

## **The Sun 301**

### Chapter 301 – Manual Labor

Nick took a deep breath and readied himself mentally.

The world hadn't felt real for the past day, but right now, Nick felt that the danger to his life was very real.

All the things that happened yesterday and today vanished from Nick's mind, allowing him to focus on the task at hand.

The hammer Nick had received was hanging from his toolbelt, and the two sacks were hanging from his back.

The first thing Nick did was to take one of the grips out of the sack, which wasn't as easy as he had thought.

The sack was hanging quite low, and Nick couldn't reach it just by moving his arm backward.

After a couple of seconds of fidgeting around, Nick noticed that the gap between the grips and the wall was wide enough for his ankle.

Nick put both his feet through the gap and let go of the grips.

The top of Nick's feet were pressing against the metal while his heels were pressing against the grips.

Keeping oneself straight in such a position would require incredible strength and put immense stress on one's body.

But that was exactly why the workers were level two Extractors.

While an Extractor's weight increased when they became more powerful, the increase wasn't really that big.

Nick was about 185 centimeters tall and quite muscular.

A normal person with his build would weigh around 100 kg, but Nick actually weighed around 160 kg.

That was extremely heavy for a normal person, but for someone with a body 50 times as powerful as the average male, this was barely anything.

After Nick let go of the grips, he "straightened" his posture and made sure that the sacks didn't slip off his body.

Then, he extended his right arm "upward" and took out one of the grips and nails.

At that moment, Nick noticed an issue.

He needed one hand for the grip, one for the nail, and one for the hammer.

If he just had to nail something to the ground, he could just position the grip, let go, and then hold the nail.

If he had to nail something to a wall, he could use gravity and hold the lowest point of the thing he was holding while also hammering in the nail at that point.

But here, things became difficult.

The grip was around 30 centimeters wide and could easily fall down.

Clink!

At that moment, Nick heard the sound of something metallic falling to the ground.

Someone must have dropped one of the grips.

Nick looked-

No!

"Hahahaha!"

Nick heard someone laughing from beside him, but he just kept focusing on the metallic "wall" in front of him.

BANG!

A gunshot rang through the atmosphere, and the sound of a body falling to the ground could be heard.

Nick didn't dare to look away from the metal in front of him.

"Never look away from the ceiling," the assistant said. "No matter what. Don't even look at where your tools are. If you drop a grip, ignore it and let it fall."

Nick took a deep breath.

This job was way more terrifying than working with Specters.

Some seconds later, Nick returned to solving the problem of how to attach the grips to the ceiling.

Nick held the grip to the spot where it was supposed to go and held the nail to its corner.

But when Nick tried to hold the grip to the wall with the hand holding the nail, it started to move and bend.

Nick experimented with holding the grip for over two minutes, and slowly, fear was giving way to frustration.

This was annoying.

'If I didn't need the hammer, this would-'

Nick's eyes widened.

Nick noticed that his ability had activated again, which gave him an idea.

He held the grip in the middle with his left arm.

Then, he held the nail on its wide back and moved it towards the hole.

EEEEEEEE!

The loud sound of metal pushing through metal appeared, but the sound became quite a bit quieter after half a second.

Half a second after pushing the nail into the metal, Nick's ability deactivated again.

The assistant was probably looking at Nick from below.

Nick had pushed the nail into the metal.

Something like this was impossible to do for normal people but not impossible for Zephyx Extractors.

Even though Nick's ability had deactivated, his power was still strong enough to finish pushing in the nail.

When Nick was done pushing the nail in, he noticed that the wide head wasn't perfectly aligned with the holes of the grip, which made sense since the nail hadn't been pushed into the ceiling at a 90° angle.

CRRR!

Nick put his thumb onto the head and bent it so that it looked like it was hammered in straight.

'This probably works,' Nick thought.

Then, he grabbed another nail and did the same thing on the other end of the grip.

The last two nails were easily pushed in, and Nick looked at the finished grip.

"Sir, is it okay like this?" Nick shouted without looking away.

"Test it," Nick heard from below him. "I don't care how you did it. In the end, it has to hold."

Nick grabbed the hold he had just fixed to the ceiling and let go of the other holds.

He was now hanging from the grip with one of his hands, his entire weight on the grip.

Then, Nick slowly did some one-handed pull-ups.

"Looks good," the assistant said from below Nick. "Fix all the others to the ceiling just like this, and you're golden."

Nick nodded and returned to his normal position on the ceiling.

After Nick had received his feedback from the assistant, more of the Extractors started to ask the same question.

Meanwhile, Nick grabbed the next grip and fixed it to the wall the same way.

The second one took only about a minute, but he became progressively faster and faster.

Whooom.

A green gleam appeared around Nick after he moved forward a bit.

His Barrier had activated, which could only mean one thing.

Nick had reached the end of the platform, and he was now entering the red world.

Chapter 302 – Red World

?Nick took a deep breath and grabbed the next grip.

He fixed that one onto the wall just like the other ones and continued moving forward.

Two minutes later, Nick's entire Barrier was surrounded by red mist.

Nick kept looking at the metal in front of him with a fixed gaze, but he could still see the mix of green and red in the corner of his eyes.

Without asking for it, an image of how he most likely looked right now appeared in Nick's mind.

He was facing an endlessly "tall" wall of metal while he was "climbing" it by creating a long ladder.

The world around him was covered in red mist that seemed to blow towards the "wall".

And in the opposite direction...

An endless domain of red with eyes in it.

An eye, over ten meters wide, was looking at Nick's back.

Its focus was unwavering, and its gaze intense.

It kept looking at Nick.

And looking.

And looking.

And looking.

Never turning away.

Never blinking.

As Nick kept moving, the huge eye kept following him.

Even though a world of mist was between them, the eye was very clearly visible.

Ever since Nick had entered the red world, his ability had deactivated and hadn't activated again.

Something was looking at him.

Always.

The Specter that Nick had freed was looking at him.

Usually, the power to notice when someone was looking at Nick was a great advantage.

But right now, it only increased Nick's terror.

Nick could feel the eyes boring into the back of his head.

He felt like somebody was directly behind him, constantly looking at him.

Unwavering.

Just waiting for Nick to make a mistake.

The crimson glow around Nick pulsed slowly.

There was more light and less light.

