

The Sun 331

Chapter 331 – Exchange

"I fucking told you!" Nick shouted as he stood up from the table. "I told you that you had a fake contract!"

"You faked your version of the contract, you fucking scummy scam artist!"

Nick shouted all of this while he pointed to Vernon's face.

Vernon became increasingly agitated, barely containing his rage.

However, he was too shocked about the revelation to shout at Nick.

He was 100% certain that he had the real contract!

He had taught Wyntor to never include a death clause in a contract!

He had given Wyntor the contract!

He had received the contract from Wyntor!

Wyntor would never write such a clause!

It was idiotic!

"You faked it!" Vernon shouted as he glared at Nick with unending anger and hatred.

"Fuck off!" Nick shouted back. "You were the one that wanted to ask the city! I'm just a 'common upstart' that doesn't even know that the city has copies of the contract!"

Vernon's clenched fists had turned pure white.

Then, he glared at the two guards from Anatomy.

The two guards had neutral expressions on their faces...

Except for a couple of tiny smirks.

Naturally, they were happy to see one of Kugelblitz's owners losing to some random Veteran in a legal issue.

When Vernon saw their tiny smirks, his rage increased even more.

"You!" he shouted at them.

Then, he pointed at Nick. "This is all a scheme to give Dark Dream to Anatomy!"

"You betrayed Wyntor! You betrayed my son! You're one of Anatomy's agents!" Vernon shouted.

"Now, now, Mr. Melfion," one of the two guards from Anatomy said as he slowly walked forward with a polite smile. "Let's not throw accusations around. Let's all calm down and-"

"No, this is a conspiracy!" Vernon shouted. "I am absolutely certain that my son would never create or sign such a contract! This has to be a fake! You must have exchanged it somehow!"

"How?" Nick asked with a snort. "I'm a common upstart, and I'm just an Initial Veteran. I don't even know where these contracts are located, and even if I knew, how could I even manage to exchange them?"

Vernon narrowed his eyes even more before he glared at the two guards from Anatomy.

"You did this! You exchanged it on the way!" Vernon shouted.

Surprisingly, the two guards didn't show any reactions.

They just kept their faces neutral.

However, the other guards had uncomfortable expressions.

"Sir," one of the guards from Kugelblitz said, "they couldn't have exchanged it."

Vernon looked with frustration at the guard.

"Sir, as you know, anyone who wants access to such important documents needs the permission of the two supervising Experts during that day, and they are never from the same Manufacturer."

"All of us gathered before the safe was even opened, and we all watched the clerk and the contract very closely during the entire journey."

"Sir, there was no way that anyone could have exchanged the contract during the journey," the guard said with an uncomfortable voice.

Vernon was still clenching his fists in rage and frustration.

"Then, it must have happened beforehand!"

The guards didn't answer.

Naturally, that was just as impossible.

The safe could only be opened with the keys of the supervising Experts, and no one could get into the safe without destroying it.

Not even a Force Specter could get in there.

Additionally, destroying the safe would require the full power of a Specialist, and it would be impossible to keep the destruction of the safe a secret.

The entire upper layer would hear the explosion of the safe, and to top it all off, a loud alarm would ring out throughout the city if the safe was touched just a bit too strongly.

On top of that, there were even more security measures.

It was an undeniable fact that nobody, except for the governor, could have exchanged the contract, and not even Vernon would suspect the governor.

"Is your plot finally collapsing?" Nick asked.

"Maybe you thought that your Extractors could exchange the contract during the journey."

"Or maybe this is just another plot?"

"Maybe you want to act like you accidentally lose control and kill me in the process. Sure, it would damage your reputation, but you would recover due to your status."

Nick slowly stood up and walked closer to the guards from Anatomy.

The guards from Anatomy threw some glances at Nick, but they quickly focused on Vernon again.

The guards from Kugelblitz seemed agitated and nervous.

This might develop into something really horrible.

The thing they were most scared of was that Vernon ordered them to silence everyone in the room.

That would cause an uproar in the city.

Vernon was barely hearing Nick's words.

He was too busy trying to figure out how Nick could have exchanged the contract stored by the city.

However, no matter how much he thought about this, he simply couldn't find a way.

Not even Kugelblitz could exchange these kinds of contracts.

So, how could Nick?

The next moment, Vernon was looking at the guards from Anatomy.

Or, how could Anatomy?

Maybe a traitor?

No, that wouldn't be enough.

There were also neutral people keeping watch over these things.

To exchange such a contract would require having control over five powerful people from separate places.

While it was theoretically possible, no one would even attempt to do that unless there were billions upon billions of credits on the table.

Dark Dream was not worth enough for something like that.

"Accept the truth," Nick said from beside one of Anatomy's guards. "This is the real contract, and you faked yours!"

"I DID NOT FAKE THE CONTRACT!" Vernon shouted in absolute rage, his voice thundering throughout the room.

The guards became increasingly apprehensive.

The situation became tenser and tenser.

Nick just looked at Vernon from beside the guards from Anatomy.

He believed Vernon.

After all, Vernon's contract was real.

All the other contracts were fake.

Even the one from the city.

The contract in the city's safe had been exchanged a couple of days earlier.

Sadly, nobody knew that there were actually two people who could exchange the contract without getting noticed.

One was the governor.

The other was Julian.

And who would suspect everyone's best friend, Julian?

Chapter 332 – Congratulations

?Everyone just looked at each other nervously.

Things could go bad real quick.

For several seconds, everyone remained quiet.

"Sir, this contract can't be fake," one of the people from Kugelblitz said carefully.

Vernon narrowed his eyes. "Are you saying I'm a scam artist?" he asked.

"No, no, no!" the man quickly answered with fear. "Maybe... your contract is fake..."

Vernon's eyes narrowed even further.

"But you didn't fake it?" the guy added carefully, almost wording it like a question.

Vernon's brows furrowed.

The contract could be fake, but he didn't fake it...

Vernon looked at the contract in concentration.

Only people who had signed the contract could give it to the city for safekeeping, and Vernon was certain that Wyntor would never allow Nick to give the contract to the city.

This meant that it had been Wyntor who had given the city the contract.

As for the apparent fake contract that Vernon had received, that had only been touched by Wyntor and Vernon.

It was difficult for Vernon to accept, but the contract that the city had kept safe had to be the real one, which could only mean that his contract was fake.

And since Vernon didn't fake it...

