

The Fall 885

Chapter 885: Primal Garden

"A primal garden? What's that?" Zac asked with a low volume as he looked around for threats.

"The most valuable plants can rarely be manually cultivated," Vai whispered. "There is something about domestication that kills the inherent spirituality of plants. Still, we can't just rely on chance encounters to provide for our needs. So, factions set up these kinds of wild worlds that are mostly untouched. We only modify the environment slightly to suit certain types of plants, and then leave them alone between harvests."

"What about the beasts?" Zac asked.

"You should know there is a symbiotic relationship between beasts and Natural Treasures," Vai explained. "They're needed to protect and nurture the plants."

"So they have their domains?" Zac slowly said. "Then we should be fine as long as we keep away from their lairs and the treasures they guard."

"I- I guess?" Vai said as she fearfully looked at the vast forest. "Unless there has been a breach to destabilize the power equilibrium in the garden."

"I guess we'll find out," Zac said as he formed a vine chair. "Keep a lookout."

The two set out, but they didn't get any further than a few hundred meters before Zac stopped again. It wasn't because he'd sensed any dangers or another pulse from the Left Imperial Palace, but rather a surprising shudder from the spatial tube on his back. Or rather, the wooden ring that he'd attached to it.

For some reason, the still germinating Heavenrender Seed had reacted to something around them.

"What's wrong?" Vai whispered, but Zac didn't immediately answer as he tried to get a sense of the situation through [Link of Demeter], his plant-taming skill.

"Vivi, what is it?" Zac asked, which prompted two of the free vines to point toward a certain tree.

It was one of the plants that had a shimmering green orb atop its tree crown, or rather the enormous flower it had in place of branches.

"Haro wants these trees?" Zac mused thoughtfully as he went over what Vai just said. Perhaps it wasn't a coincidence these odd sun trees grew in this place. "What are these things?"

"Ah?" Vai said as she looked at the glowing orb on top of the plant. "They are called [Repeater Rafflesia]. They extract a lot of energy from the soil and air to form those nature-attuned beacons. They can help speed up the growth of Natural Treasures."

"Can they be planted in a Worldring?" Zac asked.

"Well," Vai hesitated. "Beast Pouches and Worldrings slowly draw energy from their surroundings with their Gathering Arrays. Most of it is used to nurture the beast or plants inside, while some is set aside in case you visit energy-starved areas."

“Sure,” Zac nodded.

This wasn't any news – it was one of the main differences between a Spatial Ring and tools like Worldrings, with the other one being that space was stable enough to house living beings. Worldrings demanded a constant supply of energy. Depending on what and how much you'd planted inside, the Gathering Arrays might not suffice.

From there, you'd either have to get a higher-quality ring that could provide a better environment, or you'd have to supply a supplemental source of energy like Beast Cores and crystals. Luckily for him, the Worldring that Heda had gifted him was quite high-quality, to the point that it would be able to accommodate Haro well into the D-grade.

Of course, the more energy Haro got, the quicker Haro would grow, so Zac was constantly supplying the Heavenrender seed with Beast Cores. Apart from that, the main body of Vivi had moved into the Worldring, though Zac still kept the tube on his back. He'd tried wearing the wooden band on his hand, but he was simply more used to having the vines coming from his back since getting [Love's Bond].

“The process of these trees is quite energy-demanding – without them, this Mystic Realm would most likely be a whole tier higher,” Vai explained. “They would put demand a lot of energy, so it would be very expensive to put these kinds of measures inside a Worldring.”

“Will the beasts get mad if I take a few of these things?” Zac mused as looked into the depths of the jungle.

“You want to steal our repeaters as well?” Vai exclaimed with wide eyes.

“Steal? I'm just plucking a couple of flowers,” Zac coughed. “As long as the beasts are okay with it?”

“I- Ah... Maybe not? The Beast Kings should understand these plants help their treasures grow,” Vai hesitated.

“Oh well,” Zac muttered as he walked away, though his eyes never left the tree.

The two didn't dare delve deeper into the jungle and instead opted to stay close to the edge of the Mystic Realm. It would cost them a few days extra, but it was better than pathing through wilderness controlled by Middle Stage Beast Kings and their underlings. Thankfully, there was actually a small trench that ran along the edge of the jungle, a manmade path at that.

It was most likely created for the same purpose as they used it for – for the farmers to move between regions safely. According to Vai, there should be some sort of hidden tunnel system as well, but they couldn't find the entrance. Even if they did, they wouldn't dare use them – those kinds of paths were sometimes discovered by the Beast Kings and turned into dangerous traps. And with this place abandoned for at least a couple of years, that risk had only increased.

