

~~Author's Note~~

Welcome. "A Taste of Hell" is a mini series of small novelettes, each told from a unique point of view of side characters in my upcoming main series "The Pleasures of Hell", a fantasy adventure set in Hell. While the main series will have two PoVs, both human (brother and sister) and not featured in this series, these prologue/bonus chapters will give curious readers a taste of this setting from the view of the various angels and demons that populate it, and a taste of the erotic elements.

These chapters are entirely optional. No need to read them if you'd prefer to go into the main series blind.

Erotically, "A Taste of Hell", and "The Pleasures of Hell", will focus largely on monster girls and monster boys, usually paired with someone not monster-y. Expect lots of kinks to be explored, with exaggerated proportions, size difference, deep/large penetration, harems and/or reverse harems, and plenty of others. There'll be fantasies for dominant and submissive readers alike. Erotic scenes that are particularly long and descriptive will be bracketed with ♥♥♥♥/♥♥♥♥ . If you're not looking for a juicy scene, skim the dialog in these sections so you don't miss anything important.

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This chapter is heavy on setting exploration, with various 'slice of life' moments, and an easy carefree read. If you'd prefer to not get spoiled about setting details, no need to read, or read this after having read a decent chunk of the main series. I'll avoid spoiling anything major in these novelettes, but I know some readers prefer going into a series as a blank slate.

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~~Three years before the Arrival~~

~~Caera~~

Another angel in the sky.

Caera snarled as she ducked low, and crept along the jagged rocks and stones of the Gorzen Mountains. She was high up, very high, and every step was a dangerous one. Not because of the height; she wasn't on a ledge or anything. It was the bloodgrip. Every step meant a vine of the stupid stuff could catch her, puncture her skin, and turn the trip back down the mountain into a giant pain in her ass.

Sometimes she wished she was a riiva, and not only went around on two feet, but had hooves instead of feet. There was a reason riiva loved the Death's Grip corner of Hell. It made her envious, very envious.

Riiva were satyrs, according to the humans. While she and other tregeera were tigers. She didn't look like a tiger. A couple times, she'd checked out what a tiger actually looked like in a scrying pool, and she'd been surprised when she found a large surface cat. They both walked on all fours, and had tails, but tregeera often walked on two feet and stood eight feet tall. Caera was no exception. Her tail was thicker, and covered in spikes, particularly along its top and up her spine. Her skin was like most demons, black and red, where the softer bits grew redder.

But she didn't have a snout. Or if she did, it didn't stick out very far. A wide mouth filled with big sharp teeth, wider than most demons, but whatever. She had a couple of big black horns, too, sharp ones that stuck out backward from the top of her head between her dark tendrils.

And of course the only reason she gave a shit about any of this was because Leos pointed it out to her. Asshole incubus had her feeling self conscious. Not everyone was as lucky as an incubus or succubus. Then again, if she'd been as weak as an incubus or succubus, she'd probably have thrown herself off a cliff.

But even a tregeera knew better than to mess with an angel. She'd never fought one, and she was hoping to keep it that way. There was nothing stopping that angel from coming down onto Caera's head and cutting her to bits, just because they felt like it. Well fuck that, Caera stayed low and in the shadows of the giant boulders, the fires of the sky hitting the mountain with enough lighting that she had no choice but to use the rocks for cover. After what happened last month, she had every intention of staying out of sight of an angel.

She crept along, going on all fours and working her way back down the mountain. She'd gone hunting, but she hadn't exactly been hungry, and risking her neck for a snack was a stupid idea. Her kin often died for lesser reasons. So down she went, staying low, sneaking between the rocks in much the same way she'd seen the tigers do in the scrying pool. She didn't have paws, though. She had hands with sharp black claws, and her feet were raptorial, with giant black talons. They made being silent a

little hard, but the angel was really high up. No chance of being heard, especially not against the occasional crack thunder.

Go to the Death's Grip spire? Maybe tell Zel what she saw? Nah. It'd take weeks, and Zelandariel probably had scouts who spotted the angel, maybe some imps or grems if she'd been lucky enough to round up a few of the assholes. She probably had. That was Zel for you. Whatever. Caera kept low and moved down and down, slowly, avoiding bloodgrip vines that came out of the stone like stubborn roots. The lower she got, the more problematic it became, and the thorny vines and sharp stone dragged along her breastplate of warped, dark metal. More than a few of the vine spikes caught along the goort leather of her waist wrap, a few of the chains, and on the skulls she had attached to her as trophies. The big devorjin skull on her shoulder got more than a few scars from the damn climb, low as she was, doing everything she could to avoid getting spotted.

But eventually the angel was gone, and Caera was safe in the shadow of Thorn Mountain. Bleeding from a bunch of small cuts, but still alive. Any hunting trip she could crawl away from, she supposed.

A hard crunch of weight on stone brought her to a standstill. Another sent her down to the rocks again, on all fours and almost on her belly, hiding in a small ravine of jagged rocks in the side of the mountain. More bloodgrip poked into her, but she ignored the pain, even as the stupid thorns fought against the darker, thicker parts of her skin until they tried to cut her, failed, and sawed through parts of her instead. Tiny drops of her blood dripped into the ravine, but the sound was nothing against the eternal hum of the winds and burning sky of Hell.

By Lucifer, oh fucking shit. An enormous set of black wings slowly emerged below her, maybe fifty feet off. Thorn Mountain had lots of hidden alcoves, crags, ravines, and even some caves and tunnels from Valzanal's time. And enormous as the mountain was, and hard to explore, it wasn't like Caera had a good mental map of where everything was. Hell, she knew fuck all about Thorn Mountain. So fuck her, she froze solid when something came out of a hole up ahead.

The black wings turned, showing their softer red sides, as the bearer faced in her direction. She didn't move a muscle, only a bit of the top of her head and her backward curling horns visible over the edge of the small ravine she hid in. It was dark on this side of the mountain, and especially dark where she was, with a huge chunk of rock hanging overhead. With a bit of luck, it wouldn't suddenly collapse and squash her into paste.

More of the creature came out. Horns, four of them. A demon's face. A shoulder pad made of metal, and another made of a huge skull. More, a breastplate similar to hers, metal bashed into a shape

for a chest, then stuck on with a bunch of leather straps. Whoever this fucker was, he was big, and he stood on raptorial feet like hers as his giant tail slithered behind him. An enormous sword was strapped to his back between his swings, a slab of metal that looked like someone had bashed together a bunch of smaller blades, and fused on a big handle on the end of it.

A fucking gorujin demon. One of the terrible four.

The titan looked up at the sky, then down toward Gorzen Eye mountain in the distance, where Diogo's home lay within. He snarled and slammed his tail against the stones as he stood to his full height; a couple feet taller than Caera, and a couple feet made for a huge fucking difference. He was huge. Sexy as fuck, with a hard jaw and harder eyes, but she wasn't stupid enough to stick her nose out for a chance to bang a tetrad demon.

Sealing that idea was the tregeera head in his hand. His whole body was covered in blood, staining the bone parts of his armor, and dripping down over the plates of metal that covered parts of his legs and arms. It was probably the dead tregeera's, whoever she'd been.

