

Ascension of the Sylvan Cosmos.

#Chapter 71. Digging and [Basic Defensive Building]. - **Read Ascension of the Sylvan Cosmos. Chapter 71.** **Digging and [Basic Defensive Building].**

Chapter 71. Digging and [Basic Defensive Building].

Over at the Golden Sap Forest, another three weeks had gone by since Liu Shu started talking with Flor. This meant that she gained an extra 420 Experience Points.

Unlike her usual self, Liu Shu was serenely observing her surroundings, her mind at peace. She was not engaged in any activity, simply basking in the enchanting tranquility of the Golden Sap Forest, a place of unparalleled beauty, much like any tree would.

Her body was growing nicely, her roots were reaching out further, and her leaves and surroundings were healthy and glowing with health.

'So peaceful...'

It had been a while since she was in this mood. From the moment she gained a deeper conscience, there was one new thing after another, and although that was not bad as it broke the monotony of the years she spent as a normal tree, she was now content with this peaceful life, a life that brought her a sense of calm.

'The sun is really yummy today~.'

Her leaves rustled with the soft wind, and the clear sky allowed her to bask in the Sun. During the night, it had rained, so the earth was moist and easy to travel through. Moreover, the water made absorbing nutrients from the ground easier.

She had found a few rocky surfaces below her, which she had let aside as there were other pressing matters. Now that she was waiting for the materials she needed to start her construction work, she decided to explore the caves below her.

Using <Root Manipulation> and her innate vision as a tree, Liu Shu focused her energy sight on those areas. The world below the ground became clear as her root system's receptors sent the signals. Even if there was no light, with the extra senses, Liu Shu could see the entire underground from an outward perspective.

Her roots moved as Aether Mana and Anima Energy traveled to them; she slowly grew them and covered the rocky wall, trying to spot a weak point.

It took a while; after all, her roots couldn't grow too fast. Even when she was moving them around with <Root Manipulation>, growth was not something she could really accelerate.

In short, she had to work with what she had.

As her roots moved, time passed quickly, and a message that she didn't expect reached her.

[A <Rose Fairy Level 12> has used <Royal Pollination> on you. You've gained 16 Experience Points.]

[<Basic World Energy Gathering> has absorbed 4 Experience Points]

'Huh? One day has passed?' Her senses were so focused on her roots that she didn't even realize the time was passing.

Those extra 20 experience points were welcomed. After all, her total accumulated experience points had reached 1822 points.

Liu Shu's gaze moved to her system and observed her level line.

Level: 4 [0/1900]

'Ohhh, so close! Four more days, and I will reach Level 5!'

She was excited about this. Each time she leveled up, her strength grew incredibly fast, so she wondered if her strength would become close enough to Flor to become a real helper. After fighting a few times, her understanding of her current level of strength compared to those around her was pretty clear for her.

She was already in the realm of a weak Level 10 in terms of single attribute maxing. However, because of her several advantages as a tree, like her natural resistances and incredibly good Aether Mana and Anima Energy control, saying that she was weaker than a Level 10 was also wrong.

Her fight against the Level 10 River Beaver was a telling about her current strength level. Still, in her mind, while Flor was just two levels above, she was a whole tier higher than the rest, so her stats were significantly stronger. That's why Liu Shu was not clear about whether she would reach her level of strength or not.

Besides her strengthening, she was curious about what she would unlock if she unlocked anything. Until now, each level carried with it something skill-wise, but she was not confident that it would continue like this.

Perhaps if she were able to build a house before she leveled up, she would be able to unlock something related to the building. 'Hm... Should I delay my Level Up until I build the house?' Liu Shu thought that it was a good idea and moved her consciousness over to the <Lignified Vault> to check materials.

'Ohhh, so many! They have accumulated quite a bit during this time.'

She felt that today she was exclaiming quite a lot, but good things were happening, so she was happy!

'Thankfully, the <Lignified Vault> is connected to my system page, so I can look at what I have through the system interface~. If I remember correctly, I can make it look as I want, then... Show me the names of the building materials and order them by quantity. Also, show the quantity by the side of each material!'

[Inventory: Spalignwood (214), Yellow cotton (210), Earthmud (202), Pebbleheart (201), Sprout Heart (22), Earthspire (2), Yellow Cotton thread (2), Dustheart (1), Budbark (1), Gustbark (1), World Tree branch (1).]

Liu Shu exclaimed again. 'I can build a house!'

To make sure of it, she checked the materials one more time.

<Basic House>: Sapalignwood x 100 (F-), Sprout heart x10 (F), Budbark x1 (F+), pebbleheart x100 (F-), earthmud x100 (F-), yellow cotton (F-) x10.

She looked at her available constructions one by one, comparing materials, and the only building she could build was, as expected, a house. She was delighted, but she honestly preferred if she could've built a defensive structure. 'I wonder how those look. While I have a general blueprint in my mind, I don't really know how the materials will bring changes to the structures.'

Our young World Tree paused. 'Speaking of which, World Tree branch? What's that, and why is there only one? I am a World Tree; there should be many more!'

World Tree Branch (Building Material <C- Rank Material>): When enough fallen World Tree branches are stored, they can be mixed with energies and complex Woodcrafting to create this material. It is a material coveted by any builder that can increase the strength of any structure it is built with. In rare cases, it might even increase the sentience of the structure. Moreover, because of its extremely high quality, it can substitute several lower-ranked materials.

In her mind, Liu Shu exclaimed loud enough that the Rose Fairies moving around her felt her excitement. 'Wooohhh!!!'

Flor's voice reached her as she focused on the material's information. "Liu Shu, is everything alright? What did you get so excited about?"

'Flor! Flor! Do you know what!? I can build a defensive tower! Wohoo! Something that will attack in my place~.'

Flor was confused. 'Didn't that thing need five Budbarks? Even if I miscalculated, the amount we gathered should be around one unit or two, three at best.'

