

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

#Chapter 201- System [2] - Read Clan Building System: I'm not the Protagonist?! Chapter 201- System [2]

Chapter 201: 201- System [2]

Meanwhile, outside of the Fang family territory, the entire kingdom was in an uproar.

"Of all places, why the Fang Family?!"

"I knew something was off with them! Look at what happened to the Lin clan after they tried to rescue their head's daughter! They bowed under Fang tyranny! And the Gu family? Their head and even their ancestor wiped out, leaving only children to carry the banner!"

Accusations flew like wildfire, tongues dripping with venom. Suspicion and fear spread from city to city.

Yet for all the outrage, not a single force dared to move against the Fang Family.

Their silence was louder than the uproar.

Rogue cultivators, who at first itched to snatch a piece of the so-called Heaven-grade treasure, quickly retreated the moment the rumors spread.

Fang Yuan. Clan Head of the Fang clan.

The man whose name was whispered with more fear than reverence.

The treasure might have manifested within his domain but no one was foolish enough to step foot inside.

"They say the Fang are evil," some muttered in taverns and roadside inns. "But even the Fang clan's sins pale before Fang Yuan himself."

Not a single rogue dared to contest it.

Meanwhile, in the royal capital, within the Crown Prince's mansion, rage boiled like a storm.

Qin Hai paced back and forth, his face flushed crimson, eyes bloodshot.

Every breath seemed to burn his lungs. All his meticulous planning, all his calculations... ruined.

That cursed Fang Yuan!

The prince had expected him to toy with the "gift," to at least let it sit unopened for days.

Even a single night's delay would have been enough for Qin Hai to set the stage.

But no! Fang Yuan had opened it on his own terms, tearing apart months of careful arrangement.

His thoughts spiraled back to that fateful banquet months ago, when the Fang clan unveiled the spirit pond hidden beneath their territory.

The other four great families hadn't spoken their desires aloud, but their intent had been written all over their faces, they would never allow the Fang clan to monopolize such a treasure.

One spirit pond alone was not enough to plunge the city into chaos.

After all, every other great family possessed at least one within their territory.

The Fang clan had merely been the last of the five to gain theirs.

But what if you added the temptation of a Heaven-grade treasure to the equation?

Would the other families simply sit back and watch the Fang clan soar above them?

Or would they bare their fangs and do everything in their power to drag them down?

That was the calculation Qin Hai had made.

So, he prepared a gift.

A rusted sword.

It was more than just a gift, it was a message.

You, Fang Yuan, are the sword of the kingdom. But left on your own, you will rust. Only by bowing to me, by serving me, can you shine.

But now... now the entire plan was crumbling to dust.

Instead of opening the gift, Fang Yuan had let it rot in some forgotten corner. Qin Hai had no idea where he kept it.

At one point, he even prayed some curious child would stumble upon it, tear away the seal, and trigger the scheme by accident.

Day and night, he wished, he begged, he cursed at the heavens.

But the heavens mocked him with silence.

Until one day.

He was in the middle of a blood ritual, feeding the life of one of his servants into the formation. Suddenly, the sword shuddered. It trembled as though awakening.

His heart leapt. His hands shook.

Is this it? Finally?

Elated, ecstatic, he poured more blood into the formation, hell, he even used his own blood.

But then something unexpected occurred.

The sword ripped free, vibrating with a will of its own, and shot away into the distance.

"What!?" Qin Hai's eyes went wide, his face twisted in shock.

He chased, his underlings scrambling after him, but he was too late.

The blade had already found its master.

It hovered, gleaming, in the hands of a man. A man with features so familiar it made Qin Hai's blood run cold.

"Fang... Tian..." he spat, his voice trembling with rage.

And standing beside him, holding his hand, was none other than the Third Princess.

Before Qin Hai could even react, the sword flared, and Fang Tian vanished into the void.

The air fell silent, save for the hurried footsteps of Qin Hai's retainers arriving too late.

For a moment, Qin Hai stood there, frozen, his mind struggling to grasp what had just transpired.

Then his eyes snapped to the Third Princess, his face twisting into madness.

"It's your fault!" he roared, veins bulging on his neck. "Seize her! Take her! Lock her in the basement!"

One of his female guards hesitated, stammering, "B-but, Your Highness—"

"Don't make me repeat myself!" Qin Hai snarled, his killing intent surging so violently that the guard flinched and swallowed hard.

The Third Princess, realizing her danger, instinctively turned to flee.

But the guards moved faster. She cried out, struggling, as they bound her and dragged her away.

Qin Hai stood there, chest heaving, his fury uncontained.

His eyes were bloodshot, his fists clenched so tightly that his nails dug into his palms.

That day, he made his decision.

If the sword had chosen Fang Tian, then he would twist the narrative. He would frame him, brand him a criminal.

"Yes..." Qin Hai whispered, his lips curling into a venomous smile. "Fang Tian will be the villain. The world will believe he kidnapped the Third Princess. And the Fang clan... will share his fate."

Back to the present:

He clenched his fists so tightly his nails pierced flesh. *That sword, my sword, cultivated through the blood of countless servants, fed by sacrifices no one could ever trace... stolen! Stolen by that damned Fang Tian.*

The veins in Qin Hai's neck bulged as he roared, spittle flying:

"Those brothers! Those accursed brothers—both are a plague to me!"

His fury erupted. With a savage kick, he sent a heavy table crashing against the wall, the crack of splintering wood echoing like thunder.

Servants dropped to their knees, trembling, afraid to even breathe.

"GET OUT! ALL OF YOU!" Qin Hai bellowed.

The chamber emptied in a scramble, leaving him alone with his seething rage.

His chest heaved, his face twisted with hatred, his eyes wild like a cornered beast.

"...Fang Yuan. Fang Tian. One day, I'll grind your bones to dust."

Chapter 202: 202- Royal Court

Qin Hai stormed out of his chamber, his expression thunderous.

The aura around him was suffocating, so much so that his attendants trailed behind with trembling steps.

"Summon my closest confidants. We're going to the royal court," he snapped.

One of his female attendants, gathering what little courage she had, whispered, "Your Highness... it's not a good idea to appear so suddenly before His Majesty—"

SLAP!

Her head snapped to the side, her cheek burning red.

"My sister is in the hands of the demons," Qin Hai growled, his voice tight, trembling as though on the verge of breaking. "Do you understand that? The Third Princess kidnapped by the Fang Family. And you dare tell me to sit still?"

The sheer conviction in his voice would have convinced any outsider of his sincerity.

None would ever suspect that the very girl he wept for was locked away beneath his own estate.

His attendants swallowed hard and fell silent, unable to meet his eyes.

Qin Hai straightened his robes, forcing a mask of composure over his simmering rage.

Qin Hai's gaze snapped back to the trembling attendant. His voice was cold, clipped.

"And summon Teacher Ian. Tell him to meet me at the palace gates."

He didn't wait for her reply. With a sharp turn of his heel, he stormed out, the heavy rustle of his robes echoing through the corridor.

A handful of guards fell into step behind him, their armor clattering softly as they followed their prince into the storm.

The Royal Court.

