

The Sun 451

Chapter 451 – Ten out of Ten

Nick took a deep breath and opened the door leading to the Peak Adult.

Nick was still a Mid Veteran, which meant that he was quite a bit weaker than a Peak Adult.

Additionally, there was nowhere to hide inside a Containment Unit, making Nick even more nervous.

If that thing attacked, Nick would actually be in danger.

However, according to the documentation, it should not attack.

When Nick opened the door, he looked inside and saw a dead tree in the middle of the Containment Unit.

The tree barely had any roots and looked like it was close to falling over.

It was barely two meters tall, and it only had a single branch coming out from its trunk.

However, the tree was actually not the Specter.

This tree was just something that the Specter owned.

The Specter had been found with that tree, and when they tried to take it away from the Specter, it started attacking.

In the end, it was determined that letting the dead tree stay with the Specter was the best idea.

As long as it had its tree, the Specter wouldn't be nearly as aggressive.

On top of the single branch of the tree, Nick saw it.

A black crow.

That was it.

It was just a black crow.

Crows used to appear in Crimson City in the past, but the appearance of the Crimson Sea had effectively killed all of them and made it impossible for new ones to appear.

While the outside world was mostly dead, there were some occasional birds flying from one city to another.

Birds were probably the only animals that could somewhat traverse the outside world, but if they wanted food, they needed to go to a city.

When Nick appeared, the crow turned its head to look at him.

It turned its head very calmly and slowly, and when Nick saw its eyes looking at him, he felt like his heart had just stopped.

Fear exploded inside his heart, and he felt like he was about to die.

Nick was involuntarily reminded of the first time the Dreamer had noticed him in the sewers.

It was the feeling of being looked at by one's greatest predator.

Cold sweat broke out all over Nick's body, but he didn't move.

A couple of seconds passed.

Finally, the crow looked away again and focused on a random point on the wall.

Nick took a deep breath.

'That should be it,' he thought.

Nick walked over to the entrance of the Containment Unit and very carefully opened it.

After stepping out, Nick closed the door and checked over three times to see if it was really locked.

Nick's heart rate spiked, and he very slowly and carefully opened the small door leading to the Zephyx containers.

When he saw the Zephyx container, Nick took another deep breath.

'980 grams! Almost an entire kilo!' Nick thought in shock.

'980 grams of revenue without any financial investment. That's insanely profitable!'

Nick left the Zephyx container in there and carefully closed the door.

Finally, he slowly walked towards the stairs and climbed them.

While Nick was walking towards his office, he felt extremely vigilant and nervous.

Only when he entered his office and closed the door did he somewhat calm down.

'And now, I have to remain here for the next 24 hours,' Nick thought.

Nick thought back to the crow.

'It produces a crazy amount of Zephyx, but it takes someone out of commission for 24 hours in return. Additionally, working with it is extremely dangerous.'

If Nick had to rate his Specters on a scale of one to ten when it came to how dangerous it was to work with the Specter, the Bleeding Lady would be a three. She could attack an Extractor, but that rarely happened, and it was quite easy to see when she got mad.

The Money Sink and the Dreamer were ones since they didn't even want to attack anyone.

The Talker would probably be a seven or something similar. The guy would definitely attack, and one had to be quite good at going out of the Containment Unit before that happened.

The Attention Seeker was probably a two or something like that. Sure, it could attack, but it wouldn't get more than one attack out before someone definitely looked at it.

And the crow?

That was a full ten.

Working with it was extremely dangerous.

So, what did it do?

The name of the crow was the Tragedy, and it gained power by stealing luck.

Anyone who entered the Tragedy's Containment Unit would lose all their luck, and only bad luck would happen to them within the next 24 hours.

Naturally, in a world filled with Specters and greedy Manufacturers, having bad luck could very quickly prove fatal.

If Nick randomly walked around outside, one of the metal plates below him might break.

In reflex, Nick would look down, and he might accidentally look at a small part of the Crimson Sea peeking through the ground.

Alternatively, Nick might walk across a powerful hidden Specter that was searching for a new victim.

Maybe a powerful Specialist from Anatomy or Kugelblitz would come across Nick just when Nick went into a lonely alley, and with no witnesses around, they might decide to kill him.

Naturally, walking around outside the city would be even worse.

Because of that, Nick couldn't possibly leave Dark Dream during that time.

But even inside Dark Dream, problems could occur.

If Nick worked with another Specter, it would be like asking for trouble.

Maybe the Talker wouldn't find the conversation stimulating enough and immediately attacked.

Maybe Nick would think of an especially interesting thought while working with the Attention Seeker and lose his focus for a while.

Maybe Nick would fall for one of the Annoying One's tricks.

Maybe Nick would lose all his bets while working with the Gambler.

Maybe Nick would accidentally kill the Blood Fish while punching it.

Maybe the Conspirator just so happened to talk about a conspiracy that perfectly aligned with Nick's beliefs.

Maybe Julian would get nervous while looking at Nick and ask himself if he was underestimating Nick.

No matter what Nick did, it would turn into a tragedy.

Hence, the name.

So, the only thing Nick could do was to stay in his office, not interact with anyone, and maybe just train a bit.

That was all he could do for the next 24 hours.

Luckily, the effect only lasted for 24 hours.

Nick couldn't imagine having only bad luck for his entire life.

That sounded absolutely horrible.

How would anyone be able to survive that?

Chapter 452 – Plan for the Future

For the next 24 hours, Nick only trained inside his room.

Since the building was incorporated into the megastructure, the walls were extremely hard, and Nick would need to use all of his power to damage them.

A constant feeling of nervousness accompanied Nick, and he only calmed down when the 24 hours were up.

Nothing happened within those 24 hours.

However, that wasn't due to luck but due to his preparations beforehand and his actions during the period.

No one had relied on him within the last 24 hours, and no one had been in contact with him.

