

The Sun 261

Chapter 261 Mouths

"Your city?" the Prison repeated in a mocking tone.

"You live in hiding just like any other Specter."

"This is a city controlled by the humans."

However, the mouths just laughed.

And then, the amalgamation of mouths walked away from the wagon.

The Prison witnessed as the amalgamation of mouths walked out of the Prison's illusory domain.

At this moment, the amalgamation of mouths was walking through the Outer City without any disguise.

"Hey, Julian! Haven't seen you in a while!" one of the stall owners said with an excited smile as she looked at the amalgamation of mouths.

"I've been busy recently, sorry," one of the mouths facing the stall owner said with a friendly tone.

"Of course! I get it! Hey, congratulations on becoming a Specialist!" the woman said.

"Thanks, Charlotte," the mouth said.

It slowly became bigger until it eventually assumed the form of a tree.

The trunk, branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits of the tree were made of laughing mouths.

The amalgamation of mouths flowed up one of the buildings and extended towards the sky.

It slowly became bigger until it eventually assumed the form of a tree.

The trunk, branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits of the tree were made of laughing mouths.

At this moment, the tree could probably be seen from all across the Outer City.

"This is my city!" the mouths said in a special rhythm.

"If I want to be seen, I will be seen."

"If I don't want to be seen, I won't be seen."

"Everyone that I have talked to is under my control."

"And the few that aren't..."

The mouths chuckled as two people in the streets started to run away, shouting in panic that there was a gigantic monster on one of the roofs.

Yet, all the people just looked at the two of them like they were crazy.

The two of them kept shouting that the blue-haired man had turned into a huge monster.

"Julian? He's not a Specter!" everyone answered with dark tones, annoyed that some people were badmouthing their good friend.

Two of the mouths on the tree extended towards the two panicked individuals.

"You seem a bit confused," they said. "Hi, I'm Julian! I think we haven't met yet."

The more the mouths talked, the calmer the two people became.

Eventually, the two of them casually talked with the mouths.

"This city is mine," Julian repeated.

"You might be more powerful than me..."

"But are you more powerful than the city?" the mouths asked.

While the mouths were talking, more and more of them fell off the tree, traveling towards panicked and concerned people.

By the end, over a hundred mouths were flowing through the city, stopping occasionally to exchange a couple of words with someone.

The metallic figure on top of the cells looked with a neutral expression at the tree of mouths.

The Prison knew that it was much more powerful than Julian.

In a direct fight, the Prison could tear Julian apart like paper.

However, while keeping its illusions active in a calm scenario was easy, the same thing didn't apply when the Prison was in a battle.

With enough havoc, even the Heroes would come out of the Inner City to look at what was going on.

At that point, the Prison was bound to be found out.

While the chances of its escape were high, it would never be able to return to Crimson Fungus City, and even worse, Crimson Fungus City would warn all the other cities.

"You are putting on a strong front," the Prison said with its dark and metallic voice.

"While you can control these weak people, I am certain that you can't do the same to the Heroes."

"If we battle, you will also be found out."

"I have a shot at survival and even one at actually winning against the city."

"You don't."

The mouths kept laughing.

"Which is why I haven't sent Kugelblitz after you yet," the mouths spoke in unison.

"If they find you, they might become more careful, which will make it harder for me to stay hidden."

"We both have something to lose."

"And that is why you will leave my city and never return," the mouths spoke.

The metallic figure on top of the cells looked at the tree of mouths.

The Prison often received opposition in cities.

Surprisingly, it had far more conflicts with Specters than with humans.

Many of the cities were secretly controlled by powerful Specters, and these powerful Specters didn't want to share their food with the Prison.

And it almost always ended the same way.

"What do you want?" the Prison asked.

A trade agreement.

The Prison would deliver food and incredible goods that resulted in the production of more humans, which resulted in more food for the Specters.

"What do I want?" the mouths repeated with friendly laughter.

"I want you to go and never return," they said.

The Prison looked at the tree of mouths.

"You are not willing to compromise?" it asked.

"No," the mouths answered.

Silence.

"Fine," the Prison answered with a neutral voice, "but I have to take one last person."

"No, you won't," the tree of mouths said.

"This is not for me," the Prison said. "This is for-"

"Envy, yes?" the mouths interrupted. "You want Nick."

"The one with the power of the Null."

The Prison looked with a neutral gaze at the tree of mouths.

If it were human, it would have felt some shock and surprise.

"Yes," the Prison said. "Lord Envy desires the power of the Null."

The mouths chuckled.

"And why should I care?" they answered, throwing the Prison's words back at it.

"Because Lord Envy will kill you if you refuse to comply," the Prison said.

"Lord Envy is vastly more powerful than this puny little Crimson Fungus City."

"Lord Envy even has two Fallen as servants."

"You have no choice in the matter."

"Keeping the Null's power for yourself will only end your existence," the Prison declared.

Yet, the mouths just kept laughing.

"Theoretically, yes," the mouths said.

"Practically, no."

"Lucky for me, Envy and its most powerful servants are busy fighting Aegis at this moment."

"Why should I be afraid of a sharp knife in your hand when you are so far away?"

Chapter 262 Future Eternal

The Prison looked at Julian for quite a while.

It hadn't expected for Julian to know that Envy was stuck fighting Aegis.

It was true.

Envy couldn't spare any of its powerful servants since Aegis was putting enormous pressure on it.

However...

"That will not always be the case," the Prison said. "You are making a decision out of a momentary situation that will have permanent consequences."

The mouths chuckled.

"It's not permanent," they answered.

"The rate of my growth is unmatched."

"I only need to become a Demon, after which I will take control of the leadership of this city."

"And then, my power will not only be contained in this city."

"The governor can call Aegis."

"Is your lord willing to risk its powerful servants for a desire for revenge?"

The smiles on the mouths turned cocky.

"Is your lord that human?"

The Prison just looked evenly at the tree of mouths.

"I will ask one last time. Are you not willing to hand over a weak human to ensure your survival?" the Prison asked.

"If you had asked me before taking my food, I would have handed him over," the tree said.

"But you and your lord have taken from my plate without asking."

"Maybe I have been under humans too much, but I think I should feel offended and disrespected by that."

"And I also think I should now make irrational decisions borne out of anger."

The mouths snickered.

"Being a human is much more fun than being a Specter."

The Prison just kept looking at the tree.

"You are dead-set on making an irrational decision?" the Prison asked with a bland tone.

The mouths stopped laughing but didn't stop grinning maliciously.

"When you are an Eternal, can any decision be irrational?" they asked.

"When there are no negative consequences to your actions, do your actions even matter?"

"You are not an Eternal," the Prison answered immediately.

"But I will be," the mouths answered.

Silence.

"Look at the city."

"Everyone knows me, but nobody knows of my true existence."

"I am inside everyone's mind, but everyone will ignore the truth."

"Every single person sees me."

"But not a single person can see me."

"In this city, am I not the Sun and the Null at the same time?" the mouths spoke arrogantly.

"And what when I become a Fallen?"

"What when I become an Adversary?"

"When I become an Adversary, I can stop the Shields from seeing me."

"Then, only the Specters can be my enemies."

"But since I will be amongst the strongest of humanity, I am safe as long as humanity is safe."

"Do you understand what this means?"

"This means that when I become an Adversary, it is only a matter of time until I become an Eternal!"

"As a Demon, I can feed on every city! I can leave this one and go to another one without any issues!"

"As a Fallen, I can feed on Aegis' strongholds!"

"And as an Adversary, I can feed on all of humanity!"

"Humanity will be my weapon, my shield, and my food."

"So, why should I care about some Fallen called Envy?"

"It is not me that should surrender in front of Envy so that I won't be killed."

"It is Envy that should surrender in front of me so that I won't kill it."

The Prison just kept looking at the tree of mouths.

"You are not the first to speak such grand words," the Prison said evenly.

"And you won't be the last."

"Specters like you always fall to your own hubris."