Far as Caera knew, no tetrad demons served Zel. Far as Caera knew, no tetrad demons served anyone anymore, not since Belor, but it wasn't like she was willing to cross Hell to confirm. Better to sit and watch, and see what the fuck this gorujin was doing with a tregeera head.

Sure enough, he ripped the dangling tendrils out of the demon's scalp. Ripping out so many wasn't easy, and the titan had to engage his muscles. It would have been kind of sexy, if he hadn't been scalping a tregeera like Caera with each tug. Plucking one tendril would have torn it off; they were soft, long, and thin. Plucking half of them at the same time took the scalp off.

She frowned, but suppressed the urge to snarl as the beast shook the skin free of the skull, and continued shaking, hard, until more of the flesh bits inside came out in a splatter. Chuckling in a deep, almost mischievous voice, the titan took one of the dangling metal chains from his belt, and pushed the hook tip through the top of the skull. A decoration. A trophy.

Slowly, the titan turned more, and looked in Caera's direction. She didn't move a muscle, not even to duck and hide. Only the tip of her head was visible, and in the shadow of the rocks around her, the darkness of her skin and low horns would blend in. And movement would have only grabbed the huge demon's attention.

He took a step toward her. She didn't move. He took another step toward her. Still she didn't move. Her heart rate soared until she felt it pounding under her breasts, and she tightened her leg muscles and tail as she prepared to bolt. She was fast if she had to be, and she knew she could sprint

through these hills and down into its ravines and tunnels faster than this fucker could run. But she was liable to split her guts open on a sharp rock or bush of bloodgrip. And the gorujin could glide after her, if he found something to climb and jump off. Plenty of giant-ass rocks for that.

She had no choice but to hold still.

Sure enough, the titan stopped, and looked back down the mountain toward the bailiff's home. Ok, phew, he'd been trying to spook out any possible spies. The gorujin instead climbed up a giant boulder, and used it to glide to the next boulder, and the next, as he headed toward the top of the mountain. Caera did the same as she had with the angel, staying low, and for the moment, staying still, until the tetrad demon was far away enough he couldn't catch her even if he spotted her.

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"You'll never guess what I say today," she said as she climbed into the cave, through the dangling chains decorated with a couple hundred skulls. They jangled and clanged loudly, letting anyone inside know that someone was approaching.

A lot of demons in the Gorzen Mountains lived in the Gorzen Eye Mountain, where that asshole Diogo lived. But plenty chose other places to nest, like Adam's Back, where she lived now. A mountain like all the others in Death's Grip, stones and stones and more stones, but little bloodgrip thank God. The rocks were less sharp, and there weren't nearly as many remnants. A good place to find a hard-to-reach alcove, turn it into a nest, and rest where you were less likely to get killed in your sleep.

"What'd you find?" Kia asked. The gorgala sat perched on a big stone in the large cave, wings snug to her back with thumb claws hooked around her neck, her tail curled around and in front of her so she could pick at it with her claws. She wore nothing for clothes except a couple strips of dark leather that hugged her breasts and sex.

"An angel, flying over Thorn Mountain. Looked like they were heading back to the vortex."

Marquez shivered a little and shook his head. "Didn't get seen?"

Marquez the vratorin was also nude, but that didn't mean much to demons, especially the male ones. His dick was hidden safely inside his pelvis, out of sight and protected by hard black skin. He was almost as tall as Caera, and unlike her, always walked on two feet. Vratorin were common everywhere, and that included Death's Grip, with human-ish bodies that walked on raptorial feet with long smooth

tails. They had two giant horns, much bigger than Caera's or Kia's, with large heavy jaws. And this particular vratorin was a sexy guy, and one of the nicer vratorins. She liked having him around. Hell, both her friends were sexy, and nice, by demon standards. She was lucky.

What was the human expression? Friends were worth their weight in gold.

"I hid," Caera said. "No way I'm letting an angel spot me. Not after that slaughter in the tunnels."

Kia nodded. "Good. No idea why angels keep flying over Death's Grip lately. Mikalim just don't know when to leave shit alone. What have we done to deserve all this scrutiny?"

"No idea," Marquez said. "Maybe Zel did something?"

With a heavy snort, Caera stripped out of her armor, letting the metal plates covering her chest, thighs, and parts of her arms land with a clang. She was a little gentler with the skulls hanging off her; no one liked a damaged trophy. Once naked, she got down on all fours and prowled around in a circle. The cave was mostly empty, save some big rocks and a few goort leather blankets for sleeping on. She had plenty of room to move.

"I don't care what Zel said," Caera said. "If she's started shit with Heaven, she can go fuck herself. And Diogo can go fuck himself, too."

Kia chuckled. "You know that bastard's going to do whatever Zel wants him to, even if it means throwing himself into a meat grinder."

"You mean throw us into the meat grinder."

The gargoyle shrugged as she scraped some dirt from the grooves along her long tail.

"If that happens, let's just hide."

"Not gonna work," Marquez said. "You know Zel would call for a horde. We wouldn't be able to hide from everyone."

Sighing and grumbling, Caera prowled over to Marquez, and rolled over onto his lap, facing away from him. The vratorin oofed, a little surprised by her weight; she was a bit bigger than him. But he recovered quickly, and ran his claws down Caera's head tendrils, down her spine and spikes, and down along her tail. He knew just how much claw to use to scratch the dark, thick skin of her back, without hurting her. Which was a lot of pressure. She rumbled with bliss and stretched out all four legs in front of her as the man continued to scratch her back.

"I don't want another horde brand," she said.

Marquez mirrored her sigh and pat her shoulder where her brand from the last horde was, before he scratched her back some more. Deep scratches, using his nails hard enough to really rough up the hardest parts of her dark skin between the spikes. The damn bastard knew she loved that, and she purred as she quivered on his lap. He was probably just getting her ready for sex. Well, that was fine. She'd planned to fuck him anyway, but a good back scratch was a great treat, and she rumbled her purrs as her big tail wagged and tapped the stone ground.

“Sure we couldn't hide?” Kia asked. “It's doable. I have another nest, deep in Thorn Mountain. No one goes there. We could—”

Marquez shook his head. “You know if we get found out, we're dead. I don't know about you, but I like living. Plus, I don't want to slowly die on a pike.” Zel's way of enforcing horde conscription wasn't a nice one.

The three of them sighed as they let the shitty situation sink in. There were more angel sightings lately, and that wasn't a good thing. Getting called to a horde was a guaranteed way to get buried neck deep in violence, and sure, Caera loved a good scrap, draw some blood, rip off a few skulls, but a horde was different. It was a teeming throng of chaos and death, with every demon getting lost to the collective sin of the swarm. Not even Zel could completely control something like that. All she could hope to do was point the horde at her target and wish for the best.

Caera did not want to experience that again. The violence wasn't the issue, it was losing control of herself. Two hordes crashing into each other, until she literally had to walk over the bodies of other demons to get out of the mess. Knowing she could have easily been one of the dead but had been powerless to stop it, sickened her.

But Marquez knew where her mind was going, and he scratched her harder, drawing her mind back into the sweet, sweet moment of nails scratching through the thick, hard, black skin of her back.

