

Ascension of the Sylvan Cosmos.

Chapter 76. Negotiations and Defensive Building Might.

Maley saw the bag Ignatia was carrying and couldn't help but wonder what was there for it to be so important. After all, the Rose Fairy Queen had taken a detour for it, which meant that it was not a common item.

He was not the only one thinking as such; Robert, Ariel, and Doles were the same. Ignatia saw their eyes and internally smiled. The reason she was so sure about revealing her true nature at the cost of scaring them and forcing them to make a call to high-level explorers were these berries.

Ignatia was not sure if all World Trees could produce fruits with the effects of the <Delicious Berry> or if they were unique to theirs. However, in any case, getting their hands on such an item would be like seeing a money-printing machine.

As caravan workers, they were naturally not bad merchants. The ability to move merchandise around and adapt the prices and other materials for the destinations they traveled to was an essential aspect of the work to create large profits.

Hence, Ignatia was sure that they would tie themselves to Liu Shu as soon as they saw the <Delicious Berry>'s effects. This certainty was what pushed her to reveal herself, adding another layer of weight so that the scale would tilt in their favor.

Flor spoke while looking at them. "The item here is one I found in the forest. I will naturally not reveal the source. However, know that you won't be able to find it either. Now, the name of this berry is <Delicious Berry>, and the effects are..." Flor paused and smiled. "How about you see it yourself? Here, have one of them."

Flor flicked one <Delicious Berry> into the hands of each of the humans, and the Level 9 humans easily caught them.

<Delicious Berry (F- Rank)>: It is a common, seedless berry with a savory taste and pleasing scent. It can give one experience point when level 9 and lower creatures consume it. A creature can ingest a maximum of three each day.

Once Ariel saw the effects of the berry, her eyes involuntarily widened. "W-What is this?"

Flor smirked. "How about it? Interested in having a few of these?"

Ariel's heart beat quickly, and her mind planned many things. Ideas flew one after another, and between them, greed naturally sprouted. There wasn't a single sane creature that wouldn't feel covetous after seeing such a thing.

3 Experience Points a day was incredible for creatures below Level 9. Usually, even the best Experience gathering methods below Level 9 didn't reach 10 Experience Points a day.

There were other methods to earn experience, such as Flor's Royal Pollination. Yet, such methods were an exception, not the rule. The existence of Royal Pollination was a result of many coincidences and the involvement of a World Tree.

Ariel asked urgently, her eagerness clear in her rapid speech. "How many of these can you provide me? What can I do to get more?"

Her quick words were a clear sign that reflected her inner greed for the item. Ignatia looked at her and spoke. "Hey, human. Relax. You are becoming too..." Ignatia sneered. "Human."

Ariel and the other three snapped out of it when the cold voice of the Ant Queen reached them, remembering where they were and who they were making a deal with.

While influence-wise, this forest group was nothing; they were a ticket to greatness.

Flor looked at Robert and spoke. "These berries are infused with a peculiar energy that softens one of the major roadblocks in an explorer's journey."

Flor was new to negotiation, but she was not stupid. Robert was a very old person, yet he clearly had plenty of fighting experience. The fact that he was Level 9 could only be attributed to one thing: he had hit a Level Cap.

The reason Flor could think of this so quickly was because most Rose Fairies would often find themselves in a similar situation.

As the Rose Fairy Queen expected, Robert's pupils shook as they locked onto her. Flor clearly knew that he understood, so she showed a smile. "Interested?"

Ariel frowned at the strange interaction. 'A major roadblock for Explorers? Strength? Intelligence?'

Ariel was not that sure. She herself was young and her experience with Level Caps was non-existent. Creatures would only start worrying about these things much later in life or when they reached them.

As a talented woman, she wasn't worried about that yet.

Doles and Maley were not that young, but they were also not as clever. The only reason they were with Ariel was their young age and strength, not much more.

Hence, while it was an obvious hint, the three humans failed to understand that hint.

Robert nodded with a calm tone, even though his stomach was twisting with eagerness to ask about what she meant more deeply. However, if Flor didn't say it out loud, there must have been a reason.

He was quite an old-timer, so tricks like these were not new to him. "Sure. It sounds like something interesting."

Ariel laughed and commented. "Well, learning about these things is quite refreshing. What's so important for explorers that the berry gives? I can probably get more materials with that information."

Ignatia internally rolled her eyes. 'This woman is too smooth for her own good.'

Flor felt a bit awkward, as Ariel's words left her with almost no way out. "I'll explain it later," Flor commented. "Anyways, this is the new merchandise I can share with you. What do you think?"

Ariel nodded and commented. "Powerful, valuable. To be honest with you, Rose Fairy Queen, it is very tempting."

Flor understood. Even she, as a Forest Creature, was stunned the first time she saw them.

"Well, let's speak about how many of them you want to carry back and what I should expect in return. Now that you have experience selling them, you should be able to give an approximation, right?"

"Well, I can more or less give you one." Ariel started. "However, with these new ones... I'm really clueless. Selling these to buy F Rank materials is nothing but throwing gold into a mud pit. With a batch that gives 100 Experience points, I can probably buy all the materials I carried today and more."

Ariel sighed. "They are too valuable to sell for such things."

Flor shook her head. "For you, these are valuable. For me, those F Rank materials are valuable." Flor commented. "I'll give you the entire list of materials we need. You tell me how many <Delicious Berries> you need for them."

After thinking a few moments, she added. "If you complete the assignment perfectly, I'll give you access to <Delicious Berries> for personal consumption without cost."

While they were valuable, Liu Shu could grow batches of thousands a day. Using 12 of those thousands as bait for these people was ridiculously cheap.

Her words were like music to their ears. Maley stepped forward and suggested. "Queen Flor, could you give us a written list? It will save us a lot of time if you have it."

Flor nodded and remembered that she had written down every building Liu Shu talked about, including the materials.

She examined what they had in inventory and added what Ariel carried this time.

<Materials>: Saplingwood (1014), Yellow Cotton (1210), Earthmud (1177), Pebbleheart (1001), Sprout Heart (152), Earthspire (151), Yellow Cotton Thread (152), Dustheart (151), Budbark (11), Gustbark (11), Mistbark (10), Blaze bark (10).

Flor finished adding everything, and it ended as such. Then, she looked at the list of materials they needed.

