

The Sun 181

Chapter 181

Nick walked down the lonely street of the abandoned Dregs.

This part of the Dregs had nearly nobody living in it. At most, some people who wanted to avoid the blood tax tried to hide here.

And some of them actually managed to do that, but they were in the minority.

Because of that, only the people who couldn't afford to lose another two liters of blood would try that stunt.

After all, if they were going to die with the next tax anyway, they might as well take their chances.

But aside from these people, there was basically no one.

The streets were completely ruined, and walking on them was extremely dangerous.

Nick had been walking through these streets for several days now, only leaving once a day to do his duties in Dark Dream and to sleep.

Nick had become 18 years old recently, and he was finally ready to become a level two Extractor.

A John.

A couple of days ago, Nick had felt like some kind of energy inside of his body was ready to explode.

That was the sign of an Extractor being ready to break through.

The only thing they needed was to come into contact with an Adolescent Specter and have that energy explode forward.

At that point, they would reach the next level while also mutating their ability with the support of the Adolescent Specter.

Without being in contact with a fitting Specter, reaching the next level was impossible.

Of course, Nick could just come into contact with the Dung Heap since that was also an Adolescent Specter, but Nick didn't want that ability.

It didn't seem to fit the Null's ability very well.

So, Nick was trying to come into contact with a new Specter.

One that he had known for almost two years.

Back then, Wyntor had used it as an example for the category of Force Specters.

The Fog.

The Fog was a known Specter that lived in the abandoned Dregs inside Crimson Fungus City.

Many people knew about it, but the bigger Manufacturers were not interested in capturing it.

The issue was that the Fog was a Force Specter, which made it very difficult to catch and contain it.

The Containment Unit necessary to contain such a Specter was so insanely expensive that it might even take years for the Specter to pay it off.

25 million credits.

That was the price of the Containment Unit.

Something like the Fog would, at most, produce 50 grams of Zephyx a day, which was about 50,000 credits.

Assuming there were no associated costs and 100% of the produced Zephyx went to repaying the Containment Unit, it would still take 500 days to repay the Containment Unit.

But since Dark Dream only got to keep 60% of the Zephyx, it would take even longer.

Now, if the Fog were an Adult Specter, things would be different.

It would definitely produce over 100 grams of Zephyx a day, and they could still buy the same Containment Unit.

The Containment Units for Force Specters weren't built for weak Specters since it was not really profitable.

The materials needed to contain an Adult Specter barely made up 10% of the price.

The Containment Unit that Wyntor had bought had consumed an entire year of Dark Dream's profits, and he had even needed to take out a loan.

But for Nick, he was willing to pay that price.

Nick had been an excellent Chief Zephyx Extractor, and on top of that, Wyntor fully trusted Nick.

Naturally, Wyntor wouldn't waste such a great employee as Nick, and he would continue to invest in him so that Nick could reach his full potential.

The plan to capture the Fog had been created over a year ago.

Both of them realized that the Fog's ability had a great affinity with Nick's ability.

On top of that, the Fog wasn't an incredibly powerful Specter in battle.

Force Specters like the Fog almost exclusively fought with their abilities since they didn't really have bodies with which they could punch their opponents.

But in turn, capturing them was insanely difficult.

Nick knew that capturing the Fog was not a given.

Of course, Nick would get his ability either way since he only needed to come into contact with the Specter, but not being able to catch the Fog would mean that Dark Dream's investment would go up in flames.

Because of that, there was still a lot of pressure on Nick's shoulders.

As Nick walked through the empty and damaged streets, he looked around with his sharp eyes.

By now, Nick had reached a height of about 185 centimeters, and that was most likely where his growth was going to stop.

Nick hadn't been very tall before he had become a Zephyx Extractor, and it had seemed like he wouldn't grow up to be tall.

However, the Zephyx was essentially pure energy, and the body needed energy and nutrients to grow.

The Zephyx Nick had come into contact with had allowed his body to grow to a respectable height.

Of course, due to Nick's brutal training, he had also grown frighteningly muscular.

His body was almost identical to Reynold's body.

Any more muscle and Nick's speed and flexibility would suffer.

He was perfectly on the border between too little and too much muscle.

Nick was so athletic that he could even carry all five of his spears and his fist weapons while also being able to jump with quite some agility.

Nevertheless, Nick still only carried three of his spears with him since he didn't want to suffer too much of a speed disadvantage.

Nick had stopped training with Reynold and Manela a couple of months ago.

Both of them had essentially taught everything they knew about wielding their weapons to him.

Now, Nick only needed to get actual practice in real scenarios.

They were actually extremely impressed by Nick.

Reynold had even said something quite surprising.

"You do know that you are actually experienced and strong enough to join Kugelblitz, right? I could request an interview for you, and you would join my team within the week."

However, Nick declined.

Wyntor had never betrayed him and invested so much in him.

Nick wouldn't leave Wyntor like that.

Chapter 182 – The Fog

Nick kept walking down the streets with heavy and powerful steps as he kept looking around with care.

The last time someone had been reported missing had been around a month ago, and as far as everyone knew, the Fog took about a month to consume a human.

People were not completely certain what the Fog did.

They only knew that it took someone and came back a month later to get someone else.

The specific way the Fog killed its victims was unknown.

They just walked into the Fog and vanished.

Naturally, Nick felt a certain amount of apprehension since the unknown was quite scary, but he was willing to take the risk.

His future was worth it.

Nick walked from one alleyway to the other.

He was taking the same route he had been taking for days.

Nothing special was happening.

However, he was quite sure that he would meet the Fog soon.

Three days ago, one of Nick's old friends had visited him.

Julian.

The Expert Zephyx Extractor who had talked with Nick a day before he met Reynold.

Julian had talked with Nick about his problems for some time, and while he was doing so, he had asked Nick what he had planned.

Nick told him about the Fog.

There was no need to keep it a secret since everyone basically knew about the Fog, and nobody was willing to spend the credits to capture it.

When Julian heard that, he smiled slyly and told Nick which route he should take.

He said that he had seen the Fog a couple of times before and that he had been one of the Extractors that created the profile of it.

As always, Julian knew what he was talking about, and he was a pleasure to be around.

Everyone liked Julian.

Ever since then, Nick had been following this route.

