

New Eden 17

Chapter 17 Next Stage Of Body Cleansing, Part 2

He upgraded his attack power, so he put one point into strength and the other into intelligence.

Status:

Name: Astaroth

Race: Ash Elf

Level: 7 (168/280)

Stats:

HP: 180/180 MP: 385/385 Stamina: 100

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

Strength: 9 Agility: 9 Constitution: 8

Intelligence: 9 Wisdom: 8

Attack Power Str: 45 Attack Power Agi: 45 Magic Attack Power: 45 Healing Power: 40

Natural Defense: 0.8%

Luck: 0 (Stat unaffected by Level up and free points)

Available stat points: 0

Available skill points: 7

Physical Condition: Normal

Mental Condition: Normal

Equipped gear:

Beginner clothes, Basic Training Short Sword, Basic Training Longsword, Basic Training War Axe, Basic Training Polearm, Basic Training Daggers (2), Basic Training Wooden Shield, Basic Training Bow and Quiver (43)

Next up, he went to reread his skills and see what happens when he levels them up with the skill points.

Passives:

Mana Lobe Lvl 2: Your mana lobe has a higher mana capacity and if you look closely into it, you can see a crystalized mote of mana. +200 mana capacity.

Mana Control Lvl 2: You have grasped the fundamentals of mana control. Keep practicing. 4% mana cost reduction.

Perfect Mana Sense: You have an immaculate ability to sense mana, It's like you were born to do this. Can toggle actively to notice mana flows.

Mana Breathing Lvl 1: You have learned how to absorb mana through breathing. Mana regen 1/second in combat, 5/per second out of combat.

Body Cleansing Lvl 2: You have done your second body cleansing mana purge. Mana flows even better into you and it is purer. Mana capacity +100, Spell power +15%, HP +100.

Actives:

Propel: Launch an item in your hand or nearby with a strong wind controlled by mana. Base mana cost: 10 (Scales with the weight of the thrown object)

Ignite: Use your mana to ignite a flammable surface for 30 seconds. Burn damage = 10% of magic damage. Base mana cost: 10 (Scales depending on material)

Mana Siphon: You can turbo charge your mana breathing to one breath, to restore a large amount of mana (25%). Side effect: nausea.

Mana Skin: You condense mana over your body, forming a second skin of pure mana. Reduce damage taken by 10%, also has a 20% chance of repelling a glancing blow. Base mana cost: 50 (Mana cost and damage reduction scale with how compressed you make the layer)

Enhance Weapon: Gather mana into your weapon, to enhance it magically. Weapon damage +10%, Weapon durability lowers depending on quality. Base mana cost: 25 (Scales depending on how much mana is poured into the weapon)

Soul Steal Lvl 1: Force the soul of a recently deceased person into submission, gaining a part of its strength. Gain 1 Soul Shard (maximum of 10) that boosts your stats by 10% of the person's highest stat for 1 minute. 30 seconds before the soul dissipates and can't be coerced.

Intimidation Shout: Supercharge your voice using mana, causing even the air to tremble before you. 50% chance of causing fear. Effect lower against higher leveled opponents. Mana Cost: 20.

Piercing Shot: You channel wind into your arrow, propelling and twisting it, giving it a high penetrative power. +100% attack power. If this shot lands a critical hit, the damage is doubled. Mana cost: 25.

He tried putting a point in 'Enhance Weapon' and reread it to see the effect.

Enhance Weapon Lvl 2: Gather mana into your weapon, to enhance it magically. Weapon damage +20%, Weapon durability lowers depending on quality. Base mana cost: 30 (Scales depending on how much mana is poured into the weapon)

'A 10% increase in power, not bad.' He thought.

So he dropped points until it maxed out.

Enhance Weapon Lvl 5 (Max)(Mastery Lvl 0/5): Gather mana into your weapon, to enhance it magically. Weapon damage +10% - 100%. Mana cost: 5 - 50 (Scales depending on how much mana is poured into the weapon)

'Hmm? There was a qualitative change. It no longer damages the weapon. It's also variable at will now. Sweet!' He thought to himself, praising his smart thinking.

He kept the last two points for later. When he had a skill, he wanted to be maxed quickly. Then he noticed the mastery level that appeared next to his skill level.