According to Anatomy's documentation, the bad luck was like an aura, and it only affected the surroundings of the person.

If someone with the bad luck aura walked around, only bad things in their immediate vicinity would occur.

Anatomy tested this by giving Extractors a very precious but very fragile treasure.

Having that thing fall over or get destroyed would be terrible luck.

Additionally, since that thing was already very fragile, it would be very easy for the bad luck to destroy it.

If bad luck acted like water, it would definitely affect this part first since it would be the path of least resistance.

Yet, as long as the object was not in the same room as the Extractor or within a couple of meters, nothing would happen to it.

Even if random factors like wind or animals were introduced, the chances of the object breaking were not higher than normal.

However, if that object were placed close to the Extractor, it would get destroyed within minutes.

The longest time the object had survived was 14 minutes.

So, as long as someone isolated themselves from the outside world during the period, nothing crazy would happen.

Sadly, this meant that the Extractor had to be put out of commission for a full 24 hours.

Even if an emergency happened, the Extractor couldn't get involved since their involvement would make things worse instead of better.

If a Specter broke out and an Extractor with the bad luck aura got involved, chances were that three more Specters would break out within the next couple of minutes.

It was imperative to not interact with the Extractor in any shape or form!

In Nick's case, he couldn't even work.

If he wrote documents, a terrible error might sneak into them, which could prove horrible for Dark Dream's financials.

If he planned something, he might accidentally overlook something of critical importance and accidentally send an Extractor to their death.

He couldn't do anything except train.

At least the ability of the Tragedy was good.

Someone with that ability could destroy all the luck of an enemy in exchange for almost all of their Zephyx.

This could prove devastating to an enemy's lineup.

The ability could also be used on Specters.

With no luck, chances were high that the Specter would run in the wrong direction and get caught more easily.

Sadly, people with this ability could basically only use it once per fight, and after they used it, they became useless until their Zephyx recovered.

When the 24 hours were up, Nick left his office and did his daily duties of checking up on all the Specters and their Zephyx containers.

Some time later, Nick reviewed every new Specter and created new plans for them.

Dark Dream had 38 Extractors and 28 Specters in total.

That was not a great ratio.

In general, a Manufacturer wanted three Extractors per Specter.

Some Specters required only one Extractor, but some of them required more.

This meant that Dark Dream needed to double the number of their Extractors.

Especially bad was the fact that Dark Dream was lacking Veterans.

Irwin was the only Veteran besides Nick.

Nick tasked Irwin to work with the Annoying One for twelve hours.

After that, Irwin would visit the Tragedy.

Then, he would get two days off work, but he would need to stay inside an isolated room for the first 24 hours.

Luckily, Irwin didn't have a life outside work due to the things that had happened a couple of months ago.

Nick would work with the Annoying One for twelve hours a day, do his daily duties, visit the Grey Room to gain some time to plan and organize things, and work on these things for the remainder of the day.

Then, everything would repeat.

The highest priority right now was to get the Annoying One to advance.

Nick wanted to avoid working with the Tragedy until it was absolutely necessary since that put him out of commission for an entire day.

And that was basically it when it came to the Adults.

Nobody worked with the Talker.

Nobody worked with the Attention Seeker.

The Annoying One was only worked with for about 66% of the time.

And the Tragedy was barely worked with.

Nick and Taren visited the Blaze from time to time, but there wasn't much to do there.

Sadly, Dark Dream did not have enough powerful people to work with the Adults, and they were essentially throwing potential profits out of the window.

But there wasn't much they could do in the short term.

The only thing they could do was wait, hire more people, and put more effort into training their people.

Luckily, Nick was no longer under pressure when it came to finding Adults.

His path to advancement was open, and the only thing he needed to do now was to work.

Nick worked on Dark Dream's development every single day.

The first thing he did was to talk with Taren and Jenny about their future plans.

Dark Dream needed Veterans, but not every John was willing to get through the torturous process of achieving Zephois.

Nick wanted to be absolutely sure that his two team leaders wanted to become Veterans.

Naturally, Taren immediately answered positively.

His career had become his life, and he wanted to become more and more powerful.

He would definitely try to achieve Zepnosis.

He even agreed to get restrained so that he didn't eat or drink anything.

However, things were not that clear for Jenny.

She was not sure if she wanted to go through something so horrible just for her job.

Chapter 453 – Two Years

It was not expected for every Extractor to go through the process of achieving Zepnosis due to how brutal the experience was.

That was also the reason why only a third to a fourth of all Johns managed to become Veterans.

However, as a team leader, it was expected that Jenny would undergo Zepnosis.

With so many Adolescents and Adults now, Dark Dream expected to gain many more Veterans, and it wouldn't be appropriate for a John to be a team leader.

Jenny said that she would give Nick her answer within seven days.

And seven days later, her answer arrived.

Yes, she would do it.

In the past, Jenny used to have a partner, but things didn't work out very well, and they broke up about two or so years ago.

Her partner had not been an Extractor, and she had been the main reason why Jenny wasn't willing to put all of her power into her job.

But ever since they broke up, Jenny had been in a bit of a limbo.

She was interested in getting a new partner, but it wasn't easy for someone like her to get one.

It wasn't that there were not enough suitors. Far from it! As a beautiful young woman with a lot of money, she had many suitors.

The issue was that she just didn't click with anyone.

After working with Specters for nearly a decade now, Jenny had changed quite a bit.

Her outlook was very different, and she easily got bored by the interests of normal people.

And well, romance between Extractors of different Manufacturers was a no-go due to a conflict of interest.

Romance with one of her employees was also a no-no due to the power imbalance.

Sure, Taren and Irwin could fit, but those two just weren't to Jenny's taste.

In the last seven days, Jenny had thought a lot about her life, and in the end, she decided that she wanted to put more into her work.

That was why she decided to go through with it.