Luckily, the Crimson Sea's light kept the Nightmare at bay.

Nevertheless, the crimson glow's pulse made it seem like it was alive.

Nick's breathing had already quickened, and sweat was dripping down from his body.



"Hahahaha!"

Nick almost turned to look to his side when he heard the laughter.

"Hahahaha!"

Nick didn't look away from the metal in front of him.

Splash... splash.

How many people had already died to the Crimson Sea?

How much damage had Nick done to the city by freeing it?

When his mind arrived at that thought, Nick immediately steered it away from it.

He felt afraid.

He felt afraid of thinking about yesterday.

He couldn't face his actions.

He just couldn't.

Nick didn't move for a long while as the red mist kept engulfing him.

If he faced his actions...

If he did it...

He couldn't!

He didn't want to die.

He wanted to continue living.

Nick felt the familiar dark hole in his chest expanding.

Everything bright and positive in Nick's life orbited the hole until it was absorbed, never to be seen again.

Nick wanted to cry.

He wanted to shout that he was sorry.

He wanted to say that he would make it right.

But he didn't.

He just couldn't.

The bright lights orbiting the black hole lost some of their brightness, but at the same time, the hole seemed to become less prominent.

It was still there, but with fewer lights highlighting it, it didn't seem as powerful.

Nick gritted his teeth before he took a deep breath.

Then, he took out the next-

Ding!

The grip fell out of Nick's right hand and fell away.

Nick reflexively turned to-

'No!'

Nick immediately pulled himself to the wall again with all of his power.

CRACK!

Yet, while the grips were stable, they couldn't resist his full power, and he tore the grip in his left hand out of the ceiling.

Nick's eyes widened as he saw the wall in front of him falling away.

The crimson world was becoming brighter.

BANG!

Nick's right leg shot through the hole of the grip it was on and worked as an anchor.

At this moment, Nick was essentially kneeling on the ceiling.

He was facing the gigantic eye in the crimson world.

With closed eyes.

Nick had shut his eyes with all of his strength.

He could see a faint crimson glow through his eyelids, but that was it.

Seconds passed.

Then, Nick took a deep breath.

'I'm still alive,' he thought.

Nick moved closer to the ceiling again before he slowly and carefully opened his eyes again.

He had never been so happy to have his vision filled by metal.

After calming down for several seconds, Nick carefully looked at the damage.

A couple of big tears were on the metal plate in front of Nick.

This was where Nick had torn out the grip.

He couldn't put another grip there.

After some planning, Nick decided to create something he called a quick step.

There was a bit less than a meter of distance between grips on the same side.

Nick decided to avoid the damaged part by putting the grip at 75% of the usual distance and then putting another one also at 75% of the usual distance.

Naturally, the grips on the other side mirrored the distance.

Like this, the distance between grips would be smaller for a couple of steps, but it would quickly return to normal after getting past the point.

He decided to do it like this since he preferred having more grips over having fewer grips.

After a bit of work, he was done fixing his mistake and took a deep breath.

Then, he continued fixing the grips to the ceiling.

Some minutes later, Nick noticed that he had lost around 40% of his Zephyx.

'I can survive for around 50 minutes in total in here,' Nick realized.

His left arm touched the inside of the big sack of grips for a bit.

'I have five more. I can finish putting them onto the ceiling. Then, I have to go back.'

Nick continued putting the grips onto the wall.

"Hahahaha!"

Nick's eyes widened.

He wanted to look over, but he refused to turn his head.

Instead, he only looked at the wall in front of him.

For a while, he didn't move.

'That sounded like Kiara.'

Chapter 303 – End of the Ladder

?Nick didn't move for a while.

That sounded like Kiara, but he wasn't sure if that truly was her.

The way the people laughed was unlike their usual laughter, making it sound alien.

Because of that, Nick couldn't be sure whether or not that was Kiara.

He just hoped that it was someone else.

He wanted to shout and ask, but Nick didn't dare to.

If he did, his voice would almost certainly cause people to look in his direction, which would kill them.

Sadly, this meant that Nick had to continue with uncertainty.

Some seconds later, Nick was done putting the last grip on the ceiling and started moving back to the central support of the Inner City.

He moved past the part where he had messed up and continued.

Ding!

Nick touched the wall of the central support and took a deep breath.

Then, he dropped down without looking.

He landed on the platform, and only then did he dare to open his eyes.

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

They looked exhausted, which meant that they were probably very low on Zephyx.

Surprisingly, all of them were eating some kind of stark white bread, which Nick hadn't seen before.

The next moment, Nick's eyes met the assistant's eyes, and the assistant walked over.

The assistant noticed the limp sack hanging from Nick.

"How many did you lose?" he asked, referring to the handles.

"I dropped two handles and four nails," Nick said.

The assistant's eyebrows rose in slight surprise.

"You put all the other ones onto the ceiling?" he asked.

Nick nodded.

The assistant turned to look at the "ladder" Nick had created.

He couldn't see its end through the red mist.

"You were in there for quite a while," the assistant said. "You seem to have a good Barrier."

Nick nodded.

His Barrier had cost over five million credits.

Only Kugelblitz had the funds to give their Johns Barriers that were this good.

The assistant looked at Nick's ladder again and scratched his chin.

"If you manage to put two more sacks of grips onto the wall, you may leave early. You are booked for six hours, but I am less interested in the number of hours you work for me than the result," the assistant explained.

Nick nodded. "Sure."

This was a common and effective trade that good supervisors gave their employees.

When a bad supervisor saw a hard-working employee who worked more than others, they gave them even more work.

In the short term, the amount of work finished increased, but in the long term, the hard-working employee's motivation would get destroyed, and they would start doing the bare minimum at some point.

Meanwhile, a good supervisor gave bargains.

"If you do more than the average employee, you can leave early."



This created an incentive for the employee to work even harder, and they would also feel like their hard work was being seen and appreciated.

Naturally, Nick wasn't opposed to that offer.

The assistant shot Nick a short smile and handed him a piece of stark white bread.

"Eat this. It's sugar bread that has been treated with Zephyx. In around 30 minutes, you should have fully recovered," the assistant explained.

Nick took the bread and nodded before taking a bite out of it.

Nick's tastebuds were immediately assaulted with sugar.

People who had grown up in the Inner City might find this overpowering taste of sugar disgusting, but Nick loved it.

