

A WARRIOR UNDEFEATABLE

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A Warrior Undefeatable

"That's a Corpsefiend Dracolisk born right here in the Godgrave Mountains!" Luther breathed, excitement cutting through his whisper.

He added under his breath, "Years of drinking in death energy and ancient wraiths have mutated it. Its strength rivals High Immortal Realm Level Six, and that hide is nearly impenetrable."

The monster caught the scent of living flesh.

Slowly its massive head lifted, crimson pupils locking onto the two intruders while fresh saliva fell in thicker ropes.

"It's guarding something," Jared said, voice low but certain.

His stare fixed beneath the statue's base where a pinprick of ghostly light flickered like an eye.

Luther followed the look and nearly vibrated. "A Ghost Clan relic, maybe! Mr. Jared, if we "

He never finished. The Corpsefiend Dracolisk lunged.

For all its bulk it moved like an arrow, dark-red scales blurring as it tore across several dozen feet in a heartbeat.

The tail-bristling with bone spikes-whipped sideways like a siege ram, the air itself screaming at its passage.

"Back!" Jared barked, yanking Luther into sudden retreat.

Both men flashed rearward, feet barely skimming the dusty floor.

Boom! The tail smashed the spot they had occupied, blasting a crater and hurling shards of stone in every direction.

The massive tail slammed the spot where they had stood, blowing a deep pit into the floor and spraying stone shards.

The violent shockwave made the whole stone hall tremble; dust sifted down in sheets.

Thwarted, the Corpsefiend Dracolisk grew even more frenzied; it threw its jaws wide and spewed a dark-red breath of death.

Where that breath swept, even space itself corroded, webbed with fine black cracks.

Jared's gaze tightened; instead of dodging, he planted his feet, lifted his palm, and shoved the air ahead.

Chaotic force burst from that hand, swirling into a broad gray shield that locked itself in front of him.

The shield hissed, a sharp "tss-tss-tss" ripping through the hall.

The dracolisk's death breath hammered the barrier, throwing off a shrill, corroding screech.

Breath that could chew through steel met the chaotic shield and unraveled, its toxic haze shredded and swallowed in a blink.

The Corpsefiend Dracolisk's crimson eyes flickered with confusion, unable to grasp why its breath had failed.

Yet it did not hesitate; the hulking body lunged again, claws, bone spines, and that wrecking-ball tail sweeping toward Jared in one murderous surge.

"Luther, get the relic. I'll handle the beast."

Speaking with the same calm, he flickered forward and met the dracolisk head-on.

Luther, trusting Jared's strength, spared no words; his form dissolved into a ribbon of black smoke that slid toward the statue's base.

The dracolisk spotted the intruder near its prize and exploded in fresh rage, beginning to pivot-yet Jared was already in its face.

"Your fight is with me."

Jared said it without heat; his right hand formed two straightened fingers, chaotic force gathering as he stabbed at the dracolisk's brow.

The strike looked almost casual, yet it carried the annihilating edge of chaotic force and flashed out faster than lightning.

Instinct screamed; the dracolisk jerked its skull off-line and swung a foreclaw down toward Jared in the same breath.

A wet pop split the air.

The Chaos Shatterfinger skimmed the beast's scalp, carving a deep trough through its hardened scales; gray energy clung to the wound like a cancer and burrowed inward.

The monster roared, the sound shaking old stone.

Pain spurred it; the descending claw snapped forward harder, faster, the roar deafening.

Jared held his ground; his left hand balled up, swathed in swirling gray, and he drove the fist straight ahead.

Fist hammered claw.

Boom thundered through the chamber.

The impact birthed a savage blast that spider-webbed the floor and peeled huge swaths of mural from the shaking walls.

Jared wavered and stepped back three paces.

The dracolisk screamed; the struck foreclaw now sported shattered scales, drippin blood, even cracks along the bone.

Jared's brow drew tight; for a creature sitting at High Immortal Realm Level Six, its raw power was outrageous.

Any ordinary cultivator of Level Six would have been blown to ash by that punch. Terror finally surfaced in the dracolisk's eyes.

The hulking creature stared, as though just now recognizing the horrifying strength packed inside the small human frame.

And that gray force-able to slice through the defenses it had always trusted-only deepened the shock stamped across its face.

In that sliver of hesitation, Jared moved.

This time he held nothing back.

"Chaos—Hellbind!" he called, voice low and steady.

His hands snapped through a seal; chaotic force boiled off him and spun into countless gray chains that whipped toward the dracolisk like living serpents.

The dracolisk thrashed, yet the moment the first chain touched scale it cinched tight, drinking both the death aura and the thin spark of life inside.

The harder it fought, the tighter the net drew and the faster the draining went.

Within a handful of breaths its struggles faded, aura collapsing, the feral light in its eyes guttering out.

Jared stepped up to the hulking form, gaze void of pity.

"Feeding on stray souls and death mist is your nature. Attacking us was your mistake."

He said it evenly, pressing a palm to the dracolisk's brow. "Your power now belongs to me."

The chaotic force poured through the open wound, dragging swirling motes of gray light into the beast's core.

The Corpsefiend Dracolisk jerked once, scales scraping stone, and loosed a final, furious scream that rattled the cracked pillars around it.

That roar died as its hide sank against bone. Muscles collapsed, joints shriveled, and the whole hulking frame crumbled like sun-dried clay.

Moments later only drifting ash remained, save a dark-red core the size of a fist and a single unbroken length of spine, hard as iron.

Jared swept the core and the spine into a prepared jade pouch.

To a craftsman, both pieces were rare steel and furnace-grade fuel; to an alchemist, they were heatless embers ready to refine pills that bent life and death.

Across the broken floor Luther rose from the statue's base, fingers curled around a dim, greenish glow. He had pried it loose while the dracolisk died.

The object he carried fit easily in one palm. It was pitch-black metal, roughly rectangular, its outline echoing an ancient command token.

Dense Ghost Clan runes covered every inch of that metal face. Several corners had chipped away, yet a cold, nether aura still seeped from the grooves and lingered around the edges.

"This... a fragment of the Ghost King Token!"

Luther's hands shook hard enough

to scatter dust. "With a full Ghost King Token one can summon Ghost Clans, regions of unlock sealed domains. Even a fragment is worth whole cities!"

Jared accepted the shard. Cold seeped through his sleeve. Inside the metal, pure nether aura pulsed once and brushed against the storm of chaotic force sleeping in his

veins. ,

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"Looks like the trip through the Godgrave Mountains wasn't a waste after all."

Jared handed the fragment back. "It belongs to the Ghost Clan. Keep it. It may lead you to your kin."

Luther met his gaze, gratitude flickering behind the black smoke in his eyes, and stored the fragment with solemn care.

They combed the hall again, turning loose stones and cracked altars until they found several battered Ghost Clan artifacts and a handful of ancient alloys.

Small pieces, yet rich enough to fill a cultivator's year of trade.

With nothing left to claim, they stepped outside and pushed west, leaving the fallen temple to its silence.

The journey stayed mostly calm. Threats appeared—loose spirits, crumbling traps, hungry beasts—but none rose high enough to break their stride.

Twenty days of flight carried them past the last ridge of the Godgrave range and onto the soil of the western region.

The first sight made them frown. Heat haze blurred a horizon that held no end.

Where the northern region glittered with ice fields, and the central realm rolled with green hills, the west unspooled as barren desert and shattered redbed rock.

Yellow sand billowed; scorched earth stretched mile after mile.

A burning wind sliced across exposed skin, kicking sheets of grit into the air.

Every breath tasted of dryness and quiet violence; the local spiritual energy lay thin, edged, and wild.

Here and there stood dead poplars or spiny cacti, their shadows cast over bleached animal bones half-buried in the dunes.

"The western region... its reputation is deserved."

Luther sighed. "No wonder they call it a place of exile. Living or cultivating here costs ten times the effort."

Jared studied the blowing sand. Harsher lands forged harder lives; any beast that lasted here would demand respect.

They altered course and flew toward the Myriad Monster Mountain Range marked on Immortal Cyril's map.

With every league the desert worsened, the sun sharper, the dunes steeper. Sandstorms roared, pits of shifting sand opened without warning, and venomous scorpions or sand vipers struck from hiding.

At noon the sand could roast an egg; at midnight it could crack stone with frost.

Their cultivation sheltered them. Natural perils passed like buzzing flies against their protective aura.

What set their nerves on edge were the growing footprints of civilization—more precisely, of the celestials.

On the third evening they glided above a dried riverbed and spotted the first celestial outpost.

The fortress was crude but strong, walls of stacked boulders, patrolled by armored sentries. Above it, a few small airships hovered, their array lights sweeping the dunes.

Around those walls lay scattered beast-race corpses—some sun-bleached to parchment, others fresh enough to glisten.

"A celestial demon-suppression post."

Icicles shone in Jared's eyes. "Immortal Cyril was right—celestials are crushing the beast resistance with blood."

They veered wide of the stronghold and pressed farther into the desert.

Nearer the Myriad Monster Mountains, the outposts multiplied, and so did the mutilated bodies of beasts.

Even the wind-driven sand could not wash away the faint, metallic scent of spilled blood.

A collapsed ridge cut across their line of travel.

Patches of ground had turned to cinders, and splinters of ruined talismans glittered among scattered rocks. Everywhere the land still wore the wounds of small, unseen skirmishes.

