

A WARRIOR UNDEFEATABLE /

A Man Like None Other [On-Going]

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“Take a seat...” Jovan said once they entered the room.

Moments later, a servant entered with coffee. Surprisingly, the one serving the coffee was Troah, the owner of the Heavenly Treasure Pavilion in Rhino City.

Troah had apparently resumed his real identity and now held a key position in Winged Tiger City.

“I didn’t expect Lord Maceo to send you,” Troah said to Jared, raising a brow.

“Does it really matter who came?” Jared said, his voice calm but carrying a deeper meaning. “In the end, the result’s the same.”

Troah gave a faint smile. “True... If Lord Maceo had shown up himself, I wouldn’t know how to face him.”

“Everyone’s got loyalties. You’re not in the wrong,” Jared said. “If it had been someone else who caught Bastian, maybe he’d be in real trouble. At the very least, you wouldn’t hurt him.”

Troah’s expression flickered, and turned to leave without saying anything more.

“Bastian’s safe under my watch. You can rest assured about that,” Jovan said once Troah was gone. “I’m after land and resources, not his life.”

“Then let’s hear your terms,” Jared replied.

“The Treasure Land belongs to Winged Tiger City,” Jovan said firmly.

“Fine,” Jared agreed without pause.

The land was barren now, stripped of its value. He had no reason to object.

Jovan was taken aback by how quickly Jared agreed.

“Lord Jovan, no need to overthink it,” Jared said. “That Treasure Land still needs time to awaken. Right now, it’s just an empty plot and useless to Lord Maceo.”

Upon hearing this, Jovan nodded slowly. "Fair point. But I want more than just the Treasure Land. A million celestial coins, and a hundred years' worth of resources from the three southern territories of Rhino City."

"Sure," Jared said with a nod.

Jovan hesitated. "Are you sure you can call the shots?"

"Absolutely... When Lord Maceo sent me, gave me full authority. Any conditions you raise are already within my rights to approve."

"Do you even realize how much a million celestial coins and a hundred years of resources are worth?" Jovan asked, clearly skeptical

"I don't. But I know this, money and resources can always be recovered. A lost son can't," Jared said calmly.

Jovan stared at him, unsure how to respond. He had prepared for bargaining and had even calculated how far could push. But Jared hadn't even blinked. It felt like Jared was playing an entirely different game.

"You sure you're the one making the calls?" Jovan pressed again.

"I am. But in return, I need to see Bastian. Otherwise, what are we even negotiating for?" Jared replied.

"That's fair." Jovan nodded. He clapped lightly, and Troah returned, leading Bastian inside.

The boy looked pale and clearly frightened. When spotted Jared, confusion crossed his face.

"Bastian, don't worry. I'm here to take you home," Jared said, resting a hand on the boy's shoulder. At the same time, a wave of aura quietly flowed into Bastian's body.

"Jared, did my father send you?" Bastian asked.

"He did. You'll be home soon." Jared nodded.

Relief washed over Bastian's face, and a hint of a smile appeared. He looked far calmer.

At that moment, Jovan waved Troah over again, signaling to take Bastian back out. Then turned to Jared. "You've seen the boy. Where are the celestial coins and resources I asked for?"

“Lord Jovan, you know better than anyone that gathering all those things can’t happen overnight,” Jared said. “Let me send word to Lord Maceo. He’ll have everything ready within three days and send it straight to you.”

“Of course, we’ll remain here in Winged Tiger City during that time. But you’ll be responsible for keeping us and Bastian safe,” Jared demanded.

“No problem,” Jovan replied.

“I want territory and resources. Your lives mean nothing to me.” He extended a hand, shaking Jared’s. For Jovan, the negotiation had gone unusually smoothly.

As Jared stepped out of the room, Madman and Eason rushed over.

“Jared, how did it go?” Madman asked.

“It went well,” Jared said with a grin.

“He didn’t try to extort us too hard, did he?” Madman questioned.

