

Void 1611

Chapter 1611 Innocence [1]

Blue light cascaded from the heavens and graced the ground below.

Far, far away, in the distant seas of Arulion, waves crashed into each other and rose to create tsunamis that charged towards the land beyond.

HONG!

HONG!

HONG!

The heavens rang bells again. It could be regarded by others as a continuation of the phenomenon that had started a bit earlier, but that simply wasn't true.

The unveiling of Damien's dragon form flustered the heavens. That was the main reason for its reaction to him.

When it came to August, the heavens weren't flustered at all. They weren't surprised by his transformation. Rather, they celebrated the event that should've taken place several thousand years ago.

August was, at first, perturbed by his transformation. He'd kept his human form for four years now and had become more than just used to it. He was comfortable as a human, so when his skin flipped and revealed deep blue scales that covered his entire body, when his form elongated and a tail appeared behind his back, when his aura transformed and his horns grew into their true appearance, he wasn't just feeling discomfort.

For a moment, it felt wrong, like this wasn't who he was meant to be.

But that was when he looked into the sky and saw his father.

Their scales were different, as were their auras, but there he was. He flew through the sky with such dominance that all of August's doubts disappeared without a trace.

'That's my dad.'

The immense pride he felt drowned the insecurities in his heart.

Not just the pride he had in his father, but the pride he had in dragons as a whole.

August embraced his natural form. For the first time, he viewed his gifts as gifts, not curses.

And that...that was exactly what the heavens wanted from him.

VOOOOOOOM!

August's body was filled with mana like he'd never experienced before.

He was always enamored by the energy. The way it flowed so freely yet strictly dictated all things was fascinating, and the fact that it responded to him so openly and honestly made him feel a connection to it that only his relationship with Damien could rival.

He thought his bond with mana was the best it could ever be already, but that was just a product of his naivety.

Dragons were something like apostles of mana. The energy always favored their kind, and those who were able to make use of that favor were the ones who established dragons as scholars and sages.

The environment itself responded to August's presence. The ambient mana chose him as its liege, swirling around him in a whirlpool of respect and submission.

A ten-foot-long baby dragon was revealed to the world. His scales shimmered in the sunlight, and his eyes reflected the clarity of an arctic reservoir. The regality in his aura was unmistakable, and though they were only invited to aid in the child's awakening, the sixteen ancestral dragons currently present felt the need to overstay their welcome.

But could it really be called that?

They were awestruck by Damien's aura. That caused them to stop what they were doing and stare mindlessly.

August was on an entirely different level.

If Damien was respected for his power...

...then August was revered for his inborn status.

ROOOOOOOOAR!

He let out a roar instinctively. It didn't have the extreme power of the roars these other dragons had emitted, but it stirred something deep in the souls of those who heard it.

Even Damien, who wasn't a dragon at his core, felt that call.

The sixteen ancestral dragons came down from the sky, prostrating themselves on the ground with their heads bowed to the child they encircled.

'This is...'

August's eyes widened in shock. He looked up at Damien as if to ask what he was supposed to do, but Damien just smiled and shrugged his massive draconic shoulders.

August smiled too.

Right.

'I just need to do whatever I want.'

He was a child who knew his desires well and knew how to differentiate the good from the bad. Perhaps it was disrespectful to ignore the display of these ancestors, but...

'...I really want to fly with Dad.'

It was the chance of a lifetime. August never thought he'd be able to do it, and now that he could, he really couldn't wait.

WHOOSH!

He flapped his wings once. He wasn't used to having them, but controlling this form came instinctively.

WHOOOOOSH!

He flapped his wings again. Then again, and again.

His body rose from the ground, and as the wind grazed past his face, he angled himself upward and launched into the sky.

ROOOOOOOAAAAAAR!

It was a far more powerful roar than the one he released before. If it had to be translated into a language humans could understand, then...

'WOOOOOOHOOOOO!'

August was ecstatic. He was doing flips and rolls in the air before he even reached Damien's altitude. When he finally did, he circled his father several times out of pure joy.

Damien's smile never faded.

'It's a little hard to move, isn't it?'

If there was one major qualm he had with his current form, it was that his eye position and the structure of his head made it difficult for him to turn and watch as August did his laps.

Still, there was nothing more rewarding than seeing the pure and unadulterated emotion on that little boy's face as his spirits reached an all-time high.

"How about that?" Damien said, laughing all the way.

"I told you dragons were awesome, didn't I?"

"Yeah! This is awesome!"

August was just speaking to speak, really. He was too overwhelmed to properly formulate his words. He just wanted to respond to his dad no matter what.

It wasn't about dragons anymore.

This happiness stemmed from all of his wishes being fulfilled.

His dad didn't lie to him. He didn't say anything just for the sake of cheering him up.

He really wasn't a monster. He really wasn't alone.

The fact that everything he dreamed about was in front of him now was more valuable than any confidence he gained from all of Damien's efforts.

"Dad, Dad! Let's go flying!"

The size difference between them was monstrous. Compared to the hundreds of kilometers that Damien's currently shrunken form filled, August was just a speck of dust.

But did that matter?

Since his son wanted to fly with him, he would happily oblige.

"Come up!"

August pushed his little wings as hard as he could in response to his father's words, taking position above his back.

Once Damien was sure that August was there, he covered him in a slight film of mana for one specific purpose.

"Three..."

He pulled his legs in to maximize his aerodynamics.

"Two..."

He charged his mana for a perfect launch.

"One..."

After one last check to make sure everything was good...

"Let's go!"

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

Mana raged, the sound barrier broke, and Damien and August became blips on the horizon.

This was a future Godbeast's first flight in his dragon form.

Since Damien was the one supervising it...

...he had to make it more memorable than anything else.

That was his one and only goal.

Chapter 1612 Innocence [2]

Damien and August shot past all of the greatest sights of Arulion without any thoughts in mind but those of enjoying every moment of their flight.

August flapped his wings with everything he had, enjoying the rush of wind against his face and the feeling of the world zooming by as if it were incorporeal.

This wasn't a speed he could reach on his own. Not in the slightest.

Damien was supporting him with mana and allowing him to personally experience what it was like at the peak of a dragon's power.

It was truly something amazing. To fly in tandem with someone he admired more than anything else in the world was a dream for August, especially since that person was his own father.

And even when they landed on the ground and returned to their human forms, the feeling he felt in the clouds didn't leave him in the slightest.

As August reveled in new sensations, Damien approached the ancestral dragons who'd waited for their return.

"Once again, I thank you all for your help in this matter," he said, giving them a slight bow.

They'd all retreated from the world not because they were lazy, but because they didn't support the way the current Arulion was being managed.

Dragons were meant to be free creatures, not a people restrained by their own society.

Arulion worked too hard to mimic human culture, and as those at the top actively worked to suppress those below them, a majority of dragons had been turned into wastes.

To the outside world, Arulion was a haven for dragons, a place where they could live without persecution.

However, that reputation was merely the product of rumors. The real Arulion was nothing like that.

Not anymore, anyway.

"It is no trouble."

