

A Warrior Undefeatable 5726-5740

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Unperturbed, Jared watched the orb alone. With that final, exquisitely pure strand of origin soul absorbed, the sphere erupted in cascading sheets of crimson light. It hummed—again and again—until the sound became a heartbeat. Inside, the Vermilion Demon Lord's soul-flame swelled, condensing with manic speed.

Life itself pulsed outward, each surge stronger than the last, as though a slumbering heart were remembering how to beat. Then came a brittle crack-hairline, almost shy-spreading across the orb's smooth surface like dawn's first fissure in the night. Cracks spider-webbed across the orb's surface, racing outward like lightning searching for ground. Jared's pulse spiked. The last decisive heartbeat had arrived.

Without hesitation, he opened every reservoir of chaotic energy inside him and drove that molten power into the Bloodsoul Orb, a flood crashing through a narrow gate.

Boom!

A searing blossom of scarlet fire erupted, impossible to define, so bright it stained every pillar, every shattered flagstone of the great hall the color of fresh blood.

The shock wave hurled the surviving elders through the air; they struck the distant walls with bone-splintering force and slumped, fates uncertain. Only then did the radiance curl inward and begin to fade.

When the glare receded, the Bloodsoul Orb was gone. In its place hovered a single silhouette wrapped in roiling crimson energy, a cocoon that pulsed like a living heart. The shell flaked away, petal after petal of blood-light peeling and dissolving, until the figure inside stepped free.

He was eight feet tall, with midnight hair cascading over his shoulders.

Eyes still closed, lashes long, his frame all fluid muscle—each inch of skin seemed to trap thunder beneath it, radiating an ancient, dangerously magnetic allure. Most telling of all, the aura around him was no longer spectral. It thrummed with fierce, undeniable life.

And with that life came a cultivation pressure vast enough to bend the air.

Slowly, he opened his eyes. They were deep—an eternal night sky—but storming at their core churned red clouds of demonic fire, carrying the weight of countless tribulations and the exhilaration of rebirth.

He flexed his newly solid hands, knuckles whitening as forgotten strength surged back. The simple sensation of physical body and blood set his entire body trembling with joy.

Lifting his gaze past the ruined throne room, he found Jared standing with hands clasped behind him, a quiet, satisfied smile on the young man's face.

The Vermilion Demon Lord took a step through empty air and arrived before Jared, excitement blazing across his features.

"Boy, you have given me life a second time. This debt is as vast as heaven and earth, and I will never forget it," the Vermilion Demon Lord declared, voice ringing like iron on a cathedral bell.

The vow—raw, fervent, pulled straight from his soul—echoed through the fractured hall until even the drifting dust seemed to pause and listen.

Jared studied the newly reborn Vermilion Demon Lord, feeling the hurricane of vitality and power now caged within that towering frame.

"I'll admit, the physical body suits you—you clean up rather well," Jared said with an easy grin. "Besides, you've saved my neck once or twice yourself. I'd say we're even now."

"You crossed the Ninefold Heaven

for me. You burned sect after sect to

ash until the whole realm whispered your name like a curse. Everyone says you've become a devil

incarnate was that really worth it?"

The Vermilion Demon Lord's voice trembled with gratitude, the question spilling from him before he could hide the ache behind it.

He knew that if not for gathering the materials to rebuild his body, Jared would never have turned the mighty Myriad Arts Sect into his enemy, never have been branded a heretic.

Jared threw back his head and laughed, a rich, irreverent roar that echoed across the shattered plateau. "You honestly think I care what they call me?"

The raw joy in his throat rolled like thunder—each peal an answer louder than words.

The Vermilion Demon Lord grinned, eyes glinting dark gold. "You, my friend, are starting to carry yourself like a true demon lord."

Jared's smile softened into concern. "Enough talk about me. How does that new body feel?"

"Better than ever-beyond anything I have known."

He clenched his rebuilt fists.

Crimson light flashed beneath the skin, and a tide of unfiltered demonic aura surged outward yet at his heart lay a calm, righteous undercurrent, born of the Bloodsoul Orb and the array of virtuous soul energy that had reforged him.

"This physical body holds staggering potential," he said, voice humming with awe, "Because it fuses so many strands of origin power, I feel almost immune to soul-based attacks

Perhaps even latent talents will awaken in time."

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Jared nodded, satisfaction gleaming in his eyes. "Excellent. My sweep through the Ninefold Heaven to gather those materials was not in vain."

Before the last syllable faded, Jared's storage ring pulsed. A blur of silver darted out—the little celestial devourer-chirping with eagerness. At the sight of the Vermilion Demon Lord, the tiny beast scrambled forward and licked the demon lord's palms, tail quivering.

Vermilion Demon Lord knelt, roughened fingers stroking the creature's soft fur while guilt clouded his gaze. His former mount, an elder devourer, had fallen in battle, yet in its final heartbeat had left behind a single egg.

Now, its hatchling nuzzled against him, already recognizing its master. The circle—loss giving birth to hope—closed silently around them.

"Now that my strength is restored," the Vermilion Demon Lord said quietly, "let us end our grudge with the Myriad Arts Sect."

Jared blinked, surprised. He had never expected the once-ruthless demon lord to speak of mercy.

A playful smile tugged at Jared's mouth. "Mercy? That doesn't sound like the Vermilion Demon Lord I know."

Vermilion Demon Lord rolled his eyes. "Blame yourself—I've spent too long in your company, and your contagion is clearly spreading."

Laughter burst from them at the same instant—two voices, one bright, one dark, rolling together through the broken sky until even the shattered stones seemed to tremble at their shared, unrestrained joy.

"Coall, pull the troops back—now."

Jared's voice cut through the din like a blade, steady and unquestionable, the single syllable carrying the weight of thunder across the battlefield.

At that command, the entire Draconian army wheeled as one living torrent of bronze-scaled muscle and burning eyes, streaming after Jared as he lifted into the darkening sky.

The Myriad Arts Sect survived the clash with little true damage—only the sting of wounded pride echoed through its shattered courtyards and smoking parapets.

"Need me to hunt down that Soul Devourer for you?"

The Vermilion Demon Lord's tone was almost casual, yet embers of battlelust still flickered behind his crimson pupils.

He posed the question once the two of them had left the sect's ruined gates, the distant roar of retreat fading into the hush of broken stone.

"No. Right now, I feel absurdly unstoppable. Go find your little beloved instead." Jared's reply came with a light, almost teasing smile, as if impossible strength were nothing more than a pleasant secret he had just discovered.

That smile lingered on his lips—soft, knowing, impossible to decipher.

He understood all too well how the Vermilion Demon Lord's heart still circled the thought of Selene like a lonely planet refusing to abandon its dying sun.

The Vermilion Demon Lord's answering grin twisted into a rueful curve, half warmth, half pain.

"If you truly have no need of me, I'll keep watch over Leenie's crystal coffin. I'll find a way—whatever it takes to breathe life back into her. Stay alive, Jared. Should the Ninefold Heaven ever demand my strength, send word and I'll be there."

With one last reluctant glance, the scarlet figure dissolved into motes of ember-red light and vanished beyond the horizon's veil.

Jared lifted a hand in silent farewell, the gesture small yet resonant against the lonely sweep of skies the Demon Lord had left behind.

For countless days, that crimson presence had murmured within his consciousness field. Now the sudden quiet felt like a room where music had stopped mid-note, and a faint ache settled behind Jared's sternum.

"Enough nostalgia. We march for Skyreach Cliff."

His words cracked the stillness, and the Draconian ranks surged forward once more.

He led the army across cloud-latticed heavens to inspect the newborn shell of the Heaven Gate Sect rising atop the jagged crown of Skyreach Cliff.

Upon arrival, Jared traced the foundation of the grand formation himself, fingers carving trails of molten gold through the air. Constellations stirred, their distant light descending in luminous ribbons that wove into every rune he set.

Mountains of tribute—ore, crystal, sacred timber—poured in from the conquered sects. Master craftsmen toiled night and day beneath the watchful eyes of scaled sentinels, hammers keeping time with the heartbeat of the cliff.

Palace after palace rose like titans of marble and jade, each mortised into living rock.

Glittering veins of defensive arrays spread through the mountainside, while tides of pure spiritual energy rolled in, turning Skyreach Cliff into the newborn core of the Ninefold Heavens.

In only a handful of days, an awe-striking sect-equal parts fortress and cathedral—towered where barren stone had once stood.

