

## The Crafts 96

### Chapter 96: A Bet

"Let's have a vestige duel."

"Haha, are you delusional or dumb? I'm not a vestige-smith." The freelancer mocked as he breathed out with relief. He had expected Lucas to ask for something impossible, but the latter just had to be half-witted.

"Of course I know you aren't one, but that doesn't mean you can't participate in a vestige duel." Lucas smiled.

"Typically, vestige duels are between vestige-smiths. Even if you want to challenge him to one, how would you go about it?" The security captain glared.

"There's never been an official rule about who can participate in a vestige duel, so it's simple. We just compete."

Lucas explained.

"I'll also toss in a handicap for him. All he has to do is present his best vestige and I'll match its grade with mine. How's that?"

The freelancer was stunned, but he felt something was wrong.

With the proposal by Lucas, it essentially gave him the advantage. As a third level stellar practitioner, it was natural for him to have a bit of wealth accumulated which he would invest into his gear. Although his best vestige wasn't a Grade 3 vestige, it was still one of the top quality Grade 2 vestiges available, and a customised version at that.

Typically, apart from higher grade vestiges, only a few vestiges of the same grade could beat it in terms of quality. So, it seemed destined that he would win.

However, something still felt off.

'Maybe he's just ignorant and underestimated me.'

Thinking of this, the freelancer couldn't wait to compete and put Lucas in his place.

"I accept. But let's make it a bit more entertaining. If I win, not only would this matter end here, but you will kneel down and apologize to me while compensating me with a suitable fee for my wasted time." The freelancer declared.

Muffled bursts of surprise came from those who stood by the side to watch the scene. None of them had expected the freelancer to be greedy, despite being the one at fault.

Lucas however, had an idea after those words.

"In that case, if I win instead, you don't need to kneel and apologize. Just a small compensation fee of one hundred federal coins should do."

This time around, the crowd's astonishment shifted towards Lucas. Not only was he greedier, but he also claimed a fee of one hundred federal coins to be a 'small compensation'.

However, in some sense, it was 'small'. Freelancers made a lot more than the average worker and just the cheapest vestige alone already cost the average monthly salary in West Wing district. Hence, in some sense, one hundred federal coins was indeed 'small'. At least compared to the freelancer's vague compensation that could imply anything, a stated fee was cheaper.

"Sure." The freelancer agreed, confident in his victory.

Lucas smiled once he got the reply he wanted and asked the security team to clear some space for the duel.

The captain glanced at Lucas and was annoyed by the look on his face, but he still did as told.

As for Lucas, he had already walked into the stall to retrieve the necessary items for a duel. As he was the only one around, it took quite some time for him to do so.

"I'll need a volunteer to act as an overseer." Lucas spoke towards the crowd.

Since the vestige duel wasn't between participants of the convention, the organizers of the convention didn't need to send in a staff to act as an overseer. For that role, Lucas would have to outsource elsewhere, and his best bet was the crowd.

An overseer didn't hold much influence over the results of a vestige duel as it was clear to everyone; their role was more of a referee without significant authority.

"Let me."

A middle-aged man walked from the group of spectators. He was a vestige-smith participating in the convention, and his stall was only a few metres away from Lucas. He had taken note of the clash that occurred earlier, and had his interest piqued by Lucas' way of settling the issue.

For a vestige-smith, there was no glory in challenging a regular individual to a vestige duel. If one were to win, there were no benefits. However, a loss would affect their reputation. This brought about confusion for some vestige-smiths regarding what Lucas was trying to do. Although he wasn't a popular vestige-smith, having his image stained in a big event like this would affect his growth.

"What test do you want to start with?" The man asked.

Vestige duels consisted of seven tests each aimed at seven major and common characteristics of a vestige: Durability, Hardness, Sharpness, Strength, Stellar matrix efficiency, power and stellar energy purity.

"I'll leave the decision to the challenged." Lucas replied.

The freelancer smirked and called out the first test.

It was the sharpness test.

After that, he took out his vestige.

"That's...!"

"Oh my goodness, this vestige-smith is done for."

Exclamations burst out from the crowd once the freelancer revealed his vestige.

It was a Hozier-class Halberd, a special series of halberd made by a certain popular vestige-smith company, and what's more, a custom-made variation.

The company was founded by a Tier 1 Master vestige-smith, which was the rank for vestige-smiths capable of creating Grade 4 vestiges. Due to the rank of the founder, the company became renowned and quite popular. It also had a couple other vestige-smiths to support production.

The Hozier-class Halberd was one of the bestselling vestiges made by the company in their premium line. It covered vestiges from Grade 2 up to even Grade 4. The Hozier-class Halberd in the freelancer's possession was a Grade 2 edition, even then, it was very powerful and few other Grade 2 vestiges could compare.

The man who acted as the overseer for the duel was visibly shook and somewhat worried for Lucas. Not many vestige-smiths could make a vestige that could beat a Hozier-class Halberd, even more so for an unknown vestige-smith.

However, when the man turned to glean Lucas' reaction, he noticed that the latter was calm and unaffected by the vestige.

'It's either he's confident, he's putting up a front or he doesn't know what that vestige is. If it's the former, that would be nice. But if it's the latter, then he's a failure of a vestige-smith.'

The man shook his head. He had already surmised it was most likely the former. After all, no average vestige-smith could beat a Hozier-class Halberd.

He was visibly disappointed that Lucas still put up a front, and if it was the last option, then that was even worse. As a vestige-smith, one should be familiar with all top vestige-smith companies and vestige-smiths. It was like being an athlete and not bothering to research other athletes, especially the top figures in the sport. It showed that one was either too proud or too stupid.

While the spectators expressed their different thoughts yet similar thoughts about the duel -already judging that Lucas had lost-, the man at the centre of this stared at the halberd, unimpressed.

Enjoy exclusive content from empire

'Oi, system, why are people thinking that this piece of junk could win?' Lucas couldn't help but ask the system.

Although he already had a certain understanding of the vestige-smithing skill in the West Wing district, that was only for the common models. As for the ones in the Silver Fig Trade Convention, except for the ones from small-time vestige-smiths, they were all a notch or two higher than what was on the market.

At the very least, with the exceptions remaining excluded, everything here was at Grade 3 and above.

In other words, this was the first time Lucas was seeing a vestige from a premium line that was lower than Grade 3.

'I'm glad the host feels the same way. As such, the system hopes you understand the pricing scheme for the store.'

'I definitely do alright. If I had stellar energy, I could even make something like this with my eyes closed.'

Ignoring the cacophony in the background, Lucas browsed through his system inventory for a suitable vestige.

'I need to wow them, but not overdo it just yet. That's difficult.'

All the vestiges Lucas had made were stronger than the Hozier-class Halberd before him, that was unless it was of a lower grade.

'Let's go with you.' Lucas glanced at a vestige in the inventory. He then left for his stall to create the illusion that he wanted to retrieve the vestige from there. If the general public were to know that he had a spatial inventory quite similar to the Grade 4 vestige, Spatial vault, Lucas would be in big trouble.

After a few seconds, Lucas returned with a dagger in his hand.

The crowd was surprised by this. One should know that typically, a dagger was weaker than other types of weapons. This was because its small size made it lighter and weaker in comparison to weapons like a sword or a spear. It was also more difficult to fend against such weapons using a dagger. The same applies with vestiges.

"Is he giving up already?"

"Well, what else can he do? He's up against a Hozier-class."

While some questioned the choice of vestige while others weren't surprised by it, the major consensus was that Lucas was giving up on the duel. Even the freelancer thought the same as he had a mocking grin on his face.

"Let's get this started."