The one who responded was the same green dragon who led the pack when they arrived. He, Alcharist Revell, was originally a Holy Dragon comparable to those ruling the kingdom now, but as his element of Wood wasn't common enough for him to form an entire clan, he couldn't stand against the others and was eventually cast out.

He never tried to retaliate, because revenge simply wasn't in a Wood Dragon's nature. Still, that didn't mean he didn't wish to see change in the kingdom.

It was just that he knew he wasn't the person who would start the revolution.

"I hope you can deliver on what you promised us."

Damien looked at each and every one of them.

Some were strays who'd made it to the top through brutal struggle. Some were disowned members of royal clans, while others more were dragons as old as time who had watched the kingdom change and devolve.

They all had the same thing in mind when Damien came to visit them. They all saw the exact same spark in his eyes.

And when he made them that promise, they found themselves unable to reject.

Damien smiled.

"All of you can see it for yourselves, can't you?" He said confidently.

"Your future emperor...do you think he will lead you into ruin?"

He turned to look at the little boy currently playing in the field they stood in. The little boy who was loved by both nature and mana.

The ancestral dragons joined him with the same expression on their faces.

"Indeed. If it is him, then maybe this kingdom can be led to a better place."

A heart as pure as his, untouched by the corruption of the upper echelon...if it was allowed to thrive, then there was no telling what kind of miracles would happen.

He had only just accepted himself as a dragon. He didn't know it yet because of that.

Realistically, he was only four years old. Yet, his dragon form was already so breathtaking.

These ancestral dragons who'd seen geniuses rise and fall knew what that meant, but, after all, Damien knew best.

The heir to the Azure Dragon's throne was no soft persimmon.

And now that he had properly reached his starting line, he would be unstoppable.

Arulion was already a hidden world. The real Western Region was just a heap of undeveloped land. The Dragon Kingdom was superimposed on it in a different direction created by the Ether Clan.

However, even it contained worlds within.

Because of the structure of Arulion's central region, the Holy Dragon Clans wouldn't have enough space to accommodate themselves without going to war with each other. They built their palaces in the absolute center of the territory, but these could, at most, be called embassies.

They were used when visitors arrived, or when events needed to be held. Otherwise, they were just there for show.

The Holy Clans had their real territories anchored to those palaces, existing as separate worlds that spanned for hundreds of thousands of kilometers.

Despite creating a human-like society for Arulion, the Holy Clans themselves enjoyed the privileges of a real dragon.

Their territories were mostly natural. They lived in caves filled with treasure, and had more than enough space to give each and every member a territory they were happy with.

It was a little funny, but it was equally tragic. Even the ancestral dragons living away from the world believed that Arulion's royalty was straying away from their true lineage as dragons, but they were wrong.

They just made sure that they were the only ones who experienced its bliss, while all other dragons were forced to live in cramped cities, suppressed.

In one of those hidden realms belonging to the Ligua Clan, two people stood in front of a koi pond.

They had humanoid forms, but were clearly not human. They made sure that even when they were choosing a smaller form for convenience, others would still see their pride as dragons.

"Did you sense it?" The man among them asked his female companion, his gaze focused on the koi pond.

"I did, however, it cannot be real," the woman responded, not a shred of doubt in her mind.

"That man' died when we killed him. I still remember the feeling of my claws in his heart. For his mana to appear now, it must be the result of some sort of coincidence. If not, then someone has discovered some of his treasures."

The most obvious reason was the awakening of one of his descendants, but as the woman said, that was simply impossible.

That man was dead. Even if he had descendants, it was far too late for them to hatch now.

"Nevertheless, it is worth investigating."

"Just send a few children. There is no need to try too hard when nobody else knows of its existence but those who discovered it."

That distinctive aura could only be felt by those of the Liqua Clan. As long as the other Holy Clans were unaware, their only competition was the dragons who lived in Arulion. And they...

"At most, they can only be practice targets for our geniuses. Now that the heir wars are approaching..."

The woman's eyes sharpened.

"...we must come out victorious."

She didn't finish with the words she actually wanted to say, but the man understood what she meant.

"Right, our enemies now are the other Holy Clans. 'His' treasure can wait until it is over."

The woman nodded, but as the two continued to stare into the koi pond, the man's brows furrowed.

Regardless of the woman's opinion, he couldn't believe that anything could be so coincidental.

'If its children...'

Then he knew exactly who to send.

A few geniuses that even the ancestral dragons outside couldn't touch.

As long as they were deployed, he'd get his answers as fast and efficiently as possible.

And anyone who could possibly get in their way...

Well, their only fate would be death.

Chapter 1613 Innocence [3]

Damien wasn't even the one who suggested it.

It seemed that August had glimpsed the benefits of power once he'd unlocked his dragon form, because the instant they got home that night, August practically begged for Damien to train him.

"Dad, you're strong, right?"

He didn't really understand before. He didn't know anyone other than his father, so he didn't have a way to compare the things he'd seen to the norm.

Damien wasn't shy about using his power around August. Whenever it was useful for their daily convenience, he'd do whatever he needed to do.

However, those conveniences were mundane impossibilities.

Normal people couldn't just create animals whenever they wanted to. They couldn't take people from one place to another in an instant like Damien could.

When August saw the ancestral dragons, he was awestruck, sure, but not nearly as much as he was when he witnessed Damien's dragon form.

Whether it was coincidence or fate, the aura radiating from Damien was exactly what August envisioned when he imagined the strongest in the world.

Despite the fact that those ancestral dragons were extremely strong and domineering, despite everything they'd done before Damien transformed, the second he flew to the skies, they all froze in shock.

That was when August realized just how great the man he called "father" really was.

And it wasn't like Damien was going to disappoint his expectations.

"Of course!"

His answer was simple.

"Your dad is the strongest man in the world!"

What else could a young child hope for?

August instantly jumped up and climbed onto Damien, asking incessantly for him to teach him.

Since that was the goal from the start, there was no need to say anything more.

"It's going to be hard. Do you think you can tough it out?"

The only thing left was to test his resolve.

This path was a difficult one, and it was just as punishing as it was rewarding.

But...the child was innocent. He could learn of the viciousness of society at a later time.

For now, letting him learn as he pleased was more than enough.

August still didn't know anything. Unlike Damien's worries, his ancestral memories had yet to appear.

Damien also hadn't gone out of his way to tell August anything about the heir wars or what he'd been born for.

Now that a few years had passed, it was hard for Damien to see August as someone else's child. He made some mistakes by instinctively trying to raise him like a human, but now that he'd realized his mistake, he was confident in his choices and his parenting.

Eventually, August would come to know these things.

But that was a story for another time, when details about his origins slowly began trickling into his mind.

The training for now was simple.

Damien had August do foundational mana training exercises as usual, but he added a bit of physical training into the schedule as well.

He was still learning about how to properly teach him the techniques of his clan, since they were still revealing themselves to him, so Damien didn't rush past the basics faster than he had to.

'I know he's a dragon, but he's still a four-year-old.'

No matter what, he'd have to introduce August to the true struggle of a practitioner within the next two or three years, but he wanted to put it off for as long as possible.

