

The Crafts 194

Chapter 194: An Insane Proposition

"I'll get straight to the point since you seem like a man who's straightforward. The Bergs family is interested in collaborating with you. In exchange, we would use our influence to dismiss the rumours and ensure you take your place back in the industry."

Calhner Bergs extended the Bergs family's offer to Lucas.

Lucas didn't answer right away, as his mind was elsewhere.

'The Bergs family seems like the most likely suspect for the role of the mastermind.'

Lucas had done some digging on the top four families after the Exceptional Basis Examination at the EVL branch headquarters, and he also did so again some days ago, to understand his potential opponents.

The Bergs family is the number one family in Baylands city-state and has a sobriquet known to every household; the City Lord family. The moniker didn't come about due to the fact that the current city lord was from the Bergs family. Rather, it was because of the fact that the Bergs family had raised three successive generations of city lords.

To appreciate and understand how incredible this feat was needed to know how a city-lord came to be.

The Cabinet—which was a sixty-man legislative assembly made of representatives of the most powerful factions and the twenty districts—had the right to decide the city lord through a voting process. After the result was sent over to the Oklo Dynasty for certification by the royal family, the city lord would then be sworn in. Every city lord ruled for a tenure of ten years with no limit. However, every three years, a referendum to pass a vote of confidence or no-confidence would be carried out by the Cabinet. This was where the Cabinet's ability to impeach the city-lord came about, but so far, no city-lord has ever suffered from an impeachment according to the records.

After the ten-year tenure, the city-lord could still run again. Usually, a city lord would rule for three to five successive tenures, which was the equivalent of thirty to fifty years.

Although Baylands City came about some six hundred years ago, this voting system only came to be when the city-state was founded, which was about five hundred years ago. In those five hundred years, there had been fifteen different city lords. To have three city lords come from a single family was without a doubt something to boast about.

Apart from being the family of three city lords, the Bergs family also had a different identity.

The Bergs family had started out as a merchant family before diving into the military and politics. At the moment, they were known for their military prowess and political influence, thanks to holding the position of city lord for three consecutive years. The fact that the commissioner of police was a Bergs, was a good example of this. However, this made people forget that the Bergs family had a knack for making money.

Using the perks they got from being a city-lord family, the Bergs acquired a ton of properties and built quite a few businesses, enriching their pockets and strengthening the family even more. Who knew just how many companies secretly had the Bergs controlling them?

From all of this, they seemed to be the most likely suspect to be the mastermind. Whether it was political power, wealth or influence, they had it all. However, Lucas lacked evidence to accuse them.

"Like you said before, I'm a straightforward man. So, what exactly can the Bergs offer me that would interest me?" Lucas asked.

Calhner was surprised a bit, but he still maintained a calm demeanour with a smile on his face.

"You should already have figured out that this entire event has a hand behind it."

Lucas nodded his head,

"Indeed, but I don't know who that is."

"I'm sorry, but I can't say that." Calhner replied. He then continued.

"However, what I can say is that if you work with us, you wouldn't need to worry about that. We will offer you protection to the best of our ability. We will also give you access to tons of rare resources, financial support for expansion, and more."

Although it sounded like Calhner was talking to Lucas, it was more of him relaying the Bergs family's conditions to the vestige-smith behind the store. The Bergs family believed that there was at least a high-ranking Tier 1 Master vestige-smith backing the store, but for this negotiations, they saw no reason to call the fellow out. Instead, they had decided to present their terms to Lucas, believing that he would be smart enough to know what they implied.

Lucas stared at him for a short while before he asked again.

"In exchange for what?"

Seeing as he wasn't outrightly rejected, Calhner smiled at him.

"Nothing in this world is free. To gain something, you have to lose or offer something else.

"The Bergs family simply wants a fixed set of vestiges sent to us at cost price. Apart from that, we would send a few of our talented vestige-smiths to help your master in vestige-smithing. I'm pretty sure that making so many vestiges would be strenuous for him, so he would appreciate some helping hands.

"Finally, we would want to have exclusive distribution rights, whether within Baylands city-state or as regards exports. Rest assured that the vestiges would be bought at standard price." Calhner said.

"That will be all. You don't need to give me a response now. But the family would be pleased if we get one within a week. There's probably going to be more like me, but it would be in your best interests to partner with the city-lord family."

Following that, he stood up and left the store.

The terms weren't for Lucas to agree on as no one believed he was the real owner of the store. Instead, it was for the vestige-smith backing the store. Calhner informed Lucas of the terms so he could discuss it with his 'master'. Since he was done with that, there was no reason to spend any more time with a nauseating existence.

Lucas watched the latter depart but made no effort to send him off. Instead, he simply chuckled deep down.

The terms Calhner stated were all absurd and there was no way he would agree to anything like that.

The first condition was to sell some of the vestiges at cost price to the Bergs family. Cost price didn't mean the system's price, but rather, the price based on the materials used and little consideration for labour. Ignoring the fact that the system wouldn't allow that, there was no way Lucas would let himself be taken advantage of like that. Just this condition alone made Lucas wipe away the thought of partnering with the Bergs family.

The second condition was even wilder. It was to allow some of the Bergs family's vestige-smiths work with Lucas' master. Ignoring the fact that such a master didn't exist, the Bergs family's intention was clearly to learn the secret of the SS vestiges. This was because it was next to impossible for any vestige-smith to aid Lucas in producing these vestiges without understanding the fundamental workings of them.

What made the SS vestiges special was the stellar circuit technology, but Lucas' forging and inscription techniques also played a significant role in making the SS vestiges unique and impossible to replicate. If the vestige-smiths from the Bergs family were to help, they would need to be taught some of these techniques. However, there was no way Lucas would pass such knowledge to anyone that wasn't his disciple.

Hence, this second demand was impossible to satisfy.

The third stipulation was that the Bergs family handled all internal and external trades regarding the SS vestiges. Although it wasn't as impossible to fulfill as the other two requirements, it was still out of consideration. Even the Legacy Crafts dealership had only asked for exclusive distribution rights in Baylands city-state whilst excluding Baylands City from their area of operation. However, the Bergs family's appetite was even larger as they asked for exclusive distribution rights everywhere.

This would essentially mean that Lucas could only sell his vestiges to the Bergs family, and no one else.

Calhner Bergs had presented to Lucas three demands for cooperation raised up by the Bergs family. However, all three were impossible for Lucas to accept. In other words, it was impossible for Lucas to ally with the Bergs family.

Lucas tossed the idea of cooperation behind his head and began pondering on Calhner's last sentence. He mentioned how there would be more people coming to offer Lucas a hand in the days to come. This made Lucas a bit confused.

From how Calhner spoke and responded to his questions, it was difficult to ascertain whether the Bergs family was the main culprit of this incident. To be specific, it was difficult to determine whether they were the only ones.

Lucas believed that the Bergs family definitely had a hand in this, but he wasn't sure whether they were the only party involved.

The Bergs family alone was enough to pull off the conspiracy, but if there were more involved, it made the situation even more complicated for Lucas. If all top four families were involved, it would mean that there was no place for Lucas in Baylands city-state. This would imply that the advice he got from the man from Digress city-state was correct; the only solution would be to escape.

'Well, he did say that the others would show up, so I'll find out then.' Lucas narrowed his eyes.