

## **The Sun 441**

### Chapter 441 – Working More Than 24 Hours in a Day

'I'm not sure how effective it is going to be when I'm only working with it for 50 hours,' Nick thought as he looked around the grey nothingness.

The Grey Room was one of the Specters that produced far more Zephyx when fitting people worked with it.

Specters like the Money Sink, the Gambler, or the Abductor basically always produced the same amount of Zephyx as long as the power of the person in front of them was consistent.

There were no individual differences based on personality or something like that.

However, there were also cases where the personality of the Extractor was important for Zephyx production.

For example, the Bleeding Lady might decide on cutting some more if she really enjoyed herself, and the Dreamer produced more Zephyx based on how much suffering it could inflict on its victims in the dreams.

The Grey Room was one of these kinds of Specter.

The Grey Room became more powerful by inflicting boredom.

That meant that the Extractor had to be bored.

If someone managed to just keep thinking about things in here without getting bored, not a lot of Zephyx would be produced.

Of course, one could only entertain oneself in the nothingness for a limited time, and the more time passed, the more bored and desperate one would become for stimuli, which meant more Zephyx.

However, too much boredom could cause trauma, and it was important to keep that to a minimum.

Even if Nick were to completely ignore the moral aspect, giving his employees trauma by making them work too much with the Grey Room would prove horrible for profit.

Employees were employees, not slaves.

If someone had such a bad experience that they completely refused to work with the Grey Room, Nick couldn't force them to do so unless he wanted to risk leaking valuable intel.

The Grey Room was one of the few Specters for which no unified procedure could be created.

Every Extractor would need their own procedure.

'And things would probably become different once again when the Grey Room becomes an Adult,' Nick thought.

The Grey Room was already a Peak Adolescent, and it had been a Peak Adolescent for years.

Not every Specter could become an Adult, but the Grey Room had a good chance of becoming one.

The Grey Room could become an Adult tomorrow or in a couple of years.

It was basically impossible to predict.

'Most likely, the time dilation gets even stronger if it advances.'

'It won't be easy to incite the Extractors to work with it.'

'Well, at least its ability has amazing potential.'

The Grey Room's ability was the main ability that the Spartans had relied on back then.

Sadly, the Spartans had never had the opportunity to actually use this ability on Nick.

The Grey Room gave an Extractor the ability to stretch and constrict space.

It could reduce the distance between a target and the user or expand it.

Of course, a Newbie couldn't do a lot with that since the degree of space bending was very low, but everyone could see how crazy this ability could get with enough power.

Just its versatility was amazing.

It could be used for Bruisers to force a slippery target close to their range.

A Sniper could use it to lessen the distance when they were about to fire, making the shot much more accurate and more difficult to avoid.

A Manipulator could use it.

An Assassin could use it to get quickly to a target.

A Runner could use it.

It was crazy.

The ability could be developed in any of these ways.

Since Nick didn't have much to do here, he just thought about how to deal with all the Specters and how to distribute the Extractors.

'It's actually not so bad in here,' Nick thought. 'I now have all the time in the world to properly plan all these things.'

By now, Nick's job as CZE had become brutal.

This was no longer like back when Dark Dream only had the Dreamer and the Screaming Coffin.

Back then, Nick had only needed to sleep for eight hours a day and deal with the Zephyx.

Now, Nick was managing a business with over a hundred employees almost on his own.

Julian was busy with meeting people from outside the company, not giving him a lot of time to manage Dark Dream.

Although, it was important to note that Nick was essentially doing two jobs at once.

He was the CZE, for one, but he was also almost the entire HR department.

Julian focused on the financial aspects, but naturally, Nick also had to deal with finances since he was the CZE.

While there were plenty of people that envied Nick due to his position, they didn't envy him due to his workload.

Ding!

Suddenly, the greyness around Nick vanished, and he found himself in the Containment Unit again.

The Grey Room had moved back to one of the walls.

Nick wasn't really surprised that it was already over.

It felt just about as long as he had expected.

"We'll need to send a couple of employees in here and see where we stand with things," Nick said as he stood up. "The next couple of days will be filled with tests, but we should be able to optimize the Zephyx production within the week. Just be patient."

Scratch, scratch.

Nick nodded and left the Containment Unit.

After leaving, he checked the Zephyx container, and he found just about as much Zephyx in there as he had expected.

'Two grams,' Nick thought.

Naturally, Nick only worked with it for one hour, which meant that not a lot of Zephyx could have been produced either way, but the severe lack of boredom was naturally also a factor.

Nick had barely been bored in there.

Even though Nick had effectively spent 50 hours in there, he only felt like he had actually spent one or two.

'But I've made a lot of progress on the plans,' Nick thought. 'Maybe I'll work with it just to get more time in the day to organize things.'

'Since I'm no longer limited by the number of hours in the day, maybe I can take on a couple more duties.'

Eventually, Nick left the floor and went to the next Specter.

Chapter 442 – The Berry Bush

Nick walked to the fourth floor, the floor with all the Possession Specters.

After he left the Extractor shaft, Nick looked at the Containment Units.

Every single one was filled.

'I'll buy more Containment Units and stack them on top of the current ones. Stacking Containment Units with Possession Specters shouldn't be an issue.'

'To think that the floor for Possession Specters is already filled after just moving in. I guess that's what happens when you only assign one floor to an entire category of Specters.'

Nick had already created a plan for stacking the Containment Units on this floor while working with the Grey Room.

First, Nick walked to the eastern Containment Units and stopped in front of the southern one.

'This shouldn't be too difficult,' Nick thought as he walked into the Containment Unit.

As soon as he entered, Nick saw the Specter in the middle of the room.

It was a beautiful green bush filled with berries.

Yes, this was a Possession Specter.

Possession Specters could not only possess dead objects but also living objects.

There had been cases in which a Possession Specter had been created with an animal.

There was even a human one.

Nick just looked at the bush for a couple of seconds.

It looked and acted just like a normal bush.

If this were a Physical Specter, Nick might have become suspicious, but this was a Possession Specter.

Possession Specters were notoriously stupid.

The Glasses, the Can, the Screaming Coffin, the Blaze, the Rusty Hammer, all of these Specters lacked intelligence.

And the Berry Bush wasn't any different.

Naturally, the Berry Bush was the name of this bush.

