

Ascension of the Sylvan Cosmos.

Chapter 26. Verdantia.

Since childhood, Verdantia has been someone above others. Be it her appearance, race, intelligence, or almost any other metric, Verdantia never felt lacking compared with others. She was gifted compared to those around her, and that was the objective truth.

However, never had she become arrogant. As a Sylvan with an affinity to life, she was innately compassionate. Her personality was quiet yet attentive.

Instead of relishing in her superiority, she worked on herself to expand that distance between herself and others even further. This meant that she had trained in survival and many other related aspects that one needed to take into account while hunting.

However, there was one rule that every person tried to follow. "Don't fight creatures that have completed more <Energy Cycle> than you unless it is unavoidable."

Verdantia was curious about this <Energy Cycle> concept, so she went on and researched it. She managed to learn quite a bit, and even previously, in her class, they've started studying them.

Simply put, <Energy Cycle> was the breakthrough a creature needed to do to break limits and continue to <Level Up>.

The act of leveling up was similar to increasing one's existence level. The more levels you had, the more developed your being was. Creatures born with talent could even unlock skills, talents, titles, and many other things after leveling up.

However, just gaining "experience" was not enough to continuously level up to infinity. Not all creatures were born the same, and not all creatures could reach the same heights. The thing limiting this was nothing other than <Energy Cycles>.

Once a creature reached Level 9 and maxed out their experience, instead of instantly Leveling Up like the previous levels, the creature needed to create a mana circuit in their body.

The mana circuit would be an essential part of oneself, as it gave stats the stronger it is. Moreover, it was a permanent thing that would continue affecting them for the rest of their lives and level-ups.

When completing an energy cycle, that energy cycle would affect the creature again in the multiples of that cycle.

For example, the stats of the Level 10 Energy Cycle would be gained again at Levels 20, 30, etc.

One needed both talent and resources to create the mana circuits needed for the Energy Cycle.

That's why most wild creatures were stuck at Level 9 or less. Those who breached that limit were rare.

However, in front of Verdantia wasn't a Level 10, but a Level 12 creature. This existence that was calling her over, while looking amicably, could probably slaughter her entire party with just a wave of her hand.

Preparations? What could a tiny Level 4 like her prepare?

Not obeying? You might as well jump off a tall tree for a higher survival chance!

Fighting her? Right, sure, keep dreaming.

Escaping? As if she can outrun a flying Level 12 creature.

Of course, if she was Level 5 instead, Verdantia might've thought about escaping. The reason for her confidence was the reason Sylvans were such a dominant race throughout the entire world.

At Level 5, Sylvans unlocked a "transformation" skill that allowed them to bring out their true bloodline, greatly increasing their stats for a short duration.

The result of using such skill was extreme tiredness most of the time, and if the Sylvan overused it, it could even result in death.

After thinking about it for a long time, Verdantia clenched her fist and decided to follow the creature obediently. 'I'm dead either way, might as well try my luck!'

"Hey, I need to go over there for a moment."

Verdantia called her group and pointed at the side with a stiff smile. Her face clearly showed that something was wrong, so one of them frowned and asked. "Why are you leaving? We still haven't collected the necessary flowers for that potion maker."

Verdantia shook her head and said. "Just personal things. Anyway, I'm going."

Without waiting for an answer, Verdantia turned around and left, leaving her group behind.

The four people frowned, watching her departing back disappear between the lush vegetation. Another Sylvan on the team asked. "So... Should we wait?"

A human man snorted. "Why should we? If she wants to leave so badly, then we should leave her alone."

Another human male frowned. "She hasn't told us not to wait."

The first human male laughed. "And she has also not said anything about waiting for her."

The Sylvan commented. "Let's wait for 15 minutes. If she isn't back, we leave."

The first human male who spoke frowned, but after clicking his tongue, he moved to the side and sat on a thick root. "Whatever."

Meanwhile, Verdantia finally moved away from the group and took a deep breath. "I'm here. What do you want?"

Before she could even realize it, a beautiful red-haired fairy appeared before her eyes. Her petite 45-centimeter stature made her around two heads tall. Her doll-like appearance, added with the strange ruby-like eyes, made for quite a beautiful yet unsettling image.

The fairy's lips arched. "Don't worry, Sylvan. I'm not here to hurt anybody. I just want some knowledge."

Verdantia looked at her for a few seconds, but the fairy's eyes couldn't reveal any emotions, as they were like two red gems embedded in her eye sockets.

Verdantia held back her trembling and asked. "What kind of knowledge?"

The fairy's eyebrow arched, and a pleasant laugh left her mouth. "It's good that we can communicate. I'm named Flor. It's nice to meet you. What about you?"

Verdantia was feeling defensive, but since the other side appeared to be in a good mood, she chose to acquiesce. "Verdantia."

The fairy, Flor, smiled and clapped once. "Great. Verdantia, I'm going to be direct. I want to learn or have the list of materials needed to create weapons. They don't need to be anything too ostentatious, as resources in the forest aren't as rich as in your cities. However, I would love it if you could bring something of that nature."

Verdantia looked at her with a grimace. "Why do you need-."

Flor looked at her with a smile and made a slight sound. "Hm?"

Verdantia's words got stuck in the back of her throat when she remembered that she was dealing with a forest creature.

Flor chuckled. "Don't be nervous. I won't kill you even if you refuse. However, if you dare agree and then fail to return, I'll go inside that city and hunt you down."

Verdantia looked at Flor for a few seconds. "Then, why should I agree in the first place?"

Flor chuckled and flew behind a tree nearby, taking out a relatively small branch. "Well, I'll give you this." Flor paused, not hearing anything, and looked over. "Huh?"

Verdantia's eyes were fixed on the branch Flor was holding intently. It felt as if everything else other than the branch had disappeared from Verdantia's gaze. Flor frowned. "You-."

Verdantia looked at Flor with intensity and cut her off, not caring about anything. "How do I get that branch? No, where is that branch from? Can you guide me? I can pay you whatever you want as long as I have it. And even if I don't have it, I'll get it. I just need to know if-."

Flor ordered. "Stop."

Verdantia looked at Flor and waited, not caring about the menacing face of the creature she was previously so afraid of.

