

## **The Sun 251**

### Chapter 251 – Gloom

More time passed, and eventually, Nick became 20 years old.

It was crazy to think that Dark Dream was already four years old and that Nick had been working as a Chief Zephyx Extractor for an equally long time.

Dark Dream hadn't gained any new Specters for a while since they wanted to focus on their strength for now.

They still only had eight Johns, and they needed more.

After all, the number of Adolescents in Dark Dream was rising.

Even the Puppy had become an Adolescent now.

This meant that Dark Dream had seven Adolescents and only three Hatchlings.

Luckily, the three Hatchlings would never become Adolescents.

Everything seemed to be working out great.

Nick was becoming stronger.

Dark Dream was growing.

They were earning insane amounts of money.

Yet, there was always something in the back of Nick's head bothering him.

Envy.

It had been over a year now since the incident with Envy, and nothing had happened yet.

However, that didn't mean that Envy wasn't targeting Nick anymore.

It probably just took a long while to get to Nick.

First of all, Envy probably didn't have that many servants.

Specters were incapable of feeling fear, and as long as Envy wasn't free to move, it wasn't a threat to any Specters.

One had to remember that Envy gained servants by threatening to kill them.

But as long as Envy couldn't move, it wasn't a threat.

The only threat was the servants it already had.

This meant that Envy could gain a servant by talking to them via a relay and only if that Specter was, at most, a Fanatic.

As a powerful Fallen, Envy probably had several Demons and maybe even other Fallen as servants.

Envy could send a Demon towards a Fanatic that refused to become a servant and kill it.

However, these servants were probably also already busy with something.

After all, Envy was waging a war against humanity.

Nick knew these things since it was all pretty logical, and he guessed that this was one of the reasons why no Specter had shown up to capture Nick yet.

The other reason was that Envy didn't know Nick.

Envy knew that Nick was in Crimson Fungus City, that he was a John, and that he had the power of the Null.

But that was it.

No name, no address, no workplace.

There were tens of thousands of people in Crimson Fungus City.

Finding Nick wasn't easy.

'If only things could stay this way,' Nick thought as he looked at the wall while leaning on his elbow in his office.

For a long time after the meeting, Nick had been insanely paranoid and nervous.

Sleeping had been very difficult, and whenever he had a quiet moment, he felt his heart rate spike.

Just after Nick had gotten used to the constant outbursts of guilt regarding Horua, the paranoia and panic from the issue with Envy came.

Inside Dark Dream, Nick felt so strong, but at home, he felt so weak.

But he knew that this was all just an illusion.

Nick knew that he was a general amongst dwarves.

He was only powerful compared to his environment.

Most Veterans could kill Nick.

An Adult Specter could threaten Dark Dream, and an Elder would ensure its demise.

How many Elders did Envy have as servants?

Probably a lot.

Nick felt like he was waiting for his end.

It could appear any day.

But it just didn't.

Sometimes, Nick wished that this agonizing wait would just end.

Luckily, he was rational enough to not vocalize that wish.

When was it time?

When would Envy's servant show up?

Or what if Envy managed to break free and arrived itself?

Nick sighed once again.

He had worked in his dream job for four years, but not even a single one of them was filled with light or happiness.

All because of his stupidity.

All because he offered an eleven-year-old a position as a Zephyx Extractor.

Nick was getting tired.

He didn't want to feel this guilt anymore.

He didn't want to feel Envy's pressure anymore.

What was the point of becoming more powerful at this point?

At any moment, a Specter would appear that didn't care whether Nick was a John or a Veteran.

And if Nick told anyone in the city, he would be killed.

Sure, Simon was fine with letting Envy target Crimson Fungus City since that would take the heat off a different city, but the inhabitants of the city obviously didn't think like that.

Nick's mind stretched towards the ball of foreign Zephyx in his body.

He felt the warm but also threatening heat from Simon's Zephyx.

'At least, even if I get captured, Envy won't gain anything.'

Nick took a deep breath.

'Additionally, I get to go out on my terms.'

Whenever Nick felt like the pressure and terror overwhelmed him, he looked at the foreign Zephyx in his body.

This was his way out.

He wasn't stuck in this situation.

Even if his entire life spiraled out of control, he still had control over the end of his life.

And when Nick looked at the foreign Zephyx, it calmed him down.

He still had some agency left in this world, however small it was.

After a break, Nick decided to return to work and continued writing things on some sheets of paper.

By now, Nick had become very good at reading and writing.

Knock, knock.

Nick was startled as someone knocked on his door.

Ever since that incident with Envy, it was much easier for Nick to get startled.

But within a second, Nick calmed down again.

"Come in," he said with a neutral tone.

The door opened, and one of the clerks greeted Nick with a bright smile.

"Boss, you got a visitor!" she said with some happiness.

Nick raised an eyebrow before he saw someone walk through the door.

It was a young man with blue hair who was smiling with deep kindness.

When Nick saw him, he also got excited.

"Julian!" Nick shouted with a wide grin as he stood up.

Julian smiled back. "Long time no see, Nick."

Chapter 252 – Opening Up

"Come in! Come in!" Nick shouted as he gestured to one of the chairs before nodding towards the clerk.

The clerk nodded back, closed the door behind Julian, and went back to her workplace.

Julian laughed a bit and sat down. "It's still difficult for me to view you as a Chief Zephyx Extractor."

"And yet, you obviously are one."

Nick laughed. "I know, it's a bit strange. I think many people think like that but don't want to tell me."

"By the way," Nick added after he remembered something. "I heard that you managed to become a Specialist. Is that true?"

Julian laughed a bit in embarrassment. "Where did you hear that from?"

"From Wyntor," Nick answered.

"I wanted to keep it a secret for longer," Julian said, but his tone indicated that he didn't mind. "I knew that I shouldn't have told Vernon. He's such a blabbermouth."

After Julian said that, Nick seemed to lose some of his high spirits.

Nick was thinking about his second big meeting with the Manufacturers, which had happened several months ago.

However, Nick couldn't talk about these things since these meetings were highly confidential.

"You seem troubled," Julian said with a peaceful tone.

Nick looked at Julian.

Then, he sighed.

"Yeah. It's just that during the last meeting, Vernon brought up the matter about raising the taxes in the Dregs once again, and this time, the governor accepted the proposal," Nick answered.

"The people in the Dregs now have to pay 104 credits per month."

"Luckily, with the Riker Strikers and the Money Sink gone, the people of the Dregs have it quite a bit easier to gather credits."



"After all, the Riker Strikers no longer keep stealing to give credits to the Money Sink."