“Alright alright.” Laughing, she sat up, turned around to face the vratorin, and snuggled onto his lap as she hooked her big thighs around him. Vratorin like Marquez were big, well over seven feet tall, with muscular bodies even the humans found attractive. The demon-skull-like face and giant horns only made him hotter, and she grinned at him as she licked her many, many sharp teeth, and ran her fingers along his head. No tendrils there, unlike her.

Grinning like the sneaky bastard he was, Marquez slid his hands under her breasts, and casually massaged them with his hands, careful of his claws. Her back and the outside of her arms and legs were dark, almost pure black, with skin even a sword would struggle to puncture. But her tits? Nice and soft and red, and only growing redder and brighter as her friend played with her.

“And... I spotted a gorujin as well,” she said.

Kia stopped pruning, lowered her tail, and stared at Caera. “Really?”

“Yeah. Came out of a Thorn Mountain tunnel.”

“Holy shit.” The gorgala climbed down from her rock, wings still wrapped around her shoulders and neck like a cape, and sat herself down beside Marquez, snug against his arm, looking at Caera. “He spot you?”

“No. Not sure I’d be here if he had.” Caera leaned in, gave Marquez a long lick of her huge tongue along his throat, and once his cock had grown out of his body, she pinned the huge phallus against his abs with her slit. She still wanted a good ten minutes of foreplay before any fucking; a long time, by demon standards.

“Think it was the Damall?” Marquez asked.

“Maybe. He was stripping a tregeera skull clean.” Before hooking it onto his belt to hang with his other many, many trophies. The trophies were hot. Being the tregeera getting scalped and cleaned? Not so hot.

Sighing, Kia shook her head as she snuggled into Marquez’s arm, and Caera’s thigh. “Angels and the Damall. Something’s happening.”

Caera sat up straighter and jutted her chest out, giving Marquez free rein to play with her breasts. She wasn’t crazy busty like most succubi, but still, most tregeeras had big tits, which got damn problematic when they went on all fours. And considering she was over eight feet tall, her big tits were damn big compared to the smaller demon between her legs. Marquez loved that.

“Maybe,” Caera said. “Think it has anything to do with Zel? She’s been amassing numbers pretty steadily for a while now. Maybe the Damall are getting nervous?”

Kia nodded, and set her closer hand underneath Caera’s closer breast, nudging Marquez’s hand out of the way. Caera laughed as Kia’s attention focused on her tit, expression entering that ‘I’m thinking don’t disturb me’ zone it often did. Which of course turned into delicious massaging motions that had Caera rumbling more purrs, and forcing her huge tail to wag back and forth on the ground behind her.

“Maybe,” Marquez said. “I—”

Kia turned and put her free finger over his mouth. “Shh, the smart demons are talking.” Lucky for her, he didn’t use his big mouth full of big teeth to bite her. Not as big or as teeth-filled as Caera’s, but



still, Kia played a dangerous game teasing the stronger demon. Marquez seemed to like that, too. “Zel’s as power hungry as any spire keeper. If she thinks one of the other keepers are weak, she’ll go for it. Which means the Damall might be investigating. But the angels? What do they care? Been fucking forever since Belor.”

“Maybe. Maybe they think something big is happening? Like... like False Gate big?” Caera shrugged again, and chuckled when she noticed Marquez’s defeated expression. To make it up to him, she slowly eased her increasingly hot, red, softening, and now wet slit along the underside of his cock. The bumps and ridges felt amazing.

“God I hope not,” Marquez said.

Kia tried to shut him up again, but Caera blocked it, and pushed gorgala’s arm away as she laughed.

“Think we should go scouting?” Caera asked. “And hunting. I left when I spotted that angel. Getting hungry.”

Marquez held up both hands in surrender, abandoning his tit massage to do it. “Don’t eat me!”

“Should have thought of that earlier. Too late now.” Caera growled playfully down at her friend, took his huge cock into one hand, righted it, and slid the long girth and all its wonderful bumps and ridges into her dripping, boiling insides. Both Marquez and Kia groaned as they stared.

Fucking her friends was one of her favorite pastimes. Most vratorins liked to get dominant, but Marquez was perfectly willing to roll with the punches, which meant Caera got to take lead. And she did love to take lead. If Marquez had tried to fight her for it, she’d simply have wrestled him until she won. And she would have won. But there was something fun about having him submit to her freely, too.

Kia, on the other hand, preferred it when Caera or Marquez dominated her, and sure, gorgala were strong and dangerous, but they couldn’t overpower a vratorin, and especially a tregeera, once they got their hands on her; easy to do with Kia considering she was their friend. A perfect sexual trinity.

She had it better than a lot of demons, and she knew it. Many preferred to stay near the more populated areas, hunting and killing each other almost as often as they hunted and killed humans. Zel had decreed the dueling law to try and minimize how many demons needlessly killed each other, but it’d only been partially successful. They still killed each other in sneaky, backstabby ways, they just made sure there weren’t any witnesses.

Caera was lucky, damn lucky, to find a couple other demons with a little more brains, and maybe even a little more empathy, than her fellow demons. Now if she could just keep her friends alive while Zel made everyone's lives difficult, and angels and the Damall showed up at their doorstep.

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“Look at that,” Marquez said.

Kia growled, grabbed the much larger demon by one of his enormous horns, and pulled him down into the shallow ravine.

“We'll look, if you stop giving away where we are!”

Caera snorted on a laugh, which earned a whip crack of Kia's tail against her thigh. No harm no foul, with them all in their armor again, leather straps holding bent plates of metal over bits of their arms, legs, chests, stomach, and whatnot. A few skulls too, some human, some from other demons. Typical fashion statement in Death's Grip, and probably all of Hell, fashion that said: fuck with me at your own peril.

Which, in hindsight, was probably a bad fashion choice. Demons were rarely dissuaded by the promise of a good brawl.

Caera peeked over the edge of the ravine, and down over the jagged hills of Thorn Mountain. Thankfully her horns were pretty low, especially compared to Marquez's, which made peeking over ledges easier.

They hadn't climbed very high yet, but it was already a pain to climb higher. Up here, maybe a hundred feet up, the jagged mountain had lots of cliffs they could lean over, for scouting prey. Any higher and getting down would be too difficult, especially with all the bloodgrip everywhere.

It was night. The fires of the sky burned gentle, and while some clouds swept by that carried the flame, many more swept by that had extinguished. An especially dark night. Amber veins sometimes glowed especially bright at night, but Death's Grip didn't have many on the surface. It did have burning bushes though, scattered randomly, a few jutting out of stone edges in the mountain, or cracks in the ground. In some places, black meera metal forged itself naturally, and came up out of the ground in symmetrical, spiraling patterns around a burning bush, and raised it high. The natural brazier had black skulls in its pillar, and along brazier's underside. Absolutely beautiful. Hell's art.

One of those beautiful braziers, standing ten feet high, lit up a good fifty feet of darkness, exposing sharp rock surrounding a shallow path. And in that path, was movement.

Caera growled quietly as she pressed her chest and belly to the edge of the ground in front of her, and climbed over it. Slowly, prowling on all fours, tail slithering, she scaled the side of Thorn Mountain's base, keeping many of its huge jagged boulders between her and the movement. And soon movement became noise.

