

Ascension of the Sylvan Cosmos.

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Chapter 41. [Break Through Berry] and Beast Tide.

Putting aside those thoughts, Liu Shu focused on her new system. There were quite a few things that caught her attention. The first of them was the number of maxed skills she had. 'There are a lot... Can I upgrade any of them?'

She looked and listed her max rank skills.

<Charm of the Seedling (F Rank Level MAX)>

<Nature's Gift (F Rank level MAX)>

<Woodcrafter (E Rank Level MAX)>

<World Tree Wisdom (SSS Rank Level Max)>

Liu Shu hummed. 'So... How much experience do I need for each of them to rank up? First the F Rank ones.'

[Do you want to use 326 Experience Points to Increase <Charm of the Seedling (F Rank Level MAX)> to <Charm of the Seedling (F+ Rank Level 1)>?]

'I see, so F Rank needs 326 Experience Points...' Liu Shu looked at the 1900 for Level Up that she needed with a thoughtful expression. Then, she checked Nature's Gift. 'Do all skills need the same at the same rank?'

[Do you want to use 326 Experience Points to Increase <Nature's Gift (F Rank Level MAX)> to <Nature's Gift (F+ Rank Level 1)>?]

Liu Shu hummed. 'They do.' She looked at Woodcrafter and also checked to remember how much she needed.

[Do you want to use 20,739 Experience Points to Increase <Woodcrafter (E Rank Level Max)> to <Woodcrafter (E+ Rank Level 1)>?]

Liu Shu groaned in her mind. 'So much...' Then, Liu Shu looked at World Tree Wisdom and pondered. 'Do I even look...?' She was afraid that her Tree Heart would suffer if

she saw the number needed to increase the rank of that skill. After considering it for a while, she gave it a look.

'...'

Liu Shu closed the message just as it popped and then cried. 'H-How am I supposed to gather that much experience? T-This is impossible! QAQ!'

Even for a World Tree that was patient by nature, the number she saw struck fear in her heart. Liu Shu focused on her mind and chanted. 'Forget the number, forget the number! I don't even know how to call that number! I don't know numbers after hundreds of thousands! What comes next!? Thousands of thousands!? And after that?! I need to know even higher zeroes to spell that dreadful number! QAQ!'

After looking back at the 326 Experience Points for the F Rank skill, Liu Shu felt that it wasn't that unreasonable anymore. 'Hm hm. This pretty 326 is much better than whatever that was.'

That day, Liu Shu learned that big numbers are good, but only in good things like her stats.

'Anyway, I have almost no experience accumulated right now, so it doesn't matter much. So, only one thing left to check.'

Her gaze moved toward the new fruit that she could grow, the <Basic Breakthrough Berry>. 'Flor and the others would probably like it, right? But...' Liu Shu hummed. 'It can only increase tier to the F+ Tier... Whatever tier is...'

What she didn't know was that even if it could only increase <Tier> from F- to F Tier, it would be something that people would kill to have. <Tier> was usually the limitation of a person's future, or in other words, a combination of a creature's innate talent and potential.

To increase that would help not only that creature but also their descendants, who would be born with higher chances of being of a higher <Tier>. In other words, modifying <Tier> was modifying the bloodline of a creature and making all their descendants stronger.

Liu Shu was thoughtful, wanting to know what her current tier was. 'Can I eat this? System, what is my tier?'

She heard no answer, making her pout. 'Tell me~! System! Systeeem! Tell meeee! Tell me, system!'

[... System Hint: Tier is an innate quality of a creature, and the system can't access to it in a direct manner-]

Liu Shu snorted in her mind. 'Useless.'

[...]

[System Hint: However, it is possible to guess from the stat gain from level to level. <Tianlian Liu Shu>'s stats increase is as such: Aether +7, Physique +9, Anima +8, Willpower +10, and Destiny +100.]

Liu Shu exclaimed and laughed. 'Ohh, I knew the system was the best~.'

[System Hint: Not taking into account Destiny stat increase, as the Destiny gained per level can't be observed in any other creature throughout existence, Tianlian Liu Shu can be considered to be a creature between D+ and C- Tier.]

Our tree became stupefied. 'How much did you just say!?!'

[System Hint: Tianlian Liu Shu is a creature that can be considered as a creature between D+ and C- Tier.]

Tianlian Liu Shu bashed the system again. 'I naturally heard you! It was a way of talking!'

[...]

Tianlian Liu Shu couldn't help but hum as she thought of the fairies. 'Didn't Flor say once that they were F+ Tier or something?'

'Well, it doesn't matter.' Liu Shu was quick to forget about it and move on. 'I need to make the flower for the berry to grow!'

'Let's see... It is an E- Rank berry. Hm hm. I see. So, how many shards does it need?'

Liu Shu focused on her branches and chose the modified <Sylvanium Branch> to grow them. 'Does it give any benefit?'

First, she tried with a regular <Delicious berry>, just to be sure. However, nothing felt different. A beautiful flower with a batch of <Delicious Berry> appeared in just a few minutes. 'Oh... So, it isn't that much different?'

The <Sylvanium Branch> was one of her main branches connected to her trunk. The color was not that much different from the rest of her branches, with an added glossy texture.

Because of its sturdiness, Liu Shu chose that branch instead of any other one. She could feel that this branch was much stronger than her other branches. Still, she could also sense that she was not able to use <Willow Strike> on it. 'Hm... if I could use it, my

strikes would hurt much more...' Liu Shu felt that her mind was about to wander off again, so she refocused. 'Anyways... Let's start by summoning the flower!'

Her Aether and Anima moved with her will as she thought of creating the berry. However, when she thought of feeding the small sprouting bud all the energy it needed, her senses screamed danger, making her stop.

'Huh?'

Liu Shu opened <World Tree Eye> and looked at her branch. 'What's wrong? Why did I feel danger when I wanted to feed it?'

Curious, she tried again. This time, in a much more controlled manner.

Her Aether Mana and Anima Energy swirled around her body and swirled upwards in a stream toward the branch where Liu Shu was growing the flower. 'Let's use... five shards of each per second.'