Flor looked at the branch and frowned. 'This is one of Liu Shu's branches that fell off during Froorar's visit. However, I didn't expect this reaction. The previous person didn't have such an intense reaction...'

On the other side, Verdantia waited patiently. The second she had seen that branch, it felt as if her entire existence had lit up. She wanted that branch. No, she needed it.

Her soul, body, mind, and heart were all telling her to get that branch or try to find whoever that branch came from. For the first time in life, Verdantia felt as if the world had finally gained a purpose.

It was such a primal and raw reaction that she didn't feel it was odd. It didn't feel as if something was forcing her to have these feelings. It was more as if they were always there; however, they were dormant.

The sight of this branch just awakened it.

Flor finally said. "I can use this branch as a reward for today's exchange, the weapon-making knowledge. However, I can't tell you nor guide you toward the being who dropped it."

Verdantia's eyes lit up, and she asked. "Is she alive!?"

Flor's eyes widened, and she shouted angrily. "What are you cursing her!? She is alive and well!"

Verdantia's face gained an uncontrollable smile as she laughed in giddiness.

Not knowing what to do with the incomprehensible reaction, Flor commented. "So, do you agree-."

"YES!"

The Fairy Queen didn't know what to do with the previously scared woman's newfound passion. 'Is she okay? Or does Liu Shu's aura react differently with humans and Sylvans? After all, the person I approached previously was a human man...'

Verdantia asked. "What do I need to do to meet with her?"

"Huh?" Flor asked. "What do you mean?"

Verdantia approached her face toward Flor and said, her green eyes shining with a strangely crazed light. "Tell me what I need to be allowed to see her."

Speechlessnes could not explain Flor's current mood. She was completely weirded out. 'What in the branch's name? Is her head working okay?'

While Flor didn't trust her, after all, who in the right mind would trust someone who is showing this kind of strange obsession? Flor still decided to use this. "Then... I need knowledge about how to rise a World Tree."

Verdantia's eyes widened, and then she blushed. "She is a World Tree!? KYA! So pretty! So majestic! Ahhh! I bet her canopy is super stylish~." Verdantia laughed, but to Flor, it just sounded like a perverted laugh. "I wonder what shape her trunk holds, hehe~."

Flor commented, not knowing how to continue interacting with her. "Anyway, the more things you give us to help us raise her, the better."

Verdantia looked at her and smiled, her green eyes strangely swirling. "Of course. Even if I have to feed Fortuna's World Tree to her, I will do so."

Flor paused, her face becoming solemn. "Do you know her?"

Verdantia honestly shook her head and then laughed. "I don't know her, but I know I want to know her. I don't know why, but I just know that I'll be glad I did."

The Rose Fairy Queen shook her head. "Whatever. I'll wait here for you to return with that thing. After that, I'll give you the branch."

Verdantia nodded and turned around.

Flor stopped her. "If, and I say, only if you gain my trust, I'll guide you to her."

Verdantia looked back and nodded. "Sure!" Then, she continued walking.

This confused Flor. 'Why is she not jumping in joy? I thought it would be a bit more effective.'

Meanwhile, Verdantia was thinking. 'I don't understand why I am being so impulsive. I don't understand my inner feelings. However, I understand that I must follow my thoughts, not for others, but for myself. She, the World Tree, is probably the reason I was born in this World. Because to mesmerize me to this degree with just a branch... Ah.' Verdantia shuddered and let out a hot sigh. 'Flor, I don't care if you want me to guide me or not...' Her lips arched murderously. 'Whoever stops me... I shall kill.'

Chapter 27. Woodcrafting Books.

While Verdantia returned, her rapidly beating heart calmed down and her mind also slowly exited her previous strange state. She was confused, extremely so. 'Is a branch really enough to make me like this?'

Verdantia had heard in the past that some Sylvals feel close connections with particular flora, making them very attracted to a certain kind of plant. However, World Trees are special. While all Sylvals do feel attracted to World Trees, it's different.

Unless the World Tree initiates it, Sylvals look at them reverently. It's like seeing someone to be praised and respected, not as potential mates. Of course, if the World Tree chooses any Sylvan as a partner, the Sylvan would probably happily accept unless they were already engaged or something similar.

Verdantia's case was strange no matter how you looked at it. 'What would've happened if Flor agreed to bring me to see that World Tree?'

Verdantia shuddered a bit in a mix of excitement and fear. 'I would've followed, right? With how I felt at that time, it is impossible that I wouldn't have followed.'

For her, who had lived a steady and planned life, the sudden realization that she had almost thrown everything away to find that World Tree made her feel strangely elated yet also fearful.

As a long-living race, most Sylvans were much more conservationists than humans would ever be, which added to the list of reasons why, while there was enough knowledge, the cities, technology, etc., were still not that transformative.

Society's objective was not to "develop as fast as possible," but to "integrate with nature while developing."

It was a cultural thing, mostly driven to the front by the long-living dominant race, the Sylvans.

Naturally, some humans who sought advancement rebelled and created many groups to fight for those ideals, throwing the world into a constant state of conflict. But, for the most part, this conflict happened in other, more isolated places.

Furthermore, the grand majority of both races respected World Trees, which made them not only an anchor for life but an anchor that prevented a full-blown world war.

Hence, Verdantia, who knew all of this, was surprised with her own reaction, which went against everything of who she thought she was. 'Ah... Let's bring out the wood shaping and material science books and give them to Flor. I'll then return and go to sleep to clear my head.'

While some people would think that metal was the best way to create weapons, wood was actually a material that could rival and even surpass metalcraft. This comparison was not alluding to common wood but to higher-level wood.

Moreover, unlike metal, which couldn't be grown and just found, wood was a resource that could be planted and harvested.

When Verdantia arrived at the Fortuna First School library, she walked toward the material science bookshelf. As she browsed books, she heard a voice from the side. "Oh? Verdantia, are you here to read something as well?"

Verdantia looked sideways and then down. With her tall stature, most human women only reached around her chest level. She smiled softly and nodded. "Yes. I've become interested in wood weapon crafting, so I wanted to search for books that cover the basic techniques and material science. Can you help me?"