Nick trusted Julian.

And Julian wouldn't betray Nick's trust.

During the evening, Nick noticed that it became more difficult to find his way forward.

It was like his sight was being obscured by a veil.

Usually, Nick would just think that it was normal fog, but since he was specifically searching for the Fog, he knew that chances were high that this was actually the Specter.

Nick's heart rate increased, and his breathing quickened, but he did his best to appear calm.

Nick wanted to be enveloped by the Fog.

It was possible that the Fog would flee if Nick decided to attack.

So, Nick just kept walking forward.

Eventually, he couldn't see anything anymore.

The grey fog was so thick that Nick couldn't even see his own hands anymore.

Nick could feel how his hand touched his face, but he couldn't see it.

Even when Nick lightly touched his eyeball.

It was almost like Nick didn't have a body.

It was like he was only a consciousness drifting through an empty void.

Yet, Nick could still feel his body.

When he punched his left arm with his right, he still felt the impact and the pain.

Additionally, Nick could feel himself walking forward.

However, the floor had changed.

The floor had stopped making any sounds, and Nick couldn't even hear his own steps.

Additionally, it felt very even and even a bit soft.

It was like Nick was walking on a featureless carpet.

Even more, there were no walls whatsoever.

Earlier, Nick had been walking through the abandoned Dregs, and there had been houses everywhere.

But now, no matter in which direction Nick walked, he wouldn't touch anything.

It was like Nick's body had left the world.

'So, this is what it does,' Nick thought with narrowed eyes.

Since he was now well and truly captured, Nick decided to fight back and started to run.

Nick sprinted with all of his strength and jumped from side to side.

Nick was running at incredible speeds, but he still couldn't touch anything.

After that, Nick threw one of his spears into the distance.

The Ghost Wire quickly tensed, and he let the spear fall to the ground in the distance.

The spear hadn't hit anything.

Nick walked over to where the spear was lying on the ground and put it back onto his back.

'It's like this world is limitless,' Nick thought. 'I have no idea where I am, and I can't even come into contact with the outside world by throwing a spear.'

'I am no longer in Crimson Fungus City.'

'At least, that's what I would think if I didn't know anything about Specters.'

'This is only an Adolescent, and I'm certain that it doesn't have the power to transport me out of the city just like that.'

'It would have to be an Elder at the very least, and even then, it would be unlikely.'

'This means that I must still be inside Crimson Fungus City.'

'At most, it created a temporary domain that imitates an alien world.'

'Keeping this domain active is probably consuming Zephyx, but it is also most likely producing more Zephyx than it is using.'

'I can run and jump around as much as I want, and I won't be able to get out of here.'

'The only way I can get out is to make it consume more Zephyx than it is producing.'

'That means I need to tear the world around me apart and destabilize the domain.'

'The best way is to just use a lot of power.'

A moment later, Nick lifted his arm and pulled out his fist weapons.

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

Immediately, Nick started to rampage through his surroundings, kicking and punching everything around him.

While he was doing so, he kept looking at his surroundings.

That was when he noticed something.

After a particularly fast kick, Nick noticed that the guard on his shin had pulled the fog to the side a bit, revealing a small afterimage of a darker area.

However, it was immediately closed again.

'Wyntor told me that my weapons can also interact with Force Specters, which is why they were so insanely expensive.'

'And sure enough, he was right. Without my weapons, I probably wouldn't be able to break through the fog.'

'However, I am certain that this is not enough power to break through.'

Nick narrowed his eyes.

'And my ability isn't active.'

The Fog could perceive Nick, which meant that he was only as strong as a Peak Newbie.

Although, with his body, he probably had the power of an average Initial John.

'If I want to break out of here, I have to get my ability to activate.'

'Let's hope the Fog's ability is good enough.'

Chapter 183 – Hatchlings

For a while longer, Nick kept punching and kicking the air.

He knew that it wouldn't help him, but he wanted to know what the Fog actually did.

After all, he would most likely need to work with it in the future.

Might as well learn more things about it right now since it wasn't in a hurry to kill him.

From time to time, Nick managed to push the Fog to the side, revealing a darker place behind the bright grey.

By the looks of things, Nick wasn't in a place with a lot of sunlight.

The Fog wasn't strong enough to completely transport Nick into a parallel dimension or world, which was why Nick had to be somewhere in Crimson Fungus City.

Nick wasn't sure how much time passed, but he started to get hungry.

Surprisingly, even though Nick had moved around quite a lot, he didn't get thirsty.

'The Fog is probably moisturizing my body, which means I need no water.'

'Based on the clear color of the piss I just took, it gives me quite a lot of water as well. That's a healthy amount.'

'However, there is no food.'

'Is that how it kills its victims?'

'It traps them in an endless world of grey until they starve to death?'

'I wonder if that's how it becomes stronger or if it's just corpses.'

'No, it's probably not corpses. Otherwise, it wouldn't feed me water.'

'Most likely, slowly starving inside its domain is what it actually gains power from.'

'Now, is it perpetually gaining power while I am in here, or does it only get a burst of power when I die?'

This was an important question.

If the Fog perpetually produced Zephyx by someone walking through its domain, working with the Fog would be easy. He would just need to send a Zephyx Extractor in there and take them out after a while.

However, if the Fog only got the power after actually killing the people through starvation, Nick would have an issue at hand.

This meant that he couldn't ask any of his Zephyx Extractors to work with it.

Even more, it meant that Nick needed to search for criminals or something like that. He couldn't imagine just sending random people to their deaths like this.

'I can't be sure, but I think it produces Zephyx during the process of being lost. Otherwise, it probably wouldn't have been confident enough to trap me since I would have plenty of time to exhaust its Zephyx supply.'

Nick decided to remain inside the Fog for two more hours to see whether or not it would unveil another aspect of itself.

But nothing happened.

Nick's head was still clear, and even though he was sweaty from all the sports, his stamina had already recovered, which meant that the Fog wasn't isolating the Prephyx.

This meant that Nick could heal and recover while lost in the Fog.

'That's probably not something it can do yet, but I would imagine that it can learn something like that in the future.'

'After all, Veterans don't need to eat or drink anything since the Prephyx in the atmosphere nourishes them. If a Veteran were lost in here, they would never die.'