And so, the World Tree began feeding it, and feeding it, and feeding it, and feeding it again.

20 seconds... 50 seconds... 2 minutes...

The World Tree looked at the barely changing flower with incredulity. 'W-what? I have fed it more than 600 of each, and it has barely started reacting!?'

Liu Shu looked at her reserves, which had lowered for more than a sixth with a complicated expression. 'M-More? Do you need more?'

Curious, she continued giving it energy.

One thousand... one thousand three hundred... one thousand seven hundred...

Liu Shu stopped and stuttered. 'Y-You glutton! Do you really need so many Aether Mana Shards and Anima Energy Shards? Are you sure you are not trying to eat for free!?'

However, she could see that the previously immutable flower had been somewhat satisfied. 'How much more do I need?'

Not knowing the answer, Liu Shu changed strategies. 'I'll use... Hm... how about 19 of the energy I regenerate per hour to feed it?'

While she wanted to start gestating it as fast as she could, the amount of energy it needed was exceptional, which was expected as it did give an absolute advantage to

one creature. It would not make sense if she could grow them at will when she was just at Level 4.

What Liu Shu didn't expect was that she would need an entire week after that to feed the berry. Once the flower stopped giving signals of needing any energy, Liu Shu looked at it with amazement. 'It glomped 5000 of Aether Mana Shards and Anima Energy Shards...'

During this week, she had left it in the back of her mind, just allowing it to grow while she did other things, and this was the result. 'Also, if my feelings are not wrong... Each berry should take around 300 days to bear fruit. Wow~, that's almost a year!'

Liu Shu became thoughtful. 'I have two skills that require constant use, <Enchanted Growth> and <Nature's Gift>. Hm... Should I use 30 for <Enchanted Growth>, 20 for <Break through Berries>, and most of the rest for the other types of fruits? Hm. It sounds good.'

While Liu Shu redirected her energy in a focused manner, she suddenly heard Flor's voice. "Liu Shu, there has been increasing activity in the forest recently. We have spotted many people from surrounding cities appearing as well. From what we've heard, it seems that there is a beast tide approaching."

Liu Shu listened and was confused, something Flor knew would happen. "Although we are considered among the creatures that participate in the Beast Tide as a part of it instead of as a defender, that's not entirely the case."

Liu Shu was curious and continued looking at her, putting aside her decision for now. Flor sighed. "Us, Rose Fairies, can't be really considered the same as Humans and Sylvans and other similar races. We are in the monster category as our system, and the way we reproduce is basically different from them. Other creatures of the forest also see us as such."

Flor continued. "You might be asking yourself what does this have to do with the beast tide. Well, to avoid the beast tide as a monster, you just have to join it. If we do this, we will need to leave you behind, though. That's why we are not choosing that option. Still, if we don't join it, that doesn't mean that the beasts will stop charging forward. Beasts that push trees down also exist, although it depends on what kind of tree we are talking about. Mostly, low-level ones are pushed down.'

Liu Shu was curious about where all this talk was going. Flor answered it in the next talk. "I've seen that you've been doing something with your energy, so I wanted to tell you to keep your ternary essences at maximum all the time if possible. Even now, you have around seventy percent of it."

Liu Shu understood and sent her a pulse of energy telling as such. Flor added. "Also, I'll need to go for a bit to meet with a... acquaintance."

Liu Shu tilted her head, not knowing that her first encounter with interesting people was approaching.

Chapter 42. Cinderielle Wandering Through Fortuna City.

In the heart of Fortuna's city, the streets pulsed with life. The city, always a hub of activity due to the protective embrace of the towering World Tree, was now teeming with even more visitors, creating an atmosphere of vibrant energy.

A beautiful Sylvan with flaming wisps around her walked around the bustling streets. Her peculiarity made others take a second look, as a Sylvan with control over flames was rare. Moreover, her tall stature and perfectly slender body were very attractive.

While Sylvars were slightly above average appearance-wise, it was not that noticeable. More like many beautiful Sylvars, seeing an ugly Sylvan was rare. However, the tall woman walking down the streets in a red dress looked flamboyant and free, her gait confident and cool.

Cinderielle was walking while looking around. 'It has already been a few months since I started the Academy. How quickly time passes...' Cinderielle continues walking down the streets, looking around with wandering eyes. "Fortuna City, the place where that thing happened..."

Her steps got slower, and finally, she stopped at the beginning of a specific street. Her orange eyes looked sideways toward a particular spot and slowly moved as if they were following an invisible object carried by the wind. 'Where did it come from? Where did it go?'

Her eyes followed the invisible item carried by an imaginary wind and finally stopped after it went behind a corner.

'... I don't like it.' Cinderielle frowned. 'Why was I stopped that day? If they had let me get it, I would be...'

Cinderielle paused and smiled wryly, talking to herself. "I would be what, Cinderielle? What are you imagining?"

She laughed mirthlessly, eventually sighing and looking up at the clear sky. "Will I even be able to meet whoever that leaf was from?" Her eyes glazed as she remembered the past.

It was something that happened many years ago, but she clearly remembered that day when she saw that almost withered leaf flying away.

Even when she was just a child, she could remember the sensations she felt back then as if they happened a few minutes ago. The feelings of her heart trembling, her pulse

quickenings, her senses sharpening, and her vision focusing on it as if everything else didn't exist. As those sensations filled her heart, her usual clear and bright orange eyes gained a murky tone. 'I'll find her. The owner of that leaf...' Cinderielle clenched her fist. 'She is mine.'

Nobody bothered her as she stood on the streets because she was actually quite famous in the area. After all, Cinderielle made sure to come here at least once a month. She has been doing this since her parents bought a house here and started living in Fortuna City.

"Cinder! Why are you here standing dazed again?"

When someone called her, Cinderielle turned around, snapping out of her thoughts, her eyes regaining their liveliness. The red-haired Sylvan turned around and saw a tall, handsome man with black hair and blue eyes approaching with his arm raised. His body was muscular and tall, and his clothes complemented his looks.

He had straight eyebrows and a sharp nose that matched perfectly with his defined and deep facial features and his angular chin.

