

A Warrior Undefeatable 5791-5800

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"They have simple hearts and long-buried anger. Stir it, show them the illusion of irresistible support, and they will gamble everything. Once civil war splits their halls, Paxton will be too busy saving his throne to face us. We either reap the spoils or storm the sect while they bleed. If Jared Chance returns, he'll find only ruin waiting for him."

Sheldon let the idea sink in. A heartbeat later, a twisted smile carved across his face - sharp, delighted, merciless.

"Brilliant. Turn his own blade against him-yes, that is the taste I want. Gather elders and disciples skilled at concealment and persuasion. Load them with treasures and promises. Send them into the Myriad Beast Mountains tonight. Let Paxton have a taste of his own medicine. Make sure Jared never gets to return!"

"At once, sir!" the elder cried, bowing before streaking away to arrange the covert mission.

Thus, while the Infinite Soul Demon Sect retreated beneath the stars, a new conspiracy unfurled-silent as mist, lethal as poison.

Within the Myriad Beast Sect, peace briefly returned after Jared's departure, like a quiet breath drawn before the dagger falls.

Word swept through the sect like a cleansing wind-The Infinite Soul Demon Sect had pulled back its forces. Hallways once echoing with foot-dragging now rang with purposeful steps, and disciples clasped one another's forearms in fierce, incredulous relief. Paxton and the other elders whispered Jared's name with something close to awe, their earlier gratitude sharpening into a rock-solid reliance on the man who had delivered them from the brink.

Yet beneath that sun-lit calm, a riptide gathered unseen, as though the mountains themselves were holding their breath for the storm to follow.

On the ragged fringe of the Myriad Beast Mountains sprawled a bleak allotment set aside for the hybrid-beast tribe—a patch of scrub hills and dust where crooked huts leaned together like beggars in the wind. No soaring stone halls here, no cultivation pools that shimmered with spirit light.

The folk who lived there were shaped by conflict and alchemy-half beast, half human, all wary eyes. Some wore the faces of men above claws that rasped against the earth. Others walked fully upon talons, their muzzles lifting to scent a sky that had never welcomed

them. In every gaze flickered the same dull glaze: the stupor of generations told they were lesser-marbled, too tainted for the sect's proud bloodlines—yet buried beneath that torpor smoldered an ember of defiance.

Deeper in the settlement, a cavern yawned like the cracked jaw of a fossilized wyrm. Torches guttered along the walls, throwing savage orange across a circle of hulking silhouettes.

At their center stood Garth Thornscales the tribe's fist and voice. Nearly three meters tall, he was sheathed head to toe in dark crimson scales that caught the firelight like hammered iron. His leonine skull bore a single ivory horn that curved back over his mane, and a tail bristling with bone barbs dragged behind him, gouging the stone. Strength and bitterness radiated from him in waves, no one in that tribe commanded more loyalty or carried a heavier chain of hatred.

Now, before Garth, two figures cloaked in ink-black robes hovered like smudges against the fireglow, their presences muted, their motives anything but.

"Mr. Thornscales," crooned the first black-robed man, his voice a velvet hook slipping through the torch-smoke, "we understand your plight—truly, we do. You wield huge power, yet because your blood is 'impure,' the pure-blood beasts keep you penned in this wasteland. They toss you leftover cultivation scraps as if you were kennel dogs. Tell me where is the justice in that?"

Garth's gold-disk eyes narrowed, anger, humiliation, and a raw, near-invisible ambition swirling just beneath the surface.

The second black-robed man

stepped forward, his tone crisp, almost businesslike. "Our sect master holds your tribe's strength in the highest regard. He pledges that if you will rise-claim what has always been yours—and seize the reins of the Myriad Beast Sect the Infinite Soul Demon Sect will stand behind you without reservation. We will funnel resources, battle-arts, even a secret rite capable of mending the... cognitive 'gaps' your people struggle against, tuning your minds to match any pure-blood elder. Do that, and you will no longer bow as mongrels. You will sit upon the highest seat of the sect, masters in both name and truth."

The promise struck like sweet poison. Garth's breath thundered in his throat. Long-suppressed desire clawed at the walls of his restraint while the black-robed men's words burrowed deeper, needling every scar of indignity he had ever endured. "Mend... our cognitive gaps?" The words rumbled from him, gravel dragged across steel.

"Precisely."

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The second envoy produced a pill the color of moonlit jade, its surface swirling with eerie indigo motes. "Behold the Enlightenment Pill, proprietary marvel of our sect. It cannot rewrite the laws of heaven, but it will spark dormant potential, anchor the soul and sharpër thought so breakthroughs come as easily as breath. One nod from you, Mr. Thornscales, and this-along with further caches of power-flows to you unceasingly."

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The pill gleamed like a promise of new worlds, and in its sheen, Garth saw every sneer his people had suffered, every allotment where spirit stones were weighed and found "too precious" for hybrids. Rage fused with longing, crystallizing into a single, irrevocable decision.

With a snarl, he thrust out a taloned hand, snatched the Enlightenment Pill, and swallowed it dry-no ceremony, no hesitation.

Cold fire knifed through his skull, clearing cobwebs even as it awakened a deeper, more feral surge that beat against his temples like war drums.

"Good," he growled, each syllable a flint strike. "I am in."

