

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

#Chapter 161- What Happened. - Read Clan Building System: I'm not the Protagonist?! Chapter 161- What Happened.

Chapter 161: 161- What Happened.

Fang Yuan's gaze lingered on Xiao Pei's despondent form and Fang Lian's pale face.

If only the system shop offers healing pills or a body transformation elixir, he thought in his head.

"Alright then, Xiao Pei," Fang Yuan said, his voice regaining its steady command. "Go to the alchemy pavilion and seek my Aunt Jingyi. We'll consult Doctor Mu tomorrow when he's done... so let's go with our second best option."

Xiao Pei nodded, relief warring with residual dread. "Understood, Brother Fang. I'll take my leave then."

He shuffled out, shoulders hunched as if expecting fangirls to ambush him once he stepped out.

The door clicked shut.

Silence thickened, broken only by the brazier's soft hiss.

Fang Yuan turned fully to Fang Lian.

Her knuckles were white where she gripped her tunic, her spine rigid despite her attempt at calm.

"Sit," Fang Yuan ordered, gentler than his usual tone.

She dropped to the packed-earth floor like a stone, folding her legs beneath her.

Without another word, Fang Yuan knelt before her.

His fingertips brushed her temple, cool, deliberate. A thread of his qi, fine as spider silk and warm as sunlight, flowed into her meridians.

It wasn't invasive. It was a slow, methodical exploration, mapping bone, muscle, and the delicate lattice of spiritual pathways around her bandaged stomach.

He felt the knit of healing flesh, the fading echo of torn qi, the stubborn throb of bruised organs... but no corruption, no hidden fractures.

There remained no more physical threat.

He withdrew his energy and the hut felt colder without its warmth.

"How are you feeling?" he asked, eyes never leaving hers.

"Truly fine, Master," Fang Lian insisted, forcing brightness into her voice. "The pain's gone."

Fang Yuan's gaze sharpened, piercing through the brave facade. "Not the body," he said softly. The words hung heavy.

"Your mind. Your spirit. I know what you endured. I saw the aftermath." He paused, a flicker of genuine regret in his eyes. "I'm sorry I didn't get to you sooner."

Fang Lian's lips parted, the automatic denial, *It's nothing, Master*, already forming.

But Fang Yuan raised a hand, silencing her before a syllable could escape.

And then with his voice low and startlingly tender:

"You're my favorite disciple. Did you know that?"

The declaration landed like a pebble dropped into still water.

Fang Lian froze. Her breath hitched. The practiced reassurance died unspoken.

Confusion, then a dawning, flustered warmth spread across her cheeks. Her mind scrambled—Favorite? But...

The realization clicked. A tiny, incredulous laugh escaped her, shaky but real.

"But, Master..." she murmured, meeting his earnest gaze with wide, suddenly tear-bright eyes, a faint, wobbly smile touching her lips. "I'm your only disciple."

Fang Yuan's lips quirked into a rare, soft smile. "That doesn't mean it's not true, and you know it, Lian."

Fang Lian ducked her head, a fresh wave of giggles bubbling up, light, genuine, a sound that momentarily chased the shadows from the herb-scented hut.

Fang Yuan waited patiently, the crackle of the brazier the only counterpoint to her mirth, until her laughter subsided into warm, contented silence.

The quiet stretched, comfortable now. Fang Yuan leaned back slightly, his gaze steady on her.

"Do you remember," he asked, his voice low but clear in the stillness, "who it was that ambushed you? Anything distinctive?"

Fang Lian's smile faded, replaced by a focused intensity. She shook her head, her short hair brushing her jawline. "All black, Master. From head to toe. They were like shadows given form."

Her hands sketched the memory in the air. "Not a sliver of skin, not a strand of hair was made visible."

She took a breath, her eyes gaining a distant, fierce light. "Elder Ruì... she reacted first. Faster than I thought."

Fang Lian's fist slammed lightly onto her own thigh, mimicking the sudden action. "Wham! She didn't hesitate and just spun and straight up kicked us, knocking me, Bong, Lin, Wen and Rin clean off our feet and back, out of the path of their first strike. It wasn't gentle," she added, a touch of wryness in her voice, "but it did save us taking that blow full on."

A spark of pure admiration lit her face. "And Master... she was magnificent. Eighteen years old, standing there alone against the sudden dark, robes flaring around her like a banner."

Fang Lian's voice dropped, thick with emotion. "She then yelled at us... us, disciples older than her! 'Run! Get back to the estate! NOW!' With the authority of an elder. That... that's the honour of the Fang." She swallowed hard.

Then, a sudden, unexpected giggle burst from her, cutting through the gravity. "Oh, heavens, master you should have seen it! Elder Ruì was ordering me, her senior by a year to scam like a naughty child!" She covered her mouth, shoulders shaking with suppressed laughter. "It was... hilarious! She forgot who was the adult there."

The laughter faded as quickly as it came, replaced by a more pragmatic expression.

"Of course, none of us wanted to leave her as well. Pride, Master. Stupid pride." Fang Lian's gaze sharpened, reliving the critical moment.

"So I made the call. I shoved Fang Bong and the others further back, they were only at Qi Condensation, stumbling over their own fear. The newcomers... they radiated Qi Transformation, every one of them. Cold and heavy. They were like a walking glaciers."

Her voice turned crisp, commanding, echoing her past self. "'Scram!' I told them. 'You three are barely at Qi Condensation while we are supposed to be facing a group of Qi Transformation folks! The only thing you're good for right now is getting your legs moving and bringing the Clan Head! GO!'"

A shadow crossed her face. "But apparently that was enough time to launch another attack on us"

Her jaw tightened. "I didn't expect it... the newcomers also didn't wait for me to finish speaking. They didn't posture or gloat. While Fang Bong was still blinking at me, one of them just... lunged. There was no warning instead it was just ruthless, aimed to kill."

She clicked her tongue, a sound of pure disgust. "Tsk. Talk about sneak attacks."

Fang Yuan hadn't moved, hadn't blinked.

He sat utterly still, his dark eyes fixed on Fang Lian, absorbing every word, every flicker of emotion on her face.

The intensity of his silent focus was like a physical presence. A small, encouraging smile touched his lips.

"Go on," he murmured, his voice a low rumble. "What happened next? I'm... deeply curious."

Fang Lian drew herself up, the storyteller reclaiming the moment.

"Alright! So," she began, her voice regaining some of its earlier energy, "Fang Bong and the others finally got the message or the terror of what was really happening and then bolted like rabbits."

"After they turned on their heels, I spun back only to see Elder Ruì already a whirlwind ahead of me! One small figure holding her ground against six of those black ghosts!"

She punched the air, eyes alight with the fire of remembered defiance. "She must've forgotten she's the youngest of them all, and that, talent-wise, she should have been the first to run."

Fang Yuan's brow arched. "And what about you, then? You're hardly lacking in talent yourself."

"Me?" Her lips curved into a proud, almost mischievous smile. "Master, you didn't train me to leave a friend behind."