"And most of the time, it happens on the hands of the very things you consider as food."

"Becoming human will never work out."

"Specters are not human."

The mouths chuckled.

"What about Nurse Alice?" the mouths asked.

"She is an Eternal. She is different," the Prison said calmly.

"If she can be human, why can't I be human?" the mouths asked.

The Prison just looked at the tree of mouths.

And then, it gave up.

It had seen a couple of Specters just like this one.

The Prison had been to many cities, and some of them had Specters just like this one.

Specters that thought that their rise was unstoppable and unavoidable.

And then, they became Fallen, and things suddenly started to become very difficult.

A Fallen could only properly grow by feeding on Protectors, and all Protectors belonged to Aegis.

And Aegis was damn good at finding and fighting Fallen.

While it was easy for a Fallen to survive, it was almost impossible for a Fallen to reliably grow.

For one simple reason.

The Fallen's food source was its most dangerous enemy.

Since Specters didn't suffer from the weakness of biological matter, they didn't naturally expire.

There were Fallen that were tens of thousands of years old, and yet, they still didn't manage to become Adversaries.

That was because these Fallen were forced into feeding extremely rarely and carefully.

Fallen that fed rapidly didn't tend to live long.

The Prison could see the tree of mouths joining the latter group of Fallen.

Of course, the Prison didn't care about the tree's fate.

Unfortunately, the tree's arrogance made it irrational, which made it impossible for the Prison to leave with its target.

But there were other things the Prison could do.

"There is no value to be had in this conversation," the Prison said.

A moment later, all the different people who had left the wagon came back.

"Change of plans. We're going to leave now," the man in silver armor shouted.

The Experts went to the front and started to pull the wagon towards the exit of the city.

But in truth, the Prison was just slowly floating down the streets.

"Until we meet again, future Eternal," the Prison said in a mocking tone.

The mouths just kept chuckling.

Then, the tree shrunk, and all the mouths gathered in one spot again before turning back into the figure of a blue-haired man.

Eventually, the Prison left the city.

A Specter generally only cared about its own survival, and the Prison wasn't an exception.

So, as long as the Prison was far away from the city, Julian's power didn't matter.

Envy was the servant of Famine.

The Prison was the servant of Envy.

Naturally, just like the other two, the Prison had servants of its own.

And it didn't care about their survival.

Nobody noticed the confrontation between Julian and the Prison.

However, the confrontation had a lasting effect on Crimson Fungus City, even though the effect wasn't very strong.

The caravan never reappeared again.

One month later, the people were waiting for the caravan's arrival.

But it never came.

In the end, they guessed that something must have happened to the caravan.

The city made less Zephyx as a result, which was bad for the economy.

However, the people in the Outer City and the Dregs were happy.

While they didn't know what happened, the people in the Outer City noticed that the prices of mixed meat cubes had sunk.

So, they bought more of those, and since they tasted better than the veggie cubes, they preferred them.

But that left more veggie cubes, which reduced their prices by a bit.

The end result was that the food in the Dregs had become marginally cheaper, which made the people in the Dregs quite happy.

While all of this was going on, Nick just kept working at his job.

He had not noticed that Envy's powerful servant had already arrived and left.

Once more, Nick was stuck in the limbo.

At some point, Envy or one of its servants would come for him.

The paranoia and fear never left.

Luckily, the paranoia and fear were not as strong anymore after Julian had said that Nick didn't need to worry.

Time continued to pass.

Soon, another year had passed.

Nick was now 21 years old, and he recently managed to become a Peak John.

During that year, the people of Dark Dream also became much stronger.

Including Nick, there were now eleven Johns in Dark Dream.

Nick was a Peak John.

Jenny and Trevor were Mid Johns.

Jonathan, Constanze, Marvila, Larry, and Kiara were Early Johns.

Cryon, Kerry, and Taren were Initial Johns.

On top of that, Dark Dream had seven Peak Newbies, and three of them would also soon become Johns.

Aside from that, Dark Dream had hired six new employees.

Three of them were Late Newbies, and three of them were Early Newbies.

Nick decided that he would always hire new people in groups of three.

He had noticed that working with the Blood Hawk and Blood Horse was most efficient with three people.

If there were only two people, the number of complaints increased drastically.

Sadly, Dark Dream only managed to get one more Specter this year.

The newest Specter was a strange one.

It was a Possession Specter called the Can.

It looked like a rusty can made of metal, and the fact that Dark Dream managed to get this one was extremely lucky.

One day, one of the Investigators of Dark Dream walked home and saw a can on their way home.

In boredom, they just kicked it.

Tragically, their angle was slightly off, and they basically hit the ground in front of the can, which resulted in their big toe being broken.

Luckily, they could still walk and work.

Some days later, another Inspector was coming home, and they also saw a can.

At that point, they remembered that one of their colleagues had broken their toe while kicking a metal can and laughed.

What if that also happened to them?

With a laugh, they kicked the can.

CRK!

Yet, when they kicked the can, it got stuck in a rusty part of the ground, and the Inspector felt like they hit a pillar of metal.

Naturally, their big toe broke.

In the end, they just looked at the can in absolute shock.

"I refuse to believe that I'm that bad at kicking!" they shouted in anger.

Then, they grabbed the can and walked toward Dark Dream.

After waiting near the entrance for a while, the Inspector grabbed the first Extractor that came out, which was one of the Peak Newbies.

The Inspector said that the Extractor should kick the can.

Naturally, the Extractor was confused and asked what was going on.

The Inspector said that two Inspectors had broken their toes while kicking a can and that they refused to believe that they broke their toes on an ordinary can.

This had to be a Specter!

The Extractor didn't believe them, chuckled, and kicked the can.

BANG!

Tragically, they missed their kick and hit the hard building, breaking their toe.

"Ah! You see?! I knew it!" the Inspector shouted.

The Extractor just looked with shock at the can.

Then, the two of them waited in front of the entrance for the next Extractor.

The next Extractor that came out was an Initial John, and they asked them to kick the can.

The Initial John was perplexed, but after hearing that three people had already broken their toes, they also became suspicious.

Nervously, the Initial John kicked the can.

BANG!

The Initial John perfectly hit the can, and the can fell over.

The other two looked with surprise at the fallen can.

But then, the Initial John started to grab their feet in pain.

"What the fuck is this thing made of?!" they shouted in horror.

They removed their shoes, and everyone could see a bloody toe.

Everyone just looked with shock at the toe.

The Extractor had perfectly hit the can.

Yet, their toe broke.

The toe of an Initial John broke after kicking a random metal can.

That settled it.

This had to be a Possession Specter!

They immediately threw it into the last free Containment Unit on the second floor and stationed an Extractor in front of it.

The next day, they reported to Nick, and Nick inspected the can.

He kicked it lightly, but nothing happened.

Then, he used more and more force.

The can acted like a normal metal can, except for the fact that it didn't get dented by Nick's kicks.

BOOOOM!

Suddenly, Nick gritted his teeth.

Just now, the can had become insanely tough!

Yet, the can also hit the wall of the Containment Unit with a ton of force, and it also received a big dent.

After removing his shoes, Nick looked at his bleeding toe.

Luckily, it wasn't broken.

This meant that the can was weaker than a Peak Adolescent, but stronger than an Initial Adolescent.

After using several Extractors to test the can, Nick came to a conclusion.

The can was most likely a Mid Adolescent.

It managed to break Trevor's toe, but it also hit the wall with a lot of force, scratching its outside.

Luckily, the dents and scratches vanished after a couple of hours.

The next few days were not the happiest for the Extractors.

A great number of them had broken toes since Nick experimented with the can by using his employees.

Luckily, Peak Newbies could recover from a broken toe within two weeks due to their faster regeneration.

Nick only needed about three days to recover.

After some days, Nick finally finished experimenting on the can.

First of all, he gave it the official designation of the Can.

The Can produced Zephyx according to the number and strength of broken toes.

If Nick broke a toe, it would produce around 50 grams of Zephyx.