She found another groove in the mountain to hide in, close enough to see in detail, far enough to run if she had to. Marquez and Kia followed soon after, but it took them a lot longer to reach her. Kia was six feet tall, a bit small by gorgala standards, but she struggled to stay low. Marquez was almost as big as Caera and had an even harder time staying low, and had to get on his literal stomach several times to reach her without risking exposing himself. Thorn Mountain did not like that, and by the time they reached her, she could smell bits of blood on Marquez's side where the thorns had got him around the armor. She'd make it up to him later.

"Holy fuck," Kia whispered. "Are those... remnants?"

Caera returned the whisper with a quiet, affirming growl. Remnants.

"Can't be," Marquez said. "Hell grows remnants out of her flesh, right?"

Her flesh. Caera rolled her eyes, and stared back over the teeming mass of moving bodies. Marquez was one of those idiots who paid worship to Hell herself, to the constant teasing of Kia and Caera, but it never stopped him. And much as Caera thought it was dumb, she did like that the moron stuck to his convictions.

"Usually," she said. "I haven't seen remnants walking around in... in a long time."

They grew quiet as they watched, and Caera could see the strange awe in her two friends. She felt it, too. Remnants were almost always attached to Hell, writhing and squirming and doing everything they could to free themselves, even though there was nothing to free. They grew from the ground, from stone walls, from the ceilings of caves, and she once heard they literally grew into the metal cages of False Gate.

"When'd you last see walking remnants?" Marquez asked.

Kia and Marquez were younger than her. They hadn't been around the last time Zel summoned a horde, and bashed heads with Alessio.

“The only time I’ve ever seen them,” she said, “was when Zel made a grab for The Black Valley. I was...” Doing what she always did, avoiding the big battles because she cared more about her own ass than mindless violence, or whatever goal her boss would sacrifice her for. “When things got tense, and you knew battles were going to happen, remnants started walking around.”

“They freed themselves?” Kia asked.

“No. No one figured out where they were coming from. Maybe Hell was birthing them fully formed? Either way, they formed into groups and... roamed... aimlessly.”

The ravine beneath them was maybe twenty feet wide, and it was packed with remnants from shoulder to shoulder. But it was the length of the shifting motion that had the three of them frozen. One hundred, two hundred, three hundred, four hundred feet, maybe more, a line of bodies sauntering forward with all the hurriedness of a surface turtle. The remnants groaned and cried, some whimpered, some screamed, and they all pushed forward slowly, less walking than dragging their legs with each step.

As the swarm moved closer, until it started to cross the ravine across from Caera, the sound of their moans and shifting feet grew louder and louder. Christ, they were slow, but Caera knew from experience it was best to hide and not stir them up, or they’d made a racket. All demons were intimately familiar with the screams of remnants, but Caera remembered what it sounded when a roaming swarm like this was triggered. Wails would turn into howls. Screams would turn into shrieks. Other demons would come investigate. No thank you.

The sound was disturbing. An unending chorus of dragged, emaciated feet sliding over stone, and the noises. Caera had been around plenty of humans in her time, some betrayers, some not. They didn’t make those sorts of noises, even when they died painfully.

Caera and her friends waited, and waited, and the swarm eventually passed. It took a damn while, but it did, and the three of them breathed easy as the noise died.

“That, is scary,” Marquez said.

Kia nodded as she climbed out of the ravine, and found a higher perch of rock. In typical gorgala fashion, she stretched out her wings once, hooked them around her neck and shoulders like a cape again, and squatted as she stared out into the darkness.

“Very scary. I can still see them moving, like some sort of giant blob.”

“Very,” Caera said. “Ever see those zombie TV shows in the scrying pool?”

They both nodded. Those shows were freaky.

It wasn't like remnants were dangerous. Except, when they were. She couldn't blame them. If half her body was submerged in stone or thorns, and she spent every single second of existence in utter agony, she'd manage something desperate, even with weak, emaciated arms. Imps and grems sometimes got swarmed by remnants they were scavenging on, got pulled down into a couple dozen waiting hands, and slowly ripped apart.

No worry about that with a tregeera, vratorin, or gorgala. But, still, she wouldn't want to have to tear her way out of a swarm of hundreds of remnants. Given enough time, even she'd get tired, and it'd be just like in one of those zombie shows where a human gets overwhelmed and eaten.

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They went further out, past Thorn Mountain, and went into some tunnels. Death's Grip had hundreds of them, thousands, and a lot of them went for miles and miles. She didn't know if the other corners of Hell had so many caves and tunnels, but from what she heard, they all had their own interesting quirks. Everyone knew about False Gate, and the thousands of metal cathedrals and lava rivers. Maybe she'd get to see them some day.

The humans that ended up in Death's Grip usually went into the tunnels. It made sense. No one liked being exposed, and with demons roaming the surface, or gliding around, naturally humans found what cover they could. Which meant demons in Death's Grip had to get used to hunting underground, even the gliders like the imps, grems, and gorgalas.

Kia groaned as they descended into a tunnel, and climbed down, the tunnel turning into a fall that required serious claws to manage the rock faces. She wanted to be outside, gliding around and looking for humans stupid enough to stick their head out looking for goorts to eat. Too bad for her. Caera smiled up at Kia, stuck her tongue out at her, and earned another groan and snarl from her friend.

Down and down they went, until the fall angled, and instead they half slid, half climbed the tunnel, until it angled out again into another tunnel flat enough for walking. Plenty of amber veins pulsed in the stone walls, and thank God the tunnel was pretty big. More than wide and tall enough for Caera to stand up if she wanted, and for Kia to stretch out her wings. She wouldn't be gliding down here, but still.

Caera got down on all fours, and led the hunt. She didn't mind taking point. Kia and Marquez were a lot younger than her, and they listened to her. Being a leader was never Caera's intention, even of just two buddies, but if that meant she got to have someone watch her back so she could live another day and get some resonance in her belly, it was a good deal. And she liked them, damn it.

Caera sniffed at the ground. A lot of smells, some human, some demon. Some other shit too, fallo spiders and stone crawlers. She understood stone crawlers being in the tunnels; humans called them big centipedes. Fallo spiders, she didn't expect. Maybe someone harvesting the silk?

Eventually, as the three moved through quiet light of the tunnels, hiding behind large stones whenever they found some, they heard noises. Caera stopped, and stayed close to the ground as she listened. Remnants? She didn't smell them, and remnants always screamed, but these voices were casual. Humans? Maybe. But humans usually talked with urgency, or whispered. Whoever was talking ahead was talking openly. That meant demons. Deep voices, too. Big demons.

Caera listened close. Two voices. She took a deep breath of the stone. Hundreds of different smells, including some recent humans, but two smells stood out more than the others. Fresher.

She turned around and held up two claws. Kia and Marquez looked at each other, did a few gestures of their own, before nodding and pointing ahead past Caera. Okay then, they were going to follow their stomachs and keep up the hunt, even if that meant a run-in with a couple other demons. It wasn't like meeting some strangers down in the tunnels guaranteed a fight. It just often did.

Caera got up on two feet, and walked forward, tail gently weaving behind her as she came out into a large room. It'd been decades since she'd come hunting around this side of Thorn Mountain, and she doubted she'd ever come down into this specific tunnel. She didn't recognize it, and she didn't recognize this room, and she sure as fuck would have if she'd ever seen it before.

