

Void 1601

Chapter 1601 Selfishness [3]

"Haa..."

The only thing Claire could do was sigh.

Her son liked to be perfect. He almost always did what was expected of him and never acted in ways that would make people admonish him.

Perhaps it was a move he made to gain everyone's favor, or perhaps it was his nature. Regardless, Damien liked to be the person who never made mistakes.

Even now, he couldn't admit that what he'd done was a mistake.

And what was Claire supposed to do?

She could see that he was waiting for her to yell at him or punish him. He had guilt in his heart, but he refused to show it.

However, she just couldn't bring herself to do it.'

'My son is not a perfect person.'

He made mistakes too. His were considerably more damning than the mistakes normal people made, but that was just something that came with the territory.

And, in all honesty, this wasn't Claire's first time experiencing this scenario.

"Your father is the same way," she said, patting Damien's head and drawing him closer instead of doing what he expected from her.

"He liked to run around and do whatever he wanted without thinking about the consequences. Oftentimes, we were stuck dealing with those consequences, and sometimes they were as severe as the ones that lay on the other side of your wager."

Dante Void had taken many risky paths to get to where he was today. He failed in the end, but that was not because of the risks he took.

Rather, the precise reason why he was able to stay alive while being chased by the full force of the Dark God's followers was the risks he took.

At the end of the day, no matter what he wagered, Dante always came out the victor, so those things were maintained, and he was able to train with an efficiency that others couldn't replicate.

If Damien wanted to relieve his guilt by hearing negative words from someone, Claire and them weren't the right people to go to.

Not only did they unconditionally support him, as he was one of their own, they had been through things others couldn't imagine as they followed someone who was almost as impossibly talented as Damien, so their view of reality was typically different from the norm.

But if Damien searched the rest of the palace, perhaps he wouldn't find anyone who would be willing to go against his decision.

It wasn't because he was a tyrant.

The people of the palace trusted and respected him. He had done so much for them in the short period of time that he'd been in the Heavenly World, and every time he did something new, the palace saw a qualitative increase in strength and standing.

Even this time, before he went to the Sacred Abyss Universe, his actions allowed them to completely eradicate the forces of the Straea Clan, completely wiping them off the face of the earth.

And, what about Claire herself?

Wasn't one of the pillars of the palace saved from lifelong torment because of him?

Damien wanted to feel the negativity that would inevitably rise in response to his decision, but Void Palace wasn't going to give it to him.

That was what it meant to have a home.

Damien calmed himself, fully accepting the benefits that came with unconditional love, and pulled himself away from his mother.

"This is how it happened..."

He already told his mother and Serena about the five year deadline and the war, but he had yet to explain to them the full situation and how it became like that.

As he went over the events that took place in what was the past few years for him but only months in this world, both his mother and Serena gasped, their eyes wide with shock.

Damien was casually telling stories about fighting people on their level. He was eons younger than him, still a baby who hadn't even lived 200 years of life.

Yet, he was already acting on such a high level.

In all honesty, when looking through the eyes of someone with this kind of power at a young age, Damien's decisions became more understandable.

He was still young and reckless no matter how mature his experiences made him.

He still needed to take those risks in order to improve, and not even the greatest odds in the world would stop him.

"Damien, I know you're confused, but that only means that you are aware of the consequences of your actions," Claire said.

"Tell me, are you planning to let this world die?"

"No."

Damien answered without a shadow of a doubt.

"Then is there any reason to worry? Be confident and chase your dreams. We will all support you from behind, so that even when you falter, you can stand back up."

Claire smiled warmly at her son.

Serena nodded on the side, the same expression on her face.

This situation would not be dire as long as they worked together.

'This world...'

Serena was already doing the calculations in her mind.

'If our power is combined, then we can easily slow the time flow enough to gain what we need to prepare.'

Damien was planning to do it on his own, but he had forgotten that he had an entire clan of time users by his side, more than ready to work with him.

Claire was also making plans, more for the future of the palace itself than the world. If they wanted to properly wage this war, they first needed to become the leaders of this world, a force that all others obeyed.

Damien saw the gears in their heads turning.

Perhaps more than anything else, this was what cemented it in his mind wholly.

'This won't be as much of a challenge as I thought.'

Because he really didn't have to focus on anyone but himself. While he focused on improving to fight the Dark God, the rest of the world would follow him in stride.

Damien calmed himself again.

"Huu..."

He felt a bit troubled by the fact that he couldn't oversee everything, but that was just how life went.

'Everything will be fine.'

He had to take the prospect of doomsday out of his mind entirely.

No matter what reality told him, it wasn't real unless he allowed it.

'Then, my main focus should be improvement, and since I got the opportunity, I should reel the Dragon Clan in without fail.'

There was no need to panic and there was no need to fret.

Everything would go his way.

Perhaps he came back here to be admonished, or perhaps he just wanted acknowledgment from the people he respected the most.

'Speaking of...'

"How is he?" Damien asked.

"He...?" Claire repeated in confusion.

"Ah, um...my father."

Damien felt awkward. He couldn't call him "dad" comfortably yet, but it felt awkward calling him "Dante" as well.

He was left without a proper way to refer to the man who contributed to his birth, and that left him childishly fiddling with his words to move around it.

"Ah!" Claire exclaimed as she realized what he was talking about.

"Your father is doing better and better every day. It won't be long before you get to meet him," she said with a smile.

Damien nodded, not sure how to feel.

He'd done what he needed to do here. He felt a pull to stay for longer for many reasons, but now wasn't the time to take even a single instant of rest.

He needed to return to the Western Region and recruit the forces there as fast as possible so they could join the rest in war preparation.

And, while he was at it...

'I guess it's right about time for me to truly get a hold of this thing called Existence.'

Chapter 1602 Selfishness [4]

Damien left for the Western Region not long after his conversation with his mother. He only stayed as long as he needed to, going over several plans with to ensure that the Heavenly World would remain stable.

This trip was another self-satisfaction move from Damien, aside from the obvious importance of letting others know what happened.

He childishly wanted others to tell him what he wanted to hear, so he could feel better or worse about himself. He didn't quite know which one it was, but Damien was definitely looking for someone else to tell him he was wrong.

He didn't like that he was getting full of himself. He didn't enjoy wagering the lives of countless people for his own benefit.

But he did it anyway, didn't he?

It went against his moral code while following it to the tee, which caused chaos in his mind.

He had to force himself to put it away.

Damien never forgot his humanity. He couldn't just throw away his emotions like everyone else seemed to do.

He had the ability to make sure he felt nothing, but that wasn't the kind of person he wanted to be.

Even if he did something arrogantly like a God, he didn't want to forget this terrible feeling in his chest that reminded him of what was at stake.

He didn't want to lose his sense of reality.

Nevertheless, that was a problem for him to deal with on his own, not something for him to push on others.

Damien teleported away, focusing everything on work.

As his spatial fluctuations filled the room, Claire turned to take a look behind her.

"Are you sure you don't want to see him?"

A shadow came around the corner. He had been there from the start, but even Damien had been unable to sense his presence.

