

A Warrior Undefeatable 5921-5930

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Life bled from his stare. Once-lurid emerald pupils dulled to lifeless gray, a lone shred of awareness treading water in an ocean of agony and despair.

Through that crimson haze, Soul Devourer saw the three ashen humanoids form a perfect triangle around him, their synchronized steps as precise as clockwork gears.

Both pairs of hands lifted, weaving a seal so ancient and intricate the air itself seemed to pause, studying each stroke in reverence.

The instant the seal locked, the reincarnation aura blanketing the plain roared awake. Endless chalk-colored mist surged from the sky, earth, and empty air, writhing like a billion venomous serpents until it wrapped him layer after suffocating layer, shaping a cocoon wider than a house.

Inside that living chrysalis, Soul Devourer's final flicker of consciousness felt its own extinction with knife-edge clarity.

Flesh liquefied first, the gray mist reducing muscles, organs, and marrow to raw motes of energy before recombining them along unknown blueprints.

His demonic soul followed—memories plucked and bottled in unreachable vaults, emotions peeled away and ground to dust, self-awareness eroding like wind-worn stone.

Yet something was spared.

Millennia of battle instinct were distilled, hardened, and branded onto the newborn shell.

His cultivation-stripped of its devouring stain remained as pure comprehension of the laws of nature, a blank engine awaiting orders.

Even the mechanisms of his Soul-Devouring Technique were rearranged into a silent program, ready to run the moment a master gave the command.

This, as it turned out, was not annihilation.

This was reconstruction—erase the being once called the Soul Devourer, salvage the useful parts, then forge them, by some unseen template, into a flawless instrument.

A heartbeat before the last ember of self winked out, Soul Devourer finally understood what was happening.

The Reincarnation Realm was no sanctuary of rebirth.

It was a factory—an assembly line run by the very laws of reincarnation. Intruders were smelted, their consciousness stripped, value catalogued, and recast as puppets, weapons, or vessels.

And the three wardens towering over him wielded power beyond legend—each likely a True Immortal Realm cultivator or higher, yet no living creature at all.

They were flesh-and-mist incarnations of reincarnation itself, extensions of the world's skeletal frame.

"Jared... Malcolm..."

The echo of that hatred vanished with the mind that birthed it, scattering like dust within the circling gray current.

The cocoon tightened, shrinking from a ten-fathom sphere to the height of an ordinary man, then hardened into a blurred human outline that hung motionless in the air.

The three ashen humanoids watched in silence, statues hewn from storm-lit cloud, their stillness deeper than time.

The central figure lifted a skeletal hand. At his silent command, the faint outline of a human drifted forward, as though tugged by invisible strings, and settled, weightless, upon his waiting palm.

His other hand rose, fingertip gliding across that phantom skin. Ash-white vapors, as thin as spun silk, seeped into the form, mapping every secret fold, every buried meridian.

"His Top Level High Immortal Realm

Level One foundation is perfectly

intact. The core of his

Soul-Devouring Demonic Flame has

been stripped of its devouring trait. It now functions as a pure

consumption module. The Earthcore Demonic Flame nucleus remains whole and can fuse with the

reincarnation aura."

From the left came a second voice, identical in pitch yet half a note higher: "Battle-instinct retention, ninety-seven percent. Missing fragments concern berserk patterns triggered by extreme emotion—insignificant."

Flames fluttered inside the hollow sockets of the warden on the right. "Memories have been sealed in the Reincarnation Pool, Unit 372. Emotion module erased. Residual self-awareness is now zero."

The leader withdrew his finger. The miniature body spun slowly above his palm, lit by the pallid sky.

He delivered the verdict, flat and

final. "He meets all the

specifications for a Reincarnation Puppet General. Place it in the Reincarnation Pool for three months. When the shell and daw

module merge, it will be ready for command."

The left warden turned toward the colossal Door of Reincarnation. A

tremor slipped into his monotone.

"How fortunate for those insignificant beings outside that door A High Immortal Realm Reincarnation Puppet Generalis rare even in the higher worlds?"

After a beat, the right warden added, "The authorized individual is Malcolm Vayne. Contribution has reached the threshold for claiming a Puppet General. According to the rules, one may be claimed."

"Very well. Commence procedure."

Speech ended, the trio drifted backward. Their outlines bled into the air like ink in water until the land of ash swallowed them whole.

Silence remained—deep, endless, suffocating—draping this realm of reincarnation like a funeral shroud.

As it turned out, the so-called land of rebirth did not resurrect the fallen; it manufactured indistinguishable puppets.

This was no miracle. It was a fraud made of spell and bone.

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Back in Malevolent Path Hall, three months—a full season for mortals—had passed like a cough in the lifespan of an immortal.

Malcolm sat cross-legged before the Door of Reincarnation, gray tides of aura surging around him.

For three whole months, he had not moved from this spot. While cultivating the path of reincarnation, he listened to the faint heartbeats that pulsed beyond the door. Every ripple meant another shard of Soul Devourer's divine soul was refined, another step toward completing the puppet.

With each pulse, Malcolm felt his grasp of the Laws of Reincarnation deepen at a terrifying pace.

Wisps of law nascence leaking through the seams of the door drifted to him— nutrient richer than any elixir-feeding the reincarnation techniques he had studied for ten millennia.

His cultivation had climbed from High Immortal Realm Level Three early phase to the middle phase, fingers already brushing the next threshold.

More crucially, his control over the door itself was growing stronger.

Barely three months earlier, Malcolm had been able to crack the Door of Reincarnation only a sliver wide. Through that fragile opening, he siphoned stray power, shaping low-grade puppets of reincarnation or bargaining captured souls for meager scraps of cosmic law.

Today, everything felt different.

It was as if that once-delicate thread linking his soul to the colossal bone door had been tempered by countless exchanges, thickening into a sturdy cable capable of ferrying entire rivers of information.

Malcolm's ashen eyes burned with a fierce, feverish light.

"I'm close—so close," he whispered, tapping his skeletal fingers upon the bone floor. "Once that Reincarnation Puppet General is mine, I will use its frame as a conduit. The Reincarnation Realm will open wider, and perhaps, I will finally catch a glimpse of the Lord of Reincarnation's true visage."

If that happened, he would finally unearth the door's origin—and the true intentions of the three horrors that brooded behind it.

Suddenly, the chamber shuddered.

A booming hum—so deep it rattled bone-erupted from the Door of Reincarnation.

Every skull socket set into the door flared, unleashing geysers of gray-white fire that flooded the hall with blinding day.

Runes crawled across the bone surface, twisting and re-knitting themselves while shrieking like metal dragged across glass the agonized wail of laws being warped and torn.

Malcolm sprang upright, ashen eyes locked on the center seam.

Before his stare, a hair-thin fissure surfaced, spreading with frightening ease—an inch, a yard—until an ordinary man could have walked straight through.

Yet beyond the gap waited no familiar palace, only a swirling abyss of gray and white that twisted the surrounding space and tugged at the soul like a hungry cyclone.

Its silent suction made his heart pound.

From that maelstrom strode a man eight feet tall.

He was long-limbed and erect, clad in form-fitting scales the color of dried blood; ghost-pale sigils flowed across each plate like moonlight on water.

Six broad flesh wings arched from his back, their edges licking with tangible crimson flame within which faint gray runes flickered.

His face, eerily reminiscent of Soul Devourer yet colder, seemed carved by an obsessive artisan.

Where green eyes once burned, there now spun twin vortices of pure gray- pupilless, light-devouring, endless.

Even the limb Jared had hewn away had regenerated.

The new flesh matched the old, though the scales lay tighter and the talons gleamed sharper. A single ash-white vein ran from shoulder to wrist-part seal, part conduit of dreadful power.

He stepped onto the bone floor; the impact rang out—a dull, final drumbeat. Behind him, the Door of Reincarnation folded shut, the quakes stilled, the flames withdrew, and the hall sank back into uncanny quiet.

