

# Void 1621

Chapter 1621 Purpose [3]

August...actually wasn't as perturbed by the news as Damien originally expected him to be.

It was definitely troubling for him to realize that he had been born for a specific reason. The burden of his ancestor's dying wish was a hard one to carry.

But...

While he did respect the Azure Dragon, he wasn't willing to give up his life for his dream. His ancestor was worthy of his respect, but not his fealty.

Obviously, the fact that Damien cared about his ancestor's goal was the most important factor. That made August take it into serious consideration, and more than that, the reason why he was fine with doing as his ancestor pleased was...

'...that was my goal from the start.'

He heard tales of the Dragon Emperor when Damien took him to the town. He wanted to be that person who could stand above a million dragons, and he wanted to be the shield that protected them from harm.

The only thing Qinglong's story changed was context.

August didn't know what kind of state Arulion was in until now. The new regime, the current Dragon Emperor and the Holy Clans, was a cancer preying on the greater community.

It made reaching his final goal more difficult, but that only further motivated August to get stronger.

'Plus, I'm not alone.'

There was a definitive difference between him and his ancestor that became more pronounced as he saw more and more of those memories. His ancestor was a lone wolf. He liked doing everything on his own and would only feel satisfied if his achievements were a product of his effort alone.

August...never had that kind of ego. He wasn't afraid to ask for help or make relationships with others. And, he knew that no matter what he did, his father would always be there to support his back.

That was the fortune he had, and it was exactly because his ancestor had chosen Damien as his guardian.

'In that sense, I do need to be thankful.'

He owed his ancestor for introducing him to his father. For that, he would make sure that he not only became the Dragon Emperor and brought Arulion to its peak, but also took revenge on the enemies that led to this unfortunate present.

"Dad, when is it?"

He asked directly after Damien finished his explanation. He went into a bit more detail, which gave August an even more grounded understanding of what was expected from him.

"One month," Damien replied honestly.

"In one month, the heir wars will begin to choose the next Dragon Emperor. You just have to participate and win. Everything else...well, just leave the boring stuff to me."

August nodded with a smile.

One month. That was enough time for him to learn more about the outside world and fully prepare himself.

In one month, his story would truly begin.

And though that meant there was a lot of trouble in store for him...

August couldn't help but anticipate it.

All of his training had been for this.

He really couldn't wait to see what level he'd truly reached.

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That month was over before it even began. August spent all of his time digesting Qinglong's memories, training, and studying the power structures and common sense of the outside world.

The sun shone to mark the start of another day. Damien and August stood in front of the house they'd called home for the past ten years.

"This is it."

It was the moment August left the nest on his own.

"Dad, promise me you'll be safe," August said.

"You brat! I'm the one who should be saying that to you," Damien responded with a smile, ruffling his hair.

"Remember, if anything goes wrong, just call for me and I'll be there. Don't befriend suspicious people, and avoid women at all costs. They're dangerous, and with your looks, they'll pounce on you the instant they get a chance."

Damien was mostly joking.

Mostly.

Nevertheless, they kept their farewells short, since this wasn't their last time seeing each other.

Damien pulled August into a strong hug.

"Seriously. Be careful out there."

August nodded, evaporating the tears that formed in his eyes.

"I will, Dad. I promise."

The Existence barrier that separated the district from the rest of the world slowly broke apart and drifted away with the wind. With none the wiser, the two time flows were merged into one and returned to their original state.

Damien lost any excuse he had to keep August at home. Even if he wanted to ignore everything they'd been preparing for, he couldn't ignore the genuine excitement in his son's eyes.

"Go, you brat," he said, turning away.

"The world is waiting for you."

August looked at his father's back for a long moment. There was so much more he wanted to say, but he had already said it all.

He rushed forward, gave Damien one last hug, and turned around to face the world.

That first step into the unknown...

August put all of his weight into that step, and the one after, and the one after that.

His walk turned into a run, and as he ran faster and faster, he glided across the earth, leaving the small district and his home in the dust.

Damien didn't turn around to watch him go.

Honestly, he was having a hard time keeping himself composed.

'God, when did I become such a baby?'

Damien chastised himself sarcastically.

But, it was true. He didn't think there was a time when he wanted to cry as much as he did right now.

'I know we'll probably meet again soon, and it's not like I'm going to just sit back and act unconcerned while he's fighting for his life out there.'

Damien was absolutely going to go watch every part of the heir wars that August was in, but that wasn't the point.

His son was going independent. His life was now being left to his own discretion.

It was a monumental moment for the both of them, and truly...

'...fuck, I need to get my shit together.'

...Damien needed to take a moment to get used to being alone again.

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"Wow..."

It was the only thing he could say.

August had been traveling by himself for around a week now, and he'd finally reached the first destination on the map Damien had given him.

This was Arievale, the closest metropolitan district. Here, he could take a teleportation array to one of the testing centers, located relatively close to the True City Arragon, where the Holy Clans and Dragon Emperor resided.

And upon seeing such a sprawling city filled with the aura of life and the vibrance of a huge society, August's eyes immediately widened in fascination.

In no way could he be called naive anymore. He'd seen far too much to ever suffer from such a fatal affliction.

However, the world he'd seen in Qinglong's memories was eons old. It didn't resemble the current world at all.

As August stepped out of the small district he'd called home for his entire life, he was welcomed with a spectacular world filled with new things for him to see and experience.

It was only natural for him to react wildly.

Actually, while August was definitely more mature, he made sure his personality didn't completely get washed away by his ancestral memories. Everything he stood for as a child was still within him in some way. That included his innate curiosity and love for the world as a whole.

It was a great attitude to have, because right now, August felt more empowered than ever.

He was ready to take on the world.

'Let's go.'

He made his way to the teleportation array with a fiery heart and a cool mind.

If he was going to make a name for himself...

'...then I need to start with a bang.'

#### Chapter 1622 Qualifications [1]

August was now out in the wider world, but while he did have a decent amount of general knowledge from Damien's teaching, he was still relatively clueless about the more nuanced happenings and relationships between forces.

There was a lot going on in Arulion. It was a massive kingdom, after all. It was hard to notice its scale when discussing it since a majority of its land was filled with similar people doing similar things, but it wasn't the same everywhere.

Take the Aureat Clan of Golden Dragons as an example.

The original Golden Dragon was quite the promiscuous fellow, so it wasn't rare for there to be several Golden Dragon lineages throughout the world.

Every once in a while, people from these lineages would appear in Arulion, and the Aureat Clan accepted them in stride.

It was always good to have more people, at least, from their perspective, Because of their ancestor's nature, they were far more accepting of common people than their fellows of other Holy Clans.

Still, there was a strict process by which these people could enter the clan, and their bloodline needed to be properly proven. The Aureat Clan still needed to make sure they didn't let just anyone in.

It wasn't rare for Holy Clans to fight each other. They ruled this place together, sure, but they were also each other's greatest enemies and biggest contenders. Aside from the few who had alliances with each other, they were all on relatively bad terms.

The Aureat Clan had never experienced a traitor because their treatment of their own people was great. They made sure that anyone who passed their inspection was given the treatment of any other legitimate member of the clan, so they were particularly liked by their people.