His tail lashed, sending sparks skittering. "Tell me how you intend to arm us."

Knowing the plan was close to success, the black-robed men were delighted. "We will deliver a cache of high-impact demon talismans and single-use self-detonation weapons-perfect for plunging the sect into chaos and removing key elders in one stroke. Simultaneously, our forces will spark skirmishes along the outer ranges, drawing patrol squads away. The timing rests with you, Mr. Thornscales-but strike soon. The longer we wait, the more likely things might go wrong."

Several tense days later, inside the ruined core of the Myriad Beast Sect, Paxton convened an emergency council in the hall. Around him sat Bartram, Gavin, Yvette, among others.

Every torch burned low, as though the unrest that had ravaged their mountain had stolen even the fire's confidence.

"Sir Chance has been gone for days," Paxton said, voice low yet heavy enough to press on every rib in the room. "I can only wonder what trouble he walked into at the Mystic Sky Sword Sect."

A flicker of worry crept across his eyes before he forced his shoulders broad again.

Gavin thumped a paw-shaped fist against his chest plate. "Sir Chance is powerful. Trust me. He will return without a scratch, and probably carrying the heads of anyone foolish enough to block his path."

Yvette traced a nervous circle on the lacquered table. "I wish I shared your certainty," she murmured. "My heart keeps fluttering like a trapped bird, warning something terrible is about to break loose."

A sudden roar outside drowned the hall-steel clanged, beasts shrieked, panicked shouts collided in a rising storm.

"What is happening?" Paxton barked, his chair scraping backward.

Before the word was finished, he cast his awareness outward. The hall trembled beneath the surge of his lion-borne spirit sense.

At the perimeter of the inner compound, columns of fire speared skyward. Smoke rolled like black surf, blotting out midday light.

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An endless tide of Melded Beastkin warriors-each body half-melded with a different beast-charged behind strangers clad in demonic robes. They slammed into the pure blood guard's stationed to defend the sanctum.

The attackers' eyes burned red, madness twisting every movement. They swung claws and blades without mercy, uncaring when their strikes felled former brothers.

Dark talismans and cursed weapons-gifts from the Infinite Soul Demon Sect- flashed through the smoke, turning the guarded courtyards into slaughterhouses before any defense could form.

"Enemy assault! The Melded Beastkin has turned on us!" an elder cried, voice cracking beneath fury and disbelief.

"What?" Paxton, Bartram, and the rest rose as one, shock igniting into raw anger.

None of them had expected the rot festering in their ranks to erupt at the very moment they struggled to rebuild.

Bartram's growl rattled windows. "Garth! How dare that mutt betray the sect!"

He burst from the hall, fur rippling into a thirty-meter mountain of sinew and claws. The ground split when his paw struck, pulping the first wave of traitors into crimson mist.

Yet more Melded Beastkin warriors poured in like floodwater. Many were seasoned killers whose power rivaled his own.

At the heart of the chaos stood

Garth, now swollen with the black vapor of the Enlightenment Pill

Blood red energy coiled around the

massive bone blade in his grip as he stalked straight for Bartram.

"Garth! The Sect raised you, sheltered you-why spit on that kindness?" Bartram thundered, the force of his voice toppling burning rafters nearby.

"Kindness?" Garth's laugh scraped like rusted chains. "You threw us scraps and called it generosity. Today, the Melded Beastkin reclaims what is ours-starting with your heads! Kill!"

The two giants collided, claws and bone steel clanging so fiercely the courtyard tiles exploded into dust.

Hidden assassins from the Infinite Soul Demon Sect slipped through the firelight, striking Bartram's blind spots until even the indomitable bear staggered, driven back Step by bloody step.

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Paxton's face darkened to iron. He knew the sect would crumble if the panic spread another inch.

"All elders-form up on me! Crush the revolt! Gavin, Yvette-take our elite, safeguard the cubs and the archives. If the line breaks, you escort them out, no hesitation!"

The moment Paxton barked the command, several pivotal nodes of the Sect Guarding Grand Array detonated in unison. Ghostly blue fire fountained skyward, shredding sigils that had shielded the mountain for centuries. The once-radiant barrier collapsed into a drab, quivering haze, and the innermost gates of the Myriad Beast Sect yawned open like a wound.

"No!" Paxton's shout cracked through the smoke, half warning, half disbelief. His heart sank into despair.

From every direction rolled fresh battle cries-hoarse, eager, merciless—an avalanche of sound sweeping down the peaks.

The rebellion of the Melded Beastkin had been plotted for seasons. Outer posts, inner vaults, even kitchen corridors erupted at once. Neutral tribes and a few pure-blood clans seduced by promises of power surged into the fray. Within heartbeats, Paxton's proud stronghold dissolved into civil war.

"Sir! The formation is down. The traitors command overwhelming numbers, bolstered by outsiders. We are encircled!" a steward cried, drenched head to toe, his own blood gluing fur to armor.

Paxton stared across a courtyard now burning like a funeral pyre.

He saw Bartram entangled in savage combat, saw trusted disciples butcher one another, saw Infinite Soul Demon Sect plants grinning behind masks of ash.

He knew things were not going well for them. If they continued to fight, the Myriad Beast legacy would die tonight.

"Pass the word—every disciple still loyal is to withdraw into the deepest reaches of the Myriad Beast Mountains. Scatter. Survive."