If an Initial John broke their toe, it produced about ten grams.

There was no hard limit to the times someone could work with the Can.

The only limit was the number of remaining healthy toes and the health of the Can.

The Can could be kicked by thousands of people thousands of times a day without receiving damage.

However, after Trevor sacrificed his toes, it became clear that Mid Johns could only kick the Can a maximum of three times a day before its condition became too damaged.

In the end, Nick decided to not assign anyone to the Can.

Instead, he made working with it an option for every Extractor working for Dark Dream.

Forcing someone to break one of their bones regularly was not something Nick was comfortable with.

Even though it could be perceived as humorous to break one's toes while kicking a can, it was legitimately painful.

So, Nick left the Can open.

If anyone wanted to advance faster in level and earn some extra Zephyx, they were allowed to work with the Can.

However, their assigned duties were not allowed to suffer as a result.

In the beginning, almost everyone worked with the Can at least once.

It was a couple thousand credits for one kick.

But over the weeks, things calmed down.

In the end, only a couple of Extractors regularly kicked the Can.

Those were the ones who wanted to become stronger quickly.

With the addition of the Can, Dark Dream now had twelve Specters.

Dark Dream had grown a lot.

Twelve Specters, 24 Zephyx Extractors, 50 Investigators, over 30 clerks, 25 guards.

Dark Dream had over 120 employees.

There were so many employees that Nick even started to have trouble remembering all the names.

Eventually, he only focused on remembering the names of the Zephyx Extractors.

As Nick was walking home, he sighed.

He felt like he was shirking his responsibilities by not remembering all the names.

Of course, he knew that it wasn't his responsibility to know the name of every employee, but he still felt like he wasn't doing his best.

Nick walked towards the east for a couple of minutes.

Naturally, he was no longer living in the hotel across the street from the old warehouse.

After a while of walking, Nick reached his home.

At the edge between the Outer City and the Dregs was a two-

story house made of metal.

While all the metal in the surroundings was rusty, the metal the house was made out of wasn't.

Additionally, the house also looked beautiful and clean.

In fact, it looked even better than the average house in the Outer City.

Nick had commissioned someone to construct this house about two years ago.

Naturally, with his status and his wealth, Nick could splurge a lot.

For example, the house was made of steel instead of metal.

Steel was so hard that even a Peak Newbie couldn't break through it with just their fists.

Nick could damage it, but he needed to actually try to damage it.

However, that wasn't the expensive part of the house.

As Nick reached his home, he jumped up and landed on its roof.

From there, Nick could see his backyard.

It was over 50 meters long and wide, and the floor was made of stainless steel!

This was the expensive part of the house!

While no one needed to buy space in the Dregs, this location was too close to the Outer City.

Every month, Nick had to pay a couple thousand credits to the city for his backyard, but that barely tickled him.

By now, Nick was earning almost a million credits per month.

He was earning more than 90% of the people in the lower layer of the Inner City.

But he didn't care that much about it.

Nick's focus was still on his power and Dark Dream's power.

The more powerful he and Dark Dream were, the more they could do to improve the lives of people.

After taking some breaths, Nick jumped into his backyard.

At the moment, his backyard was filled with several huge pieces of rusty metal.

Nick had been using these pieces as punching bags.

Sadly, most of them had become too damaged to use them as punching bags, which meant that Nick had to clean his backyard now.

After Nick landed in his backyard, he grabbed one of the pieces to move it.

The piece was surprisingly heavy.

Usually, he could just throw them to the side.

That was when Nick realized that his ability hadn't reactivated.

It was normal for Nick's ability to be deactivated while he was walking home or standing on his house, but it always reactivated when he was in his backyard.

After all, it was surrounded by big walls made of steel.

It was very unusual for Nick's ability to still be deactivated while inside his backyard.

Nick quickly looked around.

No one was on top of his steel walls.

No one was in his backyard.

Then, Nick looked at his house.

'Someone is definitely here, and the fact that they have not greeted me yet means that they are not here just to talk!'

'Is it a Specter or a human?' Nick thought.

'Is it one of Envy's servants? If so, I have to escape immediately!'

Luckily, nothing had happened yet.

Another lucky thing was that Nick always walked around with all of his weapons.

By now, Nick's strength had become so powerful that he could throw his heavy spears like they were sticks.

Nick smoothly took out one of his spears and held it in his hands.

'No one has attacked me yet,' Nick thought as he covertly glanced around his backyard.

Slowly, Nick started to walk around one of the big piles of rusty metal.

Silence.

The entire backyard was silent, except for the sound of Nick's steps.

When Nick walked to the other side of the heap of metal, his ability still hadn't deactivated.

'They're not looking at me from above. The walls are behind me. The floor is closed with no openings. That means that they are seeing me through the heap of metal.'

'Well, this is as good of a time as any,' Nick thought as he narrowed his eyes.

About two years ago, Nick had decided to wear a uniform with an added red coat that extended up to his knees.

Manufacturers were allowed to produce these kinds of uniforms due to popular demand.

The reason why many Manufacturers wore these kinds of uniforms was the ability to keep weapons and useful trinkets secret.

The uniform naturally also came with an advanced and very practical toolbelt.

Nick covertly moved his free hand to the back of his pants, his body slowly getting filled with adrenaline.

Crk.

Nick heard the extremely subtle sound of leather boots slightly scraping against steel from the other side of the heap of metal.

Up until now, there hadn't been a single sound, and the chances of one of Nick's attackers slipping up were minuscule.

This meant that the other side was getting agitated.

Most likely, they were about to attack, the thought of which made them subconsciously tighten their grip on their weapons and lower their stance, which produced the sound.

This little sound was enough to tell Nick that his opponent was most likely human, which he hadn't expected.

There was no reason to attack Dark Dream.

The city had no reason to since they could simply disband Dark Dream if they wanted.

Kugelblitz had no interest since Vernon Melfion was standing behind Dark Dream's CEO.

And all the other Manufacturers also wouldn't attack since they didn't want to start beef with Vernon.

Even more, Dark Dream kept to itself and didn't antagonize any of the Manufacturers.

So, why would a human be interested in attacking the Chief Zephyx Extractor of Dark Dream?

Sadly, right now wasn't the right time to think about this.

As soon as Nick heard the sound, he pulled a black ball out from behind his back and threw it at the ground with all of his power.

WHOOOOOOM!

An explosion of smoke consumed Nick and a huge part of his backyard.

A smoke bomb.

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

Immediately, a barrage of bullets punched through the heaps of iron.

While normal guns wouldn't be able to break through so much iron, these were definitely not normal guns.

Based on their power, these guns were wielded by at least a Mid John.

These kinds of guns used an Extractor's Zephyx as propulsion and sometimes also as ammunition.

The bullets left holes behind in the huge heap of iron, and Nick could tell that the projectiles flying past him had quite a bit of Zephyx on them.

This meant that the person who fired the gun had an ability that allowed them to enchant their bullets.

Another thing Nick noticed was that all the bullets were aimed at a height below Nick's chest, which was strange.

If the goal was to kill Nick, they would want to hit his chest or head.

Yet, the bullets were aiming for Nick's lower abdomen and legs.

'They don't want to kill me?' Nick thought with furrowed brows as he jumped to the side.

Naturally, he had expected to be attacked immediately after he used his smoke bomb, which was why he had already jumped to the side.

'All the fire is coming through the heap of metal, and the Zephyx on the bullets seem similar. That means only one person is shooting at me. Not sure if they are using a rapid-fire gun or just using two guns at the same time, though.'

DING!

One of the bullets was about to hit Nick's leg, but then, a small green forcefield appeared.

Naturally, with his wealth, Nick had bought a far better Barrier than his trashy old one.

This one was perpetually active, and it used a negligible amount of Zephyx to stay ready.

Additionally, the Barrier encompassed his body at a distance of about ten centimeters.

Like this, his Barrier wouldn't waste Zephyx blocking attacks that would have missed Nick.

It was far better than his old one.

