

A Warrior Undefeatable 5951-5960

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"Then... we go together! Kill him completely!" Morven rasped, voice serrated from rage and loss.

Masks stripped away, Malcolm and Morven hurled themselves at Jared, unleashing every hidden reserve they still possessed.

The move smelled of finality; no feint, no mercy-only a single, perfect checkmate speeding toward a dying opponent.

"Protect Jared!" Aurelian's command burst out, raw enough to shred his throat.

The name tore from him so violently that the very air warped around the phonemes. Urgency twisted his voice into something feral.

At once, Elders from all five branches of the Five-Element Sect leapt forward, forming a battered wall of bodies between Jared and the approaching titans.

"Disciples of Metal Branch, hear me Celestial Metal Sword Array, Myriad Swords Return!" Ferrum thundered.

His beard and hair stood on end as he flung out his life-bound treasure, the Celestial Metal Sword.

The golden blade split once, then again, doubling and redoubling until the sky glittered with innumerable reflections, each locking into an airtight formation rushing for Morven.

Every phantom sword carried an edge so acute it seemed to peel sound itself, carving faint scars in the atmosphere.

The technique devoured a century of cultivation each time it was cast, yet Ferrum did not hesitate; consequence could wait, survival could not.

Woodric's voice cut through the clangor: "Azurewood Cage-Everlasting Rebirth!" Ferrum watched the elder's fingers weave faster than thought, his palms spilling emerald light that stung Ferrum's eyes.

Bar-thick vines punched out of the cracked earth, every barb tipped with a slick, poisonous gleam that made Ferrum's stomach clench.

He could almost feel the pulse inside the vines—Woodric was feeding them his own lifespan.

Every whip of green cost the old man another heartbeat, and Ferrum hated how clearly he knew it.

Aquilus, Pyre, and Terran surged forward beside him, each gathering the power of their branch until the air trembled like a drumskin.

From Aquilus's sleeves burst nine serpentine torrents, scaled in liquid sapphire, their roars hammering at Ferrum's ribs.

Pyre let himself burn away; what remained was a walking pyre so bright the surrounding air caught fire in his footsteps.

Terran sank into the ground; an instant later a colossus of rock rose, a hundred-yard silhouette that blocked out the sun.

Five elders at the pinnacle of the Heavenly Immortal Realm stood shoulder to shoulder.

Their combined fury should have sent any ordinary High Immortal retreating into the clouds Ferrum believed that a moment ago.

But belief buckled when he lifted his gaze to Morven and Malcolm.

The two stood as the highest devils of level twelve; legends whispered that heaven itself blinked when they moved.

Morven's voice cracked like thunder: "Move."

He did not even spare Ferrum's sword sea a glance; a lazy flick of his wrist said all the contempt words could not.

A tide of Ninefold Nether Demonic Aura unfurled, a hundred yards wide, blacker than midnight ink, roaring straight at them.

The wave met his thousand sword phantoms.

Steel illusions shattered like brittle parchment.

The real blade—his Celestial Metal Sword—caught the black tide, drank it, and went dim.

A single crack ran down the spine, then another, until the hilt sagged in his grip.

It snapped with a dry, mocking click.

Blood exploded from his lips before the sound even registered.

The backlash of a broken life-bound weapon tore through his channels, hurling him backward.

Rock faces rushed up like a closing door.

Impact stole sound, sight, breath.

For an instant he wasn't sure if the mountain or his ribs shattered louder.

Through the red fog of pain, Ferrum felt rather than saw Malcolm's answer—a brutality stripped of even theatrics.

The devil did not lift a hand; an impatient snort was the only courtesy he spared Woodric's vines.

Gray-white blades of reincarnation aura spun around him, a quiet mill that minced the impossible vines to powder in a breath.

Across the field, Woodric staggered; his hair drained from black to ash, skin folding into sudden centuries.

Each snapped vine stole another year from the man.

Aquilus's, Pyre's, Terran's assaults collapsed almost as quickly.

Morven reached through mist and crushed the first water dragon; the other eight burst with it, drowning the sky in harmless spray.

Malcolm's aura smothered Pyre, flames snuffing out with a scream and the smell of burnt flesh.

The stone giant tried to shield him;

twin strikes from devil and demon

turned it into an ave

and

somewhere beneath the debts

Terran's lungs failed.

Five pinnacle elders-Ferrum realized—had not lasted even the span of a single breath.

He tasted iron on his tongue.

The gulf between their power felt wider than the sky.

"An ant dares block my path?"

Morven's sneer cracked through the smoke and straight into Jared's ringing ears.

A low hiss answered the insult as the air itself recoiled.

In Morven's outstretched palm, Ninefold Nether Demonic Aura thickened, folding into a black claw big enough to swallow the sun.

Hooked fingers sprouted from that darkness, each tip burning with eerie green fire.

The claw swung down, heavy with the promise of ruin, and Jared could only watch it fall.

Even at his peak he doubted he could have met that blow head-on.

Broken ribs and slick blood now made the thought almost laughable.

Death drifted closer than his next breath, warm and certain.

Then, in the breath before impact, the world seemed to pause.

"Vmmm-"

The air trembled like a plucked wire.

A wall of crimson-gold fire erupted out of nothing, planting itself between Jared and the descending claw.

Only three feet thick, the barrier looked solid as crystal and twice as merciless.

Ancient flame sigils flowed across its surface, and the heat bent the air into ripples.

The claw crashed into the wall with a shriek of metal on metal.

Sparks burst, but the barrier did not give.

Through the rolling embers, Gerald stepped forward, as though walking out of the fire's own heart.

Usually mute, the old master now blazed from hair to robe, a living statue of flame and resolve.

His eyes held no fear, no doubt—only the calm of a man who had already crossed the line between life and death.

"If you want him, you go through me first."

The words were soft, yet each syllable landed in Jared's chest like a hammer.

"Gerald, you're courting death!"

Malcolm's snarl slashed across the battlefield.

Numb gray light pooled in Malcolm's grip, shaping itself into a spear three stories long.

Faces twisted in agony writhed along its shaft while the tip gleamed with chill intent.

The weapon moved without sound, like a thought made iron.

Jared felt it cage Gerald's very spirit, leaving the older man nowhere to step, nowhere to hide.

"Then... we die together."

Gerald's laugh surfaced, low and sudden, as though the choice had lightened him.

The smile that followed held release, acceptance, and a quiet hope he aimed toward the bleeding youth behind him.

His fingers wove an archaic seal few alive could name, forming the mark before his chest.

Flames burst outward, crimson-gold giving way to pure gold, then to a searing white that swallowed every other hue.

Heat climbed in vicious, breath-snatching waves.

The air thickened until every breath rasped like glass dust.

Jared

into

and the world burst

pillars, stone floors melting crawling streams of lava. Content"

Pill scarlet sky, wit

Even space warped, warbling with brittle pops that reminded him office cracking under a spring thaw, only now the cracking came from overheated air content

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"Earthfire True Scripture—ultimate forbidden art, True Flame Scorches the

Heavens, Sun Incarnation!" Gerald's roar rolled across the ruin like liquid thunder; every syllable hissed, spat, and curled upward as though the words themselves caught fire.

"Ancestor, no!" Jared's throat shredded itself on the plea; blood-flecked spit mixed with tears that burned hotter than the air.

He lunged a step, knees wobbling, and knew even as he moved that he would never reach Gerald in time.

The title of that technique pulsed through Jared's memory—last line of the Scripture, the page everyone treated as legend.

Burn away flesh, spirit, and every sliver of cultivation; trade an entire lifetime for a single, god-breaking blaze.

When the fire spent itself, nothing remained—not ashes, not a soul to wander.

The thought arrived alongside the sight: too late.

Gerald stood inside a pillar of white fire so bright Jared's eyes watered red. Cloth vanished first, fluttering into sparks. Then skin, muscle, bone—each layer dripping away like wax on an invisible candle.

The roar of the blaze swallowed every other sound until Jared could no longer hear his own heartbeat.

But the fire did not lash outward. It tilted, curious, then surged toward him, a tidal river of molten light.

Heat slammed into his chest first, then broke every dam inside him. Earthfire True Flame tangled with his ragged chaotic celestial energy, with the fragments of five-element power, with the stubborn roar of his Golden Dragon blood.