'Maybe the Fog will one day learn the ability to isolate Prephyx?'

Scientists were sure that most Specters were born as Hatchlings, which meant that the Fog had also been a Hatchling before.

They came to that conclusion because they had found buried data depicting a bloody room with two people fighting in it.

They also found pictures of a bloody colosseum with teeth at its edges and several people fighting in it.

The scientists were quite certain that these had been iterations of the Maw, one of the Eternals.

According to history, the Maw had once started out as just a random room, and it was eventually used as some sort of arena.

At some point, humanity must have lost control over it, and it became the terror it was today.

If the Maw had once been a Hatchling, chances were high that almost all Specters had once been Hatchlings.

Except for one.

The oldest Specter known to humanity was the Sun, and as far as they had heard, it had always been there.

The Sun was probably the only Specter that hadn't been a Hatchling.

As a Hatchling, the Fog probably didn't have the ability to nourish someone with water, which meant that it would need to get new victims quicker.

Nick was building a profile on the Fog. After all, it was his job, and the more he knew about his Specters, the better.

Seeing that nothing was changing, Nick decided to become active.

First, he wanted to try if the locator worked.

Naturally, Nick came prepared since he knew that he would meet with the Fog.

Because of that, Nick had received a locator.

He pulled a small rod out of one of his pockets and flipped it open, pulling out a couple of legs.

Then, he placed it on the ground and pressed a button.

The tip of the locator started to slowly shine yellow, which meant that it was starting up.

For a couple of seconds, Nick watched the yellow light.

And then, the light suddenly turned red.

Nick just furrowed his brow. 'That's to be expected, I suppose.'

The red light meant that a foreign force of Zephyx was interfering with the signal.

The locator worked by spreading a special kind of Zephyx, which could be picked up by certain instruments.

However, the presence of the Specter kept the Zephyx from spreading.

It was like a big man surrounding a small mouse with his hand.

The mouse couldn't move out of the hand since it was all around it, and it wasn't strong enough to break through.

'I might be able to escape on my own with the new ability I'm about to obtain, but I can't expect to capture the Fog on my own.'

'I need the help of Dark Dream, and for that, I need to activate the locator.'

'I guess it's time to advance and get my new ability.'

Chapter 184 – John

Nick sat down and closed his eyes.

This would be his first advancement, and he wanted to make sure that nothing went wrong.

Nick imagined himself pulling something out from deep inside of him.

Almost immediately, Nick felt himself becoming hotter, and he started to break out in sweat.

All the Zephyx that his body had prepared for the breakthrough was being accessed and burned.

Nick's muscles began to shake, and he felt like his heart was beating in his ear.

His face turned red, and he started to grimace with strain.

His breathing deepened.

The next moment, Nick felt like something new appeared inside his body.

It was a strange sensation.

It was like something blue and calm was expanding inside of him.

As the blue force expanded throughout Nick's torso, he felt like he was bathing in the Recovery Bath again.

It was so relaxing.

But at the same time, Nick felt like his confidence was shooting through the roof, and he felt like he had the ability to tear reality apart.

Nick took a very deep breath, and the blue force exploded.

It encompassed his entire body.

Nick kept breathing in without end.

It was almost like all the air he was breathing in was vanishing!

He just kept inhaling and inhaling, but his chest almost didn't expand.

The more he inhaled, the more he wanted to jump around and punch something.

He was so full of energy!

Half a minute later, Nick stopped inhaling.

Nick's muscles flexed on their own, and he felt like he could punch a house into dust.

At that point, the strange things happening to his body stopped.

Naturally, Nick knew what that meant.

'I advanced!'

'I'm a level two Zephyx Extractor now!'

'Finally, I'm a John!'

Nick jumped onto his feet with ease, even though he still carried his weapons on his body.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Immediately after, Nick started to rapidly punch and kick the air around him again.

This time, the dark afterimage of his real surroundings appeared more frequently and clearer.

But the next moment, the afterimages changed.

Several corpses were looking at Nick through the gaps in the Fog.

It was like Nick was surrounded by corpses that just kept looking at him.

'That's troublesome,' Nick thought with furrowed brows.

'I think I know where I am.'

Nick was quite certain that the corpses looking at him were not real.

They were just illusions.

Created by the Nightmare.

At this moment, Nick was sure that he was surrounded by the Fog, which was surrounded by darkness.

Specters didn't suffer from the effects of the Nightmare, which was why it could simply be there.

Additionally, it seemed to have the ability to isolate Nick from the Nightmare's influence.

Yet, as soon as Nick managed to create small gaps in the Fog, the Nightmare's influence could enter, which was what produced these images of the corpses watching him.

'Either I'm in some kind of room, or I'm in the sewers. I can't be entirely sure,' Nick thought.

All of Nick's hunger and exhaustion vanished after he turned into a John, and he took advantage of that and started to launch an assault on his surroundings.

Due to Nick's impressive body, his base strength was probably already on the level of an average Early John or maybe even Mid John.

He didn't know at what exact level the Fog was, which was why he was trying to break through the Fog right now.

Nick was very disciplined and athletic, which allowed him to launch a perfect barrage of brutal attacks for an extended period of time.

If he managed to exhaust the Fog completely, it was probably only an Initial Adolescent or an Early Adolescent.

But if it kept resisting, it was probably a Mid, Late, or Peak Adolescent.

Over the next hours, Nick managed to create many gaps through which he could see images that seemed to come from hell.

Yet, the Fog kept returning to its old form again and again.

It didn't matter how much Nick punched and kicked.

It seemed to have no use.

Even when Nick created a gap and pushed his arm through, the fog just closed in front of Nick's arm again.

While Nick was doing all of this, he kept an eye on the locator.

The red light was sometimes getting weaker, but it always stayed red.

That meant that the amount of foreign Zephyx isolating the signal was sometimes reducing but never really vanishing.

Eventually, Nick stopped and sat down again.

'No use,' he thought with a sigh.

'I'm sure I've attacked it for over an hour, and it doesn't behave any differently from the beginning.'

'It can probably withstand my attacks forever.'

Nick gulped as his nervousness increased.

He had been prepared for this eventuality, but he still felt nervous.

His survival now depended on the ability he had acquired.