<Materials Needed>: Saplingwood (3820), Yellow Cotton (305), Earthmud (2400), Pebbleheart (4000), Sprout Heart (462), Earthspire (352), Yellow Cotton Thread (25), Dustheart (10), Budbark (52).

Flor compared the two and nodded. 'We have enough elemental bark, it seems. Then... I'll give them a list a bit larger than what we need. After all, having extra materials will not be a bad thing. Let's see...'

After waiting for around an hour, Flor returned with a tablet with carved letters and numbers.

Ariel looked at the tablet and read it.

<Materials To Buy>: Saplingwood (5000), Yellow Cotton (500), Earthmud (3000), Pebbleheart (5000), Sprout Heart (500), Earthspire (500), Yellow Cotton Thread (50), Dustheart (50), Budbark (100).

The human woman raised her eyebrow and asked. "You need all of this?"

Flor nodded, and Ariel joked. "Are you trying to build a town or something? Hahaha..." She stopped laughing because Flor nodded again. She couldn't help but ask again. "Really?"

Flor shrugged. "Liu Shu wants to build one, not me."

Maley asked. "What structures are you going to build?"

Flor commented. "We are going to build 10 houses, 1 Well, 1 Farmland, 1 Inn, 1 Town Hall, 1 Defensive Fence, and 2 Defense Buildings."

The four humans couldn't help but feel their lips twitch. 'Are they building a town or a fortress?'

With the conversation soon back on track, everything went smoothly, and the humans left with new merchandise to sell around a day later. Thankfully for Ariel, the people waiting for them didn't leave, allowing them to breathe a sigh of relief.

Meanwhile, Liu Shu focused on creating the root system of the defensive structure within a sixty-meter radius around her. The plant structure she was building was a ring of roots that could move energy around efficiently, and it was also connected to her own root system as a subordinate creature.

Above ground, it looked really beautiful, like a flower ring surrounding her. Moreover, it was colorful and filled with tubular flowers. Their mouths were closed, but below their stem, there was a sac connected with the ground.

Their anatomy also made their stalks quite thick, creating an exotic-looking flower overall. The Rose Fairies looked at them with curiosity, not having seen such a flower before in the Golden Sap Forest.

Ignatia asked while hugging Flor in her arms like a doll. "So, what is this flower? I'm quite clueless about that."

Flor looked at it with a pondering expression, her mind trying to find an answer. However, after a while, she couldn't think of any similar flower. "I... Honestly, I don't know."

Ignatia smirked and teased. "So much for the queen of flower fairies."

Flor defended herself with a mutter. "I'm the Queen of ROSE Fairies. Not all flowers."

Ignatia laughed and commented. "Well, these flowers are supposed to be a defensive structure, no? How do they work?"

Flor blinked and shrugged. "Well, we'll have to-. Oh?"

Both their heads swiveled upward, and they saw a blue and red-feathered bird swooping down toward one of the weaker Rose Fairies. Usually, a high-level Rose Fairy would intervene and either scare the creature or kill it if they were insistent. However, Flor ordered. "Don't intervene!"

The Rose Fairy, who was about to move, became puzzled and stopped. She didn't understand why she placed the young Rose Fairy in danger, but she trusted the Queen wouldn't let one of their own die in vain.

When the bird approached at around 100 meters, the Rose Fairies felt the Aether mana and Anima energy in the surroundings move and gather into the flower bed that had grown around Liu Shu.

One section of the flower bed moved, all of the flowers pointing toward the approaching bird, and then, the energy surged from the roots into the flowers.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

Each flower shot one seed with explosive power toward the bird. Not expecting such an attack at all, the bird was squarely hit by the flower's attacks and exploded into gore in the air.

Meanwhile, in Liu Shu's mind, a message popped.

[Congratulations on defeating <Bluered Raptor Level 7>. You've gained 11 Experience Points.]

Chapter 77. [Mother Of Thousand Flower Field]

Liu Shu oversaw everything while she constructed the defensive structure. She saw how the defense reacted to the attack, the signals sent during the attack toward her, and the subconscious processes behind how the defensive structure gathered and used the ternary essences. With her incredibly deep senses as a World Tree, she could follow everything from start to finish and make some adjustments for efficiency.

The entire construction process took five days after the first test that happened on the first day while protecting the Rose Fairy. While it shouldn't have taken so long, Liu Shu was a perfectionist by nature related to these aspects.

When the final link of the roots was connected, a powerful energy pulse spread from Liu Shu and covered the entire structure, activating the subconsciousness inside the new being.

[Your construction work was successful.]

[Congratulations, you've created <Level 4 Mother Of Thousand Flower Field (E+ Rank)>.]

[Congratulations! You've assimilated <Level 4 Mother Of Thousand Flower Field (E+ Rank)>. All their stats and abilities are visible, and their name has changed to <Lignified Mother Of Thousand Flower Field>.]

[System Hint: Assimilated structures will have a basic level of sentience and can act on their own. They will also be tied to the World Tree and grow with them. Their experience gain will be funneled toward the World Tree, and when the World Tree Levels Up, so will they.]

[System Hint: Defensive structures can be ordered to ignore specific creatures. The World Tree can also actively control them. However, while Defensive Structures have their own ternary essence reserves, forcefully controlling them will consume the World Tree's ternary essences as well. Moreover, while defensive structures Level Up with the World Tree, this, in turn, makes Leveling Up much more arduous for the World Tree as it will increase the time spent to do so.]

Liu Shu read everything slowly and nodded. 'Okay, I understand. However, system, where are my proficiency gain messages? Did you forget about them?'

[<Woodcrafter> is at MAX Level. Other skills related to construction have not yet been officially learned by Tianlian Liu Shu.]

[System Hint: Proficiency is never lost. It will be translated into the appropriate points and levels once the user breaks through or learns the knowledge. Skills can also be unlocked via actions without the need to learn the specific skills through books or manuals. After all, proficiency is experience, ability, familiarity, and knowledge related to the skill. The System page will show the appropriate Level and Tier for skills. When certain limits are broken, or knowledge is learned by the being, the chance to Tier Up without paying experience is possible as well.]

Liu Shu read that and summarized it. 'So, if I'm good enough, I can Tier Up Skills without paying those stupidly high Experience Point princes?'