Paxton forced the order past clenched fangs.

"But, sir!" the elders wailed, voices breaking like old timber.

"Carry it out!" Roaring, Paxton erupted into a towering silver wolf. Moon-bright fur bristled crimson where fire-sparks met blood. One long, grief-soaked howl rippled over the compound. "All clansmen-follow me and break through!"

He took the rear alone, scything with silver claws that became whirling blades of light. Demon adepts and traitor bears reeled back, buying seconds-precious seconds-for the fleeing column.

Gavin's eyes welled with tears, yet he obeyed. He slung a bulging storage satchel-scriptures and spirit ore across his shoulders

Beside him, Yvette shoulders net

cluster of panicked cubs, steering the core disciples down hidden ravine long prepared for darkest night.

The battle along the escape route proved brutal. Claws against talisman, fang against cursed steel. Rebel scouts and Demon Sect killers shadowed every bend, hungry for the sect's heart.

To shield Paxton's retreat, Bartram

ignited his own life-essence. A bear-shaped starburst rocked the gorge, making the pursuers. His final roar echoed off shattered walls before his vast body crashed silent at last, beneath collapsing pillars.

"Elder Bartram!" Gavin and Yvette screamed, the name ripping free before they could stop it.

They felt his familiar aura blink out-one more flame smothered-yet neither dared look back. Grief pushed them faster ahead.

Paxton fought and retreated, crimson matting the silver. Every breath painted the ground red.

Only intimate knowledge of twisting gullies and raw, late-stage Heavenly Immortal might let him sever the chase at last and vanish into the endless, peril-laced wildwood of the Myriad Beast Mountains.

Days later, through rain, smoke, and whispered signals, Paxton, Gavin, Yvette, and the scattered survivors converged, one by one, at hidden refuges marked long ago in ink and blood.

The roll call was grim. Where once the Myriad Beast Sect had bustled with strength, barely a third of its core force remained, most of them bandaged, limping, or simply staring at the ground in mute despair.

They had burrowed deep inside a razor-thin mountain gorge, masked beneath layers of illusion runes that turned solid cliffs into shimmering mirage. Wind whispered over the wards, carrying no hint of life within.

Paxton surrendered his beast form at the gorge's heart. The pallor washed across

his human face. Every breath felt like dragging fire through cracked ribs.

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He glanced over the empty stretch where halls, training courts, and dormitories had stood. Their ashes now swirled somewhere on the wind, together with the screams of disciples and elders who had never escaped. The weight of that silence pressed harder on him than any wound.

"Take care, sir." Gavin pressed a thumb-length sprig of azure healing fern into his master's palm, the way a soldier might slip a blade to a fallen commander.

Beside them, Yvette worked stitches through torn flesh, her eyes rimmed crimson. She did not speak; the slight tremor in her fingers said enough.

Paxton's voice rasped like gravel. "Have we confirmed it? Why did the Melded Beastkin turn on us, and who propped them up?"

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A scouting elder—one of the few still on his feet—bowed low. "Our threads converge on the Infinite Soul Demon Sect, Master. They dangled obscene profits, threw in demonic pills and cursed weapons, and seduced Garth. The masked fighters who stormed our gates were their embedded agents."

"The Infinite Soul Demon Sect—Sheldon Soulsby!" Paxton's fist locked tight. Knuckles split, leaking blood that dripped to the moss below. "Until that debt is paid," he growled, "I, Paxton, will not rest!"

A dazed elder whispered, "Sir, what do we do now?"

The question floated over the shattered clan like smoke. Without their stronghold, they were seeds torn from soil, unsure where or whether to land.

Paxton inhaled once, twice, forcing the tremor out of his lungs. "Listen. The Myriad Beast Sect is battered, not buried. As long as hearts beat, we rebuild."

His gaze sharpened. "That begins with finding Mr. Chance."

Gavin and Yvette straightened, sparks returning to eyes dulled by grief. "Find him— yes! Mr. Chance is way smarter and stronger than we are. With him, we'll take back what is ours."

Paxton nodded. "Last we knew, he headed for the Mystic Sky Sword Sect. We make contact, fast."

He faced his two most trusted disciples. "Gavin, Yvette—you each lead a swift unit. Gavin, swing toward the Sword Sect. Yvette, shadow our ruined grounds for clues. Safety first. If you spot Mr. Chance or anything you cannot tame—pull back immediately. No heroic deaths."

"Understood, sir!" the pair replied, conviction ringing where despair had lingered moments earlier.

Paxton turned to the survivors. "The rest of you, build a temporary camp here. Mend bones, refine qi, gather every stray disciple you can find. Keep eyes on the Melded Beastkin and the Infinite Soul Demon fiends. The Myriad Beast Mountains are our hunting ground. As long as we breathe beneath these peaks, opportunity lives."

Meanwhile, at the Myriad Beast Sect's ruined main grounds What had once been sacred stone now lay beneath the boots of a new master.

Garth lounged on the sect master's throne-Paxton's throne-his hulking frame nearly splitting the carved armrests. Ill-fitting or not, he bared a mouthful of jagged teeth in a smile that stank of conquest.

The grand audience chamber-once a place of solemn oaths-now throbbed with raw ambition. Below the platform, chiefs of the Melded Beastkin tribes pressed shoulder to shoulder with fair-weather defectors and several cloaked envoys of the Infinite Soul Demon Sect.

