

New Eden 261

Chapter 261 Snail's Pace

Phoenix and Astaroth dashed back at the beast-man, catching up to him rapidly. Astaroth could tell the boss wasn't taking them seriously, since the speed he was using now was nothing compared to earlier.

It was more like a predator playing with his prey than an actual fight. But he intended to make Leon understand they meant business.

As both he and Phoenix caught up, Leon noticed them. He sped up a bit, immediately catching up to Violette and distancing himself from the duo again.

Leon raised his clawed hand high over his head, slashing forward, his claws glowing in a red fiery glow. But where he was supposed to hit a little girl, he instead hit something solid like metal.

Violette had disappeared from before him, suddenly replaced by a dwarven male with heavy armour. Gulnur looked up and smiled.

This was a new move he had learned by studying other tanks. It was called In Extremis.

In Extremis allowed Gulnur to switch places with a party member about to take a hit. But it also had a secondary function.

The ability gauged the damage dealt to him, and compared it to the original target. If the damage it would have done surpassed fifty percent of the original target's health, Gulnur gained an aggro lock for a full minute.

That meant that Leon could no longer try to hit anyone else. His eyes went red, and all he could see was the small dwarf before him.

"Gotcha!" Gulnur exclaimed cockily.

But his troubles were only beginning.

Leon was now not in his right mind, and since the system forced him into a semi-berserker mode, he lost control over the strength he exerted. Gulnur learned that quickly when the next hit came at him.

Gulnur quickly activated Steadfast Protector, boosting his defence by another ten percent, and lifted his shield again. Leon struck the shield five times in quick succession.

Even with Gulnur's shield blocking fifty percent of the damage, his armour blocking another twenty-five percent, and his defence blocking another nineteen, for a total of ninety-four percent reduction, his face still became gloomy.

If that was just six percent of the damage done, he didn't want to know the full value. An unprotected mage would have died instantly.

The pressure on his mind increased. But before he could think of it more, a heavy blow hit the center of his tower shield.

Leon had just kicked him, trying to send him flying, and by the looks of it, his strength was incredibly higher than Gulnur's. The Dwarf skid backwards for many meters, slamming his shield into the ground to stop himself with it.

Although the kick itself did almost no damage, Gulnur immediately knew that he would lose a contest of strength. And since he was aggro locked for the next minute, he was in for some poor treatment.

Astaroth and Phoenix caught up again, since Leon was no longer running away. Both of them started dealing damage in massive numbers, hitting his wide-open back.

Every time Phoenix hit, it applied a small burn effect that would rapidly escalate if the boss monster didn't extinguish the flames or break the effect. But the burn damage wasn't doing as much as Phoenix would have wanted.

She understood by the fiery effects his attacks had that he was most likely resistant to fire, since he used it himself. It annoyed her slightly, but that was part of the game.

Astaroth, on the other hand, had no such issue. His damage was purely physical, boosted by magic.

Every hit he did was taking a solid chunk of damage, even though it looked like mosquito bites to the boss monster. Every strike or slash he dealt did over three thousand damage.

This seemed like a paltry amount against a boss with health as high as it did, not that he knew exactly how much that was. After dealing almost a hundred thousand points of damage, they saw the percentage of its health drop by one.

They could estimate he had close to ten million HP with that information. It gave them a goal.

Of course, every other party member wasn't staying idle while this happened. The back liners took some distance from the melee, trying to avoid getting suddenly chased by the boss.

As for the others, they had already started attacking. In the time Gulnur was aggro-locked, the party took out fifteen percent of the monster's health.

This in itself wasn't bad, but it was insufficient. Now that Leon had regained his senses, his earlier smile had disappeared.

The beast-man had finally acknowledged them as genuine threats. He no longer restrained his power as before the aggro lock, but now he was back to fighting in control.

Over the next few minutes, he often tried going for surprise attacks on the weaker members of the group. Gulnur and Astaroth always contained him, keeping the threat to an acceptable level.

But that was bound to eventually fade. Astaroth's meld with Luna ended, and he swapped with White.

The drop in stats affected his ability to restrain the boss, and mistakes started happening. Of course, the mistakes were mitigated enough that no one died in one hit.

But the damage was rapidly piling on the party, and Silent and I'die could not keep up the healing.

In time, that could be catastrophic.

Violette forwent dealing damage at one point, focusing on using ice magic to slow down or impede Leon's movements. It was helping, and everyone knew, but with her damage gone, the health drop significantly slowed.

And the trouble would keep piling on. After almost ten minutes of combat, the boss' health dropped past fifty percent.

Leon stopped in his tracks. Everyone stopped attacking him, wary of what would happen next.

It also gave them a few seconds of welcomed respite.

Leon smirked at every one of them.

"Seems like I will have to be serious."

After saying that, his body started ballooning. His muscles rippled as his body mass increased twofold.

His blond mane grew almost a foot longer, and his face elongated slightly. His face had become more feline-like, and it was easy to recognize which kind of feline.

After finishing his transformation, he roared, as pressure descended on everyone present.

'Round two, I guess,' Astaroth thought.

Chapter 262 Beast King, Phase Two

After roaring, Leon's now larger body dropped to all fours. He launched forward, aiming at the same first target as before.

But Phoenix was prepared this time. She received the incoming beastly comet with a gout of blue flames.

Aether fueled the power behind it, and Phoenix was pooling a lot in that one attack. She did not intend to kill him, but to block his path.

Her tactic worked, as Leon suddenly had intense heat to contend against in his dash. The flames were searing his flesh and burning his fur, but the force was also stopping his advance.

Astaroth used that moment of stillness to attack a few more times, this time from afar, with his bow. Athena had been riddling Leon with arrow after arrow since the beginning, but it all seemed for naught.

The wooden shafts only ended up being broken by the beast-man as he ignored the damage. She often camouflaged herself, trying to change her angles of attack, aiming for weak points as much as she could.

Unfortunately for her, the boss' senses were extremely sharp, and she had trouble landing critical hits. Athena wasn't a quitter, though.

She repositioned time and time again. But now that Leon was busy blocking the flames with his body, and he was unmoving, it seemed like a perfect occasion for her.

Athena nocked an arrow, breathing in deeply, before exhaling half her breath. Holding the rest of it, she focused on her target.

Athena was currently at the back of Leon, and on it, there were many minor cuts, dealt by Astaroth and Gale, along with scorched fist marks, done by Phoenix.