Inside the vast hall, the king of the empire sat upon his throne, speaking with envoys from the neighboring Azure Phoenix Kingdom.

The atmosphere was one of tense diplomacy, courtiers and ministers seated in orderly rows, watching every word with wary eyes.

Suddenly, the grand doors were thrown open with a boom.

The Crown Prince barged in, his robe sleeves fluttering, his face pale with fury.

His confidants trailed close behind, their presence alone enough to stir alarm in the chamber.

"Qin Hai!?" Several ministers rose in shock. "Have you no decorum? His Majesty is in the middle of—"

"Enough!" Qin Hai's voice cracked like a whip, echoing through the hall.

His eyes burned with righteous indignation, though only he knew the rot festering behind it.

He strode to the center of the court, dropping to one knee, his fist slamming against the floor.

"Father! Disaster has struck!" Qin Hai's voice broke through the solemn court, trembling with a raw, desperate urgency. "The Fang Clan has gone out of control! I fear... I fear my sister has already been sacrificed to their wicked rites!"

Gasps swept through the court like wildfire.

Ministers shot to their feet in outrage, some whispering furiously, while the envoys from the Azure Phoenix Kingdom exchanged wary, calculating glances, political instability was always opportunity.

On the throne, the king's aged, majestic face darkened.

His sharp eyes narrowed, piercing into his son. "What nonsense is this, Qin Hai?"

The crown prince raised his head. His eyes glistened as though on the verge of tears, his entire body taut with rage and grief.

He clenched his jaw so tightly that the veins in his temple bulged, the very image of a man on the edge.

"It has already been months, Father!" His voice cracked, echoing across the vast chamber.

"Months—and still no search, no justice, no answers! How long must we sit idle while my sister, your daughter, is in the clutches of that treacherous clan? Do you not care for your own child!?"

He slammed his fist against the floor, bowing low but his words rising like thunder.

"Just give the word, Father! One order, just one and I will march to the Fang estate myself. I will cleanse that nest of vipers from the surface of the kingdom!"

The king's expression did not change, though the tension in the air thickened like storm clouds.

His fingers drummed once against the armrest of his throne before he leaned forward, his voice calm yet heavy with authority.

"Qin Hai," the king said, slow and measured, "you stand here, before foreign envoys, and dare to accuse one of the great clans of the empire without proof? Do you not realize the weight of your words?"

The court grew still. Ministers who had been stirred moments before now hesitated, their eyes darting between the crown prince and the throne.

Qin Hai's face twisted with anguish, and he dropped to his knees, pressing his forehead to the cold floor.

"Father, I have no reason to speak false! If you will not believe me, then send your own men, search the Fang estate, search their lands! If I am wrong, punish me as you see fit. But if I am right, and we wait any longer, then we will have lost my sister forever!"

The king's gaze sharpened. His silence was longer this time, deliberate.

He could not simply dismiss Qin Hai before the Azure Phoenix envoys, it would look like negligence.

But nor could he recklessly strike at the Fang Clan, whose current strength was unmatched in Coldwind City.

Finally, the king exhaled, his voice ringing clear. "This matter will be investigated. Until then, Qin Hai, you will restrain yourself. Do not act without my command."

His tone brooked no argument.

The crown prince bowed deeper, hiding the triumphant flicker in his eyes. "Yes, Father."

The king's gaze lingered on him for a long, measuring moment before he turned back to the envoys.

His voice smoothed into formal courtesy, as though Qin Hai's intrusion had been nothing more than a passing draft.

"My apologies for the interruption. Matters of family can sometimes... spill into the court. Let us return to the business at hand."

The envoy leader, an older man with calm, hawk-like eyes, smiled faintly and dipped his hands in a polite salute.

"Your Majesty need not apologize. Even the loftiest palaces are not free of family strife. We understand."

The king gave a faint nod, but his gaze lingered on the envoys, gauging their reaction carefully.

Chapter 203: 203- A widow's sorrow [1]

A few days had passed since the sword-light incident.

Fang Yuan currently stood in silence, his gaze fixed on the looming mountain beyond the city walls.

Coldwind City itself was suffocating under tension.

Merchants and traders abandoned the city as they tried to escape the incoming disaster.

Mortals with nowhere to run, no place to escape to shuttered and prayed to the emperor to save them.

Fang Yuan finally retracted his gaze.

Just last night, several clan elders had come to him, their eyes sharp with fear. They had asked the same question, their voices wavering: *Was the rumours true?*

The golden screen flickered in his mind.

[Fang Clan]

Head: Fang Yuan (Strongest cultivator in Coldwind City)

Vassal: Lin Clan

Clan Faith in Their Head: 70% (Medium) ↓ (Previously 75%)

Daily Generation: 600 Faith Exp, 4,000 Faith Points

The drop in faith was clear.

Rumors of him cultivating a Heaven-grade treasure had already spread and taken root.

His clan elders also knew too well the bloody price such treasures demanded.

Though Fang Yuan did not address it. It wasn't the time yet, the only person who knew was Lin Zhaoyue.

For some weird reason, he couldn't help but feel that she was the most trustworthy person he could share it with.

Then—**BOOM!**

The deafening blast rolled across the city, shaking tiles loose from roofs. The sound came from the Wu clan's ground.

Even from the Fang family estate, he could see debris bursting skyward from the Wu clan's grounds.

Just in time, a servant boy sprinted in, breathless, collapsing into a bow.

"Clan Head! The Wu family is under siege! It's a pack of Saberfangs, at least at the Nascent Soul stage! They have called for your support!"

Fang Yuan's eyes narrowed as he muttered silently.

"...so it's begun."

He turned to the servant, his tone calm, deliberate.

"Tell the Matriarch this, the Patriarch has already moved out to aid them."

Without another word, Fang Yuan drew his blade.

The sword hummed with power as he stepped onto it.

In the next breath, he was gone, soaring into the skies, streaking toward the Wu territory.

In the meantime, the Wu Clan's territory was in chaos.

The first Saberfang, a beast at the peak of the Nascent Soul Realm stood tall as a hill, its silver fur slick with blood.

Its claws carved trenches through stone walls as easily as parchment, every swing collapsing buildings like child's toys.

With each roar, shockwaves rattled the very foundations of the estate.

Two others, both mid-stage, prowled through the wreckage, their fangs glinting.

One tore through the Wu clan's outer guards like cattle, blood misting the air with every snap of its jaws.

The other slammed its massive tail into the training grounds, flattening dozens of disciples beneath rubble before they could even scream.

The last Saberfang, high-stage, leapt onto the central hall. Its weight alone crushed the roof, sending beams and tiles exploding outward.

From within came desperate cries of women and children as dust swallowed them whole.

The Wu Clan fought back.

Elders ignited their life force, releasing their last reserves of qi to conjure shields, blades, and storms of fire.

Yet for every strike they landed, the Saberfangs retaliated tenfold.

A single swipe of a claw shredded three cultivators mid-flight. Their bodies rained down like broken dolls.

Blood ran through the courtyards, pooling at the roots of the Wu Clan's ancestral trees.

The air stank of burning flesh and crushed stone.

Amid the devastation, Wu Matriarch's voice thundered, hoarse but unyielding.