"Allow me to congratulate you, Chief Garth-no, I should say Sect Master Garth— on seizing the reins of the entire Myriad Beast Sect!"

One of the Demon Sect envoys offered the praise with a fake grin that never reached his predatory eyes.

Garth threw back his head and

laughed, the boom of it rattling every

pillar. "All thanks to your sect's timely help. From this day forward,

the Myriad Beast Sect is reborn as

the Melded Beast

Sacred

Sect-and I, Garth Thornscales, am its

first lord!"

He swept a clawed hand toward the courtyard. "My first decree—clean the battlefield. Hang every defiant corpse outside the mountain gate. Those who kneel live. Those who resist die. No exceptions!"

"At once, sir!" several beast chiefs roared in unison, voices trembling with long-suppressed glee.

Years of humiliation fermented into savage elation; cruel methods felt like justice to the tribe that had lived too long in another's shadow.

Garth's eyes narrowed. "Hunt Paxton and the other remnants. I want their ashes scattered before they can stir anew."

"Rest easy, sir," the Demon Sect envoy replied, bowing theatrically. "Our order will send more hands to aid the search-once we receive the payment you mentioned..."

His smile sharpened like a blade waiting for flesh.

Garth dismissed the concern with a broad sweep of his arm. "My word is iron. From this moment, the Melded Beastkin Sacred Sect and the Infinite Soul Demon Sect stand as allies. The three spirit-stone veins on the mountain's west ridge are yours to mine, and my disciples will answer your summons when needed."

"Great! I knew you were reliable!" the envoy replied, satisfaction glittering behind half-lidded eyes.

The Infinite Soul Demon Sect's hidden scheme had outdone itself. They had not razed the sect outright; they had fractured it and installed a pliant regime—a victory that yielded spoils while crippling a rival.

News of the sudden coup sprouted

wings and raced through level ten. No faction had foreseen the fall of

the mighty Myriad Beast

Sect much less that its throne

would be claimed by the tribe it had long kept at its margins.

Far away, Jared lounged in steaming spirit water at the Mystic Sky Sword Sect, enjoying Linden's lavish hospitality, blissfully unaware of the Myriad Beast Sect's predicament and the introduction of a new leader.

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Deep within the Myriad Sword Mountains of the Mystic Sky Sword Sect, twilight clouds draped the peaks like silk.

Inside a guest courtyard perched on one such peak, Jared reclined in a warm pool, eyes half-shut in tranquil repose.

Pale blue spirit mist drifted off the liquid, threading into his pores and peeling away the fatigue of countless miles.

The bath that Linden prepared for him had been simmered from a thousand-year spirit milk and a score of rare herbs, each swirl knitting hidden wounds and shoring up Jared's foundations.

"Sir Chance, is the pressure comfortable?" one of the two Mystic Sky Sword Sect female disciples asked, fingers kneading his shoulders with surgical grace.

Their touch carried the faint hum of sword energy, loosening meridians while never crossing the line into discomfort.

"Yes," Jared murmured, the word drifting lazily across the water.

How did a simple visit turn into royal treatment with attendants?

He had come as a guest and been crowned an honored lord; refusal would have bruised Linden's courtesy, so he endured the pampering with bemused restraint.

For a man accustomed to walking the world alone, the silk cushions and whispered service felt less like luxury and more like an ill-fitting robe-elegant, but never truly his.

Master Cloudridge—what a sly old fox. He bows, he flatters, yet every courtesy is a probe. The warmer his smile, the larger his appetite. He craves news of the Soul Devourer and, more than that, the truth about the shadowy power standing behind me. He'll gut the heavens to learn it.

Jared reclined in the steaming waters of the pool, weighing his next move against the sect master's inevitable tests, when a sharp, indignant cry cracked the quiet courtyard.

"Who's inside? Such arrogance! You dare monopolize the Sword Cleansing Pool and order inner disciples about?"

The voice grew louder with brisk, angry footfalls skimming across the slate path beyond the gate.

The wooden doors were yanked open with a creak, and a flash of scarlet swept in— quick, hot, and uninvited.

She looked scarcely past twenty, tall and poised in a fire-red gown. Porcelain

features framed wide, almond eyes now blazing with fury, pale skin set aglow by the color roaring around her.

A long sword in a vermilion sheath

hung at her waist, its tassel

trembling like a tongue of flame

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each time she moved. The woman herself seemed a living

torch-radiant, volatile, impossible to ignore.

The moment she crossed the threshold, her gaze locked on Jared, half-submerged in the luminous pool, then flicked to the two attendants kneeling at the rim. Her expression turned icy.

"Clara!" the two young women gasped, scrambling upright in a flurry of bows.

Their knuckles went white against their robes; they knew all too well the temper coiled behind that crimson silk.

Clara Mayfield spared them not a glance. She strode to the pool's lip, looking down on Jared as though on an insect, disdain pooling in her bright eyes.

"Human Immortal Realm, seventh tier? Hmph-hardly a legend. Who gave you the nerve to occupy my Mystic Sky Sword Sect's Sword Cleansing Pool and command the disciples like servants?"

Jared lifted his eyelids, pupils calm as still water, and regarded the flaming apparition with unhurried interest.