The collision hurt worse than the wounds already killing him, yet he felt something mighty and unfamiliar unfolding beneath the agony.

"Kid... live." The words dropped straight into Jared's mind, no louder than a whisper, yet heavy enough to bend his knees.

"Carry my share of living."

"Earthfire Pavilion's future is yours now."

Each promise hammered deeper than a command; they felt like parts of Gerald's soul welding themselves to Jared's spine.

The voice ebbed, pulled away by the blaze.

Where Gerald had stood, nothing lingered-not a scorch mark, not even a curl of smoke.

An era ended in silence more absolute than any mourning bell.

Inside him, power convulsed-vast, rolling, unstoppable.

It was not merely energy flooding veins; it was every principle of fire sharpening, rising, rewriting what his body understood as possible.

Earthfire True Essence, the distillation of Gerald's lifetime, crashed through broken meridians, tearing weaknesses apart so stronger forms could bloom.

Strength followed pain, and the pain was endless.

Heat pulsed through Jared's chest, knitting shredded organs, soldering splintered ribs. Deeper still, the incoming force brushed his own chaotic celestial energy, his five-element power, and the dormant Golden Dragon Bloodline, making them vibrate like touched harp strings.

Inside the dantian's dark vault, the nearly shattered Origin Star wobbled like cracked glass, then steadied as Earthfire True Essence drenched it-thick, molten, and reassuring, as though magma had turned into a healer's hand.

Bright veins raced across the fractures, stitching themselves shut. Dull shimmer brightened to silver, then burst toward a brilliance so keen he almost flinched from a light that existed only inside him.

Bands of gold, green, blue, scarlet, and ocher rolled over the star's surface, each hue a living current trying to speak its own language through color.

Within the core, a hazy swirl of primal mist chased itself in tightening circles, waiting for permission to erupt.

Outside, red-gold Earthfire True Flame licked the star like a patient forge, heat pressing outward as though it wanted to sculpt the darkness into armor.

A thread of almost-silent draconic song drifted up from the star's deepest chamber, the Golden Dragon Bloodline stretching in its sleep, beginning to remember its own name.

The four powers—each once stubbornly separate—slowly leaned toward one another, coaxed by Gerald's life-for-life offering. His fading heartbeat echoed in the heat, insisting they learn to breathe together.

He couldn't dam the sound. Aaah—! ripped from his throat, raw and involuntary.

His neck arched; he threw the cry upward, as if the ceiling of the cavern might answer or at least witness the pain hidden inside the power.

This was no knife wound; it was creation in progress, bone and sinew arguing with a flood too big for them.

He felt every cell split, reconsider itself, and solder back stronger. Meridians stretched like wires pulled taut, then thickened, iron replacing twine. Even his spirit tightened, grains packing into steel.

His breath became a wind tunnel, each exhale louder, the pressure stacking higher and higher inside the chamber of his chest.

The invisible wall that had caged him at the top of Level Four tore like wet paper, fragments dissolving before they hit the floor.

Power settled for half a heartbeat, announcing Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Five with the certainty of sunrise.

But the surge only crouched, gathering for another leap.

Gerald's gift, diminished by age yet still drawn from a High Immortal's

Jared's own cup-sized vessel, even a third of that sea felt endless.

ocean kept pouring. esa

The tide lifted him through the middle waters of Level Five, swept him past its far reefs, then deposited him on the very edge of its final shore.

A thunderous boom echoed inside and out, as though mountains were slamming doors.

Another barricade, one he hadn't even known existed, shattered under that sound.

The flood receded, leaving him at the very crown of Level Five—one slender breath from six.

Yet he sensed the statistics meant nothing.

The true evolution lay in how the four forces now answered a single command, their merged essence cleaner, stranger, and entirely his.

Jared uncurled, rising to his feet, testing new balance that felt lighter and heavier at once.

The skin that had been a map of cuts was smooth again, flawless as untouched jade.

He felt the night wind creep through the rents in his clothes. Each ragged flap brushed skin that shone like polished stone, and beneath that pale surface four muted colors pulsed, weaving over one another in slow, restless flashes.

He lifted his right hand into the starlight.

Beside the familiar five-hued sigil on the backs of his fingers, a new brand unfurled—pure molten gold shaped like an ascending flame.

The two emblems slipped around each other, thread over thread, until they formed a single pattern whose curves felt older than language.

Dragonslayer Sword trembled somewhere beyond his vision, then sang—a thin, hungry note that rippled across the ruined plain.

Before the echo faded, the blade streaked back to his palm and settled there with the eagerness of a hawk returning to wrist and leather.

Gray streams of primordial mist curled along the steel.

Five shifting colors braided through the haze; sparks of earth-fed flame licked the edges; behind them all, a pale gold dragon-shadow flickered in and out of being.

The powers did not struggle—they folded into one another, stretched, and snapped tight, becoming a single, four-colored blade of that towered three hundred feet above the ground.

He kept the blade suspended, letting it vibrate rather than fly.

Even restrained, its presence warped the night; air buckled, stitched itself, and tore again in ragged loops, as though the sky had grown too thin to bear the weight of the sword.

"Morven... Malcolm..."

The words dropped from his tongue without tremor, quiet enough that the nearest flames scarcely shivered.

He lifted his eyes toward the two men who had lured Gerald to his death.

No rage, no grief—only the distant chill one feels while watching ants scatter across a stone.

"This stroke... is his funeral gift."

The sentence ended; the sword aura did not wait.

It lunged forward like a tide that had finally found a breach in the seawall.

For a single heartbeat, the battlefield locked in place—ash mid-air, blood mid-drip, every scream caught behind its own teeth.

Jared felt viscosity where there should have been wind, as though the very seconds had turned to resin around him.

The blade of light seemed unhurried, yet every yard between vanished the moment his focus touched it.

Color drained from Morven's and Malcolm's faces, leaving both the gray of unlit ashes.

Seasoned reflexes tilted their shoulders before thought could catch up; even so, terror showed in the way their elbows locked, in the tightness of their jaws. "Together-now! Hold it back!"

Black vapors boiled out of his pores, thick as tar, swirling into a shield three yards

deep.

Faces twisted inside the dark surface—hundreds of them, mouths open in soundless, eternal anguish.

Malcolm's own panic flared just as hard.

He hacked three goutts of scarlet essence into the air; each drop etched itself into a rune before sliding into the gray mist around him.

The reincarnation aura blushed dark red, thickening into nine concentric veils that snapped shut before his chest.

Jared recognized the strain in their eyes; they had emptied every secret drawer they owned, gambling everything on these final walls.

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Boom thundered through the field like a stone hammering a vast bell.

Then the blade-light met shield and barrier, not with an explosion but with a sickening hiss, the sound of a hot knife sinking into fat.

In Jared's widened eyes the four-hued arc slid forward as if nothing existed to slow it, parting Morven's black shield and shredding Malcolm's ninefold blood screen.

The shield burst. The screen fractured. Both men vomited blood and were flung hundreds of yards, a bone-deep gash burning across each of them.

Morven's left arm severed at the shoulder; Malcolm's right chest blown straight through, the wound crawling with four hostile forces that would not let the blood clot.

The glowing blade-wind died out, spent.

A pulse of backlash punched Jared's ribs; he coughed up more blood and tasted iron.

Gerald's borrowed fire was vanishing as quickly as it had come. The human body could not hold that fury for long.

That slash had been the last he could pull from empty lungs and shaking arms.

Morven and Malcolm lay wounded yet unbroken.

Malcolm pressed a trembling hand to the ragged hole in his chest.

"He's spent utterly spent! Kill him. Now. This instant!"

Pain twisted their faces, yet both hurled themselves forward again.

They abandoned sorcery; raw muscle and murderous instinct would finish what blood magic could not.

But just then, the air around Jared seemed to pause, waiting.

"Divine Bow!" Jared's roar tore from a throat already full of blood.

Light flared from his storage ring, and an ancient bow shimmered into his grasp.

He had hoped never to show it; displaying a treasure like this invited storms he could not afford.

Yet no trace of pressure leaked from the weapon; it simply existed, as if as old and natural as the sky itself.