"So, even though the taxes have increased, the actual strain they have on the Dregs has lessened."

Julian looked at Nick. "That sounds like a good thing. Why would that make you feel like this?"

Nick sighed again. "Because it's only momentary."

"Kugelblitz won't dare to ask about a raise in taxes yet since they just got a raise last meeting, but within the next three years, the taxes will probably get raised once again, which will put the Dregs back into its old position."

Nick furrowed his brows. "I just don't understand how someone can live with dooming so many innocent lives."

Julian looked deeply into Nick's eyes.

"It's how the world works, Nick," Julian said.

Nick looked at Julian.

"To be frank, I still don't understand why you are so dead set on improving the lives of people who couldn't care less about you," Julian added.

"The people in the Dregs stole from you when you were at your weakest."

"When you were stronger, they feared and despised you."

"When you were poor, they hated you for owning nothing."

"When you were rich, they hated you for owning too much."

"No matter what you do or what you own, the people in the Dregs will hate you."

Nick looked at the table with a conflicted expression.

He couldn't see how several mouths opened all over Julian's face.

"Why save people that hate you?" the mouths spoke in an enchanting cadence.

"What has Crimson Fungus City ever done for you?"

"No one would blame you if you just ignored all these people that hate and despise you."

"The poor are poor because they can't see with rational eyes."

"They are blinded by hate and envy."

At that moment, Nick's body shook a bit, and Julian stopped talking.

Julian realized that he had said something that caused some kind of reaction in Nick.

However, that didn't matter for now.

Julian kept talking about how terrible the Dregs treated Nick for a couple of minutes while Nick just silently listened.

After a minute, the Zephyx in the room rose to extremely dense levels, but nobody inside Dark Dream noticed, including Nick.

Suddenly, all the Zephyx entered Nick's head and weaved around his mind.

Some seconds later, everything returned to normal, and the additional mouths on Julian's face vanished as well.

Nick sighed and looked at Julian, who was just looking at Nick with concern.

"I don't know. Maybe you're right, but I can't make a decision on that right now," Nick said.

A small glimmer of coldness shot through Julian's eyes, but it didn't affect his friendly smile.

"Don't worry," Julian said. "These things take time. Just listen to your heart, and if you decide to change your mind, tell me. I'm always there to help."

"Of course," Nick said, a bit of cheer back in his expression.

Julian nodded but then remembered something.

"Earlier, you reacted rather strongly to something I said."

Nick looked at Julian with confusion.

"It was when I said that the people of the Dregs are filled with hate and envy," Julian said.

Nick's body shook slightly again, and Julian noticed.

"What is this about?" Julian asked.

Nick sighed.

"You know, in a way, I'm already endangering Crimson Fungus City at this moment," Nick said.

Julian looked with more intensity at Nick, but his friendly smile was still there. "What could you do that could threaten Crimson Fungus City?"

Nick grimaced and didn't answer.

Julian's eyes narrowed slightly.

"Come on, you can tell me. I won't tell anyone else," Julian spoke in a special rhythm.

Nick seemed to struggle with something, and Julian leaned forward.

"I wouldn't hurt you."

"I wouldn't tell anyone."

"Come on, you can trust me."

Several seconds of silence passed.

Eventually, Nick sighed.

"Do you know Envy?" Nick asked.

Julian's smile brightened when he noticed that the conflict inside Nick had vanished.

"No, who's that?" he asked.

"Envy is a Fallen," Nick said.

Julian blinked a couple of times in surprise. "A Fallen, you say?"

Nick nodded. "And not just a weak one. Apparently, Envy is the servant of an Adversary that is at war with humanity."

Julian's smile widened, which made his eyes narrow.

"Oh? And why would someone like that be interested in you?" Julian asked.

"Envy can absorb the powers of Extractors," Nick said.

"You already know what kind of power I have."

"So, yeah. That's why Envy is interested in me."

When Julian heard that, an expression of realization appeared on his face.

Several things made sense to him now, and one of them was something that Julian hadn't originally connected to Nick.

"Nick, did you know that several Veterans and even some Experts have gone missing within the last six months?" Julian asked.

Chapter 253 – His City

"Huh?" Nick uttered as he looked at Julian. "No, I didn't know about that."

Julian kept looking at Nick.

"I'm in contact with many different people within the city, and I also help out here and there," Julian said.

"But most of the time, I am walking around with the guards."

"About seven months ago, a Veteran vanished. Something like that isn't that unusual. A Veteran in the city vanishes about once every couple of years. Most of the time, they die to a Specter that surprised them."

"Because of that, nobody really cared."

"But then, a month later, another Veteran vanished."

"Sure, that was more than normal, but that could just be a coincidence."

"And then, another one vanished a month later."

Nick looked at Julian with worry. "That doesn't sound like a coincidence."

Julian chuckled. "I can assure you, it's not."

"Everyone became much more careful, and we also realized that there was a pattern."

"First, all the Veterans who vanished worked for the city guards."

"Second, a couple of days before they vanished, they acted very strangely."

"They didn't want to go to work, and they constantly talked about feeling like someone was following them."

"They started to stay away from anyone who knew them until they finally vanished."

Nick's heart rate increased.

That sounded quite scary.

"Eventually, an Expert vanished," Julian said. "Just like the others, he worked for the city guards. He was a captain, and he was responsible for interrogating prisoners."

Nick felt like a cold shiver ran down his back.

The image of the captain who had interrogated Nick shot through his mind.

"And just two days ago," Julian continued, "another captain vanished. He was someone that I knew very well and someone who was very valuable to me."

After that, Julian described the captain's appearance.

The appearance perfectly matched the image Nick had of the captain that had interrogated him back then.

Obviously, they were talking about the same person.

"Do you two know each other?" Julian asked.

Nick nodded. "Yes, he was the one that interrogated me back then."

A quick light of realization shot through Julian's eyes.

"Why did he interrogate you?" Julian asked. "Just tell me everything surrounding the incident."

"Oh, sure," Nick said absentmindedly. "A while ago, I was investigating the Riker Strikers because I suspected that their leader was a Specter..."

Nick told everything that had happened to Julian.

The Money Sink.

The dark room.

The greater relay.

His meeting with Aria and the Governor.

His meeting with Simon.

Everything he knew about Aegis.

The foreign force of Zephyx in his body that allowed him to blow himself up.

Everything.

The more Julian heard, the more his smile turned sinister.

All of this made a lot of sense now.



A foreign Specter had come to the city, and it tried to find out who Nick was and where to find him.

Julian had already known that something like that had happened.

As a powerful Specter himself, he knew very well what it took to become powerful and how these Specters acted.