"Nor did I teach you to go courting death," Fang Yuan said with a low chuckle, reaching out to flick her nose.

Then his expression softened, a faint smile tugging at his lips. "Still... I'm glad you all are alive."

Chapter 162: 162-

Coldwind City, Eastern Ravine:

The usual serenity of the Eastern Ravine was shattered.

Where moments before had hung the profound quietude of deep cultivation, punctuated only by the faint, resonant hum of active qi wells, now echoed with the clamor of confusion and discontent.

The sound, sharp and discordant against the mountain's stillness, seeped into Cave #7, disturbing Elder Joshua Fang from his meditative trance.

He opened his eyes as he felt the rhythmic pulse of energy he'd been attuned to, the very lifeblood of the cultivation caves, felt... thin and distant.

With a fluid motion, he rose as his simple grey robes whispering against the rock floor, and stepped out into the ravine's central path.

The scene before him was one of burgeoning chaos.

Disciples, their faces etched with frustration and disbelief, clustered near cave entrances, their voices overlapping in a rising tide of complaint.

"...just gone!" A young man near Cave #3 slammed his fist against the rock face, wincing immediately after.

"Where's the abundance of qi? It's like breathing stale attic air inside!"

"Same here!" A girl from Cave #5 gestured wildly. "I was on the brink of a breakthrough! But the smell made me fail. *Argh!*"

Near the entrance to Cave #1, a younger disciple, perhaps only twelve, sat slumped against the wall, shoulders shaking.

Tears tracked clean lines through the dust on his cheeks. "M-my merit points..." he choked out between sobs, looking utterly lost.

"All those chores... and life threatening tasks... all gone! For this? It's a scam! A complete scam!" His raw despair cut through the general grumbling, drawing sympathetic and anxious glances.

Elder Joshua's presence, radiating calm authority, began to register.

Heads turned, voices lowered.

He strode forward, his gaze sweeping over the distressed assembly.

He didn't shout; his voice, when he spoke, was deep and resonant, carrying effortlessly over the din and instantly commanding silence.

"Peace," he intoned, holding up a weathered hand. "Calm yourselves, disciples of the Fang."

He met their worried eyes, his own expression grave but steady. "This disruption has been noted. Those of you who had secured time within these caves, and particularly those actively cultivating when the anomaly occurred, your investment and your interrupted progress are recognized by the Clan."

He paused, ensuring his words sank in. "Worry not. The Clan will address this. Resources will be allocated, mechanisms will be inspected, and the cause will be found and rectified with all due haste. Consider your merit points secured; appropriate restitution or rescheduling will be arranged."

His gaze sharpened slightly, emphasizing the finality. "Until such time as the qi wells are restored and verified, access to the Eastern Ravine cultivation caves is suspended. Effective immediately. Please return to your quarters or assigned duties. Await further announcements."

A collective sigh, part relief, part lingering disappointment, rippled through the juniors.

Murmurs of "Yes, Elder Joshua," and "Understood, Elder," replaced the earlier complaints.

They bowed, some deeply, others with distracted haste, and began to disperse, moving back down the ravine path in small, subdued groups, casting backward glances at the now-useless caves.

Elder Joshua watched them go, the lines around his eyes deepening with concern.

Vanished? Diminished?

he thought, a flicker of surprise beneath his usual composure.

The Clan Head didn't tell me anything about this..

The rustle of silk on stone announced another arrival.

Elder Chen Fang, his expression a mix of curiosity and mild alarm, approached.

"Elder Joshua?" he inquired, his sharp eyes taking in the deserted cave entrances and the lingering tension in the air.

"What caused such an uproar? The commotion reached the Spirit Pond Area."

Joshua turned, gesturing towards the silent cave mouths. "Elder Chen. The qi wells, it seems, have failed. Diminished to near nothingness, or vanished entirely. The disciples were... understandably distressed. I've suspended access."

"Failed?" Elder Chen's eyebrows shot up. "The new wells? How is that possible?"

He peered towards Cave #1, his senses reaching out. "Have you inspected?"

"Not yet. I was about to," Joshua replied.

"Mind if I accompany you?" Chen asked, his scholarly curiosity now fully engaged.

"Two pairs of eyes, and senses, may discern more than one."

"Of course. Your insight is welcome," Joshua nodded.

Together, the two elders moved towards the nearest cave, Cave #1.

Inside, the difference was palpable.

Gone was the thick, vibrant energy that had hummed in the air, replaced by a cavernous silence and a distinct chill.

The faint, residual luminescence that usually clung to the walls was absent.

Elder Joshua placed a palm flat against the central formation stone.

Where before a powerful thrum would resonate up his arm, now there was only cold, inert rock.

He closed his eyes, extending his spiritual sense deep into the cave's structure.

Nothing. A void where potent energy had recently flowed.

Cave #2 was the same. Utterly inert. Cave #3 offered a faint whisper, the barest echo of warmth against Joshua's palm, like the dying ember of a once-raging fire.

"Here," he murmured to Chen. "A trace. But useless for cultivation."

Elder Chen, beside him, ran his fingers along a vein of crystal in the wall. "Indeed. Faint. Barely perceptible. Insufficient even for the most basic exercises."

His brow furrowed in concentration. "No signs of structural damage. No residue of external tampering that I can detect... It's as if the source itself was simply... turned off."

They moved systematically through the remaining caves.

Cave #4: dead.

Cave #5: dead.

Cave #6: another faint whisper, weaker even than #3.

Cave #7, where Joshua had been meditating: now merely a cold, silent chamber.

Cave #8: dead.

Cave #9: the faintest, most pathetic glimmer, snuffed out almost as soon as they registered it.

They went on for all the caves until they emerged back from the 50th cave, back into the muted daylight of the ravine, Elder Joshua let out a slow breath, his expression grim.

The scale of the failure was evident.

"None of reserves remain," he stated flatly. "What little is left is literally unusable. The wells are clearly depleted at this point."

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Elder Chen nodded, his earlier curiosity replaced by matching gravity.

"It's a significant setback. The Clan Head must be informed about this immediately. This impacts cultivation schedules, resource allocation... and most importantly the morale."

"Agreed," Joshua said, already turning towards the path leading out of the ravine and back towards the heart of the estate. "We must consult the Clan Head."

"I know where my nephew is currently situated," Elder Chen offered, falling into step beside Joshua.

"I saw him heading to where Senior Doctor Mu was staying. Likely still there, or nearby. Follow me."

"Lead on, Elder Chen," Elder Joshua acknowledged.

With purposeful strides, the two elders left the unnaturally quiet Eastern Ravine behind, their figures moving swiftly down the winding path towards the outer regions of the sprawling Fang estate, the weight of the inexplicable failure pressing upon them.

When Fang Joshua and Fang Chen reached doctor Mu's residence, they found Fang Yuan and Fang Lian already in the midst of something.

Fang Yuan stood in the cleared dirt yard, bathed in the late afternoon sun.

Before him, Fang Lian watched with rapt intensity, her earlier pallor replaced by a focused flush.

