

## **New Eden 91**

### Chapter 91 Start Of Phase Two

With flashes of white light, Astaroth reappeared on the platform they had appeared the first time. Astaroth looked around, as other players were already here, and more were appearing by the second.

It didn't take long before all the remaining five hundred players were present. As soon as the last one appeared, the face of chairwoman Constantine popped up in the sky again.

As she did, she also clapped her hands to garner attention.

\*Clap\*

"Welcome back to all of you. I can see some determined looks on your faces, so let us get to phase two quickly." She said.

After saying that, the image in the sky split up, to reveal a board with the names of the players, separated into five tiers. In the last tier, only five names showed up.

The names were Astaroth, Athena Woodland, Gulnur Deepshield, I'die Ad-Tempus, and Phoenix. Some players present gasped when they saw the last name.

They all wondered how the player in the second position of the level rankings could be in the last tier of points. All five in the last tier had zero points.

That effectively meant they had killed no players during the first phase. Most of the participants had the same thought at that moment.

"Those five hid for the first phase."

They were wrong but none of the five concerned were going to say anything to disprove it. To them, this was a tactical advantage.

No one would suspect their power if everyone already thought they were weak cowards. Gulnur was the only one about to contest this, but he received a sharp glare from Phoenix that instantly shut his mouth.

The chairwoman also knew this, and was currently tweaking the team-building algorithm, so that these five players were mixed with the weakest top-tier players.

She had seen what all five of them were capable of, and this was one of the few ways to balance out the power of the teams.

While the players were snickering and glaring in condescension, the screen with the tiers switched out. What replaced it was a screen showing the teams as they were picked.

The five teams that were paired with the lowest-tiered players were grumbling in frustration, sure that they were going to get knocked out of the competition already.

Once all the teams were decided, chairwoman Constantine clapped her hands again.

"Alright, now that this has been settled, the first round of fighting matches will soon begin. We assigned all teams a number. When your number is called, you will be teleported to the arena. Good luck to you all, and may the strongest prevail!" She exclaimed, lifting her arms high.

The board in the sky started showing the numbers next to the teams, and soon after, it swapped to show the first two opposing teams.

As a matter of fate, or bad luck, one of the first teams to fight was Astaroth's team. There was a timer that showed under the team numbers, and it was set at five minutes.

That meant that Astaroth had only five minutes to get to know his temporary allies. He was slightly sad that he couldn't keep the party members he had earlier, but this was how it went.

He was teleported to one side of a vast arena, and next to him were three people he didn't know, and one person he had not expected to be paired with.

The top-tier player assigned to his team was Morticia, a heavenly thousand player, from ToB. In this game, she had chosen Fey as her race, and he could now see her class too.

She had chosen Psychic, and the choice did not surprise him. In ToB, Morticia had played Mind-Bender, which was the equivalent of Psychics in this game.

It was her type of gameplay, and Astaroth instantly knew he had a powerful ally. But he wondered one thing.

'Why was she at the bottom of the top-tier list?'

To him, it didn't add up. He knew Morticia was a powerful player, and an excellent pro player at that.

It made little sense that she would be at the lower end of that ranking. And then it clicked.

'She must have played conservatively.'

It made sense if she did. The algorithm that set the teams would try to balance the power levels. If she underplayed her hand, she would end up with better teammates.

Astaroth knew she was shrewd, but this was beyond shrewdness. The amount of thought it took to deduce that in the few minutes of the introduction was insane.

'What a wicked woman.' He thought.

He looked around the rest of his team, and most of them were random players that had made it to high levels in time to be in the tournament, but didn't look like pro players.

His team was composed of Morticia, the Fey Psychic; Anton, a Demonoid Monk; Gabriel Lightshield, a Human Paladin; Helena Hawkeye, a Human Archer; and himself.

They were well-balanced, in terms of classes, but he could easily see where the power focused. He knew none of these three other players, and their gear was subpar.

Of course, gear-wise, he wasn't any better, but he knew he could wipe the floor with these three on his own. It augured badly.

As he was analyzing their strategies in his mind, Anton, the Demonoid, walked up to him.

"Hey, weakling! Don't get in my way! Understood?!" The man told him, with a heavy Russian accent.

Astaroth, who was too busy thinking, didn't even hear him speak. This caused the misunderstanding that he was ignoring Anton, and that angered the latter man.

Just as he was about to punish his impudence, a soft hand landed on Anton's shoulder. It was Morticia's hand.

She looked at Anton with sweet eyes and simply shook her head.

Anton took it for a 'Don't waste your energy' head shake, and huffed, before walking back to talk with the other 'Useful' members of this team.

Morticia watched him walk away before her smile dropped. She looked back at Astaroth, and in her eyes, the look was one of worry.

She had a bad feeling about Astaroth. He looked sturdy enough to her.

She couldn't understand how someone that gave off his aura had no points from the first round. It made her think he might have done like her and massively underplayed.

Morticia would not call him out on it though. It meant a possible wild card for their team.

As she was about to ask him what he was thinking about, the timer ran out and a loud dong echoed in the arena.

The match was about to start.

Chapter 92 A Monster Is Born

The loud dong snapped Astaroth out of his musings. He could now see the opposing team, across from them, on the other side of the very large arena.

The other teams were in bleachers all around the arena, which gave it a colosseum feel. Astaroth didn't enjoy performing before an audience, but he had long since coped with that.

Since his dream had always been to become a pro player, he knew it would happen, eventually. And since he had already taken part in small tournaments with a public in ToB, so he was a little prepared.

That's when he noticed Morticia side-eying him, and the three other players that were ignoring him entirely. This was to be expected, because of his score, but it made him chuckle.

'They are in for a rude awakening.' He thought to himself, grinning.

As the two parties started running towards each other, Astaroth directly used Spirit Melding. His hair turned white as fur grew on his arms and face and he howled to the sky.

The howling wasn't necessary, but he was using it to garner attention. He had decided that this match was his coming out ceremony.

As all the players in the bleachers, and also the ones in the arena, turned to look at him, Morticia instantly understood her earlier worry.

Since they were playing as a team, she could see his stats when she scanned him. So she instantly fell into shock.

'So powerful!' She thought.

Astaroth, meanwhile, dashed straight at the enemy players. The team against him was filled with players he didn't know.

Even the top-tier player was someone who was probably just lucky enough to pick off weakened players in phase one. He looked weak and brittle.

