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Mia, her head peeking out from behind Vinicius's leg, looked beyond horrified. She was far, features lost in the blurring of the heat waves and the length of the dungeon, and the sweat dripping into David's eyes didn't make it any easier to see her. But he could tell from the way her big green eyes looked out at the carnage before her, she was traumatized. Whatever had just happened, in classic Mia fashion, she either blamed herself for it, or took a personal stake in it.

Hopefully, her state of shock would mean she didn't give him away.

David slipped one foot around the door, and—[www.novelworm.com](#)

"You didn't come for me, old friend," Vinicius said with a voice like a T-Rex had just ground gravel in his throat. He took a step forward, one of his lower hands clutching his side, and a subtle glow in his spikes faded away, the same shade as the fire that burned in the dungeon around the rider.

The fire didn't bother the rider at all. He walked forward, both axes in hand and relaxed at his sides, half dangling in half loose grips.

"No," the rider said. He sounded... normal. He sounded like a man. Maybe a big strong guy with a naturally deep voice to go with, but it had none of the crazy bass gravel of Vinicius. Even David's girls had bigger voices, higher pitched being girls and all, but they still sounded demony. The rider sounded completely, entirely unimpressive.

All that did was make the sight of him, slowly and steadily walking through the flames, past the burning corpses and bone and metal cages, all the scarier.

Vinicius moved into the burning room, a slow prowling motion. Even with one hand clutching his gut, his motions were smooth and predatory. Might as well have been a literal dragon prowling around with how big the demon was. He didn't lean forward as much as a dinosaur, not like the eyeless one David met earlier, but he still moved with the animal posture of a hunting creature. And his dragon eyes stared at the rider with so much focus, he didn't notice David at all.

"Your armor continues to resist my flames," Vinicius said [www.novelworm.com](#)

The rider said nothing, but he did come to a stop. Almost like he was waiting, he stood there and let his axes dangle in his hands while Vinicius came closer, until both juggernauts stood in the center of the flames and ruins of what had once been a gigantic dungeon. The flames had been hot enough the burning corpses were mostly ashes now, and the cages and chairs made of bone fell apart as the splintering white snapped like beach pebbles tossed into a campfire. Black metal bars remained, standing in the flames, surrounded by death.

"Give me the unmarked," the rider said after an eternity.

"You want to kill her." It wasn't a question.

The rider didn't twirl an axe, shift weight from side to side, anything to suggest there was any sort of personality inside his shell. Just a man, a monolith, on a mission. But even from a distance, David could feel the odd mix of rage and hate pouring out of him, an aura that demanded violence and murder. The searing heat of the flames matched the heat of his fury, and the ashes of the surrounding dead matched the strange coldness that mixed with it. It was murderous hate David's brain could only understand as frigid ice and searing lava.

"Yes."

Vinicius snarled as he slowly shook his head. "You know I won't let you."

A pause, neither moving. Only the crackling of the burning bones in the wide dungeon hall, the giant demon's labored breathing, and the demons from outside pouring down the balconies above made a sound.

David crept forward. With that helmet, the rider could only see directly in front of him, so sneaking up beside him toward Mia could work. Then again, the rider probably had superhuman senses or some other bullshit. Or maybe he could sense David's presence? No, he'd come within several feet of David before, on his big goort mount, and hadn't found him. Just keep going.

Problem. The dungeon was still on fire. Heat poured up through the air, blurred his vision, and sweat flowed down his body. Running through it would be pain, and his bare feet would get burned.

Mia, whose eyes had been scattering around on the rider, Vinicius, and everything else in the dungeon, finally looked David's way as some flames settled. Her eyes opened even wider, and she opened her mouth. David shook his head, and risked a small, low wave of his fingers, the way he usually greeted his sister when they spotted each other in random places outside their dorm.

Even from a distance and through all the heat haze, her big eyes and body language spoke loud. She looked relieved. But when she took a step forward, she ran into the same problem he did. They couldn't go through the dungeon while it was this hot, not easily anyway.

David crept closer. He was now in official heat exhaustion territory, not a difficult temperature to reach for a couple gingers who lived in Canada their whole lives. Ghost salt from ghost sweat soaked his lips and reached his tongue. Thankfully, the few bits of armor he wore made no noise compared to the heavy clinks of the rider walking closer to Vinicius. If David could keep pushing forward, he could reach his sister. Bigger problem: doubtful there was an exit where Mia was. She had to come to him, not the other way around.

"You're wounded," the rider said.

Vinicius snorted, almost like one of Caera's half laughs, just a thousand times deeper and heavier.

"That won't stop you, will it?"

The rider raised his axes.

"No."