The human woman blushed and smiled shyly. While Sylvans were popular with men, human women were also attracted to them. "O-Of course, I'll help! Ah! Wait, let me as a friend of mine; her mother works in wood shaping and equipment building; I'm sure she can recommend something really nice!"

Verdantia smiled. "That's a happy surprise, thank you."

The woman's face gained a deeper shade of red, and she scurried away while stuttering. "W-Wait here, Verdantia."

Verdantia observed her retreating back, her green eyes dancing with dark thoughts. 'Should I manipulate that human woman to become an information provider? I heard her parents work in the city administration sector and have high rankings.'

As promised, Verdantia waited while also checking out some books herself. After around 20 minutes, the human woman returned, her forehead soaked in sweat. "Verdantia! I'm back!"

"Welcome back. So, what do they recommend?"

The human woman smiled proudly and took out four books. "This [F and E Rank Material List and Properties] book is really good! Also, [Basic Aether Mana Control for Woodcrafting], and this [Elementary Anima Energy Infusion for Woodcrafting]. Finally, [Basic Structures For Woodcrafting Weapons]."

Verdantia took the four books that were as thick as four fingers placed together and smiled. "Thanks a lot. These are certainly better than what I found. It really helped me with what I needed to do."

The human woman laughed shyly. "No problem!" She looked toward the ground and stuttered. "S-So, um. Verdantia, do you want to drink something together? I know a place nearby that's really nice."

Verdantia smiled apologetically. "Sorry, but I need to deliver these books as soon as possible, so I can't stop by. I'm in a hurry, after all."

The human woman's face became downcast as she nodded. "Okay, I understand. Be careful."

Verdantia laughed and flashed a charming smile. "I will. Thanks for everything." Then, she turned around and left, leaving behind a blushing woman.

As she left, she was seen by one of the people who went with her to the mission. Verdantia also saw them and almost cursed at the coincidence for the first time in her life. However, she managed to smile and greet them as always. "Sorry for leaving so soon. As you can see, I was in a hurry to get something. Moreover, since we had almost the entire work completed, I thought you would be able to complete it without me."

The human male was the one that felt disgruntled, so he snorted. "Forgive you? Do you think that your pretty face is enough for me to forgive you? Ha! You Sylvans think that you are above everyone else, always making trouble while 'thinking' about things!"

Verdantia wanted to say that if she didn't go, a Level 12 creature would've killed them all, but she just smiled. It felt like wasting breath with this person was not worth it. "I see. I won't go on any more missions with you, then. Have a nice day."

Then, without looking at him anymore, she turned around and left. 'Wasting my time, I need to get that branch as quickly as possible. What if Flor disappears because she has found another person?'

However, the man really wanted to mess with her, so he shouted. "Hey! Wait! We are not done talking! Who do you think you are to stop our contract at will? There are termination fees you must answer to, and there is also a rule that says breaking apart at will is not possible. Also-."

Verdantia turned around and locked eyes with him, choking his voice in his throat as the powerful pressure from Verdantia's cold eyes weighed upon him. "I don't have time now. Later, okay?"

The man wanted to continue being angry, but Verdantia's gaze froze him on the spot. Then, Verdantia turned around, her long green hair and dress flowing with her motions, and moved away.

She sighed in relief when she exited the school's precinct while carrying the four heavy books. 'Finally, with this, there shouldn't be any more hindrances.'

She slowly walked toward the east side of the gates and exited the town after showing her student card to the guard. Such a card was used for two purposes: identification and checking whether it was safe to leave people out.

While the culture admired nature, they weren't ignorant of the hidden dangers. If someone had yet to be initiated and have their system inlocked, leaving people out was nothing but ignorance and stupidity itself.

Verdantia rushed through the forest, using her memory and great senses to follow and return to the place where she first met with Flor.

As she was running and almost reaching, a large wolf-like creature suddenly appeared in her path, baring its fangs.

Verdantia's face became serious as she analyzed it.

Race: Green Furred Bark Canine

Level: 8

Aether Mana Shards: 172/172

Phoer Body Shards: 920/920

Anima Energy Shards: 264/264

Attributes: Aether 2, Physique 10, Anima 3, Willpower 8, Destiny 8

After seeing its stats, her face gained a sneer as she didn't even drop her books and expertly changed her footwork to do a spinning kick. "Out of my way!"

BANG!

Her foot landed on the side of the sizeable wolf-like creature's head, twisting its neck and sending it stumbling to the size as it whimpered. Then, it fell flat on the ground, and her brain clearly shook badly enough to make it lose consciousness. A large [-650] appeared above its head, showing how much damage her kick truly did.

However, she didn't finish it off and continued rushing forward, holding the four books tightly so they didn't fall. The experience it would give wouldn't be that much either way and because it was from a canine race, it probably wasn't alone. Getting entangled with it more would mean she had to fight its pack, something Verdantia didn't want to do.

And, as she had expected, Verdantia heard the howl-like sound of a few other creatures. Thankfully, because of her swift reaction and judgment, she was able to escape their encirclement and leave without needing to do any extra maneuvers.

Verdantia might be Level 4, but her stats were terrifyingly high for her level. In the tests, she was Evaluated with an overall E+ Rank, with her Willpower and Anima reaching the D- Rank, while her Aether and Phoer both reached the E Rank.

For these F Rank beasts, she was an actual monster.

After running for ten more minutes, Verdantia stopped while breathing heavily. 'I'm here, please be here still.'

She took a deep breath and called aloud. "Flor? Are you here?"

The answer came instantly. "I'm here."

A voice came from behind her, surprising her.

Verdantia turned around and asked, confused. "Huh? When did you arrive? I couldn't sense you at all."

Flor smirked. "Since you exited the city, I was following you."

Verdantia's eyes widened as a stupid sound left her throat. "Eh?"

Flor snorted. "Did you expect me to wait here patiently? What if you call the guards in the city and tell them that a Level 12 creature is here? Sorry, Verdantia, but I'm not eager to fight my way out."

Verdantia blinked and found it reasonable. "Fair enough." Then, her lips arched. "Now, you should actually know that I'm sincere, right? It's almost impossible to fake my rush, even if I knew about you chasing me since the start. You have to have a skill for it or be the actual World Tree of acting if it exists."

