

A Warrior Undefeatable 5801-5810

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The skirmish in the gorge altered Clara's attitude overnight. Her doubts vanished, replaced by respect. She now sought Jared's opinion first, allowing herself to act only after a small approving nod from him.

Interrogation proved swift. Under the twin pressures of Jared's silent presence and the Mystic Sky Sword Sect's interrogation methods honed for war, the captured Demon Sect disciples and Melded Beastkin warriors spilled their secrets like

cracked jars.

"Spare us, sir!" one demon disciple stammered, sweat streaking the grime on his face. "We were ordered to sweep this sector for stragglers of the Myriad Beast Sect —especially Master Paxton and his aides... Oh, and any scouts from the Mystic Sky Sword Sect. If we spotted them, we were to fire a signal flare. Elite squads would move in at once!"

Clara's tone was ice. "How many patrols in this sector? Where are the elites stationed? Speak."

"I... I only know our unit," the man whimpered. "Elder Rhys commanded with Captain Fangtooth at his side."

"Master Thornscales sits at the Myriad Beast Sect headquarters with certain Infinite Soul Demon Sect leaders. Mixed squads of our clans and demon disciples comb the perimeter."

"Rumor says they've ordered special sweeps of old hunting grounds and abandoned mines to the northwest and southwest—claim those mines hide fugitives," another Melded Beastkin fighter muttered, clutching a splinted arm. "It's a good hiding place, they said."

Jared listened without a word, filing every detail. Northwest... Southwest... Those might be the escape lines Paxton would favor.

After the prisoners were secured and the squad had rested, Jared studied the map spread across a fallen shield. "We move southwest. Keep low, mask every trace. If Master Paxton truly fled that way, we'll find his trail—and we avoid every patrol route we now know."

"Understood, Mr. Chance," Clara answered at once. She ordered the disciples to weave concealment spells, suppress their auras, and follow the path Jared's fingertip had traced across the parchment night.

For the next two days, Jared and his small party moved through the Myriad Beast Mountains like phantoms, skimming over ridges, slipping beneath thorny arches, never once rustling a single fallen leaf.

Three sizable patrols prowled the range, yet Jared steered everyone clear of them. They passed scorched clearings, shattered trees, and the unmistakable gouges of recent combat, but Paxton's trail remained cold.

Each hour deepened Jared's frown.

The range sprawled far beyond sight, and Paxton-wounded, wary-clearly masked every footprint. Searching like this felt no different from searching for a needle in a haystack.

Inside Jared's chest, an unspoken clock began to tick. He could sense invisible nets hunting for Paxton and the others tightening from all sides. No one knew these peaks better than the beast folk, and the Demon Sect had laced its own sorcery through the hunt. Paxton's window for survival was shrinking by the minute.

Clara edged closer, reading the tension in Jared's eyes. "Mr. Chance, we can't keep searching like this. Shouldn't we—"

Jared lifted one hand for quiet, shoulders rigid, gaze snapping toward a grove of ancient timber to the left.

A heartbeat later, the faintest sigh of movement stirred the ferns—so light Clara might have blamed the wind had Jared's spiritual sense not confirmed life.

Two figures eased out of the shadows, their pelts and skins mottled to match bark and moss so perfectly that the forest itself seemed to peel away and stand upright.

Beast folk—two of them.

Both lingered in half-shifted forms, one wolf, one leopard. Fresh gashes streaked their hides, their breathing shallow, their eyes blinking with guarded exhaustion.

At the sight of strangers—especially Jared and Clara—they bristled, claws half-raised. Then the wolf's gaze locked on Jared's face, and raw, impossible relief flared behind yellow irises.

"M-Mr. Chance?"

The name escaped in a quiver, his joy strangled to a hush even as it shook his frame.

Jared recognized him: Wilder Kaze, a wolf elder who usually shadowed Paxton's flank, a Level Four Heavenly Immortal.

"Elder Wilder?" Jared stepped forward, voice low, urgent. "Where is Sect Master Paxton? Where is everyone else?"

Wilder's eyes rimmed crimson. "It really is you! Mr. Riftclaw is holed up in a hidden valley just ahead. Many of us are down; Mr. Riftclaw is hurt. worst of all. We were scouting for medicine and a clear path out."

"Show us to him." Jared didn't hesitate.

Guided by Wilder, the team crept onward, threading between natural illusions and skirting a swamp that slept like glass but reeked of lethal qi beneath.

They reached a cliff face drowned in vines and broken boulders. Behind it, a slit barely wide enough for one body pulsed with faint array-light—hasty illusions paired with a warning seal.

Wilder flashed a sequence of claw-shaped signs. The mirage rippled, parted, and accepted them one by one.

They slipped inside. The valley proved narrow yet winding, a stone throat that swallowed sound and sunlight alike.

Roughly twenty sect disciples lay within—some propped against walls, others sprawled on grass-matted stone, every chest wrapped in stained bandages. The air reeked of mingled blood and crushed herbs.

Strangers triggered instinct. Injured beast folk lurched upright, teeth bared—until familiar eyes spotted Jared. Recognition rippled through the wounded like wind across tall wheat.

"Mr. Chance!"

"He's here!"

Deep inside the ravine, a lone

monolith jutted like an altar from the earth. Paxton slumped against the stone. Bandages, layer upon layer wrapped his broad chest. New blood oozed through the linen in dark wells, and the bronze in his complexion had drained to the brittle

hue of old parchment.

"Sir... You're here... at last!" Paxton's eyes ignited. He clawed at the rock, desperate to stand, every muscle trembling in protest.

In a blur, Jared appeared beside him, one palm settling firm and gentle on the

wounded shoulder. "Don't move."

A thread of Jared's spiritual sense

swept through Paxton's body like a lantern in a cavern. Tendons were in a frayed, organs pounded loose,

meridians torn in several planet

Worst of all, shadows of demonic essence clung to the wounds-dark fingerprints left by a battle fought far too close to death.

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Jared's brow knit, jaw tight. "How did you end up this battered?"

He pulled three healing pills of his own making-pearly, fragrant—and slipped them between Paxton's mouth before any protest could form. A ribbon of pure chaotic energy followed, uncoiling through blocked meridians and carrying the medicine where flesh could not.

The pills dissolved at once. Warm vitality swept outward; color crept back into Paxton's cheeks, and his erratic breathing settled into an even cadence.

"My thanks, sir. Had you not reached us in time-had you not gifted such elixir- Paxton would already be ashes on the wind."

"Now's not the time to thank me." Jared's voice cut the air like cold steel.

He surveyed the hollow. Fewer than thirty disciples-bruised, bandaged, some barely conscious-huddled in the rubble where once the Myriad Beast Sect bustled. Anger flickered behind his eyes, a storm building pressure.

"Where is Elder Barrington? And Gavin? Yvette? I don't see them anywhere."

At the mention of Barrington, Paxton's gaze clouded. His voice rasped, thick with grief.

"Elder Barrington... stayed behind so we could escape. Garth and the Infinite Soul Demon Sect thugs surrounded him. He... He died..."

Jared had braced for bad news, yet the confirmation drove a spike through his ribs. Bartram, that blunt, quick-tempered, but loyal bear of a man, was gone.

He closed his eyes, swallowing the taste of blood, forcing the urge to kill back into its cage.

"What about Gavin and Yvette?"

