

New Eden 331

Chapter 331 Planning Ahead

The officers settled down as Khalor resumed his explanation of the upcoming update.

"Evo Gaming will announce the time skip only when the update is almost done, meaning no one will have time to prepare for it. We should get ahead of the wave before they lock us out of the game."

"Already making plans," Phoenix replied.

Her attention was half on what Khalor was saying, and half on her interface. She was already setting up things for their guild for the time skip.

She had a few contacts that were still in Sunpeak and the other major cities of New Eden, and she was pulling out favours.

If she could get representatives of each city to at least entertain relations with their new kingdom, they would come back to something better than an empty and ruined fortress after the ten-year time skip.

She only hoped that her attempts would yield results, and not scrap everything they had built in the last few days. She would hate herself if she ruined it for everyone, instead of making it better.

But she had faith in the people she was contacting. These players had been prospects she wanted to get in the guild, but since they owed her favours, they were reticent.

They would rather have a clean ledger before locking themselves under her. After all, climbing the social ladder would be hard, with a chip on their shoulder.

Phoenix hoped they would accept her invitation after clearing these favours. They were valuable assets to anyone that could get them under their wing.

In the meantime, Khalor kept talking.

"There will be many changes in the updated New Eden. The main one being, you should never travel alone unless you can fend off multiple enemies at the ranges of level thirty to forty."

Frowns appeared on almost everyone's face. Declan interjected.

"Why so? Will there be a surge in powerful enemies?"

Looking at Declan, Khalor smirked.

"Because finding enemies alone, or under these levels, will have become quite hard after the update. Only the protected starting zones will still have enemies in the lower-level ranges."

"Then what will replace them?" the headless man asked.

"Not replaced. Changed. The creatures from everywhere in the world will have been corrupted. At least the weaker ones. And that is only the tip of the problem."

Everyone took a moment to let the information sink in. If Khalor was right, which they were currently doubting, that meant New Eden would fall into hard mode soon.

"Also, this will not be the biggest issue with traveling alone."

This time, Gulnur was the one to ask.

"What else could be worse than packs of corrupted powerful enemies?"

"Two things can and will be worse. The first one is that there will be even stronger enemies sometimes roaming along with them. But the second is worse than even that. We won't be immune to corruption."

Most of the people in the room didn't understand the weight of these words. But Astaroth was well aware of what Khalor really meant with it.

His mind was already weighing the weight of Khalor's statement. What would happen if corruption suddenly affected players?

Would they change into maniacs? Or would they lose the ability to control their actions?

The implications of either of these scenarios were bad. And that was just what he could think of, off the top of his head.

"Anyway. Let us not waste any more of this twenty-four-hour period to prepare. Phoenix, if you could grant everyone in this room level fifty, that would be a great help. As for the others in the guild, do what you see fit."

Phoenix nodded her head. She pulled away from her constant messaging, pulling her guild tab open.

It took her only a few seconds to make everyone in the underground chamber level fifty, and she then sent a guild message to the rest of the players to amass in front of the palace.

Once Khalor received his Exp, he got up from the dais stairs.

"I will consider this meeting adjourned, and head out to make my preparations for the update. I recommend you all do the same."

As he sauntered away, ascending the stairway, the other officers pondered on what to do. In the end, they turned to the two guild leaders, awaiting instructions.

Phoenix finished sending her stream of messages and turned to see them all waiting. Astaroth was looking at her pensively.

He sent her a private message.

'We might as well use them for preparation too, if they want directions anyway.'

Phoenix read it and agreed with him.

"If any of you want to make preparations of your own before the update kicks us out, you are more than welcome. If not, I have a few tasks I can assign you guys."

Seeing that no one asked to leave, or directly left, Phoenix interpreted they had nothing to do. So she nodded at them.

"Okay then. Gulnur, I will need you to head to a dwarven major city and speak to the highest rank native you know, and try to establish political connections. Same thing for you, Morticia."

"On it," Gulnur responded.

"I will try," Morticia said.

"Silent Light, you need to do the same in a human settlement. I'die and Athena, you guys can make the most of your time here, trying to fix up as much of the Bastion as you can."

The three of them nodded, leaving to do their respective tasks. This left only Astaroth, Phoenix, Violette and Gale in the chamber.

Phoenix looked at Gale, not sure what she could have him do. She doubted he had political clout anywhere, seeing as people hardly took a kid seriously.

But Gale cut the silence.

"I know what I can do. I'll head back out and tell Grandpa we might need to make some changes to our current accommodations. Also, before I leave. Astaroth, Grandpa wants to talk to you as soon as you can."

"Tell him I will come out when the timer kicks me out, and I'll be all his then."

"Okay!"

Chirping, Gale took off, wind-stepping his way out of the chamber. This left only Violette, Astaroth, and Phoenix.

Astaroth looked at Violette, opening his mouth.

"I think you should warn your parents that you might spend more time in New Eden after the update. Also, tell Alfred to increase security around your house. Discreetly, if possible."

The little girl nodded, taking her leave immediately.

Astaroth looked at Phoenix next.

"I'll have something to do, too. I will be away until the clock runs out."

"Where are you going?"

"Home."

Chapter 332 Journey Back Home, 22 Hours Left

Phoenix didn't understand what he meant by home at first. She thought he meant disconnecting and leaving the facility they were still laying down in.

But as they were heading up, he started talking again.

"I'll stay with you while you reward our members, but then I have to go. I have a lot of road to cover, and I can't teleport to Sunpeak from any nearby Elven city."

Phoenix frowned in confusion.

"Why do you want to go to Sunpeak? Home isn't there, is it?"

"No. Sunpeak is just the closest city I know with a teleporter."

Astaroth stopped next to Phoenix. She saw him taping around in his interface, before his map suddenly became visible to her.

On it, she saw he had completely zoomed out on the continent they were. Phoenix coils see practically only the fog of war on it, which wasn't much different from her own.

But it showed a few specks of visible map. One speck was here, the Bastion.

Another one was Sunpeak. But from Sunpeak, there was an obvious straight line to another place, and a V-shape from that place to another city.

She didn't recognize the name of the city, Tel'narel, and neither did she know where the other cleared-up space was. But her brain rapidly did the math.

"Are you thinking of going back to your starting village? What do you want to do there?"