Be it selfishness or compassion, Damien didn't believe August needed to lose his innocence yet.

Rather, he just didn't want it to happen.

Even now—

'That's...'

Damien's eyes narrowed.

He suddenly caught wind of a strange aura.

'It's still far away, but I'm certain of it. Those are people from the Ligua Clan.'

The distinctive aura of an Azure Dragon.

'No, it's the aura of a couple of posers.'

The Ligua Clan was not the true Azure Dragon's clan.

That man, Qinglong, had formed his own clan when he became a Holy Dragon, and the Ligua Clan could be considered a branch of it.

For it to now be regarded as the Azure Dragon Clan itself...

'Hmph. Even if they're grunts, they should have some useful information.'

It hadn't yet come time for August to interact with those of the Holy Dragon Clans. It also wasn't the time for them to notice Damien's presence in their kingdom.

Unfortunately, this little scouting party would need to be slightly inconvenienced.

Though, wasn't it a bit more than that?

There were five people in that party. All of them were just slightly over a hundred years old, geniuses that were technically from Damien's generation.

They were those who had just barely missed the cut to participate in the heir wars. They couldn't be used for that anymore, but they would still become valuable assets in the future.

As such, excursions such as those meant to find treasure like this one were usually left to them.

In another reality, perhaps they could've become stars that shocked the entire world. Regrettably, they lived in an era where Damein Void existed. They were fated to remain nameless and mundane despite all of their power and training.

"What are we even looking for?"

There were two women among them. One of them, Alexis Liqua, was the one who asked the question.

"None of us really know," Gabriel Liqua, the man who led the group, answered.

"Apparently, this order comes from the Matriarch herself. We are to find the traces of that aura they showed us earlier and investigate it."

They'd been given the "scent" to chase and were let loose to find it. Their search had led them to the outskirts of the kingdom, to a random field in the middle of nowhere, and frankly, it didn't seem like they'd find anything here at all.

Still, since it was an order from the Matriarch, they couldn't half-ass their search. They'd come here maintaining the slight hope that there would really be something amazing for them to discover here.

And there was.

But it was not for them to discover.

For it had already discovered them.

Damien hovered in the sky above the five young dragons with none the wiser to his presence.

He watched them as they spoke about their mission, and he paid attention to their auras.

The Azure Dragon's legacy inside of him reacted with unbridled disgust when he got close to them, and though Damien didn't have any particular grudges against them...

'Well, at the end of the day, they're competition.'

He flicked his hand out, and from a distance of over a hundred kilometers, his Existence touched the souls of those five dragons.

Memories they had would become his. Techniques they knew would become his. And the things in their possession...well, while they wouldn't become his, they wouldn't be theirs either.

To put that less confusingly...

'I'm going to twist the shit out of their existences.'

It could be considered a boon for them in a certain sense.

After all, since Damien was about to formulate an entirely fake experience for them, where they discovered a tomb and unveiled a number of treasures from the last era...

'...I have to give them the rewards to make it real, no?'

It felt a bit like cheating to win at a competition and then giving the losers \$5 as a consolation prize.

And though that was quite the vile feeling on paper, Damien had to admit it, at least to himself.

In this specific scenario...it really didn't feel bad in the slightest.

Chapter 1614 Training [1]

There was no need to overexplain what happened then.

Damien had already done something like this a few times.

The young Liqua Clan dragons had been sent to investigate what everyone thought was a treasure. This excursion was a learning experience for them. They weren't equipped to deal with someone of Damien's caliber in the slightest.

As such, they couldn't put up a shred of resistance as he toyed with their existences. No, they didn't even realize they were being manipulated.

The five of them fell unconscious. Their memories changed drastically as an experience they never had became real, and their environment followed suit. A dungeon that "didn't exist" was born in the empty plain, entrenched in the ground and overgrown as if it had been there since the beginning of time.

Damien had their memories already. He could tell why they were here, and since his goal was to throw the Holy Clans off rather than confront them, he made serious efforts to make everything believable.

It was unfortunate that he had to use the more annoying solution, but what could he do? This wasn't his story, but August's. He couldn't act as if he was doing all of this alone.

Nevertheless, he pulled some treasures from his spatial storage and created a few more, imbuing them all with the aura of the Azure Dragon and aging them to match the age of the tomb.

After planting them on the five young dragons, Damien threw them into the dungeon and left them there to wake up whenever they were ready.

Or, when the mechanisms of the dungeon decided to wake them up with a deadly morning alarm bell.

Whatever the case was, Damien finished as quickly and efficiently as possible before returning to August.

He now had some new information on not only the Ligua Clan, but also the heir wars that were approaching.

And both of those things would be very helpful for August's future training.

How would the Ligua Clan feel when they realized that their geniuses had been manhandled so easily?

Well, that depended on if they even discovered that it happened.

There were no flaws in the memories and treasures Damien left with those geniuses, so by the time they returned to their clan, nobody would be able to tell that something strange happened.

The lack of time passing between their departure and return would probably be the main issue, but Damien made sure to age the dragons up by a few years to make it seem like they'd been stuck in a time dilation, which would be corroborated by their memories.

It really was a perfect deception.

And for Damien, it was quite convenient.

'The Azure Dragon's memories aren't unlocking in the most efficient way.'

Damien had learned a lot about that senior in the time he'd spent raising August. Things about his life and morals were the most common revelations, but the ones that concerned August were hidden much deeper in the recesses of Damien's mind, almost refusing to come out.

It was the same with the foundational techniques of the Azure Dragon Clan.

Damien was mainly receiving memories from most recent to least. As such, he knew a lot of Qinglong's most powerful techniques and abilities, but since he wasn't aware of the process, he would have to experiment with and learn an entirely different discipline to interpret it all and make it something August could comprehend.

Unfortunately, that took time. Damien was already working on it, but he would need another year or two to become proficient enough to teach someone.

There was a far easier solution to the problem, and the Liqa Clan delivered it to his doorstep.

'It was even more convenient since they were young geniuses. They'd pretty much spent their whole lives comprehending the foundational techniques of the clan and observing examples of their end goal.'

With those memories at his disposal, Damien had the starting point of the Liqa Clan and the ending point of the true Azure Dragon Clan. Trying to figure out how to get from "Point A" to "Point B" was far, far easier than what he'd been doing before.

In fact, with a single week and some dilated time, Damien was able to fully reconstruct the Azure Dragon's techniques.

'That feels like I'm downplaying my efforts.'

It wasn't arrogant in the slightest to say that he'd taken those techniques and improved them beyond what they'd ever been in the past. And more importantly, he'd tailored them for August's use.

'With this, we can start for real.'

Damien didn't need to stall anymore.

And with August's practically insane desire to learn...

'This is going to be fun.'

Damien's encounter with the Liqua Clan took no more than half an hour to reach an end. He went back home before August could notice that he was gone.

After the week he spent creating the new Azure Dragon Manual, Damien took August back to Green Green, which had now been renamed the "Viridea Mountain" for the sake of future explorers and cartographers, to start his real training.

