

A Warrior Undefeatable 5911-5920

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"How arrogant and ignorant beyond measure!" Soul Devourer roared.

Jared's casual scorn had burned away his final thread of restraint; whatever reason he possessed went up in smoke.

For ten millennia, he had roamed unbeaten through the realms-never once had anyone dared humiliate him so.

"Very well," he bellowed, six wings shaking the air. "Let us see how many of my skills your strange domain can quell. Will it shield you from the Ten-Thousand-Soul Devourer, forged from a billion slaughtered souls over ten thousand years?"

All six tattered wings snapped wide instantly. Centuries of hoarded demonic aura erupted, a tidal wave of midnight flame.

His jaws released an ancient incantation, every jagged syllable steeped in venom and curse.

Each word curled the air into tomb-cold wind, and space itself shook with the wails of the restless dead.

"Soul Devour-Ten-Thousand-Soul Devourer!"

Thunder boomed, louder than mountains shattering.

It felt as though the gate to the depths of hell had swung wide.

A flood of half-seen wraiths burst forth—contorted faces, severed limbs, antique garments—black water unleashed from a ruptured dam.

They poured from every pore of Soul Devourer's flesh, then from his yawning maw, spiraling toward Jared in a storm of shrieks.

Some ghosts were armored torsos with no arms, others nothing but screaming heads, yet all converged as one ocean of nightmares.

An odor of raw resentment energy rolled across the scorched landscape—dense and poisonous—bearing the soul energy of a Heavenly Immortal and beyond.

In the blink of an eye, that fury congealed into a sea of pitch-black souls thousands of yards wide.

Waves rose and fell, and billions of wraiths surfaced only to sink, screaming without end.

They tore at one another, yet every fragment of their hunger reached outward, eager to sink its teeth into any living thing nearby.

The blend of perfect spite and absolute death chilled the super-heated abyss until it felt like an icebound purgatory.

This was one of Soul Devourer's true trump cards, a life-bound soul ocean forged over ten millennia of razed cities and murdered kingdoms.

Where that ocean spread, breath and thought alike were silenced; flesh perished, souls vanished.

Now, the inky tide surged toward Jared's modest Chaotic Fire Domain, intent on drowning both the gray field and the man who stood inside it.

Another heartbeat and the hungry dark would have swallowed him whole.

Yet even as that world-ending surf blotted out the horizon, Jared's expression did not change.

He did not even so much as glance at the oncoming sea of souls.

He simply lifted his left hand and pressed his index and middle fingers together—the quiet posture of a sword.

At his fingertips, a dot of crimson-gold light awakened, pure, blistering, sovereign, as though born to burn every stain from creation.

"Earthfire True Flame-Heavenburn," he murmured, as if reciting the simplest fact in the universe.

The abyss answered with a draconic roar that split stone and thought alike.

The pinprick of light detonated.

What burst forth was no ordinary flame but a hundred-yard fire dragon wrought entirely from the purest Earthfire True Flame.

Each gleaming scale caught the crimson-gold radiance and hurled it back in blinding shards. Its head was regal, and its eyes held fires that would never go out.

One majestic cry reverberated through the abyss, carrying righteous energy fierce enough to scour demons from the bones of the world.

Needless to say, Earthfire True Flame-the most supreme positive energy-was the natural bane of Soul-Devouring Technique's ultimate negative energy.

Without hesitation, the fire dragon dived straight into the black ocean of souls.

Hiss!

Steam screamed like molten oil striking snow, like sunrise lancing through the darkest night.

Where the crimson-gold flame passed, the heavy, tar-thick waters vaporized in an instant.

Uncounted wraiths found no time to wail as the blazing positive energy

instantaneously reduced them to curls of pale smoke.

Released at last, they drifted into the heavens, freed forever.

Within the collapsing sea, the scorching dragon carved paths like a red-hot blade

sliding through congealed butter—unstoppable and triumphant.

In the span of no more than two or three heartbeats, the boundless, nightmare-black sea of souls so wide it once seemed to swallow the horizon-shuddered beneath a hundred-yard-long fire dragon.

It speared through the dark sea and branded a yawning void where solid essence had once churned.

That hollow did not stop. It ballooned outward with nightmarish speed, devouring everything its burning jaws could reach.

"N-No! This is impossible!" Soul Devourer shouted.

Fury drained from his face, leaving

only naked dread. He even forgot to hold the sea of souls together,

staring mutely while a lifetime of black sorcery was scrubbed away by scarlet-gold fire.

"Earthfire True Flame... That's Gerald Earthfire's secret technique! H-How are you able to use it? That old geezer is still alive, isn't he? H-He imparted the technique to you, didn't he?"

Jared only tilted his head. The half-smile curling at one corner of his mouth stung Soul Devourer worse than any blade.

An answer came-not in words but in light, as a single beam of sword light split heaven and earth.

Fire still thundered around them when Jared moved. Somewhere between one heartbeat and the next, the Dragonslayer Sword slid into his right hand.

Its mottled gray blade looked plain, almost ancient, yet the instant he raised it, a killing intent-sharp enough to sever fate itself--erupted skyward. "Dragonslayer-Armybreaker!" Jared's shout echoed like rolling steel.

No flourishes. No prelude. Just one brutal, vertical cleave.

A beam of sword energy-only thirty feet long yet forged to perfect density-flashed gold-gray. Withingt churned chaotic gray light, while crimson-gold true Earthfire Frue Flame coiled around its exterior,

forming a blade of gold and ash.

It was the first light of a newborn world, ripping through the last tatters of black mist and ignoring distance itself as it dropped toward Soul Devourer.

Even the superheated space of the Chthonic Abyss could not escape. Where the beam of sword energy passed, it engraved a hair-thin black scar that refused to heal.

It was indescribably fast and ruthless, locked onto the very soul it has set its eyes on.

Cold terror drenched Soul Devourer. Battle instincts honed at the High Immortal Realm screamed of death.

Six wing-like membranes beat frantically, spraying black-red demon light. At the last possible instant, he hurled his body sideways, skidding dozens of yards across empty air.

Swoosh!

The void itself shrieked as the blade tore past. The beam of sword energy skimmed Soul Devourer's shoulder, then carved into the distant rock wall.

There was no thunderous boom, no blazing eruption—only a silence deeper than any tomb.

A single chasm came into being—straight as a ruler, scarcely wider than three feet, yet so unfathomably deep the eye could not find its end.

Its walls were polished to a glassy sheen, as though a divine blade had sliced stone and left a mirror behind.

Without a whisper, the fissure raced across the cliff face, vanishing only when it reached the edge of sight, severing the mountain like a butcher's cleaver. Along its rim, every shard of rock had crystallized, a grotesque beauty born of impossible heat and the razor-keen sword intent that both melted and carved in a single breath.

High above, Soul Devourer recoiled. He had slipped clear of the killing stroke, yet the backwash of Jared's sword energy still grazed the three leathery wings on his

left side.

Tissue that once repelled Heavenly Immortal blows tore apart in an instant, and a palm-sized chunk spiraled away, trailing black-crimson blood.

The gore rained into the magma river below, where it hissed and smoked like acid on ice.

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A guttural roar—part pain, part rage—burst from Soul Devourer's throat.

Behind the emerald glare lurked a wary heaviness, a realization that rattled even a being of his stature.

His gaze locked on Jared—more precisely on the unremarkable ancient sword in Jared's grip and on the strange, pewter-colored domain swirling around the young man like a storm held in chains.

Soul Devourer's voice fell to a serpent's hiss as the earlier thunder drained away, replaced by a lethal calm. "I must admit that you have surprised me. I've underestimated you, Jared. Chaos fused with earth fire, a sword that masks its pedigree you wield curiosities. But if you think such baubles can topple me now that I stand once more in the High Immortal Realm, you are sadly mistaken. My time in the Chthonic Abyss was for more than healing."

Before the last syllable faded, both of his clawed hands wove a labyrinthine sigil— an ancient demon seal throbbing with ill omen.

His jaws stretched unnaturally wide, spilling a shriek so shrill it knifed straight through Jared's soul.

"Earthcore Demonic Flame-heed my command. Rise!"

A thunderous rumble rolled out of the depths, loud enough to shake stray stones free from the cliff face.

Below, the once-sluggish crimson river of magma reared up like a prehistoric beast roused from slumber.

It bellowed, churned, and hurled molten waves against the rock.

