

Chapter 103 - Neco

We didn't have the luxury of time to gawk or question the absurdity of Misha suddenly loaning us high-tech gear.

The Golden Phoenix's people were closing in fast.

Without wasting another second, Jade and I flipped open the crates, only to freeze in stunned disbelief at what we saw inside.

"Vibro-blade, Vibro-knife, and two Kinetic-Resistance Masks," Misha declared proudly, her tone brimming with satisfaction. "Misha did not have two of the same blade on hand, so this combination must suffice."

I barely registered the second part of her explanation, my focus entirely captured by the contents in front of me.

This wasn't just good gear—this was *top-notch* equipment, leagues above what Jade or I could have realistically hoped to acquire any time soon—or maybe ever.

Vibro-weapons, as the name suggested, operated by vibrating at frequencies so high they didn't need a traditional edge. The oscillations alone were enough to effortlessly slice through most materials, turning them into weapons that could cut through nearly anything short of heavily reinforced armor.

The Kinetic-Resistance Masks were just as mind-blowing, if not more so.

They offered extreme protection against kinetic forces—whether it was a punch, a knife, or even *bullets*. High-Tier versions of these masks in the game could render the wearer nearly impervious to physical harm, even negating the blunt force trauma that normally accompanied bullet impacts.

And the ones Misha had provided? They weren't just functional—they were beautiful, clearly high-Tier in make.

Styled after traditional Japanese Oni masks, one was jet-black with white accents, while the other was its inverse, stark white with black details. The intricate craftsmanship and vibrant, deep colors gave them an almost ceremonial air.

"This... this is insane," I muttered under my breath, still struggling to wrap my head around the quality of what Misha had just casually offered us.

"Put on, quick, quick!" Misha's voice snapped me back to the present, her urgency cutting through my thoughts. "When Ela and Jade put on the masks, tap the right side twice. The top half will go translucent—in case conversation is necessary."

Her reminder jolted us into action.

Jade and I exchanged a quick glance; we *really* couldn't afford to stand here gawking.

Without further hesitation, we each grabbed a mask and slipped it on; I went for the white one, while Jade picked up the black one.

The mask fit perfectly as I placed it over my face, the braided wires wrapping themselves snugly and automatically around my head with an unsettling precision; it somewhat reminded me of those face-huggers from the classic Alien movies back in my old world, sending a bit of a shiver down my spine.

The weight of the mask was distributed so evenly by the wires, however, that it felt almost as if it wasn't there at all, quickly making me forget that I was even wearing it in the first place.

Following Misha's instructions, I tapped the right side twice.

Instantly, the upper half of the mask became translucent, providing a crystal-clear view of my surroundings while the lower half retained its fierce, Oni-inspired design.

Jade glanced between the vibro-blade and vibro-knife, her gaze lingering on the blade with a mixture of awe and apprehension.

"I... uh, I've never used anything like that before," she admitted, motioning to the vibro-blade. "Knives? Sure. But something that size? I wouldn't even know where to start."

Her honesty was refreshing, and it made the decision simple.

"I'll take the blade, then," I said, reaching for it. "I'm no master, but I've got a little experience with longer weapons. It's not much, but it's better than nothing."

Of course, I wasn't about to disclose the full truth—that my "experience" mostly came from the single level I had gained in [Anima-Razor] since the merging of the Skills and the fleeting memories of wielding the Data-Blade in Cyberspace.

Instead, I kept my explanation vague, adding, "It should be enough to hold my own for now."

With the weapons divvied up, Misha quickly walked us through their activation mechanisms.

"Simple buttons here," she explained, pointing to small, well-hidden switches near the hilt of each weapon. "Press once for activation, twice for off. Don't hold unless Misha teaches further—it can enter maintenance mode!"

Jade and I nodded, absorbing her instructions like eager students.

With a mutual glance, we both activated our weapons briefly, watching as the vibro-tech roared to life. The hum was faint but powerful, and the edges of both weapons seemed to shimmer as they vibrated at imperceptibly high frequencies.

“Thanks, Misha. Sincerely,” I said, deactivating the blade and slipping it into one of the belts on my gear. “This is... beyond generous.”

Before I could say anything else, Misha pulled me into a tight, almost bone-crushing hug.

“Ela *must* be careful,” she said firmly, her voice laced with worry. “Misha does not loan such precious items lightly. Bring them—and Ela—back safe. Misha will *not* accept anything else.”