[System Hint: Experience Points to increase the Tier of the skill are used to transform the Experience Energy into knowledge by the system interface.]

Liu Shu looked at that message and asked, curious. 'What are you, system?'

[The system is the consciousness of the universe after taking a semi-material form. Creatures are able to interact with the system as an evolutionary development. Naturally, creatures that are able to interact with it managed to gain strength and survive, while those who couldn't weren't able to continue their progeny. The trait of being able to interact with the system has been genetically passed down. Nowadays, there are no sentient races that can't see or interact with the system throughout the universe.]

Liu Shu looked at those words and felt something odd. 'Hm... Is that the truth...?' She was not sure, but it just didn't sound right. After all, why would it be partial toward World Trees? Liu Shu knew that the system did not act like it did with her for Flor or other creatures. The favoritism toward World Trees was clear.

However, Liu Shu's mind, while having developed enough to start questioning these basic things, was not developed enough to reach any conclusions. Hence, she happily forgot about it and opened her <World Tree Eye>. 'Well, whatever. Let's see how the <Mother Of Thousand Flower Field> looks!'

Information flowed through her roots and body, orderly and organized. When everything was processed, the world opened, and she could look at her surroundings.

Her vision expanded and spread around her, revealing everything in a 140-meter radius.

With it, the changed landscape entered her mind, making her exclaim. 'Pretty!'

At the sixty-meter mark, a beautiful ring of flowers was spread evenly. The flowers were around thirty centimeters tall, which was bigger than the average Rose Fairy. All flowers were tubular and drooped down like bells when they weren't active.

The charming landscape created by the flower ring and Liu Shu in the middle gave a magical yet captivating aura of natural wonder. While Liu Shu's aesthetic sense was immature, even she could sense the charm behind it. 'I built it nicely~.'

It was not her intention for it to look good, as practicality was everything for her as a tree. However, since it ended up looking pretty, it was naturally a plus she was happy about.

Liu Shu looked at her experience points next and saw that she had accumulated enough to level up.

Accumulated Experience: 1953

Level: 4 [0/1900]

'I can Level up! Hehehe' she was naturally ecstatic about it. While World Trees and related creatures weren't impatient to Level Up, that didn't take away from the surprise and excitement of it when it occurred.'

Her awakening didn't go unnoticed by Flor and the rest. After all, the presence the <World Tree Eye> carried with it was noticeable once you got used to it.

Flor flew over from admiring the flower ring and smiled. "Liu Shu, you are awake. How was it?"

Liu Shu giggled and said excitedly, like a child bragging to their parent. 'Look, look! It's nice, right? It is a strong defense for creatures far away! Now, even long-range creatures like you, Flor, can't hurt me easily!'

Flor asked with an amused expression. "What if they destroy the Flower ring?"

Liu Shu hummed. 'They can try. However, my defensive structure is different!'

Flor was startled and asked. "How so?"

Liu Shu giggled. "Well, the true body of the structure is underground! So, the flowers above can aaaaaaall be destroyed, but that will only take like 30% of the total Phoer Body Shards of the structure! Also, also, you know that the Flower Ring can regrow flowers quickly at the cost of Phoer? So~...' Liu Shu giggled maliciously. 'They can destroy the flowers and approach, and when they think they are at a safe distance, bam! They get surrounded by flowers and get slaughtered! Hehehehe.'

Flor imagined herself in that situation, and considering the firepower the flowers showed against that bird, she couldn't help but break out in a cold sweat. 'Once Liu Shu levels up... Dangerous.'

"Say, Liu Shu, can I analyze them?"

Liu Shu smiled. 'Of course!'

Flor looked at the ring and tried to look deeper.

Level 4

Aether Mana Shards: 1058/1058

Phoer Body Shards: 343/343

Anima Energy Shards: 484/484

Looking at those numbers, Flor was somewhat relieved. 'They are crazy for a Level 4, but at least they are not as ridiculous as Liu Shu's stats.'

Moreover, while the <Mother of Thousand Flowers Field> had just 343 Phoer Body Shards, it having that amount and, for example, a Rose Fairy having 343 shards was a different situation. One would need to spend much more effort to slice off all the Phoer Body Shards off the structure than to do the same with a creature like a Rose Fairy. Hence, to kill the <Mother of Thousand Flower Field>, you had to do damage to its entire root system to the point that it would be impossible to recover.

Remember that the Phoebe Body Shards represent the vitality of the creature. So, with it being assimilated by Liu Shu and supported by her, unless Liu Shu was defeated, completely killing off the structure was nothing but a pipe dream.

Flor circled around the entire ring of plants and asked Liu Shu. "This is quite nice. I wonder if it would be able to tank my attacks."

Liu Shu was startled and asked. 'Why do you want to attack her? Do you not like her?' Liu Shu spoke a bit faster than normal and looked a bit nervous. "F-Flor, <Mother Of Thousand Flower Field> is a good child. She is nice and peaceful unless you provoke me, then she will make one thousand holes in your body. B-But, she is not a bad child!"

Flor laughed. "Don't worry, Liu Shu. I won't attack it. Also, you speak as if it has its own mind. Don't you control it?"

Liu Shu sent a message filled with confusion. 'But she has her own mind.'

Flor paused and looked toward the World Tree with an incredulous look. "It..." Flor realized that Liu Shu was calling her a she, so she changed her wording mid-sentence. "She has what? How could a building have its own mind? Even though she is made of plants, she shouldn't be sentient, right?"

Liu Shu looked at Flor strangely and asked back. "Why not?"

Flor opened and closed her mind, not knowing how to answer. 'Isn't it normal for buildings to not have minds!? Am I the strange one, or is Liu Shu the one in the wrong!?'

She couldn't help but rub her forehead as another wave of headaches hit her. 'Ah... whatever. Buildings are intelligent now, got it.'

Out of curiosity and with a tentative tone, she asked. "Is the vault also sentient?"

Liu Shu answered back with a strange tone, as if Flor's question was silly and obvious. 'It is made mostly out of my roots, Flor. Of course, it is sentient. I am the vault in a large part.'

Flor looked at the World Tree with a deadpan. "Right. It is obvious."

Liu Shu agreed. 'It is.'

Flor, in her mind, shouted. 'IT'S NOT OBVIOUS, LIU SHU!'