Flor shrugged and flew in front of Verdantia. "I expected it already when I checked that you have almost 1400 Anima Energy Shards and nearly 900 of the other two, but you are truly exceptional for a Level 4." Flor smirked. "You actually remind me of the little one back at home."

Verdantia's green eyes flashed, and she said. "Here are the four books as promised. Now, can I have my branch? Also, what information do I need to give you to let me know where the World Tree is?"

Flor used her Wind Aether Mana to make the four books float and looked at their titles. "Hm... This should be enough for now." Then, she looked at Verdantia and pondered. "Not yet. I know your excitement is not fake."

Verdantia asked. "Then?"

Flor responded curtly. "I don't know if your excitement to see her is for proper or evil reasons. Both would make a reaction similar to the one you are showing."

Verdantia sighed and nodded. "Well, I can wait until you are convinced..." With a pondering look, she asked. "How do I meet with you?"

Flor commented. "I'll send someone else next time. This time, I was in a rush, so I left. Moreover, we are at war, so I don't want to be absent for too long."

Verdantia's face became serious. "There is someone as strong as you?"

Flor blinked and shook her head. "No. I'm the strongest in the area we are in. However, I'm not overwhelmingly strong enough to avoid causing involuntary damage. The last thing I want is for the little one to get hurt because of me."

Verdantia nodded, and after a bit more small talk, Flor left with four books floating by her side and gave Verdantia Liu Shu's branch.

After Flor left, Verdantia hugged her branch and laughed. Her green eyes glowed as her body was filled with bliss.

A whisper spread around.

"Mine~."

Chapter 28. Thornstride Attack!

After Flor made her way back, her Aether Mana had been consumed by around a tenth. While carrying the four books with her Aether Mana wasn't much effort, the journey back was long, and the books were somewhat heavy.

'I hope this helps.'

She was a bit doubtful. After all, her knowledge of World Trees was very limited. 'Ah!'

Flor almost smacked herself. 'I should've asked for books about how to take care of World Trees!'

While it wasn't necessary, as World Trees were more than capable of taking care of themselves, as with everything, a bit of assistance wouldn't hurt anybody, moreover, knowing more about them would help the Rose Fairies understand their main needs and valuable facts.

Flor smiled. 'Well, I now know what to ask Verdantia for.'

As she approached the grove where Liu Shu was, Flor heard battle sounds, making her face change from relaxed to wrathful. "I was gone for a day, and they think they can step on my territory as they please!?"

Let's turn back the clock an hour.

For the Rose Fairies, it was a typical day. They took care of Liu Shu the best they could, collecting the fruits growing on her branches and looking around the area for threats.

Aster was patrolling with a bored look on her face. "When we were in the other home, we didn't need to patrol so much. Why has it become a routine now?"

A Level 7 Rose Fairy by her side commented with a stutter. "W-Well, Liu Shu is weaker and also more important than that tree. It is normal for us to be more careful, no?"

Aster snorted. "Do you think I don't know that? I was complaining just because!"

The other fairy smiled wryly. "I see-"

BANG!

Aster's face changed to incredulous as a massive rock hit the other fairy and sent her flying backward without control. "WHO DARES!?"

Before anything, Aster quickly turned around to save the other Rose Fairy, but from the shrubs, two Level 7 Thornstride appeared and jumped up, opening their mouths and chomping down on her.

Their sharp fangs dropped like guillotines, deeply sinking into the body of the Level 7 Rose Fairy.

Aster saw the Fairy's Phoeer Body Shards plummet to zero as their fangs pierced through the fairy's body, signifying her death.

With her face twisted in anger, she shouted. "YOU ARE GOING TO PAY FOR THIS!"

As soon as she was about to rush forward and fight the two Level 7s, two Level 8 Thornstride appeared from the side, stopping her in her tracks. The four of them looked at her with an unmistakable sneer as one of the Level 7 Thornstrides began eating the Rose Fairy.

Even if she had the advantage of flying, a four-against-one was not a favorable situation. While Aster was impulsive, she was not brainless enough to go against them. 'This disgusting tree eaters! ARGH!'

Aster quickly turned around and returned to the place where Liu Shu was, shouting after she arrived. "We are being attacked! Prepare!"

All the Rose Fairies stopped what they were doing, and everyone at Level 6 and above moved at once toward the defensive positions.

In the place where Liu Shu was located, there were three paths leading into the area, with natural barriers that stopped people from approaching as they pleased.

In the first place, a weak tree like she was before absorbing that leaf had no business surviving for too long. It was just a coincidence that Liu Shu was born in a relatively isolated place. It was also a coincidence created by the random skill she gained that she would later absorb the leaf that allowed her to become a World Tree.

Clavel moved quickly and asked Aster. "What about the other one that was with you?"

Aster bit her lips. "Dead."

Clavel paused for a second, showing a look of grief. However, she quickly recovered. "First, the fight. We'll bury her under Liu Shu's roots after we finish."

Then, she turned to leave. However, Aster bit her lips harder and commented. "We can't. They ate her."

Clavel said without turning around. "Then, we'll bury the beast who ate her."

Aster looked at Clavel's back and turned toward the other path with a resolute face. "We will."

The three paths were each covered with a Level 8 Rose Fairy: Aster, Zinia, and Clavel.

Meanwhile, the Level 9 Amapola was in the middle of the place, and if any side needed help, she would move and quickly fly and help.

To relay which side needed aid, there were Level 5 Rose Fairies acting as messengers between the fairies.

It was a well-thought-out method in which everyone could do something. If any side faced an overwhelming number of enemies, they would all retreat and regroup near Liu Shu.

They knew that while they were protecting Liu Shu, the World Tree was not someone that could be easily messed with.

On one of the sides, at a point with two cliffs and a lot of vegetation, Clavel saw 6 Thornstride arrive. However, her face was solemn as one of them was a Level 9 Thornstride.

This Thornstride sneered. "Since my father doesn't want to attack while Flor is away and locked himself with his females, let me, Mraar, do what he couldn't and deal with that tree that killed my little brother!"