Julian knew almost all the Specters within the city, and he didn't know of any Specter that could make Veterans and Experts vanish just like this without leaving any trace.

However, Julian hadn't been sure why such a Specter had shown up or what they were searching for.

Usually, such powerful Specters had it much more difficult when entering a city than a weak one.

The reason was that they displaced a lot of Zephyx while moving.

Every city had innumerable advanced devices that scanned everyone and everything that entered the city.

A higher density of Zephyx would be picked up much more clearly by these devices.

Because of that, Specters didn't want to leave the cities in which they had become powerful.

Even more, very powerful Specters needed very powerful food, and when they fed, the entire city would notice and become wary.

This made it extremely difficult to feed more than once unless the Specter knew exactly how and where to hide inside the city.

When the Veterans had vanished, the city had started looking for Adults and Elders.

When the Experts had vanished, the city had started looking for Elders and Fanatics.

After all, since feeding was so difficult, a Specter wouldn't waste their feeding opportunity on weak food.

However, that was true only under normal circumstances.

What if the Specter's goal wasn't actually becoming more powerful?

What if it was information gathering?

A series of events shot through Julian's mind.

A servant of Envy was tasked to find Nick within Crimson Fungus City.

Not knowing who he was, the servant started to abduct city guards. After all, the city guards should have some kind of central registry for people, and they probably also saw many people.

Eventually, the Specter found out that a huge incident had happened, which should be the incident the servant had heard about when Envy had seen Nick.

After that, the Specter found out that a captain must have interrogated the target.

So, the Specter abducted a captain but found out that it had been the wrong one.

However, the captured captain knew who the right captain was.

And just two days ago, the Specter had gotten that captain.

And now...

Julian looked at Nick.

The Specter knew who Nick was.

If everything continued happening the same way, Nick would vanish in something like 28 days.

Even more, Julian was quite certain that Nick wasn't the target of an Adult, Elder, or Fanatic.

No, Nick was most likely the target of a Demon.

A level six Specter.

Julian grinned maliciously as he looked at Nick, while Nick realized that his time was approaching.

Envy's servant was here!

Within a month, Nick would vanish!

When Julian saw the terror in Nick's eyes, he grew annoyed.

"Nick, all of this is unimportant. You can just forget about all of this," Julian said.

Nick looked with confusion at Julian.

"Huh?" he uttered.

"What were you talking about?" Julian asked.

"What?" Nick asked back. "I was talking about something?"

Julian nodded with a chuckle. "You seem to be quite scatterbrained recently. You were just telling me about your plans for the next big meeting."

"Oh?" Nick asked. "Oh, yeah, right!"

"Actually, I don't really have a plan for that meeting," Nick said.

Julian chuckled a bit. "Then why did you bring it up?"

"I don't know," Nick said with a laugh.

After a bit of small talk, Julian left Dark Dream.

He finally knew which Specter kept stealing his food.

One of the Veterans and one of the Experts who vanished had had running wagers with Julian, which would have soon paid out.

Someone had dared to grab Julian's food not once but twice!

And now, it wanted to grab a third piece!

This was Julian's city!

Even the Parasite had to follow his rules!

If this unknown Specter had just asked Julian for Nick, Julian would have most likely handed him over, but that fucker ate a Veteran and even an Expert!

Those were valuable pieces of food!

Julian narrowed his eyes.

Even though he was only a Fanatic, Julian had his ways of dealing with intruders.

Chapter 254 – Dreams

After Julian left, Nick returned to working with an improved mood.

His talk with Julian helped Nick forget about all the troubles and the stress.

Sure, Envy was probably still searching for him, but for now, there was no sign of any of Envy's servants being anywhere close to the city.

Who knew? Maybe it would take another decade for them to turn up.

Julian said not to worry, and Nick believed in Julian.

There probably wasn't much to worry about for now.

The day passed without any incidents, and eventually, it was time for Nick to go to sleep.

For a change, it was surprisingly easy to fall asleep today.

Nick just didn't feel as worried as usual, and he fell asleep rather quickly.

"We hate you!"

"You don't deserve your wealth!"

"You don't deserve your power!"

Nick was on top of a small mound of corpses, and a mob of people were clawing at his feet in hatred.

Nick held a bar of gold in his hands, and he looked at the people below him with worry.

The people of the Dregs.

They hated him.

They wanted to kill him.

They despised him.

Nick looked into the distance.

There, he saw several fat people sitting on mountains of gold.

These rich people sometimes extended their hands towards one of the people of the Dregs and shook them until a piece of gold fell out, which landed on their mountain of gold.

After that, the person was thrown back to the ground, after which they stood up and ran towards Nick with aggression.

The mountains of gold were so high that the people on the ground couldn't even see the rich people on top of them.

The only things they witnessed were their empty pockets, Nick sitting on a mound of corpses, and Nick holding a gold bar.

Obviously, Nick was killing everyone and gathering their wealth.

They hated Nick!

He deserved to die!

Nick was terrified as hundreds of people clawed at his feet.

"I'm sorry!" Nick shouted.

"I want to help you!"

"Please, just give me a bit!"

"I will improve your lives!"

Yet, the people just kept shouting for his death.

Nick gritted his teeth, tore a piece off his gold bar, and threw it into the crowd.

The people glanced at the cold piece.

Then, they noticed that the gold piece in Nick's hands was bigger than the one on the ground.

"You're greedy!"

"You don't deserve your wealth!"

The people ignored the gold on the ground and clawed at Nick's feet again.

One of the rich people climbed down from their mountain, grabbed the piece of gold on the ground, and returned to their mountain.

Nick tore more and more off his gold bar and threw it into the crowd.

Yet, the crowd always found a reason to attack Nick.

Eventually, Nick threw incredible amounts of gold at all the people in the Dregs, and all their pockets were filled with gold.

While the crowd kept attacking Nick, more and more rich people grabbed poor people to shake their money out of their pockets.

The poor people became more and more injured by the continued shaking, and the more injured they became, the more they hated Nick.

They despised Nick!

They hated him!

They wanted to kill him!

Nick's fists began to shake.

He was so furious!



Why were they this stupid?!

Were they animals?!

Could they not see the true cause?!

What had he done to them?!

Why did they hate him?!

Did he deserve to be hated that much?

Nick started to hate the people as well.

CRACK!

Nick rammed a gold bar into someone's skull, killing them.

The corpse fell onto Nick's mound of corpses, making it a bit bigger.

The crowd of people only became angrier.

Their clawing intensified, and Nick was pulled down from his mound.