Sadly, it was still worlds away from Wyntor's and Ardum's Barriers.

For example, the Barrier didn't cling to his skin perfectly, and it also couldn't reshape itself to redirect attacks or diminish the attacking force.

Naturally, it also didn't have any of the fancy features that Ardum's Barrier had.

When the bullet hit Nick's Barrier, Nick could see the light of his green Barrier taking on a slightly black tone.

'That's the Zephyx on the bullets. Probably some kind of debilitating or poisoning effect,' Nick thought.

'I feel some drain on my Zephyx, but it's manageable. That probably means they are a Late or Peak John.'

'That's someone I can kill.'

'But is the gunner the only attacker, or are there more?' Nick thought.

Finally, Nick landed over five meters to the side, away from the lump of rusty metal.

Yet, when he landed, Nick seemed to collapse into himself.

Nick's body turned into mist, and he rapidly slithered forward, close to the ground.

Right now, Nick was at the northern edge of his backyard, with his house being at the southern edge.

The shots had come from the direction of Nick's house, and Nick was slithering towards the northwestern corner of his backyard.

Step, step!

But then, Nick heard steps coming from in front of him, and by the sounds of things, they were moving towards the place where Nick had just been.

'They're not alone,' Nick thought with narrowed eyes.

This was troublesome.

There could be two, but there could also be 200.

Chapter 263 The Can

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However, the confrontation had a lasting effect on Crimson Fungus City, even though the effect wasn't very strong.

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Including Nick, there were now eleven Johns in Dark Dream.

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The newest Specter was a strange one.

It was a Possession Specter called the Can.

It looked like a rusty can made of metal, and the fact that Dark Dream managed to get this one was extremely lucky.

One day, one of the Investigators of Dark Dream walked home and saw a can on their way home.

In boredom, they just kicked it.

Tragically, their angle was slightly off, and they basically hit the ground in front of the can, which resulted in their big toe being broken.

Luckily, they could still walk and work.

Some days later, another Inspector was coming home, and they also saw a can.

At that point, they remembered that one of their colleagues had broken their toe while kicking a metal can and laughed.

What if that also happened to them?

With a laugh, they kicked the can.

CRK!

Yet, when they kicked the can, it got stuck in a rusty part of the ground, and the Inspector felt like they hit a pillar of metal.

Naturally, their big toe broke.

In the end, they just looked at the can in absolute shock.

"I refuse to believe that I'm that bad at kicking!" they shouted in anger.

Then, they grabbed the can and walked toward Dark Dream.

After waiting near the entrance for a while, the Inspector grabbed the first Extractor that came out, which was one of the Peak Newbies.

The Inspector said that the Extractor should kick the can.

Naturally, the Extractor was confused and asked what was going on.

The Inspector said that two Inspectors had broken their toes while kicking a can and that they refused to believe that they broke their toes on an ordinary can.

This had to be a Specter!

The Extractor didn't believe them, chuckled, and kicked the can.

BANG!

Tragically, they missed their kick and hit the hard building, breaking their toe.

"Ah! You see?! I knew it!" the Inspector shouted.

The Extractor just looked with shock at the can.

Then, the two of them waited in front of the entrance for the next Extractor.

The next Extractor that came out was an Initial John, and they asked them to kick the can.

The Initial John was perplexed, but after hearing that three people had already broken their toes, they also became suspicious.

Nervously, the Initial John kicked the can.

BANG!

The Initial John perfectly hit the can, and the can fell over.

The other two looked with surprise at the fallen can.

But then, the Initial John started to grab their feet in pain.

"What the fuck is this thing made of?!" they shouted in horror.

They removed their shoes, and everyone could see a bloody toe.

Everyone just looked with shock at the toe.

The Extractor had perfectly hit the can.

Yet, their toe broke.

The toe of an Initial John broke after kicking a random metal can.

That settled it.

This had to be a Possession Specter!

They immediately threw it into the last free Containment Unit on the second floor and stationed an Extractor in front of it.

The next day, they reported to Nick, and Nick inspected the can.

He kicked it lightly, but nothing happened.

Then, he used more and more force.

The can acted like a normal metal can, except for the fact that it didn't get dented by Nick's kicks.

BOOOOM!

Suddenly, Nick gritted his teeth.

Just now, the can had become insanely tough!

Yet, the can also hit the wall of the Containment Unit with a ton of force, and it also received a big dent.

After removing his shoes, Nick looked at his bleeding toe.

Luckily, it wasn't broken.

This meant that the can was weaker than a Peak Adolescent, but stronger than an Initial Adolescent.

Chapter 264 – New Home

After using several Extractors to test the can, Nick came to a conclusion.

The can was most likely a Mid Adolescent.

It managed to break Trevor's toe, but it also hit the wall with a lot of force, scratching its outside.

Luckily, the dents and scratches vanished after a couple of hours.

The next few days were not the happiest for the Extractors.

A great number of them had broken toes since Nick experimented with the can by using his employees.

Luckily, Peak Newbies could recover from a broken toe within two weeks due to their faster regeneration.

Nick only needed about three days to recover.

After some days, Nick finally finished experimenting on the can.

First of all, he gave it the official designation of the Can.

The Can produced Zephyx according to the number and strength of broken toes.

If Nick broke a toe, it would produce around 50 grams of Zephyx.

If an Initial John broke their toe, it produced about ten grams.

There was no hard limit to the times someone could work with the Can.

The only limit was the number of remaining healthy toes and the health of the Can.

The Can could be kicked by thousands of people thousands of times a day without receiving damage.

However, after Trevor sacrificed his toes, it became clear that Mid Johns could only kick the Can a maximum of three times a day before its condition became too damaged.

In the end, Nick decided to not assign anyone to the Can.

Instead, he made working with it an option for every Extractor working for Dark Dream.

Forcing someone to break one of their bones regularly was not something Nick was comfortable with.

Even though it could be perceived as humorous to break one's toes while kicking a can, it was legitimately painful.

So, Nick left the Can open.

If anyone wanted to advance faster in level and earn some extra Zephyx, they were allowed to work with the Can.

However, their assigned duties were not allowed to suffer as a result.

In the beginning, almost everyone worked with the Can at least once.

It was a couple thousand credits for one kick.

But over the weeks, things calmed down.

In the end, only a couple of Extractors regularly kicked the Can.

Those were the ones who wanted to become stronger quickly.

With the addition of the Can, Dark Dream now had twelve Specters.

Dark Dream had grown a lot.

Twelve Specters, 24 Zephyx Extractors, 50 Investigators, over 30 clerks, 25 guards.

Dark Dream had over 120 employees.

There were so many employees that Nick even started to have trouble remembering all the names.

Eventually, he only focused on remembering the names of the Zephyx Extractors.

As Nick was walking home, he sighed.

He felt like he was shirking his responsibilities by not remembering all the names.

Of course, he knew that it wasn't his responsibility to know the name of every employee, but he still felt like he wasn't doing his best.

Nick walked towards the east for a couple of minutes.

Naturally, he was no longer living in the hotel across the street from the old warehouse.

After a while of walking, Nick reached his home.

At the edge between the Outer City and the Dregs was a two-

story house made of metal.

While all the metal in the surroundings was rusty, the metal the house was made out of wasn't.

Additionally, the house also looked beautiful and clean.

In fact, it looked even better than the average house in the Outer City.

Nick had commissioned someone to construct this house about two years ago.

Naturally, with his status and his wealth, Nick could splurge a lot.

For example, the house was made of steel instead of metal.

Steel was so hard that even a Peak Newbie couldn't break through it with just their fists.

Nick could damage it, but he needed to actually try to damage it.

However, that wasn't the expensive part of the house.

As Nick reached his home, he jumped up and landed on its roof.

From there, Nick could see his backyard.

It was over 50 meters long and wide, and the floor was made of stainless steel!

This was the expensive part of the house!

While no one needed to buy space in the Dregs, this location was too close to the Outer City.