'Huh? Is that with the use of the skill?' He thought.

'Guess I'll find out when it goes up.'

He liked how his stats were right now. He could surmise that other players of the same level were probably not as strong as him.

Except maybe the 'Heavenly Thousand'. But he doubted they were stronger, though.

At worst, they were equal in terms of power right now. As he thought of that, he looked up the 'Level Leaderboard'.

Level Leaderboard

#1: ??? / Level 22

#2: Grinding_Beast / Level 20

#3: Real_Number_One_Gamer / Level 20

#4: I_Am_Rich / Level 20

#5: Number_One_Gamer / Level 19

#6: No_Life_Gamer / Level 19

#7: Monster_Slayer / Level 18

#8: Azamus / Level 18

#9: Phoenix / Level 18

#10: What_Ever / Level 17

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The list went down to fifty players. Of those names, he wondered who was the number one. His name was hidden.

And then he recognized two other names. Azamus, which was number one in 'Tower of Babylon', and Phoenix, which was tenth in the same game.

'Hmm, there are already two people from the 'Heavenly Thousand' in the rankings.' He thought.

The others are bound to pop up soon too. I need to get grinding faster.

The lowest level in the chart was level 15, but it wouldn't be too long before the rest of the 'Heavenly Thousand' started climbing up there, weeding out the rubbish no lives that just farmed.

He could guess that most players on the leaderboard right now had achieved their levels by purely grinding monsters. But that would cap soon, and he knew that because he was fighting higher-level monsters.

The qualitative changes as levels go become monstrous. So the players would have to stop and solidify their base.

If it wasn't too late. And the players that had been solidifying their base already were bound to overtake the others soon enough.

'My turn is coming.' He thought, clenching his fist with resolve.

Astaroth thanked old man Aberon, stood up, and left the cave. He needed to go wash and rest. He also had to log out, eat and rest in real life, too.

Chapter 18 Soul Core, Part 1

After logging off, Alexandre took a quick shower and heated a frozen pizza. He sat down and took his phone out, opening the forums to 'New Eden'.

He re-browsed the leaderboard to see if it had changed, and was floored. The top ten had already changed.

#1: ??? / Level 23

#2: Grinding_Beast / Level 21

#3: Real_Number_One_Gamer / Level 20

#4: I_Am_Rich / Level 20

#5: Azamus / Level 20

#6: Number_One_Gamer / Level 20

#7: Phoenix / Level 20

#8: No_Life_Gamer / Level 19

#9: Monster_Slayer / Level 19

#10: Stormbringer / Level 18

Azamus, the top player from 'Tower of Babel' Had risen three ranks, Phoenix had raised two ranks, and Stormbringer, who was fourth in the old game, was now tenth.

The thing is, the rest of the top ten ranks had moved little. The 'Heavenly Thousand' was no laughing matter.

Plus, the more he scrolled down the list, the more he saw names from the top players. It was like they were leveling on steroids.

He guessed they were most likely using the tier upgrade mechanic, to boost the exp they earned. If they did that on all their kills, they effectively doubled their exp earned.

But not everyone could do that. Alexandre closed the board and looked at other posts, while he shoved the pizza in his mouth.

One post especially caught his attention. The title was 'Heavenly Thousand cheating?'.

He quickly opened it up. In the post, the OP was complaining about how he had seen Azamus taking on a group of same-leveled creatures solo and winning.

Some people then replied by saying they had seen other players from the 'Heavenly Thousand' doing the same thing. Like their characters were much stronger than the masses.

Most people complained about that, saying that they had received boosts from the game company. Or that they were hacking their stats and many other stupid theories.

Alexandre knew better though. He was confident that if he were to fight a group of four level ten beasts, he would have the upper hand.

Most players didn't yet know how to reinforce their character. It would come out soon, but he would not be the one spilling the beans.

He was going to milk his advantage as much as he could. He closed the post and scrolled a little more.

He found another post titled 'Death Penalty'. He opened it up.

The poster was calling the game unfair. He recounted how he had kept dying in the starting zone because he couldn't find a party.

Every time he died, he would lose Exp equaling the Exp the creature that killed him would have given. But when he dropped back to level one, it became way harsher.

