

## **Clan Building System: I'm not the Protagonist?!**

### **#Chapter 11: Eastern Ravine [2]. - Read Clan Building System: I'm not the Protagonist?! Chapter 11: Eastern Ravine [2].**

#### **Chapter 11: Eastern Ravine [2].**

The maid returned swiftly, her hands carefully folded around a freshly prepared robe of midnight black, trimmed with silver along the cuffs and collar.

Fang Yuan's travel attire as family head.

Woven with spiritual thread and reinforced with a thin inner layer of beast hide, it was designed not only for protection but to move fluidly with the body in high-speed flight.

"Your robe, Family Head," she said, presenting it with a respectful bow.

Fang Yuan accepted it with a nod, shedding his inner robe in one motion and slipping into the new attire with practiced ease.

The fabric settled against his frame like silk over steel.

He tightened the sash with a sharp pull, reached for his spatial ring, and attached his sword to the black jade clasp across his back.

As the final buckle clicked into place, his demeanor sharpened.

The calm of study and soft candlelight was gone, now only the wind of urgency stirred behind his dark eyes.

He gave the maid a single glance. "I'll remind you again, absolutely no-one. Not even my brother is allowed into the chamber."

"Yes, Family Head."

With that, Fang Yuan turned toward the window.

A single push from his foot.

The lattice frame burst open as he leapt into the night sky.

He rose fast, a streak of black through silver moonlight, his cloak unfurling behind him like a banner of shadow.



He summoned his spiritual energy, and beneath his feet, a translucent platform of qi shimmered into existence.

He launched forward.

The wind howled past his ears.

Below him, the vast expanse of Fang territory spread out in dark waves; fields, forests, hills, lit by flickering lanterns and the distant, pulsing lights of formation beacons.

His eyes focused eastward.

The Eastern Ravine was only a few dozen minutes away if he pushed at full speed.

He poured more energy into his flight, his nascent soul qi compressing the air around him.

Every movement was efficient. Every breath was measured.

The fatigue of the day's work was forgotten as Fang Yuan shot through the clouds like a silent blade, onward to the ravine.

When Fang Yuan arrived at the Eastern Ravine, the crisp night air carried the tension of gathered cultivators and murmuring mortals.

Lanterns cast flickering shadows over the uneven earth, and all eyes turned skyward as a streak of dark light descended from the moonlit clouds above.

He landed with effortless grace, his boots touching the earth like falling snow.

The moment his figure settled into view, the gathered crowd erupted into murmured greetings.

"Family Head!"

"Family Head Fang!"

Dozens of clan members, guards, and outer elders bowed in succession, heads lowered in respect.

Fang Yuan responded with composed nods and brief bows of his own.

"You've all worked hard," he said lightly, his voice carrying enough authority to hush the surrounding noise.

As he strode forward, the crowd parted without a word.



He made his way toward the cluster of core elders, where a broad-shouldered man with streaks of white in his hair stood waiting.

Uncle Chen—Elder Chen, the younger brother of his Father, and one of the few people Fang Yuan still instinctively respected.

The elder stepped forward and dipped into a bow. "Family Head."

Fang Yuan immediately reached forward, raising a hand to stop him. "Uncle, there's no need—"

But before he could finish, the other elders behind him followed suit. A chorus of bows rippled through the group like falling dominoes.

Fang Yuan sighed internally. *Two hands aren't enough for this.* He gave up resisting and simply returned the gesture with a graceful clasp of his hands.

"Enough formality," he said, "tell me what's happening here."

Uncle Chen straightened. His expression was grave. "Inside the mine, we've detected the presence of a beast. It's strong, stronger than anything we've seen around these lands."

He hesitated before continuing. "A half-step Nascent Soul realm. We confirmed it through the spiritual pressure it gave off when we tried to expand the excavation zone."

Fang Yuan's eyes sharpened, his mind spinning.

*A half-step Nascent Soul beast? In a spirit stone mine?*

That wasn't ordinary. But it shouldn't be random, either.

*Please, he thought, keeping his face unreadable, let it be guarding something. Something divine...*

Outwardly, his tone remained composed. "Keep the perimeter sealed. Do not let anyone wander near the entrance. If this beast becomes enraged, we don't want any casualties."

He stepped forward, rolling his shoulders lightly, and continued, "I'll deal with it personally. A beast of that level... should still be within my capabilities."

Elder Chen frowned, concern etching deeper lines into his weathered face. "Little Yuan... are you sure?"



Fang Yuan's lips curled into a calm, familiar smile. "Uncle, don't worry. If things turn difficult, I still have my Swift Step Footwork. At worst, I can run away and leave it for another day."

The elders hesitated, exchanging glances.

But there was something about the way Fang Yuan stood; relaxed, casual, yet quietly confident that made even skeptics pause.

Finally, Uncle Chen gave a reluctant nod. "Be careful."

"Always."

As he turned toward the mine entrance, Fang Yuan couldn't help but chuckle inwardly.

*A peak Nascent Soul realm cultivator... facing a half-step Nascent Soul beast. If I can't win that fight, I might as well retire and become a chicken farmer.*

It wasn't arrogance... it was math.

Though spirit beasts were indeed more physically powerful than cultivators of the same realm, this one wasn't even a full Nascent Soul realm.

And he... he had long since transcended the level his enemies thought he remained at.

But that wasn't the true danger.

The real concern... was what the beast might be guarding.

Rare beasts didn't burrow into mines for leisure.

If there was something buried beneath the stone; an inheritance, an ancient relic, or worse, a spirit herb of immense potency... it would only be a matter of time before word spread.

And when that happened, the other four families would descend like vultures on a fresh corpse.

And if he was unlucky, the royal family might even be involved considering this was going to be a treasure worthy of being guarded by a half step nascent soul realm beast.

*So I need to act swiftly,* Fang Yuan thought as his boots crunched over gravel and spirit lamps dimmed behind him.

Seal the threat. Secure the treasure. Silence the rumors.



He paused just at the edge of the mine shaft, the shadows curling around him like the mouth of a beast waiting to swallow him whole.

His fingers flexed slightly.

With a flick of his wrist, his sword detached from his back with a quiet chime, and in the next moment—

Fang Yuan stepped into the dark.

## **Chapter 12: Fang Yuan.**

The mine swallowed him in silence.

Stone walls pressed in on either side, the air within damp and close, clinging faintly to the scent of old ore.

His footsteps echoed lightly along the carved path, accompanied only by the soft hum of his spiritual energy suppressing the darkness.

The faint glow of his spiritual essence lit the tunnel just enough, casting long shadows that danced along the jagged walls.

Fang Yuan walked calmly, his breathing slow and measured.

Each step was deliberate and controlled while his senses extended outward, feeling through the stone and soil for shifts in spiritual pressure.

Threads of energy drifted through the corridors like forgotten whispers, residue of something deeper below.

He passed the first marker shaft where miners had dug too shallow to find anything.

A few wooden crates and pickaxes lay abandoned along the side, tools tossed aside when the beast's presence had been discovered.

Fang Yuan knelt, placing a hand to the stone floor and it felt warm.

Not with heat, but with intent.

Spiritual pressure had soaked the stone like steam through rice paper.

And there, nestled in the deeper waves of qi, was a pulse. Although faint, it was rhythmic like the heartbeat of a spirit beast.

"Eh... it's actually sleeping?" he murmured in surprise.



