

A Warrior Undefeatable 5931-5940

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Roughly fifteen minutes after their departure, the valley fell into a hush so deep even ashes feared to stir.

The air above the gorge twisted like heated glass, and three figures clad in pitch-black soul armor slipped from the distortion without a whisper.

At their head hovered a middle-aged man whose face was carved in perpetual malice. He scanned the empty ravine, tasted the lingering shockwaves in the wind, and his brow knotted in cold displeasure.

Such savage ripples of vengeful spirits—and beneath them, something else entirely, a strange breath of power that makes my heart seize.

The man lifted his hand and pinched the empty air. A ribbon of grey mist peeled away from the atmosphere and hovered above his palm, innocuous at first glance yet humming with an appetite for annihilation.

He probed it with a thread of soul energy, but the mist bucked like a wild beast and swallowed half the strand in a heartbeat, turning his own strength against him.

A wet cough burst from his throat. Color drained from his face as he flung the haze away, scattering it before it could gnaw deeper into his essence.

Two Soul Hunters rushed forward, armor clinking, and shouted, "Sir!"

He waved them back, eyes flickering between alarm and fascination. "This force devours soul energy as naturally as breathing. Report it to Mr. Puppet General at once, and scour a thousand-mile radius for anyone suspicious."

The hunters answered in unison, "Yes, Sir!"

With that, the three silhouettes melted into the dusk, gone as swiftly as they had appeared.

After a six-hour journey, Jared and his companions stood before a ruin smothered by ancient vines and towering trees.

Jared parted weeds as tall as a man, revealing the shattered remnants of a stone array hidden beneath.

The platform had been laid with blue-grey spiritual stones, every surface etched in archaic beast runes now blurred by time.

At its center, the core stone was veined with cracks, a faint glow pulsing like a dying heartbeat.

"It is an ancient teleportation array," Winslow said, voice reverent.

He knelt for a closer look. "The script differs from ours, yet the principle matches. Restore the missing glyphs, heal the core, feed it power, and it should awaken."

Jared nodded and glanced at his small fire unicorn. "Your turn, buddy."

Lucky leapt from his shoulder, trotting a quick circle around the array, snout pressed to broken sigils while it hummed soft, curious notes.

Moments later, it raised a forepaw. A bead of crimson-gold light blossomed at the claw tip and touched a ruined line.

Buzz!

The platform quivered beneath their feet. The fractured rune flared to life, the tiny light stitching its gap with trembling radiance.

"It works!" Selina exclaimed, delight sparkling in her eyes.

Jared crouched, letting chaotic celestial energy stream from his palm as he traced the array's inner currents.

The primal energy could mimic any law, giving him far keener insight than ordinary spiritual energy.

He soon located three key nodes that lay barren and five rune channels that had snapped like dry twigs.

"Leopold, Selina—stabilize the outer lattice," he said.

"Mr. Vermilion, when I work on the core, burn the cracks with your demonic flame so the stone can fuse anew."

Without further ado, the group jumped into action.

Leopold and Selina took opposite sides, sword light and rippling bell-tones weaving

a net that cocooned the platform, holding every stray spark in check.

Jared pressed both hands to the heartstone, threads of chaotic celestial energy seeping inside like silver needles.

Although the core seemed ready to shatter, its inner lattice was tenacious. His energy became a surgeon's scalpel, excising grit from each fissure and coaxing the stone's spirituality to knit itself whole.

At the same time, Vermilion Demon Lord's dark flame licked across the cracks, perfectly timed, melting the stone's edges so Jared's guiding power could seal them shut.

Crimson-tinged flames roared

beneath the array platform, so hot the air itself seemed to ripple and warp. Yet every tongue of fire obeyed an unseen will, never once exceeding the precise temperature at which spiritual stones would melt. Under that masterful control, the cracked stones along the platform's fissures began to liquefy, then fuse like molten gold poured back into a mold.

At the perimeter, Gerald and Winslow took up silent guard. Their auras pressed outward like overlapping shields, each man alert for any ripple that might disturb the delicate work at the center.

Two hours crawled past, measured only by the deep, steady breathing of those who watched.

Buzz!

A sudden, resonant thrum-so loud it rattled teeth-burst from the stone. Instantly, the entire platform flared with brilliant aquamarine light, bright enough to chase every shadow from the surroundings.

Where runes had once been scarred and broken, fresh sigils now blazed, their strokes seamless and whole. In the glare, an ancient bestial carving seemed to wake, rising out of the stone until a chorus of phantom roars echoed across the chamber.

At the very heart of the platform, space twisted open. A whirlpool of turquoise energy widened, breath by breath, until it spanned nearly ten feet from rim to shimmering

rim.

"It's done!" Jared's voice cracked through the roar of power.

He lowered his hands, shoulders sagging. The color drained from his face, and

sweat dampened the collar of his robe, but a fierce light still burned behind his eyes exhaustion eclipsed by triumph.

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Winslow paced a slow circle around the formation. "The array is holding, though age will limit it. From the looks of it, it can only teleport five travelers at most, and you should expect a slight drift in the landing point," he said, fingertips brushing glowing sigils as though feeling their heartbeat.

"Five is all we need," Jared replied. "Great Elder Earthfire, Mr. Vermilion, Mr. Walden, Leopold, and I will go first. Selina, you and Lucky stay to guard the array. If we have not returned in three days—or the platform shows the least instability—you destroy it and withdraw. No hesitations,

understood?"

Selina's lips tightened with reluctance, yet she bowed in swift agreement, silver bells at her waist chiming a soft, forlorn note.

The small fire unicorn yipped once, pressed its warm nose to Jared's hand, and fixed him with molten-gold eyes that promised utter loyalty.

The chosen five stepped into the turquoise vortex, and light swallowed them whole.

Inside the tunnel between worlds, everything became motion-up, down, and every direction at once. Space pulled like an ocean riptide, far stronger than any ordinary teleportation array.

Jared flooded his meridians with chaotic celestial energy, weaving a shield of rainbow aura around his limbs. Even so, he felt organs shift within his chest as

though dragged toward some invisible horizon.

Time lost meaning—perhaps a heartbeat, perhaps a lifetime—before the wrenching pressure vanished.

A Warrior Undefeatable

A thunderous boom split open the sky.

The five travelers spilled from a rent in midair, tumbling like loose stones before catching themselves above a sprawling range of jade-green peaks.

"So this is the Hundred-Beast Range?" Leopold asked, steadying his sword- calloused hands against the wind.

Vermilion Demon Lord hovered beside him, crimson pupils narrowing while he surveyed ridge after ridge of untamed wilderness.

All around, the land pulsed with life: distant avian shrieks carried on the wind; somewhere below, something enormous pounded through a valley, each footfall shaking loose pebbles from cliff walls. In the vault of heaven, a shadow with wings wider than a house glided past the sun.

Yet what drew every gaze lay to the northwest. Nearly a thousand miles off, a column of black-red resentment energy spiraled upward, and beneath it rolled the unmistakable thunder of battle-steel on fang, spell on spell.

"Not good!" Winslow muttered, face turning ashen. "That's Myriad Beast Valley. Malevolent Path Hall is already attacking it!"

"Move!" Jared barked.

Five streaks of light tore across the sky, racing toward the distant clash where dread smoke met screaming steel.

Beyond the defense formation of Myriad Beast Valley, the world had darkened as if noon had turned to dusk. More than 5,000 Soul Hunters massed in serried ranks, their black-iron armor knitting together like a living thunderhead.

In unison, they unfurled the Soul-Seizing Grand Array. Gray-white currents of reincarnation aura climbed the air, weaving an immense web that covered several dozen miles. Slowly and inexorably, the net tightened and hissed against the valley's shimmering shield, gnawing at it like acid on bone.

Inside the waning barrier, thousands of demon beasts answered desperate whistles from their handlers.

A Flame Lion belched roaring fireballs, a Thunderwing Golden Eagle hurled spears of lightning, Armored Rhinos formed a battering wedge, and a pack of Gale Wolves spun into a jade-green whirlwind. The beast tide crashed again and again, yet could not pierce the eerie gray web that smothered every spark of momentum.

Still more frightening were the three figures floating before the Soul Hunter Army.

To the left lumbered the Soul-Subduing Puppet General-two stories tall, wrapped in rattling Soul Binding Chains. Each ponderous footfall made the earth tremble. On the

right hovered a skeletal elder draped in tattered robes. He gripped a Bone Banner painted with a thousand twisted faces; a mere flick sent shrieking soundwaves that hammered the shield, leaving ripples that refused to fade.

And between them hovered an all-too-familiar foe-Soul Devourer.