Jade stood to the side, awkwardly holding the vibro-knife, until Misha turned her head abruptly and added, “Jade too. Be careful, yes?”

With a sheepish nod, Jade managed a quiet, “Of course.”

Just as we were about to turn towards the exit and leave, Misha thrust two small metal cards into our hands, each engraved with the words “*Misha’s Emporium.*”

The Gryplik’s tone turned almost business-like as she explained, “Customer cards. If unthinkable happens and Ela or Jade does not return, Guards will find these and bring items back to Misha. Misha cannot give away such expensive wares without some insurance, after all.”

I couldn’t help but grin at the practicality, even in a moment like this. “Understood. We’ll do our best to make sure it doesn’t come to that.”

Misha gave a sharp nod, her usual energy returning as she ushered us toward the exit. “Go, go! Misha will handle the rest. Trouble will not follow here for long.”

As we moved toward the exit, a sudden thought struck me like a lightning bolt, and I grabbed Jade’s arm, stopping her mid-step.

“*Wait.* Why are we heading for the front door?” I asked, my voice low but firm. “An Emporium like this has to have a backdoor, right?”

Misha, ever attentive, immediately perked up. “Of course! Misha can show—”

Before she could even finish, Jade raised her hand to cut her off, shaking her head as she turned to face me.

“No, that’s not going to work. The Golden Phoenix guys already thought about that,” she said, her tone sharp with urgency. “Citrina’s message said someone’s stationed at the backdoor. It’s covered. The only reason the front door isn’t completely blocked off yet is because the group ran into some Rockefeller Inc. guards. But they won’t be held up for long—they’re bound to split up and cover the front soon, too.”

Misha paused mid-step, her towering figure frozen in place as she processed Jade’s words.

“That is... unfortunate,” Misha said slowly, her voice losing a fraction of its usual confidence.

Jade’s words settled heavily in my chest, but I quickly pushed the growing dread aside. “Alright, then we don’t have time to stand around and debate. Let’s keep moving through the front and hope we can slip out before they split up and close us in.”

I could see Jade’s jaw tighten at the suggestion, but she nodded. “Yeah, that’s the only plan I managed to come up with as well. No point wasting more time, let’s go.”

Misha, clearly displeased but understanding the urgency, quickly stepped aside to let us continue toward the front.

I gave her a final glance, full of gratitude and worry, before turning back to Jade and confirming, “*Let’s.*”

With that, we resumed our hurried pace toward the exit.

We burst through the doors into the reception area, then pushed straight through the front entrance of Misha’s Emporium and into the main thoroughfare.

The haphazard placement of items inside the store had turned our dash into a bit of an obstacle course, but somehow, we managed to avoid tripping over anything—a minor miracle in itself.

Once outside, I immediately turned to Jade, my voice low but sharp. “Which direction?”

Her eyes darted around, scanning the area as if mentally piecing together the map from Citrina’s intel.

“Left,” she said quickly, already taking a step forward. “We need to head toward the eastern elevator bank—it’s the fastest route out of here that doesn’t directly lead us to them... *I hope.*”

I nodded, pretending I didn’t hear the quietly whispered “I hope” at the end, and fell in step beside her, my thoughts racing even faster than my feet.

It felt terrible, running blind like this, relying entirely on Jade's thoroughly limited intel.

Every fiber of my being itched for more information—something solid to work with that could give us an edge; and more importantly: Would get me out of here alive.

'If only I was better at netrunning...' I thought bitterly, frustration welling up at my own shortcomings. *'I could've hacked into the cameras around here and gotten immediate eyes on the Golden Phoenix team. Hell, I could've mapped out the whole damn area in seconds if I had the right skillset.'*

But I didn't.

And for now, all I could do was trust Jade's instincts and keep moving.

We pushed forward, our pace quickening with every step.

The narrow street we had turned into stretched ahead, a maze of dim lighting and cluttered stalls that offered little in the way of cover.

I kept my eyes darting between the path ahead and the surrounding area, every shadow and movement a potential threat.

But before we could even reach the next intersection, a voice cut through the tension like a blade—sharp, mocking, and utterly dripping with contempt.

"Look who thought they could just come to my house, cripple my son, and then walk away scot-free, boys."

The voice was female, venomous, and carried a chilling confidence that made my stomach drop.

My head snapped to the side as two men stepped out of a nearby alleyway, each one towering and menacing, their presence alone enough to stop us dead in our tracks.