Five months later, ten years after joining Dark Dream, Jenny did it.

It was brutal, but she had a lot of willpower and managed to do it.

Three days without sleep, water, or food.

She had achieved Zephois.

Shortly after she had achieved Zephois, she had also undergone her ability advancement and became a Veteran.

Another year later, Taren also became a Veteran.

According to him, achieving Zephois was easier than expected.

11 years after being established, Dark Dream now had four Veterans.

During this time, Nick also advanced a level and finally became a Late Veteran.

His speed of advancement was unprecedented.

A Late Veteran at the age of 27 was crazy.

Jenny and Taren had both become Veterans in their early 30s, which was also fast, but that wasn't even close to Nick's speed.

Dark Dream's growth had also skyrocketed.

Even with Jenny and Taren having advanced, Dark Dream still had ten Peak Johns and twelve more Johns of different levels.

Sure, these numbers were not very crazy, considering that two entire years had passed, but things changed when one looked at the Newbies.

Nine Peak Newbies.

Nine Late Newbies.

Nine Mid, nine Early, and nine Initial Newbies.

45 Newbies.

A number of 45 Newbies was very impressive, even for other Manufacturers.

The number of Newbies a Manufacturer had showed how great they were at creating new Extractors.

And for once, Dark Dream wasn't the worst in that department.

Even if one ignored Kugelblitz and Anatomy, who barely had any Newbies since they simply pulled experienced Extractors from smaller Manufacturers, Dark Dream still didn't have the lowest number of Newbies.

In fact, Solace had the lowest number, at only about 20.

Gemini, a Manufacturer that partially specialized in making Newbies, also only had 50, just a couple more than Dark Dream.

Only Ghosty's Lab with 80 Newbies had a lot more.

When it came to creating new Extractors, Dark Dream was in third place and almost rivaled second place.

Sadly, they only had 22 Johns for now, putting them in the last spot as long as one ignored Kugelblitz.

After all, Kugelblitz didn't need weak Extractors.

When the Newbies of Dark Dream walked around outside, they were no longer being constantly looked at by Newbies from other Manufacturers.

In the past, since Dark Dream had been so much smaller than all the other Manufacturers, Newbies from Dark Dream had been singled out.

Not anymore!

Now, it was normal to see the occasional Newbie from Dark Dream walking around.

Within these two years, Dark Dream had also acquired a new Specter.

It was called the Black Knife, and it was a Hatchling Possession Specter.

If it cut someone, they would receive a dangerous disease that hijacked the nervous system to send signals to all muscles, creating powerful spasms that could tear someone apart.

The Black Knife had killed many humans outside, and Dark Dream had chanced upon it.

Luckily, Newbies could survive the disease.

The severity of the disease varied based on the victim's power, of course.

A normal human would die within three days.

An Initial Newbie had a high chance of dying within seven days. Luckily, Recovery Liquid could get rid of it.

An Early Newbie would survive the disease, but they would be in agony for a week.

A Mid Newbie would feel pretty bad for three days.

A Late Newbie would feel bad for one day.

A Peak Newbie would feel a bit bad for a couple of hours.

Taren decided to only let Late Newbies and Peak Newbies work with it, but he would prioritize Peak Newbies.

Of course, since the first layer of the fourth floor had already been filled, a second layer was created, and the Black Knife officially became the first Specter of the second layer of the fourth floor.

While the Specters had not increased by a lot in these two years, the number of Extractors had more than doubled.

However, Dark Dream was nowhere near done growing.

Chapter 454 – Dark Future

While Dark Dream was busy growing, the Extractors in the city became more and more nervous.

Things have changed since Anatomy captured that Late Demon two years ago.

Coral people started to appear in the city.

In the beginning, the coral people were rather rare, but after two years, they appeared almost daily.

Even more, all of these coral people were Extractors.

So, where did they come from?

Naturally, everyone knew that the coral people worked for Anatomy, but not everyone knew who these coral people had been before they had been infected by the corals.

Well, two years ago, after Anatomy had captured the Sea King, the coral Specter, they had become far more active when it came to encroaching on the territory of other cities.

Capturing Extractors belonging to Crimson City was obviously a no-go, which was why Anatomy started to focus on the cities to the west and to the south, but mainly the one to the west.

Due to the vast domain of the Corrosive Dust, going to Darksy City in the south was very difficult.

Additionally, Anatomy seemed to have a deal with Metal Works City to the east, and they also never really went there.

Because of that, the city about 150 kilometers to the west, Stone Crystal City, was the one that had the most conflicts with Anatomy.

The conflicts had gotten worse and worse over the years, and by now, even Kugelblitz avoided sending people toward the West.

After all, Stone Crystal City knew what was going on, and the Manufacturers there obviously wouldn't just keel over and die.

No, they would fight back and take revenge.

Since Anatomy kept attacking them, they would fight back against Crimson City.

Several Manufacturers had already complained to the governor since they were suffering as well, but the governor only told Anatomy to calm down a bit.

Of course, that only made Anatomy act more covertly but with just as much intensity.

Naturally, Anatomy took the most damage out of all the Manufacturers, and they had lost several Experts and even two Specialists.

However, they had also gained a Specialist and a couple of Experts in the form of coral people.

With the addition of the three Specialists they had gained when they had captured the Sea King, they now had four Specialists, seven Experts, and around 20 Veterans as coral people.

On paper, Anatomy was losing employees due to the constant conflicts, but when one included the coral people, Anatomy was actually gaining employees.

The only downside was that the coral people couldn't work with Specters and, therefore, couldn't produce any Zephyx of their own.

However, every coral person increased the amount of Zephyx the Sea King produced passively.

Of course, Kugelblitz saw what was going on, but they didn't seem to do anything, which confused everyone.

If Anatomy kept expanding like this, they would sooner or later overtake Kugelblitz.

So, why wasn't Kugelblitz doing anything?!

Nobody knew.