Amid the reordering of territories and treasures, Jared combed through every spoil, refining body and mind until his grasp of Heavenly Law felt as deep as the ocean's floor.

His cultivation vaulted from Human Immortal Realm Level Five to Level Six; even Jared could no longer calculate the true limits of the power coiling inside his veins.

The Demon Seal Tower, the Dragonslayer Sword, and the Golden Tome meshed ever more seamlessly with his very soul, as though forged for him alone at the dawn of creation.

Then, one dawn, Jared stood upon the apex of the sect's front plaza, high above all banners and spires, cloak snapping like thunder in the newborn wind.

Below him stretched a sea of obsidian-scaled Draconian soldiers and envoys from every newly-subdued faction—dark, dense, innumerable—tens of thousands gathered in serried ranks awaiting the decree of their chosen sovereign.

Every throat tightened at once. An ocean of cultivators—saints, sect masters, foot soldiers alike—stood motionless barreath the dars, the reverence so intense it bordered on delirium

as they fixed their eyes on the Tone figure in indigo robes who ruled the platform.
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Jared let his gaze sweep across the crowd like a slow-almost

mebacked into

merciful blade His voice remained calm yet the

each measured syllable pressed into every heart below as clearly as if he whispered directly beside each ear.

From this moment forward, the Ninefold Heaven shall answer to me—Jared Chance — alone. Here we raise a new Gate of Heaven. It will stand on this very summit and

watch over every realm below. Sylvia will serve as its master.

"Those who honor my decree shall find shelter beneath my wings, inheritance, for their line, and an age of peace. Those who resist will taste the Draconian army's iron hooves. Wherever they march, the so itself will smolder. So let this law be obeyed!"

A roar exploded—mountains answered, seas rolled, and thunder seemed to birth itself inside the clouds as a single phrase of assent raced across the entire Ninefold Heaven.

With that cry an era died and another was born. The Ninefold Heaven, fractured for ages, welcomed its first undisputed sovereign—Jared Chance.

"Time to erase the Soul Devourer, utterly and forever." Jared's words cracked like flint, sparks of battle-lust flashing in his eyes.

He had just bent an entire sky to his will-what threat could one lurking fiend possibly pose? In the fierce swell of Jared's confidence, it seemed he could crush the Soul Devourer with a single, contemptuous hand.

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The vows still echoed around the Gate of Heaven, yet Jared no longer savored the triumph. The Soul Devourer remained a poisoned thorn-leave it buried, and the infection would one day rot the empire he had only just forged.

So he ceded every administrative burden to trusted lieutenants, stationed a legion of Draconians to guard the newborn sect, then departed with Coall, Cyanna, and three hundred elite Draconian warriors. Their destination was the fabled Nether Blood Sea.

The Nether Blood Sea lay at the far-western rim of the Ninefold Heaven—a ragged scar where, legends claimed, ancient gods and demons had once torn each other apart.

Long before the expedition glimpsed its shores, a stench like carrion-soaked iron clawed down their throats. An icy dread, aimed straight at the soul, rode on every gust.

On the horizon, sky and earth appeared swallowed by an endless smear of dark crimson. It was no sunset—it was an ocean brewed from the mingled blood of a million fallen deities and beasts.

The viscous sea heaved like molten syrup. Each surge did not toss foam but unveiled wailing faces—contorted, skinless, eternally screaming. Above that loathsome tide, red-black thunderheads gathered year-round. Bolts of blood-colored lightning forked through them, rumbling like drums for a funeral that had never ended.

Even the fabric of space turned brittle here. Jagged rifts—inky and starless—yawned open without warning, then stitched themselves shut, each rip threatening to swallow anything careless enough to draw near.

Below, the landscape stretched out like a charred parchment—an endless plain scorched midnight-black. Titanic skeletons jutted from the soot, their ribs taller than city walls, splintered weapons still clenched in petrified hands. Though ten thousand ages had passed, a sovereign pressure still pulsed from every bleached bone.

"D*mn it, this place gives me the creeps," Coall muttered, his gravelly voice echoing through the stagnant haze.

He shook his massive dragon head as though he could fling the cold malice coiled around his very soul. Even a creature of the Draconians—scale thicker than steel, spirit forged in primordial fire—felt an instinctive shiver crawl beneath the armor of its hide.

Azure vapors spiraled around Cyanna, the aura of a celestial dragon woven into her breath. It burned away the nearby filth like frost meeting sunlight.

"This hatred has brewed for eons," she warned, her voice as cool as winter glass. "The laws here are fractured—it will dampen our strength. Stay on guard, every one of you."

Jared nodded once, solemn. Drawing even a thread of ordinary spirit energy felt like sipping through stone. The very air reeked of feral bloodlust. Were it not for his gift of devouring such miasma, flight itself would have been a burden.

He sifted through Mortimer's stolen memories and the clues gathered later. All paths pointed to the Soul Devourer's lair—somewhere deep inside this cursed Nether Blood Sea, in a chasm called Soulgrave Abyss.

Jared cast his spiritual sense outward. Turbulent currents snarled in his mind, shredding clarity. He managed to probe only a few dozen miles before the chaos spat his awareness back.

"Slow and steady," he instructed. "Feel for any surge in souls. That will mark our trail."

The Draconian army eased forward, enormous bodies gliding like a wary serpent skirting a hunter's snare. Crossing into the sky above the NethenBlood Sea, they collided with an even denser tide of despair that pressed against scales and skin threefold.

Sensing living hearts, legion upon legion of wailing spirits burst from the crimson waves-blood-stained phantoms shrieking like iron scraped glass. Individually weak, yet numberless and fearless, they lunged for the soul rather than the

physical body, a plague made of

claws and grief.

"Cleanse them." Jared's command fell like a hammer. The order rippled through the ranks.

Cyanna moved first. Her dragon aura erupted into a rainfall of azure light. Wherever a droplet landed, a specter evaporated, howling, then vanished as harmless smoke. The other Draconians answered in kind-streams of dragon fire, arcs of lightning, spears of wind, shards of ice. Their talents and spells blossomed over the Nether Blood Sea, mowing down the endless swarm.

Jared kept his hands still. Eyes narrowed, he pushed his mind as far as the storm of laws allowed, hunting for the faintest unnatural ripple beneath the carnage.

They drifted on, witnessing horrors

fit for apocryphal scrolls: islands built entirely of interlocked bones; manotod colossal corpses adrift like totting continents and natural whirlpools-pure liquid scarlet-that swallowed everything in silent hunger.

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Grotesque beasts born of this hell occasionally surfaced-misshapen things forged from gore and resentment. Most felt the army's might and sank back, yet a few charged and were torn apart with casual brutality.

The search crawled on-long, monotonous, yet steeped in peril with every heartbeat.

Every so often, the heavens ripped apart, spawning blood-red storms loaded with wild spatial energy and soul-shattering force.

Each time, Jared flashed the Demon Seal Tower, anchoring the torn void while his indomitable spiritual sense shielded the Draconian army; without it, dragons would have been mutilated-or erased entirely.

They later drifted into a soul expanse, a colorless, scentless miasma that crawled into hearts, teasing out primordial terrors and weaving hallucinations darker than a moonless night. Several dragons, wills untempered, nearly tore each other apart before Jared summoned illusion nascence and blew the toxin away.

Ten days crawled by while they scoured the endless Nether Blood Sea, yet the entrance to the Soulgrave Abyss refused to appear.

Even my patience thins-this Soul Devourer hides like a fox in midwinter.

Coall vented a column of dragonfire, scattering the shrieking shades ahead. "Mr. Chance, drifting aimless won't do. This sea is endless, and it's draining us," he rumbled.

Jared halted above the crimson waves, eyes hard, the tower blooming from his palm like a miniature star. "If he won't come to us, we'll haul him into daylight!"

Essence surged into the tower, and soft yet boundless light rolled outward in widening rings. The glow carried a lure meant for corrupt spirits-comfort on the surface, shackles underneath.

In a sea thick with resentment, the tower burned like a lighthouse. For the Soul Devourer, its call was irresistible.

Moments later, the summons was answered. A bass hum vibrated across the bloody water.

Far ahead, the sea frothed, and a vortex hundreds of miles wide opened, sucking the abyss into itself. From its center rose a chill, malign, immeasurable pulse-an ancient beast of spirit slowly waking.

Jared recognized the aura at once. It was the Soul Devourer.

"Found him," Jared whispered, eyes glinting.