He rose and continued downward.

The mine's structure shifted slightly as he descended.

Reinforced beams gave way to smoothed stone, the marks of tools replaced by the quiet geometry of nature.

He soon reached a wider chamber, the second shaft, the one mentioned in the report.

A cavern opened before him.

Faint light spilled in from a fissure in the ceiling, where moonlight filtered through crystals embedded high above.

The glow refracted across the walls like pale water rippling over ice.

And in the center of it all, sleeping coiled around a patch of stone veined with faintly glowing lines was the beast.

Its eyes were closed, but Fang Yuan could feel it watching through instinct alone.

And beside its tail, nestled carefully as if warded by its very heartbeat, were three small sprouts of something glowing greenish-gold.

The leaves shimmered faintly, emitting a rhythm of spiritual energy in harmony with the beast's own.

Fang Yuan's gaze narrowed.

"Hollow Yeklo Grass? Seriously?" Fang Yuan blinked twice, leaned forward, and blinked again just to be sure.

Hollow Yeklo Grass!

Fang Yuan's heart nearly skipped a beat.

This wasn't just any herb, this was the core ingredient for refining the Hollow Soul Pill!

A rush of excitement surged through him like wildfire.

His hands clenched at his sides as he stared at the pale, glowing stalk nestled gently in the earth as if the heavens themselves had placed it there just for him.

There it was, tucked beneath a nest of spiritual vines and glowing ever so faintly with a silvery mist that shimmered like starlight.



The legendary herb.

He let out a low whistle.

He had only ever seen it mentioned in ancient texts.

A herb so rare, one was more likely to stumble upon ten princesses bathing in the wild naked than to lay eyes on it in person.

He took one careful step forward and squinted, just in case his eyes were playing tricks on him.

They weren't.

"Oh heavens... I take back every time I cursed your name while writing sect expense reports," he whispered, hands lifted dramatically toward the rocky ceiling.

"I'm your most devoted servant! Your most loyal son! Please, continue to rain fortune upon me like this preferably without the deadly beast attachments next time."

Of course, the heavens did not respond.

Just the dripping of water from a stalactite somewhere above.

Fang Yuan looked back at the enormous creature sleeping just meters from the herb.

It looked like a tiger. Except it was white.

And twice the size of a carriage. And its fangs were long enough to stake a cultivator in two directions at once.

"A sabertooth, huh?" he muttered, rubbing his chin.

He narrowed his eyes.

*A beast like this... it must've bonded to the herb. Maybe even incubated it for years.*

He began slowly circling the edge of the chamber, footsteps silent, spiritual energy held tight within.

His gaze moved with precision, checking for other beasts, hidden nests, traps, alternate tunnels.. anything.

But he found nothing.

Just the sleeping oversized furball and its glittering prize.



He grinned.

"A half-step Nascent Soul beast core... and a Hollow Yeklo Grass," he whispered gleefully, lips curling.

"The heavens are either feeling generous tonight... or setting me up for something catastrophic. Either way—I accept."

He cracked his knuckles quietly, rolling his shoulders.

"Now, let's hope you stay asleep, Mr. Fangs. Because I really hope you stay alive and raise another one of this herb."

Then, just as he stepped into the fringe of the beast's sensing range—

Its eye cracked open.

A single, glimmering violet slit. And behind it, awareness.

Fang Yuan didn't flinch.

He straightened to his full height, hands loose by his side, and met the beast's gaze head-on.

"I don't suppose you're the sort that negotiates, are you?" he asked conversationally.

The cavern rumbled faintly as the beast uncoiled.

Dust fell from the ceiling. The spiritual pressure surged.

Fang Yuan sighed. "Didn't think so."

He raised a hand, and a thin band of silver energy lit across his palm.

A formation seal.

Just in case.

Then he smiled and said, calmly and without fear, "Well then... shall we?"

The beast's eyes locked onto Fang Yuan, its amber pupils narrowing as it sized him up.

There was a flicker of hesitation in its stance. It was subtle but clear.

And the beast sensed something it didn't expect, the person in front of it was something dangerous.



Fang Yuan couldn't help the smug curl at the corner of his lips.

The beast took a step back as he took a step forward.

"Yes, that's right," he thought, voice purring in his head. "You finally realize who you're dealing with."

But the satisfaction was short-lived.

In the next instant; too swift for even his refined senses to properly catch the beast's entire posture shifted.

Fang Yuan's eyes widened.

"No—"

His voice thundered through the cavern, echoing off the stone walls like a crashing tide.

"NO!!"

### **Chapter 13: Inner Peace.**

"NO—!"

Fang Yuan's scream reverberated through the cavern like a thunderclap, sheer horror etched across his face.

And for good reason.

The beast, the freaking dumb, oversized, meat of a carpet had just bitten into the Hollow Yeklo Grass like it was a midnight snack!

### **CHOMP.**

One clean bite. Leaves, stalk, shimmer, spiritual essence! All gone!!

"No no no no—STOP! STOP EATING THAT!!" Fang Yuan howled, his voice already cracking in unspeakable grief.

He bolted forward, spiritual energy flaring wildly behind him.

The sabertooth froze in place out of fear despite already resolving itself to take down the treasure with it.

For in that instant, it sensed death rushing toward it, dressed in silk robes and heavy rage.



Its amber eyes went wide. It swallowed instinctively.

***Gulp.***

"...You son of a—"

In a single, blur-fast motion, Fang Yuan's hand cleaved downward.

A blade of spiritual light arced out, cleaner than a surgeon's scalpel.

The beast didn't even have time to yelp.

It was simply... two halves now.

***Flop.***

Fang Yuan stood there, chest heaving, clothes billowing slightly from the residual force of the strike.

He said nothing at first.

He simply dragged his feet across the stone toward the small patch of earth.

There, where once the Hollow Yeklo Grass had danced like moonlight on still water, now sat—

A mangled root system, half-chewed.

Like a toddler had tried gardening with teeth.

Fang Yuan dropped to one knee, gently cradling what little remained.

A long, deep sigh escaped him.

"...At least I got the beast core," he muttered bitterly, glancing at the still-steaming sabertooth carcass.

He stared for a moment longer. Then added dryly:

"Thanks, Heaven. Truly generous. Next time, just slap me and be done with it."

Fang Yuan raised his hands in silence, then drove them unceremoniously into the still-warm carcass of the sabertooth beast.

His expression was unreadable as he dug through sinew and bone, blood splattering across his robes as if mocking him with every squelch and tear.



He fished deeper, fingers scraping past shattered ribs and collapsed organs, until finally; his hand closed around something hard.

It was the beast core. He wasted no time and yanked it free.

And then blinked as he hold up the core.

It was cracked.

A jagged fissure ran down its center like a wound left too long untreated. The spiritual energy it contained was unstable; leaking, flickering like a candle in the rain.

Fang Yuan stared at it for a long moment.

"...Damaged?" he muttered.

He looked down at the corpse, at the huge white beast that had, mere moments ago, swallowed a priceless herb like it was breakfast dumpling.

Was this... the reason it had stayed here?

Trying to use the Hollow Yeklo Grass to repair its own core?

Fang Yuan let out a sharp exhale through his nose. Not quite a laugh. Not quite a sigh.

He looked at the core again, then let it drop on top of the carcass.

His mood was foul now.

He sat back on his heels and muttered, "Life really doesn't go the way people want it to."

