

The Crafts 161

Chapter 161: Ardeen Makes His Move

Lucas stood in front with a headless corpse before him. The menace that had once hunted him was now dead.

Despite that, Ramirez's last words were still in his head. Although he didn't mention who 'they' were, Lucas could guess that it had something to do with the terrorists from before.

Based on what he knew and speculated, Ramirez was a member or a lackey of the terrorist organisation related to the two attackers from the Bayena Plain incident. The desolate beasts tide was also related to that organisation, seeing as it happened roughly at the same time Ramirez was spotted in Alleva district, which was an uncanny coincidence.

Putting two and two together, Lucas surmised that Ramirez was threatening him using the organisation. For Ramirez to have been so confident albeit desperate, it was clear that the organisation was nothing to joke about. Just based on the fact that they could raise an underground organisation in Baylands City, the centre of the city-state, it was clear that they had quite a lot of resources and connections. From that, Lucas wouldn't be surprised if they had more arms in Alleva district, or even a liaison within the Central Prefecture district.

Sighing, Lucas turned around, but he didn't deactivate his vestiges just yet.

"You can come out now. I already know you've been watching."

Lucas stared in a certain direction up ahead of him. The area was blocked by trees making it dark and unwary, but he had sensed a presence there mid battle against Ramirez.

"Oh my. And here I was thinking that my stealth was good."

A voice which Lucas found to be familiar sounded as a figure walked out from the shadows.

Seeing the party, Lucas frowned.

"So it's you."

The newcomer was someone Lucas was slightly familiar with. It was the very first person he had met upon arriving at Alleva district; a character who had given him some tips and helped him make his way over.

Ardeen smiled at Lucas and nodded.

"That's right. Surprised?"

"Indeed. But it doesn't change anything." Lucas responded calmly.

Although he didn't know why Ardeen was here, it was obvious that the latter wasn't a friendly party. To have waited so long and even remained in hiding throughout the battle, one could only wonder what Ardeen's goal was, but Lucas wasn't interested in that. All he cared about was who was friend or foe, and he believed that Ardeen was the latter.

Ardeen smiled and walked over while saying,

"Relax. I came over to try and profit from the beast tide when I happened to sense a battle here. I decided to spectate for a bit and not interfere. You should know that Alleva isn't a safe place; it would be best not to poke your nose inside every situation, and that was exactly what I did."

"Makes sense." Lucas nodded his head.

But in the next second, he raised his arm and a laser beam blasted out from it.

At the same time, Ardeen had popped out a vestige and fired at Lucas.

Boom

Both sides happened to attack just at the same time, and they retreated while doing so. The result was that the two attacks had missed their targets, but the atmosphere had now changed.

"What gave it away?" Ardeen asked, still maintaining his friendly smile even though he had just tried to kill Lucas.

"You may try to hide it, but your energy is clear." Lucas said.

"The last time I met you, you were at the peak of the Body Strengthening stage. It doesn't make sense how you're now at the fourth level, unless there's something you're hiding."

Ardeen was a human based on what Lucas knew. By human, it didn't mean he was a pure-blooded human like Lucas, but a hyuman with an mDNA concentration of less than 10%. This made it virtually impossible for him to exceed the limits of the Body Strengthening stage and enter the Apertures Opening stage, just like Lucas.

However, while they were talking, Lucas —thanks to his acute sensitivity— could discern that Ardeen's ability was at the fourth level, which didn't make sense. From what he knew, there was no equipment or technique that could hide one's stellar refinement progress, and there was no way Ardeen possessed something like the system as the odds were very low.

Hence, the only explanation was that Ardeen was in league with an underground force that had connections to Digress city-state. They were the only force that could grant humans stellar refinement capabilities, and from what Lucas knew, such a group was likely related to the terrorists on Erete. Since he had just killed one of them, it was only natural for Lucas to become a target.

"Ah, that's true." Ardeen face-palmed.

"Well, I guess this is the part where we try to kill each other."

Lucas didn't respond or even make a move yet. He just couldn't understand; since Ardeen had been watching, he should know that Lucas had a Grade 4 vestige. With a fourth level strength, it was impossible to take on the third level Lucas who wielded a Grade 4 vestige; even Ramirez despite having two Grade 3 vestiges and fifth level ability, had lost. Despite knowing this, Ardeen still stood before him.

"Seal." Ardeen muttered, following which four pillars of light rose into the air around them.

Within the four pillars of light was a 200m² region with Lucas and Ardeen. Although the pillars simply stood there, Lucas felt an awry feeling from them.

"A Grade 4 vestige is really impressive. I never expected that to be your reliance, but it doesn't matter. Today would still mark your memorial date." Ardeen said.

In the next moment, he charged at Lucas, firing the gun in his hand at the latter.

Lucas raised his arms and created an energy shield using the gauntlets, blocking the shots being fired. However, the energy shield eventually cracked under the relentless gun shots.

But at the time it did so, Lucas had already closed the gap and sent his fist flying towards Ardeen.

However, as he did so, Lucas saw his fist pass right through Ardeen's body as the latter smirked at him.

In the next moment, the 'Ardeen' before Lucas dissipated as another one appeared a few metres away with his vestige pointed at Lucas.

Bang

A stellar round was fired from the vestige, but unlike the previous shots, it wasn't created out of Ardeen's stellar energy, but was a unique round made with special materials.

The bullet struck Lucas' armour, leaving a mark that dug slightly into the armour, creating a dent on it.

Bang *Bang*

Ardeen released a few more shots, but Lucas rushed to get out of the way. Although the vestige might be able to handle them, there was still a threshold to its durability.

While dodging, Lucas closed the distance between him and Ardeen, and once again, he was right in front of the latter.

Boom

Lucas released a powerful punch that split apart the air, creating a blast that went through Ardeen and struck the ground.

However, just like before, Ardeen's figure dissipated and he appeared elsewhere again. This time around, Lucas was prepared, so he managed to dodge the attacks. Regardless, the strange outcome was bugging him.

'Teleportation? No. It doesn't seem like such. Then what exactly is it?' Lucas thought as he switched to long ranged tactics

The speed of the beams fired by the gauntlets could compare to bullets, so he wasn't worried about not getting a hit even as Ardeen managed to dodge them.

The duo began to move around the area, using the trees as obstacles while attacking the other.

At the same time, Lucas was moving towards one of the light pillars closest to him. Although he didn't know how Ardeen happened to be escaping his attacks at the last moment, Lucas knew that it was related to the pillars of light.

"What happened to your vigour and aggression when facing Ramirez? Why are you simply running away?" Ardeen chuckled as he pursued after Lucas.

Seeing Lucas heading towards the light pillar, Ardeen could easily guess his intentions.

'It's about time I end this.' Ardeen thought.

The light pillars would definitely attract both the attention of the Alleva District Defence Force and the approaching desolate beasts wave. Ardeen estimated that he had only three minutes left before the desolate beasts would reach them as they were the closest group to the duo. If those three minutes elapsed and he was still here, then it would be difficult to kill Lucas.

Extending his hands towards Lucas, Ardeen exposed a glove that looked like a complex amalgamation of futuristic technology and runes. As the gloves glowed with a yellow light—a similar shade with the pillars—Ardeen clenched his fist.

A strange invisible wave was released from the four pillars spreading into the two hundred metres square space. The wave moved rapidly, with the one coming from the pillar closet to the duo, taking only three seconds to reach.

As it passed by Lucas, he suddenly felt a change take place within him; a drastic change that changed the scales of the battle.