From its depths shot columns of tar-thick flame, dark as clotted blood yet blazing with a heat that dwarfed ordinary lava.

Those were Earthcore Demonic Flames, horrors that made even High Immortals blanch.

They carried extreme heat, venom-laden earth fire, and a will devoted to chaos and annihilation-fire that could corrode celestial energy, rot magical items, and burn a soul to ash.

For the moment, however, that murderous sea of flame did not lash out at random.

Under the silent command of the demonic seal branded upon Soul Devourer, the Earthcore Demonic Flames obeyed. Like a hundred rivers abandoning their beds, crimson fire rivers converged, racing toward his shattered, half-ruined body.

Sizzle!

A chorus of sizzling rose-sharp, metallic, and violent enough to set teeth on edge.

The moment flame kissed his black-and-scarlet scales, ancient runes awoke across the armor, glowing a sinister violet beneath the firelight.

Instead of burning him, the dark red blaze seemed relieved, as though it had finally come home. Thread by thread, it seeped between the scales, sinking deeper, blending with the demonic aura coiled inside.

Power met power, and the fusion that followed was terrifying-a marriage of soul-devouring might and bottomless hellfire that made the air itself tremble. "Ugh... Ah!"

The cry ripped from Soul Devourer's lungs, raw and jagged, rolling through the cavern like thunder trapped in a coffin of stone.

His body ballooned beyond control, twisting as the newly thickened scales jutted like obsidian blades.

Black-red deepened to molten crimson, and rivers of magma-like patterns slithered across the armor's surface.

Tattered wings behind him swelled as the demonic flames filled the ruined flesh, mending, enlarging, deforming them into greater horrors.

Meanwhile, their edges burned with tangible dark-crimson fire.

Soul Devourer's aura rocketed skyward as if strapped to a launch vehicle.

In the blink of an eye, he had gone from High Immortal Realm Level One to Level One middle phase, Level One advanced phase, and finally to the top of Level One.

What made it even scarier was that he was just a step away from High Immortal Realm Level Two!

More dreadful still, a newborn miasma spread from him—a hybrid of Soul-Devouring venom and Earthcore Demonic Flame's berserk chaos.

The air reeked of ruin and prophecy.

Far off, Lindsay and Vermilion Demon Lord flinched the instant they sensed it, pain tearing through their divine souls as the latter's demonic techniques faltered.

"Hahaha... You feel it yet, Jared?" Soul Devourer asked, his voice hoarse and layered. "On the bedrock of my Soul-Devouring Technique, have woven the Earthcore Demonic Flame, a blaze that brewed in the abyss for millions of years. ms of years through relentless torment, I have birthed a technique that is mine

alone-Soul-Devouring Demonic

Flame!"

He lifted an arm now wholly dark crimson, the flames licking up to his elbow, claws clenched on empty air.

Even the space in his palm warped beneath the heat.

"This flame carries my demonic technique's soul-corroding hunger and the Earthcore Demonic Flame's world-scorching madness. It will corrode every shred of your celestial energy incinerate your magical items, and roast your very souf. You will writhe in endless torment and

madness until you become nourishment for me-your rightful lord! Jared, do you still think that odd domain and your Earthfire True

Flame can save you?"

For the first time, Jared's expression lost its unruffled calm. A shadow of gravity settled across his brow.

He could sense the Soul-Devouring Demonic Flame now emanating from Soul Devourer.

Its grade and uncanny texture eclipsed the simple demonic force and Earthcore Demonic Flame the fiend had shown earlier—a fusion that had undergone true evolution.

Daunting, yes. Deadly, perhaps. But only that.

The fire glowing in Jared's eyes burned higher, not lower.

It was not fear, but the visceral thrill of meeting an opponent finally worthy of his sword.

Jared rolled the words over his tongue. "Soul-Devouring Demonic Flame?"

Slowly, he lifted Dragonslayer Sword, the blade gleaming as its tip aligned with the storm of aura around Soul Devourer.

A quick flick of his tongue moistened dry lips, and a smile surfaced—equal parts hunger and ice.

"It does sound impressive, but let's see if it pops as easily as every other boast you've made," Jared said, his tone still carrying that infuriating, maddening rockery show me the results of your little experiments in the magma, old geezer-time to find out how much substance they really have. Oh, but you better not disappoint me. I despise nothing more than fools who are all show and no substance."

"You're courting death! I will tear you limb from limb!"

Jared's taunts shattered the last filament of reason inside Soul Devourer. Already riled by the demonic flame, he now knew only the urge to shred the insolent youth. "Soul-Devouring Demonic Flame—Myriad Souls Burn!"

With a furious beat of his six wings, he became a meteor, dragging a long, dark crimson trail of fire behind him.

His speed more than doubled, erasing the distance in a breath. The moment Jared's last word faded, Soul Devourer was already above and to the right, hundreds of feet bridged in an instant.

This time, however, brute force alone would not suffice. Instead of crashing into a reckless melee, Soul Devourer veered and thrust both palms forward with a fierce push.

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Boom!

Endless, dark crimson demonic flames erupted from Soul Devourer's palms.

In midair, the flames twisted and warped, forming tens of thousands of ferocious, burning specters wreathed in dark red fire.

These flaming specters were more solid, more terrifying than the vengeful souls before.

They shrieked, carrying the scorching heat that could burn a soul and the chilling cold that corroded life itself.

From every direction, they surged toward Jared like a torrential storm, each spirit locked onto the man's divine soul.

It was as if they would never rest until they had dragged him into a hell of demonic fire.

Even before the attack reached him, the bizarre sensation-an unnatural mix of extreme heat and soul-freezing cold-already enveloped the space around Jared completely.

He drew a deep breath, his eyes instantly sharpening like a hawk's.

He no longer held back. His chaotic celestial energy surged and roared through his body at unprecedented speed.

The Golden Dragon Bloodline in his elixir field swiftly let out an exalted dragon's roar.

The Earthfire True Scripture had reached the pinnacle of its circulation, and it felt as if a burning sun of crimson-gold raged in his chest.

Three powers, at this moment, were forcibly unified by his will and poured into the Dragonslayer Sword in his hands.

"Chaos as the base, Golden Dragon as the soul, earth fire as the blade... Three extremes as one! Slash!"

With that, the Dragonslayer Sword released a piercing, world-shaking sword cry.

Sword energy, only a few meters wide but condensed beyond description, suddenly erupted.

To everyone's surprise, this sword energy was no longer a single color.

At its core lay a deep gray of primordial chaos, as if containing the raw power of creation itself.

Within the energy beam, the ghostly image of a five-clawed golden dragon coiled and spiraled, issuing a majestic, resounding dragon roar.

It granted unstoppable cutting power and protection that no technique could breach.

On the surface of the sword energy, crimson-gold Earthfire True Flames burned like the most loyal guardians, radiating scorching heat capable of consuming all and purifying evil.

This sword, as it turned out, was the culmination of Jared's three hundred years of training in seclusion, and also the strongest attack he could produce at his current cultivation level.

It was, without a doubt, a perfect unification of skill, strength, will, and all Heavenly Laws.

When the sword struck, even heaven and earth seemed to pale.

The chaotic energy of the abyss froze before this slash.

The sword energy swept through, not with grandiose spectacle, but with an absolute, undeniable force of annihilation.

Hiss!

The sound was no louder than a hot knife through butter, yet as absolute as sunrise.

Legions of soul-eating wraiths, birthed from demonic flames, rushed forward. The instant they touched the tri-colored sword energy, they found no purchase, no fight -only collapse, vapor, and oblivion.

Unslowed, that comet of light ripped across the void, aimed straight at Soul Devourer's body.

At last, terror cracked his mask.

He could not have imagined that one of his mightiest techniques, fused with the demonic flames, would be so effortlessly shattered by Jared.

The instant the sword energy tore toward him, Soul Devourer felt layered forces— chaos, draconic edge, and subterranean fire-stacked like grinding millstones. A chill recognition flickered through his mind: this strike could end him outright.

A roar burst from his throat, half fury, half desperation. "Soul-Devouring Demonic Armor! Protect!"

The dark-crimson scales plating his giant frame flared, each one pulsing with baleful light as demonic power surged to the surface.

A breath later, that power hardened in front of him, shaping itself into a massive shield—a slab of living metal studded with backward barbs, its surface wrapped in roaring black-purple hellfire.