Still, he wasn't about to leave without maintaining appearances and blow his cover.

He stood, smeared some of the beast's blood across his robes, even dabbed a few smudges on his face for dramatic effect.

Then, picking up his sword, he hacked at the walls, shattering a few rocks to simulate an intense struggle.

He cut open his own shoulder, shallow but bleeding, and staggered slightly to perfect the look of a weary, victorious cultivator.

Satisfied with the staged carnage, he cast one last look toward the broken herb patch and whispered under his breath, "May you reincarnated as a Hollow Yeklo grass so that I can have the pleasure of refining you when I find you."



With that, Fang Yuan stepped out of the cave appearing bloodied, wounded yet victorious.

The moment Fang Yuan stepped out of the cave entrance, bathed in moonlight, a hushed silence fell over the crowd.

His robes were torn, streaked with blood; some dried, some fresh.

His shoulder bore a visible gash, and dust clung to his hair like ash from battle.

Behind him, the faint smell of scorched stone and beast blood wafted out from the mine.

For a few seconds, no one moved.

Then—

"Family Head!"

"Is he injured?"

Dozens of voices erupted at once. Elders rushed forward, cultivators quickly formed a perimeter, and several servants scrambled to prepare healing ointments and spiritual water.

Uncle Chen hurried over, his usually stern face lined with worry. "Little Yuan! Are you all right? That wound, what happened inside?"

Fang Yuan waved a tired hand as if swatting away flies, adopting the perfect tone of solemn dignity.

"The beast was stronger than expected," he said, voice grave. "It had entrenched itself around the spirit herb... and was bonded to it. I had no choice but to face it head-on."

Gasps echoed among the crowd.

Fang Yuan sighed softly, as if weighed down by the burdens of leadership and fate.

"The spirit herb was destroyed in the process too."

Murmurs turned to lament.

"Such a pity... i wonder what type of spirit herb it was to have a half step nascent soul realm beast guard it."

"What a heavy loss..."



"The heavens are cruel."

Only Fang Yuan stood silent in the middle of it all, hands behind his back, looking off toward the horizon like a tragic hero too noble for praise.

But inside, he was screaming. Shouting.

*"Destroyed in the process?!"*

No! That was just me covering up my own stupidity!

*I should've killed that oversized furball the moment I saw it twitch! But noooo—'maybe it'll raise another herb,' I said. 'Maybe I can be merciful,' I thought. Merciful my ass!*

His mental voice roared louder than any battlefield cry.

*And the damn beast core? Cracked. Fractured. Absolutely useless! You think I plunged my hand into monster guts for fun? I smell like death and regret!*

*Oh Heaven! Why do you hate me? First the Hollow Soul Pill quest fails, now the Hollow Yeklo Grass gets chomped in front of me like a midnight snack! Are you messing with me on purpose?!*

He clenched his fists behind his back, outwardly calm, inwardly moments away from collapsing into a tragic opera singer.

*If I get one more " **blessing** " from the heavens, I swear I'll start spitting at the sky every morning for balance!*

And yet, he still had to maintain a serene, proud smile on the surface. His chin lifted.

The very image of a hero returning victorious from a hard fought battle.

Truly, the greatest illusion Fang Yuan ever cast... was pretending he was fine.

A servant timidly stepped forward. "Family Head, should we prepare a cleansing bath and summon Elder Jingyi for medical treatment?"

Fang Yuan nodded wearily. "Later. Right now, gather the remains and halt the mining for now. Let the family cultivators explore for hidden traps."

He turned to leave, limping slightly for effect.

Behind him, the gathered clan members erupted into whispers of admiration.

"So brave..."



"So calm..."

"Family head is truly worthy of leading our Fang family..."

As he walked away, head held high and robes fluttering nobly, he muttered under his breath,

"Through heaven and earth, I alone am the unlucky one."

## **Chapter 14: Fated One.**

Having no mood to return to the mountain of paperwork waiting on his desk, Fang Yuan abandoned the tasks he had left undone before the Eastern Ravine incident.

His mind was simply too clouded; irritation, disappointment, and sheer emotional exhaustion weighed heavy on his shoulders.

Instead, he returned to his chamber, discarded his bloodied outer robes, and collapsed onto his bed with a deep, weary sigh.

*Cultivating*, he thought. *Just one night of quiet cultivation... there will be no beasts, nor any shattered cores, and no opportunity leaving beneath my very nose.*

Within moments, spiritual energy began to circulate through his meridians.

The steady flow helped clear the bitterness from his heart, layer by layer.

For the first time that day, his breathing eased. His thoughts slowed.

And finally, he slept, untouched by the world, free for the night.

The next morning.

Fang Yuan stirred as the first rays of dawn painted soft gold across the floor of his chamber.

His eyes blinked open, clearer than they had been in days.

His heart felt light again, the gloom of the previous evening washed away like old ink in the rain.

He sat up, stretched, and swung his legs over the edge of the bed.

"Alright," he murmured, "new day, new events to explore. It's time to make the best of it."



But the moment he stepped out of his chamber, something felt... *off*.

There was noise. A lot of it.

The courtyard outside buzzed with life; laughter, music, the clatter of dishes and clamor of celebration.

Fang Yuan paused at the threshold, brow furrowing.

It was festive. Too festive.

He glanced around, taking in the streamers fluttering in the breeze, the servants hustling back and forth with trays of sweet wine and spirit dishes.

*What the hell?*

This was louder, busier, and far more extravagant than even his birthday banquet had been.

Fang Yuan stood there in silence, watching the chaos unfold around him with increasing confusion.

"...Did I miss something?" he muttered. "An elder's birthday? A sect alliance? Heavens.... My banquet was just yesterday!"

Fang Yuan stepped out into the courtyard, and immediately, a chorus of greetings followed him like an eager tide.

"Family Head!"

"Good morning, Family Head!"

"Congratulations, Family Head!"

The last one made his steps falter.

*Congratulations?*

He forced a polite smile and gave small nods in return, but his mind was already spinning.

What were they congratulating him for? He hadn't announced any cultivation breakthrough.

And if someone had spread rumors about him getting married again, he was going to start swinging his sword.



He scanned the crowd until—*thank the heavens*—he spotted a familiar figure across the courtyard.

Aunt Jingyi.

She stood beneath a plum blossom tree, white hair flowing over her shoulder like silk. She was surrounded by a group of younger Fang girls, offering them instructions with the ease of a natural matriarch.

Her delicate fingers moved in graceful gestures as she handed out sashes and decorations.

Fang Yuan made his way over with a purposeful stride.

"Aunt Jingyi," he called as he approached.

She turned with a bright smile, eyes twinkling with amusement.

"Well, if it isn't my adorable junior brother," she beamed.

Fang Yuan stopped mid-step, blinking. "...Aunt, I'm your nephew."

"Oh?" she blinked innocently. "Are you calling me old, then?"

Fang Yuan opened his mouth.

Then shut it.

He stared at her in silent surrender, unsure whether he should laugh it off or run away from the psycho.

Jingyi chuckled, clearly enjoying herself. "You walked right into that one, little Yuan."

"Why is everyone congratulating me?" he asked, deciding to shift the topic before she called him her husband or something equally ridiculous.

Jingyi's smile widened as she leaned in, voice teasing and low.

"Oh? You really don't know?"

"...No," Fang Yuan said flatly.

She gave him a look of exaggerated shock. "You mean no one told you? Hm, maybe I shouldn't ruin the surprise then."