Her attire, her bearing, and the deference shown by the attendants announced high standing—yet rank alone had never impressed Jared.

Since when have I answered to a petulant girl?

"And you are?"

His tone drifted out lazy, almost drowsy, as if the young woman's wrath were no more than summer wind rustling bamboo.

"Clara Mayfield," she snapped, brows slanted like drawn blades. "Linden Cloudridge the sect master-is my father. Even core disciples must earn great merit to touch this pool. What might do you an outsider have?"

Ah, the sect master's daughter. Jared's bemusement settled into understanding; the arrogance tracked perfectly.

"Your father placed the pool at my disposal," Jared said, smiling mildly. "If you're dissatisfied, feel free to take it up with him."

"You!" Clara choked, anger reddening

her cheeks, "Don't brandish my father at me. You must have tricked him with honeyed words. A mere Level Seven Human Immortalvisitor shown such honor? Absurd! Now get out, this instant, or I'll remove you myself."

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The two attendants blanched and backed away, their faces drained of color.

They knew Clara's temper. She was brilliant, fiery, and freshly returned from years of tempering outside. She had yet to learn how terrifying this quiet guest could be.

Jared's patience flickered in his eyes, a brief spark of annoyance breaking through the calm surface. He had never meant to spar with a young girl, yet her relentless challenge stoked a quiet flame within him.

As tension stretched taut as a drawn bow, a deep, commanding shout split the air beyond the courtyard wall.

"Clara, stand down!"

Before the echo faded, Linden strode into the courtyard, robes billowing, gaze sharp and unyielding.

"Mr. Chance, please forgive my daughter. She has roamed the wilds ten years beside her mentor and has only just returned. She has a bad temper. I beg your indulgence for any offense she caused."

Clara stamped her foot, cheeks burning. "Dad, why are you so polite to this loser... I mean this guy! He's only a Level Seven Human Immortal. What gives him the right

"Enough!" Linden's single word cracked like a blade of wind. "Mr. Chance is my honored guest and savior of the Mystic Sky Sword Sect. Apologize. Now."

"Savior?" Clara blinked, confusion smoothing her anger.

Her gaze shifted from the plainly dressed stranger to her father's stern face, unable to match a Level Seven Human Immortal with so lofty a title.

Jared waved off the tension and rose from the ripple-lined pool. Without hurry, he draped his neatly folded azure robe over his shoulders, tying the sash with effortless grace. "You flatter me, Mr. Cloudridge. Your daughter is just straightforward and speaks her mind. Still, I wonder what brings her home after so many years away?"

Perhaps her sudden return was no accident.

Linden sighed, beckoning his daughter closer. "To be frank, Mr. Chance, Clara has trained for ten years under the Flame-Sword Venerable inside the Blazefire Secret Realm. Even I did not expect her back so soon."

He turned to her, voice gentler yet probing. "Tell me, Clara, what forces you home? Did something change inside the realm?"

Chastened by his seriousness, Clara smoothed her temper, shoulders squaring with resolve.

"I heard rumors that the Infinite Soul Demon Sect had clashed with our Mystic Sky Sword Sect on the Blood-scar Plains," she said, every word crisp. Fearing for your safety, I begged my master's leave and rode day and night to return. Only on the

road did I learn the battle had ended and you were unharmed. I was relieved."

"You were thoughtful," Linden murmured, a brief warmth softening his eyes.

The warmth faded. "Is that all? Did any other news reach you on the way?"

Clara nodded, a new weight settling on her brow. "Yes-one more, and it is alarming."

Her eyes flickered toward Jared before she continued. "They say the Myriad Beast Sect has suffered a disaster."

Jared's casual expression hardened like drawn steel. "The Myriad Beast Sect-what happened?"

The sudden edge in his tone-a blend of concern and cold blade-startled Clara. For an instant, the calm pools of his eyes blazed, and her heart skipped as though seized by winter wind.

"Details are scarce," she admitted, steadying her voice. "Rumor claims the Infinite Soul Demon Sect sowed discord. A faction called the Melded Beastkin betrayed them from within. The fighting was brutal. The sect master, Paxton, escaped with a few loyal followers and vanished. The sect is said to be under that tribe's control now."

"What?" The cry tore from Jared before he could master it.

Power surged off him in a freezing gust, fury and chill intertwined. Linden and Clara felt their breaths hitch hearts drumming beneath the unseen weight. Even the luminous liquid at the pool's rim shivered, concentric rings widening across its glassy surface.

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"The Melded Beastkin?" Jared's eyes narrowed, the syllables scraping out of his throat before he could leash them. "What in all heavens is that supposed to be?"

He forced himself to calm down. Even so, frost edged every word that followed.

Jared had fought beside Paxton, Gavin, and Yvette. Not once had any of them spoken at least, not in detail-of such a tribe.

Linden lifted a calming palm, brows knitting in sympathy. "Steady, my friend. The Melded Beastkin is a...peculiarity inside the Myriad Beast Sect," he said, voice pitched low, as though afraid the truth might bruise the air.

"Level ten's laws are odd. Whenever humans, demons, and beasts intermix, their descendants sometimes twist. These heirs inherit fragments of each blood-gift-raw strength, frightening vigor-yet their minds mature unevenly. Emotion rules them first, reason a distant second. There are many of them in the sect, yet pure-blood beast clans keep them shackled to the lowest rungs-ditch work, gate duty, every task no one else will touch. And now... The Infinite Soul Demon Sect has sunk its claws precisely there. Such venomous strategy!"