Every month, Nick had to pay a couple thousand credits to the city for his backyard, but that barely tickled him.

By now, Nick was earning almost a million credits per month.

He was earning more than 90% of the people in the lower layer of the Inner City.

But he didn't care that much about it.

Nick's focus was still on his power and Dark Dream's power.

The more powerful he and Dark Dream were, the more they could do to improve the lives of people.

After taking some breaths, Nick jumped into his backyard.

At the moment, his backyard was filled with several huge pieces of rusty metal.

Nick had been using these pieces as punching bags.

Sadly, most of them had become too damaged to use them as punching bags, which meant that Nick had to clean his backyard now.

After Nick landed in his backyard, he grabbed one of the pieces to move it.

The piece was surprisingly heavy.

Usually, he could just throw them to the side.

That was when Nick realized that his ability hadn't reactivated.

It was normal for Nick's ability to be deactivated while he was walking home or standing on his house, but it always reactivated when he was in his backyard.

After all, it was surrounded by big walls made of steel.

It was very unusual for Nick's ability to still be deactivated while inside his backyard.

Nick quickly looked around.

No one was on top of his steel walls.

No one was in his backyard.

Then, Nick looked at his house.

'Someone is definitely here, and the fact that they have not greeted me yet means that they are not here just to talk!'

Chapter 265 – Shots

'Is it a Specter or a human?' Nick thought.

'Is it one of Envy's servants? If so, I have to escape immediately!'

Luckily, nothing had happened yet.

Another lucky thing was that Nick always walked around with all of his weapons.

By now, Nick's strength had become so powerful that he could throw his heavy spears like they were sticks.

Nick smoothly took out one of his spears and held it in his hands.

'No one has attacked me yet,' Nick thought as he covertly glanced around his backyard.

Slowly, Nick started to walk around one of the big piles of rusty metal.

Silence.

The entire backyard was silent, except for the sound of Nick's steps.

When Nick walked to the other side of the heap of metal, his ability still hadn't deactivated.

'They're not looking at me from above. The walls are behind me. The floor is closed with no openings. That means that they are seeing me through the heap of metal.'

'Well, this is as good of a time as any,' Nick thought as he narrowed his eyes.

About two years ago, Nick had decided to wear a uniform with an added red coat that extended up to his knees.

Manufacturers were allowed to produce these kinds of uniforms due to popular demand.

The reason why many Manufacturers wore these kinds of uniforms was the ability to keep weapons and useful trinkets secret.

The uniform naturally also came with an advanced and very practical toolbelt.

Nick covertly moved his free hand to the back of his pants, his body slowly getting filled with adrenaline.

Crk.

Nick heard the extremely subtle sound of leather boots slightly scraping against steel from the other side of the heap of metal.

Up until now, there hadn't been a single sound, and the chances of one of Nick's attackers slipping up were minuscule.

This meant that the other side was getting agitated.

Most likely, they were about to attack, the thought of which made them subconsciously tighten their grip on their weapons and lower their stance, which produced the sound.

This little sound was enough to tell Nick that his opponent was most likely human, which he hadn't expected.

There was no reason to attack Dark Dream.

The city had no reason to since they could simply disband Dark Dream if they wanted.

Kugelblitz had no interest since Vernon Melfion was standing behind Dark Dream's CEO.

And all the other Manufacturers also wouldn't attack since they didn't want to start beef with Vernon.

Even more, Dark Dream kept to itself and didn't antagonize any of the Manufacturers.

So, why would a human be interested in attacking the Chief Zephyx Extractor of Dark Dream?

Sadly, right now wasn't the right time to think about this.

As soon as Nick heard the sound, he pulled a black ball out from behind his back and threw it at the ground with all of his power.

WHOOOOOOM!

An explosion of smoke consumed Nick and a huge part of his backyard.

A smoke bomb.

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

Immediately, a barrage of bullets punched through the heaps of iron.

While normal guns wouldn't be able to break through so much iron, these were definitely not normal guns.

Based on their power, these guns were wielded by at least a Mid John.

These kinds of guns used an Extractor's Zephyx as propulsion and sometimes also as ammunition.

The bullets left holes behind in the huge heap of iron, and Nick could tell that the projectiles flying past him had quite a bit of Zephyx on them.

This meant that the person who fired the gun had an ability that allowed them to enchant their bullets.

Another thing Nick noticed was that all the bullets were aimed at a height below Nick's chest, which was strange.

If the goal was to kill Nick, they would want to hit his chest or head.

Yet, the bullets were aiming for Nick's lower abdomen and legs.

'They don't want to kill me?' Nick thought with furrowed brows as he jumped to the side.

Naturally, he had expected to be attacked immediately after he used his smoke bomb, which was why he had already jumped to the side.

'All the fire is coming through the heap of metal, and the Zephyx on the bullets seem similar. That means only one person is shooting at me. Not sure if they are using a rapid-fire gun or just using two guns at the same time, though.'

DING!

One of the bullets was about to hit Nick's leg, but then, a small green forcefield appeared.

Naturally, with his wealth, Nick had bought a far better Barrier than his trashy old one.

This one was perpetually active, and it used a negligible amount of Zephyx to stay ready.

Additionally, the Barrier encompassed his body at a distance of about ten centimeters.

Like this, his Barrier wouldn't waste Zephyx blocking attacks that would have missed Nick.

It was far better than his old one.

Sadly, it was still worlds away from Wyntor's and Ardum's Barriers.

For example, the Barrier didn't cling to his skin perfectly, and it also couldn't reshape itself to redirect attacks or diminish the attacking force.

Naturally, it also didn't have any of the fancy features that Ardum's Barrier had.

When the bullet hit Nick's Barrier, Nick could see the light of his green Barrier taking on a slightly black tone.

'That's the Zephyx on the bullets. Probably some kind of debilitating or poisoning effect,' Nick thought.

'I feel some drain on my Zephyx, but it's manageable. That probably means they are a Late or Peak John.'

'That's someone I can kill.'

'But is the gunner the only attacker, or are there more?' Nick thought.

Finally, Nick landed over five meters to the side, away from the lump of rusty metal.

Yet, when he landed, Nick seemed to collapse into himself.

Nick's body turned into mist, and he rapidly slithered forward, close to the ground.

Right now, Nick was at the northern edge of his backyard, with his house being at the southern edge.

The shots had come from the direction of Nick's house, and Nick was slithering towards the northwestern corner of his backyard.

Step, step!

But then, Nick heard steps coming from in front of him, and by the sounds of things, they were moving towards the place where Nick had just been.

'They're not alone,' Nick thought with narrowed eyes.

This was troublesome.

There could be two, but there could also be 200.

Chapter 266 – Specter Cage

Nick silently slithered to the side and looked towards the direction of the steps.

The smoke was dense, but it was still possible to see rough shapes about one or two meters away.

The steps were loud and powerful, which meant that the person was charging forward with all their power.

If the gunner was a strong Extractor, this was probably someone of equal power, which meant that this person was moving at probably over 60 kph.

Nick had to make a quick decision.

Observe or attack?

Nick narrowed his eyes, and his fog-like body compressed.

An outline of Nick's body could be seen, and it was in a crouching position, ready to explode forward.

However, since Nick's was made out of fog, he still wasn't perceivable.

Smoke and fog looked very similar.

By now, the sounds of shots had vanished.

Nick put his right foot onto the steel wall of his backyard while looking forward with focused, intense, and narrowed eyes.

Then...

A faint outline of a running person!

BOOOOM!

Nick turned corporeal and used all of his power to explode forward.

Naturally, since no one could currently see him, his ability was active.

With his athletic body and his ability, Nick had the physical power of a Late Veteran right now.

Yet, even though Nick used an unreal amount of strength to shoot forward, the only noticeable effect of this power on the wall was a light gust of wind that extended outward from the spot that Nick had touched with his right foot.

Meanwhile, Nick exploded forward with unreal speed, his right arm pulled back.

It was almost like Nick's target was standing still.

Nick punched forward with his right arm, the blade on it already extended forward.