"It's fine. If he sees me now, it might mess with his mental state. It's better for us to meet once he's in a better place."

The man smiled. His sapphire-blue eyes gleamed in the light, and though he didn't have his Divinity, he radiated a strange aura of power unlike anything else that existed in the cosmos.

He walked up to Claire and Serena. His smile was directed at both of them, after all.

"He is one of ours, isn't he?" He said, nothing but confidence in his voice.

"I want to see how far he can go when he's living as he pleases. For us, as his parents..."

Dante Void peered through the layers of Existence, laying his eyes on Damien, who was already in Arulion.

"...isn't the only thing to make sure our children can be happy?"

Claire nodded with a smile.

As of a few hours ago, her husband had woken up, and now, her son had returned and finally showed her that he was truly safe.

Life was going to be good from now on.

The only prerequisite was the destruction of that being called the Dark God.

Dante was awake. That much was true.

However, it wasn't that simple.

The reason Dante stayed in his coma for so long was because the Dark God was tormenting him in the depths of his Existence, forcing him to fight his shadow for eternity.

The only way to escape that imprisonment was to defeat the phantom, but Dante...

Dante didn't have that kind of power.

No, he had gained a great deal through those battles and had gotten much closer to reaching the peak of that "thing" he had started sensing not long before he was captured, but he wasn't nearly enough to face the Dark God alone.

When he opened his eyes, the first thing he saw were the two women he loved more than anything else in the world carefully taking care of him.

When they noticed that he was conscious, they erupted into emotion.

He couldn't make them worry by acting like something was wrong.

Still, in his mind, he knew.

'I didn't escape. That being...he let me go.'

A pulse of energy flowed into the illusionary world earlier and shattered it. Dante almost wanted to thank his savior, but that energy had become too familiar to him over the eternity he spent trapped.

What did it mean for the Dark God to let him go?

Was it provocation? Was he saying that Dante's presence wouldn't change the outcome of his invasion?

After fighting against the followers of that being for his entire life, Dante didn't think he would be gracious enough to just give him a pass.

'But he didn't kill me.'

This time, the Dark God didn't have his people aim to kill.

Since he was still alive in the first place...

'...does that being know about...'

It seemed like his secrets had been exposed.

If things were as he believed, then that being was far greater than he'd ever imagined in the past.

The illusionary world was a nightmare. The Celestial Prison was a nightmare as well. Dante was fine on the outside, and he didn't even care about his broken Divinity and lost power.

However, he was haunted by that experience. The Dark God had completely traumatized him.

The only way for him to quiet the screeching memories that reminded him of that place was to focus his attention on the real world.

A world that was completely different from the one he'd left.

'A lot has changed.'

The world he woke up to was a new one. The palace was not his anymore, and the younger generation had already surpassed the old.

The influences that were still growing in the past were now in their prime, and some of those he knew well were long deceased.

But...it didn't bother him as much as he thought it would.

'They really did it.'

Hearing the stories about his sons, daughters, wives, and people, he felt immense pride.

Especially Damien, who was born with the worst starting point of them all.

'He actually made it here, and...'

When he regained his bearings completely, the memories of the many clones and projections he'd left through the cosmos came back to him.

He almost cried in that moment.

As if he was looking at a collection of images, he watched his son change as he progressed through life.

And he realized something.

'This isn't my world anymore.'

Everything belonged to his son now. Even his own life was primarily saved because of the countless efforts his son made to save him.

Damien wasn't the only one, either. Dante had five children, yet, he hadn't seen any of the rest of them in millions of years.

Considering that they'd only been born in the past two hundred years, the disconnection he felt was even more severe.

That level of time dilation wasn't easy to overcome.

It was a bittersweet feeling to see how they'd grown. It was even worse since he wasn't able to experience anything that had happened before now.

The separation of a million years became painfully tangible when he saw the palace.

Still, he was here.

No matter how it happened, he was here.

So there was no way he'd miss out on anything else.

'No more mistakes.'

That was the promise he made to himself.

In order to live the rest of his life in a way that he wouldn't regret, in order to never feel the emptiness of being separated from his family again...

Dante Void was willing to do anything, no matter the cost.

Chapter 1603 Dragon Clan [1]

Damien made it back to Arulion as soon as he left the palace and found himself a place to stay. The money he used was...well, a very well-made counterfeit, but that was beside the point.

He wasn't in the same city he found after being transported here by the Dark God. The citizens there didn't know much, but they knew the rough map of their own lands.

That city was on the periphery of the kingdom. It was one of the places with the least contact with the true draconic lineages, and thus, it was useless for Damien's current quest.

Katya had told him in the past. The Dragon Clans that led the rest were not friendly to those with thin dragon lineage.

There was a requirement for people to even enter this land, and once they were here, if they weren't up to par, they'd be forced to the edges of the kingdom to live with other dragonkin.

Damien had met all types of dragons before. Some, like Bai Yuxuan, welcomed halfbreeds and dragonkin, teaching them the methods to rise and become True Dragons.

But that wasn't a common practice.

The dragonkin knew they could become True Dragons, and they'd come to Arulion for exactly that purpose. However, they would never receive direct aid.

If they wanted to reach that point, they needed to work and use merit to earn pieces of information that could help them progress. Slowly and steadily, they were turned into more of a workforce for the True Dragons than disciples trying to reach their level.

It was an unfortunate situation. For dragonkin, the outside world was honestly safer than the land of their own people, which was a real tragedy.

Damien had come for the royalty. Seeing how they treated their own people, he was pretty clear on what their policies would be towards foreigners.

'If I just walk up and throw around some power, they'd probably try to go to war.'

And that would be annoying.

Dragons were, without fail, prideful creatures. If he touched their bottom line, they wouldn't sit down and take it, nor would they throw away their pride for security.

They were a species who would do anything for the sake of their pride.

'So I need to find a way to justify my presence, and I need to find a way to meet with the highest authorities of this place the hard way.'

He had to first earn their respect. He was trying to recruit allies, not slaves or enemies.

'First, information.'

Damien was currently in a city far closer to the central areas of Arulion than the one he was in previously.

This place was named Arvelheim, and it was something of a segregation line.

On the line created by this city and nine others, both True Dragons and dragonkins lived together. Past this line, only True Dragons were allowed, and in front of it was the area where the dragonkin were forced to live.

'Though, saying they live together is an overstatement.'

It was more like the dragonkin were being blatantly enslaved across this line, while it was a bit more vague on the other side of it.

This was the best place for Damien to be before he had an idea of what was going on inside the land of True Dragons.

It was a place where he could meet True Dragons and read their memories to understand and mimic their culture before making rash decisions.

'I made one of those recently and I think that's enough for me for the next little while.'

Nevertheless, Damien had learned many things about the culture those True Dragons practiced, and he learned about the hierarchy they followed.

'There are a lot of dragon lineages.'

There weren't many that were highly respected, but there were a lot of dragons who could claim themselves royalty.

'Among them, there are six Holy Dragon Clans. They're the ones that really matter.'

