

Kill the Sun

Chapter 7: Specters

"I'm in!" Nick immediately answered.

Wyntor was a bit taken aback.

"That was quick," he said with a couple of blinks. "Don't you want to know anything about your job? Salary? Duties?"

"Is it worse than my current situation?" Nick asked.

Wyntor glanced around the broken and dirty home. Even though this was one of the bigger houses in the Dregs, it was still in horrendous condition.

"The chances of death are rather high," Wyntor commented. "After all, you have to interact with Specters."

Nick nodded. "So, I gotta beat some Specters up. No big deal."

Wyntor furrowed his brows in skepticism. "Do you even know what a Specter is?"

"Powerful animals or humans with some abilities, right?" Nick asked casually. "As long as I can punch them, they can die, right?"

Wyntor took a deep breath and sighed.

"That's true for some of them, but that is not the majority," he answered. "Do you know what Zephyx is?"

"Stuff we get from Specters," Nick answered with a confident nod.

"Yes, but what is it?" Wyntor asked with another sigh.

Silence.

"Energy?" Nick asked with uncertainty.

Wyntor just snorted. "That's a copout answer. You can say everything is energy, and you wouldn't be wrong."

"Have you ever heard of Prephyx?"

"Prefix? The stuff you put before words?" Nick asked.

"No, Prephyx, spelled P-R-E-P-H-Y-X, not P-R-E-F-I-X. It's like Zephyx but with pre- instead of ze-."

Nick shook his head.

"Alright," Wyntor said with a bit of annoyance. "Lemme just give you a quick rundown of how the world actually works."

Nick nodded and listened to Wyntor.

"Prephyx is an invisible force of energy that exists all over the world. It can only be detected by very advanced equipment and by very powerful Extractors. Prephyx has an incredible amount of energy stored inside of it."

"Sadly, we can't access the Prephyx in the atmosphere. We simply don't have any means to actually make use of the energy stored inside the Prephyx."

"When the Prephyx in the atmosphere gains a certain level of density, it can create a Specter. A Specter is something that can transform Prephyx into Zephyx, which is a usable form of Prephyx."

"A Specter is not necessarily alive, and it is not necessarily intelligent. Additionally, Specters are unique, which means that there is only one Specter of any kind in the world. There are never two or more Specters that are identical. In general, Specters appear in one of three different forms, but there can be exceptions.

"One, a Force Specter. A Force Specter can be an intelligent or non-intelligent being that consists of forms of energy. For example, the Specter we call The Fog is a formless cloud of something that mimics fog."

"It is unintelligent and only follows its basic instinct. From time to time, it wanders through some parts of the city and engulfs someone. That person will then wander aimlessly in the fog until they die of starvation."

"You can't feel The Fog. You can't punch The Fog. You can't run out of The Fog. If it catches you, you will die unless you are a strong Zephyx Extractor that has equipment and abilities based on Zephyx."

"Is The Fog still around?" Nick asked.

Wyntor laughed bitterly. "Have you forgotten what I said earlier? When Prephyx reaches a certain density, a Specter can appear."

"Something like The Fog is extremely difficult to contain. Additionally, it only consumes about one human every month. The Fog is a level two Specter, which makes it stronger than the most common Specters, but it only consumes one human every month."

"Now, if we were to kill it, its energy would disperse into the atmosphere again, and we would quickly find a couple more level one Specters in the world, and chances are that they will cost more human lives than The Fog."

"Wait!" Nick shouted. "But can't we just store all the Zephyx of The Fog after killing it?"

Surprisingly, Wyntor nodded. "We can."

"But it doesn't change anything."

"What?" Nick asked in surprise.

Wyntor nodded again. "Naturally, when we kill a Specter, we store all their energy, but it doesn't change anything. If we ignore all the energy and let it disperse, a couple of level one Specters will appear. If we store all the energy and don't let it disperse, a couple of level one Specters will still appear."

"No matter what we do, killing a Specter will always result in the creation of more, weaker Specters."

Nick looked at the ground with a worried expression.

That was... troublesome.

This meant that they couldn't possibly get rid of the Specters.

Wyntor noticed Nick's crestfallen expression. "It's not as hopeless as you think."

Nick looked at Wyntor.

"Humanity's ultimate plan for survival is to contain every single Specter in the world without killing them. If we can do that, all the Specters would essentially become irrelevant since they wouldn't be a danger anymore," Wyntor explained.