The newcomer stood motionless, those cyclone eyes rotating until they fixed on Malcolm.

He sank to one knee, head lowered, his voice a hollow mechanism: "Master."

A surge of irrepressible ecstasy flashed across Malcolm's ashen pupils.

He advanced with the deliberate solemnity of a priest approaching a forbidden altar. Halting before the kneeling figure, his brittle fingers drifted across the forehead, cheek, then shoulder, lingering with the delicate care of a curator inspecting a masterpiece still wet with varnish.

A tremor slipped into his breath. "Perfect. This is utterly perfect."

He felt the dormant power caged inside that shell—a force retaining the full foundations of a Top Level High Immortal Level One cultivator.

The body, reforged in the Reincarnation Realm, now boasted sinew harder and energy purer than it had ever possessed in life.

More astonishing was the seamless bond between master and construct.

Like arm to brain, a single thought would send the puppet moving, instant, unquestioning, incapable of doubt or defiance.

It was, without a doubt, a flawless engine of slaughter, near invincible beneath the True Immortal Realm.

"Rise."

Suppressing the thrill storming his chest, Malcolm spoke the word as though it were nothing more than routine.

The puppet obeyed, unfolding to its feet and standing off to the side, lifeless as carved stone.

Its spine was ramrod-straight, each joint locked in textbook readiness, gray-white eyes fixed ahead while it awaited the next command.

"From this moment on, you are the Soul-Devouring Puppet. I appoint

you commander of every Soul Hunter within Malevolent Path Hall, and you are to patrol the entire level twelve. Within level twelve, alt

cultivators of Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Eight or

higher-whether disciples of sects, powerful lone cultivators, or reclusive old masters-whose divine

souls meet the required strength

shall all be captured, their divine souls stripped, and sent into the Door of Reincarnation. Should anyone resist, kill without mercy. Refine the flesh into low-grade reincarnation puppets and extract the divine soul twice over."

The gray vortices in Soul-Devouring Puppet's eyes accelerated for a heartbeat. "As you command."

"In addition, if you encounter

someone bearing chaotic celestial energy, Golden Dragon Bloodline, and Earthfire True Flame, capture him alive at any cost. Even if the body is ruined, the divine soul must remain intact. That individual is of singular value to me."

Once more, the puppet answered without hesitation, "Understood."

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Malcolm nodded in satisfaction, raised his hand, and with a flick, a palm-sized gray-white token shot from his sleeve, landing in Soul Devourer Puppet's hand.

The token was made from the special bones of the Reincarnation Realm. On the front was a twisted character for "Puppet," while the back was covered with densely packed command runes.

"This is the Puppet General Token. With it, everyone in Malevolent Path Hall—save for me—must treat your word as mine. All resources, puppets, and Soul Hunters are yours to dispatch."

Soul-Devouring Puppet clasped the token. Runes flashed in its eyes, and the bone slipped beneath the skin of its palm, leaving only a faint gray sigil.

"Go on, then."

Malcolm, cloaked in night-black silk that drank the hall's torchlight, swept his sleeve in a single, unhurried arc. The gesture bent the incense smoke and rattled bronze braziers along the red-stone walls. "Let the whole of level twelve taste the power of reincarnation..." he declared, each word landing like a war-drum.

The Soul-Devouring Puppet tipped forward in a precise, ceremonial bow, then turned on its heel and strode from the throne hall, joints clicking with clockwork certainty beneath lacquered bone.

Its gait never wavered each footfall measured to the width of a palm, as though an invisible ruler marked the marble.

Six membranous wings tucked half-closed against its back. Dark-crimson flames licked their ragged rims, subdued yet lethal, and the mere scent of that heat drove every attendant, guard, and mindless automaton to their knees, shivering.

That was the crushing aura of a Top Level High Immortal Realm cultivator, fused with the death-chill of the Reincarnation Realm-ice so absolute it clamped around every watching soul.

Beyond the bronze doors, nine ribbons of pearlescent reincarnation aura circling the palace stirred the moment the puppet appeared. They tightened their spiral, releasing an eager, resonant hum that tremored through the stone like harp strings plucked by unseen gods.

Soul-Devouring Puppet promptly stepped onto open air as though the sky were a paved road. Its ash-colored eyes surveyed the palace complex that stretched for a thousand miles below-every roof tile fell beneath that dead light.

Slowly, it raised its right hand, palm facing the heavens, as if weighing the entire realm upon a single, silent scale.

"Soul Hunters, assemble."

The mechanical words were quiet, yet they rang with the finality of law and raced through every corridor of the Malevolent Path Hall.

A chorus of tearing wind answered—swish after swish, sharp enough to flay stone.

Black shapes erupted from the deepest vaults, the training grounds, the sealed meditation chambers, streaking upward like arrows loosed from a single monstrous bow.

For three thousand years, Malevolent Path Hall had bred Soul Hunter Corps. Now, more than thirty thousand Soul Hunters filled the sky, every one at least Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Five, with over a thousand Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Eight cultivators.

They wore matching midnight armor and carried Soul Binding Chains, Soul-Capturing Banners, and Soul-Refining Furnaces. Each of them was a specialist who hunted souls the way others hunted deer.

Obedient as a tide, the legion formed a vast black square beneath Soul-Devouring Puppet, waiting, silent, heads bowed before the cloak that breathed laws.

The ash eyes drifted across the ranks, and the Puppet spoke again, voice still without inflection.

"Our target is the whole of level twelve. Our objective is harvest all souls at Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Eight and above. Our mission begins now. Go."

No stirring speech followed-only commands as cold and simple as the blade of a guillotine.

As one, the thirty thousand Soul Hunters dropped to a single knee and roared, their reply crashing like surf against stone.

"Understood, Mr. Puppet General!"

Soul-Devouring Puppet's gray-white cloak suddenly unfurled, broadening into a curtain of light that spanned the heavens from horizon to horizon.

Wherever that light touched, spatial laws twisted, and a web of portals bloomed-doorways leading to every dominion of level twelve.

The Puppet strode into the nearest gateway without a backward glance.

The Soul Hunter Army poured after him, a flood of armor and weapons vanishing into the rifts.

When the last shadow slipped away, the light collapsed, folding back into the cloak and settling once more against the Puppet's spine.

The portals sealed. The sky became tranquil, as though nothing extraordinary had occurred.

But from that quiet instant on, the fate of level twelve had already veered onto a darker path.

Back at Malevolent Path Hall, Malcolm stood before the colossal bronze doors of the hall.

His ashen eyes followed the path along which the Soul-Devouring Puppet had vanished, and a thin, icy smile refused to leave his lips.

Even without sight, he felt it: the moment that construct moved, every hidden teleportation array woven throughout level twelve stirred awake.

He had spent ten millennia planting those secret nodes, one in every city, one in every forbidden realm.

Each node was an eye--and a corridor.

Through that web of endless cycles, the Puppet could surface anywhere it pleased, then hurl captured souls back to Malevolent Path Hall in a single breath, straight into the Door of Reincarnation.

More importantly, the same web let Malcolm taste every ripple of power, every shifting alliance, every heartbeat across the heavens. It was a spider's net flung over the world, and nothing escaped its threads.

"At last..." Malcolm whispered, a tremor of anticipation coating every syllable. "It begins."

With a skeletal finger, he tapped the empty air, as though pressing the first key of a symphony only he could hear.

A ripple of ashen light spread from

his fingertip. At its center, a three dimensional star map blossomed, rendering the entire level twelve in cold relief--every sect hall, every family seat, every hidden ruin.

More than three hundred pinpoints now flashed across the projection, each sliding along invisible routes.

Those lights marked squads of Soul Hunters.

The brightest and fastest lone point was the Soul-Devouring Puppet.

It had already reached the prosperous eastern quadrant, a territory jealously guarded by the Three Great Celestial Sects.