The Ignis Clan of Fire Dragons, the Liqua Clan of Azure Dragons, the Noct Clan of Darkness Dragons, the Aurora Clan of Light Dragons, the Ether Clan of Void Dragons, and the Aureat Clan of Golden Dragons.

Each of those clans was created by a Holy Dragon, the pinnacle of Dragonkind, and...

'...I happen to be acquainted with one of those Holy Dragons.'

Damien almost couldn't believe that the Azure Dragon he met was "that" Azure Dragon, but as he spent more time in Arulion, the memories locked away in his head became clearer.

He knew without a shadow of a doubt that the person who'd entrusted him with his legacy was the very person who once stood at the head of that clan. Perhaps he'd been replaced by now, but that didn't change anything.

The original Azure Dragon, the being who created the Azure Dragon Godbeast Lineage...

That was the Azure Dragon Damien met on Beast Emperor Star.

'And there was something he wanted me to do here.'

He didn't make his request clear, but Damien could almost ascertain it with what he currently knew.

'Putting that aside, the easiest way to establish myself here is to create a new Dragon Lineage that qualifies as royalty. Nobody would question it if I can prove it with my bloodline, and as long as I don't make it too powerful, I'll be able to exist without much prodding from others.'

His first priority was to find a place in the True Dragon half of Arulion. After that, he could take the step-by-step approach to get himself in the same conversations as the Holy Dragon Clans.

'But no matter how slow and steady it is, I still have to remember my time limit.'

It would take a few months for the barrier spells to be prepared for the Heavenly World's time to be completely dilated. If he could help it, Damien planned to get everything in Arulion wrapped up before then.

'I've pretty much gained everything I could from here. I need to get over on the other side before I can do anything else.'

Damien nodded to himself. Tomorrow, he would change his existence and become a Royal Dragon.

For tonight though...

Crack!

A subtle crack immediately destroyed every plan Damien had for the night.

He raised his brow curiously.

'That didn't come from reality.'

Damien turned his eyes elsewhere, to a spatial storage he hadn't checked in a while.

Actually, this space was created when he was in Grand Heavens Boundary and existed separately from the Sanctuary. It hadn't been used since he ascended to the Heavenly World, but now, he was sensing something interesting from it.

An egg that he'd almost forgotten about, yet one that had more connection to Arulion than he could ever dream of having.

Crack!

Another crack.

At this point, it was hard for Damien to think anything else.

He pulled it out of storage and immediately put an Existence barrier around his room to shield it from any peering eyes.

There was a certain egg, gifted to Damien by a certain being.

He was told nothing about it, but was given the task to take care of it and make sure it inherited that being's legacy.

That egg had remained dormant for what felt like centuries. It didn't show reactions to anyone or anything.

But now, that egg was hatching.

And the being that was born from it...

Chapter 1604 Dragon Clan [2]

The Azure Dragon's egg was a treasure. It didn't matter who that child's parents were or what form it came out in. Because it had the Azure Dragon's blessing, it was destined for success.

Damien was quite curious about the being that gained this kind of affection from a being who was known to hold no regard for others. He watched intently as the cracks on the massive egg's surface widened. Pieces chipped off, giving way to an oddly...

'...humanoid figure?'

Damien raised an eyebrow. At first, he couldn't be sure, but he eventually had to accept it. The being inside that egg had white skin, two arms and two legs like a human, and features that looked...

'...oddly similar to me?!'

Damien scratched his head in confusion.

'This has to be some kind of trick, right?'

He couldn't believe it. Even as the egg was torn apart, completely revealing its figure, he couldn't fathom it at all.

The child was certainly a boy. He had Damien's amethyst-purple eyes and facial features, but he didn't quite look like he was Damien's child. Spare for the more telling features like the ocean-blue horns on his head or the draconic slits in his eyes, there were some distinct differences in his features that truly made it seem like a combination of Damien's genes and someone else's.

'But my genes weren't involved in his birth at all.'

No, this was someone else's child. However, he had clearly taken influence from Damien's mana after being in the spatial storage for so many years.

The child sat on the floor surrounded by the remains of his egg, looking around curiously at the world he'd been born into.

When his eyes landed on Damien...

"Papa...?"

His first words came before he did any incessant babbling.

"Me?" Damien replied, almost forgetting to treat the child as a child.

"Papa!"

The child exclaimed as if it had been confirmed. He crawled over to Damien and grabbed onto his leg, and, with a level of strength that should've been impossible for a child, he crawled up Damien's leg and torso until he was properly sat on his shoulder.

Damien frowned, but didn't say anything about it.

He wasn't really concerned about being this child's father.

'I mean, it's literally what I agreed to when I took him from the Azure Dragon. My main concern is...'

"...aren't you supposed to be a dragon?"

"Papa!"

"Fair enough."

Nodding matter-of-factly, Damien looked into the child's existence.

'It's chaotic, and for some reason, he hatched in human form, but he's certainly a dragon. There's no doubt about it.'

Inside of that child, there was a vast ocean beyond anything a newborn should've been able to contain. His growth potential was immense, and his genetic advantages were beyond anything most other dragons could ever experience.

He was a direct descendant of a Holy Dragon.

"Anyway, before we get you into all of that nonsense, let's get you some clothes."

The child didn't have a name yet. Damien didn't think he could name this child without feeling guilty, so he held off on it.

Before any of that, he went to the store and found a few outfits for him, considering that he was born without clothes, and that made going out in public quite difficult.

The excursion was really just so Damien could get a feel of what others were wearing. The clothes themselves were made out of his energy.

'This child has an extremely strong Azure Dragon aura. If anyone manages to sense it, things might get a lot more complicated. After all, I still don't know why the Azure Dragon was forced into Grand Heavens Boundary.'

Damien's energy could be expertly concealed as clothing, and it could mask the aura so that others would assume both he and the child were from the same clan.

That made entering the central region a lot easier, since that was something that needed to be done regardless of the child's presence.

He was an oddly agreeable toddler. He liked to crawl over Damien's body like he was a cat tree, but other than that, he never cried or raised a fuss.

The only problem was his love for food. Damien found out within hours that the child was able to eat more than a practitioner who gained power from being fat.

A dragon's appetite really lived up to expectations.

'If it was anyone else, this would've been a problem. Me, on the other hand...'

Damien was a hoarder. He wasn't just a hoarder, but one with access to an infinite space where time didn't flow. Anything and everything could be preserved.

There were monster corpses in his spatial storage that dated back all the way to his days on the Cloud Plane. With the cooking skills he'd developed over the years, it wasn't hard at all to satisfy that demonic appetite.

As such, Damien and the child set out on a journey to Arulion's central region to establish themselves.

That journey was...

'...interesting.'

This was Damien's first time raising a toddler. He's adopted children in the past, but he'd never actually had to do the parenting.

This time was different. This child didn't have anywhere else to go, and Damien didn't have the Sanctuary to contact people who were more suited for childcare than him.

They were stuck together, and Damien was honestly enjoying it more than he expected.

Life was full of challenges, but sometimes, it would become stale. The usual stimuli would lose their effect, and people became more like zombies going through routines without many thoughts at all.

