

1226

Not a limb. A spike. A loud, heavy clunk rung through the metal room, a deep thud sound of bone hitting metal. On anyone else that'd have shattered bone, but not the bound monster. Instead, a black piece of spike fell from his body, and rolled forward along the floor toward her.

Vinicius relaxed, sighing with an obvious degree of pain and exhaustion, and he nodded toward the spike. He'd broken it off his shoulder.

Mia picked it up. It was warm, long, and its tip came to a very sharp point, sharper than she expected a body spike to have. Sharp enough she could have pricked herself and drawn blood if she wanted. A foot-long pointy thing with a subtle curve, and a few inches thick at the base.

"What the... You broke this off on purpose?"

He nodded.

"Why? Wh..." She sucked in a hard breath. Ice ran down her spine. Her fingers quivered, and sweat laced her palms. "You want me to kill Zel?"

He nodded.

"Are you crazy!? You want me to k..." Her breathing stopped. The boulder in her throat threatened to suffocate her. Zel would be back any minute, expecting her to be practicing her control aura, only to find Mia not doing that for the second time in a row. And Zel had made it clear what she'd do if Mia wasn't at least trying.

No more time to think. Do what Vinicius wanted, or try the aura thing again? And she could try. She could toss the big spike aside, dig for the hidden strings, pluck them with her invisible fingers, and craft an aura. All she had to do was align her mind, get it on the right wavelength, and think 'control'.

Or, she could do something now, before Zel killed her in the future, or bound her in the same leash she had Vinicius bound with, or stuck that rod through her stomach, too, or... or...

She stared at the big spike in her hand, and squeezed.

~~~~~

~~~~~

--David--www.V.n.v.ε.lW(o)rm.c@mm

They followed along as best they could. The giant lizard didn't move fast, but a lumbering slow pace from a giant was still fast enough David and the girls had to work hard if they wanted to keep up and hide at the same time. They scampered through ditches, dodged around big rocks, and stayed in the shadows of mountains as they followed along.

Demons emerged from Death's Grip. Dozens came out of hiding, from hunts in the tunnels, or their own little caves they hung out in, to investigate what was happening. If there were any humans nearby, they ran in the opposite direction; David never spotted a single one. The demons, on the other hand, seemed excited, and they scampered toward the tower with no attempt to hide themselves. A lot of them roared and screamed, battle cries that got even David's blood pumping.

Auras. The demons were using sin auras. As dozens, maybe hundreds of demons poured out of the various holes in the mountains nearby, hints of their distant auras flowed over the rocks, almost like invisible water, or maybe like sound bouncing around the stones. Silent, untouchable, but he felt it nonetheless, like heat in his veins that demanded he give into it. Aggression, violence, all the demons summoned the aura and buried the area with it. For a moment, he felt like a piranha, getting summoned by the swarm to frenzy and rip something to shreds(www.V.n@©)wδR.M.c@M

"Is this a spire aura?" he whispered.

Caera, prowling ahead of him, shook her head.

"No. The spire aura will be a lot more obvious, but it doesn't overpower souls, just demons."

"And... we're not concerned Zel will use it?"

"We're much concerned," she said, without looking back to him.

Shit. If Zel used the spire aura, she'd be able to 'direct' the demons of Death's Grip, at least all demons the aura could penetrate, to come to the tower's defense. What the repercussions were of that, David had no idea. Did it have a cooldown? Would it have nasty side effects, or after effects?

"Will she--"

"We don't know," Jes said. "It's been a hundred years since she last did." The gargoyle crouched alongside him, and did her best to keep her wings down. Caera was huge compared to Jes, but Caera didn't have big red wings to worry about giving away their position.

Daoka clicked a few times, hopping and crawling alongside him, too.

"Exactly," Jes said. "Some weird dragon thing attacking the spire? The rider himself at her doorstep? Nothing like this has happened in... who the fuck knows how long. She just might use it."

The four of them slipped into a nearby ditch that ran parallel to the oncoming dragon. This close, each step was like someone had plugged a bass guitar into David's skull, tuned it down a whole step, and played the heavy string as hard as they could in a slow, thudding cadence. Boom. Boom. Vibration rattled through his brain into his teeth. The demons on the dragon didn't look his way, though, and they barely noticed the dozens of other demons higher on the mountains and making no attempt to hide. They were drawn into whatever the rider was doing to them, and oblivious to anything else.w.W.w.nδv@lw oRm.c@M

"What'll happen if she uses it?" he asked.

"We'll get drawn in," Caera said. "If Zel was sending us out of the province, she'd have to use her spire tools to seal in the call of the horde. But we're right here, no need to seal it."

"Anything we can do to resist it?"

"Get deep underground like Renato, or get to the edge of the province."

The edge would take a few weeks to reach at least, and considering Caera wasn't making a beeline for a nearby tunnel, getting deep enough underground fast enough wasn't a possibility.

"Then... what do we do?"

"No fucking idea," Jes said.

Shit.

Daoka clicked once, shaking her head.

"We get to the spire valley edge, and watch what happens," Caera said. "If Zel summons the horde, the three of us are fucked. I want to know what's happening before that happens, before the horde call turns the three of us into... tools."

Double shit.

~~~~~

Twenty minutes later, they hid behind a curve of rock along a mountainside that merged into a ditch, and looked out to the valley. Rows upon rows of giant black spikes, many skewering a corpse, a skeleton, with some bodies still in the process of dying. Black metal pillars, topped with black skulls with fire behind their eyes. The spire stood in the middle of it all, the deepest part of the valley, a colossal structure of black metal, red flesh, and white bone. Enormous balconies circled it at various points, edges dotted with huge white fangs, and on the edges stood dozens of winged demons. Hundreds.

www.N0veIWrM.CoM