Liu Shu giggled. 'Hehehe, that's true! I only have one. However, I have another material that's special and can substitute it~.'

While Liu Shu wanted to tell Flor about her ability to use herself as material, she felt this knowledge was too dangerous. Even when she trusted Flor, Liu Shu felt uncomfortable sharing her deepest secrets. Thinking to herself, Liu Shu planned. 'Since they usually gather my fallen branches, I guess I can sneakily use them, hehe.'

What if they asked? That was something the Liu Shu in the future would have to deal with, not her!

So, the second thing she did after deciding this was open her <World Tree Eye>. What was the first? Well, it was leaving a small part of her conscience with the roots exploring the rocky walls below her and trying to find a crevice or something to easily penetrate through and explore what was on the other side.

Flor asked to remind herself. "So, which were the materials to create the defensive structure?"

Liu Shu looked at her system and asked about it. Soon, the blueprint and materials needed appeared.

<Basic Defensive Building>: Saplingwood x 200 (F-), Sprout heart x20 (F), World Tree Branch (C-), pebbleheart x200 (F-), earthmud x25 (F-), earthspire x1 (F)

Flor heard Liu Shu's list and nodded. "I see, so that mysterious material is substituting the five units of Budbark and the one unit of elemental material."

While Liu Shu didn't specify which material she was using, she told her which ones were being substituted.

Flor asked. "So, can you acquire this material reliably?"

Liu Shu answered with a happy exclamation. 'Nop! You still have to search for Budbark and those materials!'

Flor let out a sigh as she caressed her forehead. "Sure, sure... Oh. Speaking of materials, the caravan will return tomorrow. So, that's a good thing. They might carry back quite a few materials you need."

Liu Shu giggled happily. 'Nice!' Then, she commented. 'I hope they can arrive safely and without problems~.'

Flor nodded, but her thoughts were different. 'I hope they didn't stick out or betrayed us quickly. If they informed outside forces in any way, that's it for us.'

Honestly, Flor regretted it a few days later after the caravan left. She was too confident in Liu Shu's worth. It was true that if Liu Shu grew into a land overlord and the humans were with Liu Shu from the start, they would become the most influential caravan business around. However, if the World Tree they gambled on failed to overcome the challenges, they would lose everything as well, and perhaps even worse, as being associated with a fallen World Tree was not a good reputation to carry around.

Hence, balancing the pros and cons, it was clear to Flor that humans must have evaluated everything with care before choosing. Moreover, they couldn't really be confrontational with her around for one simple reason: If they had been a threat, they would've been eliminated.

Flor was just a bit naïve and incredibly inexperienced in terms of being a ruler of creatures outside her own Rose Fairy group, so she lacked cunningness even when her intelligence was extraordinarily high for a wild monster.

This return would be something that would make clear if her decision came biting back or if it was a successful gamble. Flor sighed, feeling frustrated. 'I shouldn't do this as often. We are in a delicate situation that can crumble down like a stack of acorns.'

Meanwhile, Liu Shu didn't bother with these matters. In her mind, things were simple. She needed to grow, and whoever came in the way would be treated as friends or enemies depending on their attitude toward her.

For Liu Shu, who was recently born, many of the usual emotions of wariness and carefulness were lacking. She still didn't know the meaning of betrayal and hadn't even experienced it.

The word was so foreign that she hadn't even thought about it once in her life.

With no more distractions, Liu Shu focused on the construction of her first building. Well, if *<Lignified Vault>*'s assimilation counted as one, then this would be her second one. Still, it was the first building created from scratch by her.

'Let's do this!'

Small Proofreader Note: If you're reading this on June 18th, wish our dear author a Happy Birthday today!

Chapter 72. Building Construction Details.

There were many more things to consider besides the materials needed for building the <Basic Defense Building>. It was a complex structure that would be part of her defenses, so she couldn't just make it at random and in any way, shape, or form.

So, the first thing to consider was how big it would be. Liu Shu pondered for a while, juggling her thoughts back and forth. 'If it is too close, the purpose of even building it would be lost. I need to put it in a place so that it can attack things I can't!'

Liu Shu felt that her attack range was too limited. Until now, she has been lucky that her opponents all used closed-range skills. While, lately, she had unlocked <Root Manipulation>, allowing her to attack creatures within her Root reach, it was not reliable.

Root Manipulation was a skill mostly used for slow battles and spreading her domain. It helped her grow roots further and deeper, which was also a great advantage when fighting other trees. While their reaction speed could be measured in hours, Liu Shu's was measured in minutes and, depending on their use, seconds.

Thankfully, Liu Shu didn't have the bad luck of encountering an enemy like the Rose Fairies, who dominated aerial combat and long-range attacks. Liu Shu understood their advantage; after all, if she couldn't hit them, she couldn't beat them.

So, when placing this structure down, she wanted to create something that would cover this weakness of hers. Even if aerial enemies came, a thing that she could use to defend herself.

Naturally, she was not completely helpless against flying enemies. If her roots could go horizontally for up to 35 meters, they could do the same vertically. That was a great reach; still, the prospect of being attacked from further up was not unthinkable. At the end of the day, she was an unmoving target.

With all of this in mind, Liu Shu opened the system and entered the building interface. This interface was something she unlocked when she absorbed the architectural knowledge from the books. 'Let's see~, the <Basic Defensive Structure> is... here!'

With a thought, the designs for the building appeared in her mind. 'Hm? There are new ones?'

At first, the designs for the Basic Defensive Structure Liu Shu wanted to build were very simple. It was a tree-like structure that used its branches to throw leaves and other types of projectiles reinforced by Aether Mana.

These branches could be equipped with projectiles either crafted by herself or others, or grown naturally by the Defensive Building as part of its own cycle. After all, what Liu Shu was aiming for was an actual living organism created by Woodcrafting and architecture and other complex procedures only possible because she was a World Tree.