Having children was a challenge that one could give oneself willingly. It would add a flavor to life that couldn't be experienced elsewhere, a mixture of unconditional love and indescribable emotion.

Damien had thought about it a few times before, but his life was just too busy for him to want to bring children into the world. His wives were the same. None of them were ready to settle down and take a break from their training to become mothers.

When life became more peaceful, they could have children of their own.

But this child, the Azure Dragon's kin, was showing Damien what that experience would be like.

He was a strange child who didn't show the same naivety as other newborns, but he made Damien understand what it felt like to be a real father, to be responsible for a child's life.

Still, he never forgot what the child in his care represented.

And he never forgot the Azure Dragon's wish.

As Damien made his way into the central region to move forward his plans of recruiting the Dragon Clan, he caught wind of a certain rumor.

An event was going to take place soon. It was supposed to be something that rarely ever happened, an event beyond all others in dragon culture.

Whispers were spreading through the royalty, becoming so loud that even a newcomer like Damien was able to hear them with ease.

'The Dragon Emperor.'

A being above the Holy Dragons, the true strongest person in the entire Dragon Clan...

That being was looking for someone to take his place.

Soon, it would start; an all-out competition between anyone with some talent.

The heir wars.

It was not only a grand occasion for the dragons...

'...this is my chance.'

This was the entry point Damien had been looking for, and now that he'd found it...

'I should probably raise this little kid into a future Dragon Emperor, eh?'

Chapter 1605 Dragon Clan [3]

There was nothing new about the heir wars. It was a Dragon Clan tradition that would take place every time an old Dragon Emperor decided it was time to end his reign.

This one was special mainly because of the circumstances behind it.

Nobody was ready for it. Not a single person expected it.

The Dragon Emperor always seemed like he was in good health, and even the greatest experts believed his vitality would allow him to rule for another 100,000 years without a problem.

However, they were wrong.

The Dragon Emperor never revealed any weakness and never directly told anyone why he decided to start the heir wars now. As such, most of what was said about him was just guesses.

Still, historically, there had only ever been one reason for a Dragon Emperor to step down.

He was dying.

While speculations about his health flew around in many communities, that didn't stop people from preparing for the heir wars.

There were three main rules that absolutely had to be followed in this time of preparation.

No violence was allowed. Until the heir wars had truly begun, the several dragon clans weren't allowed to get into altercations with each other. If they did, they would lose their spot entirely. Their clan would essentially be blacklisted.

The participants had to be under a hundred years old.

Logically speaking, this rule didn't make sense. Why would children compete to become the Dragon Emperor? They didn't have the experience, the power, or the maturity to take on such a position of power.

The Dragon Emperor wouldn't die immediately. Once the heir wars were announced, the Dragon Emperor's lifespan could be estimated to have at least a thousand years remaining.

The dragon who stood above all others and rightfully earned the heir position would be personally trained by him and instilled with the values of an Emperor from their youth.

Adults were too stubborn. As they'd lived their entire lives developing their own opinions on the world, it was impossible to tell them what to do and expect them to follow. The position of Dragon Emperor was simply too important. That person would gain absolute control over all dragons, and someone who would abuse those privileges couldn't be allowed to sit in the seat.

A child who was raised to be an Emperor...while there were many factors that could cause such a prospect to go horribly wrong, it had never happened before. This was the method that allowed the Dragon Clan to function as it had for the past several eons.

The second rule usually didn't make the competition any less fierce, since people under a hundred years old could still be sufficiently powerful.

However, in the current situation of the Dragon Clan, it created problems.

Dragons had powerful reproductive systems. When they mated with other races, they were guaranteed to create life every time. When they mated with other dragons, who had systems that were just as resistant as they were powerful, it became more difficult.

There was a reason why there were so many more dragonkins compared to True Dragons. Only one to three dragons could be born to a royal pair every century.

This century was a rut. Across the board, Dragons had found themselves less fertile than they were used to. As such, the children under a hundred that were able to participate in the heir wars...

All of them had been born in the past twenty to fifty years.

They were young, weak, and reckless.

Since the wars hadn't begun yet, nobody could say what that would mean. But for Damien, it meant only one thing.

'This kid can probably compete.'

If Damien wanted to raise a participant in the short span of time he had before the event began, he still had the chance to do it successfully.

As long as he followed the first rule, and, of course, the final one.

The third of the three was a bit stranger than the rest, and oddly enough, it was accommodating.

Usually, a Dragon Emperor would be chosen from one of the Holy Dragon Clans or one of the established Royal Clans. This was mainly because the talent of those children had far surpassed their peers.

However, others weren't barred from participating.

Anyone with a sufficient level of talent and bloodline could aim for the Dragon Emperor position, and to make sure those with lesser backgrounds wouldn't be too outmatched, the third rule provided them with something like compensation.

It simply stated that anyone who wanted to compete needed to register at one of three locations in the central region. These facilities were constructed specifically for testing the qualifications of those who weren't affiliated with or backed by a major clan.

It didn't seem beneficial, but from what Damien had heard...

'...if they deem someone talented enough, that person will be given the same amount of support as a Holy Descendant.'

The entire Dragon Clan favored talent over status. After all, status was just a concept. Talent was a direct manifestation of powerful dragon lineage.

Now, if Damien bolstered his faux lineage a little and de-aged his body and soul to seem sub-100 years old, he could absolutely murder this competition.

But...he wasn't going to do that.

The heir wars were meant to choose a Dragon Emperor.

If Damien won, then wouldn't that defeat the entire purpose?

Rather than gaining the favor of these dragons, he'd only earn their ire.

'I could also ignore the heir wars completely, but...'

This was the Azure Dragon's final wish. As his memories in Damien's mind became clearer, that fact became painfully obvious.

The child in his care was born for the sole purpose of taking that throne.

It definitely wouldn't be easy to raise a dragon, especially when it needed to be done over the course of a year at most, but Damien was up to the challenge.

Hadn't he been looking for ways to put pressure on himself? Even if he wasn't directly participating, supporting and backing a contestant was just as much of a challenge.

Raising a disciple wasn't easy. When that disciple needed to inherit the techniques of the Azure Dragon Clan rather than Damien's inherent techniques, it became even harder.

'That senior...I wonder if he saw this coming.'

The power of a Holy Dragon couldn't be underestimated, especially not when he was one of the first Holy Dragons to ever exist.

'A lot has changed since he left the Heavenly World.'

The Arulion that existed now was nothing like the one in the Azure Dragon's memories.

And, from what Damien could gather, the Azure Dragon bloodline that existed in the current Holy Dragon Clan...

'...it's a fake.'

It wasn't the same bloodline that the child possessed. Since Damien hadn't seen it in person, he couldn't say anything for certain, but he was sure of it.

'He didn't leave this world voluntarily.'

There was a conspiracy behind it all that needed to be unraveled.

And Damien had no plans of letting darkness fester for any longer than it already had.

The Heavenly World could only ever be a beacon of light.

Otherwise, it was impossible for them to stand against the malevolent darkness of the Sacred Abyss Universe.