Dark-red scale mail clung to his lean frame, six ragged wings spread like a carrion bird's, and his ash-gray eyes stared icily at the valley below. The reincarnation aura coiled into a spear in his fist; every thrust tore a fresh rent in the failing barrier.

Within the valley, atop a platform piled from bleached beast bones, Blaine Leedon- leader of Myriad Beast Valley and famed Lord Beastmaster-stood broad-shouldered beneath a cloak of stitched pelts, his crimson mane bristling like a furious lion's.

Beside him crouched his life-bonded partner, the Three-Headed Flame Lion King, each snarling head crowned in fire. Their combined aura burned hot enough to warp the air.

"Mr. Leedon, our southeast quadrant is about to give!"

A beastmaster, slick with his own blood, stumbled up the bone steps, voice hoarse with exhaustion.

Blaine roared, his tone like cracking boulders. "Send the Ironback Earth Dragon to hold that corner. Move all the earth-type beasts to the southeast corner and strengthen the defenses!"

"Mr. Leedon, the Bone Banner's wail is driving our beasts mad. They're starting to turn on their beastmasters!" another elder exclaimed, panic edging his words.

Blaine's jaw tightened. He glared at the banner high above, eyes glinting with resolve. "Lion King, come with me. We'll break through and destroy that banner!" The Three-Headed Flame Lion King answered with a single sky-shaking roar. Just then, a voice rang out.

"Please wait, Mr. Leedon!"

Five streaks of light speared down and came to rest upon the platform. It was none other than Jared, Vermilion Demon Lord, and the others!

Blaine pivoted. His beast-amber gaze swept the newcomers, pausing when he saw the demon lord's crimson armor. "Demonic cultivator? Who are you people?"

Winslow stepped forward with his silver cane in hand. "I'm Winslow Walden of the Azure Firmament Sword Sect. I've come with my friends to assist you!"

Blaine blinked, sorrow flashing beneath his wrath. "Azure Firmament Sword Sect? Winslow, even your sword sect has been..."

"Mr. Leedon, now is not the time for catching up," Jared cut in, voice steady as forged steel.

Jared Chance stepped off the

platform, shoulders squared, his gaze cutting through the smoke-choked sky to the three blurred figures aloft. It lingered on the hulking Soul Devouring Puppet before hardening like tempered steel. "Our first order of business is to break the enemy."

Blaine's hawklike eyes swept over Jared, measuring the young man's modest Heavenly Immortal Realm Lever Three cultivation, and a doubtful crease formed between his brows. "Young man, this ground is steeped in death. It is not a place for the likes of you."

Before he could say anything more, Jared hurled himself from the platform. Cold light streaked as the Dragonslayer Sword rang free of its scabbard, the note clear and defiant against the thunderous sky.

With both hands, he carved the air and roared, "Chaos Origin-Heaven-Splitting!"

A column of murky, ash-gray sword energy burst upward like a newly awoken volcano, but instead of lunging at the Soul-Devouring Puppet, it veered, cleaving straight toward the sprawling gray-white net that smothered the heavens.

Wherever that sword energy passed, the web sizzled and melted, fibers shrieking as they dissolved. In the span of one heartbeat, a hole a hundred yards long gaped open in the suffocating canopy.

"What?"

The skeletal elder clutching the bone banner reeled backward, parchment-thin face blanching as the sky-wide web unraveled before his eyes.

Far overhead, the Soul-Devouring Puppet's dull gray eyes swiveled toward Jared. For the first time, ripples disturbed those hollow pupils—the laws of the Reincarnation Realm instinctively recoiling from raw chaotic energy.

"It is you the one my master seeks," he said in a mechanical voice.

The gray-white spear in its hands flicked, and the puppet abandoned the valley's barrier, streaking downward like a bolt of ghostly lightning aimed straight at Jared's chest.

Jared's eyes burned with battle lust. "Good. Come take your shot!"

Clang!

Spear and sword collided, releasing a peal of metal so fierce it mimicked thunder chased by rolling drums.

The impact hurled Jared thirty feet back. The skin between thumb and forefinger split, painting the Dragonslayer Sword's hilt crimson. The power of a Top Level High

Immortal Realm cultivater was indeed every bit as savage as legend claimed.

Yet the puppet staggered three steps, and fine cracks spidered across its spear. Chaotic celestial energy proved a far deadlier bane to reincarnation aura than anyone had dared imagine.

Vermilion Demon Lord bellowed, "Everyone! Strike Together!"

Cloaked in roaring black-red flame, he resummoned his Demonic Flame Blade and lunged toward the towering Soul-Subduing Puppet General.

Gerald raised a weathered palm. A lotus of incandescent gold blossomed in the air, birthing nine serpentine dragons of Earthfire True Flame that spiraled toward the skeletal banner-bearer.

At the same time, Winslow and Leopold plunged into the ranks of the Soul Hunters, their twin swords weaving silver arcs that smashed soul armor and carved a path for the valley's beasts to surge forward.

A Warrior Undefeatable

Blaine threw back his head and let out a bestial howl. "Disciples of Myriad Beast Valley-counterattack!"

A deafening roar answered, shaking stone and marrow alike.

The Three-Headed Flame Lion King burst through the barrier first; each of its crowns exhaled a different doom—scorching fire, biting frost, crackling lightning—erasing a swath of Soul Hunters in a single bound.

An Ironback Earth Dragon erupted from beneath the battlefield, its mountain-sized body plowing through enemy formations, scattering them like matchsticks.

Overhead, flocks of Thunderwing Golden Eagles stooped from the clouds, rainstorms of gilded lightning showering from their wings.

Thus began Myriad Beast Valley's ferocious counteroffensive.

At the heart of the maelstrom, Jared and the Soul-Devouring Puppet traded blows with a fury unmatched anywhere on the field.

Every clash between gray spear and Dragonslayer Sword unleashed shockwaves of law, rippling outward to warp air, earth, and the very rules that governed both.

The Soul-Devouring Puppet fought with the merciless precision of a machine stripped of memory and mercy. Every thrust, sweep, and feint carved straight toward Jared's heart or throat, its six wings shearing the air like surgical blades.

Yet an undercurrent of Jared's chaotic celestial energy flooded the ruined clearing, dampening the puppet's gray whirl of reincarnation aura and stealing just a shade of its momentum.

As the exchange lengthened, Jared began to read a pattern in the storm—perfect, yes, but looped like a flawless yet predictable string of code. That's it! If I can see the sequence, I can shatter it!

"Chaos Evolution-Earthfire True Flame!"

Scarlet-gold fire, molten and alive, blossomed along the Dragonslayer Sword's edge. Threads of hazy gray chaos curled inside the blaze, turning the sword into a roaring comet.

The next second, Jared lunged. The Soul-Devouring Puppet snapped its spear across the blow, yet the earth fire clung to the metal, raced along the shaft, and licked across the reincarnation runes etched into its armor, searing ash-white sigils into black.

For a single heartbeat, the puppet staggered—no more than the stutter of a clockwork gear—but that sliver was all Jared needed.

"Dragonslayer-Armybreaker!"

A dragon-shaped arc of light burst from the blade and punched toward the narrow seam between the puppet's chest plates.

The strike struck home with a wet crack.

Gray-white scales split; steel slid three inches into synthetic flesh.

Dark blood-maroon with swirling motes of ash-spattered across the shattered flagstones.

The Soul-Devouring Puppet lowered its gaze to the sparking wound. Whorls inside its colorless eyes spun faster, but not a tremor of pain or fear touched its face.

Instead of retreating, it darted forward. Its left hand curled into claws and raked at Jared's face—choosing a trade of flesh for flesh, programmed for murder above survival.

Jared whipped his blade free and sprang back, yet the passing claws shredded his tunic and plowed five bloody tracks across his chest.

He spat a mouthful of blood, his stare sharpening to ice. "You're a puppet, all right," he muttered, voice low. "No pain, no fear—only the command to kill."

Enemies like that were always the hardest to bury.

Across the battlefield, Vermilion Demon Lord had already forced the hulking Soul-Subduing Puppet General to its knees. Thousands of razor-thin threads of demonic flame snared each joint, then one obsidian knife fell—severing the metal head with a hiss of steam.

Nearby, Gerald was even swifter. Nine serpentine fire dragons coiled around the gaunt elder and his bone banner. An auric lotus detonated, and both master and relic dissolved into gray dust.

With their two puppet generals and resident elder defeated, the Soul Hunter Army's perfect ranks buckled, panic rippling through gray-cloak after gray-cloak.