Usually, these buildings were optimized for humanoid use, and hence, having "life" was not practical. So, for the basic designs people would create and build, the ability of the creature to level up was usually not taken into account.

First of all, creating anything that could level up was rare, complicated, and usually inconceivable. For something to be recognized as an organism by the system, it needed the potential to grow, and creatures couldn't give that ability at will.

But World Trees were an exception.

As the little darlings of the universe, their innate ability to control energies was superb and incredibly complex. Not to mention, their connection to life was the strongest of all creatures. So, even though World Trees come in many shapes and forms, they all have some level of life affinity.

Going back to the structure designs, what changed Liu Shu's options was none other than her own branch being mixed into in the process. With the use of the <World Tree Branch> as a construction material, the options presented were much more varied and complex, with different attack methods Liu Shu hadn't even actively thought about before.

The system interface was a helper during the designing process. Using the learned knowledge of the creature, it would be able to show the most efficient buildings.

This didn't mean the system listed all of them, just the most efficient ones. If a creature wanted something more specialized, it needed to use its own abilities to make those changes.

Furthermore, it wasn't complicated to generate structural designs that didn't follow the system's recommended ones; thanks to all her absorbed knowledge and with a bit of help from the system in terms of evaluating structural integrity, she could imagine a model in her head in almost any kind of shape or form.

The imagery was ethereal and different from what a human would see it as. It was like a flickering light structure with complex pathways for the ternary essences and also a

large root system indicating how much land it needed or how the creature would live around her.

With Liu Shu's incredible mind strength, usually spread thinly throughout her gigantic body, calculating and reorganizing these otherwise complex details was possible. It took time, but she could do it without gaining a headache. If a human of the same level had the same mental capacity a World Tree would, they would become the genius of the millennia.

Liu Shu began planning. Unlike humanoid beings that focused on appearance while trying not to lose functionality, Liu Shu's objective was for the structure to become part of her ecosystem. If the structure she created would take space from her, the last thing she wanted was for it to become aggressive when she invaded its space. Similar to the *<Lignified Vault>*, the defensive structure needed to be part of herself.

As a World Tree, she was averse to other flora that could invade her domain. Yet, if one looked around all worlds, vegetation flourished around World Trees.

These two statements contradict themselves unless you add the fact that World Trees don't hate all flora. Instead, World Trees are hostile to flora that aren't under their influence.

When a World Tree expanded, they did not attack others indiscriminately. It showed in Liu Shu's first encounter with another tree's root system.

At first, she approached carefully, testing the waters and checking its reaction. However, the random tree she approached rejected her and not only that, it even tried to push her back while attacking her.

This was a slap to Liu Shu's face, and so, that tree got brutally uprooted by her and turned into fertilizer.

Putting it in a very direct way, World Trees could be considered an invasive species that instead of upsetting the environment around them, they enhanced it while getting rid of all flora that would not cooperate with them.

Were they good?

Were they bad?

The conversations around these topics were deep and philosophical in almost every culture.

World Trees were brutal, that was something everyone knew, but appropriate for the instinctual objective all World Trees had since birth, one attached to their very name.

I digress.

With all of those concepts in mind, the way Liu Shu approached the Defensive Building Construction became clearer.

Liu Shu was thinking of creating flora that would be able to surround her and, at the same time, be able to attack at a distance. So, creating one single structure was not appropriate. 'If I do that, the problem is that I will need another three to cover all my angles right?' Liu Shu pondered hard, making time tick. 'Instead of a large tower, another tree, or a bush, I might need to aim for something smaller but able to target the skies. It would lose in durability, but it would gain plenty of functionality.'

Liu Shu's mind swam through many concepts she slowly learned while trying to visualize many different types of constructions and root net systems. One after another, they flashed in her mind and got scrapped, making her sink into deep thoughts.

As she thought, another day went by. The reason Liu Shu even realized it was thanks to her daily alerts.

[A <Rose Fairy Level 12> has used <Royal Pollination> on you. You've gained 16 Experience Points.]

[<Basic World Energy Gathering> has absorbed 4 Experience Points]

Liu Shu looked at those two messages and giggled in her mind. 'I should ask Flor for help~. Hehe.'

Liu Shu cleared her imaginary throat, and then she focused on the relaxing Rose Fairy Queen. Flor was leaning on her body after using the pollination skill. Her face relaxed, and she had a faint smile as she closed her eyes and basked in the sun that Liu Shu's branches allowed to pass through.

The scent of the World Tree was pleasant and filled everything around it with an aura of life. Moreover, the <Enchanted Growth> skill was similar to an aura, affecting everything in a certain radius. The sounds of her soft leaves rustling in the soft wind, the pleasant bark pressing against her back, and the gentle sounds of Rose Fairies buzzing around and speaking made this place the perfect spot for relaxing.

Of course, that would be the truth if it wasn't because of a certain young and mischievous World Tree.

An impish giggle escaped Liu Shu before she started her message barrage without any warning whatsoever. 'Hehe... Floooooor! FlorFlorFlor! FoOoOoOoR! Floo-o-o-o-rrrrr!'

Flor opened her closed eyes slowly, her eyebrows twitching incessantly as wave after wave of pulses slammed into her head, telling her what Liu Shu was saying.

She couldn't help but lament. 'Is this how she was calling me all those times?'

Flor rubbed her forehead with a sigh-like smile. 'This is annoyingly adorable. Tsk, tsk. I can't get angry even if I want to. Why is she so cute, eh? I can't bring myself to berate her no matter what she does, sigh.'

She straightened her body and looked at the trunk of the playful World Tree. "Yes, yes, I can hear you. What do you want, little one?"

Liu Shu laughed happily when Flor answered. 'Well, you see, you see. I was thinking about where to put my Defensive building and how to build it. Do you have any ideas? I will only have one building for now, so I will be quite upset if the enemies come and attack me from the wrong side!'

Flor blinked and placed a hand on her chin. "That's an interesting question. Let me check around for a few moments, Liu Shu."