"That... that's the Divine Bow?!" Morven's pupils shrank to pinpoints, his voice warping with disbelief.

Jared caught the moment Morven's pupils narrowed to the size of needle tips, his words twisting under the weight of raw shock.

The roar cracked across the battlefield, 'Forget the damn bow-just kill him!' The words slapped Malcolm's ears, raw and desperate.

Shock rippled through Malcolm too, but it only drove the blade-edge thirst in his chest harder, until it vibrated against his ribs like a trapped hornet.

Across the ruin, Jared bellowed, 'Fire!' The single syllable punched the air, loud enough to bruise.

Malcolm's gaze snagged on Jared's frame. The younger man seemed to empty his entire skeleton into the pull of the cord, shoulders trembling as he dragged the Divine Bow to its full, impossible arc.

Something answered that pull. All around, stray shards of malice, the residue of ten thousand dying breaths, peeled from the air and streamed toward the gold limbs of the weapon.

The field was littered with bodies—Malcolm had long since stopped counting—but now every ounce of hate they had died with lifted like gray steam.

It poured into the bowstring, thickening, hardening, until the miasma knit itself into a single, gleaming bolt.

The string thrummed—an iron-throated hum that rattled Malcolm's molars.

It wasn't a sound; it was a storm god shrieking, an ancient thunderhead splitting open inside his skull.

Then time quit. The drip of blood at his elbow, the flutter of ash, even the quake in his lungs everything halted in mid-fall.

Space followed, locking around him like glass cooling on molten sand.

Pressure smothered thought, movement, heartbeat. Malcolm's own pulse felt confiscated by unseen hands.

Helpless, he watched the golden arrow leave the string. It drifted, languid as a falling feather, yet Malcolm knew it outran every faw that had ever governed matter, racing straight för him and Morven.

The void fractured in its wake, lines snapping open with surgical neatness, each black seam bleeding a chill that promised total erasure.

Color abandoned Malcolm's cheeks; even Morven looked ashen, a corpse caught standing.

He could feel it-no, he could taste it-this shot had fastened onto the root of their very souls.

Run, tunnel, vanish into any realm-the arrow would still arrive. The certainty hollowed him out.

The old whispers about the Divine Bow stirred: once a shaft loosed, destiny itself bent to ensure blood.

There was nowhere to run, nothing to hide behind.

Survive by enduring, or not at all.

His throat shredded around the order, 'Together-hold it back!' Terror warped the words into a raw snarl.

Beside him, Morven rammed the last of his Ninefold Nether Demonic Aura into his severed stump; the stuff writhed and birthed a new, oil-black limb.

That limb flew through a string of seals, solidifying into a shield etched with a leering Ninefold Nether Ghostface.

Malcolm went harsher. He bit down,
fuseng three of the soul fangs
anchor
his own spirit-the
every reincarnation chant he'd mastered.

Their explosion spilled pure soul force into his reincarnation aura, stacking before him as a gray-black wall ten yards thick.

The moment Morven's swirling black shield fused with Malcolm's flickering soul-wall, the air tightened around Jared's lungs.

The layered barrier pulsed like a living thing, every throb daring him to believe it was impassable.

He kept the bowstring drawn, tested the tremor in it, and felt a quiet certainty bloom -no wall born of darkness or bone would matter now.

His fingers released. Light erupted, coalescing into a single golden arrow that screamed forward faster than thought.

A thin hiss reached him, high and almost polite, the sound of reality tearing along a razor line.

The note floated through the battlefield, nothing more than a breath, yet every spine flinched at its precision.

Watching it, Jared felt the memory of heat sliding through butter, the hush of a droplet folding into a lake effortless, inevitable.

The golden arrow slipped through

the demonic shield, through the wavering soul-wall, and then straight on, boring a clean tunnel through both chests before vanishing behind. them.

A wet pop followed, as if lungs had clapped together in protest.

Another, uglier burst answered an instant later, the echo almost mocking the first.

Morven and Malcolm doubled forward, vomiting black blood laced with gray shavings of their own organs that splattered against the stone like spoiled ink.

Each man stared at the bowl-sized void yawning in his chest, the edges too smooth to be real.

There was no gush of blood, only a shimmering absence; flesh, bone, even the space itself had been erased, as though the arrow had stolen the idea of them.

Morven lowered his gaze to that impossible hole, night-black eyes swimming with disbelief that looked almost childlike.

Deep inside, he could feel the root of his Ninefold Nether Demonic Technique splinter, half of a millennium's labor undone in the span of a heartbeat.

And the divine force clinging to the wound kept gnawing, patient and unstoppable, sealing every path his flesh might take toward healing.

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Malcolm swayed beside him, the same arrow-made emptiness flickering in his chest like a doorway to nowhere.

His reincarnation aura, usually stitching wounds before blood could fall, found no purchase and slid away uselessly.

The anti-magic principle woven into the Divine Arrow pried at his foundation of rebirth, widening the hole by the second.

They were alive, technically, but the fight had been stripped from both of them as cleanly as their flesh.

Breathing stayed possible; thinking already felt extravagant.

The arrow never slowed. It disappeared into the distant horizon, leaving behind a ragged seam in the sky that refused to close.

Silence collapsed over the battlefield.

A terrible, absolute silence.

Every gaze slid toward Jared, toward the Divine Bow cooling in his hands, its gold already fading to plain, ancient wood.

Jared's gaze snagged on the two High-Immortal cultivators he had just skewered. Both chests gaped, ribs jutting outward, their breaths thin as spider silk.

Only then did he dare focus on the arrow itself—its black shaft still quivered in midair, humming with a power that felt far too large for any mortal hand.

An ache of silence stretched over the field until it tore under a wall of screams from the Malevolent Path ranks.

"Hall Master is down! Pull back-retreat!" The black-robed elder's shriek rose sharp, fear bending the pitch into something almost childlike.

"Shield the Ancestor! Get the Ancestor out!" dozens of Ninefold Nether voices cracked in panicked unison.

Robes and boots churned mud as disciples trampled toward the crater where Morven's body still bled shadow.

The coalition's backbone snapped.

Order dissolved into raw instinct.

Men who had bragged minutes earlier now bolted like feral dogs, clawing and slicing at comrades just to seize open ground.

Blood sprayed because someone chose the wrong direction to run.

Alliance fighters tensed to pursue, but Jared rasped through blood-stiff lips, "Don't... chase... We withdraw too."

He knew why better than anyone.

The Divine Bow granted miracles and demanded limbs.

His right arm already felt borrowed, cut off from the rest of him, fingers frozen in the shape of the draw.

Inside his core the Origin Star faded to dull ember, fresh cracks mapping its surface.

Worse, the bow had scooped spirit from his skull until thoughts fluttered like torn flags.

Vision kept blacking out at the edges; the ringing in his ears felt permanent.

One wobble, and he would be unconscious.

Their side bled, too.

Gerald had vanished in magma and flame.

Winslow lay cooling beneath shattered talismans.

Three of the Five-Branch Elders breathed through pain; two more could barely stand.

Heavenly Sword Pavilion mourned two sages and a mountain of young blades.

Beasts from Myriad Beast Valley carpeted the dirt, their handlers scattered among them.

If they kept swinging, victory would taste like ruin.

And then who would guard the realm tomorrow?

"Heed Jared-fall back!" Aurelian barked, eyes webbed with blood, voice rasping like bellows scraped by rust.

The Sect Master's shoulders twitched toward the smoldering treeline, as if muscles alone could drag him after the fleeing enemy.

Jared felt the same iron tug-slash them down, grind them into dust, buy silence for the brothers who would never stand again.

Yet duty clamped down on the man like a collar.

Jared watched him inhale once, steady, choosing the breathing sons of the sect over the dead who could no longer hear him.

Blaine's lone arm trembled on his knee; Oswald's eyes flared but never blinked.

Neither man liked surrendering ground, yet the shape of the moment offered no other door.

The Three-Headed Flame Lion King sagged beside Blaine, three tongues of fire guttering like candles drowned in wax.

Blood soaked the stump where his right arm should have been; every heartbeat felt like someone kicking the cork out of a wine jar.

One more clash and both master and beast would simply stop moving.

