

## 1228

The rider didn't fall. He held onto his reins, and while the tetrad Saldavin landed on the ground in front of his supposed kill, the dragon wasn't dead, or even dying. With a giant cut through its snout, it got back onto four feet, and charged forward toward the spire. Saldavin jumped aside, wings carrying the leap far, but all he could do was watch as the creature ran past

him.*wʷ(w).nOvêLw©rm.©o(m)*

Before he could give chase, the tetrad the rider had brought with him, the fujara, screamed murder as she ran at him. She had four arms, her raptor talons gripped the stone beneath her, and a tail flicked left and right behind her as she leaned into the movement. Saldavin walked on hooves with an upright stance, and once the fujara got close he swung his sword down with both hands.

She dodged, stepping to the side. Saldavin's black sword crashed hard against the stone, loud enough it echoed against the mountains, and overcame the increasing noise of the erupting violence as more demons joined the fray. She wore much more armor, all of it was gold, and she had a gold short sword in each hand. And she swung each of them, one after the other, each a rapid flurry of strikes that Saldavin had no choice but to block with his sword*WwW.nOvêlwôrm.com*

The only reason David could see their duel was their height. They towered over everyone else, even the brutes and tigers. The demons from the spire swarmed over the rider's troupe, surrounded them, and soon a sea of black armor, black and dark red skin, and black spikes surrounded the two dozen the rider had brought. It was like watching the Battle of Thermopylae. The dark tide couldn't push past the tight circle of gold and bronze-covered demons. Gliders fell on them, sometimes directly into the center, but they were cut into bits almost instantly as a demon spun around, chopped them down, and turned around to fight the waves.

Roars poured over the valley. Hundreds of the demons of Death's Grip raised hands and weapons, and the tide of claws and fangs flowed up to the sides of the dragon as it pushed forward to the tower, still mounted by the rider. It paused only long enough to swipe one of its hands in front of it, eviscerate a half dozen demons, and continue on.

But it was huge, and demons had an easy time attacking its legs, its chest, and even its tail. It had no trouble dealing with them at first, and a dozen more demons found themselves crushed under its hands. A couple more went down its gullet. At one point it stopped, and swiped with one leg and then the other, each swipe hitting a demon hard enough to send them flying, before a tail flick dislodged a couple more. It could only do so much against the horde, and a couple dozen threw themselves at its sides, biting, clawing, and stabbing. None of them managed to create a deep wound like Saldavin had, but they drew blood nonetheless, and soon the path behind the lizard was a mess of corpses and crimson.

The rider pressed on. He made no motions or movements other than pulling on the reins, and continued straight on toward the spire without looking back. The lizard's hands and feet crashed into the black spikes and pillars sticking up from the ground, and shattered them. It walked over cracks in the ground without issue, cracks the girls had assured David had lava flowing in them. It leaned down with a roar and charge forward, and smashed aside a swath of demons that tried to latch onto its head.

Finally at the tower, the lizard let out another bellowing roar loud enough it ringed in David's ears. It stood up. The lizard sat back onto its hind legs, and reached high as it balanced. One hand reached out and pressed against the colossal tower, another reached higher again as it stretched out its legs. It got its claws around the lower balcony on the outside of the tower, and pressed its bloody snout to its edge.

"What the fuck," David said.

The rider released the reins, and walked up the dragon's snout up onto the balcony, bypassing the hundred demons pouring out of the primary entrance. He disappeared over the metal and big white teeth of the balcony edge, and David could no longer see.

But he knew where the rider was going.

"I... don't think Zel is going to have time to summon the horde," Caera said. "Not like she can just flip a switch and it happens. It takes a few minutes to get going, at least. If this battle went on for a bit, sure, she could, but the rider doesn't look like he's here for a battle, or even to kill Zel and take over the spire. He's..."

"Going straight for Mia." David grabbed the hilt of his tiny broken sword, and stood up.

Dao tackled him.

"Hey!"

Chirping up a storm, Dao sat on him and swung her arms around wildly, before poking him hard in the side of his chest his half breastplate didn't cover.

"She's right," Caera said. "There's nearly a thousand demons down there, getting lost in all that sin. If you go down there, you might get caught up in it."

Jes managed a weird chuckle. "Or, you know, get cut up and eaten on the spot."

"I have to get to Mia!"*www.no(v)éIwôrm.©om*

Shaking her head, Dao put both her hands down against his shoulders and refused to move.

"You're not going anywhere," Caera said. "Going in there would be suicide. Best chance we have is to wait until--"

The dragon let out a roar, and all the girls snapped their eyes -- and bone forehead plate thing -- toward the sound.

"Holy shit," Jes said. "That thing is going berserk."*www.Nôvêlwôrm.coM*