

The Sun 111

Chapter 111 – Rotten

"Save a thousand people and repay my debt?" Nick asked with a confused voice.

"Yeah," the rat said. "You destroyed one statue boy, and you would kill one statue boy above killing a thousand innocent people. So, if you save a thousand people, you would have saved more than one statue boy, right?"

Nick furrowed his brows. "I don't think it works like that."

"Why not?" the rat asked with annoyance.

"You can't really cancel a bad deed out with a good deed," Nick said.

"Why not?" the rat repeated.

Nick sighed. "Even if I saved a thousand people, Horua would have still died unjustly."

"But a thousand people surviving something that should kill them is not unjust?" the rat asked with a raised eyebrow.

Nick frowned and looked at the rat. "What are you trying to say?"

"Destiny, you know?" the rat said. "If statue boy was supposed to live longer, you changed his destiny, and changing someone's destiny is unfair, according to you."

"So, if you change someone's destiny in the opposite way by letting them live longer, that would also be unfair."

Nick sighed. "That's different. As humans, we are supposed to help each other. Changing someone else's destiny for the better is kind of expected of us."

The rat raised its eyebrows in disbelief as it looked at Nick.

Nick just looked back.

"What?" Nick asked with annoyance.

"Did you hear what you just said?" the rat asked.

"Yeah, so what?" Nick asked.

"You said it is expected of humans to help other humans," the rat said.

Nick just raised an eyebrow.

"Nick, have you looked outside?" the rat asked. "I don't know what you're seeing when you look outside, but I see plenty of depressed people who are in a horrible situation because of other humans."

"Like, so many Manufacturers are literally using humans as livestock for their Specters, and they are the ones in charge."

"How come the strongest humans are the ones that don't act like humans, according to you?"

"Shouldn't the most successful individuals of a species be used as a standard for what this species is supposed to live up to?" The rat asked.

Nick didn't answer.

The rat was right in the sense that the strongest humans tended to act as non-human as it got.

For example, the Manufacturer that hired the Inspectors to search for Specters could have simply told the city about the Dreamer. If that had happened, the Dreamer would have long been caught and contained, and so many lives would have been saved.

Instead, they kept the existence of the Dreamer a complete secret, allowing it to feed on the poor people of the Dregs for who knew how long.

Even more, the Crimson Fungus itself was responsible for the horrible lives of the people in the Dregs. After all, the Crimson Fungus was the one that consumed all the blood that the tax officials harvested.

The world seemed even darker and worse to Nick right now.

'Even the strong people are only interested in their own wealth.'

'Humanity is being besieged by Specters everywhere, and we can't even resist the strongest of them.'

'Albert said that the truly powerful Extractors, the ones at level seven and eight, are trying to fight the Specters, but the level five and level six Extractors are only interested in engorging themselves.'

At that point, rage appeared in Nick's chest.

'What's even the point of getting more Zephyx if you're not willing to join the fight against the Specters anyway?!!'

'What are Manufacturers like Kugelblitz and Anatomy even doing with all of that Zephyx?!!'

'While consuming harvested Zephyx isn't nearly as effective as generating it oneself, we could probably still produce many more level six Extractors with all the Zephyx that's just wasting away in some warehouses!'

'With more level six Extractors, we could capture more level six Specters and make the lives of everyone better.'

'If the people of the Dregs are suffering, they should at least suffer for a good cause that improves the lives of the majority of people instead of only an elite few.'

Nick didn't say anything for quite a while, and the rat only looked at him with interest.

'Yes, I don't deserve happiness because of what I did to Horua, but others still do!' Nick thought.

'If I can improve the lives of everyone else, maybe even Horua would want me to live on.'

Nick took a deep breath.

Nick had found a goal for his life.

Sadly, emotions and logic didn't always get along.

Even though Nick knew what he wanted to do, he still felt this all-consuming void in his chest.

His thoughts didn't matter in this case.

Logic couldn't help with something like this.

In the end, Nick could only sigh.

'It will be difficult, but if I actually manage to improve the lives of so many people, maybe I'll feel better.'

'Maybe I'll actually deserve to live on.'

'I can never repay Horua, but I can do my best to improve the world around me as some form of redemption.'

For the first time in quite a while, Nick actually stood up from his bed and walked over to one of the windows.

Nick looked at the city outside.

The shining sun was illuminating the grey and brown buildings.

There were no plants anywhere.

The air was stale and barely moved.

The people moved around with care.

Men were keeping an arm around their women, and the women kept an arm around their kids.

What were these people afraid of?

It wasn't the Specters.

While Specters were humanity's enemy, the vast majority of humans never came into contact with one, except for Nurse Alice or the Nightmare maybe.

No, these people were afraid of other people.

People in the Dregs often secretly killed each other.

People of the Outer City sometimes attacked people of the Dregs due to rage and frustration.

Extractors could kill basically anyone and just pay a fine, and if the fine was smaller than what they would get from the corpse-eating Specter, it turned into a business expenditure.

Nick knew that very well.

After all, the Screaming Coffin was exactly such a Specter.

With Nick's new outlook on life, the world appeared different now as well.

It seemed so rotten.

What if he could fix it?

Chapter 112 – A Goal

For a while, Nick just looked out of the window.

He saw so much cruelty and wasted potential.

If the rich could give just a little bit to the people of the Dregs, the people wouldn't need to pay with their blood.

Then, they could be healthier and could contribute more to society.

'Of course, people who don't work don't deserve to own as much as people who do, but they deserve some dignity at least. At least, they should have enough to survive.'

'As long as people can have a home, food, water, and a family, it's okay.'

'If I can turn this dream into a reality for this city, I can say with certainty that I would have somewhat redeemed myself.'

'While Horua will never get to live his life, at least his death won't have been pointless.'

'Maybe he would have even given his life if it meant improving the lives of so many other people.'

"So, you've been standing there for a while," the rat said awkwardly. "Got anything to tell me?"

Nick didn't look at the rat and only looked at the city outside.

"I guess there's something that I can do with my life," Nick said.

Right now, Nick's emotions were rather complex.

On one hand, he felt some righteous indignation and drive for retribution, but on the other hand, the emptiness in his chest still made Nick feel like he wanted to die.

It was a strange mix of motivation and lethargy.

The only thing he could do to somewhat solve or suppress the conflict was to focus on making something of his life.