An army of hate-filled expressions approached his face and bit into his flesh.

"AH!"

Nick shouted as he suddenly shot up from his bed.

He was covered in sweat.

His eyes were teary.

His heart was racing.

For a while, Nick just looked downward.

"It was just a dream," Nick said.

And yet, it didn't feel like a dream.

Nick felt like what he had just experienced was real.

After regaining his bearings, Nick went back to sleep.

But as soon as he fell asleep, the same dream appeared.

Eventually, he shot up again after a short cry.

Later, the dream reappeared a third time.

After that, Nick couldn't fall back asleep again and decided to start the day early.

The day went by as usual.

When it was time to sleep again, Nick had the same dream.

And again.

And again.

Days passed.

Nick became unfocused.

He was constantly tired.

He felt like the world was weighing on his shoulders.

Small problems looked like huge problems.

Whenever Nick saw someone from the Dregs, the images from his dreams seemed to overlap with them.

He saw the creatures of his dreams in the people.

They hated him.

They despised him.

For no reason.

He was trying to help them, but they still secretly hated and despised him.

No matter what he did, he could never become a part of them.

Couldn't they see that he was trying to help?

Why did they hate him?!

"Hey!"

Nick was taken out of his thoughts as he heard something.

He looked around but couldn't find the person that spoke to him.

"Hey! Hey, buddy! Down here!"

Nick furrowed his brows and looked at the floor.

Right now, Nick was standing on top of a grate, and through the small slits, he could see something.

A rat.

"What?" Nick asked.

"You've been having some troubles recently, eh?" the Parasite whispered through the grate.

Nick took a deep breath and just continued walking.

"Hey, hey, hey! Don't just walk away," the rat shouted.

Nick ignored the rat.

The Parasite was a plague upon this city.

If he could, Nick would kill the Parasite right here and now.

"I know how to get rid of your nightmares!"

Nick stopped walking.

"Interested?" the Parasite asked, and Nick could hear the grin in its voice.

Nick took a deep breath and walked back to the grate.

"I know what to do," the rat said. "I also know what's happening to you."

"What?" Nick asked coldly.

"Well, I'm not just going to tell you," the rat said.

"I want something in return."

Nick furrowed his brows.

He knew exactly what the Parasite wanted.

Chapter 255 Honesty

Nick looked down at the grate.

He wasn't sure if he should believe the Parasite.

The Parasite was a plague upon the city, and he was only interested in corpses.

Nick hadn't given any corpses to the Parasite in years.

It was very possible that the Parasite just wanted a last load of corpses since he believed that Nick and Dark Dream would never ask the Parasite for some clues regarding a Specter again.

"Why should I believe you?" Nick asked.

"Because of my reputation," the rat said with a smirk from below the grate. "Hey, let's talk somewhere else. I don't think you want to be seen with me in public."

Nick looked around and saw a couple of people walking around.

Without saying anything, Nick walked over to an abandoned house.

Some seconds after he entered, one of the grates started to move to the side, but Nick just stepped on it.

Splash!

The distant sound of something hitting the water in the sewers could be heard.

"What's your problem?!" the Parasite shouted a couple of seconds later.

"I don't want you to come out. Someone might see us," Nick whispered.

"Say that earlier!" the Parasite shouted with annoyance.

"So? Why should I trust you?" Nick said.

"Nick, Nick, Nick," the rat said with a sing-song voice. "I am a merchant by trade, and Dark Dream isn't my only customer."

"If I start to renege on my promises, my other customers won't ask me for another trade."

"Nick, have you ever heard that I didn't fulfill my end of the deal from anywhere?" the Parasite asked.

"No, but that doesn't mean anything," he answered.

"But it does," the Parasite answered. "Crimson Fungus City is one of my favorite territories for getting corpses. I have many more customers here than in many other cities."

Nick wasn't surprised by that.

From what he had heard, the Parasite's actual body was outside the city, which meant that it could work in multiple cities at the same time.

"There is a reason why you haven't heard that I have ever broken a promise, and there's also a reason why I am still in this city," the Parasite said.

Nick raised an eyebrow.

"Crimson Fungus City and I are trading partners, and we both have bottom lines that can't be crossed. If they get crossed, we can't work together anymore."

"My bottom line is that nobody is allowed to besmirch my image. You may call me greedy, cruel, an opportunist, a psychopath, whatever. I don't care."

"But you are not allowed to call me dishonest! My trades are fair!" the rat shouted with conviction.

Whenever Nick heard the Parasite, it was difficult for him to believe that Specters almost had no emotions whatsoever.

"If anyone crosses my bottom line, I will go after them!" the rat shouted. "I might not have the power to kill them, but I know a looooooot of things."

"Maybe I'll tell your greatest competition the locations of several powerful Specters for free."

"Maybe I'll tell them some secrets I know about you."

"I might not have a lot of hard power, but I have a lot of soft power!" the Parasite proclaimed with confidence.

"Okay," Nick answered, unimpressed. "So, nobody is allowed to call you dishonest. However, that doesn't mean you are honest. I can threaten someone's life and force them to tell everyone else that I am not threatening their life. Seems like the same thing to me."

Surprisingly, the rat chuckled a bit. "Nick, I was talking about my bottom line."

"What about Crimson Fungus City's bottom line?"

Nick furrowed his brows but didn't answer.

"Do you really think it's that hard to get rid of me?" the Parasite asked. "Do you really think an entire city filled with powerful Extractors can't get rid of a couple of rats?"

"Just send a couple hundred Johns and Veterans into the Sewers to kill the rats. Get some expensive equipment that can find life so that you don't miss any. Go stuff all the holes in the wall. Go poison the waters of the sewers with rat poison."



"You might not get rid of all of my rats, but the effort of getting into Crimson Fungus City would be far greater than what I would get out of it. That would mean that trying to get into Crimson Fungus City represents wasting more Zephyx than I could potentially get."

"Sure, it's a big act and all, but isn't it worth it? After all, according to everyone, I'm one of the biggest nuisances in the city."

Nick thought about the Parasite's words.

If the city guards actually put their minds to it, they could probably eradicate the Parasite's presence within a couple of days or weeks.

Like this, they would have gotten rid of one of the biggest tumors of Crimson Fungus City.

But they didn't.

They could, but they didn't do that.

Nick remembered that the governor had asked several times about the investigation status regarding the Parasite in the yearly meetings.

Yet, all the Manufacturers barely delivered any information.

Had the governor asked for forces to eradicate the Parasite in the past?

Had the Manufacturers simply answered with excuses about why they couldn't help?

Nick didn't know.

However, one thing was certain.