"Hold the line! Do not falter!"

But her command was drowned out by another explosion, the peak Saberfang exhaling a gale of killing intent that shattered her defensive formation in an instant.

The protective array of the clan flickered, cracked... and broke.

The Wu clan's last bastion had fallen.

And then, above the chaos, a streak of sword-light appeared in the horizon.

Fang Yuan had arrived.

His sword-light blazed across the skies and descended into the Wu Clan's shattered estate.

Dust and screams greeted him, but his expression was unreadable, calm as still water.

The peak-stage Saberfang turned first, its blood-red eyes locking on him.

It roared, the sound splitting the heavens, and lunged with claws that could sever mountains.

Fang Yuan met the strike head-on.

He drew his blade in a single, fluid motion, one sweep of qi strong enough to bisect the beast where it stood.

The world itself seemed to pause, the light of his sword stretching for miles... but he stopped, deliberately pulling back at the final instant.

Instead of death, sparks flew as steel clashed with claw.

The shockwave ripped apart what little of the Wu Clan's defenses still stood, flattening the remnants of the outer courtyard.

Mortals and servants were hurled into the air like leaves in a storm.

The Saberfang staggered, then growled, pacing in a circle around him, its fur bristling but its fangs bared in something that looked more like recognition than rage.

The Wu Clan's cultivators gasped. *He... he can fight a peak Nascent Soul Saberfang to a standstill?!*

Yet Fang Yuan's face was still calm, his voice carrying clearly through the carnage.

"Matriarch Wu," he called, blade locked against the beast's claw as sparks rained around them, "where is Wu Shun?"

The matriarch, pale and bloodied, struggled to her feet amid the rubble.

Her lips trembled. "H-He... he was sent to rally reinforcements! Clan Head Fang, I beg of you—help us drive these monsters away!"

But Fang Yuan's eyes narrowed ever so slightly, a gleam of calculation flickering within them before he began swinging his sword at the beast once again.

Each swing of Fang Yuan's sword carved trenches in the earth, each swipe of the Saberfang's claws shattered walls like paper.

The other three Saberfangs, sensing a worthy foe, turned their blazing eyes toward him. With snarls that rattled the heavens, they bounded forward.

The ground quaked as one mid-stage beast slammed its paw down, collapsing an entire courtyard, while the high-stage Saberfang lunged at his flank, jaws snapping like steel traps.

Chapter 204: 204- A widow's sorrow [2]

Fang Yuan's blade blurred, intercepting strike after strike.

Sparks and blood-mist filled the air.

"Damn it all!" Fang Yuan spat between clenched teeth, his robe tattered, blood trickling down his lip.

He parried a blow that could have torn a mountain in half, then roared, his voice carrying to every corner of the Wu estate.

"Wu Matriarch! You scheming wretch, this is how you repay my Fang Clan's goodwill!? Calling for aid, then leaving me to fend alone!?"

The matriarch, trembling and pale, opened her mouth to shout back, yet no words came.

Every cultivator of the Wu Clan shrank back in fear, of both the beast and the man.

Tyrant light sword—First form: Divine Line!

Fang Yuan's sword qi surged one last time, splitting the sky as he forced back two Saberfangs at once.

The peak-stage beast reeled, its claws gouging a canyon through the earth to steady itself.

And then, it moved.

The peak Nascent Soul Saberfang opened its maw wide, shadows swallowing light as its gullet became a black abyss.

In a single, bone-shaking lunge, it surged past the other beasts and bit down.

Fang Yuan's sword-light flared desperately, trying to cleave open an escape, but the beast's fangs slammed shut around him.

With a deafening crack, his figure vanished into its jaws.

Dust choked the air as the Saberfang raised its head high and swallowed.

Just as silence threatened to crush the battlefield, a voice cracked the air.

"—Give him back!!"

Lin Zhaoyue appeared at the edge of the Wu estate, her face pale with fury, her robes whipping in the winds stirred by the battle.

Her eyes blazed like a woman driven mad with grief.

"Give me back my husband!" she screamed, her chest heaving as tears streamed down her cheeks.

Her hand shot to her hair, ripping free a jade hairpin.

With a flick, it transformed into a gleaming weapon, radiating emerald light.

The Saberfang that had swallowed Fang Yuan snarled, lowering its massive head.

"HEAVENLY TIMBER—First Form: Wood Explosions!"

The very air trembled. The wooden beams of the Wu Clan estate groaned, then burst apart in violent detonations.

Entire pavilions went up like tinder, collapsing in showers of splinters and flame. The ground shook under the cascading blasts as if the earth itself mourned with her.

Screams erupted from the Wu Clan disciples as they scattered like ants, bloodied and burned by their own collapsing halls.

Lin Zhaoyue advanced step by step, her killing intent suffocating.

Her weapon pulsed with verdant power, the force of her Dao bending the battlefield to her will.

To the Wu Clan, she looked every bit the heartbroken widow, unleashing despair in the form of divine wrath.

"Return Fang Yuan to me!" she roared again, her voice echoing across Coldwind City, ensuring every watching ear heard her grief.

The Saberfang that had devoured Fang Yuan snarled, its massive jaws dripping with blood and qi-light.

For a moment, it squared itself against Lin Zhaoyue's furious advance.

But then, as though struck by instinct, the beast wheeled around with a thunderous roar and bolted.

The other three Saberfangs broke formation instantly, bounding after their leader.

The earth cracked under their steps as they barreled toward Coldwind City, their fangs flashing, their growls echoing like rolling thunder.

Lin Zhaoyue's eyes widened. "You won't run from me!" she cried, her jade weapon pulsing with lethal intent.

She gave chase, her form like a streak of green lightning tearing through the air.

The beasts surged toward the Zhao Clan first. The great gates of the Zhao estate barely had time to tremble before—

"Heavenly Timber—First Form: Wood Explosions!"

The entire compound detonated. Pavilions and towers burst apart in a chain of green explosions, wood and stone turned into a storm of shrapnel.

Zhao disciples shrieked as they were hurled into the air, blood spraying.

One of the mid-stage Saberfangs howled as splinters and shrapnel pierced its flank, blood spilling in torrents.

Its massive body staggered, leaving deep claw marks as it struggled forward.

The herd didn't stop.

They thundered through the burning wreckage, scattering Zhao survivors like frightened dogs, and charged toward the He Clan.

Lin Zhaoyue's eyes gleamed with cold fury masked behind her screams.

Her hands moved again.

"Heavenly Timber—First Form: Wood Explosions!"

BOOM!

The He Clan's ancestral estate erupted in chaos. Entire courtyards vanished in a rain of wood and flame.

Screams filled the air as the ground split, houses crumbled, and disciples were buried beneath rubble.

The high-stage Saberfang roared in rage as the blast cascaded over it.

It leapt sideways, throwing its body in front of the injured mid-stage beast, taking the brunt of the explosion.

Its thick hide cracked, bleeding profusely as its protective qi was torn apart.

The Saberfang pack didn't linger.

With blood dripping from their wounds and their howls shaking the heavens, they tore free of the city's edges and vanished into the wild forests beyond.