As she focused deeply, her eye caught a deeper wound on the beast's back. A cross-section between a cut made by Astaroth, and one made by Gale.

The two individual cuts were shallow, but the point where they met looked deeper. She could see a trickle of blood seeping out of that small spot.

Athena smiled as she loosed her arrow. She used Piercing Shot, wanting to maximize her chances.

As the arrow spun madly, the arrowhead became akin to a drill bit; the arrow flew true. With a squelching sound, the arrow embedded itself deeply into the boss' back, spurting blood.

-13,145!! *Inner bleeding caused!*

Leon roared to the skies, his attention splitting from the scorching flames eating away at his crossed arms. His health was now rapidly descending.

At one percent per second, the fight would rapidly be decided if he did nothing about it. He could feel the bow had pierced his intestines, and the wound would become worse if he moved too much.

But the beast-man wasn't at his first grave wound. Leon made a flash decision, tearing the arrow out of his back, inflicting another twenty thousand damage, and turned his back to Phoenix.

The scorching flames' damage suddenly doubled, dealing almost ten thousand per second. But what Leon was accomplishing covered for it.

The blue fire seeped into his insides, searing the organs and cauterizing the wound at the cost of increased pain. He took an extra hundred and fifty thousand damage, but stopped the internal bleeding.

Athena clicked her tongue. It negated her attack just like that.

Her only saving grace was that the boss had to take a huge amount of damage to limit the damage over time, and his health had not dropped by another five percent over the last few seconds.

But another issue arose. Leon was now looking at her with rage and hatred. Athena could feel the killing intent in the beast's eyes, and she knew better than to stay there.

She activated Camouflage, as she bolted away from her spot. But she underestimated the beast-man's senses.

Leon suddenly dashed directly to where she was headed, blocking her path midway.

The man's fiery claws were already on a collision course with her throat. She knew full well that she couldn't take the incoming damage.

But before the claw could rip her neck open, another white form blurred in front of her. Astaroth had dashed after Leon, sensing his intention from his eyes alone.

He knew he would have to protect his teammate. Even if Athena was camouflaged, her party members could see her location on the minimap, as her blue dot didn't disappear for them.

Leon's attack connected to Astaroth's exposed chest, lacerating the former deeply. Astaroth flew backward, hitting Athena and dragging her with him.

The pair collided into a nearby building, Athena taking the impact damage. Her health took a steep drop, but she survived.

As for Astaroth, a damage number was floating before his eyes.

-7,800

'Almost fifteen percent of my total health while melded. If not for my high defence, I would have taken even more.'

He could tell by the number that Athena would have died instantly. Even if she had a high defence as he did, her health pool was much smaller.

But he was still losing damage every second. His chest was on fire, where five gashes had torn through his armour.

He felt the burning sensation and the burning flesh smell assaulted his nostrils. Astaroth lifted off from Athena, turning his head to her.

"Are you ok?"

"I'm fine. Are you?"

"I'll live. But Leon is gonna have hell to pay for tearing my armour."

"Then let's get back to it."

Astaroth nodded at Athena before dashing back into combat. Gulnur had taken upon himself the task of holding down the boss, but he was getting hit in every direction.

Even if his armour and resistance were very high, he was still losing more health than Silent could heal him. And I'die's healing was only maintaining acceptable levels too.

This combat was rapidly becoming deadlier by the second. To make matters worse, Astaroth noticed the health bar on Leon.

The beast-man was now teetering dangerously close to twenty-five percent HP. He could tell there would be another change when that happened, and he knew their chances of beating him were quickly thinning.

It would be a contest of endurance soon. And with how low Silent's mana was reaching, and I'die's too, their chances were quite low.

'We will need to hit him with all we have. As soon as he falls into the next phase, we will need to pound him hard enough to make him give up, or we will lose.'

Astaroth wrote his intentions down in the party chat. Everyone agreed with his thoughts, and a plan was set into motion.

It was do or die, now.

Chapter 263 The Last Stretch

Everyone slowed down, attacking less and less. Phoenix started recharging Aether slowly, while maintaining her Avatar of Flames' form.

Astaroth Melded with Morpheus, immediately applying his debuff combo, making sure he always stood in Leon's way. Gulnur made sure he took as many hits as possible, charging up the damage scale for a Retribution Strike.

Violette stopped freezing the boss' path, as a massive cloud of icicles started forming overhead. Silent bent down to his knees, clasping his hands in a praying position.

Everyone was getting ready in their own fashion. Athena had no heavy-hitting skill yet, so she was tasked with dealing continuous damage at a slowed-down rate.

I'die was in a similar position, so while Silent was praying for god knows what, his job was to keep everyone alive. It was tougher on him, since he wasn't a pure healing class.

Morticia stood back, drinking mana potions every time they came off cooldown. Her task would be to pin the boss down when everyone was ready to attack.

The beast-man's health was trickling down, teetering ever closer to the twenty-five percent mark. Everyone knew that when that happened, either they defeated it, or they died.

Nods and messages started coming in from each player, signalling they were ready for the next phase. Astaroth was the last one that needed to get ready.

He knew he would dump the pressure on his allies for the next two minutes. Astaroth wasn't ready and wouldn't be for a while, but there was no more time to wait.

He signalled to go and morphed Ad Astra into a war axe. He used a Severing Strike, aiming it at Leon's neck.

The latter's senses alerted him to danger, and his head snapped toward the incoming Astaroth. Seeing the blade on a course for his throat, Leon reflexively raised his arms, trying to block the blow.

The axe blade lodged itself deeply into the boss' arms, digging a deep gash and doing more damage. No part was severed, much to Astaroth's consternation.

But his primary aim hadn't been that. With this hit, Leon's health dropped under twenty-five percent.

παπα---nova| com The boss jumped back, looking at every player and growling in a low, menacing fashion.

"I'll admit you are worthy foes," Leon said, bleeding from cuts all over his body.

"But this farce ends now."

Leon's body started ballooning immensely. It was growing in size at a swift pace, and the party knew this was their time to act.

Morticia was the first to act.

"Kruphix Curse: Mind Lock!"

Tendrils of purple energy shot forth from her hands, hitting Leon, who was now looking like a giant lion, and seeping into his head. A veil of purple covered the latter's eyes, as his body seemed to relax.

But Morticia knew this wasn't a permanent effect. It would only last as long as she had mana, and the higher the resistance of the opponent, the faster the drain.

Her mana reserves had already started draining rapidly.

"Quickly! I can't hold this very long!"

