

Void 1671

Chapter 1671 Labyrinth [7]

Remelia didn't end it with one attack.

In the time Valerie spent dodging, she'd already corrected her posture and started walking down the corridor to track her.

She pushed her hands to the side, creating heat barriers that blocked off the nearby corridors. She wouldn't let Valerie escape a second time.

Luckily for her, escape wasn't in the plan anymore.

When Valerie returned to the corridor, she was ready for war.

BOOM!

Valerie had abilities very similar to Elvira. Wood was most definitely an element that could take one to the top of the world, however, it couldn't do so on its own.

The element had just as many drawbacks as it did advantages. Unless one could expand it beyond just wood and vines, one wouldn't be able to achieve anything at all.

It was a problem that a lot of the base elements shared. To raise their power beyond the worldly limits imposed on them was vital.

Fire practitioners would attempt to comprehend the concept of rebirth that was associated with fire. They'd try to touch on higher laws like life or death to enhance the element they had an affinity for.

Valerie had yet to expand her element properly, but she'd just recently understood how important it was for her to find other methods to release her power.

With her focus on vitality, Valerie tried to connect to life to create branches and roots that could manipulate the life within other things and become indestructible through the sheer force of their vitality.

It was still a theory, so she didn't have plans to test it in this round of the competition.

However, since Remelia had become a training dummy in her mind, she brought it out anyway.

A new type of root burst forth from the ground below. In essence, it did look the same as the ones she'd summoned before. But, it was coated in a bright green aura that matched Remelia's ambient heat in environmental control.

The moss on the labyrinth walls grew into larger, more dangerous plants. The ground was instantly covered in grass tinged in flames as it came in contact with Remelia's aura.

Valerie struck before the enemy could once again.

She had only summoned a single root, but that meant that her precision control was at another level.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Remelia kept the same nonchalant attitude that she'd maintained thus far, flicking her fingers to throw an even more superheated wave of wind into Valerie.

She survived last time because she dodged. This time, she wouldn't have that opportunity.

It was respectable that she tried at all, but that was it. At the end of the day, Valerie was not her opponent.

Or so she thought.

BANG!

Her heatwave slammed into the singular root that separated it from Valerie.

Instead of moving, Valerie pushed more mana into the construct, absolutely trusting its ability.

And that trust was not misplaced.

With mana at its disposal and Valerie's control directing it, the root became more than just a thick piece of wood.

It absorbed the heat from the air, turning a bright red color like metal. The wood on its surface burned and turned black, but the internal structure refused to be compromised.

WHOOOOOOOSH!

The wind roared as it moved around the root and continued towards Valerie.

The root continued its activities, taking more and more heat into its structure. It created billowing smoke that clouded the entire corridor, but somehow, it managed to stay unbroken.

So, by the time the heatwave reached Valerie, it was nothing more than a brush of cool air, quite a pleasant experience if she had to say.

Remelia's eyes narrowed.

There was a three-step process she always followed.

The first step was the heatwave. Once the other two had been done as well, most enemies would already be gone.

Remelia was never a person who enjoyed battle. She just did it because it was necessary, so she used the simplest and quickest means possible to destroy her enemies.

However, when the three-step process was carried out and the opponent still stood, she became a different person.

Because a person who didn't fall to the three-step process had the potential to be better than her.

People who were better than her weren't allowed to exist.

Remelia stomped her foot on the ground.

BOOM!

BOOM!

BOOM!

BOOM!

The ground turned into a line of geysers that spewed superheated flames into the air.

They rushed towards Valerie, turning the path in front of her into a molten mess.

Valerie moved her arms as if she was pulling something apart.

The root she controlled widened, becoming more like the trunk of a thousand-year-old tree.

She decided to stomp as well, matching Remelia's techniques with her own.

The root charged forward.

BOOOOOOOOOOM!

It came in contact with the first geyser. Flames exploded out like liquid, splashing against the ground.

Unlike Remelia, who created the geysers artificially, Valerie's root was connected to the ground.