Chapter 1606 Dragon Clan [4]

The Central Area of Arulion was actually more of a city than half of a kingdom. There were definitely swatches of untouched land here and there, but for the most part, the central region was both developed and connected.

Dragons very much valued their true forms over their humanoid forms, however, the old tradition of building nests in caves was simply too outdated. As the independent beasts formed a society, they were forced to change a lot of their ways to accommodate more people.

The Holy Dragons and the strongest beings under them were given the privilege of moving around in dragon form whenever they wanted. It was possible for others to earn time they could spend transformed, but it was an expensive privilege and often used to identify the upper class.

Even if they were called dragon royalty to those in the outside world, the majority of the True Dragons who were able to live in the central region were still just regular middle-class citizens.

They maintained their human forms and lived in the megacity, pretty much entertaining the same daily lives as regular humans.

The training process of a dragon was, after all, quite slow and uninvolved. They would eat, comprehend laws, and try to purify their bloodlines by gaining merit through tasks posted by the true royalty.

It was quite funny. The illusion of high society shown to the dragonkin, the lives they yearned for and worked to gain...

They weren't much more decorated than the lives they were already living.

Damien and the child were on the outskirts of the central region. They would eventually need to go closer to the center when the time came to register for the heir wars. However, that time was not now.

'This place is good.'

Though they were in the central region, the area was relatively rural and the people lived simple lives. There was a mountain in the distance that would be perfect for training, and since it was a more isolated district of the city, there wouldn't be any unnecessary eyes watching their actions.

'This kid can't be raised as a weapon.'

Even if his purpose was designated from birth, Damien refused to force the child to be a tool.

He was innocent, naive, and intelligent. He had talent surpassing talent. Even if Damien waited a while, he would still be able to train that child to become great.

'First and foremost, he deserves a fulfilling childhood.'

Damien had a soft spot for children. He knew how much trauma that developed in one's youth could negatively impact one's future. He had seen several times what happened when children raised as tools finally became strong enough to demand free will.

In order to keep this child on the right path, in order to set him up for not only success, but happiness, Damien chose this district.

When he arrived with the child on his head like an ornament, he raised his arm into the air and sent out a wave of mana that rapidly grew into a dome that encompassed the entire district.

It didn't bar entry and exit from the district. Rather, it made time truly relative.

Within the district, time would flow at a rate far removed from the outside world. Damien had ten years to spend as he pleased.

The residents of this district would also be subject to the time distortion, but not entirely.

The moment they left the territory, their time would be reoriented, and it would be as if there was never a dilation in the first place.

It was hard to understand and pretty much impossible to pull off without alerting those who were being influenced, however, Existence changed the story.

As Damien got closer to the concept of control, his ability to maneuver Existence became far more precise. He could now accomplish things that would usually be impossible by imposing his will upon reality, but he couldn't yet make seamless changes like the Dark God.

Damien still had to make sure that his powers wouldn't completely destroy reality. He had to at least somewhat abide by the natural laws, bending them rather than changing them to his liking.

Nevertheless, this place had become a home where Damien and the child would spend the next few years.

And that was exactly what happened.

There were three months until the start of the heir wars and six months before the entire Heavenly World was placed under a time dilation.

Those first three months had been stretched into ten years in a place that nobody cared about, and a mysterious man and his son had suddenly appeared out of nowhere.

At first, the residents were a bit skeptical of them. They didn't look like commoners at all. That man was handsome enough on his own, and had an aura like a supreme ruler. However, his son was even more of a spectacle.

He was perhaps the cutest and most well-behaved child any of these people had ever seen, and because of him, the district had become far more joyful than ever before.

He was truly a bundle of light.

But when the denizens asked that man what his son's name was...

"He doesn't have one."

Damien was honest.

"I just encountered him recently, and it doesn't seem like his parents ever gave him a name."

It was a sympathetic situation. That man, Damien, had become a father to a child someone else had left behind. When they realized this, the denizens went into an uproar.

That was the first great event this place had held in many times. A grand feast that they put together just for the two of them.

Damien had been unwilling to name the child because he wanted the name that child remembered to be one his actual kin had chosen for him.

However, it was indeed inconvenient to just call him "kid" or "boy" for his entire adolescence.

August.

They named him after what was, in Earthen tradition, a month. It was the start of autumn, a period symbolic of change.

However, August wasn't the same in Dragon culture. After all, those months that existed on Earth weren't necessarily used in the Heavenly World.

To Dragons, August was a name close to the first Dragon Emperor, Augustine. It was a name they used to put their wishes and hopes for the child's success into his identity, to make sure that the universe would support him in achieving happiness and prosperity.

It was nothing more than a nickname that would suffice until the child gained his true name from his real family, but...

'...it's nice.'

Damien quite liked it.

Everything that had happened here happened in no more than three months in the dilated district. The denizens warmed up to the duo fast, and before even Damien could get used to this calm lifestyle amidst the madness, they'd given him and August such a warm welcome.

It wasn't a bad thing to use the name they'd come up with, right?

For better or for worse, these people were the ones that child would grow up around, the people that he would look up to and learn from when he was establishing his sense of identity.

A child's environment was just as important as their upbringing. If it was these people, then Damien didn't have to worry about bad influences at all.

Ten years.

For ten years, they would remain here, living in peace.

For now, the hurried pace of the outside world could be put aside.

All that mattered to Damien in this moment was being a responsible parent to the child that had suddenly become a part of his life.

Perhaps, just a little bit, he wanted to live vicariously through him.

Maybe Damien wanted to give this child the upbringing that he could never have.

But, the real question was...

Would he be successful?

Chapter 1607 Dragon Clan [5]

There was a district in a kingdom called Arulion, a district in a city so large it could completely cover an entire planet.

That district was small. So small and so peripheral that barely anyone even knew it existed.

Here, people lived simple lives. They farmed when they wanted to farm, they shopped in markets and ate at stalls that their peers opened, and generally enjoyed their quaint and happy lives.

This kind of place was rare in Arulion. No matter how they were treated by their own kind, dragons were dragons, after all.

Most of them refused to do mundane things. They spent their entire lives striving towards power or knowledge with everything they had.

But, in every society, there would be outliers. The only people who were willing to live in the more rural parts of the megacity were those who had discarded that pointless chase.

They renounced their claim to power as they realized how the royal dragons truly thought of them. They lived simple lives because they could, knowing that their lifespans would allow them to enjoy peace for many, many years.

What was it like growing up in this kind of place?

Time was already different in the perception of a dragon, and due to their long lifespans, their growth periods were far longer than other beasts.

A usual dragon would take centuries to get through adolescence, and would take thousands before properly reaching adulthood.

August...

Well, he didn't quite have that time.

And with his intelligence, it would've been a waste if he had to wait decades or centuries for his body to match his mind.

By the time he gained his name, August had already started talking. By the time a year passed, he was fluent in English, Dragon Tongue, and the universal language.

Speaking English was, of course, a redundant skill to possess, but since August was his son, Damien figured it was only right to teach him his native language.

At two years old, August was not only walking and talking, he was capable of sensing mana. It was only to the smallest and most instinctive form of perception, but Damien often found August playing with mana like it was a toy, laughing happily at the sparkling blue energy floating in the air.