Understanding struck Jared like a blade point to the ribs.

So that old devil Sheldon Soulsby chooses to repay me in kind: I incited the Mystic Sky Sword Sect against his sect, so he incites rebellion inside the Myriad Beast Sect.

How are Paxton, Gavin, and Yvette doing? And what about Bartram? Where are they now? Are they hurt? Are they alive?

Worry caught fire in his heart, fusing with a surge of white-hot rage that sent his aura flaring like a banner in a gale.

"Master Cloudridge, I leave at once for the Myriad Beast Mountains!" Gone was the traveler who once lounged in easy humor. Jared's back was a drawn bow, his vow an arrow already screaming toward its mark. "Whatever is happening there—I will not stand aside."

Linden had expected nothing less. He mulled it over, then inclined his head with grave respect. "Your loyalty is admirable. The facts are plain The Melded Beastkin have aligned with the Infinite Soul Demon Sect. Should that foothold harden, the Mystic Sky Sword Sect's

neighbor will no longer be a potential ally, but a Denon forged stronghold. Flanked before and behind, our mountain would become a coffin. So, we have all the reasons to assist you."

"I shall dispatch a strike squad," he continued. "My daughter Clara will command them. They will escort you into the mountains, help seek Paxton's whereabouts, and take the measure of this upheaval."

"Father, wait! Me?" Clara protested, spinning toward Jared as though he were an unexpected weight she refused to shoulder. "He's only a Level Seven Human Immortal!

What could he possibly contribute? Am I meant to drag him around and keep him breathing? I'm not going!"

"Enough!" Linden's rebuke cracked

like winter ice. "You know nothing of Mr. Chance's true strength. On the Blood-Scar Plains, even Sheldon Soulsby recoiled from a single palm of his dozens of disciples watched that very moment. It can't be an act! You will follow him to learn from him, and to represent our secto form an alliance with him and what remains of the Myriad Beast Sect. The fate of our sect is bigger than your whims!"

Color drained from Clara's cheeks. At the mention of Sheldon being struck by Jared, disbelief warred with reluctant awe across her features.

She let her gaze rake over Jared

again, trying, and failing, to reconcile that ordinary frame with the legend her father declared incontrovertible.

But

theron her father's tone left no room to doubt. She exhaled squared her shoulders, and though her pride smarted-gave the faintest nod.

She bit hard on her lower lip. For a breath, she looked ready to revolt, then her shoulders sank. "Yes, Father. I'll obey."

Jared, already thinking of the Myriad Beast Sect, ignored Clara's attitude. He offered Linden a crisp bow. "Thank you for lending your strength, Master Cloudridge. Time is tight-we should depart at once."

"Agreed." Linden's voice rang across the courtyard like tempered steel. "Clara, choose twenty keen disciples-silent feet, steady nerves, skilled in tracking and concealment. From this moment on, Jared is your field commander. Obey him without question."

Clara's jaw tightened. "Understood." She turned on her heel, but not before throwing Jared a glare sharp enough to draw blood.

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Moments later, beyond the soaring archway of Mystic Sky Sword Sect's mountain gate, Clara came forward with twenty disciples. Every one of them was clad in close-fitting travel blacks, long blades across their backs, eyes clear and predatory.

Each disciple's realm hovered between Levels Three and Five of the Heavenly Immortal stage; their movements rustled no more than a passing breeze. They were, without doubt, the sect's finest scouts.

Jared now wore a plain azure travel robe, its hems caught by the wind at the very front of the formation. Clara stood half a step behind him, pretty face locked in a rigid mask. To her, taking orders from a Level Seven Human Immortal was humiliation etched in granite.

"Safe travels, Mr. Chance. Should you need aid, send word at once," Linden called.

He pressed a sword-shaped talisman into Jared's palm—its edges cold, its glow faint as moonlit frost.

Jared closed his fingers around the charm. "My thanks. Farewell, Master Cloudridge."

He spoke no further. A streak of blue light burst from beneath his feet—then Jared became a racing comet aimed at the distant Myriad Beast Mountains. Clara hissed through her teeth but lifted her arm all the same. "Form up after him!"

Twenty-one sword lights ripped through the sky, chasing the azure trail.

They cleared the Myriad Sword Mountains and dived into a sprawl of untamed forest and broken highlands. Jared held his pace to something the group could match, yet tension furrowed his brow. His spiritual sense swept every shadow, every rustle, reaching for the faintest trace of the Myriad Beast Sect's aura.

Behind him, Clara studied his unhurried speed and the steady, unimpressive fluctuation of a Level Seven Human Immortal. With every mile, her doubt thickened.

Father says he drove off Sheldon Soulsby? No chance. Sheldon must have been exhausted after dueling Father; Jared simply happened to strike the final blow—or he used some treacherous trick. Maybe those rumors were planted by Father for reasons of his own. No way this man is that incredible.

"Hey!" Clara surged forward until her sword light skimmed Jared's shoulder. "Where exactly are we going? The Myriad Beast Mountains cover hundreds of miles—are we supposed to wander like headless chickens?"

