

## The Crafts 89

### Chapter 89: The Trident

Vestige duels were challenged that compared the performance and statistics of a vestige with another with the purpose of finding the marginally better side.

Since vestige duels were created to attract attention and boost the prestige and reputation of a vestige-smith or vestige-smith company, they were typically done with fanfare; a stark contrast to the personal tests vestige-smiths would conduct on their creation.

"So, how do you want it to be?" The manager menacingly asked the 'Grey Finger', Sofoklis.

Weapon vestiges differed from one another, and this was a well-known fact. The existence of the two main design schools that focused on cold-type and hot-type weapons, respectively, was a clear example of this. As a result, vestige duels became somewhat complicated to organise.

For instance, if a vestige-smith of the Forger faction challenged another of the Multiplex faction, how would they compete? How can one determine the better of a gun and a sword, in a way that emphasizes their overall structural integrity, strength, and design? It was close to impossible as both were different. It was like asking which is a better fruit, an apple or an orange?

Both had their advantages and might even have slight similarities, but they were innately of different families, structures, and nutrients. Similarly, the Forger faction vestiges and the Multiplex faction vestiges, despite all being vestiges, were different.

Even among the vestiges of the Forger factions, differences existed. Some weapons could be specifically created to be used in certain environments, while others were for general purposes. Take, for example, a sword made to be able to function properly and withstand a  $-78^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-108.4^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) temperature pitted against an average sword or spear.

The two weapons were made for different environments, and so, the former might perform worse than the latter in some tests or vice versa.

Hence, a variety of genres were created to be conducted during a vestige duel, depending on what was to be tested.

"Let's go for a general duel." Sofoklis replied.

A general duel was pretty much the most common duelling format. It was meant to be used for standard gear. The opposite was a specialized duel, which would be used for special vestiges, like the extreme-cold-resistant sword from the previous analogy.

Less than a minute later, the four other staff in the stall brought out a few pieces of equipment. Every stall that was rented from the convention's organizers was given the items as a bonus. The organizers were already familiar with the tradition, so they did what they could to help it; after all, this made the event flourish in turn.

Sofoklis stared at them, but didn't act right away, choosing to shut his eyes instead. The manager of the Gold Rain Factory's stall thought that Sofoklis was getting ready by meditation. This wasn't an uncommon practice, so he felt nothing about it. However, he was wrong.

Less than two minutes later, the spectators suddenly cleared out an area as a group of men in uniforms appeared. They were the security personnel for the convention, but they came here for different reasons. In their hands were a few pieces of equipment, which were immediately set up in the open.

"What's the meaning of this?" The manager was confused, but for some reason, he felt wary.

"Nothing much. I'm already bored of using the standard equipment we're provided with, so I applied for something better." Sofoklis said with his eyes still closed.

The manager began to feel dread, and even his forehead was slowly being covered in sweat. Find exclusive stories on empire

The duelling equipment provided by the organizers was naturally not of the best quality. There were hundreds of participants and the organizers had to account for the possibility that everyone would be involved in a vestige duel.

As such, they cut corners when providing the equipment for the duels, going for second-rate items, or standard ones for the better known vestige-smiths and vestige-smith businesses.

While this sounded wrong, there was no problem with it. The duel could still be carried out, with the only issue being that the tests would not be as accurate, but they wouldn't be wrong either. Also, the set of equipment was suitable for testing most vestiges.

Small time vestige-smiths, who usually participated in vestige duels, were unlikely to be able to make anything that could surpass the limit of the equipment, even if they were substandard.

As for the standard equipment, it was usually more than enough for the more prominent and renowned business and individuals.

For Sofoklis to make a special request for a new set of equipment, what he wanted to test was definitely not ordinary and could possibly surpass the testing limit of the standard equipment. Usually, only the ultimate vestige created by each participant could achieve such a mark. However, such creations were kept hidden until the fourth or fifth day of the convention.

'Is he revealing his masterpiece so soon?'

The manager wasn't the only one who thought this way. In fact, over eighty percent of the crowd had the same opinion.

"Is it possible that, Grey Finger intends on using his masterpiece from the last convention?" Someone in the audience asked the person beside him.

"That might be possible, but the Gold Rain Factory can also do the same. Also, it's been over a year now. Everyone is aware of the quality, weaknesses and strengths of all the masterpieces from last year. Even if Grey Finger made improvements to it, the Gold Rain Factory could have done the same with theirs. In fact, that's how most new ultimate works are made, so I doubt that's what he did."

A year might seem long, but in the interstellar era, it was actually quite short. In such a short period of time, it was naturally impossible to make great progress at every convention. And so, some vestige-smiths and businesses would just improve on their work from the previous year and present it as their magnum opus.

"Then are you saying that he made two masterpieces for this year's convention?" The first speaker was surprised.

"...we can't say yet, but we can't eliminate that possibility."

While the crowd discussed, the security had finished setting up the new equipment.

"Let's begin." Sofoklis finally opened his eyes. To the manager who stared at them, it felt as if hidden within those eyes was a space filled with complexity he found no words to describe with.

The manager of the Golden Rain Factory's stall gritted his teeth and whispered something to one of the staff. The man froze, but quickly recovered and rushed into the stall before coming out.

"Can the two duelists present their vestiges?"

A man who had followed the security personnel to arrive earlier spoke up. He was dressed differently from them, but this didn't make the public treat him less. In fact, unlike the security personnel that were hired, the man was an employee of the organizers of the Silver Fig Trade Convention; an employee of the Silver Fig Consortium. He was present to act as an overseer for the duel.

Since Vestige duels were a variety of tests conducted to find the better vestige, there was no need for a judge. However, an overseer was required to ensure the integrity of the duel and act as a witness.

Behind Sofoklis, a young man walked out with a long box in hand. He kneeled on the ground piously and carefully laid a cloth, before dropping the box on it.

'From what I've heard, it's said that Grey Finger is part of a sub-branch under the Forger faction and that guy should be his disciple. They call themselves the Ecclesiastics.' Lucas thought as he watched the display.

The Ecclesiastics, just like the Magi branch, were a sub-branch of the Forger faction. However, they were very eccentric. Unlike how most factions or branches are formed, the Ecclesiastics weren't formed by a technological idea or belief, instead, it was a religious ideology. The Ecclesiastics revered vestiges.

Whereas others saw the creation of the hyumankin to be the number one achievement of the human race, the Ecclesiastics argued otherwise. They held the belief that vestiges were the number one

creation of the old race, and also the very important component that led to the rise of the hyumankin's position in the galaxy.

Whenever a member of the Ecclesiastics created a masterpiece product, they would treat it as their precious baby and, in some cases, as their god.

Lucas had one word to describe them; they were loco[1].

'Best to avoid them if possible.'

With a reverent expression, the young man carefully opened up the box and a vestige was revealed. It looked like a spear, but at the same time was not.

'Hmm? A trident?' Lucas thought as he glanced at the smaller-sized prongs by the side of the weapon's shaft.

Apart from the alluring matching red and purple colours, a result of the metals used, the trident didn't seem special. It didn't even radiate any stellar energy, which was a typical sign of the power of a vestige.

Some in the crowd were confused as to why Grey Finger had brought out such a vestige to compete, but the professionals were astonished.

Unless the vestige Grey Finger's disciple brought out was a flawed item, then it was powerful, very powerful. For a vestige to be able to rein in its aura was a testament to the vestige-smith's skill.

The manager, although not a vestige-smith himself, was familiar with the craft. He already guessed the two possible explanations for the vestige having no aura. He had similarly eliminated one of them and chose the more likely option, which wrapped him with fear.

This trident was definitely a masterpiece!