Winslow and Leopold pierced that wobbling front like twin arrows, while the beast horde of Myriad Beast Valley poured after them—a flood of claws, horns, and fury that smashed the enemy line to pieces.

The Soul-Devouring Puppet swept the ruin with calculating eyes, streams of numbers flickering across each iris. Then, without hesitation, it pivoted. Six wings snapped wide, and the figure streaked skyward as a gray comet fleeing the carnage.

"Going somewhere?" Jared growled.

He gathered himself to pursue, but Gerald stepped into his path, palm lifted in silent warning.

"Never chase a cornered beast,

Jared. If that thing wishes only to flee, you will not catch it. Besides, take a look at yourself," Gerald said as his gaze dropped to the fresh, bloody grooves across Jared's ribs. "You're pretty badly injured—tend to your wounds first. For now, the fight can wait."

Jared watched the gray streak vanish beyond the clouds, his hand squeezing the Dragonslayer Sword's hilt until his knuckles whitened.

This was merely a test. Next time, one of us will not leave the field alive.

In a mere hour, the din of war faded. Thick smoke peeled away from the shattered ridges, and scavenging winds carried the last embers into a gray-pink dawn.

Of the five thousand Soul Hunters who had stormed the valley, more than three thousand lay dead. The rest fled in ragged clusters. Myriad Beast Valley paid dearly as well-hundreds of beastmasters had fatten, over a thousand demon

beasts lay cold, and the

valley-guarding grand array hung in tatters.

Yet for all the blood and broken stones, the battle was won.

On the jagged Beastbone Platform, Blaine strode toward Jared. His frame-raw muscle draped in battle-torn hides-rose like a walking cliff. He studied Jared for a breath, then bent low in salute.

"You saved our lives, young man. I, Blaine Leedon, shall never forget your help. Please forgive my previous negligence!"

Jared returned the gesture. "Don't mention it, Mr. Leedon. Malevolent Path Hall threatens every living sect. Standing together against a common enemy is simply the right thing to do."

Blaine straightened, his crimson hair whipping in the breeze. "Go on, then. Speak your purpose. Surely you did not march into our siege only for heroics. If Myriad Beast Valley can help-so long as honor is served-I will not refuse."

Jared glanced at Winslow, drew a steadying breath, and let the words fall like weights.

"We hope you will join Heavenly Sword Pavilion and the Five-Element Sect in forming an Anti-Demon Alliance to wipe out Malevolent Path Hall for good."

Blaine's pupils narrowed as silence pooled between them. At last, he dipped his chin in a single, granite nod.

"Very well. Matevolent Path Hall

butchered thousands of our kin-there can be no coexistence. Myriad Beast Valley will stand in this alliance." Blaine said before his gaze toward Jared. "However, Oswald from Heavenly Sword Pavilion is as stubborn as a mule, and Aurelian Metalhart of the Five-Element Sect is as sly as a fox. Convincing them to join the alliance will not be easy."

Jared's hand closed around his sword hilt. "No matter how difficult it is, I have to try."

"In that case, rest here a few days, Jared," Blaine said, the edge in his tone

softening. "Allow us to repay your rescue before you set out."

"Gladly," Jared replied, offering a crisp nod.

Back at Myriad Beast Valley's Beastbone Hall, Blaine arranged a simple yet heartfelt feast.

War or no war, the valley produced its treasured Hundred-Beast Blood Brew and spiritual fruit preserves. A crackling bonfire danced at the hall's center, throwing restless light across solemn faces.

A Warrior Undefeatable

"That old coot Oswald nearly dueled me on Skyblade Cliff three centuries ago over a single shard of star iron," Blaine uttered, tipping back a horn of blood-red liquor. "Once he sets his mind on something, there's no budging him. And you want him to join forces with outsiders? Hah. Not a chance."

Blaine thumped the cup down, embers popping in the fire as he turned once more to Jared.

Winslow stroked his beard. "Stubborn he may be, but Oswald is no fool. Malevolent Path Hall is getting too powerful. Even he should understand that Heavenly Sword Pavilion can't hold out by itself."

Blaine snorted. "You want to reason with that sword-obsessed madman? There's nothing in his head but swords! Unless you can beat him at the sword, you could argue till the heavens fall, and he'd dismiss every word as nothing but noise."

Jared murmured, half to himself, "Beat him at the sword?"

Blaine's gaze flicked over Jared. "Listen, Jared... Even though Oswald is only at Top Level Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Nine, it's said that his swordsmanship has reached a level where he can become one with the sword. I know you are formidable, but swordsmanship isn't your specialization—"

"I may not need to surpass him completely—just enough to make him listen," Jared interrupted. "All we need is to let him glimpse that beyond the sword lies even stronger powers of law, vast enough to make him acknowledge us. Mr. Leedon, what about the Five-Element Sect?"

Blaine answered with a crooked smile, "Aurelian Metalhart is a cunning one. The Five-Element Sect has spent centuries locked in a quiet civil war among its five branches. He

keeps the throne not by strength, but by balancing their grudges. Solve that infighting first, or the moment your back is turned, those branches will be brawling over whether an alliance even matters."

Gerald stroked the singed tips of his beard, voice rumbling like magma beneath stone. "The root of the Five-Element Sect's troubles lies in an imbalance among the five elements. Metal, Wood, Water, Fire, and Earth—each branch vies for the sect's resources, each seeking to become the dominant branch. If they can be guided toward a true balance of the five elements, their internal strife will resolve itself."

Jared fell silent, then tipped his chin toward the small fire unicorn perched on his shoulder. "Little one, you were born breathing the laws of nature, weren't you? Can you trace the flow of the five elements?"

The tiny beast yipped and lifted a claw. Sparks unfurled into shimmering orbits— gold, green, blue, scarlet, ochre—whirling until they locked into a perfect, humming wheel of elemental balance.

"Marvelous!" Winslow exclaimed as his eyes flared bright. "The Five-Element Sect drills each branch alone and forgets that the elements live to complement one another. If we use chaotic celestial energy as the catalyst, and supplement it with this fire unicorn's sensitivity to the laws of nature, we just might be able to help them rebuild that balance!"

Jared rose, cloak whispering. "Then our first stop is the Heavenly Sword Pavilion. Mr. Leedon, may we borrow a few flying beasts?"

"Borrow? Take them!" Blaine said with a wave of his hand. "Thunderwing!"

A piercing shriek split the clouds as the Thunderwing Golden Eagle King—wings wider than a city avenue, feathers veined with living lightning—dove to the terrace in a storm of crackling gold.

Blaine gestured toward the colossal bird. "Have it carry you there. This golden eagle is incredibly fast—covering a hundred thousand miles in a day is nothing to it. Also, take this beast fang token, Jared. With it, any demon beast within the domain of Myriad Beast Valley will not attack you. If you do encounter any danger, crush the token, and I will immediately lead the beast horde to your aid!"

Jared accepted the token with both hands. "Thank you, Mr. Leedon."

Three days later, the group arrived at Heavenly Sword Range.

The range rose like an army of obsidian blades, each peak spearing through the clouds. A murderous sword energy flooded the air;

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ordinary cultivators would feel their skin prickle from a hundred miles away. At its heart loomed a fortress-palace wrought of black iron—the Heavenly Sword

Pavilion—anchored upon the highest summit as though hammered there by the gods.

The Thunderwing Golden Eagle King refused to cross the boundary; the sword energy crushed every feather, so the great bird, wheeled away at respectful distance. Jared and his four companions rode the wind the remaining leagues. The moment they breached the range, streaks of sword light screamed toward them.

"Stop where you are!"

Seven white-robed swordsmen barred the sky. Their leader—a handsome youth with twin blades across his back—radiated the aura of a Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Seven. His gaze lingered on Vermilion Demon Lord, brow tightening.

"This is Heavenly Sword Pavilion's forbidden ground. Leave at once!" Winslow drifted forward, sleeves billowing. "I am Winslow Walden of the Azure Firmament Sword Sect, here with friends to seek an audience with Mr. Dugan."

"Azure Firmament Sword Sect? Ah, greetings, Mr. Walden. Word of your sect's tragedy has reached us—my condolences. However, Mr. Dugan is in solitary training and does not wish to receive guests."

"Solitary training?" Jared said. "Then kindly inform him that someone wishes to cross swords with him."

Seeing that Jared was only at Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Three, the young swordsman shook his head. "I appreciate your kindness, but Mr. Dugan duels only those who have mastered the sword. Forgive me, but you—"

Before the last syllable left the swordman's lips, Jared lifted two fingers, holding them together like the edge of a blade. The gesture looked almost casual—as if he were idly parting mist—yet a dry hiss split the still air.