'I might have been a stupid idiot in the past, and I might even still be one, but I might not always be one.'

"So, you feel better?" the rat asked.

Nick didn't immediately answer.

"In a way, yes," Nick said. "I know what I want to do, at least."

"Okay, good, good," the rat said with a grin. "You don't want to kill yourself anymore?"

Nick released a sigh. "I guess wanting to kill myself is not really important. The fact is that I can't."

"There's something I want to do, which means I can manage to survive."

"Whether I want to or not."

"Great!" the rat said. "Then, my job here is done."

After that, the rat walked over to one of the windows.

"If you need some information about Specters, you can always call me," the rat said with a grin. "The price will be higher than the first time, but that shouldn't be a problem. After all, a Specter is worth more than just a couple of corpses, right?"

Nick furrowed his brows and didn't answer.

"See you soon, Nick," the rat said before leaving through the window.

Nick didn't look at the rat and kept facing the city.

'Parasite,' Nick thought with narrowed eyes. 'You might have helped me in seeing a way forward, but we both know that you only want more corpses.'

'Albert said that Specters are unable to feel things like empathy, and that has proven to be correct in this conversation. The Parasite couldn't even understand the value of human life and how killing a child is different from killing a criminal adult.'

'You might appear nice and helpful to me, but in the end, you still convince countless people to let you kill them.'

'Without you, many people would still be alive.'

Nick narrowed his eyes further.

'For now, I need you, but in the future, things will change.'

Nick turned away from the window and sat on his bed, but this time, he didn't just blankly look at the wall.

'This entire city is run by monsters, and if I want to improve the lives of everyone significantly, I need to become as strong as them.'

'While some donations here and there won't be an issue, giving everyone enough money so that they don't need to pay the blood tax anymore will almost certainly put a target on my back.'

'It's obvious that Kugelblitz is earning a crazy amount of credits from the blood tax. The 100 credits probably can't even remotely compare to how much two liters of blood are worth.'

'I can use my wealth right now to improve the lives of everyone in the Dregs, but I will quickly turn into a target and get killed.'

'The only chance is to become more powerful.'

'If I can become a level six Extractor, I will probably be strong enough to save the people of the Dregs.'

'A Hero, huh?' Nick thought as he looked forward with furrowed brows.

'The fact that the current leaders of the city are called Heroes is disgustingly ironic.'

At that point, Nick took a deep breath and released a sigh.

'And I won't be any different, I guess. After all, what Hero kills a kid?'

Nick shook his head rapidly to get rid of the intruding thoughts that threatened to drag him back into lethargy.

Instead, Nick stood up and looked at the weapons on the ground.

'I need power,' he thought as he slowly put on the braces.

'For that, I need Zephyx.'

'And to get Zephyx, I need enough power to acquire and defend it.'

At that point, Ardum's smirking face shot through Nick's mind.

'People like Ardum will try to kill me and acquire my wealth, and they probably won't intend to use that wealth to improve other people's lives.'

Next, Nick grabbed one spear and put it on his back.

'I haven't trained in quite a long while, and I've already noticed that my physical condition has somewhat deteriorated.'

'I should get back to training.'

But when Nick thought of training, he already became exhausted, and he quickly realized why.

'Right, I haven't properly eaten in a long while.'

At this moment, Nick wasn't looking at food as an indulgence anymore but as fuel.

He needed food to survive and to become stronger.

'Let's get some food with lots of protein, and then, I will run around the Dregs to improve my stamina.'

Nick nodded once and stepped out of his room.

Chapter 113 – Training

For the remainder of the day, Nick focused on training and planning his future.

Strength, money, status.

Nick needed all of these things if he ever wanted to repay a little of the things he owed Horua.

The more time passed, the more Nick realized how much time he actually had to dedicate to whatever he wanted.

Horua had eaten so much of Nick's time and focus that, without him, Nick felt like there was nothing else to do.

For the first time in forever, Nick actually felt exhausted after working out.

Nick had run around the Outer City several times.

The citizens were not very surprised by a Zephyx Extractor running around. After all, there were quite a few level one Extractors in the Outer City, and they also needed to keep their fitness up.

From time to time, there were Extractors that kept jogging and running throughout the city.

Naturally, Nick sped up and slowed down constantly.

Since Nick was always putting in the same amount of effort, his speed kept changing due to his ability activating and deactivating.

And the best part was that Nick didn't even need to try to keep his ability a secret.

After all, if anyone saw him, it would deactivate on its own, keeping it a secret.

In a way, Nick was forced to keep his ability a secret since he couldn't even show it to anyone.

When Nick was exhausted from running around, he went to grab his weapons and trained with them.

The heavy weight of the weapons made it extremely difficult and strenuous to move around, but that was what Nick wanted.

Training was supposed to be exhausting.

When it was evening, Nick even bought quite expensive food.

Meat that didn't come from rats or insects.

Apparently, there were some kind of indoor farms where small but fat flightless birds, called chickens, were being held.

According to the person in the expensive-looking shop, the meat of these chickens was extremely rich in protein and almost had zero fat.

While Nick didn't exactly care about the fat content, he cared a lot about the protein.

So, Nick bought two entire cooked chickens and ate them.

After one chicken, Nick already felt like he was quite full, but he forced the second one down as well.

One had to remember that Nick managed to build quite an impressive body while living in the Dregs on his own.

If he didn't know how to build such a body, he wouldn't have had one.

'150 credits,' Nick thought. '150 credits for one meal, even though it was a lot.'

'If I were to eat normally, it would still be 75 credits. That's almost a month of tax.'

Nick had never eaten a meal this expensive.

However, the taste was absolutely amazing, and the contents of the meat were important.

When Nick was eating it, he almost felt like his body was screaming in euphoria.

Sadly, the euphoria was dampened by the black void in Nick's chest.

Nick had done a lot today and had eaten amazing food, but the void in his chest barely seemed weaker than in the morning.

The guilt, regret, worthlessness, self-hatred, and pointlessness were as present as ever.

Nick knew very well that all these things he was doing were just distractions from his emotions.

But that was the only thing he could do.

There was no way for Nick to deal with his emotions.

He would need to get rid of the guilt, but he could only get rid of the guilt by repaying Horua, which was impossible.

There was no way to fix this.

Which meant he had to live with this.

He wasn't courageous enough to kill himself.

He wouldn't mind dying the next moment, but he also wouldn't actively search for his death.