BANG!

An orange glow appeared in front of Nick's blade, which quickly broke into shards and splinters.

Nick felt his ability deactivate at that point, but it didn't matter.

The kinetic force had already been created.

SHING!

Nick's blade easily went through the side of the figure's head.

If they were human, they were definitely dead!

And sure enough, Nick's ability immediately reactivated.

Since the force of his jump wasn't yet used up, Nick essentially flew into his opponent's upper body.

The two of them were falling over, but Nick used his left hand to catch himself and the body silently.

In a fluid motion, Nick rolled forward while pulling the corpse over himself until it was in front of Nick.

BANG!

And Nick kicked it towards the east, at the northeastern corner of his backyard.

BOOOM!

A second later, the sound of a loud crash came from the northeastern corner of Nick's backyard.

Naturally, Nick did this to make the enemy think that he was currently fighting someone in the northeastern corner, which was close to the place he had been in when the battle started.

Meanwhile, Nick jumped towards the west again while turning into fog, which slithered across the ground.

A second later, Nick reached the edge of the smoke, which was around five meters away from the western wall.

In his fog-state, Nick glanced around the western side of his backyard.

He couldn't see anyone.

The next moment, Nick materialized again in a crouching position.

BANG!

And jumped diagonally forward as hard as he could.

With Nick's power, jumping a distance of over 50 meters wasn't difficult.

Like a cannonball, Nick diagonally shot past the wall of his backyard.

He was doing the smartest thing.

Running away.

He didn't know who was attacking him, and the top priority was to survive, not to kill his enemy.

Even more, this was an ambush, and fighting in the middle of an ambush was stupid.

He had to reset the battlefield to a neutral one.

While Nick was flying through the air, he felt his ability deactivate again.

In the air, he quickly looked around.

That was when he saw someone looking at him outside his backyard.

This person was probably insurance, and their job most likely was to catch Nick if he managed to escape from his backyard.

'If there's one guy in the west, there's probably another one in the north and another one in the south. There might be even more,' Nick thought. 'Together with the gunner and the dead one, that makes at least five people.'

The person Nick saw was cloaked in a mantle with a grey color that almost perfectly imitated the grey of Nick's walls.

The only identifying feature of the person was the long spear in their hands.

Nick could barely see a bit of their face as their eyes met, but he could tell that the person was a man and that they didn't seem scared.

But then, Nick's attention was pulled forward.

Some white gas gathered in front of Nick's jumping path.

When Nick saw that, he gnashed his teeth.

'A Specter Cage!' Nick thought with frustration.

Naturally, when big Manufacturers intended to capture a powerful Specter, they often readied Specter Cages.

These kinds of devices looked like big boxes of steel.

If one placed one of these boxes of steel somewhere, gave it a lot of Zephyx, and activated it, it would project a powerful barrier in a circle at a certain distance.

If anything approached the barrier, it would gather Zephyx at that spot and harden it.

There were only three ways to break through such a barrier.

First, destroy the steel box in the middle of the cage projecting the barrier.

Second, attack the barrier until all the Zephyx is used up. The more the barrier had to block, the more Zephyx it used.

Third, unleash an attack so powerful that the barrier can't possibly block it. Sadly, that was generally viewed as impossible since Specter Cages were made to withstand a lot of power.

In the end, one thing was certain.

Nick was stuck here until he got rid of the Specter Cage.

'Whoever wants to kill me is willing to spend kilos upon kilos of Zephyx,' Nick realized.

While Nick was about to reach the barrier, the person on the ground shouted something.

"He's over here!"

Nick gritted his teeth.

Chapter 267 – West to East

BANG!

Nick landed on the hardened Zephyx of the Specter Cage with his legs first.

With one glance, Nick overlooked the battlefield.

Half of his backyard was covered in smoke.

There was a Specter Cage surrounding his house and backyard.

There was a person with a spear below him who had just alerted everyone to Nick's position.

The next moment, Nick readied one of his spears and threw it at the person below him with all of his power, his body pushing into the barrier due to the force of the throw.

Nick had never stopped practicing with his spears, and even though the angle and his position were awkward, Nick still managed to throw with a lot of power and accuracy.

BANG!

However, the person below Nick simply jumped to the side, avoiding the attack, and Nick's spear shot through the floor into the sewers.

Nick narrowed his eyes.

BANG!

Then, Nick jumped toward the direction of his house, which was behind the guy on the ground.

BANG!

The guy on the ground immediately jumped upward with his spear pointed at Nick, ready to intercept him.

Nick's eyes shone, and his right arm pulled upward with a lot of force.

BANG!

Nick's spear shot out of the ground with a lot of force as he pulled it back with his Ghost Wire.

The next moment, the guy thrust his spear at Nick's torso.

But then, his eyes widened in shock.

Nick's trajectory had changed!

He was much lower than he was supposed to be!

Of course, that was due to Nick pulling his spear back with all of his power while flying.

For every action, there's an equal and opposite reaction.

Nick barely managed to fly below the spear, and he pointed his blade at the guy's torso.

BANG!

A yellow Barrier appeared in Nick's path.

The man's face turned white, but the Barrier managed to hold.

After all, Nick's ability hadn't been active.

However, the Barrier apparently wasn't the kind that also absorbed kinetic energy.

Nick's forward momentum completely halted, turning him stationary in the air for just an instant while the guy's body was shot into the distance, right towards Nick's house.

BANG!

The guy's Barrier activated again as he hit Nick's house, putting a sizable dent into the wall.

At that moment, Nick could see the Barrier flickering, which was a sign that it was nearly out of Zephyx.

Even though Nick hadn't managed to kill him, the guy was most likely out of the fight since moving without Zephyx was nearly impossible.

The stronger an Extractor became, the more their body relied on Zephyx, and without Zephyx, moving became very difficult.

As Nick looked at the man, who was now tumbling down the side of Nick's house, he noticed a small gleam of light coming from one of his windows.

BOOOM!

Nick's green Barrier appeared in front of him, blocking an extremely long and dense bullet.

The next moment, Nick felt like someone had just punched him in the chest, and the deafening sound of a huge sniper rifle being fired rang out from Nick's house.

This was the feeling of losing a huge amount of Zephyx in an instant.

'That's a different person!' Nick realized with gritted teeth. 'That's not the gunner from earlier!'

The difference in power between the earlier gunner and this one was huge!

However, judging by the sound and the look of the bullet, it wasn't that this gunner was stronger but that this gunner simply unleashed much more power in one shot.

The gunner probably unloaded something like 50% of their Zephyx with this shot.

And that wasn't even everything.

Nick's Barrier canceled kinetic energy.

This meant that Nick was still in the middle of the air, just starting to fall to the ground.

He was a sitting duck!

Nick quickly grabbed one of his spears and performed a Hip Throw.

The spear shot through the window where the sniper was supposed to be.

Nick didn't expect his throw to hit.

The sniper had probably immediately retreated after firing their shot, but Nick wanted to make sure.

If they decided to stay there and shoot another one, Nick might die.

After throwing his spear, Nick cut the Ghost Wire.

He didn't want to show anyone where he was going by pulling it back.

Due to the Hip Throw, Nick was thrown towards the barrier again.

After landing, he angled himself downward and diagonally jumped towards the ground.

Just before Nick managed to dive past the roofs of the neighboring houses, he saw two people jumping onto the wall of his backyard.

One of them came from the north, and one came from the east.

Those were probably the two people responsible for guarding the north and east.

For just an instant, Nick's ability deactivated, but it quickly reactivated.

BANG!

Surprisingly, Nick didn't weaken the impact of his fall this time, and he shot through the metallic grates on the ground, landing on the barrier of the Specter Cage.

The Specter Cage projected a barrier in a sphere, which meant that it was also extending below the ground.

Nick quickly pulled something out from his toolbelt and crushed it in his hand.

An instant later, the thing started to shine brightly like the sun, and Nick put it in a pocket on the chest area of his uniform.