"The Golden Shell Armor," Fang Yuan's voice rang clear, calm yet commanding, each word seeming to settle in the quiet space, "has multiple forms. So far, we've only uncovered three of them."

Fang Lian's eyes widened, her breath catching for a heartbeat.

"But Master..." she leaned forward slightly, "before you came and altered that technique, there wasn't even a second form, everyone knows that."

A rare, genuine smile curved Fang Yuan's lips. "That's true. But think about it... modification implies—" his gaze glinted faintly, "—potential for more."

He let the words hang, like bait in still water.

But Fang Lian's mind had snagged long before the end of his sentence, going back at the exact moment he had said three forms.

The clan was still reeling from when he had taken the Tyrant Light Sword and not only forged a second form, but a third. And now... had he done the same with the Golden Shell Armor?

She swallowed hard, her throat suddenly dry.

"Master..." her voice came out in a near-whisper, trembling between disbelief and a rising thrill, "there's... a third form as well?"

Fang Yuan's smile widened, radiating a quiet, undeniable confidence.

"Lian," he stated simply, the words resonating with the weight of proven accomplishment, "I am a genius. Expect the impossible."

He held her gaze, letting the sheer audacity of the claim sink in.

Fang Lian visibly gulped, the reality of learning under such a figure hitting her anew.

"Focus," Fang Yuan commanded gently, drawing her back. "For now, the Second Form: Bravery. I know you've grasped its shadow, maybe even felt its edge. But your execution..."

He shook his head minutely. "... it's still a bit flimsy."

His tone shifted into something more deliberate, almost instructional. "Suppose two attacks come at you, front and back, striking at the exact same instant. What do you do?"

Fang Lian's brows drew together, her mind already running the scenario. "If they land together..." she murmured, thinking aloud, "then the First Form: Cowardice, is the only choice. We can't call forth two Braveries at once. The focus would fracture, and the shield would collapse."

"Wrong." Fang Yuan's voice cut through her assumption, sharp but not unkind.

He raised a single hand.

"You can. Concentration isn't about brute force; it's about understanding the core."

He snapped his fingers and a single, seamless sphere of shimmering golden energy encased him completely, the perfect, impenetrable defense of the First Form: Cowardice.

"Behold the root," Fang Yuan declared, his voice echoing slightly within the sphere.

"Cowardice. It offers total protection. Shutting the world out and protecting you, sheltering you."

"But," his tone deepened, carrying a quiet, dangerous edge, "it drains you. Every heartbeat inside it is carved straight out of your own qi. Hide in Cowardice all your life..."

His gaze hardened, like a blade pressing against the mind.

"...and you are paving the road to your own destruction. Because once your qi runs dry—" he paused, letting the silence press in "—you're nothing more than a fish laid bare on the chopping block."

"But now," he continued, his gaze locking onto Fang Lian's with the weight of unshakable insight, "instead of cowering inside it... break it down. Tear Cowardice apart."

His hands moved in the air, miming the slow, deliberate rending of the sphere into shards. "Not destroy it but instead fragment it. Study each piece. Understand its essence, one fragment at a time."

His hands moved again, slower this time, drawing intricate patterns in the air.

The Cowardice shield that covered himself disintegrated into pieces.

It was no longer one shield but dozens, even hundreds.

Each flickering into existence around him, each a tiny, focused point of golden light.

They danced, interwove, and solidified into a shimmering, responsive latticework of miniature barriers.

"Each fragment," Fang Yuan explained, his voice low and intense, "each piece of that primal, all-encompassing fear... you wield it. Not to hide, but to intervene. To block a specific threat you once used your entire being to shield against. That is Bravery."

He held the complex, shimmering network of golden shields effortlessly.

"Bravery is not the absence of Cowardice, Lian. It is the overcoming of it. It is taking that instinctive urge to cower, that desperate need for total safety, and forging it into a weapon of focused defiance. You channel the energy of protection outward, selectively, with precision."

He let the shields wink out. "By mastering the breaking down of Cowardice, I forged Bravery. Making it more effective and more efficient in saving qi usage. True strength lies not in hiding, but in choosing where to stand firm."

Fang Lian stood utterly still, breath caught in her throat.

It wasn't just a lesson in qi manipulation; it was a lesson in confronting fear itself.

"Think on it," Fang Yuan commanded Fang Lian, his voice dropping from profound teacher to pragmatic leader in an instant.

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Fang Yuan's gaze shifted, sharpening like drawn steel as it landed on the shadows near the courtyard gate.

"Focus on that while I entertain the elders who've been waiting."

Two distinct, slightly embarrassed coughs shattered the charged silence.

Elder Joshua and elder Chen stepped fully into the sunlight, their faces etched with a mixture of residual awe from the lesson and acute discomfort at their intrusion.

They had been statues in the archway, utterly absorbed, the urgency of their mission momentarily forgotten in the face of Fang Yuan's revelation.

Fang Yuan beckoned them forward with a subtle tilt of his chin.

The gravel crunched under their boots as they approached, the air still humming faintly with the dissipating echoes of golden qi.

Fang Yuan didn't waste words.

His eyes, scanned their grave expressions.

"Is it the royal family?" he asked, his voice low.

Fang Chen shook his head, a single, tight movement.

His voice was strained. "No. It is much worse, Clan Head."

"Worse?" Fang Yuan's brow furrowed minutely.

Fang Joshua stepped half a pace forward, his weathered face grim.

He delivered the message, "The wells you placed within the Eastern Ravine Cultivation caves... they've all dried up. Every single one of them. The clan disciples are disappointed by the setback and I'm worried this might escalate into something bigger."

Fang Yuan went utterly still for a brief moment.

Then, a soft exhalation followed.

"Ah."

He blinked, the distant focus snapping back to the present, meeting Joshua's anxious gaze.

"That... is indeed serious." He paused, a fraction of a second where the immense gravity settled.

Then, with a movement startling in its suddenness, he turned towards the path leading out of the courtyard, already moving.

"Oh well. We should just replace the wells then, we can't have our younger generations slacking off." His tone was almost casual, matter-of-fact. "Let's go."

The two elders froze mid-step, their carefully prepared reports dying on their lips.

They stared at Fang Yuan's retreating back, their expressions mirroring identical shock.

Two words flew through their head simultaneously.

TOO CALM!

Ignoring the two elders' stunned stares drilling into his back, Fang Yuan turned to Fang Lian.

His voice cut through their silent disbelief, crisp and demanding.

"Lian. While I'm gone, i want you to try and manifest two Bravery barriers simultaneously. Also I want you to hold them stable."

And then he added with a wicked smile, "I'll be back my midnight."

Fang Lian's eyes widened.

The request felt monumental but her desire to protest '*But Master, the complexity! The time I'll need to learn!*' rose instantly in her throat.

But instead of saying what she wanted out loud, she snapped her jaw shut, swallowed the doubt, and straightened her spine.

The bandages pulled taut beneath her robes.

"Yes, Master," she declared, the words firm despite the tremor of challenge beneath them.

With a final glance at his disciple, Fang Yuan strode past the frozen elders.