"I want to tell them to move out of there. I have a bad feeling about this ten-year time skip, and I fear they might be in danger if they stay there."

Seeing his concern was genuine, Phoenix didn't want to keep him here more than necessary. She started walking back toward the entrance of the palace.

Astaroth looked at her walking away, wordlessly, thinking she was mad at him, or maybe even she thought he was crazy. But when she stopped a few steps later, and turned around, it was an urgency he saw on her face.

"Are you coming? The faster I'm done with rewarding the members, the faster you can leave."

Astaroth's serious face bloomed into a smile. He skipped forward, reaching next to Phoenix as she started walking again.

The reward ceremony didn't take long, as many of the players had not lost their lives during the trap zone phase, and they didn't need to be given Exp back. The only thing that arose was the will from most members to get a physical reward.

Phoenix promised them compensation, but said that they needed to wait until she could confirm they had such compensation to give. This assuaged them, for the time being.

Once this was done, Phoenix quickly gifted the officers in the guild the required amount of Exp for all of them to reach level fifty. When she opened up the leaderboards, she smiled.

Silent Light was currently first on it, followed by Azamus, and then the remaining ten spots in the top ten were their officers. She didn't know how long this would be the case, but it satisfied her anyway.

Astaroth looked at the timer before the forced log out, and the remaining time satisfied him. He still had around twenty-two hours.

In twenty-two hours, he could cover a great deal of distance, with his high agility, flight, and even the root travel skill from Luna. Facing Phoenix, she nodded at him.

"See you outside the game," she said, winking at him.

Astaroth nodded at her, melding with Luna. As antlers grew out the side of his head, forming a crown, Astaroth walked over to the wall of the palace tree.

When he touched it, he felt how far the tree's roots travelled, and it almost gave him vertigo. Smiling one last time at Phoenix, he melted into the tree, blasting away through the roots.

He could feel the speed at which he was travelling was much faster than before. He attributed this to his higher agility score.

The forest surrounding the bastion was big enough that he didn't have to exit the root system until his melding with Luna was almost over. By then, the speed he had accumulated blasted him past the sound barrier on exit.

Astaroth angled his exit from the top of a tree at an upward forty-five-degree angle. He launched upward like a rocket, waiting before he melded with Morpheus.

When he felt his body slowing down and no longer ascending, he melded. With wings sprouting out of his back, Astaroth used the speed he still had to glide forward as long as he could.

The skies were a dangerous place to be in New Eden, so he was only staying in them while he was flying this fast. As soon as his speed reached the norm for his agility score, he plunged, stopping a few hundred feet over the tree canopies.

His previous height had shown him the forest would soon end. He was about to reach a zone that was plains and hills for a while.

By his calculations of the distance he travelled already, plus the burst he could give himself if he used Royal Protection when it came off cooldown the next day, he estimated he could reach his starting village with an hour to spare.

And that was while factoring some rest, since he couldn't go all night without eventually sleeping. As he flew over the rest of the forest, he caught sight of several monster hoards.

If he hadn't been pressed for time, he would have dived in and reaped some Exp. But he shook his head, disappointed.

'I will do that when we come back from the update. Plus, the monsters in many places will be stronger.'

A grin formed on his lips as he imagined himself fighting hordes of corrupted monsters. The possibility of suffering from the corruption himself didn't even brush his mind, as his reverie continued.

His daydreaming continued until he saw the timer for his meld flash at the corner of his eyes. He quickly dove to the ground, making sure he wasn't hundreds of it in the air when the meld ended.

He was currently over the plains, and he felt something weird. Like someone was watching him.

But the feeling came from all around, and it was disturbing. As he was close to landing, his meld with Morpheus ended, and he melded with White.

He landed in a roll, minimizing the impact and negating the damage. But when he got up, the feeling of being observed suddenly intensified.

The hair on his neck stood as he instinctively threw himself to the side. Something flew where he had been previously, grazing the ground and gouging deep grooves in it.

'Fuck.'

That was all he could think of, seeing what was now before him.

Chapter 333 Owner Of The Black Lance

Standing tall before him was a brown, wingless dragon with stone-like scales. In terms of size, Astaroth felt like he was looking at a cruise ship.

His head was bent upward, looking the dragon in the eye, while the latter was staring him down like prey. Astaroth stayed immobile, trying not to make a sound.

Then a voice resounded inside his head, deep and guttural, closer to stone grinding on stone than actual words.

"Mortal. You have landed in my domain. Speak your purpose."

Astaroth was half-reassured, since the dragon didn't go for a second attack instantly. He hoped he could reason with the beast.

Bending his head slightly downward, to make a gesture of respect, all the while keeping his eyes on the dragon, Astaroth spoke.

"Benevolent Lord dragon. I come bearing no intention at all, other than passing through. I landed here because I could no longer fly, and am on my way home."

The dragon bent down its legs, its massive head lowering down to the ground. The tip of its nozzle was merely a few meters away from Astaroth, and he could feel the wind brushing his clothes from the dragon's breathing.

Its voice grated on his brain again.

"Then why do I smell the blood of my kind on your clothes?"

'Fuck.'

Astaroth's mind went on the double, trying to find an explanation for this. He couldn't possibly tell it he had provoked it into fighting him, right?

"Ahh, yes. I have slain one of your kind before. But I was only defending myself and my kingdom. There was no honour in taking its life."

Astaroth's heart fluttered when the dragon's head moved to a higher point, suddenly looking at him from above.

"I can hear your heartbeat, mortal. Do not lie to me, or I shall end your pitiful life."

"I swear I was defending myself, oh benevolent dragon. I only lied about it not bringing me honour. The kingdom did lavish me with rewards for slaying a threat to it. But I took no joy in slaying your brethren."

Silence floated about for a few seconds before the head lowered down again. Its eyes also seemed less predatorial, suddenly.

"Was it perhaps a red dragon?" the grinding voice asked.

Astaroth's heart skipped a beat.

'How does he know?'

"Indeed, it was. How did you know?"

The dragon in front of him suddenly lifted its front legs, raising them over his head. Astaroth froze in shock.

But before he could snap back to reason and dodge out of the way, something else occurred. The form of the brown dragon shimmered before it started shrinking.

It kept shrinking until it reached about the same height as Astaroth. The latter wasn't unfamiliar with dragons in human form, but was still surprised to see another one in his lifetime.