"It's the two stupid *whores*! What a surprise to meet you little *girls* here," the woman continued, emerging from the shadows herself with a slow, deliberate stride.

She was tall and lean, her movements radiating a predatory grace. Her eyes were cold and locked onto us like a pair of gunsights.

"Why don't we sit down for a little talk, what say you? I have been specifically ordered to *talk* to you, after all," she sneered, her lips curling into a cruel smile.

My heart pounded as I instinctively reached for the vibro-blade at my side, the weight of the mask on my face grounding me just enough to keep my breathing steady.

Beside me, Jade's hand twitched toward her knife as well, her knuckles white with tension.

The men flanking the woman cracked their necks and knuckles in unison, a silent threat that spoke volumes. We were outnumbered and possibly outclassed, but there was no way we were going to sit down and play into her game.

With only two guards, there was more of a chance for us to potentially fight and escape than if we sat down and talked, only for the rest of the Golden Phoenix's group to show up—the woman was clearly stalling.

I straightened, trying to keep my voice steady despite the fire of adrenaline surging through my veins. "You'll have to forgive us if we decline the invitation. We're kind of in a hurry."

The woman's smile widened, her amusement rolling off her in waves that practically oozed malice. "Oh, I *insist*. It'd be rude not to, after all the trouble you've caused."

I kept my gaze locked on her, her predatory energy putting the two men beside her to shame. She was dangerous—more dangerous than anyone I'd ever run into, barring maybe Valeria herself—and it radiated from her like heat from a roaring fire.

Lowering my voice, but not my guard, I muttered to Jade, "Any updates on your sister? Is she going to help us here?"

Jade's reply came quickly, but the hesitation in her voice was unmistakable. "No, nothing. I haven't heard from her since the first message... She must be trying to buy us time somewhere else."

"*Great*," I muttered under my breath, keeping my expression neutral as I raised my voice to respond to the woman. "Who even are you?"

The irritation that flickered across her face told me I'd hit the wrong nerve, but I didn't care. I needed to stall, even if it meant pissing her off.

She spat on the ground, her contempt so tangible it was almost suffocating.

"You stupid *whores* don't even know where you shit, huh? Typical low-life rats." She straightened, her voice sharp and cutting as a blade. "My name is Carinola Valir, and I just so happen to be the mother of Damien Valir—the poor boy you two rabid savages mauled on the 82nd floor just yesterday."

Beside me, Jade sucked in a sharp breath, her tension hitting me like a freight train.

That name clearly rang a few very loud alarm bells for her.

It rang a few for me too, albeit more faintly.

Vega had mentioned her during that quick elevator call when I'd sold him Damien's gun. Something about how she'd likely be trouble if she caught wind of what happened.

'Trouble' didn't even begin to cover it, I now realised.

She'd found us *way* faster than I ever would've expected.

But *how*?

Before I could dig any deeper into that particular rabbit hole, Jade leaned in, her voice low but laced with pure, unfiltered panic. "That's a fucking *Talon*, Ela. We *can't* fight her! She'll kill us both without even trying! I know you're crazy and all, but *seriously*, we can't fight her! You don't know how much Cybernetics she's got, and her equipment... We *have* to run!"

My heart sank at the word *Talon*.

It wasn't a title I had any personal experience with, but the sheer *weight* of it in Jade's voice told me everything I needed to know.

A *Talon* wasn't just dangerous—they were *the* danger.

If Jade, who seemed to think I could pull miracles out of thin air, didn't believe I stood a chance, then we were in some seriously deep shit.

My mind raced as I scanned the area, my eyes darting from one potential escape route to another.

Backtracking the way we came was technically an option, but it wasn't a great one—it would funnel us right into whoever might be trailing behind.

Every other possible path was blocked; the two men and Carinola had positioned themselves with precision, cutting off every exit like the pros they evidently were.

'*Maybe if we—*'

My frantic train of thought was derailed as Carinola's voice sliced through the tense silence, dripping with impatience and venom.

"Boys, go get those two whores for me, I tire of this. And *don't* be gentle. I don't need them to be functional or even really alive—as long as they're *technically* breathing, that'll be good enough for Liliana."

The casual cruelty in her tone made my stomach twist.

She wasn't just out for revenge—she was out to *make an example*.

Jade and I didn't hesitate.

Almost in unison, we drew our vibro-weapons and activated them, the quiet hum of the blades filling the air as the high-frequency vibrations kicked in.