As more years passed, things only got worse.

Three years later, Anatomy had transformed almost 50% of its employees into coral people.

Of course, they didn't actually transform them. They just exchanged their employees' lives for prisoners who were turned into coral people.

However, in total, Anatomy seemed to lose more employees than they were gaining.

That was different from how it had been three years ago.

But that wasn't due to Stone Crystal City.

It was Kugelblitz.

It seemed like Kugelblitz was finally waging a secret war against Anatomy.

While none of the battles had been noticed by anyone outside the two Manufacturers, the results spoke for themselves.

Kugelblitz had lost quite a few employees during "excursions".

Kugelblitz seemed to focus on the living employees instead of the coral people, and the reason was quite obvious.

They wanted to put even more pressure on Anatomy's living employees.

They wanted to make Anatomy's employees leave Anatomy.

Sadly, that was easier said than done.

Contracts made by Kugelblitz and Anatomy were extremely overbearing, and quitting any of them would put the person in prison for over ten years.

Of course, that was absolutely insane!

Ten years of prison for just quitting?!

However, Anatomy and Kugelblitz had worked together several decades ago when they had come up with these contracts.

Together, they had influenced the city's government to make these contracts legal.

Sadly, the true destiny of someone who quit Anatomy wasn't really prison.

Sure, they would be sent to prison, but almost all of them "mysteriously vanished".

The most popular theory was that they were secretly turned into coral people, but that couldn't be confirmed since none of them showed up in the city again.

If Anatomy turned them into coral people, they would be hiding somewhere inside Anatomy.

And the governor no longer inspected Anatomy.

With Anatomy becoming more and more powerful, the governor was also in more and more danger.

Luckily for the smaller Manufacturers, this huge conflict left Kugelblitz and Anatomy busy with other things, which meant that they could find Specters more easily.

However, all of them suspected that this might only be a temporary respite before disaster.

The Manufacturers suspected that Anatomy wanted to replace all of their employees with coral people, creating a perfectly uniform and loyal work force.

Even more, all the coral people were connected to each other via the Sea King.

Every coral person could see what every other coral person could.

Assassinating a single coral person was almost impossible since every other coral person would immediately know when one of them was in a conflict.

Of course, Anatomy's employees could also tell what was going on.

But what were they supposed to do?!

They couldn't quit, or they would die!

If they stayed, they would also die!

If they ran towards the west or south, they would be killed by Stone Crystal City and Darksky City.

If they ran towards the east, they were delivered back to Anatomy by Metal Works City.

Towards the north was the gigantic sea, and nobody knew if they could survive there.

So, the only way to flee was to somehow get past one of the cities in secret.

But that was extremely risky.

Things became worse and worse.

Yet, the governor wasn't doing anything, and Kugelblitz seemed to only engage Anatomy a little bit.

The future looked dark.

Chapter 455 – Covered Up

Of course, things didn't improve over the next couple of years.

The issue with Anatomy just kept getting worse and worse, and yet, no one really seemed to try to stop them.

Sure, Kugelblitz was having a couple of covert battles, but the losses on both sides were not as brutal as one might think.

They were more like small skirmishes instead of actual battles, which was strange.

Didn't Kugelblitz realize that they were going to get destroyed by Anatomy at some point if they didn't do anything?

"It's the shareholders," Julian told Nick one day. "The 30% that are owned by random people do not want to risk losing all of their investment, and Wilfred is also on edge."

Wilfred Langley was Kugelblitz's CEO and owned 30% of the company.

He was a CEO who mostly worked in the back and left most of the company's duties to Aria and Vernon.

Wilfred was also only a weak Specialist.

"From what I could tell," Julian said, "Wilfred refuses to take any fights that pose a significant risk to Kugelblitz. He only allows Extractors to attack if they have a 90% chance of success without any casualties. As long as the prognosis is not a flawless victory, he won't allow anyone to attack Anatomy."

"And since the normal shareholders are only interested in keeping their investment safe, they also won't commit to any big actions."

"Of course, not all shareholders share the same opinion, but it's still enough that it is essentially 50% against 50% when it comes to the war. Kugelblitz has a 60% rule, where a decision has to get 60% of the votes to be approved, essentially making it impossible for Kugelblitz to go all-out against Anatomy."

Naturally, Julian knew all of this since he had many friends amongst the shareholders of Kugelblitz.

'So, Anatomy gets to do all of these things because Kugelblitz's power is scattered amongst several people with their own selfish interests,' Nick thought. 'If Aria or Vernon owned 60% of Kugelblitz, Anatomy wouldn't be able to grow this quickly.'

Of course, this reminded Nick of the city in general.

The Manufacturers were also allowed to do whatever they wanted essentially since all of the city's forces were scattered.

'One human can be kind, but a group of people will only be interested in their own good,' Nick thought. 'Giving corporations power in the government will only be detrimental to the people.'

The image of the governor appeared in Nick's mind.

'And that's all because you let them,' he thought with disgust. 'You're so afraid of losing your privileged and safe position that you let this chaos continue!'

'Why didn't you immediately join Kugelblitz as soon as things got a little out of control? Did you think that it would become easier in the future?'

'Or are you already secretly on Anatomy's side?'

Whenever Nick thought of the governor, disgust and revulsion bubbled inside of him.

'The governor's weakness is the reason why this city is such a nightmare for the normal people!'

Of course, Nick wasn't referring to physical weakness but mental weakness, the inability to act decisively during a crisis.

'Sadly, there's nothing I can do for now. I can only continue strengthening Dark Dream.'

And so, three more years passed, and Nick was now 33 years of age.

During these three years, things only got worse.

Anatomy only had 20% of its original employees left.

However, they had gained over 100 coral people, and all of them were Veterans or stronger.

During the past few years, Anatomy even managed to capture ten Specialists from other cities!

It was so bad that Stone Crystal City even officially complained to Crimson City.