"Mr. Jared," Luther said, his voice tight, "the situation is even worse than we imagined."

Luther's face hardened. "The celestials have dug in here. I fear the Beastfolk Resistance is barely holding on."

Jared dipped his head. "First we find the Resistance and learn the details. Rushing in blind will only give us away."

The map Master Cyril had left showed the Myriad Monster Mountain Range sprawled across the center of the western region.

The chain stretched hundreds of thousands of miles and had once been the beast race's holy ground; now it lay beneath the celestials' heel.

After five more days aloft, the outline of the mountain range finally rose out of the haze.

A boundless sweep of crimson peaks sprawled ahead, coiled across the desert floor like a dragon at rest.

Jagged spires punched into the sky, their flanks crowded with grotesque boulders.

Between them stood the broken shells of ancient halls, the walls still bearing faded beast-folk totems.

Entire summits had been sheared away, and valleys lay choked with rubble, every vista scarred by war.

High overhead, celestial scout skimmers wheeled in slow circles, sheets of probing light sliding across the broken ground.

"No more flying," Jared murmured. "They'll spot us at once."

He and Luther dropped to the sand, muffled their auras, and used the broken terrain to slip deeper into the mountains.

Crossing the boundary tightened the air around them, as though the very rocks were holding their breath.

The range had once thrummed with life; now it felt as cold and hollow as a tomb.

Every so often they glimpsed a

luckless beast-folk

survivor battered, terrified eyes watching from cave mouths and fissures, unwilling to risk the open.

Jared and Luther snatched a handful of stragglers, and rifled through their memories with ac soul-searching art, stitching together a picture of the mountains plight.

The celestials had stationed the Beast-Quelling Hall here.

A Beast-Quelling Venerable at Top Level High Immortal Realm Level Seven held command.

Under him stood the Five Beast Kings, three thousand celestial guards, and tens of thousands of beast-folk servitor troops.

Opposing them, the Beastfolk Resistance was once led by King Altair, Lady Lysandra, and Lord Stoneback.

At its height their army had numbered 100 thousand, yet now fewer than 30 thousand remained, scattered and besieged across a handful of redoubts.

King Altair had escaped with grave wounds, his whereabouts unknown.

Lady Lysandra was trapped within the Miragebound Maze; no one knew whether she still breathed.

Lord Stoneback lay pinned beneath the Beastlock Array, his soul roasted without pause.

The Resistance Remnants, now under a few Beast Generals, clung to the depths around Skyfiend Gorge, a last stand that could collapse at any moment.

"Skyfiend Gorge..." Jared whispered, tasting the name.

That gorge might prove their only point of entry.

They skirted celestial patrols and began threading toward Skyfiend Gorge.

Each new mile forced fresh horrors into view.

Blackened beast-folk villages

smoldered in the sand, hills of bones rose like cairns and severed heads swung from poles-each atrocity a billboard for celestial rule.

"Those animals..." Luther growled, teeth grinding.

Though he was not of the beast race, Luther felt their anguish as keenly as his own.

Jared stayed silent, but the chill in his eyes sharpened until it felt like a drawn blade. Three days of creeping brought them to the outskirts of Skyfiend Gorge.

The terrain rose in tight, jagged rings-natural walls that favored defenders and punished attackers.

Yet the celestials had thrown ring after ring of troops around the gorge, sealing every gap.

Dozens of celestial airships prowled above, their formation weaving a Lockdown Grand Array across the sky.

On the ground, new stone forts bristled with sentries—celestial soldiers and beast- folk auxiliaries pacing beneath stiff banners.

Detection arrays blanketed the outer waste, ready to shriek at the faintest disturbance.

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"The guard is too tight. Forcing a way in is impossible," Luther said, brow furrowed.

After a long study, Jared pointed at a nondescript peak on the gorge's left flank. "There. The array thins, and the patrol leaves a three-breath window. We slip through during that gap."

Luther narrowed his eyes and studied the ridgeline again. The glyphs that hovered over that particular peak glimmered only faintly, every pulse several shades duller than the wards spread across the rest of the cordon. Below, the torch-bearing patrol circled at a lazier pace, leaving a longer gap between passes.

"Sharp eyes, Mr. Jared." Luther's voice carried honest admiration as he inclined his head toward Jared.

They sank behind a fallen boulder and waited. Daylight bled away by slow degrees until the mountains faded into silhouettes, and the last line of celestials finished their sunset round without noticing the two silent figures.

A moonless sky stretched overhead. Wind hissed through the rocks, stripping every loose grain of sand. It was the kind of night when shadows swallowed sound- perfect for slipping through a siege line.

Another patrol came up the slope, lanterns rocking. The moment the troopers wheeled around and began their downhill march, Jared uncoiled.

"Move."

The single word left his throat in a low hiss. His body blurred into a thin streak of gray that hugged the ground and shot toward the weakened node. Luther's cloak fluttered once and he darted after him, footfalls lighter than dust.

Three breaths—that was all the window allowed. Heartbeats hammered out the count: one... two...

Before the wards could flare back to full strength, both men slipped through the lattice of light. The glow surged behind them a heartbeat later, none the wiser for their passage.

The instant they crossed the boundary, the air itself seemed to change weight. Skyfiend Gorge pressed in on them with a living tension.

Outside lay slaughter and silence; inside, the valley throbbed with raw desperation, as though every stone remembered the last stand that had yet to finish.

Makeshift tents clustered against the cliffs. Crude barricades of shattered carts and fallen trees marked firing lines. Everywhere, wounded beastfolk groaned, cursed, or wept over comrades who would not wake.

The smell hit next—a cloying mixture of crushed herbs, burnt salve, and fresh blood that clung to the back of the throat.

Exhausted soldiers in tattered armor sagged against boulders. Their eyes, rimmed red, held the dull glaze of creatures who had seen too much and expected little

more.

Now and then a Beast General strode past, voice raised in forced encouragement. The words bounced off the camp walls and fell flat before reaching the men's ears.

Two unfamiliar figures appearing out of nowhere shattered the fragile lull. Armor rattled. Voices climbed.

"Who goes there?!"

"Enemy raid!"

"Guard the general!"

Roughly thirty beastfolk surged in, forming a loose ring. Some still bled through fresh bandages, yet every spear point found its mark on Jared and Luther.

Jared lifted an open hand. "Easy. We serve no celestial." His tone stayed even, almost gentle.

Jared spread his palm, and a wisp of chaotic gray rolled out, ancient as a forgotten dawn. The closest soldiers froze, instincts screaming even if their minds lacked the words.

"Names and purpose!" one of them barked, uncertainty sharpening the demand.

A single-eyed wolf Beast General pushed forward, hackles visibly rising. His remaining eye never left Jared's face.

"We came to aid you," Jared said. "Take us to your commander."

The wolf bared his teeth in something between a laugh and a snarl. "Two strangers claim they're saviors? More likely spies. Seize them!"

Weapons jerked higher as the ring tightened.

A frail voice, worn thin by years, cut across the clash of steel. "Hold."

The soldiers parted.

elderly stag spirit leaned on a twisted cane, snowy beard

spilling over a chest wrapped in stained bandages.

Though his transformation remained incomplete—antlers still crowned his brow—his gaze was clear, measuring, far steadier than his trembling limbs.

"Elder Hartcrest," the wolf general muttered, bowing low.

Hartcrest studied both men, but his attention lingered on Jared. Wonder flickered behind the old eyes. "Such a primal current... Eight thousand years have shown me much, yet never power this ancient."

Jared noted the appraisal without comment; the stag's perception exceeded most.

"I am Jared, and this is Luther. We crossed the Godgrave Mountains to find the Beastfolk Resistance and join the fight against the celestials."

His voice carried plainly through the hush.

"Crossed the Godgrave Mountains?" Hartcrest's eyes flashed. "High Immortal Realm Level Five and above meet certain death there. You two emerged alive-that speaks volumes."

He paused, then added, "But how do two warriors oppose tens of thousands, and a Beast-Quelling Venerable besides?"

Jared's lips tilted in a faint smile. "Numbers mean little. I alone have already slain the Five Venerables of the Divine Punishment Hall."

The final statement left the cavernous camp hanging in a breathless hush.

Even the torches seemed to crackle more quietly, sparks drifting into the night air without a sound.

Every member of the beast race stared wide-eyed at Jared, disbelief flashing across muzzles, horns, and scaled brows alike.

Some jaws sagged; a fox-eared scout even forgot to breathe until his chest jerked for air.

A hushed ripple rolled through the crowd.

"The Five Venerables of the Divine Punishment Hall!" someone whispered, the words slicing the silence sharper than any blade.

In the eastern region, those five

stood at the very peak of power, mortal! Realm

each one a High Power et

Level Seven monster the celestials called their governors.

The same voice cracked again, half disbelief, half awe.

"All five... felled by a single blade?"

Elder Hartcrest's antlered head lifted, the cane in his grip rattling.

"W-what did you just say?" His voice quivered like brittle bark.

Jared met those stunned eyes without haste.

"Glacier, Redflame, Greenwood, Terrabold, and Celestial Metal," he said, naming the Five Venerables

one by one, all

ne, all fell beneath. hand."

His tone stayed mild, yet no doubt clung to it.

"Now the whole level thirteen has my name on every warrant," he added as though discussing the weather.