The faint shimmer along the edges of the weapons was almost mesmerizing—but it was the sharp, piercing sound they made when initially activated that sent a clear message: These weren't ordinary knives.

The two enforcers stopped in their tracks, their brisk walk turning into a hesitant shuffle as their eyes darted to the deadly weapons in our hands.

Even they weren't eager to charge headfirst into something *this* dangerous.

For a brief moment, I dared to hope they might rethink their approach, but then Carinola cleared her throat. The sharp, deliberate sound sliced through the tension like a whip, snapping them back into motion.

"Who'd you steal *those* pretty toys from, huh?" Carinola drawled, her voice dripping with genuine curiosity. She leaned against the alley wall, a cruel smirk playing on her lips. "Tell me now, and *maybe* I'll be nice enough to return them to the rightful owners. Save you the trouble of having yet another debt to pay with your bodies. I hear the folks who own vibro-weapons aren't as... *forgiving* as I am."

I ignored her entirely, focusing on the enforcer who had set his sights on me.

He towered over me, easily 15 or 20 centimeters taller, and the twin knives he pulled out gleamed in the dim light, the high-quality craftsmanship immediately apparent.

These weren't the cheap, low-Tier weapons that Damien and his crew had been fumbling with—these were professional-grade.

Potentially even high enough Tier to pierce right through the Pseudo-Tier 1 clothing Jade and I were wearing as our only pieces of protective gear, barring the masks.

I tightened my grip on the vibro-blade, trying to steady my breathing.

This was going to be *extremely* dangerous, and without any real plan in place, I felt panic rise up in my throat.

'Think, Sera. You've got the weapons. You've got the gear. You've got a fucking System...! Use them.'

But even with that mantra, I couldn't ignore the sheer size difference and the fact that these enforcers had the kind of experience and confidence that only came from dealing with people like me on a regular basis.

My mind scrambled to piece together a plan that wouldn't end with us in body bags.

'I have to keep my [Blademaster's Draw] for Carinola,' I reminded myself, teeth gritting at the realization. 'It's our only shot at leveling the playing field with her, so that move is completely off the table for the big guy.'

I started shifting away from Jade, carefully pacing backward while keeping my blade ready.

If I could split the enforcers up, even slightly, it might give us a sliver of a chance.

Fighting back-to-back might've worked with Jade on the 82nd floor, but these weren't the amateur punks we'd faced there. These two were more trained, likely coordinated, and probably had the sort of long-running combat experience that made them more dangerous as a group than as individuals.

'The longer blade might help me keep him at bay,' I thought, side-eyeing the towering enforcer, 'but his sheer size is going to make closing the gap an absolute nightmare. Is this even possible...?'

My mind raced as I scanned my available Skills, desperately trying to pull something actionable out of my mental database.

[{Anima Razor}], [CQC], and [Martial Arts] all offered a wealth of knowledge, but nothing screamed "perfect counter to giant guy with two knives and zero hesitation."

Instead, they hammered home the basics: *Keep moving. Control the range. Footwork is everything.*

'Footwork is everything, huh? Thanks for fucking nothing, System!' I felt the panic creeping in, hot and heavy, as the enforcer closed the gap.

Every step he took felt like the clang of a prison door slamming shut.

My grip tightened on the vibro-blade as I tried to ready myself, but my thoughts were spiraling.

*'Fuck, **fuck**, **FUCK**—'*

Then, just as his first step into my engagement range landed, my Ego flipped the switch.

The heat of panic iced over instantly.

My thoughts condensed, every extraneous worry disappearing in a clean sweep.

My focus tunneled entirely onto the massive man in front of me.

My breathing slowed to a steady rhythm, and my stance adjusted instinctively.

This wasn't survival mode—it was surgical.

The enforcer made the first move, lunging in with one knife aimed to feint low while the other came slicing toward my upper torso.

My blade flicked into position like a second heartbeat, ready to meet him.

My blade connected with his knife, allowing me to deflect it while stepping backwards and regaining some distance.

The enforcer's initial approach was cautious and his eyes never strayed from the vibrating hum of my blade.

He feinted low, then aimed a quick slash high, forcing me to react. My vibro-blade intercepted, the deadly edge slicing through the air with a high-pitched scream but narrowly missing his arm as he pulled back.

His hesitation was clear—he knew just *how* dangerous my weapon was and wasn't about to charge headlong into it.

