

PARANORMAFIA

CHAPTER



THE SPACE WALL (PART 3)



The Next Day

The gateway to Frostica's Customs loomed like a gash in the horizon, a towering corridor of two massive gunmetal walls lined with sharp white lights.

On the far side of the divide, snow curled in pale gusts across the frozen city; on this side, Level Zero lay still and warm at its engineered fifteen degrees.

A clean, razor-straight line cut across the red carpeted ground; snow melting instantly where the barrier began.

Kaja stood just beyond the gate, the mechanical hum of the customs checkpoint vibrating faintly beneath his boots.

The guard at the terminal leaned on his post, visor dimly glowing.

"Sorry, Kaja, I can't let you through," the guard said, his tone more bored than stern.

Kaja's eyes stayed level. "I have to pass, sir. My employer's counting on me."

The guard shrugged. "Your boss will have to wait. Orders from the mayor."

"I haven't received any notification," Kaja pressed. "Is there another execution already?"

"Yep." The guard gave a dry laugh. "He's on a hot streak lately. I'd watch my steps if I were you."

"Very funny, sir," Kaja said flatly.

The guard snorted. "I was hoping you'd at least crack a smile with this one."

"Will the gates be opened afterwards?"

“No idea,” the guard replied with a casual wave. “Keep an eye on your link. You’ll get the notice.”

Kaja exhaled slowly through his nose. “I’m gonna lose my job if this keeps up,” he muttered, turning away from the frozen edge of Frostica and into the glowing red stillness of Level Zero.

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The Execution Plaza lay at the city’s center like a bright scar in the red grid. Tens of thousands of inmates pressed shoulder to shoulder, voices low with a fevered anticipation.

At its core rose a raised platform emblazoned with the Kingsland emblem, light pouring down from harsh overhead panels.

Above it all, a rectangular tower pierced the skyline, its black silhouette sharp against the clouded ceiling.

The mayor’s throne sat atop that tower like a parasite on a monument, his shadow unmistakable.

Crine and two armored guards stood at his flanks, watching the crowd without speaking.

At the edges of the plaza, two inmate merchants squatted on their worn patches of carpet.

One with a messy ponytail held up a sack of stones, voice high and eager.

“Good rocks, good rocks! Who wants some good rocks!”

“Don’t say it like that,” the second merchant with short dark-green hair, muttered. “You sound like you’re selling drugs, idiot.”

The first merchant grinned wider. “Oh, my bad. Hard rocks! Hard rocks! Who wants some hard rocks!” “Better?”

The second sighed. “Never mind.”

Kaja passed, and the merchant called after him,

“Hey, pal! Wanna buy some rocks to throw at the goner?”

“I’ll pass,” Kaja said, not breaking stride.

“These’ll knock a horse off its chair, I swear!” the merchant shouted.

His companion groaned. “Alright, now you’re just doing it on purpose.”

Kaja’s link buzzed at his wrist.

“Yes, sir,” he said, bringing it closer to his mouth.

“Kaja! What the fuck do you think you’re doing?!” his boss’s voice exploded through the speaker. “I got a whole team standing around like cones waiting for you to get here! Where are you?!”

“I couldn’t cross customs, sir,” Kaja said.

“The mayor’s doing another public execution.”

“What!?”

“They announced it this morning. I was hoping you’d call earlier to give you a heads-up.”

“Speak up, I can’t hear a fucking word! What’s with all the noise?!”

Kaja glanced toward the platform. The crowd was thickening, their noise rising. “Hold on a second, sir. I’ll go somewhere quieter.”

The announcer’s voice tore through the speakers like a whip.

“Ladies and gentlemen, it’s time for the moment we’ve all been waiting for!”

Children at the front surged forward. “They’re bringing the goner!” a girl with long blue hair eagerly said.

“Hell yeah!” a boy with spiky hair yelled, bouncing on his heels.

“Take out your rocks!” another one shouted.

From the black tunnel beneath the tower, the executioners emerged. They wore ghostlike white robes that covered their entire bodies.

A red Kingsland emblem masked their faces, while a thick brown rope hung around their necks like failed nooses.

Shields were paraded proudly, while execution swords were hidden beneath the cloth.