Liu Shu looked confusedly as Flor left. 'Why did she leave?'

There was one thing that Liu Shu was not aware of yet.

As a creature with limited vision, she didn't know how the land around her was shaped. For Liu Shu, as her roots grew, her world also expanded. However, beyond that, she saw nothing. It wasn't anything like an all-consuming darkness or a blinding brightness. It was more similar to a barrier-like thing that blocked her view.

Therefore, when Flor said something about checking the surroundings, she wasn't sure what that meant. 'Are my surroundings important? Hm... I should ask Flor one day.'

Meanwhile, Flor's leaf-like wings buzzed and lifted her body into the air. Then, she flashed toward the sky and looked around at the entries into the grove that were easy to attack from.

She muttered. "Honestly, we are quite in the open. There are not any places that are more difficult to attack or cross to get to Liu Shu. I guess we need to create a barrier somehow. Liu Shu said that she had a defensive structure called a <Basic Defensive Wall>, right? That should help once we have enough materials."

After circling around the place for an hour, Flor couldn't spot any apparent weaknesses to be exploited or, on the contrary, obstacles that could limit a group's advancement. Their grove was open and as accessible as the dense flora allowed it to be.

This made it quite clear to Flor that it was quite dangerous.

Chapter 73. Arrival of Human Caravan.

After she investigated the surroundings, Flor returned to Liu Shu's side and spoke to her. "Liu Shu, are you there?"

She didn't know if she had gone on another trip through her thoughts, so she checked. But her wording created a bit of confusion for the young World Tree.

The gentle, nature-like voice, both childish and ethereal, reached Flor with apparent confusion. 'Huh? Did you become blind, Flor? The system said that it is quite a big problem for creatures to get blind! Hm... I wonder if I can heal it somehow.'

Flor looked speechlessly at her before laughing. "No, no. I'm not blind, Liu Shu. Because I can't tell if you are in your thoughts or attentive, it was a way of checking if you could hear me. Nothing more, nothing less."

Liu Shu was confused and answered. 'But I can always hear you.'

It was the truth. Even when Liu Shu went on her thinking trips, her surroundings were still clear to her. It was just that unless it was related to what she was currently pondering, she didn't consider answering it and listened.

Unlike normal beings, Liu Shu didn't have any problems communicating with various people at the same time while understanding the conversations. It just needed more of her thinking power.

Flor shook her head, not understanding this fact about tree beings in general. "I mean it like, perhaps you are distracted or something. So, you can't hear me."

Liu Shu answered again, puzzled. 'But Flor, I can always hear you.'

Flor struggled to think of ways to communicate what she wanted, feeling that their conversation got stuck. "Ah! For example, those times you went silent for a while after I asked something."

Liu Shu answered with a puzzled tone. 'Do you mean when I went to think?'

Flor somehow felt that saying yes would be strangely rude. She didn't want to make it seem that Liu Shu taking too long to think was a bad trait. Unless the situation called for it, taking her time to think was a good trait. It was much better than rashly thinking and acting without taking consequences into account.

Since the conversation was not advancing, Flor coughed and commented, deviating the subject away from that topic. "Anyways, it doesn't matter much. You can build wherever you want and however you want, Liu Shu. We are in the open, so just place it somewhere you like."

Liu Shu looked around her with her *<World Tree Eye>* and pondered. 'Wherever I like? Hmm...'

Flor smiled. "Even though you might not be able to cover everything, you can start from somewhere and expand slowly, right? As you do with your roots, your defensive perimeter also needs time to encompass more land and become sturdier."

Liu Shu's mind flashed with ideas after hearing that. She exclaimed. 'Ohhh! That's very clever! You are very intelligent, Flor!'

Flor laughed softly, internally feeling delighted at Liu Shu's praise. "I'm glad I could help, Liu Shu." Then, she asked. "So... Have you thought in which area you will build it? I can ask the Rose Fairies to clean that area so you can start your construction."

Liu Shu commented. 'All around me!'

Flor blinked a few times, not understanding. "All around you? But didn't you say that you only had one structure?"

Liu Shu giggled. 'Yes! But if I create a flower field instead of a tree, I can encompass more land with the same materials and create a bush-like structure!'

Flor was confused. "But, you want something to kill things from far away, right? How will you achieve this with that design?"

Liu Shu explained. 'Well, there are several plants that are able to defend themselves by throwing things, right? Like you do with wind! So, I thought. I want to reach faaaaar, so can I not make a plant that launches seeds faaaaar and quickly? Like, BANG! Do you understand?'

Flor nodded. "I guess I do? But I will have to see the results before I make any further comments."

Liu Shu nodded, and Flor reminded her. "Also, the caravan will arrive today. So, in case they come with bad intentions, prepare yourself."

Confused, the innocent World Tree asked. 'Why would they come back with bad intentions? Aren't they friends because they fought together with us?'

Flor struggled with how to explain this. "Well, you see, people sometimes are very selfish and can disregard friendship for profit. Humans are a race that is quite adept at doing that. They are really good at reading emotions and controlling others with facades. That's why, even though they are not the strongest race, they are the most numerous. They know how to... survive. Forest races like us normally avoid mixing with humans because, to be frank, they outsmart us."

Liu Shu pondered. 'So, humans are bad?'

Flor shook her head for a few moments before pausing. "They are not... bad. They are just... Hm... complicated? Making a deal with a Sylvan, for example, you can rest assured that they will fulfill it and very rarely go back on their words. However, humans are fickle and often change their mind at the smallest trigger."

Hearing those words was a bit complicated for Liu Shu to understand. After all, these concepts were new to her. If she said something, Liu Shu always meant it other than the few pranks she did. However, she never really thought of saying one thing and then doing another.

Those actions felt wrong.

So, until now, Liu Shu had always taken everything they told her at face value. However, these words that were still a bit too complicated to understand were remembered by the World Tree, and they would eventually be understood by her.

