

# A Warrior Undefeatable 5981-5990

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"Mr. Chance, the Supreme has gone!"

The sudden voice skittered along Jared's spine; he jerked around.

Several paces away, the man he had once called Lord of Reincarnation still knelt, forehead nearly touching the dust.

Jared's fist found the Dragonslayer Sword, and the blade sang free, aimed squarely at the kneeling figure.

"Lord of Reincarnation, what are you planning?"

"Mr. Chance, I just realized—my legs are numb." The man's voice trembled with equal parts pain and embarrassment.

"Then... then stand up!"

Jared eased backward, letting two cautious steps open the gap.

"Thank you, Mr. Chance." The kneeling man unfolded himself slowly. "My name is Luther, not any Lord. I merely stole my clan's Door of Reincarnation."

"I have offended you more than once. Please, accept my apology."

With a stiff ninety-degree bend at the waist, Luther held the bow as if waiting for verdict.

The sincerity in that posture cooled Jared's nerves; he slid the Dragonslayer Sword back into its sheath.

"Tell me this—where exactly are we? And what is the Ghost Clan?"

The questions burst out before he could soften them.

With Mr. Sanders gone, Luther was the only thread left to pull.

Before Jared could form a question, Luther lowered his head in a formal bow. The gesture was crisp, almost soldierly, yet it carried a weary respect that made Jared's palms suddenly conscious of their own emptiness.

Luther raised a gloved hand toward the shattered mountain chain squatting on the horizon.

"Mr. Chance, we stand on the edge of the North Abyss Wasteland, within level thirteen," he said, the title ringing like a verdict.

A sigh rasped behind his words, as though every syllable had to pass through centuries of dust.

"Those ruins were once a main stronghold of our Ghost Clan."

"Level thirteen?"

The phrase hit him like the snap of an unexpected gate. He was still only in the Heavenly Immortal Realm; every manual swore the upper heavens demanded long rituals, tokens, trials.

He blinked, half expecting the scenery to shiver back into something lower, more believable. Nothing changed.

Gold-blooded Aurelian, crafty Blaine, proud Oswald—he had offered none of them a goodbye.

Vermilion Demon Lord was probably still pacing the border, waiting for word that he'd survived.

And the women who carried pieces of his heart—he hadn't even started those farewells.

"Exactly," Luther confirmed.

He drew in a deliberate breath, thoughts arranging behind his eyes before he let them spill.

"The celestial realm is crowded-countless races, more than stories bother to count," he began, voice low.

"Humans, beasts, demons—everyone remembers their banners. But a few lines run older, stranger. My people belong there."

Jared caught a flicker in the man's pupils, as if the memories themselves weighed more than the words.

"We aren't born from wandering ghosts," Luther went on. "We arrive already tuned to soul, death, the turning wheel. From our first breath we can coax the border open, escort the lost, even hold a shard of the cycle's authority."

His tone didn't boast; it confessed.

"Back in the oldest days the Ghost Clan kept death's ledger for all Three Realms, with sanctuaries on every sky. Souls came to us, and we sent them onward."

Jared's gaze drifted again toward the fractured ridges. "Then what shattered all this?"

A crooked smile peeled across Luther's face, pain threading it into something closer to a wince.

"Glory always breeds its own ruin," he said quietly, then shook his head. "But ours wasn't a storm or quake. It was... hands."

The air seemed to thin while he searched for a starting point.

"Thirty thousand years ago," he began, "our Ghost King—people called him the Abyssal Ghost King—stood so tall the heavens heard him."

He studied reincarnation until a crack of dawning ran through the Law itself.

He decided the current cycle was rigged. The wicked hid behind strong souls or forbidden rites, slipped punishment, even carried their memories into the next life.

The gentle and the small, meanwhile, were ground thin until they vanished.

A low hum, maybe the memory of old chanting, vibrated in Luther's throat.

So he vowed to forge a new wheel, one the Ghost Clan alone could keep balanced.

We poured everything into the attempt—blood, artifacts, years. That Door of Reincarnation you glimpsed was only the brightest piece.

Jared leaned in before he thought better of it. "That sounds noble. Why would it invite catastrophe?"

"Noble?" Luther echoed, a rough laugh scraping out alongside the single word—as if the very idea tasted bitter.

Luther shook his head; lamplight caught the mockery simmering behind his eyes. The dismissal slid under Jared's ribs before the man even spoke.

"Mr. Chance, you're far too naïve. Tearing open a separate path means ripping a piece of the reincarnation principle out of the existing cosmic order and forcing it under your own hand."

The words hung between them, sour and electric.

Luther's voice hardened. "Doing that is the same as carving up divine authority, a direct challenge to whatever power keeps the stars moving."

Jared's throat tasted of metal; Luther pressed on as though lecturing a stubborn child.

"Think about the great clans, sects, even lone masters. Once they climb high enough, ordinary rebirth bores them. They want to reincarnate with memories intact, maybe even leap clear of the cycle altogether live forever."

A dull pulse started behind Jared's eyes.

"For the Ghost Clan to build perfectly fair reincarnation," Luther said, "we'd have to strip those giants of their private shortcuts."

The room seemed to shrink around the admission.

"That slashes at too many vested interests. The cosmic order won't permit open rebellion, and those powers certainly won't watch their immortality schemes burn."

Jared pictured silent nods exchanged in dark halls.

"So an extermination campaign against the Ghost Clan began—everyone pretending they weren't working together, yet striking in perfect rhythm."

Luther's tone dipped, heavy as a funeral drum.

"First came backlash from the cycle itself. Our people found their cultivation blocked; the clan's fortune withered."

He drew a slow breath, shoulders quivering once.

"Then the strongest celestials and Ancient Clan lords rallied dozens of forces. They branded us usurpers meddling with reincarnation and launched a full purge."

Luther's next words crawled through Jared's bones.

"That battle-sky torn, earth split, sun and moon erased. We were fierce, but how do you stand against the cosmos and half the realm's might?"

Images burst behind Jared's eyes: burning citadels, falling spirits.

"Strongholds Shattered, kin fell. To cover our retreat, the Ghost King ignited several supreme treasures with his own essence. The invaders bled, but the King's soul scattered, one sliver sealed deep within the Reincarnation Division, forever asleep."

Luther's hands curled, nails whitening.

"After that, the clan splintered. Survivors fled, hiding names, never daring to call ourselves Ghost Clan again."

A faint tremor crossed his mouth.

"Most of our treasures were ruined or lost. My branch escaped with a damaged Door of Reincarnation, burrowing into a secret corner of level thirteen to gasp for breath."

Tears glazed Luther's eyes before he forced them back, lids blinking hard.

He steadied himself. "After ten thousand years of quiet recovery, we've clayed back a fraction of our

strength, yet our masters are gone and the lineages lie in tatters. Among my generation, carry sharpest spark. The elders pinned their hopes on me: repair the Door, wake the Ghost King, restore the clan." Bitterness seeped into his

smile.

"Before I could mend the Door, enemies sniffed out our refuge. The devastation you saw outside is rubble from that ancient war. My kin threw everything into spiriting me away otherwise, I'd be ash with the rest."

Heat pricked Jared's brow; he finally found his voice. "So you dragged the Door

down to level twelve, put on the title of Lord of Reincarnation, and started harvesting souls to patch it?"

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Color washed from Luther's face; shame fought embarrassment.

"Yes. Resources were scarce, yet the Door drinks staggering amounts of soul power. Once our hideout was exposed, I couldn't stay on level thirteen."

"Level twelve sits in the Lower Realm. The cosmic gaze weakens there, and cultivators peak at High Immortal. With my strength and the Door's latent force, I could operate unseen."

"I planned to bait them with promises of eternal life and blessings, letting volunteers offer soul power, or I'd gather the spirits of the dead from battlefields—quietly amass enough energy, then slip back, causing no wider storm."

A shrug that looked more like self-contempt. "Malcolm, Morven, and their ilk were willing pawns-hungry for power, easy to steer."

His gaze met Jared's; a rueful twist lifted his lips. "What I didn't foresee was crossing paths with you—and the man standing behind you, Mr. Sanders."

Silence thickened. Jared weighed the confession, the broken door, the ghosts of empires, and felt the future tilt.

"He could follow the twisted logic that had driven Luther's people—the Ghost Clan—to the edge. When an entire race dangled between extinction and rebirth, mercy became a luxury they could not afford.

Even so, the memory of the riots they had sparked across level twelve still sat like grit behind his eyes—streets flooded with terrified refugees, healing halls overflowing, names that would never be spoken again."

