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NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHOR



**KICKSTARTER
BONUS SCENE!**
UNSOULED

CRADLE : VOLUME ONE



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UNSOULED

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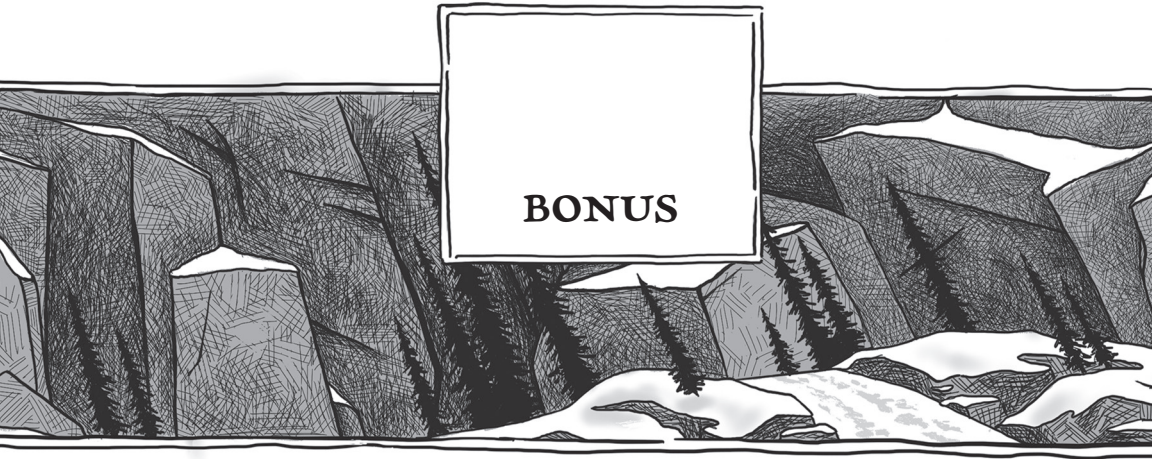
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***Unsouled* Kickstarter Bonus Scene (Part 1): Spoiler-free!**

**LOCATION: CHAPTER 11 OF *UNSOULED*,
AFTER THE FIRST SURIEL SCENE**

As he stood at the center of a stone arena, surrounded by buzzing insects, Li Markuth reveled in his victory.

Not his victory here, of course. That was a given. Jades from the Wei and Kazan clans mustered up their best techniques, old men and women rushing at him with balls of fox-fire and fists that carried the weight of stones.

They were less danger to him than a passing thought. With one swipe of his hand, he cast them aside by the dozen.

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There should be no joy in this, but nonetheless he was tempted to laugh as he cast aside these defective creatures who called themselves sacred artists. He remembered their ancestors, those who huddled in weakness and obscurity instead of facing the monsters they had created.

He drew a great deal of pleasure from the fact that he had not only outlived them by countless centuries but that he had returned as a scourge on their descendants. This was no less than they deserved.

But even that wasn't his true victory. He had won the moment he had entered this world in the first place.

This plan was the culmination of years of careful planning and calculation. He had labored as a soldier on battlefields in distant worlds, dueled as a champion, collected treasures and trinkets from those so much more powerful that Li Markuth could not look upon them.

All so that he could sneak messages through the Abidan's Sector Eleven Control.

It had been unspeakably difficult to provide instructions that would allow his own diminished descendants to pierce the Way, given their malnourished strength and near-total ignorance. But there had been enough fragments of true power left in the Sacred Valley to make it possible.

One furtive message at a time, he had built his own portal. His back door into Cradle.

Now he'd slipped in under the radar. Even the watchful Abidan Spiders wouldn't feel their web tremble, he was certain. They'd never know he was here.

And even if they did, he had exploited a loophole in their rules.

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There was nothing wrong with him being here. Li Markuth was born in Cradle and had joined his own descendants; he had not circumvented the Fate of this world, only left the stream and re-joined it later. At this point, they would cause more chaos by removing him than by leaving him.