Oswald lifted his iron sword; the blade looked like frozen mud crazed with drought- lines, ready to peel away at a breath.

Inside him, sword-intent flickered, a candle fed on its own wick, flames shorter with every draw.

"Fall back!" Blaine and Oswald shouted, voices striking the air together like twin gongs.

Order rippled through the ravaged ranks; bodies pivoted, not toward flight but toward survival.

Lines that had charged an hour ago now folded with disciplined quiet moving as though each heartbeat

carried a glass of water they dared. not spill content belongs to

The gravely wounded were hoisted first, slung across spare shoulders or makeshift

stretchers woven from shattered spears.

Those still walking leaned into one another, boots scraping ash.

The fallen received only a hurried mound of earth, no marker, no time.

Jared's knees threatened to fold, and the Vermilion Demon Lord slipped an arm beneath his ribs, keeping him upright.

At the edge of withdrawal he turned, forcing one final look at the ground they were abandoning.

Hills of bodies glistened under a skim of settling smoke; severed limbs poked from the heaps like driftwood after a storm.

The plains beyond were nothing but scorched mud, stretching red and black for what felt like forever.

The blood of Gerald and Winslow had already drunk its way into the soil, merging with countless other streams until the earth itself booked wounded.

Every footprint Jared left filled with dark red moisture, as though the ground were weeping up at him.

The wind carried a thin, uneven keening-alive voices mourning voices gone silent.

The sound snagged on Jared's ribs more cruelly than any blade he had met that

day.

The air tasted of pennies and

charcoal, laced with the copper tang of reincarnation aura and the sulfur rotor Ninefold Nether Demonic Aura.

Together they brewed a sickness that wanted to crawl down his throat and set up a grave inside him.

He wrapped both hands around the Divine Bow. The wood felt dead cold.

Still, beneath that chill he sensed a pulse, hot and furious, begging to be loosed.

That heartbeat was Gerald's and Winslow's, the ranks who had fallen beside them,

the stubborn blood of everyone too angry to pass on.

It surged through the bow now, looking for a hand willing to draw.

"Morven... Malcolm..." The names scraped out, each syllable grated between clenched teeth.

Every word tasted of rusted iron, of oaths he could never unsay.

He felt them brand the roof of his mouth, glowing with hatred brighter than any spell

he knew.

"Today's debt will return a hundredfold," he whispered to the blood-soaked earth.

"The day I come back will be the day you end." His voice cracked, but the vow did

not.

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Three days later, eighty thousand li northwest along the Five-Element Range, a veil of natural mists hid a narrow valley.

The place belonged to an old secret realm of the Five-Element Sect, its entrance tucked behind a roaring waterfall.

Caverns spread wide beyond the curtain, soaked in dense spirit energy and guarded by layers of untouched formations.

Seclusion here felt absolute.

The survivors of all three sects now pressed themselves into that refuge, breaths shallow even when no danger stirred.

Deep inside the gorge, an impromptu cave dwelling had been carved from the stone wall.

Jared sat cross-legged within, skin the color of parchment, breath so thin it barely fogged the cool air.

Spirit threads flickered around him, but his hold on them looked like a frayed knot slipping under rain.

He had stripped Jared to the waist so the lamplight could reach every gash. Cuts crisscrossed the man's chest and flanks, but the one that kept drawing Aurelian's gaze was the fist-sized hole just left of the sternum.

The Chaos Return-to-Void Pearl had punched it there, and three days of frantic tending had done little more than clot the rim. Inside, raw chaotic currents still churned, gnawing at flesh that tried to knit.

The grotto reeked of crushed petals, burnt roots, and something metallic. He had emptied nearly every sacred remedy the Five-Element Sect possessed onto the silk mats: salves that flickered like embers, pills that tingled cold as river stone.

Now a ragged crescent of jade vials crowded Jared's side. Their contents were already gone, the medicinal warmth moving through his damaged meridians, weaving with the man's own chaotic celestial energy in a fragile truce.

Aurelian forced himself out of the grotto. The air beyond tasted like dust and old smoke. In the rough stone pavilion, Oswald, Blaine, the Vermilion Demon Lord, and

a handful of other chiefs waited, each wearing the same grave stillness.

His throat rasped.

"The casualty report... it's finished." The words scraped out as though he had swallowed gravel.

He lifted the thin jade slip; weak light pulsed across its face, rows of names swimming like ghosts beneath shallow water.

Every line he skimmed leached more color from his cheeks. By the third column his knuckles trembled, the slip clicking softly against his nails.

"Five-Element Sect." He forced a breath that hurt his ribs.

Disciples: three thousand two hundred. Dead: one thousand two hundred thirty- seven. Elder or enforcer above Level Eight: forty-eight fallen. Seriously wounded: eight hundred fifty-six. Minor injuries... almost everyone else.

"Among the Five-Branch Elders-Ferrum's life-weapon destroyed, soul maimed, still unconscious; Woodric's vitality burned, at least five hundred years of life lost; Aquilus, Pyre, Terran: lighter wounds, but half a year before they lift a blade again."

Silence sealed the pavilion like wax.

Leaves hissed in the mountain wind; somewhere down-slope a muffled sob cut the stillness.

Oswald's voice, usually knife-sharp, barely reached Aurelian. "Heavenly Sword Pavilion."

"Sword cultivators: nine hundred. Dead: three hundred twelve. Two sword elders gone, forty-six elite disciples lost. Two hundred seven gravely hurt; half the rest carry wounds. My Lone Peak Sword... shattered."

He lifted only the hilt, the rest of the blade long since turned to glittering dust.

He had nursed that weapon for ten millennia. Sword and soul were meant to perish together; the sword had kept its half of the pact, leaving Oswald's foundation cracked and bleeding.

Blaine cleared a throat that sounded full of gravel. "Myriad Beast Valley."

The once-booming Beast King stooped as if an invisible saddle weighed him down; grey threaded his beard where yesterday there had been none.

"Spirit beasts: nine thousand. Dead: four thousand three hundred. Thunderwing Golden Eagle King slain, Ironback Earth Dragon King critical, Gale Wolf King lost a leg. Beastmasters: four hundred; one hundred eighty-seven dead. All three Beast- Taming Grandmasters... gone."

"My own partner, the Three-Headed Flame Lion King... he's fading."

The last word cracked, half breath, half sob.

Everyone knew the lion was more than a mount; it had shared Blaine's hunts, his winters, his triumphs for nearly ten millennia.

Now, across the ravine, the once-roaring monarch lay in a shadowed cave. Two heads hung lifeless; the third coughed scarlet foam into the dust.

Silence returned, heavier than before.

Even the Vermilion Demon Lord, slouched against a pillar, let his crimson eyes dull with exhaustion.

Aurelian pressed his palm against the crusted blood along his ribs. The pain was nothing compared with the hollowness yawning inside him. Around the courtyard the lantern smoke drifted upward, but he could not find a single shape that resembled hope.

He drew a shaky breath. "Gerald has fallen, Winslow is dead..." The names tasted like ash. "We also lost five of our best Azure Firmament

swordsmen, elder adepts of hol nexto

Five

Elements Sect masters from Beast Valley. All of them, Level Nine, gone. Meanwhile Morven and Malcolm still breathe. Two of Ninefold Nether Palace's ghost kings are intact, and at least five elders of Malevolent

Path Hall remain unbroken. Once their wounds knit..." He let the sentence wither.

He tasted the fear spreading through the pavilion. He had not voiced the ending, yet every face around the stone table turned the same sick gray, as though each of them had supplied it in their own mind.

Malevolent Path Hall would come back whole, hounds set loose. When that day arrived they would sweep the last scraps of the alliance into the dust and call it mercy.

And in the shape the alliance lay now, Aurelian could not imagine a single blade raised against them.

A harsh whisper cut through the gloom. "That leaves one question," Oswald said, his poise so brittle it rang like glass.

"What now? Hide here forever? Malevolent Path Hall will flip every level of heaven to find us. When they do, we vanish."

The words screeched to a halt and died. The pavilion breathed nothing but wind and the slow drip of blood from unseen wounds.

Silence this time lodged deeper, like a blade that refused to be pulled free.

Aurelian forced the words out, every syllable tasting of surrender. "Right now, we burrow into the dark. We hide."