In terms of superiority, it was definitely above them.

When they collided, the root was given precedence by the earth. It was allowed to push forward and destroy the geyser, while the geyser had no choice but to break under its pressure.

BOOM!

BOOM!

BOOM!

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BOOM!

One by one, the root destroyed the geysers before they could do a single thing to Valerie. It approached Remelia, who already had her hand out for another attack.

Unfortunately for her, Valerie wasn't planning to let her dominance continue.

The root she'd created was amazing for defense as seen by its ability to trap heat without bursting into flames and ash.

However, how was she supposed to attack?

The basic method of just using it as a blunt weapon seemed to be the most obvious choice, but that was far too limiting.

How did a wood dragon use its element?

The barbaric methods were reserved for young dragons who couldn't understand the more complex ones.

Real wood dragons had techniques that could turn wood into a far greater force.

"Rot."

VOOOOOOOM!

The charred surface of the root peeled off. A rush of wind picked up the ashes and blasted them towards Remelia.

It didn't look like it was powerful, but there was a force contained within that wind that was transferred to every bit of dust and ash that it carried.

Remelia's eyes widened slightly.

There was indeed a way to avoid the three-step process.

That was if the enemy was able to make her feel danger even once.

The only people who had ever struck fear in her heart were people she could never touch no matter how much she grew.

The only people who made her feel danger were those with greater talent, not power.

It was a feeling deep within her lineage, and though it seemed like it would be easy to meet this requirement, it took a lot to make Remelia specifically feel danger.

But, as the rushing wind came closer, that feeling rose to prominence.

Danger.

Valerie had the capability to make her feel it too.

And if that was the case, then there was no need for a process anymore.

She just needed to aim for the kill.

No matter what it took to get it.

Chapter 1672 Labyrinth [8]

Since her techniques didn't have as much form as most people, Remelia was looked down upon for a very long time.

She could have just reached a point in power where her reputation would be undeniable. She eventually did do that. However, before she became widely regarded as a genius, she had to find a way to make people recognize her.

Remelia had two sides.

The first was the cold-blooded killer who used invisible heat to decimate the enemy.

The other was a lunatic. A killer who operated on insanity.

She delegated the first side to those who were weaker than her.

For those people, she didn't need to use extravagant techniques with wide-ranging implications. She could just use the invisible haze to slaughter them.

It was the same for when she needed stealth.

However, against opponents who could prolong a battle and find methods to defeat her, she acted in such a way that they couldn't do a single thing in response.

Valerie had just made her switch. Her expression remained equally indifferent, but Remelia's power changed entirely.

Her aura turned a bright orange-red color. The ambient heat that she emanated took color as well, becoming hotter and hotter.

WHOOOOSH!

The rot slammed into her and brushed past. She could feel the ashes of the tree bark sticking to her skin, corroding her flesh and blood.

VOOM!

Her skin glowed like metal as it became another layer of defense. Remelia's entire body was covered in veins of flame. Her skin was hot enough to melt anything that touched it, including ash and rot.

In normal cases, "rot" was able to connect to death and steal vitality from its targets.

The heat protected Remelia's vitality, giving her the chance to take hold of the battle's momentum.

BOOM!

She stepped into the ground and slammed forward.

She jumped into the air, leaping over Valerie's root and locking eyes with her.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Her hands shot out and moved through the air.

Flames covered the entire corridor, enveloping both her and Valerie.

VOOOOOOM!

Huge waves of fire burned through Valerie's defenses, forcing her to concentrate mana back into her body.

Remelia shot forward, swimming through the blaze like it was water and reaching Valerie in an instant.

She spun her body and kicked towards Valerie's head. Valerie raised her arm to block immediately, preventing it from making contact with her more vital parts.

BANG!

The impact rocked through her bones. Valerie gritted her teeth, glaring at the genius above her.

She put strength into her arm and pushed her away, taking a few steps back.

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

Valerie resummoned her root, this time splitting it into multiple smaller parts. The wooden vines whipped towards Remelia and forced her away.