Dragons were special creatures. Their growth system was more like "cultivation" than any other species, but they still needed to abide by the system's mandates to grow when they were young.

Eventually, training alone would allow August's power to rise at monstrous rates, but for now...

'If he wants to get stronger, then he has to learn how to kill.'

Damien couldn't get over the discomfort in his heart, but there was nothing he could do.

He had already told August honestly the night before.

"You'll have to do heart-wrenching things for power."

But August didn't flinch.

His emotional acuity was still steadily growing, but his intelligence gave him a more practical view of life than others at his age.

He had already presumed that he would need to lose his innocence if he wanted to enter the world that his father and others resided in.

And his thoughts could be considered both mature and immature depending on the lens they were viewed through.

"Dad, I have to hunt, right?"

He could instinctively feel it. His awakened draconic instincts craved blood.

"Yes, and not just animals. You might have to hunt people when you're an adult, and even dragons if the situation arises."

Damien never lied to August. He tried to sugarcoat his words most of the time, but it didn't feel right in the moment.

And while the prospect did strike fear in his heart, August answered by the moral code that Damien had taught him to live by.

"Dad, I'm not scared to hunt."

"Why is that?"

"Because I'll never hunt unless I have to."

August was firm in his words.

"If someone wants to hurt me or Dad, or if I need to hunt for a necessary cause, then I won't feel bad. If hunting makes me feel bad, then I won't do it."

It was quite a rudimentary way to say it, but it was more than enough.

August was already subconsciously distinguishing between enemies and allies. He was separating himself so that all of his good qualities would only be shown to those who deserved them, while those who stood against him would see a completely different face.

It was a good mentality for a practitioner.

'But for some reason, I can't shake the bitter feeling in my heart.'

Damien realized that his son was growing up far too fast for his liking.

But...there was really nothing he could do about it.

Such was their unfortunate fate, such was the consequence of a lack of time.

Since it was Damien's fault that time had been constrained so wildly, he didn't have the right to complain.

However, that didn't change the feelings he hid deep inside of his heart.

Chapter 1615 Training [2]

The Azure Dragon Manual. It was Damien's own creation, but its origin was a period long before he ever existed.

These techniques were first developed by Qinglong himself doing something similar to what Damien was doing now. He took the teachings of his Dragon Clan ancestors and transformed them into a technique geared specifically towards people who wanted to follow the same path as him, the path of water.

It started out simple, by having one feel water with one's body. Damien took August to an artificial river he'd created for this purpose.

It was actually an entire waterway that now ran along the Veridea Mountain and into the lands below, branching out and creating a completely new ecosystem.

It had to work on its own for August to truly feel "water." Damien made sure that his own influence was completely removed from the system before they ever arrived.

August was assisted into the river. Its flow was quite strong, so Damien had to carefully make sure he wouldn't be swept away.

He created a transparent mana barrier that kept August stationary, covertly adding Existence to bend the laws and make that mana entirely impermeable.

August was given the perfect environment and was told vaguely what he needed to do. The rest was entirely up to him.

The potential that everyone seemed to see in him, would it manifest now?

The simple answer was no.

Laws highly depended on individual interpretation. That was the main reason why Damien couldn't simply devour someone and immediately use their law comprehension for himself.

He had to interpret those laws on his own. Only then could he make use of what he stole.

It was the same now that he was teaching. August needed to establish his own perception of the Law of Water. He needed to incorporate it into his beliefs and learn what laws meant to him.

Potential didn't mean anything during this process. What mattered was one's understanding of oneself.

And August...

Well, how could one expect a child to have an established sense of identity?

He would need many years to reach that point, so obviously he wouldn't be able to immediately grasp the flow of law and utilize it.

Hell, humans only started comprehending laws when they reached 3rd class, so it was stupendous to expect someone who didn't even have a single level to his name to rapidly grasp these unfamiliar concepts.

Still, this was the way that dragons developed, so Damien was training August accordingly.

It was scary at first. The rushing water carried with it an aura of death that poked and prodded at August, provoking him to lose concentration.

Yet, at the same time, there was a familiarity, a feeling of closeness like meeting a long-lost relative.

August focused on that feeling for the sole purpose of calming himself, but it ended up doing a lot more than that.

Beneath that familiarity was peace and calmness. It was the powerful and steady flow of the river that felt like the back of his father, ready to protect him at any moment.

Water...

It could be soft and flexible. Despite August's presence impeding its path, it easily split and flowed around him, losing no time in its journey. It could also be stubborn and rigid. It forced its way through any situation that couldn't be overcome with flexibility, and when it revealed that deathly aura to those who provoked it, it would exert a force incomparable to any other.

Water was incredibly versatile. It could kill as well as it could protect. It was a necessity for life, yet it could cause some of the most brutal deaths imaginable to man.

August only grasped this concept in its most basic form as he experienced its flow.

But that was only the first step.

What did it mean to him?

What did he want it to mean to him?

The feeling as it brushed against his skin was almost like it was patiently waiting for him to give it an answer, for him to define the core of their relationship.

What do you want to use your power for?

August felt like he could hear his father's voice in his ear, helping him forward.

'I want to protect Dad and be happy.'

It was a pretty obvious answer. The entire reason why August asked Damien to teach him was so that he could one day fly alongside his father again, just like they'd done before, but with his own two wings.

August remembered what Damien had told him before.

"You are blessed with the gift of water. The seas will respond to your every call, and the world itself will bend at your will. But...

you must first decide. What does water mean to you? What aspect of water do you want to define you?"

August was able to understand the essence of those sentences with his current academic level, but the more philosophical aspects were harder to digest.

'What is water to me?'

August intensely pondered on the concept. This was his first time really feeling it.

Damien told him that he could be patient and take his time to figure out his answers to those questions, but August didn't want to.

He already knew what he wanted.

His goal was clear, and what water meant to him completely depended on how it could contribute to reaching it.

As such...

'I want to be strong.'

He needed the rigidity of water to make sure he could protect himself and hunt.

'I want to be a shield.'

He needed the flexibility to be able to stand in front of the people he loved and protect them from any harm.

'I want to be cool.'

He needed...everything else...to be like his father and those ancestral dragons and heroes, unfettered by all things.

The last one was a bit subjective, since the first two would achieve the third, but August still felt the need to mention it.

Because the things he'd seen in the past few days were really, really cool.

As August started to truly formulate what he wanted from the element, the element began to respond to him. A small whirlpool formed around his body, disrupting the flow of the river.

'To think it would be that easy.'

Damien laughed, mostly in astonishment.

Bear in mind, it had already been over a day since they came here. August didn't realize how fast time was passing while he silently perceived the water around him, but if it hadn't been for Damien keeping his body satiated in secret, he would've collapsed long ago.

A single day to establish a fundamental bond with the element.

This wasn't the stage where his potential would bloom, and he was already showing a performance like this?!

'I guess I lied to you.' Damien thought to himself with a grin.

'You really are a monster. In the best and most illustrious way, you are a monster, my son.'

With immense pride glowing in his eyes, Damien got ready for the next step of their training.