The Berry Bush was an Early Adolescent Possession Specter, and it gained power in a very interesting way.

Nick looked at the berries for a while before approaching the bush.

Then, he plucked five of them.

'The documentation says don't take more than five,' Nick thought. 'I'm confident in my power and my conviction, but not following the documentation would be stupid.'

'So, for now, only five.'

Then, Nick grabbed one of the five berries and consumed it.

As soon as Nick bit down, an indescribable explosion of flavor occurred in his mouth.

His mouth produced an incredible amount of saliva, and all the saliva that gathered around the berry seemed to take on its properties, and within seconds, Nick's entire mouth tasted amazing.

The extraordinary flavor of the berry expanded throughout Nick's entire body, and his mind became alert, focused, and awake.

Nick swallowed the berry almost immediately since his body craved it so much.

A couple of seconds after swallowing the berry, Nick took a deep breath.

'That was scarier than I thought,' he thought as he looked at the Berry Bush with newfound respect.

'If it has such a strong effect on a Mid Veteran, how strong is the effect on a normal person?'

'Well, I don't actually need to ask that question. I already know the answer,' Nick thought with furrowed brows.

Nick remembered seeing several people snorting some blue dust in his past, when he had still been in the Dregs.

People who snorted the blue dust craved it and were willing to give anything for just one more hit.

This blue dust had been made of ground berries from the Berry Bush.



The Berry Bush gained power by making people addicted to its berries.

The more people craved its berries, the more Zephyx it produced.

Naturally, since normal people had been snorting the berries, Anatomy had been operating a drug business.

Was that legal?

Well, a powerful organization could bend the law a lot, but there was one aspect of this drug business that made it impossible to legalize.

The fact that it involved a Specter.

Under normal circumstances, only Extractors were allowed to work with a Specter.

If a Manufacturer wanted to involve the general public, the city would demand crazy standards of security and surveillance.

Nearly no Manufacturer would be willing to deal with that.

This meant that Anatomy's little business had been highly illegal.

However, they had enough sway and enough people in the guards that their little business didn't get unveiled.

It was just one of the many illegal things that big business could get away with and one of the reasons why Nick hated the city's government so much.

'Creating laws but not enforcing them,' Nick thought in disgust as he grabbed another berry. 'Might as well not make the laws at all if they don't apply to everyone.'

Nick consumed the five berries and walked out of the Containment Unit.

Obviously, he wanted to eat more since they tasted absolutely amazing, but Nick had a crazy amount of self-control.

Nick wouldn't use the Berry Bush to sell drugs.

Even without the moral component, Dark Dream didn't have the sway over the guards that Anatomy had, making it far more likely to get found out.

'I guess I can use the Berry Bush as a little treat for the Extractors once a day. As long as I control the access to it, there shouldn't be any danger.'

Naturally, eating too many of the berries would cause very bad things to happen, but Nick would make sure that this never occurred.

This was one of the very few Containment Units that Nick wouldn't open for any Extractor.

He didn't even trust Trevor and Jenny with that one.

Only Julian and Nick would be able to enter this Containment Unit.

Just like with the Agonizing Wait.

'I can't check how much Zephyx it will produce since I'm not a good representation of its actual production. I should check after handing some berries to the Extractors.'

Nick walked away from the Containment Unit and walked towards the south of the floor.

There were two more Containment Units on this floor with new Specters.

Nick looked towards the eastern one and took a deep breath.

'Probably only I can work with this one. I don't think any of my employees will be willing to work with that one.'

'I'm really not looking forward to this.'

Chapter 443 – The Dark Room

Nick took a deep breath and entered the Containment Unit.

He really didn't look forward to this.

As soon as he entered, he saw a big black cuboid in the middle of the room.

The cuboid was about 2.5 meters high, five meters long, and three meters wide.

This was the Specter, and it was a big one.

The people from Anatomy who had delivered the Specters had even needed to remove parts of the floor to get this huge Specter onto the fourth floor.

Luckily, the entrances to Containment Units were generally huge, almost always covering an entire wall.

When Nick saw the Specter, he grew nervous.

This Specter was on the verge of unworkable.

Nick slowly walked around the cuboid until he arrived at its backside.

There, he saw a door.

Nick put his hand on the handle and turned it.

The door creaked open, and Nick looked inside.

Black.

Everything was black.

The name of the Specter was the Dark Room, and just as its name implied, it was a perfectly dark room.

By now, it was obvious how to work with the Specter.

The Dark Room was just like the Fiend of Darkness.

The Fiend of Darkness was a Fanatic that belonged to Kugelblitz, and Kugelblitz used the Fiend of Darkness' shroud to create the Shadow Shrouds.

Nick had worn one of these.

The Fiend of Darkness encompassed people, putting them in a place without any light.

Then, it would keep them inside that lightless space until the Nightmare killed them.

The Dark Room worked the same way.

Just like the Fiend of Darkness, the Dark Room produced Zephyx based on how powerful the person inside it was and how long they were in there.

Working with the Dark Room meant suffering under the Nightmare's influence, and nobody was willing to do that.

The Nightmare's influence was worse than working with the Blaze, and Taren was the only person other than Nick who was willing to work with that.

Nick was certain that Taren wouldn't want to work with the Dark Room.

This left only Nick.

Sadly, there was no real reason for Nick to work with it either.

Sure, the Dark Room produced quite a bit of Zephyx, but Nick's quota of Zephyx his body could absorb was already filled by the Adults.

This meant, just like the Agonizing Wait, nobody would be working with the Dark Room.

However, just for the sake of completionism, Nick decided to work with the Dark Room for one round.

Nick steeled his mind and stepped into the room.

BANG!

The door behind Nick slammed shut and vanished, leaving Nick in absolute blackness.

The Dark Room's door wouldn't reappear until the person inside of it was killed.

As soon as the door closed, Nick found furious and laughing faces appearing around him.

The faces were all shouting and laughing at him before they bit into his body.

Nick didn't move.

He had been under the Nightmare's influence more than once in his life, and he had somewhat grown used to it.

Nevertheless, Nick's entire body started to tense as unimaginable pain assaulted him.

The teeth of the faces started to burn and freeze.

Walls filled with grinding spikes closed in on him.

Burning needles poked into his eyes.