Jared lifted his hand.

A gray streak of swordlight spun above his palm, radiating quiet annihilation; the air in front of it warped like fabric held to flame.

Every beast soldier felt his soul flinch away.

Elder Hartcrest stared at that light until moisture fled his throat.

At last he drew in a shaky breath, bent both knees, and lowered himself onto the stone.

"Eldon Hartcrest pays homage to our benefactor."

Confusion flickered across the ranks, but respect for the old stag ran deep.

One after another, wounded warriors and weary scouts dropped to their knees, weapons laid flat.

Jared's brows drew together.

"Elder, why this courtesy?" he asked, stepping forward to lift the old man.

Tears tracked down the furrowed lines of Hartcrest's cheeks.

"Benefactor may not know," he said, voice rough with years, "those Five Venerables bathed their hands in our beast race's blood."

"For centuries they ripped souls from our kin, refining crystals from the pain, leaving not even bones to mourn."

"Your blade has avenged an ocean of blood; let this old one bow."

With that, he pressed his forehead hard against the earth, a muffled thud echoing beneath the tents.

Realization swept the kneeling ranks like wind racing through grass.

Backs straightened, eyes blazed.

Voices burst out together.

"Our savior stands among us!" someone shouted, fists pounding the ground.

"He cut down the Five Venerables-our vengeance is real!" another roared, the words shaking hoarse throats.

The crowd bent low, foreheads touching dirt, a rough yet reverent tide.

"Benefactor, accept our bow!" they cried in ragged unison.

Jared hurried to haul Eldon Hartcrest upright, the stag elder light as driftwood in his grip.

"Rise, all of you," he urged, voice steady.

"My quarrel with the celestials is older than tonight; those kills were simply a debt I already owed."

"What matters now is breaking this siege and saving the comrades still trapped," he added, gaze sweeping the wounded camp.

Eldon Hartcrest wiped his eyes and nodded with solemn care.

"Please follow; I will bring you to King Ironhide, our acting commander."

Guided by the stag elder, Jared and Luther threaded through narrow lanes of canvas and rock toward the gorge's heart.

The largest pavilion loomed ahead, its hide walls stitched with iron plates against stray arrows.

Inside, a black-furred giant nearly twelve feet tall paced like a caged storm, each step rocking crates of bandages.

His back still carried a pelt of coarse

hair, and arms thick as pillars bulged

with restrained force; his aura

ə.

surged at the peak of High Immortal

Realm Level Six.

The breath he drew rumbled like rolling stones.

Fresh bandages soaked through along a slash that ran from left shoulder to right belly, the fabric blooming scarlet anew.

This was King Ironhide, temporary leader of the Beastfolk Resistance.

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King Ironhide stopped pacing and turned as Hartcrest entered.

"Elder, you have returned. These two are...?" His deep voice carried cautious weight.

His gaze swept over Jared and Luther, lingering on the stranger's calm eyes.

Thick brows knitted into a wary line.

Hartcrest relayed the tale in quick, low words the passage through the death range, the slaughter of the Five Venerables.

The bear king listened without a breath wasted.

When the account ended, King Ironhide's eyes widened, black pupils sharpening.

"Did you truly kill all five?" he demanded, voice rough as gravel.

Jared answered with a single steady nod.

The bear king threw back his head and let out a roar of laughter that shook tent poles.

Buried inside the sound lay both ancient grief and fierce delight.

"Well done!" he bellowed.

"Those mangy elders crippled my father; their debt is paid. From this night, Jared, you are brother to King Ironhide. Wherever you need me, fire or flood, I will follow." Around them, beast soldiers thumped chests and growled approval; the beast race never hid gratitude or hatred.

In that uproar, trust settled over Jared like a warm cloak; the king's pledge sealed it for every ear inside the tent.

Jared raised a hand for silence.

"King Ironhide, tell me the current state of the siege. Is there a path to break it?"

The bear king's smile faded; his shoulders sagged beneath unwelcome reality. "Dire," he admitted. "We have been trapped three months. Stores of grain and pills are nearly gone, wounds fester, and morale sinks by the day."

He pointed to the rough sand table in the tent's center.

"Outside lies the Heavenbound Beastlock Array," he said. "We cannot break out, and the celestials wait, wearing us thin before their final strike."

King Ironhide clenched his massive fists. Thick black fur bristled across his shoulders, and for a breath he only ground his fangs.

"And besides..." The words jammed in his throat, half-snarl, half-sorrow, as though the next truth might shatter what remained of his composure.

A tremor rippled along his wounded flank before he forced the rest out.

"They drag our captured kin to the front lines every single day," he rasped.

"They flay, burn, and break them where we can see, hoping to grind every shred of resolve we have left."

Jared's gaze turned to iron. The torchlight edged his eyes, making the gray colder. "Where is the Beast-Quelling Venerable, and where are the Five Beast Kings?"

Elder Hartcrest replied first, voice low but steady. "The Beast-Quelling Venerable remains at Beast-Quelling Hall Headquarters, three thousand miles from here, holding the core of their formation."

King Ironhide drew a rough circle on the sand table.

"Each of the Five Beast Kings commands an army encircling Skyfiend Gorge," he said. "King Redstinger and King Nightbat are the strongest-both High Immortal Realm Level Seven."

"The other three stand at the peak of Level Six."

He tapped five carved tokens into place. "Redstinger in the east, Nightbat in the west. The remaining three tighten the net from the south, the north, and the southeast."

Jared studied the layout in silence, fingertips hovering above the line that marked the gorge.

After a breath his hand flattened into a blade, a glint of frost in his eyes. "If they've split their strength, we strike one segment at a time."

Elder Hartcrest blinked. "One at a time?" The disbelief slid out before he could restrain it.

King Ironhide let out a humorless laugh and rubbed the fresh blood seeping through his bandages. "Brother Jared, fewer than twenty thousand of us can still and, and most carry wounds."

King Ironhide shoved a larger marker beside each enemy token.

"Any single army under those kings numbers over thirty-thousand, fully supplied and rested. Breaking out is suicide-much less destroying them one by one."

Jared let the concern flow past him like wind over stone. A faint curve lifted one corner of his mouth.

"No legion is necessary. I alone can handle it."

An uneasy hush spread through the tent. Canvas walls creaked in the night breeze, but no one spoke or even breathed too loudly.

Elder Hartcrest's antlered head turned first, eyes wide. King Ironhide followed, the raw question plain in both faces.

King Ironhide's voice dropped, as if polite doubt might offend a power he didn't understand. "Brother Jared... that isn't jest, is it?"

He forced a chuckle that never reached his eyes. "You caught the Five Venerables by surprise, or separated, perhaps. These kings are surrounded by soldiers. How-"

Jared raised a palm, slicing the worry clean in two.

"Just tell me which of those five deserves death most-who has spilled the most of our people's blood."

Jared cut him off, voice calm yet edged with unquestionable certainty.

Ironhide's claws dug trenches into the wooden edge of the table. "He even devised the Scorpionheart Rending Torment, a horror meant for captured warriors. I would tear his flesh myself if I could."

King Ironhide's nostrils flared.

"Redstinger," he growled. "A traitor to the beast race. To curry favor with the celestials, he slaughtered three tribes that refused to kneel—children and elders alike."

"Good. We'll start with him." Jared nodded, then turned to Luther.

"Luther, stay here and help King Ironhide hold the defenses. I'll be back soon."

"No."

He waved the protest aside. "Numbers invite notice. Trust me I know the limits." Calm settled over the tent the instant he finished speaking.

With a final nod to the two beast elders, his figure blurred into a ribbon of gray light. Canvas barely fluttered as he slipped through the entrance and vanished into the moonless gorge.

Wind rustled what remained of the silence. Elder Hartcrest and King Ironhide met each other's eyes, unsure whether to hope or fear.

Ironhide's voice fell to a whisper not meant for the shadows. "Elder, can he truly accomplish this?"

The old stag weighed the air itself before answering. "Did you feel that force in him? Something ancient, beyond faming. My instincts recoiled, the way prey shudders

before a stormtescape

Perhaps a miracle

finally within

reach."

Ironhide stared at the narrow path Chance had taken, the faintest glimmer of belief flickering in his bear-dark gaze. "For our people's sake... let it be so."

Silent ellipsis filled the gorge, stretching long enough for distant torches to fade behind cloud and rock.

Far from Skyfiend Gorge, Chance skimmed eastward, every heartbeat carrying him leagues away. The high ridges swallowed his silhouette as if he belonged to the night itself.

He folded every ripple of aura deep inside the core of his being. Chaotic force blurred outline and presence alike; a celestial patrol passed beneath his drifting shadow and never once lifted a spear.

Three thousand miles melted under that silent glide. A final bound brought him to a wind-sheltered canyon where torches painted the cliff walls crimson and gold.

Below, the encampment spread like a hive. Tents packed shoulder to shoulder housed at least forty thousand troops-two parts beast auxiliaries, one part celestial guards, all blades gleaming in firelight.

At the heart of the camp rose a pavilion too ornate to belong on a battlefield. Scar-red scorpion banners tapped above it and

dozens of Redstinger Royal Genet

ringed the entrance. From within came a woman's muffled sob and a man's coarse laughter.

Chance released a thread of perception. The moment his awareness touched that pavilion it locked on, unerring and cold.