Like this, their travels went without issue, though Zac's gaze often turned in the direction of the sprawling forest and the riches it contained. If he only could find an opportunity to do some harvesting of his own. And finally, after two days of uneventful travel, an opportunity presented itself. A tearing sound echoed out through the realm before the jungle was flooded with foreign energies.

“It's a breach! It has to be!” Vai exclaimed as the two climbed up to the edge of the trench.

Zac nodded in agreement. Even if they didn't see physically the spatial anomaly because of a haze that covered most of the jungle, there was no mistaking the energy signatures in the distance. It felt just like the breaches they had encountered themselves, except this one might be even more dangerous. His normal vision might not be able to see the breach, but turning on [Cosmic Gaze] almost blinded him from all the energies the breach had unleashed.

Whatever world was on the other side, it might be of an even higher grade than this primal garden. And it wasn't uninhabited either – it only took a few seconds before they could both feel and hear enormous clashes between Beast Kings. It was no doubt the native ruler and its subordinates who fought against the invaders.

"Do you think this means the Natural Treasures are unguarded?" Zac muttered as they looked on.

"No! You can't!" Vai exclaimed while scowling at Zac with an indignant look, just like when they met the first time. "E-Even if they are, those are private. I- I'll tell on you!"

"Alright, alright," Zac smiled before he flashed away.

The next moment, he appeared in front of one of the [Repeater Rafflesia] at the edge of the jungle. With a grunt, he started pulling with everything he got while Vivi gleefully helped. At first, nothing happened, but eventually, there was a deep groan as the powerful roots were forcibly dislodged from the soil.

The next moment the whole tree was gone, thrown into his Worldring where Vivi arranged for it to be planted a few hundred meters away from Haro. Unfortunately, the huge glowing orb above the flower had destabilized and dispersed the moment the tree was uprooted, but it looked like it had already started forming a new one the moment it appeared in the pocket world.

"What are you-!" Vai shrieked as she fearfully looked around.

"They have their hands full. I can't take the treasure, but I should at least be able to borrow a few of these things, right? You have so many, and they're not listed strategic resources," Zac grunted before he uprooted two more of the supersized flowers.

He was about to snatch a fourth one, but an exceedingly powerful mental wave suddenly passed through the area, making Zac look up with alarm. It looked like the king of the region kept a watchful eye over its domain even while fighting against the breach. The powerful ripple also confirmed that it was a Middle Stage Beast King, and not a weak one.

"We're done for," Vai cried as she glared at Zac with tears pooling in her eyes. "You will get us killed."

"Don't worry, this is quintessential adventuring," Zac laughed as he picked up Vai before running for his life. "Keep watch of the surroundings."

Of course, it wasn't blind greed that prompted him to uproot the trees. Over the past hours, he'd gotten a decent grasp of the situation in the forest thanks to [Forester's Constitution] and ample experience in the wilderness. Judging by what he'd seen, there was a good chance the local emperor would fall from this invasion. The fight was already extremely intense judging by the distant eruptions, and the breach showed no indication it was about to close.

Even if the local Beast King won, they'd be too busy licking their wounds and protecting their domain to pursue him and Vai – provided the beast even could find them. By the time the situation stabilized, he and Vai would be long gone. Still, that knowledge didn't do much to help mollify his skittish guide.

"You know, cultivation is to grasp every opportunity that comes your way," Zac smiled as he glanced in her direction. "The moment you let fear and hesitation take control of you, it's game over."

"You seem to have a lot of philosophical beliefs that are ultimately excuses to justify wanton looting," Vai said with a roll of her eyes.

"Well, that's what cultivation is," Zac laughed. "Some go at it alone, while others join factions to improve their looting abilities."

"I don't know about that," Vai muttered, but she didn't press the issue any further.

In total, the two spent twelve days in the primal garden because of a bout of bad luck. First, they encountered a shockingly large rhinoceros that for some reason stood and watched the shimmering edge of the Mystic Realm. To pass it, they would either have to walk below its fifty-meter-wide head or head deep into the jungle.

Ultimately, they backed away and built another mud hut, in which they stayed for three full days. Finally, the Beast King lumbered away toward the depths of the realm, opening up the path again. The second delay appeared when they reached the next waystation. It turned out that the lone pathway connected to the station didn't lead them closer to the Left Imperial Seal, forcing them to search for another station.

Finally, they reached their destination after circling almost two-thirds of the realm. If they had chosen right instead of left upon arriving in the primal garden, they would have saved more than a week. Still, that didn't dampen Zac's excitement upon feeling the mysterious pulse grow noticeably stronger upon stepping into the next world.

Excitement gradually turned to confusion upon attempting to exit the waystation. The reinforced tunnel just kept going and going. Finally, they saw the end of the path; an opening through which they could see a beautiful starry sky. And nothing else. This was an odd one, and Zac was a bit stumped as they stopped at the exit of the base.