If they didn't stop this rampant attack, they would refuse to trade with them, and they would attack every single person from Crimson City on sight.

They would even send their Heroes into Crimson City's domain to kill their weak Extractors!

Obviously, this would be horrible for Crimson City.

And yet, the governor did nothing!

He just reprimanded Anatomy.

He didn't even give them a sanction or fine to pay!

By now, Nick was quite sure that the governor was on Anatomy's side.

There was simply no other explanation for his actions.

Naturally, many other people also believed that, and Kugelblitz faced another internal war in the form of a vote.

Ban the governor from working with the Crimson Fungus?

Once more, the opinions were split, but this time, surprisingly, the other way around.

The random shareholders and Wilfred wanted to ban the governor, but Aria and Vernon voted against it.

According to Aria and Vernon, as soon as they threw the governor out, he would fully fall into Anatomy's camp.

Additionally, they said that they believed that the governor was still neutral in this conflict.

Again, the vote didn't go through, and nothing changed.

The governor still enjoyed preferential treatment from both sides.

So, once more, a sudden paradigm shift was avoided, and the future continued its slow descent into the abyss.

Yet, there was one positive thing that happened this year.

The Crimson Sea had been fully covered!

After around a decade of work, the city had finally managed to expand to its old size, and since the entire city was constructed with new stainless steel, there were no holes in the ground anymore.

There was no more red curtain surrounding the city!

There was no constant fear about looking down anymore!

The city looked very similar to its appearance from before the Crimson Sea, except that its outer layer wasn't made of rusty sheets of metal.

The entire city seemed beautiful and clean.

Yet, below the surface, things were still the same.

There were still no sewers.

Well, the people shat into pipes that dumped all of their excrement into the Crimson Sea, technically making it a sewer or cesspit, but it wasn't really a sewer.

And yet, the people did not feel better in any way.

With the rising threat of Anatomy, the people almost wished back the time when the Crimson Sea had just broken out.

At least back then, they knew what would be waiting for them.

Chapter 456 – Dark Dream Becoming Powerful

Things became more and more problematic.

However, Dark Dream continued to grow, and when it came to Newbies and Johns, they had become legitimately scary now.

Dark Dream's number of Newbies had not increased much. They only went from 45 to 50.

However, six years had passed since they had increased the number of their Newbies so drastically, and many of the Newbies had already become Johns.

Dark Dream now had a whopping 75 Johns!

They had even more Johns than Solace and Gemini, with both of them only having 50 each!

Anatomy used to have more Johns than Dark Dream as well, but they had lost almost all of them, leaving them with only something like 20.

Only Ghosty's Lab had more Johns than Dark Dream, with 170.

Of course, since they were only Johns, they didn't increase Dark Dream's power by a lot.

However, having a lot of employees had some benefits.

For example, the Johns and Newbies stumbled upon way more Specters inside the city.

Ever since the Crimson Sea had been covered, more Specters appeared within the city again, and Dark Dream had managed to catch a few.

For example, they had caught three Hatchling Possession Specters over the years.

Of course, since they were only Hatchlings, they were not worth that much, but they could be used to train a couple of new employees.

That was also the reason why Dark Dream's number of Newbies had increased a bit.

They had also caught an Adolescent Possession Specter, but working with it wasn't easy.

Nevertheless, Dark Dream now had 13 Possession Specters, which was nothing to scoff at.

They had also caught four Adolescent Physical Specters. Two of those could be used to train weak Johns and Newbies, while the other two were just regular Specters, basically.

However, all of these were only Dark Dream's unimportant catches.

As for important catches, they had made two.

One of them was called the Trail of Stars, named after the mythical concept of stars, which were supposed to be objects that were in the sky.

However, these obviously didn't exist since nobody had seen even one of them.

The Trail of Stars was moving trail of appearing and disappearing stars, which seemed to have been made by small children.

The Trail of Stars could fly, disperse, and regather.

Yes, the Trail of Stars was a Force Specter, and Dark Dream had managed to catch it.

The Trail of Stars gained power by fulfilling wishes in a devious manner.

For example, if someone wished that they wouldn't need to go to work tomorrow, that person might find their place of work blown to bits and their boss killed.

If someone wished for some food, they might find themselves getting captured by a person who got off on feeding someone to death.

The Trail of Stars showed quite a lot of power when fulfilling wishes.

As a test, Nick had asked someone to wish that he wouldn't bother them as much anymore.

Naturally, the Trail of Stars tried to kill Nick, and he was quite surprised when he found that it had the destructive power of a Late Adult!

That was more than shocking since it was just a Late Adolescent!

After failing to kill Nick, it went to attack the one who made the wish, but since Dark Dream had already been ready, it was suppressed before it could do anything.

Of course, to test all of this, Nick had needed to free the Trail of Stars from its Containment Unit.

But that hadn't been an issue since Dark Dream had so many powerful employees now with Suppressor abilities.

They didn't even need a Specter Cage to transport Force Specters anymore.

The ability of the Trail of Stars and the amount of Zephyx it produced wasn't anything special.

It was just the fact that it was a Force Specter that made it special.

Force Specters were always worth a fortune.

Even the useless ones.

As for the other catch, labeling it a catch was not completely right.

It was a trade.

Dark Dream traded three Adolescents for an Adult.

The three Adolescents that were traded away were the Blood Fish, the Agonizing Wait, and the Puppy.

Among this group, Nick only missed the Puppy.

Working with the Puppy had been great, but he needed to give Ghosty's Lab something that was actually good.

After all, the Blood Fish and the Agonizing Wait were not worth much.

The Puppy had been one of Dark Dream's first Specters, but the Specter they had received was worth far more.

It was an Initial Adult called the Icy Ghost.

The Icy Ghost was a floating sphere of something that could only be called coldness.

Anything that approached it would freeze over, and that was exactly how the Icy Ghost became more powerful.