Cinderielle laughed. "Well, it's something like a routine. Nothing new." Cinderielle smiled. "What about you, Theodore? Why are you here?"

Theodore scratched his cheek and laughed. "Well, you know the drill." Then he smirked. "I also wanted to see you."

Cinderielle rolled her eyes and crossed her arms while looking at him eye-to-eye. "Did they ask you to recruit me again? I've already made it clear that I'm not choosing somewhere to go until I finish the academy."

Theodore nodded and shrugged. "Yeah, are you sure you don't want to join the Azurebell Heather Sect? I might be a bit biased, but they are one of the top sects that you can find around here. Joining it after the academy won't be a loss, especially with your talent."

Cinderielle shook her head and sighed. "Again, I told you I don't want to join any power for now. It doesn't matter how good the conditions are."

Theodore sighed, his eyes flashing with a disappointed light. "I see. I might've been a bit in a rush. Sorry for being so insistent. I just wanted to make sure we could keep our bond after graduation."

Cinderielle looked at him and shook her head. "Deciding my entire future on a bond is not something I want to do. I have many years before me to choose."

Theodore blinked and remembered. "Sylvans can be guided up to Level 10 in the Academy, right?"

Cinderielle nodded. "Guiding humans until that level would not be practical for the humans, so they do so with just the Sylvans, who have a longer lifespan."

The man paused and looked at Cinderielle with a strange expression. Cinderielle asked. "What's wrong?"

He shook his head, making his semi-long hair move a bit. "Nothing. I was just wondering if this is the reason you are ignoring all my attempts."

The red-haired Sylvan moved her orange eyes and locked eyes with him, her expression unsure. "Attempts? What are you referring to?"

Theodore couldn't bear the woman's eyes and had to shift his gaze. "No... I was just wondering; do you really not want to give it a try?" He returned his gaze, facing Cinderielle, and took a step forward. "Cinder, I want us to be lovers. Can you give me a chance? I know that we are human, Sylvan. However, I can make sure to leave memories in your life that you won't regret. My feelings for you are sincere, Cinder."

Cinderielle looked at him with a complicated look and shook her head. "I've already told you that I'm not interested, right? Why are you insistent on breaking your heart?" Cinderielle sighed. "It's not about you being a human or not. If I were in love with you, I would've long accepted. However, I'm not."

Theodore smiled sadly. "Why not? What do I lack? I'm honestly someone with everything but power."

Cinderielle snorted and laughed. "It seems that you are lacking two things: power and humbleness."

Theodore looked into her eyes. "I'm serious, Cinder."

The Sylvan sighed, looking at Theodore with a strange gaze that he didn't understand. She looked at him as if he were a peculiar specimen. "Honestly, I'm unsure. Don't human men look at Sylvans as strange partners?"

Cinderielle didn't say so aloud and thought to herself. 'It's not only the age thing; even day-to-day life is much different. Not to mention, our attraction to beautiful plants is seen as repulsive for some of them... Honestly, Sylvan-to-human relationships have sadly ended for Sylvan. For us, it is more about a safety concern than liking or not liking humans.'

Cinderielle sighed and commented. "We have so many differences. Are you really sincere in your confession?"

Theodore looked back at her and asked, still not giving up. "Then, what do you like? As a Sylvan, you need to find a partner, right? After all, Sylvans are a race that has used nature around them to reproduce." Theodore shrugged and asked with a hidden derisive tone. "Or what, are you telling me that you'll search for your future partner between the trees?"

However, even if it was hidden, Cinderielle could feel the sarcasm behind that question. 'Ah. Here it is. I knew it.'

She squinted and took a step forward, reducing their distance to less than one meter. "Say, Theodore, what's wrong if I like them? Theodore, we are good friends, so don't cross the line. Plant creatures are as valid as a partner as you."

Cinderielle saw his face and sighed, taking a step backward. "Humans might not feel it, but they are as alive as us, if not more. While not all plant life is able to communicate by itself, if you are patient and search for it, you'll be listening to them."

Theodore lifted both his arms and asked for forgiveness. "Okay, that was my bad."

Cinderielle snorted and pointed at the towering World Tree in the middle of the city and asked. "Do you honestly think that she is a dead being? That she is ugly? Or that she is just an unintelligent being?"

Theodore frowned, and his eyes moved toward the towering tree. He knew that this subject was a sensitive spot for Sylvans, but Cinderielle was quite open with her ideas, so he thought that he would be okay while explaining his position.

Still, when his eyes landed on the enormous tree, he couldn't help but regret his word choice a bit. While it was a Tree, but bigger, the trunk twisted in the silhouette of an enchanting woman's torso with raised arms holding the lush canopy. Even the head was created above the shoulders. Sadly, the head didn't have defined facial features or anything at all.

'From what we've learned in class, World Tree's trunk shape exists to attract mates. World Trees are able to reproduce by themselves. However, the things they can give birth to are completely tree-like, without human characteristics. To give birth to Sylvans or other humanoids, World Tree's descendants need a very lucky mutation like the first Sylvans had, or they need a creature that can impregnate or bear their children.'

What made Theodore hesitate about it more was that she, the World Tree, had leafy and vine-like "clothes" that barely covered the private parts of the silhouette, revealing that the World Tree did feel shy if she were without those covers. These covers were completely natural and did not need to be in that shape, a shape that other races copied to create bras and similar women's private parts.

Even he, as a human, could sense the "beauty" of the majestic being.

Of course, in a world where Sylvans were the dominant race, besides the extreme groups constantly waging war against them, other humans understood the differences between the two species and lived together in harmony.

However, Theodore, who came to love Cinderielle after a few months of interaction since they saw each other every day, couldn't accept that the woman he loved was attracted to Trees. It felt like a shameful experience that would place a "He did it! He married a Sylvan that loves trees!"

Cinderielle saw the reluctance in his eyes, unable to accept it, and she internally sighed. 'Did this day finally come? While I wanted to preserve my friendship with him, I might need to end it short.'

The red-haired Sylvan chuckled. "See? This is why looking for someone with thoughts similar to yours is best, or at least someone who understands you and loves you unconditionally as long as the relationship is based on trust." She looked at the man and sighed. "And I can't find many things in common with you. So, let's end this here. You don't really love me; you lust for me.'