It was kind of a limbo.

'If I can make the lives of the people in the Dregs better, I might be able to live with myself, and if I die along the way, it's also not a loss.'

'It's a win-win either way,' Nick thought as he put his weapons to the side.

Eventually, it was time for Nick to go to bed.

It was difficult.

With nothing to distract him, Nick's mind was constantly drawn to things he had done.

Luckily, the strong exhaustion of Nick's battered body made him drift off to sleep relatively quickly.

Nick slept for over ten hours, which was far more than normal.

'But it makes sense,' Nick thought. 'I went through a lot yesterday, and I also trained more than I ever did before.'

'I never had the luxury of safety, which always stopped me from completely exhausting my body. Additionally, food was also always an issue.'

Nick felt a bit of weakness coming from his body, but it wasn't as strong as he had expected.

Obviously, Nick had trained a lot in his life, and he was very familiar with his body.

The way Nick was feeling was like how he used to feel after having muscle soreness.

'I became quite a bit stronger since I last trained,' Nick thought. 'The last time I properly trained was before I joined Dark Dream. Ever since then, I advanced several levels.'

'As a Late level one Extractor, my body is converting Prephyx into Zephyx that can't be harvested, which is then used as fuel for my movements.'

'It wouldn't be strange to think that the Zephyx also has a healing effect on my body,' Nick thought as he moved his arm around to test its strength.

'Including today, I still have two more days of rest.'

'I should use them.'

Nick quickly left his bed, bought a heavy breakfast, and started to run around again.

This time, Nick decided to wear his four cuffs while running.

That made it many times more difficult, but he kept at it.

Whenever Nick felt like he was losing strength, he started to tell himself that he wasn't doing all of this for himself but for Horua.

Nick didn't allow himself to become complacent.

He had to repay Horua!

Chapter 114 – Back to Work

Nick woke up and looked at the clock.

'5:35,' Nick thought. 'The alarm rings in ten minutes anyway.'

Nick left his bed, walked over to the clock on the wall, and clicked a button at the side.

He had learned just yesterday that the clocks in the hotel had an alarm function from one of the clerks.

This made things much easier for Nick.

After deactivating the alarm, Nick grabbed his cuffs.

But before he put them on, he looked at his wrists.

Nick saw some faded cuts on them, and he furrowed his brows.

A memory from two days ago shot through Nick's mind.

After running around with the cuffs, Nick had come home, and when he had taken the cuffs off, he had seen that they had cut into his skin.

While the four cuffs were quite expensive weapons, they were not designed to be worn for hours of running around.

Naturally, Nick's bleeding wrists hurt quite a bit, but he didn't view the pain as bad.

In a way, this pain was a reaffirmation of his own conviction.

Seeing how much he had pushed himself somewhat calmed Nick's guilt.

He was putting in so much effort that he was even bleeding.

Even if Horua could see him, he wouldn't say that Nick wasn't trying his best.

The day after that, the cuts on Nick's arms had somewhat healed, but there were still some scabs left.

Nevertheless, Nick put on the cuffs again and trained for the entire day.

In the end, he bled again, but it wasn't as bad as the first day.

And this morning, the cuts were nearly completely gone.

One would only notice them if one knew that they were supposed to be there.

Eventually, Nick put the cuffs on and left for work.

He hadn't officially been to work for three days, but unofficially, Nick hadn't worked for about five days.

So much had happened in the last five days.

Nick killed Pator.

Horua died.

Nick started to feel horrible.

Nick found a new goal.

Nick trained.

To Nick, it felt like he hadn't been at work for a month or so.

Nick walked out of the hotel and went into a nearby shop that sold food.

In the last couple of days, Nick had found something else that tasted amazing.

Apparently, these things called chickens also laid eggs, and these eggs were a great source for many different things a human needed.

But the eggs were expensive. One egg wasn't very big, but it cost almost ten credits!

Nevertheless, Nick saw spending money like this as an investment.

If eating the eggs were just a hobby or for leisure, Nick would feel like he threw his money out of the window.

But this was for his future and his power.

Nick needed to invest money into his power!

Because of that, he wasn't very bothered by the high price.

Also, the price of the food wasn't actually that high, considering what Nick made in a day.

As the Chief Zephyx Extractor, Nick made 10% of what Trevor, Jenny, and the Screaming Coffin produced.

So, even if Nick didn't work himself, he would make at least 2,000 credits a day.

200 to 300 credits for food was barely ten percent of what Nick earned that day.

After shoving five eggs down, Nick went to Dark Dream.

As Nick entered, he slightly furrowed his brows.

His ability had deactivated, but he couldn't see anyone.

'The spy is back,' Nick thought.

'Sadly, it's not the time yet to confront Ardum.'

Nick walked forward and entered the Screaming Coffin's Containment Unit.

Surprisingly, the Screaming Coffin was peacefully lying in the middle of the room.

'I guess Wyntor found a way to get a corpse,' Nick thought.

Seeing that he wasn't needed here, Nick left the Containment Unit and stopped in front of Wyntor's office.

A couple minutes later, Wyntor entered the warehouse.

When Wyntor saw Nick, he was a bit surprised.

Nick felt quite different from before.

Three days ago, Nick seemed so fragile and vulnerable, and two days before that, Nick had seemed like he was about to say the Sentence.

But now, Nick seemed quite... sturdy and serious.

He had always seemed like a nice and light-hearted guy, but now, he seemed like someone who wasn't interested in hearing jokes.

It was quite a strong transformation.

Nevertheless, Wyntor had learned how to interact with all kinds of people, and he had also learned to discern emotions from just the slightest signs.

And he could tell that Nick was concerned right now.

"You noticed our new colleagues, I presume?" Wyntor asked with a smirk.

Nick furrowed his brows. "New colleagues?" he repeated.

Wyntor nodded and pointed at a railing at the side of the warehouse.

Naturally, almost all warehouses in the Outer City were equipped with some kind of metallic scaffolding with cheap metallic stairs that led to a higher layer at the edge of the warehouse.

The higher layer consisted of a corridor made of metallic grates, barely two meters wide, which led around the sides of the warehouse.

Nick looked at the spot Wyntor was pointing to and saw a guy lifting his right hand in greeting.

The guy was wearing a grey uniform, which almost perfectly blended into the grey of the walls.

The guy was also carrying a couple of guns with him.

