

A Warrior Undefeatable 6021-6030

Chapter 6021

At that moment, inside Grace Pavilion.

Jared stood by the window, his gaze seeming to pierce layer after layer of buildings until it rested on the celestial envoy being treated like the moon among stars.

He had coaxed Rania into the adjoining quiet room, claiming he needed absolute silence to test a Tranquil Heart Formation.

Outside, the sentries were indeed looser than the last two days; the intervals between patrols had lengthened, just as his careful watching had suggested.

The narrow back paths leading toward the treasury district lay almost deserted.

"A celestial envoy... sixth-grade upper immortal....." he murmured.

Jared muttered under his breath, a cold gleam forming in his eyes.

This was a chance-contact the celestials, pull information, maybe even track down the Soul-Refining Crystal.

Julian, that sly fox, had loosened the watch on purpose; the intention was obvious- borrow a knife, test the depths.

Fine, he would play along.

His shape blurred and slid into the nearest shadow, slipping out of Grace Pavilion without a sound.

He did not sprint for the treasury; like a patient hunter he flowed along the relaxed routes, using his grasp of the Manor formation array and the masking nature of chaotic force to evade every watcher.

The treasury restricted zone usually bristled with guards.

Tonight, most eyes were glued to the treasury's front gate where the tribute was being tallied.

Jared surfaced like a wraith at a secluded rear corner of the treasury halls.

A small, hidden door used for emergency transfers sat there, layered in complex seals.

With Quentin's fragmentary memories and his own chaotic force, the barrier was hardly a wall.

Gray light pulsed at his fingertip, probing the node until the array went numb and docile.

The door sighed open a finger's width.

Inside, lamps burned bright.

Julian himself stood beside Mr. Clive, guiding him through glittering heaps of spirit crystals, herbs, and ore.

Several celestial guards fanned out, watchful.

Jared pressed into the seam between light and shadow, shrinking his presence, eyes darting over the chamber.

The mundane tribute meant nothing to him; he wanted the Soul-Refining Crystal.

Quentin's memories, plus tidbits coaxed from Rania, placed the crystal deep inside, locked within the Profound Ice Chamber warded by Julian himself.

Gliding between towering shelves and hillocks of cargo, he slipped past a roving steward and headed for that spot.

The air grew noticeably colder.

A massive black-iron door carved with frost runes loomed ahead, rippling with chill light.

The Profound Ice Chamber.

Jared had just begun to study the lock when faint footsteps and voices drifted in behind him.

Julian and Mr. Clive, business concluded, were heading straight toward him.

Julian looked like he was flaunting the manor's hidden wealth for the envoy-or steering him here on purpose.

A sharp thought snapped through Jared. He slid behind a stack of tall, frost-rimmed ice ore and smothered every trace of his presence.

Julian's voice carried over, a hair tense. "Envoy, this is the Profound Ice Chamber where we store certain special goods."

A faint tremor tucked itself beneath Julian's words.

Mr. Clive stopped before the door, feeling the wards. "Adequate defenses. Manor Lord Jade,

Unfinished soul crystals are

here?"

"Exactly," Julian replied.

"A few more days will finish the process," he added.

refining

Mr. Clive stared at the chamber gate, eyes glinting. "Open it. I want to see the progress myself."

Julian's mouth tightened. "Envoy, the refinement is delicate—any disturbance could..."

"I will judge that," Mr. Clive cut in.

The envoy's tone brooked no steeped in celestial argumest

arrogance or is there so net

you'd rather hide, Manor Lord Jade?"

The air drew taut, humming with unspoken threat.

A dry laugh flickered in Jared's chest behind the ore.

Old fox, Jared thought, you're dangling the envoy in front of the Soul Refining Crystal and hoping

Let

someone-1-stirs the pot.

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A flicker of struggle crossed Julian's face before he sighed, conceding. "Since the

envoy insists... so be it."

He advanced, weaving signs; thin lances of light shot into the gate's nodes.

Runes flared, the cold thickened, and the heavy door rumbled inward.

A sharper chill bled out, laced with a faint, soul-itching resentment.

Approval flashed in Mr. Clive's eyes; he stepped forward.

His boot hovered over the threshold when

-the moment ripped open.

A haze-gray sword flare erupted from the ore's shadow without warning.

It sheared at space itself, arrowing for the envoy's exposed back; the air hissed,

eaten away.

Jared's long-poised killing stroke had finally struck.

The blade wanted the envoy, not Julian.

Mr. Clive, a sixth-tier upper celestial, moved with startling speed.

Silver radiance burst out; a fitted inner cuirass surfaced as he wrenched aside.

Rip!

The gray edge sliced through the light, digging a deep groove in that costly armor, almost punching through.

Chaotic force seeped inside; the envoy grunted, cheeks bleaching white.

He whirled, a lightning-laced silver sword flashing into his grip, and cleaved toward

the fading shadow.

But Jared was already withdrawing, refusing to tangle.

His form melted back into darkness, streaking for the chamber's edge.

He had wounded the envoy, sown panic, and gauged both men-mission achieved.

Humiliation blazed across Mr. Clive's face; someone had dared strike him inside this treasury.

It was an affront he could not forgive.

He shot after Jared like forked lightning, Thunder Sword Light shredding the air.

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Behind him, Julian's voice cracked through the vaulted hallway like a whip. "An assassin! Protect the envoy! Seal the treasury! Catch that thief!"

Jared risked a backward glance. Torches spilled light over Julian as the Manor Lord marshaled arriving guards, barking orders with full conviction, yet a flicker of something sly flicked through the older man's eyes before it vanished behind duty.

Jared's own body cut through archways and side corridors, gliding past rockeries and covered walks, his steps soundless, his pulse drumming fast but steady.

He chose every turn, every carved screen, to break Mr. Clive's line of sight and to force the envoy's senses to chase echoes instead of facts.

The shroud of chaotic force tucked his presence into a wrinkle of silence. Only the single faint trace Mr. Clive had marked kept the envoy from losing him altogether.

Twice a slash of silver lightning carved into empty storerooms or clipped garden walls—damage Jared had lured there on purpose, widening the uproar behind him.

A last dive over a stone bridge brought him into the outer paths of Grace Pavilion just as a fresh burst of sword-charged wind shredded air where his back had been.

Alert horns blared across the grounds. Lanterns bobbed near the pavilion, guards clustering into nervous ranks as orders snapped between them.

Jared slipped through a narrow gap where two sentries overlapped vision. His body thinned into shadow, flowed past them, and breezed through the side door.

Inside, he stripped the torn outer robe, loosed his hair, and settled a calm breath, the picture of a scholar emerging from long study.

Boot heels thundered on the stairs the moment he smoothed his sleeves, shouts driving closer.

Julian burst onto the landing, fury painted across his face. Mr. Clive followed, jaw tight, one hand at his chest, a wall of armored guards spreading to encircle the pavilion.

"Search it! Every corner!" Julian's command cracked like ice. "The assassin ran this way!"

The manor lord's gaze slid over the rail, met Jared's for a brief, unreadable beat, then moved on as blades and boots flooded the rooms.

Cabinets flew open. Cushions scattered. Even Rania's private chamber rattled beneath armored fists.

Rania strode out of the quiet room, fury flashing. "Father, what is this? This is my space!"

"Rania, an assassin hit the treasury and wounded the envoy. He may have fled here," Julian answered, softening his tone toward her while never lifting his eyes from the troops.

He watched Jared from the edge of his vision, weighing every twitch.

Jared offered the proper shock. "An assassin? The envoy is hurt? Manor Lord, is Mr. Clive all right?"

Mr. Clive's palm pressed the rent in his inner armor, the gray sting of chaotic force still leaking discomfort across his face.

His stare skimmed Jared, then prowled over silken screens and carved pillars, hunting for the invisible thread that felt wrong.

To him Jared looked frail, aura capped near the peak of the Earthly Immortal stage - nothing like the ruthless shade from the treasury.

Yet unease clung to the envoy's silence, as if a puzzle edge refused to fit.

Half an hour dragged by. Wardrobes lay emptied, floors bare. The guards found nothing.