Between them walked a chained figure; Jinki.

The chains clinked sharply against the metal floor.

Jinki tilted his head up, bruises already painting the edges of his face. “Come on, guys,” he pleaded to the executioners. “Are you really gonna listen to that piece of shit? The only reason we’re stuck in this system is because we back down every damn time! Think about it; everyone in this sector’s gonna hear

us on that platform. If we storm the Space Wall together, most of us would make it through. I bet even you guys wish you could do more with your lives than this!”

“Get your head out of the clouds, kid,” one executioner said without looking at him. “The sooner you make peace with your situation, the easier it’ll be. For both of us.”

A crow launched off a nearby rooftop, its wings beating against the stale air.

Kaja sat on that same rooftop, link pressed close to his mouth. “Sir, can you hear me now?”

“Yeah!” the boss barked. “You better have a good reason for wasting my time!”

Kaja’s eyes fixed on the crowd below. “The mayor’s having another public execution,” he said tightly. “I couldn’t cross customs.”

“Your fucking mayor again?! I’m the one he’s really killing with all these damn executions!”

The announcer’s voice boomed again, silk-wrapped venom: “Get your rocks ready and don’t miss your chance to take part in the only event where it’s legal to take out your frustrations on someone. Courtesy of Level Zero Sector 5’s mayor Marx Karly, I present to you today’s goner: Citizen #48563!”

The boss’s voice rose through the static. “How long does it take after the execution for them to open the gates?”

Kaja froze. He knew that number.

“Hold on, sir,” he whispered. His eyes followed the chains, the bruised jaw, the hair spiked upward even in defeat.

It was Jinki.

“Kaja?!” his boss yelled through the line.

“When do the gates open?!”

“It’s... Jinki?” Kaja breathed, eyes widened in disbelief.

“What? Are you deaf? I’m talking to you!”

“I have to hang up, sir. I’ll be there when I can.”

“Kaja, don’t you dare—” click.

Down in the plaza, Jinki’s voice broke against the noise.

“We don’t need to keep up with this bullshit! If we stand together—”

A stone struck him across the face before he could finish.

A kid with spiky blue hair threw up his hands in victory. “Hell yeah! I got him right in the face!”

“You’re not supposed to throw yet, dummy,” the blue-haired girl scolded.

Bets began flying like stones. A woman laughed with a man. “I bet you two credits mine’ll make him bleed more than yours.”

“Make it three,” the man grinned.

An old man showed a boy how to grip his rock better. “Hold it like this and it’ll fly faster.”

“What the hell, guys...” Jinki muttered, blood dripping down his lip. “Aren’t we on the same side?”

The crowd ignored him. The plaza had already chosen its role.

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The stairway to the mayor's platform climbed along the tower's flank like a black steel ribbon. It rose straight and narrow, exposed to the execution plaza below, with two Kingsland guards standing firm at its base.

Their armor caught the pale floodlights with a dull gleam. Dark exosuits; the Kingsland crest, pressed in gold, shimmered faintly on their right sleeves. The same crest, smaller, was mounted on a pentagonal plate set at the forehead of their helmets above pinkish-red visors, which glowed softly in the dark like a pair of waiting eyes. Their stance was heavy and confident; not bored, not alert, just unmovable.

"Please let me through," Kaja said as he approached. "I have to talk to the mayor."

"Nobody gets past this point," the left guard replied through a filtered, metallic voice. "Beat it."

"You don't understand," Kaja pressed. "It's important."

The guard tilted his helmet slightly, light skimming off the pentagonal crest.

"Yeah? Then say it. If it matters, I'll pass it up."

"It's something I have to tell him myself."

"That won't cut it." The man's hand settled casually on the baton at his hip. "Get lost."

“Mayor!” Kaja shouted toward the top of the tower. “I need to speak with you; it’s crucial!”

The guard snapped forward and cracked his baton against Kaja’s face. The blow echoed against the steel steps.

“Now,” the guard said through the helmet, voice edged with static, “what did I just say? Keep this up and you’ll regret it.”

Kaja stumbled back, wiping blood from the corner of his mouth. “The one they’re about to execute... it’s my little brother.

I’m begging you. Let me speak to him. One minute is all I ask.”