If Nick's mutated ability could activate the effect of the Null's ability, he would be able to escape.

But if it didn't, Nick's chances of survival would be slim.

Dark Dream knew that Nick was captured by the Fog somewhere, and they were searching for him.

Yet, the chances of Dark Dream finding him without the locator were slim.

After all, not even Nick managed to find the Fog after days of searching for it.

Nick closed his eyes and willed fog to appear from within him.

The moment of truth had arrived.

What kind of ability had Nick unlocked?

Would Nick be able to create fog around him?

Could Nick create fog somewhere else?

Did Nick's attacks attain some kind of steam effect?

Could Nick manipulate water?

Many different kinds of mutations could have appeared within Nick's ability, and he didn't know which one he had received.

What would his ability be?

Would it be useful?

Would it help him in this scenario?

As Nick willed the fog to appear, he noticed the blue force inside of him again.

Apparently, it hadn't vanished after his breakthrough.

But now, the blue force was reducing rapidly.

Within less than a second, all of the blue force vanished.

And Nick's mutated ability activated.

Chapter 185 – Mutated Ability

Nick couldn't see what was happening due to all the fog, but he could feel his ability of Null activating!

This meant that the Fog couldn't perceive him anymore!

Nick immediately jumped to his feet and released a terrifying kick.

...

Nothing.

The Fog showed no reaction.

It was almost like Nick hadn't used any kind of attack.

Naturally, Nick released several more attacks, but the Fog just didn't react.

The next moment, Nick willed his ability to stop.

The blue force appeared inside Nick's chest again, and it returned to normal within less than a second.

At the same time, Nick's ability deactivated again.

BANG!

Nick unleashed a kick, and the Fog finally reacted again.

Nick furrowed his brows.

'It sucks that I can't see my body right now. I want to know what is happening.'

'I should try around some more.'

Nick experimented with his new ability a couple of times.

Whooooosh!

Suddenly, a huge gap appeared in the Fog, and Nick's eyes widened.

Just now, Nick had activated his new ability, and while unleashing an attack, he deactivated it again.

By now, Nick had noticed that both of his abilities activated and deactivated at the same time.

When his new ability was active, Nick's old ability was also active.

However, Nick's old ability wasn't active when his new ability wasn't.

This meant that his new ability hid Nick from the Fog's perception, but when it deactivated, it perceived Nick again.

Yet, kinetic energy and inertia were a thing.

So, if Nick unleashed an attack with his ability active and deactivated it again, his attack would still have the kinetic energy of when his ability was active.

This was how Nick had managed to unleash such a strong attack just now.

Nick's eyes narrowed, and he immediately started to unleash more attacks.

The more he activated and deactivated his ability, the more familiar he became with it.

By now, the activation and deactivation times were barely 0.1 seconds.

This meant that Nick could attack the Fog like his ability was active.

It took a bit of practice, but he became pretty good at it.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Nick kept hitting the Fog in front of him, and the gaps grew larger and larger.

The color of the light on top of the locator changed from red to a weak red to a weak green.

When Nick saw that, he felt even more energized, and he continued attacking.

By now, each of Nick's attacks created a huge gap.

If he were fast enough, he could probably even jump through one of the gaps and escape.

But there were two problems.

First of all, the Nightmare was the ruler of the world in front of Nick.

And second, Nick didn't want the Fog to retreat.

Sure, Nick was powerful and could escape from the Fog, but he was certain that he could neither kill nor contain it.

It would be like catching smoke with his hands.

This was the problem with Force Specters.

They didn't have bodies to fight with, but they were insanely difficult to catch, kill, and suppress.

So, Nick just kept kicking and punching at the same opening he had already created.

He needed his locator to remain active.

The longer it remained active, the further its signal would spread.

For over an hour, Nick just kept attacking the same spot.

By now, Nick started to feel exhausted and tired.

'How long are they going to take?!'

Slowly, the gap was becoming smaller and smaller since Nick couldn't keep attacking with all of his power.

About 90 minutes after he started attacking, Nick stopped and sat down.

The Fog closed around him again, and Nick breathed heavily.

He was completely exhausted.

At least he had gotten more familiar with his new ability, even though he still couldn't tell what exactly it was doing.

He only knew that it could hide him from the Fog's perception.

'I'll continue later,' he thought.

For about an hour, Nick just recovered his strength.

Then, he continued attacking the Fog and creating an opening.

90 minutes later, Nick had to take a break again.

By now, Nick was getting tired.

He had been awake for quite a while, and he had done a lot of sports.

'Should I sleep?' Nick thought.

He really didn't like that idea.

What if the Fog attacked him while he was sleeping?

What if it had some kind of ability to poison him with some kind of gas during his sleep?

'I suspect that it probably won't do something like that, but I'm not willing to take that risk outside a Containment Unit.'

'I have to continue.'

Nick stood up again and continued punching and kicking.

The world behind the Fog was just as terrifying as in the beginning.

Luckily, it couldn't enter the Fog's world.

In a way, the Fog was protecting Nick from the Nightmare.

Nick wanted to know where he was, but he had no idea since the Nightmare just kept changing everything around him.

He could be in a tiny dark closet or in the sewers.

Only one thing was certain.

It was dark.

Dark enough to allow the Nightmare to use all its power.

Nick was getting weak again, and he wasn't sure how long he would need to rest this time.

Moving his body had become very difficult due to all of the accumulated exhaustion.

"Nick?"

Nick felt like he heard someone calling him just now, but that could also just be the Nightmare.

But then, the color of the gap changed.

From a red and black hell, it turned into an evening yellow.

At that moment, Nick could finally see where he was.

He was on top of a tall structure within the sewers.

Nick changed the angle of his attacks and created a gap diagonally above him.

There, he saw a big hole with several people looking through it.

It was the people from Dark Dream!

"Are you alright, Nick?" Wyntor shouted through the hole.

"I'm good!" Nick shouted back through heavy breaths.

Nick could see Wyntor through the gap, and Wyntor looked concerned.

"You don't look alright," Wyntor said. "You keep switching between blurry and normal."

Chapter 186 – Repelling Cell

"I'm turning blurry?" Nick asked through his attacks.

"Yes!" Wyntor shouted. "You're turning blurry for just a very small instant before you turn solid again."