While Clavel knew that Thornstrides were not too intelligent, she didn't expect to learn about all their reasoning for the surprise attack in less than 10 seconds. 'Is there a point to speak about all of this?'

The Thornstride by Mraar's side made a hiss-like roar, feeling motivated. Clavel blinked. 'I see. It was to motivate her group.'

Clavel looked at the seven fairies by her side and pondered. 'We are more numerous. However, Mraar is an F+ Rank Level 9, while I, the strongest in this group, is just an F Rank Level 8.'

"Fight calmly, Level 5 Fairies, tell our battle situation back to Amapola. We are fighting against one Level 9, two Level 6, and Three Level 5. Also, tell her the message Mraar told us."

A Level 5 Rose Fairy rose to the air and left.

Leaving one Level 8, one Level 7, four Level 6, and two Level 5 in her ground. Clavel smiled. 'Let's see how much of a difference you and I can make.'

Mraar charged forward, her lizard-like body using all four limbs to crawl forward. Clavel also flew closer and sent a tentative wind crescent.

Mraar used her strong reflexes to dodge to the side and receive zero damage. Still, using the exaggerated dodge, Clavel moved to intercept her movements with a more robust and quick attack.

Of course, the Thornstride tanked it because her outer hide was highly durable. The damage was there. However, taking Mraar down would take much more.

The other fairies were fighting the rest of the Thornstride. While the battles between these two groups looked overwhelmingly in the Rose Fairies' favor, the Thornstrides had the advantage of being able to land a decisive blow as long as they could touch them.

How would they be able to touch a flying creature? They had many methods, like the one they used to deal with that Level 7 Rose Fairy.

One of the Thornstride used his long claw and a nearby tree to grab onto it and jump. If the Level 7 Rose Fairy hadn't quickly reacted and pushed the Level 6 Fairy out of the way, she would've been in a lot of trouble.

For the other two sides, it was much more favored for the Rose Fairy group because they didn't have the powerful Level 9 protecting them.

The two Level 8 Thornstride lead those two groups, all under Mraar's command.

Amapola received the messages from the Level 5 Fairies and quickly decided to move toward the place where Clavel was. 'If we can deal with her, it will be a very strong blow. It wouldn't be strange if the rest of Thornstride retreated in defeat.'

Clavel and Mraar fought together, with Mraar having the upper hand. While Clavel had significantly improved, the difference between levels can be massive, especially between tiers.

While they fought, Clavel had to dodge one rock thrown by Mraar quickly, and Mraar didn't let the opportunity sleep. She quickly climbed and jumped!

Clavel's facial expression changed when she saw the large creature flying her way. She had been distracted for a second, and suddenly, she was in trouble.

With quick maneuvers, Clavel's body quickly moved out of the way. However, when she thought that it was okay, the tip of her foot got entangled in something.

Seeing the red rope-like material tied around her leg, Clavel wasn't pleased. Right after, the Thornstride pulled, throwing the small Fairy toward her own opened mouth.

Clavel quickly reacted and threw a wind crescent to her face. "Scram!"

BANG!

[-200]

Mraar grunted in pain, but her eyes glowed with the determined light of a creature that had seen its own ups and downs. Resisting the pain, her jaw moved and closed her maw.

"<Thorn Chomp>."

CRUNCH!

"AHHH!"

Clavel screamed in pain as a large [-124] appeared on her head. That was almost half her entire Phoer Body Shard reserves, showing how dreadful that attack was.

BANG!

When Mraar was about to finish Clavel off, her side was slammed by something extremely heavy and sharp, throwing her sliding sideways while making her hiss in pain.

[-450]!

Mraar's side was split open, blood pouring through, and with it, her Phoer Body Shards.

Amapola arrived and quickly fed two <Basic Phoer Berries> to Clavel. While 20 Phoer Body Shards were not much, they would help the body heal much quicker.

Amapola looked at Mraar, who had around 1500 Phoer Body Shards left from her initial 2174. "How about you choose an opponent of your own size?"

Mraar hissed. "She was careless and reckless. The fact that she could now escape before I finished her off is already lucky."

Looking at the injured Clavel, Amapola frowned. "I don't care, but if you don't retreat with your people, you will regret it.`"

Mraar cackled. "What can happen? Flor is away. Then, you and I might be equal. However, what about the rest?"

Amapola looked around, and when she saw that the fairies were actually struggling, her face gained a frown. 'Why? We should be winning as we have number and level advantage.'

Mraar sneered. "You can fly and attack from a safe distance. However, do you think your race is the only race that does it? Our own race has been fighting creatures like yours for many generations. We have our own means as much as you have your own!"

After thinking for a while, Amapola carried Clavel in her arms and shouted. "Retreat!"

The fairies were surprised but quickly obeyed. A messenger was sent toward the other two sides, and soon, all fairies had regrouped around Liu Shu's side.

Chapter 29. Liu Shu's Counterattack!

Liu Shu had been quite calm during all this time. When Aster arrived and spoke with Clavel about one of the Rose Fairies dying, she didn't feel sad or upset. While she felt it was something she wouldn't like to happen, the intrinsic nature of Tianlian Liu Shu, a World Tree, treated death as something that was natural to happen.

But accepting didn't mean not caring. You can accept someone's death, but you can also retaliate against those who killed them.

From accepting someone's death to forgiving the perpetrator, there was a very big change in mentality that needed to happen.

So, Liu Shu waited. Her <World Tree Eye> was stretched to the limit, which reached 80 meters after she leveled up and expanded her roots.

She had already moved her roots far enough that other trees had become a problem. However, Liu Shu was not hasty in comforting those trees. From what she had learned from the momentary contact with them, they weren't intelligent, and their thoughts were much slower and more superficial than hers. It reminded Liu Shu of how she was before she absorbed that strange leaf.

Regardless, after expanding her reach to 80 meters, Liu Shu waited. Patiently seeing everything around her and trying not to miss a single thing. She could tell from the vibrations of the ground that people were fighting.

Even then, Liu Shu wasn't in a rush. Calmly, patiently, and attentively, the World Tree waited. She waited for her chance to eventually interfere.