While Nick was eating the bread, he turned to look at the ladder that Kiara had created.

He couldn't see the end of it, and he didn't hear any hammering coming from there.

Was she truly dead?

"What about the girl working there? I heard laughter coming from there earlier," Nick asked the assistant.

"She hasn't come back yet. Either she is dead or has a very good Barrier," the assistant said.

Kiara was one of Dark Dream's top earners since she had an Adolescent all to her own.

It was possible that she was still alive.

She definitely had the funds to buy a Barrier comparable to Nick's.

Nick kept looking at the ladder as he kept eating the bread.

Kiara could come back any moment now.

As the minutes passed, Nick became more nervous.

"Can I look for her?" Nick asked.

The assistant's brows furrowed. "Why?"

"She's my employee," Nick said.

The assistant took out some sheets of paper and looked at them.

When he saw Nick's profile, his eyebrows rose.

"Sure, but be quick," the assistant said.

"Thank you," Nick said before jumping to Kiara's ladder.

Then, he "climbed" it.

"Kiara," Nick said carefully as he kept climbing.

He kept climbing.

And climbing.

Nick's heart rate increased as he kept climbing.

There was no answer!

Eventually, Nick couldn't feel the next grip.

He touched the ceiling in many different places.

There were no more grips.

He was at the end of the ladder.

Nick just looked at the metallic wall in front of him.

He felt horrible.

Another one was gone.

Trevor, Kiara, Cryon, Jonathan...

All because of the Crimson Sea.

All because of Nick...

As Nick thought about Kiara, he remembered the little girl they had saved a couple of years ago.

Kiara had been taking care of the little girl.

A couple seconds later, Nick moved back towards the center again.

He landed on the platform with a forlorn expression.

"I take it she jumped?" the assistant asked.

Nick sighed and nodded.

"Sorry for your loss," the assistant said neutrally.

Nick didn't answer.

After a bit, he just grabbed one of the big sacks leaning against the central support and went back to his own ladder.

Nick didn't feel comfortable just sitting around.

He wanted to do something to distract himself.

Nick quickly went past the place with the weird grips and reached the end of his ladder.

Then, he just continued fixing grips to the ceiling in silence.

A minute later, Nick's mind was occupied with working again.

Chapter 304 – Grips

?Nick just kept on working, trying not to think about the bad parts of his life.

Whenever his mind wandered to the Spartans or his employees, Nick told himself that he had to be careful while working and not get distracted.

If he got distracted, he might actually die.

It took Nick about 25 minutes to empty the second sack of grips, and he turned around again.

'Do the others really have so many issues with the grips?' Nick thought.

'The assistant is willing to let me leave early after just putting three sacks of grips onto the ceiling. If I add the time it takes me to recover my Zephyx, fixing three sacks of grips to the ceiling barely takes me three hours. Not even, actually.'

'And our shift is supposed to go on for a total of six hours.'

The answer was: yes, it took everyone else that long.

First, not everyone was a Peak John. There were many Late Johns, a couple of Mid Johns, and even a few Early and Initial Johns.

Their Zephyx was used up much faster than Nick's.

On top of that, not everyone had an expensive Barrier.

A Mid John with an average Barrier could barely survive for ten minutes inside the red mist.

Additionally, their physical strength wasn't as high as Nick's.

They couldn't just push the nails into the metal with their hand.

They actually needed to use the hammers, and using the hammers in this position was very awkward, difficult, and time-consuming.

The average worker here only fixed 1.5 to 2 sacks of grips to the ceiling after six full hours.

Nick went past the spot with the strange grips and quickly reached the central support again.

He saw a couple of people recovering their Zephyx.

'Should I recover my Zephyx as well? I'm still at around 70%,' Nick thought.

Nick thought a bit about it.

Then, he grabbed one of the white breads, shoved it into his mouth, grabbed another sack of grips, and returned to work.

The bread would increase his Zephyx recovery while working.

It should easily be enough.

By now, Nick only needed 30 seconds to fix a grip to the ceiling.

Nick went past the part with the strange grips and quickly reached the end of his ladder.

Then, he continued working.

Ding.

Nick stopped moving.

Just now, he had heard something hitting some metal from the bottom of his ladder.

Nobody was supposed to be on his ladder since he was working here right now.

Crk!

Nick heard metal getting bent and torn, which made him furrow his brows.

Crk! Crk! Crk! Crk!

More and more metal was being torn out, and surprisingly, the sound became more distant.

'I don't like this,' Nick thought with furrowed brows.

By now, the tearing of metal had stopped.

Nick decided to turn around and go back early.

Nick changed his position so that he was now "ascending" towards the bottom of the ladder.

He traveled for a couple of seconds, and then...

Nothing!

Nick's arm was touching a hole in the ceiling.

A grip was supposed to be there!

Nick used his legs to balance and searched for the next one.

Also gone!

That was when Nick realized what had happened.

'Somebody is trying to kill me by trapping me here!' Nick thought. 'The sounds from earlier were them tearing my grips out of the wall!'

'I can't jump forward since the force of my jump would break the grips I am currently holding.'

'If I shout for help, people might not arrive in time, and I would probably also end up killing several other Extractors, which would put me in trouble.'

Nick moved his arm to his big sack and searched for grips.

'Seven left. I don't think that's enough to build a bridge back,' Nick thought.

'Additionally, the workers beside me haven't built as far as me, and the distance between ladders also increases since we are essentially traveling out from the middle of a circle.'

'Did they get here by jumping from another ladder to this one near the beginning, where the ladders are closer together?'

'Then, they probably moved forward and accidentally hit their hand on the space with the weird grips.'

'That made them abort their plan and destroy my ladder there instead of coming closer since I might have heard them.'



'Quite an ingenious plan,' Nick thought.

At that moment, the image of the tall man that Nick had punched shot through his mind.

'Is it him?' Nick thought.

Nick narrowed his eyes in anger.

'Sadly for you, I don't need the grips!'

The next moment, Nick turned into fog and shot forward.

Since he could adhere to the ceiling, moving like this wasn't difficult.

However, there was a reason why Nick hadn't turned into fog here before this moment.

Nick shot forward with all of his speed, and as soon as he came in contact with a grip again, he materialized.

Nick's face had turned white, and he looked insanely exhausted.