"Hide?" Blaine let out a laugh too thin to be humor. "For how long? A month? Three? A year?" As the numbers fell from Blaine's lips, they felt like milestones on a road that led nowhere.

Aurelian's eyelids fluttered shut; speaking suddenly wore him like armor two sizes too heavy. "As long as we must," he said. "At least until young Jared mends. He is the fast wick we have." He drew a breath that rattled. "Beyond that," he added, forcing his gaze up, "We find whoever still remembers justice. Level Twelve is vast. Someone,

somewhere, has not knelt to

Malevolent Path Hall. We bind

ourselves together and maybe-just maybe we breathe again."

Vermilion Demon Lord's voice rolled like distant thunder. "One more thing. We expose the Door of Reincarnation for what it is. Let the world see that 'eternity' means forging the living into puppets. Rot will eat Malevolent Path Hall from the inside."

"Easy words," Oswald muttered. He

swept a glare over the table. "After

this battle,

every corner of Level Twelve has heard the tale-Lord of Reincarnation raised tens of thousands with a flick of his hand. People now believe Malevolent Path Hall carries heaven's own seal. Why would they listen to the ruin gathered here?"

The silence folded back over them, thicker than before, as if even the air had decided their plans were fantasy.

Inside the cavern, Jared's eyelids parted. Torchlight crawled across the ceiling like tired insects. Every word of the council's despair had reached him, syllables traveling through stone to settle in his skull. He knew the shape of the cliff beneath their feet. A cliff with no ledge.

The hopelessness pressed in, thick as wet stone, offering no crack of light.

Yet Jared's gaze held no surrender.

A glacial calm pooled behind his eyes, fused with a do-or-die resolve that felt as final as snapping the last bridge behind him.

He raised his right hand, letting torchlight glide across the crossing sigils burned into the skin.

Five hues shimmered-metal, wood, water, fire, earth-braided with a thread of crimson molten core.

Deep in his abdomen, the dim Origin Star still turned, slow but stubborn, each rotation nudging a spark through his meridians.

"One month," he rasped, the words scraping out like gravel.

"Give me one month..."

"Morven, Malcolm, Lord of Reincarnation—"

"When I walk out, your worlds will burn."

Outside the window, night thickened until the ridgelines dissolved into one bruise of darkness.

Inside the valley, grief and dread pooled like low clouds, suffocating anything that tried to breathe hope.

A Warrior Undefeatable

Jared chose the deepest niche in the gorge—a natural stone chamber hiding behind a slit no wider than his shoulders.

Veins of pale mineral curled along the walls, muffling spiritual probes like purpose-made seals.

"Senior, stand guard here. No one interrupts me."

He pitched the request to the towering Vermilion Demon Lord who stalked in after him.

He would not let word of the Pentacarna Tower slip; greed moved faster than gossip.

A relic that bent time itself-any cultivator would covet that more than blood or treasure.

Time was the only coin none of them could mint.

Crimson pupils blazed as the Demon Lord nodded once, heavy as a verdict. "Relax. With me here, not even a fly will slip inside. Heal in peace."

Jared wasted no more words; he turned and disappeared into the cave's throat. Once the passage pinched into darkness, he brushed simple wards across the stone, weaving silence and shielding into the air.

He sat cross-legged, drew one deep breath, and let a muted flash bloom in his palm -the antique Pentacarna Tower.

A single thought and the tower drank him in; the chamber vanished, replaced by the vast interior worlds of the artifact.

Three months inside the tower skimmed by while the outside would see only one day.

That crooked ratio was his lone trump card-the promise that a single month of seclusion could grow sharp enough to cut down Morven and Malcolm alike.

A single month-that was all he planned to give them. In that span, those two would still be crawling, nowhere near whole.

Inside the tower, space stretched pale and endless, veiled in a slow swirl of chaotic aura that nipped at his skin like icy smoke.

Jared stepped to the silent center, dumping Aurelian's cache of spirit stones, pills, and battle spoils that still pulsed with captured power.

Rather than feed immediately, he pressed his palms together and looked inward, letting the outside hush.

Within his dantian, the Origin Star-fused from chaos, the five elements, earth-fire, and golden dragon force-hung dull and cracked, its sluggish spin threatening to grind to a halt.

Elsewhere the meridians looked like a riverbed baked and split by drought; backlash from the Divine Bow still tore at those fissures while chaotic turbulence gnawed the wound in his chest.

Time's knife was at his throat; hesitation would finish him.

A harsh glint cut through his eyes, sharp enough to nick the shadows.

Hand seals snapped into place; he drove the Chaos Immortal Scripture together with Gerald's brutal Nirvana Essence-Forging Art, abandoning every gentle rhythm he had practiced.

A concussive boom rattled the chamber.

The piled stones bled dry in an instant, collapsing into cold, useless powder that drifted around his boots.

Elixirs dissolved on his tongue, turning into a roaring flood that slammed into every corridor of flesh.

A muffled groan leaked out; heat flashed across his face, and thin cracks burst open along his skin, weeping red.

He seized the berserk tide, ramming it through clogged meridians like a mad smith hammering shattered bridges back together and wider.

Pain fired through him.

Worse than any slash he had taken in the last battle, it swallowed thought, breath, memory.

The agony seemed to begin inside his spirit and peel outward.

He clenched his teeth until they sang, veins bulging across his brow while sweat mixed with blood and soaked the ruined robe.

Chaotic celestial energy and Earthfire True Essence, driven by the Nirvana art, tore him down and rebuilt him in the same breath, a savage self-surgery on his very foundation.

At the same time, he dove his awareness into the wounded Origin Star.

Inside, four colors tangled and clashed-merge, reject, merge again-in a stormy loop.

Gerald's fading strength acted like glue, yet true union would normally need the patience of dripping water.

Patience was a luxury; he

summoned the ancient dragon soul latent in his Golden Dragon

Bloodline, wielding it as hammernet

while Chastic aura became the anvil, battering the four forces toward obedience.

The tower knew no sun, no moon, only the churn of pain and the thin wire of resolve.

His aura flickered at times a candle about to die, at times a volcano splitting its mountain.

A fresh wave of pain ignited beneath Jared's skin, so sharp it stole the breath from his throat.

Before the scream could escape, the agony folded into heat. Veins lit up in four braided colors—crimson, emerald, indigo, gold—roaming under the flesh like live wires.

Each time the marrow shattered, it reformed harder, until the reborn bones carried a misty sheen, half metal, half stone.

Somewhere beyond the sealed chamber, fewer than two weeks had slipped by.

Inside this cocoon of torment, moments stretched and snapped like wet leather, leaving him unsure if the sun still rose at all.

Deep within Malevolent Path Hall, Malcolm kept his eyes fixed on the Reincarnation Altar.

The blood pool lapped against his bare ribs, thick as syrup, warm as fresh slaughter.

Across the basin Morven floated, cross-legged, eyes closed, face an idol carved from hate.

Every rise of the crimson tide carried ghostly whispers, the packed marrow of countless dead pressing against Malcolm's eardrums.

Overhead the phantom Door of Reincarnation hung like a half-seen moon. Pale halos spilled from its threshold, seeping into wounded flesh, knitting cells faster than any elixir.

Pain still burned around the hole that Jared's Divine Bow had punched through his sternum.

Yet under the drifting light and the pool's foul nourishment, that stubborn, law-breaking shard was shrinking, grain by grain.

Breath still rattled, but each exhale carried a thread more strength than the last.

Across the way, Morven's severed limb budded pale tissue, tendons writhing like blind worms until a newborn hand unfurled.

Ninefold Nether Demonic Aura boiled around him, drawing in the pool's resentful spirits the way a kiln gulps air.

Malcolm felt the currents twist, sensed Morven's damaged foundations knitting back together.

Their eyes met for a breath. Nothing passed between them but mirrored hunger and venom.

"Jared... the Divine Bow..." Morven hissed, each word squeezed through clenched teeth. "When I am whole again will tear out his soul, claim that bow, and day it before the Supreme Master:

Fierce gratitude swelled in Malcolm's chest, hotter than the blood around his waist.

"Thank you, Supreme Master," he murmured to the Door. "I will crush the rebels, feed their souls to the eternal cycle."