Nick furrowed his brows again. "That sounds difficult. There are probably a lot of Specters."

"Oh, the numbers aren't the problem," Wyntor said casually. "You have no idea how powerful Extractors can become. The issue isn't the number, but the power of the Specters."

"Please remember that everything we are talking about is subject to the NDA. If you tell anyone else about it, your life will essentially be forfeit."

Nick nodded.

Wyntor nodded back. "Specters are categorized into different levels of power. Every new Specter starts at level one. This makes them more powerful than every normal human, but people with an attuned Zephyx Synchronizer can fight them."

"Specters and Extractors can both become more powerful. The strongest Zephyx Extractors that exist are level eight, and we have a single-digit number of them."

"However, there is a two-digit number of level eight Specters in the world."

Nick looked with shock at Wyntor.

And then, Nick remembered something he had witnessed several times by now.

"What about Nurse Alice?" he asked.

Everyone knew about Nurse Alice.

Everyone in the Dregs had seen Nurse Alice.

And everyone knew that Nurse Alice was a Specter.

Wyntor sighed. "Nurse Alice is one of the five level nine Specters."

Nick took a deep breath.

"There are exactly five level nine Specters in the world, and even if all of humanity banded together, we wouldn't be able to stop even a single one of them."

"Nurse Alice is probably the most damaging Specter in the entire world. She kills hundreds and sometimes even thousands of humans every single day."

"But her power is so great that nobody can do anything against her."

"She does whatever she wants, and we can do nothing but watch."

"And there are four more like her."

Chapter 8:

Nick thought back to the last time he had seen Nurse Alice.

It was a bit more than two months ago.

The people had gathered in the marketplace to pay their Blood Tax, and a man had just stolen all the credits of a frail young woman.

It had been quite obvious that she had already paid with her blood for the last or even the last two times.

After she had lost her credits, she just looked at the ground with a dead expression.

And then, she had uttered The Sentence.

"I wish I were dead."

At that moment, the marketplace fell silent.

Everyone knew what it meant to say The Sentence.

A minute later, a girl with a bright and kind smile walked into the marketplace. She looked like she was in her late teens, and she wore a clean pink nurse's outfit.

No one dared to stand in her way, and even though the marketplace was filled to the brim, the people still managed to make a wide road for the kindly smiling nurse.

The nurse walked over to the woman, who was still kneeling in the middle of the marketplace.

The woman looked up when the nurse stopped in front of her.

The nurse just kindly smiled at her. "I'm Nurse Alice, and I'm here because you called me," she said with a kind and empathetic tone. "Just calm down. It will be over soon, and you won't feel any pain or discomfort."

The woman looked at the ground again.

A moment later, Nurse Alice kneeled down beside her and slowly moved her right palm over the woman's eyes, like someone that was closing the opened eyes of a corpse.

When she had closed her eyes, the woman had already died.

Nurse Alice gently laid the corpse on the ground and stood up with a kind smile.

A moment later, she vanished from the marketplace.

If anyone in the world uttered something akin to "I wish I were dead," "I want to die," "Just kill me," "I don't want to live anymore," or anything similar to that, Nurse Alice would appear and grant that wish.

It didn't matter whether the person wanted it or not. After uttering The Sentence, Nurse Alice would kill them.

Even if The Sentence were said as a joke, it didn't matter.

If anyone, for any reason, uttered something akin to The Sentence, Nurse Alice would arrive and end their life.

Have you ever said anything like that in your life?

Maybe when a loved one died.

Maybe when your head was hanging in the toilet after too much drinking.

Maybe when something really embarrassing happened.

The occasion didn't matter.

As long as anyone said it, Nurse Alice would arrive.

"And she's only one of the five level nine Specters?" Nick asked.

Wyntor nodded. "Three of the level nine Specters are unmissable. I can guarantee you that almost everyone has seen the three of them in their life before. Do you know the other two?"

Nick quickly nodded. "I know one of them. It's the one that resides in the darkness."

"Correct," Wyntor said. "The Nightmare is one of the five level nine Specters, and it is omnipresent in all the dark places in the world. The darker the place, the stronger its influence."

Nick remembered one of the many times he had encountered The Nightmare.