When Nick was in his fog form, his Barrier didn't work, which meant that the red mist was injuring him.

Additionally, Nick's defenses were insanely low in his fog form.

He had barely been inside his fog form for two seconds, and he had already lost over 50% of his Zephyx!

Naturally, as soon as he materialized again, his Barrier reactivated.

A moment later, Nick shoved his legs through the metal, giving him a very stable hold.

Then, he "stood up" and took out one of his spears.

Nick's eyes were closed, but he could envision the area in front of him.

Throwing a spear without vision wasn't anything new to Nick.

An instant later, he threw his spear forward.

BANG!

Nick heard the sound of his spear hitting something hard in the distance.

"AAAAaahahahaha!"

The next moment, a scream appeared before turning into laughter.

The good thing was that no other laughter was ringing out.

The people in this shift had already experienced several deaths, and they had learned not to look around.

Then, Nick went back to grab the grips and walked forward.

Chapter 305 – Who?

?Nick traveled forward a bit, and a couple of seconds later, he noticed another hole.

One of the grips had been torn out of the ceiling again, but this one was different.

The others were torn out straight, basically just creating four long crevices near the edges, making them look rather symmetrical.

This one, on the other hand, was uneven.

Nick touched more of the ceiling in front of him.

Another grip was missing.

He leaned forward and found that a third one was missing as well.

Then, he stretched forward to the limit and found a grip.

He tested it out a bit and noted that it was still very stable.

Nick let go of the grips near his feet and used the distant grip to swing him to the other side.

'That explains things,' Nick thought with a smirk.

He could imagine what had happened.

The perpetrator had been walking back to the center when Nick's spear hit them.

Since Nick couldn't put a lot of power into the throw, the spear couldn't destroy the Barrier and was diverted to the Crimson Sea.

However, the spear's kinetic force was so strong that the grips the perpetrator was holding were torn out of the ceiling.

They started to fall, screamed, spun in the air, saw the Crimson Sea, laughed, and fell into the Crimson Sea.

'It was the voice of a man,' Nick thought. 'It was probably that tall guy from earlier.'

That also explained why the tall guy didn't blow up his little conflict with Nick.

He didn't want to ruin Nick's life by damaging his own reputation.

No, he wanted to kill Nick without damaging his own reputation.

At least, that was what Nick thought had happened.

Some seconds later, Nick reached the end of the ladder and dropped down.

He was immediately greeted by several guards glaring at him with their guns pointing at his face.

The assistant was behind the guards and also glared at Nick.

"We saw someone falling from your lane. Explain!" the assistant demanded.

Nick wasn't surprised.

The place with the funny grips was at the halfway mark of Nick's ladder, and the place from which the guy fell was near the first 20%.

He was probably not even five meters away from the platform when he fell.

"They tried to kill me first," Nick said without any guilt. "I only repaid the favor."

"What happened?" the assistant demanded.

"I was building my ladder when I heard several noises of tearing metal," Nick said. "I turned around to check and found several grips on my ladder missing. I had no way back. I'm certain that these grips didn't just fall out randomly."

"How did you manage to get back?" the assistant asked.

"My ability, which I will not reveal," Nick said.

The assistant looked at Nick for a while longer.

"Wait here. Don't let him leave!" the assistant ordered.

The next moment, he jumped up and quickly moved down Nick's lane.

Naturally, the assistant was also a Zephyx Extractor.

Nick just looked at the guards in front of him.

Over two minutes passed.

And then, the assistant came back and landed on the platform.

He looked at the guards and motioned for them to put their guns away.

"The story checks out," the assistant said.

"We also heard the sounds of metal you were referring to. Additionally, I found the place with the missing grips, and I also found the ladder being continued behind it."

"Lastly, there was no reason for anyone to be on your ladder. He probably didn't worry about coming out of your ladder since nobody pays attention to who comes from which ladder."

"I am comfortable with dropping this issue," the assistant said.

It was not surprising that the assistant managed to reach the place where Nick had been left to die.

Since he had gotten this job, it most likely meant that he had some kind of ability that allowed him to traverse the underside of the city without the grips.

However, Nick wasn't really paying attention to the assistant.

Right now, Nick was looking at someone with a surprised expression.

Near the central support, someone was eating from a piece of white bread.

It was the tall guy!

'But, didn't he die just now?' Nick thought in shock.

'I heard a man's scream, and he's the only one with a motive!'

'But then, how can he be here?!'

As Nick looked at the man, the man glanced back.

Nick couldn't tell what the man was feeling or thinking.

He was just glancing at Nick with a neutral expression.

There was no smile, anger, sadness, or whatever.

'Was it one of his friends?' Nick thought.

'Was it someone else?'

'What is going on?'

"Go fix your ladder."

Nick was taken out of his thoughts and looked back at the assistant, who was holding out another sack of grips.

"Fix the two big holes in your ladder, and you can go home," the assistant said.

The guards had already gone back to their usual positions.

Nick threw another glance at the big man, who was consuming the white bread.

At that moment, the man furrowed his brows.

Nick wasn't sure what the man was thinking about.

"Sure," Nick said as he absentmindedly grabbed the sack of grips.

He also grabbed a new bag of nails and went back to his ladder.

'Who tried to kill me?' Nick thought.

'The Spartans have been my only enemies, but they have been destroyed, and I am certain that they don't know that it was me who destroyed their headquarters.'

'It's also not some kind of powerful Extractor since only Johns are working here.'

'I also don't think it's some kind of old enmity or whatever since everyone is still busy adjusting to their new lives. It would be very strange if anyone chose this moment to get rid of me.'

'Who was it?'

'Who wants me dead this time?!'

Sadly, Nick couldn't think of anyone.

The only two suspects were the tall man and the woman from the Spartans, but none of them could have been it.

The tall man was still alive, and the voice of the person who fell down wasn't nearly girly enough to belong to the woman.

Nick had no idea who would want him dead and why.

Chapter 306 – End of the Shift

?While Nick was fixing the holes, he kept thinking about the person who had just tried to kill him.

Right now, the ever-present black hole in his chest was covered by a red film of anger.

Anger was a very good distraction from pain.



After around half an hour, Nick managed to create a ladder leading around the damaged part.

The metal plates where the old grips had been were just too damaged and unstable, which was why Nick had made a way around them.

Finally, Nick returned to the center and told the assistant that he was done.