Astaroth recognized his attire as the equipment of a caster, and directly lunged for him. As he dived through the ranks of the enemy team, they tried taking swings at him, but he was moving much too fast for them.

In mere moments, he reached their back line. And when he did, he grabbed the caster by the throat and slammed him into the ground.

That slam alone came with such force that it took away half of the player's health bar. The rest of which, Astaroth swiped away from him with a quick claw swipe to the face.

The player looked at Astaroth's furry face in horror as he burst into particles.

Astaroth turned around, grinning madly.

"One down. Four to go." He threatened.

Immediately after his threat, he used Alpha's Howl. And with the fear he had already stricken in his opponents, the skill instantly took hold.

All of them froze in terror.

Astaroth wouldn't lose a second of the fear effect, as he dashed to the next player in the back line, what looked to be a priest. He was running so fast that to most players; he was practically a blur.

When he reached the priest, he pulled out his war axe, and used Severing Strike, causing a critical hit, and emptying that player's health bar in a single strike.

"And another down." Astaroth said.

He spun around quickly, but his fear effect was wearing off. The three remaining opponents were front-line fighters, with one of them being a tank.

Astaroth saw the tank face back to the rest of his party, intent on keeping them from reaching him to reinforce him.

'What a fool.' He thought, snickering.

His own teammates were also just standing at their end of the arena, in a stupor. He was pretty sure they would not try to reinforce him, anyway.

Astaroth glanced at the three nobodies in his party. The Paladin and the Archer were wearing looks of dumbfoundedness, while Anton was seething in rage.

Astaroth guessed Anton was trying to prove himself here, and he had just stolen his chance. But he couldn't care less.

With their tank facing the opposition, the two other remaining players of the enemy team were now walking towards him, with looks of total concentration.

They knew he could outrun them, so they were going for a pincer move, trying to pin him down and pummel him to death.

They couldn't see his health number, just that the bar was full. They assumed by the damage he did, that he had put all into his attack stats, and that his health would be low.

Astaroth played into their game.

As they both split up to get him from the flanks, he didn't even move. He just looked at them, one after the other, grinning madly.

When they both thought it was now or never, they nodded at each other. Right after that, they dashed at Astaroth, weapons cocked.

As they reached him, Astaroth had still yet to move. He waited.

Both players thought they had stunned him with their pincer move and smiled, as their two weapons collided with Astaroth's armor.

Or at least they thought they did. But then they saw the slight shimmer off of Astaroth's body, and the abysmal damage they caused him.

\*-234!\* \*-236!\*

The damage numbers felt so small compared to what they were expecting, especially for critical hits! Then they looked up at his bar.

The damned thing had barely budged! They had done only three percent damage!

Fear gripped them, as they understood why Astaroth hadn't moved. He wasn't surprised; he was just looking down on them, and with reason.

'Monster!' They both thought.

But before they pull back from him, Astaroth put them out of their misery. He swapped out his war axe for his daggers and sliced the two players multiple times in a second.

As they burst into particles, the remaining player on their team saw their names turn grey. He turned around to see what was happening, only to end up face-to-face with a grinning beast-man.

Astaroth had again swapped out weapons, this time to his longsword, which he swiftly stabbed through the tank, shoving it out of his back.

The tank looked in disbelief, as his health bar drained away slowly, after losing an eighth with the stab. He shook himself back to reality, and kicked off of Astaroth, to take some distance.

But Astaroth wouldn't let him off that easily. He chased him around and sliced at him repeatedly until the player burst into particles himself.

The whole fight lasted only for two minutes, as Astaroth turned back into his normal self, looking at the silent crowd. He went all in and pulled out a quote from a popular movie.

"What!? Are you not entertained!?" He shouted, lifting his arms high.

Not more than a second after, the entire crowd erupted in cheers.

'And, scene.' He thought, smiling to himself.

Chapter 93 Emerging Pattern

With the crowd still cheering, Astaroth and his teammates were teleported outside the arena, into a spot in the bleachers. They were all grouped, and they could now watch all the other fights happening.

Astaroth sat down to enjoy the show, but before he could, a certain Demonoid in his team stomped his way before him.

"You! You stole my spotlight! How can a weakling like you kill those five players so fast!? You cheated for sure!" Anton shouted in Astaroth's face.

The Archer woman and the Paladin weren't talking, but by the looks they were throwing at Astaroth, he could guess they had similar thoughts. He didn't feel like arguing, so he tried to brush it off.

"You are the one that assumed I was weak. I said nothing of the sort." Astaroth responded, trying to sound as passive as he could.

"Stop lying! How did you kill them?! I don't want to play alongside a cheater!" Anton kept yelling.

"Let's cool down and talk like civilized beings." Morticia said, trying to diffuse the situation.

"Bug off, you second-rate pro player!" Anton spat out at her.

Morticia's face went sombre at the comment. Astaroth could see the mana around her head coalesce, and he acted before she did.

He quickly stood, pushing his chest into Anton's with enough force to push him off balance and tumbling backwards down the next set of seats.

By the time he was getting back up, Anton already had Astaroth's war axe under his chin.

"Still think I'm weak?" Astaroth said, with a snide smile.

But before Anton could even reply, a wave of pain assaulted his head. It was like a sledgehammer had just landed right in his brain.

He clutched his head, screaming in pain, as his eyes, nose, and ears started bleeding.

"Call me a second-rate player again. I dare you!" Astaroth heard Morticia say, from behind him.

When he turned his head, he could see the rage in her eyes, and the intense look of concentration she had, that was pointed directly at Anton.

Anton couldn't even muster a reply, as her psychic attack assaulted his brain. He tried, but the words came out as an indelible jumble of letters.

After a few seconds of mental torture, much bleeding and a small puddle of piss under Anton, she let go of the mental attack. The poor Demonoid collapsed to the ground, convulsing slightly.

"You know he won't take this lightly, right?" Astaroth asked Morticia.

"I know, but I don't care. He can try to fight me all he wants. Posers like him always bark and don't bite." She responded, sitting down.

The other two players in their team were now slightly shaking, happy they hadn't voiced their opinions.

'Monsters!' They thought, gulping.

Astaroth turned his head to the arena. He had seen the number of the next team, and from what he garnered through the interface, the next two teams fighting were a team of random players against the team Gulnur was in.

It seemed weird that the first two combats included a team with one of them in it. He looked up at the skies, hoping to see the chairwoman's face still there, but it wasn't.