Jared cleared his throat. "Did the souls of the Flaxseed clan really make it into the Reincarnation Division?"

"Absolutely."

Luther's answer came fast, almost stepping on Jared's last syllable. "Mr. Sanders worked wonders—they're all back where they belong."

He lifted both palms in a calming gesture. "Their essences are whole, not a thread frayed. The passage through the cycle only polished them; next life, they might even thank us."

Jared's shoulders loosened; the knot beneath his sternum finally slipped free.

Promise kept. Mr. Flaxseed could rest.

The relief lasted only until he took in the landscape—a barren sweep of slate-colored earth, no wind, no songbirds, just the weight of level thirteen's thicker, purer aura pressing against his skin.

The laws themselves felt tighter here, as if every breath demanded a toll.

Mr. Sanders hadn't bothered with good-byes; he had simply opened a door and dropped Jared onto level thirteen. The message was obvious enough—whatever could temper him in level twelve was finished.

Level thirteen—first rung of the Middle Realm. A stage wide enough to lose an army on, wide enough for him to find his place or vanish trying.

But behind the thrill lurked faces: Aurelian's crooked grin, Blaine's scowl of pretend indifference, Oswald tracing formation lines in the dust outside Reincarnation Peak.

And the Demon Lord of Vermilion clouds, loyal in his own jagged way, would think Jared had died inside the Door of Reincarnation.

He swallowed. He needed to find a way to reach them.

Jared turned back to Luther. "Is there any path to level twelve? A channel, a token—anything that lets me make a quick trip or at least send a word?"

Luther's mouth tightened at the corners. "Crossing the boundary isn't like changing inns. The walls between the two levels bite unless you have a key."

"I only managed it because our lineage guards a single World-Breaking Talisman. It burned itself to ash the moment we descended."

He shook his head. "As for messages, the laws don't match. Ordinary sigils die before they cross."

Seeing Jared's disappointment, he added, "But Mr. Sanders rarely moves without purpose. If he sent you here, he likely has plans for your friends as well."

"Level thirteen holds more openings, more fuel for your growth. When your cultivation catches up, returning will be easier than walking across a courtyard."

Jared exhaled, a long column of mist that the dry air drank in an instant.

Luther was right, and so, almost certainly, was Mr. Sanders. Worrying from a distance fixed nothing.

The priority was to master whatever this harsher sky demanded.

He scanned the barren horizon. "You said this is the edge of the North Abyss Wasteland. How much do you know about level thirteen, Luther? Where does a newcomer start?"

He had broken through the cloud-clotted sky only this morning, and the realm of level thirteen still smelled foreign-ice smoke, thin lightning, minerals no chart had named yet.

He needed a guide before the cold finished numbing his sense of direction.

A thin figure stepped from behind a blue-white stone column, cloak ragged, horns chipped a survivor of the Ghost Clan, if rumor served.

He bowed with deliberate care. "Mr. Chance, you have asked the right soul," he said, voice like wind scraping glass.

"Though my Ghost Clan has withered, generations of us traded secrets here. I know the northern half better than most wandering spirits."

"Level thirteen is vaster than the twelve skies below combined—ten times that, some say. Powers knot and snarl here—ancient sects that remember the first dawn and beast kingdoms that heed no human law. There are reclusive bloodlines that choose shadow over fame and the scattered descendants of greater clans who now live on memories. Broadly, five domains divide the sky. East-Azure Firmament, where human sect banners crowd every horizon West Myriad Monster Mountains pledged to the beast race. South-Skyfire Flame Continent, a furnace world of living fire and ore. North—the North Abyss Icefield that freezes our breath. Sparse treasure, sparse trouble; refugees and small banners shelter here. Center-Heaven-Origin Sacred Continent, richest qi under these heavens, ruled by the strongest few. We stand on the rim of the North Abyss. A march of tens of thousands of miles south will bring us to frontier cities and trade bazaars. The greatest banner here is Profound Ice Palace; rumor names its mistress Lady Aurora, a High Immortal Realm Level Seven. Lesser but still sharp are Frost Soul Sect, Frostsnow Sword Sect, and a scattering of drifting schools." Jared let the names settle, each clicking onto an empty shelf in his mind.

"A High Immortal of the seventh level—back in level twelve that stood near the summit. Here it merely guarded a provincial palace. The gap between worlds pressed on his chest like fresh gravity. He drew a slow breath.

"What do you suggest? Where does a newcomer begin? While Luther spoke, his shoulders had lifted, pride flaring beneath the threadbare cloak.

A man who bled yet still stood for a dying clan—that was a compass Jared could use.

Luther pinched his chin, eyes cloud-pale.

"Mr. Chance, your power sits at

Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Seven. That makes you a respected blade here, but not the sharpest. Claim a roof in one of those frontier

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cities first. Listen, watch, learn the

price of bread and prime crystals before you pick a fight. Trade your Lower Realm trinkets for prime crystals-the coin here holds cleaner qi than anything below. The

cultivation path is the same song,

just sung an octave higher.

Techniques, pills, treasures-alk

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refined. If you crave speed pledge,

as a guest elder to a strong house, or chase the secrets buried in ancient ruins." Jared eased a nod. The advice tasted practical, free of hidden hooks.

First shelter, then knowledge-only then the climb.

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He turned the question back across the snow.

"And you, Luther-where will your feet carry you now?"

Luther's shoulders sagged. The greenish fire in his eyes dulled as he muttered, "The Door of Reincarnation is gone. My clan may already be dead. I have nowhere left to return."

Jared watched the once-proud ghost sink into silence, the ragged cloak hanging like wet ash.

Memory supplied flashes of towers carved from bone, banquet halls lit by soul- lanterns-an empire now ground down to wandering survivors.

Pity, thin but unexpected, rose alongside his breath.

After a pause long enough for wind to slip between them, Jared said, "If nowhere feels safe, walk with me. I just arrived on level thirteen and could use someone who knows the edges."

Luther's head jerked up, eyes widening like twin moons. "Mr. Chance... you- you don't blame me?"

"One debt at a time."

Jared kept his tone even. "What you did on level twelve hurt people, yes, but the motive was survival, not cruelty. The Door is gone, and Mr. Sanders has already marked you. Live clean from here on, and I'll give you space at my side. A wet sheen slid across Luther's eyes. He dropped to his knees so fast dust puffed around his boots.

"Your mercy, Mr. Chance, I will never forget! Let me serve, let me repay your grace!" "Stand up." Jared caught the ghost's elbow, the shadow-cold skin like glass under his fingers.

"First we find shelter," he added, guiding Luther to his feet.

Luther brushed gravel from his knees. "South thirty thousand miles lies Coldabyss City, largest haven on the southern edge of the North Abyss Icefield."

"Its City Lord is a High Immortal, unaffiliated and mostly fair. We could start there." Jared inclined his head. "All right."

The moment felt like the hinge of a new book-level thirteen opening beneath his boots, untitled chapters waiting.

Inside his storage ring, mountains of ore, spirit herbs, and the Primal Unity Refinement Tome pressed against the tiny pocket of space like treasure impatient for daylight.

With that he could bargain, study, and survive.

Faces drifted across his mind-Mr. Vermilion's amused eyes, Metalhart's stern nod, the quiet patience of the valley lord, the solitary swordsman's distant smile.

An inward whisper followed—an apology for slipping away and a promise to return once strength and footing were his.

Resolve settled behind his ribs like cooling steel.

Without another heartbeat of hesitation, he kicked off the frost-crusting ground.

His figure blurred into a streak of gray light that carved a silent path through the winter air.

The wind bit and howled, tugging at his sleeves, but ahead stretched uncharted skies, tougher foes, and a stage wide enough for every ambition.

Far behind, somewhere beyond the veil of realms, a tremor brushed the edge of his awareness—as though a towering gate had sighed and folded into nothing.

He glanced over a shoulder at empty sky, felt only the quieter pulse of the world, and kept flying.

A brittle shout cracked across the ridge. "The Door of Reincarnation... it's gone?!"

Benches scraped. Aurelian, Blaine, and the others surged upright as if a cord had yanked them.

Blood drained from their faces; the air tasted suddenly of metal.

Three nights of brittle campfires drifted through Vermilion's memory.

They had waited on the cliff for Jared to step out, for the doorway to so much as flicker.

Nothing had answered but wind.

Now the doorway itself had winked out, as though some unseen mouth had swallowed it clean.

Blaine's voice split the hush. "Where's Jared? Why didn't he come out?!"