"Let me check," the assistant said before quickly moving down Nick's lane.

Around 30 seconds later, he came back and nodded at Nick.

"Good work. You can leave. We'll see each other again next week," he said.

At that moment, Nick furrowed his brows. "Next week?"

"Yes," the assistant said. "Do you think this was the only time you were working here?"

"Yes," Nick said, "the order said so."

The assistant also furrowed his brows.

Then, he held his hand out.

"Show me."

Nick took the order out and handed it over.

The assistant read through it, and his eyebrows rose in surprise.

"Huh," he said.

Silence.

"If I had known, I wouldn't have made that offer to you," he added before sighing.

"But well, we had an agreement. It's my fault for not reading through your order carefully."

Then, he handed the order back to Nick.

Nick pocketed the order, nodded at the assistant, and went to the underground's exit.

The two guards standing beside the exit immediately pointed their guns at Nick as he approached.

"He can leave," the assistant shouted from a distance.

The guards put their guns down and nodded at Nick.

Nick nodded back and jumped out of the hole.

When Nick came out of the underground, his eyes had to adjust to the different light again.

This was the longest Nick had been away from the sunlight in his entire life.

The familiar rays of the sun calmed Nick down, and he released a sigh.

Sadly, Nick's mind very quickly became tense again as he was reminded of the attempted murder on him.

'Was it only one guy, or is a group behind this?' Nick thought as he walked towards the exit of the megastructure.

As Nick continued walking, he noticed that the guards kept glancing at him warily.

He was quite sure that it wasn't because of him specifically but because of his identity as a level two Extractor.

He remembered that the guards had already been quite firm when Nick had shown up for the first time.

Something like this hadn't happened in the past.

The guards generally seemed like relaxed protectors, but ever since the Crimson Sea appeared, the guards seemed like soldiers whose job it was to suppress the people.

'But it's probably only for Johns,' Nick thought. 'All the Johns are being sent to work in an extremely dangerous location, and there have probably been instances where some of them tried to resist.'

'They are probably wary of all level two Extractors, fearing that they might act out.'

As Nick left the megastructure, he saw the guards looking at him warily.

Nick didn't engage in any conversation with them.

A couple minutes later, Nick arrived at the bottom of Dark Dream and looked up.

The two Veterans guarding Dark Dream were leaning against the wall.

One of them noticed Nick and woke up the other one.

"Back so early?" one of them asked.

Nick nodded. "I did a good job and was allowed to leave early."

The two guards looked at each other in confusion.

They were supposed to be here for six hours.

Should they stay here for a couple more hours, or could they leave?

Nick could tell what they were thinking about.

"You can leave," Nick said. "Thanks for keeping a lookout."

The two guards shrugged, said their goodbyes, and left.

Nick jumped to Dark Dream's entrance and looked through it.

He could still see rubble and blood.

For a while, he didn't know what to do.

He wanted to relax a bit since the last three hours had been quite stressful, but whenever he tried to calm down, the memories returned.

The fact that he was responsible for the city's current state.

Trevor's face.

Cryon's face.

Jonathan's face.

Kiara's face.

'Right, I need someone to work with the Lover now,' Nick thought as he tried his best to distract his mind.

'Kerry worked with it before. If she's still alive, she might agree to work with it.'

'What if nobody wants to work with it?' Nick asked himself.

Silence.

'I guess that would mean that we couldn't gain any Zephyx from it.'

'Should we sell it, then?'

Nick shook his head.

'I should continue cleaning the building first.'

A moment later, Nick returned to cleaning the building.

Within a couple of minutes, he was occupied with working again.

A couple of hours passed.

At around 11:30 p.m., someone appeared in front of Dark Dream's entrance.

When Nick saw the person, he immediately became nervous.

It was a tall young man with disheveled brown hair and eyebags below his eyes.

He looked extremely tired and exhausted.

"Wyntor," Nick said.

Wyntor looked at Nick, and Nick could see his red eyes.

"How are the Specters?" Wyntor asked.

"All good," Nick said. "The Bleeding Lady is stressed and needs some food soon, and the Dung Heap is rolling around in hunger, but there isn't much I can do about that without some food waste. Otherwise, everything's alright."

Wyntor released a sigh and walked into Dark Dream.

As he walked past Nick, he threw a glance at him.

"We need to talk," Wyntor said as he went onto the staircase.

Nick took a deep breath and walked after Wyntor.

He had expected that this would happen.

Wyntor knew that Nick had been inside the Spartans' building yesterday, and he also knew of Nick's capabilities.

Wyntor definitely knew that Nick was the reason why the Crimson Sea had broken out.

Nick had no idea what Wyntor had planned.

Chapter 307 – Nick's Fate

Nick followed Wyntor up the staircase and into his office.

When Wyntor opened the door to look into his office, he sighed.

Everything was messed up.

He walked forward and lifted something out of the rubble.

The coffee machine.

He turned it on and sighed in relief when he saw that it was mostly undamaged.

For the next minute, Nick watched Wyntor making coffee.

This was amongst the longest minutes Nick had ever experienced.

Wyntor walked over to the place where his chair usually was out of habit but stopped when he saw that it wasn't there.

In the end, Wyntor gave Nick a coffee and sat down in one of the corners.

Usually, Wyntor would never do something like this since his image was important to him, but right now, he just didn't care anymore.

He was just too exhausted.

Wyntor took a deep breath, and Nick became more nervous.

"No, you're not going to die," Wyntor said, "and no, you're not being fired."

It was like a humongous pressure had vanished from Nick's heart, and his shoulders relaxed.

The next moment, Nick sat down in another corner of Wyntor's office, exhausted.

It was like Nick had lost all of his energy at that point.

"We were lucky," Wyntor said. "For several reasons."

"After the Crimson Sea broke out, father immediately came over here, asking if this was your doing," Wyntor said. "He had heard that a black figure was responsible for this incident."

"Naturally, he was worried that he would be implicated. If anyone saw you using the Shadow Shroud, things would become extremely troublesome for him."

"Lucky for us, you came back before he arrived, and as soon as you put the Shadow Shroud back, I put it back into the briefcase."

"Father immediately demanded the briefcase back, and when he saw the Shadow Shroud inside and you sitting on a random roof, he finally relaxed."

"After that, he quickly left again," Wyntor said.

