.

The demon captain, reappearing where he thought he would be safe, felt two powerful impacts on his chest, pushing all the air out of his lungs as the two wind bullets slammed into him.

He barely had enough time to catch himself, that Astaroth was already on him, attacking with a mana-coated fist.

Throwing his body backwards, the captain evaded the punch, but not the follow-up wing slam that shot him sideways.

For the next minute, Astaroth and the demon captain played a violent game of tag, which Astaroth was coming out on top of and enjoying. But the demon wasn't done yet.

Olmaned had not reached his rank by simply being a powerful mage. He had battled his way there, and he wasn't unused to physical pain.

He also was experienced with fighting all types of individuals, and the combat style the Dragonoid-looking dark Elf was using was far from unique.

He eventually found Astaroth's pace and caught himself up, making this chase a lot less lopsided.

But this only made Astaroth grin wider.

"Why are you so jovial, mortal? Are you that eager to die?" the captain taunted.

Astaroth burst into laughter before kicking at the demon's side again.

The demon raised a shield and prepared to step away again when he heard his barrier shatter like thin glass. The next moment, Astaroth's kick was bending his body around itself, the captain feeling his ribs breaking and his internal organs lurching in place, as he blasted away like a comet.

Before he could even land on the ground below, Astaroth had caught up to him and caught him by the throat.

The demon captain watched the mortal, as air couldn't enter his lungs, and panicked. He started firing spell after spell, point-blank, in a desperate attempt to free himself.

But Astaroth took the spells with his mana-skinned body and grinned manically.

"I'm just happy I found someone that would allow me to go all out with this new form! There is nothing quite like live training, am I right?!" he blurted.

The demon's mind went blank in panic.

'Is a mortal going to end me so easily? Who is this mortal? Why me? Why me, demon lord?!"

That was the last thought that crossed his conscious mind.

Chapter 612 Figure It Out

In another one of these black domes, Phoenix looked at their new opponents.

Flying in front of her, thirty meters off the ground, was a winged demon whose dark purple skin almost made it appear invisible on the black backdrop. On its head, two long and curved horns, with between them, a flicker of purple flames.

The curvaceous body pointed to a demoness, scantily dressed, with what one could barely call threads, covering her erect nipples. But the massive bulge in the demoness' pants contradicted this female appearance.

Under them, Violette and the others were standing before an array of twenty-four demons, who all looked more formidable than the next to them.

With a quick scan, Phoenix determined they were a platoon of shock troops. And she had the officer before her.

"The demon lord ordered me to take care of you in any way I see fit. Normally I would tear you to shreds, in his name. But looking at you, mmm. I might make you into a slave instead," the demoness said, licking her lips with salacious hunger.

Phoenix felt a shiver run up her spine, regardless of her burning body.

"I don't know if that's a compliment, or insult, given your hard-to-grasp gender..." Phoenix replied, her eyes showing disgust.

The demoness tilted her head, making a fake pout.

"Oh, darling. You hurt my feelings... Can't you tell I'm a woman, just like you? Pay no attention to my large engine. I will take all the womanly pleasures while I fuck your brains out."

Another shiver ran up Phoenix's spine.

She glanced down, noticing that both sides were still in a standoff. The demons were most likely waiting for orders, while her friends were trying to gauge out their foes.

"I'll have to politely decline, darling. I'm already taken," Phoenix said sarcastically.

As Phoenix said those words, a tingle ran down her spine, and she swung out behind her.

The demoness, which had been in front of her just now, was jumping backward, dodging the swing, as the image of her that had been talking to Phoenix phased away.

Phoenix immediately fell on high alert.

'Illusions? But it was so real...'

The demoness giggled.

"Oh, you are so hot. Literally. I wish I could extinguish those flames of yours and taste your flesh. Won't you accept my proposal? Your lover can join. I have plenty of stamina for two, you know?"

Phoenix's eyes turned to slits.

"Are you just going to try to flirt me to death? Or are we going to fight?"

"Aww. You're no fun..." the demoness pouted.

"Fine. I guess I can just make you mine once I beat you to an inch of your life. Men! Slaughter the pawns!" she shouted.

And with a guttural roar, the twenty-four demons on the ground lunged at Violette and the rest of the party.

Astaroth finished his fight in an instant after the captain had died in his hands, but the surrounding dome stayed strong.

"Hmm. Let's see how far this stretches," he mumbled to himself.

He flew directly up, until he felt a certain resistance in his advance, and knew he had reached the confines of the dome. But he wasn't able to push through.

"Do I have to cut through it? Can I even do that?"

Changing the Ad Astra's form once more, he shaped it into a greatsword, before swinging it in a wide arc upward, trying to slash the dome apart. But aside from the resistance on his blade, nothing else happened.

He coated his blade with mana next, hopeful it would change the result.

He felt more resistance than before and even saw the dome quiver. But nothing more.

"Alright, fine. I'll pour more power into it. Freaking whoever did this. Did you need to make them so tough?" he grumbled.

Reaching into himself, Astaroth converted mana into Aether and started coating it over his weapon. It took more than he had anticipated before he felt the shell of Aether solidify.

But he could feel his weapon radiate with power. He only wondered why he didn't receive a notification of a new spell created, or mastery level gained.

'Is the dungeon blocking the basic system notifications?' he wondered.

But he could muse on this later. For now, his priority was getting out of here.

Swinging his greatsword again, he felt the weapon collide with the darkness, like hitting a solid wall. But the wall quickly gave way to his blade, splitting up and giving him a crack to escape through.

Astaroth immediately unsummoned his companions, before diving through the crack. There was no telling how long it would stay open, so he preferred taking no chances.

As he escaped the dome, the magic cancelled out, as it felt nothing within itself anymore. This made Astaroth grunt in displeasure.

'Really? Now that I'm out, you vanish? Fuck you...!' he mentally grumbled.

But now that he was out, he noticed a lot more of these domes had formed on the ground, as well as similar spheres in the sky.

'Whoever did this wants to separate our powerful fighters from our regular troops...!' he assumed, seeing the foot soldiers on the ground.