A big cavern with huge amber veins that reached up to a giant ceiling covered in stalactites, each pulsing with their own vein of amber. So many spikes, glowing, it almost looked like some weird sort of colossal chandelier from the surface. The floor was flat and smooth, carved out by whatever demons used the chamber, probably thousands of years ago. Surprising Hell hadn't shifted around and broken the room up in all that time, but nope, the floor was absolutely smooth.

The walls were covered in symbols, Estian, carved into the rock in big, smooth indentations.

All Hail Valzanal, Queen of Destruction, Mistress of Lust, Warrior of yada yada yada.

Statues sat along the walls, most of them in some sexual position, most of them with a giant dick, whether or not their living versions came with them. Case in point, a stone statue of a tregeera, crawling

along on all fours, had a giant dick dangling until it touched the floor. A fujara, one of the terrible four, sat with legs and arms spread, waiting for someone to hop on her giant dick fujara weren't supposed to have. Not all of the statues of demons were like that, but it was definitely a lot of dick.

There were other statues, males with big, long dicks. Caera had seen caves like this before, with statues made of either stone, or dark meera metal. Usually they had a bunch of imps and grems fucking them, and each other. No imps or grems in this chamber. But there were two devorjin in the middle of the room.

Devorjin, big dumb brutes. No spikes, no tail, just nine-foot-tall titans of muscle and meat, with faces like skulls. Which, she had to admit, were kinda handsome, in that scary 'demon face' way humans often accused them of. Super defined jaws and eyebrow ridges with big eye sockets, hiding small, dark, hungry eyes. Yeah, skull faces. Unfortunately, the dumb brute look kinda ruined it.

The two of them were squatted around a few dead humans, and munched on their rewards for a successful hunt. There were some sticks and rocks, and what looked like some goort leather tarps. No devorjin would need that. More likely the devorjin came in through one of the other tunnels connecting to the room, and the humans couldn't get past them. Free lunch.

"Hello," Caera said, and both brutes turned to face her. "My friends and I are just passing through."

Both devorjin stood up to their full height. Giant chests, covered in blood. Attractive, if not for the stern, borderline angry look the two of them gave Caera, and then Kia and Marquez when they stepped out from the tunnel.

"Leave," the one on the right said. She didn't recognize either of them, but judging from the size of them, they'd been alive for at least a little while. Old enough to be deadly, but not as old as Caera. Unfortunately, devorjins were stronger than tregeeras, or gorgalas and vratorins. She had to play this diplomatically.

"It's a bunch of tunnels, right?" She gestured to the tunnel entrances on the other side of the room. "First time passing through this area, and we didn't know other demons hunted here. But we're hungry, and we're not going to leave empty handed. Let us pass." A show of strength and will, to maybe earn some respect from the devorjin.

They both grunted, growled, and squeezed their big hands into giant fists. Okay, so, a show of strength could also put them into a fighting mood instead.

Kia held up a hand as she stood beside Caera. “Zel has a no-killing rule in place, devorjins. Remember? You can’t touch us without dueling permission from Diogo, so—”

Apparently, the devorjins didn’t care. They launched themselves toward Caera, mouths open, showing their teeth, drool, and plenty of the blood of the meals they’d just had.

Caera got down on all fours, and roared. How stupid did these devorjin have to be, to not recognize the devorjin skull on her shoulder.

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“You two alright?” she asked.

Kia groaned as she pushed the devorjin off her. Marquez sank his claws into the big bastard’s back, and helped pull him off. Heavy fuckers.

“I’m fine,” Kia said, with the usual amount of venom she had when she’d just finished doing something she hated.

“I’m good,” Marquez said, huffing and puffing.

Nodding, Caera looked down at the devorjin she’d dealt with. The big stupid bastard was dead, throat slit, and Caera’s hands were absolutely drenched in blood.

“Been a while since I’ve killed one of these dickheads,” Kia said. “Forgot how damn thick their skin is.”

Nodding, Caera crouched down on her kill, and got to ripping. Kia wasn’t wrong. Devorjins really had some of the thickest, darkest hides, and even the soft places like their stomachs and throats were darker and thicker than on most other demons. Cracking open his chest and getting the heart out was not easy, and strong as Caera was, she still had to rely on the sharpness of her claws to get through his chest and bone.

A glance back showed Kia and Marquez working together, breaking ribs and tearing demon hide, until they had access to their kill’s heart.

Nodding to each other, smiling like three happy idiots, they walked over to the wall of the huge chamber, and sat down between some of the statues.

“Any witnesses?” Kia asked.



Caera shook her head. “Doesn’t seem like. Ugh, what a pain in the ass. Zel’s gonna show up some day and ask Diogo why Gorzen Mountains’ numbers are low.”

Marquez nodded as he settled down near a statue of the gorujin, like the one Caera had seen earlier. The seven-foot-tall demon looked like a child next to the ten-foot-tall brute.

“Hopefully she gives up on the idea.”

“Won’t happen,” Kia said. “Zel’s got something in mind. And she’s gonna get us all killed going for it.” Marquez and Caera frowned at her, but she just shrugged. “You know I’m right.”

“Yeah,” Marquez said, “but we just kicked some ass. Why you gotta bring down the mood?” They all went quiet for a moment as they took a second to admire that fact, and the two massive, resonance-filled, dripping hearts they’d won as their prize.

“You’re right,” Kia said, and she licked her lips.

Marquez did too, and got ready to bite into his, but something caught his eye.

“This,” he said as he gestured to the statue of the gorujin beside him, “is one very nice looking penis.”

Caera snorted on a laugh as she bit into her heart. Resonance, so much resonance. The tingling bliss of the thick meat and blood filling her stomach and resonance pulsing into her sin and core, was glorious. She purred, and lay on her side, close to Kia, who naturally rolled her eyes, and scratched behind Caera’s neck between some spikes.

The gorujin statue did look kinda similar to the one she ran into earlier today. A fucking juggernaut of muscle, with four sexy horns, two massive wings, a long tail with some spikes on it, and some raptor feet; their cousins, the korgejins, had hooves. And if the penis on the statue was any indication, any lady would be lucky to have him, assuming they weren’t human, or tregeera, considering what he’d been doing when Caera saw him.

“Hop on,” Caera said, and she laughed as she bit into her heart.

Marquez matched her laugh as he bit into his meal, before handing it to Kia. “No lube? Humans say there’s always time for lube.”

“Promise you’ll do it,” Kia said, “and I’ll do it first and make sure it’s nice and wet for you.” Laughing, she took a bite of her heart.

Caera couldn’t tell if she was kidding or not. It wasn’t like Kia wasn’t as horny as any other demon, and every demon got hungry for some sex after a good brawl. Maybe not a near-death brawl

like they'd just had, and Kia did look a bit beat up, with a bleeding lip and some cuts on her shoulder. Plus, Kia was a stubborn bitch who didn't like people pushing her into things.

"Prove it," Caera said, grinning up at Kia.

