

The Sun 291

Chapter 291 – Traitor!

"ARIA!"

The brightly shining woman looked at the person who had just shouted at her from one of the floor grates of the Outer City.

It was Wyntor.

Right now, Wyntor was pointing at the shaking building that was Dark Dream.

Aria furrowed her brows.

Dark Dream was a competitor.

However, that thought only survived for a split second.

'If Dark Dream falls into the red sea, it will consume all the Specters inside it and become even stronger!'
Aria thought.

Aria shot through the air and stopped below the building.

Dark Dream was collapsing and falling right on her!

Whooom!

Yet, Aria just stretched her hand upward, and a domain of light encased the building.

Shockingly, the building stopped falling, and Aria calmly hovered below it.

The governor looked over and saw what Aria was doing.

After he realized the reason behind her action, the governor nodded.

Aria nodded back and lifted the building further upward.

Then, she looked for a good location and gently put the building on top of another building.

Luckily, the building's foundation was extremely solid, and Dark Dream's building was also made out of very durable steel.

If these buildings were made of stone, this would never have worked.

Taking a multi-story building made of heavy steel and casually lifting it into the air...

This was the power of a Hero.

A moment later, she flew back to support the governor.

"HAHAHAHAHA!"

By now, the arms extended into the air for over 40 meters, and even the powerful Experts felt terror when looking at them.

While it was extremely difficult to kill and contain the Crimson Sea, its actual power hadn't been dangerous to even Veterans at the beginning.

After all, it had only been an Adolescent.

But now, every bloody hand made the Experts fear for their lives, even though they weren't even close to them.

The Crimson Sea had already killed thousands of people, and it had grown massively!

While the normal people were busy hiding in the city, the guards were looking at what was happening below the city through the holes in the floor.

From time to time, they saw people zip by and launch an attack at the endless red sea.

It was almost like they were fighting against hell itself!

Sometimes, people couldn't flee quickly enough, and they fell into the red sea together with the collapsing buildings.

The fight continued.

The governor had destroyed the majority of the first layers of ruins below the city by now, and the Crimson Sea was now around 80 meters away from the actual city.

The arms could only stretch for about 40 meters.

The collapse of the city had slowed down.

Fortunately, the outer walls of the ruins were made of the same material as the ruins themselves, which meant that the Crimson Sea couldn't escape.

The governor took a deep breath.

They were regaining control over the city.

He threw a glance at the megastructure.

It was stable and still holding.

The Crimson Sea wasn't damaging the foundation in any way.

However, everything was still filled with red mist.

The governor and the other Heroes didn't care about the mist since it couldn't even injure them, but the same thing wasn't true for the other people.

It seemed like they had to learn to live with the red mist until they could find a permanent solution for the Crimson Sea.

Force Specters were extremely difficult to kill and suppress, and the Crimson Sea wasn't different.

Even though the governor was many times stronger, that didn't help a lot.

Dealing with Force Specters required very special equipment and special methods.

Luckily, the city was still safe.

"TRAITOR!"

The governor looked back when he heard someone scream in absolute rage.

Then, he saw something he would have never expected.

In front of a big hole stood Kallum Sondur, the Chief Zephyx Extractor of the Spartans.

And many meters below him, in the process of falling, was his friend.

It was a man with red hair who was carrying a spear on his back.

John Keyweather, Kallum Sondur, and this man had been the three founders of the Spartans.

But now, Kallum was looking at the falling person with eyes filled with hatred, desperation, and rage.

The person who had shouted was the one who was currently falling right toward the Crimson Sea.

"This is all because of you!" Kallum shouted after the falling person with rage.

The falling man raised his hands towards the distant Kallum.

The next moment, a bracelet on his arm began to shine, and his entire arm turned black.

Eyes appeared in the blackness of his arm, and they all looked at the distant Kallum.

And then, his arm suddenly expanded towards Kallum with frightening speed!

Kallum's eyes widened in shock.

He knew that the bracelet had scary powers, but he hadn't thought it could do that!

About a year ago, the man with the red hair had found the bracelet in the Inner City.

It was a Specter, and it gave Extractors power in exchange for a service.

Sometimes, it wanted to consume Extractors.

Other times, it just wanted someone to suffer.

The bracelet always told them what it wanted, and when it got what it wanted, it bestowed a crazy amount of strength and Zephyx to the person wearing it.

The latest task was to capture Dark Dream's Chief Zephyx Extractor alive.

The Spartans had believed that the bracelet was a Possession Specter without any sort of consciousness or battle strength.

But now, it had suddenly transformed into something that seemed very alive!

Because of that, Kallum didn't manage to react in time.

The elongated black claw grabbed his head and pulled him down with the red-haired man.

An instant later, the red-haired man was grabbed by the red hands coming out of the Crimson Sea.

The eyes inside the black arm all turned to look at the hand that had just grabbed the man, and a moment later, the bracelet left the man's arm.

The bracelet vanished, and a black figure with claws and wings appeared.

At the same time, one of the hands also grabbed the falling Kallum.

Everything had happened in less than two seconds, and the governor was still watching in shock.

What was this black figure?!

A Specter?!

That was when he remembered what Kallum had said earlier.

Kallum had said that a black figure had killed John Keyweather!

Was this the one?

Was this black Specter the one that had released the Crimson Sea?!

Chapter 292 – Crimson

The black figure flapped its wings and jumped away from the red hands.

Apparently, it did not want to get close to any of the hands.

The governor put his spear to the side.

He would capture the Specter alive and interrogate it!

CRACK!

Time seemed to stand still.

Everyone looked with shock at one of the red hands that had suddenly exploded forward to grab the black Specter!

The governor immediately took out his spear again and struck forward.

WHOOOOM!

The thousands of red hands were severed, including the one that held the black Specter.

But then, the red hands turned into red liquid.

The red liquid encompassed the red-haired man, Kallum, and the black Specter.

And they dissolved.

"HAHAHAHAHA!"

The laughter of the Crimson Sea seemed to become louder and brighter.

"HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!"

And even louder.

"HAHAHAHAHAH-"

And then, it suddenly stopped.

Silence.

A moment later, all the hands seemed to collapse and fall into the sea.

The faces in the Crimson Sea vanished.

The Crimson Sea stopped moving.

Right now, it just looked like a smooth sheet of red metal below the city.

A moment of silence passed.