Theodore looked at the tall, long-haired Sylvan, turned around, and left while pondering about what had just happened.

Chapter 43. Fortuna's World Tree. Meeting an Acquaintance.

Since Cinderielle was little, her appearance and talent had been well above average. Naturally, there were many suitors around her who tried to court her. Theodore was not the first, and he would probably not be the last.

During her school days before she came to the academy, it was to the point that her friends created a "who hasn't confessed to Cinderielle" list.

Something she just rolled her eyes at.

As she looked at Theodore's back, Cinderielle remembered a question she heard from one of her human friends back then. "Why don't you accept a confession, even if it is just to test?"

She never got to answer because a Sylvan friend interrupted, explaining how important love was for Sylvans, etc. But that question got stuck in Cinderielle's brain. 'Right, why have I always ignored these things? I never even took a good look at any of the people confessing to me.'

From the very beginning, Cinderielle had never felt any attraction toward anyone in a romantic sense.

She remembered that when they were adolescents, and their hormones started working, each time they went on a trip to the forest, she could spot a few trees that looked quite charming to her. Moreover, when she looked at the towering World Tree, her heart would pound in awe.

Still, even at the sight of these magnificent trees, she couldn't feel the mythical "love" that she was not searching for, and more like expecting to feel eventually. 'Love, huh.'

Strangely, each time she thought about love, the yellow and withered leaf that she had seen as a child constantly flashed in her mind. Her brows frowned. 'Why is it?'

She was bewildered. You must know that, regardless of a sylvan's sexuality, being attracted to a single leaf was like being attracted to the nail of a person without knowing how the person really looked.

In short, it was a really strange situation for Cinderielle. She was sure she liked that leaf's owner, but why she was so attracted was still a mystery.

This is what brought her here. Her doubts had started to grow alongside her maturity, making her question more and more things that she previously took for granted.

To get rid of these doubts, she wanted to explore and try to search for them.

A Sylvan's natural lifespan was at least thrice as long as an average human's, and this is the lifespan for those Sylvals that died "young" because of low levels.

As they gained Levels and strength, their lifespan increased more than other races, and they could maintain their "peak" health for most of their lives, so wasting a few decades searching for things like a floating leaf was not a big deal for Cinderielle.

When she returned, she would still be in her prime, or so was the plan in her head.

First, she wanted to learn as much as she could in the academy, graduate, and then explore the world to find that leaf so that she could track its origin. Naturally, Cinderielle didn't think that such a withered leaf could be found, but what she wanted to search for were similar ones.

Previously, even with that leaf in mind, she was too young and low-leveled to go on her own adventure to investigate and search for it.

Today was different. The reason she came to Fortuna City from the Academy was to start her search. She had a month without classes, so she wanted to take advantage of it and go out.

With her diligence and the academy's help in giving resources, she reached Level 6 a week ago and consolidated her strength. With her natural attributes and powerful skills, she was confident in protecting herself even against a level 10 or above being.

From what she had read, the Golden Sap Forest she was going to enter had a few tribes, but none of them had creatures of level 12 or higher, which were the ones she would fear.

The reason Cinderielle was so unafraid was the same that made Sylvans such a dominant race in the entire world. Most Sylvans had an innate ability that they had a chance to awaken after entering Level 5 and beyond. Some unlocked it at Level 5, others at 9, others at 20. It depended.

Cinderielle was a talented Sylvan, so she awakened it at Level 6. 'I'm not the only one that did so, though.'

Cinderielle's mind flashed with a particular green-haired woman, but she quickly ignored it.

Her other reason is the strange ability that she had only shared with both her parents. As long as they were strong enough, each race could see different depths and parts of other people's systems by analyzing them.

Humans and most creatures that were considered "monsters" could see the ternary essences and Levels of creatures.

Beast Humans were similar, but they had the advantage of being able to see the race and some basic titles as well.

Then, Sylvans were completely out-of-the-norm beings, able to do all of what Beast Humans could do, and then add the Attributes and Affinity Percentages.

However, Cinderielle could see deeper into the system's stats as if she were a World Tree. Besides all of the above, her ability to look at titles was much more powerful, and she could even tell some of her talents and passive skills. Plus, the Resistance Percentage was also something that would be wide open for her as long as the person she analyzed wasn't too strong for her.

The only things hidden from her were the Energy Method, some titles, some Talents, some passive skills, and a creature's accumulated experience. The rest was visible to her.

If there was a disadvantage, it was that the deeper she peered, the stronger the sensation of someone looking at the person she analyzed would grow. Getting caught was very easy if she wasn't careful.

Cinderielle looked at the giant World Tree and pondered. "Should I try to analyze it?"

It wasn't prohibited to try it in Fortuna's City because the natural defenses of a World Tree were even effective against much higher-level people.

She had even tried in the past and had been met with failure. This time was the first time she tried with her new system range that she strangely unlocked after Level 5.

Name: ???

Titles: ???

Race: Seedling World Tree of Fortune.

Energy Method: ???

Level: 26 [?????/?????]

Aether Mana Shards: ?????/?????

Phoer Body Shards: ?????/?????

Anima Energy Shards: ?????//?????

Attributes: Aether (???), Physique (???), Anima (???), Willpower (???), Destiny (???)

Affinity Percentage: Aether Resonance (??), Physique Refinement (??), Anima Affinity (??)

Resistance Percentage: Aether Resistance (??), Physique Resistance (??), Spiritual Resistance (??), Mental Resistance (??)

Talents:

???

Passive Skills:

???

<Destined Sight (D- Rank Level 1)>: The first time a non-hostile creature sees you, they will gain 100 Destiny points for a short duration.

Cinderielle couldn't help but be stunned. 'As expected, a high-level World Tree has certain anti-observation skills. Still... those are... six question marks?'

Cinderielle knew that her observation gave her an accurate number of digits, even if they were all question marks. This meant that the World Tree had from 100,000 to 999,999 shards of ternary essences. 'This is a bit...'