Fang Chen and Fang Joshua scrambled to follow, gravel crunching loudly under their hurried steps as they fell in behind his purposeful gait.

The silence stretched for several paces down the winding path before Fang Chen found his voice.

"Nephew," he began hesitantly, "where did Senior Doctor Mu go? I thought you paid a visit to the doctor..."

Fang Yuan didn't slow down.

"Likely visiting the grave," he answered, his tone softening almost imperceptibly.

"It's that time of year after all."

A heavy, unspoken understanding hung in the air.

Fang Chen opened his mouth, perhaps to ask which grave, then thought better of it.

"Ah," he murmured, and shut up, falling back into step with Joshua, exchanging a silent, weighted look.

They soon arrived at the unnaturally silent Eastern Ravine.

The absence of the usual hum was palpable, oppressive.

Fang Joshua stepped forward, gesturing respectfully towards the gaping, dark entrance of Cave #1.

"Clan Head, this way, please. The depletion began here."

Fang Yuan stepped over the threshold and into Cave #1.

The air inside was cool and still, carrying the faint, earthy scent of stone and damp qi.

With a thought, he summoned his system space.

A golden screen shimmered into existence before him, its glow casting sharp highlights across the cave walls.

He didn't bother weaving intricate seals, just scrolled through the options, selected a minor spirit well, and placed it precisely where the old one had stood.

–100 Faith Points.

The counter ticked down, numbers fading like sand through his fingers. He exhaled softly.

Pop.

It wasn't a loud sound, more a sudden, soft release of pressure.

Where moments before the cave mouth had radiated only cold, dead rock, a vibrant pulse of energy surged forth.

The faint, residual luminescence in the walls flared back to life, brighter than before.

The air thickened, rich and heavy with potent spiritual qi.

Fang Chen choked, staggering half a step back as if physically struck by the wave of energy.

His eyes bulged, darting from the revitalized cave to Fang Yuan's impassive profile. "Nephew—! That... **how?**!" The question burst out, raw with disbelief. "What profound art was that?"

Fang Yuan threw his head back and laughed, the sound echoing strangely in the newly charged ravine.

"Dark magic, Uncle!" he declared, his eyes sparkling with mischievous deflection. "A little trick from the sect I'm in. Quite useful, wouldn't you say?"

He waved a dismissive hand, the lie smooth and utterly unverifiable, no one knew the gift's true contents, not even Fang Yuan himself.

Fang Chen stared. Words tangled on his tongue only to dissolve into stunned silence.

The casual dismissal, the blatant untruth delivered with such breezy confidence, left him reeling.

He swallowed hard, the familiar term "nephew" dying unsaid.

His voice, when it came, was stiff, formal, acknowledging the gulf the display had created. "If... if you say so, Clan Head."

Fang Joshua, however, stood transfixed. His weathered face mirrored pure, unadulterated awe, untouched by skepticism.

He stared at the glowing cave mouth, then at Fang Yuan, his expression identical to when he'd witnessed this miracle the first time weeks ago.

Chapter 165: 165-13th Cave

Fang Yuan chuckled at the stark contrast between the two elders' expressions.

Well, it wasn't a big loss anyway. He earned faith points faster than most people breathed.

With fifty caves in total, each well costing a hundred points to restore, that was only five thousand faith points for the lot, each lasting at least a week before needing another refill.

And that was barely a dent compared to his current income.

Ever since the Lin and Gu incident, his daily earnings had swelled to a steady three thousand faith points a day.

At that rate, keeping all fifty caves flowing was more an act of convenience than a strain.

The only downside though... Fang Yuan sighed as he stepped out of the twelfth cave. *I still have to refill them one by one.*

The faint echo of dripping water faded behind him as he strode along the stone corridor. *Still, it's a worthy trade. A little legwork for a steady tide of faith points? I'll take it.*

His gaze sharpened, a flicker of amusement crossing his face. *Besides, there are plenty of tempting treasures in the system's vault. If I have to earn them step by step, so be it.*

He walked into the thirteenth cave, ready to begin again.

His thoughts cut off abruptly when he saw that in the center of the cave, cross-legged and bathed in the faint, dying luminescence of the walls, sat a young Fang disciple.

Sweat beaded on the boy's forehead, his chest rising and falling in a rhythm.

Beside him, Fang Joshua and Fang Chen exchanged a brief glance, just a flicker, but one loaded with meaning.

Do we interrupt him? The unspoken question lingered between them. *Better to send him away quietly than risk him glimpsing what the Clan Head is doing.*

The thought wasn't born of paranoia alone. Every elder knew the truth that clan rivalry was constant.

Just as the Fang Clan had risen sharply under Fang Yuan's hand, there was always the chance another clan could find their own prodigy... and catch up

Fang Yuan's gaze slid to them, his expression unreadable, yet his eyes carried a glint of quiet amusement.

He could read the concern in their faces as clearly as if they'd spoken aloud.

Fang Yuan held up a single hand, palm outwards, a silent command for stillness.

His gaze remained fixed on the young cultivator.

"Look at him, Elders," Fang Yuan murmured, his voice barely a whisper yet carrying perfectly in the cavern's stillness.

He tilted his head, observing the faint tremor in the boy's hands, the subtle intensifying glow around his dantian.

"See the energy coiling around him? He is on the edge of a breakthrough."

He finally turned, his eyes meeting theirs, calm and utterly certain.

"If we disturb him now and shatter this fragile moment... then we earn not just a setback, but a lifetime of bitter resentment."

He paused, letting the gravity sink in. "But if we let him seize his ascension, aided by the well we restore... even if gratitude isn't his nature, hatred surely won't be."

He finally turned, his gaze meeting theirs, calm, steady, and utterly certain.

"If we disturb him now and shatter this fragile moment... we won't just cause a setback. We'll plant a seed of bitterness that will grow for a lifetime."

He let the words hang in the cool, still air of the cave, voice low but edged with quiet authority.

"But if we let him take his step forward and helped him, by the well we restore while he's in this state, then even if gratitude is not in his nature... hatred will not be either."

Fang Joshua's jaw tightened. His voice was blunt, unflinching.

"Clan Head, a clan's rise is built on secrets and corpses. Cultivation itself is defiance of Heaven. I say we wake him, send him away, and keep our work unseen. What if he's a spy for another clan? I'd rather offend him than risk bleeding our secrets."

Fang Yuan tilted his head slightly, listening without interruption. The reasoning was sound, yet something about it scraped against his instincts.

Fang Chen's expression was more calculating.

"Nephew," he said, his tone measured, "if him harboring ill intent is what you're worried about, then we can simply remove him... and his family. That is the cleaner solution and we also make sure there's no loose ends."

For a moment, silence stretched.

Then Fang Yuan smiled, a slow, unreadable curve of his lips that seemed to both acknowledge and dismiss their concerns.

Without a word, he lifted his hand in an easy, almost careless gesture.

Beside him, the now-familiar golden screen bloomed into existence.

A flicker of will.

—100 Faith Points.