Nick had once been searching for food, which was why he had walked into the sewers. Luckily, the ceiling of the sewers was mostly made of grates, which meant that the omnipresent sun could also illuminate them.

However, there had been some dark corridors in the sewers as well, and whenever Nick walked through them, he heard the whispers.

Human voices appeared in the darkness, telling Nick that everyone was trying to kill him and that nobody cared whether he lived or died.

The whispers were trying to fill Nick's mind with paranoia, depression, self-doubt, hatred, anger, and every other kind of negative emotion.

They wanted to warp Nick into a different person.

Luckily, the dark corridors hadn't been that dark and long, which made it possible for him to quickly get through them and find a rat to eat.

The existence of The Nightmare was also the reason why many newly built "houses" in the Dregs purposefully created several holes in the ceiling and walls.

Being in the darkness was extremely dangerous, which was why everyone avoided being in dark places.

The Nightmare and Nurse Alice were so powerful that it didn't matter where someone was.

Their influence extended across the entire world.

"Do you also know of the third one?" Wyntor asked.

Nick thought about the question for a while, but eventually, he just shook his head.

"Surprisingly," Wyntor said, "the third one is the most conspicuous of all."

Then, Wyntor pointed up.

Nick looked up and saw that Wyntor was pointing at a hole in the ceiling, and Nick could see the Sun through that hole.

"It's The Sun," Wyntor said.

Nick's eyes widened.

The Sun?

Wait, the Sun is a Specter?!

"Surprising, right?" Wyntor commented.

Nick just nodded.

"We have managed to somewhat calculate and understand the powers of the other four level nine Specters, but when it comes to The Sun, we are essentially still blind."

"It is everywhere all the time. Anyone that flies above a certain height immediately ceases to exist. Everyone sees The Sun exactly above them at

all times. It doesn't matter on which side of the planet you are. The Sun is always at the same spot for everyone individually."

"And most shocking of all, its light is real. The entire world is illuminated by its light. It has the power to illuminate the entire world at the same time without having to take a break."

"The sheer amount of energy that requires is incomprehensible."

"All of humanity agrees that The Sun is the most powerful Specter that exists in the world, and it is the biggest obstacle standing between humanity and freedom."

"If humanity ever wants to achieve freedom, there's only a single thing we need to do."

". "

Chapter 9: Null

Nick just looked with shock at Wyntor.

How?!

How could a human destroy something as powerful as the sun?!

What would even happen after it was destroyed?!

"Of course," Wyntor added, "all of that is far in the future, and we might not witness it in our lifetime."

Nick looked at the hole in the ceiling again.

In the last couple of minutes, the world had become much bigger to him.

Until now, Nick had just wanted to get a good job to live a better life, but now he had heard about so many grand things.

Humanity was several times weaker than the collective Specters.

Nick only sighed.

Nick had seen horrible things in the Dregs, and he wanted to change the world.

Surprisingly, Nick's issue wasn't with the gangs or the robbers but with the system.

The people simply did what they could to survive.

If there were enough to go around, people might not kill each other as much.

Sure, greed would always be present, but it wouldn't be so overwhelming.

Sadly, Nick knew that he was just one man.

He couldn't change anything.

So, the next best thing was to live a good life without having to compromise his moral compass.

If he had the power to change things, he would, but he didn't, and he most likely never will.

After a couple of seconds of silence, Nick sighed. "What about the other two?"

"The fourth one is The Maw," Wyntor explained. "The Maw is not something that the majority of people will ever come into contact with since it exclusively interacts with Zephyx Extractors."

"From time to time, it grabs a group of Extractors and forces them to fight each other until only a single one survives, who is then allowed to leave."

Nick sighed. "And there's nothing we can do?"

Wyntor just shook his head.

"What about the last one?" Nick asked.

Wyntor looked a bit troubled and furrowed his brows. "The last one is difficult to talk about since it is rather special."

"No one knows what it looks like, and no one knows where it is, but the effects of its existence are indisputable."

Wyntor looked up at The Sun through the hole. "In a way, it's the opposite of The Sun."

"Everyone's attention is fixed on The Sun, almost like it is afraid of not being seen by everyone in the world. The fifth level nine Specter is the opposite."

"It's like it doesn't dare to show itself."

"No one is allowed to know what it looks, sounds, tastes, smells, or feels like. There have been cases in which some powerful Extractors analyzed all the scattered clues of its existence."