Vernon fell into thought.

Why?

The only explanation remaining was that Wyntor had given Vernon a fake contract.

However, Vernon couldn't think of a reason why Wyntor would give his own father a fake contract?

What would he have to gain from it?

"Are you saying that my son faked this?" Vernon asked the person from earlier with a thoughtful tone.

"No, sir! I would never accuse your son of something like that!" the man replied rapidly.

"Ah, that could be," Nick said casually from beside one of the guards. "At first glance, you seem like a nice guy, but I've seen how you act during big meetings."

Vernon narrowed his eyes again, but he didn't look at Nick.

He only focused on the contract.

"I also wouldn't trust somebody like you," Nick said with a sneer. "Someone that managed to reach the top of Kugelblitz must have done some shady things."

"Silence!" the Specialist from Kugelblitz shouted. "These are baseless accusations! Consider this your only warning!"

Nick looked at the Specialist with narrowed eyes.

His relationship with Kugelblitz was already irreparably damaged.

He had already planned all of this, but it was still extremely dangerous.

Everything was going just like Julian had predicted.

The next moment, Nick looked at Vernon, who was still in thought.

"Vernon," Nick said.

Vernon didn't react.

"Evaluate the next question carefully."

"If you were somebody else, would you trust yourself?"

Vernon didn't show any reactions, but Nick's question still entered his mind.

Would he trust himself?

That answer was obvious.

Of course not!

He was a major shareholder of Kugelblitz.

He was someone who had decades of experience in a ruthless market.

Trusting him would be na?ve.

...

And his son wasn't na?ve...

Vernon's expression changed to discomfort.

Wyntor was his son.

Wasn't it different with family?

Vernon had raised Wyntor.

He had given him everything.

Did he make a mistake while raising him?

'No,' Vernon realized. 'It's not that I made a mistake while raising him.'

'It's that I raised him too well.'

'I told him to doubt everyone.'

'I told him to be suspicious of everyone.'

A pained expression appeared on Vernon's face.

After thinking about it for a while, Vernon realized something.

Believing that Wyntor had trusted him was akin to insulting his intelligence.

He did the smart thing by not trusting his father.

Vernon should be proud of him!

But...

Then why did it hurt so much?

Vernon took a deep breath.

He believed it now.

Wyntor had given a false contract to Vernon while submitting the real one to the city.

As to why, Vernon couldn't be sure.

Maybe Wyntor had been afraid of some kind of takeover from Vernon.

Or even worse, maybe Wyntor suspected that Vernon would kill him if he learned of the clause, which would then give Nick all the shares, which would give Vernon an easy way to get all of Dark Dream for cheap.

After all, Nick was just some idiotic and naïve Extractor from the Dregs.

It would be easy for Vernon to get an amazing deal from Nick.

'Did Wyntor really think that?' Vernon asked himself. 'Did he really think that I would kill my own son?'

Vernon took a deep breath.

Then, he pushed the contract away from him and looked at Nick with narrowed eyes.

Vernon realized that Nick was actually not wrong in accusing him of killing his own son.

From Nick's point of view, Vernon must have looked incredibly suspicious with the fake contract.

But that didn't matter!

The things Nick had said to him were unforgivable!

Nick accused Vernon of killing his own son, called him shifty, and, worst of all, called him a scam artist!

Vernon had always prided himself on his fairness!

He would never scam anyone!

It had been decades since Vernon had been disrespected this much, and it didn't matter whether or not Nick had a good reason.

Vernon hated Nick, and he wouldn't forget what Nick had said to him today.

One day, if the opportunity presented itself, Vernon would throw these words back at him.

He could hardly wait.

"Congratulations," Vernon said coldly to Nick. "You own all of Dark Dream."

"I'm sure Dark Dream will-"

"Thanks," Nick interjected, not allowing Vernon to end his sarcastic insult.

Vernon's eyes narrowed a bit.

Then, he walked towards the door and left.

Even though he couldn't finish his insult, the meaning was still clear to everyone.

With the name of Melfion no longer attached to Dark Dream, its shield had vanished.

Dark Dream now had to openly compete with Solace, Gemini, Ghosty's Lab, Anatomy, and Kugelblitz.

All the Manufacturers had something that allowed them to exist.

Kugelblitz and Anatomy were the most powerful.

Ghosty's Lab was the city's bastion of technology and advancement. Its survival was vital.

Gemini had the backing of Ghosty's Lab, and the two sisters had proved to be extremely good at playing the political game.

Solace was the provider of all the light in the city, and the city government held a protective hand over it.

The Spartans had pledged themselves to Anatomy during their creation.

And Dark Dream?

Dark Dream had nothing.

Chapter 333 – Entering Anatomy

?Vernon left the room, and the guards belonging to Kugelblitz also left after throwing a couple of glances at Nick.

Nick silently watched them leave.

Then, he turned to the two guards from Anatomy.

"So, can I get a meeting with Mr. Harrow or Mr. Stairwell?" he asked. "I'm open to offers regarding Dark Dream."

The eyebrows of the two guards lifted in surprise.

They had expected that Dark Dream would become a target dummy for all of the Manufacturers and that it would be a matter of luck regarding who would get Dark Dream.

As long as Nick died, Dark Dream would have no owner anymore, and if Nick didn't have an adult child or wife, the ownership of Dark Dream would default to the city, which would then hand it over to another Manufacturer for safekeeping.

Most likely Kugelblitz since they had just too much sway in the government.

The two guards had expected that Dark Dream would quickly collapse.

But now, Nick asked for an offer.

He was willing to sell Dark Dream?

That would change everything!

"You want to sell Dark Dream?" the Specialist from Anatomy asked.

"Of course!" Nick answered. "I'm just going to die if I keep it."

The two guards blinked a bit in surprise.

Yeah, he was right, but this was a bit...

"I can ask for a meeting," the Specialist said.

Then, he turned to his colleague. "Get a couple more people and keep him safe. I don't want any accidents to happen to him!"

The other guard nodded. "Of course!"

After all, if Nick died, Kugelblitz would most likely get Dark Dream.

The next moment, the guard left the room.

"We should also leave," the Expert from Anatomy said before he also walked out of the door.

Nick nodded and followed him.

For the next several minutes, Nick saw five more people from Anatomy arriving beside him, but those were not wearing the city's guard uniforms.

They all introduced themselves with polite smiles since Nick was most likely going to be one of their colleagues.

