

## The Crafts 195

### Chapter 195: Pressure From All Angles

Three days later...

After the Bergs family's aide for external matters, Calhner Bergs, showed up at the store, it irked Lucas just a bit. When the meeting came to an end, the former had informed Lucas that there would be more individuals like himself coming to see Lucas. During these three days, the words of Calhner Bergs turned out to be true.

The next day, it had been the butler of the Dufour family that came to Lucas' doorstep.

Similar to the Bergs family, the Dufour family was a top four family that had previously produced a city lord once. However, that wasn't where the family's power and influence came from.

The Dufour family dealt in the business of unique minerals and ores —a contrast to the Mertens family that sold desolate beast parts and materials. The Dufours also have a large share of the serum market. Serums were drugs with unique properties similar to the magic potions from Lucas' past life.

The Dufour family is known to sell various serums with different effects, except for the Synno serum. But in the past, it was different.

The Synno serum is the serum used by humans to increase their mDNA concentration. While humans were born with a fixed m(o)DNA (Metamorphosed DNA) count in their genes, which was the naturally occurring form, the Synno serum was an artificial version of the mDNA, known as m(z)DNA (Metarmorphized DNA). When injected into the human body, it would attach itself to human's genes and work in tandem with the m(o)DNA in increasing the body's stellar affinity. Hence, one's overall mDNA concentration would experience an increase [1].

Due to the special effects of the Synno serum, not just anyone could sell it, with only official governments having the right to do so. However, the Dufour family had once engaged in the trade of the Synno serum, especially when they held the city lord's position.

The family forged connections with serum providers and creators in the Oklo Dynasty and ventured into the business. As a result, even after they lost the right to sell Synno serums, they were still able to make another business venture and remain in the serum market.

The Dufour family's connections in the Oklo Dynasty was what made them a fearful opponent for the other top families. With them almost running a monopoly in the serum market, the amount of money the Dufours made on a daily basis could make many eyes go green with envy.

To further solidify their control and influence in the market, the Dufour family had gone into an alliance with the Bergs family, becoming their number one supporter. It was said that one of the reasons the Bergs family was able to produce three consecutive city lords was thanks to the support of the Dufour family in the Cabinet.

Of the sixty cabinet seats, ten were already on the side of the Bergs family, therefore requiring only twenty one more for a majority vote. With the combined influence of the Bergs and Dufour family, one could see how the former had held power for so long.

A combination of connections, influence, history, and wealth, easily made the Dufour family rank second in the entire Baylands city-state; only behind the undisputed city lord family.

On the second day, another of the top four visited Lucas.

The Ross family was the last member of the top four and also the weakest. They were the most recent arrival into the top four after the fall of the Oder family from the rankings.

Unlike their predecessor, the family was into technology and electronics business. They ran a company that imported stellar processors just like Novanio Tech, with a net worth close to one billion federal coins. When the representative of the family met with Lucas, he presented roughly the same conditions to Lucas as Novanio Tech did.

There were some discrepancies in the contract, like the demand to have some of the vestige-smiths work with Lucas' 'master', and a fixed number of vestiges to be sold to them at cost price. However, they also offered to provide Lucas with stellar processors at a cheaper price than market rate, which would be more economical than Lucas' chip deal with Novanio Tech before.

They also didn't ask for exclusive distribution rights in the entirety of Baylands city-state; they excluded Baylands City just as Novanio Tech did. For exporting rights, the Ross family only asked for exclusive distribution rights in the Groeten continent. This gave Lucas the opportunity

to be able to partner up with either local or foreign companies for distribution in other continents, albeit that would be difficult.

The Ross family also, offered to aid in the design and development of new vestiges, especially in the consumer sector. While this would profit them more, since they ran an electronics and consumer tech company, it would also increase the Seven Sparks Forge market influence.

Compared to the other two top four families that arrived earlier —the Bergs and the Dufour families — the Ross family's, proposals were much better. However, Lucas couldn't let them meet with his 'master' as there was no such individual. He also wouldn't want them to learn his techniques unless the vestige-smiths agreed to be his disciples, which meant leaving the Ross family.

Finally, the stipulation to sell a fixed number of SS vestiges at cost price was similarly impossible to fulfil.

Apart from these two top families, there were also a couple other influential parties that showed up. Some of them were alliances of different groups who held some degree of power in the city-state and the Cabinet, while some were factions that had once sat at the top, and were confident about themselves, like the Oder family.

Regardless of which they were, Lucas didn't give them a response and none of them hampered him for one. It seemed like they had all agreed to give Lucas a one week period to consider their proposals. From this, Lucas understood that the entire conspiracy and complex was much larger than he had expected.

It wasn't just one party or a group, but the entire top factions that had agreed to take advantage of him. If Lucas wanted to keep running the store in Baylands city-state, or even survive, he had to pick a side.

Just as he was having this thought, someone knocked on the door.

'So they're finally here.'