A soft pop rippled through the chamber, as though the very air had swallowed the sound whole.

Vibrant spiritual energy erupted from the cave floor where the old well had been, a visible wave of golden light that washed over the stone, reigniting the walls with pulsing luminescence.

The air thickened instantly, rich and potent.

The young disciple, immersed in his trance, instinctively drew a deeper breath, the lines of strain on his face smoothing slightly as the abundant qi flooded his senses.

Fang Yuan didn't wait for the elders' reaction. He turned on his heel, his robes swirling softly.

"It doesn't hurt to be kind," he stated simply, the words hanging in the newly charged air like a quiet pronouncement.

He strode purposefully towards the cave entrance, the crunch of gravel under his boots the only sound breaking the profound silence.

Fang Joshua and Fang Chen scrambled after him, exchanging another bewildered, awestruck glance over their shoulders at the revitalized cave and the oblivious disciple bathed in its renewed glory.

Fang Chen opened his mouth, perhaps to question, but seeing Fang Yuan's retreating back he swallowed his words and simply followed, the Clan Head's enigmatic philosophy echoing in his mind.

When Fang Yuan stepped out of the cave, a smile tugged at his lips.

Not because he'd just done something noble but because the golden screen floating before him was flashing a new message.

Chapter 166: 166- Captives in the Basement.

[Hidden Quest Cleared!]

Your wife, Lin Zhaoyue, has successfully orchestrated the merger of the Lin Family into the Fang Family.

Their banners now fly as one.

Rewards Obtained:

+10,000 System Points

Exchange Function Unlocked:

Convert Faith Points (FP) to System Points at a 1:10 Ratio.

New Shop Items Available!]

Fang Yuan's gaze snapped to the shimmering system interface.

A slow, genuine smile spread across his face, wider and more satisfied than any he'd worn in weeks.

His eyes scanned the list, instantly drawn to one entry glowing with particular intensity:

◆ **[Minor Resource Well Reservoir] –10,000 FP**

Creates a crystalline reservoir deep within designated land. Instantly replenishes any Minor Resource Well linked to its network.

Capacity: Sufficient to refill ONE HUNDRED Minor Resource Wells to their peak spiritual saturation.

A low whistle escaped Fang Yuan's lips. A hundred wells capacity and instantly replenish? Was this not the comfort I asked for earlier?

This wasn't just convenient, it was transformative.

It meant stability, continuous cultivation resources without the agonizing need for him to personally refill every week!

Just below the item description, a separate, urgent note flashed in a distinct, insistent gold:

[The system recommendation is that the host should acquire this immediately.]

The smile on Fang Yuan's face sharpened.

His fingers tightened slightly.

Ten thousand Faith Points was no small sum, but the thought of never again having to trudge from cave to cave every week was far too tempting to ignore.

"One hundred wells..." he murmured, savoring the words like fine wine.

The path ahead seemed to blaze with possibility, bathed in a golden light only he could see. "Yes. That will do... very nicely indeed."

Fang Yuan turned to the waiting elders, his earlier satisfaction hardening into focused authority.

"Before I repair the remaining caves," he declared, his voice cutting through the stillness, "I have a new task. Fang Joshua, Fang Chen, mobilize a work crew. I need a reservoir excavated beneath the compound, connected to the caves via reinforced conduits."

Fang Joshua, ever the pragmatist, didn't question the purpose.

Instead, his brow furrowed in practical assessment. "Understood, Clan Head. What dimensions?"

"A kilometre square," Fang Yuan stated calmly.

Fang Chen choked on air. "Nephew!" he sputtered, stepping forward, his eyes wide with disbelief.

"A kilometre? That's not a reservoir, that's an underground lake! The labor, the time, forget all that, that is madness!"

He jabbed a finger toward the ground, his voice growing sharper. "Tell me why. Give me the purpose, and I'll calculate the optimal size myself. Blind digging on that scale is lunacy!"

Fang Yuan blinked, realizing what he had just said.

He coughed lightly. "*Ahem...* you've seen the size of these small wells. I just need a hole that can hold the capacity of a hundred wells, maybe a hundred and fifty for good measure."

Fang Joshua's brow furrowed, his voice steady and precise. "Noted. By my calculations, if we dig only a meter deep, the total length would exceed a kilometre, Clan Head."

Fang Yuan's lips curved into a faint, contemplative smile. "Huh... I suppose that works. If you need more space, feel free to dig further, no complaints from me."

"Hey, hey!" Fang Chen threw up his hands, his voice pitching higher.

"If we dig to ten meters, the most we'd need is about a hundred and twenty meters across! We don't own the kingdom, you two buffoons!" His words came out in bouts of half-panicked, half-exasperated sputters.

Fang Yuan couldn't help it, he burst out laughing.

"You two are the seniors here, and far more experienced than I am. I'll leave the exact size to your judgment. Just... make it happen."

Fang Yuan dusted his hands and turned toward the elders. "Alright then, you two will work out the numbers. I'll also go around adding these minor spirit wells to the rest of the cultivation caves. Let's depart here."

The pair bowed low. "Yes, Clan Head."

To their surprise, Fang Yuan inclined his head in return, a gesture of courtesy that carried the weight of unspoken respect, before striding away.

He moved quickly, his steps light but purposeful, vanishing into the network of caves like a shadow chasing the wind.

Not long after, the faint hum of spiritual energy began to ripple through the mountain.

One by one, each of the fifty cultivation caves gained a new heartbeat, a minor spirit well set into the stone, glowing faintly as qi swirled upward, infusing the air with a richer, denser vitality.

By the time he was finished, the mountain itself seemed to breathe deeper, its veins of qi running richer with each well he had placed.

Just then, a thought flickered across his mind.

"Hmm... I wonder how those two family members are faring."

With that, Fang Yuan pivoted on his heel and strode towards the basement under the phoenix soul pavilion.

It had been some time since he last paid a visit to the Gu father-and-son captives anyways.

The air grew heavier as he descended, the stone steps damp beneath his boots.

The faint scent of rust and blood curled in the dark, wrapping around him like an old acquaintance.

In the far corner, under the cold flicker of a spirit lamp, the two men hung in their chains, skin bare, muscles taut from strain.

Blood trickled from cuts and punctures, tracing dark paths down their bodies before dripping to the floor in soft, steady taps.

The chains rattled faintly as they breathed, each movement betraying the weight of their misery.

Fang Yuan stepped forward, his shadow spilling across the cold stone floor until it reached the two chained figures.

He stopped just close enough for them to feel the weight of his presence.

"Gu Jian," he said softly, almost as if they were sharing tea instead of a cell. "My father most trusted friend. Also a sworn brother and maybe even his only ally."

His eyes didn't waver, but there was a stillness in them that felt like the moment before a blade fell.

"So tell me... why did you kill him?"

Chapter 167: 167- Special Physique.

The words were calm, the voice gentle, yet each syllable slid like a knife's edge, leaving the air colder than before.

"The night before that incident happened," Fang Yuan began, his voice low, almost reflective, "both my parents told me they would be fine because you were his sworn brother."