But, outwardly, she didn't say anything and decided to nod and smile. Ignatia came a few minutes later and looked around with wonder. "Oh? Did the small one finish?"

Flor nodded as she sat on Liu Shu's branches. "She did."

As Ignatia approached, she suddenly felt the World Tree enter an excited state as a barrage of energy messages hit Flor one after another. She couldn't help but become amused as Flor's face went from a relaxed smile to an annoyed, helpless, yet pampering look. 'She really loves Liu Shu, eh.'

Ignatia laughed silently and heard Flor speak.

"Yes, yes. Those materials are from the caravan."

Flor gained a confused look, intriguing Ignatia more. "Huh? What do you mean, you don't want to Level Up?"

Seeing Flor get thoughtful, Ignatia asked with a smile. "What's wrong? Is the little one making trouble again?"

Flor shook her head. "She actually is making a great point. You know, she unlocked a special skill thanks to assimilating the Vault, right? So, she is wondering what would happen if she managed to complete that quest she had before reaching Level 5."

Ignatia was confused. "Level 5 is not an important level, though. From Levels 1 to 9, it's quite the same, right?"

Flor agreed. "I think so as well, but the earlier she completes them, the better the rewards, right?"

Ignatia shrugged. "Who knows? I only have one such quest as well, but completing it before Level 20 feels impossible."

Flor blinked a few times. "You do?"

Ignatia smiled smugly. "It's a secret, though."

Flor clicked her tongue and began pondering on how to answer Liu Shu.

Chapter 78. World Tree's Thoughts. More knowledge!

Liu Shu thought she could start building all ten houses since she had the materials. To make sure, she checked her inventory and the materials needed to build a house.

Inventory: Budbark x11 (F+), Gustbark x11 (F+), Mistbark x10 (F+), Blaze bark x10 (F+), Sprout Heart x152 (F), Earthspire x151 (F), Yellow Cotton Thread x152 (F), Dustheart x151 (F), Saplingwood x1014 (F-), Yellow Cotton x1210 (F-), Earthmud x1177 (F-), Pebbleheart x1001 (F-).

<Basic House>: Budbark x1 (F+), Sprout Heart x10 (F), Saplingwood x 100 (F-), Pebbleheart x100 (F-), Earthmud x100 (F-), Yellow Cotton (F-) x10.

'I really can build all ten, wow!' Liu Shu pondered. 'Or, I can build the largest building...'

<Basic Town Hall>: Budbark x10 (F+), Earthspire x100 (F), Sprout Heart x100 (F), Yellow Cotton Thread (F) x15, Saplingwood x 1000 (F-), Pebbleheart x1000 (F-), Earthmud x500 (F-), Yellow Cotton (F-) x100.

Liu Shu continued looking through her buildings and thought about all the options in her mind. 'Isn't it better to start from the largest buildings first?'

In Liu Shu's opinion, accumulating large stacks of materials was much harder than spending what she had. For example, she could fill the material requirements for one house at a time easily and build them slowly, but gathering all the materials needed for the Town Hall was more complicated.

Moreover, since materials occupy much more space once you stockpile them, other issues would affect her, like a lack of space, which requires extra planning.

Thinking of that, Liu Shu decided to build the Town Hall. 'I'll get the complicated buildings out of the way first and then focus on the smaller ones.'

So, when Flor approached, she commented on her intention of first building everything she could before Leveling Up.

Flor looked confused, and Liu Shu rationalized about the rewards she received previously. Then, she listened to Ignatia's and Flor's conversation, feeling that while they were right, she was not that hasty to Level Up.

Flor commented. "While doing things early is better, wouldn't you have much less difficulty if you build after you Leveled Up? Your ternary essences and stats would be much higher, and you would also earn quite a few more daily Experience Points."

Liu Shu agreed with that thinking as well. However, Liu Shu asked. 'What if there are rewards of different levels depending on when I build it? The system seems to like it a lot when I do things that go against the norm. For example, I got that <Defender> title because I was the lowest level and managed to contribute a lot in a war. If I was the strongest, that title would've never been given to me.'

Flor couldn't reason against that.

In Flor's opinion, Leveling Up fast was the best. You would gain strength, intelligence, and many more advantages. However, Liu Shu didn't mind about Levels. What Liu Shu wanted was to get stronger at a natural pace.

Some might argue that Leveling Up when you can would be the most natural thing, but in the World Tree's opinion, Leveling Up when you reached the limits of what you could do at that Level was the most natural way of doing so.

Why would you want to become stronger when you haven't explored your strength at the previous level? It was like learning about advanced woodworking after skimming through basic woodworking!

Liu Shu reasoned all of this to Flor, leaving the Rose Fairy Queen somewhat speechless.

Because of Flor's limited lifespan, and most creatures as well, the urge to Level Up and escape from the fearful thing called "aging" was always poking them from behind and pushing them forward.

Only ageless creatures like World Trees would look at life with such a relaxed viewpoint. Now, there were advantages and disadvantages for both. In truth, there was not a "single correct way" to Level Up.

Still, each race taught and thought about it differently.

Ignatia heard Flor speak about Liu Shu's reasoning and couldn't help but stop to think. 'No wonder World Trees are usually much stronger at the same level. If all World Trees have the same outlook as this little one, things get a bit more clear.'

Ignatia reasoned. "Flor, how about letting her do as she pleases?"

Flor frowned. "But, with the dangers that are surrounding us, we really don't have the leeway to grow slowly."

Ignatia smiled and reassured her. "Her way of doing things must be like an instinct. A desire that pushes her to do things a certain way even when she is taught the opposite. After all, you never really said that she should take her time, right? These thoughts are natural for her, which makes it clear that they are there for a reason."

Flor nodded, but her face still had a worried expression.

Ignatia laughed. "You want her to be able to protect herself, right? But, since she is eager to take things slowly, and convincing her otherwise feels wrong, we just have to get stronger ourselves."

Flor sighed. "I know. Moreover, it's not like the buildings she is building will not become part of her strength. For example, the defensive flower field has added a lot to her overall attacking capabilities." Flor rubbed her forehead. "I should relax a bit, eh?"

Ignatia found Flor's struggle to understand her maternal instincts for Liu Shu adorable. For the Rose Fairy Queen, who saw Liu Shu as her own, the feelings of wanting the best for her were predominant and made her worry excessively.