Getting the Parasite out of the city wasn't impossible, and it also didn't need a genius to come up with these solutions.

Yet, the solutions were not used.

That could mean only one thing.

The city didn't want to get rid of the Parasite.

Or, more precisely, not the city but the Manufacturers.

And why was that?

Because trading with the Parasite was advantageous.

The Parasite made them money.

And that meant that the Parasite held his end of the bargain every time.

Otherwise, the Manufacturers would have gotten rid of him already.

Nick's question had been answered.

The fact that the Parasite was still in Crimson Fungus City after decades of being inside it meant that it was honest and delivered on its promises.

The Manufacturers didn't want to get rid of it.

"Alright," Nick said. "Then, what's the deal?"

Chapter 256 Trade Offer

"Alright, so, I will give you a surefire way of dealing with these little nightmares of yours, and even if they return in the future, that way will still work," the Parasite said.

Nick furrowed his brows. "You also said that you know what's happening to me. I want to know that first."

"Eeeehh," the Parasite uttered in uncertainty. "I mean, I know what's happening to you, but I can't really tell you a lot of details."

Nick narrowed his eyes. "Why not?"

"Telling you might endanger my presence here in Crimson Fungus City," the Parasite said. "If you want to know every last detail, you gotta buy me out of the city since I can't trade with anyone here anymore."

"Buy you out of the city?" Nick asked with furrowed brows. "That's possible?"

"Of course! Everything has its price," the Parasite said.

"And how much would that be?" Nick asked.

He knew fully well that he couldn't afford that, but he wanted to know how much the Parasite asked for anyway.

"Three Specialists, 30 Experts, 300 Veterans, 3,000 Johns, or 30,000 normal people. Your pick."

Nick had been prepared for an astronomical sum, but he hadn't expected it to be this high.

"So, if I want to know what is happening to me, I have to pay that, right?" Nick asked.

"I will tell you what's happening to you, but I will just not reveal any details," the Parasite said. "I'm not a complete monster, you know?"

Nick took a deep breath.

"Fine, what do you want, and what's happening to me?" Nick asked.

"Okay, I can tell you what's happening to you right now since that won't endanger the trade, but before I tell you, I want you and the little Melfion boy to accept the trade. After all, I want a couple more corpses than back then," the Parasite said.

"How many do you want?" Nick asked.

"Energy equivalent to 50 normal people."

"That means 50 normal people, ten Peak Newbies, five Initial Johns, or one Peak John. You can also mix and match, but in the end, everything has to add up to at least 50 normal people of power," the Parasite explained.

Nick gritted his teeth.

That many corpses just to get rid of his nightmares.

"Just to get rid of the nightmares?" Nick asked with fury.

"These nightmares are not just nightmares, Nick," the rat said. "I can tell you one thing with 100% confidence."

"If you do not get rid of these nightmares, you will die within a couple of months."

"I absolutely assure you that these nightmares will kill you."

Nick's eyes widened in horror and shock.

Yes, the nightmares were bad, but how could they kill him?

At most, Nick would remain tired, grumpy, and angry all the time, but that wasn't a death sentence.

"How?" Nick asked.

"I can't reveal that detail," the Parasite said. "I can tell you that the nightmares are not the knife that's going to pierce through your heart. More accurately, the nightmares are what will push you towards the knife."

Nick blinked a couple of times with narrowed eyes. "You mean they will make me commit suicide?"

"No, that's not it," the Parasite said with insecurity. "It's more that they will make you do something that will make a specific someone kill you."

"Why would they make someone kill me?" Nick asked with annoyance. "Why wouldn't that someone kill me directly?"

"Because they're a Specter. There, I said it! You happy now?!" the rat shouted with annoyance. "You get that piece of information free of charge, but I want you to accept my trade, or I'm going to plunge all of Dark Dream into a nightmare, got it?!"

Nick's eyes widened.

"A Specter?" he repeated in shock.

"Yes!" the rat shouted. "You're being targeted by a Specter. An extremely powerful one at that. He's so powerful that you can't even hope to fight back."

"But lucky for you, he doesn't gain power from killing people. Otherwise, you would already be dead."

"However, if he feeds on you, you will end up dead."

Nick could hear the rat sigh.

"Listen, I'm already on very thin ice after telling you all of this. I seriously can't tell you more."

"I'll keep one of my rats below Dark Dream. Tell me how you will deliver the corpses to me later."

"And hurry up!"

After the rat said all these things, Nick heard it scurrying away.

Nick narrowed his eyes as he looked at one of the walls of the abandoned house.

A powerful Specter had targeted him.

Nick had thought that the nightmares were just because of all the stress regarding Envy and wanting to help the Dregs.

Yet, they had actually been caused by a Specter.

This explained why it was so hard for Nick to deal with them.

When it came to things like nightmares, there were things that one could do against them.

However, when these same nightmares were caused by a Specter, there was nothing one could do unless one killed the Specter.

But the Parasite said that the Specter was extremely powerful and that Nick had no hope of fighting against it.

'I need more details,' Nick thought as he exited the abandoned house.

Halfway to Dark Dream, Nick had a thought.

'Wait! If the nightmares are caused by a Specter, can another Specter get rid of them?'

'Could the Dreamer get rid of them?'

'That's most likely the solution to my problem and also why the Parasite demands the corpses now instead of asking for them.'

'After knowing that this is caused by a Specter, it's not very difficult to come to that solution, which means that the Parasite basically already told me what to do.'

Nick took a deep breath.

'I guess there's no way around it anymore.'

'I have to send 50 corpses to the Parasite.'

Nick released a sigh and entered Dark Dream.

It was already quite late today, and Wyntor was already at home.

'One more night of nightmares won't kill me. Otherwise, the Parasite would have been much more urgent about all of this.'

After another night full of nightmares, Nick entered Wyntor's office to talk to him.

Chapter 257 257 – The Parasite's Influence

Nick and Wyntor talked about Nick's nightmares for a while.

"I actually noticed that you seemed different from usual," Wyntor commented. "I thought that the stress was getting to you."

Nick sighed.

"I thought the same thing."

"Nick, if you're targeted by a powerful Specter, what stops that Specter from just killing you?" Wyntor asked.

"I don't know. Apparently, it doesn't get power from killing people, but when it gets power, the process will kill a person," Nick said.

"So, what do we do about this?" Nick asked.

"What else?" Wyntor answered with a shrug. "You basically already agreed to the trade on Dark Dream's behalf. We have to give the Parasite his corpses now, or Dark Dream will be in serious trouble."

Nick sighed.

"I'm sorry, Wyntor."