Even as the shield solidified, the demon staggered backward, boots scoring trenches through shattered stone, desperate to steal any distance he could.

Clang!

The sword energy crashed right into the shield. Metal shrieked like torn heaven- steel. Sparks and embers whirled between the clashing lights, strobing the tunnel in blinding flashes.

Yet beneath the clangor rose another sound-thin, despairing, like thousands of ghosts howling the moment cleansing fire erased their sins forever.

Less than a tenth of a heartbeat later, the shield detonated. Shrapnel became shooting stars, then guttered out as the residual sword intent scoured every ember from existence.

Though the sword energy was partially blocked and weakened, its remaining power was still unmatched, streaking past Soul Devourer as he retreated at full speed!

A wet, vicious splatter followed, one that was sharp enough to cut through the echoing boom.

Dark-red demon blood geysered from Soul Devourer's right shoulder, spraying the air with steaming arcs.

His entire arm, together with half the adjoining shoulder, sheared away at the root, pulverized into a drifting mist of gore by the sword energy riding the strike.

That mist lasted an instant. Sword intent spiraled after it like hungry wind, shredding, then vaporizing every crimson mote until nothing remained.

His scream ripped across the cavern. The massive figure pinwheeled backward, slammed into the distant cliff, and left a human-shaped crater veined with spidery fractures.

His aura dimmed violently. Demonic flames licked at the ragged stump, trying to regrow flesh, but gray chaotic threads coiled tighter, eating new tissue the moment it appeared.

Jared, for his part, fared no better.

Even as the sword stroke landed, the maimed fiend had flung a last counterattack.

"Soul-Devouring Demonic Palm!" he roared, voice shredding stone.

A dark red palm imprint, solid and tangible as if it were real, tore through space and slammed into Jared's left chest at the precise

stant when his old strength

faded, and his new power had not yet surged.

Blood sprayed from his lips—an ugly, copper-bright fountain.

Lightning pain exploded through him. Hot blood flooded his mouth and vaporized in the heated air.

The impact catapulted him backward; stone shattered when his body hit, dust pluming outward like dull thunder.

Shredded fabric revealed a charred, fist-shaped hollow that reached bone.

Around the palmprint, demonic flames writhed like maggots on bone, chewing through skin and muscle, clawing for a path into meridians and soul.

Worse still, a venomous, icy soul-gnawing force speared along the wound, racing straight toward his consciousness field.

"Cough, cough..." Harsh hacks tore from his throat, each one spraying crimson foam.

Jared sank to one knee, propping himself up with the Dragonslayer Sword, barely managing to stay on his feet.

He stood there, his complexion

bleached the color of old parchment.

Every cough ripped loose another spray of blood flecked foam, and the agony boring through the left side of his chest nearly stole his sight.

Yet the hand that clutched the sword remained rock-steady.

His gaze-still needle-sharp-sliced through drifting cinders as though they were silk. Inside his chest, chaotic celestial energy vaulted with unprecedented fury, racing toward the ragged wound beneath his left breast where Soul Devouring Demonic Flames gnawed like a starving beast.

His Golden Dragon Bloodline answered, flooding his ruined organs and splintered ribs with torrents of life force energy.

At the same time, Earthfire True Flames swelled outward, incinerating every strand of the invading shadow-soul energy from within.

Jared had not imagined Soul Devourer-freshly risen to Top Level High Immortal Realm Level One-could drive a claw so deep. The miscalculation stung almost more than the wound.

Or perhaps it was because Soul Devourer was a centuries-old demon, so his Top Level High Immortal Realm Level One cultivation level far surpassed that of other cultivators at the same level.

Still, the notion that a mere High Immortal Realm Level One cultivator could scar a Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Three cultivator offended Jared to the bone.

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"Y-You brat..."

Nearly three hundred feet away, Soul Devourer tore himself from the cratered cliff face, the remaining five tattered wings keeping him aloft. Black blood dripped from a severed arm, pattering onto the molten stone below, and his aura was in utter

chaos.

He glared at Jared, emerald eyes swelling with horror, venom-and a thin, reluctant ribbon of terror.

"You... You actually-"

The words rasped across broken fangs, thin and unbelieving.

He had attained Top Level High Immortal Realm Level One!

He had fused Earthcore Demonic Flame and felt his power skyrocket.

His opponent, on the other hand, stood only at Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Three.

By all reason, the duel should have been a slaughter-an instant, effortless execution.

Yet, what was the outcome he was met with?

He paid the price of an arm and half a shoulder just to land a single palm strike on his opponent's chest!

Worse, Jared's eyes still burned, undimmed, invitation shining like cold steel.

Everything Soul Devourer knew of cultivation lay in ruins, every ancient maxim ground to dust.

Jared coughed, fresh blood spattering the scorched earth.

Slowly-inch by stubborn inch-he pushed upright until his spine stood perfectly straight.

He wiped the red smear from his lip; though the gash across his chest gaped and his face blanched, the gleam in his eyes sharpened, laced now with mocking light.

"What's the matter?" Jared asked, his voice hoarse, yet every syllable carried across the ravine. "Are you shocked? Are you finding this hard to swallow?"

A bloody smile tugged at his lips, his eyes full of disdain. "Did you think reaching the High Immortal Realm makes you invincible? You think cultivation level alone determines everything? Soul Devourer, you've lived for tens of thousands of years— what have you done with all that time? You've no grasp of how true power is built. All you do is consume, pillage, and destroy. It may seem fierce, but it's empty at the core, all flash and no substance. My power is chaos, protection, and creation. Its foundation is rock-solid—nothing you, a so-called High Immortal who relies on devouring vengeful souls to get stronger, could ever hope to match."

With every sentence, Soul Devourer's face darkened, shame and hatred thickening until even the sulfur-laden air seemed to curdle.

"You managed to fight me to a stalemate today, not because you are powerful," Jared added as he lifted the tip of his sword until the cold edge pointed straight at Soul Devourer. "It happened only because I have yet to reach my peak. Once I step into the High Immortal Realm, killing you will be as easy as pie."

Soul Devourer trembled so violently that the black-red demonic flames writhing across his skin lost all rhythm. His wings beat once, then shuddered to a stop.

He burned with the urge to charge forward and devour Jared alive, yet the last threads of his sanity and his battered body screamed at him—he could not continue the fight.

This brat's recovery is monstrously fast, and that bizarre power of his suppressed me at every turn. If the fight goes on, I might truly be defeated, wiping out ten thousand years of cultivation in a single moment! I can't let that happen!

"Fine... Fine! You sharp-tongued little b*stard!"

Soul Devourer ground his teeth so hard it was a wonder they didn't shatter, forcing the words through the gaps. "I admit it—I've underestimated you today, causing you to take advantage of a rare opening."

His six wings unfolded in a slow, ragged sweep. With every backward beat, he drifted deeper toward the lightless heart of the Chthonic Abyss, hatred bleeding from his eyes like poison.

"That said, I won't forget what you

did to me, Jared Chance! The

disgrace of this severed arm, the humiliation of this day—I will repay. hundredfold, and even a

thousandfold! When I reach level twelve and reclaim my full might, I will drag you, every soul beside you, and everything you hold dear into endless perdition—forever!"

With that venom spat, the Soul Devourer's six wings snapped. He streaked away as a dim spear of black-crimson light, diving toward the abyss where magma frothed, and sulfurous mist swallowed all color. In the space of a heartbeat, he vanished behind the churning glow.

Jared, however, did not chase. Not because he lacked the will, but because he just couldn't anymore.

As it turned out, he was in no better shape. The Soul-Devouring Demonic Flame palm strike on his left chest still ran rampant, forcing him to pour every ounce of his strength into containing and dispelling it.

Besides, he knew all too well that a High Immortal Realm cultivator bent solely on escape could not be stopped in his current state.

He exhaled a thick, metallic breath. Shoulders slackened, but his gaze remained locked on the darkness where Soul Devourer had fled.

"Jared!"

The next second, Lindsay burst through the scorched haze. Tears streaked charcoal down her cheeks as she caught his sagging frame. "Are you all right? How badly injured are you?"

Her trembling hands fumbled open a crystal vial and pressed Earthfire Pavilion's finest healing pill to his lips.

Vermilion Demon Lord arrived a breath later. His crimson cloak billowed, eyes widening at the sight of the charred wound in Jared's chest and the parchment pallor of the young man's face—a storm of worry, awe, and grudging admiration twisting together.