Lin Zhaoyue skidded to a halt at the city's edge, her chest heaving, her hair in disarray, her jade weapon trembling in her grip.

"Husband!" Her scream tore out from the depths of her soul, ragged and raw.

She fell to her knees, her body trembling as she beat the earth with her fists, tears streaming down her cheeks.

Her voice echoed through Coldwind City, carrying grief that pierced even the hardest hearts.

Step by step, Lin Zhaoyue made her way back.

Her robes were torn, stained with dust and ash, her figure swaying like a woman on the verge of collapse.

By the time she returned to the Wu estate, the once-proud compound was nothing more than ruin.

The air reeked of smoke and blood; shattered beams smoldered, and rubble groaned under the weight of its own collapse.

Lin Zhaoyue's chest rose and fell sharply as she stood among the wreckage.

Her jade hairpin weapon gleamed faintly in her trembling hand.

She swept her gaze over the Wu disciples, huddled together in terror, their faces pale and eyes wide.

Chapter 205: 205- A widow's sorrow [3]

Lin Zhaoyue's hair hung loose, matted with sweat and soot.

Her eyes, red and swollen, carried the blazing madness of grief.

She raised her hairpin and pointed it toward the cowering crowd, her voice shaking with barely contained fury.

A widow bereft of reason, a wife robbed of her husband before the Wu Clan, she looked less like a grieving woman and more like an avenging ghost.

"Fang Yuan... my husband was devoured before your very eyes..." Lin Zhaoyue's voice broke, trembling like a sword on the verge of snapping.

Her gaze swept over the Wu disciples, and then she screamed, the sound tearing from her throat like thunder,

"Why did you stand there and watch him die, why didn't you lift a hand to help him!?"

Then it hardened, sharp as steel. "If my husband has fallen, then your Wu Clan shall be buried alongside him!"

Her jade hairpin flared with a searing green light, roots and vines tearing out of the cracked earth beneath her feet.

They lashed outward like vipers, ripping apart shattered beams and dragging them into the air.

Each pulse of her qi spread waves of suffocating vitality that twisted into destruction.

The Wu disciples screamed as vines coiled around their bodies, constricting until bones cracked and blood sprayed across the broken courtyard.

"Matriarch Wu!" Zhaoyue's voice thundered like rolling stormclouds, her grief painting every syllable.

"You schemed against the man who came to your aid! You stood idle while beasts devoured him! Do you think I will let this go unpunished?!"

Her fury rolled across the battlefield, amplified by the controlled Saberfangs, who snarled and roared, as though enraged on her behalf.

To the Wu Clan, it was calamity incarnate, nature and beast united against them.

The Matriarch staggered backward, pale as ash, unable to form a proper defense against the wrath of Fang Yuan's widow.

Lin Zhaoyue's eyes shone with tears that dripped down her cheeks, each drop burning into the earth as if her sorrow alone could scorch the world.

"You took him from me!" she screamed, her voice raw. "So your Wu Clan shall die with him!"

The vines thundered forward, a tidal surge of living fury tearing the courtyard asunder, sweeping toward the Wu Matriarch's hall with unstoppable momentum.

A flash of sword-light split the chaos.

"Stop this madness, woman!"

Three figures descended from the sky, their auras blazing, each one pressing down with the authority of a peak Golden Core.

Zhao Ming of the Zhao Clan, robes scorched from his hurried flight. He Long of the He Clan, eyes sharp as steel.

And Wu Shun, the pillar of the Wu Clan, face twisted with rage and desperation.

Their combined strikes collided with the tide of vines, blades, spears, and talismans igniting in unison.

The earth shook as destruction met defiance.

Yet even in unity, their power barely held.

The flood of greenery slammed against their defense, tearing apart walls and reducing stone pillars to dust.

Blood sprayed as cracks spider-webbed across their protective shields.

"Madwoman!" Zhao Ming roared, veins bulging in his neck. "Do you mean to bury us all with your grief?!"

"You dare lay waste to a clan hall, to strike at your fellow clans, have you lost all sense?" He Long's voice was cold thunder, though his arms trembled beneath the pressure of vines thicker than pythons.

Wu Shun spat blood, his teeth bared. "You dare rampage in my clan's grounds?!"

His fury cracked like a whip but beneath it lay a naked tremor of fear.

Because before them, Lin Zhaoyue did not stand as a grieving widow alone.

She stood as a force that eclipsed them utterly.

Her aura surged, raw and unrestrained, every breath drenched in Nascent Soul might.

They were Golden Core, powerful in their own right.

But against her?

They were ants trying to bite down an elephant.

The vines writhed and pressed harder, their green glow suffused with the ache of sorrow and the madness of vengeance, forcing the three patriarchs back step by step, until it seemed the very city itself might be swallowed.

Just then, an earthshaking boom erupted from the Fang Clan's side, flames and dust spiraling into the night sky.

The sudden blast shook the valley, and Lin Zhaoyue froze mid-strike.

Her killing intent wavered for the briefest heartbeat before she spun on her heel.

The Wu Matriarch collapsed to her knees in relief, chest heaving.

Surviving Wu disciples clung to life, their eyes wide with gratitude for the timely reprieve.

Lin Zhaoyue's figure blurred, darting away like lightning.

The Zhao, He, and Wu patriarchs bloodied and pale from barely surviving her fury, exhaled as though released from death's noose.

When she returned to the Fang Clan's side, the sight that greeted her was grim.

The clan's protective barrier trembled violently, hammered by a relentless storm of attacks.

Hundreds of golden core cultivators outside had surrounded them, striking in unison.

But instead of despair, a smirk tugged at Zhaoyue's lips.

Without hesitation, she slipped through a hidden gap in the barrier's weave.

Her presence passed unnoticed by the besiegers.

Inside, the Fang courtyard was a nest of fear.

Elders huddled together, voices hushed, faces pale beneath the trembling glow of the barrier.

They were cultivators, yes, but their foundations were fragile.

Of them, only two Golden Cores stood tall amid the frightened crowd. The rest were hopelessly outmatched.

When Lin Zhaoyue appeared, her robes still glistening with blood and tears, the elders startled as if seeing a ghost.

Then, as one, they rushed toward her, careful, respectful, their voices low and urgent.

"Lady Lin... where is Clan Head Fang?" one elder asked, bowing deeply, though his voice quivered.

"Patriarch Fang Yuan... did he..." another trailed off, dread choking his words.

They didn't dare voice the fear aloud.

They all still preferred their heads firmly attached to their shoulders, yet their eyes betrayed what they dreaded most: that the man they relied on, their pillar, had likely died outside if he hadn't returned back despite the chaos that occurred.

Chapter 206: 206- Fang Clan [1]

Fang Lian, one of the clan's two golden cores, stepped forward. Her lips trembled, and her voice faltered as she asked,

"Matriarch Fang... is my master—?"

She couldn't finish. The words died in her throat.

Lin Zhaoyue, however, smiled as though soothed by an unshakable truth.

She reached out, almost tender, and said,

"Oh, my child... worry not. My husband will carve his way out of that Saberfang's stomach."

The elders froze. Her tone brimmed with certainty, yet to their ears it was the certainty of delusion.