Others had taken over worlds with similar methods, and the Abidan had been left with no choice but to leave them alone. But no one had been bold enough to try it with a world as prominent and highly valuable as Cradle, the birthplace of the Abidan.

In certain circles, this would make Li Markuth something of a celebrity. But the real reward was this world.

He would depose the kings and queens of Cradle with otherworldly powers they could not comprehend, though he would have to do it with some care. Unrivaled he may have been in this world, but that didn't mean everyone here was powerless.

They would be just enough to give him some exercise before he defeated them.

The thought pleased Li Markuth greatly, and he stretched his wings. The mere movement was enough to crack the skulls of three more Wei clan Jades.

Laughable.

Markuth raised his hands in triumph, gathering madra between his palms. "Be honored," he said to his enemies. "Know that in your last moments, you will catch your first glimpse of true power."

The withered Jades didn't react. In fact, they didn't move at all.

When Li Markuth realized that he, too, was paralyzed—even the ball of madra over his head locked in place—he felt the triumph of victory wither and die.

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All his planning. All his stealth. All his care.
After all that, they had still come for him.



***Unsouled* Kickstarter Bonus Scene (Part 2): Spoiler-free!**

LOCATION: AFTER CHAPTER 11 OF *UNSOULED*.

Li Markuth drifted in the Void, bound so thoroughly in workings of the Way that he could hardly even think. All around him, the endless darkness was broken only by spots of spinning color. The fragments of broken worlds.

He had traveled the Void plenty himself, enough to gain a healthy respect for its dangers. Drifting here, bound and helpless, he was terrified.

There were predators in this ocean outside reality. Predators, perils, and even pirates.

Any one of those finding him would mean he'd be lucky to face a quick death, but either fortune was on his side or the chains of the Phoenix were enough to scare off any trouble, because nothing threatened him as he drifted.

Markuth had no way of telling how long he floated there. Time faded from his awareness, his thoughts couldn't be trusted, and each passing moment could have marked the passing of a thousand years. Or only seconds.

When he finally snapped back to himself, he was standing on

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gray sand. Everything he saw was colorless, from the overcast sky to the gray brick walls of the tiny courtyard containing him. Someone had disarmed him and dressed him in a shapeless white sack, and gray manacles covered his wrists. They weren't chained to anything, but he felt them restricting his power.

A bored-looking Abidan man stood before Li Markuth, a badge on his chest resembling the back of a clenched gauntlet or perhaps a shield. A member of the Titan Division, then. The guards.

"Li Markuth of Cradle," the guard said, "you have been convicted of willful spatial violation, the circumvention of natural order, attempted enslavement of a mortal population, and a host of other crimes too long for me to list. You have been sentenced to five hundred and three standard years imprisoned in the world of Haven, pending work release or evidence of rehabilitation. Verbally acknowledge that you understand the punishment I have recited to you."

Markuth straightened himself up, looming over the low-ranking Titan. "I deserve to defend myself at trial."

"You did." The Abidan could not have looked less interested. "Clearly, you were not successful. Now, please verbally acknowledge that you understand the punishment I have recited to you."

Li Markuth looked around desperately, but saw only gray. This must be Haven, the Abidan's prison-world. The only way to escape was to break through the world itself.

He knew he couldn't do that. Not here.

But he tried anyway.

The wind trembled and space shook as Li Markuth unleashed his madra and every other power he had. While the guard was dis-

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tracted, Markuth spread his wings—they hadn't been shackled—and took to the skies.

He only made it high enough to see over the walls when he stopped.

Guns trained on him from every direction. Some were turrets installed in the walls, others held by guards, and still others mounted on flying machines.

Not only that, but he caught a glimpse of something peeking through the clouds overhead. A twisting formation of runes, like a script-circle large enough to wrap the entire planet.

And beyond that, what he thought was the fin of an impossibly huge creature drifting through the sky.

After only an instant, Li Markuth let himself fall back to the ground.

The guard was unfazed. "Everybody needs one look around. The stupid ones need two."

"I understand the punishment you have recited to me," Li Markuth said dully.

"Good. Five hundred and three years, Inmate Li. Starting now."



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