"After we broke through, we split up and agreed to meet here," Paxton said, steadying his breath. "Their wounds were not serious, and because they knew you best, I sent each with a scouting team—one toward the Mystic Sky Sword Sect, one toward our ruined headquarters to find your trail. No matter the result, they were to return within ten days. Eight have passed. No sign of them, no message—nothing." Jared's heart plunged. A bad feeling crept up his spine.

Gavin and Yvette were cautious to a fault; silence meant trouble of the darkest kind. They would've at least sent a message.

He knelt beside Paxton. "Which routes did they take? Landmarks, coded signs—tell me every detail."

Paxton recited bearings, river bends, bluffs marked with claw-scars—their entire clandestine map—while Jared etched each point into memory.

He rose, plan already forming like iron in a mold.

A young leopard sentry burst in, spots bristling, voice kept to a frantic whisper. "Sir! We've found fresh tracks—enemy patrols, many of them, sweeping this way!"

"They're less than a hundred miles away! At least three patrol squads have merged, and two auras—strong ones—feel like Level Six Heavenly Immortals!"

"What?" Jared's head snapped toward the valley mouth, eyes narrowing to slits that promised ruin.

Faces blanched, worry rippling through the valley like a cold wind across tall grass. Paxton heaved his wounded body from the sheltered boulder, trying to bark orders, but Jared's palm settled on his shoulder, gentle yet immovable—an unspoken command to stay down.

"They came prepared," Jared said, voice steady as tempered steel. "More fighters, stronger cultivators. A straight fight ends in slaughter. This gorge hides us for now, but not forever. Time is sand in a cracked glass—we have to move."

"Move where?"

an elder croaked.

Terror dried his throat. "The

mountain range is vast, but the Melded Beastkin know every ridge, and the Infinite Soul Demon Soot trails us by sorcery Half our people: bleed or burn inside-how can we outrun fate?" Content befongs

Clara could no longer hold her tongue. "Come to Mystic Sky Sword Sect," she offered, voice clear as a bell over thunder. "Our grand array still stands. Its walls can shelter every soul here."

Paxton blinked at the young woman, unsure whether hope or suspicion should surface first. "And you are?"

"Clara," Jared supplied, "daughter of Mr. Cloudridge-leader of the sect she just named."

Paxton managed a bow that was more gratitude than grace. "Your kindness honors us, Clara. But Mystic Sky lies beyond the Myriad Sword Mountains-checkpoints, ambush routes, demon scouts. This ragged column would never cross alive."

Silence fell. It carried the dull weight of impending doom, pressing on lungs and souls alike.

Enemies were hot on their tails, and they had nowhere else to go. Are we going to be wiped out here?

Clara's eyes suddenly caught fire, as though a hidden lantern flared behind them. "There is one more place," she said, glancing from Jared to Paxton, measuring their resolve. "A bolt-hole, not a fortress-but perhaps enough."

Jared turned toward her. "Where?"

"Blazefire Secret Realm."

"My master,

the

Flame-Sword

Venerable, discovered it ages ago," she explained. "The entrance is

ver

masked, opened only by a sigil stone and a spoken charm. Inside stretches a labyrinth of fire-charged air Ordinary trackers cannot breathe there long but hunters who need only refuge will find endless turns and shadows. Better still, it sits less than two days from here, and the path there is quite remote."

Jared's pulse quickened. Secret realms bent natural law; most tracing spells died the moment one stepped across such thresholds.

Hope flickered in Paxton's eyes, mirrored by the other elders—then dimmed beneath courtesy. "A treasure like that belongs to your sect. We are outsiders—"

"That's the least of our worries now," Clara cut in her tone suddenly a sword edge: "My master drilled one lesson into me—steel your heart, aid the helpless. Now that your sect is in danger and the Demon Sect is on a rampage, the Mystic Sky Sword Sect will do anything we can to help. My father will agree with that, too."

She faced Jared. "What do you think, Mr. Chance?"

Jared weighed options—the bleeding convoy, demon hounds howling in memory, paths closing like claws. No safer card lies in this deck. He nodded once.

"Paxton," he said, "what do you think?"

Paxton drew a slow breath, then bowed deeply. "Clara, the Myriad Beast Sect owes you life itself. If we survive this night, we'll do anything in our power to aid you should you need it."

"Spare the ceremony. Save that strength for the road—and for whatever waits beyond the secret gate."

Clara bowed, then lifted her chin, grim urgency sharpening her voice. "There's no time to waste. We have to move now—slip out before their net closes. I know a back route that's almost safe."

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Jared shook his head, calm but immovable. "All of you go first."

Paxton and Clara froze mid-stride, startled by the quiet finality in his tone.

"Gavin and Yvette are still out there," Jared said, eyes flaring with flint-hard resolve. "They didn't come back on time, so trouble should've found them, and I will not abandon them."

Clara's breath caught. "But the patrols are everywhere now. Alone, you'll be a beacon to them—please reconsider!"

Paxton added, voice low but insistent, "Those two youngsters are sharp. They might simply be hiding. If you walk into the open and—"

"There is no if." Jared's reply drifted out like steel drawn from a sheath—smooth, decisive, and beyond appeal. "They brought me here, so it is on me to see them out alive."

"Head to the secret realm. Send me the exact coordinates and the method to enter. Once I have them, I'll meet you inside."

Clara heard the certainty in his voice and knew further pleas would be of no use.

"Then take this." She bit her lip, pulled a red feather-shaped talisman from inside her cloak, and pressed it into his palm. "The Blazefire Talisman is one of the keys to the realm."

Her words flowed fast, each syllable a blueprint. "Travel southwest for roughly twenty thousand miles to Crimson Rift Gorge. Deepest inside stands a rock face that burns day and night. Channel fire-type power through the talisman and carve the seal I just shared into the air with your mind. That will pry open a temporary gate."

The moment the intricate sigil flickered into Jared's mind, he memorized it, slipped the talisman away, and gave a steady nod.

Clara's voice cracked. "Be careful. We'll wait for you inside the realm."

Paxton and the remaining Myriad Beast disciples bowed deeply. Hope and gratitude gleamed behind battle-weary eyes. "Take care, Mr. Chance."

Jared answered with a single nod. His figure blurred—then vanished as though the very air swallowed him. Not so much as a ripple of space remained.

For a heartbeat, Clara stared at the empty space he'd filled, then forced herself to turn back, swallowing the strange ache in her chest.

"Mr. Riftlcaw, we leave now. Lightly wounded disciples, help the badly hurt. We move!"

Under her command, the mixed band of Mystic Sky Sword Sect elites and the battered remnants of the Myriad Beast Sect slipped from the hidden valley, ghosting southwest toward Crimson Rift Gorge.

Once alone, Jared pushed his mastery of spatial step and veiling art to their cruel limits. He became an unseen breath riding between leaf-shadow and stone.

He arrowed through forest, cliff, and dusk-lit hollows, a phantom whose senses fanned outward like an invisible radar dish, scouring every inch for the faintest echo of Gavin and Yvette while threading flawlessly between roaming search parties.

Following the route Paxton had provided, he veered toward the Mystic Sky Sword Sect's last known perimeter, where dim residue of combat stained the air and covert clan markings of the Myriad Beast Sect glimmered on bark and stone.

Those markings pointed toward an obscure track snaking back toward the sect's ruined headquarters.

Were they exposed when they headed back to the Myriad Beast Sect headquarters?

Jared veered at once, abandoning his original course and sprinting after the faintly glowing sigils he had left as furtive trail-markers.

The closer he drew to the forgotten outskirts of the Myriad Beast Sect's ruins, the tighter the ring of patrols became. Beastren scouts stalked every ridge, and the very air seemed strung on a wire of dread.