And then, everything below the city seemed to turn red.

Eyes!

Millions of eyes opened on the surface of the Crimson Sea!

In silence, the Crimson Sea was staring at Crimson Fungus City.

The governor realized with horror what had happened.

The Crimson Sea had advanced again!

It was now a Fanatic!

"Hahaha!"

Suddenly, somebody laughed, but it was not the Crimson Sea.

A man had suddenly jumped off the edge of the Outer City!

He was the one who was laughing!

"Hahaha!"

"Hahaha!"

"Hahaha!"

More and more people started to laugh as they jumped off the edges of the city, right towards the Crimson Sea.

A mere moment later, over 200 people were falling towards the Crimson Sea.

"Catch them!" the governor shouted.

The governor and the other Heroes quickly grabbed as many people as they could, but they could only hold so many people at once.

On top of that, they couldn't accelerate or decelerate quickly since the g-forces would kill the people.

In the end, the majority of people landed in the Crimson Sea.

Every person perfectly landed in the middle of one of the eyes.

"It has the ability to control minds now! Do not look into the eyes!" Aria Light shouted at the people of the city.

Everyone who thought about looking at the Crimson Sea immediately recoiled in horror.

They didn't dare to look at what was going on beneath them anymore.

Suddenly, the millions of eyes gathered together into 100 huge eyes, every eye nearly a hundred meters wide.

Luckily, none of the normal people were watching anymore, and the power of the Crimson Sea didn't seem to work without eye contact.

"Hahaha!"

The governor felt the hair on his neck stand up as he heard laughter from close by.

Then, he watched four Experts jumping towards the Crimson Sea!

For a moment, the governor couldn't believe what he was seeing.

The Crimson Sea could even manipulate Experts?!

Luckily, Experts were not as fragile as normal people, and the governor could intercept the three of them easily.

"No one is allowed to look at the red sea! That includes all guards!" the governor shouted solemnly.

Everyone immediately turned away.

Meanwhile, the Heroes gathered beside the governor.

All five of them were hovering between the city and the Crimson Sea.

Luckily, as Heroes, they were far more powerful than the Crimson Sea.

After about five seconds of silence, the eyes gathered again.

Now, there were five eyes left.

And the five eyes all focused on the five people hovering above them.

Silence.

For several seconds, the Heroes and the Crimson Sea just looked at each other.

Even though the Heroes had met many Specters in their lives, this one was definitely one of the scariest.

The way the eyes were staring at them made them think that the Crimson Sea was sentient.

Yet, they were certain that it wasn't.

This was all just instinct.

The five of them were the only beings the eyes could see, which was why they only looked at them.

Luckily, they were far stronger than the Crimson Sea.

Its ability had no effect on them.

But then, the five eyes gathered again.

And in the end, only one enormous eye was left.

The eye covered almost the entire Crimson Sea, and the pupil almost perfectly encompassed the round shape of Crimson Fungus City's foundation.

When looking at everything from above, one would see Crimson Fungus City stabbing out of the middle of the humongous eye.

Silence.

The arms and the laughing faces had vanished, but the red mist was still coming out of the Crimson Sea.

The red mist was slowly rising from around the city.

From far away, it looked like a wavy pillar of red.

From inside the city, it looked like a wall of red smoke.

The entire Dregs had collapsed.

Over half of the Outer City had collapsed.

Only about a kilometer of Outer City stretched out from around the Inner City before breaking off into a domain of red smoke.

The domain of red smoke was almost two kilometers wide and encompassed the domain outside the new Outer City.

For now, nobody could access the outer world from the city and vice versa.

The singular eye just silently and motionlessly stared at the city above it.

The sewers were gone.

The underground was gone.

Instead of black water in a dark and disgusting place, there was now a silent and motionless red eye.

The underside of the city was illuminated in an ominous crimson glow.

Looking below the floor was forbidden now.

Anyone who dared to poke a hole into the ground to look would die.

Even though the governor had saved many people from their jumps into the Crimson Sea, they would never return to their normal selves.

They continued laughing.

They didn't even stop to inhale.

The laughing only stopped when they died of asphyxiation.

Chapter 293 – Red Wall

?Silence.

There was no wind.

The air stood completely still, and the sun shone down from above.

A red wall of waving and moving mist was in front.

Nick just looked at the red wall from the roof of a building without saying anything.

The Dregs were gone.

The Dregs had been consumed by the red mist before they collapsed into the abyss below the city.

So many people had died.

When the red mist had appeared, Nick had watched with horror as the people of the Dregs had been killed.

Thousands of people had died.

After a while, Nick had to go further toward the Inner City since even parts of the Outer City were collapsing.

However, he hadn't truly been in danger.

Even though everything around him had been collapsing, he never felt like he had been in danger.

After all, he could just jump from building to building.

Yet, all the normal people didn't have that luxury.

A random piece of metal that got disconnected from another piece of metal had enough power to break bones.

While Nick wasn't in danger, the normal people were fighting for their lives.

At least the worst had passed.

For the past 20 minutes, nothing crazy had happened.

The people were slowly recovering and trying to deal with their new situation.

About 800 people from the Dregs had arrived in the Outer City.

Nick didn't know if the people who had fled to the city walls survived.

Right now, guards were patrolling around the current Outer City, making sure that nobody was causing any trouble.

Crimson Fungus City had changed drastically.

People could move, but houses couldn't.

All the metal of the Dregs and even a big chunk of the Outer City had collapsed, which added up to about 60% of the entire area outside the Inner City.

Yet, over 80% of people had survived.

While metal had been extremely cheap and houses had been abundant in the past, these things were now rare and valuable.

Almost all the houses in the Outer City were already occupied.

Together with the displaced people from the collapsed Outer City, there were now around 2,000 people without a home.

The people in the Dregs had lived a brutal and cutthroat lifestyle, but they hadn't been homeless.

Things were different now.

Groups upon groups of refugees were scattered across the Outer City now.

Their future looked bleak.

Nick had already seen Nurse Alice more than once today.

The last two hours replayed in Nick's head again and again.

He had infiltrated the Spartans and had dealt them tremendous damage.

Then, he had freed an Adolescent Force Specter.

Sure, it was difficult to capture a Force Specter, but this one had just been an Adolescent.

As soon as the Force Specter broke out of the building, tons of powerful guards would suppress it.