Unbeknownst to him, the chairwoman was also looking at him through her monitor, from Evo-Gaming's HQ. When Astaroth looked to the sky, their eyes met, metaphorically, and she shivered a bit.

The other player she then focused on was a pale-skinned man with black eyes. He also lifted his eyes to the sky, but unlike Astaroth's questioning gaze, Khalor had an evil grin plastered on his lips.

The grin sent all kinds of bad vibes to Constantine, who switched her viewpoint back to the arena. She snapped her fingers without looking away from her screen.

Her assistant walked up to her and bowed.

"Pull out all the information we have on the players named Khalor and Astaroth, ASAP. Something about them feels off." Constantine ordered her minion.

"Yes, Ma'am." The assistant said, leaving the room promptly.

'Who are you two, and how are you becoming so strong this fast?' She muttered under her breath.

She knew from a glance that player Khalor had already unlocked some content that shouldn't be available yet, and that explained his overwhelming power.

But as far as she could tell, player Astaroth was still playing a standard class. It made no sense how he could be this strong already.

A few minutes later, her assistant came back with a small data storage chip, and she bowed, extending the chip to her boss.

"This is all we have in our systems, ma'am. Any further information will have to be investigated externally." The assistant said.

"That won't be necessary for now. Thank you." Constantine replied, taking the data chip.

She plugged it into her computer and browsed the files. Nothing out of the ordinary popped out at first, but then a detail caught her eye.

Player Khalor had unlocked a legacy, which wasn't yet available content, through what seemed like sheer luck at first. But after analyzing his path, Constantine noticed something odd.

Every quest the player took, put him closer to the legacy, and after finding it, every subsequent move brought him closer to unlocking it. It was like he knew exactly what to do.

"Hmm." She hummed.

She lifted her hand again, and her assistant walked forward.

"Ignore my earlier statement. I want you to investigate this player, player Khalor. His movements are too precise to be a coincidence." Constantine ordered.

"Yes, ma'am." The assistant replied before leaving the room.

Constantine focused back on the fight going on, and to no surprise, it was just over already, with the team hosting the dwarf named Gulnur being the crushing victors.

"These players are strong. Not abnormally so like Khalor, but strong enough to be top tier." Constantine said, nodding her head.

In the arena, the public was in upheaval again. What they had witnessed made no sense.

They had watched a unilateral fight, where the tank on one side forced three melee players into hitting him exclusively, for thirty seconds, before whipping around and one-shotting a berserker.

This had let the rest of his team take down the back line, and then quickly wipe out the two remaining players.

And all of that looked like it barely took away any health from the dwarven tank. Armor alone couldn't explain how strong a defence that required.

The dwarf had blocked almost all the hits coming his way, parrying others with his mace, taking no direct body hit. It was like he was a master martial artist, playing with kids.

That instilled fear in the other parties. A pattern was emerging, plain as day, for all to see.

The players in the last tier were menacingly strong.

Chapter 94 Pattern Comfirmed

After glancing at the sky, Astaroth returned to watching the match. Even though he was happy for Gulnur's team winning, he was far from surprised by the outcome.

After fighting with the dwarf for hours in the underzone, he had seen many of his tricks and skills, and knew the calibre of his tanking abilities.

So when he flipped the combat in a one-eighty, by wiping the floor with a player, Astaroth merely shrugged and laughed.

As soon as the fight finished, Astaroth rose to his feet, looking around to see where Gulnur's team was teleported. Luckily for him, they were not all the way across from him.

He walked in their direction, avoiding the clusters of players forming the other teams as much as possible, making his way over to his dwarvish friend.

It didn't take long for him to reach them, as they were pretty nearby. He stopped a few steps away from them, as four players eyed him warily.



When Gulnur noticed his teammates had become silent, he spun around to see what they were looking at.

"Ahh! Astaroth! Come to congratulate me?" Gulnur said with a slight smirk.

He was mostly cocky with his teammates because they originally had the same reaction as Astaroth's teammates. But now they were all over him, asking how he became that strong and many other questions.

Astaroth's arrival pulled their attention from him, even if only temporarily. Gulnur knew they would have even more questions, now that they knew that he and Astaroth were acquainted.

"Actually, I haven't." Astaroth replied, a smirk on his lips.

"I came here to say that was slow. I'm sure you could have ended that quicker." Astaroth taunted.

"Hey, man. I can't show off in the first round like you just did." Gulnur said, raising his hands.

"I wouldn't want to show all my hand so early." He added.

"Oh? But did I show my entire hand?" Astaroth questioned with a grin.

"I guess that's up to the others to see." Gulnur replied, grinning too.

He had caught on to what Astaroth was trying to do, so he chimed in. Astaroth was speaking rather loudly, for someone who was just coming to tease.

He immediately understood it was a scare tactic.

Astaroth was happy that his dwarven friend understood the hidden strategy here, as it made his work easier.

If all the surrounding players heard their conversation, then they would all fight cautiously against the others from their party. But it would also put them on edge for the next fight against them again.

The next fight was already ongoing, in the meantime, and the next player from their earlier party was Phoenix. The team against hers was already weary since she was a top player.

The fact she was part of that mystery five-player group only added to their fears. And their fears were not unwarranted.

As soon as their fight started, Phoenix cast a firewall around her prey. Once that was set in place, the five enemy players did not know if they should pass through or not.

Phoenix wouldn't let them think on it too long though, as she started spinning her hands in a circular motion. Astaroth, who was side-eying the show, was not unfamiliar with that move.

He stopped talking to Gulnur and turned to look at the arena. He watched in awe, as his mana sense showed him the way Phoenix weaved the mana into this spell.

He could see her using her mana, spinning it around the fire-wall, some of it going into the flames, feeding them, and the rest pushing the fire into a spinning motion.

Astaroth could see signs of exhaustion creeping up on her features already, proving how taxing this was on her mana lobe, but she pushed on.

It took only ten seconds for her fire wall to become a flaming tornado. As soon as the tornado reached the arena's barrier ceiling, Phoenix started pushing the tornado walls inwards.

Soon after, screams and wails of pain came from inside the blazing inferno, and it took mere seconds for the enemy team to be wiped out.

And just like that, Phoenix wiped out a team on her own, just like Astaroth. The crowd became silent at the show of force they noticed.

With that fight, the pattern they all thought was forming confirmed itself. The five players in the last tier were all monsters.