He dismissed the tower and shot toward the maelstrom, the Draconian army streaming behind like scales on a single dragon. The thousand-mile gulf vanished in a heartbeat.

The whirlpool spanned several hundred miles, its spinning bloodwater a gaping throat that promised only oblivion. Yet deep inside flickered a muted, dusky glow hinting at another world.

"The Soulgrave Abyss... this is it," Jared murmured.

He sensed a sealed dimension barrier lurking beneath the swirl-an unseen door waiting to be kicked in.

"Down we go!"

Jared moved first. Confidence and audacity fused into a single blazing motion as his body became a streak of silver-white light that plunged straight toward the whirling core.

Coall, Cyanna, and the rest of the Draconian vanguard hesitated only a heartbeat before following, scales rippling, wings beating, their combined roar swallowed by the rushing current.

They pierced a gelatinous curtain of dark blood and a second skin of warped space. The moment they broke through, the pressure vanished-vision burst open like a torn veil.

The scene was nothing like the lightless abyss they had imagined. Instead, they hovered inside a cavern vast enough to dwarf kingdoms, its air vibrating with ancient, maddening hush.

Overhead stretched a wine-dark sky, thick as congealed blood. There were no suns, no moons, no stars-only a weak crimson glow that bled from nowhere in particular.

Beneath them sprawled a black landscape of twisted, serrated stone Each breath carried stench tenfold stronger than above metallic blood, tortured

souts, old resentments ground

dust.

into

At the very center rose a throne the size of a temple, built from interlocked skulls—

thousands of them, jaw to crown, eye sockets still screaming.

Upon that grotesque seat rested a figure not of physical body but of shadow so dense it seemed liquid.

A thin halo of black soul fire licked his outline, and within the blur two eyes burned— twin emerald lanterns brimming with venom, avarice, and an ageless, glacial indifference.

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This was the soul remnant of the Soul Devourer himself—no mere projection but the closest thing to his true form.

Compared with the shadow Jared had faced at the Skyfiend Sect, this presence was a hundred times fiercer, every wisp condensed into lethal intent. Though still incomplete, the raw pressure of its soul remnant alone slammed into the arriving Draconian army, making even seasoned warriors feel as though unseen chains cinched their throats.

The Soul Devourer's voice scraped across the vault, summoning echoes from every restless spirit. "Jared Chance, I had not yet set out to hunt you, and here you stroll straight into my lair. And you even drag in this swarm of slithering reptiles to die beside you-how very thoughtful."

Suspended in the thick crimson gloom, Jared faced the skeletal throne from a distance that felt razor-thin. Not a hint of fear touched his features. A slow, almost playful smile lifted one corner of his mouth, as though the nightmare before him were nothing more than a tavern brawl.

Jared answered with a lazy grin. "Soul Devourer, you picked a fine sewer to hide in -no wonder it took me forever to sniff you out. Last time you ran like a whipped cur, licked your wounds under this blood sea, and now you're barking again when the scars haven't even closed."

The emerald flames in the Soul Devourer's eyes flared, the throne of skulls creaking under the sudden spike of rage.

Forcing the anger back behind a brittle smile, he hissed, "Sharp tongue, whelp! You think a lucky bond with the Demon Seal Tower and a pack of beasts makes you invincible? To me, you're still just a slightly sturdier ant."

Jared laughed, the sound echoing like cracking ice. "An ant? Look at yourself— you're neither man nor ghost, no physical body, just a tattered wisp skulking in this godforsaken hole. I almost pity you."

He swept an arm toward the vast Draconian army massed behind him, their obsidian scales and burning standards rolling outward like a living tide.

Thumb tapping against his own breastplate, he roared, "Behold me still young, body unmarred, cultivation that scrapes the roof of creation. Commanders swarm beneath my banner like thunderheads, and I have just welded the Ninefold Heaven into a single empire!"

"And you? What do you possess? A few back-alley plots and the knack for shooting cowardly arrows from the dark. Strip that away, and you stand empty-handed."

"Ah, yes-celestial lord, you call yourself. Try sewer lord. You've spent so long squatting in this reeking gutter that mildew is your only crown."

Soul Devourer's voice cracked. "You—"

Rage rippled through his translucent body; the swirl of resentful energy around him bucked and screamed, as though every trapped ghost shared his fury.

Across uncounted millennia of cruel dominion, never-never-had a mortal dared spit such insults at his very face.

Jared flicked two fingers. "You what?"

Words fired from his mouth like arrows. "Calling you an old dog would flatter your dogs at least stay loyal. All you know is betrayal, devouring allies, and scheming from the shadows."

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"Wait, I forgot—you can run. Faster than anyone alive. Last time in Nullrift Gorge this time at the Skyriend Sect—you bolted so quickly it almost broke my heart."

"How about I teach you a few prettier escape techniques? Then, the next time someone chases you like a kicked cur, you might at least look graceful."

"Pfft—" A stifled snort split the silence.

Behind Jared, Coall's great black-scaled ribs shook with half-swallowed laughter, the dragon struggling not to collapse outright.

Other Draconians traded furtive, delighted glances—eager to laugh, yet terrified of doing so.

"Impudent whelp! I will tear you apart!" Soul Devourer screamed.

His ghost-green soul fire flared blood-red. A volcanic pressure burst outward, making the very stones of Soulgrave Abyss shudder under his wrath.

"I will rip out your soul, sear it with Netherfire for ten thousand years, and deny you rebirth forever!"

Jared clicked his tongue. "Touchy, touchy."

He folded his arms and smirked.

"That's anger already? I haven't even

warmed up. With a mind that shallow, no wonder you've spent ten millennia skulking in darkness Drop the grand title. Call yourself Lord Pettiness-or maybe Sovereign of Sulks. Fits far better."

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Jared thumped his chest once, bold as dawn. "Open those mongrel eyes wide. I'm standing right here. You promised to peel my spirit, to burn me well, come collect!"

"I'll face you with nothing but Human Immortal Realm Level Six cultivation-and one hand tied if that helps your pride. Should I so much as frown, I'll gladly take your name as my own."

The brag rattled even the Draconians; scales clinked as they exchanged uncertain looks, while behind them, Soul Devourer's fury rose like a blood moon over ruin.

Coall edged closer, his rough whisper trembling over the torn flagstones. "Mr. Chance-aren't you pushing confidence a touch too far?"

After all, the creature across from them was a relic of the abyss, an ancient terror that had brooded for tens of thousands of silent, murderous years.

"Excellent-splendid how deliciously foolish!" The Soul Devourer let out a laugh that scraped like talons across slate. "Since you are so hungry for death, allow me to serve it to you myself."

"All of you, attack together if you wish. By day's end you will learn what it means to insult a sovereign of the heavens."

In that moment, the fiend vowed to break Jared cell by cell, savoring every scream until his own rage cooled.

Jared lifted a hand, stopping Coall and the warriors who bristled for action behind him. "Hold the formation and steady the field. One toothless cur is hardly worth a crowd, and I'm more than enough to cage it."

He rolled his neck-the joints popped like splitting timber-then called the Dragonslayer Sword into his palm. The blade answered with a low metallic hum as he pointed its tip at the dark throne. "Come on, old mutt. Die where you stand!"

Power raged through him in bright, unchecked rivers. His aura shot skyward, a banner of raw intent. Inside, strength hammered against his veins he felt as though a single punch might shatter stars.

With chaos energy, woven Heavenly Laws, and hidden cards yet unplayed, he believed he could overstep realms and break this soul remnant with ease.

"Ignorant whelp! I will show you the weight of a celestial lord's power!" the Soul Devourer roared.

The skeletal throne exploded behind him. His condensed soul twisted into a black torrent that split the sky, dragging with it the hatred of the entire Soulgrave Abyss and sweeping toward Jared like a tide meant to erase worlds.

"Perfect timing! Five Elements Sword Domain, open! Time Deceleration!"

Jared's shout rang like steel on steel as he hurled himself into the oncoming night.

Color flared. The Five Elements Sword Domain blossomed in an instant, its radiance folding both time and distance, tugging the Soul Devourer toward Jared's chosen rhythm.

The battle ignited in a single breath.

At first, Jared fought like living thunder, every stroke of Dragonslayer Sword fused with layered Heavenly Laws. Blades of multicolored light cut from impossible angles, forcing the soul-torrent to split and recoil.

Time stuttered around the fiend, motions jerking half a heartbeat late. Warped pockets of space rose like glassy walls, turning many assaults aside. For several glorious exchanges, Jared's momentum felt unbreakable.