People killed by the Crimson Sea reappeared and tried to pull Nick down into the Crimson Sea with them.

The governor found out that Julian was a Specter and confronted Nick.

Envy arrived in Crimson City.

The worst things that Nick could imagine happened right in front of him.

He tried his best to resist.

However, resisting this indescribable torture consumed all of Nick's focus rather rapidly.

Whenever Nick had been under the Nightmare's influence in the past, he had either had a goal or had a method of escaping.

Right now, he didn't have either.

So, just 15 seconds after he entered...

"AAAHHH!" Nick began to scream as he tried to hold his shoulders.

However, in his illusion, he felt like his arms were bound by searing chains.

Molten metal was being poured into his screaming mouth.

'I can't!'

In his illusion, Nick felt like he couldn't move, but he knew very well that it was different in reality.

Nick turned around and kicked.

BOOOOOM!

The illusions vanished as a gigantic hole appeared in one of the Dark Room's walls.

Nick breathed rapidly and jumped out of the Dark Room.

For a while, he just looked at the Dark Room with fear.

While Nick was looking at it, all the rubble strewn around the Containment Unit started to turn into black smoke, which quickly vanished.

A moment later, the wall of the room very slowly started to regenerate.

It would probably take a couple of hours for the wall to fully regenerate.

This was the only way to get out of the Dark Room.

One had to break a wall.

Luckily, Specters were hard to kill, and as long as someone didn't attack more than one wall, the Dark Room would survive.

After some seconds, Nick finally calmed down.

'How long was I in there? 20 seconds? 30? I don't know,' Nick thought.

'Anyway, I'm glad this is over.'

Then, Nick walked out of the Containment Unit.

He checked the Zephyx container and was a bit surprised.

'Half a gram for about half a minute of work? That's a lot!' Nick thought.

'I wonder, did Anatomy put problematic Extractors in there and left them until they died? That should be a lot of money.'

Nick took a deep breath and sighed.



'It doesn't matter. I'm not doing that.'

Nick looked back at the Containment Unit and fell into thought.

'I guess this will also just be another asset, like the Agonizing Wait.'

'Yet, compared to the Agonizing Wait, this one doesn't even grant an ability.'

'Anatomy tried many times to see if it is possible to get the Nightmare's ability via the Dark Room as a proxy, but, of course, it didn't work.'

'If it were that easy to get an ability from an Eternal, more people would have one.'

#### Chapter 444 – Eternal Abilities

Every Manufacturer lusted for a way to give Extractors the abilities of Eternals.

After all, the Eternals were the most powerful Specters, and a powerful Specter had to have a powerful ability.

Sadly, the Eternals were so powerful that one would only gain one of their abilities if they were willing to grant them.

In order for a human to get an ability or achieve an ability advancement, two prerequisites had to be met.

First, the Specter's body had to be in close proximity.

Second, the Specter needed to produce Zephyx.

As long as someone was in a situation where both of these prerequisites were met for long enough, one would get an ability if they didn't already have one.

So, with these prerequisites in mind, how could someone attain the ability of an Eternal?

The Sun?

The Sun was high up in the sky, and it killed every single human that ascended higher than a couple of kilometers.

Getting close to it was impossible.

Of course, there was a precedence case with the Champion of Light, but Nick didn't know how the Champion of Light managed to achieve that.

The only way Nick could think of was that the Sun had chosen him.

The Null?

Being close to the Null meant perceiving it, and perceiving it meant dying.

Therefore, getting its ability was also basically impossible.

Sure, Nick managed to get it, but he only managed to get it by getting amnesia at just the right time.

Also, there was a high likelihood that the Null consciously decided not to kill Nick.

The Nightmare?

While the Nightmare's influence stretched to every dark place in the world, its actual body was not present.

Nobody knew where the Nightmare's body was.

Humanity only knew that the Nightmare's body had to be somewhere in the world.

However, since its body wasn't anywhere near any human, gaining its ability was also impossible.

Nurse Alice?

Well, technically, it was possible to get Nurse Alice's ability.

But would Nurse Alice hand over her ability?

There had been cases in which Nurse Alice looked at a random bystander and killed them.

It was important to note that these bystanders did not ask for death.

One had to remember that while Nurse Alice primarily killed the people who asked for death, she was still an extremely powerful Specter and also an intelligent and autonomous being.

The only thing stopping her from killing people was whether or not she wanted to.

There was no rule stating that she wasn't allowed to kill random humans.

Most likely, the humans she killed randomly had received an ability from her, and she didn't want her ability to be granted to any human.

Finally, what about the Maw?

Funnily enough, the Maw was the only Eternal that gave out its ability regularly.

Whenever it abducted Extractors for its grand battle royale, it awarded the winner its ability.

The reason for why it did that was unknown.

However, since the Maw only abducted Extractors, no one had actually ever received the Maw's pure ability.

In order to be abducted, one had to be an Extractor, and to be an Extractor, one had to already have an ability.

So, the only thing that the Maw actually gave out were ability advancements.

And that was it.

There were no more Eternals.

Getting an ability from an Eternal was almost impossible.

But that was exactly why everyone wanted to find a way to reliably obtain one.

Anatomy had experimented with the Dark Room many times.

The amount of Zephyx the Dark Room produced was unreasonably high for an Early Adolescent, which made them believe that some of the Zephyx had to come from somewhere else.

Naturally, the most obvious guess would be the Nightmare.

However, after years of trying and after countless experiments, they had concluded that there was no way to get it.

In the beginning, the Dark Room had seemed like a potential goldmine, but in the end, it was just an asset.

Nick looked at the Containment Unit for a while longer before sighing.

Anyone looking at the Dark Room would have that exciting thought.

What if?

What if they were the one?

What if they managed to do it?

But in the end, one had to be realistic.

Anatomy had probably invested hundreds of millions of credits into experimenting on the Dark Room.

If not even they could do it, how could Nick?

Naysayers might disagree and highlight the time when Nick had found the Spilling Bottle. After all, the Manufacturers had also searched for that, but only Nick had found them.

However, people who said that either lived in a fantasy world, were helpless optimists or lacked the critical thinking skills to reliably evaluate reality.

Everyone knew that the Swallowing Swamp had been a Hatchling, and there was basically no incentive to investigate it.