"Jared, you..." Vermilion shook his head, at a loss for words. "Do you know what you've done? A Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Three

cultivator standing toe-to-toe with

the Top Level High Immortal Realm Level One Soul Devourer and driving him back... If the word spreads, level eleven, and even level twelve, will erupt in chaos!"

Jared swallowed the pill, closed his eyes, and guided the medicine through his meridians. When he

spoke, his voice was thin yet unbreakably steady. "Stop making fun of me, Mr. Vermilion. Without my chaotic celestial energy naturally countering his Soul-Devouring Technique, without the Golden Dragon Bloodline's regenerative power, without the Earthfire True Flame cleansing the demonic flames... I would have fallen long ago. After all, Soul Devourer is a demon whose fearsome reputation has lasted for ten thousand years. He's not to be underestimated."

Jared's stare drifted toward the abyssal deep. "He fled to the lowest reaches of the

Chthonic Abyss. There must lie a hidden rift—or an ancient teleportation array— leading straight to level twelve."

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Lindsay's eyes widened, tears glittering anew. "Does that mean he wants to join forces with Malevolent Path Hall? He did say he's heading for level twelve!"

"Yes. That's most likely," Jared answered, blood still wet on his tongue.

A ragged stab of pain speared his chest, causing him to knit his brows tight. "An old demon like Soul Devourer is good at assessing the situation and acting at the right moment. He's cunning as a fox. He knows he can't remain on level eleven, not when he has both Earthfire Pavilion and me hunting him down. Therefore, his best choice is to join Malevolent Path Hall. It's a fellow demonic faction, strong and actively recruiting powerful cultivators. It'd be the safest refuge for him."

Vermilion Demon Lord's crimson aura dimmed at the edges. "As if dealing with the inscrutable leader of the Malevolent Path Hall wasn't bad enough, we now also have Soul Devourer in the High Immortal Realm... If they fully join forces, the consequences would be unimaginable!"

Jared drew a long breath, forcing the churning blood and the icy bite of demonic flame back into their cages. For an instant, steely resolve flashed across his eyes.

"Whatever comes, we meet it head-on. Brooding helps no one. In any case, our priority now is to find the Jadeheart Marrow and heal your partner. Then we'll make a beeline for level twelve."

With that, Jared lowered his gaze to the ancient map gifted by Gerald, fingertip tracing a nearly invisible vein of ink that revealed a hidden passage.

"We must find Soul Devourer and Malevolent Path Hall and deal with them before they forge a stable alliance," he said firmly. "Otherwise, once they are fully prepared and strike back, wielding the Door of Reincarnation along with the might of two High Immortals, we—and even the entire level eleven—will be doomed."

Jared folded the map and lifted his gaze to the only passable gap ahead. The corridor looked like a crack in the world—a narrow throat of rock plunging into darkness toward the legendary Magma Heart, the sole safe route his chart had promised.

Propped against Lindsay's slender arm, Jared steadied himself. His boots slipped on loose gravel, yet his eyes shone, razor-bright once more. "Let's go. Our goal waits just beyond that shadow," he said, low but unflinching.

Vermilion Demon Lord gave a single heavy nod and stepped forward to lead the way.

Lindsay tightened her hold on Jared's waist, her eyes filled with both worry and unwavering determination.

They left the fading taint of Soul Devourer's demonic aura behind them, drew one deep breath, and slipped through the hidden passage toward their final destination.

Vermilion Demon Lord advanced first. Scarlet demonic aura curled from his shoulders, knitting itself into a solid bulwark around his massive frame.

Each stride landed with deliberate heaviness, proof that every nerve in the demon lord was tuned to danger's highest pitch.

The Chthonic Abyss birthed threats of its own making. Soul Devourer might have fallen, yet the womb that forged him remained far deadlier than any single fiend.

The tunnel sloped downward in a slow coil. With every yard, the heat climbed, turning breath into steam.

Dull crimson walls soon glowed furnace-bright. Pockets of rock softened into glassy half-melted ridges that pulsed with inner fire.

Sulfur and age-old ore stung their noses. Even Jared's celestial energy labored, thick as syrup in the scorched air.

Suddenly, Vermilion Demon Lord stopped and raised one clawed hand. "Array fluctuation ahead," he warned.

Jared closed his eyes, leaning on Lindsay as agony ripped through the wound over his heart. Soul-Devouring Demonic Flames still wrestled his chaotic celestial energy there, and every breath he took felt like a knife was stabbed into him. Despite that, he suppressed the discomfort and let a strand of chaotic energy silently unfurl from his brow.

"It's an ancient restriction, one that's tied to the earth vein," he rasped. "I don't think this is the work of Soul Devourer. It feels more like a natural formation of this place, or a remnant from ancient times."

The passage widened without warning into a cavern nearly a hundred yards across.

At its core, blinding white magma fountained upward, yet seven distinct streams rotated in patient arcs, sketching an immense array across the floor.

Nine obsidian pillars pierced the rim, each etched in warped runes that bled searing light.

Every ember of heat-charged spiritual energy in the cavern bent to that array, weaving a translucent crimson barrier that sealed the path forward.

"It's an Earthfire Spirit-Binding Array," Vermilion Demon Lord muttered, having recognized the formation before them. "And it's an intact ancient version. The formation feeds off the earth's fire veins, allowing to run perpetually. To strike head-on would only set off a volcanic upheaval, engulfing this entire area."

Lindsay's face went pale. "Then what do we do?"

Jared gently pushed her hands away and steadied himself alone.

He drew the Dragonslayer Sword, letting its tip barely touch the ground. A wisp of chaotic celestial energy seeped down the blade into the rock, spreading like a spiderweb.

"Cough, cough..."

He spat a few mouthfuls of black-tinged blood, his complexion paling further, yet his eyes shone with startling clarity. "Every formation has a core. This one is rooted in the earth veins, so its heart must lie at the nexus of the magma flow."

He closed his eyes, focusing, letting the chaotic celestial energy roam through the earth veins and sense the formation.

The Golden Dragon Bloodline whispered within him, providing the last shred of clarity.

Though his activation of the Earthfire True Scripture ran slowly due to his injuries, it resonated subtly with the surrounding earth fire's spiritual energy.

Fifteen minutes later, beads of sweat had gathered along Jared's brow.

Beneath his left collarbone, the imprisoned demonic flames bucked against his forced circulation, dark-red filaments creeping another inch outward, as though eager to pierce the walls of his heart.

Across from him, Lindsay watched, stomach in knots. Her knuckles whitened around her cloak, yet she dared not speak for fear of shattering his fragile focus.

Just then, Jared's eyes snapped open, steely and unblinking. Dragonslayer Sword rose like a verdict, its blade leveled at a seemingly ordinary crystal pillar in the array's northeast corner.

"It's over there," he said, voice rough. "The earth vein beneath that post falters for a heartbeat-proof of a human-made blind spot, the lone living gate through which we can crack this maze."

Vermilion Demon Lord followed the point, eyes narrowing. After a moment's silent sensing, his lips curled. "Very remarkable, Jared. Your understanding of arrays is downright frightening."

"You flatter me, Mr. Vermilion," Jared replied between ragged breaths.

Still gasping, he summoned three pale-blue, ice-attributed array flags from his storage ring-spoils taken from Earthfire Pavilion for moments just like this need you to work with me. Vermilion," he said to the demon lord. "This formation feeds off the fire veins. We have to briefly suppress their flow with

extreme cold before I can break through to its core."

Vermilion Demon Lord nodded, and the crimson demonic aura surrounding him suddenly deepened into a dark red. It was a trace of his Netherchill Aura, hidden within his fundamental demonic technique. Though not his main cultivation, it was perfect for use in this moment.

"Three breaths," Vermilion warned, voice like frost over embers.

"That's enough," Jared shot back as he pulled in one cavernous breath. Chaotic celestial energy surged, and the wound over his heart burst, fresh blood soaking through his tunic, yet he clenched his teeth and stood firm.

With a flick of his wrist, the three flags streaked out like sapphire comets, staking themselves around the pillar so precisely that they formed a flawless equilateral triangle.

A Warrior Undefeatable

"Now!"