This chance arrived not long later. She saw that Amapola left when a Level 5 Rose Fairy arrived, probably because of something the fairy said. Then, about 4 minutes later, Clavel returned, injured, accompanied by the same amount of Rose Fairies as before she left.

It wasn't just Clavel. Every Rose Fairy that had gone out to fight quickly returned, some with wounds, others with a lack of mana.

Liu Shu looked around at the injured bunch with a pondering expression. The rest of the Rose Fairies had gone into hiding inside the <Lignified Vault>. It was probably the safest place around here. Not only was it perfectly hidden underground, but it was also strengthened by Liu Shu's natural defenses.

Liu Shu heard Amapola talk. "Now, we'll fight together with Liu Shu. Queen Flor told me that in case of a situation where we can't push off invaders, it is best to collaborate with her. You should know that while Liu Shu is Level 3, she is really strong and durable. Unless a Level 10 appears, it won't be easy to deal enough damage to her."

While Phoebe Body Shars were what showed a creature's vitality, size also mattered. If an ant the size of a thumb bit an elephant, there wasn't actual "minimum" damage one could do.

So, the ant could gnaw at the elephant for all its life, and even then, it wouldn't be able to do anything to it. Even piercing the skin would be challenging.

So, Liu Shu, who had reached 5 meters in height and had a thicker-than-usual trunk, had very strong defenses. There was one thing that she didn't forget, though. Thornstride seemed to have skills to help them reduce the defense of trees.

After Amapola closed the defensive line to ten meters around Liu Shu, they waited. Thornstride swarmed out in droves from all sides, quickly filling the surroundings with their numbers.

If we just counted the fighting fairies, the situation was 23 against 18.

Mraar hissed in annoyance. "I wanted to pick you all one by one, but it seems that it will be impossible."

Amapola snorted. "Are you so eager to die that you've rushed forward until here?"

Mraar shook her head. "You are the ones that will die together with that tree over there. After I eat it, I'm sure I'll have enough experience to become the next Level 10 of our clan!"

Amapola looked around and sneered. "Try it. We are waiting here."

The 18 Thornstride rushed ahead, but Mraar saw something strange. Instead of moving forward, too, they hovered back and prepared spells. 'Do they really think we are slow enough not to be able to dodge that?'

As she expected, the first volley was easy to dodge, and only the lowest-level Thornstrides were hit. Amapola, who was aiming at Mraar, also missed.

Having gained confidence from this, Mraar, who lacked deep planning and intelligence, snorted and decided to roar as a sign of encouragement for the rest of the 18 beasts.

"I don't know what they are doing, but this will make it easier to attack the tree! Go forward!"

The Rose Fairies look at them with a deep look, hiding their expression and waiting patiently. After a few moments, the Thornstrides were finally 20 meters away from Liu Shu, and as if the World Tree had been waiting for a while, it moved with absurd swiftness.

<Willow Strike (F Rank level 1 [0/200])>: The World Tree is from a willow family, with characteristic long but thin branches. She can use Aether Mana to move them and strike a target. Range 20 meters.

A Level 5 Thornstride that had gone ahead of others because of the rush saw something move toward its head before his vision turned black.

If it were able to see the message pop up, it would say something like this.

[A <??> has dealt 345 damage points in a lethal strike!]

Phoer Body Shards 0/345

From the outside, it looked much more gruesome. One moment, the creature was charging forward; the next moment, one of the Tree's branches extended while coated in Anima Energy and Aether Mana and smashed into the skull of the Thornstride, splitting its head open.

Remember that a Level 5 Thornstride had, on average, 6 points of Physique, while Liu Shu had 37. A direct hit from her meant certain death.

Both sides stopped and looked over with wide eyes. Amapola had heard Flor say that Liu Shu was strong below Level 10, but she didn't know how truly strong she was. 'What was that?'

Even Amapola, a Level 9, had trouble following the strike. The sound of air whistling was all that entered her ears before the loud banging sound. The result? Not only was its head split, but Liu Shu's strength smashed the Thornstride face-first into the ground.

The World Tree was not merciful with those who attacked her, so while the Thornstride were distracted, Liu Shu's branches moved without wind and then struck.

<Willow Strike>!

<Willow Strike>!

<Willow Strike>!

BANG! BANG! BANG!

The closest three Thornstride were hit, another Level 5, a Level 6, and a Level 7. The results not only horrified the Thornstrides but also stunned the Rose Fairies.

The Level 5 and Level 6 were insta-killed again, their bodies bursting with gore as the thin branch acted like a sword and sliced through.

The Level 7 was lucky and reacted, dodging to the side. Even then, it still struck, slicing off one of its limbs and making the creature scream in pain as it writhed on the ground.

Mraar reacted quickly and roared, fear in her voice. "Retreat!"

In her mind, she was cursing at the Rose Fairies. 'Protect!? You are protecting that thing!? Isn't it all the way around!? That Tree could probably fend all of us off by itself!'

The reason to retreat, as well, was that while Mraar was confident in herself, she didn't think it was worth it to risk her life. While she felt that she might have a chance, seeing three Thornstride get slaughtered, and one of them maimed made her doubtful.

However, it was at this moment that the luck of the Thornstride ran out.

"How dare you come to my territory!?"

Massive pressure fell upon everyone, making them stiff. Mraar turned around and saw a furious Flor looking at them as four thick books floated around her.

Mraar and the rest of Thornstride froze in place out of fear.

The Level 12 Rose Fairy Queen was entirely on another dimension strength-wise. Mraar, who never thought Flor would come back so quickly, stood there, stiff and with her eyes widening.

Flor asked again as she flew in front of her with a cold face. "I asked you, what are you doing here?"

Even when Flor was right before her face, the thought of attacking never crossed Mraar's face. This creature in the shape of a doll-like woman had five digits in her main attribute, a single attack from Flor was enough to slice her body in half.

Flor saw that she had frozen in pure fear and looked around with cold eyes. "Amapola, tell me what happened."

Amapola flew forward respectfully and told her everything that had happened. When Flor learned that there had been deaths and that Mraar's objective was Liu Shu, her lips arched. However, her eyes weren't smiling at all.