Jared all but stopped breathing. At times, he had to flatten himself beneath tangled scrub for long, punishing stretches, waiting until two patrol teams traded shifts before slipping through the gap.

Along the way, he stumbled across fresh gouges in bark and stone-and then the darker proof of violence: streaks of blood still wet enough to glisten.

A single inhale told him everything. Gavin's and Yvette's blood was among them.

Hold on. The thought plunged like lead through his chest.

Roughly sixty miles from the sect's core, a knife-edged ravine split the mountainside. Here, the soil reeked of energy discharge, the ground littered with pools of crimson that had barely begun to congeal.

Blades and spells had carved ragged furrows across both canyon walls. Rocks lay scattered like broken teeth, each one blackened by sorcery.

In the air clashed auras of Gavin and Yvette, at least half a dozen frenzied Melded Beastkin warriors, and two chilling currents that could belong only to Demon Sect cultivators.

They were ambushed here.

Jared's gaze frosted over. Every dent and scorch-mark told the same brutal tale: Gavin and Yvette had fought like cornered animals, but the enemy was numerous, prepared, and hungry for blood.

He combed the rocks until a torn scrap of black fabric caught his eye-a corner of Yvette's coat, still carrying her faint, familiar fragrance. Dried blood peppered the cloth.

His knuckles blanched as he clutched the shred of fabric.

Following wisps of residual aura and barely visible drag marks, he traced the captors' path uphill. The tracks ended at a vine-choked cave mouth halfway up the slope. A flimsy ward shimmered across the entrance, yet from within leaked coarse

voices-and the soft, broken sob of a woman.

Yvette. Jared's gaze turned icy. Murderous intent thickened in the air around him until it felt almost solid. He became lightning—one blinding flicker—and slipped through the crude barrier without stirring a single leaf.

The cavern widened into a rough hall lit by sickly green soul-lamps. Seven or eight fusion-beast brutes lounged around a spit, roaring with laughter, trading bites of roasted meat and pulls of liquor. On the floor lay trinkets they had stripped from Gavin and Yvette—cracked talismans, a shattered wrist-guard,

Yvette's slender dagger.

Farther in, two squat stone pillars rose from the earth. Chains bit into the figures lashed to them. Gavin and Yvette.

Gavin hung limp, drenched in blood. Several wounds yawned to the bone, and one arm bent at a grotesque angle. His head sagged forward, breaths thready and

fading.

Yvette's condition ignited Jared's fury. Her outer cloak had been ripped to ribbons, leaving blood-stained undergarments and pale skin marred by bruises and gashes.

A Melded Beastkin leader-goat

horns curling from his temples,

wine-stung grin smeared across a leering face—reached for what little cloth still covered her. "Quit squirming pretty thing. Once tire of you, perhaps I'll gift you to Master Thornscales as a pet. Ha!"

Yvette thrashed against the chains, eyes blazing with despair and shame, but her spiritual power was sealed, and her wounds sapped what strength remained. Jared's heartbeat became a war drum. Every drop of restraint hissed, cracked, and finally shattered.

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"Stop!" Gavin forced the word through cracked lips. The sound was ragged, a protest boiled in blood and defiance.

He managed to raise his head—and for that insolence, a Melded Beastkin trooper slammed a boot into his chest. Pain burst like shrapnel under his ribs, and a fresh ribbon of blood sprayed across the cave floor.

The goat-horned captain barked a drunken laugh. "Still have some backbone, do you? Fine. I'll finish with the pretty scout first, then take my sweet time carving you up."

Leering, he stretched a hand toward Yvette's trembling shoulder.

In that breath between reach and contact, the world seemed to hold itself taut.

Boom!

The crude seal over the cavern mouth exploded as if it were no more than wet paper, shards of rune-ash spinning out on a shockwave.

A killing intent swept in-icy, primeval, furious-like an ancient predator jolting awake after a thousand-year slumber. The air grew dense, metallic, almost wet with doom.

Every laugh, every drunken jeer from the Melded Beastkin troops died mid-throat, cut off as neatly as strings from a puppet.

They whirled. A lone figure in a plain robe now filled the entrance, framed by drifting dust.

He stood unmoving, almost calm, yet his eyes burned-glacial cores hiding a volcanic wrath that promised annihilation.

His gaze brushed the room, and even the seasoned Melded Beastkin killers felt as if they had been dunked in frozen water. Blood slowed. Breath locked.

"W-Who are you?" the goat-horned captain croaked, the bravado leaking from his voice like wine from a cracked jug.

Jared did not bother to answer.

His stare settled on Gavin and Yvette—on Gavin's caved-in chest, on the tears of relief and humiliation streaking Yvette's grime-stained cheeks.

The rage inside him flared white-hot.

"All of you deserve to die." The soft words landed with the finality of a judge's gavel.

Silence snapped.

Jared moved.

No thunderous spectacle, no ornate technique—only a single, deliberate motion.

He lifted his right hand, fingers spread, and closed them slowly around everyone in the cave, excluding Gavin and Yvette.

The cavern seemed to inhale; air, sound, even time itself recoiled inward.

A hush, one heartbeat long, swallowed the chamber.

The Melded Beastkin warriors watched, eyes wide, throats locked, unable even to scream.

Bodies, weapons, overturned wine jars, hanging soul-lamps—everything not nailed by fate itself—lurched upward as though seized by an invisible giant's grip.

Pop! Pop! Pop! Wet, muffled detonations rippled one atop another.

Flesh burst. Armor plates shattered. Wine and blood mingled into a crimson spray that painted the stone like macabre fireworks.

Seven warriors—including the goat-horned captain, proud of his Level Four Heavenly Immortal strength—vanished in mid-sentence, reduced to drifting scarlet mist.

Chunks of bone and viscera slapped against the cave walls, slid down, and steamed in the frigid aura that remained.

A cloying stench of iron flooded the hollow, as though death itself had uncorked a bottle and let its wine spill free.

The cavern now breathed a

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graveyard hush. Every Melded Beastkin warrior lay crushed or smoldering where they had fallen, and only two figures—Gavin and Yvette—remained alive, trussed cruelly to a black granite pillar.

Jared lowered his hand as though he had merely brushed lint from his sleeve, the final echoes of power fading into the rock.

He strode to the pillar. One finger flicked across the sinew ropes. The strands parted with a dry snap and curled to the ground like burnt paper.

Yvette's knees buckled. She would have collapsed, but Jared's arm swept beneath her shoulders, gathering her against him before she could sink.

Pressed to his chest, she felt the solid steadiness of his body and the faint, familiar scent that had carried her through countless drills back at the sect.

Days of terror, humiliation, and

creeping despair burst loose. She

clutched his tunic with white knuckles, buried her face in his

chest, and sobbed until every breath shook her slender frame.

"S-Sir... Sir... you really came... I knew it... I knew you would come "

Her words tangled with tears, turning into broken syllables that dissolved against his robe.

Jared sighed inwardly, set a gentle palm between her shoulder blades, and let a thread of warm immortal energy glide into her meridians, steadying her mind and easing bruised flesh.

Only then did he lift his gaze to Gavin, who was forcing himself upright on trembling legs.

Blood streaked Gavin's face, yet his eyes blazed with fury and shame. Dropping to one knee, he rasped, "Sir! I failed Yvette. I failed the sect—and made you risk yourself to save us."

"Get up," Jared said, voice low, implacable. "This is no time for guilt."