Aurelian's complexion went waxy. His spirit sense lashed across the altar and the surrounding sky.

Nothing. No lingering echo of Jared, no whisper of the Door.

A thought, dark and cold, uncurled inside every chest. Could it be...

"No! Impossible!" someone barked, half plea, half snarl.

Vermilion's throat vibrated with a low growl; scarlet light burned behind his eyes.

"That kid's tougher than stone. An ancient cultivator's tomb couldn't hold him, so one doorway sure as hell can't—"

The boast withered on his tongue. The doorway was gone. Jared was gone. Every omen felt wrong.

Another dawn bled over the ridge, then another, then another.

They risked the altar itself, stepping into the cold circle where the gateway had hovered. The stone answered with silence.

The fourth sunrise delivered what none dared name: Jared had vanished with the Door, fate unreadable.

Grief hardened into a raw, collective roar among the alliance ranks.

Their chance at revenge had just bloomed; the young leader who lit that fire had been snuffed midstride.

"Jared is the hero of level twelve!" a voice proclaimed, hoarse yet fierce.

Aurelian swallowed his grief and faced the crowd.

"From this

day,

Level twelve enters a new era. We will honor Jared's will, restore order, and guard this realm! Station a permanent watch around Reincarnation Peak. The moment any sign of Jared appears, report at once!"

Orders rippled outward. Squads moved to claim the territory Malevolent Path Hall left behind, maps and banners changing hands.

The turmoil birthed by the Door slowly thinned, as though its vanishing had corked the sky itself.

Yet certain faces would never forget the young figure who, cornered, had led them back, sliced down a High Immortal, and walked alone into the unknown.

Vermilion remained outside the peak, nights stacking like stones.

Each dawn he pictured Jared strolling up with that infuriating grin and saying, "Senior, kept you waiting."

Every dusk erased the image.

At last, the ember of hope guttered out.

Before the empty altar, he dropped to his knees and knocked his forehead against the stone three solemn times.

"Kid, you pulled me back from the

brink. I owe you. Rest easy. Your family, your friends-I'll keep an eye on them. If you really die in there, I'll bring your bones home, even if I have to split this damned

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Reincarnation Realm wide open. The promise tasted like iron on his tongue, sharp and irrevocable, yet the weight of it steadied his shaking hands more than any healing elixir could.

He clenched the tattered cloak at his shoulders, feeling the dried blood crack along the seams. A heartbeat later his body shattered into a streak of crimson, shooting toward level mine, the sky behind him tearing like wet paper. Somewhere beyond those frozen tiers, the woman who had waited centuries still clung to life. Once she breathed free, he would circle back and honor every word he'd spoken.

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The wasteland finally loosened its claws only after Jared and Luther had flown south for what felt like forever. Each mile of cracked basalt gave way to darker ice, the horizon refusing to move. Wind howled through their protective wards, salty with minerals, cold enough to peel skin from bone had the aura faltered. Jared kept half his focus on the barriers, half on Luther's silent silhouette ahead.

By the third morning, the air itself seemed to glow. Each inhale carried threads of energy so thick they tingled against his teeth. He tasted pine and lightning, a density unimaginable back on level twelve, and the Focus Technique inside his core spun greedily, begging to drink deeper.

The closer they drew to level thirteen proper, the sharper the invisible lattice of laws pressed against his skin. It felt like walking into a cathedral whose pillars refused to tolerate the slightest misstep-magnificent, but merciless.

Strangely, the pressure only clarified his breathing. Once his meridians aligned to the new pattern, each cycle of Focus Technique surged clean and effortless, as though the realm itself applauded his rhythm.

On the third sunset a white wall rose at the horizon, first a glint, then a mountain, and finally the unmistakable silhouette of a city carved from winter itself. Jared's pulse skipped, not from fear, but from the relief of seeing something built by hands, something that suggested beds and soup and answers.

As they closed the gap, the wall resolved into blocks of midnight ice, each slab veined with pale blue runes that pulsed like sleeping eyes. The protective formation hummed against his eardrums, an unspoken warning that anyone who tried a shortcut over the parapet would leave pieces behind.

Sentinels in ice-blue armor dotted the ramparts at measured intervals, statues until the wind shifted and he felt their collective breath. Even the least of them radiated the calm of the Heavenly Immortal Realm, a reminder that in level thirteen, gate duty was no apprenticeship.

Above the archway, three sprawling characters were carved so deep the frost smoked around them-Coldabyss City. The name alone chilled his molars, yet there was a fierce welcome in its austerity.

Luther stopped mid-air, voice low. "Mr. Chance, that's Coldabyss City." Jared nodded before his mouth decided to move, the syllables echoing in his chest like he had rehearsed them in dreams.

"The place has stood for more than ten millennia," Luther continued. "It's the most important haven on the southern North Abyss Icefield. More than a hundred thousand cultivators call it home. City Lord Cyril is High Immortal Realm Level Five, a rogue who once unearthed an ancient inheritance. People say his strength is unfathomable, but he keeps out of the big power squabbles. That neutrality draws small sects and independents alike." Jared filed the names away, more interested in the word neutrality than the titles. A city that minded its own business could be the safest hiding place or the easiest trap.

He adjusted his cloak, motioned, and the two of them descended toward the main gate, feet touching down with the crunch of frost like breaking glass. The guards above barely twitched, but Jared pretended not to notice; dignity was sometimes just ignoring what could kill you.

A cluster of armored sentries waited behind a waist-high barricade, their breath frosting the ironwood planks. Front and center stood a scar-faced man, muscles cabled, aura thick enough to tilt the snowflakes. Jared's senses pegged him at High Immortal Realm Level Two-here, apparently, that qualified you to check passports.

Jared swallowed a laugh; in level twelve a cultivator like that would be giving royal decrees, yet here he was counting heads at the door.

"Hold it!" The scar-faced man barked, voice gravel dragged over metal.

He planted a gauntleted hand in Jared's path. "New faces. Where from, and what business brings you here?" The question carried no malice, just the lazy confidence of someone who could break them before lunch.

Jared kept his palms visible. "Jared, itinerant cultivator. This is my companion, Luther. First time on the North Abyss Icefield. Looking to stay awhile, get the lay of the land."

"Wanderers, huh?" The scar-faced man tilted his head, the suspicion almost playful. His gaze lingered on Jared's robe seams. "City Lord's orders: every outsider gets vetted. Got any credentials, or someone inside willing to vouch for you?"

A subtle pinch gathered between Jared's eyebrows. Identity papers? Of course the guard would ask. They had risen straight from level twelve; no one ever issues level-thirteen tags to strangers passing through empty sky.

Beside him, Luther hurried ahead, his posture folded in apology. From his robe he produced a matte-black bone token and offered it with both hands. "Sir, we come from the depths of the North Abyss Wasteland. Our family fell from grace generations ago and has trained in seclusion. This crest is all that remains. We left the wilds only to see the wider world, maybe earn a little fortune."

The scar-faced man rolled the token between thick fingers, the hostility in his eyes easing but not leaving. He shook his head. "Without a proper jade plate of citizenship, the rule says I must hold you until the registry confirms who you are. The city's on edge-someone stole one of the City Lord's prized artifacts. Outsiders top the suspect list, so every new face gets searched."

Jared's head snapped up. "What?" The word slipped out before he could swallow it. An artifact heist sounded like a flimsy excuse, a net thrown wide enough to drag anyone. Still, a guard with orders was harder to argue with than a gate made of stone.

Luther leaned closer to the guard, voice lowered almost to a purr. "Brother, help us out, will you?" A small pouch of prime crystals slid from his sleeve into the guard's palm, the clink muffled but unmistakable. "We're honest cultivators. Not a crooked bone between us."

Greed flickered across the scar-faced man's gaze; his thumb weighed the pouch, feeling the heft of its contents. Then duty won out, and his mouth flattened. "Orders from the top. Any outsider without clear papers gets held. If you pass, I'm a dead man. Don't push me."

He sliced a hand through the air. "Guards, take them to holding until the records office is done." Four cultivators in gleaming mail advanced, each toying with a length of iron-gray chain that glimmered with frost runes.

A chill spark kindled behind Jared's eyes, and the tide of chaotic force inside him rose in quiet answer. He could break those men and their toys before any of them drew breath. But storming a gate on his first day here would brand him an enemy of the whole city and its lord.

Luther's voice brushed his mind, soft as damp ash. "Mr. Chance, easy. Let's go along for now. Cyril has a fair reputation; once the clerks see we're harmless, they'll send us on our way."