He let the words hang for a moment, watching Gu Jian's eyes.

"But that night... turned out to be their last night with their child. That day ended up being the last moment I would ever hear their voices."

His gaze sharpened, though his tone remained almost tender. "Tell me, Gu Jian, what excuse have you got?"

Fang Yuan reached out, fingers cold and unhurried, and tilted Gu Jian's chin upward until their eyes met.

Seeing him kept his mouth shut and simply staring back at him, Fang Yuan sighed.

"I always used to believe," he said softly, "that the crime of the parents is not for the children to bear. Maybe I was wrong?"

Without another word, he released him and turned, footsteps echoing against the damp stone as he began to leave.

For a moment, only the sound of chains shifting filled the air, then, like a snapped bowstring, Gu Jian's voice tore through the basement.

"What does that mean?! Fang Yuan! This is between us!"

His ragged breathing hitched, and he bellowed again, louder, desperate—

"Fang Yuan! Fang Yuan!"

The chains clanged violently as he strained against them, but Fang Yuan's shadow had already vanished beyond the door.

Once Fang Yuan stepped out of the basement, he let out a slow, measured sigh.

The cool night air kissed his face as he tilted his head, eyes scanning the blanket of stars above. His voice was barely audible, a whisper carried on the breeze.

"I don't have much time left..."

Before he could dwell further, a chorus of lively voices reached him, slicing through the night's quiet.

"Ah, Little Pei! Can't you let this old lady admire your new handsome self?"

Fang Yuan's gaze shifted, and there she was, Aunt Jingyi, her eyes gleaming with amusement as she reached for Xiao Pei.

The young man squirmed in her grasp, trying to retreat, his shoulders tense and hands raised in a feeble defense.

"Ah, Aunt... please..." Xiao Pei's voice trembled, half plea, half panic, as he wiggled beneath her grip.

Fang Yuan allowed himself a faint smirk.

There was something endlessly entertaining about the sight: Aunt Jingyi's relentless energy, Xiao Pei's flustered attempts at escape, and the quiet contrast of the night around them.

He leaned against the cool stone railing, eyes observing every beat, Xiao Pei jerking back, Aunt Jingyi's laughter bubbling over, and the subtle tension that made the moment feel almost alive.

Just then, Fang Jingyi's sharp eyes caught sight of Fang Yuan, and a wide, delighted smile spread across her face.

She waved energetically, her voice cutting through the night air.

"Little Yuan!"

Her excitement was palpable, almost contagious, vibrating through the space between them.

Xiao Pei's gaze locked onto Fang Yuan, and for a heartbeat, it was as if he had glimpsed a long-lost savior.

His expression shifted from flustered panic to pure awe, and without hesitation, he bolted forward.

Fang Yuan planted his feet, bracing himself.

Both Fang Jingyi and Xiao Pei came running at full speed, their energy and urgency colliding like a storm about to hit.

He widened his arms, ready for the embrace, feeling the weight of their trust and relief in every step they took toward him.

Fang Jingyi was the first to reach him, rushing forward with unrestrained energy.

She threw herself into a hug, her arms wrapping tightly around Fang Yuan.

"Little Yuan, you are doing amazing with the clan," she said, her voice warm and brimming with pride. "I just wanted to make sure you know that."

Xiao Pei arrived next, panting slightly, and Fang Jingyi released her embrace, stepping aside with a chuckle.

"Oh right, this brother of yours," she continued, nodding toward Xiao Pei, "his condition is... a little special. From what I've checked and seen, it's a hidden physique or something. I always thought those were myths or just made-up terms so it was a shocker when I came to this conclusion."

"A hidden physique?" Fang Yuan repeated thoughtfully, then his eyes lit up. "That's definitely it! Brother Da Pang, those with a hidden physique can cultivate faster, stronger, and more resilient than ordinary folks!"

Xiao Pei shuffled awkwardly at her side, stammering, "B-but... we... we don't even know what type of physique I... I have..."

Fang Yuan shook his head, a teasing smirk playing on his lips. "It'll be easy. Just change your surname to Fang, and I'll figure it out, easy peasy."

Fang Jingyi burst into laughter at the suggestion, clapping her hands with amusement.

Xiao Pei forced a laugh, trying to play along. "N-nice joke, Brother Fang..."

Fang Yuan's brows knit in confusion. "No, no, I actually mean it."

Xiao Pei froze, eyes wide and a flush creeping up his face. "Y-you're serious?!"

Fang Jingyi let out an awkward, half-laugh, half-chide. "Nephew... you're joking now, right? You'll check it for him even if he doesn't change his surname, yes?"

Fang Yuan paused, a flicker of hesitation crossing his features.

He knew the system could only scan the Fang family, but asking Xiao Pei to change his surname outright would have been... cruel.

So he smoothed his expression, letting a warm, teasing laugh escape. "Haha, Brother Da Pang, I'm joking with you. But don't worry, I'll find a way to figure it out."

"Ah... Shaoge... it's... it's okay. But... thank you... thank you so much for being... so helpful," Xiao Pei stammered, his words faltering under the weight of gratitude.

Fang Yuan rested a firm hand on Xiao Pei's shoulder, his gaze steady. "We are sworn brothers. We'll always do our best for each other."

Yet, beneath the calm reassurance, a quiet ache gnawed at Fang Yuan's chest, the heavy, invisible weight of the truths he couldn't share, a sting he could not voice.

Chapter 168: 168- System [1]

The next morning, the Fang Estate bustled like a hive.

Servants hurried with tools, disciples marched between courtyards, and the faint clang of weapons echoed in the distance.

Inside his office, Fang Yuan sat at his broad desk, sleeves rolled back, stamping paperworks one after another.

After he was done, he stretched a little and picked up his brush and then he unfurled the next scroll and wrote neatly:

Task: Feed the koi fish in the Phoenix Soul Pavilion.

Risk: None.

Merit Points: 10.

He paused for a moment as the brush hovered for a moment.

A sigh slipped through his nose before he reached for a fresh scroll.

His hand moved again, this time with a hint of irritation in the strokes:

"Note to self: Please establish a system for permanent tasks.

Especially for stuffs like repetitive duties such as tending to the koi, cleaning up the gardens, maintaining lanterns and also the patrols, they should be written once and set as standing quests.

This will prevent needless rewriting and reduce wasted time. Tell little Mei'er about this when she return back with Uncle Chen."

When he was done, Fang Yuan tapped the end of the brush against the desk, then glued the note there just in case he forgets about it. Which apparently he did, a lot.

He then opened the next scroll but instead of a blank one, it was a formal petition.

Fang Yuan smoothed it out and read:

"Petition to construct a weaponry within the clan.

Requested investment: 60,000 gold ingots.

Our clan's weapons have long been outsourced. Due to recent strained relations, we believe it is time we forge our own.

—Fang Chen and Fang Joshua."

Fang Yuan leaned back slightly, the parchment rustling in his hand.