Everyone knew of the Matriarch's obsession to Fang Yuan, how she spoke of him as though he were untouchable, immortal.

But now?

Now her words sounded like the mad hope of a grieving widow.

To them, Fang Yuan was already gone.

He had been devoured by a Nascent Soul beast; no cultivator could possibly survive such a fate.

Lin Zhaoyue's smile only deepened, calm and unwavering.

Fang Chen broke. His knees hit the stone floor, his roar tearing from his chest like a wounded beast.

"Why not me?! Why must it be Yuan'er?!" His fists pounded the ground until blood smeared across the tiles.

His voice cracked with grief, ragged and hoarse. "He bore it all—watched his parents die, clenched his teeth, consoled his younger brother and still stood tall for this clan! I should have been the one, not him!"

The elders lowered their heads. Some could not bear to watch as Fang Chen's body shook, his grief uncontained.

For years he had shielded Fang Yuan, half a father, half a brother, sometimes even a friend, but now, what was left for him to protect?

Fang Jingyi stumbled toward him, her lips trembling as though words were caught in her throat.

She reached out, but her hand quivered helplessly in the air. "Chen... he... Yuan..." She could not finish.

The Fang Clan dissolved into chaos.

Panic, despair, and cries of mourning filled the hall, a storm of hopelessness.

And yet, Lin Zhaoyue stood silent among them, her expression cool, detached.

Pathetic, she thought, her heart an island of composure. *If only you knew... all of this was staged.*

Then, cutting through the despair, a voice thundered like a divine bell:

"Are you all not ashamed?!"

The clan turned, startled. Fang Lian stood before them, her eyes bloodshot and wet, but her stance unyielding.

Her voice carried strength beyond her years, sharp enough to pierce through their grief.

"My master, our Clan Head, faced not one, but four Saberfangs! Four Nascent Soul beasts!" She spat the words, her chest heaving. "Each one is worth a hundred cultivators of equal realm and yet he stood, he fought, he bled!"

Her gaze swept over the elders, unflinching. "And here you tremble, at golden core juniors gnawing at our barrier?!"

The silence that followed was suffocating. Fang Chen's sobs stilled. Even Fang Jingyi's hand dropped to her side.

Lin Zhaoyue's eyes lit up with dangerous delight, a predatory smile curling at her lips.

Inside, her heart swirled with laughter and pride. *Ahh, husband, you really do create the most interesting disciples. This one... I'm definitely adopting her as my daughter, she's going to be ours.*

Outwardly, she stepped forward, her presence blooming like a lotus of poison and steel.

"And besides," she added with languid confidence, her voice dripping with scorn, "have you all forgotten? I am also standing here. I am a Nascent Soul master. Or did you think me a mere decoration at my husband's side?"

Her words struck like a whip, igniting fire back into the hearts of the Fang Clan.

Meanwhile In the depths of the forest, Fang Yuan sat cross-legged beside the very Saberfang that had "devoured" him.

He jabbed a stick at the fire he had just lit and muttered, "Seriously, you should brush your teeth or something. I nearly puked in there, you hear me?"

The beast only huffed, its breath hot enough to singe grass.

Fang Yuan waved his hand as if shooing away a drunk relative. "Yeah, yeah. Don't give me that look. I'm already traumatized."

He leaned back on the ground with a long sigh. "Why am I even talking to a beast, hah..."

The Saberfang rumbled low in its throat, then lowered itself slowly to the ground beside him, head dipped, posture almost reverent.

Of course, beasts weren't stupid. They could sniff out strength like dogs smelling meat.

And Fang Yuan, as a Hollow Spirit cultivator, was the undisputed top of the food chain.

To the Saberfang, this wasn't companionship, it was survival.

Fang Yuan smirked faintly. "Good. At least one creature around here knows its place."

But then his expression softened, and he stared into the fire. "I wonder how the clan is doing..."

With a flick of his thought, a familiar golden screen shimmered before his eyes.

[System Status]

Host: Fang Yuan

Realm: Initial Hollow Spirit Realm

Root: Heavenly Root

Hidden Physique: None

Dao Bone: Faith Dao Bone

Martial Techniques:

Swift Step Footwork (Low-grade Black)

Golden Shell Armor (Mid-grade Earth)

Tyrant's Light Sword (Low-grade Black)

System Points: 17,400

Faith Points: 65,000

[Faith System – Heavenly Mandate Scripture] (Saint Rank)

Current Rank: 1 / 9

Faith Exp Needed for Level 2: 100,000

Current Faith Exp: 17,466 / 100,000

Unlocked Abilities:

Authority Domain (Passive) – Foes within one meter will be instantly identified and locked under your cultivation aura.

[Fang Clan]

Head: Lin Zhaoyue (wife of the strongest cultivator in Tharz Kingdom)

Vassal: Lin Clan

Clan Faith in Their Head: 90% (previously 75%)

Daily Generation: 1,000 Faith Exp, 8,000 Faith Points

Exceptional Believers (Faith > 99):

Lin Zhaoyue – 2,000 Faith Exp, 10,000 Faith Points daily

Du Juan – 500 Faith Exp, 1,000 Faith Points daily

Fang Yuan blinked. Then blinked again.

"...Wait, what?"

Instead of his name, it was Lin Zhaoyue's name plastered under Clan Head.

Fang Yuan sat there, staring blankly at the glowing tab, his mouth twitching uncontrollably.

"...She didn't even wait for me to die, huh?" he muttered, rubbing his temples.

And then came the kicker, the Clan Faith had skyrocketed to ninety percent.

His eyes bulged. "Ninety?! When I was head, I had to bleed, sweat, and babysit half the clan just to scrape eighty! She just takes the seat and suddenly everyone's a believer?!"

He scrolled down furiously, only to choke when he hit the Exceptional Believers section.

His list of faithful had a change. His uncle was gone and in place of him, it was someone he never expected, Lin Zhaoyue.

Not only in it, but towering above everyone else like some goddess on payroll.

Chapter 207: 207- Fang Clan [2]

Fang Yuan rubbed his face, groaning.

"Of course... you stole my clan and then you steal my faith too. Next she'll be stealing my system."

Yet, despite his complaints, the numbers didn't lie.

She was raking in ten thousand Faith points a day for him, it was more than the entire clan combined.

He didn't know whether to laugh, cry or react in other ways.

Before he could decide, the underbrush stirred.

The remaining Saberfangs padded back into the clearing.

The two wounded ones slumped onto the ground, licking each other's bloodied hides with low growls.

The third one, uninjured, strode forward, jaws clamped around the neck of a wild boar.

With a casual flick of its head, it dropped the carcass at Fang Yuan's feet.

The beast's golden eyes gleamed in the firelight, as if offering tribute.

Fang Yuan blinked. "...You've got to be kidding me."

Fang Yuan stared at the carcass in front of him.

He didn't know the first thing about cooking a wild boar.

But after a moment's thought, he came to a simple conclusion, *meat was meat. If you cooked it long enough, it couldn't kill you. Probably.*

With that decided, he drew his sword, the blade gleaming cold in the firelight.

In a few efficient strokes, he carved the boar into rough chunks, not bothering with finesse.

