

## The Crafts 14

### Chapter 14 : Invader

One might wonder how did the spy, who had his eyes and attention on the building for most of the time, fail to realise that the building and its attachments had abruptly changed. The answer was simple; the system's meddling.

The system was an entity that could easily orchestrate Lucas' rebirth on Earth and transmigrate his soul as well as his past life's body into this world. Changing a building and a few structures while brainwashing a character by the side at the same time, was nothing too difficult. Of course, neither Lucas nor the spy even knew this.

At the darkest point at the night, the spy felt it was best to strike. He had less than fourteen hours to give results to his boss. What's more, Ramirez' men had come into contact with the target twice now. The spy felt a sense of urgency to make his move otherwise he wouldn't get his commission and his profile in the community might get ruined.

He arrived by the building and quietly scaled it, reaching towards a window by the side. Being a professional tracker at the first first level of the Aperture Opening stage, this wasn't too difficult to pull off.

The spy prepared to break in through the window but noticed that it was actually open. Albeit surprised, it wasn't by much. Different people had different preferences.

The room was dark but to the spy, this wasn't an issue. He looked around and spotted a bed with a silhouette laid on it.

'Found ya.'

The man pulled out a tranquilizer gun, but shaped like a Glock. He aimed at the silhouette and fired twice.

The silhouette moved a bit but quickly went still. The spy smirked seeing this and approached the target.

Suddenly, he took a step back and tilted his head to the side as his eyes abruptly narrowed.

A chisel darted towards his throat but the previous action of the spy proved to be useful as the tool narrowly missed. However, that wasn't all.

At the same time the chisel flew out, a figure lunged at him from the other side of the bed. The spy had successfully dodged the chisel attack but he was put in a difficult position to dodge the next attack. Nonetheless, there was no sign of anxiety or fear in his eyes as he let go of the weapon and punched forward.

Bam.

Two fists collided and surprisingly, they were equal.

Although he was slightly surprised, the spy counterattacked right away and punched with his free hand at the opponent.

Thud.

The attacker was forced backwards until they crashed into the wall.

An opportunity to follow-up appeared, but the spy wasn't in a hurry. From what he had experienced so far, the assailant was much weaker than he was, both in terms of speed and strength, so there was no rush.

"Oh, it's you." The spy said.

"It seems like you noticed I've been monitoring you. I'm sure I was careful so how come?"

Lucas stared at the enemy without responding, part of the reason being the intense pain he felt almost as if his internal organs were tumbling about. If not for his experiences in his past lives, the pain alone would have knocked Lucas unconscious.

Originally, Lucas wouldn't have been able to notice the man but with the spy constantly monitoring him all the time, it was inevitable that he would slip-up once. With his strong soul force and increased senses, Lucas would be able to spot him during such slip-ups.

"Doesn't matter. I'll be taking you with me now, especially that glove of yours." The spy said. Together with the information he had as well as the earlier clash, he could see that the blacksmith gloves were quite special and probably had some force-negation effect.

Lucas stood up from the ground with a frown on his face.

This time around, the enemy was much stronger and the gap was larger. Lucas' real strength averaged at the Muscle refining level of the Body Strengthening stage. Together with the special effects of the gloves, he could take on an opponent at the Bone refining level. However, the opponent this time around was different.

Lucas could clearly sense a mystical energy within the enemy which showed that his assailant had completed the Body Strengthening stage. In this world, that would make him a practitioner of the Aperture Opening stage.

In the Stellar Refinement system, until a practitioner reached the Guardian stage, which was the third stage, they would be a body-honer or Stellar Evolver; depending on their physical abilities and using stellar energy to boost those abilities. However, the second stage, Aperture Opening stage, was quite different from the first.

Apart from relying on physical strength, they could also manipulate stellar energy externally. This, as well as the increase in physical prowess, made them much stronger than the first stage practitioners.

Even with his experience and everything, Lucas was aware that this battle was one he couldn't win. But at the same time, it was one he had to win. Luckily, he had the system.

"You should just stay down quietly."

The spy charged at Lucas once he stood up.

Lucas tried to dodge, but despite having expected the attack, he was too slow to react in time.

Tap.

"Hmm?"

The spy was surprised that unlike the last time, there was no reaction from his punch. The previous blow he landed on Lucas was held back with the only intent to keep his opponent down but not critically injure him.

This time around, the spy used more power as he wanted to knock Lucas out while dealing a severe blow to him. However, Lucas remained standing and didn't even take half a step back.

The spy was confused but his thoughts were interrupted when he saw Lucas' fist closing in on his face. He dodged right away but instead of retreating, the man sent a more powerful blow attack at Lucas.

Tap.

Without a doubt, the result was the same.

At this point, the man suspected Lucas to be in possession of a force-negating body armour. If there could be a set of gloves, why not an armour? This wasn't mentioned to him because Lucas' previous enemies were unable to land a clean blow on him. Due to this, it was natural for his true skills to remain a mystery and so, it surprised the man.

The man released another punch but the result was the same. Seeing Lucas prepare to counterattack, he hurriedly retreated and landed behind with a light step.

"Who would have expected this to be happening? Quite interesting indeed." The spy smirked.

At the same time, Lucas heard a voice in his head.

"Host Protection Mechanism has been fully activated."

Host Protection Mechanism (HPM) was a new feature Lucas had unlocked after the store's renovation was completed. Unlike the other benefits he got from the system, the Host Protection Mechanism was only activated within the store (the additional building included) and the surrounding area of ten feet around it.

Once the HPM was fully activated within the applicable space, Lucas would be immune to all forms of harm as defined by the system. According to the system's description of 'harm', this happened to be a hit with a certain level of force capable of injuring the host. At the same time, 'harm' also referred to any dangerous substance or item capable of injuring the host.

Essentially, within the area of the store, Lucas would be immortal and unkillable.

As for why the first attack by the spy had injured him, it was simply because Lucas didn't fully activate the Host Protection Mechanism at that moment. He had wanted to experience what it truly felt like to face someone on the Aperture Opening stage with his current abilities.

Nonetheless, because the HPM was meant to protect the host, it would always be active, but in this passive form, the host could receive damage but not enough to kill or severely injure him. The excess damage from an attack would instead be converted into pain, which explains why Lucas was in severe pain after receiving a blow that should have broken a few of his ribs.

"Although I don't know how you did it, I don't think a defence such as yours can stop me. To be honest, I'm quite curious. How much force can your armour negate? Which would last longer, the armour or you?" The spy's voice sounded.

Lucas frowned but took a battle stance right after standing up. There was no escaping here, what's more, he had to capture the spy and interrogate him about his employers. Apart from the debt-collector and the kidnappers, Lucas didn't recall offending anyone. Of course the pawnshop was a suspect and even the pub, but compared to the other two, they weren't as suspicious.

So to ensure he made no mistakes, Lucas wanted to capture this lead.

'I can't lose this.'