As if roused by his fervor, the phantom doorway rippled. In its depth a gray vortex turned, vast, ice-indifferent.

A voice rolled out—neither loud nor soft, simply incontrovertible: "Loyalty shall be rewarded."

Three pillars of ash-white light erupted through the gate and speared down onto the altar.

When the glare drained away, three figures stood where the radiance had struck.

They were mannequins shaped like men—skin chalk-pale, eyes the flat gray of old ash, expressions carved clean of emotion.

Yet the force spilling from them slammed against Malcolm's senses: High Immortal Realm, Level Two.

Each pulse mirrored the next, threads of identical reincarnation aura weaving the trio into a silent formation.

"Reincarnation Guardians," the unseen lord pronounced. "They are yours to command—remove every obstacle."

The words carried no warmth, only the flat inevitability of gravity.

Joy crashed through him. He heaved himself from the pool, wounds screaming, and collapsed prostrate on the stone.

"Thank you, Master!" His voice shook so badly the words fractured. "I pledge my life — rebellion will burn, and your light will wash across all twelve heavens."

Morven's gaze clung to the new guardians, awe and greed battling in his newly grown fingers as he bent to the floor beside Malcolm.

The old rumor clung to Jared's memory like burrs: three High Immortal Realm Level

Two puppets had surfaced in Malevolent Path Hall.

If the puppets marched beside the

hall's recovering masters and whatever weapons still lay hidden they could scythe through the alliance's ragged survivors and weld the twelve heavens under one banner.

Chapter 5957

Inside the tower, years had slipped by like silent water, unnoticed except for the extra weight in Jared's bones and the deeper hush in the surrounding chaotic aura.

A breath later, his eyes snapped open, the gesture so sudden that the stillness cracked as though someone had struck a gong in a monastery just before dawn.

Soundless thunder rolled from inside his body, not through air but through the weave of energy itself, rattling the bronze ribs of the Pentacarna Tower.

The chaotic aura that hung inside the tower skittered away from him, coiling against the walls in restless waves, as though the building had suddenly remembered that it could drown.

Light gathered in his pupils, wet and star-deep, and for an instant four muted colors —ash, prism, molten gold, pale gold-flickered across the black like sparks that knew too many secrets.

The ragged hole that once gaped in his chest had sealed without scar; skin lay smooth and luminous, as if glazed porcelain had borrowed the warmth of living flesh.

On the back of his right hand, the intertwined sigils of the five elements and earth- fire showed sharper lines, no longer inked but seemingly baked into bone before he was born.

In his core, the Origin Star spun broader and heavier-one third larger than when he first staggered into the tower—its four colors braiding into a newborn dawn that promised both creation and extinction.

The force leaking from that star already dwarfed the ceiling of a typical Top Level Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Five expert.

His cultivation remained pinned at that visible peak, yet the fusion of the four forces, tempered by a death-and-rebirth crucible, had bent his combat strength into something unmeasured.

Even the backlash from drawing the Divine Bow had faded; the right arm that once trembled now felt eager, almost insulted by the earlier weakness.

"Time's up," he murmured, the words landing softly but carrying the inevitability of a closing gate.

His body blurred, and the next heartbeat placed him outside the Pentacarna Tower's stone threshold.

At the cavern mouth, Vermilion Demon Lord, who had been guarding since Jared entered, felt the shift first and snapped his gaze toward the tower.

Sensing the quiet storm coiled beneath Jared's restrained aura, the demon lord's eyes flared bright.

"You are whole again? No-stronger!" he blurted, disbelief and relief tangling together.

Jared inclined his head, offered no details, and walked with Vermilion Demon Lord toward the stone pavilion that anchored the valley's center.

Aurelian, Blaine, Oswald, and the remaining allies hurried over.

The moment they saw the light in Jared's posture, exhaustion peeled from their faces like winter snow under early sun.

Aurelian stopped closest.

"Jared, how are you feeling?" His voice rushed out, the question shivering on the edge of fear and hope.

"No serious damage remains," Jared said.

The plain statement felt like an iron nail hammered straight through the group's collective dread.

He let his gaze move across them.

Even after a month of rest, hollows still bruised most eyes, and each aura leaked fatigue; few had clawed back half their strength.

"Seniors, comrades, there is one thing." The syllables dropped slow, deliberate, like stones disturbing still water.

Conversation stilled; every gaze fixed on him, waiting for the stone to hit bottom.

"I intend to pay Malevolent Path Hall a visit," Jared said, the calm in his tone somehow louder than any battle cry.

The first shout-sharp, disbelieving-ricocheted through the pavilion and rattled beneath Jared's ribs before he could answer.

A second voice slammed in right after, rough with panic. "You can't," it barked, as though the single command could nail Jared's boots to the flagstones.

Then someone else—maybe Aurelian, maybe Blaine—shouted over them, "Jared, have you lost your mind?!" The question felt less like concern than a fist demanding he retreat.

The whole stone pavilion erupted: boots scraping, blades clacking, wounded throats forcing argument.

The chaos washed over Jared in hot, sour waves.

Aurelian pushed to his feet, blood still crusted at his temple.

"Malevolent Path Hall is locked down, Jared," he warned, voice wobbling yet loud. "Morven and Malcolm may be hurt, but their foundations remain, and the Door of Reincarnation guards them."

Blaine shook his head so hard the silver strands in his beard flashed. "Kid, we hate them as much as you do, but revenge isn't a sprint. Heal, regroup, then strike smart."

Oswald's newly scavenged iron sword trembled in his fist. The usually aloof swordsman growled, "If you're going, I'm going."

Jared lifted a palm, the gesture cutting through the clamor more cleanly than any shout.

"Everyone's wounded, and Malevolent Path Hall knows it," he said, meeting each anxious gaze until they wavered. "That makes now the one moment they won't expect us to move."

"I'm not marching in for a final fight,"

he continued, voice cooling into steel. "scout, and if an opening appears..." The chill in his eyes promised decapitation and chaos bought in blood.

Jared's attention slid to the towering figure cloaked in roiling crimson haze.

"Senior, hold the line here," he said. "When I return, we hunt for the Nine-Orifice

Divine Soul Herb together. Your wish will be honored."

The Vermilion Demon Lord opened his mouth, the brimstone in his breath mixing with unspoken worry. But Jared's resolve burned too bright to argue, and at last the old demon only nodded hard. "Come back alive."

More voices chased him, but Jared was already pivoting toward the gorge mouth, determination carrying him faster than any plea could snag.

A breath hung half-drawn—something in the air shifted, tingling with unreadable intent.

A low metallic hum—"Vmm"—pierced the hush, as though the sky dragged a blade across unseen stone.

Above the valley, the masking labyrinth of mist and rock convulsed, ribbons of light tearing open like ripped canvas.

Through the wound poured two titanic auras—overwhelming, yet curiously absent of malice forcing their way inside as if the heavens had granted them passage.

The alarm erupted from every throat at once: "Enemy attack?!" Terror and training tangled as blades snapped up.

Aurelian's spett-force flared, Blaine's half-mauled war-beast materialized with a pained roar. Oswald's sword light speared skyward and the Demon Lord's shadows bloomed—every soul braced for slaughter.

Jared's heart lurched, but he steadied his breathing, eyes narrowing toward the tearing sky.

The rent in space folded outward, and two figures strolled through as casually as late guests slipping into a feast.

The man in plain grey robes led, scholarly features soft, yet his gaze held oceans and centuries that made Jared feel newly born.

Beside him floated a woman in an unadorned gown, beauty unmarred except for the fragile pallor of long illness; the way she looked at the grey-robed man was dawn learning to smile again.

Their mere presence pressed against bone and spirit alike—power of the High Immortal Realm, and not its threshold but its towering middle floors. Strangest of all, the grey-robed man felt deeper still than Gerald at his peak, as though the sea itself had taken human shape and chosen politeness.

Jared blinked. For a breath the courtyard, the smoke, the raw edges of his nerves froze. Then delight cracked through his chest, hot and unbelievable.

He slashed his hand through the air toward his men. "Hold it! Stand down.

He's with

us!"

A Warrior Undefeatable

He strode across the broken flagstones, pulse hammering louder than his boots.

