

Kill the Sun

Chapter 31: Old Lady

After Albert and Nick left the Containment Unit, Nick just looked at Albert with a raised eyebrow. "So, you just talk to them?"

Albert just laughed. "At least that's the first thing we try generally. It doesn't take a lot of resources, and it's rather quick. Might as well try this before we invest lives and energy."

"Does it actually work?" Nick asked.

"Sometimes. Not always, though," Albert said. "The thing is, the Dreamer is a Specter that feeds on mentality, which means it actually understands humans to a certain degree. It might not be able to articulate itself or learn how to speak, but it should be able to understand most of what we say."

"Working with a Specter that feeds on mentality can be a blessing and a curse at the same time."

"It's a blessing since you can almost always communicate directly with them, making most things very smooth."

"But it can also be a curse since Specters that feed on mentality are generally much more intelligent than other kinds of Specters."

"Specters like these breach almost as much as Force Specters."

"Like, there is this one Specter called the Old Lady. She is constantly in agony and pain, but she is still extremely friendly. Extractors can extract Zephyx simply by talking with her."

"I worked with her a couple of times. She's actually very easy to work with, and it is even fun at times. She is a great conversationalist, and she always shows real care towards my problems. At least when she's not wincing in pain or complaining about the darkness or her loneliness."

Nick looked sympathetic when he heard Albert's description.

But the next moment, Albert suddenly pointed at Nick's face. "That! That's what she's after. Pity!"

"The Old Lady feeds on pity."

"On pity?" Nick asked.

Albert nodded. "Yep. She grows more powerful by eliciting pity from people. By being nice to them and making them like you, they are far more likely to feel bad for your circumstances. That's why it's such a great time to talk to her."

"In like the first year of her being in the Containment Unit, she breached three times. Just for your info, that's a lot!" Albert said.

"The first one was when one of the clerks got to know her and decided to free her. Of course, a rational human being wouldn't do something like that since they would essentially forfeit their life, but Specters that feed on mentality have many subtle mental influences that can cloud your judgment."

"Naturally, when the Old Lady came out, she immediately killed the clerk to make sure that she didn't call anyone."

"After that, she tried to get out of the building, but she ran across an off-duty Extractor, who rapidly suppressed her and put her back in the Containment Unit."

"The second time was after she had worked and talked with the same Extractor for around a month."

"Back then, we saw no issues, but it turned out that the more you talked to her, the closer your attachment to her."

"So, after working with her for over a month, the Extractor essentially became her eternal servant but never showed any signs on the outside."

"Naturally, the Extractor busted her out, and the two of them ran away."

"Five people died on their escape."

"It took several days to catch them, and funnily enough, a different Manufacturer captured them, which meant that the Old Lady now belonged to a completely different company."

The next moment, Albert laughed loudly.

"And then she broke out again within a week by getting a clerk to free her again, and the first Manufacturer recaptured her."

"She hasn't broken out since then. They constantly rotate clerks and Extractors, making sure that everyone only gets to talk to her once a week."

Nick blinked a couple of times in surprise.

He had expected that, as soon as the Specters were in the Containment Units, they would remain there.

But now, he had heard of a Specter that had breached three times in a year via multiple ways.

"So, yeah," Albert said, looking at Nick. "They are easy to work with, but if you are careless even once, they will breach and cause you massive trouble."

Nick could only nod.

"And the Dreamer is one of those," Nick commented.

"Yep," Albert said. "I'm pretty certain that the Dreamer will agree to work with us, but if you are careless in any way, it will not hesitate to kill anyone to get out."

"Nick, I'm going to tell you something that my old mentor has told me. Back then, I didn't believe him, but after decades of working with Specters, I can tell you that he spoke the truth."

Albert put his hands on Nick's shoulders and looked him deep in the eyes.

"Specters can not feel happiness, companionship, or pity," Albert said solemnly.

"After decades of research performed by thousands of Extractors, we have found not even a single Specter that can feel any of these things."

"Whenever you see them being in pain or being supportive, it is only an act. They want to get closer to you in some way for some sort of gain."

"Never believe them."

"Never become their friend."

"Never try to ally with them unless you know that working for you is more beneficial for the Specter than being free. Specters will always do what is most beneficial to them."

"And even then, there are Specters that act chaotically, against their own interests."

"Every Specter is unique, and every Specter needs to be treated differently."

"Even the Blood Mosquito is contained inside a special Containment Unit. It has worked together with Crimson Fungus City for decades, but they still don't dare to let its main body out of their sight."

"Kugelblitz always has at least two level four Extractors or a level five Extractor stationed near the Blood Mosquito, even though there has been no issue with it for decades."

"That's how careful you have to be of them."

"Do you understand?" Albert asked with a serious tone.

Nick took a deep breath.

Then, he nodded with conviction.

"I will never feel empathy for a Specter!"

Chapter 32: Stages

"Good," Albert said with a sigh. "Anyway, how about I tell you about some general things regarding working with other Specters?"

"Sounds good," Nick said.

The next moment, Nick and Albert walked over to the side of the warehouse and sat in some chairs.