Liu Shu was at the side, listening to their conversation. She personally liked Flor a lot; she was like a guardian for Liu Shu and someone who she could turn to when she didn't know the path forward.

It was the truth that Flor was not too accomplished or intelligent, but she hadn't failed her once before. So, until then, her trust in her was high.

However, this didn't mean that she would listen to her unconditionally. Having respect for someone was different from listening to everything that someone said. Evaluating their advice with your own thoughts was a quality that a creature must have.

If not, there was a risk of being guided wrongly. Hence, because Liu Shu felt that there would be advantages if she finished the <Sylvan Quest> before Level 5, she didn't want to be convinced otherwise.

She felt a bit wrong because Flor's words were not without reason, and she was just gambling on her instincts being correct—a stark contrast to her usual slow and steady thinking.

Flor looked at the silent World Tree and somehow, she looked like a nervous yet determined child in her eyes. The vision flashed for a moment in her eyes, but it felt quite real. 'Huh?'

Flor blinked a few times, but the sensation never came back. Nevertheless, she didn't forget. 'I should encourage her instead of constantly suppressing her. If something goes wrong, we can always think of solutions later, and after she fails, we can have a deeper conversation. Until then, supporting her will be my... no, our task. Not interfering, just looking from a safe distance.'

Flor's doubts cleared, and her usual smile returned. "Good. Then, go for it, Liu Shu. The Rose Fairies and Fire Ants will be around to protect you in the meantime." Then, she commented. "By the time you finish with the Town Hall, the caravan might arrive again, giving you all the materials for the buildings that are left."

Liu Shu's mood lifted and she became excited. 'Really!? Where did they get so many things!?'

Flor laughed and flew over, sitting on her branch with a smile. "Well, outside the forest, there are many places called cities. There, all kinds of merchandise are exchanged. The materials you need are abundant over there."

Flor sighed. "While we, the Rose Fairies, gather the materials from fallen pieces and try to harm nature as little as possible, there are creatures like Thornstrides and River Beavers that kill trees and trade their parts for income."

Liu Shu asked, curious. 'Income?'

Flor nodded. "Yes. Here, a few books that you will like. How about you absorb these before you continue? They might give you a few ideas."

Liu Shu looked at the books and exclaimed. 'Ohh! New knowledge! Let's see~.'

<City Structuring>: Knowledge about how to expand and construct a City for future upgrades, installations, and other exotic structures that might be added. Structural layering knowledge is an important quality as an architect.

<How to Manage Economy>: Concepts about the economy and how it functions. Creatures own materials, and the ability to exchange them for other necessities of similar values is important.

<The Art of System Handling>: How to use the system for daily activities or complex tasks. Everything from when and how to analyze items or situations to what type of questions are answered by the system.

<Advanced Flora and Fauna Encyclopedia>: Tens of thousands of species in a single book. The perfect book for learning about the myriads of major species around the continent. Creatures from F Rank to D Rank! With some of the most common C Rank species, the titans of the world!

Liu Shu's branch danced happily. 'So many new things!' She really liked learning about anything and everything. 'I need to learn at least <City Structuring> before I continue building, hm.'

Liu Shu giggled. 'Well, I'll learn all of them. Hehehe.'

Flor saw four of the branches extending toward her very slowly. Ignatia raised her eyebrows when she saw that. "What is she going to do?"

Flor looked at her and realized. "Ah, right. You don't know this but-."

Before she could finish her sentence, the four branches sped forward and entangled the four books. Ignatia saw the books start to disintegrate into particles, leaving her speechless. "What is she doing?"

Flor's lips twitched, still not accustomed to this situation. "Hm. Well, she is eating the books?"

Ignatia looked at Flor, stupefied. "What?"

Flor smiled wryly. "You heard me correctly."

Meanwhile, Liu Shu was accepting the messages one after another.

[Do you want to Absorb the contents of <City Structuring>? Yes or No?]

Liu Shu happily accepted. 'Yes! I want to!'

[<World Tree Wisdom (SSS Rank)>, activates. <City Structuring> has been found to not fit with World Tree's knowledge. Modifying to fit <World Tree City Structuring>.]

Liu Shu exclaimed in surprise. 'Ohh! The skill can do that? Nice!'

[Do you want to Absorb the contents of <How to Manage Economy>? Yes or No?]

Liu Shu accepted again, and this time, there were no extra messages other than a congratulatory message for it being successful.

[Congratulations! You've absorbed <How to Manage Economy>.]

[Do you want to Absorb the contents of <The Art of System Handling>? Yes or No?]

'Yes, yes! I want to absoooooooooorb, don't ask so much!'

[<World Tree Wisdom (SSS Rank)>, activates. <The Art of System Handling> has been found to be faulty and full of gibberish. Absorbing only truthful information and adding context.]

Liu Shu laughed in her mind. 'Stupid people~. Heh.'

[Do you want to Absorb the contents of <Advanced Flora and Fauna Encyclopedia>? Yes or No?]

'YES! ABSORB IT ALREADY!'

[Congratulations! You've absorbed <Advanced Flora and Fauna Encyclopedia>.]

Once all of the messages were accepted, Liu Shu felt as if someone had hit her soul and mind with a hammer, and her <World Tree Eye> disconnected. Her last thoughts were those of lamentation. 'Ah, I forgot about this QAQ.'

Chapter 79. Tangled Roots.

"Explain our general situation."

"Understood."

The place where the two voices spoke was a decorated hall with luxurious wooden furniture. Unlike other places, the furniture was perfectly crafted and clearly built from dead wood.

The general ambiance in the room was one of opulence and elegance.

"We have lost the eastern hideout to the <Azurebell Heather Sect>. An ambush coupled with a high-level Sylvan razed the place to the ground. Almost none of our people escaped. Those who did are non-important."

There were nine people listening, divided into groups of three based on their clothing.

The one who asked for the explanation, a middle-aged man, asked again. "Such a sudden move. Any idea why?"

The man doing the report shook his head. "We have no idea why they suddenly became so active. However, we managed to uncover the identity of the Sylvan."

The nine people looked over with curiosity, and the man said. "It was Verena Liferoot."

The nine people got silent, looking at the messenger with puzzled looks. "Why did she move? We didn't really touch any of her bottom lines, right?"