All in all, the guy gave off a similar vibe to the city guards but a bit more subdued.

"This is one of the members of the guard team that I hired," Wyntor said.

Then, he pointed at another spot. "Another one should be there."

Nick furrowed his brows and looked over.

It took a couple of seconds, but eventually, Nick managed to discern the silhouette of another man.

"And the last one is there," Wyntor said, pointing at yet another spot.

Sure enough, Nick saw a third person.

"There are always three guards here," Wyntor said. "We want to make sure that nobody tries to take them out one by one, which is why they all have each other in their vision and are on opposite sides of the warehouse."

"They're professionals, and they can even fight an average level one Extractor with their weapons and their tactics."

"And the best thing: this entire team barely costs 1,500 credits per day."

Chapter 115 – He Has Changed

When Nick saw the three guards, he felt like Dark Dream had changed.

Sure, they had already been an official business when they had hired Jenny, but now, Nick actually felt like Dark Dream was becoming a real business.

A CEO, a Chief Zephyx Extractor, two Zephyx Extractors, a servant, a constant presence of three guards...

There were now quite a lot more people.

'So, when my ability deactivated earlier, it wasn't because of the spy, but because of the guards,' Nick thought as he looked at the three of them.

"I should get familiar with them," Nick told Wyntor.

"Right, we also need to talk about a couple of things," Wyntor said. "The unimportant things can wait until later since you need to get to work on the Dreamer soon. By the way, do you feel confident in working with the Dreamer?"

Nick nodded wordlessly.

Wyntor looked at Nick for a bit.

'He seems quite confident,' Wyntor thought.

"Good to hear," Wyntor said with a smile. "Is there anything that you need to talk to me about that can't wait until the afternoon?"

Nick turned to Wyntor. "I want to start training with my weapons as soon as possible."

Wyntor raised an eyebrow.

Nick hadn't seemed that eager to train with his weapons a couple of days ago, but now, he seemed like he couldn't wait any longer.

"Sure," Wyntor said. "When do you want the training to be?"

"After lunch each day," Nick said. "I will be done with the Dreamer at two p.m., and lunch should barely take half an hour. I can then use another half an hour to warm up, and I should be ready to train at three p.m."

Wyntor nodded. "How will you split your training?"

"Three days of fists and four days of throwing spears per week," Nick said. "Three hours per day."

Wyntor raised his eyebrows in surprise. "Seven days a week with three hours every day? Are you sure you can handle that? I don't want to pay them for just talking to you."

Nick nodded with conviction. "I know I can handle that much."

Wyntor kept looking at Nick with skepticism, but after looking into Nick's confident eyes for a couple of seconds, Wyntor just shrugged.

"If you think so," Wyntor said, "but if I hear from them that they feel like you're not properly training for all three hours, I will take their fees out of your salary, okay?"

Nick nodded. "No problem."

"Alright," Wyntor said, patting Nick on the shoulder. "Come to me when you're done with the Dreamer."

"Of course," Nick answered.

Wyntor just smiled. "It's good to have you back, Nick."

Nick took a deep breath.

"It's good to be back," he said.

At this moment, Nick wasn't sure if he was lying or not.

In a way, he was glad that he could work again, but he also felt like it didn't matter.

The void in his chest made all of this seem meaningless and irrelevant.

Nick's feelings were telling him that it made no difference where he was.

Being in Dark Dream was the same as lying in bed.

But Nick just ignored his feelings.

In the last couple of days, he had become quite good at dealing with the void in his chest.

It still appeared every evening when there was nothing to do, but during the day, he could deal with it.

Wyntor entered his office, and Nick walked into the Dreamer's Containment Unit.

The Dreamer looked away from Trevor and focused on Nick.

Nick looked back with an even look.

After some seconds, the Dreamer took a couple of steps back.

Nick woke Trevor, and the two of them talked a bit.

When Trevor saw Nick, he felt some mixed feelings.

On the one hand, Trevor was happy that Nick had regained his energy, but on the other hand, Nick seemed to have changed quite a bit.

He seemed less jovial.

Less lighthearted.

More serious.

'Well, he does feel like a boss now,' Trevor thought with a sigh.

After talking a bit more, Trevor left, and Nick sat down in the corner.

When the Dreamer came closer, Nick felt almost no fear.

Usually, Nick felt at least some fear while being close to the Dreamer, but not anymore.

Maybe it was the fact that Nick now had a Barrier and weapons.

Or maybe it was the fact that Nick didn't care for his survival as much anymore.

No matter the case, the truth was that Nick felt almost no fear in front of the Dreamer.

A minute later, Nick fell asleep.

"Nick, wake up," he heard an instant later.

As Nick opened his eyes, he saw the concerned Jenny.

"Are you okay?" Jenny asked with a worried expression.

"Why wouldn't I be?" Nick asked, who was surprised by how shaky his voice sounded.

The next moment, Nick felt something wet on his face and cleaned it.

'Tears?' Nick thought as he looked at the wet spots on his hand.

'Have I been crying in my sleep?' Nick thought in surprise.

That was when Nick noticed that there were also several wet spots on the ground around him.

'I must have been crying a lot, judging by all these stains,' Nick thought with furrowed brows.

'Yet, I feel fine. I don't feel like I have to cry.'

"Are you sure you're okay?" Jenny asked.

Nick nodded and stood up. "It's probably an effect of the nightmare the Dreamer put me in. Seems like quite some sad things happened. Don't worry about it."

Jenny just looked at Nick with a worried expression.

To Jenny, Nick felt different.

Nick felt much colder and more distant.

It was almost like he was afraid of getting too close to Jenny.

Jenny wanted to ask Nick about what was going on, but then she remembered her last talk with him.

Back then, Nick had said that he thought that Jenny was getting too involved in his life.

He was her boss, and she was his employee.

So, Jenny decided against asking Nick.

After some small talk, Nick left the Containment Unit to look at how much Zephyx had been produced.

Chapter 116 – Dung Heap

When Nick saw the amount of Zephyx that had been created, he sighed.

'It's as expected. The more suffering someone goes through, the more Zephyx gets produced.'

Nick had produced around 15 grams of Zephyx, which was quite a bit more than previously.

Since Nick got to keep 20% of that, it meant that he had essentially earned 6,000 credits from just this.

Usually, Nick would feel quite overwhelmed, but the feeling of surprise and joy was extremely subdued at best.

It just didn't feel like anything special right now.