No chaotic celestial energy was used, no Golden Dragon Bloodline awakened—just the purest sword intent.

Hiss!

A hair-thin fissure opened in the void itself. From that wound, sword energy spilled like silver wind.

It spiraled outward, painting phantom suns, moons, and drifting constellations, then unfurled into shadow mountains, rivers, and forests. For one breathless moment, an entire miniature cosmos trembled on the edge of his unseen sword.

The young swordman's pupils shrank to pinpoints. Behind him, six fellow sword cultivators lurched back in perfect unison; the long blades in their hands shook wildly, whining like terrified hounds tugging at their leashes.

"T-That's the Sword Intent World? The realm beyond man and blade as one?" he stammered, voice cracking with equal parts awe and fear.

Jared lowered his hand, and the rift sealed without a whisper. "May I meet with Mr. Dugan now?" he asked, his tone as mild as falling snow.

The young swordsman drew a slow, steadying breath, then pressed his sword to his chest in a formal salute. "My apologies, sir. Please wait here. I will report at once."

With that, he shot away as pure sword light. Less than fifteen minutes later, the same ray of light streaked back and re-formed into the youth. His bow was deeper, his words even more respectful. Mr. Dugan warmly extends his invitation to everyone. Please follow me."

A Warrior Undefeatable

Soon, the group was led to Heavenly Sword Pavilion's Sword Duel Platform.

The arena floated above a rolling ocean of cloud, a flawless circle of black Test- Blade Stone. Its surface was carved by countless grooves, each a scar left by some bygone duel—and every scar still breathed a razor-sharp intent.

At the platform's heart stood an elderly man in coarse gray robes. His hair, streaked white, tangled in the wind while he stared up at the sky as though listening to secrets only he could hear.

A plain iron sword hung at his waist. The sheath was mottled with rust, yet Jared sensed a killing edge within it, fierce enough to split mountains.

Winslow bowed. "Mr. Dugan."

Oswald Dugan turned with deliberate languor. His face was unremarkable, almost shabby, but his eyes flashed like twin naked blades—keen enough, it seemed, to pierce straight through a man's heart. They ignored everyone else and fixed on Jared.

"Your sword intent intrigues me," he rasped. "It is not the austere way of pure swordsmanship, but at the same time, it feels broader than that."

Jared bowed. "Greetings, Mr. Dugan. My name is Jared Chance."

"Jared Chance..." Oswald tasted the name, and cold light flashed behind his lashes. "Three months ago, in level eleven's Chthonic Abyss, someone crippled Soul Devourer. That someone was you, wasn't it?"

"Yes," Jared answered, giving a small nod.

So, he even knows about that. I'm not sure how he found out about that, but now that he knows, he can better understand just how strong I really am.

Oswald's chin dipped once. "Excellent. If you could wound that ancient fiend, you have earned the right to stand upon this platform. Speak. What brings you here? If it is only to cross blades, we can begin at once."

"I have come to invite Heavenly Sword Pavilion to join an alliance," Jared said, his voice steady as steel drawn free of the scabbard. "Together we will eradicate Malevolent Path Hall."

Oswald stood in absolute stillness, the wind combing through his unbound hair while the clouds above the Sword Duel Platform seemed to pause with him.

"The blades of Heavenly Sword Pavilion are raised for no one but their bearers. If Malevolent Path Hall keeps its distance, why should I swing at them?" the swordsman finally said, every word slow, deliberate, and bright as polished steel.

"Because a falling tide sinks all boats." Jared replied, his voice cutting across the hush like a warning bell. "Malevolent Path Hall wants the divine souls of every cultivator. Heavenly Sword Pavilion will not be spared. Once they finish grinding down the other factions, this sect will be next."

"Then let them try," Oswald retorted, a flicker of savage anticipation sparking in his eyes. "My blade has hungered far too long for the blood of a High Immortal."

"Perhaps you fear nothing, Mr. Dugan, but what about your disciples?" Jared pressed, stepping closer. "Even though Myriad Blades Convergence Array is strong, can it withstand a Soul-Devouring Puppet, a Soul-Subduing Puppet General, and Malcolm Vayne himself?"

Oswald's gaze sharpened to ice. "Do you doubt the strength of Heavenly Sword Pavilion?"

"No," Jared answered, meeting that icy stare without flinch. "I'm merely stating a simple fact. Malevolent Path Hall commands the Door of Reincarnation-fresh puppets flow without end. As for Heavenly Sword Pavilion, you're one sword weaker whenever you lose one disciple. Who do you think will win as the battle drags on?"

Oswald slid a hand to his sword hilt. "So are you here to talk us into giving up?"

The atmosphere atop the stone platform hardened. Air refused to move. Sound forgot to echo.

Sweat gathered on Winslow's brow far behind them. Vermilion Demon Lord, hidden in the rear, gathered demonic fire in his palm, ready to shield Jared with his life.

Yet Jared smiled, calm as dawn breaking through storm clouds.

"I've come to offer you a chance—a chance for the blades of Heavenly Sword Pavilion to cleave apart the darkness smothering level twelve. Hide behind closed gates, and your brilliance lights only a corner. Stand beside the other great powers to shatter the demonic tide and

every

realm will echo your name. Who then would fail to honor Heavenly Sword Pavilion? Who would dare withhold respect from Oswald Dugan?"

Oswald's fingers eased away from the hilt. Sword light flickered in his pupils while he weighed Jared's pledge the way a master appraised a new edge.

Several moments later, he finally spoke again. "That strike you showed a moment ago—what is it called?"

Jared blinked, realizing Oswald meant the nascent realm he had revealed the Sword Intent World that had bloomed around his earlier step.

"It has no name yet."

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"Call it Chaos Genesis Sword then," Oswald said, turning his face to the sky as though carving the title across the clouds. "At the genesis of chaos a single sword cut purity and impurity, giving birth to all things... That name is truly worthy of your sword intent."

He paused, still facing away, voice rolling like distant thunder. "We can speak of an alliance—on one condition. Cross blades with me. Win or lose doesn't matter. If your sword lets me glimpse a stronger path beyond, Heavenly Sword Pavilion will march with you."

Jared drew a measured breath. "When?"

"Now."

Oswald pivoted. The battered iron sword at his waist whispered free.

No roar shook the heavens, yet the instant bare metal tasted air, every scar carved into the duel platform flared white. Sword energy flooded inward, weaving behind Oswald until an ethereal blade a hundred yards tall towered over him.

The true blade stayed still, but its will swept forward first.

Jared felt as though a billion needles of intent pierced his very soul-pure sword pressure, merciless and immeasurable.

Instead of fear, a wildfire of battle lust blazed across Jared's eyes, its heat bright enough to erase the tremor that still rang through the clouds over the Sword Duel Platform.

The Dragonslayer Sword flashed from its sheath with a steely cry. Chaotic celestial energy, Golden Dragon Bloodline, and Earthfire True Flame merged yet did not erupt. They curled inward, cloaking the blade in a dim aura that swallowed every gleam.

"Begin." Oswald's voice remained steady, the word striking the air like the clear note of a temple bell.

At that invitation, Jared made the first move.

He did not stab or hack. Instead, he held Dragonslayer Sword and traced a slow, deliberate arc, as though he were painting light upon the sky.

Soon, the line became a perfect circle, and within that circle, negative and positive energies swirled, the five elements unfolded, and faint visions of the creation of heaven and earth, of all things coming into being and passing away, began to emerge.

"Magnificent! What a beautiful Chaos Genesis!" Oswald exclaimed as his pupils blazed, their light fierce enough to crack stone. The iron

sword his grasp shuddered A phantom blade a hundred yards long crashed downward, severing clouds on its descent toward the glowing circle.

Within seconds, the light met the sword orb.

There was no thunder, no outward blast.

The colossal sword sank into the orb as smoothly as a fish slipping into a pond. Inside, churning chaos peeled the great weapon apart, grain by grain, until nothing remained but drifting motes that the circle drank. The orb thickened, its rim now stretching wider, hungrier.

To everyone's surprise, Oswald grinned instead of recoiling. He loosed a jubilant howl. "Again!"

The next second, his body dissolved into pure sword light. Man and weapon fused and speared straight for the orb's heart-his ultimate stroke, forged where intention and steel were utterly one.

A Warrior Undefeatable

Jared's pupils narrowed; he knew this strike could no longer be dissolved. With both hands locked on the hilt, every shred of power inside him surged outward. The

Dragonslayer Sword roared like a living beast as gray chaotic energy took the shape of a dragon and charged forward.

Clang!

This time, the ring of true metal sliced the heavens, a single note that left the air quivering.