And, nobody had slipped past their defenses yet. Every single member of the Aureat Clan was a true member of the Golden Dragon Lineage.

Until now.

An individual had snuck into their clan, and that person wasn't a dragon at all!

Golden Dragons, known for their ability to handle fate, were a rare breed in this world. The Golden Dragon Clan of the lower universe was one of their last remaining branches in the outside world.

As such, they didn't get many new people anymore. When someone finally appeared, and their bloodline was proven as part of their clan, they were extremely happy.

They welcomed that person with open arms.

Except, the entire time, that person had only arrived at their clan for a single goal.

Rose Adelaide.

Originally, she came to Arulion to follow a lead about a treasure that could awaken Dante Void.



For that purpose, she'd done extensive research on dragons and had managed to perfectly replicate their bloodline with her illusions.

Getting into Arulion wasn't difficult at all. Once she was there, she hunted for leads until she found a trail leading back to the Aureat Clan.

It was more difficult to mimic a Golden Dragon's bloodline. At first, Rose couldn't find any way to perfectly mimic the way their blood felt and flowed.

She got a lot of help from the Golden Dragon Clan in the Sanctuary, which she could still access, unlike Damien.

And after forming a rudimentary version of the bloodline, she managed to get in close contact with a few members of the main clan and used them to complete it.

It was a tenuous process, but it really wasn't all that hard, especially since it dealt with Rose's specialties.

She made it into the Aureat Clan, and she'd spent the rest of her time here, perfectly melding into their society.

"Fate" really was a big thing here. It wasn't an incomprehensible force like it was to the rest of the world. It was an energy, a law, another form of mana just like everything else.

The entire hidden world was filled with the aura of fate, and it enhanced each and every Golden Dragon within, providing them with the luck to gain opportunities and chances far more often than the average person.

Rose, despite not being a real member of their clan, also happened to get this boost. Perhaps that was why she had such an easy time maneuvering and fitting in, even though she made sure not to establish relationships with anyone.

The Aureat Clan managed the finances of the entire kingdom. They were just as good with money as they were with fate.

They also possessed the storage vault with the most treasures among all of the Holy Clans.

If it was about things that the Aureat Clan could teach her, there weren't many, but Rose put aside her personal quest for a moment so that she could prioritize the treasure.

Of course, that treasure wasn't entirely necessary anymore, since Dante was awake, but that didn't mean it couldn't be helpful.

After all, he was still in a weakened state, and not just because Damien was in possession of his Divinity.

A treasure like the one Rose was looking for would be perfect for stabilizing his mind.

That was its entire purpose.

The Golden Medallion was one of the Aureat Clan's crowning treasures. It could not only stabilize the mind but also provide absolute protection from outside forces.

It was a treasure that even Supreme Gods would die to get their hands on, and if it could provide the same protection for the Unrecorded, then Dante would be free of his suffering.

There was still a question about if it worked, and Rose wasn't sure if it was actually in the vault or if it was being used by one of the higher tier members of the clan.

If the Patriarch was in possession of it, she'd have an incredibly hard time stealing it away.

But, when it came to the vault...

'I'm almost in.'

Rose had created an elaborate plan that would allow her to take what she needed from the vault and disappear from Arulion without a trace.

For it to work, she had practiced creating dozens upon dozens of illusions that were indistinguishable from reality.

With weeks and months of practice, she reached a new height in her training, ascending even further through the ranks of Demigodhood.

'The time to strike...I should probably wait until the heir wars begin.'

That was when their defenses would be at their lowest. All attention would be focused on those young geniuses in their competition.

'Plus, the Ancient Dragons will all be gone.'

They, who represented the highest level of power under the 6 Holy Dragons and the Dragon Emperor, would be too busy facilitating the event to pay attention to their own territories.

But regardless of how many people she has to actually face, this would be the true test of her skill.

The illusions she made...

Could they really replace reality?

Could they fool even Supreme Gods?

Rose wasn't a fan of danger, but she was truly eager to find out.

And, if she could find a new lead that would take her somewhere magical, somewhere she could find her true purpose in life...

Well, the Aureat Clan specialized in fate, didn't they?

It was about time to see if that power could influence her too.

## Chapter 1623 Qualifications [2]

Even Damien didn't know that Rose had come to Arulion. Since she'd been in the Aureat Clan's hidden territory for the entirety of his stay in the kingdom, he hadn't sensed her either.

It would be quite a surprising moment when they met each other or realized each other's presence, but that wasn't any time soon.

Currently, Damien was headed towards a completely different hidden territory.

'August won't be able to grow in time.'

It was a simple yet true statement. Even if August won the heir wars, he'd face far too much opposition for him to actually be able to take the position of Dragon Emperor.

Of course, he still wouldn't be strong enough even if Damien removed all of the obstacles from his path, but that was something Damien had already planned for.

'For now, the most important thing is supporting his journey.'

Damien wasn't going to directly start a war with the Holy Clans. Not yet, at least. He wanted to convert as many of them as possible before resorting to killing.

Not because he was a pacifist now, but because they were necessary meat shields for when the war against the Sacred Abyss began.

'I mean, they are a great fighting force that will be respected and honored...yeah, that's a better way to say it.'

Damien had a lot of respect for dragons as a whole. It was the second bloodline he'd ever possessed and the basis of his strength for a long time. Most of the dragons he met in the lower universe were people worthy of respect.

However, these Holy Clans were not the same as them. They needed to be destroyed and restructured before they could be of use to anyone.

The respect they thought they deserved was only meant for their Holy Dragon ancestors. They were nothing more than leeches.

'But that's usually how it goes with things like this.'

No matter how great the first generation was, power would eventually corrupt the family line and lead it to ruin.

It was a story as old as time, a fate that had befallen many a kingdom and empire,

'The real question is...what is that guy doing?'

The Dragon Emperor...

Qinglong's memories were unraveling almost to a point where Damien and August were seeing the same thing despite starting at opposite ends.

From what Damien had seen, the Dragon Emperor wasn't one of the people involved in overthrowing Qinglong.

'Rather, it's more apt to say that he doesn't appear in Qinglong's memories at all.'

It was suspicious. The position couldn't just be taken by anyone, and if he wasn't a member of any of the Holy Clans, then just who was he?

'And why is he even sitting on that throne?'

That was what Damien wanted to know, and now that August was on his way to gain qualifications for the heir wars, he was planning to find out as soon as possible.

For the safety of his son and the prosperity of the Heavenly World as a whole, it was imperative for him to distinguish allies from enemies, and those who could be saved from those who could not.

'For your sake and mine...' Damien thought as he rushed to that place.

'...I really hope you're one of the good ones.'

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August didn't actually have that hard of a time in the outside world.

It was all new to him. He wanted to stop by every shop and eat every new food he saw at every street stall, however, he was currently on his way to a completely different city, so he obviously didn't have the time to do all of that.

His biggest problem really was reigning in his curiosity. When it came to matters of people and whatnot, he didn't have any trouble at all.

August had an appearance that made him stand out.

