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"I told you," Caera said, "it's a horde seal. Zel used the power of the spire to summon the horde, and used spire tools to seal it in so it'd stay with me for a long time, even when out of range of the spire."

"Y-Yeah, I get that. But... But..." He let go of her arm, stood up, and began pacing. "It's more than just control. It's control, and influence. It's manipulation and domination. It's..." Throwing up his hands, he paced faster. "It's something!"

"Something?" Jes asked, eyebrow raised.

"Yeah. I'm sorry, I can't explain it. It's all in here"--he pointed at his temples--"and connecting to other runes. It's like, there's a ladder, or maybe a tower, and things are stacked on top of each other. But, not just like a pile of stuff, but a structure. Some things support other things. Some things are branches." He pulled on his shaggy red hair. "There's things about life and death, creation and destruction, and both of them sit on things like existence and non-existence. But, the words don't do it justice! I can't explain!"www.novelworm.com

"You were right, Caera," Jes said. "He is one of those crazy scientists in the movies."

He rolled his eyes. "I'm saying, the rune Zel used, it's... it's something I can..." Scrunching his face up, he glared at the ground as he sank his fingernails into his scalp. "If I can just figure it out, I feel like... like I could... I don't know. Something wants to click, and it's not clicking. I gotta get it to click. It has to click or I'm going to--"

"Go crazy," Jes said. "Yeah, we get it."

"I'm... only a little crazy."

The gargoyle laughed as she got up and gestured to Caera's arm.

"So, the magic runes in your head are coming into focus and making more sense? Magic runes that your sister put there, and got sharper when you had that vision about a random girl dying? And seeing Caera's horde scar help?"www.novelworm.com

"Yeah, yeah it did. Like, seeing how the things plug together helped make things click, and--"www.novelworm.com

"You can say click all you want, it ain't gonna mean anything to a bunch of demons, David."

He winced. It was true Dao and Jes weren't the brightest people, but he didn't want to think of them as dumb. He gestured to Caera.

"She--"

"I don't go click," Caera said, shrugging. "Puzzles? No thanks. I just like learning about history. No demons down here sit around contemplating math or physics or logic puzzles, David, me included."

He sighed and sat next to Dao with a heavy thump.

"Have you seen people get stuck on puzzles in the scrying pool? Maybe movies where smart people get really--"

"Obsessive?" Jes asked, smiling.

"Yes, obsessive, about figuring something out. Some people, their brains just get stuck on trying to figure out how A and B fit together, and can't stop. I'm one of those people. I'm that guy that will go insane if he knows two things should fit together, but can't figure out how or why. Can't eat or sleep sorta insane." More than a few times, his obsessive need to figure something out had destroyed his school schedule, his sleep schedule, his eating schedule, all of it. Thankfully, that wouldn't be a problem in Hell. Sleep was an on-off switch, and he didn't need to eat often.

Getting lost in his thoughts and walking off a cliff or into an ambush, on the other hand, was definitely an issue.

"And you're still sure this won't be a problem?" Caera asked.

"I'm... I'm sure." He stabbed his temples with his fingers. "Okay, not sure. But it doesn't matter. I told you I'm going to help you and I will. I just need to... balance that." Easier said than done. It hadn't been so bad when he'd had no clue what the runes were about. After seeing the rune on Caera's shoulder, some parts clicked into place, and that was good, and bad. He was now officially in obsession mode.

Daoka clicked, sat up, reached out, and pulled his head toward her. First she squashed his face against her breasts, and then guided him down until his head was on her lap. He lay out, let his limbs go limp, and closed his eyes as he rested on her. Claws slipped into his hair, and every tense muscle in his body melted as Daoka combed his hair and scratched his head.

"At least the boy has a head on his shoulders," Acelina said. "If our lives are apparently in his hands, it is good to know he can see past his nose. Unlike--"

"I fucking dare you to finish that sentence," Jes said. From the sudden breeze, she'd probably just flared her wings.

David didn't look. Eyes closed, he took a deep dive into his brain, and the weird symbols that'd taken residence there. At the bottom, existence and non-existence. Runes branched up from there and created platforms, but what connected them was a concept, an idea, something his brain couldn't get to click. And without the click, the runes floated around like helium balloons on strings. Only the rune on Caera's arm held still, and the string that bound was now solid, like finally understanding why a mathematical equation did what it did.www.novelworm.com

Control was an evolution of intent and power, one of its children. One of many. And they pulsed as they teased him and his ignorance. If he could just make them click, click all the way down to the bottom, something would... something.

Something.