The Sword Duel Platform convulsed beneath them, and spiderweb cracks began bursting across the obsidian Test-Blade Stone.

Spectators-Winslow and the others—staggered backward under the shockwave. Leopold, whose cultivation lagged behind, coughed scarlet at the corner of his mouth.

At the clash's center, sword light and the gray dragon tore space apart, revealing strips of bottomless darkness.

After three breaths, the radiance faded.

Jared remained where he had begun, expressionless, the Dragonslayer Sword quietly humming beside his leg.

Ten yards away stood Oswald-robe shredded, ash-gray hair unbound. Having been injured by chaotic sword energy, a gash the width of two fingers split his left shoulder to the bone, yet his face shone with exhilaration.

He laughed deep, liberated laughter that rolled across the broken platform.

"Excellent! What an excellent Chaos Genesis Sword! With that stroke, I glimpsed the realm beyond the state of man and blade as one. This has been worth every drop of blood!"

Oswald threw his head back, laughter peeling through the clouds like rolling thunder.

With that, he snapped the sword back into its sheath, the click crisp and final, then strode across the battered stone toward Jared.

Stretching out a calloused hand, he hauled the young man upright in one smooth pull, the gesture rough yet strangely respectful.

"As for the alliance-Heavenly Sword Pavilion is in. But hear me first. Within the alliance, our sect will only take orders from you alone. As for all the pointless disputes and back-and-forth-don't ever involve me. Bring the petty squabbles of others to my door, and I will turn you away at the gate."

Jared dipped his chin, acceptance firm and unflinching. "Understood."

Oswald's eyes narrowed, the smile sharpening. "Also, you'd better prepare yourself for Aurelian Metalhart. That silver-tongued fox is far harder to bend than I ever will be."

"I know my limits," Jared answered, confidence ringing clear, his steady gaze promising far more than simple words.

Seven days later, the group arrived at Five-Element Range.

Unlike the knife-edged ridges of the Heavenly Sword Range, the Five-Element Range unfolded in five distinct peaks, each washed in its own hue-gilded metal, emerald wood, sapphire water, scarlet fire, earthen brown. Streams of a five-colored spiritual energy spiraled between those heights, weaving a panorama that was equal parts dazzling and uneasy.

Yet the nearer one drew, the more obvious the strain became. Currents of spiritual energy butted and repelled, their collisions betraying the sect's simmering internal discord.

Thanks to a Sword Essence Pill and his own prodigious vitality, Jared's injuries had mended by nearly seventy percent. No sooner had his party stepped across the sect's boundary stones than five separate patrols exploded from the tree line, hemming them in from every direction.

Robes told the story: gold for Metal, green for Wood, deep blue for Water, ember red for Fire, ochre for Earth. The disciples formed five distinct wedges, each eyeing even their supposed allies with measured suspicion.

"State your names and purpose!" the five branch leaders barked in imperfect unison -one voice cold as quenched steel, another hot as a bellows, the rest scattered like wind-ruffled leaves.

Winslow opened his mouth to reply, but Jared raised a quieting hand and stepped forward alone.

He pressed his palms together. At his brow, a mote of dim gray light blossomed, then burst into five radiant streams.

Chaos-tinged brilliance arced out, each ribbon homing toward a different squad of disciples without a hint of malice.

Instinctively, the disciples conjured barriers-only to watch the light settle before them, knitting miniature cycles: metal giving rise to water, water to wood, wood to fire, fire to earth, and earth back to metal-each transition flawless, seamless, and without the slightest hitch.

Those tiny wheels meshed, locking together into a greater ring that rotated with measured, inexhaustible grace.

"W-What is this?" gasped several voices at once, awe eclipsing suspicion.

For centuries, they had studied the theory of mutual generation, yet pride and rivalry kept the branches splintered. Never had they witnessed the five forces dancing so flawlessly hand in hand.

In that silent revelation, the mountain air itself seemed to loosen its ancient knots.

"Take me to Mr. Metalhart," Jared said calmly as he withdrew the chaotic celestial energy. "Tell him someone has come who can end the sect's thousand-year deadlock."

The branch leaders traded uneasy glances before the leader of the Metal Branch swallowed his doubts and bowed. "This way, please."

Inside the Five-Element Grand Hall, the chamber stretched in a perfect pentagon.

At each face sat a single elder, each representing one of the five branches—Metal, Wood, Water, Fire, and Earth-separated by lines as sharp as sword cuts in marble.

A man occupied the seat of highest

honor, neither slouching nor rigid but perfectly balanced, as though the chair had been carved around his spine. Five colors-metallic gold, deep green, sapphire, crimson, and warm umber-flowed across his robe in slow, drifting currents of light. His cheeks were round, his eyes half-mooned with an easy, knowing smile that seemed etched there by years of quiet confidence. Naturally, this was Aurelian Metalhart, revered leader of the Five-Element Sect.

"Jared, you have traveled far to reach my humble hall. Forgive me for not welcoming you sooner. I heard you crossed swords with that stubborn Oswald at the Heavenly Sword Pavilion—and even made him bow his head and join your Anti-Demon Alliance. Impressive, truly impressive."

"Mr. Metalhart, you flatter me. I have come here today to ask that the Five-Element Sect lend its strength to the Anti-Demon Alliance."

The words had scarcely left Jared's lips when the Five-Branch Elders exchanged sharp glances. Robes of metal sheen, emerald silk, sapphire gauze, scarlet brocade, and earthen brown fluttered as they leaned toward one another, voices falling into urgent, overlapping whispers that crackled like dry leaves before a coming storm.

"An alliance? The Five-Element Cycle Grand Array guards our walls. Malevolent Path Hall has smashed itself bloody against it before and failed. Why should we take the risk?"

"Exactly! It's better to hunker down and let the fiends clash with others until both sides are crippled. Then we collect the spoils while still breathing."

"Fools! Do you all not understand that when we lose one pillar, the whole structure weakens? When Malevolent Path Hall has wiped out other factions, we will be next on their list!"

"If you want to fight that badly, feel free to send in your Fire Branch! My Water Branch disciples are nurturers, not brawlers. I will not waste them in reckless charges."

The five elders glared across the pentagonal chamber, shoulders tensing, each ready to turn doctrine into open combat.

At the apex of the hall, Aurelian—forever smiling—merely folded his thin hands and watched Jared, as though the entire quarrel were a test the young visitor must pass alone.

That was when Jared realized Aurelian was testing him. If he couldn't even settle the infighting among the Five Branches, what right did he have to speak of an alliance?

"The Five-Element Sect's predicament doesn't lie with outside enemies, but with its own internal strife," Jared suddenly said, quiet yet cutting through the uproar. Silence plunged like a drawn blade. Even torches seemed to burn softer, awaiting the next word.

"The art of the Five Elements is meant to nurture and sustain itself in endless cycles. Yet within the Five-Element Sect, each branch cultivates only its own element, competing against the others, refusing to yield—throwing the balance of the Five Elements into chaos and leaving gaps in your cultivation," Jared continued, voice gaining steadiness with every

syllable. "Therefore, even though your Five-Element Cycle Grand Array is strong, it has never reached the realm of endless regeneration. How could it, when those who weave its lines refuse to breathe as one?"

Ferrum, elder of the Metal Branch, snorted, the sound like steel on flint. "That's easy for you to say, boy. Resources are finite. How do you divide what is scarce without bloodshed?"

"Why divide at all?" Jared asked,

brow lifting The elements nurture one another. Metal gives rise to Water-so the Metal Branch, as it cultivates, naturally produces metal energy that can aid the Water Branch in their practice. Similarly, Water gives rise to Wood so the Water Branch, as it cultivates, produces water essence that nourishes the Wood Branch... And so, the cycle continues. If all five branches cultivate together, resources won't be depleted; on the contrary, they will multiply through this continuous exchange."

As if on cue, the small fire unicorn perched on Jared's shoulder leapt forward. With playful claws, it sketched a glowing ring in mid-air—five radiant arcs intertwining until a perfect elemental circle shimmered above the marble floor.

This time, Jared breathed a thread of chaotic celestial energy into the image.

Colors flared-gold, azure, emerald, crimson, ocher-spinning faster until the illusion drew raw spiritual energy from the very air, refining it into a roaring torrent of balanced elemental power.

A Warrior Undefeatable

"T-This is..." gasped several elders at once, their voices trembling under the rainbow light.

Pyre, elder of the Fire Branch, sprang to his feet, cloak billowing like opened

bellows. "The Five Elements cycle can automatically absorb spiritual energy? How is that even possible?"