Wow, great, a Hatchling that was hundreds of meters big.

Containing that thing would take more money than it would produce in its lifetime.

Because of that, nobody had really invested considerable resources into the Spilling Bottle.

That was the only reason why Nick managed to get it.

If Anatomy or Kugelblitz had just sent 20 Veterans or so to dig through the Swallowing Swamp, they would have found the Spilling Bottle.

But when it came to the Dark Room, Anatomy had invested a huge amount of resources.

In fact, they had invested so much that they even felt comfortable with giving it to Dark Dream as part of their deal.

'I won't be able to get the Nightmare's ability with the Dark Room,' Nick thought. 'Honestly, I shouldn't even think about it.'

'I'll just treat it like the Agonizing Wait.'

A moment later, Nick looked away from the Containment Unit containing the Dark Room and focused on the neighboring one.

'One more Possession Specter to go,' Nick thought.

Nick pushed the Dark Room out of his mind and walked over to the other Containment Unit.

Then, he took a deep breath and opened the door.

## Chapter 445 – The Red Tub

Nick walked into the Containment Unit.

Luckily, the Specter in here wasn't nearly as bad as the Dark Room.

In fact, it wasn't even as bad as the Grey Room.

This Specter was one that Extractors could work with.

Nick looked at the middle of the Containment Unit.

There, he saw a pristine white tub.

It was about a meter high and seemed to be just big enough for a person to lie in.

However, while the tub was a pristine white, its contents were bloodred.

After all, it was filled with blood.

The tub was filled to the brim with blood, and just by the looks of things, it seemed to almost spill over.

Just a bit more, and the blood would spill towards the ground.

Nick slowly approached the tub and inspected it.

This was the Red Tub, and it was a Late Adolescent Possession Specter.

'It doesn't smell of blood,' Nick thought as he stood beside it.

'Well, no reason to wait. According to the documentation, I should be able to...'

Nick stretched his right arm forward and submerged it in the tub.

Surprisingly, the blood in the tub didn't move at all.

It was almost like the blood didn't interact with the physical world.

Nevertheless, Nick's arm completely submerged in the tub and seemingly vanished.

Nick furrowed his brows.

'It tingles,' he thought.

He didn't move for a couple of seconds.

'Now, it itches.'

A couple of seconds later.

'And now, it hurts.'

Nick took a deep breath and forced himself to wait.

Suddenly, the blood inside the Red Tub expanded and spilled over the sides.

A red curtain of flowing blood surrounded the white exterior of the Red Tub.

Yet, before the blood could reach the ground, it vanished!



It just became more and more transparent as it fell until it finally completely vanished.

Nick's heart rate increased, and he felt quite nervous.

After a couple more seconds, he finally pulled his arm out.

When he saw his arm again, he felt a cold shiver run down his spine.

There were red tubes coming out of his arm, and they were leading back into the Red Tub.

The red tubes looked exactly like blood vessels, and Nick could see his blood draining from his body and traveling down the tubes.

Nick grabbed the red tubes with his other hand and pulled.

SCRTCH!

The tubes tore out of his arm, but not even a single drop of blood was spilled.

In fact, the place where the tubes had been attached to Nick's arm didn't even have any holes.

There was just skin.

Nick let go of the red tubes, and they slowly pulled back into the Red Tub until they were completely gone.

At the same time, the red curtain of blood had also disappeared, and everything returned to how it had been before Nick had entered.

This was how one worked with the Red Tub.

The Red Tub grew more powerful by absorbing blood.

Yes, exactly like the Crimson Fungus.

Sadly, the Red Tub was nowhere near the level of the Crimson Fungus.

The Crimson Fungus was an Early Demon, and it also wasn't a Possession Specter.

Usually, a Specter like the Red Tub would be viewed quite favorably by Manufacturers.

After all, blood was a renewable resource, and it could also be purchased from normal people.

Yet, this city just so happened to have the Crimson Fungus in it, a Demon that also needed blood.

Naturally, the Crimson Fungus produced far more Zephyx per liter of blood than the Red Tub.

And since the price of blood had already been attuned to the Crimson Fungus' Zephyx output, purchasing blood for the Red Tub would not result in a profit.

Because of that, the Red Tub's real moneymaking potential remained untapped.

'But it's still good enough for the Extractors,' Nick thought. 'It hurts, but it's not nearly as bad as the Blaze.'

'Working with it is also pretty quick, and the only limiting factor is the amount of blood available.'

'We can probably get quite a bit of Zephyx out of this one.'

Nick looked at the motionless tub for a while longer.

There was a strange beauty to it.

Nevertheless, a couple of seconds later, Nick walked out of the Containment Unit.

After leaving, he checked the Zephyx container.

'Seven grams. A bit less than expected, but I also didn't get anywhere close to becoming anemic,' Nick thought. 'If 20 Johns give this thing about a liter of blood per day, we should be able to get something like a hundred grams of Zephyx out of this one.'

Of course, a normal person would die within a few days if they gave a liter of their blood away every day.

Luckily, Extractors could regenerate far faster.

Naturally, when Nick thought of the word regeneration, his mind immediately went to the ability of the Blood Specters, Hyper Regeneration.

Wouldn't that ability, in conjunction with the Red Tub, be a great way to make money?

And for once, that would actually work.

Sadly, just like the Blood Specters, the healing ability of Hyper Regeneration would be used up after a couple of uses and needed to recover.

Someone with Hyper Regeneration could probably give over 15 liters of blood to the Red Tub per day, but they would need to work with it several times per day, and they wouldn't be able to work with it the next day since their ability wouldn't have recovered yet.

Nevertheless, maybe it made sense to hire two or three new employees and give them the Hyper Regeneration ability just so that they could work with the Red Tub in the future.

'I'll think about it later,' Nick thought. 'For now, I should check out the last new Adolescent.'

Nick walked away from the Containment Unit and went into the Extractor shaft.

He jumped from the fourth floor to the fifth floor and exited.

On the fifth floor, Nick looked towards the two western Containment Units and approached the southern one.

'I wonder if this one truly is as dumb as it seems on the documentation.'

Chapter 446 – Another Blood Specter

Nick waited for a short moment in front of the entrance to the Containment Unit.

Then, he readied himself.

BANG! BANG!

Nick entered the Containment Unit as quickly as he could.