Without breaking stride, Jared answered, "First to the sect's former grounds. In the wake of the revolt, the Melded Beastkin and the Infinite Soul Demon Sect will be moving there. We grab a captive, and ask them about Paxton's whereabouts. If not, we scout the lay of the land."

"Easier said than done," Clara scoffed. "What if we stumble onto an army out there just the twenty-one of us?"

"Then we improvise."

Jared offered no further explanation. Truth be told, were it not for Linden's courtesy, he would have set out alone.

Clara tried to fall in beside Jared but found him as unyielding as an iron wall. She snorted, slowed half a pace, and sent a hiss of thought toward the friend behind her. "I have no idea what Father was thinking, putting us under the command of this show-off."

The young disciple behind her managed only a tight, uneasy smile. He kept his eyes forward and offered no reply.

Another long hour passed in tense, wordless flight. Below them spread a desolate canyon where knife-edged boulders clustered like broken fangs.

A flicker crossed Jared's expression. He lifted one hand—an unspoken order that rippled down the column and brought every sword light to a halt.

"What is it?" Clara asked, her voice sharp with battle-ready suspicion.

She swept her spiritual sense through the ravine yet felt nothing but wind and dust.

Jared did not answer. His gaze drilled into a swath of darkness deeper inside the gorge—cold, focused, foretelling violence.

The instant the others followed his stare, that darkness writhed. Dozens of figures burst out, howling, and blocked the open sky ahead of them.

Half of the newcomers wore the pitch-black robes of the Infinite Soul Demon Sect, their auras thick with malevolent mist.

The rest were not entirely human. Some bore half-shaped snouts, others full pelts or clawed hands—warriors of the Melded Beastkin tribe, their breaths ragged with feral rage.

Whether this was a patrol or an ambush, the enemy had clearly been waiting.

At their lead strode a Level Five

Heavenly Immortal elder of the Infinite Soul Demon Sect and, beside

him, a hulking boar-tusked Melded Beastkin expert swinging twin bone hammers the size of millstones.

"Ha! We scoured these ravines searching for stray beasts and sword-sect spies," the Demon Sect elder roared, delight dripping from his voice. "And look what flies into our

net fresh disciples of the Mystic Sky Sword Sect, badges shining like lanterns! Even better, a tender little lass to please Sect Master Thornscales when we drag her home."

His hungry gaze crawled over Clara, making her cheeks burn crimson with fury.

A Warrior Undefeatable

Clara's temper snapped. Scarlet anger flared in her eyes. "Demon-spawn, you court death!"

With a metallic hiss, her long red sword flashed free, its blade igniting a ribbon of searing heat that leapt straight toward the leering elder.

"Clara, be careful!" a fellow swordsman cried from the rear.

Steel rang throughout the squad as every disciple drew swords and formed a tight, hastily arranged battle array.

Both sides' numbers were even, yet the enemy boasted a Level Five Heavenly Immortal elder, a nearly equal boar-headed brute, and a pack of Berserk warriors who knew no fear.

"Kill them! Leave no one breathing!" the Demon Sect elder bellowed.

He and the boar-tusked giant lunged together, their murderous intent locked squarely on Clara.

Behind them, Demon Sect disciples and Melded Beastkin warriors shrieked and rushed the Mystic Sky Sword Sect disciples, eager for slaughter.

Battle exploded in a single heartbeat.

Clara soared like a fire-phoenix, every stroke of her blade shedding molten feathers that hissed through the air toward the elder's throat.

Her form was flawless—true inheritance of the sect. For a moment, she held her own against the Demon Sect elder.

Elsewhere, the boar-tusked leader fought like a living avalanche. Bone hammers whirled without pattern, powered solely by monstrous force.

He crashed into the Mystic Sky Sword Sect's formation. The ground quaked; their coordinated lights flickered. Two Level Three Heavenly Immortal disciples spat blood, reeling from the shock.

The Sword Sect's field-captain-blood on his sleeve, hair plastered to his brow thundered, "Form the Ursa Sword Array, now! Lock him down before he rips us apart!"

A Level Four Heavenly Immortal captain pivoted, signaling new vectors. Blades shifted like migrating stars, lines of silver light knitting themselves into a hastily redrawn constellation.

Yet the beast-fused warriors slammed against the forming pattern, every strike a landslide, every roar a battering ram that made the luminous lattice tremble.

Those creatures fought as though pain were myth. Flesh tore, bones cracked, some even detonated in geysers of gore—anything to trade injury for injury. Precision-trained swordsmen, used to orderly choreography, faltered. Screams followed.

Clara caught the mounting chaos in her peripheral vision. Panic flickered across her eyes. Her next stroke came a breath too fast, a note of desperation bleeding into the rhythm.

The Demon Sect elder—smile thin as razor wire—spotted the opening instantly. His forefinger, blackened by dark rites, thrust forward. A thread of demon force hissed toward Clara's exposed ribs.

Several younger disciples cried out together, "Clara!" Their voices cracked with dread.

She jerked sideways, blade half-raised. Too slow. Midnight venom raced toward her certain, merciless.

And then, at that very moment, time itself seemed to cinch tight.

An emerald blur slipped between Clara and the killing finger, as silent as a ghost spilling from a dream.

It was Jared.

No one had seen when he vanished from view; now he stood there, calm as dusk.

He lifted one casual forefinger. A

pinpoint of chaotic energy

glimmered at the tip—soft candlelight against night—then

kissed the incoming jet of demonC power.