"Chaos births all things and can, when guided, reforge the five elements," Jared said evenly. "Fuse it with a cooperative cultivation array, and the cycle sustains itself."

He turned toward Aurelian, eyes steady. "I will teach this method to the Five- Element Sect on one condition-cast aside old grudges, join the Anti-Demon Alliance, and face the Malevolent Path Hall beside us."

For the first time, Aurelian's habitual smile faded.

He descended from his high seat, skeletal fingers slipping into the swirling hologram, feeling the flawless ebb and surge of elemental force as if testing a heartbeat long forgotten.

A glint of astonishment flickered in his eyes before sinking into sober contemplation.

"The elements nurturing one another, in an endless cycle... In theory, it's certainly possible." Aurelian murmured at last. "But Jared, do you know why, for a thousand years, our sect has failed to live that ideal?"

Jared did not answer at once. He let his gaze circle the Five-Element Grand Hall, studying the five elders perched on their thrones of colored jade.

In the stillness, he could sense five completely distinct auras-metal's sharp edge, wood's vibrant life, water's supple resilience, fire's wild fury, and earth's solid weight. Those auras should have complemented one another, yet now they clashed and repelled, like five ferocious beasts trapped in a tiny cage, tearing at one another. "The strife exists because each branch swears its doctrine is sovereign," Jared said, his words falling like hammer strokes. "The Metal Branch sees metal as the force of decisive action, unstoppable in its power. The Wood Branch values growth, ceaseless and ever-renewing. Water benefits all things, nurturing the world. Fire burns away evil while illuminating what is just. And Earth bears all, steadfast and full of virtue."

At every declaration, the elder of that branch straightened, pride flickering across lined faces like sun off steel.

"The five branches have argued for a thousand years, each claiming their own path as the foundation of the Five Elements. However..." Jared added before letting his tone grow heavy and deliberate. "The elements nurture one another, but they also restrain one another-they are part of a single whole. To forcibly separate them is like cutting a person into five pieces: each piece may insist it is human, but the integrity, the true meaning, is already lost."

"You insolent fool! You know nothing! Metal is the head of the Five Elements-war and conquest are the very foundation of our cultivation!" Ferrum thundered.

"Rubbish!" Pyre retorted as he slammed the table. "Metal melts before Fire! Only blazing flames that purge all can stand as the ultimate law!"

Aquilus, elder of the Water Branch, gave a frosty sniff. "The ultimate law can only be realized when Water and Fire are in harmony!"

Terran, elder of the Earth Branch, folded arms of stone-tinted sleeves. "Wood strengthens Earth, and Earth yields Metal-none of you comprehend the cycle!"

Woodric, elder of the Wood Branch, remained silent, though his gaze made it clear he disagreed with the other branches as well.

Before their quarrel could erupt a second time, Jared stepped forward.

The very air congealed, as though the hall itself held its breath.

He closed his eyes. Both hands rose, palms skyward, slow as dawn.

A mote of swirling gray light blossomed at his brow—not the polite demonstration shown earlier, but something vaster, older, and raw.

Buzz!

A cavern-deep hum rolled from within his chest, as if some ancient engine were grinding awake after epochs of sleep.

Blinding gold blazed in his left palm; tender green sprang in his right. Blue waves rippled beneath his left heel, red flame coiled beneath his right, and from his sternum a heavy amber glow revolved like a newborn sun.

Five elemental forces stood revealed—simultaneous, balanced, and unafraid.

The Five-Branch Elders lurched to their feet, disbelief carving deep furrows in every face.

Most cultivators mastered one element; two marked a prodigy, three a legend told once in generations.

Yet Jared held all five at once, not in conflict but in luminous accord, each color folding gently into the next like seamless dawn.

And this, astonishing though it was, proved only the opening note.

Jared drew a fresh breath. Inside him, the chaotic celestial energy roared to life—an ocean of thunder preparing to surge.

The next second, chaotic celestial energy surged forward like the baton of an unseen maestro, slipping into the fragmented brilliance of the five elements and knitting them together.

Colors that once fought for

sovereignty bled into one another.

Golden light threaded through

rippling water. The gilded currenmet

nourished emerald radiance, which in turn blossomed with scarlet flame. Fire burned tself to ash. The ash sank, compounding into rich, earthen mass, and from that soil a fresh shard of gold was born.

Thus, metal, wood, water, fire, and earth chased one another in an endless round, spinning around Jared's body as a perfect wheel three yards wide.

What was even more astonishing was that the wheel never rested—it was constantly spinning and evolving.

One moment, it erupted into ten thousand golden blades. The next, it unfurled as a prairie fire, then collapsed into a vast sea that embraced every spark. Each transformation, however, obeyed a single, silent thought.

Inside the great hall of the Five-Element Sect, every disciple felt the elemental power in their own veins tremble, saluting that revolving crown as though a king had arrived.

Aurelian's eyes blazed. He stared at the five-element light wheel so hard that his breathing turned ragged and shallow.

Jared opened his eyes. Five colors flashed across his pupils before everything settled into a misty, primordial gray.

"The so-called struggle of the five elements-how laughable." Jared's calm voice detonated in every heart like distant thunder.

"Why must metal always be unyielding? Why must Metal always be unyielding? Why can't Water be strong? Why can't Fire give life? Why can't Earth be sharp? Why can't Wood be unbreakable?"

With every question, the elemental wheel shattered common sense.

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Gold softened into silken threads that coiled gently around his fingers. Water froze into crystal swords sharp enough to shear air. Flame _blossomed into red lotuses pulsing with new life. Earth rose as phantom mountains that speared the clouds, while ancient trunks gleamed with metallic luster no axe could bruise.

"The Five Elements have always been equal in essence. Their true strength lies only in the mind that wields them."

Jared drew his hands inward. The wheel shrank, folded upon itself, and became five marble-sized pearls that whirled above his palm.

Clinging to one pathus not net

more than building your own prison. The true art of the Five Elements..."

A Warrior Undefeatable

Jared clenched his fist without warning.

The five pearls collided. Metal, wood, water, fire, and earth-five forces once utterly opposed—melted into a single gray orb streaked with shifting color, as though twilight had been trapped inside glass.

It looked plain, almost crude, yet the raw elemental essence lurking within made every cultivator in the hall feel their very souls ripple.

"Five elements as one."

The moment the four words left Jared's lips, the little orb burst into radiance and rocketed upward.

Its beam punched through the marble dome, spearing the sky. All five-colored spiritual energy pillars swirling above the Five-Element Range surged toward that pillar in worship.

On each of the five peaks, ancestral statues ignited, sending five thick pillars of light to meet Jared's own.

A mighty roar echoed through heaven and earth, as if the laws of nature had approved!

Jared felt as if a long-dormant barrier within his body had suddenly been shattered.

Deep within his core, in that embryonic chaos, a dim star blazed awake.

It was no ordinary star but an Origin Star-its surface cloaked in gray haze, its heart turning with all five elements.

The newborn star thrummed, a cosmic bell that shook the void.

Jared's aura erupted, soaring beyond every previous limit, until the air itself bent around him like cloth drawn into a storm.

The bottleneck of Jared's cultivation shattered like thin ice in spring. In a single, breath-stealing pulse, his realm vaulted from Heavenly Immortal Level Three to Level Four, then climbed even higher until it steadied—quiet but immense at Top Level Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Four.

With the surge came revelation. His grasp of the art of the Five Elements no longer resembled study; it felt like speaking a native tongue. When his gaze drifted to the Five-Branch Elders, every swirl of elemental energy—where it flowed, where it faltered, how each element could complement or restrict one another—spread before him as plainly as ink on parchment.

"T-This is..." Aurelian stuttered. "This is the resonance of the primal elements. You have woken the ancestral veins of the Five-Element Range itself!"

The Five-Branch Elders dropped to their knees—not from fear, but from the instinctive reverence mortals feel when the very laws of creation stand revealed.

Jared drew in his aura. The bead called the Five-Element Unification Pearl drifted into his palm, dissolved, and reformed as a five-hued sigil that branded the back of his right hand with a quiet, living light.

He looked to Aurelian, then let his calm stare sweep the ring of kneeling elders. "The struggle among your branches ends here. With chaotic celestial energy as my guide, I will temper your five elemental roots into harmony. Will you watch and learn?"

Ferrum was the first to bow. "The Metal Branch is eager to learn!"

Woodric pressed both palms to the ground, sap-green aura trembling around him. "The Wood Branch is willing!"

Aquilus inclined his head, voice as clear as spring water. "The Water Branch will learn with gratitude."