The messenger shook his head. "We don't know why she moved."

A woman between the six commented. "Well, with the help of that woman, no wonder the place got razed to the ground. Any other news?"

The messenger paused and looked at the reports he had carried with her.

"Is there anything wrong?"

The messenger nodded, confused. "There was this report from a minor branch. I was going to dismiss it, but the situation feels strange. Would your excellencies like to hear it? Or do I move on?"

One of them, who had been silent so far, spoke, his voice low and gruff. "Move on. Small branches should defend themselves or be cut."

The first man who spoke previously sighed. "Can you just stay silent all the time? Every time you open your mouth you spout nonsensical drivel."

The man snorted, but he didn't retort. "Anyways, since you have it, we lose nothing by listening to it. Go ahead."

The messenger nodded. "There was a group of two Level 9s and a Level 10 that died, or, at least, went missing in the Golden Sap Forest."

Another woman who had been looking at the sky out of boredom turned her head with a confused face. "Golden Sap Forest? Where is that? Also, a mere Level 9 and 10? Why in the withered hell does that matter?"

Another of the nine spoke. "That place is a below Level 10 area. Only chiefs have Level 10 strength, but from what I heard, those creatures are F rank, F+ Rank at most."

The confusion in the woman's face cleared, and her eyebrow went up. "Oh? One of our Level 10s died in a place like that? That's certainly not normal."

The messenger looked at the information about the humans that died and said, "They were relatively weak. Regardless, do we do anything about this?"

"It still is not something of great importance." The leading man started. "Just send a group of First Energy Cycle hunters to investigate what's going on. If something happens to them as well, then we can start worrying."

The messenger wrote something on a piece of paper and threw it upward. The paper folded itself and became a shadow, vanishing as if mixed into the ground.

"Continue the report."

Meanwhile, in Fortuna City, Verdantia and Cinderielle entered the Explorer Association and walked toward the counter where they could get missions. The receptionist was a human man with a sunny look. He looked at the next ones approaching and had to look up as the two stunning and tall women stopped in front of him. He smiled professionally and spoke. "Hello, what might I help you with?"

Cinderielle asked. "Are there any requests to do around the Golden Sap Forest?"

The man smiled. "Wait for a moment, miss." He turned around and left to search.

Verdantia looked at Cinderielle with a deadpan and whispered. "Can't you be a little less direct, Cinderielle?"

Cinderielle blinked twice, not understanding. "What's wrong with my wording?"

Verdantia sighed. "What if there is someone who doubts us and is following us? Would you like to give them free information?"

Cinderielle shrugged. "Would there be someone like that?"

A voice interrupted their conversation from the side. "Miss, I couldn't help but hear about your interest in the Golden Sap Forest. Do you want to have a chat?"

Verdantia maintained a neutral expression, but her current desire to cross her staff with Cinderielle's face was strong enough to make her hands twitch.

Meanwhile, Cinderielle, who also kept a cool expression, was apologizing to Verdantia and Liu Shu several times in her head. Still, she tried to salvage the situation. "Hm, I can feel that sir is quite strong. Is there any request you would like to offer us?"

The man's smile didn't change, and he asked. "Oh? You can tell that I'm strong?"

Cinderielle smiled back. "I'm a Sylvan, sir. Our senses are a bit sharper than those of humans. I can tell at a glance that you are not weak."

The man laughed. "Right, right. Sylvans are blessed beings."

Verdantia's eyes sharpened for a fraction of a second, but they returned to normal quickly enough for anyone to notice. 'Not many people speak like that about Sylvans. Something is wrong with this person.'

Cinderielle didn't notice and continued. "So, sir. Do you want anything?"

The man nodded. "I've come from afar to visit the Golden Sap Forest. However, going there without checking in here for some missions felt like a waste. Then, I heard you speak, so I approached."

He shrugged at the end with a smile, and Cinderielle answered. "I see. Well, sir. We are from the academy nearby, and we are quite new to doing missions. So, we can't say much about the place other than what you can find in the guides over there."

Pointing at the side, there was a stand that sold guides and general knowledge about nearby places Explorers went to.

The man nodded. "I see. Thank you." Then, he walked away.

Just as he left, the sunny receptionist arrived and asked. "Are there any problems, Explorers?"

Cinderielle shook her head. "None at all. Anyways, can you show us the requests available?"

"Of course! Here they are. Please check them on the side, and when you choose, go to the counter on the right."

Cinderielle picked up the copies of the requests and went to one of the free tables at the side. A Sylvan waitress came with a broad smile and asked. "Will you eat or drink anything, beautiful ladies?"

Cinderielle looked at Verdantia, who shook her head. Therefore, she said. "We are good, thank you."

The waitress nodded and left.

Verdantia commented after checking her surroundings. "That man was suspicious."

Cinderielle blinked, confused. "How was he suspicious?"

Verdantia explained. "Not many people openly express our natural advantages as 'Being blessed.' Only religious groups think as such."

Cinderielle pondered. "And what's wrong with that?"

Verdantia looked at Cinderielle in an exasperated manner. "In this world, there are two groups that follow religion. The first is the <Verdant Sanctity Covenant>, and the other is the <Abyssal Void Nexus>." Verdantia saw Cinderielle's expression remain semi-confused and asked, incredulous. "Don't tell me you don't know about these two names?"

Cinderielle coughed. "Is there anything wrong with not knowing? Not everyone knows about everything."

Verdantia tapped the table and said, holding back her anger. "That would be the truth if the two names I've spoken about weren't the TOP 2 WORLD RELIGIONS." Verdantia took in a deep breath when looks were directed her way and continued. "It's like not knowing that there are Sylvans and Humans! While we are in the <Azure Rose Confederation> territory, their influence around here is not small!"

Cinderielle scratched her cheek. "Well, sorry. I'm a rural girl, okay? I moved to Fortuna City around 2 or 3 years ago, so I'm quite clueless about the general power dynamics. I just know some local powers like <Azurebell Heather Sect>, <Whispering Willow Sect>, or <Reverent Timber Wardens>."

Verdantia raised her hand. "That one! The last one you said!"

Cinderielle blinked and asked. "<Reverent Timber Wardens>? What's wrong?"