He couldn't see officers bearing the colours of his side anywhere. Due to this, the army on his side was in disarray.

Astaroth looked at the situation and came up with two options. He could dive to the ground, giving the foot soldiers much-needed help in clearing the demons out. But would they follow his orders or even respect him for helping?

Or he could start infiltrating the other bubbles and domes, and get the mortal army's echelons back into play. But how many foot soldiers would die while he did this?

Both options came with downsides that couldn't be understated. And if he made the wrong decision, how many would die because of him?

Astaroth wanted to think about it, but time was not on his side.

"Fuck it. The powerhouses are more urgent to get into play. I'm sorry, random soldiers..."

Astaroth flew toward another dome, slamming into its side. He made rapid work of cutting himself an entrance and got ready to go in.

But before he did, he sent a message in the party chat. He knew Phoenix wouldn't see it until they cleared their foe and got out of their trap.

Astaroth trusted her, though. And the rest of them at different levels.

He knew they would figure something out. Phoenix always did.

After sending his message, he dove into this new closed dome.

'Let's see who we have here.'

Chapter 613 Disgraceful Coward

Diving inside this new dome, it closed behind him immediately, trapping him there.

Astaroth didn't need to search long for who was locked in here, because the officer for the allied army struck the inside of the dome a few meters next to him as he entered. And he instantly recognized him.

It was the annoying Elven platoon leader, who kept looking down on him for his race.

The man was beaten black and blue, and Astaroth could see dead soldiers on the ground below. All of them had wounds on their back, and a division of demons were feasting on their bodies.

As he tried analyzing the situation, Astaroth heard the voice of the Elf reach his ears.

"You! Good timing! Distract that demon lieutenant if you're so strong. While I find a way out of here. The war needs me more than it needs you!"

Astaroth's teeth clenched at the words.

"Aren't you going to avenge your fallen troops? You are going to leave them here? To be devoured by the demons?" he asked, his traits going darker.

"Those useless fools? They couldn't even hold the demon for a minute! How am I supposed to get out of here when the trash soldiers can't even fight properly?! And that sneaky demon lieutenant struck them in the back like a coward!"

His voice cracked with fear and anger, while he tried justifying his actions.

The demon lieutenant in question was flying quietly above the dead soldiers, watching their interaction with rapt attention. His face showed no emotion.

"Now stop dawdling and cover for me! Be a good little soldier, you inferior shit!"

After screaming out his order, the Elf started scouring the edge of the dome in hopes of finding a hidden issue. In his mind, he imagined if this good-for-nothing Ash Elf had entered, he could exit without issue.

But he heard Astaroth's voice from much closer, and a shiver ran up his spine.

"Alright. I'll be a good soldier."

When the Elf turned his head to scold Astaroth, his body froze.

The emotionless face of Astaroth looked at him, hands raised on the shaft of a greataxe, as it swung toward him.

"What a—"

His words were cut short, literally, as the axe blade sliced through his neck, making a clean pass through and through, his head soaring away. His eyes were forever stuck in a look of stupor as his head hit the ground, his body collapsing right after.

"A good soldier takes out the trash when he sees some. And cowards are trash," Astaroth said, his voice monotone.

He felt something darken inside him, as his soul tainted a bit more from his actions. But he didn't care.

Scum like this man did not deserve to live. Even if given a chance at redemption, this asshole would have left it behind and fled to save his own hide.

A peal of low, snivelling laughter broke Astaroth out of his silent contemplation.

"Shi shi shi shi. I have to admit. As a demon under the aspect of pride, I am impressed to see a mortal who is prideful beyond even my level. To think you deserve to live more than others is a sin."

The demon was floating above Astaroth, in a seated position, looking at the situation from above. An enormous grin floated on his face.

"I'm coming for you soon enough. But first, let me take care of these low-life demons, who are feasting on my dead brother in arms..."

The demon lieutenant looked at him with squinted eyes, with a look of arrogance.

"I like your attitude, mortal. But I'm not going to—"

Before he could finish his sentence, Astaroth had already blurred out from before him and stood across from the division of demons, covered in blood. Behind him, the twenty demons fell to the ground, heads missing.

The demon lieutenant's face lost its grin.

'This mortal is not weak... Why is he in here?' he wondered.

"Impressive. You took them out in a flash. But I am far stronger than them. Can you do so with me as well, I wonder?" the demon taunted.

But his mind was already racing with questions.

The demon lord had promised to match them against officers and powerhouses they were always guaranteed to win against. But he didn't feel confident against this mortal.

His pride didn't allow him to back away or flee. But something was most definitely wrong.

Astaroth bent a knee next to the fallen soldiers of the allied army, closing his eyes momentarily.

"You didn't deserve to die under such terrible commandment. I hope that the goddess of the stars ushers you into the next life with care," he whispered.

The demon, seeing his attention was taken, thought it was a perfect moment to attack.

"Taking your eyes off me. A grave mistake, mortal!" he screamed, as he dove forward, a humongous sword of blood forming in his hands.

He flew directly at Astaroth, swinging his massive weapon, aiming for the mortal's neck. The mortal never opened his eyes, still silently wording a prayer to his fallen comrades.

The demon laughed internally, thinking this dumb mortal had forfeited his life for a stupid prayer that would never be heard. As the blade inched closer to Astaroth's neck, time slowed around him.

The last words he had ushered were not prayers.

"Thousand Thoughts."

Mana burst into his mind, accelerating his thinking speed and time perception. When he opened his eyes, he could see the world so much slower than it was actually going.

With his current stats, he wasn't fast enough to react to such high-speed perception. But he had a solution for that as well.

"Sublimation," he whispered next.

His body surged with power, as almost the entirety of his mana pool converted from mana to Aether, infusing into his every muscle fibre, blood cell, and bone particle. By now, the blade was only inches from his throat.

But it didn't matter how close it was anymore. For even mere inches took many seconds in his accelerated perception, and his body could react fast enough that these many seconds would pass normally for him.

His eyes locked onto the demon's gaze.

"It's your turn, now."