When he halted before the grey-robed man, his shoulders dropped into a respectful bend, almost a bow that refused to feel servile.

"Mr. Morse! Of all places-why here, why now?"

Shock blurred into gratitude as realization struck; the newcomer was Sidney, the wanderer he had dragged from the Celestial Stairway years ago.

And beside him, alive-truly breathing-stood the wife Jared had begged Mr. Sanders to call back from death.

Sidney's smile was small, almost private, but his gaze swept Jared head to toe as though measuring new dimensions.

In that brief scrutiny Jared caught a flicker-curiosity, maybe mild disbelief.

"Mr. Chance, you remain anything but ordinary. In mere days you have carved forward again. Such depth of foundation—I have never heard of its equal."

His attention shifted to Aurelian's circle, each of them locked between fight and flight.

"Friends, be at ease. My wife and I come as old companions of Mr. Chance, not as foes."

Tension leaked from their stances; shoulders fell, swords lowered a fraction, yet no one quite released the hilt.

Jared sensed the caution clinging like dust-healthy, he decided, but it could not linger.

He moved through them, naming each face, stitching lines of acquaintance between two worlds with hurried gestures.

The moment the words High Immortal Realm left his mouth, awe rippled outward like heat across summer stone.

Aurelian was first to bow, the rest folding after him in a rustle of armor and fabric.

When the formalities exhausted what patience he had left, Jared leaned in, voice low enough to keep the courtyard theirs.

"Mr. Morse, your arrival was sudden—does something press? And tell me, what do you know of level twelve now, of the Door of Reincarnation and the Malevolent Path Hall?"

Sidney's fingers threaded through his wife's; the simple touch hardened his features into warning.

He motioned toward the benches scattered near the wall, inviting, commanding, all at once.

Jared followed, every muscle primed for news that would bruise.

Once they settled, Sidney studied him anew, eyes grey as the robe draped around his shoulders.

"That is precisely why I have come. Did I hear correctly—you intend to step into the Malevolent Path Hall?"

Jared did not flinch. "Yes."

Sidney's head moved in a slow refusal, each degree heavier than the last.

"Set that thought aside, Mr. Chance. Until you reach the High Immortal Realm,

master every force inside you, and unmask the Lord of Reincarnation, you must not gamble your life."

Cold pricked along Jared's spine.

He tasted iron on his next breath. "You know who-what-the Lord of Reincarnation is?"

Silence clung to Sidney while he searched for words, thumb revolving over his wife's knuckles.

At last he said, "In chasing a way to return her soul, I walked hidden trails and once glimpsed a fraction of that Door's truth."

"The Door is no child of this realm. Its birth reaches back to ages shrouded even from myth."

"The being behind it-call it the Lord-isn't truly alive. Think of a rule given hunger, a vast malicious echo wearing thought."

He paused, letting the weight hang.

"Tell me, Jared, do you understand why that Door grants strength so freely?"

Memory flashed: the battlefield, rent stone, energy seeping like light through cracks, pouring into wounded fighters.

"We absorbed what leaked from inside it," he ventured.

Sidney's answer fell quiet. "Yes—yet also no."

"That Door is carving a path of its own."

Confusion rippled again; several voices overlapped, chasing meaning.

"A path of its own?" someone echoed.

Sidney folded his hands. "The cosmos carries laws like hidden rivers. Reincarnation is one of them, ordered, deliberate."

He pictured the Door of

Reincarnation ripping a vital thread

out of the world's fabric, clutching at like a jealous dragon, severing from every other law

Until what I ne

lurked beyond the threshold owned the cycle of souls.

"A blessing?" Sidney scoffed, his voice rasping against the stone walls. "It simply drips back the essence it stole the reincarnation current that belonged to every living thing-like pouring an ocean into a brook; of course the brook surges.

"But keep feeding it, and the current twists out of shape. Souls lose their way, and the very pathways of heaven crack."

"Every gift carries its seal. The more you wield it, the deeper it eats, until flesh and will are hollowed out-fuel for the will crouching behind that door, puppets all."

A chill slipped across the circle; Jared felt it settle on his skin like wet ash, and the others stood so still the torchlight looked painted around their faces.

So the promise of unending life was nothing more than a trap—one that gnawed at the very root of their world.

Jared cleared the grit in his throat. "Then what is the Lord of Reincarnation, truly?"

Sidney's gaze drifted past them, as though afraid the shadows might overhear. "I can't see its core. Only that it is ancient, immense, and carries a cold malice toward every heartbeat."

"Maybe it's the remnant obsession of a fallen sovereign, or an ambition that crashed on the way to transcendence."

"Or perhaps an outsider, starving to swallow this realm. Either way, it cannot fully arrive; it uses that Door and the faithful as nails and claws."

"Malcolm, Morven-those are only pieces it moves across the board."

He finally met Jared's eyes. "Listen, Mr. Chance. You carry vast fortune and equally vast consequences. The forces braided inside you the chaotic force, the scent of the Divine Bow already irritate its

reincarnation aura."

"That is why the Door's master, or the shells it commands, want you erased. But you are not yet ready to face it head-on."

"After this battle, Malevolent Path Hall will drink deeper rewards. It is a pit of

serpents now; you must stay away."

Jared said nothing. Inside, waves slammed against each other until thought splintered.

Sidney had just stamped a seal on suspicions Jared hardly dared voice and uncovered horrors he had never guessed.

Yet the fire in his chest did not gutter; it narrowed, colder, surer.

He drew a steady breath. "Mr. Morse, if Mr. Sanders were here, could he break the Door...and its master?"

Sidney paused, lips twitching toward a helpless smile. "I don't know the reach of Mr. Sanders's hand, but to crush that master would be, for him, the work of a finger flick."

From deep within Jared's sea of thought, the Vermilion Demon Lord rumbled, "If Mr. Sanders intervenes, forget level twelve; with a casual wave he could lift you to the upper reaches of the celestial realm."

The demon had glimpsed Mr. Sanders only a handful of times, yet even he sensed a strength no lower or middle world could measure.

Jared blinked. "Mr. Sanders is that formidable?"

Sidney chuckled softly. "He bends laws at will. He can pull a soul back from utter annihilation. Compared to that, the Lord of Reincarnation is clumsy."

"If the Lord possessed such skill, it wouldn't need Doors or promises of eternal life.

It wouldn't resurrect puppets; it would resurrect people."

Jared turned the thought over. Mr. Sanders could raise a mind erased to dust; the

Lord relied on hijacked laws and still delivered only marionettes. The contrast felt like daylight burning through fog.

A Warrior Undefeatable

He steadied his shoulders. "Senior, I understand." The words felt smaller than the vow behind them.

He drew a slow, cooling breath. "I'll hold back for now and keep sharpening myself. But Malevolent Path Hall won't stay crippled forever. The moment they heal, they'll come again."

Knowledge of that truth crawled beneath his ribs, heavier because he could expect no rescue.

Mr. Sanders—so formidable yet strangely absent since the celestial realm—had never shown himself twice. Maybe he was trapped, maybe unwilling. Either way, Jared was on his own.

Sidney's leather-scarred chin tipped once, as though ticking off a ledger. "Exactly. We'll keep shaking every branch—every ally, every rumor—while we probe the Door of Reincarnation for a crack. Meanwhile, Mr. Chance, you must climb faster."

His gaze dropped to the dark veining on the back of Jared's hand.

"Your fusion has barely crossed the threshold. To let it roar, you're still leagues away. I can give a shove, but the true doorway has to be found by you."

The woman beside him—quiet until now—lightly touched Sidney's sleeve. Her voice flowed like cold spring water. "Sidney, have you forgotten the clue to that Ancient Energy Refiners' Abode? It might help Mr. Chance."

Sidney snapped his fingers, embarrassment flickering across his eyes. "Right—nearly forgot."

"I stumbled on a hint in some ruins—directions to a chamber the Ancient Energy Refiners left behind ages ago."

"Their methods were raw and powerful, masters at blending alien energies like molten ore. If you reach that vault, you could finish your fusion—maybe vault upward in a single stroke. But the route is hidden, and every footstep bites."

A spark knifed through Jared's eyes. If that legacy could weld his four forces quicker, maybe carry him to Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Six-Seven even—then a restored Malevolent Path Hall or the Lord of Reincarnation might finally be mortal.

