

# 1087

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Diogo, still at the head of the pack, snorted once, but said nothing. Annoyed with her, but not so annoyed he'd start yelling. He definitely radiated 'piss me off and I'll break you in half' vibes, but Mia was just a little too exhausted at the moment to pick her words more carefully.

"Demons can't fly," the gargoyle Loria said, shrugging as she pulled her tail around her, and flicked off a piece of rock stuck to its black, leathery skin. "Glide, but not fly."

"Oh." That, actually kinda made sense. "Even the little ones?"

"Even the pests." Loria shrugged, walked past her, and hopped up onto the rock with Adron. "Boss?"

Diogo gestured out to the path ahead. Like a giant eagle, or more like a giant bat, Loria spread her massive wings, and Mia stared at the enormous wingspan. But sure enough, once Loria jumped off the rock and took the air, the issue was obvious. Loria had big wings, but not big enough to deal with her weight. David would probably talk about square-cube law, or that birds had partially hollow bones and little total blood volume, blah blah. Why would Hell care about rules like that?

Ten minutes later, Loria returned on foot, and perched on the rock beside Adron again.

"Nothing, Diogo," she said.

"Then we move."

All four humans groaned. Even if demons didn't have the stamina to go hiking for hours and hours, their bodies didn't seem to get worn down by it, dark skin impervious to wear and tear. Last thing Mia wanted was to tear her feet up again, and even toughened up, knowing they still had a massive hike ahead of them had her terrified of cutting them. Her fellow humans watched the ground as they walked as much as she did, too.

The demons though, they walked the rough terrain as comfortably as any predator who lived in it. Not a single misplaced step, no wasted energy. They fell into a comfortable formation, brutes at the front again, humans and sex demons in the center, though Mia found herself drifting a little closer toward Adron as the hike resumed. One of the tiger ladies looked at her, strangely beautiful like Caera, but with a little more hunger in her black and red eyes than Mia was comfortable with. Not the good kind of hunger, either.

"It's kinda surprising," Mia said to no one. "I mean, the sky of fire makes sense. The river of red water... and blood, and bones. The remnants. But it's still all... physical, you know?"

"Physical?"

Mia snapped her head to the side. The incubus spoke. Anyone with ears would have noticed the immediate singer's voice, a pleasing baritone, deep enough to sound nice but not deep enough to make her teeth vibrate, unlike Diogo. The other incubus she'd seen back at the cave had a more beautiful, almost feminine look to him. This one was decidedly very masculine, but his gentle eyes sent tingles through her. Bedroom eyes, twenty-four-seven.

"Yeah, physical. A lot of the stuff I read about Hell suggested it'd be like... spiraling planes on top of planes. Unending lakes of fire. Just, things that are more... dream-like? Or nightmare-like, I guess."

"Caera," the incubus said, "says what records she'd found tell of a Hell similar to that."

"Yeah?"

"Hundreds of thousands of years ago."

"Hundreds of thousands? That's... That's a long time for any language to survive." And longer than any human language existed.

"You'd have to ask Caera about that, but we find runes all the time, too old to read. They're not Estian, or Hellian." Shrugging, the incubus gestured out to the path between the mountains ahead of them, spread out enough that they could see hundreds of kilometers of land, and the spire standing between it all. "Zel might be able to answer your questions."

Mia frowned as she looked at the gorgeous incubus, and then at the demons around them. They weren't being quiet anymore, but then they were also much higher up now. Safe from ambushes or hellhounds up here, maybe.

"People keep saying Zel, but no one's told me a thing about her. I'm picturing the Queen of England, on a throne, big white wig or something."

It was the succubus's turn to speak, after a predictably sultry chuckle.

"There's a reason Diogo is going to see her in person, unmarked."

"I figured that was because you're demons, and you prefer doing things face to face and stuff?"

"That's part of it. But, the bigger reason, is because Zel is a tetrad demon. You do not send messengers to speak to tetrad demons. You speak to them yourself."

"Tetrawhat?"

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~~David~~

When he wasn't afraid of being torn up and eaten, or being tortured, Hell was actually kinda awesome.

Yes, he wasn't supposed to be here. Yes, as far as he could tell, no angel was going to swoop down and save him. Yes, he was probably doomed to a very shitty life in Hell, and he had no idea if it'd even end with one life. Other souls became remnants when they died, and had to live and die shitty lives in unending, excruciating pain, without even the ability speak to the people around them. He very much did not want that to happen to him. But, Jes and Dao insisted that was determined by the number written on souls' heads, the mark of the 'Beast', something even they didn't really understand. Far as they knew, 'Beast' was just ancient language talk, and meaningless.

So they didn't know what would happen to him if he died, and he was in no rush to find out. But, now that he wasn't intensely worried about incoming pain and death, he could actually take a moment to look around at Hell's landscape. It was badass, like a metal album cover. The massive mountains of jagged stone, most of it black but some stones stained a suspicious shade of red, the weird metal pillars with metal skull braziers on them, the amber veins that glowed and pulsed slowly, the bones, even the fucking sky of fire. Hell was kinda awesome.

Easy to say since Hell wasn't currently trying to kill him. If he'd had a mark, demons would have either eaten his heart already and he'd be spending X lives as a remnant. Or maybe they'd have taken him back to their lair, tortured him, raped him -- some demons were that fucked up, according to Jes and Dao -- and then eaten him. Or, he could have willingly accepted some demon blood, and become a betrayer. Stronger and faster than most humans, but doomed to 666 deaths in Hell.

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