"Aunt."



She giggled, fanning herself with a decorative scroll. "Alright, alright. But you'll owe me tea and snacks later."

Fang Yuan sighed. "Deal. So what happened?"

"After you left the Spirit Stone Mine," she began, stepping gracefully to the side, "a few elders decided to explore deeper. And your brother volunteered to be part of the explorers too, we elders were confused but since he was your *brother* and he's my *cute brother's* younger brother, I decided to let him follow us."

She gave him a sidelong look.

Fang Yuan raised an eyebrow. "And?"

"Well~" she dragged the syllable like a musician tuning a string, "guess what your brilliant younger brother stumbled upon?"

He stared at her with no intentions of guessing.

She huffed. "Tch. You're no fun, little Yuan. This sister's feeling so sad now. Not even a hint of curiosity? Just this cold, unfeeling stare?"

The younger girls nearby fidgeted uncomfortably.

Fang Yuan gave in with a sigh. "Alright... Aunt." He emphasized the word 'aunt' like a jab. "Let me guess. Was it a Hollow Yeklo Grass?"

Fang Jingyi blinked and went still.

Then muttered like a disappointed gambler folding her hand, "...This is why you're still single, little Yuan. You're too illogical. Not even a sense of romance, no wonder no one's ever tried climbing into your bed except me."

Fang Yuan's brain skipped like a broken formation disk.

"I—" he started.

"No, don't defend yourself," she said, holding up a finger. "Just imagine how rare that grass is. I'm more likely to have your child than you are to stumble on something like that!"

His soul briefly left his body.

That comparison... that horrifying comparison.



Fang Yuan stood there in stunned silence, his spiritual awareness flickering like a broken lantern.

It wasn't the shock of hearing it—it was the sheer audacity of how naturally she had said it!

She carried on as if she hadn't just shattered his mental sea.

"Anyway! That wasn't it," she said brightly. "Your precious younger brother, Fang Tian, discovered something far more useful."

He blinked. "...More useful than Hollow Yeklo Grass?"

Jingyi smiled.

"A Spirit Pond."

Fang Yuan froze.

His mouth opened slightly. Nothing came out.

His thoughts caught in a loop like a broken prayer chant.

Then, finally—

"...A Spirit Pond?"

"Mmm~" she said, clearly savoring his reaction.

"Hidden behind the second shaft, masked by natural formations. Honestly, even I wouldn't have found it without a spirit-seeking compass."

"But somehow your brother tripped over a rock and discovered it. Fate is funny like that."

"...And this is what everyone's celebrating?" Fang Yuan asked, voice shrill with rising dread.

"Well, of course!" she said, eyes sparkling. "It's a sign, little Yuan. Our family is bound to truly rise again!"

Fang Yuan's face paled. "But... what about the other families? The royal court? If word gets out, won't they—won't they try and come claim a share of it? They aren't going to let a treasure like this land on our hands alone!"

His concern was raw. Real.



Jingyi's expression softened. She turned to the girls with a dismissive wave.

"Go along, now. I'll be back with you all in a moment. I need to calm down my panicking nephew."

The girls scattered like birds, grateful for the excuse.

Fang Yuan, meanwhile, stared at the sky.

*Is this the joke you came up for me today?*

## **Chapter 15: Prepare.**

A few hours had passed since the morning's surprise.

Fang Yuan now sat inside his personal study, the festive sounds outside dulled to a faint background hum.

Despite the laughter, music, and bustling servants beyond the courtyard, a storm churned silently behind his composed expression.

Aunt Jingyi sat across from him, legs elegantly crossed, balancing a steaming cup of spirit tea in one hand while leafing through a stack of scrolls with the other.

"—and that, little Yuan, is why you don't sign a petition just because you want your task to lessen even by a little," she finished, tapping one of the documents with a sharp fingernail.

"you should be more careful, little yuan. You're our family head, you can't be careless and take these things lightly."

Fang Yuan didn't smile.

He hadn't smiled in over an hour.

Because something she had said earlier kept echoing in his mind:

"Well, you approved the feast! We couldn't have done it otherwise, dear."

At first, he thought she was teasing again. But she was not.

She was genuinely surprised when he told her he had not approved of anything related to the Spirit Pond celebration.

Jingyi had brushed it off casually saying he probably signed the wrong scroll in a rush, called him lazy and joked about how much he didn't want to work.



But Fang Yuan knew better.

He never signed anything without reading it.

Never.

Every scroll was reviewed thoroughly, every seal checked, every hidden formation tested for tampering.

Which meant only one thing.

Someone had forged his approval.

And it was to be an insider.

And they had done it subtly enough to get past every level of internal vetting.

His eyes lingered on the scrolls in front of him. He said nothing to Aunt Jingyi.

There was no need to cause trouble, not just yet.

He nodded with just the right hint of sheepishness; the look of a nephew caught being lazy. Let her believe that. For now.

"Mn. I'll be more careful next time," he said evenly.

Jingyi stood, brushing off her robe, clearly satisfied with the results of her impromptu tutoring session.

"Good. Because if I catch you being lazy and irresponsible once more, I'll personally see that you get married and retired."

She winked and made for the door. "Now then, I need to prepare. The guests arriving for the pond unveiling will be of extremely high esteem. Nobles, sect envoys, maybe even a royal investigator or two. It's going to be dazzling, Little Yuan~"

Fang Yuan nodded faintly. "Of course. I'll see you there."

The moment the door closed behind her, his expression hardened.

The feast was to be held in seven days.

And preparations for the feast had already begun lavish and extravagant.

Fang Yuan sat at his desk, surrounded by mountains of scrolls and inked documents, each one more tedious than the last.



The scent of spirit ink mixed with faint sandalwood from the incense burning nearby, but neither could lift the weariness pressing down on his shoulders.

With a tired sigh, he turned his gaze toward the golden panel flickering in the corner of his vision.

**[QUEST: Complete the pile of pending administrative tasks on your desk.]**

**Reward: Spirit Gathering Formation (High-Grade Black Rank)**

**Status: Ongoing**

"...Still ongoing," Fang Yuan muttered with some relief, rubbing his forehead. "*Phew*. So the one that got approved didn't come from this pile."

That meant whoever had signed off on the celebration request hadn't tampered with the current stack on his desk.

But even so...

He leaned back, eyes narrowing thoughtfully.

The Spirit Pond was discovered yesterday.

By all rights, the standard petition protocol required a day—*at least*—of deliberation, formatting, and elder review before it ever reached his seal.

And yet, somehow, the celebration had been approved, prepped, and launched all overnight.

"One night was all it took..." he murmured.

A short pause.

Then, quietly, a name surfaced in his heart; unspoken, but burning all the same.

Someone charismatic. Respected. Trusted by the elders. Someone with both the authority and subtlety to fast-track the whole of Fang family event without raising alarms.

His lips tightened.

"I see what you're doing," he said to no one in particular. "But if this is how you act... I can't really hand the family over to you."

It was not a declaration of war.



Just a quiet conflict of hearts and intentions. Two visions for the future colliding under the same ancestral roof.

He exhaled slowly and set the scroll aside.

Then—*knock knock*.

"Come in."

The door creaked open, and a familiar scent of jasmine preceded the maid as she entered, carrying a tray of morning tea and fresh breakfast.