What could an Adolescent do against 50 Veterans and over 10 Experts?

And sure enough, Nick hadn't seen anything major happen in over 20 minutes.

He had even had enough time to change his clothing and to deliver the Shadow Shroud to Wyntor in Dark Dream.

After that, he had just come out to relax.

And then, all of this happened.

In the beginning, Nick hadn't even been sure if this was truly the doing of that red Specter he had let out.

Only when he had looked at the hands and the faces of the red abyss did he truly realize that this was the doing of the Specter he had released.

But how?

It was only an Adolescent!

At most, it would eat enough to become an Adult, but that still wouldn't be enough to do any significant damage.

After all, the city had Experts, Specialists, and even Heroes.

How had things turned out this way?

How could releasing an Adolescent cause so much damage when it was surrounded by the entire power of the city?

Not even level six Specters could run rampant here.

It was difficult for Nick to connect his actions to the current state of the city.

If it was so hard to suppress the Crimson Sea, how did the Spartans even capture it?

'I just released a relatively harmless Specter to cover my retreat and to cause a bit of chaos to the Spartans,' Nick thought as he looked at the red wall with a concerned expression.

'And now, thousands of people died.'

'I wanted to save the Dregs.'

'But now, I destroyed the Dregs.'

Nick just kept looking at the red wall.

If the Dregs were still there, he would be looking at them right now.

Everything was gone.

"Boss, finally!"

Nick didn't turn to look at Jenny, who had just landed on the roof behind Nick.

Jenny looked at Nick with a mix of frustration, anger, and panic. "What are you doing here?! Dark Dream is in chaos! We need you!"

When Nick heard that, he furrowed his brows in worry.

Dark Dream.

Nick had just been responsible for thousands of innocent people dying.

Why would he give a shit about work right now?

When Jenny saw Nick's lack of a reaction, she gritted her teeth.

"Nick," she shouted, using Nick's name for once. "This is a bad time for everyone! We are all suffering!"

"We all want to cry, but we have to deal with the urgent things first! Everyone else is currently doing their best to fix Dark Dream! As our Boss, you have to be an example to all of us and help as well!" Jenny shouted.

She was angry that Nick became unresponsive during a moment of crisis.

She always believed Nick to be reliable and responsible during a crisis.

But, apparently, he wasn't.

Instead of helping like everyone else, he was just looking at the destroyed city.

She was disappointed in Nick.

Nick took a shaky breath.

Then, he quickly shook his head and stood up.

"Sorry," he said in a distracted tone. "What do you need?"

"Come, I'll show you where our office is now," Jenny said.

Nick didn't even ask about what Jenny meant.

His mind was occupied with other things.

"Mr. Melfion is currently talking with the other Manufacturers and the city. I'm busy dealing with our remaining Extractors, and we need somebody to lead us until Mr. Melfion is back."

Nick followed after Jenny, his mind distracted.

"Where's Trevor?" Nick asked absentmindedly.

"He jumped."

Chapter 294 – Assessing

"That's bad," Nick said absentmindedly.

Jenny narrowed her eyes in rage and turned back to look at Nick.

"Do you know what I mean?" she asked.

"Yes," Nick said as he looked back with a neutral expression. "He jumped into the red Specter and died, right?"

Jenny's eyes became filled with fury, but instead of saying anything, she just kept quiet and continued going towards Dark Dream's new location.

Jenny had known Nick for over four years now, and she had always believed him to be reliable, dependable, nice, and empathetic.

Yet, people only showed their true selves when they were in desperation.

A loving mother might hold her child in front of her when a threat appeared.

A strong man might run away and leave his family behind.

A strict mother might protect her child with her own body.

A weak man might fight a seemingly immortal foe to buy time for his friends and family.

And Nick?

He was always nice, strong, and dependable, but as soon as things became terrible, he just wallowed in self-pity.

And when one of his closest friends died, he just gave a nonchalant response like he had just been told about the weather tomorrow.

Jenny had believed that Nick cared about them.

But obviously, he didn't.

She thought that Nick was different from all the other Manufacturers.

In her career, she had heard a lot about other Manufacturers, and she always despised how cold and apathetic they were.

She had always been happy that Dark Dream was different.

But now, she only felt like a clown.

Different?

Of course not.

Dark Dream was just like all the other Manufacturers.

They were only interested in profits.

Maybe she should reconsider the offers from other Manufacturers she had declined in the past.

Nick silently followed Jenny for a bit.

Eventually, the two of them arrived near the Inner City.

Dark Dream's building was sitting on top of three other buildings, and it was currently leaning against the megastructure.

Luckily, Containment Units didn't break easily, and Aria had been careful when putting down the building.

In front of the building was a group of people.

There were 13 Extractors and around 20 normal people.

"I gathered all the Extractors," Jenny told Nick in a professional tone. "There might be more that survived, but these are the only ones we could find."

13.

There used to be 24 in Dark Dream.

Nick absentmindedly looked at the people.

A lot of the people he was familiar with weren't there.

For example, Jonathan and Cryon were missing.

Yet, Nick just didn't think about them.

How were they any different from the thousands of other people he had just killed?

What was the point of all of this?

"What about the Specters?" Nick asked emotionlessly.

"I didn't see any breaches, but I didn't look closely," Jenny said with a polite tone. "There are several Specters in the building that can kill me, and I believed it would be foolish for me to enter on my own."

Nick just absentmindedly nodded and jumped towards the entrance of the building.

"I'll check," he said.

The employees looked with worry at Nick, who entered the building.

They were uncertain about their futures.

Walking through the building wasn't easy since it was leaning against the megastructure, making the floor very uneven.

When he entered the lobby, Nick saw a couple of blood splatters, and a moment later, he saw a corpse.

It was one of the clerks.

Her back was at an unnatural angle, and her body leaned on the wall.

When the building had been falling, it had spun a bit.

Most likely, the clerk had died during that.

Nick looked at the body for a bit before going to the staircase and walking to the second floor.

On the second floor, Nick immediately saw a huge hole in one of the Containment Units.

However, he wasn't very worried.

Nick walked over and climbed through the hole.

The "bottom" of the Containment Unit was covered in rubble, but there was one thing that was different.

Several white arms were trying to push the rubble away, but they weren't strong enough.

This was the Containment Unit of the Screaming Coffin, and it was the least durable one in the building.