After looking at the Zephyx for a little bit, Nick grabbed the Zephyx containers and brought them over to Wyntor's office.

"Thanks," Wyntor said as he grabbed the container.

A moment later, Wyntor calculated the worth of the Zephyx and gave Nick the money he had earned the last couple of days.

After all, even though Nick hadn't been working, the other Extractors had been working, and Nick still earned money from that.

"Thanks," Nick also said as he pocketed the money.

"By the way, your first teacher is ready to start today since she doesn't have a lot to do," Wyntor said. "You're fine with starting today, right?"

'She?' Nick thought.

Nick had chosen fist weapons and throwing spears, and both things didn't seem like weapons that women would choose.

"Which instructor is it?" Nick asked.

"The spear one," Wyntor said with a chuckle. "She will be in the warehouse in a bit less than an hour."

Nick nodded with a bit of anticipation, which could almost be called excitement.

"I will be there," Nick said as he stood up.

"Nick, I need to talk to you about a couple of things," Wyntor said.

"I know," Nick answered. "I'm just getting something to eat. A consistent diet is part of training, and I need to eat something before I start training with my instructor. We can talk about everything after I get my food."

"If it's okay with you, I can get the food and eat it in here. That should save us some time," Nick explained.

Wyntor furrowed his brows.

He wasn't the biggest fan of someone eating food inside of his office.

"Let's talk about these things in your room then," Wyntor said.

"Fine with me," Nick said before leaving the office.

Nick grabbed a cooked chicken and walked to his room.

Naturally, Wyntor was already waiting there, and the two of them entered.

While Nick was tearing the chicken apart, Wyntor was telling Nick about what had changed in the last couple of days.

Nick simply listened, and when Wyntor was done with telling Nick about everything, Nick gave his input.

"I'm fine with the corpse acquisition," Nick said.

In the last couple of days, Wyntor had finally managed to finalize a deal between him and Crimson Fungus City.

Corpses were seen as the property of Crimson Fungus City.

Any corpse that appeared in the Outer City and the Dregs was the property of the city.

Naturally, it was like that since corpses could be sold for quite a lot of money to the Zephyx Manufacturers.

The baseline price of the corpses was set by Anatomy, the second-biggest Manufacturer in the city.

Anatomy's strongest Specter was the Pit of Corpses, and it was a very strong level five Specter, a Fanatic.

The Pit of Corpses essentially had no limit to the number of corpses it could turn into Zephyx.

However, the more corpses it got, the less efficient it was in producing Zephyx.

After a lot of time, Anatomy found a sweet spot.

If they purchased all the corpses at 10,000 credits per corpse, they would still remain very profitable, and the other Manufacturers would need to pay more to get corpses.

Naturally, the other Manufacturers could only buy a couple of corpses for such a high price, which meant that Anatomy would still receive the vast majority of corpses.

If one directly bought corpses from the guards without any kind of deal, they would need to pay 15,000 credits since the city also wanted to earn quite a bit.

Luckily, Wyntor had gotten a favorable deal with the city.

Every two days, they would receive the corpse of one adult male for 11,000 credits.

That made things way easier.

First of all, the corpse was cheaper.

Second, it was always a very valuable corpse since it was from an adult male. These corpses tended to have more mass than the corpses of females and children.

Third, Nick wouldn't need to find targets anymore, which was good for his mental state.

They wouldn't even need to leave since the city guards would deliver the corpse right to the warehouse.

After talking about the corpses, the two of them talked about their future plans.

For now, everyone would focus on training and getting ready for battle, and in about three months or so, when everyone reached the Peak of the first level, they would start to become a bit more aggressive towards Ardum's company.

The search for a third Specter was put on ice for now since they wanted to consolidate for a while.

The more Specters they had, the more people they needed to employ, which would make for a bigger target.

They could still expand when Ardum was dealt with.

Wyntor also told Nick about Ardum's company.

It was called Cycle, and it had a circular arrow as a symbol.

Cycle was named as such due to their strongest Specter, the Dung Heap.

The Dung Heap was an Adolescent Specter, making it stronger than all the Specters Dark Dream owned.

Ardum had purchased the Dung Heap for only 500,000 credits, which was insanely low for an Adolescent Specter.

Even Hatchlings went for at least a million credits each.

Well, the reason why the Dung Heap was so cheap was that it barely produced any Zephyx.

The Dung Heap produced Zephyx by destroying food.

And, well, food was pretty expensive in Crimson Fungus City.

Even more, the "bargain bin method" couldn't be employed since the Specter was a Possession Specter.

So, Ardum was stuck buying very expensive food to pile onto the Dung Heap to barely produce a bit of Zephyx.

Even though the Dung Heap was an Adolescent, it was probably only a quarter or half as profitable as the Screaming Coffin.

Chapter 117 – Special Law

Aside from the Dung Heap, Ardum also had two Hatchlings, but they were not very important.

The most important thing was that if they managed to deal with Ardum, they would get all of these Specters.

Naturally, Nick wanted to know how they would get them. After all, the Specters were owned by another Manufacturer, and if these Specters suddenly appeared in Dark Dream's building, wouldn't the city get involved and accuse them of theft?

Wyntor told Nick that this was not the case.

In the past, Kugelblitz had wanted to get rid of one of its competitors, and after a lot of influencing in the city's government, they managed to pass a law.

This law dictated the minimum power one needed to possess in order to safeguard the populace from a captured Specter.

One needed at least one Extractor for every Specter, and the Extractors all needed to be on the level of every Specter.

Dark Dream, for example, had two Hatchlings, which meant that Dark Dream needed two Newbies, and at least one of the Newbies needed to be a Peak Newbie.

However, there were a couple of exceptions.

For example, if a Late or Mid Newbie could prove that they could suppress the Peak Hatchling, there wouldn't be an issue.

Another Manufacturer could request a check on another Manufacturer, but the check cost a lot of money.

If someone wanted to perform a check on Dark Dream, they would need to pay a million credits.

If a check was requested, a team employed by Crimson Fungus City would arrive and inspect all the different Specters in the Manufacturer.

If the Manufacturer was deemed to be strong enough to have these Specters, the team would leave, and the other Manufacturer would have lost their credits.

However, if the Manufacturer couldn't show the power required to suppress their Specters, the Manufacturer would be forced to disband, and the Specters would be handed over to another Manufacturer.