The man in front of him had dark brown skin, reminiscent of the stoney colour of its scales, and was incredibly muscular. He felt like he was standing in front of a contestant in the Mr. Universe competition.

When the man opened his mouth to speak, his voice had also changed. Although it was still deep and gritty, it wasn't like grinding stone anymore.

"Mortal, was the red dragon a young one? With possibly a wound under one of its legs?"

This much accurate detail took Astaroth aback. He started hoping this wasn't the mate of the dragon he helped kill, or he would be a dead man shortly.

"Yes... May I know your relationship with the said dragon?"

Astaroth was already stiffening up his leg muscles, getting ready to bolt out of there. His meld with White was about to end, and the one with Luna was already off cooldown.

Sadly, there wasn't any tree nearby that he could use to travel away. But the dragon did something unexpected again.

A massive black lance appeared in the bulky man's hands, with the bladed point looking like a tri-spoked spiral, almost like a screw. Phoenix had described the weapon inside the dragon's wound to Astaroth, so he knew this was a replica.

"This weapon... Are you the one that wounded it?"

A large bout of laughter escaped the human-form dragon, sending small shockwaves into the ground under him. After laughing for almost half a minute, the dragon looked at him seriously.

"Boy, I am indeed the one who wounded it. This half-witted youngster came at me, trying to establish dominance, since I can't fly. Its total lack of respect for its elders cost him his pride and a nasty wound."

Astaroth stared at the man with his mouth agape.

'Do dragons often fight between themselves?' he wondered.

The muscular man continued.

"I have one question for you, mortal."

Astaroth nodded, not wanting to anger him.

"This is a tail spike from my tail. I left one in his wound when we fought. Have you perchance gotten it in your possession?"

He pointed at the lance in his hand.

Astaroth didn't know how to answer that question. He didn't have the lance.

But he wasn't sure he wanted to tell the dragon who had it. He was scared to start a dragon fight in Sunpeak if he did.

But since he couldn't lie to the dragon anyway, he came clean.

"I do not. But I know where it is."

"Hmm. Then speak. These tail spikes take decades to grow, and I wish to get it back, so I can put it back in its place."

"About that..."

"What? Cat caught your tongue?"

"No, sir dragon. But your tail spike... Another dragon has it in its possession..."

The dragon-man seemed annoyed for a moment, before he regained his calm.

"Tell me his name. I shall go speak with them myself."

Astaroth hesitated for a second, but didn't want to think of the alternative of not telling him.

"I only know him as Lord Aurexiar. He is the dragon guardian of the kingdom of Sunpeak."

The big man frowned for a second, falling into thought. It almost tempted Astaroth to bolt away while the man was thinking.

He was losing daylight right now, and he was on a clock. But the dragon locked its gaze on him again.

"Tell me which way."

"Pardon?" Astaroth asked, confused.

Chapter 334 Changing Direction

The dragon looked at Astaroth like he was an idiot.

"I said tell me which way. Which way is that kingdom of Sunpeak? I'll go get it back myself."

Astaroth's stomach dropped.

'Did I just start another dragon-on-dragon fight?'

"Sir Dragon. I—"

"Stop calling me sir dragon. My name is Rocunyrth. I am the oldest brown dragon left, and I deserve to be called by my name."

"I'm sorry, Sir Rocunyrth. I was going to say that you going into Sunpeak to get your tail spike might cause a fuss. Aurexiar did not look like the welcoming kind..."

"That is not your concern, mortal. Just tell me the way."

Astaroth knew he wouldn't change the brown dragon's mind, so he opened up his map and pointed the way to Sunpeak.

The dragon nodded before changing back to its original form. As it turned around in the right direction, its massive front legs started rending the earth, digging a tunnel under itself.

They exchanged no more words as the dragon burrowed away. Astaroth looked to where the dragon had been, and the hole was closed up, only brown rock covering the ground, with wet mud and pieces of green.

Bending down, Astaroth picked one of those lumps of green up, thinking it was grass. As it squelched in his hands, he rapidly dropped it.

He scanned it, understanding it wasn't grass, but a living organism.

Green Slime

Level: 1

Grade: Common

HP: 10

When he backed away from it, he quickly noticed that the 'grass' all around him was moving toward the spot of freshly unearthed rock.

He rapidly understood why this was happening. The green smiles were eating at the fresh stone and wet mud that Rocunyrth had thrown back, and out of them came grass.

The thought that this entire field was filled with slimes that pooped out grass kinda grossed him out, and Astaroth decided he had wasted enough time here.

Melding with Luna, he dashed away, restarting his journey. He had just lost a little over five minutes, holding a discussion he didn't want to have, as well as inspecting some green slimes.

He had to make haste.

With his map still open, Astaroth calculated the distance he had travelled, and the distance he had left. He estimated he had already traversed around two-hundred miles.

This was quite the distance, but considering the distance he had left to travel, he wasn't that impressed. He also had to factor in that his root travel skill had increased his speed at least tenfold.

Since there wouldn't always be a forest, or even a forest this long, to travel through, he knew it wouldn't go that fast all the time. If he could, he would reach home in a couple of hours.

'Wouldn't that be amazing?'

He estimated he still had a little less than three-thousand miles to traverse.

At his normal speed, if he couldn't use Luna's skill at all, he would never make it. So he was thinking of doing something extreme.

He had never been fond of science as a kid, so he didn't remember the exact number. But if his memory wasn't too hazy, the speed of light was about three-hundred thousand meters per second.

Doing math in his head, he calculated that this translated to roughly one hundred and eighty-five thousand miles. That was around sixty times what he need to traverse.

But he did not know how his arrival would work, and how he would even stop going forward at the right place. Astaroth was thinking of using Lightstep.

But his Royal Protection skill wasn't off cooldown yet, and wouldn't be until late the next day. By the time it would be off cooldown, he would have thirty minutes left before being logged out.

But since he wasn't sure he could reach it without using it, he was willing to give it a try. But was travelling all day that day worth it, if he was going to cover the rest of the distance in less than a second the next day?

He instead did something else. He messaged in the guild chat, requesting all his guild members to share their map data with him.

This was something he seldom wanted to use, since it made all the exploring the other players had done moot to them, as it completed his map with their info.

It made him feel dirty to steal their progress in New Eden, and sad that he wouldn't have to explore all those places himself. But right now, that wasn't his first concern.

