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Deeper and deeper into the mountain, it got warm. Caera didn't sweat, but David had to wipe a drop from his eyes. Heat sucked. Humans hid in this insanity [Ww\(w\).nOvéWOrM.com](#)

Apparently they did, and more than a just a couple. Five humans sat in a larger section of the deep cave, three men, two women, and they wore bits of armor, leather cloaks, and one of them even had a demon skull dangling from their hip. They had weapons, too. One big black sword, and one axe. Ugh, why not a spear? A spear would be great. The most underrated, most influential and useful melee weapon in all history. Human history, anyway.

The only reason the humans couldn't see Dave and Caera, was their rapt attention on the scratch marks on the wall in the back of the room, above some glowing amber veins. No, wait, not veins. Glowing runes. Plus, Caera refused to let even the smallest sliver of herself stick out from around the rocks on the tunnel, save for a single spot where the nearby amber veins weren't shining very well. Hell loved shadows, and the tunnels were even worse for it, with the amber casting sharp shadows perfect for hungry demons to hide in. Caera's horns didn't stick very high above her head, either. They were for ramming and stabbing, not posturing.

She did exactly that. Without making a sound, no roar to announce her presence, not even a grunt of exertion, she dashed around the rock into view, and threw herself at the group. They'd gotten into a more involved conversation about the scratch marks, and Caera had picked the exact moment they'd all looked to the wall, exposing their backs for a whole half second. She was too good at this.

The humans had just enough time to gasp before the tregeera ran into one, her head tilted down slightly so they were immediately skewered on her horns. And like a bull, she threw her head up, and tossed the human aside like they weighed nothing. The other humans jumped to their feet, some picking up rocks like David's, two others picking up the sword and axe.

Caera went for the two with the rocks first. One tried to block her swipe, but a rock only managed to block the tiger's big, clawed hand once, while the other hand got the woman straight in the chest. The claws went deep, above the little bit of armor the woman had, directly into the clavicle and throat. David didn't watch what happened to her throat after.

The two with the meera weapons were slow. The man with the rock wasn't, and he brought down the big thing like a mallet toward Caera while his companion died. Caera saw it coming, and had already been ducking to the side, half standing half pouncing forward with the power of her hind legs. Gravity didn't mean shit to Caera. Her massive weight hit the wall, hands first, then feet, and she bounced off the dark stone onto the man who'd missed her.

David came closer.

The man underneath Caera screamed, but she was already getting back up onto her hind feet as she slashed one hand to the side, and the man's throat disappeared in a red splatter. The first man she'd run-through with her horns crawled away, but they didn't get far, blood pouring out of their midsection over the stone. Hell was all too happy to suck the blood up into the mountain, and her dark stone turned a shade redder.

The human with the axe came at Caera, the big blade already swinging through the air from above, like he was going to chop wood with it. Caera was too fast. Even with her huge cat-like body, she managed to throw her weight to the side, and counter-pounce opposite of the axe, straight at the man. But the axe came down fast, and David braced himself for demon brains.

The huge black blade hit one of her horns, half bouncing the axe back up, half pushing Caera down to the ground. But she already had her hands underneath her again and caught her weight. She'd blocked the axe with her horn on purpose. Snarling, she pushed herself back up seamlessly, a pouncing motion she used to drive her weight onto the axe-wielder, and tear into him.

Except, Caera missed. Partly. Her body landed on the axe user, and she got her claws into him, but the motion threw her weight forward and she half rolled, sending the man's blood and flesh around and onto the ceiling. The axe went flying, and the man wielding it half screamed, half gargled on blood, as Caera's claws came out of him at an odd angle, mostly straight out. Instead of dying almost instantly, the man was left a choking mess, chest torn up, but throat mostly intact. And Caera's half roll meant she hit her side against a giant boulder sitting near one of the other connecting tunnels, hard enough the ding of her armor against the rock echoed through the cave.

David came closer, and refused to look at the dying man.

The woman with the sword came at Caera, screaming. It was a mad scream, a crazy person's scream, the sort of scream you made when you were rabid and beyond reason. For a split moment, it seemed like the woman about to slash at Caera wasn't a person at all. It was some... thing, some entity wearing a cloak and armor like David, some monster that was going to kill his friend and eat her heart. And then Jes and Dao would starve, and die, and...

David brought down the rock on the back of the woman's head. Hard. He knew he had to put every bit of weight he had into it, light as he was, and his feet came up off the ground half an inch with the impact of stone against the woman's skull. Bone broke, and the big rock went a lot deeper than he expected it to. Than he wanted it to. There was softness at the end, before the woman's body fell, a texture he felt through the big stone he'd wished to God he hadn't felt.

"David!" Caera's voice.

A shadow came up from behind one of the rocks, and David spun, gore-smeared rock still in his hands. No thought to it, just a reflex. He'd hit Mia a few times with a book, or the back of a hand, just accidental stuff when spinning around because she'd randomly and accidentally surprised him. This was like that, plus adrenaline, plus fight-or-flight, plus blood pumping in his ears telling him to hunt and kill. Aura? No. Maybe. His aura? Something angry and alive in him told him to attack, and he did.

And he smashed in the face of another person, an older man, someone maybe in their seventies. They were emaciated, and they'd jumped at David with only a small rock in their hand. Light. They crumpled like paper, spun, fell, and their empty eyes stared ahead.

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"Good reflexes," Caera said. "Fuck me, my head is throbbing. Blocking that axe was dumb. I'm seeing double again, and--David? David, you okay?"

He stared down at the old man with half his face caved in, at the woman missing half of her skull, and at the other bodies and the blood pouring out of them. The one Caera had failed to kill fast twitched and writhed, and his bloodshot eyes glared up at them, but he'd be dead in moments. [Ww\(w\).nOvéWOrM.C\(©\)m](#)

David gulped down the huge rock in his throat, looked at the much smaller rock in his hands, and the gore on it. Nausea hit him, and he dropped the weapon.

"Fucking... christ, I'm going to be sick."

Caera tilted her head as she prowled over to him, sat in front of him, and nudged his side with a hand. [ww.nOvéWOrM.com](#)

"Why?"

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