Almost always, the Manufacturer that requested the check also had a couple of empty Containment Units ready while also having a great number of extra employees, and since they also paid for the check, they almost always got the Specters.

So, what did this mean in concrete numbers?

If Ardum managed to kill Nick, he could request a check.

Wyntor wouldn't be strong enough to suppress the Dreamer on his own, and the other two Extractors were still too weak. Additionally, their abilities also weren't suited for combat.

On the other hand, if Dark Dream managed to get rid of the second John in Cycle and kill all of the Newbies, they would get all the Specters of Cycle.

At this point, it was important to mention that they couldn't purposefully kill Ardum himself.

Ardum was one of the potential heirs of the Melfion family, and even if he was supposed to prove himself worthy, the Melfion family wouldn't be happy with seeing one of their sons killed.

While nothing would happen to Wyntor, the person who killed Ardum would most likely be killed by the Melfion family.

As a John himself, Ardum could represent the Dung Heap, but he couldn't represent the two Hatchlings.

But as long as they managed to kill enough of Ardum's men, they would still get everything.

Ardum was only one man, and he had three Specters.

For quite a while, Nick and Wyntor planned through all kinds of scenarios.

At some point, they would clash with Cycle.

With Ardum's arrogance, he probably thought that Dark Dream didn't even know that he was spying on them.

Wyntor assured Nick that Ardum's head was so far up his own ass that he was defying physical laws.

As long as they acted stupid, Ardum would believe himself to be in control.

For now, they would just act like they didn't know that someone from Ardum's company was spying on them.

After a lot of talking, Nick said that he had to go.

It was about time for his first lesson.

Nick and Wyntor went back to Dark Dream.

When they entered the warehouse, they could see a new person.

"Yes, Stan?" Wyntor asked the guy who was running up to him.

It was a man with dark hair wearing a grey suit.

And at this moment, he seemed like he had seen a Specter.

His eyes were widely opened, and his face had turned pale.

"Sir, there was nothing we could do! She was-"

"Calm down!" Wyntor said with a forceful voice.

Stan looked with a worried expression at Wyntor as he kept glancing towards the back of the warehouse occasionally.

"Manela, I guess this is your doing?" Wyntor asked.

"They were weak."

Nick and Wyntor looked up at one of the scaffoldings and saw someone leaning on a railing.

When Nick saw the person, he took a deep breath.

She was big!

The person was over 190 centimeters tall. Her hair was light brown, and her skin also had a very brown tone.

Nick would have thought that she was a man, if... well...

Her front was also very big.

A moment later, Nick noticed the emblems on her uniform.

She wore the bloody red uniform of a Zephyx Extractor from Kugelblitz, and Nick could also see the picture of a three-headed mushroom on her chest.

The mushroom was being struck by three lightning bolts, which signified her level.

She was a level three Zephyx Extractor, a Veteran.

And she wasn't just any Veteran.

She was a Veteran who was being employed by the most powerful Zephyx Manufacturer in Crimson Fungus City, Kugelblitz.

This person was most likely extremely powerful, even for a Veteran.

The next moment, the tall woman jumped over the railing and comfortably landed on the ground, making almost no sound.

Crk.

Nick heard the distant sound of something scraping on the walls of the warehouse and looked over.

On one wall of the warehouse was a metallic spear embedded.

Nick remembered that this was one of the positions of the guards.

Luckily, he didn't see a corpse.

SHING!

A moment later, a tiny silver thread reflected in the air, and the spear shot out of the wall.

Clink!

And neatly landed in the tall woman's right hand.

Nick took a deep breath.

Chapter 118 – Manela

Manela, the tall woman, walked up to Wyntor and nodded in greeting.

Nick looked with quite a bit of awe at the woman.

She was so tall and strong, and her demeanor seemed so confident.

Nick had never seen someone like this in the Dregs.

"I presume you had your fun?" Wyntor asked with a sigh.

"Yes," Manela said with a confident nod, "but your guards are no good. They didn't even notice me until I voluntarily showed myself. You need better ones."

The guards heard Manela. Usually, they would have protested, but this time, they kept quiet.

Yes, they were very good at what they did, but this was a Veteran from Kugelblitz!

Of course they were not up to her standards!

If they were, they wouldn't be working for a small client like Dark Dream!

"They are more than good enough for what I pay them," Wyntor said with a friendly smile. "If I were to hire guards that you would be fine with, I would be losing more money than I would make."

Manela had an unimpressed expression on her face, but Nick could also see that she understood.

The next moment, Manela glanced at Nick.

Nick raised an eyebrow.

Manela furrowed her brows.

"Is that the guy?" Manela asked.

"Yes, this is Nick, my Chief Zephyx Extractor," Wyntor said, gesturing to Nick.

"Chief Zephyx Extractor," Manela repeated with disgust.

When she heard Chief Zephyx Extractor, the image of her own Chief Zephyx Extractor in Kugelblitz shot through her mind, a level six Zephyx Extractor, a Hero.

Compared to that person, Nick seemed like a child.

"Officially, I guess the title is accurate," Manela said.

Nick took a deep breath.

Silence.

"You're not going to ask?" Manela asked.

"No," Nick said. "I know what you mean."

"Hmph," Manela uttered as she looked at Nick for a bit more. "Well, money is money, I suppose."

Nick nodded and held out his hand for a handshake. "Nice to be working with you."

Manela looked at the hand with furrowed brows. "What are you doing?"

"Shaking hands," Nick said matter-of-factly. "Isn't that how you people from the Inner City greet each other?"

Manela's eyes narrowed.

Nick raised an eyebrow.

Did he do something wrong?

Wyntor awkwardly cleared his throat. "Nick, a handshake is more for interactions between businesses. Unless they are in an official meeting, Extractors generally don't greet each other like that."

"You can tell him," Manela said. "You don't need to lie for me."

Wyntor awkwardly coughed again. "And Manela is not from the Inner City. She used to live in the Outer City."

"Oh," Nick said, pulling his arm back. "I didn't know."

Manela just looked at Nick. "You smell of chicken," she said.

Nick wasn't sure where Manela was going with this. "Yes, I eat them every day."

"Are they good?" she asked.

"Very," Nick said. "They are the best thing I have ever eaten in my life."

Manela raised an eyebrow.

Nick didn't seem to be lying.

Then, a casual smile formed on her face. "Thanks. My mother raises the ones they sell here, and my father slaughters them. Your appreciation for the chickens is why they are still working to this day."