Nick also introduced himself.

After that, the people from Anatomy led Nick to their headquarters.

Since he was now a Veteran, Nick could just run along the rails of the Shweebs, which made it much easier to reach Anatomy.

Anatomy had a gigantic building at the top of the middle layer.

It was absolutely massive!

It was over a hundred meters high and probably took up the entire width of the megastructure!

A huge puppet hung on top of the entrance, making the building look quite intimidating.

There were no guards.

The couple of people from Anatomy led Nick into the building.

The walls were completely black, and the artificial light coming out of the ceiling seemed to get swallowed by the black walls.

'Speaking of,' Nick thought as he looked at the artificial lights. 'Why is Anatomy using light from Solace instead of just building light shafts?'

"Why are you guys using artificial light?" Nick asked.

"Security," one of the people said. "Some Extractors can fit through tiny spaces, and light shafts would give them an easy way to travel throughout the building."

"Oh, okay," Nick answered.

'So, it's because of guys like me.'

Nick felt very strange walking through Anatomy like this.

For years, Anatomy felt like the most dangerous place in the city.

Anatomy was Kugelblitz's biggest rival, and since Dark Dream had belonged to Kugelblitz, unofficially, Anatomy would have the biggest reason to attack Dark Dream.

Additionally, the two leaders of Anatomy had treated Wyntor and Nick like they didn't even exist.

Lastly, the way Anatomy had fought against the city's inspection made them appear even shadier.

Of course, their sense of aesthetic also made them appear just a slight bit spooky.

But now, Nick was using Anatomy to protect himself.

Right now, Nick knew that Anatomy wanted him to survive, no matter what.

Even if they, for some reason, didn't get Dark Dream, they wouldn't want Kugelblitz to get it.

After leading Nick through corridor after corridor, they eventually told him to wait in front of a door.

Everyone except for two guards left after that.

There was no more reason to give Nick such a big escort while he was inside their headquarters.

And then, it was time to wait.

Neither Zarren Harrow nor Mundus Stairwell were in the building right now.

The reason for their absence was as obvious as it was forgettable.

The yearly meeting of Manufacturers was happening right at this moment.

Surprisingly, Nick only needed to wait for 15 minutes.

Nick saw two people with black hair walking over to him.

Both of them were tall men who seemed to be in their thirties, and their eyes were filled with a mix of coldness, calm, and confidence.

One of them approached Nick.

"I think we haven't been properly introduced yet," he said neutrally as he offered his hand.

"Zarren Harrow, Senior Director of Anatomy."

Nick took the hand and shook it.

"Nick Nick, Chief Zephyx Extractor and now also owner of Dark Dream," Nick said nervously.

"For however long that may be," he added with an awkward smile.

The two shook hands, and Zarren nodded once before letting the other person step forward.

The other person also offered his hand. "Mundus Stairwell, Chief Zephyx Extractor of Anatomy."

Nick also introduced himself to Mundus.

"Let's talk inside," Mundus said as he stepped into his office.

Surprisingly, Zarren also walked into the office.

Nick gulped.

'Seems like I'm going to talk with both of them,' he thought before he entered as well.

When he saw the office, he was a bit surprised.

It was a bit cluttered and quite chaotic.

There were many sheets of paper scattered around randomly, and Nick also saw many boxes without any labels on them.

In a way, this office reminded Nick of his own office.

The three of them sat down at the desk.

Mundus sat behind the desk.

Nick sat in front of the desk.

Zarren was stuck sitting beside the desk since the backside of the desk was surrounded by random boxes, only leaving space for a single chair for Mundus.

Since there were also only two chairs, Zarren had to sit on one of the boxes, but he didn't seem to care about it.

"So, you are willing to sell Dark Dream?" Mundus asked.

Chapter 334 – Selling Dark Dream

?Nick took a deep breath and nodded.

"I have no other choice," he said.

The two people from Anatomy didn't say anything, subtly telling Nick that they wanted to hear more.

"Quite frankly, I know that Kugelblitz wants to kill me as soon as possible," Nick said. "You've probably already heard about the fake contract, right?"

The two of them nodded.

"I think Vernon killed his son to get Dark Dream. I don't know how things got this way, but I'm pretty sure about it."

"I mean, he didn't even grieve for ten minutes before he approached me to ask about my 30% of Dark Dream."

"He probably thought that I was easy to manipulate since I wasn't born in the Inner City."

Nick narrowed his eyes as he looked at the table.

"But I'm not."

Then, he shook his head.

"Anyway, I know that I can't protect Dark Dream since I am only an Initial Veteran. So, I have no other choice but to sell Dark Dream."

The two from Anatomy looked silently at Nick, making him nervous.

Then, they exchanged a glance.

"We don't think that's what happened," Mundus said neutrally.

Nick's eyebrows rose in surprise.

"While we wouldn't put it past Melfion to kill his son for money, we also know that he's more intelligent than that," Zarren said from the side.

"The timing and manner of everything is too strange. Melfion also wouldn't have made it so easy to disprove his contract."

"If he had planned something like that, he would have sent someone to exchange your copy and his son's copy in secret."

"Additionally, he wouldn't have killed his son right in front of his own place of work."

"Maybe there's some kind of hidden plot or meaning to commit such a dumb act, but for the life of me, I can't see it," Zarren explained.

Behind the desk, Mundus chuckled a bit.

"When looking at the facts, we're way more suspicious than Melfion," he said with dry amusement.

Nick looked at the two of them with a bit of anxiety.

"But you didn't do it, right?" he asked.

The two of them looked at Nick for a couple of seconds.

"Of course not," Zarren said calmly.

If Nick wasn't sure that he had been the one who killed Wyntor, he would think that they had killed him.

They acted just way too sinister and untrustworthy.

'Do they want me to believe that it was them to intimidate me so that I wouldn't ask for a lot of money?' Nick thought.

"How many Specters do you have, and how strong are they?" Mundus asked.

Nick looked with discomfort at them.

This was highly confidential.

However, he had to tell them since he was about to sell Dark Dream anyway.

"Nine Adolescents and three Hatchlings," Nick said.

The two of them showed no reaction.

For a couple of seconds, Mundus just wrote something on a sheet of paper.

Then, he gave the sheet of paper to Zarren, who looked at it.

Lastly, he nodded at Mundus.

Mundus turned back to Nick.