I'die was the next to act. He created a marsh under the boss, keeping it as localized as possible. Leon's legs slowly sunk into the ground, as vines already sprouted around him to entangle his body.

I'die also doubted his vines could hold the boss in place once it snapped out of Morticia's spell, but he would keep conjuring more and more, for as long as needed, to keep Leon from wiping them out.

Violette's rain of icicles then started piercing Leon's back, the needles of ice seeming never-ending, as sweat trickled down the sides of her face.

Since Leon was getting hit on the back by almost all the icicles, the damage rapidly started piling up. Violette was dealing almost the same damage alone as the party had done together previously.

Besides that, every icicle that didn't hit the boss landed in the marsh water. A layer of ice was already forming on the surface, as the cold transferred from one spell to the other.

Gulnur darted forward, reaching the legs of the gigantic lion in a few steps. His accumulated damage over the last minutes was extremely high, and now he intended to get a bit of payback.

"Retribution Strike!" he shouted, lifting his hammer swiftly.

The leg he struck with the hammer snapped back violently, an audible cracking noise coming from it. Unfortunately for Gulnur, doing this broke Morticia's spell.

The intense pain of a limb breaking brought Leon back to reality. The beast rapidly gauged his situation and knew he had very little time to react.

Leon started rocking his massive body, biting at the never-ending vines that appeared, trying to break free. The ice forming around his legs was also quickly becoming problematic.

The icicles battering against his back, together with the hammer strike to the leg, the bullets from the small gunner, the incessant arrows aimed at his eyes and wounds, along with the small deer and wolf attacking from his sides, were all draining his health.

Leon knew something had to change fast. But something else caught his attention.

The one that had damaged him the most up to now was still nowhere to be seen. But he couldn't divert his attention to searching for him for now.

Phoenix had finally taken action, too. She had been gathering Aether for a while now, and she had reached the threshold she wanted.

She whispered to herself; her face still a mask of flames.

"Avatar of Flames; Regulus Supernova."

As soon as the words left her lips, the Aether inside her hand rushed up her arms. The sheer amount of it she had compressed from the raw flames was searing her insides, eliciting a scream of pain from her.

But the results were worth her self-torture. When the Aether reached her mana lobe, and fused with the rest of it, her flame-covered body erupted violently.

The fire covering her burst outward, changing from a bright orange to a vivid blue. The ground under her feet was melting, becoming a pool of magma.

Once the fire stabilized, Phoenix felt as if she could burn the world to cinders. The rush of power was exhilarating.

But she knew she had to act fast since she wouldn't be able to hold this form for long. She stepped forward, crossing the distance between her and Leon instantly.

She punched at the lion's chest, a jet of flames erupting from her fist.

"Flashfire Fist; Supernova!"

Fwoom!

Chapter 264 A Last Second Idea

-921,500!

A jet of bright blue flames punched through Leon's body, passing through him and burning through his back. The amount of damage he took from that attack brought his health from twenty percent down to ten percent.

The boss coughed out a spurt of blood, as it burned his internal organs to ashes in its trajectory, and the rest were gravely seared. But this triggered the boss' enrage.

Leon's size ballooned one more time, forcing all the vines holding him to burst. The ice encapsulating his paws also cracked from the sudden expansion.

RRROOAARR!!

With nothing holding him down anymore, all the players on the ground immediately palled. Phoenix, who was right there in front of Leon, almost had a cardiac arrest.

She stepped back promptly; her form dissipating as she did. Her back step put her safely behind Gulnur, amid her party.

Attacks were still raining on Leon, but he ignored them. The boss cocked his head backward as gouts of fire escaped his mouth.

"He's gonna spit flames! Get behind me!" Gulnur shouted.

"Bastion of Stone!"

Slamming his shield into the ground, the rock rapidly expanded from the point of impact. Gulnur braced his body against the shield.

Another player jumped into action as well. Silent Light, who had been praying all this time, was finally ready to act.

He was charging a spell that could save them if everything failed, and now seemed like an appropriate time to use it.

"Solari Sanctum!"

He raised his mace to the skies as a beam of pure white light struck down from the heavens. The light hit his mace, before exploding outward from it, forming a bubble of white light.

It enveloped the entire party, barely reaching Gulnur. At the same time, a massive and intense blaze struck his raised wall of stone.

Gulnur knew in seconds his spell wouldn't hold long enough. Only two seconds were left on it, and he could easily guess by the strength of the flames this would last much longer.

As his wall of stone melted away, the fire washed over the bubble of light. From inside, Gulnur could still feel the blazing heat as the flames licked the bubble upwards.

"How long do we have, Silent?" Phoenix asked her healer.

"The spell will give us ten seconds of protection. If the boss isn't done spitting fire by then, we are screwed."

Phoenix looked back at the boss monster, her eyes analytic. She could tell by the speed and pressure the flames were coming out of its mouth that it would last longer than ten seconds.

"Come on, Astaroth. It's now or never," she whispered to herself.

While all this was happening, Astaroth had been flying upwards into the tree's canopy. The height of the first branches surprised him.

Even though he could tell the tree was enormously tall, he would have thought the first branches would be lower. It took him a full minute of flying upward to get to a point he could land.

From this height, his allies and friends looked like ants, and only the boss was big enough to recognize at first sight. Even though he wanted to take some time to watch the scenery from up there, he had a job to do.

His goal for coming here was that he wanted to be a certain distance away, so he could gather Aether faster and unperturbed. He melded with Luna, immediately starting his siphoning.

He could see the fight going on down there, and was impressed when he saw a massive jet of blue flames erupt out of nowhere. But the lion's roar made him realize he had less time than he thought.

Phoenix's damage had greatly shortened his window. When Leon snapped his head back, Astaroth was in an excellent position to see the fire accumulating in it.

"Shit. I can't charge anymore."

Astaroth had wanted to charge a maximum of Aether to cast a Moon Beam point-blank on Leon, but he didn't have enough time. He jumped down the branch, letting himself fall.

He would fall for at least eight seconds, so he activated Thousand Thoughts, to give himself some more time to think. He had to think of some miracle to take down Leon, lest they fail.

Astaroth refused to have wasted all this time. As he fell, his mind thinking at an incredibly fast speed, an idea came to mind.

'Can it work? It's going to have to.'

Astaroth pulled out his shortbow. He nocked an arrow and aimed at the boss' head. Since his mind was still in overdrive, he had time to think his plan through and know when to take action.