Jared drew a slow breath, letting the anger drain with the air. He extended his wrists, and the frosted iron rings closed with a hollow click. Freezing sigils crawled across the metal

seeking his power; the moment they touched the well of chaos, they unraveled like paper in rain. He sagged theatrically, making a show

Swe; Luther

of captivity Across the

mirrored the act; chains meant for

mortals never held a Ghost Clan

adept.

A spear butt punched the small of Jared's back, nudging him into the flow of midday

traffic.

He kept his gaze low, counting cobblestones as storefront chatter and rolling cart wheels tried to pretend life here was ordinary.

Coldabyss City sprawled in layers of color-jade-green awnings, copper talismans, dyed silks fluttering like flags begging to be chosen.

Every doorway advertised something a mortal would call impossible: bottled pills that glowed, blades that hummed, manuals promising shortcuts to eternity.

Men and women drifted past, their auras brushing his skin like sudden changes in weather.

Even the weakest here would dominate level twelve; High Immortal Realm signatures pulsed at every corner, yet he sensed not one Heavenly Immortal equal.

He pinched the breath in his lower abdomen, folding his own power into a quiet

knot.

No stranger needed to know a Heavenly Immortal walked beside them.

"So this is level thirteen—firmly the Middle Realm, worlds above the Lower Realm he and Luther had just escaped. The difference wasn't a rumor; it was a tide." The escort turned west, stopping at a compound whose walls rose like a frozen cliff. Sentinels lined the gate shoulder to shoulder, faces hidden behind plates of ice-blue steel.

Heavy blocks of dark ice formed the facade, each slab thick enough to smother a bonfire.

Above the archway, lacquered characters declared the place: Inspectorate Division. Inside, hallways narrowed into gloom, the torchlight yellowed and mean.

After three turns Jared lost count; then a door grated open and the guards shoved him and Luther into a cavernous cell.

Dozens occupied the chamber-old, young, men, women-most shackled by dull iron rings that had no right to hold spiritual flesh.

Their cultivation sat between first and second grade High Immortal Realm; one or two flickered slightly higher, yet fear leveled them all.

Sigils crawled across every wall like frost-bite scars, draining sound and courage together.

Even the air felt padded, as though someone had wrapped the room in thick cloth to stifle any rising hope.

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"Another pair of doomed idiots," someone muttered from the bunks.

"How long does this nightmare stretch?" a second voice sighed.

"Cyril really means to scour every outsider this time, doesn't he?"

The murmurs wove together, pity and numbness taking turns inside the same hollow eyes that appraised Jared and Luther.

Jared slid to the farthest corner, knees drawn up.

Behind half-closed lids he let his senses roam, mapping exits, counting runes, weighing the temper of both guards and prisoners.

Luther, never skilled at waiting, drifted toward a cluster of gentler faces.

He bowed just enough to be nonthreatening and pitched his voice low.

"Friends, could you tell us why we were seized the instant we crossed the gate? They claimed the City Lord lost some treasure."

"Treasure, my foot," an emaciated elder rasped. "That's the story they feed tourists. The plan is to purge anyone from the eastern region—or anyone who might breathe its air."

"The eastern region? Azure Firmament Immortal Continent?" Jared asked, eyes no longer pretending to sleep.

The elder gave a thin nod. "Exactly."

Word reached Cyril: the big human sects back on Azure are moving pieces-quiet convoys, cloaked troops-aimed straight at the North Abyss Icefield.

He assumes spies are already here, setting the stage from inside Coldabyss City.

So the City Lord would rather slit a thousand throats than let one scout slip away—everyone who entered lately went in chains, especially us refugees from the east.

Jared's senses snagged on the single phrase as though it had thorns. "Fleeing? The Azure Firmament Immortal Continent is the human race's sacred ground for cultivation. Why would anyone need to run for their lives?"

The elder darted a glance toward the corridor, shoulders shrinking before he breathed the words toward the floor. "Fellow Daoist, you don't understand. The Azure Firmament is no longer ruled by humans."

"Some hundreds of years ago, a group calling themselves celestials seized the continent. Their blood runs rich, their power deeper still, and they look down on us the way hawks look down on field mice."

"Celestials?" The word tasted metallic on Jared's tongue. His gaze tightened, memories stabbing forward-again that damned lineage. Maxwell had been imprisoned by a celestial clan chief. Of course it was them.

The elder nodded so hard his hood slipped back, revealing a bruise-yellowed jaw. "Yes. Celestials."

"No one knows how, but they bent the leaders of the continent's greatest sects to their will. The banners outside still read human, yet every order whispers from celestial throats."

"They strip resources, crush anyone who resists. Disciples and wanderers alike flee."

"We barely survived the journey to the relative calm of the North Abyss Icefield, hoping to build new homes-only to find ourselves trading wolves for tigers." His eyes shone wet.

A wiry young cultivator burst out, voice quivering.

"Those celestial bastards don't even see us as people. To them we're a lesser breed fit only for chains."

"My master refused to kneel, so they turned him into a living puppet. I will have vengeance!"

"Quiet!" The elder clapped a trembling hand over the youth's mouth. "Walls have ears. If the guards hear that, we're dead."

Jared listened in silence, turmoil roiling under his ribs.

Celestials—arrogant, oppressive—of course they would overreach.

Luther's voice cut through the dread. "Has no one intervened? What about the great powers of the Central Heaven-Origin Sacred Continent?"

The elder let out a breath that tasted of defeat. "Intervene? Who would dare?"

The celestials' origins are shadowed, their strength frightening, and rumor says they have patrons even in the Central Realm.

Besides, they rule from behind human faces. As long as the banners look proper, the great clans keep their hands clean.

Unless the celestials threaten core interests, why would anyone champion a few minor cultivators like us?

The cell drowned in thick, poisonous quiet. Jared could taste iron on his tongue.

The iron door slammed open, its echo knifing through the hush, and a squad of hard-eyed guards stormed inside.

The slam of a baton against a cell door cracked through the gloom. "Everyone up! Form a line!" the Guard Captain barked.

Jared peeled himself from the stone wall, cold seeping through his robe, every muscle coiled but his face blank.

A thin voice two cells down trembled, "What's happening? Are they letting us go?"

The sound carried brittle hope that scraped against Jared's nerves.

Boots rasped closer. "Let you go?" The captain's laugh had the edge of broken glass.

He stopped where Jared could see the blood crusted on his whip. "By order of the City Lord, every suspected spy marches to the Northern Execution Platform.

hovel

Sentence to be carried out immediately, so others learn obedience."

Shock ripped through the block. "What?!" Several prisoners slammed against their bars.

"We're innocent—no spies here!"

Someone shouted toward the upper tier, "Master Cyril, you can't murder the blameless!"

The corridor degenerated into overlapping screams, curses, wet sobs; a storm of human noise that bounced off the frozen stone and tried to bury Jared's thoughts.

"Silence!" The whip cracked.

Leather tore into the loudest man's back; red sprayed across gray rags. The Captain yanked the whip free. "Make another sound and die on the spot! Chain them all."

Steel-fisted soldiers surged in,

wolfish eyes shining. They clamped heavier collars around every neck

the new weight dragging Jared's spine forward as they forced the line out of the cell block.

set

Cold air flooded his lungs as they entered the outer passage. Jared's gaze stayed flat, but inside he

measured distances, nur

the

looseness of each guard's grip.

He had hoped the City Lord would verify identities; today's display proved Lord

Coldabyss wanted a purge, not justice. Waiting would mean dying.

To his left, Luther's whisper slid straight into Jared's mind. "Mr. Chance, what now?"

The ghostly undertone carried a flicker of lethal intent.

Even bound, Luther's posture said predator, not prey.

Jared answered without moving his lips. "Watch for openings," he sent back, calm as falling snow.

The chain snaked forward into the open. Wind knifed across the avenue, lifting grit that stung Jared's eyes while the column trudged toward the northern quarter.

Crowds gathered along both sides, cultivators wrapped in thick furs, whispering behind gloved hands.

None stepped closer; the cold in their eyes said the City Lord's power reached every doorway in Coldabyss City.

The procession climbed wooden steps onto a vast terrace of black ice, its surface shining like a butcher's slab.

## A Warrior Undefeatable

Pillars of Ten-Thousand-Year Profound Ice jutted up from the center, each streaked with old, dark blood. Breath misted around Jared, tasting of iron and frost-this was the Execution Platform.

Jared edged closer to the wooden railing, the rough grain biting his palms as he looked down. Thousands of robed cultivators jammed the plaza-locals, drifters, people with nowhere else to stare at someone else's doom.