The captain swallowed and reported, "No trace, Manor Lord."

"Useless!"

Julian snapped, sleeves flaring. "Keep searching. Widen the net. Lock down the inner court-do not let so much as a fly escape!"

Mr. Clive lifted a hand, cutting off the tirade.

His glare fixed on Julian. "I was attacked inside your treasury, the assassin vanished beside your daughter's quarters. You owe me an explanation."

Cold settled over the pavilion like nightfall.

No one dared breathe; even Rania felt the weight pressing her ribs.

Julian drew a long breath, shoulders sinking. "Envoy, my shame is great. Lately certain restless cultivators resent the celestials and our manor's cooperation."

"They sow rumors, steal goods, and now dare strike at a celestial envoy to ruin our standing and brand us traitors."

He pushed blame toward unseen rebels with earnest eyes.

Mr. Clive shook his head. "The force that hit me was strange-unlike any common rebel."

He stepped closer, voice low and sharp. "Your treasury wards are tight. How did he enter? How did he know my route and ambush me?"

Julian's mouth opened, stalled.

A strained smile surfaced. "The wards are complex. Perhaps he is a formation expert. As for your route... your arrival was grand; spies may have observed."

He bowed, both hands raised. "The fault is mine. I have sealed every gate, I will scour the city, and when I find him, I will deliver him to you."

Julian's tone stayed humble, promise thick, as he swore again to chase the phantom that stood a single pace away.

A faint shimmer slid across Mr. Clive's silver irises. Julian's smooth excuse rang hollow, and Clive tasted deceit like iron on the back of his teeth. He didn't buy a single word.

Every trick he had caught Jade Immortal Manor pulling paraded through his head one after another. Compared with those, the tale of some rebel sneaking in for assassination felt laughably thin.

He stood in the very core of the manor, outnumbered and away from open sky. A straight fight with Julian here could turn his delegation into corpses before nightfall.

His chest pulsed where that gray sword light had scraped him. The alien power still nipped at his flesh, cold, tireless, whispering that he could bleed again if he mis-stepped.

A short, sharp breath burst from him.

"Fine," he growled, letting the echo carry, "I'll trust you this once. Manor Lord Jade, the Divine Punishment Hall expects a report that won't insult our ears-soon."

"As for the soul crystals," he added, flicking a hand at the sealed door, "they're unfinished. I won't waste another breath here the tribute is

logged; I return at once to deliver it. See to your own house."

He held Julian's gaze for a slow heartbeat, then let it slide to the soft-faced scholar and the furious girl beside him. None of them spoke.

Clive snapped his cloak, turned, and strode out with his celestial guards in tow.

Before the manor gates even shut behind him, he was already plotting the next stops—two more houses one frozen valley then straight back to the Divine Punishment Hall. The elders had to hear about that ghost-gray assassin.

Julian stood on the pavilion steps until the last glimmer of Mr. Clive's carriage winked out against the clouds.

The grief and deference on his face drained away like water through sand, leaving a still, unreadable calm.

He flicked two fingers, a silent order.

Armor clinked; ranks split and withdrew, until only a handful of his most loyal stood watch beyond the lattice doors.

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"Rania, return to your quarters," he said, soft in volume yet edged like steel.

Even before the last syllable faded, Julian felt the command settle in the room like a weight; no one would mistake it for a request.

Rania shot Jared a worried look; the boy answered with the smallest nod.

She turned, skirts rustling in tight, unhappy circles, and retreated to her suite.

The side hall fell quiet once her footsteps faded.

Only Julian and Jared remained, a pot of cooling tea between them.

Silence stretched, brittle and thin, ready to snap at a whisper.

Julian moved to the master chair and lowered himself with deliberate calm.

He let his gaze rake over Jared, searching for cracks.

"Mr. Chance," he said, voice mild, "that was a clever display."

Jared, unruffled, filled a cup for himself, steam curling across his lashes. He sipped before answering. "Manor Lord Jade, I'm not sure what you mean. I've been studying formations all night."

Julian chuckled once; the sound held no warmth, no humor, only teeth.

"A lone assassin slips in and out, wielding a gray power no one here has shown- then vanishes near Grace Pavilion," Julian said, fingers drumming. "Tell me, Mr. Chance, does that strike you as random?"

Jared set the cup down with a muted click. "Are you accusing me, Manor Lord Jade?"

"Accuse?" Julian leaned forward, eyes hard. "No. I am certain."

"That gray, devouring aura-you carry it like a brand," Julian continued, voice low. "Inside Jade Immortal Manor, no one else breathes that power. Not one."

Jared let out a thin laugh, the steam from his cup swirling between them. "Since you'd already seen through me, why loosen your guards and hand me the chance?"

"Because I need answers," Julian said, each word hammered into place. "Who are you, and what do you want?"

He spread his hands, indicating the empty hall. "The envoy has gone. Only you and I remain. Speak openly."

A hush fell as Jared's shoulders straightened.

The air around him rippled, soft at first, then sharp enough to raise gooseflesh on Julian's arms even though the measured pulse still read as eighth-rank.

"Since you ask," Jared said, the power subsiding but not gone, "I'll stop pretending." "My name is Jared," he went on, each syllable steady. "I'm from the lower realms, and I've come looking for two old friends—Sidney and Cadence."

Julian's pupils pinched to points.

His fingers curled around the armrest before he could stop them.

Jared's gaze stayed on him. "So you do know them."

"They were beheaded at Soulfall Slope, their spirits forged into soul crystals."

Jared's voice hardened. "Did that order come from you?"

Julian said nothing; the silence itself confessed.

Only after a long breath did he speak, voice uneven. "Yes, the decree was mine, but the story the world heard is a lie."

"Then tell me the real one."

The request carried no heat, only iron certainty.

Julian drew a slow breath. "Sidney and Cadence..."

"They weren't mere border jumpers." His eyes drifted to the shuttered window.

"They uncovered pieces of how the celestials truly chain level thirteen, and why they hoard soul crystals."

"They reached out to factions sick of kneeling, hoping to spark... something," he admitted.

"They slipped near the storeroom, trying to steal—or confirm a certain item. The formation caught them before I could intervene."

Julian drew a tight breath, shoulders still as carved stone before he spoke. "The celestials got word fast," he said, "they ordered me to execute them at once, feed their souls into the Soul-Refining Grand Array, and turn over the crystal."

His gaze landed on Jared, weariness flickering behind the forced steadiness of his eyes.

"I may be lord of one manor, but before the celestials I have almost no choice."

A rasp edged his tone, regret cutting through. "Defy the Divine Oracle, and Jade Immortal Manor would vanish overnight. I hate what I did to Sidney and Cadence, yet I had to."

Heat rushed behind Jared's ribs, anger and grief clawing for release, but he held his breath until the surge steadied into ice.

"So their soul crystal—the A11-73 Box—where is it now?"

Julian didn't hesitate.

"In the Profound Ice Chamber."

He met Jared's eyes, unflinching.

"But I can't hand it to you."

Cold settled over Jared's gaze.

"Why?"

Julian folded his hands, voice low.

"Because that crystal is the only shield left for me and for the manor."

He pressed on before Jared could speak.

"Celestials collect soul crystals on a strict schedule. If I give yours away, what answer do I give when the next envoy arrives?"

A faint tremor slipped into his voice.

"They will tear the truth out, and once they link the loss to me, no one inside Jade Immortal Manor will survive."

He exhaled, shoulders sinking as though the burden were carved in stone.

"Jared, I know you wish to save them, but on my shoulders sit the lives of millions in Jade Immortal City."

Jared's jaw tightened; he said nothing.

The reasoning held; Jared couldn't refute it.

Seizing the crystal by force would expose the manor and trigger harsher vigilance from the celestials.

Julian's eyes narrowed.

"You killed Garth and Miles, and Quentin as well, didn't you?"

Jared dipped his head.

"Yes. They were executioners, stained with my friends' blood."

Instead of anger, Julian's mouth curved in a sharp, thin smile.

"Good. Quentin posed as my loyal hound, but the celestials bought him long ago."