He could see the golden white bubble protecting his allies slowly shimmer. It was about to break. It would then bathe his party in flames and disintegrate them. Astaroth took action.

He pushed all the Aether he had accumulated inside his body, and instead of using a spell with it, he shoved it into the arrow tip, almost like he was enhancing it.

The poor-quality metal was not made to suddenly house this kind of pure power, and he could already see the arrowhead wobbling.

He let the arrow fly as its descent went straight to the lion's head. On impact, the arrowhead imploded, releasing all its pent-up energy in all directions.

A flash of bright white light emanated from the point of impact. Astaroth, who was still in the last seconds of his Thousand Thoughts spell, saw everything happen in slow motion.

The wave expanded, washing over the protective spell Silent was holding. Leon's head was blasted into the ground, the impact knocking him out instantly, and shaving away almost the entirety of his remaining HP.

Astaroth watched as the wave came towards him, slowly but certainly. He pulled out his shield, enhancing it, casting Mana Skin, and tucking himself behind it.

This was a Hail Mary, as far as he was concerned, since he knew it would never block the damage coming at him entirely. He just hoped it would be enough to keep him alive.

As his spell ended, the wave of white light swallowed him.

Chapter 265 A Trip To Her Domain

When the shockwave reached him, the force emptied Astaroth's lungs, pushing him away like a meteor. He flew backward, crashing into a solid obstacle, before losing consciousness.

Opening his eyes, Astaroth was in a dark place. All around him were specks of light in the distance.

"Where the hell am I this time?"

Turning on himself, he noticed there was something underfoot that acted like a floor. He couldn't see anything supporting his weight, but he could feel gravity and his feet on a solid surface.

Doing a full three-sixty, he noticed something near him. There was what looked like a pond on a raised platform made of some kind of black rock.

Astaroth got closer to it, trying to peer inside. What he saw made him frown.

The water in the pond gave no reflection. Instead, it looked like the pond acted like a window to some place.

The place in question was an expanse of deep space, with spots of white that dotted the night sky. The spots were too small to see anything, and the bright light they emanated didn't allow him to see if there was something in them.

But the other thing that made him frown was the silhouette of a woman floating next to one spot of light. The silhouette seemed familiar.

The woman in the pond suddenly turned around, looking straight toward him. Her hair flared up in a cloud of purple and blue, and she disappeared from the image.

The pond rippled, suddenly going blank, and Astaroth backed away. When his back hit something, he almost jumped out of his skin, spinning around and pulling out Ad Astra.

But when he saw what he had bumped into, he breathed a sigh of relief.

"Lady Anulo. My apologies for backing into you. I had not seen you there."

The minor deity looked at him with a piercing gaze. Her eyes were trying to discern something, what was anyone's guess.

"Lady Anulo? Are you okay?"

"Who are you? How did you get here? How do you know my name? And how did you get your hands on that weapon?"

While she asked these questions, her hair flared up, giving off waves of purple, red, and green. The sudden pressure she exerted almost pushed Astaroth away.

"L... Lady Anulo! It's me! Astaroth!"

She looked at him, her hair receding a bit as her eyes focused on his traits. She couldn't quite recognize him at first.

Astaroth was confused about why. He backed away slowly, his foot hitting the rock base of the pond. When his head turned to look at it, he understood why.

The water had stopped rippling and was now reflecting the surroundings. In the reflection, he could see his face.

He currently looked like his human self, his long ears gone, and his skin its normal peachy tint. His confusion levels rose, matching the woman's.

"What the? How am I in human form? I'm still in the game, no?"

"Young man. What game are you talking about?"

Astaroth turned his head back to Alantha Anulo, noticing her hair had returned to its original colour and shape.

"New Eden. If I'm here with you, that means I should still be inside the game."

Her face contorted into a mask of confusion again. She was trying to understand what the man was saying, but his talk of the game was confusing her.

Had her world ever been a game? He made no sense.

But then again, he was standing in front of her, in deep space, as a human. And she could see the resemblance with Astaroth after observing him for a while.

Scanning his soul, she recognized the energy within it, and she could tell it was him, but his appearance didn't match. There had to be an explanation.

'I'll have to go talk with the other gods. Find out the truth.'

"How did you get here, young Astaroth?"

"I would like to know as much as you, my lady. A blast of Aether knocked me unconscious, and I ended up here."

Lady Anulo thought about it for a few minutes, letting Astaroth stand there awkwardly. Her reasoning came down to two factors.

The blast of Aether had knocked a part of his soul out, and the tethers to her had snapped it to her domain. It couldn't have happened if he had only one anchor with her, but the fact that he had pulled out the Ad Astra confirmed he had more.

She kept thinking over it for a moment, as Astaroth observed her domain. He could see a small bed-like object a little further, but doubted it was an actual bed.

After all, did gods even need to rest? He doubted that.

He was thinking about how to get back to his body. There was no way to know how time differed from here to where he was.

The sooner he went back, the better it was.

"Umm... Excuse me, Lady Anulo."

The woman left her torpor, focusing herself back on him.

"Yes?"

"I would like to know if there is a way back to my body. I don't think staying here is any good for me."

"Hm. Yes, there is a way. But it might be quite unpleasant."

"Anything to go back to my body. I need to get back to my friends and we are also on a tight schedule for something."

"Alright then. I'm a little saddened that you don't want to stay with me a little longer, though."

"Ahh... I'm sorry. I promise next time I will keep you company. But now is not a great moment."

"Very well. But I warn you. This will be very unpleasant."

"What could it poss—"

As he was asking, Lady Anulo appeared before him, grabbing him by the neck. Her face was a mask of calmness, adorned by a smile, but Astaroth wasn't buying it.

Her hand was clutching his throat, and the air was no longer reaching his lungs. She raised him off the ground, sauntering towards the fountain.

"I need you to think about your friends and where you were before here. Shut out any other thought."

Saying this, she pushed him under the water, holding him in place with a smile.

'Is she trying to kill me?!'

"Think of your friends, young Astaroth. The faster you do, the less you suffer."

Although he wanted to believe her, he was about to be unable to hold his breath any longer. He knew the second he tried sucking in air, he would start drowning.

'I never thought she would be so ruthless. I guess this is what I get for thinking gods care about us.'

His body finally flinched, trying to take that vital gasp of air, and all it found was water. His mind meandered to his friends as he felt his body go limp.

When his brain envisioned Phoenix's face, he felt his body become warmer, before a suction force drew him away.