Directly ahead, the Ice-Jade Throne shimmered on its dais, its surface sweating cold light, and yet the seat-sharp, arrogant-waited empty.

The absence told Jared the City Lord had not arrived; the plaza held its breath around that single, glittering vacancy.

A steel-throated voice cracked the air, "Kneel!"

Armor clanged. Guards forced the bound prisoners flat, faces pressed toward the throne they could not touch.

Someone on the platform bellowed, "The City Lord arrives!"

A lance of blue-white light speared from the horizon, crossing the sky in one breath and slamming to a stop before the throne.

When the glare dissolved, a middle-aged Daoist in ice-blue robes stood there, cheeks thin, eyes colder than the stone beneath his boots.

Each blink from those eyes poured silent force; Jared felt it settle in his lungs-this was Cyril, Lord Coldabyss, master at High Immortal Realm Level Five.

Temperature crashed. Frost blossomed across armor plates and shoulders; the chatter of the crowd knotted, then died.

Cyril's gaze drifted over the crouching prisoners, indifferent, as though measuring insects before choosing which heel to use.

One of them, unable to swallow the silence, cried out, "City Lord, we are wronged! We are not spies from the Azure Firmament Immortal Continent! The celestials hounded us; we fled here!"

The young man's voice shredded itself on the last syllable, leaving a raw echo.

The Guard Captain strode forward, gauntlet rising to silence him. "Insolence! Death stands over your necks, and still you spit lies."

Cyril spoke, calm as glacial water. "Wait."

At once the Captain froze, withdrew, head bowed.

Cyril regarded the young cultivator. "Oppressed by celestials? Refugees? How can I know this tale isn't a cover to infiltrate my city?"

"If Azure Firmament truly lies under celestial chains, why has the eastern region heard nothing?"

The youth shook, voice climbing. "The celestials are vast; they choke the news! Anyone who dares speak vanishes, throat slit and soul burned!"

"If you doubt, send scouts to Azure Firmament!" he pleaded. "I swear on my Dao- heart-one false word and may heaven erase me forever!"

Chains rattled as the other prisoners echoed the vow, tears streaking dirt into pale lines.

A crease formed between Cyril's brows; doubt, thin but living, cracked his frost. Jared knew the lord was no butcher; this purge came from fear. If Azure Firmament marched north, Coldabyss would be the first wall to break.

But what if the youths were truly blameless? The doubt tasted like iron on Jared's tongue.

He drew a slow breath and let his own voice rise.

He let the words leave him unforced, barely louder than a conversation, yet the marble chamber caught them and carried them to every corner.

"Lord Coldabyss, what they said is true."

A sharp hush cut through the assembly, the kind of sound that belonged to steel unsheathing.

Hundreds of gazes swung toward him at once; Jared felt the weight settle on his shoulders like fresh iron.

On the dais, Cyril's eyes narrowed to a cold sliver.

"And you are? What makes you so certain?"

Jared rose slowly, letting the Cold-Iron Shackles dangle, the links already fractured by the ripple of chaotic force he had sent through them minutes earlier.

They now rested on his wrists like souvenir chains, meaningless but noisy.

Around him, spears lifted a fraction, armor plates rasping as the nearest sentries tightened their stance.

He tasted their nerves in the air, metallic and thin.

The Guard Captain barked from behind the wall of helms, "Down on your knees!"

He lunged forward, palm arcing for Jared's shoulder, an avalanche meant to drive him back to the floor.

Jared did not bother to turn.

He raised his left hand lazily, touched the air with his forefinger.

A soft pop-barely louder than a bubble-cracked between them.

The Captain's strike froze three inches short, his body locking mid-motion, snarl embalmed on his face.

Terror flooded the man's eyes as he discovered even his own energy no longer obeyed him.

Cyril's brows twitched.

For the first time that evening, the city lord looked truly awake; his gaze drilled into the space where Jared's finger had moved.

That single tap carried a power so obscure and sophisticated it had sealed every vein of strength inside a High Immortal Realm Level Two cultivator—in an instant.

And when Jared stirred, the veil over his cultivation lifted; he stood revealed as Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Seven.

"Jared," he said simply, "from the level twelve of the Lower Realm."

His eyes held Cyril's without heat. "As for my certainty-let's just say the celestials and I have unfinished business."

He flicked his wrists; the ornamental chains shattered, dissolving into glittering shards of frost that drifted to the floor.

A vast, ancient breath rolled out of him—chaotic aura, patient and unhurried, yet big enough to cradle new worlds.

Even the seasoned cultivators around him felt their knees wish for the ground; the pressure came not from force, but from the memory of creation itself.

Cyril swallowed. "What... what power is this?"

The question rattled inside him long after the words escaped.

Jared's awareness skimmed across thousands of years of study-countless doctrines pored over, countless miracles mimicked-yet nothing had ever thrummed as pure as the newborn current now curling, bright and wordless, around the pit of his heart.

He let the silence tighten just enough to be felt, then breathed the name into it.

Chaotic force.

"City Lord, you can feel it-this

current outruns cycles, celestials every fattice you recognize were

11

a scout from Azure Firmament

Immortal Continent, why would I flaunt something so defiantly alien?"

Cyril's lips never parted, yet the air around him cooled as though silence were a verdict.

Jared watched the elder's nostrils flare, searching for fraud. The attempt faltered;

the scent of the current simply had no cousin in any catalogued path.

He extended a finger toward the shackled men and women.

"If you still doubt me, let my word cloak them. Should even one prove traitor in the future, any punishment you choose will fall on me first."

"Your word?" Cyril's gaze narrowed until his lashes nearly touched. "You stand here at the mere Heavenly Immortal Realm and presume to guarantee anything at all?"

Jared did not flinch.

Because I reached level thirteen while still bound to the Lower Realm.

"Does that not stir your curiosity, City Lord-how a cultivator short of the High Immortal Realm tore through the barrier between worlds to stand before you?"

Cyril's composure cracked; his pupils expanded, snatching every shard of light as if to confirm the impossible claim.

Jared could almost hear the titles

reverberate inside the elder's

skull-two realm barrier, membrane of law, the unbreakable edict that kept Lower Realm cultivators out of the Middle Realm until their spirit's ripened.

Break that decree, and the law itself was said to crush the intruder to dust.

Jared watched the calculation flicker behind the elder's eyes.

Either an unimaginable patron had carried him through, or he was himself so aberrant that the law stepped aside. In both cases, he was far from simple.

## A Warrior Undefeatable

Cyril's face rippled through shades of doubt and reluctant awe before he exhaled hard. With a curt swipe of his hand he broke the binding sigils. "Release them."

"City Lord?" One of the guards almost choked on the honorific, fingers frozen over the iron locks.

"I said, release them." Cyril repeated the order, each word weighted like stone; no room remained for doubt.

Steel hinges clicked open in a nervous cascade as the guards scrambled to free every prisoner.

The newly unshackled pressed their foreheads to the ground, gratitude flooding the space like dawn light; all of it gathering unspoken around Jared.

"You. Come with me," Cyril said, his voice like steel plunged in frost.

His gaze cut to the robed figure beside Jared. "Your companion as well."

The order hit Jared's chest harder than the chains that had once bound him.

Refusal never even formed; the cold authority in Cyril's eyes allowed no room.

Light cracked open around Cyril, sapphire and numbing, and in the next breath he was only a rushing comet over the rooftops.

The air he left behind tasted of winter.

Jared tipped his chin toward Luther; understanding passed without speech.

They rose together, boots skimming dust, then wind swallowed sound as their bodies broke free of gravity.

Cyril's blue tail glimmered ahead like the only road left to them.

Below, the Execution Platform sagged under scorched stone and half-conscious prisoners.

Their bewildered groans mixed with the buzz of cultivators gathered in widening rings.

Jared did not slow to comfort them; mercy would have to wait.

"Who in thunder was that?" a voice floated up, thin as smoke. Jared heard it only because fear sharpened every sense. "Level Seven, and he still bent Cyril's will?" someone gasped. The words chased Jared upward like sparks from a dying torch.

"Did you feel that aura? My bones are still trembling..." another muttered.

Jared clenched his fist, pretending the chill belonged only to the wind.

"Coldabyss City is about to flip on its head..."

The prophecy hung behind Jared like a fading drumbeat.

The rest dissolved into restless static, too many questions colliding at once.

City Lord Mansion, Reception Hall

Marble doors folded shut behind them, and with a curt wave Cyril sent every attendant scurrying into side corridors.

Silence settled, suddenly intimate.