Damien had given him an artifact before he left home that disguised his Azure Dragon aura, lineage, and bloodline so that others wouldn't get suspicious too soon, so that wasn't his problem.

His ocean-blue hair wasn't a problem either, since it was a common trait among dragons. Their natural hair colors were more varied than any other race, since they changed to mimic the element the dragon was closest to.

Water was an extremely common element. Qinglong wasn't like the Golden Dragon, but for the sake of the dragon race, all of the original Holy Dragons had been around the town quite a few times.

If not, dragons wouldn't have become the prolific species they were today.

There were several types of water dragons, and though almost all of them descended from Qinglong in some way, not all of them had his bloodline.

Those who did were rare by today's circumstances, even in the Azure Dragon itself.

The new Azure Dragon bloodline was contained within the Liqua Clan, so it was impossible for more to be born as well.

Minor water dragons were insignificant, just like the minor versions of every elemental dragon. August had no problems blending in.

Though, he did have quite a striking appearance. He drew gazes from all over, but it wasn't like he noticed.

versions of every elemental dragon. August had no problems blending in.

August was just happily going on his way, in his own world as he made it to the teleportation array and paid the fare.

This wasn't his first time teleporting. Unlike most who took the arrays to get around, he didn't feel any discomfort as he arrived at his destination.

Arragon was just as prosperous, if not more, as the place he'd just come from, but August did his best to stay focused on the goal.

'The heir wars...'

He'd been studying about it for the past month.

It was a long event, spanning over the course of several months or even years depending on how well the participants were doing.

Young geniuses would compete in several categories, and those who came out on top would fight each other directly for a chance to become the Dragon Emperor's successor.

Even then, the winner had to pass one more trial, presented by the Dragon Emperor himself.

If that trial couldn't be passed, then the Dragon Emperor would choose his favorite prospect from the final tournament and give them a trial.

If even that person failed, then the tournament would have to start over and the same process would be repeated until a satisfactory candidate appeared.

Now, it rarely took that much effort to find the successor, however, the process was completely fleshed out to accommodate for the possibility. They couldn't skimp on the details for a ritual so important.

'I wonder who I'll meet.'

Damien told him he would find geniuses on his level and even those above him. He was excited to meet the people who represented his generation.

After all, they were not only his competition, but also the allies he'd take over the world with.



August almost forgot how to be optimistic when he was experiencing his ancestral memories. However, the world made him want to think otherwise.

There was a lot of bad, but there was an equal amount of good.

Optimism wasn't something he could have just because he wanted it.

But if he could fix the bad parts of the world and protect the good...

As long as he could achieve his goals, then his optimism would be warranted.

That was all the assurance he needed to maintain it.

#### Chapter 1624 Qualifications [3]

The testing center was a massive building. Dragons were surprisingly good architects when they wanted to be, so despite the fact that it was created in just two months, it stood out and was absolutely pleasant to look at.

The line that stretched past its doors and wrapped around its entire vicinity three times, on the other hand, was not.

'Really?!'

It wasn't like August didn't know he was late, but he still didn't expect it to be like this!

'I can't do that.'

If he had to guess, with them testing people in batches of ten, the people at the end of the line wouldn't actually get into the testing facility for—

'-three whole days!'

It was unbelievable, and more importantly...

'I'm not doing that.'

August hadn't been taught to be a bad person, but...his father happened to be just a little bit mischievous.

After seeing someone do whatever he wanted for the sake of personal convenience for ten years, August had most definitely been influenced.

...maybe Damien hadn't been using Existence for the right things, but he just couldn't help himself. It really was too convenient!

Nevertheless, with Damien's mindset, there wouldn't be any harm done as long as nobody was actually affected by his actions.

In August's case...

'Sorry, Dad, but I'm gonna use it.'

The testing center was huge. It, in its own right, was bigger than the entire district August lived in during his youth. Surrounding it was a field several tens of meters long that separated it from the rest of the city.

August had to slip back into the city to find an alleyway where he could hide.

Once he did, he took a silver brooch out of his spatial ring, provided by his very generous father, and pinned it to his shirt.

Immediately, he disappeared.

Well, not really.

Invisibility wasn't efficient. Perception blocking was far more practical.

August's presence just vanished. He was still completely visible, but the people around him just couldn't register him in their minds.

He slipped back into the street and walked back to the testing center. Not a single person could see him.

'It really works!'

This was his first time trying it, and it worked even better than expected.

Life became easy when cheats were involved.

August made it through the doors and far into the line before he managed to find someone with a similar build to him and sneak in behind him.

It was really perfect, since the person behind him wasn't paying attention.

'Phew...'

August covertly took the brooch off and stored it, and, now that his wait had been shortened to an hour, he was more than happy to stand in line and enjoy the scenery and atmosphere.

It went by quickly.

"Haa..."

There was a man standing behind the registration checkpoint that August waited in line to reach.

He had been here for the past three months, and frankly, he was getting tired of it.

'Why does everyone else get to discover a genius?'

Out of the three testing centers, the one in Arragon was the one that found the least real talent.

It was probably because the people who lived this close to the central area didn't need to get qualifications to participate in the heir wars, but that didn't make his job any easier.

Rakon Astegarde was a member of the Scorch Dragon Clan that was subordinated to the Ignis Clan. He had been put in charge of managing this facility and overseeing the testing process.

However, he was bored.

Every single one of these young dragons was dreaming above their station. Most of them didn't last more than ten minutes, and the rest were disqualified within half an hour.

The line was long exactly because these kinds of people had lined up in droves.

"Haa..."

Rakon sighed again.

"Send the next group in."

He gave the order to those at the front, and the next ten people were allowed to register their names and enter the facility.

'All of these common names...'

The information came through immediately, and Rakon was made aware of who each of them was. They had names that were shared by hundreds of thousands or millions of dragons, and they would probably have talent matching that commonality.

'But...Void?'

August Void. It was a name more like a human than a dragon.

But, as he wrote...

'Just another water dragon.'

They were useful in society, but unless they had the Liqua Clan's bloodline, they were practically useless in all other ways.

'Whatever. I just have to do it. There's only three days left at this point.'

His job was almost over.

So, he welcomed in the participants as he had done a hundred times before.

"This test is simple!"

He went straight to the point. The theatrics had already become too tiring to keep up.

"First things first, we will release a True Dragon Aura on your bodies. If you cannot withstand it, then you do not deserve a chance to test for qualifications."

It began immediately.

A pressurized chamber opened on the other side of the room, and the aura trapped within was instantly released.

VOOOOOOOM!

It wasn't an Ancient Dragon's aura. Suppressing these youths with power couldn't test their talent in the slightest.

Instead, it was the pure aura of a Holy Dragon. Its suppression was exerted through bloodline, not strength.

Draconic talent was directly linked to bloodline. Even if they weren't from a Holy lineage, the blood of those dragons with talent would always lead back to a powerful ancestor in the past.

Bloodline suppression would rouse the blood hidden within them and give them the strength to resist.

However, if that blood wasn't present, or if it wasn't dense enough, then they would fail without a doubt.

'Talent is the most crucial differentiator between us and them.'