"80 million," he said. "Additionally, you get a spot as team leader, and we will also hire all of the current employees."

Nick took a deep breath.

That was a lot of money.

Nick closed his eyes for a while.

"Thank you," he said.

"But I can't give you a positive answer without asking Ghosty's Lab, Gemini, and Solace for offers."

The atmosphere in the room changed, and the two of them looked at Nick with cold eyes.

Nick looked back.

Over ten seconds of silence passed.

Mundus looked at Zarren.

Zarren furrowed his brows.

"120 million," he said.

Nick took another deep breath.

"Thank you, but I still have to ask the others."

The two of them looked at each other again.

"Are you going to ask Kugelblitz as well?" Mundus asked after a while.

"My goal is to survive," Nick said. "If I enter Kugelblitz, I might as well jump into the Crimson Sea right now."

Mundus and Zarren looked at each other again.

"Alright," Zarren said. "But just to be safe, we want you to decide by tomorrow, and we also want three of our people to guard you until then. None of us want you to die to some assassin from Kugelblitz."

Nick nodded. "Thank you very much."

The three of them nodded and left Mundus' office.

Nick quickly received three of Anatomy's Experts as bodyguards and left the building.

Next, Nick went to Ghosty's Lab to talk to their CEO.

Naturally, Ghosty's Lab was also interested in purchasing Dark Dream.

However, they only offered 90 million credits.

Nick kept all the offers secret.

Next, Nick went to Gemini and met with the twins.

He was quite surprised when they offered 150 million credits.

Nick thanked them for their offers and left to talk to Solace.

His talk with Hera was the longest, and her offer was also quite unique.

She would give Nick 10% of Solace in exchange for all of Dark Dream, making Nick a director.

Additionally, Nick would also become one of their team leaders, working under Hera.

Hera told Nick that she was quite impressed by him and that she had a very high opinion of him.

She would love to work with him.

Solace's offer was incredible since 10% of Solace already represented about 300 million credits.

It seemed like Solace put much more value on Nick as a person instead of Dark Dream.

However, Solace might also not have the strength to protect Nick from Kugelblitz.

After getting all of his offers, Nick returned to Dark Dream.

The three people from Anatomy kept watch over Dark Dream, and several Veterans from Anatomy were scouting Dark Dream's surroundings.

They didn't want any of Dark Dream's employees to come to harm.

Nick met a couple more people in his office over the day.

The next day, in the early morning, Nick publicized his decision.

And the decision shocked everyone!

Nick wasn't selling Dark Dream to Anatomy.

He also wasn't selling it to Ghosty's Lab.

He wasn't selling it to Gemini.

And he also wasn't selling it to Solace.

The entire city heard the news.

60% of Dark Dream was sold to its new CEO.

Julian!

Chapter 335 – New CEO

"And with the sad part out of the way, it is now my pleasure to introduce our new Chief Executive Officer. Some of you probably know him already."

"Please, give a warm welcome to Julian Nergiar!"

After a lengthy talk in front of all of Dark Dream's employees, Nick introduced their new CEO.

Julian.

Some of the employees felt a bit strange while they applauded, but most of them were actually quite excited.

Naturally, when they heard that their previous CEO had died, they felt scared and sad.

Wyntor had built Dark Dream from the ground up, and with him gone, the employees didn't know what would happen to them.

Would Dark Dream be sold?

Would they have to work for another Manufacturer?

Would they get killed?

But when they heard that Julian bought 60% of Dark Dream, they felt quite excited.

Everyone knew Julian, and everyone liked being in his presence.

And now, they could work under Julian!

Additionally, Julian was a Specialist!

While it was still possible that another Manufacturer could kill most of Dark Dream's workers and get it disbanded by complaining to the city about a lack of security, it would become much more difficult.

A Specialist was terrifyingly powerful.

A Specialist was so powerful that they could capture an Expert without them even being able to kill themselves.

One had to remember that fighting amongst Manufacturers was illegal and that the entire war thing had to happen in secret.

So, if one of the attackers got captured and delivered to the guards, whoever sent the agent would have to pay absolutely brutal fines.

These kinds of fines were not based on the damage done or by the agent the Manufacturer had sent but on what it would take to give said Manufacturer a fitting punishment.

If a Veteran from Kugelblitz was found to have been sent to attack Nick, it might very well be possible that Kugelblitz would need to pay over 500 million credits.

That obviously wouldn't kill them, but it would cause them a lot of damage.

Because of that, having someone like a Specialist present was insanely advantageous.

The Extractors knew that which was why they were so excited.

Having Julian as their CEO would give Dark Dream even more security than having Wyntor as their CEO.

Julian walked towards the front and waved at the 100 or so gathered people in front of him.

"Thank you for your warm welcome," he said with a smile. "I'm looking forward to working with all of you. I consider several of you friends, and I'm excited that I can help all of you to achieve your dreams."

Julian gave a long speech in front of the gathered employees, after which he walked forward to greet each and every one of them one by one.

Surprisingly, Julian knew the names of over 60 of the employees, which positively surprised everyone.

While he was greeting them, Julian also told them that he wanted to meet each and every one of them for a personal conversation.

Within the next week, everyone should come to his office at some point. Of course, only when they had time.

Julian would be in the office most of the time, and if he wasn't present, he would tell his new assistant when he would be back.

Wyntor had been an Early John, which meant that he had still needed to sleep, eat, and drink.

Since Julian didn't need that, he could spend much more time working.

Sadly, the employees couldn't talk for very long with Julian.

They had to return to work.

After a while, Julian and Nick left the big hall and walked towards the seventh floor.

Nick had a neutral expression on his face as he walked past several mouths growing out of the walls in the stairwell.

Julian had already "fully integrated".

The walls and ceiling of the entire building were covered with smiling mouths.

Yet, nobody noticed.

Nick was the only one who could see them.

It was quite ironic.

A Specter was running a Manufacturer.

Nick was not sure if he had done the right thing, but he had already made his choice.

And now, he had to see it to the end.

Several weeks ago, Nick had thought long and hard about what to wish.

He wanted to kill Wyntor, but he also didn't want to lose Dark Dream.

"I wish for us to be allies."

That was Nick's wish.

Julian had been quite surprised by that wish, and he had asked about what Nick meant specifically.

"Simple. I help you, and in return, you help me, which makes me help you, which makes you help me, and so on," Nick said.

After talking some more, Julian had gotten a new appreciation for Nick.