Chapter 614 Torn To Shreds

Astaroth rose to his feet, moving away from the blade, as the demon still moved in his intended direction.

With his fast perception speed, the ten seconds of the skill gave him a thousand seconds' worth of time to act. He rarely ever used all of this time, since it equated to almost seventeen minutes to pass in ten seconds.

But this time, he was going to use all of it.

The demon was already reacting to his movement, but in such a slow manner that it wouldn't matter. To the demon, right now, it looked like Astaroth had suddenly changed into a blur, and was moving so fast he could barely perceive him.

And, Astaroth fully intended to use this perception discrepancy.

Scrolling through his skill list, Astaroth wondered what he would use to make this demon suffer. He wanted it to suffer after it had ordered its underlings to eat the fallen soldiers, instead of ending the fight immediately.

"Hmm. If it likes ordering its underlings to feast on dead enemies, I don't think it can complain if I do the same to it. Right?" Astaroth mused to himself.

But he needed to find a way to pin it down.

Which was easy enough, given his long spell list. He had just the thing.

Astaroth changed his Ad Astra to spell slinger form again and started firing magnetic bullets into the demon. He had scanned it and knew this demon was a constitution-oriented one.

In other words, he was a tank.

So he wouldn't kill it with a few attacks.

Looking at the timer left to his Thousand Thoughts, he saw he had around nine hundred seconds left. This meant only a second had passed for the demon, but almost two minutes had passed for him.

Calculating to himself, he smiled.

"Fifteen minutes. Twelve bullets per minute. I can stop a few seconds before the end and create Synthetic Gravity under it. That should pin it in place. So, let's say a hundred and fifty magnetic bullets in its body and a plate of around five feet by five feet. That should pin it down in place for a while, I imagine," Astaroth mumbled to himself, all the while still firing magnetic bullets into the demon's body, point blank.

From the demon's perspective, everything happened so fast that he didn't know what was happening. Over the next ten seconds, his body was riddled with small puncture wounds, leaving pebble-sized objects in his body.

The damage each did was non-negligible on its own, but not enough to threaten his life.

But it could barely see its assailant, who was moving along with it, constantly out of reach. And after ten seconds, the demon lieutenant felt his body suddenly become infinitely heavier.

It crashed into the ground, feeling like a mountain had been dropped on it.

"What the fuck is happening?!" it shouted, muffled by its own lips having a hard time moving.

Astaroth looked at it, his skill now over, and smiled deviously.

"By my estimates, your body is currently subjected to a hundred times gravity. It's a miracle you haven't turned to paste, let alone retained the ability to complain."

The demon's eyes turned to Astaroth, who had become tangible in his senses again. But it couldn't move.

"What the fuck did you do to me?! How are you controlling gravity?! This is high-level magic!" the demon shouted through semi-closed lips.

"Oh, but not at all. I am not controlling gravity, rather, I merely changed how it is applied to you and this very small area you are in. I am not capable enough to alter gravity itself," Astaroth explained, walking around the demon, seemingly unaffected by the augmented gravity.

He had nothing on him that could react to the magnetic pull. He had stowed anything metallic on him into his inventory, which was already not much.

So he strutted around the pinned demon, unfazed.

"Now. What am I to do to you? I can keep you there for a while, but I wonder what I should do to take revenge on behalf of the fallen soldiers. Any ideas you wish to share?"

The demon seethed with rage, as its body felt like it was about to collapse under its own weight.

"Go to hell!" it spat.

"Soon enough. I'll have to go to kick the ass of your pestilent kind. But for now, I need something more concrete."

Astaroth walked around the demon a few other times, seemingly thinking.

Of course, this was just an act. He had long decided what to do.

But the demon needed to be punished. So he stretched its suffering.

"Oh! I know! You seem to like ordering your underlings to devour your dead foes. How about I do the same for you? Aww, but you aren't dead yet... Hmm," Astaroth hummed, scratching his chin.

"Bah! I don't have enough time to waste by killing you. I think you can handle getting torn to shreds while you live. Don't you?" he asked, his grin stretching.

The demon's eyes went wide, well, as wide as they could, with his eyelids trying to snap shut from the weight.

"What kind of monster are you?!" the demon screamed, panic overcoming it.

No creature, in any world or dimension, wished to go while being eaten alive. This was a horrible way to die.

"Me? A monster? That is rich, coming from an invading demon, who is trying to conquer a world for a master who only wants to feed on it, most likely. And I'm the monster?"

The demon tried swallowing its saliva, but there was nothing to swallow. Its fear had already dried its mouth and throat out.

Astaroth saw the demon was on the verge of a mental breakdown, and he decided now was the time to act.

He summoned Genie and White, setting them loose on the demon's body.

"Tear him to bits. But be careful, he's filled with metallic bullets. Don't break your teeth on those."

Both the wolves howled in delight. Demon meat wasn't tasty, by any means.

But getting to tear one apart, while it couldn't defend itself? That was a treat in itself.

Astaroth sat down on the ground, letting his rage simmer as he watched his companions feast on the screaming demon.

Another part of his soul darkened.

Chapter 615 Taking Control

It took Genie and White half an hour of biting and tearing before the demon finally died. During this, Astaroth contemplated whether he gave the Elf too easy of a way out.

"Maybe I should have done this to it, instead of to the demon. Meh. Too late now."

When the demon finally died, its body pieces dissipated into a puff of black and red smoke. That was when he knew he was done here.

Calling back Genie and White, Astaroth stood back to his feet. He still had a battle to rejoin, so he couldn't dally much longer.

Half an hour had passed, and in war, that was an eternity. Astaroth wondered what had happened on the outside while he was in there.

During the half-hour, Astaroth had assuaged his rage, and let his savage tendencies take over, the battle had rapidly changed.

A lot of the black domes had faded away, with only demons walking out alive, which had quickly sent the allied troops into a perilous battle. When the dome where Phoenix and the rest of the party broke down, she gasped at the madness.

Everyone in the party was still present and accounted for, aside from Astaroth, whom all of them doubted had fallen. But no allied officer was visible anywhere on the ground or in the sky.