Someone of Rakon's level was already unreachable for most of those common dragons.

'As for those like Xaria Ignis? These people probably can't even comprehend someone who reached 4th class at just fifteen, could they?'

That was like a human reaching that level as a toddler.

Rakon had already stopped paying attention.

Ten people had entered. He had already heard three buzzers, signifying that there were only seven remaining.

'As expected...'

Three more buzzers sounded within ten minutes. When another ten passed, there were only three participants remaining.

Rakon waited as he'd waited every day for months. He closed his eyes and indulged himself in random thoughts as he waited for half an hour to pass so he could call in the next group.

But...

'Has it not been thirty minutes?'

It certainly felt like it.

"Say, how long has it been?"

He turned to the woman next to him, an assistant who was helping him with his duties.

"It has been almost an hour," she answered in a monotone voice.

"An hour?!"

Rakon shot to his feet and rushed to a nearby railing. He was several tens of meters off the ground on a suspended balcony, but he could see the field below clearly.

There was one boy on his knees. He wouldn't last much longer.

However, the last two, a boy and a girl, stood strong; sweating heavily, yet refusing to bend a single knee.

'Oh...? Oh...?'

"Oh...?!"

Rakon suddenly couldn't hold his excitement.

It was true that this was only the first part of the test, but if this was the performance they were showing already...

Rakon grinned.

'I can finally shut those pesky brats from the other centers up.'

With these two kids appearing at the last second, the Arragon facility also had something big to talk about.

At this moment, that was more important to Rakon than anything else in the world.

Chapter 1625 Qualifications [4]

VOOOOOM!

That feeling enveloped all of his other senses.



For a moment, when the draconic aura was released, it pushed down on his lineage and made him see black. Within the dark world, it was only him and the dragon the aura was taken from. They stared each other in the eye, and the difference in power immediately became clear to August.

This was a being he couldn't touch.

That fear crept into his heart for the first time ever, and it did mess with his senses. When the trial first started, he was almost one of the first people to kneel.

However, he felt a small vibration in his chest.

It spread, reaching the tips of his extremities and flowing up into his brain.

'Dad...?'

Well, not quite. The feeling did originate from the artifact Damien gave him to temporarily hide his lineage away from the world, but that wasn't what spread through his body.

Rather, that first vibration was Damien's artifact attempting to silence August's Azure Dragon aura that was threatening to burst forth to suppress anyone and everyone.

It didn't succeed.

August's blood rushed and roared. It was awakened by the threat to its nobility, and it refused to go back to sleep until that unworthy peasant was shown the difference between heaven and earth.

The Azure Dragon was a mighty dragon. Those of their species were never cowardly, never willing to back down, and always looking for a fight to prove their worth.

They were the rulers of the seas, the rulers of all water in existence. At their beck and call was a force that many couldn't even hope to comprehend.

Naturally, the Azure Dragon who created this power, Qinglong, was a domineering man in his youth.

And August was being pushed to act the same.

His bloodline screamed in his ears, urging him to turn this entire testing facility to dust. It ordered him to subjugate the dragons around him and establish his rule.

However, August refused.

'That isn't my way.'

He respected his ancestor, but they were different people. He was willing to use those traits to his advantage when he needed to, but he would never be ruled by them.

He stared into that dragon's soul, the one who tried to suppress him.

And though he didn't choose to release his aura, though he reigned in the bloodline that was threatening to go wild, he didn't stand down.

'This is not a battle of power.'

If his bloodline believed he could tear this place down with his own power, then strength wasn't the key to passing this trial.

'Instead...is it potential that you want to see?'

The dragon didn't answer him. He was, after all, a mere projection created in August's mind to replicate the dragon who created it.

But August was sure of his thoughts.

He was sweating. Feeling an aura this majestic was still difficult for someone of his level, but he straightened his knees and his back, staring directly at the pressurized chamber that the aura originated from.

August controlled his Azure Dragon lineage, letting it flow through his body smoothly and under his fine-tuning. That was the solution he needed to find.

The instant he managed to achieve a level of dominance over his own lineage, the one he was facing faded into the background as if it never existed.

The rest was easy work.

August watched the people around him intently and made sure to match his exertion level to theirs, at least in appearance.

He couldn't make the judges too suspicious. That was something Damien had warned him about countless times, and even if he hadn't, August wasn't the type to crave unnecessary attention.

'Ancestor almost died too many times because he showed off his power without consideration.'

Their differing personalities allowed August to see not only the good, but also the bad parts of his ancestor.

While it seemed like this went against Qinglong's attention, that wasn't the case.

Rather, wasn't the exact reason he left behind his memories to make sure that his descendants would see his errors and learn from his mistakes?

August's acting was top-notch. Thirty minutes went by, and an hour passed soon after.

Most others had already dropped out, including the boy who was in front of him.

Only he and another girl remained.

'She...isn't she the one I cut in front of?'

It was a wild coincidence.

The brown-haired girl was obviously an earth dragon. If it wasn't because of her hair color, then it was because of the stance she took to withstand the incoming aura.

Her legs were at shoulder-width and her knees were slightly bent, giving her a level of stability that August didn't have when he was standing straight.

'Oh...?'

She wasn't using mana, but her stance itself seemed to do something special.

'Is it because she's using a stance that coincides with her element?'

If earth was stubborn and stable, then water was flexible and adaptable.

'If I changed my stance...'

August decided to try it. He calmed his lineage down so it couldn't help him resist the pressure, and he aimed for a more fluid stance that allowed him to meld into the aura and redirect its energy elsewhere.

'Da- I mean, woah!'

August felt the opposing lineage in its full glory for the first time. It was heavy, mountainous almost. It felt like a peak that was impossible to climb, urging people to give up the notion before even trying.

However, August was not perturbed. He was going to try regardless of what it said.

It took a second for him to adapt, since he'd stopped using the easiest solution, but he managed to find his groove soon enough.

He didn't move much, but he made slight adjustments when he needed to, and he circulated his mana to change the way his body reacted to the force.

And just as he managed to get a grasp of it...

Clap!

A single clap resounded from the suspended balcony, and the pressurized doors slammed shut.

The remaining aura in the facility gradually diminished, allowing August and the brown-haired girl to relax.

"Melania Achen, August Void...congratulations! You are the only two who will move on to the next test!"

Rakon's voice echoed in their ears, causing them to look at each other.

August grinned.

"Congratulations," he said.

"You too," Melania responded, somewhat coldly.

"Harsh..." August whispered under his breath, shrugging his shoulders.

Well, for now, they were competitors, so it made sense.

'More importantly...'

August watched as a corner of the training facility changed. Two massive chunks of stone rose from the ground, evidently for the "next test" that the instructor had mentioned.

His eyes narrowed in response.

'So it's going to be boring.'

He could already tell. Until he entered the actual heir wars, he wouldn't find anything interesting.

'They're underestimating us.'

Because they weren't from the Holy Clans...? Because they were commoners...?

'Bullshit.'

August was aware of his privilege. He knew that his talent was also provided by a Holy lineage, but that didn't change his stance.

'All dragons deserve a chance at excellence.'

Their species was one that was proud and great.