His gaze sharpened with quiet consideration. *Weaponry, hmm...* His lips curved into a faint, approving smile. *That is fine.*

He brought down the seal with a solid thunk—**APPROVED.**

But as the red mark dried, his mind drifted elsewhere, a name surfaced in his head. Xiao Pei.

The system's latest task echoed in his mind: **[Get a girlfriend for your brother Xiao Pei.]**

[Reward: Access to the weaponry]

His lips pressed into a thin line. *Would that truly be a win-win? Helping a brother find happiness... or would I just be a selfish bastard, pushing him toward someone only because I need the weapons?*

He exhaled deeply, then raised his voice. "Felicia."

The office door opened a moment later, and a young woman stepped inside.

Felicia, neat in her light-blue robes, bowed deeply, her tone crisp. "Yes, Clan Head?"

"Bring Xiao Pei to me."

"Right away, Clan Head." She dipped once more before slipping out, closing the door softly behind her.

Fang Yuan rose from his seat, the quiet scrape of his chair legs against the floor the only sound in the room. He moved unhurriedly toward the small cupboard tucked against the wall.

Resting atop it sat a modest brazier, a plain kettle, and a few bundles of dried herbs bound neatly with twine.

He lifted the kettle with steady hands, pouring clear water into its belly.

Then, one by one, he gathered the herbs he had on hand, spiritual bitterness root, crushed carefully between his fingers until its sharp, acrid fragrance bled into the air; strips of molten elderleaf bark, thin as paper, curling the instant they touched the rising mist.

When all was prepared, Fang Yuan exhaled softly and let a strand of his qi unfurl. It seeped into the brazier and ignited the flame up.

Slowly, the water began to shiver, steam whispering upward in delicate coils.

The air filled with a strange, biting aroma, half bitter, half sweet.

Fang Yuan stood over the kettle, watching the steam rise, his expression unreadable.

Fang Yuan watched the water in the kettle roll and break, the steam curling like pale spirits against the rafters.

Slowly, the last bubble snapped, leaving only the hiss of heat. He lifted the kettle with steady hands, poured the dark brew into a single cup, and carried it back to his desk.

He set the cup down. For a long moment, he only stared at it, the bitter fragrance rising like a dare.

A wry smile tugged at his lips. "Fang Yuan... think of this as coffee. Just cultivation-world coffee."

His voice was a low mutter, as though saying it aloud might soften the taste.

He took a sip. The liquid bit back, sharp and punishing, and he pressed his teeth into his lip with a faint wince.

No matter how many times he brewed it, the bitterness always seemed alive, gnawing at his tongue and chest both.

Only one man I know can drink this stuff without flinching... my good brother, Fang Tian.

He exhaled, almost a laugh, then set the cup aside and reached for the next scroll.

The wax seal broke easily. Inside was a neat request: permission for the Lin Family to retain their surname despite being beneath the Fang banner.

Fang Yuan leaned back, tapping the parchment with one finger, weighing it.

A family's name was not just a word, it was pride, lineage, the thread binding generations to their ancestors.

To strip it away was to demand they sever their spine and stand hollow.

Fang Yuan's gaze lingered on the scroll, thoughts weaving in silence.

From what he had discerned, unless one bore the Fang surname, he could not truly gauge a person's loyalty or even the faith they pledged through the system.

He exhaled, a faint murmur escaping under his breath.

"If only it were loyalty I could measure... not faith. I won't have to worry about betrayals, not at all."

Just then, a golden shimmer spilled across his vision.

The system screen unfurled word by word, radiant and cold.

[Host, as long as an individual or a group has wholly submitted under you, they are already part of your clan.]

No great man reaches the top without capable allies.

New Task: Raise an ally or a pet.

Goal: Increase the number of Golden Core cultivators in the Lin Family to twenty.

Current count: twelve.]

Chapter 169: 169- System [2]

Fang Yuan's eyes narrowed, then softened as he gave a small approving nod.

Not bad. Twelve already...

The Lin family. Their main branch thrived in the frigid north, rubbing shoulders with the top clans of the kingdom.

Even with such intense competitions, they had been strong and audacious enough to even extend a branch family into Coldwind City, deep in the east, carving themselves a seat among the five great clans there.

That kind of ambition alone marked them as anything but weak.

Fang Yuan exhaled softly, his gaze distant. *If I had not been born into this world, who knows what the Fang clan's fate might have been under such competition...*

He could see them still, his rivals, like stones pressing in from all sides.

The Wu clan were never the type to be easily satisfied, he remembered them sinking their teeth into mines and minerals, scraping the bones of the earth for profit.

They gave him the most headache back then.

The Zhao clan, on the other hand were slick and relentless, they had their grip tight on shops and trade routes, weaving coin into chains of influence. Fang Yuan had a hard time trying to carve a way into the market.

The Lin clan took a stealthy approach, seizing Coldwind City's entertainment market, wine, song, courtesans, theaters, all the luxuries that drowned men faster than blades. Fang Yuan outright gave up on trying to fight for a share, the Lin family had total control over that.

And then there was the He family, the most straight forward, no masks, no subtlety. They sharpened their blades and declared their intent to devour Fang lands whole.

Just remembering the years spent dealing with them tugged at Fang Yuan's temples, a dull headache rising behind his eyes.

By nature, he had never been the bold, reckless type. Timid? Perhaps. Careful? Always.

A man who saw shadows where others saw light. He was under the firm belief that just as he himself hid his true cultivation, so too must everyone else be hiding theirs.

With that suspicion guiding him, brute force had rarely been his first choice.

Instead, he relied on wit, patience, and tongue. A cutting phrase here, a cleverly placed bargain there.

Where fists only solved problems crudely, words could dissolve them like salt in water.

Of course, there were times when words failed and fists became the only language left.

In those moments, Fang Yuan shined the brightest.

His strikes were swift and precise as he ends the disputes before they could even begin.

To him, such solutions were the simplest, far more honest than the games of politics and persuasion.

A single blow carried more truth than a thousand words.

And when it came to fists, he had no equals. Even while deliberately masking his cultivation, feigning weakness to mislead others, the outcome never changed.

They were never truly his peers.

Pity, Fang Yuan mused, none of the four rival clans truly resorted to violence.

To them, strength was ornamental, a side-piece to influence and reputation.

Only their pampered young brats, arrogant little "geniuses", ever bothered to fight.

Those he had beaten up again and again, until humiliation was carved into their bones.

At least they didn't lost their nerve and instead they always came crawling back, eager for revenge.

Fang Yuan enjoyed it.

He knew their elders clung to integrity above all, so he exploited that stubborn pride.

Whenever he faced a deadlock in negotiations, he simply found a way to provoke one of their young masters, dragging the issue into a wager.

Supposedly, if the He clan dangled a land deed to one of Fang's holdings.

Fang Yuan would immediately seek out the young master of the He Clan, and upon meeting him, he'd offer a chest of gold ingots as a bet for the land deed, playing the part of a desperate gambler to perfection.

Naturally, the young master of the He Clan would take the bait without hesitation, wagering the deed in a heartbeat.