Cyril lifted a jade kettle and let fragrant amber swirl into Jared's cup.

The humility in the gesture felt almost surreal after the scaffold.

"Mr. Chance, my earlier conduct was unforgivable. Pressure has made me overcautious; I beg your pardon."

Jared accepted the cup, its porcelain still warm from Cyril's hands.

"You are gracious, City Lord. I understand your caution."

Cyril leaned forward, eyes bright as blade edges.

"Let's speak plainly. How did you reach level thirteen? What lineage grants you chaotic force? And this feud with the celestials—tell me everything."

Steam rose between them while Jared tasted the tea, buying heartbeats.

He weighed secrets against necessity and chose the thinner mask.

The thaw in Cyril's tone told Jared the man wanted an ally, not a hostage.

That same heat sharpened whenever the celestials were mentioned; resentment flickered behind his courtesy.

Jared set the cup down, letting the clink clear the air.

"I'm from level twelve of the Lower Realm. A Senior opened the path for me that's how I crossed the ceiling you call a sky."

"The chaotic force was luck, nothing more—an old ruin, a shard of power, wrong place, right time."

"As for the celestials, we've traded blows before. Their clan chief keeps my friend Maxwell in chains."

"I came to level thirteen to sharpen myself—and to break those chains if I can."

Cyril tapped a thoughtful rhythm on the armrest. "Maxwell... the name isn't known to me."

"Still, the celestials are infamous; their arrogance stains the whole realm and the tiers above it."

"They treat every other race as servants and make enemies like it's breath." His gaze narrowed.

"Tell me, when you vouched for those Eastern Region cultivators, was that a courtesy-or your true intention?"

Jared allowed the answer to leave on a breath he hadn't realized he was holding.

"Naturally."

He lifted his chin toward Cyril, letting the lamplight catch the edge of his eyes. "I trust what they've reported. And the way the celestials conduct themselves—I've loathed it from the start."

A brief spark of approval flashed behind Cyril's frost-pale eyes.

"Good! Mr. Chance, quick words and a straight soul. Since that's so, I'll trust you this once. The Eastern Region cultivators will be settled my people won't trouble them again."

Jared clasped his hands and bent at the waist. "Many thanks, City Lord."

A pause, then the City Lord's brow tightened like ice forming on glass. "However..."

"The situation on the Azure

Firmament Immortal Continent may be harsher than even their stories suggest, Quiet reports reach

me-celestials are scheming

there,

and it is more than carving new borders."

"It seems they want the continent as a springboard, a way to bleed into all of level thirteen, inch by inch."

Jared's brows cinched before he felt them move. "If that's true, we have to stop them."

Cyril released a thin sigh that clouded in the cold hall. "Harder than you think." "The celestials are strong and old. Coldabyss City—even the entire North Abyss Icefield cannot face them alone. Unless... we unite other realms."

He fixed Jared with an expectant gaze. "You stand in the Heavenly Immortal Realm, power beyond your peers, and you carry an old grudge against them."

"Would you slip into the Azure Firmament Immortal Continent, learn their true strength and aim? With solid proof, I could rally the Middle Realm and beyond."

The offer landed exactly where his own intentions already pointed, and a low heat stirred behind his sternum.

He had intended to visit the Azure Continent anyway, to hunt for Senior Morse's trail and sift through the celestials' secrets.

Backed by Cyril's request and resources, the road suddenly looked straighter.

He inclined his head. "I will go. First, to find an old friend; second, to gauge the celestials and carve out a rescue path for the Senior they're holding." "Excellent!" Cyril's voice rang like crystal struck. "Whatever you need, speak it. I maintain hidden contacts on the Azure Continent—they will aid you."

They pored over routes until torchlight trembled. Cyril slid a thin map across the table, along with a pouch that clinked heavy with prime crystals.

When Jared finally stepped out of the city lord mansion, the sky above Coldabyss had already darkened to deep violet.

Luther kept pace at his side, worry sharpening his tone. "Mr. Chance, are we truly heading to the Azure Continent? The place is a nest of celestials now."

"We have to." Jared's gaze sought the star-blurred east.

"I need Senior Morse, and I need to see just how loud the celestials dare to roar."

A sideways grin tugged at his mouth. "Besides, with you around, I'm not worried."

When things turn ugly, you can simply send their souls on."

Luther's smile faltered. Color crawled up his ears as he rubbed the back of his neck. "Mr. Chance,

please don't tease me. I'm only net?

High mortal Realm Level Five.. Without the Door of Reincarnation I'd be nowhere near your match." C6ntent .net Jared pinched the bridge of his nose, swallowing a sigh. So all that swagger came from borrowing the Door of Reincarnation, yet the man still paraded around as the self-proclaimed Lord of Reincarnation. The arrogance was almost impressive.

## A Warrior Undefeatable

The sound of hurried footsteps scraped across the courtyard stones. An elder in tattered robes dropped to his knees before Jared, pulling a dozen frightened cultivators down with him. "Thank you, benefactor, for saving our lives!" His voice trembled, thick with tears that refused to fall. Jared's stomach tightened; moments ago these people had been lined up for the headsman.

He bent, fingers sliding beneath the elder's elbows, and lifted him gently. "Please, stand. You were condemned on false charges. I will go to the Azure Firmament Immortal Continent myself, learn the truth, and see justice served."

The elder shook his head so violently his wisps of hair whipped the air. "Kind one, don't set foot in Azure Firmament. The place devours good men. Not long ago two cultivators breached the barrier and reached level twelve. They were dragged back and beheaded in front of everyone."

The words struck Jared like cold iron; his heartbeat stuttered.

His mouth moved before thought could stop it. "Elder, were those two a man and a woman?" A tremor threaded through his voice, louder to his ears than any shout.

The elder's eyebrows leaped. "How could you possibly know that?" His bafflement rang genuine.

Heat drained from Jared's limbs, leaving them to wobble. Sidney and her husband had once risked level twelve for him, promising to return quickly. Had the executioner's blade found them instead? And were they now trapped on that same continent, heads already lost?

Luther leaned closer, voice pitched low. "Mr. Chance, you know those two, don't you?"

Jared forced a slow breath, shook his head. "I'm not sure. Elder, where exactly were the executions carried out?"

"In Jade Immortal City, eastern region of Azure Firmament," the elder said without hesitation. "That city belongs to Jade Immortal Manor—we fled from their square the moment the axe fell."

Jared's hand shot out, stopping the elderly peddler before he could shuffle past.

"Sir, did you see who beheaded those two cultivators?"

The words scraped his throat; urgency throbbed in his temples.

The old man's brows knit; he shook his head.

"I only heard about it, never saw it myself."

His gaze slid away, as though the question carried splinters.

Jared folded his fist in thanks, barely pausing.

"Luther, we leave for Jade Immortal City now."

The resolve tasted like iron on his tongue.

Before the last syllable cooled, his figure blurred.

A silver arc knifed into the sky, vanishing beyond the roof-line.

Startled, Luther gathered wind under his robes and darted after the gleam.

Wind screamed past Jared's ears, yet his heart raced faster.

Please let it be some other couple, he begged the empty sky.

If it was them, he would raze every celestial stronghold on this continent.

Seven dawns later, their shadows dropped onto Jade Immortal City at the continent's western rim.

The journey across the North Abyss Icefield's buffer lands had stripped his cloak white with frost.

Here, spring breathed from every stone; warmth seeped through his boots.

Walls rose like carved jade, pale and luminous, brushed by drifting aqua light.

Inside, towers layered like crystal petals; cranes glided between balconies the way sparrows chase grain back home.

Yet beneath the perfume of spirit mist, something pressed on his lungs.

Pedestrians hurried with eyes fixed ahead, conversation clipped to whispers.

Patrol squads in matching teal robes prowled the streets, the words Jade Immortal stitched over their hearts like a warning.

The unease curdled into action; he caught a middle-aged cultivator by the sleeve.

"Friend, forgive the intrusion," he said, bowing. "Some days ago was a man and woman executed here, in public?"

The man's face drained of color; he snatched his sleeve free.

"Never heard of it! You have the wrong person!"

He bolted, as if Jared's question carried plague.

Jared questioned another, and another; each time the recoil was the same.

At the first mention of decapitation, mouths sealed; shoes scraped away from him. The topic itself felt cursed, hovering like black smoke they refused to breathe.

So, talk of the deaths was smothered here; common folk feared even the echo of it.

"Mr. Chance, this isn't Coldabyss. Under celestial eyes, everyone walks on knives," Luther murmured.