"Since that's it." Flor looked at the trembling creatures and then at Liu Shu. A quick analysis told her that Liu Shu had not wasted almost any energy or mana.

After pondering for a few seconds, she flew toward Liu Shu and whispered gently. "Liu Shu, do you want to fight them? I'll tell them a lie, saying that they can fight you to the death to escape. However, if I see that you are in trouble, I'll kill them and help you. What do you think?"

Liu Shu was in a focused state because it was mid-combat, so she answered right away after giving it some thought. A small pulse of aura that meant something akin to "I don't mind" reached Flor.

Flor wanted to train the little one's attacking methods, so she nodded and turned around. "I'll give you all a chance. Attack Liu Shu. If you win the battle, those who survived will be able to leave. If you lose, then you will become her fertilizer. Rose Fairies, move aside!"

Amapola, who hadn't heard Flor's whisper to Liu Shu, spoke. "Q-Queen! We shouldn't do that!"

Flor pinned her down with one look. "That's my decision. Step back."

All Rose Fairies looked at each other in confusion and then moved toward the <Lignified Vault> with Flor. Once there, Flor took the chance to store the four books in it.

Meanwhile, Mraar and the rest looked between the five-meter tall and thick tree and Flor with caution. Mraar asked. "Are you telling the truth?"

Flor looked at her indifferently and spoke. "Does it matter? Your life is in my hands. If I want to, I'll let you live; if I don't want to, I'll kill you. This is your only chance, regardless of whether I'm lying or not."

Mraar became doubtful and then started hissing around, telling the others to fight with her.

Some of them had become so scared that they had trouble moving, but Flor didn't rush it and waited while making sure none escaped.

Her red, ruby-like eyes emitted a cold light as she looked at them as if they were already dead.

'Now, become fertilizer so that Liu Shu can grow faster and stronger.'

Hello, dear. First of all, thank you for reading~.

Second of all, I'm here to promote myself shamelessly! I have a Patreon page! /mortrexo. Why is this important? Well, I'm uploading the art of the novel there PLUS up to FIFTEEN EXTRA CHAPTERS!

Even with the lowest tier, art is unlocked, so check it out~. Even if you just read this novel, you have over 45 completed pieces of art! I spent a lot of money, okay? By the way, there is zero AI art; you can even see the sketches for each and every piece. If you have a bit of extra money, I would appreciate it if you could support me~.

Much love and hugs,
Mortrexo.

Chapter 30. A World Tree's Strength.

Liu Shu heard Flor's announcement and looked at the fifteen Thornstride slowly walking around her with analytic eyes. 'One Level 9, two Level 8, four Level 7, and the rest are Level 6.'

Then, she looked at her ternary essences.

Aether Mana Shards: 951/1013

Phoer Body Shards: 1499/1499

Anima Energy Shards: 991/1044

While they weren't as much, her stats were incomparable to them, which made her stronger than she looked.

'I have two attack methods, <Willow Strike> and <Willow Strike Barrage>. The first has 20 meters of range, and the second has 12.' She pondered as she saw with her 360° vision how some of the Thornstride were preparing to lunge forward.

At once, the two Level 8s and Four Level 7s took the lead, rushing forward the fastest they could.

The instant they crossed the 20-meter mark from Liu Shu', the <World Tree Heart> released Aether Mana and Anima Energy across her internal passways and channeled it toward her branches.

<Willow Strike>

Her branch flew through the air like a whip, aiming for the Level 8 creature. This time, the Thornstride was prepared and dodged to the side. While Liu Shu's natural combat sense was not bad, she was no expert.

After she failed the attack, she used <Willow Strike> again and targeted the same Thornstride. This time, because the creature had dodged quickly and lost some speed, the branch was quick enough to cut through the air and land on its side.

BANG!

The strike threw the Level 8 off-balance, making it tumble as a large gash opened on its shoulder.

[You've dealt 248 Damage to <Thornstride Level 8>].

The place where the branch landed was the shoulder, so doing more than a quarter of its total Phoer Body Shards was not possible.

When her current prey fell, her branch moved one more time, aiming toward the head.

BAM!

The weakened and disoriented creature couldn't dodge in time, and the decisive blow landed on the middle of its head, burying it under the soft dirt.

[You've dealt 660 Damage to <Thornstride Level 8 >]

Liu Shu threw a quick scan and saw that its Phoer Body Shards were actually not depleted.

Phoer Body Shards: 12/920.

However, such a small number was a death sentence unless the other side had really strong regeneration or someone to stabilize their situation and heal them.

While she dealt with the Level 8 beast, a few things happened. First of all, the other Level 8 and the four Level 7s had arrived at the 10-meter mark.

The second thing was that the rest of the creatures, Mraar included, had rushed forward to attack her.

Liu Shu, as it was natural for all beings without special training, decided to deal with the closest threat first.

The five leading the charge tensed when they felt the Aether Mana and Anima Energy rushing across Liu Shu's body toward her canopy.

Their bodies prepared, and their pupils shrunk to see which branch would come and attack them.

However, unlike in other times, Liu Shu didn't use just one branch.

At the ten-meter mark, <Willow Strike Barrage> was perfectly available for her. And so, she used it.

Her Aether Mana and Anima Energy tanked for 100 points, throwing enough resources toward her canopy to move. Then, she released everything in a storm of ten attacks.

The pupils of the Thornstrides narrowed further when they saw not one but ten branches start to move. Mraar, who was looking from right behind, couldn't help but grit her teeth. 'She can attack with more than one branch at a time!?'

Her eyes became determined as she rushed forward. 'I need to damage her after she deals with those five and kill her before she can kill me!'

Meanwhile, the ten branches fell at the five creatures, sending two to each of them.

The Level 8 managed to dodge one, but the second landed on its left frontal leg, instantly maiming it.

Meanwhile, of the four Level 7s, two of them got caught by both branches, while the other two were lucky enough to dodge. The ones that dodged could defend themselves enough that when the second branch landed, it didn't eliminate most of the Phoe. The hit was harsh, as it stole around half, but they remained alive.

The result was nothing but expected for those two Level 7s that couldn't doge. The first branch was like a giant hammer, cracking their skin and body, making them dizzy. Then, the second one was like a blade, piercing the wounded armor and slicing into the being, killing two more and reducing the numbers from 14 to 12.

