

1092

"We don't know shit, just some stories, or some ancient runes if you can find them and read them. Don't matter. My point is, if God was still around, you'd think they'd leave a vortex that cuts straight to Heaven there?"

No, no he... or they, wouldn't. Not that he knew shit either, but it did seem like something God would fix, since it kinda shit all over the Heaven Hell dynamic if people could go from one to the other.

"So, there's really a vortex connecting Heaven and Hell?"

"Yeap. Dangerous as fuck, and since demons can't fly, the only people using the vortex are angels. Or at least, that's what I've heard. Closest I've been to False Gate was, what, somewhere between the Black Valley and Angel's Spine? How the fuck would I know?"

"I... don't suppose you can just call? There's no magic bauble, crystal ball, special kind of scrying pool? How do the spires communicate?" [www.noelworM.com](#)

Jes laughed, struggling to keep it quiet.

"Welcome to the Dark Ages, pipsqueak. Want to talk to someone? Get on a hellbeast, maybe a goort, and ride. Usually takes a month of hard running to get from one spire to the next." [www.noelworM.com](#)

It was like a slap to the face. Cold, harsh reality, completely at odds with the warm air and absurdity around him. It was the number one thing people took for granted about the modern age, and that was instantaneous communication. There was a time when it took months for news to circulate even a small country. The only people you really knew were the people in your village, and anyone within twenty minutes of walking distance.

He shook his head. "That can't be right. We have puddles of water that let us see anything we want on the surface, but we can't talk to each other unless it's face to face?"

"Hey, if you can convince an angel to fly around carrying messages, by all means. But for the rest of us, you wanna say something, you say it in person. That's why I know Diogo's going to take you to Zel in person, remember? You can't just--" She crouched lower, and snapped her head back at David and Dao. "Down. Quiet. No sounds."

"N--"

Daoka slipped her hand around his mouth and pushed down on his shoulders with the other. Not a single click.

His heart jumped up into his throat, and his eyes shot around in a panic, but Jes and Dao didn't move. They were listening. All he could hear was the remnants behind him, but Jes heard something else, and she held up a finger to her lips as she looked at him.

After a few seconds of nothing, long enough for his heart rate to slow down to just very high, not absurdly high, Dao removed her hands, and nudged her horns against the side of his head before walking past him. Jes and Dao crept ahead a little further, talons and hooves silent on the stones. A few feet further along the rock and path, Jes poked her head up over a ridge.

She gestured for David, and he came, doing his best to not make noise. Somehow, despite being barefoot and having no talons or hooves, he still managed to make more noise than the two demons, but quiet enough it was lost under the remnants, the roaring fire above, and the relentlessly warm breeze. But if he misstepped, one slip on one pebble would make a sharp sound, and that'd punch right through the background sounds.

Jes motioned him closer. With a slow, deep breath, he came up beside her and peeked over the rock ridge.

People. Humans. A dozen humans crept along through the rocks and stones, each wearing cloaks made of the same dark red leather Jes and Dao slept on. They worked amazingly well, a perfect shade that fit into the glow of the burning sky, the dark rock, and the blood stains that coated everything. Perfect camouflage. [www.NoVeiWOrM.c©m](#)

He half expected to see them wielding primal spears, but there weren't any trees anywhere, not ones any sane person would turn into a weapon. Forbidden fruit were at the top of the food chain of importance. Instead, the humans had swords and axes. Big, black things that were more like slabs of metal banged together. Heavy, hard to use. Only half the humans had them, the bigger six, every one of them bigger than David, and every one of them obviously weighed down by the huge weapons strapped to their sides.

One of the humans turned, and looked up to the rocks. David froze.

They looked perfectly normal. A woman, a regular woman, the kind you found billions of on the surface, albeit wearing some of the same armor bits Jes and Dao wore. Curved chunks of black metal, beaten into shape the same way the weapons were, held on by leather straps darker than their cloaks. Not as much, just enough to cover a few body parts, usually the stomach. But none of that scared him.

It was her eyes. Her eyes looked up to the rocks, and stared, wide. She was too far to see David as anything more than a bump on the rocks that matched all the other rocks, but her eyes were so damn wide he could see them clearly. Ice shot up through his veins, staring into those eyes. If he moved, it might give up where he was, but he couldn't move even if he wanted to. All he could do was stare at the woman as she scanned the billion rocks around her, including the ones David, Jes, and Dao hid behind, before she moved on.

The three of them watched the twelve humans continue. Like them, the dozen souls didn't stick to any simple, easy path. They climbed up and down ravines, cliffs, and slipped around rocks like they knew the place as much as the demons did. Whoever these humans were, they'd been around for a long time.

Once they were gone, Jes sat down against the rocks they hid behind, and David and Dao followed suit.

"I'm surprised you didn't run out and join them," Jes said, smirking at him.

"You... You said I shouldn't trust other souls." [www.NoVeiWOrM.c©m](#)

"I did, but for all I knew you wouldn't listen to me. Good thing you did. I've seen fresh meat run into Cainites, thinking they'd found friends, only to get chopped up and eaten."

"Fucking christ."

"Cainites, or just roaming bands. And that was just a scouting party. You can find groups of hundreds of humans working in these mountains, hiding in the tunnels, killing random demons unlucky enough to stumble onto them."

"Really?" he asked. "Diogo doesn't just, summon a hunting party and exterminate them?"