"Oh, don't sweat it," Wyntor said with a dismissive wave. "I would've agreed to the trade anyway. You're worth much more than 50 corpses."

Sadly, that only marginally reduced Nick's guilt.

"Is it true?" Nick asked.

"What?"

"That basically everyone is trading with the Parasite."

Wyntor nodded. "Yep. I didn't want you to know, but basically all the Manufacturers are regularly trading with the Parasite, and they're giving him a lot of corpses."

"Many of the Manufacturers are even indebted to him. The number of corpses the Parasite asks for is based on how many a Manufacturer can provide, which means that a more powerful Manufacturer has to pay more."

"Naturally, getting that many corpses without arousing suspicion is extremely difficult, which is why the Parasite accepts them in installments."

"Some of the Manufacturers have to pay off their debt over months."

"Of course, the Parasite is smart enough not to put too much debt on everyone. Otherwise, the Manufacturers might unite to get rid of him so that they don't need to repay the debt."

"Whether you like it or not, the Parasite's existence is deeply woven into the foundation of Crimson Fungus City," Wyntor explained.

Nick took a deep breath.

He hadn't thought that the Parasite's power was this great.

Everyone knew the Parasite.

Even the people in the Dregs.

Yet, all the normal people and even the normal Extractors didn't know the true extent of the Parasite's power.

Everyone thought that the city tried to get rid of the Parasite.

But it wasn't.

"So, how do we get the corpses?" Nick asked.

"I'll simply reroute the Screaming Coffin's corpses to the Parasite," Wyntor said calmly. "The Screaming Coffin won't die because of a lack of corpses, and it also isn't nearly strong enough to break out of its Containment Unit."

"It can just walk in circles inside its Containment Unit for 50 days or so."

Nick sighed once again.

He hated that he was improving the Parasite's power just so that he could survive.

It felt so selfish.

It felt so dirty.

'I MUST improve the lives of the people in the future!' Nick thought with conviction.

'I have already taken out so many moral and ethical loans that it feels difficult for me to repay them, but I have to give it my all!'

"Tell him that he will get his corpses every day at 10 a.m.," Wyntor said.

Nick nodded.

The two of them talked for a bit more before Nick left Wyntor's office to talk to the Parasite.

On the first floor inside the building was an empty room, which no one was allowed to walk into.

When Nick and Wyntor had received the building after dealing with Cycle, they had seen that one of the plates on the ground was loose inside this room.

Wyntor immediately knew that this was where Ardum traded with the Parasite back when he had still been the owner of Cycle.

Wyntor decided to leave the room like this since they might need to contact the Parasite again in the future.

Nick walked into the room and moved the metal plate to the side.

After moving a couple more things below the metal plate, Nick could see the sewers below him.

"Hey!"

Suddenly, a rat's head popped up from around the corner before looking around.

"Where are my corpses?" it asked.

"We don't have that many in storage right now," Nick said. "We accepted your offer. Every day at 10 a.m., you will get one corpse. That will continue for the next 50 days. The corpses will come through here."

The rat seemed a bit disappointed but quickly perked up again. "Sure, no problem."

"So, what about the solution?" Nick asked.

The rat blinked a couple of times. "I thought you would have already realized the solution."

"Do you mean the Dreamer?" Nick asked.

"So, you did!" the rat said. "Yes, the Dreamer deals with dreams, and it doesn't like when other Specters step into its domain."

"The Specter that's targeting you is much more powerful than the Dreamer, but even he can't fight it inside a dream."

"With that other Specter influencing your mind while you sleep, the Dreamer can't feed, which is why it will get rid of the foreign influence."

"Work with the Dreamer once, and your issue will be solved, and if it ever starts again, just do the same thing."

Nick released a sigh of relief.

"So, I won't die?" Nick asked.

"Eeehhh," the Parasite muttered. "That can still happen, but the chances are much lower. The Specter will just try to push you towards the knife via another way."

Nick furrowed his brows.

Naturally, he wasn't happy with that.

However, there was one more thing that he wanted to ask the Parasite.

"Is the Specter that's targeting me a servant of a Fallen or an Adversary?" Nick asked.

"Pffft," the rat sputtered. "Hell no! If he were, I wouldn't be here, and you would all be dead!"

"He's just like me, a free agent. No allegiances whatsoever."

Nick took a deep breath and sighed.

He wasn't sure whether he should be happy or not.

He honestly didn't know what option he would prefer.

Nevertheless, it was time to wait for Envy's servant to strike again.

But before that, Nick needed to pay the Dreamer a visit.

Chapter 258 258 – Renegotiation

Nick told Jenny that he would take one shift of working with the Dreamer today.

As a reason, he said that he wanted to be familiar with all the Specters and that he hadn't worked with the Dreamer for a long time.

Naturally, Jenny immediately gave Nick the next shift, and a couple of hours later, Nick walked into the Dreamer's Containment Unit.

Jonathan was the one who had just been working with the Dreamer, and Nick woke him up as soon as he entered.

Obviously, Jonathan immediately became panicked when he saw Nick.

Why was Nick here?!

Did Jonathan do something wrong?!

However, Nick quickly calmed Jonathan down, and Jonathan left the Containment Unit.

Now, only Nick and the Dreamer were left inside the Containment Unit.

Nick looked at the Dreamer, who only silently looked back.

"Today, we're going to work together," Nick said.

The Dreamer didn't answer.

Nick lay down near one of the walls and closed his eyes.

Some seconds later, Nick felt the Dreamer standing beside him.

Some seconds passed.

And some more seconds.

And even more.

After several minutes, Nick opened his eyes and furrowed them as he looked at the Dreamer beside him.

"Is there an issue?" Nick asked.

The Dreamer, who stood directly beside Nick, just looked at him.

Nick just looked back with annoyance.

"I'll ask again. Is there an issue?" Nick asked.

Scratch.

Nick looked down and saw that the Dreamer had scratched the floor with one of its talons.

"Do you want to say something?" Nick asked.

Scratch scratch.

The Dreamer's talons scratched twice.

Nick took a deep breath.

He hadn't thought that it would actually happen, but he had thought about something like this happening.

A change in power dynamic.

It had always been Nick and Dark Dream that dictated the rules, not the Dreamer.

But now, things were different.

After looking through all the memories of all the people who had worked with the Dreamer, it knew that Nick was the Chief Zephyx Extractor.

It knew that Nick was far more important than normal employees.

"Alright," Nick said. "One scratch for yes. Two scratches for no. Three scratches for that this question isn't important. Do you understand?"

Scratch.