He gave a dismissive flick of his sleeve.

"The Turner brothers were his claws-better gone. You've saved me no small trouble."

Surprise flashed across Jared's face.

So the lord's resentment toward the celestials ran deeper than it appeared.

Jared lifted his eyes, suspicion sharpening.

"You let me strike the envoy and brought me here for more than confession, didn't you?"

He cut to the point.

"What do you really want, Lord Jade?"

Julian's stare held him for a long breath; then the lord leaned back, gambler's light in his eyes.

Julian's voice softened, almost admiring.

"You carry rare arts, boundless

promise, and the nerve to wound Clive today. That shows you can bargain-of-fight-with the celestials."

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Heat colored his next words.

"I'm done being the celestials' dog, fetching souls for them."

His tone dropped to a raw whisper.

"But I lack the strength. The four elders of Divine Punishment Hall sit like mountains I cannot climb."

He spread his hands, palms up.

"Helping you today helps myself. I'm betting that you—or whoever stands behind you can shake the celestials."

The vow rumbled quiet but firm.

"I can't hand over their soul crystal

yet, but when the time is right I'll

er

you, even try to preserve what remains of their souls." .net>

He leaned in, voice barely above a murmur.

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"I'll also give you intelligence on the celestials in the eastern region, cover your moves Jade Immortal City and across Azure Firmament Immortal Continent, and, at feed, lend you support."

He paused, letting the offer settle.

"In exchange—"

His gaze drilled into Jared.

"If you truly gain the power to fight the celestials, you must free Jade Immortal Manor and do it without turning on us."

He added, softer but resolute.

"And never harm Rania. Her heart toward you is sincere."

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Jared listened, mind racing beneath a mask of calm.

Aligning with Julian meant colossal risk; if exposed, neither would survive.

Yet the gains were clear—an ally inside the celestials' domain and a thread of hope for the Morse couple.

Big wagers didn't scare Jared; vengeance had already mortgaged his life.

He stood and crossed the last step between them.

Jared extended his hand.

His voice rang steady. "Your honesty earns respect. The Morse debts will be paid, and the celestials' secrets unearthed."

He tightened the offered handshake.

"When the moment comes, we'll stand together—for the manor and for everyone crushed under level thirteen's weight."

Jared clasped Julian's hand. Julian's palm felt dry, his grip iron-tight, as though he wanted the pressure to brand the agreement onto skin.

Jared held on for a single heartbeat, aware of how fragile the alliance was, yet feeling it lock into place all the same.

Heat churned in Jared's chest, rising behind a mask of composure.

The promise changed nothing; the flames of revenge and inquiry only licked higher, demanding more than a single handclasp could offer.

Hurting Clive once had been a start, not a finish.

Jared needed the envoy broken, stripped, exploited—only then would the scales begin to balance.

To do that, he had to reach the celestials' marrow, not just bruise their skin.

He released Julian's hand, drew in a slow breath, then spoke in a low, steady voice. "Manor Lord Jade..."

Jared's fingers fell away completely. His gaze sharpened, bright as a brand.

"Will Clive head straight back to the Divine Punishment Hall once he leaves?"

Julian shook his head, the motion firm but careful.

"No. His run is a routine collection of offerings and soul crystals across the eastern region. Jade Immortal Manor is only one stop."

"By protocol, he'll continue to the next site Profound Ice Valley in the northern reach-finish all errands, and only then return to make his report."

Jared tasted the name, then pressed on.

"Profound Ice Valley... how long until he gets there?"

Julian pinched his brows, thinking.

"Half a day if he pushes, a full day if he drags. The Jade Phoenix carriage is fast,

but he's hauling tribute and must follow checkpoints. He can't rush it."

A crease formed between Julian's eyes; realization dawned.

He muttered, "Jared, you're not thinking of..."

Jared cut him off with a single word.

"Exactly."

Frost glittered in Jared's eyes.

"I want the envoy to stay in that gorge for good. After that, I'll borrow his face."

Julian blurted, "Absolutely not!"

His expression tightened, voice sinking.

"Clive is upper-immortal sixth tier and a trained celestial elite. He isn't someone you simply pick off."

"He travels with dozens of celestial guards, none of them mediocre. You hurt him once, but in a straight fight the outcome is uncertain."

"And if a celestial envoy dies out there, the Divine Punishment Hall will rage. They'll send stronger hunters, and the blowback will be catastrophic!"

Jared, however, looked completely sure.

"Manor Lord, spare yourself the worry. In a head-on clash, I know my chances."

"Since I've chosen to stand against the celestials, I buried my life long ago."

"If wearing Clive's skin lets me slip into their strongholds, learn what they hide, and reach the truth about soul crystals, that risk is worth every drop."

He paused, staring straight at Julian.

"Besides, this is step one of our pact, isn't it? If I can't finish a wounded Clive, how could I ever shake the celestials?"

Julian found himself staring back, unsettled by the calm, colossal confidence in the young man's eyes.

This youth wasn't just reckless; he was hiding resources Julian still couldn't see. Maybe just maybe-Jared could truly pull it off.

After a long hush, a gambler's glint lit Julian's eyes. He had already placed a stake; why not wager the whole board?

"Fine!" Julian said, voice firm as a blade strike.

"Once Clive leaves Jade Immortal City, his path to Profound Ice Valley cuts straight through Blackwind Gorge."

"The terrain there is vicious-chaotic aura, spatial tears-perfect for an ambush. I'll give you a detailed route map."

He hesitated, then lowered his voice.

"Make it a one-strike kill. No survivors, no trace."

"Remember, Clive carries emergency artifacts keyed to the hall. Pin his soul in an instant, or he'll signal or self-detonate."

"Understood."

He dipped his chin, sealing the promise, and let the plan settle like a stone inside his mind.

The Soulsearh Technique had always been part of the design.

He wouldn't merely kill; he would harvest every memory Clive possessed.

The two of them bent over the map for another stretch, hammering out timing, signals, and fallback points.

Julian slid a marked chart across the table and listed the envoy's probable lifesaving charms and emergency seals.

Once the plan felt airtight, Jared retreated into the Pentacarna Tower.

Inside, time flowed differently; days dripped away while he adjusted meridians,

refined the dual-cultivation gains with Rania, and drove his combat edge to a new

peak.

Outside, barely half a day ticked by; within the tower, several dozen had already turned over.

Dawn still lingered when Jared slipped out of Grace Pavilion. The guards, lulled by

false calm, never sensed the shadow gliding past.

He streaked toward Blackwind Gorge, his figure a whisper inside the night.

He kept every motion

inconspicuous. No blazing footwork,

no glowing treasure, just a faint

streak of ordinary light that wrapped around him. Under that shell, chaotic force churned and pushed him forward so fast the canyon walls blurred.

Blackwind Gorge opened ahead, wedged between two sheer peaks that stabbed

into the clouds. Belts of sooty gale howled around them year-round.

The ravine plunged deep. Jagged boulders jutted like broken fangs, and those swirling black cyclones tore at sound and spirit alike. They even tugged at the fabric of space-perfect cover for an ambush.

Jared arrived early. He walked the bends, ran a palm across stone, tasted the wind.

At a sharp turn where both cliffs leaned inward and the wind screamed the loudest,

he stopped.

No formation flags, no glowing runes. He simply bled chaotic force into the unruly aura already here.

Wind dust, and his own energy.

tangled until his presence vanished the man dissolving into landscape.

Then he waited, as patient as bedrock.

Roughly two hours later, a familiar cry cut the sky.

The shrill call of Jade Phoenix steeds carried over the wind, joined by the low hum

of a carriage breaking through air.

Three alabaster birds hauled a lavish carriage. Dozens of silver-armored celestial

guards flanked it in a tight escort as it followed the planned route straight toward Blackwind Gorge.

Through the half-drawn curtain

Jared spotted Clive inside. Pale lips,

a hand pressed to his

from earlier still gnawed at himenet

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Clive kept glancing toward the distant city, brows knotted, as if replaying the failed

visit to Jade Immortal Manor. Suspicion rode every twitch of his eyes.