Usually, Julian killed most people after granting them their wish.

Sure, he would still lose some Zephyx after killing them, but it wouldn't be as bad as when he killed the person before fulfilling their wish.

There were a select few people who had won a bet against Julian and lived to tell the tale, but they were all rather weak.

They were the only ones who knew about the city's true ruler, but they couldn't tell anyone.

If they tried to tell just a single person, they would die.

In a way, they felt cursed.

They were the only ones who could see the truth, but they could never tell anyone the truth.

Nick had joined these select few, but compared to them, Nick had a more personal connection with Julian now.

They were going to be allies.

Julian would help Nick become more powerful and increase the power of Dark Dream.

In exchange, Nick would be Julian's employee and do what he said.

Of course, owning a Manufacturer also gave Julian something.

He would earn a lot of money, and he would also have an official job.

Everyone believed that Julian was working for one of the Manufacturers, but all of the Manufacturers thought he was working for one of the other ones.

And since he now had his own business, he no longer needed to be afraid of being found out in this way.

Chapter 336 – A Visit

?The two of them entered Julian's new office.

As soon as the door opened, Nick noticed that Julian's office was covered in even more mouths.

It was almost like the entire office was made of mouths.

The only place that didn't have any mouths was the chair in front of the desk and a small pathway leading to it.

Julian walked through the mouth-covered area, and the mouths seemed to phase through him.

Then, he sat down behind the desk, seemingly fusing into the domain of mouths.

Nick couldn't see Julian anymore.

"Come in," a chorus of friendly voices said.

Nick's eyes showed determination, and he stepped inside.

He had made his choice.

He had made his wish.

This was what he had chosen.

Regrets?

Guilt?

Fear?

Feeling any of that would be an insult to his choice.

This was the ugly face of his choice, and he had to look at it.

Dark Dream had been handed over to a Specter.

Something that was supposed to suppress Specters was now being run by a Specter.

This was a betrayal of humanity.

A human had willingly handed something like this to a Specter.

Something like this happened very rarely.

After all, even little kids knew that Specters were humanity's greatest enemies.

Accepting a deal with a Specter would only end in one's death.

'But I need this!' Nick thought with narrowed eyes.

'This is the only way I can achieve my goal!'

'If humanity ever wants to win against the Specters, humanity first needs to unite!'

'The same thing is true for this city.'

'As long as Kugelblitz, Anatomy, Ghosty's Lab, and so on fight against each other, Crimson City will never get enough power to truly free themselves of Specters like Julian or the Parasite.'

'Getting rid of the Parasite would have just required them to work together, but that never happened.'

'In the end, the Parasite only vanished from the city after another Specter got rid of him.'

'Having Julian officially rule the city will cause less damage and misery than having the current leaders in charge.'

'I would much rather hand the entire city to him than have things continuing to be this way!'

'And when I am finally strong enough, I can take over.'

'Humanity needs to unite, and the strong must stop their exploitation of the weak!'

Nick's eyes narrowed.

'And if they refuse to comply, they are humanity's enemy!'

"You're not afraid?" the mouths in the room asked.

"I made my choice," Nick said.

The mouths chuckled.

"Didn't you always say that you hated how the weak suffered? And now, you're handing a building filled with proverbial explosives to a Specter," the mouths said.

"Your enemies are my enemies," Nick said. "The Heroes are the only ones that can see through your identity, and they are also the ones that were the reason why the Dregs had been so horrible."

"You haven't told me a lot about your power, but I know how Specters work. If you really want to become a Demon, you need to kill several Specialists after winning bets against them."

"However, even if you win the bet and get the ability to easily kill them, every Specialist that dies also provokes a huge investigation."

"You need a human that knows your true self and acts as your mouthpiece."

Nick looked at the mouths with narrowed eyes.

"If I had to choose between you and the current leaders of the city, I would choose you."

"You have a selfish goal."

"The current leaders have a selfish goal."

"But your selfish goal will cause less misery and death."

The more Nick thought about the absolute filth that was the mindset of Crimson City's leaders, the angrier he got.

"Handing humanity's fate to a Specter might be better than handing humanity's fate to a human."

"I don't regret giving you Dark Dream," Nick said. "If Wyntor kept being Dark Dream's owner, it would have one day been sold to Kugelblitz, and I would need to join another Manufacturer."

"I want to help humanity, and to do that, I need power."

Nick looked at the eyes.

"Just like how I am helping you become more powerful, you are helping me become more powerful."

Silence.

"Humans are so interesting," the smiling mouths said.

"Your opinion of humanity is so low. Yet, your life's mission is to help humanity."

"Aren't you also human?"

"Will humanity have a better fate if you are its decider?"

Nick looked at the mouths.

"Yes," he said with conviction.

Silence.

The mouths chuckled.

"How truly interesting," the mouths said.

"Working with you might prove to be very entertaining."

Silence.

"Do you have a plan for Dark Dream?" Nick asked. "You are now the CEO, and I am your employee. Is there anything you want me to do?"

"Yes," the mouths answered.

"Since we are now allies, I don't want you to die. That would be bad for me."

"I have seen how powerful you are. I saw the ambush of the Spartans."

Nick's eyes narrowed slightly.

"I also know that you were the one that freed the Crimson Sea."

"The Crimson Sea ate several pieces of my food, and it made it much harder for me to find opportunities to collect debts from lost bets."

"You're lucky I'm not a human, or I might have killed you out of anger."

Nick didn't say anything.

"Nevertheless, your survival is now relevant to my power."

"Because of that, I want to get rid of your weakness."

"And while we're at it, you may also prove your loyalty."

Nick didn't show any reactions.

"Your power is terrifying, but only as long as the enemy doesn't know how it works."

"There is one person, aside from myself, that knows how your power works."

"This person is your weakness."

Nick's jaw clenched.

"Prove that what you said are not just empty words."

"I made a wager with Albert."

"I bet that you would visit him within the next two months at his home."

Nick didn't move, but his heart rate shot up.

"I want you to visit him."

Nick didn't say anything as he silently clenched his fists.

The smiles on the mouths seemed to widen.

Chapter 337 – The Good of the City

?Nick left Dark Dream's building after finishing his talk with his new superior.

After Nick left the building, he went to the edge of the city again.

Whenever he wasn't certain about something or felt overwhelmed, he came here to look at the wall of red mist.

Just as always, Nick looked at the red wall while lost in thought.