He had not been taught at all. Rather, Damien had been giving him the regular education a child should have, though August was learning at the level of a middle schooler already.

Nevertheless, with a child who was able to grow mentally and understand concepts faster than anyone his age humanly could, Damien felt it remiss to force him to grow slowly.

With Existence, bringing his body up to match his mind wasn't difficult at all. Still, Damien didn't push it too much.

August's knowledge grew by the day, but his mental state was still that of a child. If Damien increased his age based on his smartness, August would've already been 14 or 15, but he was not nearly there emotionally.

As such, though only two years had passed, August already looked five years old. He could run as he pleased without being inhibited, and his physique allowed him to play with mana without being burdened.

'He's a good kid.'

Damien smiled as he watched August play. They were on the mountain behind the district. It didn't have a name before, but ever since Damien started bringing August here, it had gained the name, "Green Green."

'I'm going to have to find some language where that sounds cool, because there's no way I'm letting any map call this place Green Green.'

Well, it was a name created by a five-year-old, so it was to be expected.

Damien had been bringing August here since he was old enough to walk.

August was incredibly interested in mana. He didn't talk to anyone but Damien much, but he was always finding ways to play with his mana and experiment.

Since he was an Azure Dragon, his ability to intuitively do wondrous things with the energy was great. The city was constraining. August couldn't do as he wanted when he was stuck in a place with so many people. The mountain was a perfect place for him.

August was a bit shy, but it wasn't because he was socially awkward.

'What's the best way to describe it...?'

Was it that he couldn't fit in with his peers? IDamien was always too strong for the majority but too weak for the minority. He never had enemies among his peers, but those stronger than him were far, far stronger than him.

Because of his rapid development, August was in a similar situation with his intelligence.

Though, he didn't seem to mind it. He was very vocal with Damien, and when the two of them were alone, he was an incredibly vibrant child.

Truly, with every day that passed, August made Damien more and more certain that his decision to provide the kid with a proper childhood was the right one.

"Dad, look!"

Damien's attention was grabbed by the call. When he looked over...

"Woah!" he exclaimed in admiration.

Damien...didn't quite know what he was looking at, but it could definitely be described as an expression of August's creativity. The mana was entangled and strangely patterned in a chaotic manner, but no matter how disorganized it looked, it was something that required a surprising amount of mana control to maintain.

"Good job, kiddo!"

Damien walked over and ruffled August's hair. He giggled, leaning into Damien as he continued toying with the mana.

'That time is approaching, huh...'

It was a bit bittersweet.

If August's control kept improving like this, Damien would 00:36

pretty much be forced to teach him so that he wouldn't harm If August's control kept improving like this, Damien would pretty much be forced to teach him so that he wouldn't harm himself. And when his ancestral memories eventually awakened...

Would he still be the same kid he was now?

'I guess this is the struggle of a parent.'

In the end, his job was to support his child and watch over him. Whatever he became, as long as he was happy and safe, it was fine, right?

Two years had passed, and another two years passed soon after. August continued to age, but only until he was eight years old.

Nothing much had changed. August's personality was consistent, and so was everything else. It was the product of the mundane place Damien had chosen to be their home.

Nevertheless, the passing of two more years meant that August's skill improved by leaps and bounds. Damien had taught him some basic control skills to keep him safe, but he'd managed to hold off on any real training.

Until now.

For human children, Damien believed that mana training should only begin in their teenage years. That was the same principle he followed before letting Xue'er start training.

However, dragons were inherently different, especially Holy Descendants.

Damien could sense it. August's ancestral memories would awaken soon.

Before August abruptly gained great power, Damien needed to make sure he had at least a comprehensive understanding of the basics and a true moral code.

There was really only one thing that still concerned him.

'For some reason...'

Despite the fact that years had passed...

'...he still hasn't transformed.'

August had never once tried to enter his dragon form.

It was almost like...

'...he refuses the idea of being a dragon at all.'

Chapter 1608 Dragon Clan [6]

It was a case Damien had never seen before.

The pride of the dragons didn't need to be mentioned more than it already had. It was an ingrained trait that every dragon was born with.

Most dragons spent their formative years in their original forms and only transformed into humanoid forms when they reached a certain age. This was a practice supported by the laws of Arulion. No matter what one's status was, one would be allowed to experience the pride of dragons before eventually being suppressed.

August was...different?

It wasn't that he'd been born different. He was instilled with that same core personality trait as the rest of his species. However, his trait was almost instantly suppressed.

Damien could've figured out the problem with a simple scan of August's soul, but he didn't want to. This was his first time experiencing parenthood, and he didn't want to give up the learning experience for easy answers.

His brows were furrowed as he fell into thought.

'Should I just ask directly, or would that make him more anxious?'

A child's trust was a strange thing, and Damien didn't want to ruin their current relationship by trying to push his boundaries.

'But I'm his parent, am I not?'

He wanted to think he wasn't some regular stranger in August's eyes. He wanted to believe that he had privileges above everyone else.

But...

Damien remembered his own childhood. He remembered how he felt when his mother tried to learn what was happening inside his mind.

Their inability to come to terms with each other was one of the main reasons a rift formed between them. Each and every argument they had after that only served to widen the rift and drive an immovable wedge between them.

It took Damien's mind breaking from trauma and a very slow recovery after that for him to finally come to terms with his parents and understand their perspective.

As night fell, Damien brought August back to the small and cozy home he'd built for them in the city. It had a rural and wooden aesthetic like those around it, but the interior was modern like the earthen styles Damien preferred.

After a hefty meal, enough to feed ten human adults, he put August to sleep and made his way to his own room.

'I wanted to start teaching him the ways of a practitioner, but it might not be a good idea to do that until he's gotten over whatever's happening.'

Damien frowned.

He was being so careful with August that it was almost hypocritical. His recent actions had been the complete opposite of careful, so he almost felt like he didn't deserve to be this hesitant.

'Maybe my concern is holding me back?'

If he treated August like he treated disciples, life would probably be much easier for him.

'But will it be good for him, or would it be detrimental?'

In the end, it was that desire.

The desire to live vicariously through his child, to use parenthood as a way to truly absolve the negatives of his own childhood by making sure his child wouldn't suffer through any of the same things.

Wasn't that really the thing holding him back?

'Is it because I'm getting stronger? The traces of mental instability remaining in the core of my existence are slowly revealing themselves, pleading to be resolved.'

He sighed to himself. Taking a new path in life led to new challenges in places where he least expected them. It wasn't unwelcome. It was just a bit strange and hard to get used to.

'Hm?'

Damein's mind returned to reality as he heard a knock on his door.

"Dad, are you up?"

August peeked his head in, his voice soft in case Damien was asleep.

"I'm up. What are you doing standing at the door? Come in."

August nodded and entered the room. He closed the door behind him and walked up to the bed, jumping up to sit next to Damien.

He wiggled around to get comfortable on the bed, or so it seemed at first, but as Damien looked closer, he saw the hesitance on August's face.