"Is that it, you mangy cur? Some celestial lord-you're all bark and no bite!" Jared taunted, a sun-bright slash of sword intent nearly ripping through the fiend's core.

The Soul Devourer grunted, soul fire flickering as the near-miss shaved away a shard of darkness-and Jared's confidence surged all the higher.

A muffled snarl escaped the abyssal torrent; its inner fire pulsed, wounded but far from extinguished.

That minor victory fanned Jared's resolve into a blaze.

Yet as the minutes bled on, a subtle wrongness crept under his skin-the rhythm he had set now felt heavier, slower, as though some unseen undertow had begun to drag him toward depths he had not planned to visit.

Soul Devourer's tide of soul energy felt bottomless, an ink-dark ocean that only grew deeper the longer Jared stared into it. He wielded that power with the ease of a concert maestro. Every ripple, every current, every unseen undertow responded to his slightest whim.

Jared's sword light-brilliant arcs drawn from the Five Elements Sword Domain-kept scoring the phantom physical body in front of him yet each but pre

a wisp of gloom that the

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surrounding sea of resentment

refilled in a heartbeat.

Not even attacks aimed solely at the soul could touch the monster. Soul Devourer swallowed such assaults the way wildfire swallows dry grass, turning them into more of his own strength.

What unsettled Jared most was the

man's experience. Soul Devourer anticipated every feint every hidden

rhythm, with saltine

rhythm, slipping aside with insulting economy while looking for the one seam in Jared's Heavenly Law he had not yet patched.

When the counterblows came, they were plain, almost lazy swats—yet each one probed a soft spot in Jared's divine soul, a hairline crack in the law weave he relied on for balance.

Boom!

The next collision rattled the heavens. Jared's Five Elements Sword Domain shuddered like stained glass struck by a war-hammer, its multicolored lattice veining with spider cracks that promised to burst at any second.

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A shaft of icy, corrosive intent speared through the shield of soul energy around him and plunged straight into his consciousness field. Pain flared like molten needles behind his eyes, forcing him back several hundred yards. His face blanched.

"H-How can this be?"

Jared reeled. Even the ancient Hydra power coiling through his veins could not fully block a soul energy honed to such terrifying purity.

"Hehehe... Frightened now, boy?" Soul Devourer's laugh scraped the air like rusted chains. "Your little Heavenly Laws are clever, your Power of Immortals novel-but in the face of absolute power and a gulf of realm, they're just pretty fireworks. I've devoured more so-called prodigies than you've bothered to count."

Jared clenched his jaw until it creaked, refusing to bow. He flung out his hand and summoned the battered Demon Seal Tower once more. "Demon Seal Tower, suppression!"

The bronze tower rocketed forward, spilling a cataract of pristine silver light that crashed down over Soul Devourer like a waterfall of dawn.

A flicker of caution crossed the specter's eyes, but it was swallowed by feral delight. "If the tower were whole, perhaps I'd yield. As it stands... break for me!"

He marshaled a mountain of soul energy, shaping it into a night-black claw large enough to eclipse the tower's glow. The talons stabbed straight into the falling curtain of light.

Light and darkness scraped together, filling the sky with a sound that set teeth on edge. The tower's radiance flickered, dimmed, then steadied, but Soul Devourer's pressure kept climbing, threatening to smother its brilliance entirely.

"Time Acceleration, slash!"

Jared bent the Heavenly Law around himself, bursting sideways in a blur. One heartbeat later, he stood at Soul Devourer's flank, Dragonslayer Sword blazing with killing intent as he poured every shred of strength into a single stroke.

Yet the Soul Devourer twisted at an impossible angle, as though joints meant for humans had been replaced with liquid shadow. The sword missed the core by inches. In the same breath, a needle-fine soul spike drifted out of the darkness and arrowed toward Jared's brow—silent, merciless, and perfectly aimed.

Jared's eyes flared wide. He flung himself sideways, yet the black radiance still grazed his shoulder, hot as molten glass.

A moment later, pain knifed straight into his soul—white-hot, burrowing—and the left half of his body went numb as though a piece of his divine soul had been torn away.

A guttural groan escaped him. Cold sweat beaded along his brow, collecting at his temple and slipping down the curve of his jaw.

The speed and Heavenly Law he normally flaunted now felt sluggish, dulled, almost laughable before this enemy.

"Mr. Chance!"

Coall and Cyanna started forward, faces drawn tight with alarm, instinct begging them to shield their commander.

"No one move!"

Gritting his teeth, Jared barked the order. Pride forbade him from letting his people witness how close he stood to collapse.

He drew a breath so deep it rattled inside fractured ribs, forced his shredded soul to knit for an instant and a manic spark ignited behind his eyes. Old mutt—take my final

stroke! Golden Tome, lend

me your resonance!"

Deep within his consciousness field, the Golden Tome stirred. A nearly imperceptible thread of ultimate energy melody laced itself into his sword intent.

It was one of the secrets he had never dared reveal until now.

Since the tome had first awakened, he had learned to tease out slivers of its might.

Yet he still could not draw upon its full majesty.

His blade flashed. Wind and cloud recoiled as though the heavens themselves blinked.

A sound like creation's first chord

reverberated through the abyss. The

sword fight grew solemn, vast,

carrying judgment and an end

cleaved toward the Soul Devourer.

For the first time, the Soul Devourer's ghastly features tightened with genuine concern.

"Interesting... yet far from enough. Ten-Thousand-Soul Devourer!"

His roar rang out, and every resentful spirit in the Soulgrave Abyss seemed to answer, surging into his phantom body until his aura swelled monstrously.

He expanded into a sky-blotting demon silhouette, jaws yawning wide enough to swallow stars, and snapped straight at the ultimate energy-infused sword light.

A detonation ripped through the abyss-too vast for mortal words.

At the crater's heart, the blast shredded space itself. Stone ripped apart, the ground split, and rivers of blood reversed their flow into the yawning dark.

An irresistible force slammed into Jared. Dragonslayer Sword nearly flew from his grasp as he was hurled back like a severed kite, a ribbon of crimson tracing his arc.

He crashed among jagged boulders. Bones snapped, organs shifted, and his soul rang as though struck by an iron bell. Darkness pulsed at the edges of his vision.

Across the gulf, the demon shadow dimmed, emitting a pained screech. The cut had wounded it, but nowhere near enough to break it.

A Warrior Undefeatable

Soul Devourer re-knitted his vaporous form, a midnight silhouette floating over the shattered earth. His gaze settled on Jared, who was still struggling in the distance, and his voice coiled out like a razor. "That was your ultimate strike? Pathetic. It did not even tickle me."

Jared dropped to one knee. The sword in his fist became a crutch, its tip gouging a trembling groove while he hauled air into bruised lungs. Sweat and blood blurred together on his face, disbelief widening his eyes.

How can this be? I have thrown every hidden card, even tapped the very cadence of ultimate energy, and still cannot touch his core. A moment ago, I felt unstoppable—certain I could crush that ancient cur with one squeeze. Reality lands like ice water, dousing every shred of swagger. Did I level the entire Ninefold Heaven only because the adversaries were weak? Up against a monster that survived from ancient times, my so-called power is laughable—and he has not even finished rebuilding his physical body.

Soul Devourer watched Jared's spiraling despair and drank it in. "Now you see the gulf between us," he purred. "Kneel, beg, gift me your soul and that Demon Seal Tower. Perhaps I shall grant you a swift death."

Jared lifted his head and swiped the blood from his mouth. Shock still lingered, but something feral now burned behind it—a cornered wolf's glare that knew solo heroics were done.

"Beg? In your dreams," he snarled, forcing his body upright in one convulsive surge.

He whirled toward the restless Draconian lines behind him. "Coall! Cyanna! Quit spectating-move! We end this mangy relic together. Tear him apart!"

Honor, duels, the pretense of fairness—rubbish when life balanced on a blade's edge. All Jared wanted now was Soul Devourer's annihilation.

"Roar! Brothers, carve up that antique and avenge Mr. Chance!" Coall's bass thundered across the field.

First into the fray, the black-scaled giant erupted with a roar that cracked the very sky.

"Form the Myriad Godslayer Formation!" Cyanna's crisp command sliced through the troop. Draconian soldiers snapped into motion.

Hundreds of throats unleashed a cataclysmic dragon chant. Their killing auras fused, knitting into a single colossal energy dragon that barreled forward, intent on pulverizing all in its path.