He lost the equivalent to his level, but at a debt. Then 90% of his experience would go towards paying the debt.

But after he died five times without being able to repay the debt, his character was deleted, and he was locked out of the game for 24 hours.

"I'm so happy I didn't die against that bear." Alexandre said, shivering.

He would have been screwed.

'What a harsh penalty' He thought.

He kept reading the post and a little lower, another piece of information almost made him choke on his food. PvP gave experience.

A player wrote that, when he died, he lost the required amount to level, dropping him down a full level and some.

Another wrote how he killed a player of the same level and gained his level fully, aligning with what the other person had said higher.

So that meant that you gained what the player lost. Now that was going to spark a PvP war.

Players would try to kill the people on the leaderboard now. Because that was the best way to take someone down from it and take his place!

The Leaderboard would fluctuate a lot in the next few days, with the grinders getting knocked off, and the talented players going in and up.

Since he was in a zone with no other players, he was safe from that, but that also meant he couldn't use that tactic to level up either. He would have to grind.

He smiled wide. He was in the best place to grind, given that he could sortie out with a higher-level NPC.

He just needed to dish out maximum damage and collect Exp from their kills! Alexander closed up the forums and quickly finished his pizza.

He then took a nap for a few hours and logged back in.

Launching 'New Eden'

Logging in

Welcome back player Astaroth

As soon as he opened his eyes in his alcove, he jumped up and left. He practically ran to the barracks.

When he got there, he slowed his pace down. He could still see the respect in people's eyes when they looked at him.

They were no longer looks of mockery or disdain. Astaroth walked into the barrack building, the warriors inside piped down.

One man got up and walked to him with a pint of ale. He extended his hand holding the pint towards Astaroth.

"This is for you, lad. Had you not shot that arrow yesterday, I would be dead." The man said.

That was when Astaroth recognized him. He was the man that was pinned down by the Alpha!

Astaroth took the pint and nodded his head. He then took a big swig of the beverage, before making the biggest grimace his face could perform.

This thing was not only strong, but it was also hot! He swallowed the hot, piss-like, liquid and smiled awkwardly.

Everyone in the barrack exploded into laughter. Astaroth wasn't sure if they were making fun of him, or if they were just hazing him.

Not that it bothered him, but he wasn't used to having this much attention on him.

So he just looked at all of them with a confused look, thinking 'At least they don't seem like they are mocking me anymore.'

Chapter 19 Soul Core, Part 2

Another man got up amidst the laughter and walked to Astaroth.

"Excuse the nasty prank with the ale." He said, trading the mug in Astaroth's hand for another.

"The boys wanted to see you keel over, but you have a good stomach on you. Either that or no taste buds. BAHAAA!" He added, ending in a hearty laugh.

"My name is Chris Pentalogius. It's a mouthful I know, so my friends call me Chrispy. My subordinates call me the Colonel. You can call me whatever you like." The man said, bringing Astaroth to a table and sitting.

Astaroth held a laugh.

"Now, what you did yesterday was nothing short of saving a life. You saved Kloud's life by getting us and then saved another life, with that well-placed arrow."

"The boys wanted to reward you properly, so we got you weapons. Actual weapons. Not those toys you walk around with." Chrispy said, looking down at the training weapons Astaroth was carrying at his belt.

"We commissioned the blacksmith to make you weapons to replace your training weapons. All of them. Unfortunately, you carry a lot of weapons, so they will only be basic weapons, nothing fancy, but they will be better than what you have now." The man continued.

"Captain Kloud also had something he wanted to give you, as a reward for saving him, but he wanted to give it to you himself, and sadly, he is not in a shape to be walking around just yet. So you will have to wait." He then said, taking a swig of his mug.

Astaroth let him finish saying his bit, before taking a sip of ale and looking around. The atmosphere in the barracks was not one of despair or fear of having almost died.

The warriors all acted like it was just another day at work.

'Mind you, for them, it probably is.' He then thought.

"Then I shall graciously accept all of your gifts. I hope we can hunt together in the future and become friends." Astaroth said, smiling slightly.

These men just gave him what he needed most to level up faster. Better weapons!