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"Yes... We will feast on the richest prey first," Malcolm murmured, eyes glinting like broken ice. "Three Great Celestial Sects, huh? Pfft. They've been hoarding level twelve's best resources in for ten millennia. It's time for them to pay the price for that."

He pivoted, gliding back into the cavernous hall.

Before the yawning Door of Reincarnation, he folded his legs and sank into silence.

The moment his eyelids met, his mind dove into the vast web, ready to witness the hunt he had scripted for level twelve.

Far beyond the range of his perception, in an expanse of roiling chaos, a palace of flawless white jade drifted like an island of stillness.

Inside, an elder in a teal robe opened his eyes. Mist veiled his features, yet a spark of alarm cut through the haze.

"The power of reincarnation has suddenly surged a hundredfold..." he whispered his voice echoing off jade pillars. Worse it is laced with an old, repulsive devouring aura. Could it be that damned fiend again? No wait... It's even colder, emptier, and more lifeless. It seems like a puppet."

The old man rose in a single, graceful stride and stepped to the palace's edge, gazing toward the distant level twelve.

Only after a long, troubled breath did he speak again, weighted syllables scattering the surrounding mist.

"Looks like the calm we have enjoyed is ending," he conceded. "I dread to tally how many lives this storm will swallow, or how many living beings and great powers it will drag into this cruel mess..."

Shaking his head, he turned back inside and began summoning the other reclusive masters who, like him, had slumbered too long.

The storm had begun, and no one could remain uninvolved.

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Meanwhile, at Earthfire Pavilion's Heavenfire Secret Realm, Jared sat cross-legged on the Flame Lotus Throne at the chamber's heart, eyes closed, breath long and steady.

Crimson-gold earth fire flowed around him like docile silk, threading through the air in languid currents.

On his left breast, the once-hideous imprint from Soul-Devouring Demonic Palm had dwindled to a faint rose scar, its surface alive with wisps of chaotic energy and the elusive shimmer of a golden dragon.

Exactly three months had passed since he crawled out of the abyss beneath the world.

In all that time, Jared had not taken a single step beyond the Heavenfire Secret Realm.

Earthfire Pavilion emptied its treasured vaults for him, dispatching healing elixirs, body-tempering tonics, and mind-clearing teas in an unending stream.

Vermilion Demon Lord, too, lingered instead of leaving with the Jadeheart Marrow, just so he could pour a lifetime of demonic cultivation into Jared's hands.

Outside the realm, Lindsay kept vigil night and day, using her own Earthfire True Scripture to steer the surrounding flames and quicken Jared's recovery.

Now, Jared's eyes opened.

Deep within those pupils swirled primordial gray, the sovereign gleam of a soaring golden dragon, and the blistering red of earth fire-three lights shifting, meeting, then sinking into calm and quiet.

He let out a slow, stale breath.

The breath coalesced into a palm-sized dragon of three colors that circled him thrice before bursting into pure, radiant spiritual energy.

"Finally... I've recovered completely."

He rose and curled his fingers into a fist, feeling rivers of strength thunder through his veins.

His chaotic celestial energy now shone denser than before, his Golden Dragon Bloodline straining toward another awakening, and the Earthfire True Scripture had vaulted to its seventh tier.

Nominally, he remained at Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Three, yet his true combat power was far beyond that.

A razor-bright glint flashed in Jared's eyes.

If he had to fight Soul Devourer again, he could now promise a decisive kill within fifty exchanges.

"Hubby!"

Lindsay's shout came from the entrance of the realm, and a flame-red blur swept in like a swallow on the wind.

She wore a scarlet combat outfit today, ponytail high, every stride radiating crisp, buoyant valor.

"How are you feeling? Are you completely healed?" she asked as she looked Jared up and down.

The man rose and smiled. "I'm fine-and, in fact, my cultivation has improved slightly. Tonight, we can get back to our dual cultivation."

Relief loosened Lindsay's shoulders; the idea of missing their dual cultivation had worried her more than she dared admit.

Once she had tasted that sweetness, restraint no longer came easily.

"Father told me to fetch you. He said there's something important we need to

discuss. Also, several unfamiliar guests have arrived in the grand hall, and they all radiate powerful auras."

Jared's brow lifted.

Earthfire Pavilion entertained visitors daily, yet for Ignatius to send Lindsay

personally, and for her to wear such gravity was a rarity indeed.

"All right. Let's go check it out."

Inside Earthfire Pavilion's main hall, a heavy, waiting hush pressed against the stone pillars.

The grand audience chamber, once vast enough to dwarf a regiment, now felt strangely cramped.

Dozens of figures occupied both colonnades-some seated, some standing— forming stern rows that mirrored one another.

Their attire spanned opulent

brocade, plain homespun, even rag-torn robes still wet with blood, yet every last one radiated an overwhelming surge of power no weaker than a Heavenly immortal Realm Level Seven.

The moment Jared crossed the threshold, he was met by a simultaneous snap of

gazes, as though the roof itself had turned to stare.

Inside those eyes, he caught appraisal, curiosity, and doubt—and, threaded between them like barbed wire, several strands of undisguised hostility.

"Jared, over here," Ignatius greeted as he beckoned Jared over.

For once, he wore the full regalia of the Earthfire Pavilion—scarlet robes stitched with nine lotus-blazing suns, a coronet of red-gold crowning his brow—solemnity carved into every line of his face.

Jared stepped to Ignatius's side, letting his gaze roam the chamber like a silent lantern.

A few faces leapt out of the crowd—faces he actually knew.

On the leftmost chair lounged Vermilion Demon Lord, eyes closed as if dozing, though black mists of demonic aura whispered around his frame in constant vigilance.

Opposite him sat Gerald, usually as elusive as smoke; today the venerable patriarch twirled his long beard, studying every guest with fathomless eyes.

The rest were strangers, each carrying their own tale of disaster.

An old man wearing a tattered green robe, his left arm severed at the shoulder, bore a wound wrapped in a strange gray-white aura. The aura continuously ate away at his life force leaving his face as pale as paper.

Beside him stood a beautiful middle-aged ady cradling a shattered Hyre whose every string had snapped. Blood beaded along her fingertips, yet she appeared numb to the sting, staring past the doors toward a sky only she could see.

Three gold-armored guardians stood shoulder to shoulder, plates scarred by blades and spears. One man's armor had been rent open by talons, revealing a gash so deep the bone glimmered beneath.

Huddled nearby, seven or eight younger cultivators wore intact robes but terror-creased faces, twitching at the faintest rustle like arrows quivering on a taut string.

Yet the eye was drawn most irresistibly toward the trio occupying the very center of the hall.

At their head was an elderly man leaning on a cracked cane, whose hair and beard had turned snow-white.

His aura sank deep like an ocean trench; Jared could not gauge its bottom, save that it hovered near Top Level Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Nine.

Flanking him was a man and a woman.

The man was about thirty, with sword-straight brows and star-bright eyes. He carried a long blade wrapped in coarse linen, and even though it was sheathed, a keen sword intent leaked through the fabric.

The woman, on the other hand, was barely into her twenties, with serene features framed by a water-blue gown. Silver bells at her waist chimed softly, weaving a rhythm that soothed restless souls.

Ignatius cleared his throat, voice rumbling like banked embers. "Jared, this is the grand elder of level twelve's Azure Firmament Sword Sect, Winslow Walden." Winslow dipped his chin, snowy brows quivering almost imperceptibly as his gaze rested on Jared.

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Ignatius continued with his introductions, gesturing toward the younger pair. "Behind him stand his personal disciples, Leopold Hawke and Selina Moonfield. As for the rest of our guests... All of them fled here from level twelve."

Fled?

The single word echoed in Jared's mind, cold and metallic. His pupils constricted, a blade-thin glint flashing across his amber eyes.

For cultivators, the road had always been simple to name and cruel to tread. They had to defy fate, risk their lives, and constantly strive toward higher realms of existence.