Valerie looked at her arm, hissing slightly.

The burn was terrible. With just a few seconds of contact, her arm had been turned into a charred mess.

She put more mana into her arm to replenish her vitality.

The roots were burning as well. Remelia had been held back for a second or two, but that was all.

She would charge again at any second.

And more importantly...

'These flames have to go.'

They were inside of an inferno right now. Valerie's power was being suppressed to an extreme. She could hold her own, sure, but she couldn't win if the current circumstances were maintained.

Her eyes darted from side to side for but a second to assess her options.

By the time she was looking forward again, Remelia was already back.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Her lowkey fighting style was gone. She was attacking with fists and feet, but her every move emitted blazing flames that were superheated to an almost plasma-like state.

The burns not only limited what her wood could do, it forced her to focus on replenishing her own vitality so she didn't incinerate.

Remelia clearly had the advantage. She was barraging Valerie and leaving no space for the other girl to do anything.

Valerie was able to block and stay alive because of how she concentrated her mana, but returning fire was out of the question for now.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Left, right, and straight up the middle.

Valerie blocked them one by one while simultaneously healing herself.

The only things she could use were the vines and moss on the walls.

Still, it was something, so she was absolutely going to use it.

BOOM!

She blocked another strike and acted immediately.

She spread her fingers and exerted as much mana as she could in such a small amount of time, summoning everything that would respond to her call.

The vines hardened and gained some spirit. The moss seemed to gain sentience as it braved the flames to become Valerie's sword.

The air hissed as most of it was incinerated before it arrived, but the small pieces that made it were enough.

They turned into knives and pierced Remelia's arm before she could strike again.

Valerie's eyes widened as she strengthened her control, sharpening and condensing the moss and vines into blades that could penetrate Remelia's armor.

They succeeded in drawing blood.

They also gave Valerie a single second of respite as Remelia was distracted, allowing her to withdraw from the confrontation.

VOOOOOOOM!

She didn't waste time. The instant she got free, she moved to take control of the environment.

A forest within flames. To create one was easy, but to make it withstand the flames was a different story.

Valerie needed to channel everything she knew into it.

The potential for wood to create and control life, the realizations she had made during the battle thus far...

'I can do it.'

With her current mana level, it was absolutely possible. She was a 4th class, after all. She just didn't know exactly how to use her power the right way.

Valerie had been taught the Revell Clan's techniques since she was young. But, because of her nature, she had never been able to realize what they truly meant.

She never made the connections she needed to. In a certain sense, she'd ascended to 4th class through luck alone.

Alcharist partially blamed himself for being too indulgent and not trying harder to make her grow. That was why he let her go out into the world.

Only here would she be able to truly experience life and train to the best of her potential. Only here would she learn that there was more to life than what she originally expected.

He was correct.

The instant Valerie found herself in a challenging situation, she blossomed and adapted.

A forest within the flames, a forest that could destroy them entirely...

She could create it as long as she tried.

Mana raged with such force that Remelia was pushed away. She tried to approach closer, but the sheer power kept her at bay.

The ground was once again covered in the color green.

However, this time, whenever the grass spread, the flames that once held their position were dispersed.

VOOOOOOOM!

Trees grew in an instant, and a massive ecosystem of plants and grasses spawned in the corridor, completely overrunning it.

Despite many battles taking place at the same time in the labyrinth, many people had switched their focus to Valerie and Remelia.

A corridor that was half forest and half inferno, a place where geniuses were using their true power to confront each other...

It was extremely riveting for the audience.

But, as the number of geniuses still participating got smaller, a new mechanic was added.

When they saw it, would they still want to continue their battle to the death?

Or perhaps...would they make an alliance against the other participants?

Whatever the case was, the audience was hooked. The announcer kept their blood boiling for every single second of the competition, and despite so many different events still raging on excitingly, the battle was arriving at its end.

The only question was...

Who would be the final winner?