Rolling her eyes, Kia slid out from under Caera's head, and climbed onto the huge statue's lap. She lowered herself down and sat with her tail and butt against the statue's pelvis, and its giant cock sticking up between her thighs. She'd have to take off the armor to fuck it, but that didn't mean the image wasn't hilarious, and Caera laughed.

The vratorin thought about it for a second, before he shook his head. "Nope, not gonna do it. Don't really want a giant dick in my ass."

It was Caera's turn to roll her eyes. She put the huge heart in her mouth, got up on all fours, and turned around so she could wave her big ass and big tail at Marquez.

"You're obsessed with this ass," Caera said through a muffled mouth. She wasn't lying.

"Well, yeah, I have a penis. Naturally, I want to stick penis into ass. Where else would I want to put it?"

Caera tried to not laugh at his silly, all-too-self-aware hypocrisy, but she couldn't help it, and she had to catch the heart as it fell from her mouth. She prowled her way over to Marquez, and curled up against his leg, between him and the giant statue Kia was riding. She munched on her heart, and Marquez absentmindedly used his claws on her back, between those spikes she could never quite scratch right, and she purred as she melted.

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They took a bit of time collecting their trophies. Two devorjin skulls was a pretty sweet prize, and Caera made sure both of her friends each got one; she already had one. The fight had gone better than anticipated, and sure, they'd all gotten a few scrapes and bruises, and cuts, and Marquez had nearly got his arm ripped off before Kia intervened, but they'd come out on top against two devorjins.

If there'd been any witnesses, it'd have been a problem, for either group. Caera was the defender, but it'd still been a three on two fight. Diogo wouldn't have liked that. Well, fuck Diogo, she wasn't about to just bend over and die in a duel because a devorjin didn't like her in his territory.

Turning skulls into armor would take a tool or two and some time, but it was easy enough to hang them from the chains they had on their belts. One for Kia, and one for Marquez.

“Hot,” Caera said, and she stepped back before getting on all fours again.

Kia and Marquez both smiled at each other before swaying their hips a bit, causing the few other skulls dangling on their belts to hit against them. Music to the ears.

“Maybe we shouldn’t have come hunting this way,” Kia said, “if we ran into trouble so early.” She gestured to the two giant devorjin corpses at their feet. The bodies weren’t an issue, since they’d break apart eventually, bones and blood eaten by Hell, or scavenged by some hungry imps or grems. Not like anyone could identify who killed them anyway. No forensics in Hell. What she was worried about, was running into more demons with sticks jammed up their asses.

“We can go back,” Caera said. “I want to keep going, see what’s so special about this cave. But if you want...”

Marquez shook his head. “I’ve never been here, and after that fight, I’m feeling committed, and energized.”

Caera grinned at the man. A belly full of resonance would do that.

Kia sighed, stretched out her wings, hooked them against her back and around her neck, and gestured ahead. “Your nose is going to get us killed some day, Caera.”

“Kept you alive all these years, right?”

“Yes...”

“Besides, I’m curious!” She gestured around to the statues, and the markings on the walls. “You don’t want to know more about what Val was up to when she was in charge?”

“Not really.”

“Oh come on! I mean, look at this.” Caera walked up to one of the fujaras, a big one, biggest fujara she’d ever seen. No dick on this statue, either.

The runes over her head in the wall were written in amber. That, was pretty awesome, and Ceara had no fucking idea how someone managed it. You didn’t just go touching amber. On the outside, it was just glowing rock, but if you punctured it you were liable to get a fuck load of lava or hellfire all over you. She knew of no way to forge it or manipulate it, but someone two thousand years ago did, and they’d written Valzanal’s name in lights. Valzanal, Queen of Death’s Grip, Dominator of the

Mountains, and a few other ridiculous titles. Didn't seem so ridiculous, when lining the wall in a giant chamber filled with statues, over the head of one huge, sexy as fuck fujara.

Far as Caera knew, fujaras, one of the tetrad demons, didn't normally hit eleven feet tall, but Val did. Big raptor feet and a long tail, a head topped with four enormous horns, with four arms and four eyes. The extra eyes were overtop the others, and pretty much identical to the ones below, making her forehead kinda big, but it worked with her giant horns and flat-ish skull-like demon face.

The long, flowing head tendrils, the tight waist of abs, and the giant tits, were probably a bit of an exaggeration. Probably. Otherwise Val would have made even a succubus envious.

She had some massive spikes on her back that almost looked like they could have been wings, but were really just giant fucking, badass spikes. Caera looked behind her at her tail, and the dozens of sharp spikes that lined its spine that got bigger as they worked up her body. Not nearly as awesome as a fujara's, and especially not Val's.

Val might have been so big and strong, even for a tetrad demon, because of her age. Maybe the spire did something to her when she took it over. Caera didn't know. Zel was pretty big and strong for a bolstara, too, but it wasn't like Caera ran into demons from the terrible four very often to do a comparison. Pretty much never, usually.

"You don't wanna know more about this?" Caera asked.

Kia shrugged. "No?"

Marquez stroked his chin a few times before he walked up to the statue, and circled it.

"I admit, it is a great piece of ass."

Caera laughed. "Val would have eaten you alive. Literally."

He shrugged. "Woulda been worth it." And, as if to prove his point, he reached up and groped the demon's huge tits.

God damn it. Caera laughed again, and pointed to one of the other tunnels.

"Come on. We should scout the area at least, and see if it's a good hunting ground. Maybe not camp out here like those two idiots," she gestured to the two dead brutes, "but I want to see if it's good hunting." And she didn't want to be near that remnant swarm, topside. Too close to their usual hunting ground.

"Fine fine, let's go." Kia came up to her and gave her breastplate a hard thump with the back of her hand. "You're taking lead."

“Of course.” Caera grinned at Kia, and made sure to show off her wide mouth and many sharp teeth. “Just follow my nose.”

With that, Caera got back on all fours, took a look at a few of the tunnel entrances, and took a deep whiff. Whichever ones smelled like upside probably had tunnels leading back up. But she wanted to go down. Down, deep down into the mountain. They’d come this way for a meal, because Caera didn’t want to hunt where she’d seen an angel, a gorujin, and a remnant swarm. But she’d also been curious about this part of Gorzen Mountains.

She picked a tunnel that smelled particularly heavy with stone, burning, and flesh, and started down the path. Kia and Marquez followed behind.

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There was always the concern they’d stumble onto some crazy group, exploring new territory. The Damall were an issue, and Caera had to wonder if the gorujin she saw on the mountain was working for them. If he was, that was fucking terrifying, more terrifying than if Zel had somehow recruited a tetrad demon to work for her. Or they might run into a group of organized humans, with swords and spears and shit, surviving off whatever essence they could get. And they could get nasty sometimes, too. If they were a big enough group and organized enough, even deadly.

There was also a warning sent out by Zel about the Righteous Horde. The chances of them coming to Death’s Grip was pretty small, but that didn’t mean it couldn’t happen, and if it did, Caera and her friends would have no choice but to run like hell. Still, sneaking through amber-lit tunnels in the depths of one of the hundreds of mountains in Gorzen, the chance of meeting them was beyond slim.

When they did finally hear some sounds and spot some movement, it wasn’t any of those things. It was an orgy.