Not every member was willing to share their map data, since some of them revelled in exploring unknown places, and stealing their map data was like stealing all their hard work.

He held no hard feelings for these members, as he wouldn't have done so, either. But for those that shared their map progression, he thanked them profusely.

He sent a message to Phoenix, with a screenshot of all the names of those who sent him map data, asking her to reward those players a bit more lavishly.

She didn't question his decision, having seen the message, and even sent him her own map data.

Receiving all these pieces of the map, Astaroth's map looked a lot more complete. I'die and Athena's map data also covered so much of the forest around the Elven kingdoms and the Bastion, that a huge chunk of his map lit up around there.

He was grateful to all of them, because he had already spotted what he wanted.

On his map, around fifty miles from him, there was a level thirty dungeon. A guild already claimed it, as Athena had tagged it. But seeing the guild tag on it, he grinned.

'Oh, I'm going to enjoy this very much.'

Grinning from ear to ear, Astaroth darted in the dungeon's direction. The tag under the dungeon was the guild emblem of Aces High.

Astaroth revelled in the idea of stealing resources from them. Of course, he wasn't stealing anything, since dungeons weren't locked in their amount of parties allowed inside at the same time.

But if he could complete a hidden quest, or something similar, inside the dungeon, those resources were non-renewable.

He secretly wished they hadn't completed it yet.

Chapter 335 A Meeting Of Gods

Back in the Bastion, Phoenix was completing preparations for the time skip. When Astaroth had left, she thought about an issue that would arise when they were gone, but didn't want to bother him about it.

Who would rule their new kingdom while they were gone?

She thought about it for a while, doing other things in the meantime, until she thought of a solution. What if they put the guardian in charge?

Leon had just as much right as them to rule, seeing as he was the kingdom's new guardian, and who would try to fight a surrogate king in the Mythic grade?

But she knew he was lazy and prone to violence, since he was a beast man. As she wondered how she could keep him in check, another idea came to her.

She wasn't sure it would work, but trying wouldn't hurt anyone. But she would need to wait until nightfall.

Every player around the world of New Eden was hurrying to complete unfinished quests, or amassing reputation points as fast as they could. Some were simply farming levels as quickly as they could, through dungeons or monster bashing.

Players were even willing to pay their hard-earned gold to guilds, to gain temporary access to their dungeons.

This made many guilds focus on boosting their earnings, as they publicized the availability of their dungeons, and even offered mentorships or dungeon guides.

This extra income would most likely go a long way after the update. They did not know what the update would change, or if it would only unlock new zones, but they would rather be flush with cash than stuck penniless in a new version of the game.

A lot of speculations were circulating on the web about how big an update it needed to be for Evo-Gaming to lock the game for a week. People were speculating on the changes.

Some theories went as farfetched as a post-apocalyptic New Eden after the update, and some others, tamer, thought there could be a new continent or world to explore.

A few rumours of a time skip were airing here and there among those, but it was impossible to know what was coming, since the company was extremely tight-lipped about it.

Everyone went about their plans, expecting the worst, for that was the best way to be prepared. But somewhere in New Eden, a single Fey man wasn't aware of all this happening.

Up on a flying mountain, inside a small cave where time acted on its whims, this man was sitting on a rock pillar, cross-legged, watching the small waterfall flow in reverse.

He watched as the winds blew into the cave, only to be sucked out again, leaving trace mana of it, as well as oxygen to breathe.

He listened to the sound of water drops of crystalline, falling on the stoney ground, with their sound echoing in the cave, playing the weirdest, but most soothing melody.

His eyes were taking in all this information, his mana sense refining to detect all these unnatural phenomena, his eyes seeing more and more of a hidden network with every passing hour.

He didn't know how long he had been sitting on this rock. His body had long since stopped aching, and his sense of time was as skewed as it could ever be, with all the elements acting on a loop around him.

His mentor, Tyr, was standing at the edge of the cavern, seemingly unaffected by the gusts of wind rushing in and out around him. He was looking down, towards the land far below, unseeable to human eyes.

But his eyes were far from human. The golden iris in their center belied his true nature, even if the abnormal Chronos had yet to understand his nature.

In his eyes, he could see every thread of time and every sway of the web it created. And as he watched, he could see the web become thicker and thicker every hour.

'He's about to step into my domain again. I wonder what he wants this time?'

Turning around, Tyr smiled at Chronos.

"Keep practicing your senses, young Fey. I have someone to meet. I will be right back."

Chronos nodded absent-mindedly.

Tyr suddenly vanished from the edge of the cavern, leaving Chronos alone. As he disappeared, a thin veil of gold and blue threads enveloped the cavern, sealing it shut from prying eyes.

Tyr reappeared at the top of the mountain he was living in. On this mountain, a plateau was built, with a Viking-style hut in the center, as well as a massive throne in front of it.

Tyr suddenly enlarged manifolds, becoming ten meters high, his arms suddenly thick with muscle, all traces of his advanced age, gone.

He sat on the throne, leaning on his hand, and waited.

An hour went by, with nothing happening, until a surge of Aether blasted at the edge of the plateau. A golden vortex opened up where the energy was blasting from, and out of it walked a tall and slim being.

This being had skin of golden light, and no facial features aside from two black, bottomless eyes. He floated forward, reaching a few meters from Tyr, before stopping his advance.

"Tyr. I require your services once more."

His voice was like a buzz, like a high voltage current was modulating to create noise that mimicked words. Tyr disliked the sound of this being's voice very much, but sucked it up.

"Gaius. I expect nothing less when you visit me. What is it this time? Should I rewind the clock for you to fix your mistakes once more?"

Energy buzzed around the golden being, as to reflect the anger it was feeling.

"Do not speak my name so casually. You know very well the difference in our statuses, and how you should address me, Tyr, God of Time."

"I do not owe you that respect, Gaius. Even if your status to mortals is higher than mine, remember that I could always reverse time to where that was not the case. I have no obligation to call you anything other than your name."

"You will call me God, as everyone else does!"

Pure golden Aether lashed out at Tyr, cutting superficial wounds on his body, which reverted to normal not a moment after. The buzzing Aether around Gaius intensified.

"Don't lash out at me, Gaius. I am the oldest being in the universe. You cannot harm time. Anyway, let's get past your little tantrum and go straight to your reason for visiting me."

