

1359

~~Day 38~~

~~David~~

The lava rivers sucked. If he'd still been wearing all the armor, he'd have died again from it. Even wearing only the leather skirt and the half breastplate, that was at least thirty pounds of gear. The dagger, something that'd probably been made for a satyr or gargoyle, was another fifteen pounds. Trekking dozens of kilometers with it was pain.

Caera took lead, arm mostly healed. Jes's side was still a problem, and she held it as they walked. Daoka walked beside David in the back, and she giggled as she passed his dagger from hand to hand like it weighed as much as a baseball. Acelina walked behind them, hissing every so often as she held a wing out in front of her and checked the tears. The Las drifted around, never content to stay in formation, a couple around Caera and a couple around David for maybe five minutes before they changed positions. They each carried a piece of his disguise, unbothered by the weight, and happy to use the metal chunks as a bludgeoning weapon if need be.

A merry band of adventurers.

"This... sucks," he said, wiping sweat from his forehead. Without the disguise, no need to give himself a fake number anymore. If and when they needed to do the fake disguise thing, they'd set it all up again.

"It's not that hot," Jes said.

"I'm going to die."

"No, you're not. Pussy."

The most disturbed groan he could manage coursed through his body, and he glared at Jes as hard as he could. All that got him was laughter, from her, Dao, and Acelina. He looked back at the huge demones and narrowed his eyes, but again, all that got him was more laughter. Which was great. Anything that made Acelina laugh struck a chord in him that made him smile, but he knew if he smiled at her, it'd spoil her fun, so he continued to groan and moan with exhaustion.

Daoka giggled at him, came in close, and hooked his arm over her shoulders.

"Don't baby him," Jes said.

"I think I could stand to be babied a bit, especially since I'm gonna be the one to talk to the next group we find."

"Armor?" Lasca asked. She jumped over to him, fluttered her wings a few times, and held up the two pieces she held that'd go on his legs. Each had to weigh ten pounds, no problem for a demon to wave around like batons, even a small one like an impa(w)W(w).@D(v)EI@δr©.com

"Not yet, thank god."

Lasca smiled up at him, even beamed with her big eyes, and darted back to the front of the group to walk with Caera.

"We should find myself some armor," Acelina said, "if I am doomed to join this group on these suicide missions."

"You're welcome to leave any time," Jes said back at the spire mother.

"Angels behind us. Cainites with imbued weapons ahead of us. And still a long journey to the Grave Valley." Sighing, Acelina shook her head and gestured out to the lava rivers around them. "No. I am stuck with you, until we can reach Azailia."

"Armor makes sense," David said. "--what's that?"

Everyone stopped on a dime, snapped their gaze back to David, and looked where he was looking. He gestured out at one of the distant lava rivers.

The cavern was gigantic, probably a kilometer wide and longer still, with a dozen rivers of lava running its length. Amber veins were everywhere. On the walls, the ceiling, the ground under their feet, and they were huge and hot. No bloodgrip vine, but plenty of remnants coating the walls and ceiling too, roasting alive, but thankfully at a distance. Tens of thousands of them, so many their voices joined into a humming drone in the background.

But he wasn't looking at any of that. He pointed at a small dot in the distance up ahead, and squinted, scanning for movement. None.

"I know what that is," Caera said. "You'll see."

Caera motioned for them to follow, and they did, walking the winding path. Relentless heat buried David until his sweat drenched him, but they marched on, trusting that Caera knew the way through the maze. She got close to some lava paths, and the only reason David didn't catch fire from proximity was Hell and her weird rules. Lava was hot, but not Earth hot.

The thing in the distance grew limbs. A tail. Wings. The closer they got, the more the heat haze dispersed, and the features of the huge statue defined. Two legs. Horns.

Utterly fucking huge.wWw.Nðve(w)r©.êø(m)

"What the fuck is that?" he asked once they were close enough. There was a lava river between them and the statue, but even separated by fifty feet, the statue looked colossal. Twelve feet tall, the female demon looked terrifying. Hot, but terrifying.

"A child of the Old Ones," Caera said. "A kalatara. You'll find statues for many of the different children down here."

"Kalatara. Fancy name. Which Old One?"

"Azazel."

"Oh shit... Like, the Azazel from--"

Caera shook her head. "The surface got the names of some of the Old Ones, but none of the context."

"Oh. Wait, what?" David came up to Caera, and stood beside her as they both admired the gorgeous, scary, naked statue. "How'd the surface get things like the names of stuff from down here?"

"Angels, I imagine. I don't know for sure, but a lot of demons think angels can reach the surface. Maybe they did." With a gentle swing of her enormous tail, Caera pat David on the leg, and motioned ahead.

"More!" Laara said and pointed out to the lava in the distanceWww.ñov(ø)lwOr(m).©øm

She was right. More statues appeared, dozens of them, each a towering behemoth that made Acelina look tiny. They came in a bunch of different shapes, some with four arms, some with two, some with wings, some with hooves, some with tails. All naked, but no dicks this time. The males had demony faces as was typical, except even more... demony, with bigger jaws and skull-ish eye sockets and teeth. The ladies had mostly human-shaped eye sockets like Jes or Caera, but they had no noses at all, far as he could see from a distance, and their jaws were sharp and angular.

Their bodies looked like meera metal, but with the constant flow of the lava lighting them, it was hard to tell. Many were locked in physical combat, clawing at each other, biting or tearing or strangling.

"That Vinicius demon," David said, "was one of these?"

"Yeah," Jes said, and she approached one of the statues that stood in their path. Jes was almost seven feet tall, but she didn't have to duck very low to get under their crotch. "The children of the Old Ones are all dead, far as I know. Only Zel's bogeyman is alive."

The other enormous statues were off to the side, with lava between them and David and the group, but the one statue in their path, locked in a half sprinting half leaping pose, had everyone stopping to stare. Some male species, big wings, thick raptorial feet, a tail. Basically a gorujin tetrad, from other statues he'd seen, but so much bigger, and with a crazy assortment of giant horns, and even a bit of a snout.

"An abdarin. A child of Abaddon," Caera said. "Last one anyone knew of died hundreds of years ago, in False Gate."

"Belor," Acelina said, and a shiver worked through her wingswWw.Nøøe1W©rM.CøM

"What happened here?" David asked, and he touched the statue's closer knee. "You said a bunch of these statues are down here, but why?"