The Dreamer just kept looking at Nick with its dead stare, but it still scratched once to show that it understood.

Nick sighed.

"Do you know why I am actually here?" Nick asked.

Scratch.

'Just as I thought,' Nick thought.

"Do you want to negotiate something?" Nick asked.

Scratch.



Nick took a deep breath.

"Do you see the influence of a strong Specter on me?" Nick asked.

Scratch.

"Can you get rid of it?"

Scratch.

Nick took another deep breath.

"Do you want to get out?"

Scratch scratch.

Nick furrowed his brows. "You answered with a no instead of an irrelevant. Do you actually want to stay here, or is it just not important? One scratch for wanting to stay, two for not important."

Scratch.

Nick looked at the Dreamer for a while.

The Dreamer had just said that it didn't even want to leave.

Of course, Nick didn't fully trust it, but he was willing to believe it.

While 85% of all the Zephyx it produced was confiscated, it could still feed on Johns every single minute of every single day.

This basically made Dark Dream an ideal place to feed.

Nick took a deep breath.

"Alright. So, you want to stay. You're saying that you wouldn't want to escape, even if you were not inside a Containment Unit. Is that right?"

Scratch.

"Obviously, I'm not letting you out," Nick said. "If you were in my place, you also wouldn't let yourself out."

Scratch.

'At least it's honest,' Nick thought.

Nick took another deep breath.

"Alright, don't think of me as barbaric," Nick said. "I could theoretically go the hard-ass route and say that it's my way or the highway, but I'm not going to do that."

"You have been with us for four years, and there haven't been any incidents. The only people you killed are the ones that you were told to kill, right?" Nick asked.

Scratch.

"For four years, you have produced Zephyx without causing any issues. On top of that, you know that you are basically the only one who can help me out of my current predicament, I presume."

Scratch.

"So, now, you want to renegotiate with all of these things considered, right?"

Scratch.

"Alright," Nick said. "You are currently getting 15% of the Zephyx, and you are already an Early Adolescent. You have to know that it won't help either of us if you get too powerful. After all, if you get too strong, it gets too dangerous to work with you."

Scratch scratch.

Nick raised an eyebrow. "Are you saying that you becoming more powerful won't endanger weaker employees?"

Scratch.

Nick furrowed his brows. "Just to make sure. If I were to send an Initial Newbie with little willpower to you, they won't die?"

Scratch.

"But I guess you won't produce as much Zephyx," Nick said.

Scratch.

"So, you can stop working with someone before they die, right?"

Scratch.

Nick took a deep breath.

"Alright," he said. "Then, let's talk about your future terms."

"I will still prioritize Johns when choosing who works with you, but I am also allowed to send Peak Newbies to you. Working with you should help them in becoming Johns quicker."

"In exchange, your share of Zephyx gets increased from 15% to 25%. That's the deal."

"I honestly can't give you more. Otherwise, you would only be working for eight hours a day because you become so strong that nobody can work with you, and sadly, I'm too busy."

"Do you agree?"

Scratch.

Nick's eyebrows rose.

'That was... easy.'

Nick repeated the terms of the new agreement, and the Dreamer once more confirmed that it accepted.

"Alright," Nick said. "Then, we have a deal. Let me go outside and change the settings on the Containment Unit."

Nick stood up, changed the settings of the Containment Unit, and came back in.

"All good," Nick said. Then, he lay down beside the Dreamer.

"Now, can we start?"

The Dreamer looked at Nick, and Nick started to become tired very quickly.

As soon as Nick fell asleep, the nightmare returned.

For just a couple of seconds, the Dreamer looked at the nightmare.

And then, the nightmare was dispersed, replaced by the Dreamer's own creation.

Nick's issue with the nightmares has been solved.

Chapter 259 259 – Caravan

"How much will it be this time?"

A man wearing a luxurious suit looked at another man wearing some kind of silver armor.

The two of them were located near the middle of the Inner City.

Behind the man in armor were several more people and a huge wagon.

The huge wagon was over 20 meters long and nearly five meters high, carried by over 20 gigantic tires.

Just by the looks of things, the wagon probably weighed several tons.

The lower half of the wagon was solid steel with no openings, but the upper half had a couple of openings to let light in.

If one looked through the openings, one would see a luxurious interior filled with several beds.

Four people stood in front of the wagon, near several grabbable parts.

Usually, people would feel shocked after seeing the four people. After all, all four of them were Experts.

Yet, no one even batted an eye at the wagon and the people since they were here every month.

It was a trading caravan.

And the four Experts were there to pull the wagon.

Yes, their only job was to pull it.

Around the wagon were five other people, looking at the interior of the Inner City with boredom.

All five of them were Specialists.

Level five Extractors.

But there was one more person.

The one in the silver armor. The one who was currently talking to the person in the suit.

This person had a shocking identity.

He was a Hero.

A level six Extractor!

And he was the leader and owner of the trading caravan.

They moved from city to city, buying the local specialties at a low price and selling them at a much higher price.

There was a lot of money to be made this way.

After all, traveling through the outside world was supremely dangerous.

In general, there were four kinds of Specters outside the cities.

First, freshly born Specters. Naturally, these kinds of Specters were very weak and valuable. Almost all of them were Hatchlings.

Second, Specters that had to flee from a city to survive. Those ranged from Hatchlings to Fanatics and even to the occasional Demon.

Third, Specters that operated from outside any cities, like the Parasite. Those Specters tended to be very dangerous, and something like this was generally only considered possible after a Specter became a Fanatic.

Lastly, Specters that had destroyed a city. Almost all of them were Fallen, and they were very rare.

If one was lucky, one wouldn't meet any Specters except for some Hatchlings, which could be sold for a ton of money in any city.

However, if one was unlucky, one could come across an extremely powerful Specter, and even if the Specter was so powerful that it didn't care about the group, it might decide to use the group of humans to sneak into a new city.

After which, the group would die, of course.

Going outside was extremely dangerous.

But that was why trading between cities was so valuable.

And these people earned their living this way.

"The food has proven to be a great hit," the man in the silver armor said to the man in the suit.

The man in the suit was a representative from the city, sent to negotiate with the trading caravan.

"We're glad to hear that!" the man in the suit said with a friendly smile. "I presume you want more this time?"

The man in the silver armor nodded. "Not many people are interested in the big mosquito larvae of this city, but the few that have tried them loved them. I think I'll take a stock of about 150 kg of those this time."

The man in the suit nodded and wrote something on a small piece of paper.

"People also love your rusty cubes. I keep telling them that they are called mixed meat cubes, but they just keep referring to them as rusty cubes due to their color," the man in the silver armor said with a laugh.

