

1244

They both froze, and the world flashed white. Images hit David hard, and his head reeled back as symbols crashed into him. They flared in his brain, redlike fire, amber like the veins of Hell, gold like the rays of Heaven, and they demanded he notice them. Somewhere in the dark matter of his brain, a piece of his brain told him he recognized the symbols, and once it did, his subconsciousness jumped on board and filled in the blanks.

Runes. Those were runes, like the ancient language he'd read for Caera. The same, but different. Runes his brain struggled to understand, struggled to pronounce even inside his own imagination. Life, death, creation, destruction, Heaven and its nine islands, Hell and its nine provinces, so many more. Three stuck out, loud and bright in his thoughts: potram, royam, and ballam.

He forced his eyes open and met Mia's. If his eyes were as wide as hers, he was probably scaring the shit out of her, too.

"I'm alive," he said. "I uh, came here to rescue you, but--"

She threw up her hands. "But we don't have time!" Her eyes screamed at him more than her voice. Whatever had happened when they'd touched each other, she'd seen it, too.

"I know! But we can't go back up and out, not with hundreds of demons coming down."

"Shit, I didn't think--"*Ww.évêLwørM.c(ø)m*

He threw up his hands. "What the hell were those symbols!? We touched and suddenly I'm swimming in a new fucking language of shit I don't understand!"

"I know! I don't understand them either. But--"

He didn't get to interrupt her. Something big and heavy crashed into the doors with enough force to make the T-Rex sitting back against them shift a few inches across the floor.

"Holy shit," David said. "The rider is... is..."

Vinicius looked down at him, which he did even while sitting, and grumbled in his chest. David didn't speak alligator, but that was probably an annoyed grumble.

Mia grabbed his shoulders. "What do we do!? Think of a plan! Think!"

"I'm thinking!"

"You're panicking!"

"So are you!"

"I--Adron!" She got on her knees beside the demon and shook him by his unburned shoulder. "Oh god Adron I'm sorry! I told Vinicius to stop the rider, and he did that! And Hannah, and... and..."

"Hannah?" David asked. Mia snapped him a glare, and the one-eyed demon, barely conscious, aimed his one eye at David with enough malice to kill. Well, shit, don't mention Hannah.

"I warned you about him," Adron said, and he sat forward. Or tried, anyway. Mia pushed him back against the wall beside the closed doors.

"I know. I know and I'll make sure he doesn't do anything like that anymore. But let's get out of here. We need a way out! We need to find Kas, and get out."

"Kas?" David asked, and braced for some more eye knives. No eye knives this time, thank god.

"A sarkarin demon," Mia said. "Big like that Diogo brute you just saw, but eyeless, two big horns on the sides of his head. Big tail."*Ww.Nov(ø)L(w)O(r)m.cøm*

"Looks like a big shark dinosaur?"

"Y-Yeah. Did you--"

"Diogo and... and a sarkarin, were fighting the rider. The shark knew who you were and told me where to find you."*©©W.NovLWørM.Com*

Mia's eyes shot upward. "He... He can't be..."

"We don't have time for this," Adron said. This time he managed to get up, and pushed Mia away when she tried to stop him. "Once people realize Zel's dead, they'll start fighting for control of the spire. That means coming down here." He gestured to the hole in the center of the balconies. "Even if they don't find out yet, I can hear that fight above, same as you." Despite one hand back against the wall to keep from falling, Adron found enough energy to half yell his words, half beg. "We're going to get caught in the middle, and--"

"We have time for Kas!" Mia jammed a finger up at Adron. "He's your friend! And Hannah..."

Adron shook his head. "We can't--"

"Hold the door," Vinicius said. "I will take my spire back, take its power, and you will be safe."

"Okay, I just met you," David said, gesturing to the giant monster, "but I trust you as far as I can throw you."

"Same," Mia said, clutching her strange necklace.

David continued. "There's no way we're just giving you control of the spire. Who knows what you'd use the horde call for."*Ww(w).n.V©LwOrm.cøm*

"And it'd probably free you of the leash," Mia said. "And you burned Adron! You tried to kill him!"

David almost asked, but let it go. If a leash was how Mia was controlling the biggest, scariest demon David had ever seen, details could wait.

Vinicius shook his head. "The rider..." After a heavy rumble, he lowered his head. Exhausted, maybe, or not willing to explain. Stoic asshole behavior. "I must take control of the spire. It is mine."

Mia marched up to the giant and stared up at him with eyes David had never seen. The fuck had happened to her in the week it'd been since he last saw her?

"You will not! We're going upstairs to find Kas, and--"

David took her hand. Again, touching her skin was like an electric shock, and strange symbols shot through his mind, same as before. Mia was the source of them, but from the look in her eyes, she was seeing things come from him, too, or was getting stuck in some sort of feedback loop.

He let go, gasping.

"The fuck... is... that?"

"You tell me!" She grabbed him by his half breastplate and avoided skin contact as she shook it. "What have you been up to all this time? I thought you were dead, and--we're getting distracted! We need a plan!" That was her panic voice. It sounded dangerously close to her 'do what I tell you to' voice, a voice only he ever usually got to hear. The joys of being a brother. "You always have a plan, David. What's the plan!?"

"I uh... didn't have a plan."

"What!?"

"I saw the rider and his army attack the spire, and I just ran in! I left my girls behind, and--"

"Your girls!?"

"A few demons that have been helping me, but--"

He didn't get to finish the sentence. Hell broke loose.