Placing the complicated thinking aside, Liu Shu decided to start working.

Inside the <Lignified Vault>, the stacks of materials she needed to create it were already stacked into piles. So, Liu Shu just needed to move everything with her roots.

Similar to when she was assimilating the <Lignified Vault>, this process was energy-intensive, consuming rivers of energy to modify everything to her will.

Her other functions stopped, leaving her entire energy pool to create the structure. The sub-processes all around her body gradually came to a halt, leaving only those related to her survival and energy functioning.

As her focus increased, the aura around her also became increasingly concentrated.

Even though her Ternary Essences were not at Flor's level yet, because of how concentrated and pure her energies were, the effect was astounding and imposing.

The roots filled with neon-like veins, glowing enough that those too close to the surface managed to leak a bit of their colors. The air of mysticism and wonder around the enchanting World Tree increased together with her concentration, forcing everyone to pause and look at her.

Meanwhile, inside the closed Vault, energies leaked from her roots and covered the entire room, allowing Liu Shu better root control in the energy-filled environment.

With everything set up, her roots at the 60-meter mark around her began shifting and making space. She was thinking of creating the ring of flowers around that far away. As

she grew in size and reach, the ring would expand with her growth since her intent was for it to become one with her own body.

<Lignified Vault> was of the same nature, and as Liu Shu leveled up, the vault would expand. Speaking of which, the vault was around 200 cubic meters. Big enough for what the Rose Fairies had and big enough for Liu Shu's current needs.

Liu Shu's roots moved away from the walls of the vault and approached the materials, gently grabbing them and moving them into the earth. Using her affinity with her environment, she could transport things with her roots through the ground. Moreover, because the dirt was something Liu Shu had practically molded for her needs, she could easily control the movement through it as if it were a viscous liquid instead of solid ground.

So, gradually, all materials prepared for the defensive structure were moved into the ground and spread apart by following the design she had imagined.

From the outside, the sound of the earth shifting was heard, telling people that Liu Shu was modifying her surroundings with her powerful roots. The sense of power and awe it gave was enough to make many of the Rose Fairies pause to look at the marvelous creation of nature work.

Ignatia had decided to come today and meet again with those cheeky humans. Moreover, Flor had gone to her and shared her worries, so she had come with another 100 ants.

The group was stronger than her previous one, thanks to the ants having several breakthroughs after the battle.

When she arrived, she was immediately captivated by the mysticism created by Liu Shu's work. She quickly spotted Flor and approached her. "Flor! What is happening?"

Flor looked at Ignatia with a smile and floated to her side. "Welcome, Ignatia." She looked at Liu Shu and laughed. "Well, she is creating something. World Trees are truly impressive, aren't they?"

Ignatia saw how Flor looked at Liu Shu and blinked. 'Hm? The gaze is quite affectionate. Did something happen in the days I was gone?'

"So, good news or something? You are looking at the young one quite... differently."

Flor blinked and looked at her with confusion. "Am I?" Flor pondered. "Well, Liu Shu has recently learned how to communicate more appropriately, so I'm happy. I guess it is that?"

Ignatia hummed, giving Flor a long stare. "Nothing more?"

Flor looked at the large Ant Queen with a strange gaze. "What more can there be?"

Ignatia's smile returned. "I see. That's indeed good news."

Flor stared at her, speechless. "You are so strange sometimes."

Ignatia laughed and caught Flor between her hands, placing the relatively tall woman on her shoulder. Flor was a bit bigger than the other Rose Fairies, reaching around 45 centimeters in height, so when sitting on her shoulder, Flor looked like a large doll being carried around. Flor asked as she grabbed onto Ignatia's hair. "Don't you find it bothersome?"

Ignatia smirked. "Why should I?" Then, she quickly changed subjects. "So, when are these humans arriving?"

Flor shrugged. "Who knows?" Then, Flor explained her fears, and Ignatia nodded. "Well, that's really well-thought. It is not completely impossible."

Flor sighed. "Sorry for involving you in another dangerous matter."

Ignatia grinned, her compound eyes shining with amusement. "Don't worry about it. We are all protecting that little one with hopes of her giving us protection in the future when she grows, so I'm well aware that we'll need to sacrifice a bit before the tree bears fruits."

Flor laughed. "That's quite a way to put it. Well, it's quite right as well."

Ignatia giggled. "Right? So, be bothersome with me. I will help you as much as I can."

Flor softly smiled while looking at the Ant Queen. "Thank you, Ignatia."

As they spoke, an ant carrying a young Rose Fairy approached, and they both spoke using their own languages. "We've spotted the humans!"

Flor and Ignatia looked at each other with deep gazes and turned around. Just to be secure, Flor also called for the combat Rose Fairies and waited. 'Let's see, humans. Did you, or did you not fulfill your side of the promise?'

Chapter 74. Materials? Building Materials!

Ariel walked through the grove at a slow pace. 'It has been almost a month since we came here for the first time.' Looking at the forest around her, the sense of danger that she felt when she came here initially had disappeared. 'Honestly, being allies with a World Tree is quite good. The berries were much more popular than I ever imagined. And, I don't know if it is because they are from a World Tree, but even after a long time, they didn't spoil.'

Ariel looked behind her. The new caravan group that accompanied her was formed of four carriages. Two of them were full of materials Flor had asked them to gather before they left. Most of them were bought with the income generated by the berries. The third one was filled with proper merchandise, and the fourth one was a passenger carriage. It was currently empty, but it could be used for the people to rest.

The number of people in her caravan had increased, but not much. Ariel didn't want to spread the fact that there was a World Tree nearby to others.

When they approached the grove, Ariel looked back and said. "As I told you before, I will be entering the grove alone with my three trusted allies. Wait here and defend the merchandise. Once I make a pact with the monsters, I will come back with them to exchange materials."

A woman in the group frowned and asked. "Are you sure they are trustworthy? They might've lured you here to kill you. Also, how long should we even wait?"