She bowed deeply. "Family Head. Your morning tea. Soft rice, lotus cakes, and glazed sweetroot. Would you like the kitchen to prepare something else?"

Fang Yuan blinked at the tray, then gave a weary smile. "No need. This is fine. Thank you."

As the maid bowed again and quietly placed the tray on the table, Fang Yuan sat back, looking out the window at the garden beyond his hands grabbing a lotus cake.

Fang Yuan took a slow bite of the lotus cake, the soft sweetness melting on his tongue.

For a moment, he allowed the taste to distract him from the weight of thoughts circling in his mind.

Then his eyes drifted toward the open window, where the morning breeze stirred the plum blossoms in the courtyard garden.

He set his teacup down with a soft clink.

"Felicia," he said, his tone casual but his gaze sharp. "Did anyone enter my chamber last night?"

The maid, who stood silently nearby, straightened. "None, Family Head."

Fang Yuan studied her a second longer, then gave a slight nod of approval.

"I see. Good work." He picked up another lotus cake, still warm and fragrant. "This is tasty," he murmured.

Felicia offered a soft, respectful smile. "The kitchens received fresh lotus root from the eastern terrace garden this morning. I'll be sure to inform the chef."

Fang Yuan took another bite, then said thoughtfully, "I'm sure the surprise being planned in seven days... will be just as sweet."



Felicia gave no visible reaction, only bowed her head lightly. "Of course, Family Head."

## **Chapter 16: Find.**

Fang Yuan leaned back in his chair, the lotus cake half-finished in his hand.

Whoever had made the decision in his name, they clearly believed they'd gotten away with it. And perhaps—for *now*—they had.

But Fang Yuan was not going to take the bait so easily.

Let them plan. Let them act like he was none the wiser. He would play the role of the oblivious Family Head a little longer.

After all, what kind of cultivator ignored a High-Grade Black Rank Spirit Gathering Formation?

His eyes flicked to the glowing system panel still hovering beside his desk like an ever-watchful attendant.

**[ QUEST: Complete the pile of pending administrative tasks on your desk.**

**Reward: Spirit Gathering Formation (High-Grade Black Rank)**

**Status: Ongoing ]**

Fang Yuan rolled his shoulders with a quiet sigh and muttered, "Back to the battlefield, then..."

With a casual wave, he summoned a fresh stack of scrolls to the surface of his desk, some petitioning new trade routes, others arguing about pasture boundaries.

Felicia from the side, quietly refilling his teacup.

Fang Yuan glanced up from his scrolls, the flick of his brush pausing mid-air.

"You may leave, Felicia."

The maid nodded with a practiced bow and exited the room, leaving behind the faint scent of tea and the quiet rustle of her retreating steps.

With a sigh, Fang Yuan returned to his task. He picked up another scroll, eyes narrowing as he scanned the words with sharp efficiency.

"Declined," he muttered, stamping it without hesitation.



Another scroll. "Approved."

Again and again, the rhythm rolled on like a tide, steady and relentless.

But just as he reached for the next petition, a knock disrupted the silence.

He closed his eyes briefly.

"...Come in."

The door creaked open, and in stepped Fang Mei.

She wore a worried expression, her usually vibrant presence dimmed with unease. Her hands were folded tightly in front of her, sleeves slightly crumpled—signs that she had been pacing.

"Brother," she said softly, "have you seen Fang Tian?"

Fang Yuan arched a brow, setting his brush down with exaggerated care.

*"Losing control of your would-be husband already?" he thought dryly. "And here I thought she'd have him whipped by now."*

But he didn't voice the thought when he realised she was actually searching for him with genuine concern.

So, he stood up, brushing his sleeves as he crossed the room to her.

"When was the last time you saw him?"

Fang Mei hesitated, eyes flicking briefly toward the morning light spilling across the floor.

"Last night," she said.

"We both used the Bone Marrow Pill you gave us with hopes that we would start cultivating with our new bone marrows.

But when I woke up this morning... he wasn't there. I looked around but couldn't find him so I came here."

Her voice faltered near the end, tinged with a vulnerable worry that Fang Yuan rarely saw from her.

Fang Yuan placed a reassuring hand on her shoulder.



His voice, calm and steady, carried the quiet authority of someone who had seen too many things go wrong to panic over just one.

"Don't worry, Mei'er. We'll find him," he said gently. "I promise."

Fang Mei nodded, but her eyes remained troubled.

Fang Yuan gave the scrolls on his desk one last glance and sighed. "Besides... I needed a break from those damned petitions anyway."

With that, he stepped out alongside her, the breeze outside brushing against his sleeves like a quiet reminder that the world didn't stop for paperwork.

As they walked side by side through the winding corridor of the main estate, the silence between them lingered for a while.. thick, uncertain.

Fang Yuan glanced sideways at his sister. "Mei'er," he began gently, "did the two of you ever talk about going anywhere recently?"

Fang Mei hesitated. "No... not really."

He nodded slowly, eyes narrowing slightly in thought. "Did he mention wanting to visit a specific place? Somewhere new? Somewhere old?"

She shook her head. "I don't think so..."

His gaze rested on her a moment longer. "Was there anything he seemed interested in lately? A book he was reading? A location he asked about?"

Fang Mei's brows furrowed, lips parting slightly, but nothing came out. She shook her head again. "I don't know..."

Fang Yuan's steps slowed.

He turned slightly, studying her expression.

Her shoulders were curling inward, her voice growing smaller with each answer, almost like she felt she was failing him just by not knowing.

He exhaled through his nose softly and stopped walking.

"...Alright," he said, his voice easing into a gentler tone. "Forget the questions for now."

Fang Mei nodded, looking down.

Fang Yuan looked towards the horizon.



"We'll find him," he said quietly. "No matter where he's gone."

The two walked in silence.

Their footsteps echoed gently against the stone paths, the distant murmur of servants and chirping birds the only sound between them.

Fang Yuan kept his eyes forward, mind cycling through possibilities. Where could Fang Tian have gone? And more importantly—why?

Beside him, Fang Mei walked with her hands clasped tightly before her. Her gaze flicked toward him, then down again.

The silence stretched on, brittle and awkward, as though even the air didn't know what to say.

She opened her mouth.

"Uh—"

The sound was barely audible, more a sound of hesitation than a full word.

Fang Yuan turned to her immediately.

He blinked, and then chuckled softly under his breath. "Ah... my bad. I was so deep in thought, trying to figure out where he went... I forgot to say anything."

He gave her a small, reassuring smile. "Don't worry, Mei'er. He's surely going to come back."

Fang Mei nodded, a bit too quickly, her eyes lowered. "Mn..."

She didn't add more.

Fang Yuan watched her for a moment longer, then turned back to the path ahead.

He let out a quiet sigh in his heart.

*She used to be so bold...* he thought.

There was a time she'd shout 'Brother!' from across the courtyard without a care, puffing her cheeks when scolded, demanding extra sweet cakes at family banquets, or dragging him to see some silly play she had fallen in love with.

But now...



Now she barely looked him in the eye.

*Ever since she and Tian confirmed their feelings, she's been walking on eggshells around me,* Fang Yuan mused. *Like I'm some demon instead of just her brother...*

He didn't mind the relationship, he had approved it himself, even, but he already missed the way she used to be.

## **Chapter 17: Search.**

Fang Yuan and Fang Mei arrived at the Eastern Ravine.

The once-bustling excavation site had turned silent.