One by one, he skewered the pieces along the flat of his sword, then rested the weapon across the flames.

The fire crackled, fat beginning to drip and hiss.

Fang Yuan sat in silence, eyes fixed on the makeshift spit as the fire worked its way through the meat. Fat popped and hissed, smoke curling upward with the faint aroma of charred flesh.

When the surface browned to his liking, he leaned forward and, on a whim, sent a thread of divine sense coursing through the sizzling meat.

He had no idea what exactly he was checking for, but the gesture made him appear like a professional and he liked it.

Satisfied, he plucked a piece from the skewer, blew lightly on it, and sank his teeth in.

His brows lifted. A spark of surprise lit his face.

"Oh, damn," he muttered under his breath. "This isn't bad at all."

It was only then that he noticed them, the Saberfangs.

Four pairs of predatory eyes locked on the sword, jaws parted, thick strings of drool dripping onto the dirt.

Yet not one of them dared to move closer.

They only sat there, muscles taut, as if the meat was the most tempting thing in the world but far more terrifying was the man who held it.

Fang Yuan's gaze shifted, meeting the beasts' hungry eyes one by one. His hand moved with deliberate ease as he tore off two sizzling piece of meat from the skewer.

"Here," he said flatly, flicking it toward the two wounded Saberfangs. The morsels landed before them, and the beasts pounced, snapping it up with grateful, almost pitiful eagerness.

Another piece was stripped away and tossed to the one who had dragged the boar back in the first place. "For your trouble."

At last, his eyes settled on the largest of them all, the peak-stage Saberfang.

The firelight glinted off its fangs, its body coiled in restrained tension.

Fang Yuan pointed his sword, still heavy with the weight of meat, as though delivering judgment.

"You," he said, voice steady, carrying the weight of command. "Go out there. Bring back food for your family."

He flung another strip of meat its way, then, without sparing a glance at its reaction, lifted the rest of the boar and laid the whole carcass atop the fire.

The flames leapt higher, crackling, smoke billowing into the night.

Fang Yuan sat there, calm and unhurried, as though feeding Saberfangs and commanding them was no stranger than tending to his clan.

Surprisingly, the Saberfang seemed to understand. It devoured the meat in a single gulp, then turned and padded off into the shadows without resistance.

Fang Yuan's eyes lingered on its retreating form. A quiet thought stirred at the back of his mind, slipping out in a low murmur.

"I think... I'm starting to understand how Lin Zhaoyue managed to tame them."

Meanwhile, back at the Fang Family estate—

The protective barrier still shuddered beneath the relentless assault of rogue cultivators.

What made it unsettling was not the attack itself, but the unnatural order in their movements.

Rogue cultivators were never supposed to be this unified.

And yet, here they were, coming together and striking as one.

From within the barrier, Fang Lian stood rigid, her gaze fixed on the attackers above.

At her side, Lin Zhaoyue slipped an arm over her shoulder, voice low and edged with mischief.

"My dear," she whispered, "Do you want to see how many of them you can bring down before they finally manage to overwhelm you? I'll swoop in to rescue so you can go all out, you know."

Fang Jingyi, standing protectively at Fang Lian's side, reacted the instant she heard Lin Zhaoyue's words. She slapped Zhaoyue's hand away and pulled Lian into a tight embrace.

"Ow," Lin Zhaoyue drawled, arching a brow as if in pain. "And what exactly was that for?"

Silence pressed down for a breath before Jingyi managed to stammer out, her voice trembling,

"Wh—what do you think you're trying to do? She's a child, she's Fang Yuan's disciple."

Lin Zhaoyue only smiled, her tone smooth and unbothered.

"I'm trying to train her, of course. She's my husband's disciple and whatever belongs to him belongs to me. So, legally on that topic, that makes her my disciple as well."

With a flicker of qi, Zhaoyue tugged Fang Lian forward. Neither Jingyi's grasp nor Lian's own resistance could stop it.

In the next heartbeat, the girl stumbled forward, collapsing face-first against Zhaoyue's chest.

Lin Zhaoyue glanced at Jingyi and said evenly, "I want to see her capabilities before I begin training her."

Inwardly, she added to herself, *And let her vent some of that bottled-up stress while she's at it.*

Chapter 208: 208- Metamorphosis

Before Fang Jingyi could protest further, a surge of qi rippled from Lin Zhaoyue.

With a casual sweep of her hand, she thrust Fang Lian straight through the barrier.

"Go on, my dear!" Lin Zhaoyue's voice rang out, wild with excitement. "Get them all! Show me everything you've got!"

Behind her, Fang Jingyi went pale, the blood draining from her face. The sheer horror of the scene crushed her composure, and she crumpled to the ground in a faint.

Outside, Fang Lian stood in silence, her expression unreadable as she watched the sea of cultivators.

The attackers, startled at first, quickly shifted their focus. Dozens of them broke from the air and charged straight at her.

Without a word of complaint, Fang Lian's sword was in her hand.

The air around her dropped to an icy chill as she whispered, her voice cutting through the chaos like the edge of her blade.

"Tyrant Light Sword—First Form: Divine Line."

A single, searing line of pure, condensed light manifested before her, humming with annihilating intent.

It shot forward, too fast to track with the eye, a divine verdict written in luminescence.

The front rank of the charging Golden Core cultivators had no time to react.

Five of them simply ceased to be, their bodies, spiritual shields, and prized artifacts vaporized where they stood, leaving behind only scorched earth and the acrid smell of ozone.

Those at the flanks recoiled, their aggressive shouts dying in their throats, replaced by a stunned, primal silence.

Hundreds of Golden Core experts, now halted their advance, their collective aura of invincibility cracking like thin ice.

They stared at the slender woman. She hadn't even moved from her spot.

A grizzled elder at the front, his beard singed from the near-miss, found his voice. "You dare?! Who are you to stand against the combined might of—"

"Tyrant Light Sword—Imperfect Form: Scattering Prism."

Fang Lian did not let him finish. Her sword wove a complex pattern in the air, and the terrifying light around her blade fractured.

A hundred smaller, yet no less deadly, beams of light erupted outwards like a wrathful sunburst.

They did not discriminate, lancing into the crowd with pinpoint accuracy.

Panic finally broke the ranks.

Golden Cores flared as cultivators scrambled to defend, summoning barriers, throwing defensive talismans, and parrying with their own spiritual weapons.

Cries of pain and shock echoed as the beams punched through weaker shields, piercing shoulders, legs, and in a few unfortunate cases, hearts and cores.

Dozens fell, not dead, but grievously wounded, their formations crumbling into disarray.

"Form up! Don't let her pick us off individually!" another commander roared, his voice strained. "Overwhelm her with combined techniques!"

A wave of elemental energy gathered, a coalescence of fireballs, ice shards, and earthen spikes, a tsunami of destruction meant to bury Fang Lian.

A flicker of contempt passed through Fang Lian's cold eyes.

She took a single, graceful step forward, planting her foot firmly. She raised her sword and point it towards the heavens.

"Golden Shell armor—imperfect form: Unyielding Radiance."

A dome of golden light erupted from her, expanding outwards in a blinding, inexorable wave. It met the combined assault head-on.