Jared shook his head. “It’s fair. He asked for a million celestial coins, a hundred years’ worth of resources, and that Treasure Land.”

“What?” Eason’s eyes went wide. “That’s a hefty price. You didn’t actually agree, did you?”

“Of course I did. He could’ve asked for all of Rhino City, and I still would’ve agreed. After all, I never planned to give any of it,” Jared said casually.

“You’re not giving it to him?” Eason blinked in disbelief.

“Not a chance. I’m just buying time. We’ll get Bastian out of here without handing over a single thing to Winged Tiger City,” Jared said with a smile.

“Jared, we passed through so many cities and checkpoints. Won’t it be really difficult to break out?” Madman asked, brows furrowed.

“There’s always a way,” Jared said, voice light but confident. “We’ve still got time to figure it out.”

At that moment, the person arranged by Jovan arrived to escort Jared and his group to their quarters.

For the next three days, they were restricted to the confines of the city lord mansion in Winged Tiger City.

After Jared and the others had settled in, Jovan's eyes remained fixed on the western mountain range. Slowly, his figure faded and vanished.

By the time Jovan reappeared, was already in a small town nestled in the mountains. The place was filled with cultivators dressed in red robes. None of them acknowledged Jovan with so much as a nod when arrived, but Jovan didn't seem surprised by the lack of courtesy.

He walked into a lavishly renovated house. Inside, a masked man sat silently. His complexion looked poor.

When noticed Jovan entering, his tone was cold and sharp, "So, what's the result?"

"Sir, we've got an agreement. One million celestial coins, a hundred years' worth of resources, and even the Treasure Land. Rhino City agreed to everything," Jovan said excitedly.

"Oh?" The masked man was visibly surprised. "They agreed that easily?"

"Yes, they jumped at it. They promised everything would be ready in three days," Jovan confirmed with a nod.

"I've always thought that if someone agrees too quickly, it's not a good sign. You'd better be on your guard these next three days," the man warned.

"I understand," Jovan replied firmly.

With a wave of his hand, the man dismissed Jovan.

After Jovan exited, the man suddenly started coughing violently, and the black cloth covering his face slipped off.

If Jared had been present, would have immediately recognized the man-it was Braxton, the overlord of Celestial Palace's Eighth Hall.

Previously, Braxton's divine soul had been summoned by Colby, the head of the Haverford family, using a token. That encounter led to a prolonged battle with Jared, who at the time was possessed by the Vermilion Demon Lord. Jared had beaten Braxton into a miserable retreat.

Since returning, Braxton had remained in a frail state, requiring significant resources to recover. Now, leading the forces of Celestial Palace's Eighth Hall, had taken control of Winged Tiger City.

The current city lord, Jovan, was merely his puppet. It was Braxton who came up with the idea to demand such an outrageous sum of celestial coins and resources from Rhino City.

Jared had guessed correctly. The real decision-maker in Winged Tiger City wasn't in the city lord mansion at all.

Unbeknownst to Jared, Winged Tiger City was now secretly under the control of Braxton. Likewise, Braxton had no idea that Jared was among those negotiating with them. He never would have imagined that Jared could have climbed the Celestial Stairway and reached the celestial realm so soon.

That night, inside the city lord mansion, Jared, Eason, and Madman didn't rest. Instead, they quietly slipped out of their rooms under the cover of darkness.

"This mansion's enormous. Where do we even start looking for Bastian?" Eason muttered, his brow furrowed.

"I already marked Bastian with a trace of my aura. All we need to do now is track it," Jared explained.

He slowly expanded his spiritual sense, searching for the aura had left inside Bastian's body. It didn't take long before picked up the signal. Following the subtle trail, led the group toward the mansion's backyard.

Though guards patrolled the area, Jared and the others managed to avoid them. The city lord mansion was in a region surrounded by dozens of cities, so the guards didn't expect any infiltration. Their complacency made it easier for Jared's team to move unnoticed.