"Ants remain ants," Soul Devourer hissed. "If you crave death, I shall oblige."

With a contemptuous snort, he swelled, drawing the very marrow of the Soulgrave Abyss into himself. Winds howled as his vast soul collided head-on with the charging Draconians.

Coall, long past patience, met the impact with another roar that shattered what little still stood of the surrounding void.

With a thunderous rush, the obsidian

dragon hurled itself through the murk of Soulgrave Abyss. Clad in roiling murderous qi, its

mountainous bulk looked like range of burning black peaks

crashing forward in a single

unstoppable tide.

"Myriad Godslayer Formation—rise!" Cyanna cried, her voice as cold and sharp as winter iron.

At once a pillar of emerald light burst from her—pure dragon aura made visible— spearing into the clouds to mark the heart of the formation.

Hundreds of Draconian beasts

answered her call. No longer circling at random, they wheeled along an ancient pattern, their roars folding into a single chord while rivers of dragon essence fused into the newborn array.

An apparition took shape overhead a five-clawed golden dragon several times larger than Coall's true body, sculpted entirely from condensed power yet gleaming as though forged of living metal.

Every scale shone like hammered gold. Its eyes burned twin suns, and the pressure of its presence alone drained all color from sky and earth.

This was the Draconians' oldest war array—a killing engine that gathered the might of a legion into one sovereign beast.

The manifestation bellowed—a primeval roar dredged from the dawn of creation.

Its titanic claw tore open the air, scattering laws of reality like sand, and raked straight for Soul Devourer.

Where that claw passed, space cracked like brittle glass, exposing a hurricane of black void currents behind the shattered pane.

"Parlor tricks! Ten-Thousand Soul Banner—appear!" Soul Devourer spat, the first hint of caution sharpening his tone.

No longer mocking, he loosed a shriek that made the abyss vibrate.

From deep within his spectral mass surged a banner blacker than midnight. On its surface, billions of anguished shades writhed and wailed, clawing at the silk as though it were the walls of hell.

A Warrior Undefeatable

The soul banners caught the wind and swelled to a thousand-foot sheet. One ripple, and an unending flood of ashen vengeful spirits poured out like a dam burst, filling the sky with a river of hate.

Denser and fiercer than any specters birthed from the bloody sea below, they knitted themselves into a cyclone of sheer soul-force and slammed into the golden dragon's claw.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The collision thundered louder than worlds colliding.

Two powers capable of unmaking continents crashed head-on, each refusing to yield an inch.

For a heartbeat, it looked as if the end of Soulgrave Abyss had come.

A globe of annihilating force expanded outward, grinding jagged stone ridges to dust and gouging the blackened floor dozens of yards lower.

Even space buckled-hair-fine fissures of spatial rifts forked like ebony lightning, flaring and vanishing before the eye could follow.

The golden dragon let out a wounded scream. The massive claw, woven from the strength of hundreds of Draconians, was eaten away-nearly half its radiant talons dissolved by that soul-storm.

Yet swaths of the vengeful spirit horde evaporated under the claw's blazing, positive energy, purified in great sizzling swirls.

The clash ended in a deadlock-neither side able to dominate, both forced back on trembling currents of power.

"How... How is that possible?"

From a ledge cloaked in drifting ash, Jared felt his pulse slam against his ribs. He had watched the Ten-Thousand-Dragon Godslayer Array tear seasoned immortal realm cultivators to mist, yet that impossible wall of force was now held at bay by one figure—Soul Devourer-alone. The revelation felt like a fist of ice closing around Jared's throat.

Just how strong is this monster?

"Don't let up-pour everything in! Wear him down and break him!" Cyanna shouted, blood streaking the corner of her mouth, yet fire blazed in her storm-green eyes.

Pain lanced through Cyanna's veins with every glyph she forced to burn, but she still drove the array harder. Above her, the golden energy dragon roared back to life. Its tail-broad as a city street-cracked through the clouds like a primordial scourge, whipping storms into spirals as it lashed toward Soul Devourer.

The dragon's jaws yawned wide. From that molten throat erupted a column of searing gold, a river of stellar fire more than three hundred feet across that spilled downward like an overturned galaxy.

"Keh-keh-excellent! Then let the heavens taste oblivion. Soul Devourer World- Bite!" Soul Devourer rasped, his laugh scraping across the battlefield like rusted chains.

The sable banner in his grasp

writhed. Soul Devourer snapped it in a vicious arc, and a tide of wailing sake, spirits flooded free. Instead of mindless skirmishers, they

fused-bone to bone, hate to vel.ne

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hate-until nine colossal

specter-dragons coiled beside their master, each one as large as the golden energy dragon itself. Their bodies were sculpted from the purest malice Scales glimmer like oil-slick midnight, talons curved like scimitars, and from hollow eye sockets burned emerald hellfire.

Though their throats made no

sound, the shriek of their souls thrashed the air as they charged the gilded behemoth.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Ten titans collided above Soulgrave Abyss, ripping open night itself. Claws shredded scales, torrents of energy detonated like thunderheads, and invisible currents of soul-

venom gnawed at every fragment of light. Pure yang draconic fire clashed with the absolute negative energy

vengeful spirits. Each element devoured the other, grinding the very laws of creation into a raging, whirling meat-grinder of cosmic force.

Coall chose a different hunt. Forgoing the array's rhythm, the black-scaled dragon relied on brute muscle and battlefield instinct, darting through the chaos like a midnight dagger. He circled Soul Devourer's true spirit form, striking in blur-fast ambushes and vanishing before retaliation could catch him.

"Mangy relic—eat my claws!" he bellowed, voice rumbling like boulders down a gorge.

Seizing a sliver of opening, Coall folded his serpentine bulk with impossible grace, blinking into existence behind Soul Devourer's exposed flank. Black light condensed over his talons; space itself split as those razors hurled toward the spirit core pulsing at the lich-lord's spine.

"Hmph—ignorant worm," Soul Devourer hissed, refusing even to glance backward.

A mere thought from the necromancer birthed a storm of midnight shields, each forged from condensed soul energy.

Screeeeech!

Coall's talons scraped the barrier, sparks scattering like meteors while metal-on-stone shrieks split the air. Hairline fractures zigzagged across the shields but held.

A retaliatory chill—vicious, invasive—snaked up through Coall's forearm, stabbing lightning-cold needles straight into marrow and mind. His massive frame jerked, a strangled roar of pain clawing free of his throat as the venomous backlash tried to freeze even a dragon's heart.

"He slashed at the air, yet a film of midnight ice suddenly glazed the great black claw. The frost did not merely numb flesh—it drove

splinters of agony straight into

dragon's soul forging his colossal body to stall. Soul-freeze?" Coall's roar cracked out, part disbelief, part rage, icicles already hanging from his fangs.

It was the first time the ancient drake had faced an attack that ignored his iron hide and struck the spirit chained within.

A Warrior Undefeatable

"Begone!" the Soul Devourer snarled. With a lazy flick of one skeletal wrist, an obsidian soul spear congealed-dense as reality, honed to pierce creation itself. It shrieked across the void, aimed dead at Coall's skull.

The dragon whipped his serpentine body aside. Even so, the spear grazed his neck, shaving off a sheet of gun-metal scales. A gash to the bone yawned open, and black vapor rose to gnaw at the spirit beneath.

"Coall!" Jared cried, the name tearing from his throat.

Pain lanced through Jared-mind and sinew aflame-yet he forced himself into the air, wings of raw energy sputtering behind him. He understood one truth with brutal clarity. They could not survive a war of attrition.

The Draconian army was mighty, yes, but the Soul Devourer had lived through forgotten epochs and now fought in a citadel soaked with his own power. Here, his soul energy seemed endless, his tricks limitless. If the battle dragged on, only the Draconians would die.

Jared had to break the rhythm-now.

"Demon Seal Tower-seal him!" he shouted. Ignoring the taste of blood, Jared flooded the tiny tower in his palm with torrents of chaotic Power of Immortals.

The tower spun, ballooning until it loomed over him. From its base poured cleansing light and a brutal suction meant to smother Soul Devourer's power and grant the dragon a single desperate breath.

"Annoying trinket! Shatter!" Soul Devourer hissed. He split a sliver of will, raised the soul banners, and sent a column of compressed wailing spirits-thick as a fortress tower-slamming into the tower.

Dang!