Even at this time, there were 6 years left before the heir wars began.

It was more than enough time for August to become someone that his competitors couldn't even begin to stand against.

Chapter 1616 Training [3]

The daily life of the father-son duo revolved around training ever since then. They didn't even notice as the months passed. They were simply too entrenched in what they were doing.

Damien had never been this involved in someone else's growth before. Even when he trained Astoria and the others, he just aided them and gave them what they were lacking. They all had their foundations built beforehand.

With August, he was the one supervising from beginning to end.

It was more than he expected.

Damien was the type of person who learned best when he was left on his own. His mentors had always been there to help him through the roadblocks he couldn't overcome on his own, but everything else was left to him.

August was different not only because he was young, but because he responded to "learning" in a different way.

Unlike Damien, who needed to experience things to learn, August did best when he was taught. He was able to interpret words and information to gather what he needed better than anyone else, and Damien wasn't about to ruin that advantage.

He was there every step of the way, giving August tips and tricks to get past the hurdles he faced. At the same time, August progressively learned and eventually managed to establish a connection with water that was both pure and sturdy.

August had decided that he wanted to pursue multiple concepts of water at the same time. Damien didn't stop him either, since he believed that the increased workload would actually stimulate August's inquisitive mind better.

Still, one year was spent exclusively on feeling and connecting to water.

By the end of that year, not only did August have the appearance of a ten-year-old, he also had a physical body even other baby dragons would envy and a grasp on the foundation of his power.

With that...

"It's time."

They couldn't put it off anymore. It was time for August to hunt for the first time.

'Though, I've eased up a bit more now that some time has passed.'

Damien wasn't as worried as he was before. He had been taking August on hunts with him for the past few months, teaching him how to maneuver in both his human and dragon forms. August had seen the deaths of several creatures, and he'd become used to the rules of the jungle, at least when he was hunting for animals.

If there was something new Damien had learned about his son throughout all of this, it was that he was more confident than he liked to let on.

He seemed to believe that he would be able to do anything he said he could.

There were instances where that just wouldn't be true. Eventually, August would have to face defeat so that he could grow from it and learn how to deal with it.

However, that was something Damien wasn't willing to fake. It would only have a real effect if it was a loss that August felt in his core.

Nevertheless, that didn't have anything to do with the current situation, since there was no way for August to lose right now.

The exercises they were starting now were meant to acclimate him with blood and hunting. It wasn't meant to test his strength and push him to his limits.

So, the animals August was to hunt really were animals. Wild animals that saw them as enemies, sure, but animals nonetheless.

Against a dragon...

"Remember what I taught you?" Damien asked.

August nodded with a firm expression.

"Hunt like a dragon."

Be confident, don't doubt, and always aim for the kill.

They were already on Veridea Mountain. Damien had filled this place with several new species and created an ecosystem that had been functioning on its own for about four years now.

Since it was able to grow and develop, the species he created here had developed habits and personalities of their own.

In this completely primal environment, Damien disappeared, leaving August alone.

That was when it finally set in.

'Dad is probably nearby.'

Rationally speaking, August didn't believe Damien would actually leave him behind. And nobody could tell him he was wrong, but...

'That's not the right way to think.'

Eventually, he would have to learn to give himself confidence, so he could protect his dad instead of it always being the other way around.

He calmed his heart and focused his mind. He remembered the lessons he'd been taught, and spread his awareness to search for prey.

'There.'

August's nose twitched as he sensed them. There was a pack of wolves about five hundred feet away. They were natural predators of August's favorite breakfast source, Sun-

Swallowing Pigs.

August's eyes lit up.

'That means...!'

If a wolf pack was exposing itself like this, then it was marking its prey. Those wolves would completely vanish from perception in a few moments and start their hunt.

That was one thing. It didn't really matter to August. What really caught his attention was a simple...

'...bacon!'

He was a dragon, after all. If there was one thing that was irresistible to him, it was good meat.

And there really wasn't a variation of meat that tasted better than Sun-Swallowing Pigs, at least, not to August.

He rushed through the forested mountain. His feet tapped the ground lightly, but his every step propelled him forward by several feet.

He could feel the wolves getting closer. He couldn't sense the pigs yet, but knowing they were in the vicinity was enough. Hunting these predators came first.

400 feet...

300 feet...

By the time he was within 200 feet of them, the wolf pack noticed his presence as well.

His hostility was plain as day, but since these wolves didn't have any sort of training, they were not able to sense the draconic notes in that aura, a sign for them to run.

No, they didn't have a single thought of fleeing. They charged together, the twelve of them as one, towards the new prey they'd sensed on the horizon.

August's eyes sharpened.

The smells in the surroundings filled his nose, the scenes his eyes perceived were digested by his brain and processed rapidly.

Those draconic slits, no matter how beautiful they may have been, were purpose-built. They existed for the hunt, and now that August was in nature, they were responding better than ever before.

100 feet.

The wolves were already in sight. Their powerful aura could now be felt, but August refused to be pushed back.

He jumped into the air. As he twirled his body, it morphed, elongating into the form of a dragon.

ROOOAAAR!

It was a rookie move, but August felt the need to roar anyway.

He slammed down to the ground in front of the wolf pack, and without paying a single bit of attention to their cowering selves filled with fear...

He swept his claw out with all of the power he had available to him, aiming for the kill.

There was no hesitation.

There was no struggle.

The second August was given the opportunity, he took it in stride.

Because he was a dragon.

It was bred into his blood, his bones, and the very essence of his existence.

He was born to be the king of the hunt.

Chapter 1617 Awakening [1]

Blood. It was August's first time seeing it in such quantity.

He had rarely ever been cut before. His skin was, after all, draconic. No matter how he nicked himself or fell, his body was never actually affected.

And, he never knew how strong he was inherently.

He was able to play with Damien without any problems. He was already climbing over Damien's body when he was still a toddler. He didn't lose the habit when he grew up. He still liked to wrestle with his father, and he often ended up accidentally scratching him and whatnot.

Damien never flinched. Even when August thought he had hurt him, Damien assured him that there was nothing wrong and even proved it by showing him the uninjured area.

August just didn't realize that it wasn't because he was weak.

He never even thought to think that Damien's skin was just stronger than a dragon.

Until now.

August was comfortable in his dragon form by now. Damien allowed him to freely transform and made sure he could feel absolutely secure. As such, his actions weren't hesitant in the slightest. The fluidity with which he attacked was more than enough to generate a ton of force.

SHIK!

The sound was disgusting. Blood flew through the air as the wolf August attacked burst into pieces. The sheer force of his claws tore it apart before their sharpness could even come into play.

August was mystified for a second. His body shivered, not with fear, but with a strange sense of glee that he couldn't explain.

The wolf's Legends flowed into his body in the form of experience, and for the first time in his life, August witnessed his own Status Panel.

Though, he swept it out of his vision instantly.

'Not yet.'

He'd already been told that it would appear, but it wasn't the right moment for him to check it.

He was still surrounded by the rest of the wolf pack, and he refused to take his attention off of the battle until it was over.