Nick blinked a couple of times in surprise as he thought back to the chickens he had eaten.

Manela's parents were the ones who raised and slaughtered them?

"The chickens taste amazing," Nick said with a nod.

"Thanks," Manela said with a small smile.

But then, her face immediately turned into a solemn frown filled with seriousness.

"We don't have time for this," she said.

Nick nodded.

They were not here to talk about chickens.

"Get your spears," Manela commanded.

"I have one," Nick said, taking out one of them.

Clank!

Manela slapped the spear to the side, and it fell to the ground.

"Get your entire set," she ordered. "I heard you got a set of five. Get them all. Leave your vambraces in your room."

Manela had already noticed the reason why Nick wasn't carrying all of his spears with him.

The single spear she had thrown to the side was already way too heavy for someone like Nick.

A set of five would be absolutely brutal to carry, and if Nick also wore his fist weapons, things would only become more troublesome.

"Of course," Nick said as he turned around to leave.

"Take your spear with you," Manela commanded.

Nick furrowed his brows. He would come back here anyway. Why should he take the spear with him?

"Show respect to the craftsmanship," Manela explained, seeing Nick's expression. "A spear is only ever supposed to remain in three places when not being used."

"On your back."

"Stabbed into something."

"Or lying on a clean surface."

"You can stab your spear into the warehouse floor since that is what a spear is supposed to do, but you are not allowed to leave it lying on such dirty ground."

Manela flicked her fingers, and the spear on the ground flew into her hand by itself.

CRACK!

The next moment, she flicked Nick's spear downward, and it perfectly stabbed into the ground.

"That's okay," she said.

Then, she kicked the spear, and it fell to the ground.

"That's not okay."

'Show respect to the craftsmanship?' Nick thought.

At that moment, Nick thought about how he would feel if he produced something with all his passion and love and then saw it getting thrown in the dirt with disregard.

'I most likely won't mind, but I can see how someone can view this as disrespectful,' Nick thought.

"Okay," Nick said, bending down and lifting the spear.

After putting it on his back, Nick left the warehouse.

Meanwhile, Manela looked at Wyntor. "He's malleable," she said. "That's good."

Wyntor nodded. "I see a lot of potential in him."

Silence.

"You don't agree?" Wyntor asked.

Manela looked at the exit with furrowed brows.

"I don't know."

"He is malleable, and I can see a fire burning inside of him."

"But on the other hand, he also gives me this certain feeling that I have felt from many of my colleagues."

"It's like he's fighting a hopeless battle, and he knows it deep inside."

"He seems too idealistic."

"People like this don't tend to live long."

Chapter 119 – Lesson

A minute later, Nick came back to Dark Dream.

He had put his cuffs away, but the weight of all five spears was almost crushing him.

Manela could see how much Nick was suffering under the heavy weight of the spears.

She had no idea why Wyntor bought him such a heavy and advanced set of spears.

These spears seemed way too heavy for someone of Nick's level.

However, Manela also knew that a majority of an Extractor's power came from their ability.

Most likely, the heavy weight of Nick's throwing spears was related to his ability.

Manela knew that Wyntor wasn't dumb. After all, Wyntor had been in her department for a couple of days a couple of years ago while he was learning about how to run a proper Manufacturer.

"Let's go," Manela said, walking past Nick and leaving the warehouse.

"Go where?" Nick asked.

"Training spot," she said. "We can't throw spears in here."

"Oh, right," Nick said as he started to walk past her.

"Have fun!" Wyntor shouted before going back to his office.

Manela and Nick walked through the streets.

Many people on the streets looked at Manela with respect and shock.

A Veteran from Kugelblitz!

Even more, she was huge!

It was almost like a bronze goddess of war was walking through the streets.

Manela didn't say anything as they walked, but her speed slowly picked up.

Nick already had issues walking at a normal pace, but it only got worse when Manela walked faster.

Nick gritted his teeth and also sped up.

The sound of Nick's footsteps was extremely loud and reverberated through the streets.

After a while, the two of them reached the entrance to the Dregs.

The next moment, Nick saw Manela casually jumping on top of a two-story building.

She looked back, motioning for Nick to come up with her.

Nick looked at Manela with furrowed brows.

He could barely walk with all this weight.

How was he supposed to get on top of a building?

Nick looked around but didn't see any stairs.

The wall was also very flat.

There were no smaller buildings within reach.

Sure, if Nick's ability activated or if he didn't carry his spears with him, he would have no issues getting up there.

Sadly, it was during the middle of the day, which meant several people were looking towards Nick's direction at all times, and he was obviously supposed to bring his spears with him.

Manela just kept looking at Nick without saying anything.

Nick thought for a bit.

A couple of seconds later, he walked to the entrance of the house and loudly knocked.

"Anyone in there?"

No answer.

"Hello?"

No answer.

"If you don't open, your house might get damaged."

No answer.

At that moment, the door gave way since it had never been locked.

Nick hesitated, shrugged, and entered.

After looking through the house, he couldn't find any sign of people living there.

This house was at the border between the Outer City and the Dregs.

Most likely, nobody would be living here.

While it officially was part of the Dregs, the guards really weren't the biggest fans of the stinky people from the Dregs, and they didn't like them living this close to the Outer City.

Because of that, almost all houses at the border were empty, and this most likely was one of them.

'Good to know,' Nick thought with a nod.

Nick walked out of the house again and looked at Manela, who was still looking at him wordlessly.

"Can I throw my spears to you?" he asked.

Manela's brows furrowed.

She didn't immediately answer.

"What if I say no?" she asked.

"That's also fine," Nick said.

Silence.

"Show me," she ordered.

"Alright," Nick said.

Nick took out one spear and stabbed it into the ground beside him.

He did the same with the next three spears.

Nick grabbed the last spear with both hands and stabbed it into the wall of the house.

Then, Nick grabbed another spear and stabbed it higher into the house by throwing it.

After doing that five times, Nick created a small staircase.

Manela said that it was fine if the spears were stuck in something.

So, this should be okay.

After climbing to the second spear, Nick put his legs around it and let his upper body fall.

Like this, he could easily grab the first spear.

When he got it, he walked all the way to the top and stabbed it into the roof.

Manela looked at him wordlessly as Nick went back down to grab the second spear.

A couple seconds later, Nick was on top of the building with all of his spears.