Phoenix was drenched in sweat on the stage, as she glanced at the bleachers, finding Astaroth with her eyes. She grinned at him, almost as if saying 'You're not the only one who can solo a team.'

Astaroth grinned back, accepting her silent challenge. This tournament was decidedly more interesting than all the previous ones he had ever taken part in.

The next two fights cemented every player's fears, as Athena and I'die also crushed their opposition, each in their own way.

Athena ran around the entire arena, making arrows rain on her enemies non-stop, as her allies tried to help take down the enemy. They only ended up holding the tank in place, while Athena wiped out the entire team.

As for I'die, he didn't want to deal damage himself, so he instead invoked thick vines from the ground, ensnaring all five players on the opposing team. His allies then wantonly massacred them.

The fights that came after were much lacklustre, even when a top player like Azamus was part of it. It was like the first five combats had set the bar too high.

Azamus was fuming in anger when the crowd reacted so poorly to his own prowess like it was child's play. He locked his eyes on the player that started this horrible trend, Astaroth.

He had hatred in his eyes, as he recognized the noob that had flung him away like a vulgar football. He silently vowed to make him pay, after making the Necromancer pay, too, for playing with him.

That Necromancer was currently wiping the floor with his opposition too, as he summoned endless waves of undead. Even if their individual levels and strength were subpar, there was a quality in quantity.

Soon after, the first round of combat of the second phase ended. Only fifty teams were left already, out of the twenty that would go to the next phase.

## Chapter 95 Waiting Time

During the first round, the only other match that brought the onlookers to the edge of their seats was the one with Khalor, the Necromancer. His onslaught of minions, ghosts, skeletons, zombies, ghouls, and many more, all painted him as an evil player.

Yet, what really depicted him like that was his lack of restraint. When his undead started swarming the enemy players, many times, his allies also got hit.

He didn't even try to stop it from happening, and after his match, he had killed all his teammates. Luckily for them, they were respawned because of his victory.

They angrily shouted at him, as they cursed and threatened, only to be put to silence when Khalor's death knight finally drew his halberd.

But the situation didn't escape the eyes of one angry and hateful Demonoid. When he saw that friendly fire was allowed in the competition, an evil grin crept up his lips.

He had thrown a vengeful gaze at Astaroth, as he started planning in his mind. This was his shot at grabbing the glory. If only he could get rid of this cheating noob at the start of the fight, then he could prove his worth to the rest of the team.

Astaroth felt a brief chill running down his spine, but ignored it. He had been getting glared at by so many players since his match that he was growing a shell.

As soon as the last fight ended, a large timer appeared in the sky. It showed ten minutes, meaning that the teams could take some time to plan their next fight adequately this time.

Of course, any manner of preparation would only work in certain scenarios, and since no one knew their next opponents, it was posturing more than anything to plan the fight.

Morticia walked over to where Astaroth was sitting, intent on having a conversation with him. When she reached him, he turned to her and smiled.

His smile was one that a friend would give you, and it didn't feel forced. It almost threw her off.

She stared at him for a few seconds before snapping out of it.

"Ahem. I have a question for you, Astaroth." She said.

"Do you know-" She started saying.

"The answer is yes." Astaroth replied, cutting her out mid-sentence.

"Wait... What? You don't even know what I was going to ask." She said, confused.

"I know, actually. You were going to ask me if I knew the other four players from the last tier. The answer is yes." Astaroth said, smiling lightly.

"How did you... No, it matters not. What I truly want to know is why are you all so strong, and all have no points from the first phase?" She then resumed asking, after her confusion passed.

"That is a question that is probably burning everyone's mind right now. The answer is simple. We aren't." Astaroth chuckled as he replied.

"What? What do you mean, you are not? We all saw you decimate teams so easily. Especially you and Phoenix." Morticia said, her confusion coming back.

What Astaroth was saying made no sense. He was saying they weren't strong, as if no one saw him kill five players in minutes, in one versus five.

"Don't get me wrong, I am definitely stronger than most players here. I'm saying we are not all that strong." Astaroth then said.

"The reason all five of us won our fights so easily is that the first to go was me. And I used the opportunity to plant the seed of doubt and fear in everyone's minds." He said, waving his hand at the surrounding players.

Morticia looked around and understood what he meant. All the players seated next to them were looking at him like he was the boogeyman.

"The reason the second confrontation went so well for my dwarven friend is also simple. He is an exceptional tank and has a few special skills." Astaroth continued.

"My guess is, he was lucky while levelling, and unlocked some specific skills for him. Plus, the opposing team was so scared of him maybe being as strong as me, they all dived him directly, playing right into his specialty." He added.

"That made it easier for his team to bulldoze the opposition, and they were smart enough to use that huge opening. And that solidified the seed of fear. Also, the conversation I had with him was for that too." Astaroth finished explaining, still smiling widely.

"So, this was all just circumstantial luck?" Morticia asked, baffled.

"Pretty much!" Astaroth laughed.

"But then, what about the other three?" She asked.

"Ahh, that is even easier to explain. Phoenix is a monster of a mage. Athena is probably a professional archer. And I'die just did what any good druid should do. Also, the players already feared them, so that helped." He said, pointing at each concerned player as he named them.

"Okay, I can understand that. But you still haven't explained why all five of you have no points from the first phase." Morticia then said.

"That has a simple explanation, too. We were in a simile dungeon, under the battle map. We were busy killing thousands of monsters while everyone was duking it out." Astaroth said, shrugging his shoulders.

"Slaying monsters, huh? Wait... You said thousands?!" Morticia exclaimed, her eyes going wide.

"Yes, thousands. Around five thousand." Astaroth replied, like it was an easy feat.

He knew it was misleading, since they had been far from easy to kill. But the stronger he looked, the more players would be reluctant to fight him.

While they were having this conversation, Astaroth got a notification that made him smile widely. He had been waiting for it ever since he came out of his fight.

Before he even went to talk to Gulnur, he had used the Soul Cores, and Monster Cores, to send White Death into the evolution process. There was a one-hour duration for the process, and he had hoped it would end before his next bout.

And it has just ended.

\*Ding!\*

\*Evolution process for Spirit Animal White Death completed. Evolution process successful!  
Congratulations!\*

Chapter 96 Phase Two, Round Two

Astaroth excitedly opened up White Death's status screen.