Those stranded in level eleven dreamed of breaching the twelfth. Those already astride that summit whispered of a fabled thirteenth level, then of realms so distant they carried no name at all.

This hunger for ascent was an iron law, older than dynasties, etched into the marrow of every era.

Yet today, elites of level twelve had fled—battered, desperate—to seek shelter on the eleventh. The very notion cracked destiny's spine.

"Father—" Jared began, voice pitched low enough that only Ignatius could hear.

Reining in the questions boiling behind his ribs, he offered a bow in formal salute. "Ladies and gentlemen, for what purpose have you crossed the boundary to this humble hall?"

His courtesy landed like a stone in still water; several muffled, frigid snorts rippled through the great hall.

The one-armed elder in a storm-green robe jerked up his head, veins blazing scarlet across his eyes. "What brings us? Young man, are you truly ignorant, or are you putting on an act?" he scolded.

"Elio Frostgate, mind your words!" Winslow cut in, the rebuke snapping through the hush like a bowstring.

He turned to Jared, letting the edge of his tone soften. "It seems you have been secluded in cultivation, unaware of the chaos outside. I will be brief."

Drawing a breath that trembled in his chest, he delivered each word like a funeral bell. "Level Twelve is drowning in calamity. Three months ago, Malevolent Path Hall went out in full force. Under Malcolm, it unveiled a nightmare-an abomination called the Soul-Devouring Puppet. Its power rivals Top Level High Immortal Realm Level One, and it doesn't fear pain or death. With thirty thousand Soul Hunters under its command, they started from the eastern region of level twelve and launched a hunt that would sweep across the entire realm."

Jared frowned. "A hunt?" he echoed, the single word heavy as an anvil.

"To hunt the living and extract their divine souls," Winslow replied, the words tasting of rusted iron. "Any cultivator above Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Eight is prey. In just three months, the Three Great Celestial Sects in the east have vanished. Kneel or resist, it mattered not-each soul was ripped out, every corpse hammered into puppets for the hunters. Elio fled Frostgale Valley; two of its three elders died, while the rest scattered to the winds. Lyla Harpwell is from Heavensong Pavilion. Her master shattered her primordial celestial weapon to shield her disciples, perishing with three Soul Hunters. Those three armored men are the Mountguard Sect's remaining elites. When their mountain gate was breached, their sect protected three hundred children and fought their way out. Now, only the three of them remain."

A hush settled over the audience chamber, thick and suffocating.

Only the stifled sobs of a few young survivors and the soft drip of Lyla's blood striking marble dared disturb the silence.

Weight gathered in Jared's chest until each heartbeat felt like a stone sliding down a well.

Memory flared-back in the Chthonic Abyss, Soul Devourer had said, "When I reach level twelve and reclaim my strength..."

Back then, the chill along Jared's spine had seemed irrational. Now it felt like prophecy fulfilled.

So it had never been a mere illusion.

"Malevolent Path Hall... Soul-Devouring Puppet..." Jared muttered, tasting the names like poison.

His gaze snapped to Winslow. "Do you know where that puppet came from?"

Winslow shook his head. "All I know is that its face is very similar to the notorious Soul Devourer of ten millennia ago, yet its techniques now drip with suffocating reincarnation aura. Some believe Malcolm butchered Soul Devourer and reshaped him into the puppet."

Jared traded a weighted look with Vermilion Demon Lord at his side; each read the same heaviness in the other's eyes.

The nightmare they had feared was no longer a rumor-it was here.

"Why has no grand coalition risen to resist him?" Jared asked, each word a spark against dry tinder. "Level twelve is supposed to be thronged with legends—High Immortals by the hundreds. Are we truly going to let Malevolent Path Hall run wild without a single united sword raised against it?"

"Resist?"

Elio gave a broken laugh that scraped across the air like metal on stone. He lifted the remains of his right arm and pointed at the empty socket where his left shoulder had once been. "Do you know what carved this void, young man? A casual brush of reincarnation aura from the Soul Devouring Puppet. I stand at op Lever Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Eight, yet

before that thing, I failed in less than three moves."

His throat grated, every syllable soaked in equal parts terror and despair. "In the past three months seven High Immortals had gathered to hunt it down. But three died on the spot, two were captured, their divine souls torn out and refined. One fled, grievously maimed, never to be seen again. Only Skverest Sword Immortal escaped-alive, yes, but his cultivation foundation is shattered, and, likely, he will never be able to fight again."

A collective gasp sliced through the hall, the sound sharp as winter air sucked between clenched teeth.

Even Gerald, half-dozing moments before, forced his rheumy eyes open. Terror flashed there like sparks in failing embers.

Seven High Immortals were routed like children?

What, then, was the true magnitude of the Soul-Devouring Puppet's power?

Just then, a frigid voice cut the hush. "So you guys fled?"

Vermilion Demon lord had opened his scarlet eyes at some unseen moment. Those burning pupils swept across the chamber, disdain curving his lips. "You couldn't win, so you scurried to level eleven to cling on to life. Have all the cultivators of level twelve become spineless creatures?"

Elio lurched forward, anger flaring-then collapsed into a single, ragged sigh. Words died before they formed.

He had none.

Vermilion Demon Lord's cruelty was also the truth, and truth left no refuge.

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After a long silence, Winslow stroked his white beard and spoke, each word measured. "Mr. Vermilion is not wrong. When I led the Azure Firmament Sword Sect members to retreat, I had asked myself the same thing How is it that after a million years of cultivation, we end up as defeated, pathetic beings at a stranger's gate? It sure is sad and laughable. That said, I did not come merely to survive. Level twelve is already a living purgatory, and Malevolent Path Hall will not stop there. Malcolm is harvesting souls by the tens of thousands. When his preparation is complete, the next step will surely be Level eleven, and from there the remaining worlds."

The old man first looked to Ignatius, then to Jared, resolve gleaming in his eyes. "I have come today to implore that everyone in level eleven make the necessary preparations. If every realm joins forces, then perhaps a single thread of hope will remain."

The hall drowned again in wordless stillness.

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Ignatius's brows knitted into a knot of flame. Gerald's fingers froze upon his beard. Every Earthfire Pavilion elder bore the same heavy look. Winslow's warning weighed more than stone.

If the prophecy proved true, level eleven would soon face its own apocalypse.

Ignatius cleared his throat, voice rough with hidden worry. "Jared, you have crossed blades with Malevolent Path Hall-and with the man that became the Soul- Devouring Puppet. Tell us—what is your judgment?"

Every eye circled back to Jared.

He released a slow breath that seemed to draw all tension toward his lungs before letting it drain away.

Then he stepped into the center of the hall, meeting faces etched with despair, fear, and a fragile, desperate hope. His gaze finally locked on Winslow.

"Mr. Walden, do you know why Malevolent Path Hall is ripping divine souls from living flesh in such numbers?"

Winslow shook his head. "Only that it feeds the Door of Reincarnation. He means to sacrifice them, trading their essence for power-or for some darker purpose we have yet to name."

"Door of Reincarnation..." Jared began, words hanging like a blade yet to fall.

Gerald hesitated, the flicker of dread in his eyes hardening into grim certainty. His voice rang across the hall, deliberate and loud enough that no syllable could be doubted. "That Door of Reincarnation is no holy artefact of rebirth. It is a doorway- nothing more than a tunnel into a realm of unyielding laws, a furnace where all divine souls are broken down and rebuilt into instruments of slaughter. Rebirth, eternal life—those are lies woven to bait the desperate. Soul Devourer is only the opening note of this dirge. He is not the first-and he will also not be the last."

The declaration struck the audience chamber like a hammer on an iron gong. Gasps collided with murmured oaths. Robes rustled, chairs scraped, and the vault of red-lacquered pillars seemed to tremble beneath the sudden, swelling uproar.