The cataclysmic wave of techniques didn't explode, it unraveled.

Fire was extinguished, ice sublimated into mist, earth shattered into harmless dust against the impervious wall of radiance.

The dome pushed further, forcing the hundreds of Golden Cores to stumble back, their faces a mask of disbelief and dawning fear.

She was one. They were hundreds. Yet in that moment, she was the immovable object, and they were the insignificant tide breaking against her shores.

Fang Lian stood within her dome of light, her expression unchanging, her breathing even.

She slowly lowered her sword, the unyielding radiance solidifying into a palpable barrier between the mob and her mission.

"The next one who takes a step forward," she said, her voice quiet yet carrying over the stunned silence, "will experience what it's like to see the world without a head."

Hundreds of seasoned experts, each a powerhouse in their own right, hesitated.

They looked at the scorched line on the ground, the wounded groaning at their feet, and the impassive woman who seemed less a person and more a force of nature.

The cost of "overwhelming" her had suddenly become terrifyingly clear.

Lin Zhaoyue's eyes shone as she watched Fang Lian. Every motion of the girl's blade thrilled her to the bone.

"She's killing them, truly killing them out there!" Excitement bubbled in her chest until she could no longer contain it.

She threw back her head and cried with wild joy,

"My husband! You raised a monster!"

And that's when she saw it. Fang Lian had raised her sword once more, but the motion was different.

It was not the swift, cutting arc of the Divine Line, nor the defensive form of the golden shell armor line.

It was slower, more deliberate, like a summoning.

The terrifying white light that had lashed out before now drew inward, coalescing above her blade not into a line, but into a sphere, a miniature sun, humming with contained cataclysm.

It grew, its light so pure it seemed to bleach the color from the world.

And a star appeared in the sky.

But not just one... but two.

Lin Zhaoyue froze, breath caught in her throat. Her shock gave way to exhilaration. And she was not the only one.

The commotion outside the barrier had grown too fierce to ignore.

One by one, the Fang clan members poured out, from elders to the youngest capable disciples, who had now gathered at the entrance.

They arrived just in time to see the twin stars ignite in the sky, a sight burned into their collective memory.

A profound silence fell over them.

This was the pinnacle of their clan's heritage, the Tyrant Light Sword's Second Form: Star form, executed with a perfection they had thought lost to the world.

A wave of nostalgia swept through them.

They had seen this before, felt this same awe, this same unshakable security.

They had seen it in their patriarch.

Elder Fang Chen, his face weathered by grief, felt hot tears stream down his cheeks unchecked.

He wasn't ashamed. He was witnessing a miracle. His voice, thick with emotion, broke the silence among his kin.

"Fang Yuan... you live on in that child." The words were a sob and a declaration.

"Your light did not go out."

He broke down then, shoulders shaking, but his tears were not of sorrow; they were an eruption of pure, unadulterated joy.

The hole their patriarch's death had left in their world felt, for this one glorious moment, a little less empty.

And at that moment, not a single clan member thought to worry for Fang Lian's safety being out there all alone.

For they all knew what it meant to wield the Star Form in perfection.

Fang Yuan had told them long ago: the perfected Star Form was not merely a technique, it was a threshold.

To wield it with such flawless mastery was to step beyond the limits of the Golden Core realm.

A complete understanding of its principles also paved the way for a smooth ascent into the Nascent Soul stage... and marked the path of a true Swordmaster.

Chapter 209: 209- Transformation

Meanwhile outside the barrier, up in the sky. The air in Fang Lian's lungs was fire.

Her meridians screamed in protest, a raw, scraping agony as her Qi threatened to buckle under the immense demand.

Every instinct for self-preservation shrieked at her to stop, to let the gathered light dissipate before it consumed her from the inside out.

But an even deeper instinct, roared louder.

KEEP AT IT!

And in that very instant, a memory surfaced vivid flash behind her eyes.

Suddenly she was back at the eastern courtyard. The courtyard was bathed in a cool, silver light from the moonlight.

And there she was, Fang Lian, her head barely reaching her master's shoulder, stared up at the sky, her mouth agape.

Fang Yuan standing beside her had his hand outstretched.

Above them, six structures of blinding white energy hung, a five-pointed star, sharp and precise, humming with terrifying power.

"Tyrant Light Sword—Second Form: Star Form," Fang Yuan intoned, his voice steady, almost serene.

"Is it not beautiful?"

Fang Lian swallowed hard, her eyes wide. "It is, Master. I've never seen anything more beautiful."

"This..." Fang Yuan's tone softened, a quiet undercurrent of weight in his words. "...is not yet the perfected version."

The young Fang Lian could only stare. To her, it was the most beautiful, the most powerful thing she had ever seen.

It was bright enough to shame the moon and seemed to hold the weight of the mountains.

And yet she was told it was not the perfected version.

"Not perfected?" she had whispered, awe-struck. "How can that be?"

"A star, Lian," Fang Yuan said, lowering his hand and looking down at her with a kind, knowing smile, "is a sun."

She blinked, confused. "A sun? But it's a star. And it has five points. It's perfect."

He chuckled softly, a warm, rich sound. "Trust me Because your master is a wizard."

The word was strange, foreign. '*Wizard.*'

She didn't understand it, just as she didn't understand how her master knew so many inexplicable things.

The mystery was filed away in her mind, another piece of the enigma that was Fang Yuan.

Now, months later, facing down an army of rogue cultivators, the truth of his words exploded in her mind with the force of a revelation.

A star was a sun. It wasn't about points or angles. It was about nature, about essence.

It was about containing that boundless, furious stellar heart.

The crowd of Golden Core experts before her strained against the pressure, their faces masks of terror and effort.

The very air under her twin suns grew thick and heavy, pushing them to their knees.

Yet, a few, driven by desperation or foolish bravery, pushed through the crushing weight.

They lunged, their swords aimed, their techniques flaring, a final, pathetic defiance against the daystar.

A profound calm settled over Fang Lian. The strain in her Qi was still there, but it was a distant echo.

She didn't kept holding on to the light.

With a thought, she let the attack fall.

The twin stars above imploded and then expanded in a single, silent, annihilating wave of pure white heat.

There was no sound. Sound itself was consumed. The light washed over the attackers, over the ground, over everything.

It lasted only an instant.

When the light receded, the world had changed.

The charging cultivators were simply gone. Vanished. Not even ash remained.

And before the gates of the Fang family estate, the earth itself was forever scarred. A vast, glassy crater, half a mile wide, stretched into the distance.

The ground had been melted and fused into a sheet of obsidian-like glass, still shimmering with residual heat.

At the center of the crater, two deeper depressions marked the points of impact, a permanent testament to the twin suns that had briefly blazed there.

The only sound was the faint, high-pitched ping of the superheated glass slowly cooling.

Fang Lian lowered her sword, her breath finally evening out. The perfect star form had not just defeated her enemies.

It had rewritten the landscape.

The world tilted on its axis. The searing heat of her own power faded, replaced by a sudden, bone-deep chill.

The glorious, terrifying light was gone, and in its absence, the true cost of wielding it crashed down upon her.