Status:

Name: White Death

Race: Dire Wolf

Grade: Special

Level: 29 (178'778/259'950)

Evolve: 0/5000

Stats:

HP: 24'500/24'500 / MP: 640/5640 / Stamina: 100

Strength: 37 (+4) / Agility: 58 (+6) / Constitution: 48 (+5) / Intelligence: 29 (+3) / Wisdom: 29 (+3)

Attack Power Str: 205 / Attack Power Agi: 320 / Magic Attack Power: 160 / Healing Power: 160

Natural Defense: 5.3%

Available stat points: 0

Skills: Ghost Claw, Soul Bite, Tearing Claws

Passive Abilities: Spiritual Body

It immediately stoked him to see the health value be so high. With this, he would have a very hard-to-kill ally at all times.

He no longer needed to put points in constitution as much. Meaning his firepower will keep growing this much more from now on.

Astaroth could also feel the flame of White's soul had grown a little stronger near his own. When he reached inward to contact it, his mind drifted to the pocket of void he had been in previously.

In front of him stood White Death, now at least a meter higher than he previously was. White looked down at Astaroth and grinned.

"I can already feel some of my strength has come back. Thank you, master." He said, bowing his head solemnly.

"Don't worry about it, White. I'm doing this for me as well, since you being stronger means I also become more formidable." Astaroth replied, putting his hand on the wolf's head.

Astaroth then closed his eyes, feeling his soul drift back to his outer body. He opened his eyes as Morticia stared at him.

They had been in a conversation until now, and Astaroth had suddenly just smiled and closed his eyes. Morticia just looked at him weirdly, before dismissing the event entirely.

They eventually returned to their conversation, with Astaroth explaining what they had been doing in the first phase with much details. Even though Morticia was his teammate, this would give her a good measure of fear for when they eventually weren't a team any longer.

He, of course, has that conversation in a low voice, to not give too many details to the other teams seated around them. The impact that had on them was quite visible, as some players tried to inch closer, to listen in.

Soon, though, the timer for waiting time ran out. It was now time for the second round of fights. The screen in the sky shuffled before showing the next round's team number match-up.

To no one's surprise, the first five teams to fight this time again would be the teams with the five anomaly players. But one thing was different this time around.

The teams that would confront them all had a pro Esports player in them. Whatmore, the pro players were all players that were high in the level ranking before the tournament.

The difficulty level was now much higher for the five players concerned, except for maybe Phoenix, one such player herself.

It was like the organizers of the tournament wanted to rapidly knock them out of the competition. No one complained, though.

Seeing as how the five players concerned had practically wiped the floor with their last opponents, they all felt like this was a balanced match-up.

This time, the first team to pass was I'die's team. Phoenix's team, Athena's team, Gulnur's team, and last, Astaroth's team would follow them.

Astaroth was disappointed to go last this time, but he didn't mull over it long. He would still get his chance to show off, anyway.

The four fights before his proceeded a lot slower, this time, seeing as their opponents were on a higher scale of strength and skill. It was touch and go at some times, but they all pulled through in the end.

The ones that had the hardest time were I'die and Gulnur, who both were talented players, but had not yet experienced quite that much. They pulled their own weight, but the wins they had were not as overwhelming as before.

Athena, in her fight, showed a very high combat intuition, and always seemed to be in the right position to fire her arrows.

She also evaded her pursuers' pincer moves on more than one occasion, making her seem like some kind of hidden expert.

It was like they were playing cat and mouse, but the mouse always eluded the cats. This impressed Astaroth a lot, and he started wondering where she honed these skills.

These did not seem like gaming skills, but a more real-life skill set, like she had been in similar situations before.

As for the mighty Phoenix, she crushed her opponent this time as well, showing off another impressive pyromancer skill. As soon as her fight started, she set the whole arena ablaze, making it look like hell.

Her opponents and her allies both started taking massive damage over time, as the flames burned their health away. It also made it hard for her opponents to find her amidst the inferno, making them unable to stop it.

It was over in minutes, and the only one left standing was Phoenix. Her teammates were very discontent with her methods, but kept silent, as she had won them the fight, anyway.

Astroth watched all the fights with a smile, as he internally praised them. He knew he would most likely have to fight them in the next phase, but that was what he wanted.

When Gulnur's combat ended in a very brutish tank standoff, with Gulnur eventually overpowering his enemy, Astaroth stood up. It was now his team's turn.

He looked up at the screen to see who they were against and smiled even more. His opponent would be a veteran pro player that he had always admired, even from a young age.

The ranger player, and ex-number-one e-sports player, Killi. As Astaroth lowered his eyes from the screen in the sky, he was teleported into the arena.

Not far away from him and his team stood their opponents. And at their head, was a tall, blonde man, wearing very nice full leather armor.

The way he stood there exuded confidence and a kind of noble charm. Like he was owed a victory, regardless of his enemies.

Astaroth stepped forward a few meters, as Killi did the same. They both stopped a few feet away from each other, gauging one another.

"It's a pleasure to meet one of the older Esports players out there, sir Killi." Astaroth said, smiling like a child in front of their idol.

"I'm flattered you feel that way, kid. Although I don't like being called an older player." Killi laughed as he responded.

"Pardon my words then, sir. I hope we both get to enjoy this fight earnestly." Astaroth said, giving a small nod.

Killi only nodded at the youngster as they both walked back to their teams. Not long after, the bell for the start of the fight resounded.

\*Dong!\*

Chapter 97 Still A Worthy Opponent

Right as the bell rang, Astaroth melded with White Death. The stats boost his spirit companion got from upgrading were non-negligible, but not game-changing.

As he was melding, he had to side-step a volley of arrows coming his way. Killi was already on the offensive, starting with his bow, trying to shave off some health from Astaroth.

Astaroth knew that this fight would differ from his last one, because Killi was his opponent. He had seen a lot of this man's past competitions and streams.

It would not be easy to make combat with an opponent with his experience on the battlefield. He was also a very proficient archer and swordsman, as had been proved in the past.

Clearing his mind from stray thoughts and distractions, Astaroth focused his gaze on Killi. This would be the most interesting fight he had in a while, aside from his sparring with Kloud.

He dashed forward, after slipping by the arrows, and gave chase to his opponent. Killi, fully expecting his actions, started jumping backwards, all the while firing his bow.

Every time the two men got close enough for Astaroth to confront Killi in a melee, the latter pulled out his two scimitars, a deftly blocked any hit sent his way, before using skills to disengage from combat.