Among the survivors from level twelve, faces blanched as if all blood had fled. Elio- the one-armed cultivator once famed for steady courage-shook so violently that his teeth chattered. "Y-You... What did you say? The Door of Reincarnation is a lie? Then what happened to our masters, disciples, and others?"

"Their divine souls are scattered to dust. Nothing of their true essence remains," Gerald answered, each word a frost-rimmed blade despite his ember-rich tone. "Some were drained as fuel to keep that accursed purgatory turning. Others will be butchered and fashioned into new puppets for Malcolm's slaughterhouse."

Boom!

The broken lyre cradled against Lyla's chest exploded with a roar, splinters flashing like dying stars. She swayed to her feet, crimson tears carving streaks down her cheeks. "Malcolm Vayne, Malevolent Path Hall... I want them to pay for this!" she thundered, her screams ringing like tortured steel, drowning even the crackle of settling debris.

Several younger cultivators collapsed where they stood. Knees struck marble, shoulders quaked, and raw sobs poured out-grief so sharp it carved straight through the din.

They had fled with hope gripped between their teeth-hope that captured comrades were merely chained, biding time until a rescue.

Sadly, that final, fragile thread now snapped, curling away into the dark like smoke from a snuffed candle.

Jared stared at Gerald, stunned. When the old man first spoke of the Door of Reincarnation, none of this horror had been mentioned.

How many more secrets is this old geezer still hiding from me?

"Great Elder Earthfire, is this truly so? Why keep such things from me?" Jared asked. His voice was steady, but embers of accusation glowed beneath each word.

"Because I did not wish to speak of it," Gerald replied-flat, unyielding, a stone wall dropped across further inquiry.

Winslow closed his eyes, a snow-haired figure carved from fatigue. Long moments passed before he inhaled and lifted his gaze; tears glittered in ancient pupils that had withstood millennia.

"So that is the reason..." he whispered, voice hoarse with understanding. "No wonder-not one of our seized comrades managed to leave even the faintest soul imprint behind."

Forcing the ache back into his chest, Winslow squared his shoulders and regarded Gerald with new respect. "It seems, my friend, you know far more than the rest of us combined."

"To tell you the truth, I once walked the Reincarnation Realm myself and saw the Door of Reincarnation's blasphemy with my own eyes. More importantly..." Gerald said before turning, his dark gaze settling on Jared. "What are your plans, Jared?"

Jared faced Ignatius and Gerald, then gave a deep bow.

"I humbly request permission to enter level twelve and confront Malcolm before his carnage spills into the eleventh."

Ignatius surged upright, the brazier

flames mirrored in his furious eyes. "What? Jared, do you grasp the chaos unfolding within level twelve now? That Soul-Devouring Puppet rivals a Top Level High Immortal Realm Level One. Tens of thousands of Soul Hunters obey Its every

gesture. Approaching them now would be like walking into a death trap. Have you forgotten that puppets feel neither pain nor fear? Their true strength only ever climbs."

"Which is precisely why someone must move now." Jared retorted as he straightened, irises hard and

bright as tempered blades. "If won't

wait for Malevolent Path Hall to

marshal its full strength and storm level eleven, we'll be crushed. The only way forward is to strike first-disrupt them while they still don't have full control of level twelve and we might yet tip the balance. Besides Malcolm already knows I carry chaotic celestial energy. A man like him won't allow me another breath of growth. So instead of waiting for him to come to me, why not take the initiative to hunt him down?"

Ignatius started to argue, but Gerald lifted one gnarled hand—a quiet, unquestionable command that froze every further word in Ignatius's throat.

Slowly, Gerald rose. Each movement seemed to creak with age, yet his presence weighed on the hall like a mountain of smoldering coal. He stepped close to Jared, clouded pupils roaming over him inch by inch, as though reading not flesh, but the seams of destiny stitched beneath it.

After a long, brittle pause, the old man asked, "Can you guarantee success?" Jared's answer came without hesitation. "I cannot. But some things aren't done only when you're certain of success."

Gerald's stare held for another heartbeat, then softened into a faint, almost wistful smile—one part pride, one part fatal resolve. "Very well. I shall join you on this mission."

"What?" Ignatius gasped, color draining from his face.

The elder waved him off. "Ignatius, I'll leave Earthfire Pavilion in your hands. Protect it well. My body has recovered, and it's time for me to stretch these limbs.

Besides..."

His gaze swung back to Jared, a spark of curiosity brightening the murk in his eyes. "A successor to chaotic celestial energy appears once in ten millennia. I intend to see with my own eyes just how far he travels."

Vermilion Demon Lord pushed to his feet, crimson irises already burning with battle lust. "Count me in. Helping you is reason enough, but I also need the Nine-Orifice Divine Soul Herb hidden somewhere in level twelve. My partner's life depends on it."

"Mr. Vermilion..."

The demon lord bared a line of ivory teeth. "Ha. Stop dithering. You've done me a great favor, and for now... I'm staking everything on you."

A Warrior Undefeatable

Lindsay, silent until now, darted forward and clutched Jared's sleeve. "I'm going too!"

"Nonsense!" Ignatius scolded. "Lindsay, your cultivation is far too low. Level twelve will swallow you whole."

The princess lifted her chin, eyes bright with unshed tears. "Father, I'm already at Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Six, and the Earthfire True Scripture I practice restrains demonic techniques. I can help!"

Jared laid a gentle hand over hers. "No. You should stay. This path drips with peril. Earthfire Pavilion needs steady hands here just as badly as swords out there."

Lindsay bit her lip; moisture shimmered across her lashes. Yet after a trembling breath, she let his sleeve slide free, knowing he spoke the hard truth.

At her current level, she might end up being a burden if she went.

Winslow rose, robe sleeves brushing the floor as he bowed deeply. "Your courage humbles me, Jared. Though the Azure Firmament Sword Sect lies in ruins, these old bones retain some worth. I know every contour, faction, and hidden gate across level twelve. Permit me to act as your guide."

Behind him, Leopold and Selina stepped forward, bodies folded in solemn salute. "We follow our master wherever he treads."

Jared glanced toward Gerald. The elder offered one slow nod—an ember of approval glowing in the wrinkles around his eyes.

He dipped his chin, a thoughtful breath escaping his lungs. After a heartbeat, he clasped his hands and spoke—each word steady as a temple bell. "Then we must trouble you, Mr. Walden. We entrust everything to your guidance."

Jared brought his fists together in salute, the gesture both respectful and resolute. As he straightened, his gaze swept across the vaulted hall, lingering on the battered cultivators

who had escaped level twelve and were now huddled beneath Earthfire Pavilion's crimson banners.

His voice carried, warm yet commanding, echoing off pillars forged from living magma. "Friends, remain within Earthfire Pavilion as long as you must. Mend your wounds, hone your spirits. When we carve open a path back into level twelve, we may yet need your blades beside us."

Elio and the others traded uncertain looks—torn cloaks, splinted arms, eyes rimmed in sleepless red. Then, as if seized by the same invisible chord, they bent at the waist. "We await your command!"

Fear still gnawed at their hearts, a cold animal refusing to loosen its jaws. Yet Jared's words had struck flint against steel; within that darkness a single spark rekindled.

They were not fleeing.

They were gathering strength—waiting for the hour to turn—and then they would storm back through the gates of ruin and make their enemy bleed.

Jared's final murmur cut through the hall like the first crack of dawn. "There is no time to lose. We'll set off in three days."

During those three days, Jared cloistered himself with Lindsay in the deepest chamber, sharing breath and flame until exhaustion left her draped across his chest, heartbeat fluttering like a spent bird.

He knew that once he stepped onto level twelve, untold years might pass before their hands found each other again.

So he loved her with reckless abundance, as though trying to fill an hourglass to bursting before the sands were snatched away.

Three dawns later, they gathered before the stone arch that marked Earthfire Pavilion's main gate.