Cinderielle looked at her own stats and couldn't help but gulp. 'Powerful. Too powerful.' Cinderielle discreetly looked around, only looking at people's Levels walking on the streets, and she couldn't see any question marks. The highest she saw was a Level 21 walking in luxurious armor. However, she had to look away as that person quickly turned to look in her direction.

Thankfully, she wasn't discovered. 'I need to be careful with my curiosity.' Cinderielle shook her head and walked toward the Adventure Bazaar, where she wanted to take a quest.

She had done the registration a few weeks ago, so she was more than ready for it.

After walking for a while, she arrived at the establishment and entered inside. The building was large enough to stick out between all the surroundings ones.

While it wasn't a vastly profitable business because it was the only one in Fortuna City, it had enough income to become a large and luxurious place. The reason others didn't create competition was because Fortuna's World Tree herself had constructed this building.

Cinderielle remembered hearing about an incident a while ago when a group ignored warnings and built a bridge. Then, in one night, it was gone.

Nobody knew what happened, but they understood that the World Tree's involvement was necessary for something like that to happen. Hence, she didn't doubt they were squashed by the powerful being safeguarding this entire city.

This happened many years before she was born, so it was from a while ago. However, the warning was so powerful that even today, people abide by rules without daring to disrespect the absolute ruler of this area.

Inside the Adventurer Bazaar, you could see an organized reception, with queues for different types of requests and staff walking around ready to answer questions or help people.

The flashiest thing about this place was the variety of equipment everyone wore. Thanks to her performance within the school, she managed to win a few nice low-level flawed items. However, most of her equipment was unranked. She wore a beautiful red dress with a black waistband.

On her arms, she wore elbow-long gloves with excellent protection, and her staff was slung over her back. Her feet were wrapped in decent shocks, and she wore quite comfortable shin-height boots. Other than this, she had a short sword at her waist just in case she lost her staff.

Slung on her back, a lovely black backpack that could hold quite a lot at a glance could be seen. It was not filled by any means, but it had some things like camping materials and other necessities that didn't occupy much space and were light.

'To accept quests... Over there.'

Cinderielle approached a queue and waited patiently. 'Hm... It will take around half an hour?'

As she waited, she felt a familiar aura and turned to look over. There, a woman of her age with a curvy and alluring figure was walking down the stairs holding a staff similar to hers.

Their heights were similar, but their body types were the opposite.

While Cinderielle was a lithe and agile-looking cool woman, the one walking down the stairs had a perfect hourglass figure that tempted the viewer to hug her thin waist.

Furthermore, the quality of the staff that the woman held was much higher than hers. Her eyes couldn't help but lock on it. 'What's with that staff?'

Cinderielle strangely felt jealous when she saw that staff in Verdantia's hands and wanted to snatch it somehow. However, before the murkiness in her gaze reached her heart, she snapped out of it.

Her face changed. 'Snatch it!? Am I crazy!?' However, as she looked at that staff, she couldn't help it as the feeling of stepping forward and taking it for herself came from deep within her.

Chapter 44. Cinderielle and Verdantia Meet

When they looked at each other, Verdantia raised her hand and called her. "Miss Cinderielle, it is a surprise seeing you here." Cinderielle saw her eyes going to her back and smiling. "Is this your first time going on an adventure?"

Cinderielle blinked and blushed a bit. "I-Is there something wrong with my setup?"

Verdantia shook her head with a smile. "Some of the things you have are a bit excessive unless you are going on a long exploration. But it's mostly correct."

Cinderielle nodded, her eyes moving toward the staff from time to time. Verdantia naturally caught her eyes and asked. "Something wrong with my staff?"

Cinderielle coughed and shook her head. "No... It's just... What materials did you use to make it?"

Verdantia's eyes gained a touch of wariness. "That's a strangely specific question, no?"

Cinderielle laughed, scratching the back of her head. "Is it? Hahaha. Sorry, it was just stunning and eye-catching. I was honestly curious."

Verdantia's eyebrow raised. "Oh...? 'Stunning and eye-catching,' you say. Miss Cinderielle, this staff is nothing but a brown-colored staff with a branch coiled around it."

Cinderielle waved her hands and changed the subject. "Ah, don't worry about that. Also, you seem like you come here often."

Verdantia squinted for a few seconds, but after a while, she let it go and answered her. "I do come quite often. While I usually go solo, there are times when the forest is too dangerous and I need to gather in groups."

Cinderielle nodded and looked at Verdantia's backpack. "What do you carry there?"

Verdantia paused for a second before answering. "Books."

"Huh?" Cinderielle asked again, confused. "I meant in the backpack."

Verdantia nodded with a smile. "You heard it right."

"Why are you carrying books to the wild!?" Cinderielle was flabbergasted.

Verdantia shrugged. "I like to read them."

The red-haired Sylvan looked at the green-haired one with an incomprehensible face. 'Is this the difference between a veteran and a newbie? I prepared with care, yet she currently looks as if she is going on a picnic.'

Verdantia placed a hand over her mouth and laughed. "Don't look at me like that. As a Sylvan related to Nature, very few creatures are hostile to me. If I had fire affinity like you do, I would've needed to be as careful as you."

Cinderielle found the explanation reasonable but not so much. "I see."

While they were talking, someone approached them by calling them.

"Verdantia, where are you going out this time? I thought you would remain at home, making potions and reading again, hahaha."

The green-haired woman turned to look and saw her usual companions. She had changed groups after what happened in the past, and honestly, Verdantia was quite satisfied with them.

She smiled, her aura gentle and nature-like. Even between Sylvans, it was clear that her closeness to nature was extraordinary. "I'm going to the Golden Sap Forest. I need a few fungi that only grow over there, but if I'm lucky, I might find new plants or other interesting flora."

Cinderielle's ears perked up. 'Golden Sap Forest? Isn't that the place I decided to explore this time as well?'

"Oh? Well, you should be able to defend yourself in that area. However, be careful."

Cinderielle blinked and gave Verdantia a deeper look. 'What Level is she?' She wanted to check, but doing so with close people felt a bit too invasive. As an example, it was similar to seeing someone bare in one of those magazines compared to seeing a friend of the opposite sex naked in front of you.