As soon as Killi would be a suitable distance away, he would switch back to his bow, and continue kitting Astaroth around the arena. Anyone who got near the fighting duo got violently slashed at by both parties.

In the two men's eyes, there should be no one to interfere in their clash. Killi was here to prove he was still capable enough to be a top player, and Astaroth was here to prove he had what it took to reach the summit.

Both men were left alone and fought with abandon until only four players were left standing. Sadly for Killi, he was the only member of his team left alive.

The remaining two players were Morticia and Anton. Both of them started surrounding Killi, trying to box him in.

Killi had a very tactical mind, and he recognized the danger he was in instantly. He opted to cut down his troubles fast and dashed toward Morticia.

He knew her class was all about control over the enemy, so he had to take her out quickly, to give himself a better chance. As he ran to her, firing arrows, Astaroth and Anton both converged on Morticia.

Astaroth had not been using skills that much, trying to gauge his level in actual combat against a veteran, and as of now, Killi was barely scratched, while he was down to half his health.

His melding was also reaching its end, and this would be his last attack while fully merged.

As all three men reached Morticia, the situation rapidly took a turn for the worst. Anton, which was believed to be charging at Killi, deviated his trajectory, cutting towards Astaroth.

He swung his axe wide, aiming for Astaroth's midsection, just as the latter was reaching Killi. Killi saw this happening from the corner of his eye and grinned.

Astaroth, in the meantime, had to suddenly evade a great axe coming at him rapidly. He kicked off the ground, giving up on his assault on Killi, to prioritize himself.



Just as he did, the axe passed where his torso would have been, missing him by a hair's breadth. When Astaroth landed back on the ground, his hair was back to normal, and his stats went back too.

"What are you doing, Anton!?" Astaroth barked.

"I'm getting rid of a cheater." Anton growled back.

"How many times do you intend to accuse me of this nonsense?" Astaroth replied, clenching his fists.

"This will be the last time, since this is where you die and leave the competition." Anton answered, grinning like a madman.

"You will willingly make us lose, just to prove a point? Are you stupid?" Astaroth questioned.

"Shut up!" Anton yelled, snapping.

"Time to die!" He added, dashing at Astaroth again.

This time, Astaroth was ready to greet him, though, and had a devilish smile on his face. As Anton got closer, Astaroth summoned White, letting out right in front of the charging berserker.

White Death immediately pounced on the Demonoid, pinning him to the ground. As the giant white wolf snarled at him, Anton lost all his earlier courage.

He could see the health bar on the wolf, since it was technically part of his team, and he became white from terror.

"This... This is a boss creature! You are cheating again!" Anton yelled, shaking in his voice.

But that was the last thing he said, as White started chewing his face off. Screams of pain and terror filled the arena, while the crowd watched in ravenous horror as it chewed the Demonoid to death.

Astaroth refocused on Killi, and he noticed Morticia was having it rough. Even though she was a skilled player, with a manipulative class, fighting in close combat was not her forte.

He dashed back to the duo, going to lend a hand to his teammate. Killi did not miss this recent development and disengaged from combat again.

"That took less time than I thought it would." Killi said, a bitter smile on his lips.

"I'm sorry if we were interrupted, Sir Killi. Shall we go for round two?" Astaroth asked, pulling out his polearm.

"Don't count me out again." Morticia growled from the side.

She was cut at many places, and her health bar was dangerously low. But her eyes showed an angry determination to get even with the Ranger.

"Then we shall take him out together." Astaroth replied, nodding at her.

At this moment, White walked to Astaroth's side, blood still dripping from his maw. Not a moment later, both it and Astaroth dashed forward, locking Killi in combat with them.

Morticia took every opening she could get to launch a psychic attack on the Ranger, and disadvantage him as much as she could. This helped, but Killi was not a rookie and he held this fight for a few minutes.

It took the trio a whole five minutes to take down one player, while the crowd kept shouting their support. Killi had achieved his goal of proving he was still very much in the game.

After he dropped dead and disappeared, the crowd roared in applause and cheers, both for the losing and winning teams. This had been the most entertaining match up to now.

Morticia and Astaroth were both teleported out of the arena, only to reappear in the bleachers, next to the other three players of their team. Both of them turned to Anton, rage in their eyes.

The Demonoid gulped in fear.

Chapter 98 Phase Three Commences

While Astaroth and Morticia both verbally tore a new asshole on Anton, the fights continued in the arena. Although they were fascinating to most onlookers, they didn't reach the culmination the previous ones had.

The groups grew thinner, and thinner, as matches progressed. By the time the second round was done, only one hundred twenty-five players were left.

Since they needed that number down to one hundred before going to phase three, everyone knew there would be five more fights.

As the board changed to show the five next combats, almost everyone in the colosseum exhaled in relief at the same time. Of the ten teams chosen to fight each other, none were from the last bracket.

This eased the minds of the competitors, who thought they at least now had a chance of going to the next phase. Of course, the ten teams were the ones that had the most trouble fighting in their previous two rounds.

It was like the algorithm was purposely trying to eliminate the weakest players first. It made sense, in a certain fashion, that the strongest players made it to the next step.

But it also put a lot of pressure on the ten teams bound to fight next. Because this meant they would most likely still die in the next phase.

And since there were no participation prizes for anyone that wasn't the final winner, these players had a fire lit under their asses now.

This batch of combats took a while longer than the previous ones, as they were all closely matched in power and skill level. They soon ended.

When the last team won their match, everyone was teleported back to the center of the arena, with the screen in the sky changing again. Chairwoman Constantine was on it again, her smile as wide as her face.

"Congratulations to all the phase two winners. We shall now move on to phase three." She said, clapping her hands lightly.

As she did, the arena's floor split open, sending everyone falling down. Under the players, a long way down, was another set of combat stages.

These were much smaller, and there were a lot. As each player fell, they were all split into pairs and dropped into arenas.

The landing was soft, as the organizers did not want their participants to die on impact. When all the players made it to their stages, Constantine's face appeared in the sky once more.

"For this stage, we have divided the teams for the previous phase into five brackets once more. Each player will fight a person from each bracket once, and we shall tally the points from these matches." She said, the screen splitting and showing the brackets.

There were twenty players in each bracket, and by which teams were where, one could easily guess how the split had been made. In the first bracket, four names were easily recognizable.

Astaroth, Phoenix, Athena, and Khalor's names were all in the first bracket. Meaning they were the four strongest teams from the last phase.