"Increase speed. Clear that gorge ahead."

The envoy's cold command rolled across the escort, proof enough that he wanted

no part of this cursed valley.

Under a surge of energy the carriage shot forward and dove between the canyon

walls.

At the tight bend where wind clawed hardest, the world suddenly tore open.

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Stones exploded upward.

Jared burst out of the seemingly empty rubble without a sound to warn them.

He raised one finger. No chanting, no glowing array-only a thread of gray light so dense it swallowed the sun. It ripped toward the carriage's heart faster than thunder.

Its mark: the envoy seated within.

Every scrap of Jared's spirit, blood, and chaotic force poured into that single thrust, the very essence of annihilation.

Compared with the jab he had slipped inside the treasury, this strike carried several times the weight.

"Ambush!" Clive's shout cracked the carriage walls.

Gooseflesh crawled across his skin; raw survival instinct screamed at him.

He hurled every shred of divine power outward. Layers of shimmering defenses erupted inside the cabin as he flung himself backward, hoping to smash through the rear panel.

Still too slow.

The gray finger-light tunneled through shield after shield and landed squarely between Clive's brows.

Pfft.

A soft sound, more sigh than blast.

Clive's backward lunge froze midair.

His eyes bulged, disbelief drowning the last flicker of will.

From the gray dot at his forehead, decay rippled outward. Flesh, bone, and the hidden soul crumbled like dry sand drifting on the wind.

He never even touched the emergency communication charm pinned inside his robe.

One strike an envoy at sixth grade of the upper-celestial realm was dead.

"The envoy!" one guard shrieked.

Panic flared, yet training held. Silver-armored guards locked into formation and hurled torrents of light, talismans, and steel at the lone attacker.

Jared did not spare them a glance.

In the blink of an eye he appeared beside the slowly falling corpse and pressed a palm to its crown.

Soulsearch Technique.

An ocean of splintered memories slammed into him: celestial cultivation arts, maps of the eastern region, corridors inside Divine Punishment Hall, half-formed truths about soul crystals.

He skimmed for the urgent pieces, sheathing his own spirit in chaotic force so any planted curse slid off harmlessly.

That same force spread outward as an invisible tide.

Every incoming spell hit the field, dimmed, and unraveled into silence before it could touch him.

A guard's throat rattled. "A... a monster!"

Across the shattered formation, Jared caught the widening whites of the silver-armored celestial guards' eyes. Helmets tilted, throats bobbing, a few shields dipped as though their elbows had turned to water. Terror crawled across their faces, stark and raw, brighter than the swirling canyon dust.

Their bolts of light sputtered against the gray aura and died like sparks sinking into deep water.

Shoulders stiffened, mouths hung open; the unspoken question glazed every pair of eyes—why didn't a single strike bite?

Inside Jared's mind the last shard of Clive's memories slid into place—routes, passwords, hidden dread. A chill steadied behind his breastbone, clean and metallic.

He raised his gaze. The silver helmets reflected the dim whirlwinds, yet he met the eyes beneath them, one after another, letting them feel how briefly they still existed. Loose ends bred disasters. The thought settled with the weight of law: leave no roots.

Jared pushed off invisible footing; his body liquefied into a streak of ashen light.

It wove through the tight battle array, faster than their halberds could tilt, faster than panic could form.

Where the ray brushed metal, silver

silent

dulled, pifted, and then vanished. Where it kissed flesh, armor, or spell light everything unraveled in motes the canyon wind carried away. ,

No screams broke free. Steel crashed only once before losing its voice. The hunt felt more like culling lanternflies than soldiers-swift, mute, already decided.

Barely ten breaths later the canyon hushed again. Swirling black winds resumed their lonely whistle around scattered piles of gray dust.

Jared hovered above the debris, cloak slack in the updraft.

Between his fingers rested several storage rings and the envoy's key tokens, still warm from their owner.

He shut his eyes.

Light and shadow rippled across his frame; joints cracked softly, bones sliding into unfamiliar alignments.

Within three slow breaths another Clive stood in place, flawless to the last embroidered thread.

Moon-white starry robe draped over the proud, hawkish face.

Power hummed at the sixth upper-immortal tier, and even the wounded sullenness that belonged to the celestials lingered in those now-golden eyes.

He rolled his neck; the borrowed tendons stretched with an oddly familiar sting, as though greeting an old cloak.

Routes, meeting codes, the Divine

Punishment Hall's protocols, even chilling hints about where the so

crystals ended up all of it now sketched itself across his thoughts in bright, ordered strokes.

An hour ago he had meant to ride this face straight into the Hall and dig from the source.

The fresh memories, however, bent that goal sharply aside.

Four resident elders watched every gate; wards overlapped like spider silk; a single misstep would ice his name across their notice boards.

Worse, the celestials verified each envoy through a branded divine imprint, not mere looks or tokens.

He could fake aura and authority, but forging that core spark would take research he did not yet own.

So the Hall can wait for now... Jared's inner voice cooled.

A thin, icy smile curved his lips. This stolen skin could still earn plenty elsewhere.

He flicked through Clive's itinerary: Profound Ice Valley, Sunfire Sect, Greenwood Gate-ripe orchards awaiting harvest.

Memory replayed ledger

дет

columns annual tribute tallies taller

than men; crates of spirit stones,

herbs ores, and the blue fit soul.

the bluesit soul

crystals loaded under watchful eyes.

The numbers alone could push his cultivation three steps; the soul crystals promised something darker and useful.

Resources, he mused, were like lungs: more was always better.

'Plenty to gather,' he murmured, pupils flickering with sharp light.

He had only just arrived at level thirteen; promise alone would not win future wars.

Fuel mattered.

Jade Immortal Manor could not bankroll everything without drawing eyes.

Wrapped in an envoy's robes, however, he could walk in daylight and take what he pleased.

The visits would weigh each sect's loyalty, maybe shake loose rebels like Julian-or unearth deeper celestial secrets.

Decision settled, he wasted no more heartbeats.

The ornate Jade Phoenix carriage waited, the three beast-birds pawing the air, jade feathers gleaming.

He gestured; gray motes crawled over the fallen guards, knitting sinew and steel into obedient husks.

Moments later dozens of blank faces lined up beneath the carriage, wordless and perfectly still.

Jared lounged onto the cushioned couch, exactly the way Clive had, and murmured into the air, "Head for Profound Ice Valley."

The carriage wheeled about; the puppet guards rose in formation, banners

snapping, spectacle intact as they climbed into the raging winds.

Thus began a tour draped in celestial authority, its true cargo greed and inquiry.

A Warrior Undefeatable

Clouds shredded around the Jade Phoenix beaks as the carriage tore forward.

Inside, Jared sat cross-legged, eyes closed.

He funneled Clive's memories through his own channels, smoothing accent slips, matching the envoy's cadence of breath. With every cycle of energy, his aura overlapped the disguise more tightly, seam by seam.

He left Jade Immortal Manor at dawn. By late morning the mountains ahead already breathed a sharper cold, proof the trip to Profound Ice Valley was never meant to be long.

Hours later a wall of white filled the skyline. Sheets of ancient ice and fresh powder hugged a vast gorge, its rim glittering like crushed starstone. Even inside the carriage Jared felt the breath in his lungs crystallize.

At the gorge mouth a straight line of figures waited, their robes stiff in the wind. Spears, banners, and glowing talismans formed a silent corridor.

At the front stood Master Frostmere, the Valley Master himself, draped in formal ice-silk. Behind him several elders and hand-picked core disciples held ceremonial staves, faces tightened by the cutting air and by expectation.

Once the watching crowd spotted the familiar Jade Phoenix carriage flanked by silver-armored celestial guards, spines straightened. Deferential smiles spread like fire beneath frost.

Snow crunched as the carriage settled. Master Frostmere strode forward, robe tails snapping.

"The whole Profound Ice Valley welcomes the honorable Envoy Clive! Your journey must have been arduous," he declared, bowing so low his forehead almost touched the ice.