'Well. This is how I die...'

Chapter 266 Dire Straights

Feeling his body getting sucked away, Astaroth assumed he was taking his first death in New Eden. But his eyes opened to a familiar tree canopy.

Gasp!

In front of him, Morticia was shaking him by his collar.

"Get up! We need you!"

Astaroth looked around himself, confused, everything blurry. He knew he was most likely concussed.

"What's happening? Why are you yelling?"

Astaroth could hear some faint fighting noises in the background, but his ears were ringing intensely. As his sight slowly settled, he noticed he was inside a ruined building of sorts, with the opposite wall to him completely blown in.

Morticia slapped him across the face.

Slap

"Get a grip! If you don't join the fight, we are all going to die!"

"What? What are you talking about?"

He looked to the party window and saw that almost every party member was currently teetering on the red, aside from him. Silent Light's mana bar was practically empty, and so was I'die's.

A sense of urgency took hold of him. He stood to his feet, still wobbling wearily.

"What is happening?"

"I'll explain later! For now, you need to get back into combat. You are the only one in fit condition."

Astaroth could guess what had transpired. Since Silent was out of mana, and he was the only one almost full of health, he assumed Silent had prioritized him when he was out in hopes he would wake up.

That would have led to the situation becoming extremely dire for the rest of the party when he didn't rise.

Astaroth walked to the building's gaping wall. What he saw outside was utter chaos.

Leon's body seemed to be still strewn on the ground, far away, while monsters surrounded him and his allies from every side. And they split apart everyone, to cover the most ground they could.

The party had banked everything on Astaroth waking up, and now they were deeply in trouble. His brain finally pushed through the blur and nausea.

When his eyes steeled, Morticia breathed a sigh of relief. Fatigue took hold of her as she crashed to the ground.

Astaroth briefly checked in his skill window, checking how long he had until he could meld with Luna again. To his surprise, the timer was already back to zero.

'I've been out for over ten minutes. That explains the direness.'

He immediately melded with Luna and cast Moonlit Sanctuary inside the building.

"Everyone inside the building! I'die! As soon as everyone is in, close up the entrance and fortify the walls!"

After shouting this, Astaroth shot out spells to the enemies close by, practically one-shotting everything he hit.

His allies almost jumped in surprise when they suddenly heard his voice. Most of them started moving immediately, but Phoenix and Gulnur were being more stubborn.

"I can still help!" Phoenix shouted.

She was backing up slowly, covering her allies to the building, but not going in herself. Gulnur was doing the same, but he didn't talk.

"I know you can, but you also need to rest. Get inside."

Phoenix kept shooting fireballs and flame bolts at the enemies, ignoring his demand. She refused to let him fight alone.

Even if the horde of monsters had diminished in the last minutes, leaving him to fight alone would be reckless at best, and suicidal at worst.

"Gulnur, you too."

"No! I have to defend everyone, as the party's tank. I'm staying, even if it's the death of me."

Astaroth sighed while killing enemies left and right. He took a rapid step toward Gulnur, grabbing the back of his plated armour.

"I'm sorry, but you've done enough. Go rest."

"What the—"

Astaroth's grip on his armour made the metal wince a bit as he flung him inside the stone building. He then turned to Phoenix, and with a wave of his hand, mana engulfed her.

She turned her head toward him, fury in her eyes.

"Don't you dare! Let me help!"

"After you've rested."

"No! I refuse to leave you fighting alone!"

"See you soon."

With another wave, the globe of condensed mana carried Phoenix inside the building. I'die watched as Phoenix came flying in and nodded to Astaroth.

Astaroth nodded back, as stone started covering the hole, and the walls thickened. In a matter of seconds, the building looked like a dome of grey stone.

Some monsters attempted to dig through, unsuccessfully, before turning their angry eyes to Astaroth. It was now him against the horde.

By his estimate, there were still around a thousand monsters of varied races remaining. It wouldn't be a walk in the park.

He dashed into the fray, taking upon himself the burden of protecting his allies as they had protected him.

"Come at me, all of you! Let me show you why I took down your king!"

Meanwhile, inside the dome-covered building, Phoenix was slamming her hands against the rock.

Thud *Thud* *Thud*

She spun on her heels, looking at the druid.

"I'die! Let me out! Right now!"

"No. If I open up the stone, I won't have enough mana to close it up again. We would all be left exposed."

"Then we keep fighting! Aren't we all talented and powerful players?! What are you scared of?"

"Be reasonable, Phoenix." Athena chimed in.

Everyone around was exhausted and battered. Silent Light was already sprawled across the floor, gasping for air.

They all understood Phoenix's frustration. Being protected by one player meant they were failing to carry their own burden.

It was an affront to any gamer that respected himself. But right now, Astaroth had asked them to rest.

They could always join after they had recuperated. Astaroth could take care of himself in the meantime.

But Phoenix did not want to take no for an answer.

"Then I'll just blast a hole into this wall and get myself out!"

As she said that, fire already formed in her hands. But just before she could launch the fireball at the stone, a wave of deep purple mana washed over her.

Her mind became numb, and it cancelled her spell. Phoenix dropped to her knees before falling to her side, asleep.

Morticia looked at her with a soft smile.

"Do as your lover asked you to do. Rest."

She turned her head to the rest of the party.

"Anyone who wants to follow in her footsteps, you are more than welcome to try. The same fate awaits you."

The party kept quiet.

"Good. Now let's all rest, so we can go back and help him as fast as possible. Astaroth might be strong, but he isn't omnipotent."

Morticia sat down in the rubble, followed by all the others. Silence permeated the room.

Chapter 267 Testing Out New Forms

The fight started with a bang, as Astaroth shot a Moon Beam into the compacted monster horde, killing dozens of them in a single spell. He then started running through that cleared line, shooting Fire Bolts and Wind Blades.

As he zoomed away from the stone dome, the horde followed behind him, nipping at his heels. Astaroth shot spell after spell, gravely wounding or outright killing enemies.

He also took damage, since there was no way he could dodge every incoming attack. He was fast, but not that fast.

But the damage he took was paltry compared to what he dished out. After two minutes of running around and killing enemies, he had already thinned the herd by a quarter of its mass.

He suddenly recalled something. The description of the Ad Astra specified it could emulate any damage.

He hadn't tried using it to cast magic yet, since he thought it was mainly a melee weapon. But what if he could use it as a spell-casting focus?