"That should be my ability!" Nick shouted back. "But more importantly, what about the Repelling Cell?"

"We got it!" Wyntor shouted back. "We're going to prepare it, but it might take several hours! You can rest for a while!"

"Okay, good," Nick shouted back. "I'll come out again in a couple of hours."

Then, Nick stopped attacking the Fog, and all the gaps closed.

Nick immediately sat down and started to heave heavily.

He was so insanely exhausted, and he also started to become hungry again.

His breakthrough had only temporarily filled his hunger.

Fortunately, Nick didn't feel as nervous anymore.

After all, the people of Dark Dream had found him, and he only needed to wait now.

Luckily, the Fog wasn't really a conscious Specter, as shown by its passiveness in this situation.

Any intelligent being would have noticed that Nick could have escaped from the Fog after activating his ability.

But the fact that he didn't leave meant that it would most likely be a bad idea to continue containing him.

If the Fog were intelligent, it would have let go of Nick and would have run away.

Even more, the discussion between Nick and Wyntor was also a dead giveaway that something was going to happen to the Fog.

It seemed like the intelligence of the Fog was on about the same level as the intelligence of the Screaming Coffin.

Maybe even less.

Because of that, Dark Dream had all the time in the world to build something.

For the next couple of hours, Nick just waited and recovered.

He was so hungry and tired, but he couldn't go to sleep yet.

They had to capture the Fog first.

Eventually, Nick stood up and started to attack his surroundings again.

"We need two more hours," Trevor shouted at Nick as soon as he saw the gap.

"Okay!" Nick shouted back before stopping.

Just now, Nick had seen over five of Dark Dream's Extractors working on creating a platform beside the Fog.

Many metallic grates and plates had been bent into supportive beams for an eventual platform beside the Fog.

The hole in the ceiling of the sewers had also been expanded by a lot, and Nick had seen several broken walls behind the hole.

'The Fog is probably below some big building in the Outer City. By the looks of things, Wyntor probably purchased the building and demolished the majority to make the hole,' Nick thought.

Nick took a deep breath and sat down.

The more time advanced, the more difficult it was to wait.

He just wanted to eat something and go to sleep.

Sleeping felt so tempting right now, but Nick wanted to be certain that nothing would happen to him.

Additionally, Nick would most likely sleep for more than just two hours.

After some time, Nick unleashed some attacks again to check on everyone.

"We'll start in 30 minutes," Trevor shouted when he saw Nick kicking the Fog again.

"Okay!"

Nick stopped attacking and waited.

Just now, he had seen that the platform had already been constructed, and everyone was testing the stability of it.

Nick had seen several people punching the walls and jumping up and down.

It was important that the platform they built was very sturdy.

After all, the Repelling Cell was a heavy hunk of hard metal, which weighed over a ton.

Nick prepared himself for 30 minutes.

And then, it was finally time.

Nick unleashed some attacks again, and he saw it.

On a platform beside the Fog was a massive black cube. Many light blue tubes and wires went through the walls of the cube, and there were four big cylinders filled with white liquid behind it.

"We're ready!" Wyntor shouted from outside the hole. "We're going to activate the Repelling Cage!"

A second later, Wyntor nodded towards his employees on the platform.

Trevor stood near the console of the Repelling Cell and nodded back.

Trevor activated the Repelling Cell, and it started to give off a deep and powerful hum.

The light blue tubes and wires turned white, and the cell started to shine.

At the same time, the white liquid on the cylinders on the back lowered.

The white liquid in the cylinders was pure Zephyx.

Every cylinder had a full kilo of pure Zephyx inside it.

This meant that just these four cylinders were worth four million credits!

"Okay, you can bring it inside now!" Wyntor shouted at Nick.

Nick nodded and narrowed his eyes.

Then, he started to take tiny steps forward while he kept launching attacks.

When there were no gaps within the Fog, Nick wouldn't be able to move in the real world, no matter how far he ran inside the Fog's world.

But with several big gaps, Nick could move in the real world.

Somewhat.

It was still a bit awkward.

Nick kicked open a hole and moved his hand slowly towards the opening while walking forward just a bit.

The Fog needed to close itself behind Nick's hand and body, which made it move backward just a tiny bit.

If Nick just directly jumped out, the Fog would probably fly away and vanish.

Slowly, over a couple of minutes, Nick managed to advance to the edge of the ruin he was on.

Then, he continued.

A minute later, Nick was mostly on the platform that Dark Dream had built for him.

He was directly in front of the Repelling Cell.

He kept advancing, and two minutes later, he was already inside the big cell.

When he reached the back wall of the cell, he stopped advancing and opened a gap behind him so that he could talk to the people of Dark Dream.

He saw almost all of his Extractors smiling with excitement at him.

"We're going to transport you with the Fog," Jenny shouted to him. "In two hours, you can come out!"

"Okay!" Nick shouted before he stopped attacking.

Outside, everyone was looking at Wyntor.

"Activate it," he told Trevor.

Trevor nodded and pressed a big red button on the Repelling Cell.

Then, it activated.

Chapter 187 – Elevated Status

While Nick was resting inside the Fog's domain, Trevor activated the Repelling Cell.

WHOOOOOM!

Immediately, the hum of the Repelling Cell became many times louder, and some of the Extractors even held their ears.

The wires and tubes turned an iridescent white, and the cell seemingly turned white.

Inside the cell, the white light pushed the Fog towards the center.

At that moment, the Fog realized that something was going on, and it tried to flee.

It moved in a random direction, but it could only move for about ten centimeters before it couldn't proceed anymore.

Naturally, it tried all the other directions, but the same thing happened.

It was almost like it was surrounded by thick and durable wool.

It could push into the wool, but at some point, the resistance of the wool was greater than the force the Fog could use.

This effect was produced by the Zephyx running through the cell.

Just like how the Fog had suppressed the locator with its own Zephyx, the Fog was now suppressed by the Repelling Cell with its own Zephyx.

Just like the locator, the Fog tried to expand outward but couldn't force its way through the overwhelmingly powerful and dense Zephyx around it.

The walls, ceiling, and floor of the Repelling Cell couldn't be touched by the Fog at all.

In the end, the Fog turned into a smaller cube inside the bigger cube.