Ignatius stood with the pavilion elders, sending them off. Tears rimmed Lindsay's eyes as she pressed a red-gold pendant into Jared's palm. "This is Earthfire Pavilion's protective charm," she whispered. "When danger closes in, crush it, and it will release an Earthfire True Flame Shield. Also... Promise me you will return alive."

Jared closed his fingers over the warm pendant and nodded with solemn certainty. "I promise."

Gerald had traded his ceremonial crimson for an unadorned gray robe; hands clasped behind his back, he masked his formidable aura until he seemed no more than a kindly traveler awaiting a carriage.

Vermilion Demon Lord, by contrast, lounged with irrepressible swagger, scarlet hair whipping in the wind, a grin promising mayhem to any realm foolish enough to bar their path.

At Jared's heel frisked Lucky, the small fire unicorn, scales glimmering like hot coals and tail swishing in eager loops.

Across the courtyard, Winslow waited with Leopold and Selina, their travel cloaks billowing, swords and bells silent yet taut with readiness.

His cane had been mended, his robe snow-white once more; his expression returned to placid calm, though grief and iron resolve still smoldered deep within his eyes.

"The teleportation array is ready," Ignatius announced, voice echoing off the mountain walls.

"It will deliver you to a hidden ravine skirting the Ancient Battlefield Ruins on level twelve. That area used to be the Ancient Battlefield, so the space is fractured and difficult to trace. That said, beware the ancient restrictions and wrathful spirits that haunt those ashes."

Jared nodded. "Understood."

Before stepping away, he let his gaze roam over the mountain range, over Ignatius's proud face, over Lindsay's trembling smile, and over every elder and disciple who had come to see them off.

Then he turned, shoulders squared, and strode into the teleportation array.

Gerald, Vermilion Demon Lord, Lucky, Winslow, Leopold, and Selina followed one after another, forming a silent procession of seven.

Brilliant light blossomed; the ground rippled like water as reality bent around the sigils.

In a single breath, the seven figures vanished inside a sky-piercing pillar of radiance.

Lindsay stared at the now-empty platform; tears finally broke free, tracing hot paths down her cheeks.

Ignatius laid a steadying hand on his daughter's shoulder, his own gaze fixed on the distant heights of level twelve, features carved in grim concern.

"You have to return to us, Jared. The fate of level eleven itself may well ride on you..."

The scarred rim of the Ancient Battlefield Ruins unfurled into a jagged valley, its walls clawing at a sky the color of clotted rust.

A ripple shivered through space. Seven figures spilled from the distortion, boots skidding across ash-slick stone.

Jared steadied himself first. A pulse of spiritual sense fanned from his brow, sweeping the wasteland in a silent search for danger.

The valley lay barren, smothered beneath a suffocating red gloom. Iron-tainted wind carried the stale odor of blood and rot.

Cliff faces loomed on every side, charred black as if scorched by an ancient furnace that had never cooled.

Across the cracked earth sprawled a litter of bones-some unmistakably human, others bestial, many shattered beyond recognition.

Farther out, broken buildings and toppled walls sagged against the haze, while pale gray wraiths drifted above the ruins, fading in and out like frayed memories.

"So this is the legendary Ancient Battlefield?" Jared muttered, brows knitting as the metallic air pressed against his lungs.

Even after untold millennia, murderous intent, resentment energy, and the chill of death still pulsed here so fiercely that each breath felt like swallowing needles.

Winslow flicked his cane. A cool emerald glow blossomed around the group, sealing out the valley's decay with a hush of pristine air.

"That's right. Legends claim titans at Top Level High Immortal

Realm-and perhaps beings even higher-fell here. The spatial fabric hangs by threads, and shards of broken laws prowl the cracks Few dare step deeper." Winslow's voice stayed calm, yet the glow around them tightened all the same.

He lifted the cane and pointed eastward. A pillar of gray-white light pierced the distant horizon, its sterile aura of reincarnation palpable even from here. "Three thousand miles that way once stood Skypivot City, brightest jewel of level twelve Now-most likely only ashes remain."

Jared followed the gesture. Across the blood-red sky, that ghostly beam rose like a frozen scream, radiating the dead silence branded upon it by Malevolent Path Hall. He knew the sign instantly—it was Malevolent Path Hall's mark, cold and absolute. "Let's get out of this place first. Lingering here will do us no good," Jared said, voice low but urgent.

Just then, Gerald suddenly spoke, his clouded eyes sweeping across the surrounding void. "Something has been stirred."

As if on cue, every drifting wraith snapped its head around. Empty sockets, black as tomb mouths, locked onto the seven intruders.

A single shriek tore loose—then multiplied into a chorus so shrill it rattled stone and bone alike.

The swarm surged, wave after wave of starving phantoms racing in from every direction, eager as sharks at the first scent of blood.

A Warrior Undefeatable

The valley erupted—an ocean of gray spirits boiling skyward, their wails coiling together until the air itself seemed to sob.

Thousands burst from ruins, bone piles, even the ragged seams of space. Some retained twisted human shapes, others rolled like fetid mist, all bearing emerald flames where eyes once lived.

They did not fly so much as swim, bodies rippling through the air and leaving rings of colorless ripples in their wake.

"Set up the array!" Winslow barked as he swung his cane outward.

Silver threads erupted from the tip and expanded into a vast shining web that snapped shut around the party like a celestial net.

Azure runes flowed along every strand, exuding the tranquil force of the Clearheart Soul-Guarding Array—the bane of all malevolent entities.

The first spirits struck. Sizzling echoed as their pallid forms melted away, evaporating like frost under midday sun.

Yet the horde was endless. Impact after impact rocked the web. It quivered, dimmed. Winslow's face blanched beneath the strain.

"Master!" Leopold and Selina sprang forward, swords and ringing bells flaring to reinforce the faltering shield.

Behind Leopold, the coarse-wrapped longsword gave a startling ring as it flew from its sheath. Light burst like a scarlet rainbow, multiplying into thirty-six gleaming sword shadows that locked themselves around the light-weave in a perfect sword array.

Each sword shadow cut with merciless precision. Wherever it passed, wraiths were sliced clean in two, viridian sword energy coiling along the wounds to bar the severed souls from knitting themselves whole again.

Selina folded her legs, settled into stillness, and unhooked the silver bell at her hip.

With a gentle flick, she sent its chime across the darkness. Clear, crystalline rings blossomed into visible ripples, and every wraith they touched slowed, ghost-fire in their eyes guttering as though thought itself had been shaken.

But the respite would last only a heartbeat.

From every quarter, new wraiths surged, and among them loomed several whose auras dwarfed the rest-true Wraith Kings, tyrants of the dead tide.

One giant wraith, more than ten yards tall and stitched from countless bones, threw back its skull and roared, dark-red flame blazing inside hollow sockets.

Each ponderous step cracked the earth into spider-web fissures, releasing waves of putrid death-mist that rolled like storm surf.

Opposite it drifted a pale woman in tattered court robes, beautiful yet bloodless, cradling a broken jade hairpin while she hummed an age-old, heartsick lullaby.

The melody threaded straight into the mind, swaying one's very soul, drowning courage in sorrow.

Vermilion Demon Lord snorted. "Hmph. Pitiful soul remnants... How dare you swagger in my sight!"

Scarlet light flooded his pupils, and a demonic aura erupted around him like a breaking dam.

He strode beyond Leopold's light-web, curled his right hand, and drew from empty air a longsword wrought entirely of dark-crimson flame.

"Demonic Flame-Soul Sever!" he roared.

The blade swept wide. Air tore apart, and dozens of wraiths disintegrated to ash before they could even scream.

The bone titan raked at him with a claw the size of a carriage, but Vermilion Demon Lord met it head-on, blade flashing upward.

A thunderous, metal-on-metal detonation rang out.

The explosion of sound rolled through the valley like a gong struck inside a cathedral of stone.

The monster's talon sheared clean away. Vermilion Demon Lord's demonic flames licked along the stump and raced over its rib-cage.