Jared, wearing Clive's proud mask, scarcely gave the Valley Master a glance. He tipped his chin a fraction, the tiniest nod, and let silence announce his superiority.

A curt hum slipped from his nose. Without waiting for a second invitation he followed the bowed Valley Master toward the grand hall, its walls hewn from single slabs of sky-blue ice that caught every stray beam of light.

As they advanced, disciples lined both sides, heads lowered. No one dared inhale loudly; awe and a thin layer of fear misted their eyes whenever the envoy's boots clicked by.

The moment Jared crossed the threshold, the air plunged to bone-deep cold. The biting chill only polished the hall's solemn splendor, pillars of frozen crystal soaring like cathedral columns.

At the center waited a translucent ice-marble table, its surface set with gem-bright spirit fruit and flasks of fragrant, frost-tinged immortal wine.

Master Frostmere pulled out the head chair and gestured. "Envoy, please take the main seat."

He kept his posture bent, fingers trembling slightly against the icy armrest, a picture of deference.

Jared lowered himself without ceremony, cloak spilling over the frosted chairback. "Valley Master Frostmere, my time is limited. The tribute and the soul crystal—are they ready?" The words dropped with that unquestionable celestial weight.

"Ready, fully ready!" Master Frostmere blurted, nodding so fast the white tassels at his crown swayed.

At his signal two disciples hurried in, each carrying a frost-rimmed jade chest. A third bore a rune-laced frost-jade casket hugged close to his chest.

Lids lifted with soft clicks. Inside lay rows of top-grade ice-attribute spirit crystals, rare herbs, and glimmering ores, cold vapor curling upward like pale smoke.

The frost-jade casket opened last, revealing a single soul crystal marked B12-18. Blue light pulsed within, threads of icy mist swirling around a core of locked lament.

Jared's senses brushed the offerings. Quantity and grade matched the records. The soul crystal's frigid resentment pricked his own spirit, yet his expression stayed marble-still.

His knuckles rapped the ice table once. "Everything tallies. The tribute and the soul crystal travel with me." Not request—decree.

The simple statement left the air heavier; across the table Frostmere's shoulders dipped another inch beneath weight he could not name.

"Yes, yes!" Master Frostmere exhaled, relief and tension tangling in the cloud of frost before his lips.

He motioned frantically; servants whisked the jade chests aside while he personally lifted the sealed frost-jade casket and set it before Jared with both hands.

Jared tucked the casket and the spatial rings into his sleeve with casual flicks, as though stamping paperwork.

But the real performance had only just begun, and Jared let the thought settle like a knife hidden beneath velvet.

Across the hall Frostmere caught Jared's mood and flashed a quick look to an elder, the kind of glance merchants trade before unveiling premium stock.

Obediently that elder stepped forward, presenting a smaller, intricately carved ice-jade box that glimmered like compact winter starlight.

"Honored envoy, the journey is taxing," the elder said, bowing. "Please accept three Tranquil Mind Focus Pills refined from our ten-millennia Iceheart Lotus—our humble token of respect."

One of Jared's brows lifted. He cracked the lid. A clean, penetrating chill rolled out, mingled with sweet herbal fragrance, and three marble-smooth azure pills rested inside.

Even a cursory glance told him the medicine could anchor a wavering spirit and fuse perfectly with any ice-aligned practice.

Outside this valley, treasures of that caliber might spark a regional war.

"Valley Master, your thoughtfulness is noted." A faint curve touched Jared's lips as he pocketed the box.

Private tribute, duly received, he mused; nothing the official ledgers would ever mention.

Master Frostmere's shoulders loosened the moment Jared pocketed the pills.

"The road is long. Perhaps the envoy would honor us by resting here for two days?" His voice dripped hopeful eagerness.

Frostmere leaned closer, lowering his tone. "The finest Ice-Soul Cave Residence awaits you. I have also chosen several maiden disciples-masters of ice dance and melody to serve your needs and relieve travel weariness..."

As he spoke, Frostmere's palms met in a soft clap that echoed like cracking ice through the huge hall.

The beaded curtain to the side rippled.

Four young women glided in, clad in sheer ice gauze that caught the lantern light. Their beauty was chilling, their eyes warm. They knelt gracefully. "Greetings, honorable envoy."

Each girl carried upper fourth-tier cultivation, proof the valley had groomed them carefully for moments like this.

Had the real Clive been here, Jared knew, the offer would have drawn a satisfied smirk and an indulgent nod.

A curl of scorn twisted through Jared's chest, icy and small. He kept it behind the mask, flicked his sleeve, then let out an impatient breath.

"This envoy still has official duties," he said, voice flat, eyes already sliding past the girls. "Prepare the cave residence. Everyone else, leave."

The perfume on the four girls bled toward him, sweet and cloying. If he lingered near them his disguise might crack; one careless word could cost him his head. His pulse beat once, hard. He stepped back, keeping his glare bored rather than fearful.

Master Frostmere's shoulders

stiffened. Jared caught the flash of

panic in the man's eyes before the

valley! lord waved the girls away. Silk

ems whispered across the
ice-stone as the young women
hurried out. Frostmere's smile
thinned, almost brittle under the cold light.

"Yes, yes—your devotion to duty is admirable." Frostmere bobbed in apology, voice eager. "The residence is ready. Absolute quiet. No one will disturb your cultivation." The words spilled out in a rush, as though noise alone could mend the misstep.

Perfect. Silence meant fewer eyes and fewer chances to slip. Jared let the relief float only a breath deep before sinking it beneath his borrowed arrogance.

His features eased, just enough. "Lead the way."

Deep within Profound Ice Valley, they stopped before a cavern whose mouth exhaled wisps of silver mist. The corridor behind it glistened with runes—layer upon layer of barriers woven to smother sight, sound, and aura. Frostmere bowed low, then backed away.

Jared crossed the threshold. A sweep of his divine sense combed every crevice, every shard of frost. No hidden sigils, no watching spirits. Satisfied, he triggered the resident formations and faded his own veils atop them, lattice after lattice of muted light.

A thought flicked. The Pentacarna Tower shimmered over his palm, rough bronze catching the blue glow.

Its doors parted. He stepped through, the outside world sealing off behind him.

inside the Pentacarna Tower

He drew out the B12-18 Soul-Refining Crystal, laid it inside a jade box, and pressed a talisman over the seam. Pale seals tightened, locking the eerie blue shimmer away.

He could not free the trapped soul yet, but at least it would no longer bleed misery into the air.

Next came the Tranquil Mind Focus Pills and the cache of celestials' resources he had stripped from Clive's corpse. He arranged them before him, neat and orderly.

A Warrior Undefeatable

"Let's begin." His whisper fell like a stone into water, sending quiet ripples through the tower's hush.

Jared folded his legs, spine straight, and drew the first verse of the Chaotic Scripture across his mind.

The chaotic force inside him rumbled in answer. He swallowed the three pills. Cool medicine burst open, streams of brightness threading into his meridians.

The chill soothed his spirit, yet each ribbon also fused with the churning gray energy, making the flow smoother, rounder, more obedient to his will.

Snippets of Clive's training lore surfaced—fragmented diagrams, half-understood mantras. Jared sifted them one by one, discarding vanity, keeping the bones of power.

Every scrap he kept he measured against the chaos path, letting it sharpen what fit and grind away what did not.

Time inside the tower stretched, silent and thick.

Beyond the cavern walls only two hours crept by; within, several days drifted past Jared's closed lids.

When the final draught of pill energy sank into his core, his aura drew tighter, darker, like a storm cloud packed with charge.

No breakthrough, yet his foundation felt like tempered steel, every fracture line hammered flat.

"Next stop." The single thought rang clean.

His eyes opened, light folding back behind the pupils.

He dismissed the tower, peeled away the woven wards, and stepped into the frigid passageway.

At the mouth Master Frostmere waited, breath pluming. "Did the envoy rest well? Anything else Valley can provide?"

Jared offered the barest nod. "Acceptable. I depart for the Sunfire Sect now. Conduct yourselves wisely."

"Safe travels, Envoy!" Frostmere bowed until his beard brushed the ice.