A sound no louder than a bubble bursting at the surface of a pond.

The lethal strand unraveled, melted, died—snowflake meeting noon.

No thunderclap, no blinding collision. One heartbeat it existed; the next, nothing.

Stillness spread, eerie, absolute.

The Demon Sect elder's grin froze. Confusion swamped his eyes, as though the sky had forgotten to be blue.

That strike-feared by peers, deadly to equals had been snuffed out like a guttering match.

Clara remained frozen, staring at the broad back shielding her, disbelief widening her gaze.

Jared did not pause.

The same finger drifted on,

tone

ket

deceptively languid, then tapped the elder's brow-faster than thought

gentler than a moths wing content

"Ugh—" A short, wet syllable barely escaped.

The elder stiffened. Light fled his pupils. Encircling demon energy deflated like a punctured skin.

A look of dumb astonishment lacquered his face as he toppled, lifeless.

He was killed just like that.

A Level Five Heavenly Immortal of the Infinite Soul Demon Sect perished without even time to scream.

Everyone froze in utter shock, including the Melded Beastkin warriors and their leader.

Jared exhaled as though he had brushed dust from a sleeve, nothing more.

He turned, serene, meeting the stunned eyes of the Melded Beastkin leader with a gaze as calm and deep as mountain lakes.

The leader met Jared's eyes and, in that one still moment, a cold wind seemed to pour straight into his bones. Terror tose not from wounds or pain but from someplace far deeper-his very soul. He had never felt so small.

A Warrior Undefeatable

Those eyes were calm-unnaturally calm-like quiet water that could drown a city. The chieftain understood, with dawning dread, that Jared was looking at him the way a man looks at an ant. He roared, trying to shatter the fear with sound alone.

Muscles knotted beneath his hide as he swung his hammer large enough to break mountains. The air buckled around the descending weapon. He meant to smash this eerie human into nothing but pulp.

Jared did not bother to draw the sword at his hip. He did not even take a stance.

He merely lifted his left hand-pale, slender, almost delicate-and spread his fingers toward the howling hammer. Then he closed them.

Crack!

A sound like glaciers splitting echoed. The hammer, forged from an unknown monster's spine and said to be unbreakable, splintered as though it were rotten wood. One heartbeat later, it exploded into a cloud of ivory shards that glittered in the sun.

The shrapnel never reached Jared. Instead, unseen force raced back along the handle. The Melded Beastkin leader's arms cracked, bent, and he shot backward as if flung by an invisible giant, screaming blood into the wind before slamming against distant rock. Bones snapped; he would not rise again.

All of it happened between one flash of lightning and the next.

From Jared's arrival, to the elder of the Demon Sect falling, to the Melded Beastkin leader's destruction-no more than three seconds.

Silence swallowed the battlefield.

Every surviving Infinite Soul Demon Sect disciple and Melded Beastkin warrior froze as though time itself had bound them. Their two mightiest leaders—one dead, one crippled-had fallen before they truly understood the fight had begun.

Across the shattered ground, swordsmen of the Mystic Sky Sword Sect stood open-mouthed. Their hands trembled. Rumor had told them Jared was formidable; rumor had lacked the imagination to describe this.

Clara's crimson blade now pointed at the earth. She stared at Jared's back, that plain robe she once mocked suddenly towering in her eyes—an unfathomable cliff.

Memories rushed in: her father's warnings, Jared's mild smile, her own dismissive words. A hot tide of shame threatened to drown her.

So Father was telling the truth. I'm so ignorant. Who in the world is this man?

Jared paid the swirling emotions no heed. His gaze swept the remaining enemy ranks—measuring, deciding.

"Surrender, or die."

Four simple words, yet they landed like hammers on every quaking heart, leaving no space for doubt—only a choice between kneeling and oblivion.

Steel rasped against stone, then fell silent. One by one, the last surviving enemy fighters—barely a

dozen stared at the elder's body

sprawled in the dirt and at the d

beast-fusion leader writhing and howling a short distance away. Whatever courage still smoldered in them guttered out.

Clang!

Clang!

Swords, axes, and spears slipped from numb fingers and rang against the ground. Pale-faced, they dropped to their knees, shoulders shaking like leaves in a storm.

Only then did Jared turn. His calm

gaze settled on Clara, who was still reeling from what she had just witnessed. The moment their eyes met, a tremor ran through her slender frame. Heat rushed into her

cheeks, and she looked away.

swallowing the swirl of relief,

gratitude, and mortification

tightening in her chest.

"Ms. Cloudridge," he said, voice as even as if he had not just shattered a strike force

in a heartbeat, "clear the field. Have the disciples clear the corpses, question the prisoners, and map every patrol pattern they know—especially where Paxton and the others might have fled to."

"Y-Yes... Mr. Chance." Head bowed, voice no louder than a mosquito's buzz, Selena forced herself to breathe. She rallied the still-dazed disciples, barking crisp orders that steadied her own nerves as much as theirs.

When she dared another glance at the young man in the robe—hands folded behind him, staring toward the distant haze of the Myriad Beast Mountains—her eyes had changed. The last spark of disdain was gone, replaced by reverence and a curious, unbidden urge to understand the mystery standing before her. Who in heaven's name is Jared Chance?