Nick went to one of the rooms at the side of the floor and retrieved some rope and some equipment.

Then, he jumped into the Containment Unit and freed the Screaming Coffin from all the rubble.

Of course, as soon as the Screaming Coffin was free, it tried to consume Nick.

Nick just tore all its arms out and put plenty of rope around it.

Finally, Nick just put the Screaming Coffin on his back and carried it like a backpack.

Next, Nick entered one of the other Containment Units and checked for holes.

Luckily, there were none.

The only thing he found was a pair of glasses lying in the corner of the Containment Unit, which was to be expected.

The Can's Containment Unit also didn't have any issues.

The Dung Heap was quite upset and sloshing around, but there were also no holes there.

After that, Nick went to the third floor.

The floor was covered in blood.

The distant wailing of a woman echoed throughout the floor.

The next moment, Nick could see a white silhouette slowly coming from around the corner.

It was a bleeding woman, and she seemed quite upset.

Nick just walked towards her calmly.

"Did your home break?" Nick asked.

The Bleeding Lady just looked at the floor, still crying.

"Let me see," Nick said.

Then, Nick went to the Bleeding Lady's Containment Unit, and sure enough, one of the support beams had rammed through the walls of the Containment Unit.

"Ah, I see," Nick said.

Then, he walked to another one and pressed a couple of buttons on the console.

"This will be a bit loud. Don't worry. It's supposed to be this loud."

Nick pressed one button, and the entire floor started to resound with a loud alarm.

The Bleeding Lady seemed to get more agitated, but Nick just looked at the Containment Unit that was slowly opening.

A bit later, the Containment Unit opened, and Nick pointed inside.

"Here you go. You can paint it red if you want," Nick said.

The Bleeding Lady just shook a bit.

And then, she slowly walked into the new Containment Unit.

A moment later, Nick just closed the Containment Unit again and resumed his tour.

Chapter 295 – Status

?After the Bleeding Lady entered her new Containment Unit, Nick checked the next one.

Everything seemed to be in order.

The only thing in the Containment Unit was a distressed puppy.

Nick just petted it for a bit before leaving.

"Did your Containment Unit get damaged?" Nick asked the Money Sink, who was just leaning on a wall.

"No," she answered. "What happened?"

"An Adolescent Force Specter broke out and destroyed the Dregs and about half of the Outer City," Nick answered absentmindedly.

"Am I in danger?" the Money Sink asked.

"No, everything has already calmed down again," Nick said. "In fact, you're very safe in here. The outside has become much more dangerous for Specters now."

"There was a big announcement earlier. Apparently, everyone who looks at the new Specter will jump into it. They even said that it eats other Specters."

The Money Sink furrowed her brows. "A Specter that eats other Specters. I've never heard of something like that."

"It's a big red sea," Nick said. "It replaced the sewers. Want to take a look?"

The Money Sink just looked at Nick with a neutral expression. "Didn't you just say that taking a look would kill me?"

"Yes," Nick said with a neutral voice. "It's a joke. Ha ha."

The Money Sink just looked at Nick with an even expression.

"Alright, bye," Nick said before he exited the Containment Unit again.

Nick walked up to the fourth floor and opened the door.

BANG!

Immediately, a red blur shot at Nick.

BANG!

But Nick just slapped it.

The red blur hit the wall and landed on the ground.

'The Blood Hawk broke out,' Nick thought, looking at the red hawk.

In the distance, Nick could also hear something heavy hitting the walls again and again.

Nick walked over to the Blood Hawk, grabbed its throat, and carried it with him.

The Blood Hawk tried to break out, but it was helplessly inferior to Nick.

After rounding a corner, Nick saw a hole in the Blood Horse's Containment Unit.

However, the hole wasn't big enough for it to fit through, and it was doing its best to widen the hole.

Sadly, even though there already was a hole there, the Blood Horse's power wasn't nearly enough to widen it.

Nick entered the Blood Horse's Containment Unit and punched it once.

Then, Nick took a metallic cord out from the equipment he had gotten earlier and put it around the Blood Horse.

That was a Zephyx Suppressor, and it would keep the Blood Horse's power suppressed for about six hours.

Nick just wanted to make sure that it didn't escape.

After leaving the Containment Unit, Nick looked at the other ones on this floor.

All of them were damaged.

This floor had been reserved for the Newbies, and the Containment Units here were all pretty cheap.

Sadly, this meant that none of them survived.

Nick had no other choice but to carry the Blood Hawk with him to the fifth floor.

Luckily, everything was fine on the fifth floor.

Neither the Lover nor the Dreamer escaped.

The Containment Units up here were also far more expensive.

Nick opened one of them and threw the Blood Hawk into it.

Then, he opened the other free one and dumped the Screaming Coffin.

Lastly, Nick went to the sixth floor.

Just as expected, the Fog didn't break out.

The Fog's Containment Unit was by far the most expensive and durable one.

The Zephyx fueling the Containment Unit also wasn't an issue.

After Nick had escaped from the Spartans, he had gotten rid of the 2.5 kg of Zephyx he had taken by simply adding them to the supply here.

Lastly, Nick checked the seventh floor.

Almost everything was destroyed, but that wasn't a big deal.

At least all of the Specters were contained again.

Three Specters escaped, and one was stuck in a damaged Containment Unit.

This could have been way worse.

In silence, Nick looked at the destroyed seventh floor.

With the urgent things dealt with, Nick had a quiet moment to himself.

Everything felt like a dream.

It just felt like everything that happened within the last hours was just some dream.

Had these things truly happened?

Had Nick really done all these terrible things?

It just didn't feel real.

It was like Nick was navigating a dream or a fantastical scenario he had made up in his mind.

Eventually, Nick just turned around and walked down the stairs again.

When he exited the building, all the employees looked at Nick with worry.

Nick also saw three new people in the group.

Three guards.

All Veterans.

Nick jumped down from the entrance and landed in front of them.

The leading guard nodded. "Are you the Chief Zephyx Extractor of Dark Dream?" the guard asked.

"Yes," Nick answered.

"What is the status of the Containment Units?" the guard asked.

"Six damaged Containment Units," Nick said.

When the employees heard that, they felt a cold shudder run down their backs.

They were very happy that Jenny hadn't told them to go in.

"But only four of them were occupied," Nick added.

"What about the four Specters?" the guard asked.