And even if his own advantages were provided by lineage, he wanted to find a way.

A way for all dragons to reach the same heights that he could.

## Chapter 1626 Qualifications [5]

The next trial was pretty much exactly what August expected.

He and Melania were given ten minutes to rest and recuperate before they were led to the rocks that appeared on the other side of the facility.

"The next few tests are just to find the baseline of your strength. As long as you can reach the minimum required level, you will immediately be slotted to participate in the elimination round," Rakon said, explaining to the two young geniuses.

"Excuse me," August said, raising his hand.

"What is the elimination phase?"

Rakon's brow raised slightly.

"Well, it's not surprising that you don't know. Surprisingly enough, we've had over a hundred young talents pass the qualification phase. The heir wars allow anyone with enough potential the chance to become the Dragon Emperor, but that is only on paper."

"Actually, nobody was expecting a number like this," he continued honestly.

"Usually, we only have two or three commoners pass. I don't know why the number exploded so much this time, but we really can't have that many participants in the final competition."

"Even from the Holy Clans, there are only fifty participants. In order to keep the numbers even and make sure that only the best of the best can take part in the sacred tradition, a new elimination round has been added."

"It only has one purpose. To weed out those that got lucky and make sure that only the top one hundred geniuses gain a spot in the true battle."

"I see..." August responded as Rakon finished his words.

It made some sense. If the heir wars usually took months or years with three commoners and a similar number of nobles, then how long would it take if there were a hundred more participants?

The problem was...

"How is this elimination round formatted?"

"It doesn't matter to you yet, but there's no harm in knowing," Rakon responded. He was more than happy to answer questions from geniuses who had already proven their amazing talent.

"It'll be simple, since nobody wants to waste more time. The lot of you who pass will be placed in an arena together. Simply put, you will fight until only fifty of you remain, and those fifty will proceed to the true heir wars."

"Now," Rakon said, moving the conversation along.

"Allow me to tell you about your current trials."

August nodded. There wasn't much more information he needed, anyway.

The trial was the most basic of trials. It was used by dragons, humans, and all other races with fists alike.

The stone was special. Mana was used to make it denser than it should've been. As long as August and Melania could strike it and dig their fist a certain distance into it, they would pass.

In this case, that distance was an entire foot.



Dragons were physically stronger than other races, after all. They required more from their young than others did.

Still, it was manageable.

Punching stones was one of the most basic physical training exercises that Damien made him do.

'How much harder can it be?'

August and Melania walked up to their own stones.

They were not allowed to use mana externally, but anything else was permitted.

To the side, Melania took a lowered stance and was obviously planning to use mana to enhance her movements. August could practically see it flowing through her body.

As for him...

'I think I'll do it with just my strength.'

Mana was...

In August's mind, mana was not meant for things like this. Mana was purer than this, and far too sacred to be wasted on mere physical enhancement.

He didn't need to use it to justify his strength. He didn't have anything against those who did, nor did he look down on them. They just had different perceptions of power and mana, and that was totally fine.

'I would wish her good luck, but she'd probably just glare at me.'

Scenes flashed through August's mind.

BOOM!

The powerful force of his father's punches when they sparred.

Damien practiced technique, but wild strength was more his forte. When he struck, power would be emitted regardless of what kind of form he used.

It was an efficient type of fighting that allowed him to attack from any angle while maintaining the same amount of power.

August didn't fight with the same wild style, but to say he wasn't inspired would be wrong. The ability to distribute strength that Damien had was ideal for August.

He pulled his body back and got into position. His fist was at his side, as he wasn't yet ready to strike.

He closed his eyes and prepared himself. Since there was an elimination round, he needed to stand out as a top seed before it started.

One foot...

Bang!

From the side, the sound of Melania's impact rang out.

That was the last thing August heard as he tuned out the world.

His fist and that rock. Those were the only things that mattered.

His mana was as calm as his breathing. His heartbeat slowed as he entered a state of extreme focus.

"Huu..."

A single breath.

He used it to prepare himself.

He went over the motions in his head, and without an ounce of hesitation, he raised his fist, pulled it back, twisted his body, and flung it forward.

BANG!

August felt the rock scraping against his skin as his arm pushed deeper and deeper into its surface.

By the time it stopped, he didn't have much arm left. He was practically wedged into the rock's surface.

"You..."

August made a silly expression and tried to pull his arm out.

"This..."

Rakon looked at him with wide eyes.

"Ah...sorry..."

August made a silly expression and tried to pull his arm out.

"This..."

It didn't move easily. He pulled at it a few times before putting his foot against the rock and using his entire body weight to drag it out.

Only then did—

CRACK!

August's arm flew out, throwing him back a few steps, and the rock cracked into five pieces, crumbling under its own weight.

"YOU...!"

Rakon repeated himself, louder this time because his surprise was immense.

August scratched his head awkwardly.

'Am I in trouble?'

Rakon speed-walked up to him and grabbed his shoulders.

"Wow! What a showing!"

His eyes were practically glowing with excitement.

"Young man, you are one of only three people who managed to crack the stone! Congratulations!"

"Oh...?"

August glanced at the stone and turned his eyes to Melania's side. She had also passed, but she had just barely made it past the mark. Nothing extraordinary happened on her side.

Currently, even she was staring at him with a dumbfounded expression.

How could anyone expect a mega genius to appear out of nowhere like this?!

Now, nothing had been compared.

There was still a mana test and a mental test before the elimination round, and only if he passed that could he be considered a real genius.

But to produce physical strength like this, and without the help of mana at that...

'Hahaha, if he does good, then it'll do great things for me!'

Rakon could already see the promotions he'd receive for finding such a talent. He would even have the potential to enter the Ignis Clan's hidden territory to train.

And, if a genius he supported showed good results in the heir wars, he would gain even more.

'This is good.'

He couldn't wait to see what happened in the next two tests.

Because if August showed the same performance as he did in the first two...

'...then supporting him will be my best investment yet.'

## Chapter 1627 Qualifications [6]

Melania sort of faded into the background after that.

She was still there. She did the remaining two tests along with August, but her genius was overshadowed by his at every step.

August didn't mean to do it.

In the last two tests, he really couldn't control his results. He just had to pray that he didn't show anything too crazy.

Nevertheless, the next two tests measured mana and mind. They were categories that would become incredibly important when the heir wars started, so even before they entered, these geniuses needed to prove that they were worthy.

August was only 3rd class. Many of his competitors were 4th class. He was also a ten-year-old, the youngest of the young.

He'd lied about the latter when he registered, because they would probably lose their minds if he was honest, but the first part was already enough of a crutch.

That was why Rakon needed another reason to put his money on August.

For a 3rd class to stand a chance, they needed to be far beyond others of their same caliber.

The mana test was more about purity than capacity. Capacity would grow for anyone, and since they were dragons, they already had an unreasonable amount of space to house their energy. Dragons were inherently expected to have large mana capacities.

To them, purity mattered more. It told of how a genius treated mana, and what kind of work they'd done to maintain it.

August was particularly skilled in this facet.

He had been enamored with the energy since young, and it was the first thing he learned even when he didn't have any thoughts of training.