The rider came at him. Someone wearing that armor should not have been able to move that fast, but the gold and bronze layers of metal did little to stop the man from leaping at Vinicius with both axes up.

Vinicius stepped aside, and spun. He was a gigantic monster of a demon, and like Caera, had a thick tail, as thick as one of his tree trunk legs. Spikes covered the tail's back, and unlike Caera's, they didn't look like they had any give or bend. Perfect for skewering.

The colossal wall of dark red skin and black spikes smashed into the rider's front and side, and the rider brought his axes down. The gold blades hit, but the impact sent the rider back and to the side, hard. A couple of gashes now ran down the sides of the monster's tail, but shallow, barely bleeding, while the rider flew and hit one cell with metal bars. They bent inward like a streetlight bending to a car crash.

The rider said nothing, no grunts or groans, no heavy breaths. He got back up and faced Vinicius, only to meet the monster head-on as the titan charged toward the rider. One hand clutching his gut left the monster with three, and all three of them reached out for the rider.

Mistake. The rider wasn't wounded, or even disoriented. Flying and crashing that hard into a wall would have killed any soul, and turned their brain into a pancake inside their skull. But the rider swung one of his axes up, caught Vinicius on the underside of one of his arms, and used the momentum of the axe to spin, and swing the other axe up as well. Vinicius yanked one of his other arms back again, but the second swing caught him deeper in the arm, more than just a graze.

But Vinicius had more than just claws. He swung his head down and to the side, and drove his huge horns into the rider. Most of Vinicius's horns pointed up from his head, but a couple came out from the sides and forward with a bit of curve, big enough the demon could hit and stab with them. Case in point, his head swing came from the side, and smashed into the rider's helmet.

David braced to see the rider's helmet come off. It didn't. The armored titan fell to his side, and one of his axes came out of his hand. Vinicius and the rider both looked toward the axe as it skidded along the floor, and came toward David.

The axe stopped in front of David. Everyone froze. God had a sense of humor.

"Vinicius!" Mia yelled. "Don't let him hurt David!"

And now they knew his name. Wonderful. It probably didn't matter, but still, he frowned at her and hoped she could see it through the hazy air.

He also put his tiny sword in his bad hand, and tried to pick up the axe with his good hand. His palm got within an inch of the grip before the heat told him what would happen if he grabbed it, and he yanked his hand back in time.

The rider got up, Vinicius raked down with his claws, but of his three available arms, one was bleeding, the other was bleeding buckets, and the rider was ready for the good arm. He swung up with his axe, and Vinicius pulled his arm back in time to keep his hand. He'd seen the attack coming. But the rider jumping up to Vinicius's head, and punching his huge dragon snout with his free hand, was not something Vinicius saw coming [www.novelworm.com](#)

Vinicius fell back. The room shook with the impact of his mass colliding with the floor. The ashes of corpses filled the air, giant bones that'd yet to snap from the heat shattered, and metal cages bent and crumpled.

The rider might have been able to follow it up and jump the demon, go for the kill, but it'd have been risky. No, the rider had a different aim, and he went for it. He wanted to kill the unmarked. And he wanted his axe back.

"You uh... should get a chain for this thing," David said, backing up. "Use it like a rope or--"

The rider ran toward him, a juggernaut of mass and strength that bulldozed through flames. Mia screamed. Vinicius roared as he got back to his feet, but the rider closed the distance to David in seconds.

David did the first thing that came to his mind, that'd come to anyone's mind when an enormous man wearing thick gold and bronze armor complete with a medieval great helm shaped like a skull comes running at you. He ran, too, in the opposite direction. Maybe the rider would stop and turn around once he got his axe back?

Nope. The rider picked up the axe, and resumed coming toward David with an unfair running speed. Why switch targets and go for David? Because Mia was trapped in the dungeon, and he could go for her after he cut David to bits. Shit.

Well, at least the rider's attention wasn't on Mia anymore. Double shit.

David didn't have to go far to get out of the dungeon's entrance hall and back to the inner balcony, and he skidded to a halt before almost falling over the edge into the spire's center hole. If that shady black area he saw was the bottom, it looked deep enough he'd splatter if he jumped. [www.novelworm.com](#)

He spun around again and faced the rider. The vrat still hid behind one of the big metal open doors, but a glance was enough to tell David whoever this demon was, he was out of commission. He wouldn't be helping.

But the vratorin did look up, past David and to the balcony above and behind him. In the increasingly loud chaos, the vrat's quick glance was the only warning David got. David threw himself to the side, and a blur of mass came down onto David's balcony with a heavy thud.

Diogo hit the metal floor, dove past David, and with his one remaining arm, slammed his giant fist into the rider's face.