Frustration beat against Jared's ribs. "Then where do we ask?"

"Every big city keeps shadows for sale," Luther said. "We find the darkest corner."

He noticed a thin, secret heat flare behind Luther's lashes.

"Information brokering, black-market trades, underground ring fights-any place that runs on coin or brute power will spill a few answers. West side of Jade Immortal city, back back alley, there's a stall called the Knowledge Pavilion."

Jared's answer came before the echo of the name had settled.

"Lead the way."

He followed Luther through side corridors the color of old parchment, always one stride behind, always watching the corners Luther@hose not to take.

The crowds thinned; noise softened to scattered footfalls and the tap of loose shutters.

Moisture clung to the narrow lane ahead, as though the stones sweated secrets.

A spoiled-pill scent tangled with wet mold and something raw-blood, maybe that caught at the back of his throat.

People here dressed like yesterday's promises—faded at the seams, some torn outright.

Most eyes slid across him with

merchant caution

r street-wolfet

threat none held the floating grace

he had grown used to in the city' brighter quarter.

The deepest alley spat them out before a squat shop no taller than Jared's shoulder.

Above the door a chipped wooden sign hung askew, the dark red paint blurring

three characters: Knowledge Pavilion.

He saw no doorman, yet the air around the frame prickled, layers of quiet sigils woven tight enough to hum against his skin.

He pushed inside.

An oil lamp, half-starved, shook its yellow flame over the counter and filled the room with pulse-weak light.

A hunched old man sat behind the plank counter, scar tissue mapping every inch of his face.

He polished a night-black dagger with a cloth so filthy it had grown its own shadows.

His breath crawled through the shop, indistinct, but Jared tasted the weight of it— High Immortal Realm, third grade at least, maybe more.

Without lifting his head the man rasped, the sound like a cracked gong:

"Buying, or selling?"

## A Warrior Undefeatable

"Buying."

Jared stepped closer, letting the lamplight find his face. "A public execution in Jade Immortal City, recently—a man and a woman. I want every detail. Who swung the blade, what led to it, and where the bodies rest."

The dagger paused mid-stroke.

The old man's filmed eyes lifted and drifted over Luther before pinning Jared, lingering just long enough to note a Heavenly Immortal Realm signature where he'd expected less.

A smear of amusement cracked his throat.

"This information isn't cheap."

"How much?"

Jared kept his tone even, as though inquiring after the price of bread.

Three fingers rose from his scarred fist.

"Thirty thousand high-grade prime crystals."

"Thirty thousand?" The number tasted like iron filings.

Beside him Luther sucked in a sharp breath that whistled like new steel.

Jared ran the math: in level thirteen that sum could swing a fine high-grade artifact, or bankroll an ordinary cultivator's decades of comfort.

A robbery spelled out in digits, yet the old man's face remained calm stone.

Jared felt his brow knit, the weight of the wrinkles equal to the weight of the price.

The coins in his spatial pouch-Cyril's generous advance plus everything he'd converted from level twelve-barely cleared five thousand. A gulf yawned between need and means.

The brass counter felt colder than it looked; Jared let two fingers rest on it, steadying the tremor in his chest.

"Would another treasure serve as collateral?"

The old merchant's eyelids barely lifted; the movement reminded Jared of a tortoise refusing to stick its neck out.

"We trade only in prime crystals-no credit, no pawns."

Cold light rippled across Jared's vision before he understood it came from his own eyes.

Beneath his ribs the sealed reservoir of chaotic force shifted, like storm water straining against a dam.

Every tick of the hanging clock sounded louder than the last.

He could feel impatience raking its nails along his spine, urging him to drag answers out of the merchant by force.

Luther's voice knifed into Jared's mind before sound reached his ears.

"Mr. Chance, stop. Wards layer this place. The old fool's strength is masked, his backers unknown. Force him and we might wake Jade Immortal Manor or worse, the celestials."

Jared drew in air so slowly his lungs burned, chaining the reckless surge back behind bone and will.

Luther was right; this was celestial turf, where one wrong vibration could summon a tribunal.

A ragged flap of cloth snapped aside behind the counter.

A bruised youth shot out footfirst, stumbled, and kissed the floorboards with his cheek.

From behind the cloth came a roar thick with phlegm.

"Get out! Bring fake leads again and I'll snap your legs next time!"

The words rattled across the shelves, making dusty vials vibrate like frightened teeth.

The youth pressed a bloody lip against his sleeve, then scrambled for the door, half crawling, half sliding on panic-slick boots.

An idea flicked like tinder inside Jared's head; he tapped the counter to reclaim the merchant's gaze.

"We'll revisit the price later," he said, already turning toward the doorway.

He caught Luther's sleeve and slipped into the street before the old man could object.

The battered youth limped toward the alley mouth; Jared and Luther shadowed him, matching every stride with softer ones.

At the corner they stepped ahead, blocking sunlight and escape in the same motion.

The youth jerked back, eyes fever-bright behind swelling bruises.

"What do you want? I'm broke!"

Jared lifted both palms, letting the alley's weak light show he carried no weapon.

"Easy, friend. No harm meant."

He loosened a cotton pouch; muted blue glints of prime crystals spilled against the fabric.

"Answer a few questions and the bag is yours."

Greed widened the youth's eyes, then caution narrowed them again; he swept the street with a quick, hunted glance.

He leaned in. "Not here. Follow me."

He threaded them through seven turns that smelled of rotting fruit and colder fear.

At last they ducked into a shack so ruinous the walls argued with gravity.

He latched the door, then spun, hunger and worry wrestling for space on his face. "What do you need to know?"

Even while speaking, his gaze kept hopping to the pouch as though afraid it would sprout wings.

Jared did not circle. "The recent beheading outside Jade Immortal City—a man and a woman. Tell me everything."

Color fled the youth's face so fast it seemed vacuumed out.

He shook his head hard enough to sting. "Know nothing! Even asking costs a head!"

Jared inched the pouch forward until the crystals' dull shimmer nudged the youth's knuckles.

"Speak, take them, and we vanish. No one learns who helped us."

The kid's fingers hovered above the pouch, pupils flickering like a trapped animal watching an open gate.

Need pulsed in his face, but fear kept his heels glued to the floor.

"We only want a general hint," Jared coaxed, letting the pouch dangle where the lamplight could kiss every gem.

"For instance, where the execution is scheduled. That can't be state secret. Give us the spot and we'll handle the rest."

"Soulfall Slope, three hundred li east

of the city the youth snatched the crystals as though they were

burning coal. "-that's where Jade Immortal Manor handles the worst

offenders, wicked ground through and through."

"Anyone killed there has their very soul pinned down, doomed forever. That's all I know, I swear. Don't ask me for more—please!"

Before Jared could frame another question, the boy wrenched the door wide and bolted into the corridor, soft boots drumming a panicked retreat.

"Soulfall Slope..... souls chained..." Jared mouthed the phrase, tasting iron at the back of his tongue.

Unease crawled higher with every syllable, a cold vine squeezing breath from his ribs.

Mr. and Mrs. Morse were seasoned adepts; a plain beheading might still leave them a sliver of escape.

But a site designed to strangle spirit as well as flesh... that cracked open possibilities Jared refused to name.

"Mr. Chance, what now?" Luther's whisper barely slipped past the room's stale air.

"We go to Soulfall Slope," Jared said, each word a nail.

"Alive, we bring them home. Dead..... I'll at least trace where they bled out."

Neither man lingered. They slipped through the eastern gate and shot across the plains, the city shrinking to a cracked bowl behind them.

Three hundred li blurred beneath their boots in less than a breath.

The first glimpse of the hollow between twin barren peaks punched the air from Jared's chest.

The slope itself sagged like a wound, no wider than a village square yet dense with

a reek that felt older than bone.

A permanent veil of gray mist hovered overhead, thinning the daylight to a smoker's cough.

No grass dared break the soil; the earth glistened a dark, blood-heavy red.

Somewhere in the murk, screams drifted-shrill, hopeless, layered like old paint— voices of souls shackled so long they had forgotten silence.

At the center stood black pillars streaked with dried gore, each wrapped in rune- scored chains as thick as a man's thigh.

Even without a witness, Jared knew: this was where sentences ended.

He swallowed the quake in his gut and dropped onto the sodden ground.

Mud clung, warm and slick, as if someone had just wrung it from fresh organs.

Wails jabbed at his mind like sewing needles, but the chaotic force coiled in his core flicked them aside.

Jared crept toward the cluster of black stone columns, forcing each step to stay silent. Stale air pressed against his ribs, but he kept moving until rough granite filled his reach surface up†††† ne

and he

could study.

close.