Inside, a middle-aged man lounged

in scarlet war armor. A blood-dark scorpion tail trailed behind the throne-like chair, twitching time with his enjoyment. Wine sloshed across the floor where he toasted himself.

Two fox-tribe girls huddled against him, clothing torn, cheeks wet with tears they tried to hide.

The man was King Redstinger, newly ascended to High Immortal Realm Level Seven and drunk on cruelty.

The coy plea drifted across the close, stuffy tent. "Great King, have another cup....."

The young vixen forced the corners of her mouth upward, an expression that quivered under the lamplight.

She leaned in, both hands lifting a shallow bronze goblet toward the scorpion king's chest.

King Redstinger's lips curled into a greasy grin as he snatched the cup.

Wine splashed down his throat in one swallow, then he caught the vixen's chin between thumb and forefinger.

"Pretty thing, once I wipe out those fools in Skyfiend Gorge, I'll make you my concubine. You'll drown in riches."

Disgust flickered across her pupils before she buried it behind lowered lashes.

She forced a meek nod, afraid even the tent's torches might betray her true feeling.

At that instant, an unhurried voice floated through the hot canvas air of the tent.

"You won't live long enough to try."

King Redstinger's expression went rigid. He shoved the girl aside, sprang upright, and raised his scarlet tail; the barbed stinger gleamed like frosted steel.

"Who?!"

A gray silhouette stood at the flap, arrival unseen, presence undeniable-Jared.

Hands clasped behind his back, he studied King Redstinger with bored detachment, as if the scorpion were already a corpse.

"Guards! Guards!" King Redstinger bellowed, voice cracking the hush. Nothing answered. Beyond the hide walls, the night lay as mute as a graveyard.

A Warrior Undefeatable

"Stop yelling. They're all asleep," Jared Chance said in a mild tone.

He began to walk forward, each stride slow, measured, inevitable.

King Redstinger's pupils pinched to needlepoints.

His awareness brushed the perimeter and found every sentry's aura sunk into a bottomless slumber, not slain, simply unreachable.

Cold realization crawled beneath his carapace.

When exactly had this stranger acted?

And how had he, a High Immortal Seven, felt nothing at all?

"Y-you... who are you?" His voice no longer sounded like a sovereign, only a frightened beast.

Red energy roared over his skin as he lunged; the scarlet tail whipped forward like a poisoned spear at Jared Chance.

The strike moved faster than lightning, the stinger loaded with venom fierce enough to kill a Level Six High Immortal outright.

Jared Chance raised his right hand; two fingers slid together like closing chopsticks.

Crack! The sound popped sharp and clean.

The deadly barb stopped between those fingers, absolutely still, unable to drive even a hair's breadth farther.

"What?!" Shock ripped from the scorpion king's throat.

He yanked, but the tail refused to budge, gripped as if by celestial pliers.

Jared Chance pressed ever so slightly.

Snap! The armored point splintered under that tiny squeeze.

The once-indestructible stinger lay in shards, crushed between two placid fingers.

"Ah!" The shriek tore through the tentcloth.

The tail was a life-bound artifact; its shattering lashed pain straight into his spirit sea. Agony flared white behind his eyes, nearly buckling his knees.

Battle instincts overrode the agony; his free hand slapped toward the crimson gourd at his belt.

That vessel housed Redstinger Venom Sand-once loosed, the toxic grains blanketed everything, rotting flesh beneath Level Seven in a breath.

Jared Chance moved first, speed eclipsing thought.

The instant the palm met the gourd, Chance materialized before him; the left hand speared forward, two fingers driving for the king's brow.

Redstinger tried to twist away, but the surrounding space clamped down like cooling glass-his limbs refused every command.

"No!" Despair flooded his voice.

A muted hiss marked finger meeting flesh.

Chaos Shatterfinger burrowed through the glabella, gray light vanishing into the brain.

The scorpion king stiffened; color drained from his eyes, aura collapsing like a gutted furnace.

Then his body sagged and toppled, lifeless.

Jared Chance didn't spare the corpse a glance; one casual gesture drew the crimson gourd and the man's storage ring into his palm.

He turned to the two trembling vixen youths, voice gentle.

"Do not fear. I'm here to free you. Dress yourselves and come with me."

The two fox girls blinked as though waking from a heavy fog.

A startled breath left both of them, and their hands flew to smooth torn sleeves and tug loose collars back into place.

When they straightened, wide amber eyes found Jared Chance, and relief flooded their faces in a shy, grateful glow.

Jared turned toward the flap and lifted it.

He tilted his head, signaling them forward, then stepped ahead so the lantern light framed a clear path.

The sisters followed close, bare feet whispering across the rugs, until they slipped into the colder night air behind him.

Beyond the canvas, dozens of Redstinger Royal Guards sprawled across the packed earth, limbs tangled, helmets askew.

Thunderous snores rattled from every throat, a rolling, comic storm that broke against the canyon walls.

Not one guard stirred; Jared's earlier Chaos Hypnotic Art held them in a dream deeper than wine or wounds.

Jared paused to survey the heap of armor and muscle.

Fingers flexed once, then relaxed; a single flick could have ended every breathing chest before him.

He let the thought pass. Dead men screamed louder than sleepers, and tonight he wanted silence, not charity.

A muted swirl of gray mist rose beneath Jared's boots, swallowed the three figures, and stretched into a slender arc of light.

The arc skimmed over tents, watchtowers, and canyon rim without stirring so much as a banner tassel, then vanished into the moonlit sky toward Skyfiend Gorge.

From the moment he entered Redstinger's camp to the instant the gorge walls welcomed him back, less than an incense-stick's burn had passed.

Somewhere behind that silent flight, King Redstinger's name had already joined the dead.

His throne sat empty, his scorpion tail broken on a tent floor that would never feel his stride again.

Yet the celestials massed beyond the gorge marched through their nightly drills, oblivious, banners still bright with his sigil.

Not a single horn sounded to mark the loss.

Moonlight spilled across the gorge courtyard as Jared set down, the two fox girls stepping shakily beside him.

King Ironhide's massive frame froze mid-stride; Elder Hartcrest's antlered head jerked forward, disbelief widening both sets of eyes.

"King Redstinger... really dead?" King Ironhide's rumbling voice broke the hush.

He snatched the crimson scorpion token from Jared's palm, rotating it between clawed fingertips, as though the carved chitin might deny the truth.

Each inspection ended the same unmistakable seal, fresh owner.

"Dead. Body and soul both scattered." Jared's reply came level, neither cruel nor proud.

The words carried no swell of triumph; they fell with the casual certainty of a man reporting finished chores.

Jared guided the shaken fox sisters toward Elder Hartcrest; a gentle nod sent the stag-elder bustling to find blankets and rest.

Turning then, Jared leaned over the sand table where miniature ridges and camp markers traced the warfront.

A measured fingertip tapped the figurine marked Nightbat. "His speed and sonic craft favor the dark; we strike before dawn and deny him both."

Excitement rattled King Ironhide's plated shoulders; the great bear's fur bristled as though charged by storm.

"Brother Jared, your methods border on the uncanny! End the five traitor lords and we might yet break this siege!"

Elder Hartcrest's ears tilted back, voice low.

"Your swift victories will soon reach the Beast-Quelling Venerable. Should he march with the celestials, our walls may not hold."

Steel glimmered behind Jared's calm gaze.

"Let him come. Inside that hall he hides behind layers of stone and oath; out here his throat lies bare, and I have ways to sever it."

He tracked the thinning night clouds, judging the hours left until first light.

"No delay. I leave now. King Ironhide, gather an elite unit and watch for my flare."

"The moment Nightbat falls, drive at the enemy's west wing and strip their stores." King Ironhide slammed a fist to his chest. "Understood!"

Gray brilliance wrapped Jared once more, and in a blink the streak shot beyond the gorge rim, swallowed by the moon-drenched dark.

Western Front, King Nightbat's camp.

The Nightbat encampment

crouched beneath the plateau like a wound that refused to close, every torch extinguished, every corridor soaked in damp shadow.

Canvas had no place here; rows of tunnels bored through limestone and countless bat soldiers hung inverted along the walls, wings cocooning their bodies.

From time to time a thin pulse of ultrasound rippled through the darkness, testing for any breath that did not belong.

At the cavern's core, a crimson pool steamed softly.

King Nightbat floated within, arms spread, black wings half-submerged, skin drinking the simmering gore like nourishment.

When he rose, he cut a gaunt silhouette-tall, bone-lean, clad in shadow-woven robes.

Vast black wings unfurled behind him; scarlet pupils burned above fanged lips.

His cultivation fed on stolen lifeblood; each surge of power demanded another draught from the unwilling.

Dozens of shriveled rebel bodies bobbed beside him, hollow eyes staring upward as though still pleading for release.

An unseen tremor brushed the cavern mouth. Nightbat's eyes snapped open, pupils tightening to knife points while he pivoted toward the entrance.

A wisp of power drifted in, older than the camp, older than the war—so faint it barely stirred the air, yet it prickled every instinct he owned.

Unease coiled deep in his gut.

"Who?" The single word cut the silence like a blade edged with suspicion.

Nightbat's wings snapped wide, membranes trembling, every muscle poised to launch or strike.

From the mouth of the tunnel a gray shape materialized, stepping out of darkness as though it were only another doorway—Jared.

"I came to kill you." Jared's tone remained almost gentle, a chill promise drifting on the damp air.