That meant more damage, so more Exp! He was holding back from hugging all the men one by one. He simply ignored the fact that Kloud wanted to give him something too. That would wait until he was better, anyway.

He stayed in the barracks for a bit, enjoying his ale and the ambiance, before leaving all the training weapons on the racks in the courtyard, and walking towards the forge.

He could feel the heat of the forge from meters away from the building. He walked into the smoldering building, getting assaulted by the heat once again.

This time though, he didn't get any notifications about overheating. He guessed that his higher stats protected him from the forge's heat better.

Astaroth took the small hammer and tapped on the bell lightly three times and then waited.

Ding Ding Ding

After a few minutes, the burly blacksmith walked out from the back. He looked at Astaroth for a second, before smiling.

"Aye, lad. Ye come fer ya weapons, ay reckon. Ay'm almos' done wif 'em. Whay don' ye come back later?" The blacksmith said.

"Oh? you already knew I would come to fetch them?" Astaroth asked.

"Aye. Ay knew dem soldiers wouldn' come fer 'em." The man answered, laughing a bit.

"Ok, well in that case, can I come back to fetch them tomorrow? Would that be alright?" Astaroth requested.

"Aye. That would be better, I reckon. See ye temerrow, wee lad." The blacksmith said, waving him away and walking back into the forge.

Astaroth walked back out of the forge and went to Aberon's house next. The old mage had asked him to come back soon, he still had something for him.

As usual, the door opened up to him before touching it. He walked to the back of the house and found the bookcase open, so he walked down again, making his way to the cave at the end.

Once he got there, he found Aberon sitting on the ground, legs crossed, meditating. Through his mana sense, Astaroth could see the mana around the man getting sucked in at an impressive speed.

'He's probably recuperating from his spells the other day.' He thought.

The old mage opened his eyes once Astaroth was close, sensing his approach. He unfolded his legs and used a little burst of wind to help himself up.

He then turned to Astaroth.

"Sit down, young man. You left after the body cleansing yesterday, but we weren't done. I still have one more thing for you to do." Aberon said, pulling something out from his robes.

It was the clear blue orb from the Alpha's body. He extended his hand to Astaroth, the orb resting on his palm.

"Here, take it." He said.

Astaroth took the item and inspected it.

'Dire Wolf Alpha Soul Core'

Crafting Material.

This item contains the remnants of a powerful monster's soul. Can be used for crafting a multitude of things.

Forging/Sewing: Can be used during forging or sewing to give +5 Agility points to armor.

Alchemy: Can be used in a potion to make 'Agility Potion'. The stats given depend on the potency of the potion.

Scroll Making: Can be used to make 'Scroll of Summoning, Dire Wolf Alpha'. The strength of the summon depends on the scroll maker's talent.

"But, sir, I can't use this yet." Astaroth said, after looking at the descriptions.

"You can." The old man answered flatly.

Astaroth just looked at the man awkwardly. Then, after a minute, it dawned upon him.

Soul core. Soul is another word for spirit.

This orb contained a spirit remnant! His eyes went wide. Aberon saw the change in expression and smiled.

"Seems like you finally understood. Good. Now I will guide you through forming a contract with the spirit. Although I can't do much to help you, I will try my best. But the result will depend entirely on you." He said, pacing around Astaroth again.

"I will do my best, sir!" Astaroth said excitedly.

He was maybe going to have his first contracted spirit! He hoped this would work.

That was possibly his edge over everyone else. He focused his eyes on the orb.

'I will make you mine.' He thought, smiling from ear to ear.

Chapter 20 First Contract, Part 1

Astaroth eyed the orb greedily.

"What do I do, sir?" He asked Aberon.

"Start by trying to feel the soul remnant inside the orb. It should look like a flicker of flame to your mana sense. Feel it out until you can see it clearly. Once that is done, try to contact it using your mana." The old man instructed.

Astaroth did as instructed. It took him a few minutes to feel the soul, and a few more to contact it.

Once his mana touched the soul, he felt a wave of hatred and anger wash over him. He could feel his mana being pushed back slightly.

"The soul is pushing me back, sir. What should I do?" Astaroth asked.