Mana purity was hard to achieve for commoners. Since they didn't have the necessary means to purify the mana on their own, they'd often end up with mana as rough as what their environment could provide them.

August had Damien.

Not only did he learn how to purify his mana, he was given an environment where the mana was already extremely pure.

Putting those two facts together with his love for mana, which caused him to constantly interact with it, August's mana purity didn't even have to be mentioned.

The testing device practically danced with spirituality when it received his energy. It was a reaction that only those of the Holy Clans could produce, which instantly put August's identity under question.

Though, nobody actually addressed the elephant in the room.

Rakon's eyes shined.

'He's definitely a hidden noble.'

Sometimes, people of that caliber had strange desires. Wanting to participate in the heir wars as a commoner seemed to align with those actions, usually taken under the excuse of "experiencing life."

Melania also thought the same. That was why she didn't feel too bad about losing horribly to him.

Her mana was also relatively pure, especially for a commoner and an earth dragon, but how could she dream of coming close to a true noble?

It helped her put aside the negativity brewing in her heart and concentrate on the test, so it didn't matter to her whether her assumptions were true or false.

'He sure doesn't act like a noble.'

August was an outgoing person, and he looked to be interested in others purely out of curiosity, not out of some twisted sense of superiority.

It was hard for nobles to hide their regality. They'd never touched the common air before in their lives, so how could they properly mimic their less fortunate counterparts?

August's ability to do so meant that he'd either been living away from his clan for a very long time, or...he had a disgustingly twisted mind.

Well, the chance of him not being a noble at all also existed, but nobody considered it in the slightest.

When August and Melania finished the mana test, they were led to another chamber within the facility.

It was a large building, but most of the space wasn't put to use for testing. A large percentage was made to hold people, since large crowds were expected, and the rest was used for a variety of purposes, since these buildings wouldn't just be torn down after the testing ended.

Nevertheless, when they entered the room, Rakon immediately shut the door behind them without another word.

The two of them were left alone, and before August could say anything, the lights shut off with a large bang.



The darkness was complete. He knew that Melania was nearby, but he couldn't feel her presence. He knew that his senses were working, but he couldn't hear anything, smell anything, or attempt to perceive his surroundings at all.

His mind was isolated from all else, and that was when his final trial began.

A trial of mind, created to see if geniuses could endure the high-risk high-reward environments they'd be thrust into when they joined the heir wars.

If their minds couldn't handle the pressure, there was no point in their talent. It would all go to waste regardless of what happened.

So, this was the last test, and the most important.

The scenes that flashed through August's mind made him feel like he was really present inside them.

He could feel the sensations of war as he was enveloped by a battlefield. The sword in his hand was real. He couldn't control his actions, but he could feel the movement of his muscles as his arm chopped down to kill another enemy.

Blood was everywhere. Mayhem was everywhere. And, on the other side of it all was a treasure that everyone present wanted for themselves.

It was all or nothing in this place.

And August...

The light in his eyes immediately died.

His emotions numbed, and his perception of everything changed immensely.

This scene...it wasn't new to him. Qinglong had been in wars like this thousands of times at the very least. He was always fighting tooth and nail to gain a treasure that he had no business of getting his hands on.

For those rewards, he risked everything. He killed and killed until he was the only one left, and after attaining what he fought for, he'd go looking for the next battlefield.

It was a tiring life in August's opinion, but it was one he'd been forced to live every single night for the past three years.

This was how he dealt with it.

The instant he found himself in a life-or-death situation, he turned everything off and embraced his draconic instincts.

When it was necessary, he'd become the monster he feared when he was a child.

When he needed to, he could give an entirely new meaning to the name "August Void."

And that...that was the most bittersweet thing for Damien to watch happen, knowing that he couldn't do a thing to change it.

It was a mentality a child should never have.

But, when that child was a dragon, and the Azure Dragon's successor at that...

It was a mark of fate, the makings of a ruler.

It was already obvious that August would participate in the heir wars before he even entered the room.

But if this was any indication of how that event would go...

Surely, it would be far more significant than anything that had happened in Arulion in many, many years.

## Chapter 1628 Qualifications [7]

The test ended soon enough.

August's qualifications didn't need to be questioned anymore.

His mental stability in the midst of chaos was astonishing. No genius at his age should've ever been able to show results like those.

That includes those from the Holy Clans.

A mentality like August's could only be developed through years of experience in combat. August had put his age down as 18. His body looked young, but just barely mature enough to be passable.

For him to maintain such stability could only mean that he'd been involved in war for his entire life, from birth to now.

It was incomprehensible, really.

Rakon and his assistants had their jaws wide open as they made sense of the data.

How much more surprised would they be when they realized that August had never actually been in a fight with another sentient being before?

None of the other dragons had to go through what he did.

Ancestral memories were called that because, in a sense, that was what they were. However, they weren't really "memories."

They were comprehensions. They were records of techniques and how to use them, laws and how they worked, and the most prideful moments of a draconic ancestor's life.

Draconic ancestors were worshiped. They were seen as perfect beings by those descended from them. Naturally, they didn't want to ruin that perception by showing them their faults.

Qinglong was different. Because of his unique ideologies and circumstances, August had been raised totally differently than a usual Holy Dragon successor would be.

The version of him that existed within his mind was completely different from the one that existed in the world.

Someone like Melania ended up serving as a control. She was as a genius of her and August's age should've been.

Melania passed the test. She had her reasons to participate in the heir wars, and she refused to give up before she even caught sight of them.

Seeing August's performance motivated her. If someone younger than her could achieve results like those, then what was she doing lazing around?

She put her all into the mental test, but even then, she wasn't expecting her own reaction.

She froze up the second she found herself in danger. Her mind was stuck in stasis, and as her illusive body followed her mental state, she was instantly cut in half by an enemy soldier and killed.

She was revived in the illusion, but her mind didn't stabilize. Death only shocked her further into her frozen state.

Over and over again, she died. It was getting to the point where her health was in concern. Rakon and the rest were preparing to pull her out of the situation and mark her attempt as a failure.

However...

Even she didn't know how she did it, but she regained control over her mind.

Her arms shook, reflecting the instability within her, but she raised the sword in her hand regardless.

She closed her eyes as she swung it down on the approaching enemy, but that only made the feeling of cutting through flesh and bone more palpable.

Melania wanted to vomit. She was nauseous beyond belief. Her every instinct told her to give up so she could leave this place.

She had never been in this kind of situation. She lived with her family in Arulion. Crime didn't even exist here, and since she'd never left her district to see the wildlands where other beasts roamed, she'd never fought outside of sparring

This was her first time seeing so much blood.

And this was the first time she'd ever killed anyone.

The assistants in charge of the illusion advised Rakon to pull her out. It was already too dangerous for her to continue. Her results had already been recorded as well.

But...

"Let her stay."

He didn't agree.

Despite his somewhat nihilistic attitude towards the entire qualification test, Rakon was still an avid supporter of geniuses.

He could see how Melania was trying, and he could see that if she was given time, she'd manage to adjust.