The titan shrieked, battering itself frantically with the remaining claw, but no mundane strike could quench that flame.

Then again, how could he when Vermilion Demon Lord's demonic flame was fused with Ninefold Nether Demonic Aura to produce a powerful fire born to consume all souls?

Three breaths later, the colossus collapsed, a heap of charred powder scattered to the wind.

"That's it? Pathetic," Vermilion murmured.

He sheathed the fiery sword and stood tall, crimson pupils sweeping the field with undisguised contempt.

Jared offered a quick laugh beneath the thunder of distant wails. "Mr. Vermilion, I'd wager you've reached Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Eight, haven't you? Your rise is nothing short of staggering!"

The praise brought a rare flush to the demon lord's cheeks. "Well... Compared to you, I'm still far behind."

At that instant, the female wraith's lament turned suddenly sharp.

In the air, countless translucent blades of sound materialized and hurled toward Vermilion Demon Lord like a hailstorm.

Strangely, the blades did not fly straight; they writhed like living serpents, twisting to seal every avenue of escape.

Vermilion Demon Lord's brow creased, yet before he could brace himself, a curtain of blazing gold unfurled between him and the storm.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The air itself convulsed beneath the triple detonation. Edges of invisible sound, honed to killing sharpness slammed against the shimmering barrier. Every strike birthed a fresh shockwave, making the shield shudder but never shatter

Vermilion Demon Lord wheeled around just in time to see Gerald

ghost to his side-skeletal fingers

splayed, stepping

nches from the

void. Suspended above that palm bloomed a slow-spinning fire lotus of molten gold and scarlet

The barrier quivering before them was no simple light screen at all. It was the lotus's own fire, a sheath of living flame woven for protection.

"Don't let your guard down," Gerald warned, voice rusted with centuries of ash. "These resentful shades hail from antiquity. In life, they were at least heavenly Immortal Real Level Eight-some even grazed the High Immortal Realm. Time has leeches nine-tenths of their power, yet the instincts and special abilities they forged in blood have not left them."

The female wraith's spectral humming suddenly cut off mid-note. She lifted her hollow gaze, those empty sockets fixing on Gerald with chilling purpose.

Without a sound, she tapped her broken hairpin toward him.

Space split itself into a strand no wider than a hair—an ink-black fissure racing faster than thought straight for the center of Gerald's brow.

A Warrior Undefeatable

That thread was no tangible weapon; it was a spatial rift. It was clear that before she died, the wraith had mastered Space Law.

Gerald's pupils tightened to pinpoints, though calm never left his weather-beaten face.

His left hand blurred through seals, and his lips shaped an archaic syllable lost to living tongues.

"Suppress."

The fire lotus erupted, petals of molten fire flaring outward in a roar of alchemical sunrise.

Torrents of earth fire surged forth, congealing before him into a crystalline wall three feet thick.

Ancient runes of fire coursed across that wall, radiating heat so fierce the very air wavered like a mirage.

The black filament pierced the crystal barrier, hissing and spitting sparks that scraped the teeth.

The spatial rift and earth fire wrestled, each devouring the other. The wall thinned by inches, yet the dark line dimmed just as quickly.

When only a fragile veneer of crystal remained, the spatial fissure guttered out like a snuffed wick.

All this time, Gerald had not moved a single step.

Across the way, the spectral woman flickered, her form half-dissolved. With a brittle snap, the jade hairpin crumbled to dust against her phantom breast.

"Stand aside, Great Elder Earthfire. Allow me!" Jared's voice cracked like steel unsheathed.

He broke from the protection of the Clearheart Soul-Guarding Array with a single stride.

Dragonslayer Sword rang free of its scabbard, its cry part thunder, part dragon roar. No flourish followed—only a thrust as pure and direct as purpose itself.

Along the blade, chaotic celestial energy intertwined with Golden Dragon Bloodline and earth fire, fusing into a mist-gray beam veined with streaks of gold and crimson.

The condensed sword energy measured scarcely three feet, yet the sky darkened beneath its crushing aura.

Sensing annihilation, the spectral woman shrieked and vaulted backward, layering pale barriers before her with frantic, flickering seals.

The instant Jared loosed his streak of chaotic sword energy, he knew resistance was meaningless.

The pale barrier the female wraith had woven crumpled like damp parchment, and the midnight-bright blade lanced through her forehead, bursting from the back of her skull in a spray of silver ash.

Her elegant figure froze, witch-fire eyes guttering to dying coals.

She glanced down at the smoldering fissure across her chest, then lifted her gaze to Jared. A fragile, almost thankful smile-release at last-softened the blur of her face.

A breath later, she dissolved into drifting motes of dust.

Jared slid the blade home and stood amid the settling gloom, brows drawn tight.

In that final slash, he had felt an uncanny hum. When his chaotic celestial energy brushed the wraith's core, it did more than destroy.

It analyzed, devoured, and assimilated the fractured law sealed inside the ghost.

"Chaotic celestial energy can evolve into myriad laws, or reduce all laws to nothingness..." Jared muttered as clarity struck.

These ancient spirits persisted because their obsessions had merged with the battlefield's warped ordinances, shaping twisted pseudo-laws.

The chaotic celestial energy he wielded, however, was the origin of every law. Here, within these ruins, that power might prove stronger than anywhere else.

"Watch out! There's more incoming!" Selina shouted, her voice cracking the hush.

Jared's reverie shattered as the earth began to quake beneath a fresh tide of death.

All horizons erupted with specters, their hollow screeches welding into one thunderous gale.

Three presences towered above the swarm: a battle-scarred Warlord Wraith brandishing a shattered axe a throat slit Monk Wraith draped in tattered robes, and a hulking Weapon Monster Wraith cobbled from broken steel.

Rage had made them disciplined; the dead now advanced with strategy, not frenzy.

The Warlord Wraith marshaled

hundreds of lesser ghosts into a

f

serrated phalanx that pressed forward, step by deliberate step High overhead, the Monk Wraith hovered cross legged, chanting a sinister scripture; greasy gray light fanned out, armoring the legion in mournful light.

Behind them, the Weapon Monster Wraith bellowed, its jagged body disgorging rust-flecked blades in a roaring metallic storm.

"Form the Seven-Star Demon-Subduing Array now!" Winslow barked, a ribbon of blood threading from his lips.

Leopold and Selina leapt to their points with him, forming a living triangle. Azure light flared, birthing seven spinning star-shadows overhead.

Chill starlight cascaded down, raising a luminous rampart that stalled the oncoming ghosts.

The cost was brutal; crimson trickled from Winslow's mouth, proof that the formation would not endure long.

Elsewhere, Vermilion Demon Lord and Gerald were snared in brutal duels with the remaining Wraith Kings, far too occupied to assist.

Jared drew a steady breath, resolve crystallizing.

His hands wove an ancient sigil—a technique he had comprehended from the legacy of chaotic celestial energy, but had never truly unleashed.

"Chaos Origin-Return to the Void," he whispered.

The words drifted softly, yet the air convulsed, bending toward a silent, yawning abyss that formed around him.

The pressure around Jared was no

longer blade-sharp, no longer

furnace hot. Instead, a nothingness

yawning enough to swallow, to erase, to reduce every viny note to silence unfurled from his core.

Space within three hundred feet warped like ripples in glass. Colors bled away,

drained to the pallor of morning ash, until all that remained was a swirling smear of gray chaos.

A Warrior Undefeatable

Inside that zone, every wraith's lunge slowed to the crawl of molasses, as though time itself had become a pit of tar.

The trio of Wraith Kings sensed the horror first. They thrashed like beasts trapped in quicksand, yet the gray domain bore a will of its own, an unseen gravity that dragged their massive shadows to a standstill.

Meanwhile, Jared's complexion blanched by the heartbeat. Veins rose across his temples, and a ribbon of blood slipped from the corner of his mouth. For someone at his current cultivation level, forcing the technique Chaos Origin-Return to the Void exacted a brutal price.