He pulled Gavin to his feet, fed him a healing pill, and sent another ribbon of immortal energy coursing through shattered bones. "How did the two of you end up in their hands?"

The pill melted—heat flowing through Gavin's limbs. Breathing easier, he answered at once.

"After we split into squads, my team slipped to the perimeter of the old Myriad Beast Sect stronghold without trouble,"

"We seized a lone Melded Beastkin

Lone

warrior, wrung out some troop layouts, and were ready to withdraw when we ran headlong into Yvette's unit. Her trail had already been spotted. A full squad was hunting them down. I swung in to cover her. Our two groups merged, fighting while falling back. We cut down plenty of pursuers, but their numbers kept swelling-then Demon Sect elites arrived. The formation shattered. Yvette and lured most of the chase toward this ravine so the younger disciples could scatter. We were ambushed here, spent, and captured. The others... we still don't know if they escaped."

Gavin's jaw flexed. "Those b*stards... after they dragged us here, they cursed and beat us—then tried to do worse to Yvette." His eyes burned crimson.

"Enough." Jared's reply fell like frost.

"Their debt will be repaid a hundredfold, but first we move. The noise I kept muffled may still draw other hunters."

Both captives nodded instantly.

Jared draped one of his spare robes across Yvette's shoulders, hiding the tatters of her uniform.

Gripping one survivor in each hand, he stepped once. The three of them vanished from the cave mouth and slipped into the forest's broken moon-shadow, racing southwest.

Half an hour later, several intimidating auras crashed into the cavern. They stared at the ruin, sucked in sharp breaths, then loosed furious roars and shrill alarm whistles. By then, Jared, Gavin, and Yvette had escaped more than thirty miles into the night. Jared followed every waypoint and incantation Clara had provided him. Wind howled past his ears as he raced for the hidden gateway of Blazefire Secret Realm.

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The Crimson Flame Gorge lay in the southwest quadrant of the Myriad Beast Mountains. Its name came from the strange scarlet fire that burned, eternal and soundless, in the canyon's deepest throat.

The cliffs on either side climbed like sheer red knives. Centuries of searing heat had scorched their surfaces into dark-maroon glass, so hot the very air wavered in trembling waves.

Few plants dared survive here. Only fire-loving ferns and crusts of copper-green lichen clung stubbornly to cracks in the stone, their presence a quiet testament to nature's will to live.

Clara led Paxton and the battered remnants of the Myriad Beast Sect through that furnace of stone. By the time they reached the gorge's final chamber, every step felt like dragging lead. Days of pursuit, nerves stretched taut, wounds left half-dressed -the price showed in their eyes: drained hope hanging by a frayed thread.

At last, they stopped before a wall of red crystal that soared three hundred feet, polished smooth as a mirror. It was not ordinary rock but Crimson Flame Crystal, veined with sparks of molten gold.

A thin film of pale-gold fire crawled across its face-quiet, nearly gentle, and yet so hot that even the air buckled and writhed.

This was the hidden gate into the Blazefire Secret Realm.

"Here," she whispered, voice cracking but resolute.

Her cheeks were flushed an unhealthy rose from the heat, yet a fragile spark of hope lit her eyes. Turning to her weary companions, she managed a steady nod. "Give me a moment. I'll open the way."

Paxton and the other beasts stared at that burning wall. Roaring, unspent fire- energy pulsed behind the crystal-raw, pure, and powerful enough to cloak them from any hunter.

Perhaps, they dared to believe, the secret realm could become a refuge no Infinite Soul Demon Sect hound would sniff out.

Clara took a deep breath, swallowed pain and exhaustion, stepped within ten paces of the wall, and produced a pendant shaped like a crimson feather—an identical twin to the one she had once entrusted to Jared.

Forming quick seals, she transmuted the last of the sword energy into blazing spiritual fire and poured it into the talisman.

A phoenix cry rang out. Scarlet light erupted, spearing into the heart of the flaming wall. At the same time, her mind etched a complicated sigil, line after luminous line, across the surface of her own soul.

Just as the final stroke brightened and the flames on the wall began to pulse in rhythmic waves, an outline of a doorway shimmered into existence.

A single, cold snort cracked through the gorge like thunder, harsh enough to rattle bones.

The sound carried a spear-point of soul-piercing power and blistering sword intent. Clara took the blow full on. Agony detonated behind her eyes, shattering the sigil she was weaving.

She gasped, a thin thread of blood slipping from the corner of her mouth, and staggered backward. The talisman's glow guttered, then died. The half-formed gateway crumbled, flames rushing back to erase every trace of passage. Hope winked out with it.

"Who's there?"

Paxton forced breath into his lungs and stepped between Clara and the unseen threat, silver pupils sweeping the gorge like blades.

The remaining disciples rallied behind him, knuckles white on weapons, forming a ragged shield around Clara.

A deep, imperious voice answered, dripping with reproach. "Clara, how dare you?"

Space rippled before the flaming wall-like water parting—until the silhouette of a man materialized, haloed by the eternal fire as though the gorge itself bowed to his arrival.

A man in late middle age strode out of the swirling dusk, his crimson robe blazing with gold-thread flames that seemed to dance on the cloth. Across his back lay an ancient scarlet sword. Even sheathed, it bled heat—an invisible furnace of killing intent that hissed against the evening air as though it might scorch the canyon clean.

The pressure rolling off him dwarfed anything Paxton had ever felt. The man stood at the very summit of the Heavenly Immortal Realm—perhaps Level Eight, perhaps Nine—and every heartbeat in the gorge quickened beneath the weight of that mastery.

"Master!"

Clara dropped to one knee so quickly her already-torn shoulder screamed. Blood still rimmed her lips, yet she bowed low, hands pressed to the cold stone.

This was Reiner Asher, Clara's master, the former prodigy of the Mystic Sky Sword Sect, and the wanderer who later carved his legend across a dozen realms, granted the title Flame-Sword Venerable.

His eyes flashed over Clara—a flicker of pain softened the hard heat, then vanished beneath a storm of anger.

He turned that storm on Paxton and the battered beasts behind the girl. None carried swords, all carried wounds, and their beast auras stank of desperation. Reiner's face darkened until the air itself felt wet with impending rain.

"Clara," his voice cut like frost laid over fire, "have you forgotten my law? The Blazefire Secret Realm is my place of seclusion. No outsider may so much as touch its threshold. You stepped away to meddle in that petty war between Mystic Sky and the Demon Sect-I let that pass. Yet you dare drag these... stray creatures here and even dream of opening the sanctum? Do you not care about my rules? Do you not care about the Mystic Sky Sword Sect's discipline?"

"Master, please calm your anger!"

"I was wrong," Clara cried, forehead pressing to stone. "The Myriad Beast Sect was ambushed by the Infinite Soul Demon Sect and traitors within. The sect fell in a night. Mr. Paxton Riftclaw and the survivors broke through with their lives. Pursuers close behind, nowhere safe ahead-my heart could not watch them slaughtered. I beg you, grant them shelter until the hunt passes. My father has given his approval."

"Linden agreed? That is his affair." Reiner's brows twitched, but the furnace in his voice only blazed higher. "This place is mine. I forged the rule. Not your father, not the shades of our ancestors risen from the grave, will alter it."

He faced the refugees as though they were insects crawling across a prayer mat. "A pack of whipped dogs dares profane my retreat? Leave at once—or learn what mercy my sword denies."