Astaroth didn't want to use it as a wand, since it would be a waste of his second hand. But he was having trouble thinking of a weapon that would allow him to cast from both hands and not slow down his casting speed.

A staff would use both hands, but it would slow down his attacks, since he would fire one spell at a time. As he wracked his brain on the matter, he kept dipping in and out of combat.

He was less focused on his fighting, so he took more damage, but it was still manageable. But then he had an Eureka moment.

He envisioned it in his head, sending the mana into Ad Astra, forcing it to morph. His artifact flashed white for a second, before disappearing from his hand.

The next second, the pommel of the Ad Astra appeared over his chest, with the metal forming some kind of flexible tube going from the orb to his two hands.

The tubes split at his hand, forming some weird tubed glove with metallic fingertips. Two of the fingertips, his index and middle finger, had open tips.

Astaroth looked at it with a wide grin.

He inspected Ad Astra, wanting to know how this weapon was called by the system.

Ad Astra (Spell-slinger's Gloves Form)

Grade: Artifact

Attack Power: (Level 48) 1920 (All stats) (Tens of level * ten * level)

Durability: ∞

His grin widened.

'Now we're talking! Time to test these bad boys out!'

Astaroth formed guns with his hands, leaving the index and middle fingers extended. When he channelled a fire bolt, he felt the spell go through the weapons' orb, before leaving toward the hands.

Two identical bullets, made of fire, left his hands, hitting two nearby enemies.

-14,200! *-14,200!*

The two enemies instantly turned into flaming corpses before turning into pixels and vanishing. Astaroth had used four points to max out his Firebolt spell, and the increase in damage, along with his weapon's damage, and landing crits surpassed his expectations.

He rapidly dumped another four points into Wind Blade and Stone Bullet, maxing them out too. They were basic spells, and only gave two hundred percent damage, but that seemed plenty in this case.

He hurriedly cast Stone Bullet and Wind Blade, which also came flying out as bullets made of their respective elements. The speed at which they flew was augmented, though.

Their penetrative power seemed augmented by the Ad Astra, guaranteeing critical hits, as long as he didn't hit a well-covered spot on the monsters. Astaroth was in heaven.

His killing power drastically went up, allowing him to mow through the enemies with great ease. But he also noticed something else.

The spells cost more mana to cast than usual when fired through the gloves. Astaroth took it as a trade-off for the augmented penetrative power and longer spell travel.

Since he wasn't casting through his body directly, there seemed to be some loss of mana along the weapon. But with his extremely high mana levels, he couldn't care less.

By the time his meld with Luna was close to expiring, Astaroth had already cleared out half the monster horde. He had slowly started seeing higher-levelled monsters, as well as high-grade ones.

His damage was still good enough to contend with them, but he was also taking more damage than before. Astaroth switched his meld to White, in a practiced manner, morphing from one form to the other quasi-instantly.

While he transformed, he also thought it wise to switch the form of his weapon. Since his meld with White allowed for greater combat capability than magic, he thought of something new there, too.

He infused the Ad Astra with more Mana and it flashed white. The orb that had been over his chest disappeared from it and reappeared as two smaller orbs.

The two small orbs were adorning the top of his new weapon. He had transformed the Spell-slinger's gloves into a set of large metallic claws that covered the ones that already came from melding with White.

His hands looked a little funny, suddenly metallic and oversized. But the sharp sheen the claws gave off was more than enough to convince anyone of their lethality.

Astaroth abandoned his kiting tactic, switching to a hit-and-run tactic. His speed in this form wasn't any inferior to Luna's form, even considering the lower stat increase.

This allowed him to weave through the enemies deftly. Astaroth reminded himself of something a martial artist had once said.

'Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee.'

That was how he felt at that moment. His graceful movements allowed him better evasion than earlier, since his focus was more on his immediate surroundings than on further targets.

And his hands sliced swiftly through anything too close, spurting blood everywhere he went. The fight went on for the full duration of his meld, dashing in and out of enemies, spraying their insides on the ground.

When it was time to switch again, Astaroth was bloodied red, dripping with blood of many colours, and bits of flesh. It didn't seem to bother him much, though.

He focused his mind on one thing: surviving. Inadvertently to him, his running and fighting had brought him closer to Leon's unconscious body.

Body which was twitching and shuddering.

Leon was waking from his slumber.

Chapter 268 Revealing The Truth

While Leon slowly rose from his unconscious state, Astaroth kept fighting what was left of the horde. He had already melded with Morpheus, using his aerial advantage to kite the remaining monsters to death.

When he transformed Ad Astra into a bow, he quickly noticed the extra power his arrows gained. It was like the weapon was automatically enhancing the projectiles magically.

It didn't take long for the Zone boss to be back on his feet. Leon's form had also shrunk back to its humanoid one.

When he noticed what was left of his horde, his face morphed into a mask of anger. Leon's head snapped to the flying, bat-looking Ash Elf.

He roared with rage.

"ENOUGH!"

Every surrounding monster instantly stopped moving, the command of their king being absolute. Astaroth stopped firing arrows, but stayed in flight.

He wasn't sure if the beast-man would consider himself defeated yet, or if he would have to engage him again. The only thing he was sure of was that Leon looked pissed.

"Why are you slaughtering my subjects?! Tell me?!"

Astaroth looked at him warily.

"You are asking the wrong person. I was out for a while, too. When I came to, my friends were defending me from them."

"Your friends must have attacked them first! My subjects would never disobey my orders!"

"Why don't you ask them?"

"Are you suggesting they disobeyed me?"

"I'm suggesting they could have lost it after they saw me take you out and sought revenge."

Leon averted his gaze from Astaroth, sweeping his subjects one by one. Most of them held his gaze, but a few of them looked to the ground as their eyes met.

That was a sign enough for him to accept that what Astaroth was saying might hold some truth. He turned his head back to the man.

"I want to hear your friends' version. Tell them to come here, now."

"Can you assure me they won't be attacked until they have spoken their side?"

Leon only nodded in return, sweeping his gaze back on his subjects. All he met was the top of their heads as they gazed at the ground.

Astaroth nodded, before sending a message in the party chat. When he asked his party to come to where Leon was, they assumed that the combat with the boss wasn't done, and they left their shelter in a rush.

But when they saw Astaroth flying above the ground, Leon standing still and looking at them, as well as all the remaining monsters with their heads down low, they were confused.

Astaroth tried explaining the situation succinctly, as they walked over to him and Leon. He needed them to stay their weapons, lest Leon think they really did attack first.