At this moment, Nick's feet were outside the Fog since it couldn't touch the floor at all.

Luckily, humans were immune to the effect of the Repelling Cage.

In fact, almost all Physical and Possession Specters were also immune to the effect.

The thing was that the Zephyx of the cell was simply denser than the Fog's body, but its density couldn't possibly compare to a human body.

For Nick, walking through the Zephyx was marginally more difficult than walking through air but not nearly as difficult as walking through water.

When Nick felt his feet coming into contact with dry instead of moist air, he knew that the Repelling Cell was working.

On the outside, the people saw the white light of the Repelling Cell becoming stronger and weaker in different places.

This showed that something inside the cell was trying to escape.

But that was to be expected.

"Get it back to Dark Dream!" Wyntor commanded.

The Zephyx Extractors nodded and jumped onto the platform.

The platform shook a bit, but it still held.

"3, 2, 1," Jenny counted down.

Then, four people lifted the cell on each corner.

Trevor quickly ran under the cell and pushed upward from the middle.

The cell was lifted, and after a bit of solving logistical issues, they managed to push it out of the big hole.

As soon as they did, they almost collapsed in exhaustion.

They were all Peak Newbies by now, but that fucking thing was still so fucking heavy.

Even more, Jenny and Trevor were Initial Johns already, but this thing was still so heavy.

Jenny and Trevor were both assigned to the Dreamer, and the Dreamer had turned into an Adolescent about three months ago.

This meant that their advancement had also sped up.

Nick was still working with the Bleeding Lady, but he wasn't producing as much Zephyx as Jenny or Trevor, which was why it took him longer to advance.

Yet, despite having two Johns helping them, it was still not easy to move the Repelling Cell.

"Come on, Boss is still in there," Trevor said through heavy breathing. "Let's get this thing back to Dark Dream."

The other Extractors nodded and lifted the Repelling Cell again.

Some minutes later, the Extractors were moving through the Outer City while carrying the Repelling Cell.

Naturally, that created a lot of buzz, and the people were watching with interest.

Obviously, almost all the other Manufacturers also noticed what was going on, and they sent their people to watch Dark Dream.

All the Manufacturers knew what a Repelling Cell was, and they knew what it meant when several Extractors carried one through the streets.

Especially when it was active.

Most of the Manufacturers were impressed.

Some of them had heard of Cycle and Dark Dream, but they hadn't really paid any attention to them.

They barely had any Specters or Extractors.

However, the capture of a Force Specter acted as a kind of milestone for Manufacturers.

Capturing a Force Specter was one of the most difficult things to do.

It needed a ton of money, intense planning, and many powerful Extractors.

That made Force Specters very valuable.

While a Force Specter didn't produce more Zephyx than any other kind of Specter, just the investment needed to capture them made them worth a lot.

Some Manufacturers would probably even pay ten million credits.

Since Dark Dream had managed to capture a Force Specter, it meant that they had become an actual Manufacturer in the eyes of the other Manufacturers.

The Spartans, the Manufacturer just one place above Dark Dream, only had a single Force Specter.

One had to remember that the Spartans had four Veterans, over 20 Johns, and over 40 Newbies.

They had over ten Specters, and one of their Specters was about to become an Adult.

Yet, they only had a single Force Specter, which was also their main Specter.

So, even though the size and power difference between Dark Dream and the Spartans was massive, the other Manufacturers now often put them together when talking about other Manufacturers.

A Manufacturer that could capture a Force Specter was a good Manufacturer.

Naturally, the other Manufacturers now paid more attention to Dark Dream.

Dark Dream was actually becoming interesting to them.

Before the cell reached Dark Dream's building, the other Manufacturers had already found out what kind of Specter was in the Repelling Cell.

Everyone knew about the Fog, and everyone had seen where the Extractors from Dark Dream had come from.

It was pretty obvious that the Fog was in there.

The Manufacturers didn't really care.

No one really wanted to invest the money to capture the Fog anyway.

They didn't care that Dark Dream caught it.

Chapter 188 – Captured

Nick felt the floor moving below him, and he knew that his people were currently carrying the cell to the building.

He just wanted to go to sleep, but he kept himself awake.

About an hour later, Nick felt like he was being pulled upwards, which told him that the Repelling Cell was getting pulled up.

Naturally, Nick knew about the entire plan, and he knew how they were going to pull the Repelling Cell upward.

A pulley on the roof.

The bad part was that this meant that all the onlookers knew on which floor the Fog would be contained, but there was nothing they could do about it.

The Repelling Cell was too big and didn't fit through the doors, and carrying it up the staircase would probably take hours.

One had to know that every hour the cell was active used up a kilo of Zephyx.

It wasn't worth the millions of credits just to keep the floor a secret.

So, they just pulled it up at the side of the building.

When the cage reached the sixth floor, the Extractors removed the walls and pulled it inside.

After that, they put the walls back.

The group of onlookers talked with each other for a while before leaving since there was nothing to see anymore.

On the sixth floor, the Extractors carried the cell to the expensive Containment Unit for the Fog.

Since the Containment Units were all surrounded by the inner walls of the building, it didn't look any different from the other Containment Units.

However, if one stripped off the walls, it looked very different.

First of all, there were many small windows with sensors and cameras on the wall.

Additionally, there were so many expensive wires and tubes going around the Containment Unit.

Lastly, the console was almost five times as big as the consoles of the other Containment Units.

This thing had so many different functions that it couldn't be compared to the other Containment Units anymore.

This thing was a beast!

Jenny and Nick had undergone a five-day long training course on how to operate this Containment Unit by its designers and creators.

They were the only two who could operate this Containment Unit.

The main door of the Containment Unit opened, and it sounded a loud and scary alarm.

Then, everyone waited.

To ensure that no Specter was accidentally released, the Containment Unit would sound the alarm for a full five minutes before opening.

This was to make absolutely sure that no one was trying to secretly open it.

Five minutes later, a big part of the wall was opened, and the walls were moving into a form that seemed to mirror the Repelling Cell's shape perfectly.

The Repelling Cell and the Containment Unit were made by the same company, and they were obviously compatible with each other.

The Extractors moved the Repelling Cell to the hole and heard several clicks.

After making sure that all eight clicks sounded, they stepped away.