At this moment, his heart was beating rapidly in his chest.

'My first kill was an adult woman who stole my credits in the Dregs, and I didn't even kill her on purpose.'

'My second kill was someone from the Insurance Gang that tried to rough me up. This one wasn't accidental.'

Nick took a deep breath.

'It might not have been a kill, but the next time I felt something like this was when Horua became catatonic. In a way, that was accidental.'

'Later, I killed several people belonging to the Riker Strikers.'

'Compared to my first kills, these were much easier.'

'They were causing suffering to innocent people, and no one would care if I killed them. Most people would probably even be thankful.'

'Then came Pator.'

Nick remembered what Pator had said to Horua.

While Pator had gone against Dark Dream, he was also helpless in the fact.

In a way, Pator was just a child who had been exploited by a rich psychopath.

Nick could see a definite trend in the people he killed.

From accidentally killing an enemy.

To purposefully killing an enemy.

To accidentally killing a helpless person.

To purposefully killing a child that was forced to become his enemy.

After that, Nick thought about the day the Crimson Sea had escaped.

He remembered the way all the innocent people turned into liquid while screaming in pain and terror.

It was still difficult for him to think about it.

The only way Nick could deal with the guilt was to keep telling himself that he would stop even more suffering from occurring.

Yet...

'And now, for the first time, I am going to kill an innocent person on purpose.'

Nick took a deep breath.

'Albert has never done anything against me. In fact, the opposite is true.'

'Albert is the reason why I even managed to become a Zephyx Extractor.'

'He trained and taught me for months.'

Nick looked at the ground.

'And now, I'm going to essentially kill him. I might not be the one actively killing him, but my actions will result in his death.'

Albert's face shot through Nick's mind.

The nice old man.

Naturally, he really didn't want to kill Albert.

He wanted Albert to be successful and happy.

Albert hadn't even shown an inkling of wanting anything bad to happen to Nick.

'I don't know,' Nick thought.

'There's just no way I can justify killing Albert.'

'It's not right.'

'How am I different from the people I despise?'

'In order to further my goal, I am going to kill an innocent person.'

Nick just kept looking at the floor.

'But what choice do I have?'

'Death.'

'If I don't do it, I will die.'

'What then?'

'Will the deaths of all the innocent people be for nothing?'

Silence.

'They will be.'

'If I die, all these people would have died for nothing.'

'But how many more innocent people will die until I finally reach my goal?'

'Albert might be the first innocent person that I will kill on purpose, but as long as I follow Julian, he most likely won't be the last.'

'As long as I keep following Julian, I will commit more and more horrible acts.'

Nick took a deep breath.

'Nevertheless, what I told Julian was not a lie.'

'If he becomes the true ruler of the city, the city will have it better than right now.'

'I only have three choices.'

'First, refuse and get killed off by Julian. This will make the city's future uncertain. The deaths of the innocents might be for nothing.'

'Second, secretly visit the governor or a level six Extractor and unveil Julian. This will definitely result in Julian's death, but I will also die. The fact that I sold him Dark Dream is already unforgivable. Albert will survive, the city will stay as it is now, and the deaths of the innocents will be for nothing.'

'Third, kill Albert. This has the highest chance of improving the city, but it will result in more innocent people dying. The debt of guilt will increase as time progresses, and the pressure of repaying said debt will increase.'

Nick just kept thinking about the issue.

'It is an undisputable fact that Julian will improve the city in the long run. Especially if he also wants to please me a little bit to keep me loyal to him.'

Nick looked at the red wall with focus.

'The best outcome for the city is if I am the sole ruler.'

'The second best one is if Julian is the ruler with me as an important support.'

'The third best one is Julian being the ruler on his own.'

'And the worst one is if things stay this way.'

'The lives of the common people are morally more important than the lives of the Extractors.'

'The weak do not have the power to change the city. Only the strong people have the power.'

'A Newbie might be able to sway the way their new team works just a little bit.'

'A John can already work as a guard and not condone illegal things that happen around them.'

'A Veteran can change how teams operate.'

'An Expert has a lot of influence over how the guards and at least one Manufacturer operate.'

'And the influence every Extractor has over their surroundings only increases with power.'

'Which also increases their responsibility and guilt for why things are the way they are.'

Nick looked at the red wall.

'As long as the city's security isn't majorly compromised, I would rather kill a Specialist than a commoner.'

Nick took a deep breath.

He made his decision.

'Albert, you may have treated me well, and you are not my enemy, but this is bigger than you and me.'

'I don't want to kill you.'

'But for the good of the city, I have to.'

Chapter 338 – Entrance

?Nick entered the Inner City after coming to a decision.

He knew that the longer he waited with his visit, the harder it would become and the more doubt would appear in his mind.

'I can't afford to doubt myself now,' Nick thought. 'I have made my decision, and I have to walk it to the end.'

'If I die on the way, I will have made the wrong decision and doomed many innocent people.'

'But if I manage to reach it, I will have made the right decision.'

'The correctness of my choice is connected to my success.'

'That means I have to try my absolute hardest to achieve success!'

'I no longer have the luxury of choice.'

Nick looked for a Shweeb rail and jumped onto it from a distance.

As a Veteran, jumping a distance of a couple hundred meters wasn't difficult.

He didn't even need his ability for that.

After landing on the rail, Nick ran on top of it.

If the rail became too steep, he simply grabbed the side and pulled himself upward.

The relation between his strength and his weight was so unbalanced that Nick felt like there was almost no gravity.

The inherent power of Zephyx was ridiculous and couldn't be compared to anything.

After a minute, Nick reached the layer where the big Manufacturers were.

Some seconds later, Nick reached the layer where Kugelblitz was.

He threw a glance at the entrance but continued upward.

Julian had told Nick where Albert lived.

Albert lived in an older house on the upper layer of the city.

For the first time, Nick would enter the upper layer of the city.

Usually, Nick would feel a bit excited, but it was impossible for him to feel these kinds of emotions right now.

Nick felt so much pressure that any other emotion barely registered.

All the guilt that Nick had felt for his past actions was replaced with pressure to succeed.

If he didn't succeed, everything would be for nothing, and he would count as one of the greatest monsters humanity had ever seen.

His actions had resulted in over a thousand innocent people dying, and he had done nothing good in return.

Because of that, he had to succeed.

Nothing was more important than improving the lives of the common people.

He had to do it!