"He doesn't know you're responsible for all of this."



Nick released a sigh.

Vernon had been the biggest danger to Nick.

While Wyntor had a connection with Nick, Vernon didn't have one.

He would have no issues throwing Nick to the people just to spare himself a bit of trouble.

Additionally, Vernon was probably furious.

The Dregs had been the very reason why Kugelblitz could produce so much Zephyx, and now, the Dregs were gone.

If they wanted blood in the future, a completely new system would need to be implemented, and most likely, Kugelblitz wouldn't get even nearly as much blood as before.

By freeing the Crimson Sea, Nick had caused immense damage to Kugelblitz's revenue.

Of course, while one could blame Nick for freeing the Crimson Sea, one couldn't really blame him for the extreme level of damage it had caused.

No one could have predicted that something like this would happen.

But that didn't matter.

The people wanted someone to blame, and Nick would fit that bill.

If they found out that Nick had been the one who freed the Crimson Sea, death would be certain, but only after a life worse than death.

With Vernon out of the picture, only three people were left who knew that Nick was the responsible one.

Nick, Wyntor, and the Parasite.

"What about the Parasite?" Nick asked.

Wyntor took a sip of his coffee.

"At least one positive thing came out of all this," Wyntor said.

"The Parasite's rats have used the sewers as their home and way of traversing the city, but with the Crimson Sea now taking up the entire underside of the city, the rats can't traverse the city anymore."

"Since his rats are just minions, he needs to use Zephyx to give them the ability to resist a Specter's influence."

"Resisting the Nightmare isn't very difficult for him since it only affects mentality."

"But things are very different with the Crimson Sea."

"A bit of red mist instantly turns a rat into soup."

"On top of that, all the paths to the outside world have been cut off. That means the rats can't transport any of the corpses out of the city."

"Staying in the city equates to losing Zephyx for the Parasite."

Wyntor took another sip.

"No rats have been spotted since the incident."

"We can say with high confidence that the Parasite is gone."

When Nick heard that, he released a sigh of relief.

The Parasite might be angry at him and want something in return.

If the Parasite were a human, it would most likely immediately tell on Nick to take revenge, but Specters weren't like that.

The Parasite would probably blackmail Nick and Wyntor for a very long time.

Luckily for them, the Parasite couldn't operate in the city anymore.

"At least one good thing came out of this," Nick said.

Wyntor nodded. "In fact, while things seem disastrous now, there are actually several good things about the current situation."

Nick perked up and looked at Wyntor in surprise.

"Which are?" he asked.

"The Parasite was a huge issue," Wyntor said. "Naturally, the Crimson Sea is also a huge issue, but there is a fundamental difference between the two."

"We can't deal with the Parasite, but we can deal with the Crimson Sea."

"We can?" Nick asked in shock.

Wyntor nodded. "We've already come up with a long-term plan."

"First, we make the underside of the city traversable."

"Second, we create more support for the city."

"Third, we create a bridge to the outside world."

"And finally, we completely cover the Crimson Sea."

Nick's eyebrows rose.

"Cover it?" he asked.

Wyntor nodded.

"We completely encase it in steel. If there is no way to see the Crimson Sea, and if there is no way for its mist to enter the city, it might as well not exist."

"Additionally, the Crimson Sea's presence is a huge deterrent to Specters."

"As far as we know, the Crimson Sea's hypnotic powers also work on Specters."

"This means that the Specters can't use the underground of the city to hide from us anymore."

"We expect the number of new Specters popping up in the city to be reduced by over 50%."

Chapter 308 – Retelling

?When Nick heard that, his eyes widened in surprise.

There would be far fewer Specters?

At that moment, Wyntor chuckled in a ridiculing tone.

"Of course, the Manufacturers are not happy about that," he added. "They all want Specters, and with fewer Specters appearing in the city, their growth will slow down."

"But what are they supposed to do? They can't get rid of the Crimson Sea that easily."

"I expect that we are going to see much more importance being put on the wilderness."

While Wyntor was talking, Nick thought about what this meant for the people living in the Outer City.

With fewer Specters, people didn't need to be as scared anymore.

On top of that, the Dregs were gone.

Many people of the Dregs hadn't been able to integrate into the Outer City since nobody wanted to come into contact with them simply because they were from the Dregs.

Maybe the survivors would have it easier integrating into the Outer City?

Of course, that was only an optimistic musing.

Maybe it would be even worse than before.

Nevertheless, the future didn't seem as grim anymore.

For just an instant, a thought appeared in Nick's mind.

'Did the death of around 2,000 people improve the quality of life for thousands more?'

'Is that such a bad trade?'

But before Nick could think more about these things, Wyntor said something.

"Now, I need to know what happened yesterday in detail. Don't leave anything out," he said.

Nick looked back at Wyntor and nodded.

Then, he told Wyntor everything that had happened.

Wyntor wasn't surprised when Nick confirmed that he had released the Crimson Sea.

He had expected as much.

However, Wyntor was very surprised about a different thing.

The sheer scale of damage Nick managed to inflict on the Spartans, even without the Crimson Sea.

Nick had entered a tightly guarded building with five Veterans, 20 Johns, 20 Newbies, and many guards, while Nick was just a John.

And as a normal John, he managed to kill a Veteran, several Johns, and tens of normal people.

On top of that, Nick managed to free several Specters without raising the alarm.

This was absurd.

In an open conflict, causing the enemy this much damage would require sacrificing about as many Extractors as Dark Dream had in total.

But Nick hadn't sacrificed anything.

He had done all of this on his own.

It was almost like Nick was a one-man army.

Wyntor had never heard of any Extractor causing that much destruction in relation to their power.

It wasn't even close!

An Extractor was already extremely powerful if they could fight against five other Extractors on the same level.

But Nick...

Nick essentially destroyed an entire Manufacturer that was vastly more powerful than all of Dark Dream.

Wyntor would have never thought that the dirty boy from the Dregs could have such immense talent.

In Wyntor's mind, Nick's worth outweighed the worth of all of Dark Dream's Zephyx Extractors combined.

As long as he had Nick, Dark Dream would rise.

When Nick was done retelling what had happened, Wyntor told Nick about the things that he hadn't seen.

For example, how the city tried to contain the Crimson Sea, what the Spartans' people said, and what had happened in the Inner City when everything became chaotic.