The impact rang like a cathedral bell struck by lightning. Light guttered; hairline cracks crawled across bronze flanks now dim and trembling.

Agony ricocheted through Jared's link to the artifact. He spat blood, and the sky lurched as his body nearly dropped from the air.

"Mr. Chance!" Cyanna screamed. Her formation faltered, runes flickering like candles in a sudden gale.

That single, stuttering heartbeat was all the Soul Devourer needed-and he saw it.

"Now! Netherworld Soul-Devouring Curse!" he roared. Nine shadow-drakes-each forged from bottomless resentment-abandoned their clash with the golden energy dragons and whipped toward Jared in a black, spiraling tide.

The wraith drake nearest the Golden Dragon's burning talons convulsed midflight. A heartbeat later, two more followed, banking hard and letting the dragon's fire claw rents the size of canyons across their scale-less hides. Bleeding shadows instead of blood, the trio hurled themselves toward the spell-core-the glittering eye of the formation where Cyanna and the other Draconian champions hovered in tight, disciplined ranks.

High above them, Soul Devourer spread his spectral arms. Lines of black light folded between his fingers, knotting into a sigil so malicious it seemed to eat the color out of the sky.

An inaudible ripple-cold, invisible, and all-pervading-rolled outward like rings through dark water, saturating the suicide-diving drakes and the formation's heart with a vis curse older than language.

"Fall back—reform the array, now!" Cyanna's voice cracked as she felt that venomous ripple brush the very root of her soul.

Her emerald aura stuttered. Even her dragon-queen composure faltered as she tried to redirect the ranks.

Too late.

"Shatter." Soul Devourer breathed the single word, colder than the void itself.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Three wraith drakes detonated beside the array's core, flowering into black suns whose expanding coronas were equal parts raw energy and curse-forged soulfire.

Blood-thick, incandescent, Incandescent,

unmistakably draconic-erupted

from Cyanna's lips and from a dozen lesser warriors nearby. The moment it cleared their throats, the curse consumed the vital essence inside, turning crimson to ash. Her once regal dragon aura shredded like leaves in a gale. Face bleached bone-white, Cyanna spiraled toward the ground, her life-force guttering.

Above her the majestic Golden Dragon avatar gave a mourning roar. Light bled from its scales, then the

entire gargantuan shape went translucent, scattered, and died in a silent shower of golden sparks.

Hundreds of Draconian soldiers holding the spell-matrix screamed as backlash ripped through their channels. Scales cracked, horns snapped, and they tumbled from the sky like broken meteors.

"Cyanna!" Jared howled, lurching forward, desperate to catch her but his own wounds dragged at him, slowing his reach by a fatal fraction.

Pain lanced through his ribs; the world lurched out of focus, forcing him to one knee while she fell.

"Pathetic," Soul Devourer cackled, the sound a rusted hinge on a crypt door. Even dimmed by the outburst, his presence blotted out the sky.

His gaze swept the ruined Draconian lines, then fastened on Jared, who was struggling merely to breathe.

"Your turn, whelp. Watch every last shield you hide behind die screaming, and know I am the hand that ends them."

The ten thousand soul banners whipped overhead, releasing a starving storm of vengeful spirits that dove for the wounded Draconians on the ground.

Soul Devourer himself blurred into a twisting shadow, murder pouring from every contour as he streaked straight for Jared.

He meant to crush the young man's soul with his own hands and savor the shatter.

A Warrior Undefeatable

"Protect Mr. Chance!" Despite ribs jutting and scales split, Coall lurched forward again, roaring as his massive, night-colored body became a living bulwark before Jared.

The few Draconians still able to move beat broken wings, dragging themselves into the air to weave one last, trembling wall around their leader.

Yet without the strength of their battle array, each dragon stood fragile as glass before the Soul Devourer.

"Out of my way." The Soul Devourer's voice cracked like frozen steel.

A careless sweep of his hand released a soul-quake; invisible force hit the onrushing dragons like cosmic hammers, flinging them howling into the dark, their soul-lights guttering out.

Coall spat searing dragonfire, but the specter dispersed it, then conjured a colossal hand of condensed soul energy that came crashing onto the dragon's skull.

Boom!

The impact shook the plain.

The skull that had shrugged off blades and fire finally cracked; Coall's scream split the night while his titanic body plummeted like a meteor, punching a crater into the earth and vanishing beneath choking dust.

"Coall!" Jared's cry tore from his throat, raw and desperate.

Watching his guardian fall for him ripped Jared open; agony and fury rose like wildfire, threatening to consume what remained of his reason.

He hated his own helplessness and his blind pride.

If I had not insisted on a solo duel-had not underestimated the horror standing before him-would the night have bled this way?

That earlier surge of invincibility now mocked him, a hollow joke smashed by reality's fist.

There was always someone stronger, always a higher sky, and he was paying for his youth and arrogance in blood.

Soul Devourer drifted closer; the chill of its killing intent seemed to freeze Jared's blood and spirit alike.

He stared at that face forged from spite, at the emerald flames dancing in its eyes, and felt despair press on his chest like a mountain.

Am I truly going to die here? No! I cannot die. Sylvia is waiting, the Heaven Gate Sect has only just risen, and the Vermilion Demon Lord has barely reclaimed his flesh-my work has only begun.

A savage instinct to live surged; Jared squeezed the last drop of chaotic energy from his battered core and even set his wounded soul ablaze.

The Dragonslayer shrieked in his grip; five-element light, ripples of space-time, and a barely perceptible echo of mystical energy the forced themselves into a single, blazing edge.

This would be his final strike—reckless, delirious, and utterly unhinged.

"Soul Devourer, you mangy cur! I'm dragging you down to hell with me!"

Jared's eyes burned a violent crimson. Gripping Dragonslayer, he flung himself toward the looming Soul Devourer like a moth plunging into living fire.

"A useless death-throe," Soul Devourer scoffed.

Deep inside his spectral core, a pinprick of bottomless darkness ignited—the very heart of his essence—ready to snuff out Jared's soul forever.

Their final collision hovered on the brink of eruption, tension screaming in the air. And then, at the razor-edge of that instant, the impossible happened.

Bzzzz!

The entire Soulgrave Abyss convulsed without warning, a quake that rattled bone and thought alike.

This tremor did not come from their clash but from the very marrow of the realm itself.

Above the abyss' blood-red sky, a monstrous rift tore open from horizon to horizon. Beyond was no void only atrocean of glittering, imperial starlight.

From that celestial sea, a pillar of pristine, sanctified luminescence—an avalanche of life and purification—plunged like the Milky Way in freefall.

It ignored distance, spearing straight through the abyssal walls to strike the Soul Devourer a heartbeat before he met Jared's blade.

"Aaaah—Starry... Purification... Light? No-NO!"

His shriek sliced the dark—a sound born of terror far worse than death itself.

The specter's once-solid form boiled, melted, then vaporized, the agony of soul-level annihilation dwarfing any mortal wound a thousandfold.

The sudden miracle arrested Jared mid-charge. He skidded to a halt, head snapping upward, disbelief widening his eyes.

He stared at the descending
column—at once familiar, yet
foreign and at the Soul Devourer
inside thinning to transparency
before his gaze. His mind went stunningly blank.
What in all realms is this? Who could wield such power? Why intervene now, at my
bleakest hour?

A Warrior Undefeatable

"H-him? How-how can he be here? No... Impossible!"

Despair quaked through the Soul Devourer's voice, as though he had glimpsed a fate crueler than death itself.

Jared stood slack-jawed, blood dripping from rents in his armor as the impossible turnaround hit him. One heartbeat ago, he had braced for oblivion; now the shock of survival turned his legs to water, and he swayed in the sulfur-tinged gloom. Gritting his teeth, he forced ruined muscles to obey, then lifted his chin toward the jagged tear still hanging in the sky. Beyond that ragged wound stretched a boundless sweep of night—an ocean of constellations so bright they seemed close enough to pluck from the dark.

Within that cosmic surf, a shape began to gather—hulking, indistinct, yet unmistakably regal. It was wrought entirely of cold starlight, and currents of ancient Heavenly Law streamed around it like luminous rivers, veiling every feature but hinting at power older than mountains.

The moment that figure solidified, a hush rippled through Soulgrave Abyss. Even the frenzied wraiths shrank back, clawing at the air as if to hide from something that weighed directly on the marrow of existence.

That aura—Fire Spirit Lord!