With that, Vermilion Demon Lord thrust both hands forward, spell-weaving fingers blurring in fevered succession. A wave of dark-scarlet demonic aura burst from his palms and hardened into three monstrous ice serpents, their scales jagged with murderous frost. They shot downward like comet tails and drove toward the triangle formed by the three array banners, aiming for the very vein beneath the cavern floor.

Boom!

A thunderous detonation followed. Polar cold slammed against molten heat, and the collision screamed like metal dragged across bone. The magma lake convulsed, yet in that instant, the serpents bored into the subterranean meridians and froze the fiery current solid.

The next second, Jared sprang into action.

Instead of using the Dragonslayer Sword, he raised two fingers as a blade, gathering at their tips a thread of graying chaotic sword energy so condensed it looked carved from storm clouds caught at dusk.

His footing wavered like a drunk, yet his speed was spectral. He slipped through the gap at the heart of the three array banners, a ghost of motion even the eye resisted tracking.

Those two fingers touched the base of an iridescent crystal pillar, exactly where its roots anchored into stone.

"Break!"

The single breath of a word drifted out as lightly as falling ash, yet inside the pillar, a latticework of fractures began to proliferate with the haste of winter ice racing across a pond.

Its glowing runes dimmed. One pillar failing triggered the next, until all nine trembled in sympathetic panic. Soon, lines of molten rock on the array map faltered, reversed, and spiraled into chaos.

"Retreat!" Jared hissed the order and wheeled back up the tunnel.

The trio had barely cleared the mouth of the cavern when apocalypse roared behind them. Nine pillars detonated together, uprushing magma forming a crimson geyser that swallowed every trace of stone.

The shockwave should have levelled mountains, but the cramped tunnel throttled its fury, directing most of the violence inward where it imploded upon itself.

When the lava settled and the smoke thinned, the formation was gone. In its place yawned a crater so deep its bottom shimmered with magma trying to crawl home.

At the darkest reach of that pit, a natural staircase glimmered, descending into untouched night.

"Let's go," Jared said as he wiped fresh blood from the corner of his mouth and stepped onto the first basalt tread.

Behind him, Vermilion Demon Lord watched the younger man's swaying yet unbowed back, a knot of emotions flickering across crimson eyes before he followed in silence.

The stairway coiled ever downward, each turn dragging them closer to the planet's molten heart. Worse still, the heat thickened until breathing felt like drinking flame.

Walls had vitrified under ages of furnace wind, becoming mirror-bright glass that distorted their reflections into wandering phantoms.

Sometimes, ancient fossils flashed behind the translucent glaze-creatures no surface scholar had ever named.

One hour later, their path was blocked again.

This time, no man-made array stood in their way, but a barrier forged by nature itself a roaring waterfall of living lava.

Streams of dark-gold lava poured from the vaulted ceiling, spreading into a curtain dozens of yards across, heat shimmering like a killing haze. Beyond that incandescent veil flickered a jade-green glow-the aura of Jadeheart Marrow.

Alas, the lava waterfall was no inert wall as shapes swam across its surface. Countless beasts sculpted from pure fire prowled within the molten sheet. They resembled lizards but bore three heads and six clawed limbs, each body wreathed in blinding white flames.

Every one of those Lava Beasts was a guardian born by the furnace of the world to deny passage to all who dared seek the marrow beyond, and they exuded power equal to the Heavenly Immortal Realm beginner phase.

That said, what made the approach to the falls truly perilous was a buried current of geomantic gravity that pulsed through the stone like a second, darker heartbeat. Step by step, that unseen weight thickened around anyone who dared to venture closer, dragging at flesh and bone until every breath felt shackled by an invisible iron band.

Jared's wounds still throbbed. He suspected that, in his present state, he would not reach even halfway across the glowing torrent before the crushing force snapped his spine and pulped him against the molten wall.

Vermilion Demon Lord inhaled, his chest expanding like a furnace bellows. "I'll lead the way."

Demonic aura surged around him,

layer upon layer, until a snarling crimson armor crusted over his skin. "Conserve your strength, Jared. We still need your chaotic celestial energy to seal off the vein's O sorrosion when it's time to claim the jade marrow."

Jared swallowed pride and offered a

sharp nod. "Those Lava Beasts are wrought from pure earth fire

essence. Their core sits inside the centrabskull. Riding the waterfall's fury they like giants and

strike

regenerate endlessly unless all three fire cores are shattered at the same instant."

Vermilion Demon Lord answered with a hunting cry. Ancient runes flared across the demonic armor, buying him a heartbeat against the mounting gravity. "Understood."

He hurled himself forward, a blazing red meteor that slammed straight into the molten torrent.

A guttural, world-splitting roar thundered from the depths.

Dozens of Lava Beasts erupted, charging as one molten tide.

Demonic aura coiled around Vermilion Demon Lord's arms, solidifying into twin crimson war blades. He swept them left and right in overlapping arcs that painted the air with sizzling crescents.

Where the blades passed, rocky heads toppled. Yet, just as Jared had warned, magma churned at each wound, rebuilding skulls even before the headless bodies struck the ground.

A murderous glint flashed in the demon lord's eyes. "Demonic Flame-Coreburn!" The twin blades burst apart, transforming into hundreds of hair-thin crimson threads that spun outward and drilled with surgical precision into the brow of every beast, targeting the hidden fire cores in all three skulls at once.

A rapid series of muffled pops echoed through the spray.

The Lava Beasts froze, their glow fading. Seconds later, they collapsed into ordinary slag, sliding back into the waterfall like spent embers swept into a forge.

The maneuver demanded near-perfect fire control, and it was clear that Vermilion Demon Lord had revealed his true skill.

However, the torrent birthed more monsters without pause; sever one head and three new bodies burst free.

As the trio pushed deeper, the gravity thickened, and spiderweb fractures began crawling across Vermilion Demon Lord's crimson armor.

Jared saw the fissures spreading and spoke to Lindsay without shifting his gaze from the battle. "Cover me for a while."

With that, he sat down cross-legged, the Dragonslayer Sword laid horizontally across his knees, as his hands formed an ancient, arcane seal.

A single mote of chaotic light ignited between his brows, seeping like quicksilver through every vein. Inside his torn chest, the Soul-Devouring Demonic Flame recoiled, lashing back in dark red tendrils that skittered toward his heart.

With a guttural command, he ground the word through clenched teeth. "Suppress!"

Jared's Golden Dragon Bloodline instantly boiled awake, a muted roar coursing through his meridians and forcing the demonic flames to retreat by half a breath. Seizing the opening, he pushed his chaotic celestial energy to its limits, tuning its nature to pure assimilation.

This was no strike-it was infiltration.

The chaotic celestial energy slid outward, silent as mercury, blending into the surrounding earth vein and mimicking the very breath of the lava fall.

A single misstep would invite earth fire backlash that might finish him for good.

Ten breaths later, Jared's eyes snapped open, blood streaking his lips, yet his voice rang firm. "Seven yards left, three feet behind the fall—there's a gravity node. Smash it now!"

Hemmed in by five gargantuan Lava Beasts, Vermilion Demon Lord

accepted the order without hesitation. He endured two molten blows that shattered half his armor, then hurled himself left, gathered every shred of his demonic power, and hammered his fist into the point Jared had called out.

Crack! Crack!

A crackling like shattering crystal ripped through the air.

The entire lava curtain shivered, its molten torrent spasming as though struck by an invisible hammer. Gravity itself slackened, loosening its grip by nearly a third.

Across the river of fire, every roaming Lava Beast lurched mid-prowl, their once-dense bodies suddenly porous, as if the heat that birthed them had been leached

away.

A Warrior Undefeatable

Jared forced the last scraps of strength into his legs and vaulted upright. "Now! Follow me!"

The next second, he plunged first through the blazing cataract. His Dragonslayer Sword carved a whirling aperture of muddy gray, bending the onrushing magma and the dazed Lava Beasts aside long enough to open a breath-wide passage.

Lindsay darted after him, a shell of Earthfire True Flame blossoming around her like a translucent lotus. Behind them, Vermilion Demon Lord swept his arms wide, ribbons of demonic aura locking onto the cleft and prying it apart so the molten walls could not reseal.

The three shot through the falls like arrowheads. On the far side, the world exploded outward a sudden hush, a gasp of cool, jade-scented air.

The chamber they burst into measured scarcely thirty feet across, yet its beauty stole breath faster than the sulfur smoke outside.