The self-proclaimed God simmered down just enough to talk in a more reasonable tone.

"I need you to advance time. Ten years, to be exact, and that in a few hours."

Chapter 336 Cliffside Misadventure

Tyr frowned at his request.

"Does the universe look like a clock that you can push the needles on whenever you want to? Time is not a train that you can speed along its railway whenever you desire."

Gaius looked at Tyr, his eyes squinting in anger. He couldn't force the old god into action with threats of harm, since, as Tyr said, one couldn't harm time.

But he had other ways of forcing his hand.

"Tyr. Remember that I was the one to create the followers who give you power. I can just as easily erase them. I am the god of creation, but I am also the wrathful one, the god of destruction."

Tyr snorted a laugh.

"You do that. Then I won't have the power required to do you that favour of yours. For a god, you aren't always the sharpest."

"Enough!"

In his anger, golden vortexes appeared all around Gaius, sucking in the dirt and stone comprising the mountain. Tyr frowned.

He wouldn't care if Gaius swallowed up this mountain, normally, if he was alone. He could always rip a new one from the ground.

But he wasn't alone. And he didn't want to bear the responsibility for the death of this abnormal.

He also didn't want to kill a person who was capable of inheriting his power. This was rare amongst the mortals, even if it was an abnormal.

Clicking his tongue in annoyance, Tyr opened his mouth to respond.

"Fine. I'll do it for you. But this time, you will duly owe me a favour. No more using my powers freely. Do you understand?"

The buzzing Aether blowing off of Gaius simmered down, and the vortexes shrunk until they disappeared. The god schooled his anger until it was gone.

"I will agree that I won't be using your powers freely. But you and I both know I am already overlooking something that you shouldn't be doing. So consider my favour repaid in full, as I keep turning a blind eye to it."

"Tch."

Tyr thought he had hidden his cave well enough for Gaius to not sense the mortal down there, but he guessed it was hard to escape the watchful eye of the current strongest god.

"Just tell me when it needs to be done."

"You have twenty-one hours, fifty-eight minutes, and thirty-one seconds. By that time, all abnormals should be gone from this world, and back to theirs, until ten years have passed."

Tyr nodded his head. That would leave him enough time to prepare the spell, and another thing he wanted to prepare.

Seeing he had gotten his way, Gaius was ready to leave. But right before he did, he turned his head back to Tyr.

"Next time I come to see you, this mortal better be gone from here. You know we shouldn't interact with them physically. Our divinity changes them."

Tyr chuckled.

"He came to me. I just didn't send him away. But he will be gone."

As Gaius left, Tyr shrunk back to his human size, taking on his old-man appearance again. He teleported back into the cave under him and kept the magic seal on it.

Tyr glanced at the Fey man, who was still deep in contemplation, learning to see the threads of time, like he was teaching him. A smile crept up on Tyr's lips.

Even if Gaius advised him against this, Tyr didn't care. He would keep the mortal by his side for as long as he wanted to, if it meant teaching someone how to use his powers.

Tyr had long since looked for a mortal that could inherit his legacy. Even if gods weren't supposed to hand down their legacies to mortals under the Mythical rank, Tyr had seldom ever found someone who could take it at all.

So he wasn't going to let this chance run by. But it was no mince feat to receive a legacy from a god. Especially a god of something as powerful and immutable as time.

'I hope I can teach him fast enough before Gaius comes back.'

On the surface of New Eden, Astaroth was reaching the zone where the dungeon was located. It was inside a mountainous range, spanning what looked like many miles across on both sides.

The dungeon entrance was at the bottom of the biggest mountain in sight, and by the looks of it, the only road entrance to the mountain range was being guarded by some Aces High lackeys.

He scanned the horizon and found a spot where he could climb a cliff and make it inside the mountain range unseen.

Astaroth was currently melded with White, so he dashed in that direction, trying to keep cover from possible patrolling players as much as possible.

Astaroth wasn't a climber, by any measure, so looking at the cliff, his stomach lightly churned. But he had to make it up there.

He tried jumping up, taking a massive leap, and blasting off the ground. But he only made it up a few dozen feet before gravity took hold of him again.

As he landed with a dull thump, Astaroth frowned.

From afar, the cliff looked like it was climbable. But now, from up close, he could barely see any footing he could leverage to ascend it.

He thought of using Propel to make his jump higher, but he knew it wouldn't suffice. Another idea he had was using Wind Walking to run up the wall, as a certain red superhero in comics could do.

But he was almost certain he wouldn't have enough speed to make it up there. But he was willing to try, anyway.

Focusing mana around his feet, Astaroth willed the wind to form a cushion of air under his soles, lifting him off the ground about a centimetre. He got into a sprint start position and faced the wall.

Bursting into motion, cracking the earth under his feet, Astaroth dashed at the wall, before he started running up its surface. His mind burst into joy as he felt himself ascend the cliff side vertically, as he ran like the wind.

But mere moments into his ascent, as he had reached a height of a hundred feet, he felt his steps become lighter, as he was suddenly edging away from the wall.

This translated into losing speed, and soon enough, his upward momentum stalled. Feeling gravity take hold of him again, Astaroth swore in his mind.

'Fuck!'

Chapter 337 Mastering His First Skill

Feeling his body speed up toward the ground, Astaroth did the only thing that came to mind. He activated Thousand Thoughts.

His perception of time slowed down to a point where even his fall was happening inch by inch. This allowed his brain to settle down and think of a solution to his predicament.

It was too early for him to switch melds to Morpheus, as it was freshly on cooldown. As for his other meld, it was still on cooldown too, and it wouldn't have helped.

The closest tree to him was metres away from where he would land. His next thought was to use the Ad Astra, in a form that would allow him to grab onto the cliff.

But when he looked at his distance from the surface, he scratched that option out. He was already too far away.

He tried using Propel on his body to launch himself upward, but could only apply enough force to slow his fall. He felt the jerk of the wind spell hitting his back, but it was hardly enough to push him.

A thought occurred to him. His mind recalled how Wind Walking worked, pushing his body off the ground only enough to reduce friction.

But it was enough to keep him aloft. He thought, 'What if I use Propel under my feet, while that cushion acts as the solid ground?'