Recognition flashed; his scarlet pupils shrank to pinpricks, and a low hiss slipped between sharp teeth.

The stories of a killer who felled the

Divine Runishment Hall's Five Venerables thundered through his thoughts those tales matched the

aura now filling the cave.

"It's you!" The words burst out, half fear, half fury.

Nightbat's lips curled into a dark smile.

"Bold, trespassing so deep in my nest. Since you arrived, you'll never leave alive."

Jaws yawning impossibly wide, he released a pulse of sound no ear could register. The vibration raced forward, invisible and instant, hunting its victim's very soul.

Nothing stirred in its wake, yet foes below seventh-grade upper immortal usually dropped mind-shattered before they could even scream. Jared's brow tightened by the width of a hair.

Behind that small gesture, a tide of chaotic force rolled out of his consciousness.

It flattened itself into a gray shield that hung in mid-air like mist, opaque yet strangely calm.

The horrific sound wave slammed into the gray shield.

For a heartbeat the surface rippled, then the vibration vanished like rainwater swallowed by sand.

A Warrior Undefeatable

King Nightbat's pupils shrank.

"What?!" The shout burst from him before sense could catch up.

That Soulshatter Demon Dirge had once crippled a Top Level High Immortal Realm Level Seven foe.

Yet the youngster in front of him, only Ninth Level Celestial by his reckoning, stood untouched as if it were a spring breeze.

Jared gave no answer.

He stepped once, the motion light and silent, then reappeared in front of King Nightbat like a flicker of bad light.

His fist snapped forward.

The punch looked plain, almost informal, but the air around his knuckles darkened.

Chaotic force threaded through the strike, and thin black cracks crawled across the space it traveled.

King Nightbat jerked his wings in front of him.

Lines of obsidian runes flared across the membrane, knitting into a dense shield.

Boom!

The cave shook as the two forces met.

Fist hammered wing.

The impact folded the air inward, popping ears and rattling loose stones from the ceiling.

The rune wall ripped like wet paper.

Jared's fist tore straight through the battered wing and buried itself in King Nightbat's chest.

Bone cracked with a noise like splintering ice.

Spurt!

A sheet of black blood fanned across the pool, hissing where it landed.

King Nightbat spewed another mouthful of tar-thick blood.

His breastbone sank inward; ribs snapped with every staggered breath.

Terror caught up with him.

Gray energy flooded his meridians, eating through flesh and spirit alike, and every technique he tried to muster scattered before he could grip it.

"No... impossible..." he rasped.

"I'm High Immortal Realm Level Seven-how can you..."

The roar tore what remained of his voice.

Hate and disbelief swam in his blood-red eyes, chased by a deeper, crushing fear. Jared offered silence.

His left hand rose, two fingers aligned like a blade, and he drove the gray edge toward the center of the bat king's brow.

King Nightbat lurched aside, but the broken body lagged behind the order.

The ash-colored lightspear slipped through his forehead and sank into the sea of his awareness.

Darkness closed over him like a door, and it never opened again.

Jared plucked the storage ring from the corpse, then peeled away the pair of black wings that had once looked so imposing.

In skilled hands those membranes could be forged into a fine flight treasure; he stored them without a word.

He spared the cavern no second glance and slipped into the shadowed tunnels. Within breaths he was gone.

Barely half a stick of incense after he left, the night-watch bats discovered their king lying in the blood-soaked pool.

Panic spread through the Western Front Encampment the way mold spreads through damp grain.

"The king is dead!"

"Enemy attack! Enemy attack!"

Alarms clanged, wings beat the air, and an entire underground city stumbled over itself in chaos.

By then Jared had crossed half the battlefield and stepped onto the Southern Front.

His next mark was King Goldtoad, third of the Five Beast Kings.

King Goldtoad was weaker, sitting at the peak of Top Level High Immortal Realm Level Six, but he made up for it with venom and armor.

His ancient body, a thousand-year poison toad, carried skin thick as bronze and spittle that could dissolve top-grade spirit gear.

Jared shunned subtlety.

He walked straight into the central command tent, gray light wrapped around his boots like a veil of dust.

"Who goes there?!"

King Goldtoad had been bent over a campaign map with several lieutenants. When the stranger appeared, rage and shock rippled across his wide face.

"The one who has come for your life," Jared replied, voice as still as stone.

Chaotic force gathered in his palm, stretching into a gray longsword that hummed with quiet hunger.

The breath leaking from that blade prickled King Goldtoad's skin, and his heart sank.

The visitor was no friend.

He roared, and his body ballooned outward.

In an instant a house-sized golden toad squatted where the man had been.

Bulbous poison sacs crawled across his back.

He belched a cloud of swirling green venom that flooded the entire tent.

The nearby commanders barely had time to scream.

The mist ate them to slurry, spirits and all.

Gray light rippled over Jared's skin.

Every drop of poison that touched the halo fractured, then vanished as if devoured by something older than rot.

King Goldtoad's pupils widened until they swallowed the gold around them.

Only now did he realize he had met his bane.

He sprang, the massive body falling toward Jared like an eclipsing moon.

At the same time his tongue snapped out, lightning-fast, a needle of gold venom glimmering at its tip.

The bead of gold poison at the tongue's tip pulsed, brighter than torchlight.

King Goldtoad had nursed that venom for a thousand years; a single mote of it had ended High Immortal Realm Level Seven masters before.

Jared's gaze sharpened, no hint of retreat in his stance.

He lunged instead, gray longsword sweeping up.

The blade carved an arcing crescent of chaos-laced light that sliced toward the looming toad.

A wet, tearing pop split the stale air.

The sword crescent sheared through the muscular tongue, severing it at the root.

Momentum carried the strike onward, cleaving King Goldtoad's skull from crest to jaw in one clean line.

The colossal carcass crashed down, rattling shields and tents.

Inky-green blood gushed out, sizzling wherever it splattered and chewing deep pits into the earth.

Somewhere in the smoky dusk of the camp, a scout screamed, "Three kings are down!"

The cry raced through the western region faster than falcons.

Fortresses, valleys, and skyships jolted awake as if struck by rolling thunder.

Inside Beast-Quelling Hall Headquarters, the Beast-Quelling Venerable slammed both palms onto the jade rail and finally stood.

"Within a single day he decapitated Red Scorpion, Nightbat, and now King Goldtoad?" His voice scraped across the pillars.

Shadow pooled beneath his eyes; the Venerable's face lay still and dark as standing water.

"So the Divine Punishment Warrant didn't exaggerate," he said. "Jared really does wield an uncanny power."

Below the dais, only two thrones remained occupied.

King Silverserpent and King Ironhawk hunched in uneasy silence, scales and feathers drained of color.

"Venerable, that human is too terrifying. Perhaps we should... perhaps we should lie low for now?" The plea rang across the silent hall.

King Silverserpent's voice barely rose above a whisper; every syllable crept out, as though sound itself might provoke wrath.

"Lie low?" The Venerable's chuckle was colder than marble.

He straightened, cloak flaring.

"I have guarded the western region for hundreds of years without retreating a step.

Send the order-summon every banner and weave a Heaven-Snare net. I will meet

Jared myself."

"And dispatch word to the Grand Venerable of the Central Region. Tell him Jared has appeared and request reinforcements."

The command runners bowed as one. "Yes, sir!"

King Silverserpent and King Ironhawk nearly tripped over each other, rushing to echo, "Yes, Venerable!"

Ice flashed in the Venerable's eyes. "Jared, whatever your origins, the western region will be your grave."

Deep within Skyfiend Gorge, King Ironhide had followed Jared's plan to the letter.

His sudden strike on the Western Front Encampment seized wagonloads of grain and crates of pills, and his troops roared with renewed confidence. "Brother Jared, you are truly the savior of our kind!" Ironhide bellowed, his voice booming off the canyon walls.

The bear king's massive paw thumped Jared's shoulder, the gesture rough yet brimming with affection.

Jared's expression stayed grim. "Bear King, the Beast-Quelling Venerable is gathering every army to surround us. The real fight starts now."

Elder Hartcrest nodded slowly. "Mr. Jared is right. We may have slain three kings,

yet the celestials' foundation remains untouched."

"The Venerable still commands tens

of thousands of elites," Hartcrest added, and reinforcements are already marching from other.

regions. The pressure is only growing

Luther hurried into the tent, cloak dusted with grit. "Mr. Jared, I found an ancient array deep in the valley. The stone is cracked, yet the sigils still shine—and they look like Ghost

in the valleys,

Clan script."

Jared's eyes sparked. "Show me."

Guided by Luther, he threaded through twisting gullies and slipped into a concealed cavern near the gorge's heart.

Torchlight revealed a circular stone

one

dais roughly thirty feet across, every inch etched with interlocking runes that spiraled like skeletal vines.

Age had rubbed many glyphs pale, yet the underlying lattice remained unbroken, its pulse faint beneath the dust.

Tracing one groove, Jared found patterns matching marks on the Ghost King Token fragment Luther once carried.

"A Ghost Clan teleportation array," he concluded.

"And not a minor one. In ancient days the Ghost Clan used arrays like this to leap across continents."

Luther's breath hitched. "If we can repair it, we might escape to other Ghost Clan territories."

Jared weighed the idea. "It will take time and a mountain of space-attuned materials to restore. Time is the one thing we lack."