I kept my footwork tight, circling and stepping backward, using every ounce of the reach my blade afforded me to stay out of his range. But even that proved difficult, as his larger overall size narrowed that gap tremendously.

He lunged again, testing my defenses with quick jabs and sudden swipes, each attack designed to measure my reflexes.

I parried clumsily, the edge of my blade singing as it deflected one of his knives, while the other scraped dangerously close to my arm.

'Keep moving. Control the range,' I reminded myself over and over again, my muscles screaming to stay nimble despite the rising tension.

The only thing keeping me focused on the fight was my Ego, making sure that I didn't lose myself in the panic of back-to-back near-death-experiences every time the enforcer came in for an attack.

Unfortunately, he was quickly beginning to pick up on my lack of finesse.

My strikes were clearly mechanical, my counters hesitant, and my footwork betrayed the fact that I was relying more on instinct than any real technique.

His confidence visibly grew with every exchange, as his eyes darted towards my blade less and less often, and it showed in his attacks—bolder, faster, more precise.

He ducked under a wide slash of my blade, rolling to the side and coming up with a knife aimed straight for my torso.

I barely managed to sidestep, my jacket catching the tip of his blade and splitting slightly at the edge—as I had thought, his knives were at least Tier 1, potentially even Pseudo Tier 2.

My armour would only be a minor inconvenience at best.

He smirked, clearly enjoying himself now.

Sweat dripped down my temple into the mask as I swung again, this time aiming for his legs in a desperate attempt to slow him down.

He sidestepped effortlessly, his grin widening.

“You don’t know what the fuck you’re doing with that thing, do you?” he taunted, his voice dripping with amusement as he advanced.

I ignored him, focusing on the rhythm of his attacks.

Another feint—low this time—followed by a lightning-quick swipe aimed at my ribs.

I immediately realized that I parried too late, the vibrations of my blade meeting his knife for just a split second before his second blade came darting forward, forcing me to stumble backwards, slightly losing my balance.

That was his opening—and he took it.

With a quick sidestep, he slipped past my off-balance guard, his knife driving toward my side. My jacket's fabric groaned as it absorbed some of the impact, but it wasn't enough.

The knife tore through, biting into my flesh with a searing jolt of pain.

I gasped, instinctively pulling away as I swiped the blade close to his throat, forcing him to retreat and regaining distance as my other hand shot to my side.

Blood was already seeping through my fingers, warm and sticky.

The enforcer's grin stretched wider as he spun his knives idly, clearly savoring his upper hand.

My breath came shallow and fast, the pain radiating from the wound should have been threatening to overwhelm me, but it barely even registered thanks to the adrenaline pumping through me and my Ego's best efforts.

I couldn't afford to stop or get distracted—he was coming again.

The enforcer pressed harder now, his attacks utterly unrelenting.

His knives came at me in rapid succession—slashes, stabs, and feints that kept me constantly on the defensive. Every swing of my vibro-blade felt slower, heavier, as if the weight of my injuries was starting to drag me down.

A sudden swipe nicked my upper arm, the blade cutting cleanly through the fabric and grazing my skin.

Pain flared sharp and immediate, but I had no time to dwell on it.

The enforcer's next attack came low, aiming for my thigh.

I barely dodged, stumbling back, but his second knife followed seamlessly, slicing across my forearm as I raised it in a desperate block. The wounds weren't deep, but they were enough to sap my already dwindling energy.

*'This isn't fucking working! I'm going to fucking **die** at this rate,'* I thought, my mind scrambling for a solution as I retreated a few steps to catch even a sliver of breathing room.

My eyes flickered to the side, driven by instinct.

A part of me hoped, *prayed* even, that Jade might be faring better—maybe even well enough to help.

But what I saw froze me in my tracks.

Jade was on her back, scrambling desperately to put distance between herself and her attacker.

Blood smeared the ground beneath her, pooling ominously as she clawed at the slick pavement to get away. The other enforcer advanced steadily, his knife glinting red with her blood, his intent to finish her off chillingly clear in every deliberate step.

Time *froze*.

Not literally, of course, but in that moment, my mind surged into overdrive.

Everything else fell away, leaving me in a cold, crystalline state of clarity.

'What the actual fuck am I doing here...?' The thought hit me like a freight train, barreling past my growing despair. *'Why the fuck am I fighting like this? Why am I still trying to **escape** when they're clearly not giving us the option?'*

The realization spread through me like wildfire, burning away the fog clouding my judgment.