He recalled how Morticia had described her thought process to upgrade her skills mastery during the siege. It was easy to understand that mastery was about innovating how you used skills and spells, more than an actual repetition of them.

He was nearing the ground, his Thousand Thoughts skill almost over, and guessed he had nothing to lose trying it. At worst, it would slow his descent enough for him not to die on impact.

Shifting his body to an upward position, Astaroth bent his legs. He then used Propel under his feet, pushing upward against the air, cushioning his boots.

He could feel the two winds pushing against each other in his senses, and his fall was abruptly slowing down. As his skill Thousand Thoughts ended, he felt a change in the air magic under him.

The two currents knocked each other away, stopping his fall and giving him a bit of upward momentum.

Ding!

Your innovative use of counter-currents from Wind Walking and Propel has furthered your understanding of how Wind Walking works. Mastery level 1 gained for Wind Steps.

Astaroth grinned, but he didn't have the luxury of time to look at it right away. Repeating his process from earlier, Astaroth was able to direct it under a single foot with much more ease.

With this, he could hop from left to right, gaining more and more height and momentum as he did. His ascent proceeded rhythmically until he was able to grasp how to use his new spell correctly.

It then became as easy as running, but upward, in the sky. If anyone had been looking, they would have seen him zigzag upward, like he was bouncing off invisible walls, using them as footrests.

Reaching the top of the cliff drained a lot of mana from Astaroth, but his large pool of the resource made it more than acceptable.

As he landed atop the mountain, he let himself fall on his back, as the adrenaline of the fall finally subsided. A fit of laughter escaped his mouth.

"Ahahaha! That was nerve-wracking! But I learned something!"

His mind rested on how he gained the mastery, and he now had a new objective, that he would have to work on as soon as possible. Gaining more masteries in his current spells.

He wasn't sure everyone could have the same masteries, either. If he were to guess about it, his thought was that mastery level allowed you five variants of a spell that you found out by yourself.

If he was right, then that meant that even basic spells could become signature moves, as long as you mastered them five times. His mind was already rushing with ideas.

He wasn't sure if any of them would work, or how he would make them work, but his imagination had just become the limit to his magic capacity.

He had been focusing on his melee fighting for a while, and decided it was about time he put a bit of effort into his magic, too. He had grabbed at that possibility at the start, because he wanted to fight with both.

He never intended to fight only with his physical prowess, but had done so, time and time again.

'I guess old habits from previous games don't die.'

He vowed to himself to use the remaining hours before the patch to better his understanding of magic. Aberon had once told him that magic, like everything, was limited by how you understood it and practiced it.

Astaroth took a few more minutes to let his heart stop thumping in his chest before standing back up. He looked at his map.

He could see the entrance to the dungeon on the map, but was still not in a position to see it with his eyes. He could feel the mana draw in his sense, though.

With that, he could tell he was getting closer.

Astaroth started sprinting across the side of the mountain, sometimes jumping to a different cliff side, using his new skill to traverse the long gaps.

He diverted a bit of his mind to reading the new Wind Walking description.

Wind Walking (Mastery Level 1/5): You conjure wind magic under your feet to reduce friction with the ground. Gain a 50% -> 75% speed increase. Lasts 1 -> 2 minutes. Cooldown 5 minutes. MP cost: 100 MP.

Your ingenuity has allowed you to find a new use to Wind Walking, and better use the current version. New skill unlocked: Wind Walking; Sky Steps.

Wind Walking; Sky Steps: Using a counter-current, you bend the air itself into becoming solid under your feet. With this, you can jump further up, or even change the direction you are going, in mid-air. MP cost: 150 MP/step.

His lips stretched into a smile as he thought of all the uses he would have for this new skill. But he then noticed something.

Both Wind Walking and Sky Steps had no level next to them. He wondered why that was.

He tried using a skill point in Wind Walking, but got a notification.

Skill point use denied. You cannot use a skill point on this skill, as it has no higher level. Please use mastery levels to strengthen it. Good luck, Player!

'Hmm. How curious...'

Chapter 338 Barging In

Going through his skill list, he saw very few skills that didn't have a level next to their names. He wondered how the system determined what should have levels and what shouldn't.

He cared little about it, though. His full attention snapped back to his surroundings as he arrived at the edge of a mountain that gave him a view of the dungeon entrance.

Looking down below him, Astaroth almost laughed. The number of players defending the dungeon entrance here was pitiful, at best.

And from the looks of it, they weren't any stronger than the lackeys defending the entrances to the mountain range. They were probably just there as a threat or warning to others whose turf they were on.

But to Astaroth, these poor saps were merely an appetizer. His melding with White was over, and he was ready to meld with Luna.

The players down there were in their level thirties, and weren't even qualified to be called a challenge for him. He could guess that Aces High was currently under a lot of pressure at their guild base, and that was the reason the forces here were so meagre.

That only played in his favour. He figured that by the time any of them could send a warning, he would already be inside the dungeon.

He also assumed he had enough time to flee the dungeon once he was done with his business. As he smiled to himself, Astaroth took a step in front of him, walking off the side of the mountain.

The zone in front of the dungeon was a safe zone, where he couldn't kill any player. But that wouldn't stop him from knocking them around a bit.

Astaroth had read online that people had tried fighting in safe zones that weren't cities. Apparently. The damage they received was always zero.

But another interesting fact also emerged from their tests. You could knock an enemy out if you hit them over the head hard enough.

The damage done would remain zero, but the impact still registered. And he intended to do something of the sort here.

As he fell, Astaroth melded with Luna, transforming into his usual form, before using Sky Steps, to burst forward at the runts in his sight.

His aerial lunge brought him directly into the face of one player guarding the dungeon, and a knee to the face was all that player ever had time to see, before everything went black.

Sending him flying like a cannonball, Astaroth rapidly used Sky Step again, not letting himself touch the ground, and darting right at another player, whose mind was still processing what was happening.

Before his mind could connect the dots, a swift kick to the temple snuffed his lights out. Out of the five players defending the zone, only three remained conscious.

Astaroth quickly spun around, locking his sights on the next victim to be. His predatory eyes scared the player witless, and he almost passed out on his own.

Lunging forward, Astaroth punched the poor man in the stomach, blowing out every ounce of air in his lungs, letting him pass out from oxygen deprivation.

The two other players were quicker on the intake than their peers, and one of them was already lunging at Astaroth, trying to scare him away. But he grossly underestimated his intimidation factor.