"Sir!" Paxton, hair

matted with dried

blood, stepped forward, bowed until his great shoulders shook. "I am Paxton Riftclaw, head of the Myriad Beast Sect. Disaster drove us offense was never meant. If you allow us a few days' refuge, every

is here;

remaining treasure of our sect is yours. In the future, should you speak a command, the Myriad Beast Sect will obey, even unto death."

Reiner laughed. "A sect that cannot guard its own gate thinks to bargain with me?

Your baubles are dust in my eyes. Crawl out of this canyon now, or I will carry you out on my sword's edge."

A Warrior Undefeatable

"You-"

A wolf-clan elder with bandaged ribs lurched forward, fury flaring in his yellow eyes. Paxton seized the elder's arm, dragging him back before defiance became death.

Clara's heart twisted. Shame scorched hotter than her wounds as if her master's flames had leapt inside her chest and left nothing but ash.

She turned. The Myriad Beast Sect survivors huddled behind her, and the new despair in their eyes felt heavier than chains. She swung her gaze to Paxton, who still knelt with half-healed wounds. His skin had gone a deathly shade of white.

A single breath of resolve, then she dropped to her knees and slammed her head against the stone—once, twice, a third time each crack echoing across the gorge. Red welts ballooned across her brow before she even lifted her face.

"Master! Every mistake is mine alone. I took it upon myself to break the rules. I deserve any punishment—strip my cultivation, cast me out, whatever you decree, I accept without complaint. But please... please find a shred of mercy and save them! They have nowhere left to run. If the Infinite Soul Demon Sect captures them, they'll be torn apart. Master, I'm begging you!"

Her plea dissolved into sobs. For all his iron discipline, Reiner had always favored her as a disciple, and Clara clung to that final sliver of hope.

Watching his cherished student abase herself, Reiner's fury only deepened—yet now it aimed at Paxton and the ragged outsiders. They seduced her into disobedience and even drove her to injure herself for their sake.

"Stubborn child!" he snapped, his voice a blade.

He moved no more than a sleeve. The silk fluttered, and an invisible storm of molten fire lashed out—erupting like a volcano, cutting like sword energy.

It smashed into the kneeling girl. The gorge boomed.

Blood spattered the air as Clara shot backward. She crashed yards away, skidding across gravel before lying still. She tried to rise, limbs trembling, but her strength guttered out. Within heartbeats, her aura sank to a faint whisper.

"Clara!"

"Ms. Cloudridge!"

Sword Sect disciples and the battered beasts lurched forward, only to freeze when Reiner's chill glare swept over them. The look alone felt like being sealed in ice.

"That strike," Reiner said, voice flat as iron, "punishes you for defying my command, escorting strangers, and being disrespectful."

Clara lay on the dirt, blood leaking from her lips, eyes shining with pain and helplessness. Reiner's chest twisted, but his face stayed grim and unforgiving.

"Now take these feeble strays and vanish from my sight. Stay one moment longer, and the next blow will do more than bruise you."

Despair dropped over the Myriad Beast Sect remnants like a mountain. Their last flicker of hope had been snuffed out by Reiner. Some disciples sank to the ground, eyes empty, resigned to whatever doom awaited.

Paxton's fists clenched until his claws pierced his own palms, blood threading through his fingers.

He looked from Clara's broken form to his tribe's hollow faces, a storm of rage and helplessness roaring inside.

Is the Myriad Beast Sect really done for?

Just as that hopeless question rang within him, a ripple rolled through the air at the canyon mouth, not of spiritual force or bending space, but offiving flame hot, nirable, dancing as though fire itself had grown a heartbeat and was now racing toward them.

In the next breath, a plain-robed silhouette ripped through the air, devouring

hundreds of yards as though the ground between never existed.

Each stride landed on an invisible stairway of living fire. Crimson-gold flower-shaped flames blossomed beneath his boots, flared, and vanished before a single ember could drift away.

Despite the impossible speed-faster than any movement art the onlookers had seen-no wind screamed, no spiritual current shattered. The motion felt like a page of reality had simply been turned.

The figure was Jared. Wrapped inside a shell of his own celestial force, Gavin and Yvette clung to his arms, barely keeping pace with the miracle he created.

"Blazing Stride?" Reiner blurted, the words cracking through his composure like glass under a hammer.

A heartbeat earlier, he had stood aloof, arms folded, face hewn from stone. Now his pupils shrank to pinpoints. Shock and raw confusion chased one another across his features-feelings so strong they broke through the iron discipline of a Heavenly Immortal master.

Jared ended his advance; the flower-shaped fire dissolved like dew beneath sunlight.

His gaze swept the scene-Clara crumpled on the gravel, breath thin; Paxton and the other beasts cornered in despair; the red-robed sword cultivator whose presence bent the air itself.

That must be Clara's teacher, the Flame-Sword Venerable. And something seemed to be going on.

Every disciple who recognized Jared shouted his name as though a lighthouse had just ignited in endless night.

Jared dipped his head, urging them to calm down.

He knelt beside Clara. Her pulse fluttered; threads of blistering sword intent still gnawed at her meridians, the gift of her own master's strike. Jared's brow tightened. A ribbon of gentle refined chaotic energy. slipped from his palm, weaving around her heart to seal the damage and quiet the inner storm.

"M-Mr. Chance..." Tears welled anew in Clara's eyes—shame, hurt, relief tangled hopelessly. "I-I'm sorry... I couldn't—"

"Hush." His voice was a hand on her shoulder. "Breathe first. Words can wait."

He eased her against a slab of stone a few yards back, where the heat of battle no longer reached.

Only then did Jared rise, meeting Reiner's burning stare with a serenity as immovable as bedrock.

Reiner's initial shock ebbed, replaced by a keen, probing curiosity. He studied the young man before him—cultivation no higher than Human Immortal Realm Level Seven, yet his bearing felt ancient, mountain-steady.

Not a flicker of fear showed in Jared's eyes, even under the weight of a Heavenly Immortal's presence. And unbelievably, the youth had just used the long-lost Blazing Stride.

"Boy, who in the world are you?" Reiner demanded, voice low, edges sparking like steel across granite.

"Why do you wield the Blaze Stride? That footwork belongs only to the Fire Spirit Lord, a secret never taught. Across the entire world, barely a handful can use it. From whom did you steal such knowledge?"

A Warrior Undefeatable

He did not answer immediately. A small, unhurried silence settled over the inferno-lit cavern, as though he wished the crackle of molten stone to speak first.

Jared glanced at Clara, who lay off to one side, a streak of blood glimmering against her pale robes, then let his calm gaze climb back to Reiner. "So you're the Flame- Sword Venerable," he said, his voice cool enough to hiss against the heat. "Clara's master-correct?"

Reiner lifted his chin, pride flaring in ember-bright eyes. "I am. Now answer me, boy. Where did you learn the Blaze Stride?"

Jared merely tilted his head, a faint, icy smile cutting across his mouth. "Why should I indulge your curiosity? Instead, explain something to me. A master maims his own disciple without hearing the whole story-what lesson does that teach? She led them here to save them, nothing more, nothing less. Where exactly is the crime in that?"

Reiner barked, "Impudence!" The word cracked like a whip, shaking sparks from the cavern roof.

"How I discipline my disciples is none of your concern," he growled, every syllable scattering sparks. "The Blazefire Secret Realm is my retreat. First rule-no outsider sets foot within its flames. She broke that rule by bringing you in. I spared her cultivation only for the sake of our bond. Answer me now, or I will shackle your soul and scour your memories myself."

Jared's expression did not so much as tremble; a mocking curve tugged at one corner of his mouth. "Your retreat? Your rules? Tell me, are you certain this sanctuary actually belongs to you? Because it feels more like something the old Fire Demon Lord left behind."