From the arched ceiling drooped countless jade-green stalactites, each one pulsing with a mellow inner glow, veins of milk-white light dripping down their polished flanks.

At the cave's heart lay a pool no wider than a wash-basin, filled with opalescent

liquid that shimmered in seven shifting hues. Life itself thickened the air, each inhale tasting of spring rain and ancient scripture.

It was the Jadeheart Marrow!

Encircling the pool, nine slender jade stalagmites rose like candle wicks. Each upheld a single bead of jade marrow so pure it refused to fall, a constellation cradling its moon.

Invisible forces braided among the nine pillars, knitting a final, flawless barrier.

"Nine-Star Spirit-Nurturing Array, naturally formed by the cosmos," Jared said, panting, his eyes filled with wonder and awe. "It cannot be cracked. Only pure life force can coax the jade marrow to open its hand."

He turned to the woman beside him. "Lindsay, I need one drop of your blood essence."

Without blinking, Lindsay pricked her fingertip. A bead of crimson-gold-shot through with a thread of cool cyan-pearled in her palm, a symbol of the direct bloodline of the Earthfire Pavilion and the mastery of the Earthfire True Scripture at a profound level.

Jared caught her offering, then sliced his own palm. A drop of gold-flecked scarlet, laced with raw chaotic energy and Golden Dragon Bloodline, welled forth.

The two droplets merged, swirling into a marble of liquid rainbow-fragile, luminous, and perfectly round.

Then, he flicked the prism toward the pool.

The moment it touched the unseen web, ripples chased one another across the air —yet nothing barred its path.

It vanished into the milky surface.

A low hum blossomed, and every jade pillar chimed at once, weaving a celestial chord that rolled through bone and soul.

The pool stirred. From its center, a fist-sized clot of jade marrow rose, compact as carved tallow, its riot of colors folding inward until only a gentle alabaster glow remained.

With a silent beckon of his fingers, Jared drew the treasure close and guided it into a waiting Chilljade Vial.

The instant the jade marrow left, the nine suspended droplets finally fell, replenishing the pool. In moments, the surface brimmed anew, its light a shade paler—a reminder that true heaven-born gifts must be taken with reverence, never in greed.

"Done."

Relief gusted from Jared's lungs. His knees buckled, but thankfully, Lindsay caught him before the stone could.

Behind them, Vermilion Demon Lord stared at the vial. For ten thousand years, his eyes had been a still, black lake. Now, ripples of raw, almost childlike excitement crept across their surface.

He parted his cracked lips, yet all that tumbled out was a rasping whisper. "Jared, I'll remember this favor..."

"Mr. Vermilion, your partner's life is the priority," Jared replied, his voice faint but steady, its calm weightier than any oath.

He managed a weary smile and pressed the vial into the demon lord's palm. "We need to leave the Chthonic Abyss now. Soul Devourer may have fled, but lingering here invites ruin," he added, each word costing him a pulse of pain from the wound over his heart.

Vermilion Demon Lord bowed, both hands cupping the vial as though it were the last ember of creation. He slipped it inside his robes with reverence, then nodded once—hard, decisive.

Retracing their path, the trio found the shattered array no longer barred the way. Without that choking maze of sigils, their escape became a swift descent through echoing crimson caverns.

Four hours later, they emerged beneath the yawning arch patrolled by the Earthfire Pavilion's wardens—the very mouth of the Abyss.

Jared paused at the threshold and glanced back. The pit behind him stretched into bottomless ink, a silence so deep it seemed to drink light.

Soul Devourer has escaped to level twelve, and now—with the Door of Reincarnation and the threat of Malevolent Path Hall—everything will converge there for the final reckoning.

His grip tightened on Dragonslayer Sword. The wound in his left chest still twitched, yet threads of chaotic celestial energy were already smothering the lingering poison.

The road ahead was ruthless. The sword in his hand was more so.

He would carve a path-or die trying.

Far above, within level twelve, Malevolent Path Hall reared like a blighted crown against the void. Its main keep pierced the clouds—an obsidian fang embedded in nothingness.

Every tower, bridge, and parapet was built from interlocked midnight bones. From each eave hung lanterns fed by soul fire; green flames fluttered in the airless dark, weeping soundless chorales of the damned.

Nine rivers of ashen reincarnation aura—each as thick as a city wall—spiraled around the palace. When they inhaled, space wavered and groaned; when they exhaled, reality itself shuddered.

Deep inside the grand hall, bone-forged chains draped from a ceiling a hundred yards high. At the end of every chain, a still-beating soul core pulsed—powering the citadel with unending agony.

Those cores were the last memories of fallen elites, milked forever to keep Malevolent Path Hall alive.

At the chamber's heart lay a circle of black stone polished to a mirror.

Soul Devourer knelt there, forehead pressed to the icy floor. Six tattered flesh wings drooped like burnt banners; charred edges dripped sluggish beads of clotted demon blood.

His left arm was gone at the shoulder, and strands of Jared's chaotic sword energy clung to the stump, gnawing like invisible worms and refusing to let the wound seal.

Once, Soul-Devouring Demonic Flames had roared across his scales. Now, only pin-sized sparks flickered, and the faces of a million devoured souls blurred, fading on his cracked armor.

Arrogance that had shaken the Chthonic Abyss days ago lay shattered beside him. On a throne of fused bones sat Malcolm Vayne.

Skin clung to bone, waxy and corpse-gray. There was no warmth, no pulse—just intent colder than interstellar ice.

His robe—black as a starless

gulf—was threaded with runes of reincarnation that pulsed in and out

with each whisper of his breathe

Blind, gray eyes studied Soul

Devourer, and a speck of

amusement surfaced like oil.

"Soul Devourer..." The name drifted from his lips, rust dry, an autumn leaf scraping stone.

The voice itself rasped like two bones grinding together, every syllable sending a nauseating tremor through the captive's failing spirit.

"Ten thousand years ago, you swallowed a million souls and shook the entire level nine. Today, you crawl before me like a defeated wretch begging for help."

As Malcolm rose, his robe billowed though no wind stirred. Reincarnation aura swirled around him, birthing silent whirlpools that pulled at every mote of light, as if the hall itself wished to hide behind its master.

Malcolm's dry, rasping voice echoed across the throne room like iron scraping marble. "So-someone as formidable as yourself loses an arm to a mere cultivator of the Heavenly Immortal Realm. Your demonic flame scatters, you flee in disgrace, and now you cower before me for shelter..."

the bone-carved

He descended th

steps with deliberate, almost lazy grace. Each tap of his skeletal shoe sole rang out, sharp enough to slice the heavy silence. "Tsk, tsk. If only the old fools you killed and harvested ten thousand years ago could see how pathetic you are now. Even the Reincarnation Pool would ripple from their laughter."

A Warrior Undefeatable

Soul Devourer's face contorted so violently it seemed his skin might split. Shame and fury gnawed at his spirit like venomous serpents, leaving his emerald eyes swimming in humiliation.

"Mr. Vayne, that young man is no ordinary opponent." The words grated from Soul Devourer's throat, each syllable torn loose by pride too wounded to stay silent.

"He wields chaotic celestial energy—the primordial power from the dawn of creation. It can give birth to all things and return them all to nothingness. On top of that, the Golden Dragon Bloodline flows within him. His body rivals the primeval Golden Dragons, and his regeneration borders on the absurd. He cultivates the Earthfire True Scripture, and that Earthfire True Flame devours demonic techniques like mine..."

With every admission, resentment thickened his voice. "The combination of these three is terrifying, and the combat power generated is enough to strike above one's rank, even against a High Immortal. I-I simply was momentarily careless and fell victim to his bizarre, chaotic sword intent..."

"Chaotic celestial energy?"

Malcolm's ash-gray pupils contracted. For one breath, the reincarnation aura swirling around him stalled, as though time hesitated. His bony fingers rubbed the sleeve of his robe, and a flicker of wary memory flashed deep within his eyes.

Despite that, the moment soon passed, and his gaze smoothed to a placid, bottomless stillness.

"A rarity indeed," he conceded, voice still parched yet tinged with unfathomable intent. "Since the dawn of creation, chaotic energy has long dispersed throughout the myriad worlds, transforming into countless laws. There are very few who can reconverge chaotic celestial energy."

His stare returned to Soul Devourer and chilled. "That said, defeat is defeat. Ten millennia ago, you perfected your Soul-Devouring Technique and forged a demonic body from a million souls. You sure seemed invincible then, huh?"