Astaroth stepped forward so fast, the man saw him practically teleport into his face, as Astaroth gave him a strong headbutt to the forehead. His lights went out instantly.

'Use your head, my parents used to say. Is that what you meant, pops?'

The last player was busy sending a message to the guild officers, and could barely send it out before a chop to his nape sent him into the arms of Morpheus.

With these five whelps out of the way, nothing could stop him from entering the dungeon. And he did, losing no time.

Traversing the portal entrance, Astaroth reappeared on a different mountainside. In front of him, a large cave entrance, with an eerie, unnatural lighting to it.

Behind him was a drop that was easily as high as a hundred-and-fifty-story building. The ground was so far down, Astaroth almost had a bout of vertigo.

He imagined the dungeon was the cave in front of him, but something told him that wasn't where he wanted to go.

Looking upward, the mountain kept going up for quite a while. He could guess that no one had tried to climb that way, yet, since the climbing gear in New Eden wasn't as advanced as the gear in their world.

But he had a way around this, and he was curious about what could be up there. Using his new Sky Step skill, Astaroth started his ascent to the mountaintop.

He would have waited for Morpheus' cooldown to end, but he was impatient. And his very high mana pool, when melded with Luna, counteracted whatever mana cost he would use to jump up.

The strength of his jumps, and the power behind the wind burst were also higher in this form, so his travel upward was going swiftly.

But before he could even make it to the top, another cavern entrance greeted him. Curiosity took hold of him, and he landed on the stone plateau before it.

He could feel an outrageous amount of mana coming from the grotto, and wondered what could exude such a high concentration of energy. It could either be an artifact, or, in the worst case, a very powerful enemy.

Astaroth took the cautious way in, tiptoeing his way in, lighting a small ball of fire over his hand with Flame Beacon, and making it hover over his head.

It took him very little concentration to keep it there, after having used it many times already. This allowed his hands to be free, in case he needed them to move something, or fight.

Astaroth secretly hoped this was the place for the hidden dungeon quest. This was what he came here for, after all.

'Pissing off Azamus, here I come.'

Chapter 339 Getting Ready

Far away from this dungeon, Khalor was teleporting back to the red continent, where the Demonoids, Orcs, and Undead lived in peace. This was the spawning place of players of these races.

It was not forbidden for the three races from travelling to the other continents, but it was rare. Mainly because they were treated as monsters almost everywhere they went.

Only the strongest of them did that, as they could defend themselves from the unwitting guards and patrols that might mistake them for common monsters. Such was the life of these three races.

Khalor had travelled back to talk with his legacy giver. His death on the battlefield around the Bastion had been a setback for him in terms of Exp and levels, but it had another perk added to it.

When he had come back from the graveyard, he noticed his legacy quest had suddenly updated. It had been locked behind three question marks for a while now.

The last Necromancer legacy owner had talked little about his legacy quest, and only mentioned where he found it on the forums, since no one could get it anymore.

This was why Khalor had located it so fast. This was one of the strongest legacies that New Eden offered.

The only other ones that were worth mentioning were the ones that the top players had found. Like the one of Simo Hayha, the deadliest sniper in history, that Azamus had found.

Or the one from Tyr, that his cherished friend had chanced upon. He wondered what Xavier had become, or if he had found the legacy again.

If his memory was correct, Xavier had found it not long before the update which was about to happen. The man had been a co-worker of his in the last timeline.

Khalor had found a job not long after New Eden started, when the money transfer option became a thing, many workers transferred into the game, making use of their trade skills there, to make money.

This had opened up many jobs, some in Khalor's trade, and he had pounced on one. That was where he had met Xavier, who after a long time of insisting, had roped him into playing New Eden.

Xavier had enchanted him with tales of monsters and magic, frequently referencing how he was learning time magic, from an old man.

But by the time Khalor had joined in on the game, changes had already started happening to the world that would later be revealed to be irreversible.

And Khalor had died before Xavier could master his magic.

'I wonder how you are faring, Chronos...'

Brushing aside his melancholy, Khalor focused his mind on the matters at hand. He had to meet with Hades.

Getting a meeting with the god of death was no small matter. He usually needed to jump through so many hoops, just to get a chat with the man.

But his quest required him to meet the god, so he hoped it would be a lot more direct this time.

Reaching the entrance to the underworld, the part of the continent where the undead clustered, Khalor stopped at the gate. Even if he was the undeath legacy holder, he still had to be allowed into the underworld.

Soon enough, the thundering of a giant footfall echoed toward him. Stomping in his direction, was a large, black, three-headed dog, with fire in its eyes.

Khalor bowed his head, waiting for the guardian of the underworld to sniff him out and allow him inside. He sighed loudly, wishing he could take this undead into his army, as it would greatly improve his combat ability.

But that wasn't something he could do, for now. Even the owner of the legacy in his last life hadn't ever used Cerberus in combat.

After a short, low growl, the gate creaked open for Khalor, who nodded at the giant canine, before walking into the underworld. Once he was inside the underworld, he summoned the two-headed raven, which was his fastest flying mount, and darted to the south.

'I wonder what I'll have to do next.'

Night had fallen on the Bastion, and Phoenix was ready to try out her idea. She had already talked to Leon, who seemed to want nothing less than to be forced into ruling the kingdom.

"Ruling humanoids, and ruling beasts, are two different things. Ruling your kind is so tedious. I don't want to be stuck doing this for ten years, or however long it'll take you to be back," he had replied.

But Phoenix wasn't leaving him much of a choice. She knew no one else who could take up the mantle, that she trusted with it.

That was why she was preparing to meet with someone important to the Newly evolved beast-man. She had thought about it long and hard, and concluded that she should be able to pull it off.

'If he could do it with a weapon and his race, I should be able to do it with a direct connection to her power, no?'

She had waited for night to fall, and climbed up to the highest branch of the palace tree. And there, she sat in the spot she and Astaroth had been just two days prior.

Closing her eyes, Phoenix started condensing fire in her hand. Astaroth had used Aether to call on her, so she assumed she needed to do the same.

After condensing flames for five minutes, she had a ball of pure white fire in her hands. The glow it projected was visible from the ground, and some players that still walked around the base, wondered what it was.