The light was so bright that it shone through the pocket, but the light was quite subdued now.

Nick had met the Nightmare more than once during important battles, and he had decided to invest in this trinket.

It was essentially an Arclight but in a round form.

Nick immediately jumped forward with all of his power.

Since his ability was active, Nick could cross the entire distance of the Specter Cage in one jump.

Three seconds later, Nick landed below the ground on the eastern side of the Specter Cage.

The next moment, Nick rammed his blade into the floor above him and cut a hole in it.

Then, he grabbed the Arclight in his pocket and threw it into the sewer water.

Naturally, the Specter Cage encompassed quite a lot of sewer water as well below it.

Nick had thrown his Arclight into the sewer waters since it was very noticeable on him.

The light of the Arclight was immediately consumed by the black sewer waters, and Nick jumped out of the sewers.

Now, Nick was outside the eastern wall of his backyard while everyone was rushing towards the west.

Chapter 268 – House

As soon as Nick came to the surface again, he saw someone.

There was a tall man standing on top of the eastern wall of Nick's backyard.

Luckily, the guy was looking towards the west, which meant his back was turned to Nick.

With narrowed eyes, Nick could see a throwing spear in the guy's right hand and a couple more on his back.

It seemed like this was one of the few people who chose throwing spears, just like Nick.

Nick quickly thought about how to take him down without being noticed.

A bit later, Nick grabbed three of his spears and carefully and silently stabbed them through the ground behind him.

Then, he ran forward and jumped with all of his power.

With his ability active, Nick jumped with incredible power at the person on the wall, his right arm extended.

BANG!

The orange Barrier appeared and broke apart before Nick's blade entered the back of the guy's head.

For just an instant, Nick's ability deactivated, but it quickly reactivated again.

The next moment, the three Ghost Wires became taut as the sides of the three spears pushed against the ground.

Nick's body stopped in the air behind the guy.

Nick pulled his blade out of the guy's head and grabbed him with his hands before pulling himself back.

The corpse and Nick sunk behind the eastern wall of Nick's backyard.

Thanks to his ability, Nick could tell that nobody had seen this. Probably because everyone was busy running and looking toward the west.

Nick would have loved to look at the corpse and find out who was attacking him, but he didn't really have the time.

Someone might have already noticed the hole he had made in the west, and remaining in the same spot for too long was extremely dangerous in his situation.

Nick quickly smashed the corpse into a random ruin of a house and ran towards the south.

He knew that his biggest strength in this situation was his incredible speed.

With his ability, Nick could run as fast as a Late Veteran!

In barely a second, Nick reached the northeastern corner of his house, which was also the southeastern corner of his backyard.

Nick turned into fog, climbed the corner, and peeped over the wall.

He didn't like what he saw.

There were five people at the western wall of his backyard, and two of them were in the process of jumping over it.

'The sniper is not among them. That means there are at least ten people in total in this ambush, and as far as I can tell, all of them are Mid Johns at least!' Nick thought with gritted teeth.

That was a huge number of people just to get rid of Nick!

"He's not in the west! Fan out and defend!"

The next moment, Nick heard someone shouting from beyond the wall.

'Based on the fact that he's shouting with such authority and ordering everyone around, he's probably the leader,' Nick thought.

Nick remembered the person who had jumped over the northern wall when the guy in the west had shouted earlier.

He hadn't seen that person among the five currently in the backyard.

'The guy that guarded the north is most likely the leader, and he's currently to the west of my backyard.'

The next moment, Nick turned corporeal, grabbed something from his toolbelt, and threw it into the backyard.

BOOOOM!

The smoke bomb Nick had thrown at the northwestern corner of the backyard exploded, putting nearly everyone in the backyard in a cloud of smoke.

"He's here!" someone inside the backyard shouted.

However, Nick had not entered the backyard.

He had just thrown the smoke bomb in there to make them think that he was in there.

Instead, Nick jumped towards the eastern wall of his house and turned into fog.

Naturally, since this was Nick's house, it had a couple of nice additions.

Normal people wouldn't really notice the true purpose of these things.

Every house in the Outer City had light holes. After all, the people didn't want to get attacked by the Nightmare.

However, Nick's house had bigger light holes.

The light holes in Nick's house were over ten centimeters wide, but there were fewer of them.

Normal people would just think that this was a stylistic choice.

But in truth, these light holes made it very easy and convenient for Nick to move from one room to the other in his fog-state.

Moving through a slit or small holes cost a lot of Zephyx and took a while, but it was barely an issue to move through such big holes.

Nick easily entered through one of the light holes and slithered across the ceiling of the first floor.

He rapidly moved from room to room, passing through big light holes near the ceiling.

Some seconds later, Nick finally found his target.

In one of the rooms on the second floor, Nick saw a grey-haired young woman with a humongous rifle.

She was currently looking at the backyard.

Nick materialized behind her, pulled his arm back, and punched her with a hook.

The blade of Nick's arm hit her orange barrier, which immediately broke into pieces.

BANG!

Her head separated from her shoulders and shattered against the steel wall.

Naturally, that made a lot of noise, and Nick was sure that everyone had noticed what was going on.

However, before they could turn to look at the house, Nick and the corpse had already vanished from the window.

The headless corpse was lying below the window, and Nick was slithering through the light holes near the ground.

BANG!

The front door shot open as someone kicked it, and Nick saw the entering person with shock.

'Wait, isn't that the guy that ran out of Zephyx after I punched him in the west?!' Nick thought.

Yes, it was the guy that Nick had thrown against his house.

Yet, here he was, storming into the house with a lot of energy!

It was almost like he hadn't lost any Zephyx whatsoever!

Nick decided against engaging the guy since that might take too long.

After all, everyone else was probably already running towards the house, and Nick had to leave.

So, Nick just slithered out of his house.

Luckily, the guy was too busy charging towards the second floor to notice the small cloud of fog in the room.

Chapter 269 – Different Perspective

After Nick slithered out of his house, he saw someone carefully running towards it from outside.

Nick hadn't seen that person before.

It was a petite figure with a gun, and Nick could see a couple of green strands of hair poking out from her cloak.

It was most likely a woman.

'She came from the place where the guy landed earlier. Is she the reason why he recovered so quickly? Does she have some kind of healing ability?' Nick thought.

The woman was too busy running into the house behind the other guy to take note of the cloud of fog clinging to the outside wall on the second floor of the house.

Nick rapidly jumped over her and landed on the ground behind her.

As she reached the entrance, Nick materialized in a crouching position behind her.

BOOOM!

Her Barrier materialized and broke apart.

This time, Nick was careful not to make too much noise.

So, instead of using all his power to bury his blade into her skull, he simply grabbed her hair through her cloak, pulled her head back, and buried his blade in her neck.

It took half a second longer than normal, but she died silently.

Next, Nick ran towards the west of his house and came around the corner.

And his ability deactivated!

Just five meters in front of Nick was the guy from the north, the probable leader of the ambush!

Their eyes met.

Nick couldn't fully see the guy's face, but for some reason, he felt familiar.

Nick felt like he had seen this guy before.

The man immediately pulled his spear back and assumed a defensive stance with his empty left arm in front of him.

However, instead of attacking the guy, as the guy had thought, Nick actually turned around and vanished behind the corner again.

"He's south of the house!" the guy shouted as he ran after Nick.

The guy passed the corner and...

Nick was gone.

However, the guy knew where Nick went.

He was an experienced fighter, and the gust of wind he had just felt almost certainly came from a strong jump.

He looked up, but he only saw the white of the Specter Cage slowly vanishing, which meant that something had just been near it.

Had Nick just jumped towards the barrier and then jumped over the house, toward the backyard, in just the single second it had taken the leader to shout and round the corner?

That would have needed an insane level of speed to pull off!

This ambush was not going as planned!

This fucker was so slippery, it was unreasonable!

"He's on top of the building!" the leader shouted.

BANG! BANG!

The sound of gunshots came from the backyard.