Jenny went to the Containment Unit's cell and pressed several buttons.

Then, she nodded to Trevor.

Trevor nodded back and pressed a button at the side of the Repelling Cell.

The cell started to shine even brighter, and half of a cylinder of Zephyx emptied immediately.

The humming turned even louder.

BANG!

The wall of the cell facing the Containment Unit shot open with incredible force.

BOOOOOM!

Then, the cell exploded in a bright white light, and all the Extractors had to protect their eyes.

Inside the Repelling Cell, Nick's eyes opened wide when he saw the Fog instantly vanish from around him.

The next moment, Nick saw the Fog hitting the distant wall of the Containment Unit with wonder and surprise.

BANG!

The wall of the Containment Unit slammed shut with insane power, and the wires turned white and purple.

Nick heard a low humming noise coming from the Containment Unit, but it couldn't be compared to the ear-shattering noise of the Repelling Cell.

Outside, Jenny pressed several buttons on the Containment Unit's console and checked through all metrics.

Everyone waited with bated breaths.

About a minute later, Jenny released a sigh.

"Everything looks good," she said with a smile.

Immediately, some of the Extractors sat on the floor in relief while a couple others were cheering.

They had done it!

"We can celebrate later," Jenny said. "Get Boss out of there first."

The Extractors quickly walked up to the Repelling Cell, and Trevor pressed several buttons.

After eight clinks, Trevor gestured for the Extractors to move the cage back, and they did just that.

Inside the cage, Nick saw the cell getting moved away from the wall, and he released a sigh of relief.

The next second, Trevor looked into the cell and smiled. "We got it!"

Nick smiled back and walked out.

As soon as he walked out, all the Extractors cheered.

Their Chief Zephyx Extractor had done it!

Without him, they wouldn't have been able to capture the Fog.

Nick had been the one that had located it, kept it busy, and moved it into the cage.

He had also been the only one in true danger.

Not even a single Extractor wasn't proud of Nick at this moment, and they were happy that they had an actually competent boss.

Nick smiled with embarrassment as he rubbed the back of his head.

"Well done, everyone!" Wyntor said with a couple of claps for his employees. "You all did amazing work today!"

The Extractors smiled respectfully.

Then, Wyntor walked over to Nick and put his hand on Nick's shoulder.

"Good job, Nick!" he said. "I knew it wasn't a mistake to invest so much in you!"

Naturally, Wyntor spoke the latter part quietly.

"Thanks, Wyntor," Nick answered with a sigh. "I'm beat. I just want to eat something and go to sleep."

Wyntor nodded with a laugh. "I can imagine! Then, I won't keep you here any longer. Have a fun night, and we're going to see each other the day after tomorrow."

Nick and Wyntor had already agreed that Nick would get the day off after capturing the Fog.

"Thanks, I really need that now," Nick said.

Wyntor just laughed.

Chapter 189 – New Ability

Nick left Dark Dream, got something to eat, and went to sleep.

The next day, Nick went to the arena that he and Reynold had created over a year ago.

By now, Reynold and Manela had stopped training Nick, but he was still using their training grounds for his own training.

Kugelblitz had its own training rooms, which were much better than these places.

Reynold and Manela simply didn't need to use these places to train.

After finishing his regular workout, Nick decided to test his new ability.

He still wasn't sure what his ability actually did.

He quickly searched for an abandoned house and entered since he didn't want anyone to find out what kind of ability he had.

While his first ability was literally impossible to see, his new one could be seen.

After all, Wyntor had said that Nick had turned blurry.

Nick's ability was active, which meant that nobody was seeing him currently.

That was the best opportunity to test his new ability.

Nick lifted his right arm, looked at it, and activated his ability.

As soon as he activated the ability, his arm turned cloudy and almost transparent.

Nick's eyes widened, and he looked at the remainder of his body.

Everything had turned cloudy and blurry.

It was almost like Nick was looking at his body through an extremely dirty and grimy window.

The next moment, he touched his left arm with his right hand.

And his eyes widened in shock.

His right arm passed through his left arm!

Next, Nick moved his arm rapidly through his body, and that was when he noticed what was actually going on.

Part of his blurry body was leaving him and being pushed away like smoke.

'I'm fog!' Nick thought.

Sure enough, Nick looked like some kind of colorful fog.

The part of Nick's body that had been pushed away slowly flew back to Nick's body and reattached itself.

Next, Nick started to move around.

He could still keep his form while moving, but the faster he moved, the blurrier and less distinct his body's shape became.

It was like his body was trying to keep its shape but was too sluggish to do it rapidly and consistently.

Even more, Nick started to feel weak, and his head started to ache.

So, he deactivated his ability.

In an instant, the fog turned solid, and Nick's body reappeared.

'That's how the Fog couldn't notice me,' Nick thought.

'The Fog didn't have eyes, and it also probably couldn't hear. This means that it could only perceive me by touch.'

'So, when I turned into Fog, it lost its perception of me.'

'It's probably the same thing with humans. When I turn into fog, they can't feel me with their bodies since I won't feel any different from air.'

'But in that state, I also can't interact with anything. I can't use my weapons or damage anything.'

'Speaking of!'

Nick activated his ability again and looked at his clothing and weapons.

Surprisingly, his weapons and clothing also turned into fog.

Even his Barrier turned into fog.

It was very strange.

Next, Nick pulled out one of his spears while he was in his fog-state and materialized again with his spear in his hand.

'This means I can manipulate and change my body shape while I am fog,' Nick thought.

Nick experimented with his new fog-state for over an hour, and he finally managed to create a full profile on it.

'Sure enough, there has to be a weakness to my ability. It can't all be this perfect all the time,' Nick thought with furrowed brows.

When Nick had been inside the Fog, he had transformed his body many, many times, but he had never run out of Zephyx.

This meant that deactivating and activating his ability didn't cost any Zephyx.

Yet, there had to be a Zephyx cost to this, and Nick had already found it.

Keeping his body in one piece cost Zephyx.

For example, if Nick were to just stand in the same position, he could permanently keep his fog-state active since he wasn't using any Zephyx.

However, when he moved, his body was using Zephyx to keep the fog clumped together.

The more his fog moved, the more Zephyx his body used to pull it back together.