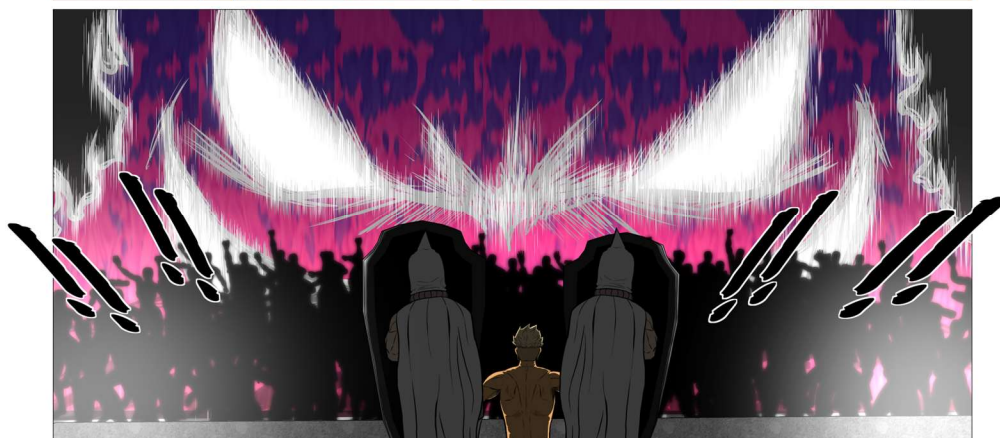
The guard let out a short, mocking laugh. “Stop it, you’re gonna make me cry.”

Above, the announcer’s voice thundered through the plaza.

“Executioners, get your shields and helmets ready! The stoning starts in ten... nine... eight... seven...”

The crowd stirred like a single massive beast. A dark haze rippled over them, their excitement

gathering shape — a grinning, formless monster
swelling in the air.



“Six... five... four... three...”

Jinki kneeled at the center of the platform in chains, eyes wide and locked on the sky. “They’re really gonna do this,” he whispered.

“Two... one!”

The horn blared.

The first stone flew; a blue-haired child’s throw. An old man followed. Then the flood.

Jinki twisted, raising his forearms over his head.

An executioner jabbed his ribs with the point of a hidden blade.

“Don’t move,” came the low voice beneath the hood.

Rocks slammed into him. His forehead split. Blood streaked his cheek and chest.

The executioners didn’t flinch; their towering metal shields deflected every stray impact aimed at them.

“Looks like you owe me five credits,” the second guard at the stairs muttered.

The first tilted his head toward the platform. “What? No way that bastard’s already covered in blood.”

“Yep.”

“Damn... either he’s trash at dodging or the crowd’s getting sharper.”

Their focus wavered, and Kaja seized his moment; he burst between them, boots pounding the first steps before they even turned their heads.

“Hey! Get back here!” a guard barked, but Kaja was already climbing.

The staircase rattled faintly under his weight as the guards scrambled after him, but he had a head start, and he knew every second counted.

He reached the top; and froze.

A third guard stepped out from the shadow of the platform's edge, laser pistol leveled at Kaja's face.

"Easy now," the guard said. "Where do you think you're going?"

The commotion finally reached the mayor.

From his throne on the platform, flanked by Crine, the mayor leaned forward. "What's going on?"

"Mayor!" Kaja called out. "Please allow me to speak with you!"

"Who let him up here?" the mayor snapped. "Get him out of my sight. He's ruining the show."

Kaja dropped to his knees, forehead to the steel.

"I am citizen #48562. The person you are about to execute is my little brother. I implore you to reconsider your decision and give him a chance. I'm sure he didn't mean to do whatever he did."

The mayor rose slowly from his seat, cloak dragging against the floor.

"Did you really risk your life coming here to say... this?"

He stopped over Kaja.

"This world doesn't run on empathy. It runs on power. On respect."

Kaja lifted his head slightly, eyes desperate.

"Please, Mayor. I swear on my life, I'll make sure he never does it again."

The mayor's boot snapped across his face.

Kaja went down hard, rolling dangerously close to the platform's edge.

"Of course he won't," the mayor said, picking at his ear with a pinky. "He's getting executed. Count yourself lucky I'm in a good mood. Otherwise, I'd toss you in with him."