BANG!

And immediately jumped to the side as a red blur shot past him.

Yes, this was yet another Blood Specter.

By now, it was quite obvious that Anatomy had given Dark Dream plenty of Specters that either didn't produce a lot of Zephyx or were very difficult to work with.

Of course, Anatomy couldn't fill the entire lineup with useless Specters since that might create a legal problem for them.

Because of that, they had given Dark Dream a couple of useful Specters, but only barely enough to count as fulfilling their deal.

Luckily, all these useless Specters were Adolescents.

Dark Dream preferred gathering all the trash in the Adolescent ranks so that their Adults were useful.

Naturally, Blood Specters didn't produce a lot of Zephyx, and their ability also wasn't the greatest, but they acted as good training partners for new Extractors.

Well, usually, that was true.

'It's even dumber than I expected,' Nick thought as he looked at the Blood Specter.

BANG!

A red blur moved diagonally from the floor to the ceiling behind Nick before bouncing off and hitting the ground again.

Nick easily sidestepped and looked at the Blood Specter.

In front of Nick lay a red fish.

It was about a meter long and just lay on the ground.

The next moment, it hit the ground with its tailfin, and its body catapulted towards Nick.

Nick sidestepped again, and the fish's bloody body hit the wall of the Containment Unit before flopping onto the ground again.

This was the Blood Fish, and this embarrassment of a Specter was a Peak Adolescent.

Yet, while it was a Peak Adolescent, even an Early John could win against it with quite a lot of confidence, as long as they had an attack powerful enough to injure it.

Yes, its body was strong, but slapping the ground with a fin wasn't the most optimal way of using said strength to attack.

As Nick watched the Blood Fish flopping around the Containment Unit, he imagined the scene of a normal person dying to it.

Sure, the Blood Fish was silly, but it still weighed several kilos and could throw itself forward at over a hundred kilometers per hour.

Additionally, it was also quite hard.

So, yes, while it was ridiculously weak and pitiful for its level, it was still powerful enough to massacre huge numbers of humans.

But it would look dumb while doing so.

BANG!

Nick kicked the Blood Fish as it threw itself at him again.

BANG!

The Blood Fish hit the wall of the Containment Unit and flopped to the ground.

'One more useless Specter from Anatomy,' Nick thought as he watched it recover.

'Who would have thought that there's a Blood Specter that isn't even useful for training? I mean, I can send a bunch of Initial Johns in here, but what's the point? What are they going to train? Avoiding a fish being thrown at them? I can throw fish at them. We don't need a Specter for that.'

BANG!

Nick punched the Blood Fish again when it jumped at him, and just like last time, it hit the wall and flopped to the ground.

'This is a Peak Adolescent.'

'This is something that Extractors train years for to beat and suppress.'

'Well, I guess even the Blood Ancestor isn't perfect. At least the existence of this stupid fish proves that the creation of the Blood Specters is random, which, in turn, proves that the Blood Ancestor doesn't have intelligence.'

BANG!

'But seriously, a Peak Adolescent? I would expect something like this as a Hatchling. Even the Blood Hawk is scarier than this, and that's an Early Hatchling.'

BANG!

'I wonder if it's actually dangerous if it gets thrown into a pool. Probably. I mean, it's a fish.'

BANG!

Nick punched it one last time and watched it hit the wall once again.

'This should be it,' he thought.

The Blood Fish remained motionless beside the wall for over 20 seconds.

'Yeah, that's it,' Nick thought as he walked over to the exit.

He opened the door.

SLAP!

At that moment, the Blood Fish once more threw itself at him, but Nick just slapped it to the side.

'Okay, but that's it,' Nick thought as he walked out of the Containment Unit.

Then, he closed the door without another incident.

'I should just ask Jenny to beat this guy up once a day. There's no point in sending a normal Extractor in there since there's nothing to be gained except the couple of grams of Zephyx it would produce.'

'Since Jenny is so busy with her job as team leader, she could probably still absorb more Zephyx in a day, and working with this thing is quite easy and quick.'

Nick walked over to the Zephyx container of the Containment Unit and looked at it.



'About 60 grams. As expected,' Nick thought.

Naturally, 60 grams of Zephyx was pitiful for a Peak Adolescent.

'But I guess slapping a fish around for a couple of minutes for a couple thousand credits is a good way to earn a comfortable living.'

'At least, I won't have issues convincing Extractors to work with this thing.'

Nick closed the little door leading to the Zephyx containers again and looked at the Extractor shafts.

'That's it. That's the seven new Adolescents.'

'The Conspirator seems pretty useful.'

'The Agonizing Wait is just a valuable stone waiting to be sold.'

'Same with the Dark Room.'

'The Grey Room is very good. Good Zephyx production and nice ability.'

'The Berry Bush is actually also quite nice. It might even increase the morale of the employees.'

'The Red Tub is okay, I guess. Average Zephyx production but no ability.'

'And I guess the Blood Fish can be used as a treat for Extractors that performed well.'

'Anyway, that only leaves the three Adults.'

'At least those aren't useless,' Nick thought as he approached the Extractor shafts.

Chapter 447 – Eye Contact

Nick went to the third floor.

This was where all three of the new Adults resided.

Nick decided to change the third floor to a floor solely for Adults.

He felt quite nice when he saw that half of the Containment Units on this floor were filled.

Together with the Blaze on the fourth floor, Dark Dream now had five Adults.

'And only two Veterans,' Nick thought with furrowed brows. 'We are allowed to keep the Specters thanks to Julian's power, but we really need more Veterans. Taren and Jenny should really hurry up.'

'Although, even with the two of them, we would still not be even close to working the Adults to peak efficiency.'

'Sadly, getting Veterans from outside is basically impossible. We're not Kugelblitz, after all.'

Nick stopped thinking about Dark Dream's lack of Veterans and looked towards the northeastern Containment Unit.

'According to the documentation, working with this one should be about as exhausting as working with the Talker,' Nick thought.

Nick approached the Containment Unit, took a deep breath, and entered.

As soon as he entered, his gaze focused on the Specter in the middle of the room.

It had a humanoid shape, but that was the only thing that made it appear human.

Its entire body was covered in human eyes with red irises, and all of them frantically looked around the room.

It didn't matter where one looked.

