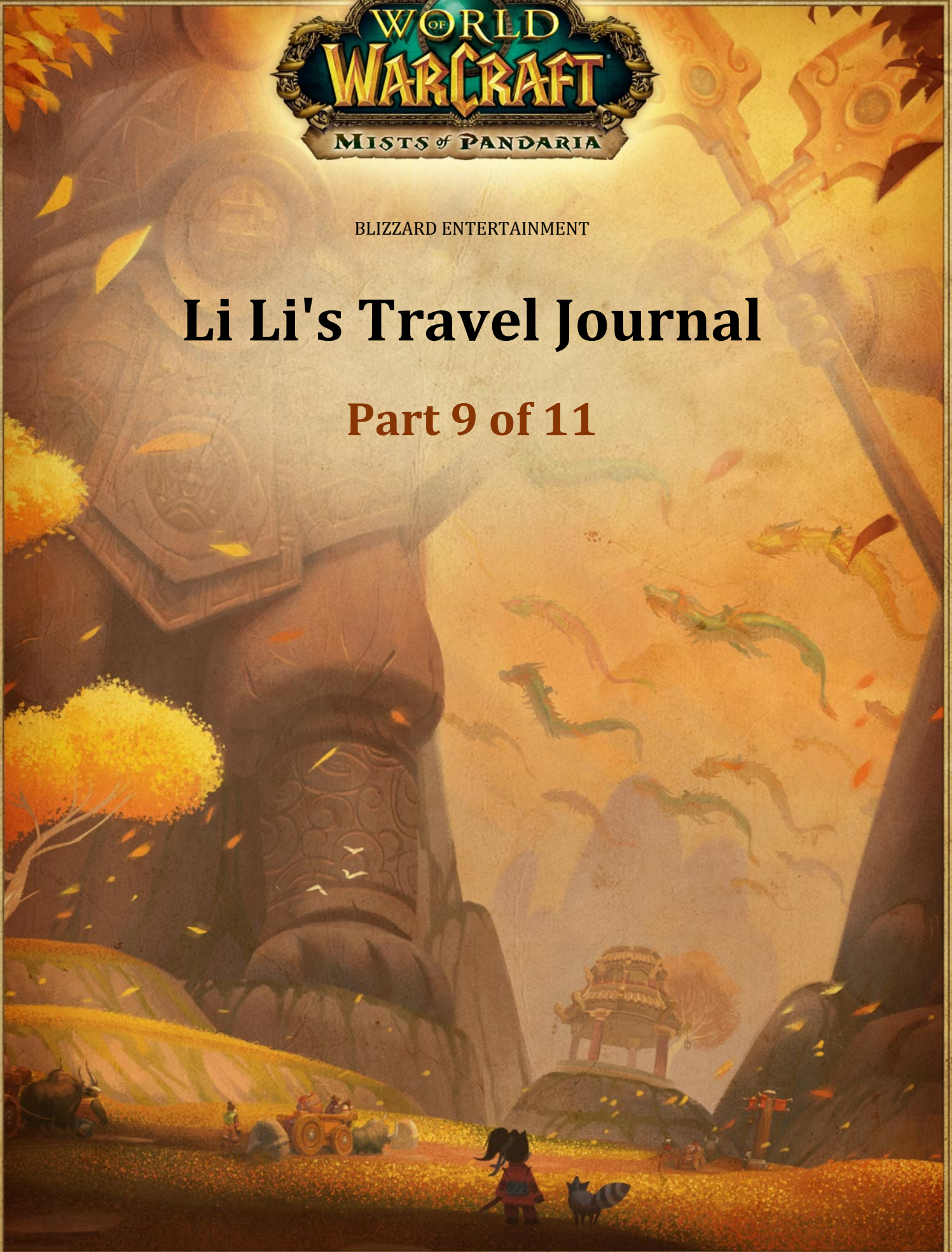




BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT

Li Li's Travel Journal

Part 9 of 11



Entry Nine: The Vale of Eternal Blossoms

The Vale of Eternal Blossoms was like its own little world hidden in the heart of Pandaria. A warm, calming breeze washed over hills of golden grass. Leaves and blossoms rained down from the trees, filling the air with a sweet smell. Instead of getting all dry and crunchy like normal leaves and petals, the ones that fell stayed fresh and soft for days.

A lot of the things I saw seemed to fit with the legends I'd heard of the vale. Cubs across Pandaria grew up learning myths about the place. One of the most popular stories was that the region was home to a handful of magical pools. Some people even claimed that the waters could perform miracles! There was definitely something special to the vale, and I wasn't the only one who wanted to see if the tales concerning the region were true.

Dozens of pandaren refugees flocked to the golden valley. Almost all of them had been driven out of Kun-Lai Summit, their homes destroyed by the yaungol. The poor folks brought as much as they could carry with them, which in most cases was only the clothes on their backs. If they were lucky, they also had a yak or two, some old family heirlooms, and enough food to last them maybe a couple of days.

I joined two refugees—a pandaren named Buwei and his son, Little Fu—who were traveling by themselves. They were both pretty quiet until I put the ol' Stormstout charm to good use and learned more about them. It turned out Buwei and his cub had lost *everything* in a yaungol attack in Kun-Lai... even the rest of their family. Now, the father and son were headed to Mistfall Village, a place in the vale that had become a refuge for many of Kun-Lai's pandaren.