The tunnel simply ended at a seemingly bottomless chasm. It wasn't that they were far up on a mountainside either – there simply wasn't any ground. It was just an almost sheer mountain wall that stretched as far as he could see in every direction. Was it a floating mountain? If so, just how big was this place? And how were they supposed to find the next waystation?

"I recognize this place! This is the Ramsi Wall, it's extremely famous! I can't believe we're here, it shouldn't be accessible, this is—" Vai exclaimed with excitement before her expression turned hesitant.

"What's wrong?" Zac frowned. "Are we stuck?"

"Ah, that's... No, it's not that. We should be fine," Vai hesitated. "You taught me that one couldn't hesitate, that one had to grasp opportunities..."

"I did," Zac nodded.

"I- well," Vai said with a blush on her face. "There is a unique type of plant here – [Stargazer Camelias]. They can help one get in tune with the cosmos, to deepen one's understanding of space. If I could get just one, ah, just two... I could perhaps solve some matters that have bothered me over the past centuries. It-It's not for me. It's only for research!"

"Only for research," Zac nodded with a small smile. "Well, let's go."

Four days later, Zac once more found himself fighting off a pack of infuriated flying marsupials as Vai picked her sixth [Stargazer Camelia] while blushing from excitement rather than embarrassment. He was currently hanging from the sheer cliff wall, using Vivi to move him about and block the Peak E-grade beasts that tried to get to the researcher.

In fact, this was how they had traversed the wall over the past week since there was simply no better method available. The creatures that lived inside the complex cave system of this enormous cliff weren't joking around, and he had been forced to use [Arcadian Crusade] two times already. Scaling the wall was actually safer, even if a drop would mean you would keep falling until you dropped into the Void.

Vai's newfound love for looting had cost them a couple of days and left Zac with a new set of scars. Still, Zac didn't mind. Helping Vai gather some resources on the way was the least he could do in return for all the help she provided. Besides, with the researcher getting into the spirit of things, it would get easier for Zac to snatch any interesting items he found while they searched for the next piece of the seal.

After all, this was the inner region of the Void Star, where the Void Gate kept their best things. There were bound to be all kinds of treasures in this place.

For example, the flowers weren't the only valuable thing in this place. The Ramsi Wall was a cultivation haven that was only accessible for a short stint once every few centuries. The explosion of the Cortex must have pushed it into place, giving the two exclusive access. Normally, it would cost the Hegemons of the Void Gate quite a few Contribution Points to access this place and ponder on the Dao of Space.

Vai worked with practiced ease, nimbly cutting off the stem before placing the flower in a vat that she filled with space-infused water. A moment later, the water had frozen, sealing the medicinal efficacy within. The flower looked quite mesmerizing while ensconced in ice, and there wasn't any question about where the name came from.

The large flower really resembled Abby's eye. Its black-and-blue petals formed a spiraled pattern that looked like a nebula, and in its center was a pitch-black bulb that represented the black hole. It was the bulb that contained the medicinal efficacy, according to Vai.

"I got it," Vai said with a wide smile, her hesitation over pilfering the treasures of the mystic realm long forgotten.

"I think we need to leave this whole region if we want to find more of them, do you want to-" Zac said, but he froze as he turned his gaze toward the endless expanse.

"A vortex is about to open!" Vai exclaimed with a mix of elation and fear. "We need to get away from the open!"

The vortex in this instance was a recurring weakness in the spatial barriers of this realm, and why the Ramsi Wall was considered a cultivation haven. For some reason, it always released a meteor shower

packed with spatial energies. It was the reason the camelia could grow in this place at all, and the dense energies essentially turned the whole realm into something greater than a peak-quality cultivation chamber for a while.

However, that burst of ambient energy also came with a melee between native beasts as they fought for the falling debris. Even powerful Beast Kings would come out from their caves, and the two needed to be gone before that. Luckily, they hadn't forgotten their main purpose, and they had continuously moved toward the next waystation following markings that had been left behind on the wall.

It still took them half a day to reach the tunnel, and Zac finally breathed out when they were safe behind the barrier. By this point, the vortex had almost completely formed and covered half the sky, and the majestic scene took his breath away even after having seen marvels like the Twilight Ascent and the Void Star.

"It's starting," Zac muttered.

"Could we stay and watch for a little while?" Vai asked with puppy-like eyes. "It might be risky to open the gates right now in either case, and these waystations should have special cultivation chambers. We should be able-"

"Sure," Zac smiled, and the two quickly found one of the hidden cultivation caves that had a different set of arrays than the entrance. "I'm curious what a rare opportunity of the Void Gate looks like."