Crusted blood, long dried to brown, pocked the column, yet newer gouges still bled

a faint rust, as if whatever happened here refused to settle into memory.

el.m

The ground told its own story-drag tracks scoring the dust, star-shaped scorch pits where spells had detonated, and, scattered like shed petals, several shredded scraps of

cloth unlike any fabric he knew.

He crouched, fingertips trembling, and lifted one scrap between thumb and

forefinger.

The weave resisted even that gentle tug—Heavenly Silkworm Silk threaded with some ice-laden filament, colder than stone, yet impossibly supple, still humming with a thin, pristine aura.

That aura echoed Mr. Morse's ageless, serene power, only now it flickered—weak, fractured, as though the man's very spirit had been shaken apart.

Another shard, softer in color, breathed a quiet wood-tinged vitality that fit the gentle steadiness Jared remembered from Morse's wife.

## A Warrior Undefeatable

"It was them... really them..." The words cracked as they escaped him, half whisper, half growl.

His hand shook around the silk; nails bit deep enough into his palm to draw blood he barely felt.

He had braced for confirmation, yet when truth struck, it carved straight through bone—an ice pick of grief twinned with a firestorm of rage.

Mr. Morse the scholar Jared had dragged from the shattered steps of the Celestial Stairway, the polite sage who reappeared at level twelve and pointed him toward the Ancient Energy Refiners' Abode—had seemed untouchable.

And Sidney's wife, barely reborn, her eyes still learning sunlight, had clung to tomorrow like a child to a lantern.

Yet here, in the reeking throat of Soulfall Slope, they had been—

"Where are their bodies? Why is there nothing left?" After scouring the perimeter, Luther straightened, confusion darkening his eyes.

Even decapitation should have left torsos, he muttered, brow furrowed.

Even if someone cleaned up, they would have missed at least a smear.

Jared forced every breath to level out, then fanned his awareness over Soulfall Slope inch by inch.

Near the foot of one pillar, a pinprick wobble in space shivered against his senses.

Thick death aura and rancid resentment lay over it like tar; without his chaotic force, he would have missed the pulse entirely.

"There's something underneath." He shaped two fingers into a blade; swirling chaotic force answered, sharp and quiet, and he traced a single line across the base.

A wet, tearing hiss split the stillness.

The basalt shell parted, revealing a narrow throat of darkness angling down, barely wide enough for one body at a time.

From that wound gushed denser death and resentment energy, braided with a strange spatial pressure that made his skin crawl toward the cut.

A ragged opening gaped where the hillside should have been smooth.

Faint glimmers of sigil-dust still clung to the rim, proof of the concealment and sealing art he had just torn apart with raw chaotic force.

Any ordinary cultivator would have walked past without sensing a thing.

"Is that..... a tunnel down, or the mouth of some pocket realm?" Luther's whisper scraped the back of Jared's neck.

The man's uncertainty fluttered in the stale air like a moth looking for flame.

Jared drew one steadying breath; metallic rot filled his lungs and dared him to hesitate.

He ignored it and sprang into the dark.

Boots slapped stone a heartbeat later; Luther had jumped too.

The passage angled downward instead of dropping straight.

Its cramped walls were glass-smooth, as though some patient tide had licked every edge away for centuries.

With every step the air thickened-stale death first, then the sharper tang of resentful breath he could almost taste.

Under it, a pulse of warped space throbbed against his ribs, as if directions themselves were flexing.

Nearly three hundred feet in, the claustrophobia ripped open into cavernous breadth.

At the heart of the chamber squatted a circular pool as wide as a small courtyard. The liquid inside was thick as clotting syrup, a dark wine that kept belching bubbles. Each pop sprayed the stench of iron and something more feral—screaming spite that tried to crawl up his nostrils.

Above the blood, countless pinpricks of warped gray-white light drifted like tattered fireflies.

They struggled without sound, shards of souls denied any door forward, their misery radiating like cold fire.

Higher still, embedded in the stone dome, a fist-sized rhombus of the same pallid light spun slowly.

It breathed the exact law of rebirth Luther once wielded—only purer, domineering. Recognition pricked behind Jared's eyes.

Crystal, pool, the killing topography of Soulfall Slope—together they sang one purpose: grind every loose spirit that died here until nothing but obedient ash remained.

His gaze locked on the rim of the pool and refused to budge.

Scraps of clothing and splintered belongings lay there, hopeless flotsam on a red shore.

A broken long sword—plain, old, unmistakable—caught the dim glow.

Mr. Morse never let that blade leave his side.

Beside it rested a smooth jade hairpin still breathing the faint warmth of wood-aligned qi; it belonged to Sidney's wife.

Other shredded tokens, all carrying the couple's scent, sprinkled the stone like breadcrumbs that ended in blood.

No bodies waited.

Only the silence where bodies should have been.

"Their remains were... melted in the pool?" Luther's voice cracked dry.

Jared drifted toward the rim.

Each footfall thickened the killing heat in his chest until chaotic aura roared out, devouring every thread of death-fog that dared approach.

He knelt and lifted the severed sword as gently as if it were a living limb.

A ghost-thin imprint flared along the steel-Morse's final will.

Rage, defiance, terror for the woman he loved—then abrupt blankness.

A raw howl tore from Jared's throat, the sound of a beast that had just found its pack butchered.

He felt Jared's fury before he saw it. It broke open like a furnace door, blasting heat made of rage, grief, and savage self-reproach straight into Luther's bones.

Jared's eyes flashed blood-red. A chaotic aura boiled off him, gray eddies clawing across the cavern and whipping the blood pool into a violent, sloshing tide. "Celestials..... Jade Immortal Manor... good," Jared growled, each word trembling with the promise of something awful, "very good."

The words left his lips like shards of black ice, too cold to melt even in the fevered air.

"Mr. Morse... if I let this debt stand, I deserve no breath," he said, his tone settling into lethal calm.

"I will scour Jade Immortal City—no beast, no child, no stone left alive. Every celestial lackey on Azure Firmament will die beside them."

A column of killing intent burst upward, punched through the ceiling, and spun above Soulfall Slope as a funnel of ashen wind.

Luther shrank back, the cavern light strobing between gray and red. He had followed Jared through wars and graves, yet he had never seen the man lose the reins like this.

The pressure rolling off him was so vicious that even Luther, a High Immortal Realm Level Five ghost, felt his spectral heart stumble.

If Jared unleashed that storm, Azure Firmament would drown in blood—and this was only the opening rumble.

Jared straightened slowly, the motion controlled again, and lifted Mr. Morse's keepsakes as though they might break from a breath.

The crimson shimmer faded from his eyes, but what remained there was worse-

rage cooled into something deliberate, bottomless.

"Luther." Jared spoke the name as though it were a lever he meant to pull.

"Here," Luther snapped, spine rigid before he realized he had moved.

"Find out," Jared said, each syllable landing like a hammer. "Use every contact you own I want the name c

the dade Immortal Manor butcher who swung the blade, and the coward who ordered it."

of

"Drag the celestials into the light with them—every last accomplice."

"Understood." He bowed, knowing the mountain before him was nothing compared with the volcano at his back.

"This cursed passage stays buried," Jared muttered, glaring at the hidden tunnel.

The look he threw at the stone throat was the same that had just promised

genocide.

"Mr. Chance, disturbing it now will draw every nose in the city," Luther cautioned.

"If we want the names of the executed and the one who signed the order, we'll need allies. Let the passage rest until we tie more hands to our side."

He forced a slow breath through clenched teeth. The roar in his skull ebbed, inch by stubborn inch, until a edges sharpened damp afley. stones, Luther's steady outline, the paltid sky trembling above them.

Rage alone would change nothing; he could feel that truth settle.

He angled toward Luther, voice low enough that the wind had to lean in.

"What kind of faction are we supposed to reach?"

Luther answered without hesitation, the words grinding like flint behind his teeth.

Look at the Azure Firmament Immortal Continent now—every city afraid of its own shadow. Someone, somewhere, has to be pushing back in the dark.

"If we find that resistance and fold ourselves into their network, we can gather intelligence for half the cost and twice the speed."

He found himself nodding before the sentence had finished shaping itself.

"Fair. Then we track down the kid who peddles rumors."

He had dealt with hidden circles before; none opened their doors without a trusted broker to vouch.

So the chatter-monger would have to do.

Only a fool tried to scam the Knowledge Pavilion, and that boy had done it with a grin—exactly the kind of recklessness they could use.