Absolutely every inch of the Specter's body was covered in these rapidly moving eyes.

The way the eyes moved seemed desperate and panicked.

It was almost like they were scanning for a threat.

As Nick looked at the Specter, he noticed that it was impossible not to make eye contact with it.

Whenever Nick looked at the Specter, the eyes he focused on turned completely still and looked back into his eyes.

Yet, he could still see the other eyes frantically moving around in his peripheral vision.

But when his focus went to the moving eyes, they turned still and looked back.

It was quite disorienting for Nick to see constant movement in his peripheral vision, which always vanished whenever he tried to look at it.

Nick wasn't sure which way the Specter was facing since its front and back looked completely identical.

It didn't even have any joints, essentially turning it into a 2D painting of a human, except that the human was filled with eyes.

'This is definitely one of the creepier ones we have,' Nick thought calmly.

Nick was a bit creeped out, but he wasn't really scared.

He knew what this thing could do, and even if it attacked, Nick was quite confident that he could fight it.

This was the Early Adult that they had received, and Nick knew that he could suppress it if necessary.

Several seconds passed in which he only looked at the eyes.

Then, minutes passed.

Nothing changed.

Nick just kept looking at the eyes.

That was how one worked with this Specter.

This Specter was called the Attention Seeker, and just as the name implied, it wanted attention.

Blinking was fine.

Looking away for a brief moment was also okay, but that moment should not be longer than a second.

Naturally, working with the Attention Seeker was very similar to working with the Talker. In both cases, one needed to pay constant attention to one task that couldn't be interrupted.

In the case of the Talker, one only needed to become active every couple of seconds since the Talker also needed to talk, but during those times, one had to actually put effort into what they were saying.

In comparison, the Attention Seeker demanded constant attention, but the attention it wanted didn't need a lot of mental power to be delivered.

It was just looking.

In fact, it was even fine to defocus one's eyes and to stare off into space.

As long as the pupils of one's eyes pointed towards the Specter, it was fine.

For minutes on end, Nick just kept looking from one eye to another.

Since there were many eyes to look at, it wasn't completely boring to look at the Specter.

Minutes passed.

Nick spaced out.

After around half an hour, Nick started to plan things in his mind again.

Suddenly, something in his peripheral vision moved, and Nick focused his eyes again.

Nick's eyes opened widely when he noticed that the Specter had come quite a bit closer. Updated from novelbIn.(c)om

'Guess I looked away for too long,' Nick thought as he looked at the Specter that was now only two meters away from him.

'I should be more careful.'

Sadly, the Attention Seeker did not have any intelligence.

It worked completely on instinct.

If there was nothing living nearby, it just stood there.

If there was something living nearby, it immediately tried to get its attention.

Naturally, it did that by attacking the living being.

As soon as the living being looked at the Specter, it would stop moving and just bask in the attention.

Funnily enough, since it didn't move when anyone paid attention to it, nobody knew how it actually attacked.

After all, nobody had ever seen it attack.

Of course, that was a bit creepy, but that actually didn't matter.

Its behavior was very good for Manufacturers.

Since it didn't attack when anyone looked at it, suppressing it was extremely easy.

Even a John could do it.

They just needed to walk up to the Specter, lift it, move it away, keep looking at it while doing so, and place it back in a Containment Unit.

The thing didn't attack anyone who looked at it.

Extractors were even allowed to poke its eyes.

Although no one had ever attempted to do that.

This meant that this thing was easy to get back in the Containment Unit if it broke out, and it probably wouldn't even kill a single person during a containment breach.

It was one of the safest Specters to have in one's facility.

The only bad thing was that working with it could be dangerous for weaker employees.

If a Veteran spaced out, their Barrier would be strong enough to withstand the Specter's attacks for long enough that they could look at it, after which the attacks would stop.

But if a John spaced out, things would not be so easy.

Nevertheless, that just meant that only Veterans could work with it. As long as a Veteran was working with it, there were no issues.

#### Chapter 448 – Double Deal

Since Dark Dream only had two people who could work with this thing anyway, Nick decided to spend about four hours in there.

The Containment Unit had a clock near the ceiling, and Nick just glanced at it from time to time to see how long he had been in here.

Although, he had to be careful not to look at the clock for too long.

After around an hour, Nick noticed that he kept losing his focus from time to time, and by now, the Attention Seeker was only a meter in front of him.

Another hour later, it was standing directly in front of Nick.

By now, it had come within striking distance.

But instead of becoming afraid, Nick raised an eyebrow in interest.

If he wanted to, he could just walk around the Specter and go to the wall on the other side of the Containment Unit, putting several meters between them.

But he decided against it.

Instead, Nick just kept looking forward.

And for the next two hours, the Attention Seeker didn't move.

How come?

Did Nick suddenly start paying more attention?

No, actually.

He was just as distracted as before, but that didn't matter.

The Specter took up so much of Nick's peripheral vision that looking away from it basically required Nick to turn his head, and he wasn't so distracted that he would do that.

In a way, being closer to the Specter made it easier for Nick to work with it.

Sure, it felt a bit more threatening, but it made working with it much easier.



"Gimme a sec. I have to check the clock," Nick said.

Then, he moved his head to the side and looked past the Specter at the clock.

Within a second, he went back to his old position.

"Alright, we can continue," Nick said.

Silence.

Naturally, the Specter didn't answer.

Instead, its eyes just looked into Nick's eyes.

A couple of minutes later, the four hours Nick had planned for this session were up.

'Time to head out,' Nick thought. 'But first...'

Nick slowly pushed his right arm forward.

A moment later, he felt the squishy feeling of his hand touching a bunch of exposed eyes, but he just pushed more.

The Attention Seeker seemed to float backward as Nick pushed.

It was almost like it was a human-shaped balloon.

When Nick pushed it to the middle of the Containment Unit, he walked backward toward the exit.

He opened the door without looking at it, stepped through, and closed the door in front of him, cutting off the eye contact.

Nick was quite good at this since he left in a similar way whenever he was done with the Talker.

'Alright,' Nick thought after leaving. 'Let's check the Zephyx.'

He walked over to the small door hiding the Zephyx containers and opened it.

When he saw the Zephyx, his eyebrows rose in positive surprise.