Kaja gasped. "How much would it cost for you to forgive him? I've saved credits for years. I'll pay whatever it takes."

The mayor laughed sharply. "I've seen it all. You're trying to bribe me now?"

"I'll work fifty years if I have to. Please."

"Well," the mayor said, turning back toward his throne, "I'll give you this; you're persistent. If it were anything else, maybe you'd have had a chance. But the show has already begun."

"Sir, I'm begging you!"

The mayor's head turned, eyes narrowing.

"Did you just raise your voice at me?"

Confiscate all his credits and get him out of my sight. If he resists, throw him in the hole. We'll make a slave out of him."

"You can't do that," Kaja muttered, under his breath.

"Oh, he can," the top guard said, pressing the muzzle of the pistol closer. "Walk."

Below, the announcer's voice cracked over the loudspeakers.

"Level Zero citizens, be quiet! The mayor is about to make his announcement."

The mayor strode to the front of the platform, arms wide. The crowd fell into dead silence.

“May this serve as an example,” he said, voice booming, “to anyone who dares even think of rebelling against me.”

He raised his arm, palm flat like a blade.

“Executioners, ready your blades.”

“JINKIIIIII!” Kaja screamed, struggling as two guards held him at the base of the platform.

Jinki, on his knees beneath the floodlights, lifted his bruised and bloodied face at the sound of his brother’s voice. His lips twitched into something halfway between a smile and an apology. “...Kaja?”

A fist slammed into the back of Kaja’s head, driving his face against the steel floor.

“Shut it,” one of the guards growled. “I’m not dying because of you.”

The mayor stood tall at the edge of his throne platform, cloak stirring faintly in the wind.

“Execute him,” he ordered; lowering his arm like a guillotine.

Two executioners in their white shrouds stepped forward, blades raised high.

In one motion, steel carved down from collarbone to gut, twin arcs meeting in a single red burst.