Phoenix knew she had to take charge.

She quickly scanned across the battlefield, spotting the demon officers, some of whom were hanging back due to injuries, whilst others were in the thick of battle, overcoming swathes of Humans, Elves, Dwarves, and a plethora of races of the allied troops.

Things were not looking good.

"Alright, listen up, guys! We need to bring this battle back to a steady one. A lot of low-rank officers have been taken out, and the battle is slipping into chaos. This is what the demons want. So let's fuck up their day!" Phoenix hollered.

Everyone in the party seemed more than happy to hear this.

"Jeanne, Jaxx, and Peaceful Grove, you guys are on stabilizing duty. Go around the battlefield and heal the troops. Jaxx, you keep both of them safe. Understood?"

The three players concerned nodded, darting off to get to work.

Jaxx immediately activated his legacy skill, ready to throw down with any demon that would wander too close to his sister and ally.

Phoenix immediately turned her head to the next players.

"Chronos, Food Goblin, Meat-Shield, and Twinxie. You guys are on mobile battle unit duty! I'll guide you where to go, while you guys strike out squads of demons to get our troops on a better footing."

"Aye aye, boss lady!" Food Goblin chirped.

"First go a hundred meters southwest of here. A battalion is getting overrun, so help them out. Be careful, though. You won't have a healer unless Jeanne and Peaceful Grove happen to be near. So don't get reckless."

The four of them nodded, bolting off toward their first assigned location.

Phoenix looked at the remaining three players before her. In terms of power, RedWing might be a bit weaker than Jaxx, but since Jaxx was tankier, he would make better protection for the healers than the Dragonborn.

But she was still happy with her choices.

"The rest of you, you are on hunting duty. I need you to pick off any demon battle officer you can see. Break their chain of command again. Even if it's only temporary, it will buy us time to get some officers back, hopefully. I'll fly around the battlefield and try to get some semblance of order reestablished."

Galtion grinned widely, his eyes squinting through the slit in his full-piece helmet. The spear in his hand crackled with energy before he disappeared, followed by a sonic boom.

Phoenix, Violette, and RedWing had to cover their ears, lest they became deaf.

"Where should I go, Ma'am?" RedWing asked, slightly thrown off to be set loose like this.

"Listen, Tusk, I mean RedWing. You are a lieutenant of Paragons. Get yourself together. You might be in charge of entire parties of our players in the future. I am going to need you to get a sense of tactic for yourself. I can't be holding your hand forever."

Red wing gulped at the chid. But he knew she was right.

Gripping the haft of his greataxe tightly, he nodded. His eyes reflected a growing resolve, as well as nervousness.

But he eventually had to fly on his own. This was his chance.

As he darted off, tentatively using his wings to accelerate his gait, Phoenix turned to Violette, who was still standing next to her.

"Is something wrong, dear?" Phoenix asked her.

"I wonder why Astaroth is taking so long to come out of this bubble, is all. I have a feeling something is up with him. He's been especially violent today. I'm worried about him," Violette replied, her face reflecting her emotions.

Phoenix wanted to reassure her that everything was fine. That Astaroth wasn't acting any differently than usual.

But she would be lying to the girl. And she refused to lie to Violette.

"Astaroth has been on edge lately. A lot of people are trying to harm him, and he has gone on the defensive. This makes him more... reactive than usual. But he will be fine, dear. I trust him. Don't you?"

Violette looked Phoenix in the eyes, trying to find comfort in her words. She found only uncertainty.

But she did trust Astaroth. She trusted him more than many people.

"Okay..." she said with a sigh.

"I do have a question, though," she added.

"Hmm?"

"How loose do you want me to go?"

Phoenix grinned at the little girl's question.

"Give them hell. Send them back home with a fear of water they will remember for eternity," Phoenix replied, patting the girl's head.

Violette's face changed from a mask of worry to an innocent, yet devilish smile.

"Okey dokey!"

Phoenix watched as Violette's form shimmered and grew, until she stood twenty meters high, made of crystal-clear water, and she washed into the demon army, taking with her anything that wasn't an ally.

"She's growing stronger every day. I can't let myself fall behind..." Phoenix said, a smile hanging on her lips.

She had been holding her Avatar of Flames form during all the battle, the power up from consuming fire earlier helping her keep her mana reserves high. But it was time to kick things into higher gear.

"Regulus Battle Regalia," she whispered.

Chapter 616 A Bloody Figure

Slashing his way out of the black dome, Astaroth looked around.

The battlefield hadn't devolved as much as he had expected, but a few details did catch his attention.

First of which, was the three gray names in his party list. Food Goblin, Peaceful Grove, and Meat Shield, all had their names greyed out, with empty health bars.

'Three dead... In half an hour. That's more than I had hoped, but less than I had expected.'

Looking around the battlefield, Astaroth noticed there were very few black domes and bubbles remaining. And what few remained were mostly up in the air.

Using his active mana vision, he spotted the biggest mana signatures across the plains separating the two war camps. He saw so few large signatures that were tainted in black and red demonic mana; he felt disappointed.

'What use is there to have officers if they get slain by the opposition so easily?'

A few of these large mana signatures, he recognized, though. One of them, in particular, was burning a vibrant red, a sign of its fire essence.

Astaroth flew in that direction, using Sky Steps, and stopped near Phoenix, who was assessing the battlefield from an aerial position.

"There you are. Did you get a tough opponent in there?" Phoenix asked when she felt him approach.

"We can say that. What's the situation like?"

Phoenix eyed him with worry, but when she saw his calm face, it subsided.

"We lost Meat-Shield and Food Goblin to a hiding demon officer. He's still roaming about, taking out powerhouses that manage to free themselves from their black prisons. Peaceful Grove died in an AOE attack that wiped out a hundred soldiers. The others are hanging on for now."

Astaroth nodded his head, trying to figure out his role to come.

He hesitated to join the remaining bubbles, lest he fall into a combat way out of his league. But hearing that a stealthy demon was roaming the battlefield, he made it his task to take care of it.

He reactivated his active mana vision and found it lickety-split.