Phoenix looked at the ball of dense fire Aether and took a deep breath. She then slowly pushed the Aether inside her chest, igniting her body on fire.

She gritted her teeth, as this was not her using a skill, but her body combusting, as she guided the fire to her back, where her royal marking was. She wanted nothing more than to howl in pain, but she bore the pain.

Phoenix called out in her mind.

'Lady Alantha Anulo, Kingdom Spirit of the Ash Elves, and Goddess of the stars, I call upon you.'

Deep in space, lady Anulo heard her voice, and was shook for a second. But hearing her painful plea, she answered the call.

Phoenix was waiting with impatience, as the flames licked her back, searing her flesh. And then she felt something cool touch her back, extinguishing the fire and soothing her pain.

"You have called, companion to my child. I have answered."

Chapter 340 Ensuring Continuity

Opening her eyes, Phoenix could now see the tall woman, dressed in her gown made of the starry sky, with jet-black skin and eyes giving a milky glow. Her flamboyant hair, with colours of a nebula, still fascinated the former.

Remembering she had a timer ticking, Phoenix snapped out of her amazement.

"Goddess of the stars, I have called for you, for I have a favour to ask."

Lady Anulo tilted her head to the side a bit.

"This is the second time I am called down here for a favour. Are mortals suddenly getting more demanding? Tell me, what is this favour?"

Phoenix audibly gulped.

'Did I push my luck by calling her?'

But it was too late now, so Phoenix braced for repercussions.

"I know it is presumptuous of me to call on you for this. But, us players will soon disappear from New Eden, and no one will be here to rule this new kingdom we founded."

Alantha Anulo's attention was suddenly piqued.

Even if this new kingdom wasn't under her direct purview, the guardian was one of her followers now, and it would still pay tribute to her. So the continuity of it would not be in vain.

"Tell me, why do you think you will be gone, and for how long?"

"We have it under a reliable source, that by the time all players get back to New Eden, ten years will have passed. But for us, it will only have been a week."

Lady Anulo frowned.

'How could she or any of the abnormals know such a thing? Even I haven't heard of any order of altering the time flow.'

"And what is the favour you need of me? I can't sit a ruler on your throne for you, so I cannot see how my help is needed."

"Actually, I already had a replacement in mind, but he refuses to cooperate. I wanted to ask you to force him into it and put in place a safeguard so he respects the seriousness of his role."

"Hmm..."

The goddess looked pensive for a moment, her hair flickering behind her, ever-changing in colour between pink, purple, green, blue and red. Phoenix stared at the phenomenon again, her eyes gleaming in admiration.

When Lady Anulo cleared her throat to garner her attention, Phoenix snapped out of her daze, lightly coughing away her embarrassment.

"I take it the replacement you have in mind is your guardian?"

"Yes. I already asked him to do it, but he refused me, complaining about the responsibilities being too much. Unfortunately, I have no one else who can take this mantle and I doubt I can find anyone in the time I have remaining."

Lady Anulo nodded her head lightly, acknowledging her request.

"I can do this for you. But I will want something in exchange. The Aether you are giving me right now is only enough for me to answer the call. For a favour this size, I will require a tribute much more substantial."

"Just name your price. If it means I come back to a kingdom still standing in ten years, I am willing to pay, and I think Astaroth would agree."

Nodding her head, Lady Anulo snapped her fingers. As she did, the laying down form of a beast man appeared on the branch near Phoenix.

Spinning around, fury in his eyes, Leon growled out.

"What the heck?! Who dares—Lady Anulo! My apologies!"

He quickly got to a knee, retracting all traces of fury from his demeanour.

'So he can be tamed?' Phoenix questioned internally.

Lady Anulo walked over to Leon, passing her hand through his long mane, which elicited a low purr from the beast-man.

Leon opened his eyes again, noticing he and the goddess weren't alone. He cleared his throat to push away the purring and took a serious face.

"What can I do for you, my lady?"

Phoenix didn't rub his reaction in and let him keep his dignity. She instead turned her head to Lady Anulo.

"I summoned you here at her request. Something about you refusing to do your duties as guardian of the kingdom?"

Leon's eyes darted at Phoenix, a sharpness in them.

"My lady. My duties were never supposed to have 'ruling the kingdom for them' attached to them. I thought, as a guardian, I would only have to guard it."

Lady Anulo shook her head.

"Young Lion. Guarding something can mean more than one thing. Here, you would guard the sanctity of the kingdom itself, by allowing it to keep prospering in its ruler's absence."

Releasing a deep sigh, Leon bent his head downward.

"I will accept my duty, my lady."

"Good. Now, on to setting the guidelines and rules you will need to follow. Young woman, I take it you have already prepared for this?"

Phoenix smiled at Lady Anulo. She took out a rolled-up parchment, with on it a list of things that needed to be done and respected while they were absent for the next ten years.

Leon's face morphed into despair. He could feel the weight of responsibility already pressing on his shoulders.

By the time they were done, Leon's eyes seemed lifeless and devoid of any brain activity. Even Lady Anulo had to admit this mortal was one thorough one.

The list of things to work on and rules to follow was an exhaustive one, and it covered any and every point Leon could ever encounter in the next ten years completely.

If Leon even sneezed in the wrong context, he would have to face the goddess to explain his reasons. But in exchange, Leon would get personal training from the goddess to control a new facet of his powers.

As for Lady Anulo herself, she was guaranteed a temple in her honour, where the citizens would pray to her, making her progressively more powerful.

Phoenix had planned out everything down to the dot in a single day, and it impressed the deity. In any normal circumstance, the meagre Aether the mortal had called her with wouldn't have been enough to keep her down in the realm of mortals for so long.

But Alantha Anulo had used her power to extend her stay, curious to see how far she had planned. Now, with all this jotted down on paper, with Phoenix's blood tying her to it, Lady Anulo validated the chart.

Infusing her power into it, transformed the paper into a divine edict, cementing into the laws of the world itself.

"Thank you, Lady Anulo. I can never be grateful enough for this."

"No need to thank me. It was transactional, young woman. On that note, I must take my leave. I have already overstayed my welcome on this plane."

The minor deity didn't wait for a reply, as she vanished into a portal of purple and red. But Phoenix was satisfied with the results.

Looking at the clock, only twelve hours remained before the update locked them out.

'Still so many things to do. I hope Astaroth is making good progress too.'