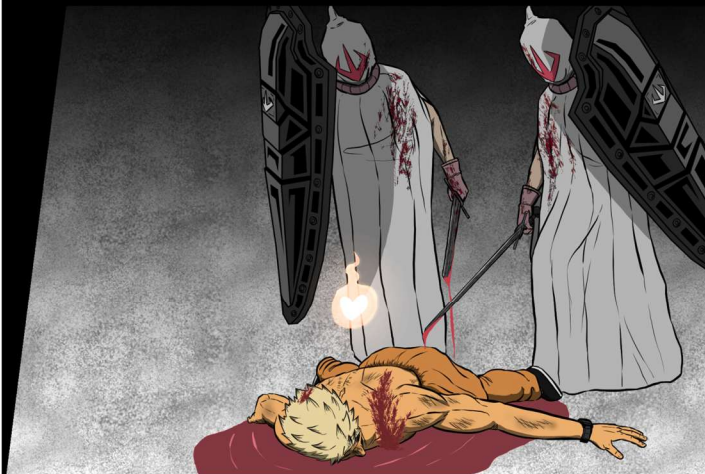
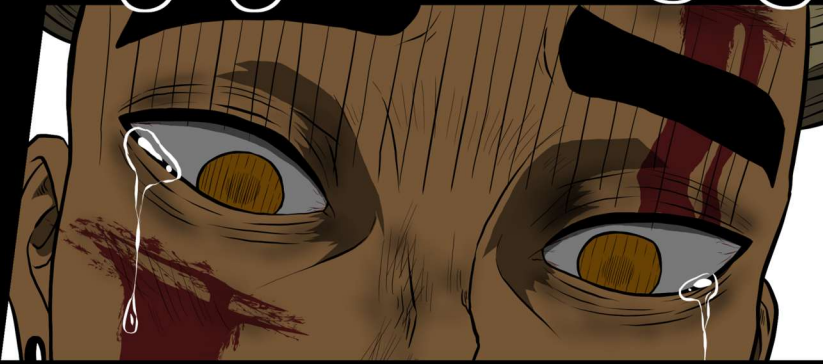
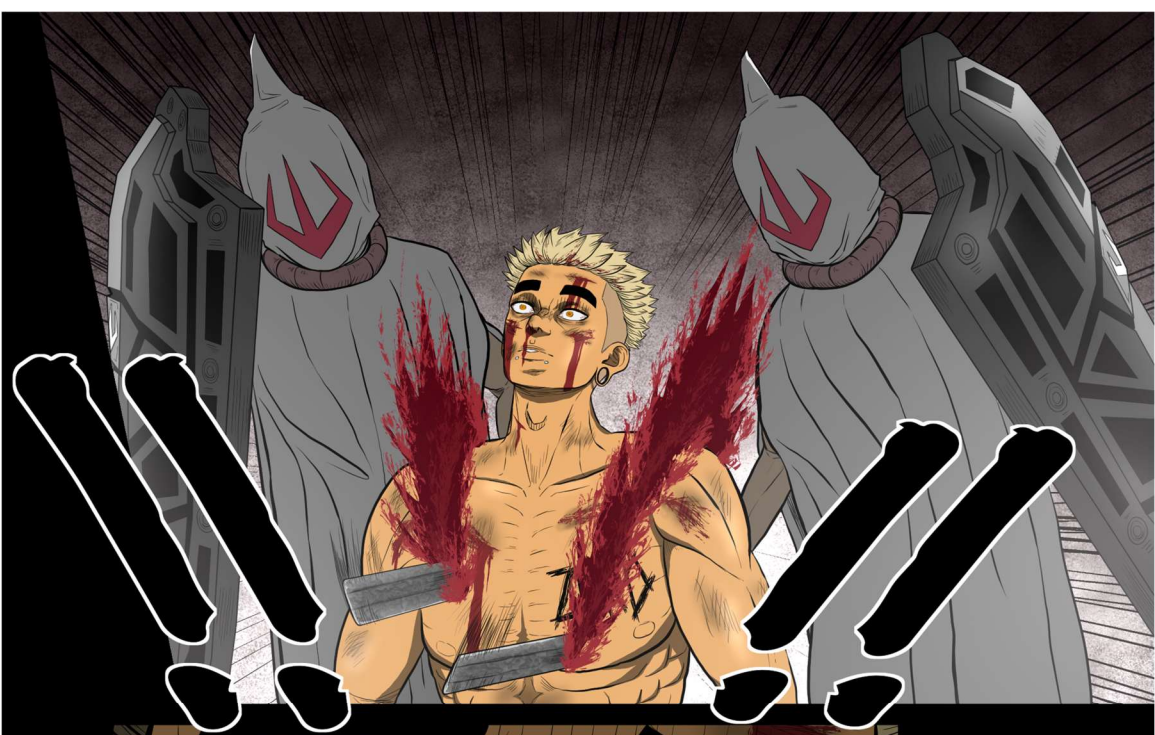
A sound escaped Jinki’s throat; a breath, half caught, half crushed.

Blood spilled down the steel flooring like a torn artery.

His body swayed, then toppled forward into the pooling red.

“Sorry, big... bro,” he whispered, just before his head hit the ground.

His soul sphere lifted silently from his body;
white heart faint at its center.
It dimmed, shivering like ash in the wind.



“His soul sphere’s still conscious,” the mayor barked sharply. “Keep stabbing him!”

Steel plunged again. And again. And again.

The plaza, moments ago loud and greedy, fell into a hungry quiet. Kaja didn’t hear the crowd anymore; only the sound of his brother’s blood dripping, steady, rhythmic. A hollow bell against metal.

The bars in Kaja’s eyes faded; his sclera darkened to black. His irises burned bright green. Years poured through him in jagged flashes;

Frostbitten fingers at eight years old.

Factories where the lights never turned off.

Every humiliating “Yes, sir” to men who never saw him as more than another tool.

Every credit saved, counted, guarded like something holy.

Every night whispering promises of freedom to a younger brother who believed him.

All of it – nothing now.

His jaw clenched. His breath trembled.

“Damn it,” Kaja whispered.

A third eye split open on his forehead, dripping with green light.

Tattoos burned white-hot along his face, outlining faint wing-like patterns stretching from the corners of his eyes to his cheekbones.

“Damn it all.”

And then it tore out of him – a green inferno.



The two guards holding him flinched, bodies trembling under the pressure radiating off him.