As such, he allowed her to continue, and eventually, she barely passed the standard by the skin of her teeth.

That was the expected result. No, the expected result was for both of them to fail.

If they ended up failing the mental test, they still would have been allowed into the elimination round. Mentality could be improved, unlike talent.

However, both of them passed the test. To differing degrees, of course, but that didn't change the fact that they both passed.

'Among the hundred and fifty that made it to the elimination round, only ten passed the mental test.'

They were the ones Rakon was most excited to see.

Yes, he held prejudice against commoners. That was normal for anyone in his position.

But when it came to geniuses, his standards were different.

Plus, he really couldn't contain his curiosity.

If someone outside the Holy Clans really did win the heir wars...

...what would happen to Arulion?

It was an exciting prospect.

And it was more than enough to make a prejudiced man drop his bias.

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Not everyone really understood what it meant, but a lot of those near the front of the line realized that something was strange when over an hour passed before they were allowed to enter the facility.

When the line had been moving every ten to thirty minutes before that, it was a pretty obvious change.

But, there was no way for them to actually know. After all, August and Melania didn't exit the facility with the rest of their group, who had been too busy suffering through the wild draconic aura to notice what anyone else was up to.

There was still an indicator. The fact that only eight people left the facility when ten people went in let others understand that two people had either passed or done something insane.

Since the former was more possible...well, tensions heightened immensely.

Many were starting to wonder if it was even possible to make it through the qualification test after seeing so many people fail, but the fact that other commoners had passed gave them hope that they'd be able to do the same.

Whether or not they could was a completely different issue, and it didn't really matter to August.

He and Melania were taken to a room connected to the suspended balcony where Rakon was when they first entered the testing grounds.

They didn't need to be there. Their names had been registered for the elimination round.

There was indeed some information they needed to know before they left, but it definitely didn't take enough time for them to relocate and sit down for the conversation.

Nevertheless, Rakon had brought them here with an offer, and he didn't want them to leave until they'd at least heard it.

"I will be honest with the two of you," he said, looking at the two youths who sat on the sofa across from him.

"I want to sponsor the two of you."

What did that mean?

How would it benefit them?

Rakon had prepared a speech to explain those things long ago, when other facilities started welcoming real geniuses.

However, this was his first time actually being able to give it.

He was quite excited for this moment, as he had been since the two of them arrived.

August, on the other hand...

He didn't have any plans of accepting that sponsorship. He lost interest in this conversation the moment it started.

But, since he was already here...



'Well, I guess I can at least hear him out.'

Forming relationships with others was never a bad thing.

And perhaps Rakon's offer could actually provide something valuable, even if he gave it up.

#### Chapter 1629 Qualifications [8]

What Rakon said was relatively standard in terms of sponsorship. He didn't want to invest too much into geniuses he'd just met, but he also wanted to give off a friendly impression in case they turned out to be more than they already were.

What he offered them was simple.

"Resources."

"I can give you access to resources that you can't imagine right now, and I can take you to training locations that will easily boost your strength. Plus, having a connection to the Scorch Clan and Ignis Clan could never be bad, right?"

There was a more detailed explanation, but he needed to hook them first. He was ready to give them what they needed to become great dragons even if they didn't win the heir wars.

"And all I ask for in return is your cooperation and hospitality when it's all over."

He wasn't giving them a free contract. At the end of it, they would owe him a favor that would probably outweigh the level of aid he provided them.

'That's how this always goes, right?'

Qinglong was captured into slavery against his will, but after he was purchased, he was given a similar deal.

He was told that he could work off his slavery and earn his freedom back as long as he promised his owner a favor in the future.

However, when he approached that man with the money, he was met with betrayal.

It was expected, but it was still a humiliating moment for the young Azure Dragon.

Deals like these were presented often in the world. Young geniuses were easy to scam.

Not all of them were nefarious, and Rakon definitely didn't seem like he had nefarious intentions, but he was not an individual entity.

'He's directly connecting this to his clan. When that favor comes, it won't be to him, it will be to them as a whole.'

And at that point, nobody could say what they'd be asked to do.

Rakon talked for several minutes before he was finished. As he looked to the two youths for their answers, August sighed.

"I'll have to decline your offer, but I do appreciate it," he said.

Unfortunately, neither his father nor his ancestor were any good at pleasantries, but he did his best to sound friendly.

"Can you tell me why?" Rakon asked, his brow raised.

August thought for a moment before answering.

"I think...I want to try and fight on my own. Maybe after I've established myself, we can talk about sponsorships again."

"I see..."

Rakon frowned for a second before fixing his expression.

"What about you, then?"

Rakon looked towards Melania, who was silent with her brows furrowed.

'It looks like she has a lot more to consider than I do.' August thought.

A woman had come to his side and subtly given him a cue to exit the room.

He immediately rejected it, so it was obvious that he'd never even considered the offer. If Melania was going to seriously entertain it, it was best for her to have a more comfortable environment with less prying eyes.

August didn't mind.

He followed the woman out of the room and down an elevator that connected to the suspended balcony. He was shown to a door on the opposite side of the building from where he entered and escorted off the premises.

'They're succinct.'

August was given all the necessary information about the elimination round on his way out, along with an emblem that he could use to identify himself when the time came.

'I have a week.'

In a few days, the qualification round would end. Only a few days after that, they'd be sent straight to the elimination round to duke it out for their final places.

'They're really rushing it.'

It wasn't just inside the facility. The entire process for admitting commoners into the heir wars was compressed into the least possible amount of time.

'It's probably because the heir wars should already be underway. Was there a delay of some kind?'

August shrugged. He didn't know anything, so there was no point in trying to guess.

'More importantly, I now have a week of free time.'

Barring the time he used for regular training, he could do whatever he wanted for the next seven days.

'And...Dad left me a lot of money.'

August's eyes shined.

'It wouldn't hurt, right...?'

After only recently entering society, August had been focused on doing what he had to do. That was mainly because he didn't have much time left to take the qualification test.

However, his father had been especially stern in telling him.

"Don't overwork yourself. If you want to explore and relax your mind, then do it without regrets."

It was a little ironic that Damien was being so serious when he was telling August to have fun, but it was just a reflection of his strong sentiment.

August looked into the city separated from him by a large green field.

'Then, let's not waste any time.'

There was too much to see and too little time.

So August wasn't going to let even a single second go wasted!

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Without an ounce of overstatement, August spent the rest of the day eating.

Nobody could comprehend his voracious appetite. Damien managed to feed him solely because he had the power to create animals out of mana, but anyone else would've suffered immensely.

That was exactly the reason Damien gave August so much money.

He predicted this scenario.

August went to every food stall he saw, sat down at eight different restaurants, and practically drained several vendors of everything they had to offer in the span of 6 hours.

By the time night fell, August was in some random part of the city that he couldn't even find on a map.

As he glanced around, there were only slightly rundown buildings everywhere, most of which were houses.

'And...I'm lost.'

He had no idea where he was.

He followed his nose here because he smelled something delectable, expecting there to be a large restaurant in the vicinity.

But after an hour of searching, he realized that the smell was coming from someone's house, and at that point, he had to give up on his quest.