"Senior, where is this abode?" The question left him before caution could pull it back.

Sidney answered with silence. He raised a single finger; starlight bled from the gesture and knitted itself into a faint, hovering map.

Most of the ghostly expanse blurred like wet ink, but one corner glowed beneath a rune shaped like a coiled storm—part cloud spiral, part primordial furnace.

"This point sits on the extreme western rim of level twelve," Sidney said, tapping the rune.

"It drifts in a fissure beside the Void Gale Belt, where winds slice through broken space. Shards of time float there. Mistaken paths swallow entire sects."

"The portal lies inside a calm shard called the Eye of the Return-to-Void-looks like a hidden orchard, feels like a meat grinder."

His gaze sharpened on Jared. "Your fused energies may shrug off some of the rot, but the Refiners' wards strike at the core. Enter only if you trust your essence."

"Opportunity is born in danger; I know." He clasped his fists, spine unbending.

Resolve coursed through his limbs, hot and level. Retreat had been burned from his vocabulary long ago.

The Vermilion Demon Lord bared serrated teeth. "Sounds delightful. I'm coming."

Jared returned the grin with a nod. If the demon tagged along, perhaps the Nine- Orifice Divine Soul Herb would finally appear.

The starmap folded into a

thumb-sized, pale-gray token, neither

Hor jade. Sidney placed

Jared's s palm. "Feed it your force,

near the zone it will guide you."

II

"Whether you breach the Eye and find the abode depends on strength—and on luck."

The token breathed with an ancient, murky pulse. Jared folded his fingers around it, accepting the weight of a new promise.

He held the half-packed satchel against his knee, the straps still warm from his palms The pause before departure let old questions leak back in: how was the celestial hierarchy arranged, and who exactly were Sidney and his wife?

The why clanged louder than the tools at his belt, and before caution could reclaim

his tongue he stepped toward Sidney.

Senior Sidney, I can't thank you and your lady enough for what you've done.

"Where are the two of you cultivating these days within the twelve-level sky? If I ever need to repay the favor, I'd like to know where to find you."

Sidney exchanged a glance with his wife, their eyes touching in some silent language Jared couldn't even guess at.

"Mr. Chance, there's no need for formality. We've never been long-term residents of the twelve levels."

Not long-term? The word snagged like a burr; he froze halfway into a nod.

"You haven't?"

Sidney's smile stayed gentle, but something vast moved behind it.

"That's right. My wife and I journeyed here from level thirteen."

Level thirteen? The syllables felt like a stone dropping through his stomach.

"Level thirteen?"

Beside him, Aurelian, Blaine, and the other sect masters stopped breathing for a heartbeat, their surprise mirroring his own.

He knew they had reason: everyone

who sat at the summit of level

twelve understood the thirteenth

existed understood, too, that

Strength alone was never the key that unlocked its gate.

Aurelian cleared his throat, his voice softer than usual. "Friend, would you mind

telling us how you reached level thirteen?"

Jared looked between them, bewildered.

"Isn't it as simple as opening a void tunnel? That's how I went from level one all the way here."

Aurelian and Blaine both shook their heads, the motion slow and identical, as if rehearsed.

The answer only thickened Jared's fog; even the usually unflappable Vermilion Demon Lord looked as though someone had swapped the horizon on him.

A Warrior Undefeatable

Sidney's chuckle eased the tension only a little; then he began to lay out a map Jared had never seen.

"Mr. Chance, the thirty-six levels aren't stacked like bricks. They're grouped into the Lower, Middle, and Upper Realms, each defined by how complete its laws are and how rich its energy flows."

"The Lower Realm covers levels one through twelve. Your level twelve stands at its peak—good laws, decent energy, but still fundamentally different from the Middle. Within the Lower Realm, yes, void tunnels work."

"The Middle Realm spans levels thirteen to twenty-four: larger worlds, finer energy, stricter laws. My wife and I are sheltering in a hidden corner of level thirteen."

"Above that is the Upper Realm, level twenty-five up to the fabled thirty-six. Stories say its laws verge on perfection, holding the very source of the Grand Way itself. I can't speak to that; I've never climbed so high."

The explanation cracked open a door in Jared's mind; he had known the numbers but never the gulf between them.

He swallowed the rush of possibilities. "Senior Sidney, if the laws differ so sharply, what does it really take to cross from level twelve into thirteen?"

Sidney's eyes grew thoughtful, as though measuring unseen walls.

"The barrier between levels is easy compared to the one between Realms," he said. "What looks like a single step is actually a leap from the Lower to the Middle."

"Raw strength can tear space inside the Lower Realm, but it can't pierce the membrane that safeguards the Middle. That living film rejects or dissolves any power or life-form that doesn't already resonate with its laws."

Sidney's voice dropped to a lecturer's calm. "Second, you need something that calls the Middle Realm to you," he said. "There are two ways." Jared kept his eyes on the man, chest tight around the promise inside those words. "First, a powerful clan up there can open a sanctioned ascension corridor and pull you through. They only bother for prodigies in the Lower Realm, or for disciples carrying a sacred inheritance."

Jared pic night.

the corridor, something bright and knife-sharp cuttin

seam through

Sidney continued, "Or you find a relic soaked in Middle-Realm law. Use it as a beacon at the right place and hour, throw obscene power at it, and force a makeshift gate. That trick barely works. The portal shivers, wants to tear itself apart, and usually drags its maker with it."

Sidney raised his hand before Jared could dream further, his expression stone-still. "Last, and this matters most. Your own being must climb high enough. Down here that means the High Immortal Realm. Your body, mind, and the path you walk all have to molt, accept deeper rules. Not every High Immortal can touch level thirteen. Insight weighs more than brute power. Without it, the Middle Realm's heavier, denser laws press until bones crack, or its purer air starves the core and you wither."

Sidney's explanation tugged open a sealed memory. He remembered the Celestial Stairway—each glowing step trying to erase him, only letting him pass because the sky itself wanted him there. If that ladder had not existed, he would never have reached the celestial realm in the first place.

Sidney turned softening only when his wife's palm brushed his sleeve. "We came to level twelve because we fell Mr. Chance's aura and used: an old treasure to mask ourselves from the Lower Realm's rules. But the artifact is temporary. If we linger, the reverse pull of these laws will gnaw at our foundations."

Sidney's gaze flicked to his partner; regret and devotion tangled behind his pupils. "That is all we can share, and now we must go. Take care of yourself, Mr. Chance."

The urge to keep them lingered on Jared's tongue, but he bent instead, folding his arms in a deep salute. "Thank you, Seniors, for lighting the path. Your help will stay with me."

Sidney helped him upright, a warm grin chasing away the earlier steel. "Mr. Chance carries vast fortune and a steady mind. One day, perhaps above level thirteen, we'll meet again."

"Treasure yourself. Fuse your power until it is truly yours. The Ancient Energy Refiners' Abode could be the spark that lets you soar."

A muted gray light unfurled around the couple. Space rippled like disturbed water; their outlines thinned, washed away, and were suddenly gone—no afterglow, no echo, nothing.

Silence pressed on the valley for a long breath, everyone blinking as though words might still hang in the air.

Jared pulled fresh air into burning lungs and let it settle. He turned toward the Vermilion Demon Lord. "Senior, shall we move?"

The demon's forked tongue swept across his lips; crimson eyes kindled like forge coal. "I've waited long enough. Let's see what baubles that dead refiner hid."

Jared faced Aurelian and the others. "I'm going after the chance that can break this stalemate. Guard the valley. Keep hidden from the Malevolent Path Hall. Your safety matters more to me than treasure."

Aurelian's head bobbed with firm emphasis. "Go, Mr. Chance. We'll hold the line and patch ourselves up. Just-stay alive."

Blaine clapped Jared's shoulder hard enough to rattle bones. "Come back breathing, kid. I still want to storm the Malevolent Path Hall with you."

Oswald's voice cut the air like frost. "Return swiftly."

Jared met the demon's gaze; resolve mirrored back at him. In the same breath they burst into motion-one gold streak, one crimson-piercing the valleys warding mist and sprinting west toward the rumored Void Gale Belt.