"What's up bud? Is there something bothering you?" he asked softly.

August nodded slightly. It was clear that he wanted to speak, but he was doubting what he wanted to say.

Did he think Damien would get angry? Or did he perhaps fear the question itself?

"Dad..." August started, the hesitance in his voice not fading at all.

Despite the anxiety he was feeling, August tried to power through it and say what he wanted to say.

If there was something Damien had always taught him, it was how to vocalize what he wanted.

"Never be ashamed of yourself."

That was the motto.

If he wanted to ask something, he could ask without fear. If he wanted to act a certain way, nobody could tell him he was wrong.

August had grown up shy, sure, but that was only when it came to expressing his hobbies and talents. He had never been afraid to satisfy his curiosity.

In the end, after a few seconds of struggle, that question finally made its way out into the world.

"...why can't I be like you?"

Damien was immediately stumped.

"What do you mean?" He asked, genuinely curious.

"Why am I different?" August fired back.

"I want to be like Dad, but I can't. This is actually fake, right?" he continued, grabbing his skin and pulling.

"Dad, actually...am I a monster?"

August's voice shook as he asked. Tears welled up in his eyes.

Damien's expression immediately softened. He pulled August into a strong hug, as if to expel all of those doubts with a single motion.

'I understand now.'

This was why August never entered his dragon form. This was the problem that had been plaguing him all this time.

It was the complete opposite of what Damien expected, but at the same time, it was exactly what he thought.

August truly didn't want to be a dragon, but it wasn't because of any of the normal reasons.

It was simple, but heartbreaking.

He could instinctively sense Damien's soul, and despite the alterations that disguised him as a dragon, August wasn't fooled.

Was it the connection between father and son that surpassed even Existence, or was it because this child had been absorbing his mana since he was just an egg?

August idolized his father. To him, Damien was the perfect person.

But Damien was a human, not a dragon.

And that was exactly what bred insecurity in his heart.

'So it ended up being my fault.'

Damien never stopped to consider the consequences of raising a son who came from a completely different species and culture. He never thought there would be consequences at all, considering that, in all aspects, he was currently a dragon.

Still, August had come to him honestly and expressed his worries. Since Damien now understood the problem...

'...I can work to fix it.'

It was time for Damien to embark on a new mission.

To build August's confidence.

"You're no monster," Damien said confidently, pulling August closer to make sure he could clearly feel his sincerity.

"You are my son. No matter what happens, no matter what differences we have, that will never change."

He didn't know if he was saying the right thing, but he said whatever came out instinctively.

This was, after all, just to calm the overwhelming emotions currently controlling August's actions.

Actions spoke louder than words, right?

The real surprise would come when the sun rose.

After this conversation ended and August was put to sleep...

'...I have a lot of preparations to make.'

Chapter 1609 Dragon Clan [7]

Did Damien have to explain the concept of adoption now? Since August was already questioning why he was different, it might have been better for him to know that he and Damien were different.

But Damien didn't think so. If August, who idolized his father, suddenly learned that he and his father weren't biologically related at all, how would he feel?

For now, that information could be omitted. The most important thing was to help August value himself and stop feeling insecure.

There was nothing at all wrong with him. He was, in fact, the coolest and most awesome 8-year-old in the entire world.

Damien assured him of this in every way possible, adding a bit of comedy to ease his emotions.

But there wasn't much he could say. It wasn't that he didn't know what to say and it also wasn't that August didn't want to hear it.

Rather, August ended up falling asleep where he sat while Damien was coaxing him. It was already incredibly late at night, and it had taken a lot out of him just to voice his concerns.

Now that the hardest part was over, and now that Damien had calmed him down, he was properly tuckered out.

Damien smiled a bit sadly as he felt August grip his hand in his sleep.

'So it was because he wanted to be like me, huh?'

He suddenly felt like all of his worries were unwarranted.

For a long time now, he'd been worried about his relationship with August. He'd been worried that he was doing everything wrong in parenting because he was too focused on comparing himself and August to his mother and him from the past.

However, while he didn't know it, August had done something monumental for his father.

He had shared his inner feelings. He had shown in a single action how much he trusted and respected his dad.

And there was nothing more valuable to a father than the trust of his child.

Damien had been validated beyond belief. He felt the tension in his body release as he realized that he was doing a good job.

'What a feeling.'

There was never another feeling like this. It was a first among firsts, and the warmth it provided was indescribable.

'What a good kid.'

Without even realizing it, he was a beacon of light.

It wasn't right to let him wallow in darkness, right?

Damien's body blurred as several clones jumped out and disappeared from the house.

Tomorrow would be a day just for August.

As for training...

Well, that could wait.

They still had six years before their time ran out, didn't they?

The morning sun shone through the windows across the many houses in the small district. Its rays flooded the eyes of those sleeping within, awakening them to the dawn of a new day.

A pair of eyes fluttered open in Damien's house. Their owner looked around in confusion before suddenly propping himself up, embarrassment written all over his face.

'This is...dad's bed.'

He had been sleeping in his own room for over a year now, and he thought he'd gotten used to it, but it seemed he was wrong.

He still slept the most comfortably when he was holding his father's hand.

As August woke up and went through his morning routine, groggily walking down the stairs to the living room, he smelled something delicious from the kitchen.

Now, on a normal day, he'd rush to the dining table as fast as possible to see what was on the menu, but today...

"Dad..."

August peeked around the corner at the edge of the stairs. He had only just remembered what had happened last night, and despite his father's assurances, he was still a little afraid that he'd get scolded.

However, what was there for him to get scolded for? It was nothing more than the irrational fear of a child who was just starting to come out of his shell.

"Oh, you're up?" Damien said as he saw August's small figure out of the corner of his eye.

"Come sit down. I'm making pancakes."

"Pancakes...?"

"Potatoes and eggs too."

"Eggs..."

"Ah, and there's also some bacon I made with the Sun-

Swallowing Pigs we caught in the mountains..."

"Bacon...!"

Well, to his defense, August didn't do it himself. His body somehow arrived at the table and seated itself without telling anyone!

"Pfft...!"

Damien held back his laughter, since August's face was already as red as a tomato.

He brought the food to the table, ruffled his son's hair, and sat down himself.

"Eat up. We have a lot to do today."

"We're doing something?"

August spoke with surprise. Damien always told him the night before if he had something planned for him. This was the first time he was learning of it right before doing it.

"Yup. It's a surprise, though, so that's all I'm going to tell you."

August's heart beat a little faster. Surprises...he hadn't experienced them before, so he didn't know how to feel.

But, he ate far faster than usual. Damien hadn't really given him a proper response to the questions he asked last night. He was smart enough to know that, but he also didn't ask questions.

For them to be going on a surprise excursion now...it had to be related somehow, right?

Right.

To put it simply, Damien had only one goal for today.

He wanted to show August how cool dragons were.

August had never seen them being their true domineering selves, only ever being around dragons who embraced the mundane.

It was about time for him to realize that he was not a monster.

No, rather, he was a monster in the best ways possible.