Phoenix looked groggy, and her only clear reactions were some of hostility towards Morticia. The latter seemed to pay no heed to the hateful looks as she walked toward Leon.

Morticia decided it would be better for her to talk in this scenario. She was the eldest in their group and considered herself the most rational as well.

She also intended to use her background in psychology to appease the boss, since they were still not in a fighting shape. Phoenix would have contested that if she were in a talkative form.

Once Morticia was before Leon, she did a small curtsy.

"Spare me your humanoid politeness, Fey woman. Speak. Tell me your side of the story, so I can decide whether I punish my subjects or rip your group to shreds."

Some audible gulps resounded from the rest of the party, while Astaroth frowned at the beast king.

Morticia, though, paid the threat no mind. She stood back straight, smiling warmly at Leon.

"The situation was quite hectic after the explosion, your majesty. After both you and our leader collapsed, our group and your subjects went to find out their respective leader's status."

Leon growled low at the title Morticia gave him. Even though he was indeed the king of beasts, he felt like the woman was using the title to insult him.

Morticia coughed slightly before proceeding.

"When we saw our leader was unconscious, we surrounded him to keep him safe, in case of retribution. Which didn't make itself wait long. Once your subjects saw you unconscious too, some of them started howling and roaring, and seconds later, we were surrounded."

"Can you point me to the ones that howled and roared?"

"Why certainly!"

Morticia started looking through the monsters, to identify those she remembered howling, but before she could point out the first one, the monster lunged at her.

His speed was nothing to scoff at, Morticia's eyes going wide at the incoming creature. It was a dark leopard-looking monster, and his movements were akin to a lightning bolt.

As its jaws were nearing Morticia's throat, an arrow impacted its skull, veering the head to the side, before its body suddenly went limp. In front of Morticia stood Astaroth, who received the weight of the monster with his body, after killing it.

Astaroth looked at Leon with rage.

"Does this not prove what she is saying?"

Leon looked at Astaroth with defiance. He wanted to rebuke the Ash Elf, but the reaction of his subject to being accused was convincing of the truth the humanoids were claiming.

The monster that attacked wasn't an outlier, either. It was one part of the group that had already tried overthrowing him.

He thought he had quelled their spirits of rebellion already, but it seemed he was wrong. Leon turned his head to the remaining monsters he knew were part of the same faction.

As soon as their eyes met, he could sense the fear in them. He relished in the feeling, taking mental notes to deal with those subjects later.

For now, he still had to make right upon his agreed promise to the Ash Elf. Even if serving under a humanoid made him sick, they had proved themselves fair, and he would not renege on his deal.

"I will deal with the wrongdoers later. For now, I will agree that you defended yourselves. As per our agreed terms, I shall join your guild."

Ding!

You have recruited an NPC in your guild. You can check your recruited NPCs in the specified section of the guild tab. Congratulations on acquiring a native ally!

Chapter 269 Claiming The Bastion

The guild members in the party almost yipped with joy. Getting an NPC to join a guild was said to be difficult.

But they didn't just get any NPC! They had recruited a Semi-Legendary one!

This was huge!

Astaroth only nodded in satisfaction. But more good news came in next.

Event successfully concluded! Congratulations to the guild Paragons for their tenacity and unwavering will!

Generating rewards

Rewards generated successfully!

10 Million Exp points to each player

5000 Gold to each player

Treasury content of the Bastion has been doubled

5000 guild reputation points

Evolution Fruit (Guild Leader only)

The sudden influx of Exp made every player present jump with joy. Ten million may not seem like much the further your level went, but it was still a massive amount.

And that amount was aside from the Exp they made from killing all the monsters. From the horde, which was originally about four thousand strong, only a little over three hundred remained.

Almost everyone in the party levelled up. The only outliers were Astaroth, who already needed an insane amount of Exp to level up, and Morticia, who was missing only a sliver to do so herself.

Aside from those, Astaroth's spirit and Genie didn't benefit from the additional ten million Exp, so they didn't level up either. But Astaroth paid it no mind.

His current aim was to complete the reason they came here in the first place. They still needed to reach the Bastion's stronghold and officially make it their own.

From what Athena had explained to them outside, she had gained the right to the land from the tribe of Wild Elves outside. But the Bastion itself was no longer considered theirs, ever since the horde of monsters had taken it as their own.

Astaroth had half hoped that making Leon join their guild would fix the issue, but it seemed like that wasn't enough. Astaroth turned to look at Leon.

"Can you direct us to the stronghold? Or better yet, guide us there?"

Leon huffed at the demand, since he hated taking orders. But he was now under Astaroth by the guild rules, so he still did as asked.

Astaroth had an inkling of an idea where the stronghold would be, but the less time they wasted searching for the exact room he wanted to be in, the better for their next objective.

Leon guided the group inside the gigantic tree that stood in the center of the Bastion. The inside looked like what most of them had expected, with the features holding their majesty, albeit their unkempt appearances.

What surprised the non-Elvish players was that most of the decorations or walls seemed like they had been grown this way, not carved or built. The interior all seemed part of the same piece of wood.

I'die and Athena were familiar with this architecture, since most Elvish structures were like this in cities and villages. They still did not know how it was done, though.

After many twists and turns inside the tree structure, which resembled a ruined palace, they reached a large open room. At one end of the room, a large slate of stone was leaned on its side.

From all the leathers, clothes and shiny things strewn across its surface, Astaroth could tell this was where Leon had made his throne, for lack of a better word.

But when Astaroth scanned the stone, he grinned from ear to ear.

Ownership Pillar (Unclaimed and temporarily destroyed)

Astaroth used some telekinesis to clear the top of the stone.

"Hey! That was my bed!" Leon exclaimed.

Astaroth looked at him with a frown.

"Make one somewhere else. I need that stone standing upright."

Leon grumbled slightly under his breath. He had been living there for decades and being forcefully moved out peeved him.

But he could hardly go against the guild leader's orders anymore.

After clearing the surface, Astaroth identified what would have been the previous location the pillar was standing. With some more magic, he picked the pillar up and slowly moved toward its destined resting place.

Seeing his efforts, Violette and Phoenix helped him out. The stone pillar was massive, so with their joint efforts, it took less time to put it upright.

After a few seconds of uneventful watching, the pillar finally stood upright again, now back in its crevice, after many years.

A flash of light shone in the room, half blinding the people present. Once it was done, the stone pillar looked like new, all traces of time and wear gone.