His words had barely settled when his head snapped toward the tunnel mouth, pupils tightening.

"They've arrived," he said.

A Warrior Undefeatable

Low thunder rolled over the valley as wave after wave of celestials marched toward Skyfiend Gorge.

From the shadowed ridges, their bronze shields caught the stray light, so the entire mass looked like a single, ever-rising black tide.

Overhead, more than a hundred celestial skysloops swept into formation and locked together like slabs of dark iron.

Their keels glowed, linking bows to sterns until the last scrap of open sky behind Jared vanished.

Down on the battered plain, tens of thousands of celestial guardsmen and conscripted beast soldiers closed ranks.

Their square formations advanced one deliberate step at a time, spears leveling in a forest that never stopped creeping forward.

At the very front, Beast-Quelling Venerable hovered above the dust.

Gold armor wrapped him from throat to heel, every plate ringing with the steady hum of a Top Level High Immortal Realm Level Seven aura.

That pressure pressed down like a full cliff on every living thing beneath him.

Flanking him floated the two surviving beast kings, King Silverserpent on his left and King Ironhawk on his right.

Eight celestial captains at High Immortal Realm Level Five spread out behind them, forming a jagged half-circle that mirrored their master's killing intent.

The Venerable's voice cracked across the gorge like lightning.

"Jared! Show yourself and die!" The words boomed from his throat, rattling loose stones from the cliff face.

The thunderous command ricocheted against every wall of Skyfiend Gorge, rolling through tunnels and ravines until even the deepest crevice carried the sound.

Inside the dim war tent, King Ironhide's shaggy brows pressed together.

"Brother Jared, we're surrounded," he rumbled, voice pitched low so the nearby scouts would not panic.

"Enemies on every side, no fewer than fifty thousand." Each syllable landed like another nail in the floorboards.

Jared stepped out of the hidden cavern and let the cold daylight slam against his face.

High above, the Venerable's gold-clad silhouette shone like a hanging executioner's blade, and battle heat surged behind Jared's eyes.

"Alpha Bear, gather everyone and break out," Jared said, never taking his eyes off the sky.

"I'll carve a path for you." The promise came out calm, but the air around him vibrated with chaotic force already gathering.

"No! We fight beside you!" King Ironhide burst out, fists the size of millstones slamming together.

Dust drifted from the cave ceiling with the blow.

"That is an order."

The words cut sharper than any blade, leaving no room for discussion.

Jared's tone hardened. "If you stay, you slow me down. Trust me I can fight my way through."

Each clipped phrase carried the weight of iron certainty.

King Ironhide opened his mouth, found no counter, then shut it with a crack.

At last he growled, "Fine. Brother Jared, stay alive." Resolve and worry tangled behind his dark eyes.

Jared turned to the shadow-wrapped Luther.

"Luther, guard the Bear King during the breakout. If a window opens, start fixing that array."

His gaze held no hint of doubt.

Luther nodded twice, quick and forceful.

"Understood, Mr. Jared. Be careful." The normally flat voice trembled at the edges.

Jared wasted no more breath.

He gathered chaotic force under his soles and shot up, a single gray streak ripping through layers of swirling mist.

Wind screamed past, unable to cling to him.

"Beast-Quelling Venerable, weren't you looking for me?" Jared's shout carried clean and even.

"Well, here I am."

Although calm, the declaration rolled across the battlefield, entering every ear like a personal summons.

For one silent heartbeat, even the marching boots missed their rhythm.

The Venerable's stare sharpened until it felt like a spear haft growing from his brow.

"A youthful hero indeed," he said, voice dropping to a cold admiration.

"Pity you chose to oppose the celestials. That road ends only in a grave."

"Life or death-we'll know after the blades meet," Jared answered.

Within his meridians, chaotic force raged like a storm locked behind iron doors.

The Venerable barked a laugh that held no humor.

"Arrogant whelp. Form the array!"

At his command, every skysloop pulsed.

Gold light poured from their prows, weaving itself into chains that shot outward, link after blazing link.

In seconds a titanic mesh arced overhead and swooped toward Jared.

This was the Heaven-Net Entrapment Array.

Once inside, even a High Immortal Realm Level Eight expert usually clawed in vain for freedom.

Cold light flashed as the Dragonslayer Sword appeared in Jared's grip.

He raised it without ceremony and swung.

"Chaos-Skybreaker!"

The cry ripped free of his chest, fusing sound with power.

A gray sword beam tore upward.

Where it passed, gold chains snapped like rotten twine, and the giant net split open, daylight flooding through the wound.

The Venerable's expression tightened.

"Such force... he must not leave here alive." A rare flicker of concern crossed his features.

He hurled himself forward and threw a punch.

The blow warped the air, shaping a gold fist the size of a small mountain that dropped toward Jared.

Jared didn't dodge.

He met the incoming mass with a punch of his own, muscles and chaotic force snapping into perfect alignment.

The two fists collided.

A thunderclap followed, loud enough to make nearby hearts stutter.

The shockwave fanned outward.

Dozens of celestial soldiers below sprayed blood and tumbled through the air like rag dolls before crashing onto the rocks.

The impact hurled Jared a hundred yards back.

He skidded to a halt, a thin line of blood tracing from the corner of his mouth.

The Venerable also swayed mid-air, disbelief flashing through his eyes.

That punch had carried seventy percent of his strength, yet the Heaven Immortal Level Nine youth still stood.

"This one cannot be measured by common standards," the Venerable realized, unease coiling in his chest.

Alert now, he barked, "All forces, advance! Spare no cost-kill him!"

"Kill!"

The shout rolled from the five-division host in perfect unison, dense enough to shake the teeth in a man's skull.

Fifty thousand troops surged forward, a living tide aimed straight at Jared. Armor clanged, banners snapped, and the ground itself seemed to crawl beneath their charge.

Metallic wind hissed at Jared's ears

as King Silverserpent shot in from the left and King Ironhawk sliced in from the right, the two apex beasts moving like mirrored blades

In mid-air, King Silverserpent's frame blurred, stretching outward until a 100-foot silver python coiled where the man had been.

Its jaws yawned; a billow of ink-green venom rolled out, and every shard of cliff it touched fizzed, slumped, then crumbled into shining dust.

Opposite the serpent, King Ironhawk burst into bronze feathers and reformed as a giant eagle; the span of its wings smothered the sun for a heartbeat.

Air screamed beneath hooked talons that scythed downward, leaving white gouges in the sky itself.

For an instant Jared stood at the eye of a tightening ring—sky choked with wings, ground crawling with steel, poison mist closing the gaps.

No avenue of retreat remained.

Yet the sight did nothing to chill him; heat rushed up his spine and his fighting spirit towered higher than the walls of blades hemming him in.

"Come on then!" he bellowed, the shout cracking like thunder between the cliffs.

He drew a breath that seemed to drag the universe through his lungs, and the chaotic force exploded outward.

A gray membrane formed around his body, swelling in a blink until it domed over 100 feet of air and stone.

Spearmen at the rim rushed in and staggered the instant the haze touched their armor.

Strength bled from limbs, breathing went ragged, and a sickly gray climbed their skin as the field drank power and life alike.

From somewhere inside the choking crowd a voice cracked with terror, "What kind of devil art is this?!"

Another soldier shrieked, "My spirit power's draining away!"

Panic blossomed in every direction, the shouts layering over each other until fear became a single, ragged chorus.

Jared waded forward like a wolf through penned sheep; each sweep of the gray longsword carved an arc, and dozens fell before their screams finished forming.

Blood mist sprayed so high it stained the clouds, and bodies tumbled from the air like broken arrows.

But for every foe that dropped, three more surged in; fifty thousand warriors meant the tide never truly receded.

Beyond the melee, Beast-Quelling Venerable and the two beast kings traced sigils through the air, latticing fresh formations that kept shrinking Jared's battlefield. "Nine Hells Dragon-Shackle Formation!" their voices boomed, stamping the first array into place.

"Tenfold Demon-Seal Formation!" followed a breath later, layers of runes slotting together like prison bars.

"Nine Heavens Thunderfire Formation!" they cried, and sparks danced across the forming cage.

Each array settled with a rumble, stacking weight on his shoulders until the very air felt ready to crack his bones.

The chaotic force roared inside him, still monstrous, yet every surge tore more fuel from a dwindling core.

Hours or maybe only minutes of unbroken slaughter had already burned through more than half his remaining essence.

A memory flared behind his eyes; he slapped the silver storage ring at his waist.

"Lucky, lend me your fire!" he shouted into the ring.

A pillar of flame punched out of the ring, accompanied by a thunderous roar that shook the formations.

A young fire unicorn burst into view, now the size of a calf, crimson scales gleaming where embers crawled between the plates.

Flames rolled under its four hooves, and a single golden horn atop its brow flashed like a brandished blade.

The aura pouring off the creature rivaled a High Immortal Realm Level Five elder, raw and untempered, laced with the regal bloodline of the unicorn clan. "Rooooaar!" Lucky trumpeted, fire swirling into the shape of a crown above its head.

It snapped its jaws; a ribbon of gold fire lashed across the front ranks and dozens of celestial guards vanished, reduced to drifting ash before their weapons hit the ground.

Lucky galloped through the air, ramming shields apart, scattering shields like toys, unstoppable as a living comet.

A stunned lieutenant gasped, "That's a unicorn...?"