Where hammers once rang and miners shouted over one another, now only the low hum of formation barriers and the whisper of wind through the stone remained.

Ever since the discovery of the Spirit Pond the previous night, the entire area had been sealed off.

No miners were allowed near. The air felt denser here now; rich with spiritual energy.

Fang Mei glanced around, hugging her sleeves tighter. "Brother... what are we doing here?"

Fang Yuan kept walking ahead without pause, eyes calmly scanning the terrain.

"With your new bone marrow, it's best you cultivate inside the Spirit Pond for the next week."

Fang Mei blinked in shock. "B-But... that's..."

She trailed off, unsure if she was more stunned by the privilege or nervous about being alone in such a place.

But Fang Yuan didn't turn to her.

Instead, he looked to his left, toward a shadowed alcove where no one stood and spoke with quiet reassurance, "Don't worry, Mei'er. I'm the Family Head. I have full control."

Fang Mei tilted her head, confused. "...Brother?"

*Why had he turned that way?*

Before she could ask, Fang Yuan shifted his gaze forward again and approached the sealed entry of the ravine, where two family guards stood in attention.



"Family Head," they saluted in unison.

Fang Yuan gave a nod. "Open the formation."

The guards stepped aside and began the unlocking process, their hands forming a series of quick, practiced seals.

The invisible barrier shimmered briefly before parting like a curtain of mist.

Fang Yuan turned back to his sister, his voice calm and firm.

"Come. I'll take you to the pond myself."

Fang Mei hesitated only for a moment before following, her heart pounding with anticipation.

The mine shaft swallowed them in shadow.

Gone were the sounds of celebration from the estate.

Here, only the echo of their footsteps remained, trailing along the damp stone floor like whispers of the past.

Fang Yuan led the way, torchlight casting flickering shadows across the walls.

Crates of unused equipment lined the sides, hastily abandoned after the discovery.

The air grew colder the deeper they went, yet paradoxically denser, rich with qi so thick it clung to the skin.

Fang Mei stayed close behind, her voice hushed in awe. "It feels... different down here."

"It should," Fang Yuan replied, not turning.

"A Spirit Pond forms when ley lines converge. Just being near one is like breathing in liquid essence. Once inside... it'll be up to you how much of it you can refine."

She nodded, the firelight catching the glint of resolve in her eyes.

They took a sharp turn at the second fork. A natural stone arch framed the final passage, glowing faintly with protective formations.

Someone had reinforced the place overnight.

As they stepped past it, the air changed.



Moisture tickled Fang Mei's lashes. A soft, emerald glow pulsed from deeper within, bathing the corridor in hues of jade and silver.

And then, there it was.

The Spirit Pond.

Nestled within a cavernous hollow, it glimmered like starlight poured into water.

Faint threads of spiritual qi rose from its surface in lazy spirals, coiling upward and vanishing into the cavern's peak.

Lush moss covered the stones at its edges, and glowing blue lotuses floated across the water's surface, undisturbed by time or wind.

Fang Yuan's eyes swept across the chamber—the glistening moss, the tranquil pond at its center, the faint, ever-rising wisps of spiritual energy.

But more than anything, it was the jagged cracks along the walls, the scattered scorch marks on stone, and the half-buried claw gouges on the floor that made his brows knit together.

His gaze landed near the far edge of the Spirit Pond, where the water lapped silently against a patch of flattened earth.

There.

That was where he had fought the sabertooth beast. Where the Hollow Yeklo Grass had once shimmered in delicate defiance.

Where he had cleaved the creature in half in a moment of rage and regret.

His eyes narrowed, just slightly.

*"Wasn't this... the exact spot?"*

The thought surfaced unbidden, bitter and cold.

*"So how—how could I miss it?!"*

He had scoured this place. Even dug through the beast's remains with his bare hands.

Yet now, not even a full day later, a Spirit Pond emerges like some ancient treasure offering itself to someone else?

*"...And Tian just happened to stumble upon it?"*



He felt the urge to scoff, but instead kept his expression calm, unreadable.

Not a flicker betrayed the frustration stirring beneath.

He let out a slow breath through his nose, folding his arms behind his back.

"No... No use dwelling on it."

At the same time Fang Mei gasped softly, a hand flying to her lips.

"It's... beautiful."

Fang Yuan gave a quiet nod. "And dangerous if not used properly. Don't dive in headfirst. Sit near the edge first. Let your marrow acclimate."

She nodded, the reverence clear in her stance.

Fang Yuan stepped forward and placed his hand on a control pillar, dissolving the shallow formation veil around the pond.

The qi instantly grew heavier, and Fang Mei inhaled sharply.

He turned to her with a calm expression, hands clasped behind his back.

"This week, this place is yours. No one else steps foot in here unless I say so."

Fang Mei's eyes went round as saucers. "Brother... that's—"

"—A privilege," he interrupted smoothly, "that you'll need."

She blinked. "Need...?"

He nodded solemnly. "Yes. If you truly plan on marrying my junior brother, then you'll need to be strong enough to protect him. Or at the very least, be able to fight alongside him."

"...Fight?"

He gave her a deadpan look. "Do you think love in the world of cultivation means picnic dates and poetry under the moonlight? No. It's either dual cultivation or dual decapitation—there is no in-between."

Fang Mei sputtered. "I—wha—"

"You've already stolen my little brother's heart," Fang Yuan said with a dramatic sigh. "Now it's only fair you learn how to guard his liver, lungs, and dantian too."



Fang Mei could only stare at him, torn between laughter and horror.

He placed a hand on her head, gently patting it like a war general sending off a new recruit.

"Go on, Mei'er. Bathe in the pond. Meditate. Enlighten yourself. But at least try not to drown."

Then, without waiting for a response, he turned and walked away.

## **Chapter 18: Ingredients.**

Fang Yuan stepped out of the cavern, the cool air of the ravine brushing against his sleeves like the breath of a long-sleeping beast.

As the formation shimmered closed behind him, sealing the Spirit Pond away once more, the two stationed guards straightened and saluted.

"Family Head."

He nodded in return, his tone firm but quiet.

"From now on, no one is to enter this place without my personal stamp of approval. Not even the elders."

The guards exchanged a brief glance and gave a synchronized bow. "Understood."

Fang Yuan lingered for a breath, gaze drifting once more toward the stone corridor that led back into the depths.

Then, with a final glance, he turned and left.

The path from the Eastern Ravine to the central estate was quiet, lined with peach blossom trees whose petals danced faintly in the breeze.

By the time he reached the main gate, a few servants and patrolling guards greeted him with bows, but none dared interrupt his stride.

Fang Yuan made his way back to his office, the heavy oak doors swinging open with a whisper of qi.

He stepped inside, the scent of ink, tea, and old paper welcoming him like an old friend.

The mountain of unfinished scrolls still sat on his desk, as if mocking his earlier break.



Fang Yuan sighed softly, rolled his shoulders, and muttered, "Alright. It's time I stop delaying the quest. I won't be able to sleep if I failed."

Then, he sat down and picked up his brush once more.

Soon, a few hours passed.

Fang Yuan leaned over the final scroll, his brush gliding across the parchment in one last elegant stroke.

He let the ink settle, pressed his stamp against the lower seal, and exhaled deeply.

"Done," he whispered, a small, triumphant smile tugging at his lips.

He leaned back in his chair and stretched, joints popping in relief.