The recognition struck Jared like a thunderclap. Relief and wonder tangled with raw exhaustion; he had never imagined the celestial sovereign would intervene twice on his behalf.

A voice followed, mild yet carrying absolute sovereignty, drifting down from that star-forged colossus and thundering across the abyss until every cliff wall rang like a gong.

"Soul Devourer, you have defied the Heavenly Law-stealing souls, shattering mortal order, and daring to consume the child of destiny. Your crimes demand eradication."

The judgment sounded calm, but each word was formed of pure law. They hammered into the ragged remnant of the Soul Devourer's spirit, making that once-towering tyrant convulse as though chained to an invisible rack.

"No-mercy, my lord! I repent! I will endure any punishment-only spare me!" The Soul Devourer's shriek cracked into pitiful sobs, pride gone, dignity discarded.

He prostrated himself, a ruined shade pounding its forehead against the spectral floor, looking less like a monarch of terror and more like a stray cur smitten by lightning. Starfire warped around the cringing spirit, stretching him into grotesque shapes before snapping back, as if the cosmos itself mocked his abasement.

The creature knew the truth every onlooker now breathed he could no more resist the Fire Spirit Lord than a candle can outshine the sun.

Watching the once-invincible Soul Devourer grovel, Jared felt the pressure of helpless rage he had swallowed moments earlier ignite into savage delight.

He straightened, ignoring torn sinews and the blood soaking his robes. A familiar crooked grin-equal parts pain and defiance-spread across his face, and he let his words fly like barbed arrows.

"Well, well-look who's whining now! Weren't you the almighty Soul Devourer, barking about ripping my spirit out and roasting it for ten thousand years? Where's all that bravado? What happened to calling

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us worms and maggots? Why are you shaking so hard? Careful, or that

excuse for a soul will flutter

apart like a shredded rag the moment a breeze rolls through. Come on, show the Fire Spirit Lord that big bad temper of yours! Oh, right-you only puff up when the targets are ants, but the second a real power arrives, you fold faster than a lame shrimp. Begging for mercy now? Too late! A scum-stacked fiend like you deserves a soul-lantern, not a second chance-let the Fire Spirit Lord hang you up and keep the flame on for a full millennium!"

The tirade poured from Jared in a torrent, each insult fueled by the pain of shattered bones, the sight of fallen comrades, and the wild gratitude of still being alive.

Every syllable hit its target. Soul Devourer's incorporeal form quivered, the sickly green ghostfire of his essence sputtering like a torch in a hurricane.

One heartbeat more, and that fury would surely explode-but trapped beneath the judgment of the heavens, there was nowhere left for his rage to go. Blanketed by the blinding column of starlit purification and by the boundless majesty of the Fire Spirit Lord towering overhead-Soul Devourer could only press his spectral forehead against the dust. Not a single whimper, let alone a protest, dared slip from that quivering phantom throat. Deep inside, however, his hatred for Jared swelled like a poisoned tide.

Even if every drop from the Netherworld Abyss were mine to wield, it still would not scour this humiliation from my soul.

Down in the blasted pit, Coall raised his battered head. Blood streamed between his fangs while a crooked grin tugged at the torn edges of his lips. He meant to laugh, but the sound snagged on pain-only a rasping "huh-huh" leaked out. All around him, other injured Draconians managed weary nods of vindication. Jared's tongue, they

decided, was sharper than any blade-each word had sliced straight through the Soul Devourer's pride.

High above, the blurred silhouette of the Fire Spirit Lord showed no sign of meddling in Jared's gutter-born tirade. Instead, the cosmic figure spoke again—voice calm as eternal flame—delivering final judgment upon the trembling Soul Devourer.

"Incorrigible and unforgiven. In the name of the stars—be purified."

At that decree, the pillar of stellar fire

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flared white-hot, its core tightening until it looked forged of diamond light. Purifying power swelled tenfold maybe more-an avalanche of holiness crashing downward. Soul Devourer released one last scream so drenched in despair it curdled the air. His shadowy body

shrank like rce hurled into molten

steel, thinning, paling-about to

dissolve into nothing at all.

Across the battlefield, every chest loosened at once. The long, brutal struggle was at last sliding toward an unexpected yet welcome close.

Yet just as relief began to bloom-Boom!

Beside the first tear in the sky above Soulgrave Abyss, a second rift ripped open without warning. From its jagged mouth spewed roaring black-fire, hotter than volcanic glass and wilder than a storm at sea.

Tsunami-like pressure erupted outward, its violent heat smothering the sanctity of the starlight in a heartbeat, replacing holiness with raw, ruinous chaos.

A Warrior Undefeatable

"Ha-ha-ha-ha! Fire Spirit fossil, bullying a half-dead phantom proves nothing. Face me, the demon lord!" The laughter rolled like thunder laced with inferno.

A mountainous hand-forged entirely from pitch-black flame-lunged from the rift and clamped around the descending column of starlight as if seizing prey.

"Fire Demon Lord?" The Fire Spirit Lord's voice, for the first time, betrayed a note of stern fury.

Flame-wrought fingers collided with cosmic light—no deafening blast followed, only the hiss of two absolute laws gnawing at one another. Starlight tried to cleanse the demon flame; the demon flame strove to consume the starfire. For a breathless span, neither side yielded, deadlocked in silent annihilation.

Jared watched the Fire Demon Lord's arrival, brow knotting tight.

For crying out loud—why does that walking bonfire always pick my battles to crash?

Back in the cataclysm of level six, the Fire Demon Lord had appeared from nowhere, ripping the Soul Devourer out of the Fire Spirit Lord's grasp.

Now, just as starlight was about to erase the fiend forever, that same blazing tyrant tore the heavens open once more.

Within the single heartbeat of stunned silence, the Soul Devourer's last shred of essence—thin as a needle, black as midnight—shrieked like a cornered beast. It wriggled free of the star-forged shackles, then shot downward in a hair-fine streak and vanished into the boiling sea of blood below, leaving only echoing terror behind.

"Ha-ha-ha! I live—I live! Fire Spirit Lord! Jared Chance! You crawling Draconians! Mark my words when I return, you will repay this humiliation a hundredfold!" Soul Devourer howled from the depths, its voice bubbling up through the crimson waves like a curse.

Hope, so recently kindled in Jared and the Draconian army, guttered out in a single icy gust. The future that had seemed within reach was stomped flat beneath the returning tread of the Fire Demon Lord.

High above the battlefield, fury blazed across the Fire Spirit Lord's starlit visage. "Fire Demon Lord—your meddling ends now!" His words rang out, cold enough to freeze suns.

From the ragged wound in space, the Fire Demon Lord's voice rolled forth, molten with contempt. "Spare me the speeches, old star-keeper. I've long hungered to test your so-called Cosmic Purifying Flame. Dare you meet me beyond the heavens?"

"Name the place," the Fire Spirit Lord replied three calm words that cracked like thunder.

Two supreme auras locked, the universe itself shivering beneath their gaze. The pillar of starlight folded inward. The colossal hand of black flame clenched and withdrew. In silent agreement, one figure blazed like a silver river, the other like a charred sun. Together they ripped through the Ninth Heaven's wall and streaked into the uncharted dark, shifting the war to realms unseen.

They had arrived like passing storms and vanished just as abruptly—celestial titans who treated worlds as casual chessboards.

Soulgrave Abyss fell mute again, its air thick with iron gloom. Only Jared, the battered Draconian army, the unseen remnants of the Soul Devourer, and a slowly healing rift remained.

Despair that arrives after hope is the heaviest stone a heart can bear.

Jared scanned the suddenly quiet chasm, every breath rasping against cracked ribs while his spirit flickered like a dying lamp. Around him, comrades bled and sagged, and yet a bitter smile still tugged at his lips.

"Fire Demon Lord, you flaming bastard! The moment I have the strength, you're the first name on my list!" Jared rasped, forcing the threat past torn lungs and into the echoing dark.

"Mr. Chance, what do we do now?"

Coall's broad shadow fell across Jared's armor as he turned, worry sharpening the lines around his eyes. A single question left his mouth, low and gravelly, yet brimming with unspoken urgency that seemed to echo against the war-scarred stones.

"We head back to Nethergate Sect," Jared answered, resolve tempered by fatigue. "When Mr. Swanson and the others heal, we'll return and make Soul Devourer pay. Right now, just the two of us and the other candidates are nowhere near his level."

"Understood." Coall dipped his head once, the gesture as solid and weighty as an iron gate slamming shut.