For why they don't hesitate to take the gamble, Fang Yuan always made sure to provoke them in a 'peaceful and calm' manner.

After the bet was made, before a crowd of wide-eyed onlookers, Fang Yuan would make their fight appear perfectly balanced, until, of course, he pulled ahead at the very last second, as if by some miraculous stroke of luck.

That way, when the same issue arose again, the young master wouldn't even consider backing down.

He would cling stubbornly to the illusion that victory had been just out of reach last time, and that Fang Yuan had only won through by sheer luck.

Naturally, he was exposed eventually.

Not all of the other clan heirs were equal in cultivation, and their patriarchs were no fools.

Still, the young masters kept coming back for more.

God bless them for being too arrogant for their own good... and blissfully stupid, Fang Yuan mused internally, a faint smirk tugging at the corner of his lips.

After all, from childhood until now, those so-called prodigies had tasted defeat at Fang Yuan's hand more times than they had ever heard their parents say the words: *I'm proud of you.*

A faint smile curved his lips at the memory. Then, just as quickly, it slipped away.

A subtle frown crept across his brow.

"No... something's off here."

He stilled. His reminiscing cut short, Fang Yuan summoned the translucent golden screen of the system before him, his sharp gaze scanning the new task.

His fingers hovered mid-air, his expression caught between curiosity and suspicion.

"...A task without a reward?" he murmured. His tone was light, but his brows pressed together in thought. "What kind of absurdity is that?"

He waved a hand, frowning. "Hey, system... don't you owe me an explanation?"

No response came. Fang Yuan's lips twisted in a half-smile, half-grimace. *Great. Scammed by my own system, again. Typical. Whoever gave me this system, please stub your toes.*

Just then the golden screen flashed again.

[Congratulations! Fang Tian of your clan has successfully ascended to the Nascent Soul Realm.]

Reward: 1× Hollow Spirit Pills.

[Hollow Spirit pills are now purchasable in the shop]

Fang Yuan froze mid-breath, eyes wide.

Chapter 170: 170- BT [1]

"A Hollow Spirit Pill... really?" Fang Yuan's voice trembled as the words left his lips, half-murmured, half-accusation.

His throat felt dry, his breath uneven, as if he dared not believe what he saw.

The golden screen then blinked out of existence and in its place, weightless yet unbearably heavy, a single pill appeared in his palm.

There was no jade bottle, no ornate seals nor even a grand ceremonial glow. It was just a single pill resting quietly in his hand.

And yet Fang Yuan's breath hitched. His chest tightened. His hand trembled, his fingers quivered. His pulse hammered against his ribs.

Because he didn't need embellishment to know. Deep down, even his very soul told him.

His very bones knew this single pill could be worth more than the entire Tharz Kingdom wealth combined!

A laugh almost escaped him, half-mad, half-rapturous but instead his lips only quivered.

He stared, eyes locked, as though the pill might vanish if he blinked.

Excitement surged through him, raw and violent, spilling into the air.

And in that split moment, losing control of himself, his aura cracked open, rippling through the room, unable to stay still.

His hands kept trembling as he reached for a jade bottle and carefully placed the Hollow Spirit Pill inside.

Only when the lid clicked shut did Fang Yuan finally let out a long breath. His shoulders eased, yet his eyes lifted toward the vast sky with an uncharacteristic solemnity.

"Oh, brother..." he murmured, voice caught somewhere between mockery and reverence. "For all the headaches you've dumped on me, I'll forgive all of them. Because this gift... this one actually makes up for all of it."

He clasped his hands behind his back, tilting his head as though the Heavens themselves leaned close to listen.

A faint grin tugged at his lips, crooked and wry, yet his tone never wavered.

"I'm a gold digger, Heaven. That's right, give me the right wealth, and I'll wag my tail like the most loyal dog. I'll even bark for you if that's what it takes. I'm telling you this straight, Heaven: no lies, no pretenses."

After a moment of stillness, he secured the bottle once more and slipped it into his spatial ring.

He lowered his gaze to the stack of petitions on the desk.

A short while ago, they had weighed on him like endless burdens, tedious and boring.

But now, after securing the pill, his eyes softened. What once felt like a mountain of chores appeared orderly, almost inviting.

A faint smile tugged at his lips as he pulled the first sheet closer.

With steady strokes, he began approving them one by one, not with impatience, but with a quiet ease, as though each petition was no longer a duty, but a task worth his attention.

After an hour passed, his hand stilled.

He unfolded the next letter and read silently:

"Greetings, Fang Clan Head. My name is Cheng Bo. You may not recall me, but we crossed paths briefly on the day of your clan's internal strife.

I now wish to propose a trade to the Fang Clan, in exchange for your aid in taking revenge against the Wu family in Coldwind City. The offer includes a hoard of grade two weapons and one personally crafted grade three weapon.

If this interests you, please send your reply through the Merchant Association."

Fang Yuan's brows arched ever so slightly. His eyes lingered on the page, a flicker of amusement breaking through the calm mask on his face.

"Interesting..." he murmured, leaning back. A thought surfaced, Coldwind City was already restless. Was it not said that a single mountain could not host two tigers? And yet, at present, four prowled in the same territory.

The corner of his mouth lifted. This was no mere petition, it was an opening.

Fang Yuan tapped the letter once against the desk, his gaze sharpening.

"Cheng Bo, hm? Revenge against the Wu clan, and weapons to sweeten the deal... Very well. I may not recall who you are but you have piqued my interest."

The decision was readily made, though he did not move immediately.

Instead, he folded the letter neatly and set it aside, stacking it atop the growing pile of matters that demanded his attention.

I'll send the request through the Merchant Association once this mountain of work is cleared.

He dipped his brush again, the scratch of ink against parchment resuming its steady rhythm.

Line after line, he copied the mini-quests the system had provided, his hand flowing with patient precision.

Now and then, he would reach for another petition, skimming through it as a way to rest his wrist before returning to his meticulous writing.

The cycle continued for hours, the flickering lamplight crawling across the desk as day bled into evening.

At last, Fang Yuan set the brush down, rolling his shoulders as though he had been carrying not just paperwork, but the weight of the entire clan.

Finally, he allowed himself a long breath, his work, at least for now, done.

He then rose from his desk and stepped out, the cool evening air brushing against his face as he made his way toward the eastern ravine.

His stride was unhurried, yet each step carried quiet intent.

My breakthrough to hollow spirit comes first, the rest will follow naturally, he thought, his qi flaring faintly as he lifted off the ground.

With effortless grace, he soared across the clan's territory, robes trailing like a streak of shadowed light.

It wasn't long before the ravine came into view, alive with the sounds of industry.

Below, the site buzzed with motion.

Mortals strained at ropes and pulleys, while cultivators directed earth-moving techniques and reinforced stone with qi.

Each person moved with clear purpose, forming a living rhythm of construction.

At the center stood Elder Joshua and Elder Chen, their voices carrying authority as they coordinated the chaos into order.

Under their command, the earth was being hollowed into a colossal pit.

Watching from above, Fang Yuan's lips curved faintly.