His arms reached high over his head as he closed his eyes and tilted his chin upward, basking in the rare satisfaction of a fully cleared desk.

And then—

***Ding.***

A clear chime echoed within his mind like the sound of a bell struck underwater.

A glowing panel bloomed into view before him, elegant and ethereal.

**[ QUEST COMPLETED:**

**Complete the pile of pending administrative tasks on your desk.**

**Reward: Spirit Gathering Formation (High-Grade Black Rank)**

**Status: ✓ Completed ]**

**[Initiating transfer of knowledge on how to set up the formation... ]**

"What the—?"

Before he could even stand, a strange warmth surged through his temples.

His eyes widened. He clutched the arms of his chair.

A flood of information poured directly into his mind—not words on a scroll, not verbal instruction, but a living memory: diagrams, measurements, formation runes glowing in sequence, qi flow patterns, anchor points, balancing arrays, and material compatibility.



Every detail came with absolute clarity, as if he had personally spent a hundred years researching the formation.

When it ended, he sat still for a long moment.

Then—

He looked at his hands, as if they had changed.

"That... was insane."

The Spirit Gathering Formation now lived in his memory like a second language. And it wasn't just theory. He could build it. Right now, if he wanted.

He blinked once, then let out a slow whistle.

"System," he murmured, smiling faintly, "This is what I expected when you arrived, I love you!"

"Hmm... I wonder if I can build it now," he muttered, rising from his chair with a thoughtful glint in his eyes.

Fang Yuan walked slowly to the shelves by the side of his office, where thick ledgers and treasury scrolls were stacked in meticulous order.

He pulled out a dusty red ledger with golden thread binding, the one detailing the family's core resources; spirit ores, refined metals, spiritual anchors, array stones, and more.

With a flick of his hand, the pages turned rapidly, stopping at the inventory list for formation components.

He began cross-referencing everything the system had just burned into his mind:

- Spirit Engraved Core Stones: minimum six, grade-three or higher.
- Anchor Flags of the Eight Winds: one set.
- Mithril-threaded Conduits: ten lengths, silver-essence grade.
- Qi Conduction Plates: black steel, preferably tempered.
- Lotus Dust: refined from spirit lotus petals, at least fifty grams.
- Jade Stabilizers: minor. Optional but recommended.



His eyes scanned the entries. Line by line, resource by resource.

And then he blinked.

"...We actually have all of this?"

He double-checked. Then triple-checked.

The treasury held ten spirit engraved core stones, eight more than he needed.

The Eight Winds flags had been stored since the days of his grandfather's failed Heaven-Earth Array experiment.

Mithril conduits? Sitting in a crate next to the west vault.

Qi plates? Plenty, polished and unused.

Lotus dust? Rare, yes, but he himself had commissioned its refining two years ago when trying to make a pill that exploded on contact (***a side project, best left unspoken***).

And jade stabilizers—well, those were practically decorations at this point.

He slowly closed the ledger.

And then grinned.

"So... I could build it now."

He tapped the ledger against his palm, his expression thoughtful and pleased.

"...Guess the higher ups in the heavens finally decided to stop playing jokes on me." He paused. "Unless this is also part of the joke. That won't be funny."

He set the ledger down with a soft thud, his gaze drifting toward the open window where the afternoon sun was beginning to mellow into evening gold.

"All right," he said under his breath, a faint smile forming. "Let's build a formation."

He scribbled down the required materials onto a sheet of paper, his brush swift and precise.

Once finished, he stamped it with his personal seal, the crimson mark still fresh as he called out toward the door.

"Felicia."



The maid entered promptly. "Family Head?"

Fang Yuan handed her the list without looking up. "Send this to the treasury. Have them prepare everything and tell them it's urgent."

Felicia accepted it with a small bow. "At once," she replied, before quietly turning and leaving the room.

## **Chapter 19: Event [1].**

Fang Yuan stepped out of his office, the scent of ink still faint on his sleeves, stubborn, like it had sunk into the fabric after hours at the desk.

The estate had shifted into its evening rhythm.

Lanterns bathed the walkways in amber, casting long shadows that swayed with every breeze.

Somewhere farther down, he could hear servants moving about, voices muffled but laced with urgency.

The upcoming ceremony had everyone on edge.

He moved through the corridor without hurry.

Silks and ornaments passed by in the arms of busy attendants, their movements brisk, practiced but each one still paused just enough to offer a quick bow.

"Good evening, Family Head," one said, breathless but respectful.

He gave a curt nod, a flicker of tiredness behind his eyes. "Carry on."

The words came out calm, but there was a weight behind them.

Not exhaustion but more like pressure, constant and quiet, coiling deeper by the day.

He let the scent of sandalwood guide him to the quieter wing of the estate. Plum blossoms rode the air, soft and fleeting.

Here, the noise fell away. His chambers sat at the far end—ornate, yes, but still tucked beneath the hush of the mountain's slope.

By the time he reached the doors, the sun had nearly vanished behind the peaks.

Candlelight flickered through the latticed screens.



Someone had already prepared the bath.

He slipped into the stone basin without a word, the heat wrapping around him instantly, loosening knots he hadn't even realized were there.

He leaned back, eyes shut, lips parting on a long, silent exhale.

For a moment, it was just the warmth and the sound of water brushing stone.

But peace didn't last long. It never did.

A rustle. A light knock.

Followed by a soft clear voice.

"Family Head," Felicia called gently from behind the screen. "The items from the treasury have been delivered. They're in the chamber."

He didn't open his eyes. "Good."

A pause, just long enough to feel.

"Make sure no one disturbs me," he added, voice low but firm. "Not for any reason."

Silence followed. Then:

"...As you command."

Her footsteps faded, barely audible against the polished floor.

Fang Yuan let himself sink deeper into the water, the heat seeping into bone and spirit.

The silence returned, giving him peace of mind.

The system's knowledge stirred beneath the quiet. The Spirit Gathering Formation.

The theory was clear and now the intent was solid. But building it, that would be a test.

He let out a slow breath and let it rise in curling steam.

Eventually, when the water cooled, he stood.

Reached for the robe laid nearby.

The night air kissed his damp skin, and he could feel the subtle shift of qi as it brushed against him, drawn like thread to needle.



He dressed simply, black robe, silver clouds at the cuffs then stepped into the outer room.

It was neatly arranged, as expected. Boxes sealed with the Fang Family sigil. Bundles carefully laid on the table.

Felicia had taken care to ensure everything was positioned with precision.

Spirit stones glimmered under silk. The room was quiet, but not dead.

Something hummed, almost imperceptibly.

Like breath caught in a long pause.

He stepped closer. Brushed the edge of a core stone.

Its surface pulsed faintly beneath his fingers, responding not just to his qi, but to the intention behind it.

His gaze drifted to the window. Outside, the estate had fully settled into night.

Moonlight spilled across the rooftops.

Lanterns flickered like drifting fireflies.

The door clicked softly shut behind him. He didn't turn.

His mind was already elsewhere.

Spirit stones — the true currency of cultivators.

While gold still held value among mortals, it was spirit stones that made the world of cultivation turn. To a cultivator, gold was little more than glitter; spirit stones, on the other hand, were power.

These stones came from spirit mines, though their abundance depended on the mine's quality. Most mines yielded only a modest amount, making high-grade stones rare and precious.

But spirit ponds? That was a different story entirely.

A well-maintained spirit pond could produce a steady stream of spirit stones every single day — a veritable treasure trove for any clan lucky enough to control one.