Reiner recoiled as though thunder-struck. "What?"

The authority he had been projecting shattered for an instant; the molten air around him wavered, and flames along the rock face guttered. A shock greater than his earlier outrage swept across his features—raw dread mingling with disbelief.

His pupils tightened to pinpoints. "How do you know the Fire Demon Lord? Who... Who are you really?"

Certainty settled in Jared's chest like a well-placed stone.

So my hunch was right after all. He had found the name familiar when Linden first mentioned the Blazefire Secret Realm, and Reiner's reaction made the connection undeniable.

"Who am I?" Jared met Reiner's trembling stare. "Since you recognize the Blaze Stride and have heard of the Fire Demon Lord, there's no harm in telling you. The Fire Demon Lord is an old friend of mine. He left this sanctuary behind, and as his friend, I have every right to bring a few companions here for shelter."

"Friend?" Reiner echoed, brows arching. He laughed a booming, jagged sound that ricocheted across the lava walls. "Ridiculous! The Fire Demon Lord has lived for

tens of thousands of years. You've barely stepped a century into the Human Immortal Realm, yet you dare call him your friend? Absurd!"

His laughter cut short, eyes narrowing to blades. "Even if, by some chance, you inherited a scrap of his legacy and learned his name, explain the Blaze Stride. That aft is the Fire Spirit Lord's exclusive creation. The Fire Spirit Lord and the Fire Demon Lord—one righteous, one demonic—have warded for endless ages, fire against fire. You stand there claiming friendship with the Fire Demon Lord, yet your technique belongs to the Flame Spirit Lord. Are we supposed to believe you befriended two beings who would sooner burn each other out of existence than share a cup of water? Rubbish—absolute, stinking rubbish!"

Reiner, veins flaring crimson

beneath his skin, lost what little patience he had left. "I have no time for these fairy tales. Tell me now—who did you learn the Blazing Stride from? And how brat did you learn the true name of the Fire Démon Lord? Lie, and I will erase both flesh and soul from the face of this canyon."

Before Jared could answer, Reiner's sword intent erupted like a volcano held too long.

Scarlet sword-light thrashed upward, bathing half the ravine in blood-red glare.

The heat snapped through the air with gunshot cracks. Stone liquefied, ran in molten rivulets. Behind him, the ancient blade slid halfway from its scabbard, its exposed edge glowing like fresh magma while a predatory hum rattled the air.

The full weight of a Heavenly Immortal Realm master crashed outward. Paxton and the other beast-clan warriors groaned, stumbling back. Those of lesser rank spat blood and crumpled, unable to bear the pressure. Even Clara—already wounded—clutched her chest, lungs suddenly too small for air.

At the very center, Jared remained unruffled, coat hanging still as dead calm water.

It was as if he occupied a pocket of untouched space. The blaze powerful enough to boil seas halted three feet from his boots and went no farther.

"You are correct,"

Jared said, voice

mild, almost conversational. "The Fire Demon Lord and the Flame

Spirit Lord seldom see eye to eye et

Their quarrels are their own. But I met them separately. The Fire Demon Lord once shared wine and philosophy with me. The re Spire Lord, finding my stride agreeable, taught me the Blazing Stride. For amusement, nothing more."

Reiner's lip curled in a smile made of sparks. "Amusement? Fine. Looks like you won't tell the truth if I don't teach you a lesson."

He no longer cared to untangle contradictions. A single thought—break him first, question him later—flashed across his mind.

After all, the boy had stolen the Blaze Stride, invoked the Fire Demon Lord by name, and now spouted nonsense in front of everyone. That alone warranted execution.

"Redflame-rise." The command cracked like flint.

The ancient sword cleared its sheath in a shriek of metal. Temperature spiked again; air folded into ripples around the blade's molten glow while stone screamed under the heat.

Rather than hack straight down, the sword traced a single line across the sky, carving fire into emptiness. "Sky Scorching Sword Domain-unfold."

Thunder rolled. Within a circle a hundred paces wide, scarlet infernos blossomed— some as blades, others as lotus petals, still others drifting like burning clouds. Every flicker carried Reiner's lifetime of sword intent, each strand hot enough to vaporize the body and soul of a novice Heavenly Immortal.

A Warrior Undefeatable

Sword-shaped flames, flower-shaped flames, and roaming ember-clouds tore

through the sealed space. Perception warped under the blistering heat. Razor-keen sword intent pressed from every direction, crushing and scorching whatever dared remain inside the domain.

That blistering tempest of blades was none other than Reiner's famed domain—a scorching nightmare he had ridden across level ten of the heavens, crushing every challenger as though the sky itself belonged to him.

Paxton shouted, his throat raw. "Sir!"

Clara's voice overlapped his, sharper, higher. "Mr. Chance!"

The others staggered back, horror blanching their faces. Beneath that hellish domain, they could scarcely defend themselves, let alone lend the slightest aid.

Jared gazed into the roaring inferno and sighed, the sound soft, almost regretful. "So reason is off the table after all," he murmured, the words as calm as falling snow.

He reached behind him and closed his fingers around a long, time-worn hilt.

A single, clear hum rose, like a dragon's cry, like the first note struck when creation split the void.

The tone knifed through the raging flames, pierced the shrieking sword intent, and rang in every ear. Even the fire itself paused, as if listening.

Jared drew his blade.

The Dragonslayer Sword left its sheath.

No mountains toppled, no clouds tore apart.

Its steel was a dark chaos, swallowing the light that touched it.

He gave an almost casual flick of the wrist.

In that instant, an indescribable intent flooded outward.

It was neither heat nor frost, neither edge nor weight, but something beyond the five elements, a union of ruin and rebirth.

It felt like the first split of both sides of the world at the dawn of everything.

Against that intent, the Sky Scorching Sword Domain—once proud to incinerate all—now looked petty, almost hollow.

"What?"

Reiner's face paled. The sword intent he had cultivated for millennia bowed like a vassal before a king, trembling on the verge of collapse.

Impossible.

That blazing intent had been forged beside the Inextinguishable Ember for thousands of years-his supreme fire.

How could the sword will of a mere Human Immortal suppress it?

"Break," Jared whispered.

The Dragonslayer Sword slid forward along a trajectory too profound for words, so slow it seemed languid, yet so fast it ignored both space and flame, spearing straight toward the heart of the inferno.

Reiner watched the incoming strike. No swirling typhoon of sword energy, no blinding flare of light-only the quiet gleam of Jared's blade.

Yet wherever that needle-thin tip drifted, the roaring firestorm that made up his Sky Scorching Sword Domain melted away like frost beneath noon sun. Tongues of flame faded to wisps, then nothing at all. A brittle, glassy crackling rose from the

very fabric of the domain, as though an enormous pane of colored crystal had been tapped by a finger and now spider-webbed with hairline fractures.

Crack!

The sound rang through the gorge-sharp, final.

In that heartbeat, Reiner's once-impenetrable domain, famed for trapping and burning cultivators of his own realm, shattered under what looked like an absent-minded flick of Jared's wrist. Shards of... ember-red light scattered across the sky, falling as glowing cinders that winked out the moment they touched open air.

"Urgh!"

The collapsed domain ripped across Reiner's spirit. He staggered, a dark groan caught in his throat. Blood threaded from the corner of his mouth while astonishment—pure, undiluted—stormed through his eyes.

Even his hand, holding the sword, began to quiver.