'103 grams for about four hours of work,' Nick thought. 'That's a bit less than the Talker, but within the same ball park. Although, I have to keep in mind that the Talker is a level higher. If the Attention Seeker advances, it will definitely produce at least the same amount if not more Zephyx than the Talker.'

'It's also quite easy to work with. I could even plan a couple of things while working with it.'

'Honestly, I prefer working with it than with the Talker.'

'Its ability is also excellent for Bruisers.'

The Attention Seeker's ability made others look at the ability user through many subtle means.

A feeling of threat.

A feeling of being the weak link.

Weird lights appearing in one's peripheral vision when one wasn't looking at the ability user.

A feeling of interest.

Strange sounds.

In short, as long as one didn't focus on the ability user, focusing on anything became quite difficult.

After all, one's focus was always pulled back to the ability user.

Because of that, planning assaults on other members of a group was very difficult due to the constant distraction.

The best way to deal with this issue was to kill the ability user, and this kind of attention was exactly what a Bruiser wanted.

Sure enough, the Adults that Dark Dream had received were far more useful than the Adolescents.

The Attention Seeker was a great Specter and very useful!

'I can probably give Irwin a 12-hour shift with this guy, send him to the Peak Adult, give him a full day of rest, and repeat. I don't want to work with the Peak Adult before I'm a Peak Veteran myself. Working with that thing is very dangerous, not only for me but also for Dark Dream.'

Nick looked towards one of the two western Containment Units.

That was where the Peak Adult was located.

However, Nick decided to work with that one last.

For a good reason.

Working with it basically represented not being able to work with anything for the next 24 hours.

'I can think about this one later. First, I should look at the Mid Adult,' Nick thought as he looked towards one of the two eastern Containment Units.

'If Anatomy didn't lie, this one is a Mid Adult that is going to become a Late Adult within the next year. As long as that statement holds true, I don't need to work with the big one until I'm a Peak Veteran.'

'I just hope that they were honest. After all, we demanded a Late Adult during negotiations, but they didn't want to give us any of the ones they had.'

'Instead, they offered us this amazing dual bundle.'

'Two Specters that are very similar to each other.'

'The light and the dark.'

'The good and the bad, and both of them give abilities that are very complimentary with each other.'

'At least, that's how they phrased it.'

'They said the complementary partner is the Early Adult. I didn't know the identity of the Early Adult during negotiations, but I know now that it is the Attention Seeker.'

'So, this one is supposed to be very similar to it.'

'And according to the documentation, it is.'

'I just hope it advances soon.'

Nick walked away from the northeastern Containment Unit and went towards the neighboring one.

Chapter 449 – What's the Time?

Nick stopped in front of the Containment Unit and readied himself.

He took a deep breath.

Then, he closed his eyes and opened the door.

Nick could not see anything inside the Containment Unit due to his closed eyes, which made him quite nervous.

Walking towards a threat with closed eyes went against every instinct a human had.

Nick closed the door behind him and walked towards the right with outstretched arms.

Squelch!

Nick suddenly touched something slimy and soft, and he did his very best to not open his eyes.

He moved his hand around, trying to get past that slimy thing.

Yet, the slime didn't seem to end.

"KI KI KRRR KI KRRR KIKI KI KRRRKII KI KI!"

An alien, insect-like sound came from directly in front of Nick.

It was very high-pitched, abrupt, and loud.

Nick had no idea what kind of creature could make such a noise.

However, Nick just kept his eyes shut and searched for the wall.

Eventually, he got past whatever was in front of him and finally managed to touch the wall.

"What are you doing here?" the voice of a small girl asked innocently from beside Nick.

However, Nick didn't answer and just kept searching with his arm.

"DON'T TOUCH THAT!" the deep voice of a man shouted.

Nick's hand flinched, but a moment later, he returned to searching.

Finally, he found the corner!

Nick walked towards the corner and sat down.

"Death is but a temporary respite from torture," a chorus of people spoke from behind Nick.

Nick didn't turn around.

BOOOOOM!

The sound of a massive explosion came from behind Nick, and he even felt his hair getting blown away by the shockwave.

Yet, he didn't turn around.

Squelch. "AAAAAHHHH!"

The sound of something sharp piercing through flesh echoed throughout the Containment Unit, accompanied by the shrill scream of a dying woman.

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry! Please, don't ignore me! I'll never do it again!" a small boy shouted.

The next moment, Nick felt something incomparably soft touching the back of his neck.

His body shivered, but Nick didn't move.

"Oh, come on," a husky female voice whispered into Nick's ears. "Don't you want to take a peek?"

"I can be whatever you want."

Nick didn't do anything.

"Oh, by the way. What time is it?" a casual male voice asked.

Silence.

"Hello? I'm talking to you!"

Silence.

"Dude, I'm not doing my thing right now. I genuinely just want to know the time. You can look without getting attacked."

Silence.

A sigh.

"I get that you don't want to look at me since I always attack whoever looks at me, but come on. I really just want to know the time. You don't even need to look at me. Just tell me."

Silence.

"Just trust me once, okay? You're pretty strong. I can feel that. At worst, we have a little scuffle, and that's it. And if that happens, you can be sure that you shouldn't have looked at me or whatever."

"I just want to know what time it is. It's kind of important."

Silence.

"Come on, man, I'm alone in here the entire day. You know how boring this is? I just want to talk a bit."

Silence.

More silence.

Minutes of silence.

"AAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHH!"

A terrifyingly loud screech in Nick's ear.

Nick's body shivered, but that was everything he did.



Silence.

"AAAAHHH!"

Silence.

Silence.

Silence.

"AAAAHHH!"

"AAAAHHH!"

Silence.

'I guess that's the last phase,' Nick thought.

He knew what was happening, but he was still agitated.

This Specter gained power by being perceived but being ignored, which was funny since it constantly did its best to not be ignored.

If it wanted to be perceived but ignored, it could just keep humming behind Nick or slowly move its whatever over his back.

Instead, it tried every trick in the book to get Nick to answer or to look at it, except for actually attacking him.

According to the documentation, it was amazing at imitating all kinds of sounds and voices, and it used that ability to get its victims to look at it.

After which it killed them.

This was probably one of the strangest Specters in existence due to its contradictory nature.

It acted like it wanted to kill its only source of power, which was strange.

Every other Specter wanted to keep their supply of food steady and constant.