While many didn't consider it that big of a privacy breach, it was considered polite not to do so.

One of her male friends nodded. "Well, that place is quite safe. With your level 7 strength, you should be okay. Moreover, you have that <Low-Grade Flawed Level> staff with you. It should be a walk in the park."

Verdantia looked nodded with a smile. "Yes. There shouldn't be any other problems."

Meanwhile, Cinderielle's eyes almost popped out of their sockets. 'Level 7!? Low grade!? What is she doing with something so expensive!?!'

You must realize that even some Level 10 explorers hadn't worn a Low-Grade item in their lives. Only wealthy people of Level 15 and above started wearing them if they ever did. Having one at Level 7 was too luxurious. Verdantia smiled a bit awkwardly. "Sadly, it ended up being a Level 10 weapon, so I can't fully bring out its strength."

Cinderielle couldn't hold her interest and asked. "W-What are its stats?"

Verdantia thought for a moment and shared them with Cinderielle. While they weren't close friends, they had shared enough conversations to know that she was trustworthy. "These stats are the ones without the Level Penalty. With it, I can only use around 50% of its strength."

Cinderielle nodded and looked at it.

[Level 10 Nature Tree Staff (Low Grade Flawed Level)]

+50 Aether Mana

+50 Phoer

+600 Anima Energy

Aether (+5), Physique (+5), Anima (+50), Willpower (+5).

Cinderielle almost coughed a lung out. 'PLUS FIFTY ANIMA!? HUH!? AND THIS IS THE WEAKENED VERSION!'

Verdantia's companions nodded empathetically. "Honestly, it is a waste."

Cinderielle looked at them, puzzled. "What's a waste?"

Verdantia coughed, but one of them smirked and continued speaking. "She that branch coiled around the staff? That staff was a Basic Grade Complete Level staff, but after coiling that branch, it jumped directly to the Low Grade."

Cinderielle's eyes flashed for a second and asked. "Oh? Why?"

Verdantia sighed, and her companion spoke. "Because that branch is a D+ Rank branch!"

Cinderielle was petrified on the spot; not even her facial muscles were twitching. 'D-D-D+ Rank!?'

Her friends shook her head. "If she were patient and used it as a base material when she had the resources, who knows what kind of monster weapon she could've created? Sadly, it has already fused with her current staff, so there is nothing we can do."

Verdantia coughed loudly this time and changed the subject. "Anyway, I think it's your turn, Miss Cinderielle."

The Fire Sylvan followed Verdantia's finger and saw that the queue before her had disappeared as they talked. "Oh! Well, let me go and get my first quest." She approached the counter and followed the procedures without problems.

With a smile, she turned around and saw that Verdantia and the others had left. 'Tsk. They could've said goodbye or something.'

Shaking her head, she exited the building when a new notification appeared in her system interface.

[Quest Received: Explore the recent movements in the Golden Sap Forest. Creatures are starting to become more active, and there is a chance of a beast tide.

Completion Condition: Gather enough information to be useful.

Reward: Sylvanium Shards (2), Etherium Shards (10), Ascendium Shards (10)]

Looking at the notification, Cinderielle was baffled for the "n" time today. 'A Sylvan Quest!? My first Quest turned out to be a Sylvan Quest!?"

There were two types of quests in the world.

The first type was regular quests created by creatures, which were the most abundant and weren't registered in the system interface. The rewards were given my real entities, and it was usually done in the local currency or even with items.

For example, a quest about exterminating a plague in a particular house, a quest about hunting for a specific creature, etc. When created, all quests were regular quests.

However, very rarely, there were some quests people dubbed as [Sylvan Quests].

Sylvan Quests were admitted as an official quest by the System, and other than the expected rewards by the one who created it, the person who completed it to the System's satisfaction would receive extra rewards from the System itself.

These rewards were highly varied, from a few coins to extremely rare equipment, to large amounts of experience points, or other kinds of bonuses like permanent attribute increases, potential increases, and many more things.

The number of possible rewards was so vast that even when there was a registry, people added new ones almost daily.

However, the same quest might not trigger for different beings. They were called [Sylvan Quests] because, most of the time, they happened to Sylvans. This was another advantage over other creatures and another reason why extremist groups hated Sylvans just for existing.

If humans had accepted the quest to explore the forest, they would've probably never triggered the Sylvan Quest Cinderielle had.

That didn't mean humans couldn't trigger them, but the conditions were much stricter and more unique. They were called Sylvan quests for a reason.

The rewards Cinderielle had were attractive, as they were the Universal Currencies. Universal currencies worked everywhere because they could be used to create, enhance, or produce varied structures and items.

Between them, Sylvanium Shards were used for all kinds of construction, equipment forging, potion making, and many more. It could be said that, without Sylvanium, their current society wouldn't be able to develop as much as it has, without hurting the environment as little as they did.

Of course, there were other kinds of materials. Still, Sylvans and most humans didn't use them because Sylvanium was much more efficient and valuable and could be used to create basically anything.

Then, the other two currencies she received, Etherium and Ascendium, were used similarly to Sylvanium. But, contrary to Sylvanium's all-encompassing use, these three were used for specific items.

Items that enhanced or used Aether Mana needed Etherium and Sylvanium.

Items that enhanced or used Anima Energy needed Ascendium and Sylvanium.

Of all the items, those that boosted Destiny were the rarest and most extraordinary. More than 99 percent of those in circulation were rewarded by Sylvan Quests in the past, and they were treated like precious babies by those who owned them.

Destiny was a stat that couldn't be changed by regular means, so anything that modified it was extremely precious.

Producing items that used all Universal Currencies was also very complicated, almost impossible because Ascendium, Etherium, Cognium, and Celestium reacted harshly when combined.

If any producer managed to create even one flawed basic-quality item by using all four materials, they would instantly become famous. It was something that almost never happened, though.

So, when Cinderielle saw the rewards of the Quest, her eyebrows shot up with pleasant surprise, and her lips arched.

Before leaving, Cinderielle decided to check her current equipment.