"We had a couple of spare Containment Units," Nick said nonchalantly. "I dumped three of them in stronger ones. Sadly, I don't have one for the last one, but that's not that big of an issue in the short term. It's a Late Hatchling Physical Specter, and I put a Zephyx Suppressor around it."

The guard furrowed his brows.

"Please, show us," the guard said.

Nick just gestured to the entrance. "Come with me, then."

Nick and the three guards jumped into the building, and Nick showed them all the floors.

The guards checked the monitors and Containment Units, and sure enough, the only problematic one was the one with the Blood Horse.

A bit later, Nick and the three guards gathered in front of the building again.

"Thank you," the leading guard said with less severity in his voice. "We're going to send someone to repair one of the Containment Units on the fourth floor. Expect them within the next five hours. Until then, please keep an eye on the suppressed Specter."

Nick nodded.

Then, all the guards jumped away.

Chapter 296 – Busy

Nick just absentmindedly watched the guards leave.

Then, he looked back at the building, which was leaning against the megastructure.

It still was difficult for him to accept that all of this had happened.

"Boss?"

Nick looked back at his employees.

'Right, I should probably give some orders,' Nick thought.

"Take the next day off," Nick said. "You can come back the day after tomorrow during the morning. I will tell you what to do then."

Most of the people thanked Nick and quickly ran away.

Almost all of them had some loved ones, and they were quite worried about them.

The only reason why they had even showed up was to make sure that they still had a job and that the Specters didn't escape.

Jenny threw a neutral glance at Nick before she also left.

After some time, Nick was left alone.

For a couple of minutes, Nick just aimlessly stood in the middle of the street, looking around.

Eventually, he jumped to the entrance of Dark Dream's building again and sat down.

The building was tilted by about 20°, which made it a bit awkward sitting there, but Nick didn't care.

He just looked at the city from his elevated position.

The city's atmosphere had changed so much.

The feeling the old city gave people was one of hidden and distant danger.

Now, it gave a feeling of immediate threat and danger.

The main contributor was the red mist surrounding the city like a wall.

Over half an hour had passed since the incident, and the people were slowly coming to terms with their new situation.

Slowly, the shocked silence turned into heartbroken crying and aggressive shouting.

The refugees were crying in desperation, and the people who were living here were slowly starting to shout in anger.

They wouldn't share their houses with these dirty people!

Of course, there were also some people who wanted to help everyone, but those people were in the minority.

As more minutes passed, one scuffle after the other broke out.

People were blaming each other.

When humans felt like something unjust happened to them, they very quickly tried to find someone that they could blame for this injustice.

Sadly, nobody in the Outer City knew what had happened yet.

'I know whom they can blame,' Nick thought with self-ridicule.

For a while, Nick just sat there.

Over the next hours, a couple of missing employees showed up, but Nick just sent them away.

Eventually, Nick felt like he needed something to do and decided to clean the inside of the building a bit.

His first order of business was to feed the clerk's corpse to the Screaming Coffin.

After that, Nick grabbed the biggest pieces of rubble and moved them out of the building.

Of course, cleaning the entire building was way too big of a task, and he barely made any progress over several hours.

By now, a huge pile of debris had gathered below the building's entrance, but Nick just felt like the rubble inside the building was endless.

While Nick was cleaning the building, he constantly thought about the city, but it still didn't feel real.

At some point, Nick saw a couple of people waiting in front of the entrance.

They were the people sent to repair one of the Containment Units.

Nick brought them in and showed them the fourth floor.

After a while, the people decided to repair one of the unoccupied Containment Units.

Over the next hours, the people managed to repair it, and Nick transported the Blood Horse into the repaired Containment Unit.

With that, all the Specters were officially contained again.

The repair people left, and Nick was left alone again.

By now, it was already morning again.

Nick was still cleaning the building.

At 8 a.m., one of Wyntor's people showed up to tell Nick that Wyntor was still stuck in meetings.

Apparently, he was talking to a crazy number of people because of many different things.

Nick gave the man a rundown of what had happened in Dark Dream, and the guy left to tell Wyntor.

More hours passed, and Nick was still busy cleaning the building.

He didn't drink, eat, or sleep.

He was just cleaning the building absentmindedly.

At 12 p.m., one of Wyntor's people showed up again with a message.

"Sir says that he has done his best, but he couldn't get an exception for you," the man said.

"Exception for what?" Nick asked.

The man looked a bit surprised about that question.

"The undercity work," the man said. "Sir didn't get an exception for you, but you only have to do it once compared to all the other Zephyx Extractors."

"Sir has already dealt with the matter of security for the company. When the guards come to take you, just follow their orders. You don't have to worry about Dark Dream."

"Sir also said that he will contact you personally when he finds the time."

"He also told me to tell you that you shouldn't do anything drastic and that the only reason why he could talk with so many people in such a short time was that he trusts you with Dark Dream in his absence."

Nick's expression turned a bit uncomfortable.

"Thanks," Nick said.

The man nodded and left Nick again.

He still didn't know what undercity work was, but it didn't seem that important to Nick right now.

In fact, nothing seemed important.

What was the point of doing any of these things when he might as well be dead soon?

Whenever Nick thought about the fact that the state of the city was his fault, he felt a deep feeling of foreboding.

His heart was telling him that this was dangerous.

It was like Nick was hiding from an extremely powerful Specter.

Nick's heart was telling him that he would die if he confronted the Specter.

In the same way, Nick felt like he would die if he confronted the things that had happened yesterday.

Absentmindedly, his mind went out to the foreign ball of Zephyx in his neck.

The dangerous and explosive warmth of the foreign Zephyx calmed Nick down.

If he just touched it...

If he just moved it a bit...

Chapter 297 – Outsider

"Nick Nick, Chief Zephyx Extractor of Dark Dream?"

Two Veterans working for the city arrived in front of Dark Dream and confronted Nick when he brought out yet another piece of rubble.

"Yes, that's me," Nick said neutrally.

One of the guards handed over a sheet of paper, and Nick read through it.

It was a written order signed by the governor.

Nick was ordered to contact the guards at the southern entrance of the Inner City at 6 p.m. today.

He was ordered to work one shift in the undercity.

Nick looked at the clock and realized that it was already 5:30 p.m.

"We will watch over the company in your absence," one of the guards said with annoyance.