There it was, a faint mana presence, weaving through the battlefield, leaving a trail of blood as it went, striking at vital points, causing many soldiers to fall to their foes. But Astaroth could see him well.

"I'll get that buffoon that's hiding. If you want me to do anything specific, message me," Astaroth said, before bursting away in a wave of wind.

"Wait! How are y—And he's gone..."

She was curious about how he would find him. But if someone could, it would be him.

His uncanny ability to sense mana, where she only felt a faint presence, was tried and tested, after all.

She still had a battle to orchestrate, so she couldn't waste too much time following his progress. But she trusted he would get the job done.

She had to swap around her previous assignments just to compensate for the three dead party members. She would have left things as they were, but more and more attacks were raining on Jeanne and Jaxx, so she couldn't.

'RedWing. Go help Jaxx protect Jeanne. I think the demons are starting to catch on to what she's doing,' she asked him in the party chat.

'On it!'

'Violette, I know you are enjoying the chase right now, but I need you to assist Twinxie and Chronos before they get taken out. You're better at wide-range attacks, so you'll cover a party better than Galtion.'

'Okay!'

She saw the enormous water-elemental-looking Violette spin around, and backtrack toward the pair of mages, and laughed a little.

Galtion was better put to use in these one-versus-one scenarios, with how he fought, so it was better to let him be, for now.

With how few officers made it out of the dark domes alive, it was hard to regain a semblance of a chain of command, and no one seemed to listen to the orders Phoenix gave. It was starting to irk her.

'Can't these fuckers realize I'm trying to guide them to victory?' she wondered, gritting her teeth.

On Astaroth's side, he made a brisk pace toward the invisible demon, and when he caught him with his free hand, the demon yelped in surprise.

It was still invisible, and it looked like Astaroth was raising his hand empty. But he could feel the added weight.

"How are you seeing me?!" the demon whimpered, slashing his knife at Astaroth's arm.

But the dagger strikes barely tickled his massive health pool, as he had melded with White.

"You aren't as hidden as you think, filthy demon. But it's okay. You won't have to hide much longer."

Closing his grip like a vice, Astaroth started repeatedly stabbing his metallic-covered claw into the demon's abdomen, spraying purple-ish blood everywhere.

To the onlookers, it looked like the air itself was spraying blood, covering Astaroth from head to toe.

And when he was done, and the demon died, it reappeared, falling to the ground with a dull thud. Astaroth was covered in grim, and he looked like an incarnation of death or a god of war.

The devilish grin he released only accentuated this effect.

"Come, demons! Come and meet your maker!" he shouted, before bursting into action again.

Astaroth didn't know what was happening to him, that made him feel so violent, but he didn't care. His blood pumped loudly in his ears, as his heart throbbed in excitement.

For every demon he felled, the more excited he felt. It was exhilarating.

The allied soldiers around him dared not stand in his path, lest he treat them as enemies. But one was brave enough to ask him for orders.

"Sir! You must be an officer from another division. Please, tell us what to do!"

Astaroth halted his killing dance to look at the soldier.

The poor man almost fainted when Astaroth's full attention landed on him. Astaroth's blood-covered figure was nightmare-inducing, and his intense glare drove the point even further.

"I'm not here to take command. I'm here to slay demons. You want orders? Follow the ones that the women on fire keeps trying to give you, instead of acting like fools!"

He resumed his massacre, no longer paying the soldiers any mind. But his words nonetheless echoed across the battlefield, and soon enough, reached Phoenix.

She jumped on the chance, and order came back in minutes, as her orders spread amongst the troops on the ground.

'There is still hope, after all. Let's just hope nothing unexpected happens from here on out,' Phoenix mused.

Chapter 617 Pulsing Death

But luck wouldn't be on Phoenix's side. As soon as she thought this, another wave of pure evil mana washed through the battlefield, crashing through the allied troops.

But the difference in power from the first one was too great. Something had changed.

Some of them outright fell unconscious, while others fell to their knees, gasping for air.

It affected the nine remaining players to different degrees, with the ones that couldn't wield mana or had no legacy affected the most—Astaroth, whose control over a stronger source of magic than mana, immediately felt the difference.

'This isn't demonic mana... This is Demonic Aether. Whoever is sending these is not a foe that just anyone can take on...'

A second pulse washed through the battlefield.

Astaroth flew into the sky to see where it came from. And from there, he saw it.

Deep inside the demon war camp. A portal was opening.

One whose size was unlike anything he had seen up to now. And it kept expanding.

With every meter it expanded, another pulse of demonic Aether pulsed out from it, crashing into the allied troops.

The demons were unaffected by it, and only stood by and watched as their enemies started dying on their own, overloaded by a power that was out of their reach. Astaroth caught one of his ally's names graying out and spun his head toward him.

Galtion, who had been zooming through the battlefield up to now, suddenly crashed to his feet, howling in pain, clutching his head, before he exploded into pixels, disappearing from the plain.

The black domes and bubbles that had been containing the high-level fighters of both sides suddenly burst as well. One of which was next to Astaroth's position.

The Elven general, Isarrel, came flying out of it. And when she felt the disturbance in the Aetheric flow around her, her face paled.

Another pulse.

Three other names greyed out from Astaroth's party list. RedWing, Twinxie, and Jeanne collapsed, in the same manner as Galtion just moments ago, and burst into particles.

Only five remained. But for how long?

The general turned to look at Astaroth, who was nearest to her.

"Get your friends and go! People of your power won't resist this for much longer!" she shouted.

And Astaroth agreed with her.

Every wave that pulsed through the battlefield grew stronger, and he could see Violette and Phoenix were already straining to stand upright. Chronos, Jaxx, and himself seemed fine, though.

He nodded toward the general and flew back down to Violette and Phoenix's position.

"We need to leave. Now."

Phoenix looked at him in pain.

"I can keep fighting. Don't worry about me."

But her strained expression belied her true state.

Another pulse.

Phoenix dropped to her knees, and Violette fell unconscious before vanishing in a burst of pixels.

"Stop being stubborn. The next wave will kill you. You don't need to prove anything to me. Just back away, before you die for nothing. This stage still isn't over. We will need everyone we can keep alive."