[Level 5 Blazeiron Sword (Basic Rank Complete Level)]

+60 Aether Mana

Aether (10).

[Level 5 Blazeleaf Robe (Basic Rank Complete Level)]

+25 Aether Mana

+90 Phoer

+25 Anima Energy

Aether (+5), Physique (+15), Anima (+5), Willpower (+5).

[Level 5 Blazebark Staff (Basic Rank Flawless Level)]

+90 Aether Mana

+25 Phoer

+25 Anima Energy

Aether (+15), Physique (+5), Anima (+5), Willpower (+5).

Usually, carrying two weapons and one defensive treasure was considered wealthy. Especially if one of them was of flawless quality. To say that Cinderielle was powerfully equipped was an understatement.

This was all thanks to the academy's benefits she had gained, which lent her these items as long as she was a student. 'Well, if I break, lose, or damage them, I will have to pay for reparations from my own pocket. I need to be careful.'

With confidence, Cinderielle left with a caravan toward the forest.

Chapter 45. Upgrading Skills. Rose Fairies' birth and Flor.

Meanwhile, in the Golden Sap Forest, things were changing quickly.

It had been a while since Liu Shu arrived at Level 4, and her experience had accumulated enough to buy the first skill upgrade. Moreover, during this time, the Rose Fairies managed to keep themselves a bit more hidden than usual, attracting wild animals that wanted to take a taste of Liu Shu, only to get, quite literally, sliced in half by her branches.

At Level 4, Liu Shu's basic stats rivaled those of Level 10 creatures. She had grown to be a force to be reckoned with, strong enough to face almost all creatures in the Golden Sap Forest.

But that was speaking about normal creatures. Liu Shu found, surprisingly, quite a lot of resistance from the trees surrounding her. While they were all between Levels 6 and 9, she had been battling more than one of them at a time.

Some trees posed some resistance to her roots, making it a slow battle for dominance. Because her regeneration was absurd, Liu Shu made it a secondary action to clean up her surroundings. So,

All of this naturally awarded her abundant experience points. She had killed quite a few creatures: seven Level 5s, five Level 6s, two Level 8s, and one Level 9. This gave her a total of 124 Experience Points. Then, because two months had passed since she leveled up, she gained another 960 Experience Points, making her Accumulated Experience equal to 1084 Experience.

Liu Shu looked at that number with a thoughtful face. 'I'm leveling up so fast~. I'm already halfway through; if I wait three more months or so, I should be able to reach Level 5! But...'

Liu Shu looked at her skills and pondered. 'I should Level Up the skills...'

Why did she think as such? One of them was Nature's Gift, which is one of her most used skills. The other was Charm of the Seedling, an interesting skill that helped her and similarly placed her in a pinch in the past.

So, after giving it some light thought, Liu Shu finally decided to upgrade them.

[Do you want to use 326 Experience Points to Increase <Nature's Gift (F Rank Level Max)> to <Nature's Gift (F+ Rank Level 1)>?]

'Yes!'

[326 Experience Points consumed. <Nature's Gift> has gone from F rank to F+ rank.]

<Nature's Gift (F+ Rank level 1 [0/1200])>: Produces small, magical fruits with unique and beneficial properties. It uses Anima Energy and Aether Mana to produce. Depending on the strength of the fruits, there is a chance that they will also need Phoer. You can fasten their ripening time by 60 days, spending as much Aether Mana and Anima Energy as you need to create them.

Current Fruits Available: <Delicious Berry (F- Rank)>: +1 exp to Level 9 and lower beings. Max: 3; <Basic Phoer Berry (F- Rank)>: +10 Phoer Body Shards. Max: 5; <Basic Mana Berry (F- Rank)>: +10 Aether Mana Shards. Max: 5; <Basic Energy Berry (F- Rank)>: +10 Anima Energy Shards. Max: 5; *<Basic Breakthrough Berry (E- Rank)>: +1 Sub-Tier, max F+. One every ten years.

The fruits she could create didn't change, but now it was much cheaper and faster to make them. Her ability to speed up went from 30 to 60 days.

'Nice! With this, I will be able to produce much more~. From her Aether Mana regeneration's 106 points, she always used 36 of them for <Enchanted Growth>, around 40 for all the berries except the <Breakthrough Berry>, for which she used ten separate energy points. Finally, the last 20 were used by Liu Shu to fight things around her.

20 Aether Mana and Anima Energy in an hour didn't seem like much, but she could get things done slowly.

The rest of her ternary essence reserves were only touched when there was an active situation that needed her attention.

'But I'm not done yet! Hehehe.'

[Do you want to use 326 Experience Points to Increase <Charm of the Seedling (F Rank Level Max)> to <Charm of the Seedling (F+ Rank Level 1)>?]

'Of course I want to~.'

[326 Experience Points consumed. <Charm of the Seedling> has gone from F rank to F+ rank.]

<Charm of the Seedling (F Rank Level 1 [0/1200])>: Attracts small animals and insects to the area, fostering a harmonious ecosystem. There is a very small chance of attracting a friendly, bigger animal or insects that will help protect you. Creatures below the F+ Rank will be affected with much ease.

'The only change here is what kind of creatures get affected. Hm, that's... not bad?'

Liu Shu was unsure, as this skill has always been quite elusive for her.

Meanwhile, as soon as she upgraded her skill, a visible aura spread from her, moving the fallen leaves and grass with a refreshing breeze.

The Rose Fairies that were flying around stopped, looking at the tree with gentle smiles. They couldn't help but feel thankful that they came here. Liu Shu's berries had been nothing but a life-saver and had also pushed many young fairies up the levels at a very quick pace.

Slowly yet surely, all Rose Fairies were getting stronger. Flor was resting on Liu Shu's canopy when she felt the refreshing breeze, making her smile. "Did you upgrade something, Liu Shu? It makes the aura around you much gentler and welcoming. I like it."

Our cute Liu Shu heard her and laughed in her mind. 'Nice~, I'm glad I can make them feel better around me. I hope others feel like that too in the future~.'

Then, she refocused on her things. Her Accumulated Experience had been reduced to 432 points, making her Level Up objective quite distant again. Not that Liu Shu minded; she was not in a rush. Her main objective had always been slow, steady, but constant growth.