The more things it froze, the better.

However, the reason why it was worth so much was its ability.

Its ability allowed Extractors to infuse things with cold.

Bullets, other people, Specters, anything.

That made this ability insanely versatile.

Many people had been interested in purchasing the Icy Ghost, but Ghosty's Lab had never wanted to let it go.

That was until it advanced to becoming an Initial Adult recently.

Surprisingly, as soon as it advanced, Ghosty's Lab was fine with selling it, which seemed completely contradictory.

Nevertheless, Dark Dream made a good catch with the Icy Ghost, but there were other good things that had happened.

The Dreamer had become an Adult a couple of years ago, and it had already advanced to becoming an Early Adult.

This was great news for Dark Dream since the Dreamer was their flagship Specter and since not every Specter could become an Adult.

However, the Dreamer wasn't the only Specter that advanced.

The Abductor also advanced, and it was now an Initial Adult.

But there was one last Specter that also advanced.

The Grey Room had also become an Adult.

With this, Dark Dream now had nine Adults!

Dark Dream was growing more and more, and Dark Dream's employees felt great about the future.

But then, something horrible happened.

It might not have involved Dark Dream, but it might implicate them in the future.

Anatomy had done something drastic.

Chapter 457 Selling Specters

"Everyone is converted?" Nick asked Julian with furrowed brows.

Julian nodded. For once, he wasn't wearing his trademarked arrogant smirk.

"Two days ago, Anatomy's leadership called every Extractor in for a meeting. The Extractors believed that they would be let go since everyone has already seen where Anatomy is headed."

"But after they called everyone, they suppressed all of them and brought them to the Sea King one at a time," Julian explained.

"So, it finally happened," Nick said with a dark voice. "No more human employees are left in Anatomy."

"Not quite," Julian answered, eliciting a raised brow from Nick. "There are five human Specialists left. These five and the three Heroes are still left."

Nick remained silent for a while.

"Has the governor made his decision?" he asked.

"He already made a ruling," Julian said.

Nick listened intently.

"He ruled that Anatomy didn't have the necessary number of Extractors to take care of so many Specters and that Anatomy had to rectify that issue within the month," Julian said.

"So, he's actually going against Anatomy?" Nick asked.

Julian snorted. "What have I taught you about human nature, Nick?"

"That humans are inherently selfish and that it is easy to control them if I use that selfishness," Nick said.

"Right," Julian said as he leaned back in his chair, "and what's the option that would bring the governor the most benefit?"

Nick furrowed his brows. "Short term or long term?"

"Short term, obviously," Julian said with a disgusted chuckle.

"Staying neutral," Nick said.

Julian nodded. "He has not joined hands with either of them."

"But then," Nick said, "why did he order Anatomy to hire normal people again, and why is there no mention of the forced conversion of their current employees?"

"He didn't," Julian said.

"He didn't what? Tell them to hire more people or didn't mention the conversion?" Nick asked.

"Both."

"Both?" Nick asked in surprise.

"He didn't mention the conversion in any way, and he didn't order Anatomy to hire more people."

"He told Anatomy to rectify the issue, and Anatomy is planning on doing that."

The next moment, Julian took out a stack of papers and threw them on the table. "We got that from Anatomy just a couple of minutes ago."

Nick grabbed the stack of papers and looked through them.

The more he read, the wider his eyes became.

"Is this...?"

"A full list of every Specter Anatomy owns," Julian said, "except for their Fanatics and the Sea King."

"Ten Hatchlings, 32 Adolescents, Nine Adults, and five Elders," Julian said.

"Nine Adults?" Nick asked with furrowed brows. "That's also how many we have."

"Don't forget that they gave us three of them," Julian said, "and I also believe that Anatomy gave Metal Works City even more than they gave us. They used to own over 20 Adults and over 10 Elders."

Nick looked through the list of Specters some more.

"Why did they give us that list?" he asked.

"They gave this list to every Manufacturer. Their intentions should be obvious," Julian said.

"They want to sell them?" Nick asked in skepticism.

Selling Specters was generally viewed as a bad financial decision since they were assets that continued to produce money while being held.

They essentially made money out of nothing.

"Every Specter weaker than the Fanatics," Julian said.

"How much?" Nick asked.

Naturally, Nick was very interested in purchasing these Specters.

Sure, horrible things were happening, but there wasn't really anything he could do about this.

Might as well strengthen Dark Dream.

Julian laughed in a sinister manner, and Nick raised an eyebrow.

"They're selling it for a price that we can't pay," Julian said.

"They want Extractors in exchange for the Specters," Julian added.

Nick's eyes widened.

They wanted Extractors?!

Of course!

If they got some Extractors, they could make even more coral people, and they would grow even more powerful!

"Two Hatchlings for one Veteran."

"One Adolescent for one Veteran."

"One Adult for three Veterans or one Expert."

"One Elder for eight Veterans or two Experts."

"Those are their prices," Julian said with a chuckle.

Nick remained silent for a while.

Naturally, giving Anatomy these Extractors meant dooming them to a fate worse than death.

This offer was not attractive for Dark Dream.

First of all, they had too few Veterans compared to how many Specters they had.

Dark Dream needed Veterans more than Specters right now.

Additionally, Nick wouldn't accept this offer even if they had a surplus of Veterans.

One reason was that this could influence the fate of the city.

He was willing to pay credits since an influx of credits wouldn't change a lot, but an influx of manpower could give Anatomy just what it needed to win.

And the other reason was that Nick refused to do something like that to his employees.

He was fine with killing problematic ones, but he wouldn't be okay with giving them to the Sea King.

Maybe he felt like that because he himself came very close to that fate.

Or maybe he just considered torture and cruelty to be a no-go.

People could call Nick a killer or murderer, but they couldn't call him a torturer.

However, whether or not that was better was left to the individual.