Verdantia commented. "That power, the <Reverent Timber Wardens>, are a subgroup of the <Verdant Sanctity Covenant>. Or, well, they are a group that follows the Covenant's beliefs. Usually, even in the territories of the major groups, smaller powers

of the other major groups are not prohibited. Well, all but the <Abyssal Void Nexus>, who is basically at war with the rest of the world."

Cinderielle exclaimed. "Oh! So the <Abyssal Void Nexus> is the bad guy!"

Verdanita looked at Cinderielle as if she were a subspecies of Sylvans lacking intelligence. Her gaze was so depreciating that Cinderielle felt her face heating up with shame. "W-What, am I wrong?"

Feeling that she needed to give this woman a bit of proper education, Verdantia lamented in her head. 'Is she really my rival in getting Liu Shu's affection? Why is a genius Fire Aether Sylvan so ignorant? Do they not teach anything in rural areas? I need to keep this in mind when Liu Shu's dominion extends throughout the world.'

Verdantia sighed and commented. "Anyways, that man, the one we saw, called us, Sylvans, blessed." Cinderielle nodded and motioned for her to continue. "The way he spoke might appear praising, but in truth, it is a way of looking down on Sylvans. Something like 'Sylvans are strong only because they are blessed.' This kind of thinking is predominant in the <Abyssal Void Nexus>, as they are a group with a majority of their members being human and less than 0.01% being Sylvans."

Cinderielle blinked. "They say we are blessed but... Blessed by who?"

Verdantia looked at the orange-eyed woman for a few seconds, and Cinderielle fidgeted in her seat. "W-What's wrong?"

Verdantia asked, or well, it was more like a statement. "You don't know who they worship in their religions, do you?"

Cinderielle laughed. "Hehehe. Nop."

Verdantia sighed and rubbed her forehead. "We'll delay our visit to the forest for three days."

Cinderielle's eyes widened. "Why!? I wanted to see Liu Shu and-!"

Verdantia's face, cold as the moon, cut off her words. "I'm going to make you learn as if you were Liu Shu and force you to swallow books!"

Cinderielle felt that Verdantia was not joking and stuttered. "I-I don't have a skill for that."

Verdantia's lips arched quite diabolically. "Let's awaken it, then."

Cinderielle felt that becoming friends with this woman was as much of a blessing as it was a curse. 'Who would've thought that below the usually elegant, calm, and gentle woman, there was a cold-faced demon!?'

Verdantia grabbed Cinderielle by the collar and dragged her out while using a few roots to place the copies of the missions on the counter. "We are returning these. We won't take any missions for now, thank you."

The receptionist saw Cinderielle's lamenting face and Verdantia's cold face and decided that interrupting or asking about what was happening was unnecessary. "Sure. I hope to see you soon."

Verdantia spat. "That will depend on how fast she can swallow books!"

The receptionist's head was filled with question marks, but he didn't dare retort.

Meanwhile, Cinderielle was lamenting in her head. 'I want a refund! A refund of my friendship!'

Chapter 80. [World Tree City Planning] Effects.

Liu Shu took around four days to learn and assimilate all the contents of the books she swallowed this time. It was a short time considering the information that was printed in the encyclopedia.

There was one thing that bothered her quite a bit. 'I should've learned the <World Tree City Planning> before creating my defensive structure.' She expanded the <World Tree Eye> skill and inspected her immediate surroundings.

'As expected, I should've started building the wall to at least create an inner circle where I would create my first city section. As I grow, since my buildings will be linked to my body, they will naturally grow apart from me. If not, all my efforts would be wasted when I become large enough to cover tens or even hundreds of meters wide.'

Liu Shu learned a bit about how truly large World Trees could get. It depended quite a lot on the World Tree species, but in general, reaching beyond the clouds was possible.

Liu Shu lacked knowledge of what clouds were, but she knew that they were things thousands of meters above the ground. 'Speaking of which, what type of <World Tree> am I? My race just says "World Tree" and nothing more. System?'

[Request Denied.]

Liu Shu asked, confused. 'Why? Can't I know what type of <World Tree> I am?'

[World Tree Races are part of a creature's power. If Tianlian Liu Shu has yet to unlock the potential of her special powers as a World Tree, she will be named just <World Tree> in the system interface.]

Liu Shu hummed in her mind, finding those words interesting rather than annoying. 'So, I do have a power, but I haven't awakened it yet.'

This slight change in thought process would come as a surprise for others since it showed mental growth for the young World Tree. Liu Shu moved away from thoughts quickly and refocused on her surroundings. For the first time, she couldn't help but lament her lack of vision range. 'Cities are hundreds of meters or even kilometers wide, but my vision barely reached 140 meters. Even my normal vision that's not supported by <World Tree Eye> reaches just around 160 meters around me.'

Liu Shu heard Flor's voice reach her. "Liu Shu, are you awake?"

Her voice snapped Liu Shu out of her thoughts and she became cheerful again. 'Flor! How long was I sleeping? Although, I can guess it was four days, hehe.'

Flor smiled. "Yes, it was four days." She asked. "How was it? Anything that you are worried about?"

Flor expected the usually carefree tree to tell her that it was okay, but instead a long rambling of complaints started slamming into her brain. 'MANY! Listen, listen, Flor! You see, I placed the defensive structure, right? BUT! Why did nobody tell me that I needed to plan how I placed my things? I just thought of making them pretty and placing them around me as I liked! Thankfully, I got the book! That book tells many things about City Building, Flor! There are many interesting concepts. And, and, you know, there is also a way to calculate how large the city must be and the proportions so that when I grow, the city doesn't lose its shape, and...'

The constant rambling forced the flying Rose Fairy Queen to sit down on one branch as she closed her eyes. 'As her strength and spiritual strength grow, her energy pulses are getting stronger. Before, they were just little taps. Now, I feel like my brain is being agitated inside my skull. I think I need to teach her how to control her communication skills.'

After listening to her ramblings for around fifteen minutes, Flor commented. "So, in short; The position of your defensive structure is not to your liking."

Liu Shu giggled. 'Yes!'

Flor sighed. "Liu Shu, the structure is one with you, right? Like, it is connected with your roots."

Liu Shu exclaimed in agreement. 'That's right!'

Flor hummed. "Then, can't you move it around as you please, although it might take time?"

Liu Shu became silent, making Flor think she said something wrong. "You can't?"