I wasn't fighting to *win*—I was fighting to *run*.

Even as this man aimed to carve me apart, I'd been trying to avoid killing him.

I'd been holding back, trying to disarm or disable him, clinging to some foolish, misplaced hope that I could somehow end this without taking a life.

But this wasn't a sparring match, wasn't a skirmish.

This was survival in its purest, ugliest form.

It was kill or be killed.

And my hesitation to cross that line, to take that final step from injuring somebody to killing them, wasn't just putting *me* at risk; it was threatening to cost Jade her life, too.

She was *dying*.

I was *losing*.

I had been fighting like there was another way out this entire time.

'But there isn't... is there? If I don't end this now, she's dead. I'm dead. This is it.'

Something shifted deep inside me.

A switch flipped.

Immediately, my Ego surged like an icy flood through my veins, quelling the despair, the panic and the lingering hesitation that I had been holding onto this entire time in an instant.

Everything else dissolved, leaving only a singular, primal purpose: ***Kill***.

As time resumed, the enforcer eagerly stepped forward, sensing the momentary stillness in me as weakness.

I moved first.

The first strike was precise and ruthless, my vibro-blade causing the air to scream as it arced toward his chest. His eyes widened in surprise at the sudden shift in my approach, and he barely managed to deflect the blade away from his heart.

But I didn't stop there.

Another strike followed, then another—a rapid series of sharp, deliberate slashes aimed at his vitals.

The enforcer stumbled back, his earlier confidence replaced with frantic, desperate attempts to parry the relentless assault.

Gone was the wild flailing of a novice trying to survive.

My attacks now were calculated, surgically aimed to kill.

He deflected a slash aimed at his throat, but the force of the swing sent his arm reeling.

Recovering from the initial shock, he growled and pressed forward, countering with a downward slash of one knife while angling the other toward my ribs.

I pivoted, deflecting the first knife with a somewhat clumsy parry of my blade.

Then, instead of dodging the second knife as instinct demanded, I leaned *into* it.

The knife shot toward my throat, but I deliberately moved my head into its path.

Fully trusting in Misha's gear, I headbutted the blade, the Kinetic Resistance Mask absorbing the full brunt of the impact with an almost eerie ease.

The force going out from the Mask, as it discharged the kinetic energy into the opposite direction, ripped the knife from his hands and sent it flying through the street, the enforcer momentarily stunned by the sheer audacity of my move.

I didn't waste the opening.

Mid-step, I brought the vibro-blade around in a deadly arc, slicing clean through his other forearm at the elbow.

His severed limb fell uselessly to the ground, his remaining knife clattering beside it.

A guttural scream erupted from him as he stumbled back, trying to retreat, but I had the speed advantage, already closing the gap.

My blade screamed through the air one more time, carving clean through his right knee and severing the leg entirely. He collapsed backward, his body giving out as his remaining hand scrambled desperately to clutch the bloody stump of his arm.

But desperation wasn't enough to save him.

He was still alive; I had not *killed* him yet—that wasn't acceptable.

Before his body hit the ground, I stepped into the swing, pouring all my strength into one last strike. The vibro-blade whirred viciously as it arced through the air, its edge slicing effortlessly through flesh and bone alike, as if it was mere paper.

The cut was clean, precise—a single motion that separated his head from his shoulders.

His body crumpled lifelessly to the ground, blood pooling rapidly beneath him.

But I didn't stop to admire my handiwork—there was no time for that.

Even as his severed head rolled to a stop, I was still moving.

I pivoted sharply, my hand darting to my side with practiced speed, fingers wrapping around one of my throwing knives. My breath was ragged, the exertion and pain from my wounds clawing at the edges of my focus, but I wasn't done.

'[Sharpen].'

The Ability activated with a flicker of thought, the blade in my hand gleaming dangerously as its edge gained a supernatural sharpness. Without hesitation, I launched it, aiming straight for the back of the second enforcer's head.

I would have hated the thought of killing somebody like this; so I didn't think.

The knife spun through the air as I finally sank down onto one knee.

My lungs burned, my chest heaving as I tried to gulp in air.

Blood trickled steadily from my wounds, staining the ground beneath me as I fought to stay conscious. Every muscle in my body screamed for rest, but I forced myself to hold on—just a little longer.

Then, a sickening thud cut through the street, followed by the unmistakable sound of a body hitting the ground in a crumpled heap.

I didn't need to look.

The sound was confirmation enough...