

## The Crafts 33

### Chapter 33 : Assassins?

When humans first began to explore the far reaches of space, they came to the conclusion that their bodies lacked the innate ability to manipulate stellar energy and survive in the vast expanses of space. The issue of the latter could have been solved by developing special suits, but the former was a drastic disadvantage, so much so that it was termed a disability for the entire race.

Humans then became a naturally disabled race, a title they felt humiliated by.

After years of research, the first generation of hyumans: an advanced species that could not only manipulate stellar energy but could also live in special regions that humans would find uninhabitable.

However, the impairment of their genetic constitution was but one of the problems the human race faced at the time. The inadequacy of their weapons to compete with that of alien species was a flaw in their society; one so bad that the leaders at the time felt it was on the same level as their genetic impairment. The creation of hyumankin seemed to point at a solution to this.

Relying on their newly gained abilities thanks to their advancement on a genetic level, hyumans began researching a way to imbue their weapons with stellar energy, raising its destructive prowess up by a few levels. In time, which was accompanied by intense research and progress, the first generation of vestige-smiths were born.

Vestige-smiths were talented geniuses with a high stellar energy manipulation ability, who dedicated themselves to the art of crafting stellar energy-based technologies known as vestiges. They differed greatly from the occupation of engineers and blacksmiths, but were somewhat similar.

If one were to describe a vestige-smith in a simple description, you could say that they were the combination of an engineer, a blacksmith and a scribe, an occupation from Lucas' first life that focused on storing spells inside scrolls by drawing magical runes on them.

But at the same time, vestige-smiths weren't just a simple combination of all these occupations; otherwise, a blacksmith could just learn engineering and memorise a few runes, then inscribe them on his product, and voila, a vestige.

The truth was as simple as the description, yet not. It was for this reason that the professions of engineers and blacksmiths were separated from vestige-smiths. To be able to attain the latter title, one would need not only knowledge of the former two occupations but also to be extremely talented and naturally blessed.

The blessing here simply refers to having a high m(o)DNA concentration and an exquisite ability to manipulate stellar energy to the atomic level and even further below; something even a Guardian—a being at the peak of a planet and referred to as its ruler—might not be able to achieve.

All these requirements gave birth to a profession that defined the next few generations of humanity and the humankind.

Looking at the dead body of the Blue-gemmed Cockatrice, which was taken down without a hitch by a vestige, albeit one under the control of a fifth level Apertures Opening stage freelancer, Lucas began to look forward to the extent of power a vestige-smith could realise through their creations.

In his first life, there was an equivalent profession known as a magic weapon craftsman. However, these craftsmen were more of blacksmiths with some knowledge on inscribing runes. Compared to vestige-smiths, it was like a bicycle maker to an automobile engineering company; the difference was vast. Their creations weren't on the same level of power.

Nonetheless, Lucas wasn't an average magic weapon craftsman, as he was among the top three in his world. He had also transmigrated to Earth, where he broadened his perspective and absorbed a lot of theoretical knowledge, exactly the same as those in this new world. As such, Lucas was confident that he could compete with the top vestige-smiths in time.

'One day, I'll make a killing weapon like that.' Lucas thought as he stared at the streamer that returned to Lisa's side.

At this moment, the trio were slowly returning to the same shuttle, yet seemed to be bickering about something. It was only when they had gotten into the vehicle that Lucas realised that Lisa was actually reprimanding the duo on their actions. In her opinion, they used the wrong strategy and could not finish off the monster in time, forcing her to then step in.

The team continued on their way and didn't experience a strange event of a native monster abandoning its habitat as with before. This began to make them think that the situation with the Blue-gemmed Cockatrice was different and unique.

Eventually, it took a few more hours until they had arrived just a few kilometres away from the Astranian Forest. As it was getting dark, the team captain was against entering at that time and instead decided to go in the next day. He was the only one with a handful of experience with the Astranian Forest, as well as being the team leader, so it was natural that everyone else went with his decision.

They landed the sare and set up camp around twelve kilometres away from the forest. The distance might seem like much, but to a desolate beast of the middle levels, it wasn't. Nonetheless, it was an appropriate distance that would offer the team enough time to assemble their formation or retreat, depending on the strength of their assailant.

A while after they had set up camp, the team leader walked towards Lucas and sat beside him.

"Hey." The middle-aged man smiled.

Lucas was confused but nodded back in greeting while trying not to seem impolite.

"I'll get straight to the point." The middle-aged man said.

"Did you offend anybody?"

Lucas was surprised and immediately became suspicious, wondering what the man's intention was.

As if he sensed this, the man continued.

"I've noticed that we were being trailed by someone. Their strength is lower than my team's, so I doubt they're after us. Our enemies wouldn't be so dumb as to send weaklings to deal with us. That leaves the only possible target to be you, which is why I asked."

Lucas now understood the man's actions, but at the same time, he couldn't help but be worried. It seemed that someone was keeping an eye on him, even after he left the West Wing district. What's more, this was the Wastelands' Astranian Forest region.

If anything were to happen to him here, it would be easy to make it look like a monster assault and not a planned murder, so the city-state government wouldn't even be able to avenge him. If it hadn't been for this middle-aged man warning him, Lucas would have been at great risk.

"Why are you telling me this?" Lucas asked with a slight confusion.

"Naturally, it's because you're our client. Until the mission is complete, your safety is in our hands. However, I'd like to clarify one point: even if the enemy is much weaker than us, we can't interfere too much in this. At best, we can grant you secure passage into the forest and delay them from finding you for a while, but after that, we can't do much.

This is because of an unwritten rule in the freelancer community, so unless we're specifically being hired to ensure your safety throughout, it would be impossible for us to neutralise your trackers."

Although he didn't entirely understand, Lucas nodded at the response. The freelancer profession was based on accepting missions and completing them for a designated fee. However, there were situations where two missions could clash. In such situations, the freelancers involved were expected to act professionally.

For instance, if one was hired to find a rare special material and another freelancer was hired to do the same, the two would have to compete professionally. If one of them found it, the other wasn't allowed to attack him for the package, as that would draw the ire of other freelancers.

Such an unofficial rule was put in practice by the top freelancers and guilds, over time becoming common knowledge in the community. This rule helped to maintain a certain sense of formality as well as safety to the community.

In this case, someone was tracking Lucas and might have even been sent to deal with him. However, the Autumn's Gate guild couldn't interfere in this as their relationship with Lucas was merely limited to a single mission of them having to escort him safely into the Astranian Forest. As for what happens after he gets there, it was none of their business.

This met that as long as the trackers didn't make a move on Lucas until he arrived at the Astranian Forest, the Autumn's Gate guild could not interfere. Coming out to warn Lucas of a possible threat in the shadows was already a warm gesture by the team leader. Having even offered to delay the trackers said a lot about the middle-aged man's personality.

"Thank you." Lucas said as he bowed slightly at the man.

"There's nothing to thank me for here. I just wanted to let you know to prevent any problems from my side. It would be bad on our reviews if this trip of ours ended on a bad note." The middle-aged man chuckled before standing up and taking his leave.

As for Lucas, he began to brainstorm a solution as the protection offered by the Autumn's Gate guild would come to an end the next day.