There was literally nothing that was more important!

Ironically, the more horrible things Nick did and the guiltier he felt, the more his own survival and power mattered to him.

Nick was no longer living for himself.

His life belonged to humanity.

His life belonged to the world.

Feeling excitement for seeing something new was incomparably unimpactful and irrelevant.

It didn't matter.

And since it didn't matter, Nick couldn't feel it.

Nick continued ascending, and a couple of seconds later, he saw the rails making a curve and entering several garages.

He jumped down from the rail and landed on the floor, which was made of incredibly powerful and durable black metal.

The sunlight shone through the windows behind Nick.

He was incredibly high up.

After stopping for just a second, Nick walked towards the single person standing beside a small door.

Almost everything in front of Nick was taken up by a solid and massive black wall.

The only thing that looked different was the small door made of wood, which contrasted with the cold feeling of the wall.

When Nick saw the person standing beside the door, he couldn't help taking a deep breath out of shock.

The person was a woman with silver hair who calmly looked at Nick.

She was wearing the uniform of an Extractor who worked exclusively for the city.

These kinds of Extractors were quite rare, and they were tasked with the most important matters since they didn't have any vested interests in any of the Manufacturers.

But the thing that Nick was shocked by was the emblem on her chest.

She was a Specialist.

A level five Extractor that exclusively worked for the city.

Nick didn't even know that the city had someone like that.

However, the most prominent feelings Nick had after his shock passed were anger and disgust.

A Specialist!

A Specialist was so powerful and could do so much for the city!

Yet, the Specialist's job was to guard a door!

The reason for all of this was clear.

The richest people in the city demanded absolute security for themselves!

Even if their desire for absolute security put many others in danger.

After all, they had the most money, and as people who had the most money, they deserved the best things.

Nick didn't have an issue with some luxury, but as soon as someone took so much that it negatively impacted a great number of people, he got angry.

"I don't know you," the woman said casually.

She was neither rude nor friendly.

"My name is Nick Nick, and I'm the Chief Zephyx Extractor of Dark Dream," he said.

When the Specialist heard that, her eyebrows rose in positive surprise. "Oh, you're Julian's friend?" she asked.

Nick nodded. "Yes."

"How are things going for him in Dark Dream? I haven't seen him in a while," she asked with interest.

"He just took over Dark Dream, and he is currently getting familiar with it," Nick answered neutrally. "He seems to be doing quite well."

The Specialist smiled. "That's great to hear. Anyway, you want to enter the upper layer?" she asked.

Nick nodded. "I'm here to visit an old friend I haven't seen in a long while."

"Who?" she asked.

"Albert," Nick answered. "I don't know his last name."

"It's okay," the Specialist said. "I know everyone that lives in the upper layer, and there's only one Albert."

"You don't have the wealth or power required to live in the upper layer, but it's enough for a visit. I can let you through, but keep in mind that you must leave again within the next twelve hours, or you will forcefully be thrown out, and you will also have to pay a hefty fine."

Nick nodded. "That's fine."

The Specialist also nodded, and a small needle suddenly appeared in her hand.

"I must test your blood to see if you are human."

Chapter 339 – The Upper Layer

Nick furrowed his brows, but he still extended one of his arms.

Sure enough, the upper layer had ridiculous security levels.

'But even that is not enough since Julian managed to enter the upper layer,' Nick thought.

The copy of the contract that the city had stored had been in a safe on the upper layer, which meant that Julian must have managed to enter.

'Most likely, she just let Julian pass without testing him since he is her friend,' Nick thought.

The Specialist moved the needle to Nick's right index finger and drew a bit of blood.

A moment later, she put the needle into a small hole in the wall.

DING!

A green light appeared above the hole for three seconds before vanishing.

The Specialist pocketed the needle and looked at Nick with a smile.

"You may pass. Welcome to the upper layer!" she said as she stepped to the side and gestured to the wooden door behind her.

"Thank you," Nick answered with a nod before he walked to the door.

"After you go through the door, please read the sign with the rules before entering."

Nick nodded without answering.

Nick put his hand on the door and pushed.

The door opened easily, and as soon as it did, Nick felt a small gust of pleasant-smelling air coming out.

He stepped inside and closed the door behind him.

When he saw where he was, he was a bit surprised.

Nick found himself in a hall made of wood.

The hall was about 50 meters long and 10 meters wide, and there were lockers everywhere!

It reminded Nick of the rooms before the Containment Units in Dark Dream.

Nick saw another wooden door on the other side of the hall and saw a big sign beside it with the rules on them.

'Shoes are forbidden.'

'Wearing outside clothing is discouraged.'

'Wearing weapons is forbidden.'

'Don't be loud.'

'No running.'

'Be respectful.'

'Don't ask personal questions without knowing the other person well.'

'Don't enter private property without the permission of the owner.'

There were a couple more rules, but those were the most important ones.

Nick also saw a couple rules specifically for visitors, and when he was done reading them, he furrowed his brows.

This was crazy.

The next moment, Nick walked over to some lockers that were specifically for visitors.

He opened one that was unoccupied and saw what he was soon going to wear.

It was a brown shirt made of very soft fabric and some comfortable brown pants made of the same fabric.

When he touched these things, he had to take a deep breath.

He had never touched anything so soft!

The next moment, he took the clothing and entered a changing room at the side.

In the changing room, he undressed and put all of his clothing in a basket before going into a shower with cleansing liquid.

After showering, Nick put the warm and fuzzy clothing on before walking out of the changing room.

He put the basket with his stuff into the locker before grabbing one of the keys and locking it.

Then, he put the key around his arm and walked towards the exit.

This was the first time in years in which Nick had been walking barefoot.

He couldn't help thinking about his past in the Dregs.

The wooden floor felt warm and nice on his bare feet, and the clothing warmed his body.

After reaching the door, Nick opened it and stepped through.

For the first time, he entered the upper layer of the city, a place where only people worth over 100 million credits could live.

Nick's feet stepped on a small path made of soft dirt.

Beside the path was green grass.

Basically everything around Nick was covered in grass!

There were also quite a lot of trees with beautiful green leaves almost everywhere.

The air smelled fresh and invigorating, and the sky was a beautiful bright blue.

There were also a couple of small and white clouds slowly drifting across the sky.

Even though it tried its best to hide, Nick's senses could also pick up some kind of furry animal with a big bushy tail that was clinging to one of the trees with a nut in its mouth.