Another huge chamber, stalactites above, plenty of amber veins, and lots of statues along the walls. There were also some burning bushes in the chamber, giving the room plenty of light, and maybe a bit too much heat. Demons didn’t sweat, but they did like to relax when shit got a little too hot. A relaxed demon was a soft demon. A soft demon was an easily aroused demon.

So, as Caera and her friends stuck their heads out from around the tunnel, and the wave of heat hit them, the three of them began to relax, and smile, as they watched the beautiful display.

No devorjins. Good, they were always such hardasses. No tregeera either. Good, they were always angry, jealous bitches. But there were a whole bunch of other demons in the room, and far as Caera could see, she didn't recognize any of them from Diogo's fortress. Maybe a group hiding from Zel's control?

Caera froze when her eyes finally went past the closest group of statues and demons fucking and getting fucked, to the big set of wings in the back of the room, currently getting serviced by a couple succubi.

Oh fucking shit that was a korgejin. Oh shit, that was Renato! So much for tetrad demons being rare, that was two in one night.

"Renato?" she said, and everyone stopped and looked at her.

The giant demon met her gaze, and let out a big, bellowing laugh.

"Caera! You stupid bitch, get over here."

Caera smiled, and waved for her friends to follow. No fucking way that was Renato. But she recognized the big cut in one of his wings, and how one of his big horns was missing its tip.

Much as she wanted to keep her eyes on him, she couldn't help but look around at all the skin and sex. Apparently Kia's sarcastic idea to fuck the giant statue in the last chamber wasn't so sarcastic down here. One little gremla was doing her best to fit a statue's cock into her, and considering how tiny gremlas were, that was impressive. But considering how much more comfortable a dick made of out flesh was, compared to stone or metal, it was no surprise most of the demons around were fucking each other, not the statues.

There was a borjin — humans called them minotaurs — also trying to fit a gremla on his dick. Same problem, massive size difference issue, but demons were stretchy, and her belly bulged with the massive amount of dick he'd managed to get in there. Impins and gremlins, with big dicks hanging between their short legs, were making sure a gorgala was getting stuffed. A few incubi and succubi were treating a vratorin. A few other demons were trading each other around, before some of them got adventurous and tried to fuck one of the big statues. Certainly enough fluids on hand to make it possible.

Caera stopped in front of Renato, her friends close on her tail, and she grinned up at the big dumb bastard as she sat, still on all fours.

"This where you been hiding?"

Renato shrugged as he leaned back, and grinned at her. “Hiding’s a strong word. Zel knows I’m here.”

Renato was a korgejin, one of the two male demons in the terrible four. Big fucking muscles, two big fucking wings, two big fucking arms, but unlike the similar gorujin she saw earlier, he didn’t have a tail, and he had hooves. Just like the gorujin, he had one of those skull-like demon faces that were strangely masculine, and scary, and hot. Plus, being ten feet tall kinda added to the whole sex appeal thing he was rocking. Tetrad demons were God damn terrifying, and fucking gorgeous in ways humans just didn’t appreciate. Not usually, anyway.

Succubi certainly appreciated it. Two of them were sitting between his legs, rubbing and massaging one very large cock. But they both slowed their fun when Caera got close, and their eyes lingered on Marquez a bit, too. Oh la la.

“I tell you, Ren, I have had one fucked up day. Saw a fucking angel patrolling the skies near my hunting grounds.”

Ren lowered his hands from their gentle rest on the back of the two succubi. “That is disturbing.”

“Then I saw a fucking gorujin, stripping a tregeera skull.”

“Very disturbing.”

“Then my friends and I — Kia, Marquez, this is Renato — ran across a remnant swarm!”

“A swarm?”

“Yeah, a swarm! Fucking hundreds of them, walking! Just, moving on down the path near Thorn Mountain, going only God knows where.”

Renato frowned as he looked down, thinking. “That is—”

“Disturbing, yeah, I know. But right now I’m wondering what the fuck is up with you! You just hanging out here?” She gestured around at the orgy, and then at the two succubi. “And Zel knows you’re here?”

“She does.”

“She doesn’t consider you a threat?”

“Nope.”

“And... why not? It’s not like tetrad demons get along. I kinda figured you’d just upped and died on me years ago, probably to Zel. Apparently not.”

Ren shrugged as he gestured around. “I worked out a deal with her a few years ago. She leaves me alone. I leave her alone.”

“And... you’re not worried about Diogo?”

“Nope.”

“And... you’re not worried about getting pulled into a horde? Cause something tells me, if she makes that call, she isn’t going to just accept you saying no to a horde call.”

Renato thought about that one for a bit, before he scratched one of his horns, and set his hand back on one of the succubi.

“I came down here to find a little peace. If Zel summons the horde, then I suppose I’ll obey the call, and return to peace when I’ve killed everything in my path.”

Caera gulped. Much as Renato sat around and acted like a lazy idiot, she knew he was anything but, and she remembered what happened to him during the last horde. He still had the brand, visible on his naked shoulder, like hers.

“Surprised you’ve stayed down here hidden all this time.”

“These tunnels,” he said, gesturing to them, “connect to many places in Gorzen Mountains. Though if you’ve come to hunt and explore, I do suggest being careful. A couple devorjin have been down here, stirring up trouble until I sent them on their way. I think they were looking to do more than just hunt, but also earn a trophy or two and offer it to Diogo. Worms.”

Caera glanced back at her friends. All three of them squirmed a bit.

“I’ll keep an eye open,” she said. “And everyone else?” She gestured to the dozen demons, still in the middle of fucking, though half of them had drifted closer to listen to the conversation.

Renato shrugged. “Same reason you have two friends of your own, I suppose. The horde call left more than a brand on us, didn’t it?”

Caera winced. It certainly did. She glanced back at her friends, and they offered her some smiles. She’d told them about back then, no need to retread.

“Good point. But, moving on. Anyone lay claim to this area? Have you?”

“Just this chamber and the ones connected to it.” Which didn’t sound like a lot of territory, until a glance around showed a dozen tunnels connecting to this chamber, the tunnels were fucking long, and the chambers were fucking huge. It was a lot of territory. If Renato had been anything but a tetrad



demon, he would have had to recruit a bunch of enforcers, probably devorjins and tregeeras. Doable, but it didn't seem to jive with his new personality.

She remembered Renato during the horde. She remembered a hungry, violent, angry demon who shredded through the border forces between Death's Grip and The Black Valley. She remembered bodies piled on top of bodies. She remembered mountains of skulls, and the roars of demons giving into their most basic instincts, indulging in murder and rape and everything in between. Demons were perfectly happy taking out their deepest, most fucked up desires on each other, when humans weren't around.

Caera looked to the side, at the only human in the room. A betrayer, considering the 666 etched on their forehead. A man, body hardened into pure muscle, probably by Renato putting him through some serious post-death training. Every nearby demon was either looking at Renato, and looking for a piece of him, his giant body, and his huge dick, or the human man, who had two gorgalas and a riiva fighting for a piece of him.

Caera licked her lips at the sight of him. Humans were attractive. Humans were very, all too attractive. Something about the sight of one got any demon with a pulse hot and bothered, either aching for a fight, for a meal, or for a fuck. Incubi and succubi may have been weak, but every demon knew the score. They were fucking lucky to look so similar to humans.