Obviously, he wasn't happy that he had to stand guard in front of Dark Dream for a couple of hours.

Nick put the sheet of paper into one of his pockets and nodded. "Then, I will be going now."

The two guards didn't say anything and just went to the entrance of Dark Dream.

Nick still didn't know what undercity work was supposed to be, but he also didn't care that much about it.

He didn't wait and immediately went to the southern entrance of the Inner City.

As Nick traveled through the streets, he saw many people sitting outside.

They were refugees, and they had lost everything.

Nick also saw a ridiculous number of guards.

He guessed that the governor had probably ordered all the guards to work overtime during this moment of crisis.

Many of the people were walking through the streets in groups, and they were constantly throwing suspicious glances at the people sitting in the streets.

Nick ignored all of the people while he was traveling through the streets.

Eventually, Nick arrived at the southern entrance of the Inner City.

When he arrived, he saw a group of 20 Extractors waiting at the side.

Most of them belonged to Ghosty's Lab, but there were also many from Anatomy.

Surprisingly, every single one of them was a level two Extractor.

Nick ignored them for now and walked up to one of the guards.

There were about five times as many guards near this entrance as normal, and they all looked at Nick warily.

Nick even noticed that several guns were directly pointed at him, which was unusual.

When the guard read through the sheet of paper, he started to frown.

Then, he snorted.

"Lucky bastard," he commented before putting a stamp on the sheet of paper.

Nick took the sheet of paper back, and the guard motioned for him to join the group of Extractors at the side.

Nick didn't answer and just walked to the side, joining the other Extractors.

"Hey, you!"

Nick met the eyes of one of the Extractors from Anatomy.

He was a tall and wide man, filled with muscles.

Behind him, the others were also glancing at Nick.

"Yes?" Nick asked neutrally.

"You're wearing a neutral uniform," the man commented. "Who's your employer?"

"Dark Dream," Nick said.

The man furrowed his brows and looked at someone in the group of Extractors.

It was Kiara.

Kiara just nodded. "Yes, he's our Boss."

That elicited a small chorus of ohs from the group.

This was the Chief Zephyx Extractor of Dark Dream?

Naturally, almost all of them had heard of Nick.

Not because of his power but because of the lack of it.

A Chief Zephyx Extractor who was also a John was so strange and abnormal that basically everyone talked about it.

"Good, you can stay," the big man said.

Nick was not sure what this was about.

The city was in charge of everything, and Nick was quite sure that this guy didn't have any kind of say in all of this.

Nick didn't say anything and just walked over to Kiara.

"Boss," Kiara said in greeting. "I'm sorry that I couldn't show up yesterday. I... had things to do."

Nick just nodded. "I understand."

Silence.

Some minutes later, another Extractor showed up, and the big guy confronted them.

Just like Nick, this Extractor wore a neutral uniform.

"Who's your employer?" the big guy asked.

"Dark Dream," the woman said.

Nick raised an eyebrow.

He didn't know this person.

The big man looked back at Nick.

"Is that true?" he asked.

"I don't know her," Nick said.

That made everyone look back at the woman with narrowed eyes.

"I work in a different department!" the woman shouted in anger at Nick. "I've also never seen you before, and yet I don't claim that you don't work for Dark Dream."

The watching people narrowed their eyes even further at the woman, who got more and more nervous.

Then, Kiara let out a short laugh.

"You claim you work for Dark Dream, but you don't even recognize our Chief Zephyx Extractor," she said.

The woman's eyes widened in shock as she looked at Nick.

The tall guy from Anatomy glared at the woman.

Eventually, she walked to the group, but everyone kept a big distance from her.

It was almost like she had some kind of deadly and contagious disease.

"What's this all about?" Nick asked Kiara. "Why are Extractors claiming to work for us?"

"They're from the Spartans," Kiara said with disgust. "After all their executives died, the Spartans split up."

"Everybody knows that the Spartans are the reason for the city's current state, which is why they try to hide their identities. They wear normal uniforms and claim to work for us."

Nick looked at the isolated Extractor while Kiara was talking.

"She will most likely get into an... accident... later," Kiara said with apathy and disgust.

Nick looked at the Extractor for a bit more.

Then, he looked away.

He didn't feel bad for her in any way.

She was a member of the Spartans, and the Spartans had tried to kill Nick.

The only reason she was still alive was that she wasn't working while Nick was killing all of them in their building.

"It's good that we have their Chief Zephyx Extractor here," the big man commented to one of his friends with a laugh.

"At least that guy's good for something now."

Chapter 298 – Incident

?Usually, Nick wouldn't care about such a comment.

Yet, when he had heard that comment just now, his insides began to tense with rage, and he narrowed his eyes.

Naturally, it was to be expected that several people weren't happy with Nick's success.

He was a John, just like them!

What made him so special that he got such a prestigious position as Chief Zephyx Extractor?!

Naturally, envy created resentment, and people wanted to voice that resentment.

Nick understood all of these things, which was why he usually didn't care.

But things were different today.

Nick had felt apprehensive and apathetic ever since the incident had occurred, and the sudden burst of anger was the first real emotion he had felt since then.

Kiara watched with surprise as Nick walked up to the big man.

The big man's friends noticed Nick's approach and tapped the big guy on the shoulder, who turned to look at Nick with a raised eyebrow.

Nick stopped in front of the big man and looked into his eyes.

"What?" the big guy asked with annoyance.

"What was that comment just now?" Nick asked with a threatening tone.

The big man looked at Nick with surprise.

Then, an arrogant and provocative grin appeared on his face.

"I said that you're at least good-"

BOOOOOM!

BANG!

A green Barrier appeared before the big man's body shot towards the walls of the megastructure, hitting them with an explosive sound!

Everyone looked with shock at the man, who was now on his knees beside the Inner City wall.

For just a moment, everything was silent.

Then, the man's friends turned to Nick aggressively.

"What the fuck is-"

But the guy that had just shouted stopped when he saw Nick.

Nick's eyes were absolutely bloodshot, and his teeth releasing cracking sounds.

Everyone immediately had the same thought.

'This guy is insane!'

This was not the expression of a sane and normal person.

This was the expression of someone who lost all their marbles.

The pure anger that Nick radiated at this moment made the onlookers feel apprehensive.

Of course, the fact that his punch was so strong and fast that nobody even saw it played a role in that.

