

## 1108

"Yes. Zelandariel rules Death's Grip. Clockwise, the Grave Valley is ruled by Azailia. Counter-clockwise, Alessio rules the Black Valley."

"Grave Valley and Black Valley? Sounds like we're surrounded by a necromancer's wet dream." Oh shit. "That... That isn't a thing, right? Necromancers?"

"Fuck me I hope not," Jes said. "Zombies are scary."

"Damn scary," Caera said, nodding, as if what she said made perfect sense and wasn't the most ridiculous thing David had ever heard.

"You guys know you're demons, right? Super strong? Lift big rocks and tear people apart like they're made of tissue paper?"

Daoka hopped in closer and unleashed a flurry of clicks. Hand gestures included running, chasing, and something that looked like falling and being swarmed.

"Daoka's right," Caera said. "A few billion human corpses, with probably no resonance to eat, walking after every demon, endless? That's horrifying!"

He threw up his hands. This place was crazy. These ladies were crazy.

"How about Jesus?" he asked. "Did he exist?"

"I've never found runes talking about him," Caera said. "Why would someone like that be in Hell?" *www.NoVèLw.rM.Com*

"Touché. I--"

The mountains broke away, a valley opening between them as the path rounded the corner of the cliff. Hell, was massive. The mountains were massive, and some of them were two, maybe three times as tall as the one they were only maybe a third of the way up now, but in front of them it all opened up and pulled apart. No mountains blocked his view, at all, and while the hazy heat of Hell warped everything, he could see, and see, and see.

Hell, was flat. It didn't have a horizon. Past the valley and the enormous spire structure inside it, the valley didn't come up high enough to block his vision of what lay beyond. Something black, and long. The Black Valley. To his left was the inner sea, but he couldn't see it with mountains in the way. To his right was the ocean that surrounded the big donut of Hell, but he couldn't see that either with more mountains in the way. But facing Hell's counter-clockwise, he could see all the way through Death's Grip, kilometers upon kilometers away, hundreds, maybe a thousand or two, to where the Black Valley's outer edge touched the outer ocean in the distance. The heat blurred it all. But it was endless, and somewhere in the distance the surface of Hell and the burning sky merged.

There was no horizon. The distance went on and on and blended in a seam, like a weird painting your eyes got lost in. *www.NoVèLw.rM.Com*

For the first time in his life, vertigo hit him, and he snapped his hand out to catch his weight against the cliff wall. Away from the death fall, thankfully.

Daoka hopped up behind him and helped stand him straight, clicking away like a worried hen.

"I'm fine. I... I just, didn't realize how... strange that would look."

"Strange for you," Jes said, chuckling. "I don't understand how people on the surface can stand living on a big rock ball floating around in endless nothingness. That doesn't make you sick?"

He couldn't help but laugh a little at that. Laughter was good. It helped settle his heart rate he didn't notice spiking. *www.NoVèLw.rM.Com*

"It did get a little overwhelming thinking about it sometimes," he said. "Just, a big ball of rock, pulling us down with gravity, floating around in a big emptiness. Here, it's... it's not that, is it? It's almost like, it's more solid than the surface world, in a strange way." The opposite of the floating islands of Heaven.

"Hell is the bottom of the Great Tower," Caera said. "It makes sense it feels more anchored."

Finally, more Q and A.

"What is the Great Tower?"

"No one knows."

Fuck.

"Really?"

Caera nodded, and prowled ahead. He jogged after her.

"It's an old term that gets thrown around, but no one knows what it means. Maybe the angels do, but down here, all anyone knows is the Great Tower, sometimes called the Forlorn Tower, has three levels. Hell, the surface, and Heaven."

"Forlorn..."

"Like I said," Jes said, "if God or whoever was ever around, they aren't anymore. Fucker fucked up and left us." The gargoyle flapped her wings, jumped ahead, and resumed leading their little group along the high mountain path.

"I can't believe that," David said. "He, or they, couldn't have just left. You don't go creating universes and then just leave them. Right?"

Daoka clicked a few times, lower pitched than usual. She didn't sound convinced.

"Whatever happened," Caera said, "it happened fucking ages ago, long before Cain's War. I haven't even found a rune referencing a rune about when God left or where they went. But they're gone, that's for sure. Gone, or happy to hide and do fuck all."

That was damn depressing, but also, an interesting mystery. Judging from what the demons were saying, the fact God existed was taken as a given. But was it? Hell apparently wanted people with 'evil' resonance, and Heaven wanted people who had 'good' resonance, but that didn't necessarily prove God existed, just that humans, demons, and angels existed on planes that had their own ecosystem. For all he knew, the Great Tower could have been created from the big bang, or some equivalent.

Then again, he was trying to rationalize that God might not exist, while in Hell.

"So, the Great Tower," he said. "Jes said I might only have to die once to go back to it? Because I don't have a mark?"

"She means going back to it so it can spit you back out again. I haven't found a rune about it, but it does seem what most demons assume happens. Your deaths in Hell cleanse you, and then you go to the Great Tower, clean and ready for another round. Or maybe you get broken down and used as fuel for a new wave of souls."

Another point for the ecosystem theory.

"So souls are like fertilizer for new souls?"

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