August scratched his head awkwardly.

'Well, I have to make my way back to the city so I can find somewhere to stay...'

Where was the city? He had no idea, but that was his goal.

August continued to walk around. He followed his nose and his eyes, searching for signs of more active areas.

He figured that the city would still be alive at this time of night, unlike where he was now.

However, he didn't end up finding what he wanted.

His path took him further outside of the city, and the houses around him became more and more decrepit.

Slumping down against a nearby wall, August sighed again.

'Now I'm foodless and homeless.'

The outside world was great, but he was also not equipped to deal with it yet.

'Life was definitely a lot easier when Dad was here.'

August didn't think about it when he was out and about, occupying himself with activity after activity, but now that he was alone and stuck with his thoughts, loneliness started to dawn on him.

'An entire week, huh...'

He didn't think he'd be able to take it as easily as he originally expected.

'I guess I'll just go train.'

He didn't want to sleep on the ground, but he didn't want to waste the night searching for the city. It would be easier in the daytime.

His best option was to just spend the night practicing. He could worry about his problems later.

But perhaps it was because he was a lucky person.

Just as he had that thought, he saw the shadow of a person in the distance.

'...is that?'

It was a familiar face.

'My savior...!'

August rushed over without hesitation.

They'd only met briefly, and they'd only met today...

...yet, right now, Melania Achen was his only hope of finding shelter.

Chapter 1630 Curiosity [1]

"Hey!"

August's voice echoed through the quiet streets.

"Hey, wait up!"

Melania reacted to it. There was no way she couldn't considering how obvious he was. However, in the darkness, the first thing she registered was an unknown shadow approaching her rapidly, so she naturally took a defensive stance.

She was holding a bag of groceries, but she'd already prepared to drop it if things got ugly.

"Woah, relax! Remember me?"

August slowed down and let her eyes adjust so she could see him.

"You are...the boy from before?" Melania said, somewhat relaxing but keeping her guard up.

They didn't know each other. There were loads of things August could do to her right now that she wouldn't want, especially if he really was a hidden noble.

"That's right. My name is August. We met at the testing facility earli—."

"What do you want?"



Melania cut him off and got straight to the point. She was too close to home to allow any random man to take up her time.

Nothing could be allowed to go awry.

'Why is she wary?'

August understood mostly, but he didn't understand why she'd instantly assume that he was trying to do something nefarious.

'It must have something to do with her own experience.'

Her life was different from his, so they reacted to things differently.

He would probably be curious first and wary later, but Melania suppressed her curiosity and stayed cautious of everything around her.

"Um, well, I don't know how to say this without embarrassing myself, but...I'm lost. Would you mind pointing me towards the city?"

August was frank. Obviously, she didn't want to entertain him, so he was fine with just getting directions and leaving.

Melania looked him up and down.

His clothes were dirty since he'd been sitting around on the unpaved rock that was the roads in this area. He had dark circles under his eyes, whether from worry or tiredness.

He really didn't look the same as he did when they first met, though his demeanor didn't change at all.

"Before that, how did you even get over here?"

Disregarding her first instinct, Melania asked about his situation.

"I don't really know? I was just walking, then I smelled something so I came this way, and then I kept walking, and somehow I ended up here."

"Somehow?"

"Yeah, somehow."

"Ha."

Melania almost couldn't believe it. This place was three hours outside of the city. There was nothing nearby except other decrepit houses and the bland livelihoods of the common people that often went ignored.

Was it even possible to come to this place unless one was born here?

Melania didn't think so, but everything about August told her that he wasn't lying to her.

'Is he naive or is he just stupid?'

She couldn't tell.

But with his attitude...

"If you go back to the city now, you won't find anything good."

"Crime" didn't exist here. Dragons didn't commit "crimes."

However, a draconic society was still a draconic society. It was a ruthless place where the strong prevailed and the weak were suppressed.

"Crime" didn't exist because things that could be deemed as crimes elsewhere weren't the same here.

If one was strong, one could rob and steal as one pleased. If one was strong, the will of others didn't matter.

If one attacked someone weaker, they wouldn't be punished. Unless, of course, someone stronger than them didn't like what they were doing.

If someone like August, who looked like a fallen noble, entered the city at a time like this, there was no way he'd see the sun unscathed.

August didn't know this, so he was a bit confused.

'What am I supposed to do if I can't make it back? Sleep on the streets?'

Wasn't it a bit rude for—

"Haa..."

Melania sighed before he could finish that train of thought.

"Come with me."

She started walking without another word.

August looked around, as if he was asking the world if she was talking to him.

But seeing her continue to walk whether he followed her or not, he just stopped asking questions and rushed to catch up with her.

Melania led him through the maze-like streets of this residential district until they reached one of the many monotonous residences that outsiders would never be able to tell apart.

She only turned around to face him again when they reached the door.

"If you say anything out of line, you're gone. If you do anything even slightly suspicious, you're gone. Just be mindful, sleep, and leave in the morning. You can find a hotel or something tomorrow."

August's eyes widened slightly.

"Wait...you're letting me stay here?"

It was a sudden proposal, but not an unwelcomed one. August would much rather sleep for free than pay for a hotel, especially if he had to spend hours returning to the city before he could even find one.

"Just shut up and follow me."

Melania sounded like she didn't want to deal with this at all, but...

She was the one who brought him, wasn't she?

He asked for directions to the city, but she chose to show kindness instead.

'She has it in her, but her circumstances don't allow her to be kind, huh?'

August read it almost immediately.

'Is this the norm around here?'

He was forced to wonder as he accepted Melania's terms and followed her into the house.

Immediately, he was blessed with warmth.

It was quite cold outside. Arulion's climate was varied and ever-changing. It had six seasons, and currently, it was the equivalent of winter in this sector of the kingdom.

August was more resistant to cold than other dragons, who were already more resistant to cold than other races. It was one of the many benefits of an Azure Dragon lineage.

Still, the warmth was much appreciated. The instant he entered the house, he felt like he'd been healed.

"Sit over there."

Melania's voice drew August's attention. She used her head to motion over to a small chair, one of only a few in the house.

Aside from the warmth, there really wasn't much.

A kitchen, a table where four people could sit, another small chair and a worn center table that constituted the "living room," and a stone staircase leading to the second floor.

August didn't comment on it, instead opting to just do as he was told.

Melania went to the kitchen with her groceries and started putting them away.

"I'll set up some blankets for you, so you can sleep where you are right now. No matter what, the upstairs area is off-limits. If you even think about it, I'll kill you."

She still hadn't looked at him more than a few times. Melania was putting in effort to make sure this was just a random act of kindness, not something he should take for granted.

And August accepted those sentiments.

He didn't plan to impose on her for longer than he needed to, and her...family circumstances had nothing to do with him.

'I can't help but be curious, though.'

Melania's attitude towards the upstairs area was far sharper than anything else she'd said.

'Her motivation...could it be?'

August looked at the ceiling, but he didn't think too hard about it.

In the end, if Melania didn't want to share her life, he wasn't going to press about it.

He was just thankful that she decided to show him kindness.

And for that, he had to reciprocate in kind.