Yet he refused to yield. Teeth grinding, he flipped his hands, shattered the previous seal, and wove a fiercer one in its place.

"Return!"

At the command, the murky field imploded with a thunderous sigh, racing inward toward Jared.

Like a soap bubble pricked by a pin, the hundred-foot expanse collapsed into his open palm, condensing into a fist-sized orb of swirling, gun-metal mist.

Within that dim sphere, countless miniature wraith silhouettes clawed and howled, their cries muffled as if beneath miles of water.

Outside, the swarm that had moments ago carpeted the valley was simply gone.

They were not slain; they had been devoured whole, dragged screaming into the newborn chaos orb.

An uncanny hush spread across the gorge, so profound it felt sacrilegious to breathe.

Winslow, Leopold, and Selina stared at the slowly rotating orb in Jared's hand, then at the now-vacant valley. For several seconds, words abandoned them.

Vermilion Demon Lord and Gerald had by then finished their own fights and returned to Jared's flank, shock and grave respect mingling in their eyes.

"Jared, that move you just—" Vermilion Demon Lord began, then stopped, unable to find language big enough.

Jared answered with a weary smile and loosened his fingers. The chaos orb unraveled like smoke. As it faded, what remained of the compressed wraiths dissolved into pure, silvery soul energy that dispersed on the wind.

His knees buckled, but thankfully, Gerald caught him before he could fall.

"I overdid it," Jared muttered, the words thin.

Gerald pressed a heated palm to Jared's spine, pouring refined earth fire energy into his meridians. "This divine power is undoubtedly mighty, but the energy drain far exceeds what you can endure," the elder said, voice low but stern. "Unless desperation forces your hand, do not use it again."

Jared nodded and folded into a seated pose, drawing breath, letting his aura knit itself together.

In that fleeting instant of casting, he had felt his soul, his celestial energy, even his life itself yanked toward emptiness like dust toward a black hole.

Had the chaotic celestial energy and the regenerative might of the Golden Dragon Bloodline not answered, he would have been a husk before the divine power was completed.

Yet the result was staggering.

One blow had scoured miles of battlefield clean, erasing the wraith horde and its three kings alike.

For the moment, the Ancient Battlefield lay secure.

An hour later, Jared opened his eyes. The weakness lingered, but the danger had passed.

Winslow stepped forward, his expression a tangle of amazement and dawning comprehension. "Jared, now I understand how you found the courage to enter level twelve alone."

Power and methods of this caliber have already leapt far beyond the bounds of an ordinary Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Three cultivator. Jared Chance is no ordinary man!

Jared shook his head, lifting the stray dust from his shoulders as if batting away praise that did not belong to him. "You flatter me, Mr. Walden. Those strikes were nothing but a bit of sleight-of-hand. As you can tell, chaotic celestial energy happened to fit the air in this ruin. Elsewhere, I doubt the result would sparkle half so bright. In any case, what's more urgent now is contacting the survivors on level twelve. See that gray-white beam clawing at the eastern rim? We must reach every sect that still draws breath here. Mr.

Walden, you said Azure Firmament Sword Sect has fallen, but there are still a few sects putting up a resistance, yes?"

Winslow's smile faded. His eyes, as

vel

old as winter stone, slid to the southeast horizon. "That's right. Malevolent Path Hall may be powerful, but level twelve is vast there's no way they can wipe out every faction in such a short time. As far as I know, at least three forces are still fighting back. To the southwest, seventy thousand miles away, lies the Myriad Beast Valley. Ancient beast-taming arts thrive there. Every disciple bonds with a demon beast from birth and rides that fury into war. The valley keeps tens of thousands of such creatures, from low-level Gale Wolves up to Thunderwing Golden Eagle. There are even rumors that, deep within the valley, several ancient, primeval beasts still lie in slumber. Their leader, Lord Beastmaster Blaine Leedon, is a High Immortal Realm Level Two cultivator and has Three-Headed Flame Lion King no weaker than himself. Malevolent Path Hall has attacked them twice, but drowned both times beneath stampeding claws. But no matter how formidable the beasts are, when facing the Soul Hunters-specialists in attacks on divine souls-there is always the risk of vengeful souls possessing them and turning on their masters." .net After a pause, Winslow added, "To the east, ninety thousand miles away, stands the Heavenly Sword Pavilion the foremost sword sect of level twelve. Every disciple trains in the Nine-Skies Sword Canon, a technique that emphasizes breaking all defenses with a single strike. Their leader, Sword Zealot Oswald Dugan, may only be at Top Level Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Nine, but his swordsmanship is so powerful that he's able to fuse with his blade to become a single breath. Because of that, he has inflicted grievous injuries on a High Immortal Realm Level One cultivator despite the rank difference. On top of that, Heavenly Sword Pavilion's defense formation, Myriad Blades

Convergence Array, can draw upon the metal and iron energies within a thousand-mile radius to form blades and strike enemies with unmatched power. However, sword cultivators are mostly proud and aloof by nature. Convincing them to unite will likely not be easy."

Fascinated, Jared continued to listen intently. "To the northeast, 120 thousand miles away, lies the

Five-Element Sect," Winslow said

"The sect cultivates the way of the five elements, and its disciples are divided into the Metal, Wood, Water, Fire, and Earth branches, excelling in elemental magic and combined formation techniques. Their sect sits at the convergence of the Five Elemental Ley Lines, allowing them to draw power from heaven and earth. The sect leader, Five-Element Saint Aurelian Metalhart, is a Top Level High Immortal Realm Level One cultivator, skilled in elemental escape techniques and transformations. The Five-Element Sect excels in

defense, and their Five-Element Cycle Grand Array endures endlessly; even Malevolent Path Hall's assault for over a month

failed to breach it. Yet the sect has a fatal flaw-its internal factions are numerous, and the five elemental

branches often quarrel among themselves. Were it not for the pressure of external enemies, they would likely have already fallen into disunity."

With that, Winslow turned to Jared. "These three sects are currently the backbone of level twelve's resistance against Malevolent Path Hall. Myriad Beast Valley can take the Soul Hunters head-on; Heavenly Sword Pavilion boasts the most powerful offensive sword cultivators, capable of cutting down enemy leaders; and the Five- Element Sect's defenses are unmatched, serving as an unyielding fortress. If the three could truly unite and cover each other's flanks, they would indeed have a chance at turning the tables."

Light flared behind Jared's pupils like sparks striking steel. "Myriad Beast Valley is closest, and Malevolent Path Hall has already failed there twice. That fear means a third assault is brewing. We head for the valley—now."

Vermilion Demon Lord bared perfect white fangs in a grin. "A beast-taming sect? Delightful. I wonder whose pet stands taller their menagerie or my Celestial Devourer."

Gerald stroked his soot-stained beard. "I met Blaine Leedon decades ago. He may

be hot-tempered, but he's a man of his word. If we can earn his trust, it will make our mission much easier."

"Then let's set off now."

Jared turned to Winslow. "Mr. Walden, are there any shortcuts we can take?"

Winslow raised the battered bronze compass. A breath of power, and a ghost-map unfurled in scarlet light. One winding line led southwest.

"Three thousand miles from here sits a ruined teleportation array, originally constructed by the ancient Spiritmaster Sect. It leads directly to the Hundred-Beast Range, which is the outskirts of Myriad Beast Valley. However, it is very old, and

much of the formation is damaged; it can only be used once repaired by someone skilled in array techniques."

At Jared's boots, the small fire unicorn yipped, thrusting one claw at its own puffed-up chest, amber eyes sparkling with pride.

Gerald laughed, smoke-rough and warm. "This little one feels the flow of energy better than any sage. Let him prod the ancient array; it might just work." Jared snapped his cloak around his shoulders. "All right. Let's go now!" Soon, seven silhouettes bled into streaks of colored light and tore across the sky toward the distant southwest.