The brash confidence Jared had

flaunted on arrival lay in ruins. One strike from Soul Devourer had shattered it, hurling him back into harsh reality. Yes, he had marched a Draconian army across level nine, yet before a true titan he remained insignificant—a child swinging wooden swords at thunder.

He had even dreamed of storming level thirty-six.

What a fool I was. An utter fool.

Determination, stripped of arrogance, crystallized. He had to return to Nethergate Sect and forge greater strength, or he would never survive another clash with Soul Devourer—let alone challenge Malevolent Path Hall or survive the higher levels. He had arrived swaggering. He would depart chastened, the tail of his cloak dragging through dust like a beaten banner.

So Jared, bedraggled yet unbowed, led the Draconian army in a ragged arc back toward Nethergate's black peaks, every wingbeat and footstep a quiet vow of redemption.

On arrival, he commandeered every last resource—elixirs, spirit ores, fractured law shards—and vanished into the yawning mouth of Pentacarna Tower, sealing its gates behind him with a clang that rang like final judgment.

A Warrior Undefeatable

Inside the tower, where one outside hour stretched into days, his cultivation turned frenzied. Pills dissolved on his tongue like peppermint, torrents of spiritual veins were

siphoned straight into his core, and relics packed with broken laws cracked apart under sheer absorption.

His body became a bottomless furnace, devouring matter, energy, even the faint shimmer of time itself.

The memory of his crushing defeat lashed him forward. Each imagined swing from Soul Devourer's blade stoked his drive. The illusion that he was already fearsome had been obliterated. In its place burned a lucid, almost desperate hunger for higher cultivation levels.

Moments or perhaps weeks—whirred by in that warped chamber, sand slipping through an unseen cosmic hourglass.

Then, deep in the tower's heart, a roar of power erupted. Ether howled, walls vibrated, and swirling clouds of light spun into a tempest.

Jared's eyes snapped open. A nebula of chaos seemed to flicker in their depths— worlds forming and collapsing in a heartbeat before plunging back into stillness.

His cultivation, once stalled at Human Immortal Realm Level Six, surged a full tier higher—Level Seven, at last.

Although Jared had advanced only one level, the life-and-death struggle against Soul Devourer and the reflective calm that followed inside the tower—had tempered every facet of him. His strength, spiritual perception, and mastery of the Heavenly Law all felt newly forged—layer upon layer, dense and unshakable, as though a blacksmith had folded the same blade a hundred times. He pictured the man he had been mere days earlier. Ten exchanges—no more—and that unseasoned version of himself would crumble beneath the weight of his present blows.

Across the tower's interior, other chambers now rippled with power. Shuddering waves of energy rolled outward, heralding that his companions, too, had reached the end of their secluded trials.

Sylvia was the first to leave her solitary training. The wounds that once scarred her delicate frame had vanished, replaced by an ethereal glow that belonged to the very peak of Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Three. Wisps of pale light threaded through her hair like dawn mist. That radiance curled around her and stretched skyward, linking her breath to the newly restored destiny of the Heaven Gate Sect—an invisible covenant between woman and mountain, past and future.

Moments later, Neville emerged, posture square, aura steady—each breath as deep and measured as a rolling drum. His injuries had heated

so thoroughly they now felt like 19

distant rumors. Zevon followed. The moment he crossed the threshold, the very air thickened. His presence resembled a fathomless ocean at night-dark, endless, impossible to gauge with mortal senses. Power slumbered beneath that surface, larger than before and considerably more dangerous.

When the three saw Jared walk out whole-and stronger-every tight shoulder in the hall finally dropped.

"Jared, are you all right?" Sylvia's quick steps carried her close, sea-glass eyes shining with worry. "Did every wound mend?"

"I promise, I'm fine," Jared answered, warmth blooming behind his smile. "Better than fine, actually came out a touch sharper than I went in."

Zevon's dark gaze drifted over him, curious. "Your gain was substantial," he remarked quietly. "Your foundation feels rock-solid now. Yet I detect a faint restlessness clinging to you—like sparks beneath a kettle lid."

At Zevon's words, Jared finally noticed it—the storage ring at his finger pulsing with agitated beats, broadcasting muffled feelings of grievance and impatience. A thought unlocked the ring's inner world, and its silence broke apart.

"Aaaoo-woo!"

A crimson blur shot out and skidded to a halt against Jared's boots. The small fire unicorn nosed his trouser leg with desperate affection, but its wide, glassy eyes brimmed with reproach. Soft whimpers trembled from its throat-tiny indictments of neglect.

Jared blinked then the truth struck him. The little celestial devourer that once shared the ring's beast chamber had departed alongside the newly restored Vermilion Demon Lord Left alone inside that echoing. space, the unicorn born a herald of joyous flames-had been marooned in dull solitude, its nature stifled.

"A fire unicorn—a fine celestial beast," Neville breathed, wonder widening his eyes.

Zevon crouched, studying the

creature's scarlet scales and

ember-lit mane. "An ancient blessed beast," he murmured. "Its potential is

limitless. Still it's a cub. It needs

copious spirit beasts and rare

treasures to grow. Raise it well, and

someday it will guard you like a blazing shield."

A Warrior Undefeatable

Jared managed a wry smile at the prospect. The path forward suddenly felt both brighter and far more expensive.

Feed a fire unicorn? I can barely marshal enough resources for my own ascension, let alone the Draconian army gulping them down like a desert drinks rain.

Jared crouched. The chambers of the war-torn hall echoed as he stroked the creature's warm, ember-speckled head. "Little one, it isn't that I don't want you," he murmured, voice husky with helpless affection. "we're feeling the pinch too."

The small fire unicorn seemed to understand. It let out a plaintive whimper, then licked the center of Jared's palm—each lap a plea and a promise all at once.

With a soft sigh, the beast sprawled across his boots, eyes half-closed, announcing in stubborn silence that wherever Jared went, it would follow.

Jared's resolve melted. He nudged its fiery horns. "Fine—stay at my side. We'll find what you need on the road. One step at a time."

Zevon adjusted the steel-rimmed spectacles on his angular face. "Mr. Chance, what is our next move?" Every warrior in the room stiffened. They all knew one truth—the threat of Soul Devourer still loomed over the Nine-Heaven realm like a shadow that refused to lift.

Jared rose, eyes igniting with fresh steel. "My strength is restored. We return to the nether sea, pry that mangy cur from his hole, and finish this. Together—no duels, no pride, only decisive force." Heads dipped in grim agreement. Around them, battle lust coalesced like rolling thunder.

After a short respite, Jared, Sylvia, Neville, Zevon, Coall, Cyanna, and the smoldering little unicorn perched on Jared's shoulder surged into the sky—an elite spearpoint aimed straight at the nether sea.

Seasoned now, they pierced the sea's viscous waves and descended into Soulgrave Abyss. But the realm felt hollow. The vast soul-pressure once cast by Soul Devourer had vanished, the crimson heavens fading to a sickly rust.

The air still reeked of iron and grievance, yet without a master's will, the aura drifted, scattered, confused.

Ahead, the throne of stacked skulls still towered—empty.

"Stay sharp-something's off," Neville warned, voice a serrated whisper as his spiritual sense combed every inch of tainted air.

Zevon pinched two fingers together, runes flickering between them. After a tense breath, he exhaled. "No trace of his soul's nascence remains. It appears he has truly fled

A ghostly gleam ignited atop the vacant skull throne, coalescing into a hazy likeness

of Soul Devourer-the room's chill deepened as unfinished hatred took form.

What hovered in the shadows was

no living dragon at all. It was merely a fragment of sentience, a phantom recording etched into the void-thin as smoke, yet sharp enough to slice through every startled breath in the cavern.

"Heh-heh-heh... I knew you'd come back with your men," the echo rasped, the laugh curdling into mockery. "Too bad you are tragically late. I have lounged here for several days, and even this splinter of me has healed. The shallow pond of Level Nine is no longer worthy of a true titan, so I have already soared to level ten. If you possess any courage come find me at the infinite Soul Demon Sect on level ten. If not remain here and shiver until I return in my prime to swallow you-and this entire realm-in one glorious bite."

The arrogant laughter rolled across the vast chasm of Soulgrave Abyss, then guttered out as the spectral image unraveled into fading motes of light.

Those gathered exchanged uneasy looks; color drained from more than one face.

None of them had expected Soul Devourer to be so ruthless—abandoning the lair he had cultivated for years and fleeing straight to level ten the instant danger closed

in.