Naturally, Nick was quite intimidating as someone who had trained in hand-to-hand combat for years while also having killed more than ten people in combat with his bare hands.

Instead of shouting at Nick, the guy's friends took some apprehensive steps back while covertly reaching for their weapons.

"What's going on over here?!"

Everyone turned to look at one of the guards.

Then, they noticed that several guns were now pointed at them.

Nick glanced at the guards.

His demeanor had already returned to normal.

It was almost like he hadn't exploded in anger just now.

"Nothing," Nick said.

The guard frowned and looked at the big guy, who was currently walking back.

The guy looked at Nick with narrowed eyes.

"What's going on?" the guard asked the big guy.

The guy didn't look away from Nick.

"Nothing," he said.

The guard narrowed his eyes. "You all have to work together today, and I don't want to see something like this happen again. The next time something like this happens, the aggressor gets their shift doubled!"

No one answered.

A moment later, the guards turned and went back to their posts.

After the guards left, four groups formed.

One was Nick and Kiara.

Another one was the big guy and his friends.

The biggest group was the neutral people.

And the last group was the lone Extractor from the Spartans.

Kiara just looked at the big guy's group without any fear, while Nick ignored them.

The big guy kept glancing at Nick while he was talking with his friends quietly.

Nick's anger had vanished, but it was replaced by fear and frustration.

Nick knew exactly that his destiny had been in the big guy's hands just now.

If the big guy had complained to the guards, this incident would blow up.

If this were just between two Extractors, this wouldn't be a big deal, but this was between a Chief Zephyx Extractor and a normal Extractor.

Everything Nick did reflected on Dark Dream and impacted their relationship with other Manufacturers.

Sure, the guy had provoked Nick, but that didn't give Nick a justification for hitting the guy.

Obviously, Nick had lost control over his anger, and losing control over anger was something that teenagers and stupid people did.

This was unbecoming of a Chief Zephyx Extractor since it made Nick appear like a hormonal teenager.

The fact that the big guy hadn't told the guards about this saved Nick's reputation and maybe even his career.

Nick wasn't sure why the guy hadn't blown the incident up.

Pride?

Did he feel like running to the guards was a cowardly move?

Fear?

The guy would obviously also get some punishment since he had provoked Nick.

Malice?

What if he wanted to kill Nick in secret?

Nick didn't know.

No matter what the reason for it was, the guy hadn't blown the incident up.

Since the incident hadn't been blown up, this was just seen as a short conflict between two men.

They didn't want others to interfere.

So the others wouldn't interfere.

Some tense minutes passed, and a couple more Extractors appeared.

In the end, there were 33 Extractors.

Eventually, a group of three people walked over to the group.

"Everyone, pay attention, please!" the leading man shouted.

The Extractors all looked at the man.

"In five minutes, we will send all of you down into the undercity."

"If you, at any point, look down, you will die."

"If you lose your hold, you will die."

"If you sabotage others, you will die."

"Am I understood?" the guy said.

No one answered.

The leading guy gestured to one of the people beside him, who walked forward and handed out a couple of things.

Every Extractor received a huge sack, a heavy hammer, and a smaller sack.

The small sack was filled with nails, and the big sack was filled with grips that could be nailed into walls.

"For the next four hours, your job is to nail these grips into the underside of the city."

Chapter 299 – Not As Valuable

?Nick finally found out what undercity work was.

So, it was putting grips onto the underside of the city.

The more Nick thought about it, the more sense it actually made.

They would need to expand the city again at some point, and they couldn't just attach a single layer of steel. That would be far too unstable.

The floor of the outer city was made of three layers, and all three layers added together were about a meter thick.

The upper layer was made of the big metal plates that the people walked on.

The middle layer was made of big and robust steel beams.

The lower layer was made of the same metal plates as the upper layer.

Originally, the entire floor of the Outer City was made of these layers, but the floor of the Dregs deteriorated over the years.

Parts of the Dregs had only had a single layer of metal plates and grates.

But that didn't matter anymore.

The Dregs were destroyed.

Another reason why the city might want some grips on the bottom of the city was that some people might be able to catch themselves if a part of the floor broke.

They didn't need to be able to climb back up to survive.

They just needed to hang on for a while so that other people could save them.

Lastly, the stability of the city had changed.

The Inner City wasn't any more or less stable than before, but the same thing wasn't true for the Outer City.

In the past, many supporting pillars kept the Outer City stable.

Sadly, over 80% of them had vanished, which was one of the main reasons why so much of the city had collapsed.

Most of the Outer City was hanging onto the support of the Inner City, and due to the lever principle, the further one went from the Inner City, the more dangerous it got.

How much strain did a metal plate put on the city's support when it was an entire kilometer away from the closest support?

This meant that the city needed to create diagonal supporting beams.

Those were beams that connected to the bottom of the big pillar and the underside of the city but further away from the central support.

Bridges used these kinds of support beams very often.

The city was currently cut off from the outside world, and the first order of business was to reestablish the connection.

To do that, the city needed to expand again.

And to expand, the city needed more support.

And that support needed to be constructed on the city's underside.

And to start construction on the city's underside, people first needed to be able to traverse the underside.

Aka, the grips.

Everyone looked at the sacks they had received.

Most of them had already known what waited for them, but there were still some open questions.

"Why are we being sent?" one of the Extractors asked with a bit of fear. "Can't the normal people do this?"

The older man looked at the Extractor neutrally. "And how are the normal people supposed to survive the red mist?"

The Extractor's eyes widened.

He had completely forgotten about that!

Right, the entire underside was covered in the thick red mist!

"And how are we supposed to survive that?!" the same Extractor asked in fear.

"You have Barriers," the man said calmly. "If you don't have one, you can borrow a standard one with a 2:1 conversion rate."

"This is madness!" the Extractor shouted. "Our Barriers won't hold for several hours! Why aren't the Veterans or Experts doing this?!"

An annoyed expression appeared on the older man's face.

"Because it's too dangerous," the man said.

Silence.

The faces of several Extractors turned white.

The older man gestured forward, and all the guards pointed their guns at the Extractors.

These were not just normal guns.

Additionally, even though a level two Extractor could probably block over five shots with their Barriers, the sheer number of guns ensured that they would die.

"The physical strength necessary to survive and work down there can only be achieved by level two Extractors," the older man said. "However, it's not truly safe. If a plate collapses, even a level three Extractor will fall to their death."