Beast-Quelling Venerable's pupils shrank. "Impossible! How can a unicorn exist on level thirteen?"

With the beast at his flank, Jared finally found breathing room; their combined assault punched holes straight through the encirclement.

Man and unicorn charged in, broke out, and dove back seven times; each pass left fresh fields of bodies littering the blood-slick earth.

Yet the sea around them only grew darker; for every gap they carved, new troops flooded forward, shoulder to shoulder.

A fresh column of celestial banners appeared on the horizon, headed by a High Immortal Realm Level Six commander whose aura rolled in like distant thunder.

"Jared Chance! The Grand Venerable

of the Central Region has decreed your extermination. Every celestial in level thirteen hunts you there is no escape!" the newcomer roared.

Beast-Quelling Venerable echoed in a low, iron tone, "Hear that? Your doom is sealed."

A Warrior Undefeatable

Jared acted as though the threats were wind; the Dragonslayer Sword blurred into a silver-gray storm, each rotation faster than the last.

His eyes glowed crimson, chaotic force nearly bled dry, and fresh cuts mapped his arms and shoulders, yet the blade never paused.

Jared pulled his gaze from the blazing wreck of the nearest sky-skiff.

Lucky hovered beside him, wings beating unevenly. Cracked crimson scales dulled the unicorn's natural luster, and every breath sent out only a handful of weak sparks.

Heat that once rolled off the beast like a furnace now felt no warmer than late-autumn air. The change pinched Jared's chest tighter than the corded bruises wrapping his ribs.

A raw roar rose over the clang of steel and the hiss of shattered spells.

It came from the direction of Skyfiend Gorge—dozens, maybe hundreds, of throats driving one word ahead of them like a boulder: a pledge to kill.

The sound bucked through the smoky air and slammed straight into Jared's eardrums, jarring him out of the daze of exhaustion.

Through the drifting ash, a familiar voice carried above the rest. "Jared, we're here!"

The shout rang bright, reckless, and utterly certain, as if the speaker had never doubted they would find him alive in this hurricane of light and gore.

King Ironhide burst from the canyon mouth at a full charge. The battered remnants of the Beastfolk Resistance poured in after him, weapons lifted high.

Even after all their losses, the very thump of their boots hit the ground like a war drum that refused to die.

Less than twenty thousand fighters remained, and nearly every armor plate they wore had a crack or a bloodstain.

Yet the force of their arrival felt like a mountainside breaking loose, momentum hungry to bury anything in its path.

"Beastfolk, today we avenge every river of blood they ever spilled!"

King Ironhide's roar shook dust from the shattered cliff face. He bulged outward, bones snapping into place as fur exploded across his frame. Then the black bear the size of a two-story hall thundered forward.

The ten-foot bear's first swipe tore a trench through the celestials' front rank. Dozens of armored bodies whirled into the air; more were smashed into the ground so hard their breastplates folded like tin.

Jared felt the shock wave rumble through his boots.

Elder Hartcrest answered the charge, antlers gleaming. The white stag grew until his hooves hovered a man's height above the dirt.

Soft white radiance welled from the tines of his rack, spilling over nearby fighters. Torn flesh knit, broken bones slid back into place, and the wounded straightened with new breath on their tongues.

Luther became a streak of living night. Each time the shadow clarified into a figure, a celestial officer clutched at a suddenly empty chest cavity before crumpling.

Jared tracked the motion only by the brief glints of steel sliding free of blackness.

A gasp slipped from a knot of celestials. They had not expected anyone else to throw themselves into this slaughter on Jared's side.

A hot pulse of gratitude flickered behind Jared's sternum, but it broke apart just as fast.

He cupped both hands around his mouth and roared, "Who told you to be here? Get back, now!" The command cracked his raw throat.

King Ironhide laughed, a deep, rolling sound that carried over clanging metal. "Jared, the beast race never abandons the one who saved us. If we die, we die together!"

"Together!" The word blasted from two thousand throats at once.

The declaration pounded against the ruined sky like a second heartbeat, daring any listener to doubt it.

Their arrival shoved the enemy tide back two steps. Blades stopped brushing Jared's cloak for the first time in minutes.

His chest expanded with a single, precious breath that did not taste of panic.

But the relief lasted a heartbeat and no more.

Enemy banners still clogged the horizon, and every standard bristled with fresh spears marching toward them.

Yet the battlefield remained dire.

Finger bones rattled as he flew through a rapid sequence of seals. Overhead, more than a hundred war barges flared to life, their hull runes spitting jagged golden light into the clouds.

"All vessels," the Venerable hissed, "unleash judgment!"

Gold engines howled. The air pressure dropped so sharply Jared's ears popped, and sparks rained from the sky in wide arcs.

Each barge fired a beam as thick as an ancient cedar. The hundred streams merged almost instantly, braiding into one colossal pillar of annihilation that plowed toward the patch of sky Jared and the beastfolk held.

A hundred blazing beams fused into a single 100-foot column of destruction that thundered toward Jared and the beastfolk ranks.

The blood drained from Jared's face. He knew his battered body would never hold against that strike and the fighters behind him had even less hope.

"Chaos, guard the heavens."

The words left his teeth as a snarl. He dragged the last threads of chaotic force out of his core and rammed them upward, shaping a titanic gray shield above the army.

Lucky sensed the peril before the shout finished. Gold fire flared across every plate still clinging to the unicorn's hide, then funneled into the forming barrier.

The sudden brightness turned Lucky's flame to a mere candle stub, but the shield swelled another several yards.

Thunder cracked.

The annihilation beam slammed into gray light.

The shield juddered so hard Jared's bones echoed the vibration. Fractures spider- webbed across the surface like dry earth splitting under drought.

Pain burst behind his eyes, but he refused to let his knees fold.

Blood spilled from his nostrils, then from his ears. The taste of iron filled his mouth, yet he planted his boots and pushed harder against the collapsing heavens.

"Jared!" King Ironhide's bellow tore

through the blast's roar. The bea

tried to charge to him, only to be intercepted by King Silverserpent and King ronhawk diving from opposite sides.

"Out of my way or die!"

Ironhide's rage flattened the ground where his paws landed, but the two enemy kings locked him in a deadly triangle of blades and fangs.

Elder Hartcrest poured every breath of healing light he held toward Jared, yet the cracks only widened. The stag's flanks heaved, silver eyes desperate.

Just as the barrier's weave started to peel apart, Luther stepped out of shadow at Jared's side. He slammed a pitch-black token fragment against the trembling surface.

It was a shard of the Ghost King Token.

Nether aura surged from the fragment, coiling with Jared's chaotic force. The cracks slowed, then, unbelievably, began to stitch themselves closed.

Jared's vision blurred from more than pain. "Luther, what are you doing?"

"Mr. Jared, this is all that's left to me."

Luther's voice barely carried over the shriek of colliding energies. His skin already blanched, veins darkening as the token leached life from him.

Another bolt of terror tried to rip through Jared, but he shoved it down with raw will. "Hold the line!

The Deam's weakening!" He roared forcing the words past cracked lips.

A muffled tremor answered him. Somewhere inside the gold pillar, power faltered.

Jared felt the moment like a loosened knot around his heart: the impossible strike finally beginning to run out of breath.

The beam's edge thinned, shafts of clear sky sneaking through the glare.

Yet every second it lasted still pushed the shield toward its limit.

Jared braced, shoulders screaming. Lucky's last embers flickered along the barrier rim, while Luther swayed, one hand locked around the token as if welded there.

Light finally guttered out. The extinguished beam left ringing silence in its wake and a dozen floating motes of molten gold that fizzled into nothing.

The gray shield shattered the instant the threat vanished.

Force from the break hurled Jared, Lucky, and Luther backward in three separate arcs. Blood fanned behind each of them like red banners.

But lungs still sucked air, and hearts still beat.

The pillar of destruction flickered.

Its once-solid core thinned, and the outer rings broke apart into sparks that drifted before they died.

Weight that had been crushing Jared's bones a heartbeat ago lifted just enough for him to straighten his neck and look up.

Across the sky, the runic conduits under every warship dimmed from blind white to a sullen gold.

Even siege-class weapons needed time and spiritstone fuel to recharge.

The fleet was panting, the way soldiers did after a sprint.

When the final strand of light went out, night rushed back.

The gray shield hanging over Jared's head shattered with a single, echoing crack.

Shards of dull light spun outward like broken glass before dissolving in the wind.

The backlash hit all three at once.

Jared, Lucky, and Luther spat blood and tumbled through the air, bodies cartwheeling until they crashed against the churned ground thirty feet away.

Yet their chests still rose and fell. They had lived through a blast meant to erase High Immortals.

Beast-Quelling Venerable's face

dark until it looked carved from

iron. He had bet everything on that

one perfect strike and could not

accept that Jared still breathed

"Kill! Leave no one alive!" His roar cut through the din like a sword.

The celestial ranks surged forward again, shields up, halberds leveled, eager to drown the battered defenders under sheer numbers.

King Ironhide hurled King Silverserpent and King Ironhawk aside, then charged to Jared's side. "Jared! Go! I'll cover you!"

His bear-skin armor dripped with enemy blood as he spoke.

A Warrior Undefeatable

Jared shook his head, voice hoarse. "I'm not leaving."

"You have to!"