The Spirit Pond.



That would be the place.

Tucked deep in the ravine, rich with natural qi—living qi.

The land pulsed there, slow and steady, like the breath of something ancient and dreaming.

He turned back to the table and unwrapped one of the bundles. Cold black steel plates, smooth as water.

Next, silver-thread conduits, curled tight, glinting like caught moonlight.

The Lotus Dust shimmered behind the jade vial's seal delicate, volatile.

And then the unfinished flags.

Just enchanted wood for now. Bare. Waiting.

He knelt slowly beside them, robes folding like shadow around him. Picked up a single piece.

Rough to the touch. Unforgiving.

His fingers ran along the grain as he studied it, expression unreadable except for a small crease at his brow.

"So," he muttered, not quite to the room, not quite to himself, "this is where the real work begins."

He closed his eyes.

In the dark of his mind, the system's gift flickered to life blueprints forming in light, runes rotating in calm precision.

And so, without ceremony, beneath the quiet weight of moonlight and unspoken resolve, Fang Yuan began.

Time passed in a blur.

The chamber lights rarely dimmed, save for the few hours Fang Yuan allowed himself to rest in meditation.

Ink brushes wore down to nubs.

The scent of lotus dust clung to the walls.



Runes etched with razor precision glowed faintly across the newly crafted formation flags, each one a testament to long nights of steady focus and relentless refinement.

By the seventh night, the last anchor flag was completed.

Fang Yuan set it aside gently, letting the qi within settle.

He let out a long breath and leaned back in his chair, exhaustion pressing lightly on his shoulders but his eyes still burned with quiet fire.

"Just in time," he muttered.

And then—

Knock. Knock.

The sharp sound cracked through the quiet.

"Family Head!" came Felicia's voice—urgent, tense.

Fang Yuan's eyes narrowed.

Fang Mei got kidnapped! The guards reported that she isn't in the spirit pond anymore!"

## **Chapter 20: Event [2].**

Fang Yuan panicked not.

He simply rose from his seat, the final formation flag still glowing faintly on the table behind him, and extended a hand.

The air within the chamber stilled. Then—

Boom.

A ripple of pure spiritual will surged out from him like a tidal wave.

Invisible to the naked eye but unmistakable to any who cultivated, the spiritual wave shot through the estate and beyond, blanketing the entirety of Coldwind City in a breathless instant.

It wasn't violent. But it was absolute.

In the hearts of those sensitive to qi, it was as if the sky had leaned down to whisper in their ears.



And it whispered power.

Across the city, four distinct locations erupted in simultaneous chaos.

Zhao Clan, perched in the northern high halls of Coldwind Ridge—Zhao Ming, the elderly Patriarch, trembled mid-meditation, his eyes snapping open.

"Nascent Soul!" he croaked, leaping to his feet.

He Family, their underground arena buzzing with fighters—He Long, mid-spar with his third son, faltered as his knees bent involuntarily. Sweat poured from his brow as he turned toward the source.

"Impossible..."

Lin Pavilion, a spire of knowledge and arrays—Matriarch Lin Xi's tea cup cracked in her hand. Her expression remained unreadable, but her fingers trembled against the lacquered table.

Wu Fortress, home to Coldwind's most militant family—Wu Shun growled low in his throat. "Who the hell stepped into that realm in our backyard?!"

And above them all, beyond the city walls, on a royal path lined with guards in ceremonial armor—

A silver-gilded carriage rolled to a halt.

Inside, the young man wearing imperial colors sat up straighter, a flicker of awe in his gaze. He turned to the man beside him, a calm figure robed in grey with a scroll sealed to his back.

"Teacher Ian," the prince murmured, "is that... what I think it is?"

The one called Ian closed his eyes, letting the ripple wash over him before nodding once.

"Yes, Your Highness. A Nascent Soul cultivator... no doubt."

He cracked open one eye, the faintest smile pulling at the corner of his mouth.

"And it would appear they reside in the very city we're heading to."

The prince's eyes gleamed.

"How intriguing indeed."



Back within the estate, Fang Yuan lowered his hand, expression unreadable.

That brief sweep hadn't just been a show of power—it had been a search.

He had tasted every sliver of spiritual movement, examined every thread of qi that stirred in response. From the central market to the outskirts, from the forests to the underground vaults.

Fang Yuan stood alone in the center of the quiet chamber, the final echo of his spiritual wave fading into the still night like the last ripple on a calm lake.

Moments passed.

Then, like a net tightening, his mind snapped into focus—memories, impressions, qi threads all aligning with a single realization.

He found out where Fang Mei was and who was responsible for this case of kidnapping.

At least they were close enough to not actually hurt her so he didn't really feel it necessary to go to her right now.

The other party... may have been cautious or being overly restrained. But they were unaware that their little antics hadn't gone unnoticed by him.

Fang Yuan's lips curved into a slow, knowing smirk.

he murmured, half-amused, half-predatory. "Interesting."

Fang Yuan snickered softly under his breath, eyes glinting.

He turned slightly. "Felicia."

The maid stepped in from the side room, her posture straight despite the lingering tension.

"Family Head?"

"Bring me my robe," he said, his voice light now, relaxed. "I have an event to host."

She hesitated. "And Fang Mei...?"

"She'll be fine," Fang Yuan said simply, brushing a nonexistent wrinkle from his sleeve. "She's in the middle of a little game. She won't be hurt."

Felicia gave a short bow. "Understood."



Moments later, she returned, arms cradling a garment of midnight black—trimmed with elegant silver lining the cuffs and collar.

The robe shimmered faintly under the light, woven from spiritual thread, the inner lining made from thinly tanned hide of a low-tier thunder beast.

An outfit worthy of the Fang Family Head.

Crafted not only for its appearance but to withstand force, speed, and power. Defensive in structure, graceful in movement. Authority made wearable.

Fang Yuan slipped into the robe with practiced ease, the fabric settling around his frame like it belonged there.

He then reached to a small lacquered box on the nearby shelf. With a soft click, it opened to reveal an insignia to recognize the mark of a Golden Core cultivator.

He stared at it for a long moment.

Then closed the lid.

"Today," he muttered, voice laced with dry amusement, "is a day of surprises."

He swept out of the chamber, Felicia falling into step just behind him, her steps quiet, her face unreadable.

The lantern light caught on the silver trim of his robe as the two vanished into the deeper halls of the estate.

He moved through the estate like a blade through silk—quiet, unopposed.

By the time he stepped into the courtyard, the crowd had already begun to gather beneath the twilight sky.

Lanterns swayed gently overhead, their warm glow dancing across polished stone tiles and satin-draped tables.

The air was heavy with perfumed incense and the faint clinking of wine cups.

Guests—merchants and dignitaries from across Coldwind City—filtered in with guarded smiles and eager eyes, their robes bright and their words brighter.

As Fang Yuan stepped forward, the crowd parted almost instinctively.



He was a striking figure in the silver-trimmed midnight robe, calm yet commanding. The very air around him felt different; colder, sharper, like something just beneath the surface had teeth.

But not everyone greeted him with silence.

From near the platform, a voice spoke up, tinged with impatience and something darker.

"You're late."

The speaker was Elder Fang Guo, one of the older family members, his hands folded into his sleeves, his expression neutral but only barely.

The line of his jaw was tight, and his narrowed eyes held a faint glimmer of challenge.