The whole Profound Ice Valley spilled into the courtyard, heads lowered while the Jade Phoenix carriage climbed the sky. Once the speck vanished, collective shoulders loosened; invisible sweat was wiped from unseen brows.

The next destination lay ahead: the Sunfire Sect.

The landscape flipped from white to burning red. Rivers of magma pulsed beneath cracked stone, and heat shimmered over jagged peaks.

Sect Master Blaze Redflame—a barrel-chested man with a face the color of hot coals—met Jared with a sheepish grin that trembled around the edges.

Ceremony matched the valley's: trumpets, bows, forced smiles, fear hiding in every throat.

Jared inspected the offerings. Upper-grade crystals, a ledger, and the B12-22 Soul Crystal, its molten aura licking at the jade seals.

Then came the private tribute.

Blaze presented three stalks of Earthfire Blood Coral and a jug of Flamefire Immortal Brew, heat rolling from both like breath from a furnace.

"I heard, Envoy, that you were troubled back at the Jade Immortal Manor..." Blaze's words tiptoed out while he pushed the gifts forward, sweat already beading along his hairline.

Heat haze shimmers over the obsidian tiles as Master Redflame steps closer, both hands steady yet tense around a narrow jade tray.

He keeps his eyes lowered while he whispers, "A few humble items, honored envoy. They might soothe your mind and anchor your spirit, strengthen your realm."

Jared lets a cold snort scrape his throat, the sound sharp as iron on stone.

He sweeps the tray into his sleeve without a glance, allowing his face to darken another shade, the look of a man recently ambushed and still seething.

The sect master flinches, sweat blooming along his temples. "Please, Envoy, set your mind at ease. Sunfire Sect has never failed its tribute."

"We have readied the safest chamber for your seclusion," he adds, voice dropping, "No outsider will come within ten walls."

The offer of dancers hovers unsaid, floating like smoke in the heated hall.

Catching Jared's grim expression, Master Redflame merely bows deeper, a faint gesture of invitation that promises women on a nod, yet holds the words behind clenched teeth.

Jared ignores the signal; the only thing he needs is that locked room.

Soon scorching winds give way to thick stone corridors. He follows a servant torch into the volcano's gut, arriving at a basalt door rimmed with molten cracks.

Inside, heat pounds like drums, yet the spiritual seals hold the walls firm. Jared lays formations, then slips into the Pentacarna Tower.

Crimson coral floats before him, veins of lava gleaming. He channels chaotic force; colors whirl, break, dissolve into clear motes that seep through his meridians, bathing each node with raw life and fire

He uncorks, the Flamefire Immortal Brew. One burning swallow rolls down, spreading a mellow blaze that rushes along bone and blood

tempering muscle like steel pulled from the forge. for

Time inside the tower stretches, day bleeding into unseen night as cultivation threads every breath.

When he finally stills, his flesh hums—denser, tougher—each flex sending a quiet crackle through the air.

Exiting the sect gates, Jared steps

onto the carriage. Below, Master

Redflame and thousands of

disciples kneel on scorening

flagstones, foreheads nearly kissing the rock.

Their silent plea is obvious—may this temperamental envoy leave without disaster.

Jared points the Jade Phoenix carriage toward the endless green rising on the horizon. The towering canopy of Greenwood Gate calls like a cool breeze.

Hours later, trunks the width of palaces loom around the landing platform; moss-sweet air carries birdsong and resin.

Fairy Greenleaf glides forward, a mature grace in every gesture, dark hair pinned with jade leaves that quiver softly.

After formalities, she lifts a slim wooden case and a crystal vial. Ten-Millennia Greenwood Spirit Marrow gleams pale gold; three Vitality Genesis Pills rest beside it.

"Envoy, your complexion surpasses even last year; your cultivation, truly splendid." Her voice rings gentle, admiration threading each syllable.

Smiling, she continues, "A modest token from Greenwood Gate. We have prepared a Yinwood Spirit Grotto-quiet, secluded, perfect for regulating your breath." Though rumors of Jade Immortal Manor swirl, she never alludes to them; only serenity fills her lowered gaze.

Jared accepts everything without protest. Guided through hollowed roots into the tree's heart, he arrays sigils, then vanishes into the Pentacarna Tower once more.

Thick emerald liquid spirals above his palm; life energy pulses so rich it perfumes the air. He folds it into his core, following with the gentle glow of each pill. The nutrients stitch tiny fissures left by frantic cultivation, sharpening mind and marrow alike until spirit gleams like polished crystal.

Chaos and vitality mesh, destruction and growth swirling in balanced tide.

When he steps from the grotto, power steadies at Heavenly Immortal ninth grade, a breath away from the upper realm.

His aura flows smooth as river glass, free of the hollowness that plagues rushed ascents.

Feeling that boundless calm, Fairy Greenleaf lowers her eyes, reverence softening every feature as she escorts him to the carriage.

Thus Jared, masked as Clive, rides the skies city after city, the Jade Phoenix carriage blazing a royal path.

Wherever he descends, sect masters line the forecourts, backs bent, voices trembling, gifts stacked like mountains.

Spirit stones that sang, roots that bled starlight, even flawless cultivatrices wrapped in silk—all pushed forward with quivering hands.

Jared's only price is solitude. A sealed chamber, always. Behind its barriers he slips into the tower, grinding every tribute into personal strength.

One outside hour becomes several inside. Endless cycles of breath and stillness stretch beneath the tower's colored skies.

Supply after supply pours in, and the chaotic force devours each flavor, weaving them into an ever-thickening lattice of power.

Eventually, pressure knots at his core, then releases—a silent bloom that lifts him to the pinnacle of Heavenly Immortal ninth grade.

One more push, he thinks, and the next realm will break like thin ice.

"Good. Time to greet the four venerables of Divine Punishment Hall." The silent words flare with anticipation.

Strength floods his limbs, crisp and obedient, and his confidence surges to match.

A Warrior Undefeatable

He guides the Jade Phoenix carriage toward distant spires veiled in pale gold light, the air thickening with divine oppression the closer he comes.

Several thousand miles out, he dismisses the carriage into its token, letting silence replace rumbling wheels.

The silver-armored puppet escorts have served their purpose; a flicked wrist shatters their cores, bodies collapsing into dull metal before vanishing into his ring. Jared lifted off on a thin ribbon of light, the night air scraping across his cheeks.

He arrowed toward the Divine Punishment Hall complex, its towering silhouette drowned in a wash of pale gold.

Each mile he closed, the pressure pouring from the celestials' domain pressed harder on his bones.

The weight wasn't physical; it was authority made solid, a reminder that one wrong breath could get him shredded.

From this distance the complex lounged like a sleeping beast, thick fumes of divine intent rolling from every eave.

The stench of power crawled over his skin and tried to dig in.

Spiked roofs and arching spires lined up in patterns he couldn't fully track, yet his gut felt the design snap into place.

An array that blanketed miles hummed in time with the world itself, every tremor echoing through the soles of his boots.

A chill pricked the base of his neck, but his face stayed locked in Mr. Clive's usual aloof smirk, shadowed by recent "wounds".

Inside, he cinched the ripple of chaotic force until not a spark leaked.

What filtered out matched Clive's divine signature exactly, a trick he'd torn out of the envoy's mind with the Soulsearch Technique.

It wasn't perfect-nothing could fake a full celestial brand-but almost no checkpoint was built for "almost."

He coasted to the vast front gate.

Two Divine Guards in gold plate stood statue-still, their auras spiking at high third- tier Upper Immortal, bright as twin suns.

Their eyes swept every traveler like blades, cold, bored, certain of their own place at the top.

Jared's boots hadn't touched the landing stone before the left Divine Guard, a face chiseled from granite, stepped forward.

"Halt. Identify yourself." His shout snapped like iron striking ice.

Jared dismissed the flight light and slid into Clive's ingratiating grin.

"Esteemed guards, you work hard. Envoy Clive Cloud, returning from the eastern region with the latest collections, ready to report to the venerable one."

As he spoke, he produced Clive's envoy token and two other personal seals, holding them between relaxed fingers.