The second tier contained Gulnur, I'die and Azamus' teams, plus one other, with a strong Esports player. The next tiers also contained very well-known names.

All the Esports players not in the first tier had looks of disappointment and anger in their eyes. Especially a certain gnome that was fuming and almost frothing at the mouth.

"Now, your first opponents have already been decided, and will be from the same brackets you are in. This makes that first fight the fairest you will have." Constantine spoke.

"The subsequent combats will either be against stronger or weaker opponents. Time will tell." She added with a light smirk.

Astaroth turned his head slightly, looking at his opponent. His face immediately lit up with a manic smile.

He was going to enjoy this very much.

"Anton." He said, looking across the small platform.

The Demonoid in question shivered. He knew his time in the competition had just ended. He turned toward Astaroth.

"Will you cheat again? Or will you be a man and fight me like one?!" Anton tried to taunt.

"Hah! I don't need skills to take out trash like you!" Astaroth replied, with a taunt of his own.

Anton's shivering became stronger, this time out of anger.

"Like a cheater like you would beat me in a fair fight!" He fumed.

"Then let's make a wager." Astaroth grinned.

'Hook, line, and sinker.' He thought.

"I will not use any skills, and I will take you out in less than two minutes. And if I don't, when the timer reaches fifteen seconds, I will stop attacking you and surrender." Astaroth said, smiling.

Anton was beyond insulted by his words, and immediately accepted, thinking there was no way he would lose in a fight with no skills. He pulled out his great axe, ready for the fight to begin.

Astaroth looked at the Demonoid and chuckled in his head.

'Just another muscle brain like Konnor.' He thought.

Meanwhile, the chairwoman was still explaining the proceedings to the players, and was just about finished. After completing her explanation, she smiled warmly.

"May the strongest ones prevail, and may luck ever be by your side!" She exclaimed, as she disappeared from the sky.

A large timer appeared in her place, counting down from ten seconds. All the contestants pulled out their weapons and faced their opponents, ready for the fight.

Astaroth was staring down at Anton, as the latter was seething in rage. And soon he could put that arrogant Russian bastard in his place.

Astaroth was not a racist man by any measure, but getting called a cheater repeatedly had grated against his patience and common sense.

Now he was ready to carve out his opponent's heart and feed it to White in front of his eyes. But he kept his face as smug as he could.

The more Anton lost his cool, the dumber the mistakes he would commit. And Astaroth was betting on that to succeed in his wager.

He was going to prove there and then that he was no cheater.

While all these thoughts went through his head, at super speed, the countdown reached the three-second mark. Astaroth braced himself as the last seconds ticked away.

On reaching zero, another large gong resounded.

\*Dong\*

Anton dashed at his opponent, rage in his eyes.

"Today, you die!" He yelled, as he crossed the distance between them.

Chapter 99 Beheading The Beast

Astaroth inspected the angry Russian's face, as he mad dashed towards him. He could guess by his posture alone, that this charge was a reckless one.

The man had already lost all semblance of logical thinking and calm.

This played right into Astaroth's plans. He could loop this raging bull around for days, he was certain of that.

As Anton finally made it to him, Astaroth only shifted his body ever so slightly, to evade the great axe coming in from overhead. He then spun on himself, equipping his longsword and wielding it in two hands, slashing at the man's back.

A cut to the back was a warrior's greatest shame, and Astaroth could guess this simpleton adhered to this mentality. And as proof, the Russian Demonoid bellowed in rage, as he turned around.

"Stop running around, coward! You said you fight me like a man!" He shouted.

"I am. I'm just not a stupid animal like you are." Astaroth snickered, adding oil to the fire.

"RRAAGGHH!!" Anton howled.

Anton ran back at Astaroth again, his feet stomping the ground heavily. Astaroth knew this was unnatural, so he swapped out the longsword for a shield and his shortsword.

Anton bulldozed forward, his axe's shaft before him, colliding into Astaroth violently. This was a charge skill, and it pushed Astaroth back with much force from it.

But before Anton could use the momentum to shove him away, or attack, Astaroth pivoted his foot to the left, pushing off of it and sending Anton to the side too.

As Anton passed his side, Astaroth pulled out his daggers and slashed quickly at the former's ribs. He then quickly stored them and swapped them out to his bow.

He fired four arrows in quick succession, taking leaps back as he did, gaining some distance. This angered the Demonoid more, making him feel like Astaroth was toying with him.

He finally stopped his charge and spun around. Blood was leaking from his mouth, where he had probably bitten his lip in anger.

"Stop jumping around!" Anton yelled.

He went back to running toward Astaroth, trying to get a good hit in, but was deflected and dodged time and time again. It was like he was chasing a fly, buzzing around his head unceasingly.

After a minute and a half of fighting, Anton was already at a wit's end, and his health was dangerously low. He didn't want to go down in this fight, even if he could still get more points in the next ones.

So he did what any logical player would do. He pulled out a health potion and drank it.

The move took Astaroth aback, being a smart one, one that he thought Anton was incapable of doing. Anton's health went up by half again, meaning he had fifteen seconds to take that much health.

This would be a tough battle. But Astaroth was not one to give up.

He bit the bullet and became reckless too, this time dashing at his opponent, his polearm pointed forward. He was using this fight to get used to switching weapons depending on the situation.

This was good training for him, but he had to stop this and get serious. If not, he wouldn't win his wager.

An intense brawl out then happened between the Ash Elf and the Demonoid, both swinging at each other with abandon, chipping at each other's health bar.

When the timer reached fifteen seconds, Anton stopped attacking, to laugh out like a madman.

"Hahahaha! You failed to kill me in the time you said. That just proves how weak you are!" He barked out.

His health bar was practically empty again, but he knew he has won. Astaroth had respected his word of not using skills all along, so when the latter put down his weapon, Anton knew it was over.

He walked over slowly, enjoying this moment, etching it into his head. He had won.

Then something changed. His viewpoint was shifting.

He started seeing the sky, then the floor, and the sky again, before his head hit something. What was really weird was what he saw before him.

His body was still standing in place, with Astaroth behind it, a great axe in his hands. The axe's blade was bloodied and dripping.

That's when he understood what had happened. Astaroth has used a skill.

It was the same skill he had used to chop off another player's arm in the second phase! He had lied to him.

"You..." Anton muttered, his head on the ground.