Robert looked at that woman and squinted his eyes dangerously. "Hey, what's with this sudden attitude? We decided to come here together and make this deal back in the city. Are you getting scared now that we've come this far?"

The woman stuttered. "I'm just making sure. If something happened, wouldn't we wait here indefinitely?"

Doles crossed his arms. "One week, how is that? If we don't return in one week, you can leave." Then, he added. "Oh, and those who leave before the deadline will be banned forever from our group and any associates. The only reason to leave is if a powerful beast has appeared."

Robert approached the carriages full with materials and disconnected them from the others. He then harnessed one of the three creatures that had pulled the carts to this spot and led them into the grove.

The beast was a plant creature with several legs. Similar to a centipede, it used a complex net of legs to move through almost any surface without problems. It was long, around five meters, and its speed was incredibly fast.

Moreover, they only ate small creatures and grass, which was completely harmless for Sylvans, Humans, and other creatures who had domesticated them and used them as transportation. Their stamina was the weak point compared to other beasts. However, since their food was easy to acquire and buy, they were an affordable option and one of the most popular.

These creatures could also reach up to Level 9, becoming absolute monsters in terms of pulling capability. They could pull tens of carriages by themselves and cover long distances over complex terrains.

While there were a lot of options to choose from for pulling beasts, these creatures named <Centirage> were the most popular quality-price-wise.

Their own <Centirage> was level 4, relatively weak, but it got the job done.

When Ariel, Doles, Maley, and Robert crossed the grove and approached Liu Shu's area, their steps became slower. Not only them but even the <Centirage> became agitated.

Robert asked with a cautious tone. "What is happening ahead? Did something happen to them?"

Ariel shook her head. "Impossible. Didn't you see the strength of that World Tree? Not to mention, Flor, the Rose Fairy Queen, is an incredibly imposing existence. I haven't heard of a Level 12 appearing in the Golden Sap Forest in the last century."

Robert commented. "Never be so sure about these things. Since there was a beast tide recently, many territories got freed, and new beasts will occupy those. There is a big shift about to occur in the general fauna and flora in the Golden Sap Forest."

Ariel agreed with the feeling. 'I guess we'll have to approach silently first.'

"Doles, you are the best of us at stealth. Can you explore?"

Doles snorted. "You always leave me these dangerous jobs."

Ariel rolled her eyes. "You were the one that came to me at first bragging about it. Now that you've got the job you've asked for, don't complain."

Doles fake cried. "Ouch, Ariel doesn't love me anymore~!"

Ariel kicked his ass, sending the man flying into the trees. "I never loved you! Now go!"

Maley, seeing his brother make a perfect parabola and disappear in the forest, couldn't help but salute Ariel. "Perfect kicking motion, Madam!"

Ariel almost kicked him as well, but she held back.

It didn't take longer than 10 minutes for Doles to come back with a face full of wonder. "The fairies and ants are still there, so there haven't been any changes. This aura is because of the World Tree. The atmosphere around there is... incredible."

Curious, the four followed Doles while keeping a tight leash on the <Centirage> so that it didn't go rogue and they lost the merchandise they'd taken so much trouble into carrying here. They had expectations of receiving new items to sell since the previous ones were very popular and earned them tremendous profits.

Once they walked past the final line of trees that separated the grove from the area Liu Shu resided, they couldn't help but stop as the atmosphere, filled with ethereal blue lights, captivated them.

The aura of the World Tree spread all around the place, filling everything with mystique and intrigue. Ariel looked around for a few seconds, and when looking ahead, she saw Flor and Ignatia waiting on her while several Rose Fairies and Fire Ants stood behind them.

Ariel frowned and asked. "Is everything okay?"

Flor smiled and approached. "Well, it seems that way. Is there anyone else besides you that has come?"

Ariel shrugged. "Just us four are not enough personnel to move a caravan through cities. There are bandits and beasts that attack them, so we need a relatively large force to avoid being robbed."

Flor nodded and asked. "So, where are those people?"

Ariel pointed in the direction of their caravan and commented. "In that direction. We told them to wait for us for one week. If you doubt my words, you can check them by walking in that direction. Other than that, these two carriages you see here are full of materials for the World Tree. Those you told us to collect if possible."

Ariel smirked. "Not only that, we even managed to secure a few books that might interest the World Tree."

Flor blinked a few times and sighed. The sigh was a bit abrupt, and the four humans were puzzled and a bit alert. However, Flor returned to her usual smile and nodded. "Thanks a lot. Can I see the books?"

Ariel felt the air around Flor warm up, making her relax, and smiled back. "Of course! Come, come, Queen Flor. I bet you will love them!"

Ignatia approached as well and looked at them with her compound eyes. Doles and Maley were young men and couldn't help but lower their eyes to sneak peek at the absolute bomb that was Ignatia.

The ant queen was able to catch their gaze thanks to her vision, and she smiled at them. "Have you seen enough?"

Ariel and Robert glared at the brothers. They coughed, and Maley smiled awkwardly. "Sorry, Miss Ignatia. I couldn't help it because you are too beautiful."

Ignatia snorted. "I'm not interested in males."

Maley scratched his head, wanting to answer. 'I'm not interested in ant monsters as well.' But he didn't dare.

Meanwhile, Ariel picked up the books from the carriage and gave them to Flor. Flor was too small to hold them, but using Wind Aether Mana to make them float, she could slowly look at the titles and translate them.

"<City Structuring>, <How to Manage Economy>, <The Art of System Handling>, <Advanced Flora and Fauna Encyclopedia>."

After Flor read the book titles, she was satisfied. 'These are useful. Hm... Should I give them a few of the <Delicious Berries> as a sign of trust?'

Flor pondered for a while, and Ariel took this time to ask. "So, what's happening with the World Tree? Why is everything around here so... How to say it, fantastical?"