Wyntor looked at the ground with a troubled expression. "One day, that group died, and all their findings were destroyed along with them."

Then, Wyntor looked at Nick. "But interestingly enough, nothing else was damaged. Only the things relevant to it had been destroyed."

"Due to the manner of its existence, we call it Null."

"Null..." Nick repeated with a shocked voice.

Wyntor just raised an eyebrow. "Why are you so surprised? Specters have strange abilities."

Nick looked at the ground.

After a bit, he looked at his hands with an unsure expression.

"I think I understand now," he said. "That's why Albert was so interested in me."

Wyntor looked with quite some interest at Nick. "Do tell."

Nick looked at Wyntor.

"I think I've seen Null before."

For just an instant, Wyntor was taken aback, but he quickly became skeptical. "If you did, you would be dead."

Nick slowly shook his head. "I think I have seen it before, but I do not know what it looks, smells, tastes, sounds, or feels like."

Wyntor blinked several times. "What?" he asked in confusion.

"I have amnesia," Nick said. "I don't remember anything from before I was ten. My earliest memory is waking up in a room in a random house in the Dregs. I lived in the house for a couple of days, but some people came in and threw me onto the streets."

Wyntor looked with intensity at Nick. "And what makes you believe that you have seen Null?"

"My attuned Zephyx Synchronizer," Nick said. "It has been attuned ever since I remember."

"Speaking of," Wyntor said. "I need to know what kind of ability you have. Can you show me?"

Nick laughed helplessly. "That's the thing."

"It's impossible."

"I can't show you my ability."

Wyntor's expression became skeptical. "Then, how am I supposed to believe that you even have one?"

"I have one, but I can't show you," Nick said.

"Explain," Wyntor said.

"I can only use my ability when no one can see me," Nick explained. "When no one can see me, I can move about five times faster, and my body is several times stronger."

Wyntor rubbed his chin in thought. "That is a very substantial increase in power. Can you prove your ability in some way?"

Nick remembered the time he had fixed the hole in the ground by breaking part of a house and nodded.

"Follow me," Nick said as he walked out of the house.

Wyntor followed Nick, and the two of them stopped beside a ruin of a house.

After a bit of testing, Nick found an iron plate that had been bolted onto two stable beams.

No normal human could get the iron plate off the beams without tools.

"Wait on this side," Nick said as he walked to the other side.

Wyntor waited with raised eyebrows.

BOOOOM!

Wyntor's eyes shot open in shock as he saw a big dent appear on the iron plate!

BOOOOM!

Another huge dent appeared after an explosive sound!

"That enough?" Nick asked as he walked out from behind the plate.

Wyntor still had difficulties believing Nick.

What if Nick had prepared some kind of contraption that he could quickly hide after using it?

Wyntor wanted to test Nick some more, but after several minutes of different kinds of tests, Wyntor could only accept that what Nick was claiming was the truth.

As they returned to the house, Wyntor thought about Nick's ability, and when they sat down again, Wyntor had only one question.

"How can you use that ability against an opponent? As soon as you enter a fight with anyone, you effectively lose all your power."

Nick smiled uncomfortably.

"I have no idea."

Chapter 10: Everything Prepared

Inside the house, the two of them returned to talking.

Wyntor and Nick talked about Nick's duties and the plans of development for their Zephyx Manufacturing Company.

Wyntor also told Nick about the two remaining categories of Specters since they had gotten sidetracked earlier.

The first one was a Force Specter, which represented a Specter in the form of something untouchable. The Fog had been used as an example.

The second kind of Specter was a Physical Specter. As the name suggested, a Physical Specter had a physical body. The body could be an animal, a human, a plant, an item, and so on.

For example, the Crimson Fungus was a Physical Specter. It could be touched, and it could be injured by a strong physical force, while something like The Fog couldn't be injured by a physical force, even though The Fog was vastly inferior to the Crimson Fungus.

Lastly, there were Possession Specters. These were Specters that did not have their own bodies. Instead, they took control over a living or non-living entity.

For example, Ghosty's Lab had once essentially won the lottery by finding The Glasses, which was a Possession Specter.

The Glasses was a level two Specter, and it simply looked like a pair of glasses. If anyone put on the glasses, their reality would slightly warp in very inconspicuous ways. Over a long-enough period of time, the wearer would become insane.