Astaroth smiled as he approached it.

When he put his hand on the cold, hard surface, he received a system prompt.

Ding!

Do you wish to make this fortress your new guild headquarters?

* Yes / No*

Astaroth immediately pressed yes. As he did, a worldwide announcement resounded.

World Announcement!

*Guild Paragons is the first guild to take ownership of a fortress! For their efforts, they will be rewarded with resources and gold for upkeep, as well as an additional 5000 world reputation points!
*

Congratulations to guild Paragons!

Astaroth almost slapped his face when he read the announcement.

'I wanted to keep this quiet for as long as possible! Why didn't the system let me decide to announce it or not?!'

Seeing his discomfit face, Phoenix giggled lightly.

"It's a good thing no one knows where we are. We would get swarmed by other guilds trying to take it from us, otherwise."

"Let's make sure it stays this way..."

Astaroth didn't want to check in the guild treasury just yet, even though he was strongly tempted. He had something else in mind first.

His inventory contained an apple of some sort that hadn't been there previously. The Evolution Fruit.

He had been thinking of whether to give it to Genie, or keep it for himself, for later. He wondered if he could even consume it.

But another idea came to his mind. His gaze locked on Leon.

"Leon. Tell me something."

"Huh? What?"

"How long have you been in the semi-legendary state?"

Leon thought for a while, before shrugging.

"I don't remember how long exactly. It's been decades, at least. Why?"

"If I had a way of assuring you traversed that last stage, what would you do in exchange?"

"What?!" Leon exclaimed.

Chapter 270 Devising A Plan

Seeing his overblown reaction, Astaroth knew he was on to something. He promptly pulled out the fruit from his inventory, showing the beast-man.

Leon's eyes bulged when he saw the fruit.

"I take it you know what this is."

"Where did you get it?!"

"I got it as a reward for clearing this place. Why?"

"This is the reason I took possession of this place. This fruit drew me here."

"Did you get it?"

Astaroth grew curious. If Leon took hold of the Bastion for this fruit, then why did he stay after?

"I never could. The smell of the fruit drew me here, but I searched everywhere and never found it. I stayed in the hopes another would grow before too long. It never did."

Still holding the fruit out, Astaroth became pensive. Had the fruit disappeared, or did something take it away before he could have it?

Moreover, why did it appear now as a quest reward? Was the system trying to guide his hand for something?

Astaroth could feel Leon's eyes boring through the fruit. The greed in his eyes was boundless, and he knew only the prospect of breaking guild rules did he hold back.

Astaroth didn't know what joining a guild entailed to NPCs, but he could guess by how little it happened that it had significance.

Astaroth also noticed another thing. The fruit he was holding seemed—light, for lack of a better description.

He thought a fruit that could evolve a creature was bound to be chock full of energy. But after scrutinizing it with his perfect mana senses, he failed to see that much mana or Aether in it.

It was like the fruit was lifeless.

But given how Leon wanted it, he could surmise it would still break him through to legendary rank. But what if it was full?

What would happen to Leon if the fruit contained the energy it should have? It gave him an idea.

"I can assume this fruit would push you to legendary, Leon, right?"

Leon nodded his head twice, rapidly.

"Then I want to try something out. The fruit seems empty in my senses. If you let me fill it with Aether, I think it can benefit you more."

"Can you do that? I mean, I know you can tap into Aether. I felt it earlier. But can you fill the fruit up?"

"I can try. I have an idea in mind to give me a chance at it."

"Would you still give me the fruit, then?"

Leon looked like an excited child, looking at the prospect of candy if he behaved.

"I have a condition."

"Anything!"

Astaroth laughed at Leon's reaction. In the meantime, most of the players had gone to explore the new headquarters they now owned.

Gulnur had extended a guild invitation to Death The Gnome, which the latter had promptly accepted. What player in his right mind would decline to join a guild with such good fortune, after all?

Silent had extended the same courtesy to Morticia, but she declined his invitation. She had told him, "I will only accept it if it comes from Phoenix."

Silent had been confused at first, but he quickly understood her underlying meaning. With how Phoenix looked at his sister, he understood it was better if Phoenix made the move, so they would at least set some boundaries.

It hadn't taken Phoenix long to send one of her own. Morticia knew where the base was, which was a risk factor. But she was also a very experienced pro player.

Having her in Paragons would not be a loss.

Now, the two of them were observing how Astaroth interacted with their new NPC guild member with curiosity.

eaglesnovel.com Phoenix already knew Astaroth treated the NPCs like people, and knew a part of the reason. But for Morticia, this was news.

She had treated the NPCs with respect up to now, but she always treated them like what she thought they were; lines of code.

Seeing Astaroth treat Leon like he was an actual person was a tad odd. But she let it happen, and only observed from the side, her psychologist's interest piqued.

"My condition is simple. I believe the Bastion was once the location of a great city, most likely Elven in nature."

"That's not a condition." Leon interrupted.

"I'm getting to it. What if it is still qualified as one?"

"I don't understand what you are trying to say..."

Phoenix was the one to interject next.

"Wait... You don't mean to say we could start a nation, right?"

"That was indeed what I was thinking. As for my condition, Leon, it is quite simple. If what I think is valid, then we will need Kingdom Spirit, or Guardian, in this case."

Phoenix became excited. But her pragmatic side still showed.

"But we would need so much more than just guild members for that. And that would entail opening the city to everyone and exposing its location."

"I know. But if what I think I can achieve works, and Leon accepts my condition, we wouldn't have to worry."

Even Leon was curious now.

"What do you think you can do with the fruit?"

"I think I can ask another person to help me fill it with the required Aether to make it strong enough to make you skip a grade. I think I can make you a mythical grade with it."

Leon's eyes shone as his mind took in the prospect.

Phoenix and Morticia looked at Astaroth with amazement. The idea itself was outlandish, but somehow, he made it sound like it was not just a possibility, but also a certainty.

"I accept!" Leon exclaimed.

He kneeled, lowering his head.

"I accept your terms. If you can make me a mythical being, I will gladly devote my life to protecting this land in your name. May the gods be my witnesses."

As he said this, a loud thunderclap echoed in the skies, surprising everyone in and near the bastion. The skies were blue and clear of any cloud, and yet, thunder had boomed.

This told Astaroth that Leon's words had been received and noted by the gods. He knew next to nothing about this world's gods, but he knew this.

No one could renege a promise made in their name.

"Good. Then let me begin this." Astaroth replied, his grin widening.