The Rose Fairy Queen answered. "I'm clueless as well. Liu Shu started doing something a while ago, and now, well, everything is like this."

Ariel remembered that Flor couldn't communicate with the World Tree, making her feel a bit sympathetic. "So, that book about communication didn't work?"

Flor shook her head. "No, it worked. However, the messages are still vague. Still, I can understand her a bit better, so I'm happy."

Ariel smiled. "Anyways, wanna check the list of materials we've carried here?"

Flor nodded eagerly. "Sure, show me."

Ariel jumped into the carriage and took out a wood tablet with white inscriptions. "Here it is~. Take a look. I even listed them as units taking into account what the World Tree considered a whole."

Flor raised her eyebrows, surprised. "Thank you for going that far."

Ariel grinned widely. "Well, since I'm on your side, I will do my best to help. I know that most creatures look at humans as dangerous and deceiving, so I want to at least try and make you relax."

Flor didn't deny it and looked at the list.

Materials List (F- Rank):

Saplingwood x1000

Yellow Cotton x1000

Earthmud x1000

Pebbleheart x1000

Material List (F Rank):

Sprout Heart x150

Earthspire x150

Yellow Cotton Thread x150

Dustheart x150

Material List (F+ Rank):

Budbark x10

Gustbark x10

Mistbark x10

Blazebark x10

Flor looked at the list with widened eyes. 'How in the roots did she get so many materials!?'

She reread the list many times over and couldn't help but feel that Ariel was pulling her leg. "I-Is this correct? I only gave you around 600 berries, and you've come back with all of this?"

Ariel shrugged. "While there are a lot of them, most of them are considered useless materials. One berry could buy many of them. I just didn't know exactly which ones you liked, so I bought a bit of everything, going by tiers and such. How is it? Is this good enough?"

Flor nodded like a pecking chicken, forgetting about the usual elegance she carried when acting as the Rose Fairy Queen. "Very, very. Good enough! More than good enough!"

Ariel burst into laughter, finding the 45-centimeter creature adorable. "I'm glad, then."

Ignatia, standing at the side, pouted and placed Flor on her shoulder. "Don't become too excited, or you'll fall from mid-air."

Flor chopped Ignatia's head. "What am I? A child that has not learned to fly or something?" Then, she looked back at the list and smiled. 'I'm sure Liu Shu will be ecstatic.'

Chapter 75. Ant Queen's True Face.

Ariel looked at Flor for a while, and when she saw the Rose Fairy Queen staring at the materials, she asked her. "So, where do I unload these carriages?"

Flor looked at them and said. "Come with me. There is a place where we can do so. As for space..." Flor looked at all the materials and became thoughtful. "They should fit inside, although barely. I never expected the Blazebark and other elemental barks to be so big."

Ignatia asked. "Didn't you have one Gustbark piece already?"

Flor nodded. "We do, but I thought it was a bigger piece than usual."

Ignatia laughed. "You are so silly sometimes, that's cute~."

Flor chopped her head again. After all, she was seated on her shoulder. Ariel looked at them and asked. "It's quite impressive."

Flor tilted her head. "What's impressive?"

Ariel commented. "Well, in books, it is always said that different forest races usually can't stand the sight of each other. Slaughtering each other for even the slightest grievances." Ariel pointed at the two Queens and smiled. "However, look at both of you."

Flor was about to speak when Ignatia interrupted and stated first. "Don't put us in the same category as wild beasts that know nothing and just listen to their instincts. While I can't say that we are as intelligent as races like you humans, the only reason Rose Fairies or I can't really become a "proper" race is because of the limitations we are born with."

Ignatia sighed. "My intelligence is far above average for forest creatures; however, even if I can compare to humans, I will never be considered part of a proper race because my progeny consists of little darlings who, sadly, can't develop complex thoughts."

Ariel listened as Ignatia continued. "Rose Fairies are similar. Their intelligence is clearly not low. Flor even broke a few barriers and is slowly taking strides to gain intelligence thanks to her recent transformation." Ignatia cut Ariel off, who was about to speak. "But she will never be considered one of the intelligent races. Even if she manages to build a country here, she won't. The reason is that her system is different. There is a difference at the core of our very beings that we can't change."

Ariel didn't speak as Ignatia spoke fluently and with intensity. "So, Miss Ariel, while we are forest creatures who, most of the time, probably lack intelligence in your eyes and with reason, do not bulk us with those beasts that move with just instinct."

Flor looked at Ignatia deeply, finding her words somewhat enlightening. She was a Level 12 and had recently developed a new view of the world. Her ability to think and discern situations was also getting much clearer.

Ariel nodded and said. "Excuse me, Ignatia. I guess I unconsciously grouped you up. I've been interacting with both of you, so I should be the one who knows what you just said the best. Yet, I was inconsiderate."

Ignatia nodded, her antennae bobbing up and down. "It's good that you know."

Flor changed subjects by pointing at the entrance of the <Lignified Vault>. "That's where we will store our items."

Robert looked at the large and heavy-looking door with interest. "Oh? You've built a subterranean nest or something?"

Flor smiled. "It's a vault."

Robert's thick eyebrow raised. "A proper vault?"

Flor nodded. "It wasn't like this at first. However, after we built it near Liu Shu, she somehow assimilated it with her roots and reformed it. The vault is not only spacious and secure, but it is also protected by Liu Shu. It is the most secure place for us."

Then, the Rose Fairy Queen's wings buzzed as she floated off Ignatia's shoulder and approached the vault's door.

Grabbing onto the hidden handle, Flor slowly pulled upward. Her strength was exceptionally high, even for her petite body, and soon, the heavy door began rising. From the depths of the entrance, a dense aura of pure Aether Mana and Anima Energy slammed onto them, creating a suffocating area around them.

Maley asked with a loud exclamation. "W-What's that!? What is this aura?!"

Flor pondered. "Hm... Perhaps Liu Shu is doing something down there?" She looked at the tree, but the tree's voice reached her first.