Like all of the refugees, Buwei and Little Fu believed they'd find peace in the valley. And who could blame them? Until a few days ago, the vale had been blocked off from other

areas of Pandaria for thousands of years. All that time, the great celestials had watched over it closely. The legendary beings handpicked special caretakers—the Golden Lotus—to help them keep an eye on the vale. The pandaren I met said it was a huge honor to be chosen as a member of the sacred order, but the whole thing seemed a little weird to me. I couldn't imagine a godlike creature showing up one day and asking me to leave my friends and family behind to spend my life in a secret valley.

All that aside, I understood why the refugees were coming to the vale. With the celestials and the Golden Lotus around, it was probably the safest place in Pandaria.

At least, it *used* to be.

Buwei told me that the vale had once been the seat of the mogu empire. Recently, the big stinkers had found a way back inside the valley and were trying to reclaim their old turf. It was hard to believe that the mogu had ruled over a place as beautiful as the vale, but statues of them were everywhere!

Despite the news of the mogu, Buwei and Little Fu cheered up as the days wore on. I wished I could take credit for that, but the honor went to my bandicoot, Shisai. The furball had gotten over most of his anger issues once we'd left Kun-Lai. But just in case, I taught the two refugees how to calm him down if he got a little cranky, using treats and chew toys. Buwei and his son played with the bandicoot a lot. Having him around must've taken their minds off of everything they'd lost, especially for Little Fu. The only time he smiled was when he held Shisai. Pretty soon the cub became a master at taking care of the critter.

When we finally reached Mistfall Village, I was surprised at how big and lively it was. The village's stone streets looked ancient and worn, but many of the buildings seemed new. Buwei said that Mistfall used to be smaller, just a few structures here and there occupied by

the Golden Lotus, but the first wave of pandaren from Kun-Lai had quickly expanded the place.

The refugees hadn't wasted any time making themselves at home. The sounds of pandaren chatting, laughing, and singing filled every corner of the village. Most of the carts they'd brought had been broken apart and rebuilt into makeshift tables and market stalls. Leftover scraps were used as firewood to cook big boiling pots of green curry fish or to roast skewers of peanut chicken. Now and then I saw sprites—like the ones back on the Wandering Isle—peek down from atop the roofs. The mischievous little guys watched the refugees go about their business before darting out of sight.

Visiting Mistfall was great, but I still wanted to explore the rest of the vale. I set off early the next morning. Buwei was sleeping. So was Little Fu. The cub was smiling, his arms wrapped tight around Shisai. I'd been planning on taking the bandicoon with me, but after seeing how happy he made Buwei's son, how could I? After everything Little Fu had been through, he deserved Shisai. Plus, I was getting tired of finding the bandicoon's hair in my clothes, food, and tea every day. At least... that was what I told myself to keep from blubbering like a baby as I wrote a good-bye note for the father and son. Then, I made my way out of the village.

Just after sunrise, someone—or *something*—started following me through the vale. I felt it in my gut, but what really tipped me off was the weird stench that hung in the air like incense. It reminded me of Ryshan and the other anglers in the Krasarang Wilds: a mix of sweaty fur and fish parts. I tracked the smell down and caught my stalker hiding behind a big boulder. At first I thought it was my granny Mei, but after a closer look I realized the thing wasn't as hairy as she was. Not by a long shot.

It was a grumple. I'd seen the strange creatures in Kun-Lai, but I'd never met one of them up close. They were expert mountain climbers and trackers with an incredible sense of smell. Traveling around the hostile mountains made them pretty superstitious, and they had a habit of carrying charms (like coins or rabbit feet) called luckydos. Grummles even took on the names of their favorite luckydo, which in the case of my new friend also explained the stink...

"Messenger Fishtail at your service!" the grumple said. "Chen Stormstout sent me to find you, but it was most difficult. I followed for many days making sure *you were you*. Not enough stink. You need a better luckydo."

"Or you could've just asked me who I was," I replied.

"A grumple always trusts his nose above all else."

He handed me a scroll addressed from Uncle Chen. Between the ale stains and bits of spicy tofu splattered across the parchment, I learned that he'd finally gotten off his butt and left the brewery. Not only that, he'd found *more* Stormstouts in the Sunset Brewgarden, some kind of settlement in a region that he cryptically called the Dread Wastes. He told me to meet him at one of the guard towers along the Serpent's Spine, the great wall that stretched across western Pandaria.

And Li Li, Uncle Chen wrote at the end of the letter, whatever happens, do not go to the other side of the wall! It is extremely dangerous there. Just stay put when you reach the guard tower.

The fact that he didn't mention the way I'd run off without his permission made me nervous. Something big was happening down in the Dread Wastes if he was going to let that slide. As much as I regretted leaving the vale, I knew that Uncle Chen needed me. And, well, I *really* wanted to walk on the wall.

"Come, come!" Messenger Fishtail pointed west, where the Serpent's Spine ran across the vale's edge. "I will lead you to the wall, but we must hurry. East winds are blowing. That means good luck and safe travels!"

Even from far away the Serpent's Spine looked *huge*. I'd first seen the barrier in the Valley of the Four Winds. From that moment on, I'd been hoping to one day gaze out across Pandaria from the top.

Well, that day had finally come.