Now, what was the usual first battle like? It was a scene of failure and weakness where one realized that the training they had done wasn't enough to get them through the real world. It was a time for people to adapt to the rapidly changing situation that a real battle where life-and-death were concerned was.

However, one couldn't expect that from August.

After all, this was a dragon's natural habitat. In their youth, they were meant to be reckless and belligerent. All of that talk about scholars and sages only came once they were old enough to get over those primal urges.

August awakened to these instincts late, but now that they were allowed to shine, they flowed in full force and allowed him to feel every ounce of what they represented.

'More.'

August twisted his body and slashed his claw down, cutting another wolf into three pieces.

AWOOOOO!

Another jumped up from behind, its teeth bared. August turned his head, but he found that the wolf had entered his blind spot. Covered in shining light, he flipped and returned to his human form, Mana appeared in his hands as he pushed them towards the wolf's exposed underbelly.

Boom!

A pulse of water slammed into the wolf and threw it into the sky. August immediately returned to his dragon form, planting all four legs on the ground.

ROOOAAAAR!

A blue and white swirl of energy was released from his jaws. As August swung his head around, the beam cut through not one, not two or three, but five of the wolves in the pack, turning them into mincemeat.

Dragon's breath was an inherent skill. The moment August found his connection with water, he found that ability.

And it wasn't the only one.

August had unlocked three of the Dragon Race's best natural traits. Only, he hadn't been able to find much of an opportunity to use them.

He wanted to.

He wanted to fight with even more power than he was using now.

Voom!

With six enemies left, August felt emboldened. He used more mana in his claws despite not needing it at all. He watched his enemies turn into blood mist and reveled in the feeling of it.

He almost lost himself to that emotion.

Almost.

'Remember.'

His father's voice once again rang in his ears. It was only a subtle reminder, but it was more than enough to snap August back to reality.

Whoosh!

He jumped back and crouched growling at the wolves, who took a similar position as they started to encircle him.

'This is a hunt.'

This was not the time to be consumed in bloodlust.

He was not going to be an evil dragon, nor was he going to be someone consumed by things that went against his ideals. If he wanted to reach the future he desired, then he needed to stay on the right path.

'Focus, August.'

He pushed away the emotions in his mind and tried to fill it with thoughts of the battle.

There were only six of them left at this point. They were still able to surround him, but the fact that he'd taken down half of their pack without sustaining a single wound had struck fear into their hearts.

They weren't stupid creatures. Their minds were developed enough for them to have a fight or flight response. Everything told them that they needed to flee as soon as possible, but they also realized that if they turned their backs on the enemy, they would instantly die.

This was a losing battle for them. August knew it as well as they did. Now that he'd collected himself, the rest of the battle was just going through the motions.

His claws moved rhythmically, and his body moved with the flexibility of water. One after another, the wolves were taken down.

And only in the end did they realize how outmatched they were.

CRUNCH!

It was an incredibly dull sound, but it wasn't supposed to be at all. There were only two wolves remaining, and as August focused on killing one of them, the other snuck up behind him and clamped its jaws around his hind leg.

That didn't sound like an action that would result in a dull sound, right? Unfortunately for the wolf, that was the sound of its teeth shattering into pieces against the scales of a dragon.

August looked back, the curious expression on his face heavily contrasting his blood-covered appearance, and glanced at that wolf.

It slowly let go of his leg and backed away, looking at the ground the entire time.

Was it pleading for mercy?

August frowned to himself.

'Would it be okay...?'

He didn't want to kill an enemy who'd surrendered.

Maybe it wasn't the right decision, but that was what he wanted to do.

And if there was anything he'd been taught, wasn't it to follow that instinct?

August gave the wolf one last look before flying away to look for his next prey.

And from the sky, Damien nodded as well.

In almost every way, it was an incredibly satisfactory performance.

It had been mentioned too many times already, but there was no way for Damien to stop feeling it.

Pride.

He was unbelievably proud of the boy he was fortunate enough to call his son.

Chapter 1618 Awakening [2]

The rest of the hunt went swimmingly.

August was able to keep his wits about him after the first incident. He really wasn't an overly aggressive person in the first place. Once he realized that his instincts were taking over, he was able to make sure it didn't happen again.

Wolves, Sun-Swallowing Pigs, and many other animals fell prey to August's hunt.

And to finish everything, he faced a tiger by himself, achieving victory almost as smoothly as he did when he fought the wolves.

In fact, he was even more fluid since he'd become more used to combat. That tiger didn't stand a single chance.

The training turned out to be too easy for August. The mental hurdle that Damien originally thought would be his greatest challenge was overcome near the start. The rest was really just a matter of him getting used to his own power.

August was still relatively innocent. He'd spared several enemies instead of making sure they died. In this way, he was completely different from his father.

It took Damien until recently to even consider showing mercy to his enemies. August, on the other hand, was a naturally born hero.

It made Damien smile.

He couldn't say he agreed with the ideology. He was not a heroic person. He was willing to sacrifice anyone and commit any evil if it meant the things he valued were protected.

That was not the mentality of a hero. That was just a common practitioner.

August wanted to save everyone. When he said he would only hunt when he needed to, he truly meant it. Enemies who'd surrendered were included in his mercy.

And, from what happened on Veridea Mountain, it seemed to work out.

The ones who were spared never came back. Maybe it was because they were nursing their wounds, but pack animals like the wolves he spared were bound to send their pack after him sooner or later.

Damien observed the entire mountain to make sure no outliers affected August's training, and he saw how those animals reacted to his son's kindness.

It was strange, unlike anything he'd experienced himself.

'But maybe that's just the fundamental difference between us.'

Truly heroic people would be able to rouse those kinds of feelings in people. To make people change for the better, to convince them to acknowledge their mistakes and move forward...

If August could do that, he would lead Arulion to a future far better than the one it was currently scheduled for.

As such, despite the fact that he believed that all enemies needed to be killed before they became a problem, Damien didn't try to influence his son's thinking,

He just resumed August's training as usual.

"Dad, did you see me out there?"

When August came back, he was ecstatic. He jumped on Damien and talked incessantly as if his mouth had no off button.

"Of course I saw it," Damien responded happily.

"I was watching the whole time. You did amazing."

He really did. He showed Damien that he was a real dragon, and practically affirmed his decision to let August come face to face with danger despite his age.

'But if I end up having kids, I can't really use him as a baseline.'

That would be far too unfair to them, and there was no way in hell he would let his human child fight and kill at five years old. That was a privilege reserved exclusively for dragons.

Nevertheless, the two most important steps had been taken.

August had now built his foundation and was ready to kill. Everything that came next was just textbook.

He needed to increase his level and comprehend the Azure Dragon Manual at a higher level.

This period of training; it would be monotonous and taxing, boring at times yet incredibly rewarding.

All August needed to do was stay strong and power through it.

As long as he did, when the remaining years passed and he went to participate in the heir wars...

Well, nothing more needed to be said.

Though, on the topic of the heir wars, it was about time, wasn't it?

'I guess I need to tell him about everything soon.'