Pyre struck his fist to his chest, a curl of scarlet flame licking over his knuckles. "Fire Branch—ready to learn!"

Terran rumbled assent, earth-brown light pooling about his knees. "Earth Branch is willing to learn."

Just like that, all contention fell away. In every eye burned only hunger for a higher road.

Jared nodded once. He lifted a

single finger and tapped the air. A curtain of shifting color

unfurled gold, green, black, red, and ocher braided together. Inside that living screen, the Five Elements birthed and quelled one another,

split and merged, borrowed strength and returned it. The mysteries did not read like scripture; they lived and moved, a direct exhibition of the laws of nature themselves.

The elders watched like starving scholars, drinking in each transformation. Centuries-old barriers inside them loosened; fresh insight bloomed at a speed that left their hearts pounding.

Beside Jared, Aurelian folded his arms, a maze of emotions flickering behind his eyes—admiration, relief, and a trace of awe he could not quite hide.

"Jared, you may not realize it, but in just one day, you have rebuilt the Five-Element Sect. A feud that rotted us for a thousand years ends today. That is a debt we will remember for all generations."

Jared shook his head. "You flatter me, Mr. Metalhart. The art of the Five Elements has always been a single whole; I merely swept aside the fog to reveal the truth."

Then, he glanced at the sigil glowing on his hand. "Besides, I've gained much myself. Illuminating the Origin Star has elevated my understanding of the art of the Five Elements to a new level—and that is more than enough."

Aurelian fell silent, then executed the sect's highest rite—the Five-Element Ceremonial Salute. "Jared, from this hope you are the Five-Element Sect's Elder Guardian. Your standing equals mine. Every disciple will heed your word."

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He turned, voice ringing through the grand hall. "Hear me! The

Five-Element Sect joins the

Anti-Demon Alliance with immediate effect. All branch disciples will cease internal strife at once. Within three

days, you will grasp Elder Jared's method of cultivation in the Five Elements. In seven days, we march with the Alliance to strike down Malevolent Path Hall!"

The Five-Branch Elders answered as one, their shout rattling the rafters.

No dissent remained—only a single, rising will to fight side by side.

Jared felt the newborn Origin Star flicker to life deep in his core. Its silver-white pulse rippled through every vessel like an anthem he had waited his whole life to hear.

In that instant, the air around him trembled, as though the heavens themselves acknowledged the marriage of the five elements. The circle was closed, and the seed had sprouted.

Now, it's time to settle the score with Malevolent Path Hall...

Far away, the aurora that had crowned the Five-Element Range had not yet faded,

but the weather across level twelve was already turning-clouds tearing, winds reversing course, destinies shifting like pieces on an unseen board.

A Warrior Undefeatable

Back at Malevolent Path Hall's headquarters, Malcolm stood before the Door of Reincarnation with his hands clasped behind his back. The door's bone-white surface writhed with living runes, each glyph squirming like a trapped centipede under his pallid gaze.

Behind him, a black-robed elder knelt, forehead pressed to cold stone.

"Spread the word. Anyone in level twelve who bends the knee to Malevolent Path Hall shall be spared-and we will grant them the blessing of eternal life through the Door of Reincarnation," Malcolm ordered, his voice rattling like gravel across frost, yet every syllable rang with a promise both terrible and seductive.

Now that Jared had joined forces with the three great sects against the Malevolent Path Hall, Malcolm knew he could not afford to be careless.

After all, those three sects were powerful, and Jared even had Gerald by his side.

"At once!" the black-robed elder replied and swiftly vanished into the corridors' gloom.

The summons flew on black wings. Within hours, the rumor of immortality blazed across every sky-bridge and market square of level twelve

Soon, rivers of cultivators were pouring toward Malevolent Path Hall's fortress like moths to flame.

The black-robed elder returned, trembling with barely contained excitement.

"Mr. Vayne, three days have passed since the news went out. Over thirty-seven sects and nearly a hundred wandering cultivators have pledged their allegiance. Among them, eleven are old elites at Top Level Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Nine or higher."

A thin smile cracked Malcolm's lips.

"Immortality... Resurrection... They make for such exquisite bait," he said as he stroked the door's skeletal frame, and the runes quivered as though savoring his touch. "What do these old cultivators fear the most? It's neither defeat nor disgrace. They fear the dark beyond breath. They crave time-time to mend mistakes that gnaw at their hearts."

"Indeed," the black-robed elder replied. "And now, we have given them hope. Even if the hope is false, they would still stake everything on it. Such is human nature."

Malcolm glanced toward the courtyard, where hundreds of auras jostled in restless devotion. "Bring in the first flock. Let them witness a miracle with their own eyes."

"Yes, Mr. Vayne!"

Beyond the fortress walls, a wasteland once stripped bare of life now roared like a carnival. Scholars in tattered robes, warriors whose beards were older than kingdoms, mothers clutching cracked memorial tablets—all pressed forward until the crowd became a single heaving creature.

Every face tilted toward the gray-white pillar soaring from the plains, and in every eye burned the same desperate fever.

"That Door of Reincarnation—tell me, can it truly bring my son back?" a woman asked, voice raw, knuckles white on the splintered memorial tablet she hugged to her chest.

"Lorian, you have lingered on this earth for forty-eight thousand years," a gaunt elder uttered to his friend, voice thin yet sharp. "Your final grains of life are sliding away—why not stake everything on one last roll of the dice? Malevolent Path Hall has sworn it—render distinguished service, and the Door of Reincarnation will open to you. Step through, and you may claim eternity. I have cultivated for fifty thousand years, yet I've been stuck at Top Level Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Nine for twenty thousand of them. Breaking through seems impossible, and I have less than a hundred years of life left..."

The man called Lorian wavered for a moment, then his hesitation turned to iron resolve. "Okay, okay! That's enough. I guess it's better to gamble everything than to vanish into nothingness!"

Scenes like theirs echoed everywhere, one fevered negotiation after another rippling through the crowd.

A deep bronze bell tolled from the direction of the Malevolent Path Hall, its single note stretching like a chain across the plains.

"The hour has come—followers, enter the hall and witness the miracle of rebirth!"

Hundreds of Soul Hunters in sable robes marched from a pillar of ashen light, lining themselves into two silent phalanxes that formed a corridor toward the hall's shadowy heart.

The supplicants arranged themselves by cultivation levels like students before an exam, then stepped into the passage one by one.

At the far end, Malcolm lounged on a throne of interlocking bones, the Soul- Devouring Puppet standing beside him, its eyes vacant, posture perfectly still.

The first to be ushered forward were three decrepit titans of cultivation, each trapped at the precipice of Top Level Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Nine, each hearing death's breath in his ear.

"Greetings, Mr. Vayne!" the trio chorused, bowing so low their spines creaked.

Awe warred with naked longing in their clouded eyes.

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"Rise. Since you come in earnest, shall let you behold the Door of Reincarnation with your own eyes," Malcolm said lifting two languid fingers

Sigils spun between his hands; a ribbon of gray-white aura shot toward the monumental doors.

The doors parted a hair's breadth, revealing a lifeless expanse the color of dust and bone.

Yet, in that instant, a dazzling

panorama burst through-crystal

pavilions, birds swirling among rosy

clouds, and countless figures

stroming in serenity, every face

belonged to a cultivator Tongo

believed dead.

"T-That's my senior, Azuryth!" the green-robed elder shouted, voice cracking. "Didn't

he die from a heavenly tribulation five hundred years ago?"

"Look! That's Violetta. Didn't she vanish in a secret realm a thousand years ago?"

"My partner... She is there as well..."

Tears instantly flooded their eyes; their frail bodies shook as though the weight of longing alone could crush them.

"The Door of Reincarnation spans life and death, past and future," Malcolm intoned, each syllable

soaked in hypnotic power. "Servon et

faithfully, earn merit, and you may regather your own souls and flesh-and even petition the Lord of Reincarnation to return those you mourn."

With a muffled thump, the three elders collapsed to their knees, foreheads striking the black stone.

"Mr. Vayne, your grace is boundless. We pledge our lives to the Malevolent Path Hall!"

Malcolm's smile was slight, but satisfaction glittered in his eyes.

"Excellent. From this day forth, you are the first elders of reincarnation. Go-tell the masses what you have witnessed."

Trembling with fervor, the trio sprang up and raced out of the grand hall, shouting the promise of eternity to anyone who would listen.

Almost at once, voices from beyond the hall burst in, so charged with emotion that every syllable trembled like a plucked bowstring.

"It's true! It's absolutely true! I just saw Azuryth myself!"

"The Door of Reincarnation can summon the dead back to us. It can grant eternity!"