"Did you really think I would adhere to my word after you cowardly drank a potion?" Astaroth spat, leaning before the head.

"You wanted a fair fight. I gave you one." He added, before standing back up.

The timer ran out at that moment, signifying the end of the first bouts.

Anton and Astaroth both disappeared from the platform, reappearing in different ones. Anton looked at his hands as they shook in rage and disbelief.

He was winning. He had won.

Now he couldn't even get back at this cheater for lying to him. The next fight was about to start in a few seconds.

He bellowed out in an animalistic fashion, spit flying out of his mouth, mixed in with blood, from his hoarse throat. His eyes had gone completely mad as he looked at his next opponent.

The elvish player before him shook in terror from the enraged gaze, and almost peed himself from sheer horror. Anton vowed in his head to get back at Astaroth, even if it was the last thing he would do.

Astaroth, in the meantime, appeared on another platform, facing a familiar player again. Before him stood a small gnome, armed with a rifle.

"We meet again, number three player, Azamus." Astaroth greeted him, with a curt bow.

"You!" Azamus spat out.

"I'm going to enjoy riddling you full of holes and lead!" He added, aiming preemptively.

Astaroth smiled at the action. He knew the gnome was mad at him for throwing him away, but he didn't think he would be that mad.

It mattered not, though, as he would not do that again. This time, he was going for the kill.

Astaroth grinned, as the timer for round two ticked its last seconds, before the gong resounded again.

\*Gong!\*

\*Bang!\*

Chapter 100 The Mystery Grows

\*\*\*On another platform, during round one of phase three\*\*\*

Phoenix was looking into the eyes of a person she recognized. This man was the last person she wanted to face.

It was Khalor, the Necromancer. Behind him, stood three colossal figures.

One, was a tall fully plated man, with a tall halberd in his hands.

The second, was a gigantic two-headed raven, looming over him.

The third, was a giant monster which she had been battling not so long ago. The Manticore.

Phoenix knew that those three undead alone could wipe the floor with her corpse. Her best bet was to take down the player faster than they could take her out.

But by any measure, that was easier said than done. She knew just by looking at him, that he was as strong on his own as his undead.

When the gong rang, Khalor immediately summoned wave after wave of zombies and skeletons. Her only choice available was to turn the platform into hell's landscape.

She used her strongest spell, Inferno, and set the entire platform ablaze, with flames flickering from bright yellow, to white, and to blue. The fire was melting all the zombies and skeletons as they charged at her.

But the outcome had been decided the moment she faced her opponent. From the sky came raining a shower of poisonous spikes and fireballs.

And from in front of her, a shadow in full-plated armor dashed through the flames. All three attacks hit her simultaneously, taking out her health bar instantly.

The fight took mere seconds, and it was the first one to end. Once it did, the platform went back to normal, with Phoenix and Khalor face to face, and screens with the other fights next to them.

"Well, that went well..." Phoenix said with a dejected sigh.

"Don't beat yourself over it. There is only one player here that could withstand those attacks currently." Khalor replied, turning to watch the fights.

He was fixated on one screen in particular. One where, a familiar figure to Phoenix, was battling a Demonoid Berserker.

"Astaroth..." Phoenix mumbled.

Phoenix looked at Khalor, and could see he was watching pensively. His eyes reflected interest, but also curiosity.

"What is it that makes you and him so monstrously strong?" She asked him.

"Hmm?" Khalor replied, breaking out of thought.

"Why are you two so strong, compared to the others?" She asked again.

"Your friend isn't overwhelmingly powerful yet. As his fight against Killi proved, he can still be fought on equal grounds." Khalor said, rubbing his chin.

"As for myself, I will not reveal this information. You all will know in due time." He said, turning his focus back on the screen where Astaroth's fight was playing.

Phoenix couldn't glean any additional details from the man, from his body language or speech pattern. It was like she was talking to a man that was trained to remain silent.

It only made her even more curious what this mysterious man knew. He was talking in enigmas and riddles, and she hated being in the dark.

The rapture with which he was watching Astaroth fight also troubled her. This man, who looked so confident in his assessments and statements, looked at Astaroth like he was a complete mystery.

"Why are you so obsessed with him? Why him?" Phoenix asked Khalor.

"Because he is a mystery. An uncalculated variable. An unpredictable piece, in a very complicated puzzle." Khalor replied, his eyes glued to the screen.

"A puzzle? What puzzle? What are you talking about?" Phoenix asked, her confusion only growing.

"It matters not, for now. All will be revealed in due time." Khalor stated, the screen before him going blank.

The two-minute timers had run out, and the next rounds were going to start soon. Khalor turned to face Phoenix, smiling and nodding, before they were teleported away.

Phoenix reappeared on another platform, next to her second opponent. She was frustrated by the lack of answers and flustered by the confusion Khalor had pushed into her mind.

She would need to find him again after the tournament and have a serious talk with him. She hated being in the dark, and she had more questions than ever for him.

But for now, her mind snapped back to the task at hand. She locked her eyes on her next adversary.

The poor man shivered in his boots as her fiery gaze swept over him. He was a human warrior, in chain mail, holding a shield in one hand and a sword in the other.

He recognized the woman before him and knew he had lost this match already. She would burn him alive in a matter of moments, and he gulped audibly.

\*\*\*In chairwoman Constantine's office\*\*\*

The chairwoman was watching the battles going on, keeping her eyes on two specific players. When she saw one of them obliterate his opponent, she shifted her focus to the other.

The sound was still on for the 2 platforms, and she could hear the conversation they were having. It troubled her, but she paid it less attention than the fight on the other screen.



She was watching the player named Astaroth attentively, trying to see signs of a legacy of any kind. That would explain his strength, but she couldn't find any.

That meant he would only become stronger if he got his hands on one, and that made her smile.

'Maybe we have hope yet.' She mumbled to herself.

The conversation took a turn she wasn't expecting on the platform with the player Khalor, and her heart skipped a beat.

When she heard him talking about a puzzle, it flipped a switch in her head. She immediately switched her focus back to him.

'Does he know?' She thought.

'No. He can't know. No one should know already.' She mumbled, her eyes piercing through her screen.

This was adding to the importance of finding out who he was. The fact he had a legacy before they divulged the legacies, and that it seemed like he knew some classified information, put him in her priorities.

She had to find him, and quickly. Maybe he had answers to questions she had.

Her fist balled up, with her mind wishing her assistant could hurry on her task.