King Ironhide bellowed, "You're the beast race's hope! If you live, the celestials will never sleep easy. If you live, our people still have a future!"

He stared into Jared's eyes, every line of his face pleading. "Brother, I'm begging you. Go!"

The fearless resolve inside those eyes stabbed Jared's heart harder than any blade.

He understood King Ironhide had already traded his own life in his mind.

Luther whispered, "Mr. Jared, we should leave."

His breath rattled. "Keep the green hills, and we'll have firewood someday."

Far off, fresh celestial banners crested the ridge. Their leader radiated the pressure of High Immortal Realm Level Seven, a stranger drawn from some distant province.

Stay any longer and every road would close forever.

Jared clenched his jaw, burned King Ironhide's face into memory, and said, "King Ironhide... take care!"

He recalled Lucky, slung Luther's arm over his own shoulder, and shot toward the depths of Skyfiend Gorge as a streak of gray light.

"Think you can flee? Not that easy!" Beast-Quelling Venerable snorted and launched after them himself.

King Ironhide laughed, the sound wild and bright, then let his body swell to its full size.

A bear thirty yards tall planted two hind paws in the dirt and blocked the venerable's path.

"Old bastard! Your opponent is me!"

"Courting death!"

The venerable's fist, wrapped in auric flame, smashed forward.

King Ironhide did not dodge. He met the blow chest-on, ribs cracking, while his massive paw slammed sideways toward the venerable's neck.

Life for life—it worked. For the moment, he pinned the venerable in place.

Around them, surviving beast warriors ignited every reserve they had, throwing their bodies into the tide to buy Jared a few more breaths.

Jared half dragged, half carried Luther back into the cavern and skidded to a halt before the ruined teleport array.

Luther knelt despite shaking legs and began re-threading broken sigils. Jared stood in the mouth of the cave, cutting down every pursuing soldier who dared step inside.

One stick of incense later, the array breathed to life, a pale, trembling glow outlining the stone insets.

"Mr. Jared, it will barely work," Luther said, voice tight. "It can send only two people, and I can't tell where it will land!"

Luther urged, panic breaking through his composure.

Jared looked back toward the valley. Beast warriors fell one after another, crimson pooling beneath collapsed bodies.

King Ironhide, drenched in his own blood, still clung to Beast-Quelling Venerable like a shadow that refused to be shaken off.

Elder Hartcrest lay spent on the ground. Celestial blades rose and fell until white fur, antlers, and life were all in tatters.

Of the original 20 thousand beast soldiers, fewer than a thousand remained, and that number was dropping with every heartbeat.

Pain sliced through Jared's chest as

if a real blade had lodged between his ribs. The pressure stole his breath. Blood pounded behind his ears, every beat driving the wound deeper.

Faces flashed before him—friends, comrades, strangers who had trusted his promise. Each face

seemed to fall away into darkness, leaving only the moment their lives were extinguished.

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If he had never set foot in the western region... If he had not killed the three monster kings... If

"Mr. Jared, move!" Luther's strained voice cracked across the roar of battle, urgent and raw.

Jared dragged in a harsh breath, forced the hurt down, and wrapped an arm around Luther. Together they stepped onto the dim, sigil-scarred platform.

Runes kindled under his boots. In that first flare he turned, seeking one last glimpse of the field they were abandoning.

King Ironhide seemed to feel the farewell. The huge bear looked back, muzzle dripping red, and split his ruined lips in a fearless grin.

The Beast-Quelling Venerable's fist punched straight through the bear's chest, spraying dark blood across shattered stone.

Light exploded from the array. In the blinding surge, Jared and Luther were wrenched out of sight.

When vision returned, Jared found himself kneeling on spongy moss beneath trees so tall their crowns erased the sky.

Ancient trunks crowded together, branches knitting a ceiling of leaves. Warm spiritual mist rolled through the air, laced with the sour scent of rotting foliage.

Luther lay motionless beside him. The Ghost Clan youth breathed in faint, ragged sips of air.

Jared brushed trembling fingers over his own ribs. Chaotic force was nearly drained, bones shifted under the touch, organs pulsed with dull fire.

He ignored it and leaned over Luther, gaze narrowing on the still rise of the other's chest.

Life flickered low inside that body. Soul threads frayed. Any race but a ghost would already have slipped past saving.

He emptied every healing pill from

his ring, crushed them, and pressed the powder past Luther's lips. Gray energy trickled from his palm, wrapping the fading aura long

enough to anchor it.

Only after the last spark flowed did Jared collapse backward. Above the canopy a ragged strip of evening showed, mocking in its calm.

"I'm sorry... I'm sorry..."

The words barely left his tongue, more breath than sound, repeating until his throat rasped.

Never had helplessness bitten so hard. Strength lay somewhere ahead of him, yet tonight it felt an eternity away.

If he had reached High Immortal Realm sooner if he had honed every shred of power instead of dreaming—

But the world offered no if.

In that single battle, the Beastfolk Resistance was almost wiped out. Only a few hundred even had a chance to escape.

He had survived, yet the weight of those lost pressed heavier than any wound.

Chapter 6050

"Celestials..... Beast-Quelling Venerable... High Venerable..." The names hissed from between his teeth, each one a coal dropped onto his heart.

Fire rose behind his eyes. "If this debt goes unpaid, I-Jared is no man!"

He folded his legs, spine straight, and began knitting broken meridians together.

Deep in the Myriad Monster Mountain Range, a tattered column of beastfolk slipped through shadowed passes toward a hidden refuge.

At roll call they counted again. Two divisions once thirty rows deep now came to only three hundred twenty-seven names.

Bandaged limbs, torn armor, and hollow gazes told the rest.

"King Ironhide is gone... Elder Hartcrest is gone... so many brothers..."

A young wolf dropped to his knees, sobs shaking his lean frame.

A Beast General barked, voice hoarse yet unyielding, "They died protecting Mr. Jared and the future of our kind!"

"We survive for them. We carry their will until the day we strike back!"

Gaunt hands wiped tears. New light sparked in raw, reddened eyes.

"Revenge!"

"For King Ironhide!"

"For every fallen brother!"

The seed of hatred had already been pushed deep into the soil of every heart. It lay quiet, waiting for the right season to crack the earth and blaze across the land like a wildfire.

At the same moment, inside the Central Divine Punishment Hall.

Stone pillars stretched toward the high vault, and cold silver flames burned in tall braziers, pushing every shadow flat against the marble floor.

The Grand Venerable stood before the jade table, battle report from the western region unrolled beneath his gauntleted hand.

A dark cloud settled over his face, as heavy as the ink on the page.

"Jared Chance... he slipped away again."

His voice cut through the hall like the snap of frost.

The Grand Venerable let out a thin breath.

"Still, the Beastfolk Resistance is almost wiped out-one of his arms has been hacked off."

The words rang without heat, the verdict of a butcher tallying meat.

After a moment's silence he flicked his sleeve.

"Spread the order. Double the manhunt. Jared Chance is wounded and on the run; he will look for a place to mend himself."

"Tell every faction to inspect unfamiliar cultivators. Focus on those who are badly hurt and whose realm sits between the Heavenly Immortal and High Immortal stages."

"Also, track the exit of that teleportation array. It belongs to the Ghost Clan. Level thirteen still hides corners we have yet to pry open."

A glint colder than steel flashed in the High Venerable's eyes.

"Jared, no matter where you crawl, will find you. When that day comes, I will rip out your soul and refinedt into crystal as tribute to the spirits of the Five Venerables!

Far away, Jared had sat in silence
for a full day, drawing what et ce he could back into his
chaotic
ruined mendians.

Only now did a faint warmth return to his palms.

He opened his eyes.

Luther still lay beside him, unmoving; the sight pinched Jared's brows together.

Luther's breathing was so thin it barely stirred the moss under his cheek.

The clan's trademark chill was seeping out of him in wisps, like smoke slipping from cracked ice.

Jared recognized the line he stood on.

Without help, the friend who had followed him through blood and fire would not last three days.

"I need something that can heal a Ghost Clan body... medicine, a technique, anything."

The mutter faded as his divine sense spread in every direction, combing the forest for answers.

This place was the opposite of the western desert.

Spiritual energy hung in the air so thick it looked like pale mist.

Ancient trees stabbed toward the clouds, their trunks wrapped in ropes of vine.

Some of the trees wore patterns Jared had never seen—swirling grooves that pulsed faintly.

Others dripped soft green light from their leaves, like lanterns half-hidden in fog.

He was just about to scout farther when Luther's body jerked as if struck by lightning.

"Ah—" Luther curled into himself, a rough moan leaking between clenched teeth.

Jared shoved a stream of chaotic force into him, hoping to steady the collapse.

Instead, the energy hit something foreign and bounced back, repelled by the young man's Ghost Clan blood. Content Belongs

"Damn it!" The curse bit the air.

He ground his teeth, caught between panic and frustration, when Luther's eyelids finally slid open.

The eyes beneath were pure black, not a speck of white in sight, deep enough to swallow light.

The aura rolling off him shifted, losing every trace of measured cold.

What rose in its place was raw, brutal chaos that made Jared's skin crawl.

"Luther? You all right?"

Jared eased back half a step, every muscle ready to spring.

Luther gave no answer.

He rose, joints popping, spine bending at wrong angles before snapping straight.

Head tilted, he seemed to sniff the air.

A flicker of crimson slid across the black depths of his eyes.