After that, he went into a crouching position and jumped towards the roof of the house.

Yet, when he arrived, he saw nobody!

The leader gritted his teeth and ran towards the northern edge of the roof, the one pointing towards the backyard.

But when the leader saw the backyard, he had to take a deep breath in shock.

"Samara," he whispered under his breath.

Someone's body was on the northern wall of Nick's backyard.

The body was impaled by a spear going through its head!

Beside the corpse lay two black guns.

"East!" someone inside the backyard shouted before two people in cloaks ran towards the eastern wall.

The leader narrowed his eyes and also ran towards the east.

He was far faster than everyone else, and even though the two in the backyard started earlier, the leader arrived in the east first.

However, what greeted him was a huge cloud of smoke covering the area east of the backyard.

The leader and the two from the backyard quickly searched through the area.

"There's a hole!" someone shouted.

The leader quickly reached that spot and saw a big hole in the ground.

At that moment, he realized what had happened in the beginning.

He imagined Nick running from the west to the east after escaping the initial ambush.

So, that was how he managed to get into the house!

And then, the leader's eyes widened as he realized that the target must have done the same but in reverse just now!

Even worse, they had just wasted nearly five seconds searching for Nick in the cloud of smoke!

"Gillian! Disperse the cloud of smoke in the east! Everyone else, he's coming from the west!" the leader shouted.

"Coming!" a deep voice shouted from inside Nick's backyard.

BOOOM!

But then, the leader and the two people beside him heard a loud bang coming from the wall of Nick's backyard!

The three of them ran towards the backyard, but then, the leader saw a bloody spear poking out of the eastern wall of the backyard.

He knew very well what was on the other side of the wall.

The leader felt like the situation was going out of control.

He had to regain control immediately!

"EVERYONE, ASSEMBLE IN THE CENTER OF THE BACKYARD!" the leader shouted with all of his power, his voice booming throughout the surroundings.

Meanwhile, the leader himself jumped over the wall and landed in the middle of the backyard.

The two people who had accompanied him to the east quickly arrived by his side.

BANG!

The sound of something powerful hitting something thundered out of the house.

The two people beside the leader immediately charged towards the south.

"Stop!"

However, they immediately stopped moving after their leader ordered them to stop.

This entire mess had started with them chasing their target's tail like a cat!

The leader wouldn't make the same mistake again!

The leader stepped between the two of them.

"Follow me closely! We can't allow ourselves to get separated!"

The two of them nodded.

Until now, the two of them had been locked onto their target with tunnel vision, and they hadn't noticed their surroundings.

Only now did they realize how bad the situation actually was.

Their leader had called for everyone to gather in the backyard, but they were the only ones there!

Three people in total, including the leader.

This meant that their target had killed eight of their colleagues!

What the fuck were they fighting?!

Chapter 270 – Scattering

Nick watched the three remaining people slowly walking towards his house.

Right now, Nick was in his fog state inside one of the heaps of rusted metal in his backyard.

'Eleven people in total, huh?' he thought as he watched them with narrowed eyes.

For a while, Nick just looked at the three of them.

They were constantly on the lookout and didn't dare to split apart.

Nick could attempt killing one with a spear throw, but he decided against it.

'That one sniper shot and the three shots I took from the gunner already exhausted over 80% of my Zephyx,' he thought.

'Entering battle in my state is stupid.'

'I have to remember that I am still at a numbers disadvantage and that the strongest of them is still alive.'

'From what I could tell, all of the assassins have been Peak Johns, and the leader is most likely a Veteran.'

'If he were alone, I might attempt it, but not with the two guys beside him.'

Nick watched as the three of them carefully entered his house.

Then, Nick slowly slithered from one heap of metal to the next.

'I think it should be here,' Nick thought as he looked through the heap of rusted metal.

Then, Nick finally found it!

At the bottom of the heap was a black box of steel with several buttons on it.

'The Specter Cage!' Nick thought.

After that, Nick came out of the northern side of the heap and went to another heap.

He threw a glance at the building.

Nobody there.

The next moment, Nick materialized and immediately threw a spear at the heap of metal hiding the Specter Cage.

BOOOM!

The spear shot through the metal and sank into the sewers.

Since Nick wanted to keep his location secret, he had cut the Ghost Wire of the spear.

The next moment, a huge amount of Zephyx exploded out of the heap of metal, and the barrier surrounding Nick's home vanished.

Meanwhile, the three people inside the house ran out, and when they felt the huge amount of Zephyx in the backyard, they knew what had happened.

They had failed!

They hadn't been able to catch Nick inside a cage, so how could they possibly catch him outside of one?

The leader gritted his teeth and took a deep breath.

"Mission failure! Get rid of the evidence before the guards show up!" the leader ordered.

The next moment, the leader retrieved some kind of device.

The two people beside the leader pulled out a round object and handed it to him.

The next moment, the three of them jumped over the backyard wall and ran towards the east for a couple of seconds.

The leader quickly pressed a couple of buttons on the round things and pocketed them.

After that, the leader pressed a button on the device he had pulled out.

BOOOM! BOOOM! BOOOM!

Eight powerful explosions appeared all around Nick's distant home.

Huge chunks of his steel walls were blown off, and even Nick's house was blown to pieces.

The round objects the two guys had given to their leader were bombs.

In case the mission failed, they would be used to get rid of the evidence.

At most, the guards would find scraps of Zephyx and metal.

Naturally, everyone had also been forbidden from bringing belongings with them that could possibly be linked to their person or their place of employment.

The three of them threw one last glance at the resting place of their eight colleagues before quickly running toward the east.

They zigzagged through different alleys while jumping and running through houses.

Suddenly, only two of them were left, but they weren't worried.

They split up in designated positions.

After all, if Nick talked to the guards, he would tell them that three cloaked people had attacked him and that they were running away currently.

Because of that, they split up while taking off their cloaks.

Suddenly, only the leader was left.

For several minutes, the leader kept running at his full speed while subtly changing his appearance.

Eventually, he transformed into someone who didn't look any different from a random citizen of the Dregs.

He would travel through public places now while mingling with the people.

Only when he was 100% certain did he actually slowly restore his real appearance.

Eventually, he slowly walked toward the Inner City.

His bored eyes looked at the entrance and the people beside it.

"Sir, please wait a moment," one of the guards told the leader.

"What?" the leader asked with boredom.

"Sorry to disturb you, but something happened in the Outer City, and we are supposed to investigate every level two and level three Extractor coming from the Outer City," the guard said respectfully.

"What is this about?" the leader asked in boredom.

"The Chief Zephyx Extractor of Dark Dream was attacked by several level two Extractors and a level three Extractor. Do you know anything about this?" the guard asked.

"I heard the commotion, but I thought it was just a battle between some gangs," the leader said in boredom.

"Where have you been for the last two hours?" the guard asked.

"I was meeting the head of my Investigation department," the leader said with annoyance.

"Are there any witnesses?" the guard asked.

"Almost my entire Investigation department saw me," the leader said calmly.

"Alright, thank you for cooperating," the guard said. "One last thing."

Then, the guard pointed at somebody sitting on the ground with their head lowered.

"Do you know this person?" the guard asked.

The leader furrowed his brows, walked forward, and lifted the body's head by the hair.

It was a corpse.

It was the corpse of one of the two people that had fled with the leader.

It seemed like Nick had followed them, killed them, and brought them to the guard.

"Mergur Mender," the leader said. "He quit our company around four months ago. I've seen him on the streets here and there, but I haven't talked to him since then."

"Sir, we would like to talk more about this at the station. I know that it wasn't you, but we have to follow all the leads. You knowing one of the culprits sadly makes you a suspect," the guard said carefully.

The leader just nodded. "I get it. Lead the way."

The leader wasn't really worried.

Everything for today had been meticulously planned.

There were tons of witnesses who could give him an alibi.

Also, no one would expect that he would personally go out to kill some level two Extractor.

After all, he was Kallum Sondur, the Chief Zephyx Extractor of the Spartans.