Chapter 1673 Labyrinth [9]

There were only five geniuses remaining in the competition. August, Valerie, Remelia, Eris Noct, and a man named Mikael from the Dawn Dragon Clan. Now, less than half of them were left in the arena. The rest had been eliminated in some way, shape, or form.

Mikael just took down the last one, leaving the five of them as the only remaining competitors.

He was nowhere near any of the others, but his actions had a profound impact on them all.

Suddenly, a map appeared in front of each of the geniuses. Its contents were simple. A rough picture of the maze that showed them the relative structure of the labyrinth without revealing its actual paths and patterns. And, on it, five red dots.

Not a single one of them misunderstood what those dots were.

Their positions had just been revealed to each other, as had their progress.

Valerie had just created a territory for herself which allowed her to fight Remelia evenly, so she now had the freedom to look at the map.

There were two groups and an individual.

One group was her and Remelia, but the other...

Two dots were moving closer and closer to the labyrinth's center with every passing second. She and Remelia weren't moving, so it was obvious that those were two other geniuses.

Somehow, in the small amount of time that had passed, two people had made an alliance that allowed them to see the finish line.

Which meant that everyone else was falling behind. "Hey, let's stop!" She yelled, getting Remelia's attention.

They needed to rush towards the center before continuing this battle if either of them wanted a chance to score more than a single point.

Remelia definitely heard her, but she didn't react at all.

BOOM!

She let her flames loose, attacking Valerie as if nothing significant was happening.

She also saw the map. She also understood its implications, but she refused to leave a battle unfinished.

The only thing she learned from the map was that she needed to remove Valerie even faster than before.

"What the hell are you doing?!"

Valerie shouted while she blocked the fire and counterattacked.

Her forest blasted vitality into the blazing inferno it bordered. It vied for the space, extinguishing everything that couldn't incinerate it.

"We need to get to the center! Now isn't the time for us to fight!"

In case her opponent was an idiot, she said it out loud to get it through her skull.

Remelia, however, was more stubborn than Valerie expected.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

It was as if she made her attacks stronger and louder so that she wouldn't have to hear Valerie's voice.

'Right now, training isn't as important as winning.'

She'd gotten everything she could out of her fight with Remelia. From now on, everything she did would just be practice.

Valerie could practice her newly discovered techniques whenever she wanted. Now that she had access to them, the rest of the road was a lot simpler to traverse.

Points didn't come so easily. The people who placed at the top of the leaderboard would blow the competition out of the water. They'd get further and further away every single time their competitors contently received a single point, and in the end, only they would be participating in the final rounds.

Valerie wanted to see this competition to the end, which meant she had to get to the center before those two other geniuses did.

She yelled and screamed at Remelia until she could hardly stand it anymore. "Listen to me, bitch!"

Valerie was mad. She wanted to fight this fight at first, but the emergence of the position tracker completely offset her plans.

Every second she spent fighting Remelia was destroying her chance to vie for the top spot in this round.

"We don't have..." BOOM!

"...time for this!" There was no way around Remelia. She was too good at spatial control. Even if Valerie was able to distance herself from Remelia, the woman would chase her to the ends of the earth. She still had to find a way through the maze after this battle ended. She couldn't make those kinds of decisions while she was being assailed from behind by a mad genius.

Valerie wanted third place at the very least.

But, with one uninhibited dot moving towards the center on the other side of the two she was most concerned about, she didn't know if she would have a chance.

'Either I destroy this bitch and make it there...'

Valerie's eyes sharpened.

'...or we both go down here.'

It was down to the wire. None of them realized that they were the last remaining talents in the labyrinth until the map appeared. Now that they knew, all of their plans had severely changed.

A rat race for the center, a true desperate struggle for first place...

Now that it had come to this, the labyrinth challenge returned to its most basic essence. The geniuses dropped their schemes and planning. They dropped their curiosity and ambition. They purely focused on the labyrinth, so they could find a path to the finish.

Still, those two dots that made Valerie so wary were scarily close to the middle already.

Who were they?