Near one room in the rear courtyard, Jared stopped.

"Bastian's right here," said, pointing at the door.

Apparently, Bastian hadn't been abused or thrown into a cell. Instead, was confined to a room, decent treatment under the circumstances.

"I'll go get him," Madman said, rushing forward, but Jared held back.

"Wait... Let me check for any arcane arrays first," Jared said, crouching low.

With his finger, drew an unusual rune on the ground and channeled the Power of Immortals into it.

A low hum followed, and the runes lit up. The room itself began to glow faintly. Clearly, it was protected by an arcane array. Charging recklessly would've triggered it, and escaping would have been impossible.

"D*mn, they're really cautious," Madman grumbled. "Even in a place this secure, they still lay arcane arrays!"

Jared said nothing, his eyes locked on the shimmering runes. He pressed his palm against it, determined to break it head-on. They didn't have time to search for the core.

Golden light burst from his palm, and the glow of the arcane array slowly faded away until it disappeared entirely.

"Done," Jared said.

Without waiting, Madman rushed into the room and came back moments later, dragging Bastian out.

Bastian looked stunned, about to cry out, but the moment saw Jared, shut his mouth tightly.

"Don't talk. Follow us. I'll get you out of here," Jared whispered.

Bastian's eyes widened, but nodded quickly. With that, Jared's team began their escape from the mansion, Bastian now with them.

But as they left the backyard, they unexpectedly ran straight into Troah.

Troah had come to deliver supplies to Bastian, not wanting to suffer. Having lived for years in Rhino City and been well treated by its people, Troah had even become the owner of the Heavenly Treasure Pavilion. Still, as a Winged Tiger City native, had responsibilities couldn't ignore.

When Troah and Jared locked eyes, both sides were stunned.

Jared moved in a flash, striking with his palm. He had to knock Troah out before could raise the alarm. If word got out, their odds of escaping with Bastian would plummet.

Troah started to raise his hand to defend himself, but then, strangely, dropped it.

Jared's palm landed hard on Troah's chest, flinging backward. His head lolled to the side as lost consciousness.

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Looking at the unconscious Troah, Jared frowned slightly. He had clearly felt Troah offer no resistance and hadn't even made a sound.

But there wasn't time to think about it now. Jared quickly led the group out of the city lord mansion with Bastian In tow.

Once outside, Jared scanned the area, then turned west toward the mountain range.

“Jared, shouldn’t we head north if we want to get to Rhino City faster? Why are we going west?” Madman asked, puzzled.

“We came from the north. Every checkpoint on that route was heavily guarded,” Jared said. “To the west, there are fewer checkpoints because it doesn’t border Rhino City.”

The truth was, Jared was also curious about the small town in the mountains. He wanted to see who lived there and to confirm whether his suspicions were right.

Just as they left the city lord mansion and moved toward the western mountains, a loud alarm blared behind them.

Figures shot into the sky from the mansion. Soldiers spread out rapidly, beginning their search for Jared’s group.

“Alert all cities, lock down the gates! We can’t let those Rhino City people escape!” Jovan bellowed in fury, glaring at the unconscious Troah. He couldn’t believe Jared had the guts to rescue Bastian right under his nose.

But even if they got out of the mansion, they’d never make it out of Winged Tiger City. Dozens of cities surrounded them. There was no way out for Jared and his companions.

Hearing the shrill alarm, Jared knew the worst had happened. They had been discovered.

“We’ve got to move faster!” Jared shouted.

Beneath the star-filled sky, Madman carried Bastian while Jared and the others sprinted westward at full speed.

Jared glanced upward, among those distant stars, one of them had to be the mundane world he came from.

They picked up speed, avoiding flight to stay hidden. The flatlands around them offered nowhere to hide, but thankfully, the distance between cities stretched for a few hundred kilometers. That gave them a chance.

If the cities had been closer together, breaking out would’ve been nearly impossible. Even so, Jared and his team could cover a few hundred kilometers in under an hour.

