

The Crafts 88

Chapter 88: Vestige Duel

On the first day of the Silver Fig Trade Convention, the event had just kick-started, so there was a lot of fanfare ongoing. The convention was an annual five days long event and hosted by an alliance of the top richest companies in the vestige industry. It was only natural that it would get the best coverage and be an event worthwhile for freelancers.

While the other participants of the convention had set up their stalls and showcases earlier, Lucas had just completed his. But right after doing so, he left to check out the other participants' booths.

It was his first time attending such an event, and it gave Lucas the opportunity to see upfront, the difference in products between the other vestige-smiths and himself. While Lucas had previously visited a couple stores for this, the convention was on a different level. Here, no vestige-smith vendor or business would hold back or hide away their prized creations.

Everything that could be termed as the 'best' would be put on display, and on the last two days, they would pull out their 'ultimate weapons'.

On the second day, Lucas still left his stall empty and unattended as before. Once again, he wandered around the public square like a potential client.

Compared to the first day that was calm and peaceful, the second day was different. There was still a large crowd, but the atmosphere was different. If one were to describe it, the atmosphere was energetic and eventful. As for the reason, it was quite interesting.

The Silver Fig Trade Convention, for big businesses, was a routine operation that they were obligated to participate in. But for others, especially small businesses, it was different. For them, the convention was an opportunity to stand out and make a name for themselves.

The selection process for the convention's participants, while cheap, had strict standards to prevent scammers from getting in. This was why the process took between one to three months.

For the small businesses that managed to pass, they were glad and took it as an achievement, but the journey didn't stop there for them. In fact, it only began.

Due to the fact that the convention was an annual event, it gathered tons of vestige-related businesses in the district. The West Wing district was as large as a major city and close to the Wastelands, so there were a lot of such businesses in the district. Even after the selection process, many businesses of different sizes still got approved.

This made it difficult for the small parties to compete and attract clients in the convention. So, some of them decided to utilise unconventional approaches and techniques to stand out.

One such was the Vestige Duel.

A vestige duel was a contest between two or more vestige-smiths or businesses, with the focus being on the quality of their vestiges. It involved having vestiges from the different competitors exposed to the various tests until there was a clear lead. It was similar to the "striking blade against blade" challenge that was used to test swords in the ancient epoch of the human race era.

The second day of the convention was usually when vestige duels began to take place, which was why the ambience was more lively than the first day. On this day, many small businesses or vestige-smiths would go to different stalls or stores and challenge the owner to a vestige duel.

Since such events were competitive and interesting, it attracted a lot of spectators. The winner would receive exposure and even a few interested clients. As for the loser, as long as their vestige performed well in the duel, they might still make an impression on the spectators. But there was always the risk of being ridiculed and developing a bad reputation.

The challenged side could reject the duel, but it might give birth to the idea that they were afraid, unless the difference was vast. For instance, if a random small-time vestige-smith were to challenge one of the vestige-smiths at the top, it was natural for the latter to ignore the duel and consider it a waste of time.

Big corporations and well-known vestige-smiths valued their prestige a lot, so they didn't engage in vestige duels as often. As a result, the 'sport' was more common for small-time sides, and occasionally witnessed between medium-sized businesses or vestige-smiths with some reputation.

Currently, Lucas was spectating a vestige duel. It was between a somewhat popular vestige-smith against a vestige-smith company.

Vestige-smiths weren't so common, but they weren't rare either. It was an occupation just like doctor, engineer, and so on, except it had even more strict requirements. Just like an average

occupation, succeeding alone as a vestige-smith was something very difficult, hence why there were more successful companies than individually-ran businesses.

It should however be noted that vestige businesses were different from vestige-smith businesses. Whereas the former only sold vestiges, the latter sold as well as created vestiges. Despite that, a vestige-smith business was sometimes not even owned by a vestige-smith, but someone who knew how to run a business.

Nonetheless, such vestige-smith businesses could still participate in the convention, and a duel as well.

Vestige businesses could participate as well, but without the ability to produce a vestige, it was pointless to do so as they would be overshadowed. Most times, they attended the convention as a client, looking for vestige-smiths to partner with. The Norsegold Co., for instance, was a vestige business, and they would most likely be in attendance at the convention as a client.

The vestige-smith was the challenger, and the vestige company was the challenged side. The vestige-smith was someone who had a bit of a reputation in the West Wing district. Many vestige businesses placed orders with him and bought his products, which they would later sell at a higher price.

"I can't believe 'Grey Finger' Sofoklis is participating in a vestige duel as a challenger. It's been so long."

"You're right. The last time Sofoklis challenged someone was five years ago, and it was a fellow vestige-smith. I heard that not only did he win, but he won so convincingly that he ended the man's caterer as a vestige-smith."

"Yeah, I heard that too. Rumours say his opponent retired from the industry and became a teacher instead."

"That's insane."

Listening to the murmurings and discussion by some in the crowd, Lucas couldn't help but be surprised as he stared at the middle-aged man who stood opposite a stall.

The man was calm and didn't show any reaction to the words of the crowd, only staring at the stall. 'Grey Finger' was an alias given to the man, as that was the insignia he left on the vestiges he made—a kind of logo to promote his brand.

The stall in Grey Finger's view was similar to Lucas', but it was slightly larger. It was clear that even though the Silver Fig Trade Convention was open to all, the treatment each participant received was slightly different. Lucas was unknown, so the space he was given and the stall were all basic.

But this vestige-smith company had a bit of a reputation in the district, so it was natural that their treatment would be better.

While this didn't seem like much, it would still affect one's ability to attract clients.

In the stall were five individuals who appeared slightly uncomfortable at the challenge.

A vestige duel might seem like an opportunity, but it was one filled with risks. Even if the loser could still retain a bit of dignity after the duel, it was only on the condition that their performance was similarly impressive and the gap was not much. If it were the opposite, it would not only affect their sales but also their stocks.

Hence why vestige duels were very risky for businesses, and avoided by the big companies.

"Is the Gold Rain Factory going to remain hiding in their stall, or will you accept my challenge?" Sofoklis said as he stared at the five individuals.

"Is the Gold Rain Factory catching cold feet?"

"It can't be helped. The title 'Grey Finger' isn't an unknown one. Apart from those bigwigs, not many vestige-smiths could compete with him. There's a reason why he's a supplier for many businesses you know."

"Even still, if the Gold Rain Factory does nothing, they'd lose a lot of trust from the market. Can't they at least put up a fight?"

The crowd discussed the situation that took place. Lucas watched with interest, not intending to compete or interfere with them. It was currently afternoon and Lucas had already watched a few vestige duels, but those were between small-level businesses and vestige-smiths. This was the very first one that involved reputable parties.

One of the five, who happened to be the manager assigned to the venue for the day, walked out with an anxious smile in his face

"I don't know why you're targeting us, Mr Grey Finger. Can't we just talk this out amicably?"

"I'm not targeting you. I'm merely here to prove a point and test a new creation of mine. Don't waste any time and give me a response, as my time is limited." Grey Finger Sofoklis replied without any consideration of giving face.

It was clear that he didn't plan on retreating just because of a few words. Experience new stories with empire

The manager, seeing that his efforts to avoid a duel had failed, gritted his teeth.

"Don't look down on us just yet. Since you want a duel, a duel you shall, receive!"