Nick remained silent for a while.

"Did the governor comment on this?" he asked.

"What do you think?" Julian asked.

"Of course not," Nick answered.

Julian just chuckled a bit.

Nick looked at the stack of papers.

"He's not even pretending anymore," he said. "He might as well directly shout from the rooftops that he is corrupt."

"Is he?" Julian asked with a smirk.

Nick just threw an annoyed look at Julian. "Isn't he?"

"I think you're misunderstanding him," Julian said. "He's not corrupt."

"He's just leaving the fate of the city in the hands of the people."

Nick raised an eyebrow.

"You see, if Anatomy still has Specters left over in a month, every additional Specter will be confiscated by the city, and Anatomy won't be paid for those."

A malicious and arrogant smile appeared on Julian's face.

"As long as none of the Manufacturers throw coal into the fire for warmth, their house won't burn down."

"As long as everyone puts the need of the community above their personal wealth, things won't look so bad."

Julian chuckled.

Nick just scowled in disgust.

He wasn't disgusted at Julian.

Chapter 458 Who Accepts?

Whenever Specters were moved from one Manufacturer to another, it couldn't be kept hidden.

While the identity of the Specter could be kept hidden, the fact that a Specter was moving couldn't since every Specter would be moved via a Specter Cage.

The guards and the powerful Extractors would notice such a Specter Cage.

So, it was quite clear which Manufacturer accepted Anatomy's offer.

After one day, who had accepted Anatomy's offer?

Nobody.

No Specters were moved during this day.

What about the second one?

Also nothing.

The third?

Nothing.

Every Manufacturer had received the offer, but none had accepted it yet.

Would they actually all decide to sacrifice a bit of their profits for the good of the city?

Obviously, Dark Dream wouldn't accept it.

The city also wouldn't accept it.

While Solace was still separate from Dark Dream, they were too closely connected.

Hera and Ramona knew Nick and Julian, and they also knew that Nick would be the one making the decision whether to buy or not, like most of the time.

For some reason, Julian seemed to leave running most of the company to Nick.

Hera and Ramona knew that Nick wouldn't accept such an offer.

He might seem cold, emotionless, and strict, but his Extractors were treated extremely well.

He never forced them to do anything.

He didn't even intimidate or threaten them into doing something.

Obviously, Nick put a lot of value on his Extractors, and accepting such an offer would ruin the image he had created.

Originally, the two of them were on the fence about this matter.

However, Nick's firm refusal of the offer and his conduct made Solace decide against purchasing a Specter.

Just like Dark Dream, they would refuse the offer until the very end.

It was just not worth straining their relationship with Dark Dream.

That left Gemini, Ghosty's Lab, and Kugelblitz.

They were the only ones that could possibly purchase a Specter.

As it stood right now, Anatomy only had around 150 coral people.

Kugelblitz also had around that many Extractors.

However, Kugelblitz had over 50 Experts, which was crazy.

They had almost 80% of all the Experts inside the city.

Anatomy had a couple of Experts as coral people, but they didn't have 50.

Yet, they had around a hundred Veterans, double what Kugelblitz had.

But if Ghosty's Lab were to help Kugelblitz, the number of Veterans would become even again, and they would lose in the Expert department.

Of course, these numbers would only become relevant in an open battle.

In these secret skirmishes, the number of weaker Extractors didn't matter.

In an open battlefield, however, three Peak Veterans with fitting abilities could take down a Mid Expert.

For example, Clayton, Petry, and Jason were all Peak Johns right now, and if they used their abilities simultaneously on a Mid Veteran, the Mid Veteran would run out of Zephyx within a few seconds.

Naturally, combining abilities like that required a lot of training with each other, and it wasn't that easy to accomplish.

But Anatomy didn't need that.

Anatomy had the Sea King.

Anatomy had the coral people.

All coral people were controlled by the same being, the Sea King.

The coral people were like many little fingers that the Sea King could move.

If the Sea King ordered it, every single Coral Person all over the city would lift their hand at the same time and point at the same spot.

They were one being.

They were one organism.

This meant that they could perfectly combine their abilities.

Even more, since a being of much greater power was perceiving the surroundings and giving orders, Veterans could even react to an attack from a Specialist.

Of course, the Veteran wouldn't be fast enough to actually avoid the attack, but the order to move would have been given in time.

It was like a slug that saw a big foot slowly coming down on it.

It would see the foot and try to move, but it wouldn't be able to evade.

This made these coral people extremely dangerous in an open conflict.

As it stood right now, Anatomy was a genuine threat to Kugelblitz, even though they didn't have as many Experts.

As long as they didn't get any more coral people, things still looked good.

The Manufacturers also knew that.

As long as nobody gave in to greed, Anatomy most likely won't launch an open attack.

One week had passed, and nobody accepted the offer.

Yet, Nick still didn't feel any hope.

'An individual human can be kind and benevolent, but a group of humans will always aim to grow so fat that they will die under their own weight,' Nick thought with disgust.

'Giving the masses the power will always result in short-term gains at the price of long-term losses.'

Another week passed.

Nobody accepted the offer.

Only two weeks were left until the governor would confiscate all of Anatomy's weaker Specters for the city.

Half of the time had passed, and Anatomy was still stuck with all of their Specters.

They hadn't gained a single Extractor.

A couple more days passed.

No one accepted the offer.

Only ten days were left.

No one accepted the offer.

Nine days were left.

No one accepted the offer.

Eight days were left.

Nick still wasn't hopeful.

He knew humanity too well.

Seven days.

Six days.

Five days.

After 25 days, no one had accepted the offer yet.

Ramona and Hera became hopeful.

Would the war be avoided?

Nick still wasn't convinced.

Humanity was disgusting, and he knew that everyone was only waiting for the last few days.

Four days.

Nothing.

Three days.

Nothing.

Two days.

Still nothing.

The morning of the last day arrived.