"Join Malevolent Path Hall! This is our last chance to attain immortality!"

The courtyard detonated like dry tinder struck by a spark.

Moments earlier, there had been doubts. Now, watching three revered elders quake in open rapture, every reservation dissolved to smoke.

"I'm in! I'll surrender every magical item I own!"

"As long as they can bring my daughter back from the dead, I'm willing to do anything!"

"Grant me immortality! Give me one more chance to ascend!"

Hysteria spread through the assembly like a fever impossible to contain.

Within half a day, the number of converts doubled. Two wavering mid-tier sects arrived en masse and bent the knee.

The news cracked across level twelve like distant thunder.

Yet the shock that would truly rattle every sky still waited in the wings.

A Warrior Undefeatable

On the fourth day, at noon, thirty thousand miles east of Malevolent Path Hall's headquarters, the fog-shrouded Dead Silence Swamp suddenly shook.

Boom!

Muck erupted skyward, unveiling a palace complex so vast it blotted out the sun- jet-black roofs hung with pallid skulls, walls crawling with twisted runes that exuded arctic dread.

From its heart, nine columns of ink-dark demonic aura coiled upward, knitting into nine snarling demon heads that roared in silence at the scarred sky.

Every cultivator across level twelve felt that monstrous pulse shiver through their souls.

"I-Isn't that Ninefold Nether Demonic Aura?"

In Myriad Beast Valley, Blaine sprang from his throne; the three heads of his Flame Lion growled in unison. "Could it be..." he breathed, words smothered by the beast's rumble.

On the Sword Duel Platform of Heavenly Sword Pavilion, Oswald's iron blade quivered in his grasp. He stared east, sword light blazing in his eyes. "It's the Ninefold Nether Palace... Those fiends are still alive?"

Inside the Five-Element Grand Hall, Aurelian's face leached of color. "Ninefold Nether Palace... That demon sect vanished without a trace ten millennia ago. Have they finally broken seclusion?"

For every old cultivator who remembered the name, a tidal wave of dread rose unchecked.

Once, the Ninefold Nether Palace reigned as unchallenged sovereign of demon-kind throughout level twelve.

Its leader, Morven Bloodshade, also known as Netherlord Bloodshade, had stood at Top Level High Immortal Realm Level Three. Three Ghost Kings served beneath him, each High Immortal Realm Level One, and even his Nine Grand Nether Envoys were all Top Level Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Nine.

There were three thousand disciples in the palace, and even the lowest-ranked among them had reached Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Five.

Ten thousand years ago, the sect sealed its gates and vanished. Some claimed an internal strife destroyed them; others whispered they'd found a path to a higher cosmos and simply left this world behind.

Unthinkable as it seemed, the dread silhouette of the Ninefold Nether Palace— banished from living memory—rose again in that very moment, at that very place.

Its chain of obsidian halls, each vast as a fortress, shuddered, tore itself loose from ancient bedrock, and drifted upward on a tide of black mist. Then, like a leviathan changing course, the entire floating citadel pivoted and began to glide toward the distant headquarters of Malevolent Path Hall.

"D-Do they mean to swear allegiance to Malevolent Path Hall?" someone shouted.

"That old devil Morven Bloodshade is said to have less than a hundred years of life left..."

"In that case, Malevolent Path Hall's offer of eternal life must look like the one straw left for him to grasp."

"If even the Ninefold Nether Palace bows, who in level twelve can still oppose Malevolent Path Hall?"

Panic raced through the realm like a wildfire driven by dry wind.

Every faction that had been content to wait and watch suddenly found its seat too hot to remain.

"Hurry! Gather every costly tribute we possess and set out for Malevolent Path Hall at once!"

"The Ninefold Nether Palace has already surrendered, so what are we still waiting for? Do you want to stay here and die?"

"Hesitate, and someone else will steal all the credit!"

Soon, streaks of colored light slashed across the skies of level twelve, all converging on the Wailing Soul Plains.

Among them flew recluses who had hidden for thousands, even tens of thousands of years. Needless to say, they had smashed their own sealed sanctums for a single chance at unending life.

Around the outer perimeter of the Wailing Soul Plains, early defectors to Malevolent Path Hall shook with excitement, bodies literally trembling.

"It's the Ninefold Nether Palace! Look, even they have arrived!"

"We pledged our allegiance first. That makes us elders in the new order!"

"Glory to Mr. Vayne! Long live the Door of Reincarnation!"

Deep within the very heart of the floating palace complex, silence reigned inside the central black hall.

An ancient figure sat unmoving upon a throne carved from bleached bone. He wore flowing robes the color of midnight, and his skin had shriveled to the parchment hue of a desiccated corpse.

Hollow eye sockets housed pupils of absolute black-twin tunnels opening into the depths of hell itself.

Viscous demonic aura coiled around him. Each breath he drew warped the surrounding air as though reality objected to his existence.

This was Morven Bloodshade, also known as Netherlord Bloodshade, the dreaded master of the Ninefold Nether Palace.

A pallid young man in a plain black robe stepped forward and bowed low. "Great Elder Bloodshade, Malevolent Path Hall lies just ahead. Mr. Vayne himself waits outside to receive us."

Morven's eyelids lifted. A flicker of scorn rippled through the abyssal darkness of his gaze.

"Immortality? Resurrection? Hmph-pretty lies to snare fools. Yet the Door of Reincarnation does hold a trace of the Laws of Reincarnation. If I can get it, I might shatter my fetters and steal myself another thousand years."

He rose. At his movement, the robe billowed although no wind stirred.

"Come. Let us meet this Malcolm Vayne—and pray he knows his place."

Thunder cracked across the Wailing

Soul Plains as a colossal palace wrought from night-black stone descended through swirling indigo clouds. The spires of the Ninefold Nether Palace gouged the sky itself casting lurching shadows over a thousand watching cultivators.

Malcolm strode forward across the bone-white dust. At the palace gate, Morven emerged, robes of deep crimson dragging like spilled ink. Under the weight of countless eyes, the two men halted an arm's length apart—and smiled.

Malcolm's smile was thin, glacial, already calculating the next move. Morven's, by contrast, blazed with feverish greed, as though every soul present were seasoned meat laid upon his plate.

But at that moment, all who had pledged their allegiance were quietly happy with the decision they made.

"Even the Ninefold Nether Palace has come. We made the right decision!"

"Malevolent Path Hall will rule all of level twelve!"

"We will all attain immortality!"

Frenzied shouts slammed together, rose in waves, and roared up to the clouds until the very air trembled with fanatic faith.

Back at Five-Element Range, Jared stood on the tiled crown of the Five-Element Grand Hall.

The scarlet dawn painted his silhouette as he stared east, where a pillar of inky demonic aura clawed into the heavens. Dragonslayer Sword quivered in his grip, hungry for blood.

Behind him, the top echelons of the Anti-Demon Alliance-Aurelian, Blaine, Oswald, Vermilion Demon Lord, Gerald, and Winslow-gathered, each wearing a solemn expression.

"Ninefold Nether Palace... Morven Bloodshade..." Blaine muttered. "Ten millennia ago, that fiend could duel a High Immortal Realm Level Four. His lifespan may be running out, but who knows how strong he is now?"

"With the palace's full strength pledged, Malcolm Vayne now commands at least six High Immortal Realm cultivators. And us? We only have three," Aurelian said dejectedly.

Jared offered no reply.

He closed his eyes and let the warmth of the five-colored sigil seared into the back of his hand seep inward. Deep in his core, the Origin Star revolved, slow and solemn as a tide-pulled moon.

When he opened his eyes again, terror had no place there-only a fathomless calm that rolled outward and hushed the hall.

Originally, the Anti-Demon Alliance

was already facing a tough fight against Malevolent Path Hall, which had Malcolm and the Soul-Devouring Puppet-both at Top Level High Immortal Realm plus a Soul-Subduing Puppet General and other puppets. The outcome was anything but certain.

Now, four more High Immortals from Ninefold Nether Palace had appeared behind him, led by a powerful being like Morven.

In a single stroke, the balance had toppled.

A while later, after the sect leaders had returned to their respective sects, the bronze doors to the Five-Element Sect suddenly burst open.

A beastmaster from Myriad Beast Valley staggered in, armor dented, one arm clamped around a bleeding Thunderwing Golden Eagle. "Sir! Urgent message from Mr. Leedom!" he said as he thrust forward a cracked beast fang token, According to Mr Leedom, seventeen mid-sized sects have defected to

Malevolent Path Hall. Six of their patriarchs are Top Level Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Nine, whose

lifespans are nearly spent. They... They all believed the lie that the Door of Reincarnation would save them!"