[Congratulations on defeating <Thornstride Level 7>. You've gained 5 Experience Points.]

[Congratulations on defeating <Thornstride Level 7>. You've gained 5 Experience Points.]

Added to the previous Level 5 and two Level 6s, the experience she had gained for now totaled at 18.

Liu Shu looked at the desperate creatures getting very close with an indifferent gaze. Her feelings right now were nothing but calm.

Unlike her usual self, it felt as if only this was right. The creatures that attacked her or those around her were enemies she needed to eliminate because those who honestly lived for her well-being were creatures that she needed to protect.

When they were at the five-meter mark, Mraar caught up and overcame them quickly, taking Liu Shu by surprise. "Take this! <Thorn Chomp>!"

Her mouth opened as energy condensed around her teeth, and then she bit the thick bark.

CRUNCH!

The sound of wood splintering was heard around as Liu Shu felt a sensation of pain run around her body.

[A <Thornstride Level 9> has dealt 92 points of damage to you.]

Liu Shu was angered, and her branches quickly gathered energy, using almost 200 Aether Mana and Anima Energy to activate <Willow Strike Barrage> one more time.

Like a storm of attacks, the branches fell on top of them, giving very little space to maneuver. Moreover, Mraar was at an actual melee range, so the attacks came right from above, causing her to receive two attacks of the seven heading her way. For the rest, Liu Shu sent them toward the other three who were about to attack her, killing them.

[Congratulations on defeating <Thornstride Level 8>. You've gained 6 Experience Points.]

[Congratulations on defeating <Thornstride Level 7>. You've gained 5 Experience Points.]

[Congratulations on defeating <Thornstride Level 7>. You've gained 5 Experience Points.]

Meanwhile, Mraar saw her Phoer Body Shards Plument, each strike landing on her, stealing more than 250 Shards. With her 2.174 Phoer Body Shards, losing more than 500 was a blow that made Mraar spit blood.

Her eyes bulging and bloodshot, Mraar hissed and attacked with her claws two times before biting again.

[A <Thornstride Level 9> has dealt 113 points of damage to you.]

[A <Thornstride Level 9> has dealt 157 points of damage to you.]

[A <Thornstride Level 9> has dealt 162 points of damage to you.]

The attacks landed on her trunk one after another, slicing off sizeable chunks of bark, reaching deep, and making her sap flow.

Phoer Body Shards: 975/1499

In her mind, Liu Shu was writhing in pain, as this was her first time receiving the sense of being chopped. Ignoring everything else, Liu Shu's senses warned her that she should deal with Mraar as soon as possible, so she used <Willow Strike Barrage> one more time.

Mraar saw the branches coming her way, but instead of dodging, her eyes shone with a crazed sigh as she lunged forward and tried to rip Liu Shu's top and bottom parts by placing her claws in the slashes she made and pulling them apart.

However, as a five-meter-tall tree, Liu Shu was sturdy enough for that not to be possible with Mraar's strength. Moreover, with her absurd 37 points in Physique, Mraar's 21 points fell short.

Seeing that it was impossible, Mraar relaxed as she gave up and saw the barrage of attacks coming her way in slow motion.

Her hind legs pushed her laterally, dodging the first two. Then, she jumped backward, dodging another three attacks.

[Congratulations! You've Unlocked Skill <Basic Motion Vision (F Rank Level 1)>]

However, Mraar couldn't be happy with it. 'Now? You couldn't have come two seconds earlier?'

Even with the newly gained Motion Vision, she couldn't see a way to block the remaining 16 attacks coming her way.

From a distance, one could see the branches falling and slamming into Mraar with ruthless accuracy.

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

[Congratulations on defeating <Thornstride Level 9 (F+ Rank)>. You've gained 35 Experience Points.]

Liu Shu looked away from Mraar as soon as she died, and then, she used 200 more Aether Mana and Anima Energy, leaving her with less than 100 of each. Her branches moved and aimed at the remaining nine Level 6, killing them all.

[Congratulations on defeating <Thornstride Level 6>. You've gained 3 Experience Points.]

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[System hint: From now on, a large number of killing messages will appear as such: Congratulations on defeating <Thornstride Level 6>*9. You've gained 27 Experience Points.]

As soon as all Thornstrides were dead, Liu Shu's aura calmed down, and she gave one final look at her ternary essences.

Aether Mana Shards: 112/1013

Phoer Body Shards: 976/1499

Anima Energy Shards: 144/1044

Returning from her cold and analytical mode, her mind relaxed and spread again around her entire being. 'Wow~. That was intense, hehehe.'

Liu Shu hummed in her head, feeling tired and refreshed. 'I never fought in this manner; it was... Interesting?' Liu Shu used her World Tree Eye to look at the corpses of the 18 creatures around her, and then she realized. 'Oh? How much experience did I win?'

Liu Shu looked at her accumulated experience and exclaimed. 'Wow! I've gained 98 Experience Points! So many!'

She still needed more to level up, but she was very satisfied with her progress. Moreover, her proficiency in both her attacking skills had also become much fiercer. When used in real combat, these skills increased proficiency significantly.

Practicing them also helped, but the effects were almost negligible compared to real action.

Flor approached with a pained smile and looked at the large wounds Mraar had created at the base of her trunk. The times she almost flew forward to kill Mraar were not few, as she had to restrain not only herself but also some of the Rose Fairies around her.

"How are you feeling, Liu Shu? Is everything okay?"

Liu Shu answered in her mind, a bit groggy because of her lack of both Anima Energy and Aether Mana. 'I'm fine~. Hehe, Flor is such a... a... Hm? A worrying person?'

[System Hint: That's called a worrywart.]

Liu Shu exclaimed. 'I see! A worrywart!'

Flor felt the tries in communication from Liu Shu, but the feelings were so jumbled and messed up that it was similar to not receiving anything. Flor coughed. "Anyway, rest, little one. You can go to sleep for a bit if you want. Once you wake up, I have something interesting to show you."

Liu Shu decided to agree and restarted all her functions, such as flower creation and enchanted growth. Then, she went to sleep for a week.