His words held some truth, and Phoenix knew this. But she hated backing away.

Nonetheless, this wasn't a time when she could afford to be stubborn. She could feel her mind tearing at the seams.

She didn't even respond to Astaroth, before bursting into flames and flying away as fast as she could.

As she did, another wave blasted through the battlefield. By now, any soldier that wasn't an officer, or a powerful mage, had already dropped dead, bleeding from every orifice.

Phoenix managed to escape the range of the pulse and remained alive.

Astaroth flew back up, next to the general, and summoned all his soul companions.

"My allies will be fine. Tell us what we can do to help."

The general looked at him angrily before clicking her tongue.

"I hope your potential doesn't go wasted, you little idiot. Help us clear out the remaining officers. The portal will only expand for so long before it's large enough to let out what is trying to pour out."

"If I may ask, what is that?"

Isarrel looked at him like he was stupid.

"What else could necessitate such a large portal? Or pulse out in such terrifying power? Of course, it's the demon lord. Now get to fighting."

Astaroth's eyes turned to slits.

'Will I get to see what our ultimate foe is like before the fateful fight?' he wondered.

But for now, he had to focus on other enemies.

Looking about, he quickly found a powerful foe to test his mettle against.

He sent a message in the party chat for his allies to see.

'Jaxx. Chronos. Since you two are still combat-ready, help me take down the red fucker that is flying around our dead troops.'

As he sent it, he darted toward the east, heading for the enemy he mentioned.

The demon officer he picked out was a large, red-skinned demon, with wings like a bat, and horns like a mountain goat. In his hand, he held a massive scimitar, as big as himself, and seemingly sharp enough to cut through steel.

But it didn't deter Astaroth.

The demon, feeling a mana signature coming straight at him, spun around to meet the brazen fool who thought he could challenge him. But it surprised him to see a face he had never seen before.

Astaroth dispensed himself with trivialities and directly attacked, not letting the demon get time to berate him. But as his greatsword clashed with the demon's scimitar, he quickly understood he wasn't going to win in a contest of raw strength.

All his momentum was immediately cancelled out, and the demon was even pushing him back. If he were to fight alone, Astaroth could probably not win.

But he wasn't alone.

Shegror looped from the top, slamming into it, as Morpheus blasted the demon's mind with magic, trying to get it closer to the ground.

White Death, Genie, Luna, and Jaxx arrived simultaneously, waiting for the demon to be within reach. As for Chronos, he stood further back, already tugging at the time web, trying to reach the right thread.

Scanning his enemy, Astaroth understood this wouldn't be an easy fight.

Chapter 618 Changing Situation

**

Demon Colonel Mel'gaz

Level: 125

Grade: Rare (Zone Boss)

Health: 20,521,200

Mana: 72, 200

**

Even with his entire party, Astaroth doubted they would have taken down such a foe. And by his rank alone, he knew this wasn't the top dog.

Somewhere on the battlefield, or still in the demon war camp, was a general who could wipe the floor with this demon like it was child's play.

Maybe it was luck at play that they hadn't crossed paths yet. Or maybe the general was waiting for something strong enough to fit it.

It was better if they didn't cross paths, anyway.

Astaroth peppered the Colonel with attacks, using the weight of his greatsword, combined with well-placed uses of Sky Steps, as well as Propel, to put weight and momentum in his weapon. But the demon intercepted them like they were nothing, his scimitar barely moving an inch on every impact.

Astaroth's hands were already starting to feel numb. It was like he was hitting a concrete wall with a stick.

Mel'gaz smirked at him.

"Alright, mortal child. Enough playing. Let me show you a true strike."

His deep voice vibrated inside Astaroth's head as a sudden pressure descended on him.

The movement of the demon's sword was quasi-instantaneous, and Astaroth barely had the time to lift his sword in defence. But it was futile.

The scimitar smacked into his greatsword, bushing it into him, and blasting him back.

-24,584

Astaroth flew off like a cannonball, barely able to control his flight, only to notice the demon was already right over him.

'Fuck!' Astaroth cursed in his mind.

'I can't go blow for blow against him. I have to dodge and parry, or I will be dead faster than I can notice.'

The first blow had already taken two-thirds of his health, since he wasn't melded right now. He could not afford to take a second one.

It was a good thing his parry was considered successful, taking away fifty percent of the original amount of damage, before his Mana Skin and armour took away another part, and his natural resistance took away another small chunk.

He could guess the blow had dealt around eighty thousand damage, flat, before all this. And he felt no mana or energy coating the attack.

That had been just a normal blow.

As the blade dropped toward him again, Astaroth melded with Luna. He couldn't afford to hold back.

His power surged, forcing the demon back a bit, raising an eyebrow in surprise.

But Astaroth wasn't done.

"Royal Protection!"

His body exploded in power once more, as his grade suddenly jumped from Special to Legendary. He had never felt this powerful before.

The added stats on Luna ever since her absorption of her birth parents, and now the surge in power from reaching this high of a grade, his mind and body reached a state it had never reached before.

Time felt like it had gone to a crawl, as his perception accelerated beyond normal means, almost reaching the same speed as when he used Thousand Thoughts. And his body felt light, almost like he was a feather in the wind.

He watched as the blade of the giant scimitar was coming towards him and smiled.

Astaroth raised a hand, projecting a bubble of mana, forming a flat barrier in front of him to block the blade.

A loud clang resounded as the scimitar collided into the barrier, halting.

The demon's eyes went wide. He had expected the mortal to be stronger, given the surge in power, but this went beyond his expectations.

To stop his blade like this, with a mere barrier, was not something anyone could do.

The Colonel quickly understood that the situation had changed. And he laughed maniacally in response.

"Ah ha ha! Ah ha! AH HA HA HA HA! YES! FINALLY A WORTHY OPPONENT!"

Red flames appeared on the demon's skin, as he blurred out of Astaroth's vicinity. Astaroth could see him, with his mana senses, but his body could not follow such a speed.