Kaja's Echo detonated; a jagged, spiked blast that hurled bodies back and rattled the tower.

People nearest him sailed, armor skidding, boots screeching against the floor.

Up on high, the mayor grabbed the edge of his throne as the platform shuddered.

"What's happening!?"

Beside him, Crine's voice went flat.

"You should find someplace safe to hide, sir."

"Some place safe?" the mayor spat. "You're some place safe! You're staying right here to protect me, you imbecile!"

Crine's eyes slid to him, cold.

"You just insinuated you were smarter than me, didn't you?"

Below, Kaja's emerald colored soul sphere flared into being above his shoulder; the numerals 100 carved across it in black, scratch-marked symbols.

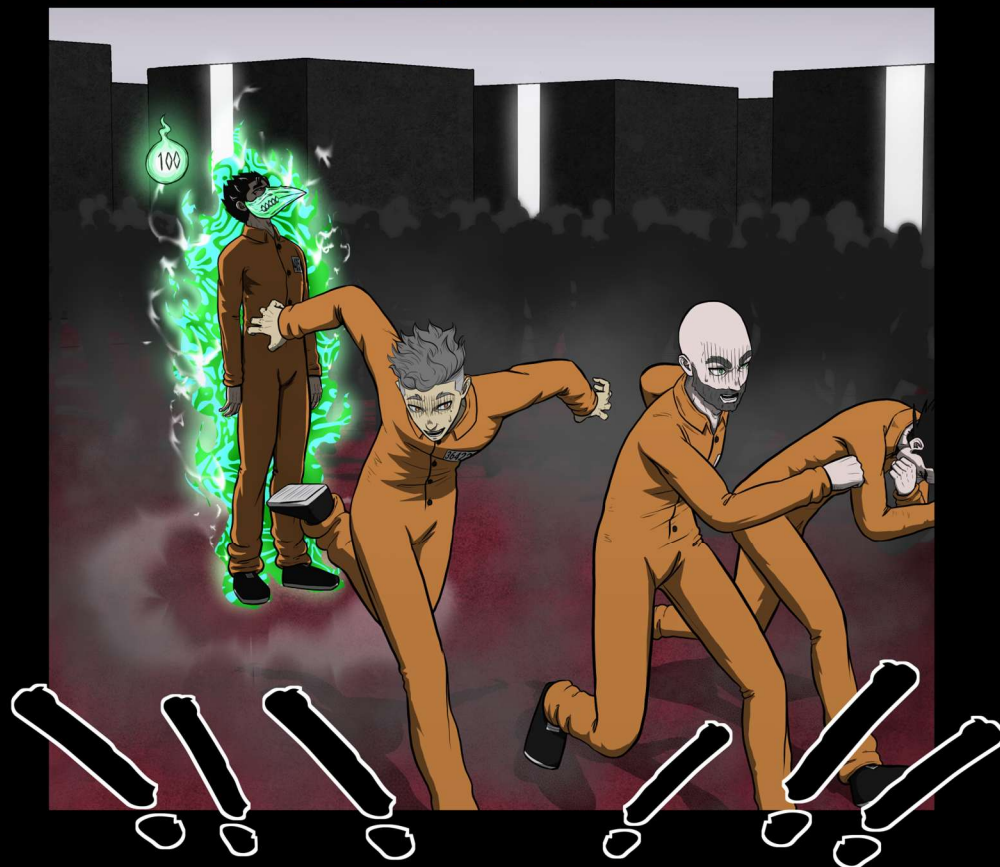
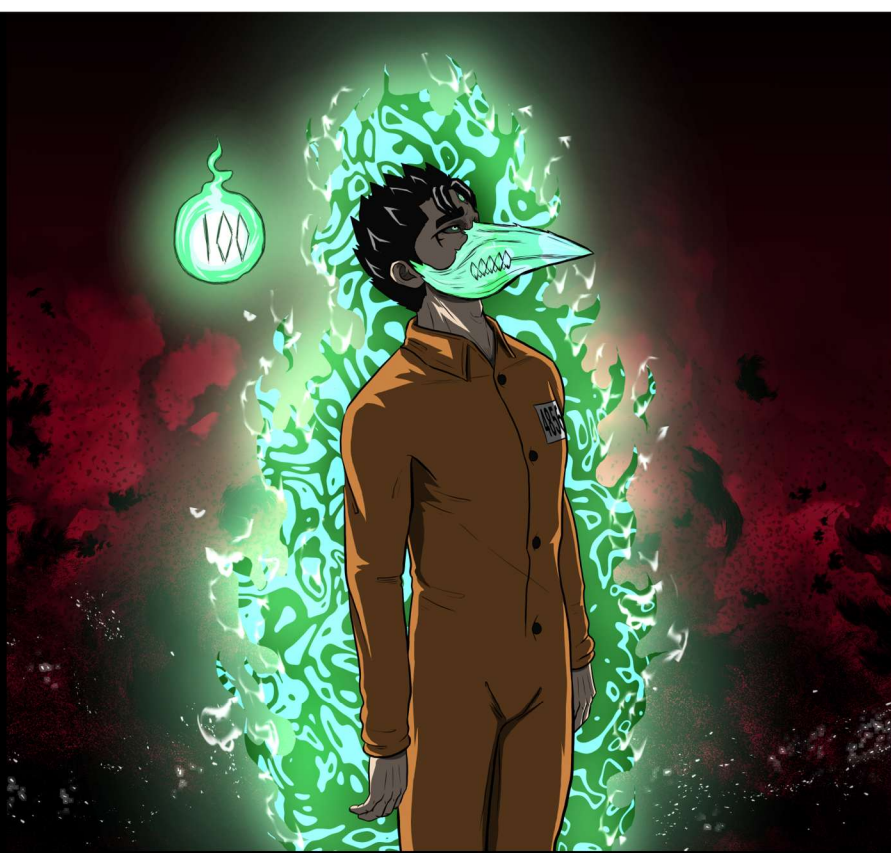
The mask had already wrapped his face; a ghostly green beak forged from flame.

