

1109

Caera shrugged. "No one knows, David. At least not down here. Maybe the angels know more, but down here, all we have are old runes that most demons don't even know how to read anymore. Very old forms of Estian, and some runes I don't even recognize."

"Estian, the language we're all speaking right now."

Daoka clicked once.

"Sorry. Except Daoka." He smiled back at the satyr, and she returned it.

"Yes," Caera said. "Everyone understands it, but like surface languages it has a nasty habit of evolving over centuries."

"Problematic."

The tiger demon grinned up at him. "Very."

He returned the grin. She liked the way he talked. He liked the way she talked. It was nice talking to a demon who cared about things like details, or the past, someone who wanted to figure out how things worked, and why.

Plus, she was beautiful. She had a slender-ish sort of face, like Daoka, but he could see a little more age there, maturity, like a milf. Or, cougar. A tiger cougar. He forced himself to not laugh. And unlike Daoka, who had slender, small lips, Caera's mouth was wide, and every time she spoke he could see her many, many sharp teeth, like a cross between a shark's and crocodile's.

"Jeskura," he said. "She said I could see the vortex if we got high enough."

"We're not nearly high enough for that."

"Damn."

"And from this far it's just a tiny vertical line in the distance."

"Damn damn."

Caera laughed. "All these questions about Hell. I figured you'd be more interested in trying to figure out why you're special."

"I am. I need details about how everything works, so I can put together the infrastructure in my head. Turn the black box into a white box. Once I understand why things do what they do, and then what they'd do if certain variables were changed, I can deduce what's going on with me and Mia. The more information I have, the more..."

Jeskura stopped and stared at him. Daoka stared at him, in her own way. Caera stared up at him, eyebrow raised.

He groaned. "Just, keep giving me information and eventually I'll be able to figure out what's going on. Hopefully." *w w @ . n o V e l w O r m . c o m*

"He's one of those thinker types," Jes said, rolling her eyes before resuming down the path. "Gonna bore me to death."

"Thinker types have a habit of dying quick down here," Caera said. "You don't respond fast enough when shit hits the fan."

He winced. Like when he hadn't helped Jes and Dao with the humans.

"But," Caera continued, "I'll do what I can to keep you alive, and deal with Diogo. Then I'll have two unmarked with me when I get those Cainian sheep. And from there, we--"

Daoka clicked several times, loud and rapidfire.

"Yes yes we can figure out what to do about Tacitus, too. Either way, I want to see what happens with these unmarked. I definitely want to see why you have this strange... large aura, that gives us a tingling sensation."

"It changes a lot when he's horny," Jes said. "Like... from being around a gentle breeze, to a getting swept up in a fucking tornado."

"You guys get tornadoes down here?"

"Sometimes," Caera said. "Rare, but they happen. Deadly. Lots of fire."

"Scary."

Daoka clicked once. She thought so, too.

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As much as part of him was looking forward to experiencing last night again, lots of sex with his new awesome amazing best-thing-ever giant penis, the trek took them up higher, and by the time the fire sky dimmed and the amber veins in the rocks softened, they were exhausted. Strong as demons were compared to humans, they tired just as easily. More easily, maybe.

They found a vertical crevice in the mountain wall, and slipped inside. Before he knew it, he collapsed on his ass, and let out a long groan.

"I keep expecting to get hungry," he said. "I mean, if I don't need to eat except to heal injuries, which makes no sense by the way, then why do I get tired? Where's the line between injury and exhaustion, biologically speaking?"

Jes sat across from him, the crevice meaning their legs touched and passed each other, and she rolled her eyes.

"This kid, I swear. Just accept it and adapt."

Daoka clicked a few times as she sat down, with him, not Jes, which earned another eye roll from the gargoyle. Chuckling, Dao gave Jes a playful grin, and snuggled into David's side. She rubbed her closest horn against the top of his head, and put a quick kiss on his ear. Okay, maybe he wasn't too exhausted?

Caera slumped down on the ground, flat out on her stomach with arms and legs splayed out, like a cat, or maybe a dog, giving in to total exhaustion. Thankfully she did it at the entrance of the crevice ten feet away, or her claws would have slammed right into the side of Dao's legs.

"Hell is a reflection of the surface," Caera said. "How that works, I don't know. But Hell changes as the surface changes, and it warps the rules. Sleep when you're tired, but being tired doesn't drain essence. Not in humans, at least. Demons burn through their essence pretty quick, and we burn through resonance replenishing it. At this rate, I'll need to eat in a day or two."

Hell was a reflection of the physical world? Which meant, the surface world was ground zero, the starting point? Did Heaven work the same way as Hell? How did any of that fit into the Great Tower idea?

Caera didn't know the answers, so he didn't ask. She knew a lot, and a lot wasn't enough.

"Resonance and essence," he said. "Anything I should know about them?"

The tiger lady managed a weak shrug. "Not really. I assume Jes and Dao already told you how the basics work?"

"Mhmm. But I don't really get... like... how resonance works. Why do humans have it? What is it?"

"We don't know. Everything I know about resonance is just repeated word of mouth. Humans are probably born with resonance, and alter it during life. It's the measure of how good or bad a person you were. If you're more bad than good, you come to Hell, and die, and die, and die, until the last bit of the bad resonance is wiped away. Supposedly."

"The numbers on people's foreheads represents how bad they were." *w w w @ . n o V e l w O r m . c o m*

"Exactly. But having a higher number doesn't mean you have more resonance, just that what you have is more tainted, and tastier." She managed a weak grin. "It takes longer and longer to correct, so you have to die more." *w w w . n o V e l w O r m . c o m*

He shivered, remembering how awful remnants had it. At least it wasn't eternal torture, but being used as mortar in a wall of stones, bleeding and screaming, for who knew how many days, or years, only to have to do it again and again? Fucking terrifying.

"Hell is wiping people clean before sending them to the Great Tower, to get reborn, or turned into fertilizer for new souls? Why?"

Another shrug.

"You know all we know, now. You're asking the big questions most demons just don't care about, and we couldn't answer even if we did. I've spent a hundred years digging through ruins and old tunnels. I've been all the way to Angel's Spine, and I've seen the edge of The Red Pits. I've never, ever found any sort of explanation for why God set things up the way they did, David. They just did."

The most infuriating answer. 'Because'. But it wasn't her fault, so he sighed and groaned a little, leaned back against the wall, and closed his eyes.

~~~~~ *w w w . n o V e l w O r m . c o m* ~~~~~

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~~Day 19~~

~~Mia~~

It happened again.

Instead of waking up to the quiet chirping of her smartphone bird alarm, her LED lights slowly turning on, and the dread of having to go to morning classes, she woke up to a sky of embers growing into flames, and she was surrounded by grunts and moans.

Day three of their trek. One more night and they'd arrive at the spire late tomorrow, according to Scira. Mia had no idea how to feel about that, or how she felt waking up to an orgy, again.

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Adron and Hannah were only a few feet away, quietly fucking, Hannah lying on Adron's chest on her back. The angle really pushed the bulge on her stomach up and out, turning it from subtle to blatant. And because Mia was a moron, she lifted her head enough to get a look down and along Hannah's gorgeous naked body, and down between her legs. Adron wasn't in her slit. The angle hid it from view, but seeing Hannah squirm and pant in bliss as Adron fucked her ass, sent more tingles through Mia's body.