The Colonel was moving much too fast for him to catch up. But that didn't mean he was getting overpowered.

Barriers started appearing around Astaroth, one after another, before a loud boom echoed, as a blur passed by, and the barrier shattered. Jaxx, as well as Astaroth soul companions, halted their advance.

There was nothing they could do any more in this fight.

But they weren't immobile for long, that already the foot soldiers nearby decided to play with them. So they had to defend themselves.

"Just how fucking powerful is he going to get?!" Jaxx shouted at Chronos.

Chronos himself was more than impressed by the level of power Astaroth was displaying. He was almost on a par with the enemy he was battling.

Of course, he could see the demon's thread wrapping around Astaroth's more and more. So he knew the demon was still overpowering him.

But it would take much more time, in his opinion.

Chronos stopped paying mind to the two monsters smacking into each other like tops in a bowl and focused on the incoming demon foot soldiers.

All this time, the pulsing of demonic Aether never stopped, pulsing out every ten seconds, sending more allied soldiers and officers to death's door.

But the top officers of the allied army didn't seem worried. Like they knew something that no one else knew.

But General Isarrel, who was still busy fighting off Lieutenant Colonel Belenos, couldn't believe what was happening not far from her.

A weak Ash Elf, who was so many levels under her, at the same range as the foot soldiers of their army, was holding off a colonel of the demon army. This was unheard of.

The power-up he had gone through would make even the most altruistic person greedy for his power. She almost hoped he would die in this war.

Such a powerful person, who could still grow, would shatter the balance of power in the world. Wars would be fought in hopes of garnering his favour.

But deep down, she had a feeling he wouldn't be here once the fight died down. Like a foreboding feeling, that this man wasn't supposed to be here at all.

'Let's hope I'm not wrong...'

Chapter 619 Pulling The Web

Astaroth frowned as the combat stretched from seconds to minutes. He realized he was only on the defensive and couldn't do much more.

The more time passed, the closer Mel'gaz got to him. His incessant taunting was also annoying.

"Come on, mortal! Give me something more than just a barrier to play with! All this power at your disposal, and you hide behind walls! Don't be a coward!"

Astaroth figured he could fight him mano-a-mano if he wanted to. But then, would he be able to win?

Right now, his best bet was buying time.

Back over the hill, almost a mile away, Phoenix had finally reached an area where the pulses of demonic Aether no longer reached. But she was devastated.

"Can I really do nothing? This can't be right..."

It repugned her to be pushed out of the equation like this. Even if she knew she would get stronger, in time, it annoyed her that two players who were weaker than her were unaffected by the pulses.

It felt like a slap to her face. Something of a, 'You haven't reached this level yet.'

She worked her brain and thought hard on possibilities infinite. But she couldn't think of a way to push back the Aether that would assault her as soon as she walked into range again.

She was so far; she could not see or sense what was happening. She only found out about Astaroth's power-up through the party screen, which showed him suddenly in the millions of HP.

Phoenix loathed her situation. She needed to find a solution to her inability to help.

Waves of demonic foot soldiers constantly surrounded Jaxx and Chronos, back on the battlefield, and the situation wasn't ideal. Astaroth had commanded Shegror, Genie, and White to help them, but it was barely enough.

What few officers of the allied army remained were all preoccupied with their own foe. This had all the makings of a losing battle.

But no order of a retreat ever came.

Jaxx stopped near Chronos, who had a few demons hounding him, and cleared him of pursuers before asking, "Why are we still here?"

Chronos looked at him, his head tilted.

"This fight isn't lost yet. Reinforcements are coming."

Jaxx looked at him, question marks all over his face.

"What are you talking about? What reinforcements? Who could come at this point that would change anything to this losing battle?"

But Chronos only smiled mysteriously in response.

In his vision, seven threads in the time web were shining like lighthouses, as they threaded into the flow of time that led here. That was how he knew.

But they wouldn't get here for another half hour.

Of course, these were estimations. The ebb and flow of time was unpredictable and changed faster than anything else in the universe.

A single decision could alter it forever, in unimaginable ways.

It had already changed so many times in the last hour that he could barely keep up.

And right in front of his eyes, it changed again.

A pulse of mana washed over the battlefield, coming from the opposite direction from the portal. It made Astaroth frown.

Not because it was strange. But because he recognized its signature.

'How did Phoenix get a pulse of mana sense so far from herself? Did she unlock a new skill?'

Another washed over them again, and he received a notification.

It was a message.

'Astaroth, I found a way to help. Can you restrain the demon you are fighting for a few seconds?'

Astaroth grinned to himself.

'I'm not sure. But I will try. I'll tell you when I can pin him down.'

'No need. I'll see it,' she replied.

Astaroth suddenly had a reason to stop being on the defensive. If Phoenix insisted she could help, then he trusted her judgement.

As the demon colonel dived at him once again, Astaroth raised a barrier, but instead of away from him, he hugged it to his body. The demon saw this as an opportunity and dived right at him.

"Have you finally decided to fight me like a man?!" he howled, as his giant scimitar slashed at Astaroth.

Astaroth let the blade crash against his barrier, feeling it pass through it, before cutting into his armour.

Mel'gaz, seeing he was finally getting in striking range, had pumped more power into his strike, and the attack carved right through the barrier. But Astaroth's smile at being hit pulled up so many red flags in the demon's mind.

But before he could back away, barriers were already pushing into him, wrapping around him like a bubble.

"What are you doing?! Let me go and fight me like a true warrior!" the demon growled in rage.

But Astaroth snickered in response.

"I don't have to fight you on fair grounds, fiend. I was just gift-wrapping you for a friend."

"Huh? What are you even saying?! Rele—"

But as he shouted, he felt a burst of magic erupting far away, and coming toward him. Mel'gaz's face grew pale.

He immediately put all his power into breaking free from the barriers restraining him. It took him less than two seconds.

But as the barriers shattered, he felt his body lurch to a stop. Time seemed to have stopped around him.

'What is going on?!' he shouted inside his mind.

Chronos was looking straight at him, sweating bullets as holding on to the time thread of an entity so much more powerful than he was straining. But he wasn't done.