For the next three hours, Albert taught Nick about general techniques for working with different Specters.

The more Nick heard, the gloomier he felt.

Apparently, there were quite a great number of Specters that simply gained power by killing people, and they only produced Zephyx that way.

These kinds of Specters were either amazing or almost worthless.

It all depended on the moral flexibility of the Manufacturer and their standing in the community.

As the de-facto owner of the city, Kugelblitz didn't use any unsavory methods like this, but there were a couple of Manufacturers that did just that.

Naturally, Kugelblitz acted like the righteous authority and tried to uncover the obvious practices of the Manufacturers, but behind closed curtains, they were most likely paid off to look the other way.

These other Manufacturers mostly got their Zephyx from dying people.

An old person has a horrible disease that will eventually lead to their death?

Hey, want to earn a ton of money for the family you're leaving behind? You just gotta die a bit earlier.

And apparently, there were always enough sick people, even though Albert said that the hygiene and cleanliness in the Inner City was brutally high.

Albert even went as far as to say that getting sick in the Inner City without outside influence was nearly impossible.

Albert didn't directly say it, but he suspected that the Manufacturers were using shady methods to spread these diseases, but none of that had been proven yet.

Naturally, Nick was not really worried about all of that but about what he would do if he captured such a Specter.

Killing someone just for a bit of money?

That felt unacceptable to him.

Sadly, the only other option to get Zephyx out of these kinds of Specters was to use the bargain bin method, and when Albert mentioned the bargain bin method again, he actually chuckled in embarrassment.

Under Nick's stunned gaze, Albert told him that Wyntor actually didn't own a shredder like the one Albert had shown him.

Apparently, the cheapest method to shred parts of Specters was buying a huge shredder that cost Zephyx to operate.

Its prize was two million credits, over four times as much as the Containment Unit the Dreamer was currently in.

Wyntor didn't have the finances to purchase something like that.

When Albert had said that they would just grind the Dreamer down, he had lied.

"So, if the Dreamer refuses, we are essentially stuck?" Nick asked.

"Well," Albert said as he scratched his chin. "Not exactly."

"If, for some reason, the Dreamer completely refuses to work with you, you can still sell it."

"The Dreamer is not a newborn Specter. I think it is in the Mid, if not Late, Hatchling Stage. That's worth quite a bit."

"Hatchling Stage?" Nick asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Oh yeah," Albert said. "That's what we Extractors call the different levels of the Specters. The official designation is simply level-based. Level one, two, three, and so on, but we Extractors decided to come up with an unofficial one."

"Hatchlings are level one Specters."

"Adolescents are level two Specters."

"Adults are level three Specters."

"Elders are level four Specters."

"Fanatics are level five Specters."

"Wow, wait," Nick said. "Why are they suddenly called Fanatics? Everything up to this point seemed to follow an age progression."

Albert chuckled a bit. "Mainly because level five Specters and stronger have this thing where some people start worshipping them due to their power and influence. For example, the Parasite has a secret cult, and all the Manufacturers are trying their best to get rid of it since the cult kills people and delivers corpses to the Parasite."

"Anyway, level six Specters are Demons. We call them like this due to their extreme power and danger."

"Level seven Specters are Fallen."

"Level eight Specters are called Adversaries. Mainly because they pose the biggest problem to humanity as a whole."

"Really?" Nick asked. "What about the level nine Specters?"

"First of all, there are fewer level nine Specters than level eight Specters."

"Second, the five level nine Specters are already an integral part of our lives, which we can't escape from. Their existence determines the baseline of humanity as a whole."

"So, in a bizarre way, the level nine Specters are not humanity's enemies but the judges of humanity's prosperity."

"In contrast, we can still somewhat resist the level eight Specters, and the level eight Specters are doing their very best to suppress humanity."

"If you view humanity as a big company, you could view the level eight Specters as the chief executives and the level nine Specters as the owners. The owners very rarely come into contact with the employees, and they are rarely noticed by the employees, but when they arrive, even the chief executives have to be beyond respectful."

"In comparison, the chief executives are the ones making all the decisions and dictating how everyone feels. So, while the level nine Specters are more

powerful, they do whatever they want, which means, in a way, they are not the collective enemy of humanity."

"It's a bit weird to explain."

"It's like, one is a huge monster, and the other is a natural catastrophe. You can't really view a natural catastrophe as an enemy or fight it, you know?"

Nick scratched his chin.

"Oh, by the way, what are level nine Specters called?"

"Eternal," Albert answered. "They are just called Eternals."

Nick nodded. "Is there something similar for Extractors?"

Albert nodded.

"Level one Extractors are called Newbies."

"Level two are called Johns."

"John?" Nick asked with a raised eyebrow.

Albert laughed. "Yes, John. Level two Extractors are the most numerous and most average. They used to be called John Doe, but it was shortened to just Johns. The most common and generic Extractors get the most common and generic name."

"Johns," Nick repeated. "You're serious?"

"I'm absolutely serious," Albert said with a suppressed chuckle.

"If everything works out, you will also become a John one day."

Nick just blinked once.

