

## The Crafts 111

### Chapter 111: Winter-Summer Axe Versus Upgraded Brown Shield

"The final product is a vestige I made by combining two major philosophies; a new path I've decided to pave myself. The idea is still under realisation, but it's more than enough for today. You should feel proud being the very first vestige-smith to experience this first-hand in a duel."

After Lucas said that, the hum quietened and the glow disappeared. The entire area was silent as the crowd was stunned by just what took place. They could all feel that the brown shield became different after the metal plate was inserted, but they couldn't put their finger on what the difference was.

If anything, the brown shield gave off a strange solemn sensation.

Ignoring the confused looks, Lucas finally gave the shield to the robo-tester to begin the vestige.

"First test, hardness test."

The overseer recovered himself and adjusted his monocle. The overseer had his reasons for choosing the hardness test as the first test.

After the brown shield's transformation, even he, despite being an appraiser of the Silver Fig Trade Convention, was unable to spot the change in the shield. To be exact, he had sensed a rise in stellar energy purity and quantity and spotted slight changes to the runes, but that was all; if he were to have truly noticed nothing, then he was incompetent.

However, the appraiser believed that the change wasn't limited to just that; in fact, he felt it was much more. This was why he went for the hardness test.

The hardness test was a priority test for shields to pass, alongside durability and strength tests. Passing alone wasn't just enough, as they had to ace it. A premium model shield vestige had to score the highest in these tests. Even an average model had to score within the highest possible range for an average model vestige.

The performance of the brown shield was already known to all, but the appraiser felt that there would be a surprise waiting after that transformation, hence why he wanted to figure it out right away.

Nicholai glanced at the appraiser and could guess his thoughts, but he wasn't bothered. From the start, the advantage was in his hands, and he had made proper preparations. What could a metal plate attached to a shield change?

The robo-testers carried the two vestiges to the hardness testing equipment, which was a complicated piece of equipment about a metre and a half tall (fifty-nine inches or roughly five feet tall). It looked like something one would get straight out of a factory or a laboratory, with its arms, sensors, displays, and hydraulic press.

There were three stages in the hardness test, each done with three different attachments used on the equipment.

The first stage was carried out with the first attachment, which was a probe with a sharp tip, similar to the Vickers hardness testing machine. The probe would stab the vestige with a specific force that would be slowly increased to find the vestige's penetration point.

The second probe had a blunt round tip and was used for finding the dull indentation point of the vestige.

As for the third probe, it was shaped like a trident. Its function was a bit more complicated than the other two, but it worked for checking the scratch resistance and rune defence features of a vestige. As there were runes that increased the strength and hardness of a vestige, it was only natural for the effects of such runes to be tested in this regard.

This was a different test from the stellar matrix efficiency test carried out in vestige duels.

Compared to his previous vestige duels, as this was one with great stakes, the equipment used for testing was a level higher than the ones Lucas was more acquainted with. Just the difference in height between the hardness tester used here and the one used in his vestige duel against the freelancer was enough to show the difference.

The preparations for these pieces of equipment were done earlier since many had already predicted he would be challenging Nicholai today.

Both vestiges were tested at the same time, with all three stages carried out at once. It came as no surprise when the Winter-Summer axe began to show signs of damage before the brown shield. In all three stages of the hardness test, the brown shield came out on top.

The point systems followed the same logic for the Grade 2 vestige duels. From the 201 points mark up to 500 was left for Grade 3 vestiges. This was quite a vast range compared to the 100-200 points for Grade 2 vestiges.

The reason for this was simply because Grade 3 vestiges could be made in various ways and by different people, who were even more skilled and creative than Grade 2 vestige creators, the Tier 1 vestige-smiths.

For a Grade 2 vestige, it usually had to average at least 400 and above in all tests to be considered a masterpiece. The even more powerful ones could go past 500 points in some tests, touching the level of a Grade 4 vestige. The Winter-Summer axe, for instance, was rumoured to have achieved such a feat.

For the results of the hardness test, Lucas managed to do very well, scoring an incredible 484 points. As for the axe, it only got 467.

Lucy appeared relieved at the result. One could say that apart from Lucas, she was the next person whose results affected the most in their camp. This wasn't just a contest between Lucas and Nicholai, but one between Lucy and Arlott, and the factions behind them as well.

Whichever side came out on top, as long as they could sign a deal with them, the Novanio Tech board would reward the agent who aided the deal.

Supposing Lucy got Lucas to sign a deal, but he lost to Nicholai, the aftermath would be negative. Usually, the loss wouldn't be an issue, but if Arlott were to bring Nicholai, the victor, over to his side, then it would definitely be a big deal. It would affect how much interest and resources the company would invest in Lucas.

This in turn would also affect her, the agent who brought along a 'failure' to the company, after all, comparisons breeds discontent.

"Hmph. Lucky strike." Arlott snorted.

However, unlike the agent from Novanio Tech, Nicholai, the overseer and some others were stunned at the result.