Damien was wrong the first time, but he was confident now.

August's bloodline memories would awaken soon.

And with that, he'd be exposed to the gnarly truths behind his birth.

Five years really could pass in a flash.

But perhaps that was because it was only two months in the outside world.

Not much had changed in Arulion, though, the excitement surrounding the heir wars had spread further and enveloped the entire kingdom,

The common people wanted to see just as much as the nobility how their next leader was chosen. And, if that leader didn't match their expectations, naturally they weren't going to sit still.

Despite the policies of the current Arulion, these dragons had been living lives they'd learned to be satisfied with. It couldn't be allowed to get worse than this.

Nevertheless, as the time approached for the challenge to begin, more and more people lined up at the three locations that had been specified as testing centers for trial participants.

All of those without noble backgrounds who thought themselves talented enough to compete for the throne had rushed to those centers to test their qualifications, and, as expected, most of them went home in shambles.

The level of talent necessary to participate was far higher than what a common dragon could have.

The current Dragon Emperor was quite insistent on adding a method for the common people to get involved and participate, but in reality, it was just a pretense.

The bar was too high. One or two people could make it through, sure, but none of them would make it that far in the actual heir wars.

Rather than a hand extended for peace, it served more as a way to show common people the gap between their geniuses and the noble geniuses.

Still, every testing center would always experience a few outliers, people who couldn't be judged by the same standards as others.

This year was particularly filled with them.

There had never been more than 4 commoners in the heir wars at a single time throughout the entirety of Arulion's history,

However, somehow, in these few remaining weeks before everything began, ten of them had shown up.

Ten geniuses beyond all others. People who, based on talent alone, could easily compete with the noble geniuses.

It was incredibly surprising for those who watched them be tested, but the true surprise hadn't even come close to arriving yet.

No, he was still within a time dilation, hidden away from the world.

But he would be out soon.

Years had passed for him, and his training had reached heights that he couldn't have imagined when he first began.

He was evolving into a new person, a person he quite liked, and...

About three years prior to this moment, they started to awaken; memories that presented him the history of his lineage.

Perhaps that was the moment his change became severe.

What went on in August's mind?

And how did he react to the tragic story of the Azure Dragon?

To find out what truly happened to him, one had to rewind to that time and see for oneself...

Chapter 1619 Purpose [1]

Three years before the heir wars began was seven years into August's life.

But that wasn't the key that unlocked his ancestral memories.

Instead, it was his power level.

In the years following his first few sessions of training with Damien, August improved rapidly. The Azure Dragon Manual was an exponential growth method, and it truly showed its worth once August started really comprehending it.

Damien would take him out to fight in the wild at least once a month, increasing the strength of his enemies to scale with his growing strength. Other than that, Damien would spar August once a week to help him develop his battle sense and learn how to fight against enemies who were capable of complex thought.

The rest was mostly up to him.

Damien was able to guide him when he needed it. When August had questions, he could always trust that they could be answered. Still, with his inquisitive mind and those hints from his father providing him with a clear path, he was able to make rapid progress through intense studying and practice.

Within a few weeks of killing for the first time, August had achieved his second class. Within another year, he reached 3rd class. And as time passed, he got closer and closer to the definitive bottleneck that was his Universe Baptism.

That was the key. As that moment approached, the gateway to those memories slowly opened, letting them stream into his mind.

That first night was terrifying.

Since the Azure Dragon Godbeast lineage started with Qinglong, August's ancestral memories were exclusively about his life.

It started in his youth, when he was a young dragon in the Heavenly World. Back then, Arulion didn't exist. For millions of years, the dragons truly lived openly in the Western Region, and without too many Godbeast lineages to their name, they all followed the path of the Dragon Emperor who ruled them.

Qinglong did the same at first, but it didn't take long for him to face disappointment. Contrary to the majority of his race, he did not have a neutral element. He was born with an affinity for water, and when he tried to practice techniques unrelated to it, he was stumped and unable to move forward.

Qinglong had a wild dream. He didn't just want to be a great dragon. He wanted to be like the Dragon Emperor, forging his own path amidst the darkness.

But...it was difficult. There was simply no basis for him to follow, even if he tried to interpolate existing techniques.

Qinglong was only ten years old when he went out into the world to explore and learn on his own.

And for August, who was seeing these memories when he was around the same age, it felt like he was watching an alternate version of himself.

Except, it wasn't like that at all.

Soon enough, August's privilege was revealed to him.

Qinglong was immediately struck with misfortune. He was young and ambitious, but he didn't have the necessary power to walk the cruel world on his own. Within a year of his adventure, he'd been captured by poachers and sold into slavery.

He was abused and tormented. His scales were torn off to sell to those who wanted them, and anything else that could be stripped without killing him was stripped away. By the time Qinglong was eventually sold, he was no more than a sack of skin and bones, nothing like the True Dragon he was a year prior.

The person who bought him wanted him as a pet. He was given a lot of healing elixirs at the start and brought back to his original form, but that was the end of his new master's grace.

He was trained as a mount. He was whipped and beaten whenever he refused to listen, and he was forced to carry an air of subservience wherever he went.

It was because he was a dragon.

Humans had always been terrified of their species, as dragons did sometimes terrorize humans for amusement or other unexplainable reasons. It wasn't as if dragons didn't earn hatred from weaker races, but it had nothing to do with Qinglong. He was just a child, completely uninvolved with those matters.

Still, he was singled out and tormented because he was on his own.

Perhaps it was at that time, when none of his fellows came to his aid despite some of them knowing about his situation, that Qinglong realized how ugly the real world was.

He only had himself.

If he wanted to escape the hell he was subjected to, he needed the power to stand above those who persecuted him.

To find the path of water...how was he meant to do it when he was in captivity?

Qinglong's beginnings were truly humble.

He didn't earn his connection with water through calm meditation in a flowing river like August and many others in the current day. He had to make do with his circumstances.

Faucets, puddles, rain...

Anything he could use, he used. The process was grueling and arduous, taking several years to finish, however, Qinglong eventually gained his starting point.

The water he always felt connected to responded to his emotions.

It was a symbiotic relationship in every way.

And the instant that relationship was established, Qinglong felt the power brewing within him.

He hid it away. He let others think he'd been broken.

But as someone seeing his memories, August could feel his emotions.

No, it was just a singular emotion.

A rage beyond anything August knew was possible.

That malevolence, that bloodlust, was the start of Qinglong's journey.

With it, he went to confront his "master" and those who'd forced him into his pitiful circumstances.

And it wasn't hard to imagine what he did.

It was brutality on a level August didn't think was possible.

Naturally, it struck great fear into his heart.

The disconnection he felt confused him immensely as well. When he woke up that morning in his own body, he almost couldn't recognize himself.

He immediately went to Damien, unable to stop the tears that welled up in his eyes.

But, for the first time, there was nothing Damien could do.

This was something August had to witness not only for his ancestor's sake, but for his own good.

This was how he'd see the world he was going to enter, and this was a test that would show whether or not he could maintain his beliefs in that icy environment.