But that was it.

As long as one knew what was going on, it wouldn't be a big issue, and to top it all off, The Glasses produced Zephyx as long as someone wore them.

It didn't endanger anyone.

It didn't attempt to escape.

It was easy to get Zephyx from it.

It was the perfect Specter for Zephyx Manufacturers.

Naturally, Wyntor and Nick wanted to get a Possession Specter for their business, but finding one depended on luck and resources.

The two of them wouldn't even be able to do anything against a Force Specter since they didn't have any Zephyx Equipment yet. Without equipment made of Zephyx, it was impossible to interact with Force Specters.

Even worse, Force Specters were notorious for being hard to contain since most of them could just pass through walls.

Containing a Force Specter needed a highly advanced containment unit made of many different materials made of Zephyx.

In the end, they were left with going after a Physical Specter, but that came with its own challenges.

First, even a level one Specter was something that every Zephyx Manufacturer wanted. Even the really big ones.

Specters were very rare, and all the big Zephyx Manufacturers had people dedicated to finding clues about possible Specters.

Then, Nick also had to contain them, and lastly, he could only attempt to get a level one Specter.

A level two Specter was too powerful for a new Zephyx Extractor like Nick.

The rat that had tried to convince Nick to kill himself had once said that Nick had met two Specters.

Yet, Nick hadn't been able to see the Specters.

To Nick, it had been like he had never seen any Specters, which meant that the Specters had been either invisible or mixed among the crowd of people.

Surprisingly, Nick didn't doubt the rat's words. After all, he knew who the rat was.

In fact, everyone knew about the rats.

The rats were the minions of a very powerful Specter called The Parasite.

The Parasite was located somewhere in the wilderness, and nobody had seen it before.

In order to get human corpses, The Parasite took control of a huge swarm of rats and sent them into the city. Through its minions, it could interact with and sense the entire city.

And when someone was suicidal or depressed, one of the rats would walk out and try to convince that person to kill themselves.

While The Parasite was very powerful, its rats weren't very powerful, and forcefully attacking someone with a swarm of rats had proven to be very inefficient. Because of that, The Parasite tried to convince people to kill themselves without uttering The Sentence.

Despite everything, Nurse Alice wasn't the biggest fan of having the corpses of her clients defiled, which was why The Parasite didn't dare to consume the corpse of someone that had uttered The Sentence.

Nevertheless, The Parasite was very powerful, and it could probably find all kinds of Specters in the city.

Sadly, it was impossible to work with The Parasite. Otherwise, it would already be working with one of the bigger Zephyx Manufacturers.

Eventually, Wyntor and Nick ironed out all the details, and their working relationship was set in stone.

Wyntor was the owner, CEO, clerk, recruiter, and administrator of the company. Essentially, he was dealing with everything that wasn't related to interacting with Specters.

Nick was the Chief Zephyx Extractor, information gatherer, and security officer.

In short, Wyntor was the brains, and Nick was the muscles.

Wyntor also showed Nick the place he had bought for their company.

In the western edge of the Dregs, just a little bit before the actual city, Wyntor had bought a big warehouse.

In comparison to all the buildings in the Dregs, the warehouse actually wasn't made of rusty metal. Instead, it just looked plain.

Inside, the warehouse had been completely emptied except for one thing.

In the center of the warehouse was a steel cuboid, 5x5x3 meters big.

This was one of the cheapest containment units available, but it already cost a ridiculous sum to get one.

According to Wyntor, this Containment Unit had cost him over 200,000 credits.

It was made of extremely hard steel, and the walls were over 30 centimeters thick.

Nick even wanted to try if he could escape from it, but the walls were so hard that even he was helpless.

This kind of cheap Containment Unit could safely contain a level one Physical and Possession Specter, but it wouldn't work against Force Specters.

Even more, level two Physical Specters would have enough power to slowly chip away at the containment unit until it broke.

When Nick heard that, he realized how powerful a level two Specter actually was.

A level two Specter could break through this insanely solid room of metal?!

Eventually, everything had been prepared.

They had a Containment Unit.

They had an administrator.

They had a Zephyx Extractor.

Now, they were only missing the last piece.

A Specter.

As Nick walked back onto the streets, he just awkwardly scratched the back of his head.

"I have no idea where I can find one."