"He one of yours?" Caera asked, gesturing to the guy buried in thighs and tits fighting for space on him.

"Sebastian. Did you want to fuck him? I can arrange that." Renato grinned at her as he stretched out his wings, and gently teased the backs of each succubus on his lap with his claws, earning some purrs from them. "Or we can. How long has it been since we enjoyed each other?"

Caera thought about it, but after Marquez gave her a small, obviously jealous poke, she laughed and shook her head.

"I'll pass," she said eventually. "Got my friends when I need sexy times." Nodding, she stepped back, wrapped her left arm around Marquez's head, right arm around Kia's head, and gave them snug headlocks as she grinned at Renato. "Though, I mean, we're gonna go explore, and when we come back, maybe we can join you a bit. Sound good fellas?"

"Yeap," Marquez said, and he held out a thumb.

“Ugh, fine,” Kia said, holding out her own thumb. Try as she might to sound and look unhappy about the situation, Caera could see her little gargoyle friend glancing between both the betrayer, and Renato. Betrayer, because humans were unfairly hot. Renato, because, well, he was huge.

And Marquez being Marquez, he barely noticed. His eyes were a little more focused on the two succubi.

“So we can go exploring?” Caera asked. “We got a meal already, so we’re good for now. But we saw the statue of Valzanal, and we were pretty intrigued.” No point in asking if Ren knew her, he’d been born after her death. One of the few.

“You have my permission.”

“Thanks.”

“Just be careful how deep you go, Caera. The paths go deep. Very deep.”

She raised a brow as her tail twitched. “Um, how—”

“I don’t know how deep. I’ve claimed my territory, and I’m keeping it for now. Until something happens to force me to act, I am... relaxing. But know that the tunnels go deeper. I do not explore them.”

That, was one of the best things and worst things about Hell. So many places to go hunting and exploring, so many ways to get lost on an amazing trip back in time, so many ways to fall into a hole and plunge a mile down into a fucking pit of lava.

She grinned at her two friends, who both groaned as they noticed the look in her eyes.

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“You know, Caera,” Kia said, “if you want to keep us alive, taking us on another one of these trips into some long, forgotten cave, isn’t the best way to do that.”

“You’ll be fine. Just stay behind me. If I trigger a trap, I’ll dodge.” And she could, too. Probably.

They followed along the tunnels as they spiraled downward. The chambers they ran into below weren’t nearly as fancy as the one Renato had claimed, but they were chambers, with various statues Caera was now convinced were built by Hell herself. The details were just too good, and some of them

were in intimate positions she had no idea how any demon, no matter how talented, could have possibly carved them.

Which meant shit had happened here. Something big, something nasty, something important. Probably Val up to no good, having a giant orgy with humans getting raped and eaten in the middle of it, and any number of really fucked up shit that horrible bitch was into. By Val standards, Zel was chill as fuck.

Predictably, the pleasant quiet of the tunnels couldn't last forever. As they went down and down, amber veins consistent and bright, the distant screams and groans grew louder and louder.

Remnants. The three of them groaned, and huddled closer together, as they walked down the path of rock and stone, and remnants.

Remnants meant no traps. You couldn't leave behind traps with remnants growing out of the walls and pulling at everything. But it also meant every step was a pain in the ass. A lot of demons loved hanging out in rooms with remnants, and if you were one of the stronger demon breeds like Caera, it'd take a lot more than a few of them grabbing you in the middle of a nap to kill you. But she didn't like remnants, didn't like being around them, and neither did Kia or Marquez.

They followed the tunnel, and avoided the remnants as best they could. Whenever one got in their way, they killed it. Remnants almost always seemed happy to die, in the strange way a madman didn't realize the only escape from their pain, was death, until it finally happened. The numbers on their foreheads ticked down by one, and then they fell apart. One less screaming voice, for the moment.

It didn't get too bad. Caera had seen tunnels and rooms with enough remnants that the walls looked like they were the inside of a giant monster's stomach. This tunnel, even when it got cramped, never had anymore than a few remnants in their way, and other than a couple annoying times one of them got a hand on Caera's arm or leg or tail, the trip down went smoothly. Down, and down, and down.

After a couple hours, Kia and Marquez both let out some frustrated groans.

"We've seen a hundred statues, Caera," Kia said. "But nothing else."

"Yeah," Marquez said. "This is getting a little ridiculous."

"Come on, guys! Just another..."

The trio rounded the corner of another tunnel, and stopped.

The chamber before them defied all reason. The tunnel connected to it, but it was a straight drop down into the enormous chamber and its spherical shape, a chamber so massive it could have fit a thousand of the other chambers. Absolutely colossal. At the base of it, several rivers of lava flowed cutting through the sphere chamber like a vein of blood. The heat was immense.

Looking across the chamber, Caera could see other tunnels, each connecting to the chamber but ending in the same hard drop. Kia would be able to get across, but no one else would.

It wasn't the chamber or the lava that had them stunned, though. It was the statues below, in the lava. Caera didn't know what the fuck could survive standing in the blood of Hell, but these statues did. Big statues, skin gleaming red from the light of lava, bodies made of metal. There were easily a thousand statues, some standing on the shores of the lava river, but most standing in it, lava reaching their waists. It was hard to tell how big they were, with how massive the chamber was and how far away they were, but she figured they were probably twelve feet tall, bigger than tetrad demons. That, was a lot of lava. That, was a lot of statues.

And they were fighting. A thousand demons, locked in battle, claws and talons, swords and fangs, cutting into each other's flesh.

"What the fuck," Caera said, staring down. "It's... It's..."

"A graveyard," Kia said. "Or a monument?"

Marquez squatted down close to the ledge and leaned over it. "That, is fucking terrifying. You think—" He slipped.

Caera grabbed the man by one of his horns and yanked him back, hard. Thankfully the stone of the walls had some grooves for her claws to catch to brace herself. Marquez fell onto his back, and stared up at the ceiling, a little dazed.

"Dumbass," Kia said, and she slapped the idiot on the chest. Sighing, she also helped him stand back up.

"Thanks," he said. "And, uh, I don't know shit about shit, but that is a very... epic little slice of history. You think?"

"Monument, then," Caera said. Still holding the tunnel wall, she peeked a bit, and stared at the statues some more. She didn't recognize them, not a single one. No terrible four, no tregeera, no gorgala, no vratorin, no devorjin or borjin or succubi or incubi or anything. Thousands of bodies of muscle and claw, giant demons that looked like they could have easily killed a tetrad demon. Nothing but statues, now.

“Who made it?” Kia asked.

Caera shrugged. “Hell herself, I guess. Fucking... creepy.”

“Recognize any of the demons?” Marquez asked.

“Nope.”

“Then,” Marquez said, lifting a finger, “I think we should pronounce this journey over, and go back and enjoy ourselves an orgy. Yes no?”

Kia rolled her eyes, but she laughed, too. “I guess we can do that. Caera?”

“Um, yeah, sure.” She tried to look away from the statues below, but she couldn’t. So many, and they were all utterly huge. Some had wings, some didn’t. Some had swords or other weapons, some didn’t. But they were all fucking huge.

Like Belor had been, last child of Abaddon.