Damien did his best. He comforted August to the best of his capabilities and even eased up his training regimen so he wouldn't be overwhelmed by it all.

Yet, when August went to sleep that night, he returned to that place, right where he left off.

The torture of the nighttime, the memories of his ancestor...

It started now, but it wouldn't end any time soon.

August was forced to struggle for the first time in his life.

Qinglong's experiences tried to shatter his mind, but at the same time, they tried to teach him.

It was up to August to find the teachings hidden within the suffering.

And that...

For someone who had lived such a coddled life, it was incredibly, incredibly hard.

Chapter 1620 Purpose [2]

August's demeanor started to change from then on.

This was a dragon's process of maturing. Every single one of them would eventually go through it, but the actual "when" would differ depending on when they reached the appropriate power level designated by their ancestor.

For most, it would happen during or after their Universe Baptism. And for most, that would only come decades or centuries into their lives.

During the process, they'd adopt some of the traits of their ancestors while retaining the core of their personalities. This was the reason for the massive divide in thinking between each Dragon lineage, since they all functioned on a different pre-established ideology.

Nevertheless, even for dragons from the Holy Clans, ancestral memories took decades to unlock. Their geniuses weren't influenced by them until they were properly ready.

August didn't have the same privileges, because the Azure Dragon didn't have those privileges.

'The Ligua Clan doesn't receive Qinglong's memories.'

That was a fact Damien learned when he stole the memories of their geniuses. Their ancestral memories contained the experiences of dozens of ancestors and mainly focused on techniques and other power-related matters.

Qinglong wanted his descendants to know his story. He knew they wouldn't be able to meet in his lifetime, so he at least wanted them to know what kind of being he was.

Despite being only seven physically, August's mind aged several years or decades every single night when he went to sleep. It was only natural for him to mature.

His body had grown into that of a fifteen-year-old, but that could hardly reflect his mindset.

Qinglong didn't want his descendants to suffer from the curse of naivety, so he made sure they would learn from his mistakes and erase that mind state altogether.

August still cared deeply about Damien. He became quieter, but he did find other ways to show his affection.

It was just hard for him to stay childish.

He had seen so much. He had seen Qinglong suffer to levels he couldn't believe. At first, he couldn't understand how his ancestor managed to stay sane through it all.

But that ancestor came to him eventually.

It was conviction.

A pure unbridled conviction towards his goal, towards his desire to leave his mark on the world.

Everything told him to quit. Everything told him to just give up and die. But he didn't, did he?

He refused to let life have the upper hand. He cursed fate and fought against it tooth and nail.

That was the reason why Qinglong was able to eventually achieve the heights he did.

He got revenge on the people who thrust him into madness. He punished those who stood against him, took victory in stride, and learned from every mistake he made.

Could August do that?

With the mindset he'd had until that point, he knew it was impossible.

He had to change if he wanted to survive, but that didn't mean he had to throw everything away. Just like his ancestor, he needed to keep his beliefs strong.

Since he was a child, he'd always idolized heroes. He wanted to save people and bring peace to the world. He wanted to create a place where another Qinglong would never need to be subjected to those torments.

It seemed more and more impossible the more he saw, but wasn't it the same for Qinglong?

Aside from maturity and a sense of reality, Qinglong gave August the conviction he didn't have.

Perhaps that was the greatest change.

August wanted to train harder. In the years that came, he pleaded with Damien to train him seriously, to teach him through force.

Damien was obviously averse to the idea, but August's stance was immovable.

He was practically forced to go along with it, to give August what he needed to stimulate his growth.

As a parent, it was hard to watch his child change and become someone different from the innocent child he knew. Especially when he wasn't assured of the path his son was taking, he couldn't help but doubt it.

But he had no choice.

It was not his life.

And he was not going to let his hesitation inhibit his son. Unless something went horribly wrong and he strayed from his path, Damien didn't want to impede a child who just wanted to become the person he wanted to be.

He stopped holding back.

For August's sake, he cut off his emotions during training so he could do what he needed without doubting himself.

That was how those last three years passed.

The atmosphere had lost its heartwarming air, and with fierce training as the only thing that defined it, August began to live like someone over twice his age, someone who was truly on the road to becoming an expert.

Three years went by, but August wasn't able to easily overcome the barriers separating him from 4th class.

It was different for dragons. Since they got in contact with laws from young instead of slowly working up to laws like humans, they were always a level more powerful, however, their progress also took much longer to achieve.

Laws weren't kind. They didn't just present themselves to be comprehended. Even for someone with as much potential as August, it was impossible to just breeze through these extensive processes.

Rather, because of his talent, it was even harder. He had to prove himself worthy of his natural-born gifts. He could do more, but more was expected from him in return.

He put everything he had into training, and when the time came for that conversation to happen, he was already prepared for it.

"August, I'm sure you've realized this already, but I...I am not your biological father."

It was a bit late, but Damien still felt the need to say it.

August nodded. As Damien guessed, he already knew from long ago that they weren't related by blood. It remained unsaid for one obvious reason.

"I don't care. You're my dad no matter what anyone or anything else says."

August was unflinching about it. Nothing could change his mind. Damien was the one who raised him. He'd done so much to make sure August would have a good childhood and grow up properly. August loved Damien as his one and only father. That was the end of that conversation.

Damien smiled a bit at the sentiment.

"The memories you've been seeing, those that once belonged to the first Azure Dragon, Qinglong...they tell a story that you have yet to fully witness."

August was still young, so he was still experiencing the younger years of Qinglong's life. That amounted to thousands of years of memories, but when that number was taken in relation to the millions or more years that Qinglong lived, it was really nothing.

August would experience those memories on an exponential curve, and at some point, he'd be digesting millions of years at a time, but that was not now.

"Your ancestor was once the Dragon Emperor. He founded the Azure Dragon Clan with nothing but his own hard work and eventually came to be the strongest dragon in the world. However, his success bothered a lot of people, and they eventually came to stab him in the back."

Damien had to simplify what happened a lot to make it comprehensible in a short amount of time, but Qinglong's story was somewhat similar to his father's.

"Qinglong was removed from the throne and usurped by a regime that suppressed their own kind. His clan was taken from him and turned into something that no longer represented what he stood for. He was forced to flee into the lower universe, a place where his enemies couldn't reach, and, coincidentally enough, the place where I am from."

August's eyes shook as he realized where the story was going. He steeled himself, preparing for what was to come.

"I was able to meet him coincidentally during my travels, and after seeing my memories and conversing with me, he decided to entrust your safety and his mission to me. You were born in that hidden place. Not from two parents, but from the sacrifice of Qinglong's Legend."

Damien looked August in the eye, his face utterly serious.

"You are the perfect successor he birthed to reclaim the throne he left behind."

There it was. The revelation of all revelations.

It felt like Damien had been rushed these past few years. It was like he knew something was going to happen and wanted to do his best to prepare August for it.

This was it.

The revelation that he had been born for a purpose, to become the Dragon Emperor.

And since this was being told to him now...

'It's probably time for that to happen.'

Something big, something that would allow August to get closer to that goal...

It was here.