He reached out toward the direction of the magic, burst and pulled on the air.

A wave of power left his body, expanding like a bubble around him, and everyone caught inside suddenly stopped moving. Swords halted, spells stood still, and people became statues.

Astaroth was affected by this too, but he could see it wasn't a full stop. His heightened perception allowed him to see objects still moving.

Like the massive flaming spear coming at the demon, moving ever so slightly.

That was also why he knew the spear wouldn't be strong enough to even threaten its target. But he could fix that.

Astaroth willed his mana to change to Aether, and commanded it to fill up the flaming spear. He watched, his body still barely moving, as the spear grew in size a thousandfold.

But another issue cropped up.

The demon could move out of the strike zone before it hit as soon as the time slow ended.

He needed to remedy that.

'Guess I'll take one for the team...'

Chapter 620 The World Weeps

Chronos wasn't able to slow time this much for long. As soon as he weakened beyond the power he needed to hold this spell, it dissipated. But his hold on Mel'gaz held for another second.

In this single second, Astaroth wrapped his arms under Mel'gaz's arms, locking him in place with barrier after barrier, locking them together. He resolved himself to take the hit as well, as long as it took down this enemy.

The spear of flames, which now was the size of a telephone pole, crashed into the exposed demon's chest before exploding.

The battlefield flashed white, forcing everyone to cover their eyes.

From afar, Phoenix watched as a mushroom cloud erupted from the battlefield's direction. She knew her power alone wasn't enough to cause this and assumed something else had happened after her spell hit.

But she was already falling unconscious, from using all her mana to throw this attack.

'I hope this was enough to help...'

A mile away from her, the dust settled from an explosion that outright wiped out Chronos and Jaxx, along with Mel'gaz and any soldier that had stood in a two-hundred-meter radius.

Astaroth dropped to his knees, exhausted, wounded, but laughing.

His health was almost at zero, and he was burnt beyond recognition on the front. The act of laughing hurt him while he collapsed onto his back.

"I may have exaggerated the power I poured into the spear. But it worked..."

As he said these words, mostly for himself, a pulse of demonic Aether washed through the battlefield again. But this time, his heart beat in tempo.

And the pulses happened, one after another, as his heart beat in his chest, resounding in his ears.

'He's coming. Will I get to see him?'

But as the portal finally expanded one more time, reaching into the sky at an impressive three hundred meters high, a hand grasped at the edge of it, from the inside.

A pure black hand.

In the sky above the portal, seven flashes of various colours caught the attention of the allied army officers who were still alive.

"Finally. They move at the last second, fucking progenitors..." Isarrel mumbled as she kicked the enemy before her.

"Everyone retreat! Now!" she shouted.

Every officer still alive suddenly burst into action, using spells, skills, and items, to disappear from the battlefield.

And as they did, a gigantic septagram appeared in the sky above the portal. The different coloured points all joined in the middle, where they merged in a white heptagon.

In the middle of this heptagon, a white ring appeared, seemingly made of runes. The runes flashed, and another similar ring appeared, touching each point of the septagram.

Then it flashed again, another ring of runes appearing even bigger than the second, covering the entire sky of the region.

In the sky, standing atop each point of the septagram, was a single person, each of a different race, each wearing robes of different accents. But all of them had one thing in common.

Their shining eyes.

Their voices chanted as one.

"World Magic; Eternal Banishment!"

As if reacting to their magic, the world itself became silent. The demons moved their lips, but no sound came.

The stomping of feet from the remaining foot soldiers was completely silent.

Spells fused upward, only to dissipate before even reaching the Septagram.

The first sound to come back was a whining shrill. And it became louder, and louder, until it stopped, and the portal exploded.

The continent on which this happened, which was now called the dark continent, was changed forever.

The skies became covered in eternal darkness; as the sun refused to shine on it, clouds of red perpetually encapsulated it. The land itself drained from the very life essence that had been maintaining it, becoming barren.

Grass died, trees dried, and flowers rotted, as the ever-pervasive essence of what had been forever banished seeped into the earth, forever corrupting it.

The explosion killed any living thing within a hundred-mile radius of it, wiping the slate clean of any demonic invasion.

Once the spell died down, every mage around the planet could feel the world cry in pain. Magic weakened, growing crops wilted, and animals around the world echoed in the world's pain.

The seven mages that had caused this, the progenitors, looked down at the devastation with glum expressions.

None of them were content with what they had to resort to. But the demon lord could not be allowed into their dimension, or things would be infinitely worse.

"We had no choice," an Elven man said, his face turned to a Fey woman.

"I know, Aravelle. But the world weeps. We have forever scarred it with this. And I fear the repercussions on us, for wounding it..."

"We shall forever atone for this to it, Necen. Rest assured," a stout-looking dwarf said.

"I only hope that is enough, Beseag..." Necen replied.

"Let us leave this tainted place. I can feel it doing ravages on my skin already," a human woman complained.

"Always so vain, Edith. It's a miracle you don't live in a place made of mirrors..." a gnome with burnished skin said, half chuckling.

"You really can't talk to me about being vain, Hispos. You made all your servants call you 'Most Handsome Master'... That's far more vain than I," Edith replied, looking at the gnome with disdain.

"Hey! I'm not forcing them to say that. I may have programmed it at first, but they have long since become sentient enough to no longer use it..." The gnome, Hispos, defended himself.

Edith clicked her tongue.

The two last ones looked at the interaction and decided not to chime in, simply teleporting away.

Aravelle sighed.

"Always so distant, those two. I understand for Sensez, since her voice could curse people around her, even though she could hardly affect us. But why Egbert? You'd expect a vampire to be more sociable..." he complained.

For seven equals, in the eyes of the world, they rarely, if ever, treated themselves as such. But they couldn't act upon each other to set opinions right.

"Whatever the case may be, we should make reparation for our actions today. Necen. Find us a way to give back to the world, so she doesn't shun us for eternity."

Necen nodded her head, before vanishing in a cloud of purple and pink mist.

The others followed suit, and the sky emptied out, leaving nothing but destruction behind.