He tilted his head back and sighed, a long, quiet breath up into the gray sky through the halo of fire, his eyes burning.

"Holy shit," one guard choked from yards away, visor half-shattered, sprawled on his back. "He's a Mask User!"

The plaza exploded into panic. Inmates broke in every direction, cramming the thin alleys between cube-cells; bodies jammed, some climbed over

others, children went down and were nearly trampled as the stampede tried to force itself through gaps that weren't there.



“Hurry up – shoot him!” another guard shouted, fumbling for his pistol. “Shoot him!”

Kaja slowly tilted his head toward them.

The number on his sphere dropped from 100 to 85.

As he pointed downward, his voice came through the mask warped, like spoken through boiling water.

“Lick the floor.”

Dominator’s Echo slammed outward on an unprecedented scale. The pressure crushed thousands within nearly five hundred meters. Guards dropped flat, their helmets’ gold Kingsland crests grinding against the steel beneath the carpeted floor; their sleeves scraped as their arms buckled. Inmates collapsed in ragdoll rows, cheek to pegged to the crimson ground, lungs heaving against the invisible weight.

“I can’t— move!” a guard wheezed, nailed where he lay.

At the top, the mayor buckled to his knees, trapped under the same crushing force.

“Aow! What’s going on!?”

Crine crouched in front of him, placing his palm on his head; fingers spread, almost gentle.

“Listen up, Mayor. If I bring this guy’s mask back to the King, I regain my Barricader rank. Now... guess what that means.”

Panic flooded the mayor’s voice.

“Wait— I didn’t mean to speak to you that way. I’m sorry! I’ll— I’ll double your pay if you stay and protect me. Triple! Sounds good, right?”

Crine's hand slid lower, gripping the mayor's face.

"What's the matter, Mayor— don't feel so superior anymore?"

"Mm—mph!" the mayor choked, eyes bulging as Crine's fingers tightened. Blood beaded at the ducts and ran. Bone cracked under the pressure; teeth clicked together. With a wet, final crunch, Crine caved the face in; nose and cheekbones shattering, blood spurting from mouth, eyes, and ears. The body slumped sideways on the throne steps.

Above him, his soul sphere flickered, the heart at its center dying out.

Crine looked down at the ruin he'd made, a thin smile cutting across his mouth.

"Sweet dreams, Mayor."