Nick could also see animals with feathers and wings that could fly. These animals looked like smaller and thinner chickens.

About 50 meters away, Nick could see a man, a woman, and two kids sitting on a blanket in the middle of a small meadow.

They were eating some sandwiches, which they had brought from home via a nice basket.

Compared to Nick, all four of them wore white clothing instead of brown.

The color of the clothing probably represented the difference between visitors and citizens.

Nick saw the family laughing happily.

He looked away from them and focused on the dirt path in front of him.

Nick's fists clenched.

The contrast between the upper layer and the Outer City hit him like a ton of bricks.

The upper layer was disgusting.

The sheer amount of Zephyx required to make all of this possible had to be ridiculous.

How much of the city's wealth was wasted on creating this paradise for the richest one percent?

The fact that these people could laugh all carefree in this paradise while the displaced people of the Dregs were fighting for their lives in a world of blood and rust enraged Nick.

Nick remembered how much he had suffered in the Dregs when he was younger.

And while he had suffered, these people had enjoyed life in this paradise!

He hated the upper layer.

The upper layer perfectly represented what was wrong with the city.

Nick took a deep breath and walked forward.

As he kept walking, he passed by a couple of people wearing white clothes.

One of them even started a casual conversation with him, but Nick only gave curt answers.

He only asked the guy where he could find Albert.

The man looked a bit offended by Nick's tone, but he told Nick where he could find Albert.

Nick just thanked him and left.

Not even five minutes later, he arrived at Albert's house.

Chapter 340 – Albert's House

After walking through what seemed to be a forest, Nick reached Albert's house.

Nick had seen a couple of houses on his way to Albert's house.

All the houses he had seen were made out of wood or mossy stone.

Only when Nick saw Albert's house did he realize that he hadn't seen a single piece of metal until now.

Albert's house, compared to all the other houses, was made of black metal.

It was the same kind of metal that the entrance to the upper layer was made out of.

Albert's house was the only thing made of metal that Nick had seen in the upper layer.

It was strange.

In the Dregs and in the Outer City, everyone was surrounded by nothing but metal.

The ground was metal.

The houses were metal.

Everything was metal.

But here, nothing was made of metal.

When Nick saw the house, his heart rate spiked again.

This was it.

This was the moment.

As long as Nick went to the house, knocked, and saw Albert, he would doom him.

He could still leave.

Albert was not yet dead.

Nick could still turn around.

Nick took a deep breath.

He clenched his fists and did his best to focus on the house in front of him.

Then, he walked forward.

Nick felt like the world was compressing his head as he moved his arm towards the door.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

He had done it.

He had knocked.

Nick felt like the surroundings had darkened.

That was it.

There was no way back now.

Some seconds later, the door opened, and Nick came face to face with Albert.

He looked just like the first day Nick had met him, except for the different clothing.

Just like back then, Albert had mostly black hair with a couple of grey streaks going through it.

All in all, he looked to be in his fifties.

However, that wouldn't be accurate for him since he was an Expert.

Albert was probably already over a hundred years old.

Nick still remembered how Albert had helped him analyze his abilities and trained him for a couple of months.

Albert furrowed his brows as he looked at Nick.

"Who are you?" he asked.

Naturally, while Albert hadn't changed, Nick had changed quite a bit.

The last time Albert saw Nick was when he captured the Dreamer.

Back then, Albert had shown Nick how Chief Zephyx Extractors found ways to work with Specters.

The last time they had met, Nick was still a 16-year-old with above-average fitness.

Now, Nick was 21.

He had grown quite a bit, and his muscle mass had more than doubled.

But the most noticeable change was Nick's aura and demeanor.

Back then, Nick had still seemed innocent, naïve, and insecure.

Now, Nick appeared solemn, serious, and intense.

The wonder of seeing new things had been replaced with disgust at these things' moral and economic implications.

The world that had once been colorful was now covered in a grey, black, and red film.

And just like the world had lost most of its colors, Nick also seemed far less colorful.

When Nick saw Albert's face, he felt like the black hole in his chest had reopened again.

He knew that he was looking at a dead man.

It had been done.

Albert had lost his bet, which meant that Julian could consume him anytime.

Julian became stronger by making bets and winning them.

When he won his bet, his powers while fighting the person who had lost would multiply, making him almost invincible.

Julian was also an entire level above Albert.

At this moment, it would be enough for Julian to send one of his many mouths to Albert.

Albert wouldn't be able to see or defend himself from the mouth, and the mouth would consume him whole.

In essence, Albert would vanish.

One day, while he was just sitting in his home, a mouth might appear below him and kill him.

No one would notice.

Nick had doomed Albert to this fate.

"It's me," Nick said, trying to keep his voice from quivering.

"Nick."

Albert's eyebrows rose in surprise, and he looked Nick up and down.

"Wow," Albert said after a bit. "You look completely different 02:50

from back then."

Then, Albert laughed.

"To think that you would still remember this old man!" he shouted with joy.

"Come in!" Albert said as he made space for Nick.

Nick nodded and walked past Albert.

Inside the house, Nick saw a room filled with books.

On one of the walls was a hole with a fire burning inside.

Nick hadn't seen a fire in years.

Creating fire was extremely difficult since there was nothing one could burn.

Wood didn't exist.

Paper was rare and made of materials that didn't really catch fire.

Clothing was mostly made of thin strands of bendy metal.

Food was mostly cooked in big areas with clean metal plates that focused the light.

And yet, Albert had a fire burning in his house.

The fire gave the room a cozy and warm feeling, but every second it burned represented several credits.

Nick looked at the room with a complex expression.

Under normal circumstances, he would grow angry at the waste of credits happening right here, but he just couldn't get angry at Albert.

After all, he would soon be dead.

"Nice place," Nick commented.

"It's nothing special," Albert said as he walked over to a nice chair.

"Come, sit down," Albert added as he pointed to another chair.

Nick walked over and silently sat down.

"You want something to drink? I have coffee," Albert said.

Nick felt a desire for coffee.

Sadly, that desire was quickly overwhelmed by a stinging feeling of guilt and hypocrisy.

Coffee?

He didn't even need to drink anything to stay alive.

He was a Veteran.

Why would he need to drink anything?

After also adding the ridiculous price of coffee...

"No, thanks," Nick said.

How could he possibly accept drinking coffee after solidifying his goal?

Coffee would be a thing of the past for him.