The guard took the token, injected a thread of divine power, then studied Jared's features with an accountant's patience.

After a breath he nodded and handed the token back.

"Identity confirmed. Enter. Venerable Glacier is in the side hall."

Relief flickered through Jared's chest; he shifted his weight to move past the gate. "Hold." The single word cracked behind him like a reins tug.

The right Divine Guard, silent until now, let his sharper gaze finally settle on Jared.

His eyes scraped down Jared's robes, lingering where a record slip should have been.

"Mr. Clive, why wasn't the collection log sent ahead through the transmission array? Protocol demands immediate transmission."

A needle of ice tapped Jared's spine.

Clive's memories had warned him of this rule, though enforcement was spotty.

He bowed deeper, face flushing just enough.

"Reporting, sir-the trip was ambushed at Jade Immortal Manor. My Messaging Jade Slip was ruined in the fight."

"The attackers shadowed me afterward, so I rushed the remaining pickups and couldn't reforge the link. I meant to detail everything to the venerable personally."

"Ambushed?" The question cut short and flat.

The two guards traded a look, suspicion sliding into place.

"Open your storage pouch. I'll count the offerings and the soul crystals myself. No entry until numbers match."

The request slammed into Jared like a shove; this wasn't standard gate work at all.

Normally only Venerable Glacier audited the haul, and even he skimmed.

Jared's smile cracked, anger curling beneath it.

Clive's persona liked outrage more than apology; Jared let it bloom.

"Gatekeepers, by the hall's rules I report straight to Venerable Glacier. Are you accusing me of skimming?"

He pitched the final words louder, enough for patrolling celestial guards to lift their heads.

The right Divine Guard's face darkened.

"Watch yourself, Clive. Inspection is my duty. Your stalling only looks guilty."

Heat gathered between the three men like oil near flame.

Jared let a sharp laugh slip, shoulders trembling as if from insult.

One hard step forward cracked the flagstone under his boot.

"I crawled here half-bleeding to finish the job, and you lecture me?"

"If you can't show basic respect, don't blame me when business gets delayed."

"You-!" The guard erupted, golden light crackling along his armor seams.

Jared didn't give him time to finish the threat.

Speed ripped the air apart.

Too fast for thought, faster than the eye's first blink.

To the guards, his outline smeared into smoke right before their eyes.

All he did was raise both hands, palms open, simple as greeting.

Jared's palm met the left Divine Guard's armored cheek. A sharp crack split the still air.

Without pausing, he pivoted and let his other hand fly. A second crack followed immediately, even louder.

Both blows landed flush, echoing off the marble steps.

Helmets rattled as the two Divine Guards jerked sideways.

Jared had judged the force to a hair. The slaps slid under their protective aura, yet struck hard enough to twist their heads and raise angry welts that swelled before his eyes.

bet

A hush rippled outward. Patrolmen who had been marching past froze mid-step, mouths hanging open as if the world had turned upside down.

Someone whispered, unbelieving, "The envoy just slapped the gate Divine Guards?"

Another voice cracked, softer still, "Right in front of the Divine Punishment Hall?" The notion felt impossible, as though someone had punched a hole in the heavens. The left Divine Guard clutched his burning cheek. "You... you dare strike us?" he roared.

Fury flared across his features; golden light erupted from his armor as his upper-immortal pressure slammed outward, ready to retaliate.

Jared stepped closer instead of backing down. "So what if I hit you?" His voice cut like ice.

He let his own aura surge, thick and brutal, easily overriding the Divine Guards' presence and pinning them where they stood.

His eyes, cold as freshly forged steel, swept across them.

"Remember your place," he said, voice low yet freezing. "I serve Venerable Glacier directly, carrying his orders."

"You are mere gate dogs; you think you can bark at me? Those two slaps are a lesson."

Delay me again and, when the venerable asks why I'm late, can you shoulder the blame?

He struck each word like a hammer: "Venerable. Mission. Official mandate." Every title landed heavier than the last.

Their shoulders trembled; Jared saw veins beating in their necks while fury warred with caution.

The raw difference in

cultivation-and the threat of failing their superiors pressed on them like an iron weight, smothering their anger.

A Warrior Undefeatable

Jared knew the celestials thrived on rank; every rule inside this fortress screamed power above all.

As Clive the envoy, he technically stood several rungs above simple gate guards, and Jared made sure they remembered it.

When manners collapsed into open conflict, their badges could not protect them; Jared doubted they would gain any advantage.

He caught the flicker of confusion on their faces-why was the usually pliant envoy suddenly this fierce?

Perhaps they blamed his sour mood on that rumored ambush; the thought darted across their eyes.

Or maybe they sensed deeper trouble in his mission and wanted no part of it.

Jared could almost watch the possibilities tumble through their minds like dice across a board.

The right Divine Guard ground his teeth, stepped aside, and hissed, "Very well, Mr. Clive. Enter. But this isn't over."

Jared snorted, ignored them, and swept forward, cloak snapping as he crossed the vast threshold into the shadowed hall.

Not until his silhouette vanished did the two guards finally let their fury boil over.

The left Divine Guard barked, "Damn that Clive! Hiding behind Venerable Glacier's favor."

Heat throbbed across his cheek; the sting of humiliation nearly drove him mad. "This isn't finished," he growled.

The right Divine Guard's eyes glimmered with venom. "The venerable will deal with him; we'll see him crawl."

He spun on his heel. "Let's alert the Law Enforcement Department under Venerable Celestial Metal. Report Clive's erratic conduct for immediate review."

The pair stalked off, unaware the man behind that face was someone else entirely.

Inside the corridor, Jared felt little stir; the incident had served its purpose.

The slaps had been more than intimidation; they let him probe the celestials' rules and measure how far Clive's name would carry.

The answer pleased him.

Everyone he passes shifts aside without being told. Lower-ranked celestials bow while stronger ones stride through unchallenged. The pecking order hums in the air like static Jared can taste on his tongue.

He keeps the borrowed power of being Venerable Glacier's favored envoy wrapped around him like a cloak; as long as that emblem stays bright, needless questions slide away.

Guided by Clive's memories, he threads the solemn corridors at a brisk pace. Celestials hurry past, faces blank with duty. A few who know Clive give him a curt nod and keep moving, exactly the distance Jared wants.

After seven quick turns and several warded archways, he reaches the northern annex known as Frigid Silence Hall.

The doors are shut, exhaling a steady breath of chill.

No sentry stands outside, yet an icy pressure leaks from within, sharper than during his last visit—a silent warning that Venerable Glacier is home.

Jared smooths his robe, adjusts the faint hitch in his breathing so it matches a wounded man, then inhales once and taps the door with two measured knuckles.

"Enter."

The command drifts out, flat and glacial, carrying no hint of warmth undeniably Venerable Glacier.

Jared pushes the door and steps inside.

The scene matches his memory down to the shadowed corners.

Dim light hangs above ice-blue floors and walls carved from ten-thousand-year glacier stone; the air bites like midwinter.

At the far end, Venerable Glacier stands with hands folded behind him, back to the door, studying a tangle of star charts etched into the wall.

His robe is black trimmed in azure, his hair white as frost; even the outline of his shoulders radiates a suffocating cold.

He strides forward and drops to one knee about thirty meters away, forehead low.

"Envoy Clive reporting, Venerable Glacier. The collection run in the eastern region is complete. I have come to render account."

Venerable Glacier turns, movement slow as settling frost.

His face is carved from ice. His gaze drags over Jared like a drill of frozen steel.

"Rise."

His voice remains level. "Task Jade Slip, offerings, soul crystals."

Jared answers, lifts the prepared Task Jade Slip from his chest and, after a heartbeat's hesitation, a storage pouch conspicuously slimmer than it should be.

He sets both items on the glacial desk beside Venerable Glacier, then retreats three steps, hands at his sides.

A pulse ticks in his jaw despite him; the tension slips through the mask.

Venerable Glacier lifts the slip. A sweep of divine sense verifies the route, no flaw found.

Then he takes the pouch; his awareness dives inside.