When Nick heard about the black figure coming out of an armlet, his eyes shone.

'That must have been Envy's servant,' Nick thought.

And when he heard that Envy's servant fell into the Crimson Sea, he released a sigh of relief.

With Envy's servant destroyed and with Specters now having it much harder to enter the city, Nick could finally relax.

Nick doubted that Envy had more than one servant inside Crimson Fungus City and that one servant had been destroyed.

Additionally, since the outside world was cut off, no other servant could enter for the time being.

Until the time the bridge to the outside was built, Nick wouldn't need to fear Envy anymore.

Nick's mind finally relaxed.

Yet, as soon as it did, Nick felt his chest starting to ache.

The more he relaxed, the more terrible and guilty he felt.



All of these possibilities and speculations about the future were nice, but they didn't change the most important thing.

Nick had caused the death of over 2,000 people.

He had caused the death of the very people he wanted to help.

But as soon as these thoughts resurfaced, Nick shook his head to banish them.

He couldn't think about these things.

He didn't dare to.

"I presume that black Specter was what made the Spartans attack you?" Wyntor asked.

Nick became a bit nervous when he heard that.

He still hadn't told Wyntor about Envy, and that wouldn't change.

Nevertheless, Nick nodded. "Yes."

"Based on how much the Crimson Sea grew by absorbing the Specter, we estimate the black Specter to have been an Elder," Wyntor said as he took another sip from his coffee.

"No wonder you were so stressed out all this time."

Nick nodded.

"Luckily, the issue has been solved now," he added.

Nick released a sigh of relief.

"Tell me what happened in the last 24 hours," Wyntor said.

Nick told Wyntor about everything that had happened and what he had done.

"Someone tried to kill you again?" Wyntor asked with furrowed brows.

Nick nodded. "I expected that it was the tall man from Anatomy, but he's still alive."

Naturally, Wyntor had heard about how Nick had punched the tall man.

While Nick had definitely committed quite a big mistake with that act, Wyntor wasn't really angry with him.

Anyone who managed to stay calm after going through all these things was more machine than human.

"I still don't know who tried to kill me," Nick said.

Wyntor sipped more of his coffee.

"It's actually not that hard to figure out. You're just missing a key piece of information," Wyntor said.

Nick looked with surprise at Wyntor.

"You know who tried to kill me?"

Wyntor finished his coffee.

"No."

Chapter 309 – Back to Business

"But I know why they did it," Wyntor added.

Nick raised an eyebrow.

Wyntor didn't know who tried to kill Nick, but he knew why?

"The Crimson Sea," Wyntor said.

"The Crimson Sea is a Specter, obviously, and Specters produce Zephyx when they grow more powerful, and when an Extractor is close to a Specter at that moment, they also grow more powerful, right?" Wyntor said.

"Whenever anyone falls into the Crimson Sea, it produces a ton of Zephyx. However, since it's not in a Containment Unit, we can't harvest the Zephyx."

"But Extractors can still grow more powerful by absorbing it."

"This piece of information is highly confidential, but it's not that difficult to figure out, actually. Veterans are already pretty good at sensing Zephyx, and they are bound to feel the burst of Zephyx whenever anyone falls into the Crimson Sea."

"I'm quite certain that someone was trying to kill you so that they could absorb more Zephyx and become stronger."

"You might not even have been their first target," Wyntor said.

"They didn't target you for yourself but for your identity as an Extractor."

Nick's eyes widened.

That might have actually been it!

Even more, maybe that man had been responsible for more deaths before he got to Nick?

At that moment, Wyntor chuckled.

"Remember the name of the Crimson Sea's level?" Wyntor asked.

"Fanatic," he added. "Fanatics are called as such because cults are often created around them."

When he heard that, Nick imagined a couple of people in black robes sacrificing other people to the Crimson Sea.

That sounded quite dangerous.

"I think I shouldn't be surprised, but I still am surprised," Nick said with a slight chuckle.

Wyntor nodded before standing up from his corner.

"I'm going to deal with your issue with Anatomy," Wyntor said.

Nick felt relieved but also a bit guilty.

"Don't stress yourself out about it," Wyntor said when he saw Nick's expression. "You went through enough bad things for one day."

"Get Dark Dream properly running again, and everything's fine."

"Thanks, Wyntor," Nick said as he also stood up.

"Oh, by the way," Wyntor said as the two of them were leaving the office. "The governor will soon announce the new name of the city."

"New name?" Nick asked. "Why?"

"Names for cities are mostly used to create an image of the city in the minds of people who have never seen it. Usually, the strongest Specter in the city is the one that has the biggest impact on a city's perception, which is why many cities are named after their strongest Specters."

"While the Crimson Fungus is technically still the strongest Specter, it is definitely not the most troublesome or the one with the biggest impact."

"However, the Crimson Sea also isn't strong enough to get the entire city named after it."

"Because of that, we decided on a hybrid name."

"Crimson City."

"Crimson City?" Nick asked.

A moment later, Nick thought about the city as a whole.

The underground was crimson.

The mist was crimson.

Even the big fungus was crimson.

"I guess it makes sense," Nick said.

Wyntor and Nick said their goodbyes, and Wyntor went back into the Inner City to get some well-earned sleep.

Meanwhile, Nick stayed in Dark Dream and continued cleaning it.

He didn't feel hungry or sleepy.

He hadn't slept since the ambush on his home, which had happened over two days ago.

Nick felt like the ambush had happened this morning.

Slowly, Dark Dream was getting cleaner and cleaner.

During the morning, only the seventh floor was still in chaos, and a huge hill of debris had been created in front of Dark Dream.

Nick had used the debris from the building to create a ramp leading up to Dark Dream's entrance.

When Nick was finally done cleaning the floors, he looked at the building.

It was much cleaner now, but it was still awkwardly leaning on the side of the megastructure.

"Good morning, Boss."

Nick looked over and saw one of the Peak Newbies arriving for work.

Nick nodded. "Good morning. Jenny isn't here yet. I can assign you some work if you want to earn some money."

The Newbie nodded. "Yes, please."

"Are you familiar with how to work with the Puppy?" Nick asked.

The Newbie's eyes shone in excitement. "Yes!"

"Then, go to the third floor. I'll send someone to get you in eight hours. The Puppy is still in the same Containment Unit as before."