"Did you think a spirit will submit to anyone? One that you have just killed? What else were you expecting?" Aberon said, almost laughing at the question.

If taming a soul was easy, every mage would do it.

"Just keep focusing on it until the repulsion can't stop you from contacting it." He added.

Astaroth focused more. He pushed his mana harder and continuously into the soul until he could feel his mana touch the soul without interruption.

"I can force contact now. What next?" He asked the old mage.

"Now you crush the orb in your hand. Set the soul free. It will more than likely try to overpower you, but you must resist. If you can hold out against it until it deems you worthy, it will form the bond to your soul by itself. Remember this: anything you see will be in your mind." Aberon instructed Astaroth.

Astaroth nodded his head. He then took in a big breath and crushed the orb.

Immediately, darkness swallowed his vision. His body lost weight like he was floating in space, and he couldn't tell up from down.

A few seconds after, a wolf materialized in front of him. It was the same Dire Wolf Alpha he had helped kill.

It snarled at him.

"You think I will bond with you, puny elf?! You are much too weak to kill me, even less likely to force me into submission!" Astaroth heard in his head.

"You can talk?!" He responded.

"I can do much more. Kill you, for example." The wolf responded in his head, sending a wave of mana at Astaroth.

The mana crashed into Astaroth, sending him tumbling into nothingness, but he stabilized himself quickly.

"You don't scare me, you oversized dog!" Astaroth yelled at the apparition.

"Hmph! We will see about that!" The wolf huffed, then said.

"Let's see how long you would last against my pack if you were alone!" The wolf then said, before howling.

Around Astaroth, many wolves started appearing. They formed out of nothing and then surrounded him.

Astaroth pulled out his polearm and stood ready. The surrounding wolves snarled and growled without moving.

That changed rapidly as the wolves repeated the strategy used against Kloud. One moved in from one side and another moved in from the opposite side, trying to sandwich him.

If he tried moving sideways, out of the two wolves' way, another would lunge at him, forcing him back into the middle. He got hit a few times, but strangely, he felt no pain.

It wasn't until he got hit a dozen times he noticed why. The more he got hit, the weaker and slower he became.

It was like they were draining away his strength. And then he remembered what Aberon had said.

It was all inside his mind! They were draining away his mana!

Astaroth changed tactics and didn't let himself get hit anymore. He focused on dodging, not trying to hit back.

Astaroth wasn't damaging the wolves, anyway. He fought on like that for a few minutes, but he was rapidly tiring, and the more he grew tired, the more he got hit, forming a terrible circle.

'This isn't working.' He thought.

He tried to make sense of the situation while dodging, but couldn't focus enough. Then he realized.

It's all in his head. That's what Aberon said.

If this is in his head, doesn't he have absolute control? Theoretically, this could work, but he wasn't sure.

Unfortunately for him, he no longer had any other option. He stopped moving altogether, closed his eyes, and focused his mind.

The wolves all lunged at him, seeing an opportunity. Astaroth kept his eyes closed but imagined the space around him empty.

Astaroth visualized the darkness; he visualized himself in it, alone, with the Alpha's spirit. He kept his eyes closed for a while, but never felt the bites from the wolves.

He opened them up, and the wolves were gone. Only the Alpha remained. A look of anger was on his face.

"So you have figured it out. So what? Do you think that is all I can do?!" The Alpha said, snarling at Astaroth.

"No. That is not all you can do. But there is not only you in this space. And this space is inside MY mind. You will bend to me!" Astaroth said, domineeringly.

"I BOW TO NO ONE!" The wolf bellowed. He then tried lunging at Astaroth to eat him.

"I said BEND TO ME!" Astaroth yelled back.

The wolf received a wave of mana that came out of nowhere. It pushed him back and then pressed him to the ground.

The more he struggled, the harder it pushed him, eventually crushing him to the ground. The Alpha started whimpering in pain.

"Yield and bond with me. Only then will you stop suffering. Resist, and I shall ground your soul to dust!" Astaroth declared, acting imperiously.

"You are too weak! I won't yield!" The wolf responded, trying to push itself back up.

The force pushing on it only grew. It cried out some more, feeling its strength erode the longer this went on.

Yet, it kept resisting. It was stubborn to the end.