As she thought of these things, her <World Tree Eye> caught something in the Rose Fairy garden. 'Oh? Some of the flowers are about to open~.'

Liu Shu consciously used her <Enchanting Growth> aura on the flower, and its petals spread open, blooming into a beautiful flower with a sleeping bare woman in the middle.

Her appearance was similar to an 8 to 10-year-old, making her look cute and adorable. 'Another Rose Fairy~.'

Thanks to her aid with <Enchanted Growth>, there was a Rose Fairy birth rate boom ongoing. All of them were still at a really low level. But the future was promising for the race. For now, their population was approaching 160 Rose Fairies.

The little creature that had just been born opened Rose Fairies' characteristic red jewel-like eyes and looked around dazedly. It was clear that the Rose Fairy didn't know anything at all as it just sat there, not moving.

Liu Shu was curious and analyzed her.

Name: ---

Titles:

<Rose Fairy>: Affinity with plant beings increased by 10%

Race: Rose Fairy

Energy Method: Simple pollination (gain experience equal to <Flora level*tier>/<Your level> per flower. Can be used once a day.)

Level: 1 [0/140]

Aether Mana Shards: 46/46

Phoer Body Shards: 22/22

Anima Energy Shards: 22/22

Attributes: Aether (4), Physique (2), Anima (2), Willpower (2), Destiny (2)

Affinity Percentage: Aether Resonance (15), Physique Refinement (7), Anima Affinity (10)

Resistance Percentage: Aether Resistance (6), Physique Resistance (4), Spiritual Resistance (4), Mental Resistance (4)

Talents:

Passive Skills:

Accumulated Experience: 0

'Oh~, she is stronger than others!'

As a reference, an ordinary Rose Fairy was born at Level 0, so they all had 10 in their ternary essences and 1 in their attributes like most creatures. Even when they leveled up, their stats were half of what this new Rose Fairy had.

As Liu Shu observed, a Rose Fairy approached. Unlike the usual youthful look most of them had, she had a clearly weaker constitution with wrinkles at the side of her eyes. Her flying was also slower and more gently paced, and while her body remained slender, one could feel the age weighing down on it.

The elderly Rose Fairy, who was in charge of taking care of the Rose Fairy Flowers, approached with a smile, and when she saw her ternary essences, she was surprised, too. "Oh, you are a powerful one, little seed! Even stronger than that child, Flor."

The newborn fairy looked over blankly and blinked. Clearly, she couldn't speak, and probably, her intelligence was far from developed. However, there were some basic instincts in her, like all creatures had, and the immature fairy slowly tried to stand up while falling back on the recently opened flower. The wings on her back were undeveloped, but they were changing from a wet white color to their usual greenish color quite quickly.

The elderly Rose Fairy didn't do anything and just watched with a smile.

Meanwhile, when Flor was mentioned, Liu Shu focused her <World Tree Eye> on the senior Rose Fairy. This action was noticed by the elderly Rose Fairy as Liu Shu's presence enveloped her.

The elderly fairy looked at Liu Shu with a gentle smile and asked. "Are you curious about Flor, Liu Shu?"

Liu Shu answered enthusiastically. 'Yes! How was Flor when she was little?'

The Rose Fairy slowly flew toward the newly born one when the young fairy started flapping her developing wings with a buzzing sound. While doing her routine, the elderly fairy spoke about Flor. "Well, Flor's Flower Seed was birthed by a close friend of mine. She was quite a gentle one." The Rose Fairy sighed. "However, as a high-level fairy, she battled outside a lot, and eventually, she died by the claws of a River Beaver."

The woman grabbed one hand of the young Rose Fairy and slowly flew up, helping the newly born one fly up with her. Flying was the Rose Fairies' method to remain as a top race in the dangerous forest; adding their innate affinity with Wind Aether Mana, they all learned how to fly right after their birth.

Liu Shu listened silently to the tales of Flor's "mother" for a few minutes, showing how much this elderly Rose Fairy liked that person.

The elderly Rose Fairy continued. "Well, enough of her. I guess you want to know more about Flor, right? Haha. Sorry, Liu Shu, this sack of old bones sometimes gets sidetracked."

Liu Shu was surprised by this fairy's ternary stats. While she was a Level 7 Rose Fairy, her stats were similar to those of the Level 5 young Rose Fairies.

In the end, while <Level> was an indicator of a creature's life level, <Stats> were an indicator of a creature's current strength. Just seeing the decrease in them, Liu Shu instinctively knew that this particular Rose Fairy didn't have much left.

The elderly Rose Fairy spoke gently as she guided the recently born one around her trunk. "When Flor was born, I took care of her in honor of my friend. In the words of some city races, I'm somewhat close to her adoptive mother."

'Oh! A mother!' Liu Shu couldn't help but think. 'Who is my mother? Probably another tree with branches similar to mine?' For now, Liu Shu hadn't seen trees with dropping branches like hers, as most had thick and sturdy ones. Her <World Tree Eye> vision had already broken through the 100-meter mark, allowing her to see much more of the world around her.

"Flor was actually a weak Rose Fairy at first..." Hearing the woman speak again, Liu Shu refocused. "Her attributes were nothing but half of what this one has, hahaha." The

Rose Fairy smiled. "However, as she grew up, Flor was always very active. She was the first to push herself and learn spells, fight for resources, enter the battlefield early, and more."

"Believe it or not, she was quite bloodthirsty, and she has hunted River Beavers and Thornstride since she was Level 4! Her constant fighting bore fruits and gave her strength. She naturally broke through her tier, going from an F Tier to an F+ Tier one. After that, Flor was even more active. Flor has battled during eighty percent of her few decades of life. That's how she broke through the limit and entered Level 10."

The Elderly Rose Fairy smiled. "That's why, when she now lazes around, we don't say anything. She is our protector, our guardian shield. Her presence lets us all rest comfortably at night and wake up without fearing the outside. We know for certain that if something happens, Flor will be the first to move."

Liu Shu heard her, and her mind went into deep thought. 'A protector brings happiness to those close, huh...'