This was not a gap in raw power. It was annihilation delivered from a loftier level. Jared's single stroke contained an intent toward blade and toward flame—that dwarfed everything Reiner believed he understood. It was the very gateway to a dimension of swordsmanship he had yearned for but never touched.

Jared lowered the Dragonslayer Sword until the point brushed loose gravel. The chaotic glow sheathing the blade receded like sunset, leaving only dull steel and quiet confidence.

"So," he said, voice mild, "can we head inside now?"

Reiner's breathing turned uneven. His gaze flitted from Jared's steady face to the ancient sword resting at the man's side.

That slash overturned everything I knew.

The youth stood at Level Seven of the Human Immortal Realm. Yet the eerie intent, that strange weapon, even the names he had tossed out—Fire Demon Lord, Fire Spirit Lord—all whispered of legacies far beyond Reiner's imagining.

Should I keep fighting him?

Confidence slipped through his fingers like sand. Jared's intent smothered Reiner's fire-aligned sword art, and a prickle in the veteran's gut warned that single blow had not been delivered at full strength.

The silence stretched for a dozen long breaths. At last, the towering aura that normally raged around Reiner ebbed, and the furnace-hot edge in his sword intent retreated like a tide from shore. He drew one slow lungful of air and exhaled, as though forcing shock and frustration from his chest.

Then, he pivoted aside, clearing the path toward the wall of burning rock behind him. His voice emerged hoarse, scraped raw: "Go on."

He asked nothing further. Some answers, he decided, were better left unlearned. Relief loosened Jared's shoulders. Facing Reiner again would have crushed him. If not for Maxwell's inheritance—and the pure sword intent I tempered inside that void tunnel amid the flame meteors—I wouldn't have survived even one direct hit.

He pushed stray thoughts aside and motioned to Paxton, Gavin, Yvette, and the others behind him. "Let's go."

Jared lifted the talisman that Clara had pressed into his palm earlier

that day. Asilent

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command-nothing more than flicker of will-and a thread of chaotic energy flowed from his core into the artifact. Crimson light burst. across the talisman's facets. At the same instant his fingers shaped the esoteric hand-seal Clara had taught him. The rune slid from his knuckles and sank into the cliff face ahead.

This time, they were allowed entry.

The crystal wall convulsed. Flame roared, parted, and re-formed as a gateway three

full stories high, its threshold lined with **A Warrior** **Undefeatable**

The moment Jared crossed that threshold, a force one hundred times richer-and far wilder—than anything outside slammed into him. It smelled of primeval wilderness and felt like a colossus of fire rousing from sleep to swallow him whole.

A single, resonant hum rippled through space, then the dizziness of transition broke, and the world opened like a curtain yanked from a stage.

Even Jared-tempered by battlefields and heavens alike—caught his breath.

He was not inside some petty cave-dweller's hideout. He stood within a self-contained realm, cut loose from level ten itself, forged entirely from living fire.

Overhead stretched a sky of perpetual combustion: no sun, no moon, no stars-only rivers of molten flame thick as syrup.

To the east flowed newborn dawn-gold fire, warm yet imperious.

In the west, sunset-orange currents drifted like embers, solemn and vast.

The southern vault blazed with blistering white-the illusory echo of the true solar flame that purifies all things.

Northward drifted violet-black clouds so deep they seemed able to swallow heat, light, even souls.

Nothing here stayed still. Fire streamed, collided, and reshaped itself: a phoenix beating fiery wings, a dragon carving circles in incandescent air.

Color bled across the dome in radiant sheets—beauty enough to steal breath, danger enough to still a heart.

Beneath Jared's boots lay dark-red bedrock crystallized by eons of burning, its surface veined with endless, web-thin fissures.

From those cracks erupted pillars of flame-some icy blue yet searing, others midnight black yet bright as noon. Each column arced skyward until it met falling tassels of fire,

weaving blazing waterfalls that stitched earth and heavens together. The roar of their union never ceased, a living anthem of this untamed realm.

Magma did not hide meekly beneath the crust. It rolled in full view of the heavens, coursing across the scarlet continent like rivers, lakes, and an ocean of open fire. A living artery, pulsing heat in every direction.

Crimson, honey-gold, and bruised-violet channels intersected and diverged, each lava river slow yet relentless, the current thick as spilled honey and twice as unforgiving.

Upon those molten waters drifted flowers of pure flame and porous stones that burned forever, their embers refusing to sink or dim.

The air reeked of sulfur, yet was laced with a strangely sweet fragrance—an intoxicating perfume born of minerals no mortal furnace could name.

Far off, whole mountain ranges rose—peaks sculpted not from rock but from flame-forged crystal, each summit towering like a cathedral of embered glass.

Those peaks were formed of treasures that would spark wars in the outside world: Scarlet-Core Crystal, Solar-Fire Gem, Heart-Flame Jade—all fused naturally, here, in obscene abundance.

Every mountain stood translucent. Liquid fire flickered inside their bodies, throwing hallucinations of dancing light that rippled across the land in surreal halos.

And at each summit burned an Eternal Flame, a crown that would never gutter, sculpted by cosmic whim into ever-changing shapes.

One such flame unfurled as a red flower large enough to blanket half a mountain. Its petals turned slowly, each vein etched with drifting runes of creation.

Another arranged itself into the crouched silhouette of a fire-forged unicorn—silent, unmoving, yet its mere posture poured dread and reverence across the valley.

A third burned as the outline of a vast palace—arches, eaves, and shuttered gates chiseled from living fire—as though some primordial god still dwelled within. Fire-aligned spiritual energy hung so thick it had condensed into a shimmering mist—rose, gold, and violet threads sliding through the air like gauze.

A single breath scalded throat and lungs, branding the chest with a sweet, agonizing warmth.

Yet for any who practiced the fire-type cultivation methods, this realm was paradise unspoiled, the ultimate crucible.

Even more astonishing, the land had birthed fire-born creatures-sentient motes shaped by the very essence they swam in.

Flame-sprites no larger than a fist skipped across the lava like children on a playground, their bright eyes blinking within candle-like bodies.

Ruby-scaled dragon-carp, several feet long, glided beneath the surface. When they leapt, fountains of sparks followed them into the blistering air.

Far overhead, Radiant Fire Birds-wings wider than a doorway, tails trailing seven-colored fire—glided in silence, their calls as clear as phoenix song.

At the foot of distant slopes lumbered magma giants-hulking golems stitched from flaming boulders. Each sluggish step made the ground tremble like a drum.

Violence and beauty, creation and ruin-every heartbeat of this place declared the primal law of flame, weaving a savage yet vibrant tapestry of life.

Here, the fire laws were whole. The energy hierarchy soared far above anything known within level ten's most revered danger zones or sanctuaries.

The sharp rasp of scorched lungs tore through the brilliance, a brutal reminder that paradise welcomed only the worthy.

Paxton, Gavin Stone, Yvette

Shadowstep, and a few dozen

remaining Myriad Beast Sect disciples followed Jared onto the dark-red crystalline ground-and calamity struck the instant their boots touched down.

The omnipresent heat, once merely oppressive, found new purpose. It lunged like a predator that had tasted blood.

Scalding spirit-fire became millions of barbed, red-hot needles, driving through every pore, burrowing toward bone with merciless hunger.

Skin sizzled as though an iron brand had been clamped across every inch of flesh.

Each breath no longer drew air but vaporous magma, searing windpipes, blistering lungs from the inside out.

Even tightly shut eyelids failed to shield them; blinding brilliance burned straight through, stabbing the mind with vertigo and white-hot pain.