A bit embarrassed, Liu Shu answered. 'I can...'

Flor blinked and laughed. "Did you forget that you could do that?"

Liu Shu felt even more embarrassed when Flor pointed it out. 'I did...'

Flor patted the trunk of the World Tree gently while laughing. "Don't worry, it happens to all of us."

Liu Shu asked, doubtful. 'It does?'

Not expecting such an answer, Flor was stumped for a second, but she recovered. "Y-Yes, everyone has these silly moments."

Liu Shu's cheerfulness was quick to return. 'Oh! Hahaha, then it doesn't matter!'

Flor had the urge to raise her hands in surrender. 'Her optimism is invincible.'

The Rose Fairy Queen then asked. "So, what are your plans? Which building will you build next?"

Liu Shu answered unexpectedly. "The walls!"

Flor blinked. "The walls? Do you mean the <Basic Defensive Wall>?"

Liu Shu's voice was determined. 'Yes! I want to create the outer layer of the town's perimeter so that I can build from the outside to the inside. While doing the opposite gives more freedom of construction, the way I do it makes it easier to assign spaces to the structures I will build. Moreover, I can create a multi-ring city so that I can place the important structures in the inner ring while I place housing in the outer ring. Then, with that, I will be able to continue to expand and create intricate yet simple roads and streets to connect everything. It can also serve to separate those I trust to be near me and those I don't.'

Flor was listening with her mouth slightly opened. 'Eating books is quite good, eh? I should focus on this. Her intelligence regarding those topics is incredible. Instead of just absorbing the information, it seems that she digested it and assimilated it, turning it into practical knowledge.'

With several new ideas in mind, Liu Shu's gaze toward her surroundings evolved. Instead of seeing it as just nutritious land that she liked to eat, it was slowly and

meticulously analyzed. Her roots that extended all around the place helped her imagine the ideal positioning for all the structures. This positioning was ever-shifting, becoming more refined as time went by. 'Hm. Doing the wall first is the clear option. When I do that, and I have limited space, I'll be able to plan better.'

Liu Shu checked the materials for the wall and told Flor that she was going to begin building it. Before that, Flor asked. "Liu Shu, you haven't changed your mind about first leveling up?"

Liu Shu sent a negative message through her thoughts. 'Nop. I will build the entire town first... Well, the structures that the quest has asked me for. There are a few basic amenities that the quest has skipped that I might do as well. But... I need to unlock the architect skill, or anything similar before I do so. If I don't, then I will just Level Up after the quest structures.'

Flor smiled. "Well, lately, everything is calm, so take your time."

The World Tree asked. "By the way, Flor. How far are you away from Leveling Up?"

Flor blinked and smiled. "Well, I need 7440 Experience Points to level up, and I recently did so, so you can imagine that I am quite far away, haha."

Liu Shu exclaimed. 'So many!'

Flor agreed. 'It gets increasingly difficult to Level Up. Thankfully, Royal Pollination speeds things up a lot. Compared to the Experience Points I gained before, my current pace is like flying!'

Liu Shu felt happy for her. 'It's nice that you can become stronger quickly!'

"That's true," Flor added. "Speaking of becoming stronger. Have you done anything to the Rose Fairy Garden where we grow our young?"

Liu Shu commented. 'I've been covering it with my <Enchanted Growth> skill. Is there a problem?'

Flor smiled. "None at all. The new children are quite a bit stronger than they used to be, so I was curious. Go on and do your thing. I guess that a wall will take quite some time, so by the time you finish, the caravan might've arrived with the new materials."

Releasing a cheerful aura all around her, Liu Shu giggled. 'Nice!'

Flor didn't inform Liu Shu about Cinderielle's and Verdantia's visit. She had actually met once more with them outside of Fortuna City during Liu Shu's slumber, and they told her about their plans.

The Rose Queen's lips arched. 'Heh. Even if you come, Liu Shu will be occupied with her things. No chance of trying to place your roots on her. Heheheh, hahahaha.'

The Rose Fairies flying around couldn't help but turn with weird looks and look at the laughing Rose Fairy Queen.

"Is the Queen okay?"

"I guess strength finally affected her brain."

Clavel smacked their butts very gently. "Hey, less chatter. Have you already fertilized the land around Liu Shu?"

The two Rose Fairies giggled. "Not yet~."

One of them looked at Clavel's slightly taller stature and smirked. "How is your promotion to Level 9, Miss Clavel~?"

Clavel smirked. "It's very nice. After the fighting and such, I've finally accumulated enough strength to Level Up! Well, I'm not the only one, but I've reached Level 9, which is the limit of most Rose Fairies." Clavel sighed. "I wonder if I will ever be able to reach Level 10..."

Amapola approached and commented. "Don't worry, with Liu Shu's help, it will be possible."

Clavel blinked. "Oh, you are so sure about it?"

Amapola smiled. "I'm actually about to break through into Level 10."

The three Rose Fairies exclaimed. "WOW!"

One of them approached, her characteristic red eyes glittering. "Really!? You are about to Level Up?"

Amapola nodded. "I've accumulated enough experience already. I'm just trying to understand how to do it." Amapola commented. "At first, it felt impossible, like an impassable barrier. But, as I ate more and more <Delicious Berries>, that barrier started to loosen, and now it is quite faint. I can already grasp some of the concepts about the Energy Cycles and how to create them."

Clavel asked. "Can you tell us?"

Amapola shook her head. "Queen Flor, Lady Ignatia, and even the humans I asked all told me not to share them. The reason seems to be that each person has their own way of doing it, and being influenced by others on purpose is not quite good." Amapola

commented. "Of course, sharing sensations is not bad. I think the problem is with the details. I'm not sure, though."

Clavel looked at Amapola with an unimpressed face. "I don't like that."

Amapola shrugged. "They all told me I would understand once I Leveled Up."

Clavel pouted, but she didn't insist. Still, she soon regained her usual smile as her eyes landed on the growing World Tree. "While there have been a few complicated situations, I feel like everything is going better since we came under Liu Shu's canopy."

Amapola nodded and said with a melancholic tone. "Some of us won't make it, but at least our race will flourish under her. It is a bit of a gamble, but I heard the humans the other day say it and feel like it is appropriate. 'No pain, no gain.'"

The Rose Fairies felt that those words were interesting and quite truthful.