"Thanks, Boss!" the Newbie said with excitement before they left to work with the Puppy.

Everyone wanted to work with the Puppy.

Working with the Puppy was a lot of fun, and time passed very quickly while working with it.

A couple minutes later, three more Extractors came.

They were the three that Dark Dream had gotten from Gemini some time ago.

All three of them were Peak Newbies and were on their way to becoming Initial Johns.

Yet, when Nick assigned work to the three of them, they became terrified.

The Dreamer?!

None of them had worked with the Dreamer before!

The reason was that the Dreamer produced Zephyx based on the level of the Extractor, and Dark Dream used to have plenty of Johns to work with it.

Sadly, that was no longer the case.

Nick assured them that it wasn't dangerous.

He even said that it made no sense to covertly get rid of them since they have been exemplary employees ever since that little revolution a year or so ago.

The first couple of clerks had also arrived, and Nick told the clerk manning the reception to tell the Extractors that he would be back to assign work soon.

Then, Nick took the three Extractors to work with the Dreamer.

He simply talked to the Dreamer a bit and told the three of them how to work with it.

Naturally, Nick wasn't scared that the Dreamer would kill them.

After all, Nick and the Dreamer had had a talk about a year ago.

Two of the people from Gemini left since their shifts would start later.

When Nick reached the entrance again, he saw over five Extractors.

'At least we still have a couple of people left. I thought it would be worse,' he thought.

Chapter 310 – Wrapping Up

?Two hours later, Nick finally knew how many Extractors Dark Dream had in total.



One Peak John, which was him.

One Mid John, which was Jenny.

Three Early Johns, who were Constanze, Marvila, and Larry. The three of them had been the first recruits Nick had received from Ghosty's Lab.

Two Initial Johns.

Five Peak Newbies.

Two Late Newbies.

Two Early Newbies.

That was it.

Seven Johns and Nine Newbies.

Dark Dream used to have 24 Extractors, but now, they only had 16.

Nick decided to send the three Early Johns to work with the Fog.

In order to accommodate Jenny's increased workload as the only team leader for now, Nick only assigned her to the Bleeding Lady, which barely took 15 minutes out of her day.

After talking with the two Initial Johns, Kerry agreed to work with the Lover from now on.

While working with the Lover was definitely the worst job inside Dark Dream, it had many benefits.

It didn't take long.

It paid very well.

It gave a lot of security.

It made the Extractor important.

The last John was assigned to work with the Glasses every four days while also getting a round with the Fog every four days.

Obviously, that was more work than almost all other Extractors did since working with these two Specters was divided into 24-hour shifts.

But that was because the last Initial John specifically requested this.

His name was Taren, and he was the recruit that Nick used to test which ability the Fog gave new Extractors.

Taren asked for more work for a couple of reasons, and he was very honest and direct about these reasons when talking to Nick.

Taren had lost his girlfriend when the Crimson Sea broke out, and he now aimlessly walked through life.

He wanted something to do that could distract him and give him a new purpose.

He even jokingly said that he used to have conflicts with his girlfriend since he wanted to work more while she didn't want him to.

Taren kept saying that he wanted to put his everything to work and that Nick should consider him for the next position as team leader.

After hearing all of this, Nick felt for Taren since Nick himself felt similarly.

Wasn't he also just searching for distractions?

For now, Nick decided to give him more work.

Taren had been with the company for over two years now, and Nick hadn't had any problems with him.

Nick decided to talk to Wyntor and Jenny about this.

The Newbies were also sent to work with all the different Specters.

After another day, the food deliveries for the Dung Heap had also resumed.

The delivery of corpses for the Screaming Coffin also resumed.

The credits for the Money Sink had never been an issue.

One day after everyone had resumed working, everything inside Dark Dream was going smoothly again.

The only bad part was that Nick needed many more Johns now.

Dark Dream only had seven Johns, while they had nine Adolescents.

Luckily, two of them were Possession Specters, and one of them basically counted as one.

Nevertheless, Dark Dream needed more people.

Especially after another issue raised its head.

The undercity work.

Every John working for Dark Dream had to work six hours below the city every two weeks.

Wyntor and Nick talked about the issue of lacking manpower, but in the end, they decided to speed up the growth of their people instead of buying Extractors from outside.

The three guys from Gemini should become Johns within the month, which would alleviate a lot of pressure.

After talking to Jenny, they decided that she would be the sole team leader for now.

They decided against making Taren a team leader for now since they weren't certain yet if he was ready.

If his motivation remained after half a year, Nick would teach him how to be a team leader and then make him one.

But for now, they wanted to see if Taren really wanted to devote himself to Dark Dream or if this was just a momentary fancy due to his girlfriend's death.

Another day later, Wyntor told Nick that the official investigation into the Spartans had been concluded.

Nobody even knew that Nick had been in the Spartans' building or that Dark Dream was connected to the Crimson Sea's escape.

"By the way, we also found out how the Spartans originally obtained the Crimson Sea," Wyntor said. "Everyone wanted to know because the entire city failed in containing it, while a couple of Veterans apparently managed to do the impossible."

Nick was very interested in hearing that.

"Turns out..."

"They never needed to suppress it."

"They got some info about some kind of rogue Extractor that kept kidnapping and sacrificing people."

"One of the founders killed the Extractor and found a hidden room in their houses."

"In there, he found a red pool, and it was a Late Hatchling."

"They simply carved the pool out of the building and moved it into a Containment Unit."

"Originally, they believed it was a Possession Specter since it wasn't doing much and worked normally with it."

"But when it became an Adolescent, it suddenly started expanding by quite a bit."

"Luckily for them, as a new Adolescent, it wasn't very powerful."

"The three founders were used to suppressing wild Specters, and they managed to quickly move it into a free Containment Unit for Force Specters."

"From what we heard, they actually killed a level two Extractor and used their body to get the Crimson Sea to move."

"They kind of used the body like a sponge."

"The John was a couple of levels higher than the Crimson Sea, and the Crimson Sea needed all its power to absorb the body."

"From what the witnesses said, the Crimson Sea gathered around the corpse like it was a sponge."

"Lastly, they just threw the body into the Containment Unit, and the Crimson Sea was contained."

"Over the next couple of years, the Crimson Sea advanced to become a Peak Adolescent, and that's when it broke out."