"I get it," the other man answered with a laugh.

"Put me down for 800 kg of those."

For a couple of minutes, the man kept asking for more and more things.

In the end, he bought over three tons of food and another eight tons of miscellaneous goods.



The man in the suit created a contract, and after some negotiation, they agreed on the terms.

After the contract was signed, the man in the armor took out several white crystals.

Each crystal represented five kilograms of solidified Zephyx!

The crystals were carefully put into a suitcase, which was being guarded by a Specialist.

A moment later, several people appeared in the plaza, all carrying crates filled with different items.

"Anything interesting happen lately?" the man in the silver armor asked casually.

"Not much. Everything's basically the same," the man in the suit answered.

"Oh, right! I've heard that there is a new Manufacturer in the city," the man in the silver armor commented.

The man in the suit furrowed his brows. "Is there?" he asked in confusion.

"I think so," the man answered. "At least, I've heard someone say it. What was their name again? Dark Dream?"

"Oh, right," the man in the suit said. "I would say they are kind of new. Although, I thought you would have already heard about them. They've been here for a couple of years already."

"How are they doing?" the man in the silver armor asked.

"Pretty good, as far as I can tell, but that's to be expected. The owner of Dark Dream is the son of Vernon Melfion."

"Oh?" the man in silver armor uttered. "Then, things make sense. I was surprised since it is so rare to see a new Manufacturer appearing in any city. Are they here in the Inner City?"

"No, they're in the Outer City," the guy in the suit said casually. "Pretty big building in the south. You basically can't miss it."

"Interesting," the man in the silver armor said.

#### Chapter 260 260 – The Prison

When all the wares were loaded into the wagon, the caravan turned around and traveled out of the Inner City.

In the Outer City, they followed one of the major roads towards the south.

The leading man of the caravan looked a bit to the west, and he saw a couple of big buildings.

Yet, one of them was quite a bit taller than all the other ones.

With his powerful senses, he could read the sign of the distant building.

Dark Dream.

"We're going to continue traveling tomorrow," the leading man declared. The other people in the caravan just nodded and started talking to each other before they split up to look at the city.

The leading man went into the huge wagon and looked at the distant building of Dark Dream.

His eyes were scanning the entrance of the building at all times.

As soon as the target appeared, he would get it.

He had been on this mission for over a year now, and he looked forward to going back to his normal routine.

However, some minutes later, something unexpected happened.

The man looked towards the gate of the Inner City.

Just now, a young blue-haired man walked out of the gate.

And by the looks of things, he was walking right towards the caravan.

Even more, the distant young man looked directly at the man in the silver armor inside the huge wagon.

The silver man noticed that and furrowed his brows.

A Specialist?

What did a Specialist want from him?

Well, with luck, the Specialist wanted to join them.

The blue-haired man stopped about five meters away from the wagon and looked at it with a smile.

One of the Specialists of the caravan noticed that and rudely stepped between the blue-haired man and the wagon.

"Hey! You're not allowed to be here!" he reprimanded.

The blue-haired man didn't even turn to the Specialist.

Instead, he just looked at the wagon.

"You really don't want the following words to reach the ears of any onlookers," Julian, the blue-haired man, said.

Inside the caravan, the man in silver armor furrowed his brows.

He wasn't sure what the blue-haired man wanted, but he still used his Zephyx to create a barrier that isolated sound.

Something like that wasn't difficult to achieve when one had many years of experience with manipulating Zephyx.

Julian just smiled politely.

Then, more and more mouths opened on his face.

The eyes of the man in silver armor turned lifeless and absentminded.

"What do you want?" a terrifyingly deep voice came out of the wagon itself.

There was no reason to hide anymore.

The blue-haired man obviously knew the wagon's true identity.

"You've taken my prey," the many mouths spoke at the same time, their lips beautiful and their teeth immaculately white.

"And why should I care?" the wagon asked. "You're no threat to me."

The Zephyx in the surroundings increased, and everything around Julian and the wagon seemed to turn blurry.

From the outside, it looked like a blue-haired man was just politely talking to a man in silver armor.

But in truth, an amalgamation of beautiful mouths was facing a transforming wagon of steel.

The man in the silver armor vanished, just like all of the furniture inside the top of the wagon.

The wagon expanded upward, and its "skin" split apart into the shape of several windows with metal bars.

Inside each window were several malnourished humans of all ages, sexes, sizes, and power levels.

All of them were just hopelessly looking outside at Crimson Fungus City.

A select few of them were shouting loudly, hoping that anyone on the outside would notice their pleas, but based on the lack of enthusiasm of the other humans, it was probably hopeless.

The top of the wagon grew until it revealed a long and gaunt figure of plates, wires, and razors.

Finally, its true form was unveiled.

Its humongous torso was an amalgamation of prisons, and several long and powerful arms of steel extended out of the prisons, all controlled by the gaunt figure of metal growing out of the top of the prisons.

Most shocking of all was that all the humans in the prisons were real.

They were actual humans that were being imprisoned.

This was the Prison, a Demon.

It was a Mid Demon, and it gained power by imprisoning people.

The more powerful and numerous the people were, the more Zephyx it gained.

With its incredible illusion powers, it traveled from city to city, acting like a trading caravan.

The ten people traveling with the wagon were all illusions.

And how did it hide from the sensors in every city?

The Zephyx crystals.

Naturally, the sensors always alerted the city that something with a lot of Zephyx was moving through the gate.

The only thing the Prison had to do was to show the crystals.

Obviously, the crystals were the reason for the alarm.

Like this, the Prison traveled from city to city, and whenever it saw a good target, it would consume it, which would end up with the target being trapped inside one of the cells of its abdomen.

And to make sure that nobody connected the disappearances with the caravan, the Prison left an illusion of said person behind for a couple of days.

Lastly, it was also one of Envy's most powerful servants.

"Why should I care?" the Prison repeated, its voice dark and metallic.

"I am a servant of Lord Envy, general of the almighty Famine!"

"Crawl back to wherever you came from!" the Prison shouted with its metallic voice.

"You have barely reached the fifth level. While you might be powerful in this little city of yours, your power is worthless in the wider world," the Prison said.

"I am a servant of Lord Envy, general of the almighty Famine!"

"Crawl back to wherever you came from!" the Prison shouted with its metallic voice.

"And be glad that I am not forcing you to become my servant right now!"

Silence.

But then, all the mouths started to grin and laugh.

"Lord Envy," the mouths said.

"Almighty Famine."

"True, I am far weaker than any of those."

"I am even weaker than you."

"But this is my city!"