But this one actively provoked people into looking at it when that was actually in opposition to what every Specter wanted, becoming powerful.

In a way, this Specter was really similar to the Attention Seeker, even though the similarity was based on how contrasting the two were.

It was actually funny and ironic how the guy that wanted to be seen actually didn't say or do anything to get said attention, while the guy that wanted to be ignored did his best to be seen.

'Seriously, this one should be called the Attention Seeker. Not the other one,' Nick thought as another shrill scream came from beside his right ear.

Working with this Specter was always the same.

First, it tried its best to get someone's attention.

It used screeches, sounds, begging, threatening, and all manners of distracting acts.

And when it realized that it wouldn't get any attention, it defaulted to becoming the most annoying thing in existence.

People weren't sure if it did that because it thought this was the greatest chance of gaining attention or if this was just to spite and annoy the Extractor working with it.

It just randomly became silent and imperceivable for a random period of time, ranging from anywhere between one second and one hour.

Then, it screeched loudly in one's ear and became silent again.

Rinse and repeat.

Working with it wasn't very dangerous since keeping one's eyes closed was actually pretty easy, but it was probably one of the most aggravating and frustrating things to do.

The constant jump scares of having someone screech in one's ear were insanely infuriating.

'I get why Anatomy named this one the Annoying One.'

"AAAAHHH!"

Chapter 450 – Regretful Ability

"AAAAHHH!"

Nick stood up.

'Alright, that's enough! The alarm didn't ring yet, but I'm done with this fucking thing!' Nick thought.

'I don't know how long I've been in here, but it's been long enough!'

"Hey, hey, hey, where are you going? Can't you stay just a bit longer?" the voice of a nervous child spoke.

Nick ignored it and searched for the exit.

Instead, he touched a bunch of slime, which was blocking his way.

"Come on, just stay a bit longer," the sad voice of a big man said.

Nick searched for a way to get past the slime, but the slime just seemed to move with him, keeping him from reaching the entrance.

After around a minute of trying, Nick stopped moving.

He wanted to warn the Annoying One, but that would just provoke an attack.

Ironically, attacking it had a lower chance of provoking an attack than talking to it.

Nick took a deep breath.

Then, he moved his arm towards the slime with a lot of force.

"Hey, watch it! This took hours to get right!" the voice of a disgusted woman shouted.

Nick shoved the slime to the side, and he felt the heavy weight of the Specter shift.

"You fucking asshole!" the Specter shouted from the side. "I'll fucking kill you!"

BANG!

An explosion came from Nick's right, and he felt a strong wind.

However, he just slowly kept walking towards the direction where the exit should be.

In the end, no attack arrived.

Finally, Nick arrived at the exit.

"Fine, you win this time," the voice of a moping child spoke.

Then, Nick opened the door, stepped out, and closed it behind him.

Outside the Containment Unit, Nick took a deep breath and opened his eyes.

The light in the hallway almost blinded him, but he was almost glad to be blinded since that meant that he didn't need to work with the Annoying One anymore.

At least, not today.

'Honestly, I would much rather work with the Talker. Talking for eight hours is way better than sitting in this Containment Unit for an hour!'

Nick took another deep breath in annoyance.

But then, he sighed in helplessness.

'But the Annoying One needs to be worked with constantly to assure that it will become a Late Adult soon, and we only have two people who can work with it.'

'I guess I'm forced to work with it for around 12 hours per day if I want it to advance within the next year.'

'Maybe I'll just make some earplugs and get some kind of vibrating alarm to know when the time is up.'

'Ah fuck, I forgot! The documentation said that if it notices that we can't hear it, it starts putting its slimy appendages down our shirts, and it even starts sexually molesting us!'

Nick groaned.

'This fucking guy!'

'Is this why Anatomy wanted us to have this guy so badly?'

Nick looked at the console and checked the time.

'Two hours and 42 minutes. That's how long I've been in there.'

Then, he looked at the little door leading to the Zephyx container.

'Let's see if it produced a good amount of Zephyx, at least.'

Nick walked over and opened the door.

'About 80 grams,' Nick thought. 'That puts it at about the same level as the Talker.'

Nick sighed again.

'I guess there really is no excuse for not working with this thing except for annoyance.'

Nick closed the door again and looked at the entrance to the Containment Unit.

'At least there's one good thing about this specimen.'

'Its ability!'

The Annoying One had the opposite ability of the Attention Seeker.

Instead of pulling attention toward the user, attention was pulled away from the user.

Someone affected by the ability would find other random things much more interesting than the user.

It was like the user of the ability turned into an unassuming little grey man that didn't elicit any attention.

While the Attention Seeker's ability was perfect for Bruisers, the Annoying One's ability was perfect for Runners and Assassins.

Naturally, after looking at the ability, one would think that this would be perfect for Nick.

And one would be right.

'If I had known this Specter existed, I would have chosen it for my ability advancement when I became a Veteran,' Nick thought.

'But now, it's too late.'

During ability advancement, an Extractor could only choose an ability from a stronger Specter.

An ability from a weaker Specter would not work.

It wasn't important how much stronger the Specter was. It was only important that it was stronger.

Nick could use an Elder, a Fanatic, or even a Demon to advance if he managed to become an Expert in the future.

However, he couldn't use Hatchlings, Adolescents, or Adults.

If he wanted to use the Annoying One for his ability advancement, he would need the Annoying One to become an Elder first.

And that would take at least two decades, and it might even never happen.

Not every Specter could advance to the Elder Stage.

Naturally, Nick wasn't willing to wait for that long.

Julian's fast growth put a lot of pressure on Nick.

'Well, there's nothing I can do about it anymore. Also, I'm not even sure if that ability would have been better.'

'The ability to blind my enemies has already saved my life, and I can even create some light in the darkness.'

'I guess it depends on what I value more, staying hidden for longer or being able to escape after already being detected.'

A moment later, he looked at the western Containment Unit.

'I should get everything prepared for the next 24 hours. I don't want to take any chances.'



Nick left the third floor and went to his office.

For the next couple of hours, he made several plans and put his affairs in order.

He wouldn't be involved in Dark Dream for the next 24 hours.

Then, he went back to the third floor and stopped in front of the last Containment Unit.

'As long as I don't do anything, nothing should happen,' Nick thought.