The cold in the hall plummets, frost spidering across the floor.

A storm of murderous chill explodes from Venerable Glacier, slamming against every surface.

"Clive!"

"Why are there barely three tenths of the scheduled offering crystals?"

"Rare materials are almost nonexistent, and you brought four soul crystals when the list demands seven. Where are the others? Where is the A11-73 Box from Jade Immortal Manor?"

Jared jerks, collapses to both knees. His voice cracks. "Mercy, Venerable, please! There are reasons. Allow me to explain!"

"Speak!"

Venerable Glacier's eyes narrow, cold blades fastening on him.

Jared spills the rehearsed tale in one

breath-shadowy assailants, ambushes, cargo seized under fire. He paints himself as the loyal envoy who bled to safeguard what little remained.

Venerable Glacier listens, frost growing thicker around his boots; scorn flickers behind the icy glare.

"A mysterious enemy... repeated ambushes... and they still wrested soul crystals from you?"

He descends the ice steps one by one, looming over Jared.

"Clive, do you take me for a three-year-old?"

He circles closer, pointing out the untouched bandages and the flush of healthy blood. "These wounds are showpieces-not the marks of repeated ambushes."

"More important, your soul ripple, however carefully forged, is a hair off from Clive's. Speak—who are you, and where is the real Clive?"

A cold clarity settles over Jared's mind; the playacting is finished.

The accusation did not jar him. Jared had braced for it the instant he stepped inside. Cold air slid over his skin, and, almost in relief, his breathing leveled into an even rhythm.

He lifted his head. The tremor he had painted across his face vanished, wiped clean by a flat, glacial stillness that seemed to freeze even the torchlight reflecting in his eyes.

Jared rose, unhurried. The feeble

wobble in his stance snapped away, replaced by a heavy, coiled

presence. Chaotic force seen from his pores—silent yet overwhelming, like a tide gathering under dark clouds.

Pressure exploded outward. Marble tiles groaned, frost on the walls shattered. Power at the very brink of the Heavenly immortal threshold slammed through the chamber, thick enough to make the air ripple.

A Warrior Undefeatable

The corner of his mouth twitched into something almost like respect. "No wonder you're Venerable Glacier. Your eyesight really is vicious."

His voice stayed level, as though discussing the weather. "Since you've seen through me, there's no point in keeping up the show."

Icy light blazed in Venerable Glacier's eyes. "Bold wretch! Impersonating a celestial envoy and trespassing in the Divine Punishment Hall—you will have your very soul ripped out, refined into a soul crystal, and tortured forever!"

He hadn't even finished the last syllable before he lunged. The movement was blinding, cold wind snapping across the hall.

No weapon glimmered in his grip; he simply flattened his hand and drove it forward as if swatting a fly.

In an instant the chamber plunged toward absolute zero; Jared's breath crystallized mid-air, shards of frost crackling around his boots.

A colossal palm, pure Frost Law made solid, condensed above him. It carried the promise of freezing worlds and shattering souls as it descended.

The very air splintered; hair-thin cracks laced the frozen space like a shattered mirror.

Any ordinary Upper Immortal sixth-grade would have been erased without a trace.

Clearly, Venerable Glacier meant to end the struggle in a single blow and drag answers out of whatever was left.

Yet heat flashed in Jared's eyes, a spark of pure battle joy.

"Perfect!" he barked.

He surged forward instead of back, both hands carving rapid, intricate sigils before his chest.

Chaotic force roared out, not to meet the ice head-on, but to whirl before him, condensing into a spinning vortex.

He growled, "Chaos Return to Origin-Spatial Genesis!"

At the vortex's core, a pinprick of absolute darkness blinked into being.

It ballooned outward, ripping open an unsteady gash that led to raw, unknown void.

The giant ice palm crashed straight into the tear, its power shredded, scattered, then devoured by swirling chaos.

Jared's figure flickered; he dove after it and vanished beyond the fracture.

While sliding through the rift, he poured everything into holding the torn space steady, forcing it outward until a rough sphere—maybe three hundred feet across—formed around him, a newborn Chaotic Microcosm.

Behind him came a frosty snarl. "Think you can flee? Dream on!"

The precision of the spatial art made Venerable Glacier hesitate for half a breath, then his killing intent doubled.

He blurred into an ice-blue streak, slicing through the narrowing rupture and plunging after Jared.

A muffled boom rolled through Frigid Silence Hall. The gash snapped shut, leaving only brittle cold and ragged waves of warped space.

The two combatants were gone.

Chaotic Microcosm

Gray, murky currents of chaos churned everywhere, the border of this pocket world twisting and quaking.

Jared had carved the place as a private arena-no outside senses, no witnesses, and the ground itself eager to obey him.

The moment Venerable Glacier stepped in, his link to the Frost Law thinned, while biting streams of chaos gnawed at his protective aura.

"Parlor tricks," he sneered. "A flimsy bubble won't hold me."

He unleashed everything. Upper Immortal seventh-grade might thundered out of him, cracking invisible whips through the haze.

Ice-blue law chains spiraled, shoving the chaos back. Between his hands, an Ice Crystal Longsword coalesced, clear as glass and colder than death.

"Impostor, die! Extreme Ice Annihilation Slash!"

He swept the blade. A wedge of ice-blue sword aura, sharp enough to carve heaven from earth, tore toward Jared.

Jared read the swing coming and felt the a bite with cold. Venerable Glacier's sword carved a blue arc so heavy the floor groaned, power, dwarfing the casual palm from the halt

He set his jaw. Heat never reached his eyes, only a steady spark of purpose. Fear

tried the door, found no latch, and backed away.

He raised empty hands. Chaotic

force, rolling in grey mist, bled from

his pores, curling into his palms and

fusing into a long austere blade that looked carved from the universe's first dawn.

"Chaos Genesis!" His shout rolled like thunder inside the cramped sky of the microcosm.

He stepped through the cold and broke it, sending his own sword downward in a clean, merciless cut.

No colored halos answered him. Only one strip of dense grey light leapt from the blade, straight as fate, to meet the roaring Ice-Blue Sword Aura.

The first contact hissed like steel plunged into acid.

Grey and blue slammed together, twin storms locked at the neck.

Instead of thunder, a long grinding whine rose, like teeth scraping stone while the edges ate each other grain by grain.

Ice-Blue Sword Aura shattered first. The strands unraveled, each thread stripped of shape then swallowed by the advancing Chaos Sword Light, mute and devouring.

The Chaos Sword Light drilled onward, its tip now inches from Venerable Glacier's chest.

"What?!" The shout cracked, more shock than sound.

Jared saw the man's pupils shrink, saw the confident chill on that angular face melt into raw alarm.

The ice lord staggered back a pace, gawking at the fragments of blue still drifting away like dust.

He threw his sword across his body, and ice-blue law chains burst outward, stacking shields between him and the incoming light.

Boom.

Grey power hammered the new barriers, a blunt bell strike that echoed through the warped sky.

Shockwaves punched across the floor.

Venerable Glacier's arm shook, fingers numbing around the Ice Crystal Longsword. The blast forced him three full steps backward.

"You... what kind of power is that?!" His voice rattled between anger and raw disbelief.

A halo of frost flared around him, yet the man's shoulders twitched, the stance no longer sure.

Jared tasted the advantage on his tongue. The grey within his blade hummed, craving another bite of ordered law.

He leaned into the microcosm, riding

its currents. Space folded, and he

slid past sight to the venerable's

flank Chaotic Longsword sketching lethal arcs toward throat, heart, spine.

Ice blurred around him. Venerable Glacier whipped the longsword, birthing a blizzard of mirrored blue blades that clashed against Jared's grey line after line.

Here, Jared moved like a fish in home water. Every swing carried the microcosm's hunger, dissolving each frozen copy before it could bloom.

The venerable's strength bled away, stifled to a whisper.

Even the strikes that reached him struck fog; chaotic currents drank half their bite before they kissed his guard.

Across the churned air Jared glimpsed tiny hesitations, timings broken by fear. He guided each into a widening crack, swordplay so fluid it felt remembered, not improvised.

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