Malcolm stopped before the kneeling figure. A twig-thin finger lifted, brushing the torn edge of a tattered flesh-wing.

Where his gray, almost translucent fingertip drifted, ghostly currents of reincarnation slid into the fissures of the demon's mangled flesh. Soul Devourer convulsed, every quake a full-body tremor born in the deepest vaults of his shredded spirit. Inside that ruined shell he felt something worse—the eerie tide was prying open the very source of his demonic cultivation, studying each layer, decoding every secret scripture that had once crowned him terror of an age.

Inside that ruined shell, he felt something worse the eerie tide was prying open the very source of his demonic cultivation, studying each layer, decoding every secret scripture that had once crowned him terror of an age.

"And now?" Malcolm asked, letting the words hover like a descending guillotine.

Malcolm leaned in until his ash-colored eyes were a breath from the Soul Devourer's humiliated, fear-streaked emerald pupils. "After a mere ten thousand years of suppression," he whispered, each syllable dripping cold amusement, "you crawl back into daylight only to be trounced by a junior cultivator."

Straightening, he gave a slow, almost pitying shake of the head. "Oh well. So be it." A chill clamped around Soul Devourer's heart.

Malcolm's tone held something far darker than mockery—an omen coiled in every calm syllable.

"Mr. Vayne!" Soul Devourer exclaimed as he jerked his head up. "If you help me recover from my injuries, I will yield the complete Soul-Devouring Technique. This demonic technique is the result of ten thousand years of my cultivation. It can devour divine souls to strengthen the user, and if perfected, even a High Immortal Realm Level Four cultivator could be fought on equal footing! In addition, I will march beside you for dominion over level twelve. Though I am injured, my foundation in the High Immortal Realm remains, and my understanding of the Laws of Reincarnation is far beyond that of ordinary cultivators..."

"Soul-Devouring Technique..." Malcolm tasted the words like dark wine, his withered fingertip gliding across a tattered wing as though caressing a priceless artifact. Suddenly, he laughed—a hollow, splintering cackle—and the grin that split his lean face opened unnaturally wide, baring teeth the color of ancient bone.

"Well, I do require the assistance of a High Immortal Realm cultivator," he admitted, pale eyes flashing with wicked delight, "But not to conquer level twelve."

Then he leaned in so close that his corpse-like nose nearly brushed Soul Devourer's. "I need one to forge a superior Reincarnation Puppet."

Soul Devourer's emerald pupils contracted to needle points.

"You..."

He tried to spring upward, yet the omnipresent reincarnation aura clutched his limbs like wet cement; lifting even an arm became a nightmare of slow-motion agony.

"Relax. I will not kill you," Malcolm cooed, resting a skeletal fingertip against Soul Devourer's brow. "I will merely refine your soul—peel away the memories, the clingy emotions, the tedious spark of self. What survives—battle instinct, cultivation base, mastery of arts—shall become the sharpest, most loyal blade in my hand. There will be no more pain, no more fear, no more hesitation—only perfect obedience. Your

Sour Devouring Technique with roar at full strength, your combat experience will pour directly into me, and within reincarnation's cradle, you will rebuild this flesh stronger than its prime. Tell me, is that not another road to immortality?"

As soon as he finished his speech, Malcolm's fingertip clenched, and power cracked like splitting stone.

A deafening hum burst through the great hall as reincarnation aura erupted in all directions, swirling into a cyclone that blotted walls, floor, and ceiling from sight.

From the hall's vaulted ceiling,

chains fashioned from naked bone thrashed in a frenzy, clattering like a thousand jawbones gnashing in the dark. Suspended at their chaotic center, a crystalline core

are of stole

souls unleashed a needle-thin shriek that lanced through marrow and memory alike.

At that same instant, the runes carved across the floor, walls, and soaring pillars blazed alive in perfect unison. Ash-white radiance flooded the great hall, cloaking every surface in a deathly gleam that felt less like light and more like the breath of the underworld.

Nine fresh chains—coalesced from pure reincarnation aura—spiraled out of the empty air. Each was as thick as a soldier's wrist, its surface crawling with ancient sigils that writhed and convulsed like maggots starved for time itself.

The moment those spectral cables arrived, they ripped the fabric of space and struck Soul Devourer faster than thought, impossible to parry or evade.

One chain speared the top of his

head, another the center of his forehead, a third the middle of his chest and a fourth the lower abdomen, the very center of his elixir field. The remaining five struck both shoulders and the soles of his feet, completing the merciless circuit of nine.

"Ugh... Ah!"

Soul Devourer's cries sliced through the dark chamber, a note so high and ragged that stone vaults trembled, and drifting ash froze mid-air.

It was not mere flesh in torment. Each wail carried the horror of a soul being torn open, layer after layer, until consciousness itself felt flayed.

The nine reincarnation shackles writhed around him like starving vipers, siphoning his nascent demonic technique, spiritual power, shattered memories—every thread that had ever made him Soul Devourer—grinding it down and refining it into cold, obedient essence.

"Malcolm Vayne! How dare you!" The Soul Devourer bellowed, each syllable laced with desperate fury.

His eyes bulged so wide the skin around them threatened to split. Deep inside those ghost-green pupils, a last, crazed light detonated like a dying star.

Inside his ravaged frame, the final embers of his Soul-Devouring Demonic Flame flared in reckless self-immolation. Dark-red fire jetted from every pore, turning him into a staggering effigy of living flame that flailed against its shackles.

Yet amid that frenzied blaze came a new sound—a vicious hiss, like water spat onto

a forge. Runes along the reincarnation shackles blazed white-hot. Waves of pale reincarnation aura surged through the links and into his veins. Wherever that tide swept, the crimson flames sputtered, dimmed, and died.

Guided by a purpose all its own, the ghostly current reversed course, racing up his meridians and hurtling straight toward his sea of consciousness, eager now to grind the very core of his divine soul to dust.

A Warrior Undefeatable

"Soul Devourer, did you truly think I had not seen through your little charade?" Malcolm asked as he took three unhurried steps back.

The chains binding Soul Devourer clanged, sparks leaping as the captive thrashed in futile rage, yet Malcolm's pallid, ash-tinted eyes remained flat, indifferent, almost corpse-like.

"You feigned allegiance, nothing more," he continued, voice a measured hush that somehow filled the hall. "You planned to curl up inside my Malevolent Path Hall, leech its baleful aura, mend your wounds, and when you finally claw back to your former peak, the very first soul you intend to harvest—would have been mine."

Malcolm spoke the accusation not in anger but as if reciting a ledger entry. "After all, the Soul-Devouring Technique can advance only by consuming souls stronger than the last," he went on. "My own soul has bathed ten thousand years in the currents of reincarnation. To you, it must smell like ambrosia distilled from the gods."

The captive froze mid-struggle.

Malcolm had spoken the naked truth.

Yes-Soul Devourer had intended to hide within the Malevolent Path Hall, heal, then seize Malcolm's divine soul and the throne that came with it. Once he seized control of Malevolent Path Hall, who in level twelve would be able to stand against him?

"What an utter shame," Malcolm murmured.

He raised a withered hand and traced a maze of impossibly complex seals in mid-air. "I have outlived more schemes than you have swallowed souls. From the moment you crossed my threshold, your intent was as clear to me as midday sun."

The next second, both hands slammed downward, completing the seal.

"Rather than letting a threat grow, I think it'd be better to turn it into a puppet!"

With that, booming thunder rolled through the hall.

The stone floor split apart in a jagged starburst.

Bone-white tiles shattered and sprayed like shrapnel, revealing a yawning pit that appeared bottomless.

From that abyss, a gate rose—one hundred yards tall, forged of fused skulls. Ghost-lights danced in every vacant eye socket.

Across that ghastly door, warped runes crawled and re-knitted themselves, distorting the very air with a gravitational pull that made the hall groan.

It was, without a doubt, the Door of Reincarnation.

"No! Malcolm Vayne! Even in death, I will hunt you down!"

Soul Devourer shrieked, wings lashing, severed arms sprouting raw flesh in a desperate bid to tear free—but the effort meant nothing.

The nine chains tightened at once, yanking him into the air and flinging him like discarded cargo straight toward the open gate.

Another concussive roar shook the chamber.

A vortex—dozens of yards wide—flowered at the center of the door, swirling in muted grays.