When they reached the next city, the guards were just about to question them. Jared didn't give them the chance.

Swoosh!

With a sweep of the Dragonslayer Sword, beams of light rained down like falling stars, tearing through the city gates. The guards didn't even scream before they were cut down. This was exactly what Jared wanted, a fast, silent kill that wouldn't raise a broader alarm.

If Jovan realized they were heading west, he'd send massive reinforcements after them.

"Let's go!" Jared said.

Without hesitation, vaulted over the city walls.

Jared continued cutting down the guards, while Eason and Madman followed with Bastian, pressing forward through city after city.

As dawn approached, they could see the mountain range drawing nearer. Jared's anxiety deepened. He was sure that by the time the sun rose, Jovan would have figured out their direction and sent pursuers.

"How many more cities ahead?" Eason asked, frowning.

"Doesn't matter. We'll deal with it when we get there. We've already busted through plenty," Madman replied. "Only the main city of Winged Tiger City was the real threat. The rest of them are just trash."

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That evening, Jared had dealt with every obstacle swiftly and decisively, never dragging things out or hesitating. This gave the Madman the impression that the other cities within Winged Tiger City were comparatively weak.

"Don't let your guard down. Let's keep moving!" Jared urged.

The group of four pressed on. Before long, another city appeared on the horizon. This one was clearly larger than the previous ones. Though it wasn't on par with the main city, it was still far more expansive than the rest.

Most notably, the city gates were tightly sealed. A dense, grey-brown mist hung thick in the air around it, completely obscuring the gates from view.

The entire city was blanketed in fog so heavy that even when Jared ascended into the sky, couldn't clearly make out its structure.

He tried probing it with his spiritual sense, only to find that the mist blocked them completely. It was no accident. Someone had clearly laid the mist intentionally, as if to keep the city concealed on purpose.

"This is so strange," Madman said. "It's like a ghost town. I can't feel a single trace of aura."

"Someone's masked the city's aura on purpose. This place probably holds way more significance than any of the others we've passed in Winged Tiger City. Getting through this one might not be as easy as the last," Eason said gravely.

"It's covered in mist on all sides. We can't see what's going on inside. Should we try flying over it? If we can't see them, they can't see us either," the Madman replied.

"That won't work. That mist is the result of a massive arcane array. Even flying over it would set off alarms. For now, we take it step by step. Let's just break the arcane array first. Otherwise, we'll be sitting ducks in a trap," Jared said, determined.

The group approached the city, and to their surprise, found no guards at the gates. It looked abandoned, like a ghost town, but Jared wasn't fooled. A truly deserted city in Winged Tiger territory was practically impossible.

Standing before the towering gates, Jared's eyes glinted red. He had activated his Nethersky Eye.

The arcane array was huge, and if went about breaking it through normal means, it would take too long, and there was no guarantee of success. So, Jared turned to his Nethersky Eye, cautiously beginning to analyze the arcane array.

Buzz!

The moment activated it, his vision shifted drastically.

The Nethersky Eye was fully open. In his view, the once-impenetrable mist began to lift. As its power intensified, Jared's gaze pierced the city gates, as though were already inside the walls.

The arcane array had blocked off all auras and spiritual senses, but it couldn't block the Nethersky Eye.

Looking into the city, Jared saw no civilians. Only soldiers everywhere. Rows upon rows of armored troops, some training, others patrolling.

Then it clicked. This wasn't a regular city at all. It was a giant military camp for Winged Tiger City. Soldiers were trained here before being dispatched to the other cities.

Jared's heart began to race. All their wandering had led them straight into the lion's den. He deactivated his Nethersky Eye.

"Jared, what do you think?" Eason asked quietly. "Can you crack the arcane array?"

"I changed my mind. Let's take another route," Jared said without hesitation, turning on his heel.

"Jared, what are you doing? Don't tell me you're scared?" Madman called after him, puzzled.