It was a bit like a guy attached to two heavy weights lying on the ground. While the man was standing, he wouldn't need to carry the weights, but when he moved in any direction, he needed to use power to move the weights.

While he had been kicking inside the Fog, Nick had been using a bit of Zephyx, which was why he had become so hungry and exhausted, but it wasn't a lot since the movement was controlled.

But things would become very different if the movement became involuntary.

Like getting punched, kicked, or shot.

At that point, his body would be dispersed in many different directions, which would require a ton of Zephyx to fix.

And if he didn't have enough Zephyx?

Nick wasn't sure, but the most logical explanation was that he would automatically return to his normal form...

At whatever location his body was.

Nick had tested this by simply punching a wall while he was in his fog-state.

As soon as Nick's foggy hand hit the wall, it exploded and scattered across the wall.

When Nick's hand had returned to his body, he had felt quite exhausted.

He assumed that he had used nearly 30% of his Zephyx storage to pull his hand back into place.

And that was him only punching a stationary wall.

If someone kicked through his body...

One had to remember that Zephyx Extractors were extraordinarily powerful.

A proper kick from a John would create a huge gust of wind.

That would disperse Nick's entire body.

Nick was almost certain that he would die in that situation.

Using the fog-state in direct combat was extremely risky.

It was more useful for running away, repositioning, or just general movement.

Luckily, there were not only bad things about this ability.

Nick had also found quite a few useful things.

Chapter 190 – Strengths and Weaknesses

For example, Nick noticed that moving was very different from normal.

While Nick was many times slower in his fog-state, there were a couple of interesting things.

For example, he could cling to any surface and move along it quietly.

Nick could quietly slither up a huge building like a spider without any issues.

Then, he could simply materialize on top of it with all of his equipment.

Sadly, Nick couldn't just fly.

His fog needed to be attached to something, and it couldn't move too fast, or Nick would lose a lot of Zephyx.

Nick had tried to throw a spear and attach himself to his own spear while it was flying, but he immediately stopped when he felt his Zephyx vanish at insane speeds.

The reason was the strong wind, mostly.

After that, Nick took a while to come to terms with the fact that a strong gust of wind could kill him if he wasn't careful.

But there was one other thing that was quite interesting.

Nick could fit through tiny openings as long as he moved through them very slowly.

As long as Nick moved slowly through a small hole, he didn't need to use as much Zephyx to recover his shape.

For example, Nick had moved through one of the grates on the ground and entered the sewers.

However, that move had cost him 20% of his Zephyx and took almost half a minute.

But that was still impressive!

After all, Nick could now easily enter the sewers, and even more, he could travel through it by clinging to the ceiling.

This meant that the sewers had essentially transformed into pathways Nick could use.

Well, as long as there was light.

Traveling through the darkness was still dangerous.

Nick had a lot more experience with the Nightmare, but traveling through its world was still extremely dangerous.

If Nick accidentally commanded his body to move away from the ceiling, he would drop down into the sewers.

It was possible that Nick would simply land above the liquid since he wasn't very dense, but it was also possible that he would fall into it, and his body would disperse.

Nick didn't want to find out.

But, of course, this wasn't the only use of this ability.

For once, the Nightmare's existence actually helped Nick.

After all, nearly every single building in Crimson Fungus City had holes in its walls and ceiling so that the sunlight could enter.

And Nick could fit through these holes.

Sure, it would cost some Zephyx and would take a while, but it was possible.

In summary, the ability was extraordinarily useful in non-combat scenarios but almost useless during combat.

Unless his opponent was blind and deaf.

'I would say it's pretty useful,' Nick thought. 'My battle style is already mostly reliant on finding ways to escape my opponent's perception and attacking from that position.'

'And as far as I see it, this ability achieves just that.'

'But now, I wonder what kind of ability the normal one from the Fog is.'

One had to remember that this was a mutation of Nick's ability that had been granted by the Null.

This was not the ability the Fog would give someone without an ability.

One could see quite clearly that the ability that Nick had received worked to make it harder for people to perceive him, which was exactly what his main ability was all about.

Almost all abilities Nick would receive from any Specter would somehow or some way try to reduce the ways Nick could be perceived.

Some of them were simply more fitting than others.

For example, the Fog's ability was obviously very fitting to Nick's main ability, which was to be expected.

A less fitting one would have been the Lover, for example.

Maybe the Lover would have made Nick invisible to people who wanted to have sex with him?

Not very useful.

After all, someone would actually need to see him in order to even think about having sex with him.

Maybe the Dreamer would have made him very quiet for sleeping people?

Also not very useful.

Eventually, Nick finished all of his research and trained a bit more.

Even though he had a free day, Nick still hated doing nothing.

Over a year had passed since the incident, but Nick was still a bit scared of quiet and isolated moments.

Whenever he was alone with nothing to do, he felt nervous.

This made sleeping difficult, but Nick managed to circumvent that problem by training so much that he was always completely exhausted before going to sleep.

Maybe once he managed to achieve his goal, these problems would vanish.

Nick could only hope.

So, after a lot of training and planning, Nick went to sleep.

The next day, Nick entered Dark Dream again and did his daily duties.

Get the Zephyx canisters.

Measure the Zephyx.

Put the canisters and the measurements into Wyntor's office.

Check if the Screaming Coffin needed a new corpse and potentially give it a new one.

Get the pile of fresh garbage from the delivery man and dump it onto the Dung Heap.

Work with the Bleeding Lady.

Ask Jenny if anything of note happened.

Those were the regular duties that Nick did every morning.

When those were done, Nick either planned something for the Extractors, talked with Wyntor, searched for Specters, or coordinated with the Investigator Department of Dark Dream.

But today, Nick would do something different.

Someone had to find out the best way to work with the Fog, and that was Nick's job.

How long could someone survive in the Fog?

Was it possible to sleep in it?

Could more than one person enter?

Would that produce more or less Zephyx?

What was the easiest way to break out?

How much Zephyx did it produce?

There were many things Nick had to check.

Any inaccuracies on his part, and Dark Dream might lose tens of thousands of credits in potential profits per day.

When Nick was finally done with his daily duties, he told Jenny and Wyntor that he would be experimenting with the Fog.

And then he went to the sixth floor.