Its depths held no matter, no energy—only law.

The primordial rules governing life, death, and return.

The moment his ravaged body touched that spiral, invisible forces ripped it apart and drew the pieces inward.

His scream cut off, clipped like a beast's throat beneath a butcher's blade.

The Door of Reincarnation slowly closed.

The runes on the Bone Gate returned to stillness. Only the gray-white flames flickering in the eye sockets of the skulls on the door seemed slightly brighter than before.

The great hall fell silent once more.

Malcolm walked to the Door of Reincarnation. His gaunt hand pressed lightly against the cold bone surface, eyes closed as he sensed its energy.

After a moment, a cold, satisfied curve appeared at the corner of his mouth.

"Ah, the Reincarnation Realm... It's truly mysterious."

Meanwhile, inside the Door of Reincarnation, Soul Devourer's consciousness gradually stirred amid an endless fall.

His divine soul had been pierced and torn by the reincarnation shackles, and he should have plunged into chaos under the unbearable pain.

Yet some foreign, rule-bound force forcibly kept his awareness intact, allowing him

to feel every shred of agony, every shred of despair, in full clarity.

When he finally opened his eyes and saw the world he was in, he realized it was a space composed entirely of gray and white.

The sky was gray-white, devoid of sun, moon, or stars-only a dense layer of clouds that seemed heavy enough to press down.

The earth was gray-white, with cracked soil, exposed rock, and withered vegetation. Everything was stripped of color, leaving only deathly gray and silence.

Even the flowing spiritual energy in the air was gray-white-a form of energy he had never encountered.

In any case, the cold, silence, and absolute sense of order were the complete opposite of the chaos, greed, and devouring nature of Soul Devourer's Soul- Devouring Technique.

Most terrifying of all was the omnipresent suppression of rules in this world.

Here, the Soul-Devouring Technique he had painstakingly cultivated for ten thousand years ran more than ten times steeper, and every manipulation of demonic flames felt like struggling through viscous mud.

His divine soul's perception was compressed to a radius of just a hundred yards; even if something was visible to the naked eye at a distance, in his awareness, it was nothing but void.

Even his sense of time was twisted.

He felt as though he had been falling for an eternity-long enough for mortals to live and die through dozens of reincarnations. However, when he looked back up, the gray white sky still hung far above, its distance unchanged.

"I must leave..."

Soul Devourer gritted his teeth. His remaining will drove his shattered divine soul, trying to regain control of his body.

He could feel the strand of chaotic sword energy at his severed arm was being suppressed in this world, its corrosive speed greatly slowed.

Yet, in contrast, the pain of his divine soul being torn away grew ever sharper.

Though the nine reincarnation

shackles had vanished, the wounds

they left behind

remained His soul

was like a leaky, broken vessel

losing the very essence of his being

with every passing moment.

Finally, after a fall that felt both eternal and instantaneous, he touched the ground.

There was no impact, no tremor-like a feather landing on water, unnaturally soft. After several moments, Soul Devourer struggled to his feet and looked around.

He stood upon a barren plain that stretched without limit, as though some ancient god had scraped the world raw and left it to fade.

The ground was the same dull gray-white as the overcast sky, horizon smeared into horizon until earth and firmament became a single lifeless smear.

Here and there, twisted trees jutted up like polished bones, their claw-shaped branches raking at the low clouds in mute accusation.

The silence, on the other hand, was suffocating.

There was no wind, no insects chirping, and no flow of water. Even the rhythm of his own heart dwindled to a timid murmur he could scarcely detect.

A Warrior Undefeatable

A voice suddenly rang out. "Leave?"

It was a dry, mechanical tone-cold as metal-vibrating like the hidden gears of a cosmic law grinding into motion.

Soul Devourer whirled, cloak snapping though no wind stirred this desolation.

Three ashen figures now enclosed him in a flawless triangle.

They looked vaguely human, yet he could not be certain that they were alive.

Ancient gray-white robes draped their forms, wide sleeves brushing the dust-colored ground.

Faces blurred beneath shifting mist; only the vaguest contours of nose and mouth remained.

Most horrific were their eye sockets-twin black hollows cradling gray-white flames that fluttered like candlelight in a tomb.

Each flicker sent a shiver through the surrounding space, as though the rules of reality quaked in respect.

Their bodies seemed condensed from pure reincarnation aura, standing there as if perfectly fused with the gray-white world. Were it not for seeing them with the naked eye, Soul Devourer's divine soul perception would not have detected their presence at all-just as a person could not sense the air around them.

The figure at the apex projected its words straight into his mind, the sound a serrated whisper. "Outsider. The Reincarnation Realm forbids the living."

"Surrender your soul, enter the Reincarnation Pool, and you may be born anew," the left-hand figure intoned, utterly void of emotion.

"Refuse, and you will be refined," the right-hand figure finished, each syllable cold enough to freeze hope.

Alarm bells shrieked through Soul Devourer's consciousness, and even his divine soul recoiled.

The pressure pouring from the three ashen figures surpassed Malcolm in his prime.

It was not mere power but a difference in existence itself—an ant before a dragon, shaking because the dragon happened to look its way.

"I am Soul Devourer," he said, forcing steadiness he did not feel. "My arrival is an accident, and I meant no offense. I implore you—show me a path by which I may depart."

Silence tightened, brittle as glass.

The gray-white flames inside the ashen figures' hollow sockets fluttered faster, their unreadable gazes locked on him without a word.

The humanoid figure in the center spoke again, a note of unquestionable authority in its voice. "Denied. Rule of Reincarnation, Article 1,372: Anyone who enters without the permission of the Lord of Reincarnation shall be considered an intruder. Their divine soul is to be refined, their consciousness stripped, and reincarnation completed."

With that, the three ashen humanoids lifted their right arms together.

The movement was mechanical, puppet-stiff, yet it carried a hypnotic, air-thieving rhythm that seemed to shrink the horizon.

Chalk-pale palms unfurled, pressing down upon emptiness. No gale followed, no crackling surge—only a hush so absolute it erased the very memory of sound.

Soul Devourer felt the entire cosmos leaning upon his shoulders.

It was not brute force but the weight of law ancient, absolute, inescapable.

He became a doodle on paper,

flattened by an invisible hand from a

higher world, incapable of

understanding, resisting, or even fully feeling the horror that approached.

A roar burst from his throat-raw, desperate, doomed.

The last embers of demonic flame kindled around him as six shredded wings beat the air in wild abandon, seeking even a hairline crack in that unseen prison.

Alas, nothing yielded.

Each flicker of fire snuffed out the instant it touched the crushing law; every movement thickened, an insect drowning in amber until even motion forgot him.

The descending palms seemed leisurely, yet they crossed time and space in a single, unavoidable heartbeat.

A muffled, wet pop split the silence.

The first palm landed atop his crown.

Soul Devourer convulsed; dark-red demon blood sprayed from every orifice in seven gruesome jets.

He felt the hub of his soul clutched, squeezed, then drawn upward-bucket after bucket hauled from a bottomless well.

Ten millennia of cultivation, the essence of a million devoured spirits, every memory, feeling, and epiphany-each ripped free with mechanical indifference.

A scream unlike anything mortal echoed across the ash-gray plain.

The cry lasted a single heartbeat before silence reclaimed it.

The second palm settled over his sternum, and the world answered with a brittle crack.

Splintered bone snowed inward.

A death-cold current poured through the invading hand, seizing the heart that had beaten thirteen thousand years and freezing it mid-throb.

Life withdrew like a tide; oceanic vitality shrank to a guttering wick in mere breaths.

Then the third palm descended upon his elixir field in the lower abdomen, the seat of power he once believed untouchable.

The impact thundered—an internal detonation that made the gray plain flash white.

A sound ripped across the desolate plain—a brittle crack that announced the collapse of something once thought eternal.

Soul Devourer had spent ten

thousand years tempering his Soul-Devouring Technique, swallowing rare natural treasures, until a blazing demonic core burned at his center.

Now, beneath a single palm strike, all he had wrought toppled like a child's sandcastle the nascence, of Soul Devouring Demonic Flame, the core of Earthcore Demonic Flame, every pivot of power crumbling into listless ash.

The three attackers withdrew their palms in the same breath, already indifferent to the ruin they had caused.

What remained of Soul Devourer slumped to the dirt—a sagging leather shell emptied of bones and hope, twitching once before lying still.