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David forced down the urge to gulp or stare too hard at the absolute madman talking about the most ridiculous shit he'd ever heard. And the Cainites believed him. Maybe they were so drunk on their ridiculous religion and demon hearts combined, they were into the idea of assaulting Heaven. Or... they'd convinced Greg? They sounded like a cult. A deluded, mindless cult.

A cult in a post-apocalyptic environment had always seemed like a dumb trope. But, David wasn't most people. For him, it was a given people would naturally start relying purely on their intelligence, and make only quality, evidence-based decisions in a post-apoc setting, when literally any and every moment could spell their last. Who the fuck throws away science and reasoning and joins a cult the moment nukes get dropped?

Except this wasn't some post-apoc setting where people did random, weird shit. It was Hell. If you had a group of literal murderers in the afterlife getting stronger by eating demon hearts, and you apparently had a religion passed on by word of mouth about some super powerful guy from the Christian bible, who apparently ate angel hearts to become super powerful in Hell, maybe becoming a part of the cult made more sense.

Greg grinned. "I know, I know. Thinking too big, right? I'm just testing the water. See how you react."

No more people forced their way into the temple, the archway tunnel entrance completely clogged. This was everyone, then, or everyone nearby. Any time now, Caera.

"I... don't know," David said. "I didn't really think about it."

"How many hearts have you eaten?"

"Just one."

"What kind?"

"Kind? Um, a man's."

"A human man's?" he asked.

"Y-Yeah." Come on, girls. He could only stall for so long.

"Well, once you've eaten a few demon hearts, you'll get a taste for it. The Cainites don't experience the memories, but I bet you will." Greg licked his lips as he looked at David's forehead. "You'll feel them buzz through you. It'll only take a few, and then you'll crave the memories they give you."

What the fuck what the fuck what the fuck.

"So... what now?" David asked.

"Not sure. We've been working on clearing out this mountain of any more of that Renato fucker's friends."*www.NevEI@óR-M.čOm*

"Renato?"

"Yes." Greg gestured to the side of the cathedral, and a few dozen Cainites stepped out of the way. A collection of demon skulls sat on a black table, including a particularly large one. "And we've been collecting souls for the anvil." Nodding, he patted the anvil before sitting on it.

"Souls... for the anvil?"*www.NoveLwORM.com*

"Correct. Can't make hellfire weapons without human souls."

Something went click in David's brain. The anvil rune and the hellfire rune aligned with another rune. Souls. The soul rune in his brain was beyond complicated, with resonance and essence coiling around inside it, a knot of lines he had no chance of understanding. But something about the anvil rune lined up with it, and hellfire, and the concept of catalyst and implement he picked up earlier from the imbued weapon. And--

"So. Dilemma," Greg said. "You're here, another unmarked. I don't know what to do with you. I'm committed to the Cainites, and I've proved it a dozen times over. I don't know anything about you, except that you're unmarked like me. You probably have all the same powers I do." Nodding, Greg turned around, set both hands on the anvil, and tapped on it a couple times with a knuckle. He held out a hand to the side, and Janette put David's dagger in his palm. "For all I know, you'll use your powers to betray me. Betray us."

Fuuuuuck. Caera? Jeskura? Dao? Help?

"I wouldn't. I--"

"You came here looking for help, because the Cainites who found you told you about me. About us. How do I know you didn't betray them and get them killed?"

"I--"

"I think my loyal congregation, armed with hellfire, armed by me, would not succumb to some random group of demons. And even if they did, demons would have run you down, David, followed your scent, and killed or captured you. Escape wouldn't have been possible." He slowly turned and faced David, dagger at his side. "You're a liar, David. So are many of us; we're in Hell, after all. But anyone who lies and puts the congregation at risk, dies."*Ŧw(w).fiøV(ε)lwoR@.coM*

"You sure?" Janette asked. "He's unmarked. Maybe he can be useful. He might even--"

Greg eyed the woman, and she reared back as if he'd struck her.

"You... do make a good point, Janette. I am certain he lied to get here, but it would be a waste to simply kill him." Greg gestured to the Cainites behind David. They stepped forward and grabbed his wrists. Double fuck. "Let's see what a weapon imbued with the power of an unmarked soul can do."

Okay, time to panic.

"Help!" David yelled, pulling on the grip of the Cainites holding him. He wasn't going anywhere. "Someone fucking help!" Was that a good signal? They hadn't agreed on a signal. Maybe he should have cawed like a bird?

Greg laughed. Janette laughed. The Cainites laughed. How were these people so fucked up?

Screams erupted from behind, and all the Cainites spun around. Without hesitation, they drew their weapons, and more than a few of them glowed red. One of the two Cainites holding David let go, and the other turned, letting David see the backs of a dozen Cainites, and a hint of the dark archway they'd come through.

Oh thank god, the girls were coming.*(w)Ww.noVelwoŦm.Cem*

Something moved in the archway. David waited to see black horns and red eyes, but something white cut through the shadow instead. Something gold erupted in the darkness, and it came at them like a comet.