The day started with more regular activities. Damien and August went deeper into the central region, enjoying the various delicacies and cultures showcased as they came closer to the land of true royals.

The entertainment in these places was quite nice. There was music unique to the Dragon Clan and all kinds of shows and plays that represented the deeds of heroic dragons of the past.

Watching those, August's eyes sparkled. This was his first time seeing people who looked like him portrayed in such a good light.

He didn't know he could be a hero. But, as he realized the possibility, a sparkle of childish ambition lit his heart aflame.

Damien's eyes lit up as well when he saw August responding well, but they hadn't even gotten to the main spectacle yet.

Once they finished up with the more regular activities, their adventure actually took them away from Arulion. The constraints of society made it so that the true nature of dragons was muted within the kingdom.

There were some hidden experts and more traditional dragons who hid away in the mountains outside the central region, refusing to accept the more human society that the kingdom had adopted.

And Damien's clones had spent the entire night visiting each and every one of them, telling them about his problem, and recruiting them for a very special event.

Damien and August arrived in the middle of an expansive flat land far away from anything else.

August's eyes were covered by a blindfold for the sake of the surprise.

That was probably why he hadn't freaked out by now.

After all...

Chapter 1610 Dragon Clan [8]

"You ready?"

Damien's voice resounded in August's ears.

His heart pounded. The entire day had already been exciting, but it was clear that everything had been leading up to this.

'I'm a dragon.'

That was what August had learned so far. He learned what dragons were, and he learned that they could be heroes and scholars if they wanted to.

But it was all still theoretical. He'd only seen plays and reenactments. He'd never seen that sort of power with his own eyes before.

"Here we go!"

Damien's voice was all he heard above the whipping winds of the environment.

August nodded, and soon after, he felt the blindfold rising off of his face.

When his eyes adjusted to the light, he saw nothing more than an open field.

That was until he looked up at Damien.

No, he went to look up at Damien, but he was forced to look past him.

WHOOOOOOOOOOSH!

A huge aura filled the sky. A massive being swept past with such speed that it caused a sonic boom to ripple through space.

BOOOOOOOOOM!

The emerald-green dragon that swooped by was only the first.

A second, a third, a fourth, a fifth...so many dragons, kilometers long each, swept past Damien and August, flipping and rolling through the clouds as they claimed the sky as their dominion.

"Woaaah!"

August's eyes widened in adoration.

He held onto Damien's leg, and Damien's mana covered him to protect him from the wild energy and sound. As he stood there, he laid witness to a sight that not many would ever get to see.

Sixteen ancestral dragons zipped through the air. They roared and displayed their auras, fought and danced, and put on a show for the child below.

They didn't know who he was.

They only knew that he had a very powerful and caring father.

And if it was for a young dragon pure of spirit and uncorrupted by the ways of Arulion, then they'd happily lend their aid in helping him awaken.

Dragons had several ancient rituals, many of which were symbolic and used to praise their species and their traditions.

This type of maneuver, where they flew together and embraced the sky with such passion, was one of such beautiful performative rituals.

A rainbow of beautifully deadly dragon's breath painted Damien and August in their reflections, and the majestic aura of so many ancestral dragons washed over the young dragon watching from the ground.

That aura made him shiver. It excited something deep within him, making his blood boil. Instinctively, he wanted to transform right then and there, embracing his true form.

Though...

"Isn't it amazing?" Damien said, looking at August.

"It is..." August responded somewhat half-heartedly.

He truly enjoyed what he was seeing. He felt inspired and he felt more confident in his identity after seeing people like these.

However, his heart was still a little gloomy.

Knowing that dragons were cool was one thing. That was half of the problem, and with this, it was certain that August took pride in being a dragon.

But that didn't change his desire to be more like his dad.

Weren't the two paths too different? August couldn't choose between them at all, and his mind was torn in two.

"What're you making that face for?"

August looked up as he felt Damien's hand on his shoulder.

"It's nothing..." he said, trying to brush it off.

But Damien just smiled.

"You know..."

He stepped forward, turning around to face his son.

"I can do that too."

"You can?"

The look in August's eyes changed immediately.

"I can."

"You're lying."

He simply didn't believe it. He could feel it. His dad wasn't a dragon. No matter what happened, there was no way his dad could be a dragon.

That was the exact reason for his sadness.

However, Damien didn't think the same.

"I'm not lying. Say, do you want to see what I can do up there?"

August was definitely still skeptical, but seeing the confident grin on his dad's face, he had the urge to hope for a miracle.

He nodded, his eyes slightly gleaming.

Damien's grin widened.

He no longer had a bloodline core. That much was true.

But he was part-dragon too at one time.

His dragon form wasn't just an imitation, but a true face of his existence. There was nothing fake about it, unlike his disguise.

Damien sent mana into his core. He talked to the mist and brought forth Existence, sending waves of energy into his bloodstream.

That strange black and white blood that flowed through him was not something of this world. It morphed with just a single command, and suddenly, a bloodline that had long disappeared returned to Damien's body.

Thump!

His heart thumped.

Thump!

Once again.

THUMP!

Damien's body vibrated as his heartbeat echoed off the walls of his skeleton.

His blood rushed and roared, and as it gained more and more power, his body began to change.

He grew massive, morphing until he was no longer humanoid.

Black scales grew all across his body, lined with a dark-purple tint that was barely recognizable in the sunlight.

Two horns jutted out of his head and twisted around each other to form a crown as his head itself changed into that of a dragon.

Two massive wings, larger and more powerful than those of the dragons surrounding them jutted out of his back as he grew a tail and changed from a bipedal creature to a quadrupedal one.

A terrifying black dragon, unlike any other in the world, was revealed.

WHOOOOOOOSH!

Damien flapped his wings and shot into the air.

ROOOAAAAAAR!

His powerful roar filled the skies, causing space itself to tremble.

The aura of the black dragon's birth caused bells to chime in the heavens. Damien's presence was recognized as that of a True Dragon, and not just any True Dragon, but one on the scale of a Holy ancestor.

Damien's dragon transformation was a huge event. So huge, in fact, that the sixteen ancestral dragons he'd invited to build August's spirit had paused to watch him.

However, Damien didn't care about the reactions they had, nor did he care about who else recognized his otherworldly presence when the heavens chimed.

He was focused on one boy, his massive amethyst draconic eyes looking straight into his.

And that boy's reaction was everything he could've hoped for.

THUMP!

It wasn't Damien's heartbeat anymore. August's heart was beating so rapidly that he almost couldn't breathe.

His eyes were wider than saucers, shimmering with a layer of tears that appeared due to the sheer amount of overwhelming emotion he was feeling.

That was it.

That was all he needed.

He could feel the authenticity from Damien's dragon form. He could feel that his father was, in this moment, a True Dragon.

And he looked damn cool.

'I can be like dad.'

He could be like his father, and he could also be a great dragon. He didn't have to compromise one for the sake of the other.

Being a dragon was awesome.

And being Damien's son was even better.

August felt his body lighten as his worries drifted away.

A light shined over him, and something that should've happened long ago finally, finally happened.

August's body changed.

And his dragon form was revealed to the world for the very first time.