The older man didn't say anything else, but his unspoken message was clear.

The level two Extractors were not worth as much as level three Extractors.

Someone had to do it, and the Johns had been chosen for this job.

The Extractors obviously weren't happy, but the city didn't care about that.

They had to work, or they would be executed.

Several more questions were asked by multiple people, but those mostly pertained to the undercity work.

Eventually, all the questions had been answered, and the older man left after ordering his assistants to lead the Extractors to their workplace.

The assistants led the Extractors through the entrance of the Inner City.

Naturally, the Extractors followed without any complaints.

The city was not messing around.

After they entered the megastructure, they were led into hallways in the megastructure's walls.

They followed the hallway for around 300 meters before they stopped in front of a big hole.

In front of them was a hole that was around five meters wide.

When Nick saw the hole, he felt his heart rate increase.

The hole was in the middle of a bigger room, and Nick could see an ominous red glow coming out of it.

It was almost like the hole led right into hell.

Yet, there was no red mist, strangely enough.

In the room were three guards, and all three of them wore the uniforms of Veterans.

The leading assistant told the Extractors to follow him before he jumped into the hole.

He also assured everyone that they were not in danger yet.

Nick took a deep breath, and together with a couple other Extractors, he jumped into the hole.

Since the assistant had said that they were not in danger yet, Nick dared to look down.

There was a metal plate about five meters below him, and everyone easily landed on it.

Then, Nick looked around.

Chapter 300 – The Underside

Nick had been below the city many times in the past, but he couldn't associate the sewers with what he was currently seeing.

The group of Extractors found themselves on a big platform, which was directly attached to the megastructure's support.

They were directly beside the humongous, chrome-like structure that supported the entire city.

The platform they were standing on was made of metallic plates that extended to about a distance of ten meters from the central support pillar, and from the looks of things, the platform completely surrounded the pillar, making it several kilometers long.

When Nick looked to the outside, he saw a red world, but it looked quite different than the one Nick saw whenever he looked at the city's edge.

When one stood at the city's edge, the next visible thing that wasn't red mist was over a kilometer away.

Because of that, the red mist looked like a red wall.

But down here, one could look at the city's underside.

Nick realized that the red mist wasn't actually as thick as it had seemed.

The underside of the city was still visible at a distance of ten meters, but barely.

At least, this meant that Nick didn't need to be blind while working.

The Extractors all looked at the red mist in silence.

The mist was glowing crimson, and its luminescence changed from time to time.

Sometimes, it was brighter.

Sometimes, it was not as bright.

"Look at the edge of the platform," the assistant said.

Nick did just that.

He noticed that the edge of the platform was actually about a meter higher than the place where Nick was currently standing.

A couple of plates had been put on the edge of the platform, creating a small wall.

"We had to construct this divider because of the size of the Crimson Sea," the assistant said.

"The edge of the Crimson Sea is around 2.5 kilometers away from here, and several people have already died because they saw the very edge of the Crimson Sea."

"And no, the red mist does not block the view of the Crimson Sea."

Nick took a deep breath.

Right, a tall person might be able to view the Crimson Sea from this location if there were no divider.

"From now on, you can't be careless anymore," the assistant said with severity. "If you see even a tiny part of the Crimson Sea below you, you will die."

"Don't even look forward since you might accidentally catch a glimpse of the Crimson Sea's edge."

"Keep your eyes locked onto the city's underside."

"We've already lost over 20 level two Extractors to the Crimson Sea during construction. It would be for the best if you didn't join them," the assistant said.

Naturally, the Extractors were quite nervous.

Any glance downward, even by accident, would kill them.

They were terrified.

"Anthony Hawkins."

One of the Extractors looked with confusion at the assistant, who had just called him by name.

"You start from here," the assistant said, pointing at a spot on the ceiling, which already had four grips attached to it.

The spot was about two meters away from a couple of grips leading into the red world.

The four grips that were already attached were in a side-by-side position, creating two "ladders" that were offset.

If one faced the ceiling while lying down, the first grip would be where one's left foot ended.

The second one would be at the right knee.

The third one would be at the left hip.

The fourth one would be at the right chest.

It was obvious that the Extractors were supposed to continue this pattern.

The Extractor walked to the spot below the grips and gulped.

"Don't start yet," the assistant said. "I will call the start and end of your shifts."

After saying that, the assistant called out more names and pointed them toward more locations.

"Nick Nick," the assistant said as he pointed at four grips.

Nick walked over and stopped below his assigned spot.

The assistant continued assigning spots.

"Hahahahaha!"

The Extractors turned to the side when they heard a distant laugh.

This kind of laughter was very familiar to them.

All of them still remembered the cacophony of laughter from yesterday.

Each time someone laughed, someone died.

"If you were already working, you would all be dead," the assistant said.

Nick's heart nearly stopped.

Right!

If he were already working on the city's underside, him turning his head to the right might have put the Crimson Sea into the right corner of his right eye.

"Hahahaha!"

"Hahahaha!"

"Hahahaha!"

Three more laughs came from the red world.

"Laughter rarely occurs alone," the assistant said evenly. "Just like with you all, many people forget the danger, and when someone laughs, they turn to look in that direction."

"Whenever someone dies, between one and four others die as well."

Silence.

While the assistant continued assigning spots, Nick thought back to yesterday.

It hadn't even been 24 hours since the incident.

Nick remembered the red water that had come out of the Containment Unit's edges after he had grabbed the Zephyx containers.

Sure, the red water was dangerous, but it was nothing compared to the endless terror that the current Crimson Sea instilled in the people.

How could something this weak turn into something this terrifying in such a short amount of time?

It just didn't feel real.

"Alright, get ready to start," the assistant said.

Nick shook his head to get rid of the memories of yesterday and looked upward.

Then, he jumped and grabbed two of the grips with his hands.

"Look at the grips and how they have been nailed into the metal," the assistant said.

Nick did just that.

Every grip had four huge nails going through them.

Yet, the nails were not straight.

There was one nail in each corner, and the nail was hammered into the wall in such a way that it diagonally pointed outwards.

"We expect you to do it the same way. If you hammer the nails straight into the wall, the grip isn't nearly as stable."

Then, the assistant looked at the time.

"5:23 p.m."

"Your shift starts..."

"Now!"