'Flor, close the vault. I'm losing mana density. I can't work well if I lose too much.'

With a quick motion, the Rose Fairy Queen closed the door, creating a loud bang. The powerful sound startled the rest, and Ignatia asked. "What's wrong? Is it too heavy?"

Flor shook her head. "We can't open it until Liu Shu finishes with her things, I guess."

Ariel asked with a frown. "And how much time will that take?"

She couldn't help but feel awkward as she answered. "I don't know."

Ariel, Maley, Doley, and Robert couldn't help but feel helpless as they looked at the World Tree. Being so close, they could feel the sheer magnitude of the energies being manipulated, so it was clear that she wasn't doing something that would be finished in a few hours.

Flor commented. "How about you leave all the materials here and then leave? It's not like it will matter much whether they are inside or outside the vault. Moreover, the space around Liu Shu is free, so dumping the materials there won't bother anybody."

Ariel found no better option, so she agreed with it. "Sure, we can do that."

For the next two hours, they worked together to unload both carriages. There was always someone around the <Centirage> so that it wouldn't flee from Liu Shu's presence. However, other than that, there were no problems unloading all the items.

Looking at the wide array of building materials, Flor couldn't help but feel happy. 'With this, we'll be able to build quite a few things.'

Flor then spoke. "Wait here, I'll come back quickly."

The humans saw Flor fly away into the forest with curiosity, but they didn't bother following behind her.

Robert looked at Ignatia and spoke seriously. "Ant Queen."

Ignatia's compound eyes didn't move, but Robert felt that even when Ignatia kept looking forward, she was looking at him thanks to the complex layering of her eyes.

Robert commented. "You know how your race is usually classified, right?"

Ignatia nodded faintly. "Intelligent Ant Queens like me are usually classified as a big threat, right?"

Robert shook his head. "If a beast tide and the birth of an ant queen are discovered simultaneously, guess where the top levels of that place will go. Will they go defend their country from the approaching beast tide? Or will they leave everyone behind in that danger and go hunt the recently discovered ant queen?"

Ignatia turned her head and looked at Robert. Being stared at by those compound insect eyes was pressuring, as reading emotions from them was impossible. While

Ignatia looked mostly human, her long antennae, compound eyes, large thorax-like tail, and the aura around her highlighted her lack of humanity. "They will hunt the Ant Queen."

Robert paused, and Ignatia smiled. "Do you know why I'm as intelligent as I am? After all, I'm just a monster born in a cave that has been surrounded by ants since birth. Even if ants can communicate, it doesn't make sense that my intelligence and vocabulary are as developed as they are."

The four humans tensed, many ideas flashing through their minds.

Ignatia laughed. "Well, I will leave you with that itch. However, know that I understand how dangerous I am. My existence is one that most other creatures hate." Ignatia looked toward the forest where Flor lived. "While not for the same reason, I've always been hunted. The only race that actually let us live in the forest without problems was the Rose Fairies."

Ignatia's throat made strange clicking sounds that sounded like laughter. "In truth, even before the World Tree appeared, I was never going to antagonize the Rose Fairies unless they made the first move. Thankfully, I avoided a life full of fighting for survival alone because I was patient and didn't start expanding as soon as I had the chance."

Ignatia smiled. "Before Flor became as strong as she currently is, who could stop me if I wanted? Frootar? Ha!" Ignatia laughed mockingly. "My numbers are in the thousands, while those of any other race in the forest never exceeded two hundred. I could stomp them using tactics, and I could stop them with raw power. Regardless, no one could stop me."

Ignatia spoke. "But if I did that, I knew that eventually, someone who is much stronger than I am would appear to stomp me into the ground," Ignatia enunciated mockingly. "Like the ant that I am."

The four humans didn't feel relieved hearing Ignatia's self-reflection. Quite the opposite, their sense of alertness was at an all-time high. The intelligence shown by the Ant Queen made it quite clear why they were considered a threat.

As monsters, every ant acted by pure instinct and followed the queen's orders. However, the leader was not as stupid. On the contrary, a humanoid Ant Queen was as intelligent as any other human. Ariel and the other three realized it now. Ignatia was, by no means, stupid.

If anything, she was even more wise, intelligent and cunning than most humans they'd met.

If someone tried to trick this creature, that person falling to the ant queen's mandibles would be much more probable unless the difference in strength was too high.

Ignatia commented with a smile. "So, dear humans. Flor is relatively naive and knows almost nothing about negotiation and everything, but I do." A menacing clicking sound escaped Ignatia's throat as she articulated. "If you think that I don't know that you've kept a few of the gains for yourselves from selling the berries, you are mistaken. Do not try to scam Flor or that little tree she adores again, understood?"

Ariel's smile faltered as her heart rhythm accelerated. As Ignatia said, they hadn't been completely honest. In truth, they spent just 60% of their earnings on buying these materials. With the other 40 percent, buying another *<Centirage>* and carriage and filling it with more materials was not impossible.

They just thought that, since forest creatures were clueless about pricing and other things, they would be able to earn a little extra while taking advantage of them.

Ignatia looked toward the forest and saw Flor returning with a large sack full of berries. "She is about to give you an even more valuable resource and trust you once more." Ignatia warned. "I, the Ant Queen, am protecting this grove. Don't you dare try and pollute it with your human culture of dishonesty."

Ariel and the other three felt chills rushing through their bodies, even when the pressure from Ignatia had disappeared.

Flor arrived with a smile. "Oh? Why are you so serious? Did I take too long?"

Ignatia smiled and picked up the bag while placing Flor on her shoulder again. "Don't worry, Flor. We just had a small conversation. How about you show them those berries? I'm sure they will be able to buy many more materials."

Flor nodded a few times. "Right? That kind of berry is very valuable, after all."

Ignatia looked at the humans and smiled. "You'll work hard, right?"

The four humans nodded solemnly, their faces carrying a smile uglier than crying.