Tomorrow, all of the Specters for sale would be confiscated by the city.

Everyone looked with nervousness and excitement at the situation.

"Hahahaha."

Julian laughed from beside Nick as they stood outside of Dark Dream's building, looking up at the middle layer.

Nick didn't answer.

He wasn't surprised.

'Humans...'

Several Specter Cages were coming out of Anatomy...

'Are disgusting.'

And entered Kugelblitz.

Chapter 459 Voted Suicide

On the last day, Kugelblitz accepted the offer, and several Specters were moved from Anatomy to them.

Naturally, the Extractors had already been handed over to Anatomy beforehand.

No one knew which Specters were purchased, but Julian told him that five Specter Cages were moved from Anatomy to Kugelblitz.

Most likely, none of these Specters were Hatchlings or Adolescents.

This meant that Kugelblitz must have forked over at least 15 Veterans.

Nick was not surprised in the least.

He had expected this to happen.

'If you don't cut a veggie cube into bite-sized chunks, they will choke on their own greed,' he thought.

However, as long as things didn't get any worse, Kugelblitz still had a chance at winning.

Julian kept laughing from beside Nick.

Nick just looked upwards with an apathetic gaze.

Meanwhile...

"Why are you that dead set on committing suicide?!" an angry shout reverberated throughout the room.

"I worked here for over a century! I gave my life for this!"

"And now, you want to destroy it for just a couple of Specters?!"

The other eight people in the meeting room looked at the furious woman.

The one who had just shouted was Aria Light.

Naturally, she had voted against accepting the offer.

This was the first time Aria Light had raised her voice in a meeting in several decades.

Her conduct had always been perfect.

But today, that streak of perfection ended, and she lost control of her anger for the first time in a long while.

And to be fair, how couldn't she?

Kugelblitz had just voted to accept the offer of all five Elders from Anatomy for ten Experts.

That was madness!

How could these people vote for this?!

"I know you don't like it," a sickly-looking man with a weak smile said softly from the head of the table, "but the board of directors has already come to a decision. Please, keep in mind that we all own part of Kugelblitz."

Aria glared at Wilfred Langley, the CEO of Kugelblitz.

Meanwhile, Vernon sat beside the furious Aria, and he looked at the table with a devastated expression.

He looked like he couldn't believe what had just happened.

Naturally, Vernon had also voted against it.

He wasn't a good person, but he also wasn't a dumbass.

Giving Anatomy that many Experts would most likely result in Kugelblitz's destruction!

Vernon owned 20% of Kugelblitz, and Aria owned another 20%.

Wilfred Langley owned 30%.

The six other people in the room were representatives of groups of people who all owned 5% each.

Kugelblitz only went through with major decisions if 60% of the company decided to go through with it.

And with Aria and Vernon voting against it, but it still going through...

Yes, every single other person in the room had voted for it.

Vernon and Aria had noticed that Kugelblitz kept making progressively worse and worse decisions over the past couple of years, but they would have never believed that Kugelblitz would vote for what was essentially suicide.

There was no logic behind all of this!

"Miss Light," a fat and tall man with brown hair and a beard politely said, "you do not need to worry. Ghosty's Lab and Gemini know that they can't accept the offer as well."

"We have already reached the bottom line of what everyone believes to be safe."

The man chuckled a bit.

"They shouldn't blame us for eating the second-to-last fruit of the dying tree. We were simply faster."

"And it also won't be our fault if that tree dies without a sapling. We are not the ones that took the last fruit."

The man slowly shook his head in confidence.

"They won't dare to eat the last fruit. Otherwise, their precious tree will die."

"Normal humans don't choose death, Miss Light."

The other five normal directors looked just as relaxed and confident as the fat man.

No other Manufacturer would dare to strengthen Anatomy even more!

After all, they wouldn't want to die, right?

And just like that, Kugelblitz would gain five more Elders while not strengthening Ghosty's Lab or Gemini.

"That's not what's going to happen!" Aria shouted. "They know that we are Anatomy's first target! They might prefer us over Anatomy, but if we go through with such reckless and irresponsible decisions, their opinion might change!"

The fat man laughed like it wasn't a big deal.

"Change their opinion? Miss Light, who would willingly put their life into the hands of the Sea King?" he asked.

Aria Light glared at the man.

Then, she looked at all the directors, who just smiled back politely.

Lastly, she looked at Wilfred.

Wilfred just drank some coffee.

Aria gritted her teeth, but instead of raising her voice again, she stormed out of the room.

Silence.

"I didn't know Miss Light had such a temper," one of the directors said.

Vernon looked up from the table and glared at the director.

The director just coughed awkwardly and looked away.

Some seconds later, Vernon stood up.

"I have to deal with some things," he said before leaving the meeting room as well.

Meanwhile, about 250 meters below this meeting room, some other people were also meeting.

"Kugelblitz has accepted the offer," Ghosty said to Herman Reichert.

Herman sighed. "Just as expected, their greed knows no bounds."

Silence.

"Will we join them?"

Silence.

Ghosty just looked out of the window.

A couple hundred meters away...

"Kugelblitz has accepted. What should we do, Mindy?" Cindy Wunder, the Chief Zephyx Extractor of Gemini, asked.

"Why are you even asking me, Cindy?" Mindy Wunder asked back. "We're always of the same opinion."

Cindy looked at Mindy for a bit.

Then, she looked at the table before a grin appeared on her face.

Finally, she looked at Mindy again.

"You know how spiteful I can be," she said.

Mindy looked back, and her grin mirrored Cindy's.

"Aren't we both?"

Down below...

"Hahahahaha," Julian kept laughing.

Nick just looked up with disappointed disgust.

Maybe he actually still had some hope hidden deep in his heart.

Sadly, even if that were true, it would have been extinguished as soon as he saw another five Specter Cages leaving Anatomy and going towards Gemini.