"Ah!" A young fox-clan disciple—barely Level Two of the Heavenly Immortal Realm — collapsed to his knees, unable to endure the trial of living flame.

Skin that only a heartbeat ago looked whole, now erupted with a rash of liquid blisters. They swelled burst, and dribbled sickly yellow pus. He curled up on the scalding floor, breath thinning so fast it no longer sounded human.

"Hold on. Keep your heart meridian sealed with your art—now!" Paxton roared, the order raw in his throat.

Yet Paxton himself fared little better. Born of the Silver Moon Wolf line, he commanded wind and lunar force—elements that recoiled from pure flame.

A furnace seemed to replace his

chest. Every organ sizzled like meat laid on iron. The demon power usually flowing like mountain streams inside his vessels clogged to molten sludge. Old wounds flared. Heat lanced up his throat. He tasted iron and forced the mouthful of blood back down while a purple hue suffused his face.

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Gavin's true form, the Earth-shatter Ape, carried resistance toward fire. Even so, fire reddened every inch of his hide. Sweat surfaced only to vanish in white salt crusts before a drop could fall.

Jaw locked, Gavin planted himself between the oncoming blaze and Yvette, who wavered behind him on the verge of blackout.

A Warrior Undefeatable

Yvette's gift lay with shadows. In this realm of searing light, her talent shrank to nothing. Only the sliver of celestial power Jared had slipped into her veins earlier kept her heart from stalling outright.

Around them, the rest of the Myriad Beast Sect looked defeated. Eagle clansmen watched their own feathers curl to charcoal. Tiger youths' fur became charred. Snake-blooded novices listened to their scales crack open like old pottery. Choked groans rolled through the troop, one after another, the mournful rhythm of an army tossed alive into a smelter.

Clara might be a disciple of Reiner and practiced a top flame-type technique, but due to the injury she suffered, her meridians were thin ice under a torrent of lava. Pale as bleached parchment, she shook and coaxed her art into motion, each cycle buying only another moment before annihilation.

Despair enveloped them yet again. They had outrun pursuit, crossed into a sanctuary whispered of in legends, only to discover the sanctuary itself eager to burn them down.

Death stood one step away, its hot breath already licking their souls.

"Calm down."

The words drifted clear and bell-bright, yet they carried authority that silenced pain itself. It pierced scorched ears, rang against nearly broken spirits, and nailed every cascading flame in midair.

Jared had spoken. He did not so much as glance at the carnage behind him. He simply lifted one elegant hand toward the tidal world of fire and pressed his fingers down like a painter smoothing canvas.

Nothing exploded. No arc of spell-light shattered the sky. Yet the moment his palm descended, something deeper than power rippled out. A hush of ultimate energy spread from Jared in widening rings, the way a pebble troubles a mirror-still lake— silent, unstoppable, perfect.

This was not cold battling heat. It was a command—an edict from a higher law. Under that whisper of supremacy, the flames bowed, their roar fading to a humble crackle, as if the entire realm had remembered who truly ruled it.

In the span of a single heartbeat, the impossible became real.

From the spot where Jared planted his boots, an unseen radius rolled outward, as though a colossal hand had stroked the very air.

Flames that had moments ago screamed hot enough to melt iron fell silent, tamed, settling at a warmth almost pleasant.

Chaotic tongues of colored fire_ once battering everything in their path—lined up like soldiers answering a sovereign call.

The violent impurities were skimmed away, leaving only the gentlest, most refined core of fire-element essence.

Even the blinding glare dimmed, passing through an invisible sieve until the light shone bright yet harmless.

The raw scorch on every skin receded like a tide; lungs that had burned cooled, drawing slow, luxurious breaths.

Wide-eyed, the crowd stared at the neat divide this wonder had carved into the world around them.

Beyond the boundary, the inferno still howled, heat waves twisting the air into a furnace of light and terror.

Inside it, temperate breezes drifted over a pool of mellow aura and gentle radiance —a pocket of paradise.

An invisible frontier separated inferno from oasis as cleanly as knife glass.

Beneath their feet, the dark-red, glassy soil remained, yet its buried fury now purred rather than roared.

Not far away, a fissure—once vaporized by heat-burbled with milky springwater that smelled faintly of wildflowers and cool stone.

Around that newborn spring, tufts of jade-green, flame-shaped spirit grass sprouted in seconds, dew gleaming on every alien blade.

"What... What kind of sorcery is this?" Paxton breathed, feeling the searing ache inside him dissolve into a warm, vibrant tide of bestial power.

To rewrite the laws of such a savage realm and so utterly-could not be explained by any ordinary array or divine art Paxton had ever studied.

It felt instead like command of Heaven itself, a decree uttered and instantly fulfilled.

Behind Jared, Clara stood transfixed, those pale eyes dancing between awe and a trembling thrill she could not name.

She, more than anyone, understood the weight of what had just occurred. The core rule of the Blazefire Secret Realm was simple-fire, raw and supreme.

Her own master, Reiner, had

cultivated here for millennia, yet

could only carve a tiny, fragile

pocket of safety for meditation. Jared had conjured an oasis with a

casual flick of the wrist, wide as

city square and flawless in stability. The feat lay beyond every

framework of strength or doctrine she possessed.

Gavin and Yvette exchanged a glance, reverence and relief shimmering openly between them.

The elder's depth, they realized, was oceanic-immeasurable and best left untested.

Catching the stunned gazes that circled him, Jared answered with nothing more than a calm, almost playful smile.

I'm an expert at playing with fire.

The fire nascence housed in his core was a tapestry woven from countless fires.

The demonic fire within him dwarfed the Blazefire Secret Realm's inferno a thousand times over.

Without that, Jared wouldn't have been able to show off.

"We stay here," Jared said, his tone calm yet unquestionable. "Use every breath to mend what has been broken."

He turned-unhurried, unruffled as though shattering a hell-level formation were nothing but stretching stiff joints.

His gaze swept the newborn celestial spring and the curls of flame spiritual plant edging the pool. He nodded.

"Those waters carry gentle life-essence. Bathe your wounds in them; you will heal twice as fast."

"Thank you sir! You're beyond amazing!"

Dozens dropped to their knees. Their

voices trembled, a single, quavering

chord of gratitude. They had their

lives snatched from the jaws of

certain death, then delivered a packet of paradise to

recuperate-such grace could never be repaid.

Paxton, eyes bright with unshed tears, bowed. "Myriad Beast Sect will never forget this favor. Should we one day rebuild you will stand as our Supreme Lord. At your word every beast son and daughter shall rise or fall.

Jared lifted an open palm. A hush of gentle force pulled them to their feet. "Enough ceremony. Every heartbeat spent kneeling is a heartbeat stolen from recovery."

At Paxton's barked orders, the others quickly settled down.

molten gold fire. Beyond, a rippling curtain of

red and amber shimmered like liquid glass while unbearably pure fire-type power crashed over the group in waves.

"Move."

Jared stepped through first, swallowed whole by the flaming veil.

Gavin and Yvette hurried after him, half-carrying the grievously wounded Clara.

Behind them, Paxton snapped orders, shepherding the dazed survivors of the Myriad Beast Sect toward the blazing passage one by one.

Reiner remained outside. He stared at the vanishing silhouettes—Jared's most of all until his own resolve crumbled into a long, complicated sigh.

Crimson Rift Gorge fell quiet once more, its air hot enough to warp steel, its lone cliff still cloaked in tireless, whispering flame.