"Impressive," Manela said.

"Thanks," Nick said.

"I don't think you know what I meant," she added.

Nick blinked in surprise. "What did you mean?"

"Your question earlier," Manela said. "You asked me if you could pass your spears to me."

"Yeah, what about it?" Nick asked.

"I've done this with a couple of people, but you're the first one that actually asked for help without giving up," she said.

"Huh?" Nick uttered.

"This was supposed to teach you two things."

"First, that throwing spears are more than just weapons. You can use them in many different ways."

"And second, that we are not alone as Zephyx Extractors."

"As Zephyx Extractors, we are always working together. We are a team."

"Even if we go into battle, we go into battle together."

"Because of that, asking for help is not wrong and even encouraged."

"Tasks that seem very difficult can easily be overcome by working together with someone else, and not accepting the help of others is often very stupid."

"You're actually the first one that asked for assistance like this."

"Most of the time, if the person doesn't find the solution, they just say that they give up. They see asking me for help as giving up when it is actually the very point of the lesson."

Nick blinked a couple of times. "Then why did you ask what I would do if you said no?"

"I wanted to know what you had planned," Manela said. "You went into the house to see if someone lived there, which means you probably were planning on damaging the house. I wanted to see what would happen."

"Oh," Nick said. "Well, originally, I wanted to throw my spear upwards and let it land in the roof, but I realized that it was too heavy to throw that far up. So, I went with this."

Manela looked at Nick for a couple more seconds.

Then, she nodded. "Alright, let's continue," she said before holding out her hand.

Nick grabbed it and shook it.

Manela looked at him with a deadpan expression.

"Give me your spears. I'll hold them for you."

Nick stopped shaking Manela's hand.

"Oh, okay."

Chapter 120 – Collecting

For the next couple of minutes, the two of them jumped from building to building.

Eventually, Manela stopped, and Nick looked at the place in front of him.

Ruins.

They were standing on the highest building around, which was four stories high. In front of them were half-destroyed and completely destroyed houses for nearly fifty meters.

Even more, many of the plates and grates were completely ruined, exposing the sewers.

In a way, this area looked like an ancient ruin in the middle of a swamp, except that the swamp itself was made of even more disgusting water.

"Can you tell what destroyed all of these buildings?" Manela asked.

Nick looked around.

After a while, he noticed that there were many round holes in the destroyed buildings.

"Something round and strong," Nick said.

Manela grabbed one of Nick's spears and threw it.

SHING!

Nick's eyes shot open in shock as he saw his spear perfectly passing through one of the holes!

"This was my training ground," Manela said. "This is the only place in the Outer City where I can practice throwing my spears."

Nick looked at the destroyed buildings and the houses.

Manela must have thrown countless spears.

"Get your spear. You need to get familiar with this place anyway," she said.

Nick took a deep breath and nodded.

"Hold up," Manela said, holding out Nick's other spears. "Don't forget your other spears."

Nick took another deep breath.

"Of course," he said, putting them on his back.

Immediately, Nick felt extremely heavy again.

As he looked at the destroyed building in the distance again, he felt like it was now much further away.

Even more, Nick was on top of a four-story building while the spear had shot through a hole in one of the small houses.

On top of that, the grates on the streets would never be able to hold Nick's weight and the weight of the spears.

This meant Nick needed to jump from building to building while also carrying his spears.

It was essentially impossible.

However, Nick remembered what he had learned in the previous lesson and what Manela had said.

Throwing spears were not only weapons.

Eventually, Nick created a route in his mind.

First, he climbed down the building by dropping three of his spears.

By dropping them, Nick could easily control in which way they would reach the ground, and all three spears stabbed into the roof of the smaller building beside this one.

Then, Nick jumped down the building and stabbed the last spear into the wall.

Since Nick didn't weigh a lot without his spears, the wall managed to withstand his weight.

After that, Nick pulled the spear out and dropped onto the roof.

With his physique, he could withstand such a drop.

A moment later, Nick put the spear with the others and left to get his lost spear.

Manela had never said that Nick couldn't put his spears to the side.

Without his spears, it was easy to jump from building to building.

About a minute later, Nick entered the destroyed building and found his spear stabbed into the ground.

Returning also wasn't difficult, but the climb to the top of the tall building wasn't easy.

Nick used the same method he used during the first lesson, but due to the greater size of the building, Nick needed to jump much more.

But eventually, he did it and arrived at the top with all of his spears.

Manela wordlessly walked over to Nick and took one spear.

SHING!

And threw it through the same hole.

"Nice going, smartass. Now, do the same, but take your spears with you," she said.

Nick took a very deep breath to calm down.

"Of course," he said.

"I don't want to see you drop your spears," Manela said. "If your spears are leaving your person, it better be to act as a foothold or something similar."

As Nick looked at the route he needed to take, he became worried.

With the added weight, that route was now impossible to take.

There were too many big jumps.

This time, it took Nick almost five minutes to come up with a new route, and the route was long.

The spear was barely 40 meters away from Nick, but he would need to traverse over 200 meters to get to it.

Climbing down the tall building was the first problem.

With so many spears on him, the wall couldn't possibly resist Nick's weight if he held onto a single spear.

However, Nick came up with a solution.

He jumped down and immediately stabbed one of his spears into the building.

But before he fully stopped, he let go of the spear and continued falling.

And stabbed in the second spear.

Eventually, Nick had put all four spears into the wall.

Since Nick no longer had a spear on his back, he could climb up to the highest one, retrieve it, and fall to the second.

The second could withstand the combined weight of Nick and one spear, but the third one quickly broke off the wall when Nick dropped onto it with two spears.

Luckily, the spear still managed to slow his fall, and eventually, Nick broke through all the spears and landed on the ground.

His bones and muscles hurt, but he could still move.

Then, the arduous journey began.

Nick used his spears to close the gap between buildings while also having to retrieve them.

He needed to balance on them.

He even used them to break down a wall.

It took Nick over 40 minutes to get to his original spear and retrieve it.

Then, the long journey back began.

The way back was even more difficult with an additional spear, and it took Nick another 30 minutes.

Finally, Nick arrived on top of the building.

Manela grabbed one of the spears and threw it through a different hole in a different building.

"Next one."

Nick took a deep breath.

He had expected that he would learn how to throw spears.

Instead, Manela was the one throwing, and he was the one collecting them.