Her knees buckled. The sword in her hand, once an extension of her will, now felt like a mountain of lead.

Her vision swam, the edges darkening, the stunned faces of the remaining cultivators blurring into a meaningless mosaic of color and then she started falling from the sky.

But before she even hit the ground.

A pair of strong, steady arms caught her, gathering her close before her knees could even brush the scorched earth.

The scent of sandalwood, uniquely, comfortingly Lin Zhaoyue, filled her senses, a familiar anchor in the sudden void of her exhaustion.

She was turned gently, her limp form cradled against a firm, warm body.

She managed to lift her heavy eyelids just enough to see Lin Zhaoyue's face above her.

There was no fear there, no alarm.

Instead, there was a look of such fierce, unbridled pride that it seemed to glow brighter than the twin suns Fang Lian had just summoned.

Lin Zhaoyue looked every bit the proud parent, her gaze sweeping over Fang Lian's pale, sweat-streaked face as if beholding a masterpiece.

A soft, incredulous laugh escaped her lips, a sound of pure wonder.

"You..." Lin Zhaoyue whispered, her voice thick with emotion. "You managed to surprised even me there, Fang Lian."

Those words, filled with more awe and affection than any lengthy praise, were the final permission Fang Lian's body needed.

The last thread of tension holding her consciousness together snapped.

A soft, almost soundless sigh escaped her lips. Her head lolled trustfully against Lin Zhaoyue's shoulder.

In the absolute safety of those arms, surrounded by the evidence of her own impossible strength and the warmth of someone who looked at her not as a monster, but as a marvel, Fang Lian let go of everything.

And she fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

Chapter 210: 210- Reunion.

Lin Zhaoyue didn't spare a single glance for the glassy, smoldering crater beyond the barrier.

Her entire world had narrowed to the weight in her arms.

With a surge of Qi, she leapt backwards, flying with a graceful speed that belied the fierce protectiveness in her hold.

The Fang family's barrier shimmered as she passed through it, accepting her without a whisper of resistance.

She landed softly inside the courtyard, ignoring the awestruck and tearful gazes of the clan members.

She marched past them all, her expression a mask of determined care, and headed straight for the inner chambers.

And in a world away, the air was thick with the savory scent of roasting meat and pine needles.

Fang Yuan, hummed a cheerful, off-key tune as he turned a spit.

Two plump boars were roasting over a crackling fire, their skins glistening golden-brown, fat dripping and sizzling into the flames.

Arrayed around him, sitting with an air of improbable patience, were the four Saberfang.

Their eyes, usually burning with primal ferocity, were now fixed intently on the rotating boars.

Their tails gave the occasional, thumping thump against the forest floor, drooling.

They waited, with the absolute discipline of soldiers awaiting their general's command.

Fang Yuan poked at the sizzling meat with a stick, a satisfied grin on his face. "Almost done, my friends. Just a little more... Ah, perfection."

He leaned back against a log, stretching his arms behind his head. For a moment, his humming ceased.

A distant, almost imperceptible flicker of immense energy, familiar and dearly missed, touched the very edges of his perception.

It was a feeling of stellar radiance, perfected and unleashed, followed by a faint, sudden dimming.

He chuckled softly to himself, a knowing glint in his eyes as he looked up at the sky, as if he could see across the vast distances.

"Done already?" he mused, his voice a low rumble. "And she even pulled that off. I knew she had it in her."

One of the Saberfangs tilted its massive head, a low, questioning grumble in its throat.

"Don't you worry about it," Fang Yuan said, reaching over to give the beast a fond scratch behind the ear. "Just the sound of my one and only pupil passing her final exam. Now, who's hungry?"

The four Saberfangs focused their intense gazes back on the fire, their brief distraction forgotten in the face of the imminent feast.

Fang Yuan's smile remained, a blend of pride, nostalgia, and the simple joy of a perfectly roasted boar.

Kathi City, Southern Region of the Tharz Kingdom:

The air in the small, dim room was thick with the scent of medicinal herbs.

It was supposed to be a reunion, a moment of long-awaited forgiveness. Instead, it was a deathbed vigil.

"Du Xiao..." The name was a broken sob, torn from Du Juan's throat as she collapsed to her knees beside the cot.

Her hands, trembling violently, clutched her younger sister's limp, cold fingers. "Oh, Xiao'er..."

On the cot, Du Xiao was a ghost of her former vibrant self.

Her skin was waxen and stretched taut over sharp bones, her breathing a shallow, rattling whisper. The light in her eyes, once so bright and defiant, was guttering out.

Behind Du Juan, a man stood.

A single, tear tracked a path through the grime on Du Xiao's cheek.

Her lips, pale and cracked, parted with immense effort.

"Jie... jie..." she whispered, the childhood honorific a dagger in Du Juan's heart. "I'm... so sorry. I should have... listened to you."

"No!" Du Juan cried, the word bursting from her with raw anguish.

She pressed her forehead against their joined hands, her body wracked with sobs.

"No, don't you apologize! It's not your fault ! I'm sorry! I was too harsh... I shouldn't have drove you away... This is my fault! My fault!" Her voice dissolved into incoherent weeping, the grief of years and this imminent loss crashing down upon her all at once.

She had found her sister only to lose her immediately.

Xiao Pei shifted his weight from one foot to the other, the worn floorboards creaking under his boots.

The raw, grieving energy in the room felt like a physical wall, and he was an intruder.

He cleared his throat, the sound awkward and far too loud in the heavy silence.

"I, uh..." he began, wincing at the tremor in his own voice. "I think... I can help her. If you would let me."

His words landed like stones in a still pond.

Du Xiao was too far gone, her consciousness a flickering ember too weak to grasp their meaning.

Du Juan's head whipped around, her tear-streaked face twisted with anguish and fury.

"Help her?!" she screamed, the pitch raw with desperation. "Don't you dare give me false hope now! Can't you see she's dying? Do you think this is a game?!"

Xiao Pei flinched at the intensity, but his hands shot up quickly, shaking his head.

"No! I'm serious! I—I have an artifact, a Soul-Anchor pendant" he stammered, fumbling at his storage pouch.

"One that can... nourish a person's soul. Even if her body fails, her spirit can endure. Please—let me try!"

The words pierced through her grief.

Du Juan froze. She was a Nascent Soul master. She was the most knowledgeable person in the room, perhaps for miles, about the intricacies of the soul.

She could see her sister's soul already withering, flickering like a candle in the wind.

But if the artifact was truly genuine, then perhaps, just perhaps, they could preserve it, nourish it, and keep her alive long enough to carry it back to the Clan Head or Matriarch, together with the Seven-Ring Lotus pill then...

Her heart lurched violently.

In the next breath, she seized Xiao Pei's hands, tears shining anew in her eyes.

"I love you!" she cried, the words bursting from her in wild relief. "Forgive me for shouting, thank you, thank you!"

Turning back to her sister, Du Juan's voice hardened, filled with a fierce vitality that had been absent moments before.

She clasped Du Xiao's frail hand once more, her tears now burning with determination.

"Hear that, Xiao'er? You are not leaving me. You will not die in front of my eyes. Do you understand? I forbid it."