What were they doing?

And how had they managed to form an alliance in this free-for-all environment?

Well, it was a funny story, actually...

It happened just under half an hour ago.

August was doing as he did, entertaining the crowd with his various tricks as he traversed the labyrinth at a speed faster than anyone else.

He'd practically understood its entire structure at this point. With the knowledge he'd accumulated, finding his way to the center was simple.

He was responsible for the defeat of yet another genius, this time one from the Karmic Dragon Clan.

His power was esoteric and hard to predict, but at the end of the day, that kind of genius was more skilled in intellectual challenges.

If it came to who could reach the center fastest without any obstacles inhibiting them, then that genius would have been a top contender for first place.

Unfortunately for him, he met August.

His end wasn't even met valiantly in battle.

August used him as a test subject to see if he could properly exploit the labyrinth when he needed to, and he'd found exactly the results he'd wanted.

Regardless, it was a small hiccup in his otherwise unimpeded journey. He continued on his way without thinking much of it. But, his fortune was also riddled with some chaos.

His relatively simple labyrinth challenge ended with a single encounter.

He rushed through a straight corridor and took a left turn. He took the first right after that, then continued straight for a while longer.

In the end, August found himself at the exact dead end that he was expecting to find, and as it moved to show him what stood on the other side...

He froze.

He'd run into the only person he wanted to avoid in this entire labyrinth, the person nobody wanted to see.

Their meeting made the crowd go wild in anticipation. August Void, a newcomer from a common background who'd surprised them over and over...

...and Eris Noct, an indomitable force that had shown herself to be invincible among her peers. Were they going to fight?

Was August going to be defeated casually like everyone else who ran into Eris?

Or...would he show them another surprise and find a way out?

The crowd was dying to know.

But as the two's eyes met, there was only silence between them.

Chapter 1674 Victor [1]

Eris was immediately hostile.

August could tell that from the moment their eyes met, escaping back the way he came was impossible.

He had to find a way to distract her so he could run. Otherwise, this would simply be the end of his journey.

The power gap was too big, and August couldn't put up a convincing defense that would stop her from taking him out.

His eyes darted through the corridor on the other side of the moving wall for a single second.

He recognized several patterns and instantly came up with a plan.

Before the audience could even reach the edges of their seats in anticipation, he shot through the gap in the wall.

'One.'

Eris was already raising her hand to attack.

August stepped on the floor in one specific position that he'd calculated before jumping out of the way.

Swoosh!

There was a sound of wind as the floor dropped out. Eris was taken by surprise. Her attack was broken, and she was instead forced to correct her body with mana so she could float out of the pit.

August used the opportunity to scale the wall, slamming his hand down at a certain point before jumping away again.

Arrows.

They shot from one side of the corridor to the other, creating a wall of projectiles that kept Eris stuck floating in the pit.

One would believe that these traps weren't enough to stop Eris in the slightest, but that wasn't the case.

After all, the maze scaled itself to match those within. Because August was present, the traps were a bit weaker, but Eris' presence balanced them out.

Even if it was her, forcing a way through the two tricks August had implemented would take a decent amount of time.

And that was all August could hope for.

He'd gotten lucky in that there were arrows and a pitfall at this specific dead end, however, luck wasn't a factor in the third one.

In fact, even August's actions had nothing to do with it.

Every dead end would be accompanied by a closing wall. BANG!

The dead end closed once again, and suddenly, a new wall emerged on the other side, closing off the corridor.

August was already running across the wall. He jumped over it without a problem and landed on the other side. At that point, he was just fleeing for his life.

He was able to make it out because he was thoroughly prepared and had the space to act freely.

Eris, on the other hand, had to first make it out of the first two traps if she wanted a chance at dealing with the third.

The best-case scenario was her getting trapped and disqualified, but August knew not to hope for the best.

If he thought she was going to fall here, he wouldn't have run so desperately once he'd escaped her.

For the time being, he didn't think over his movements.

He took left turns, right turns, and ran as far as possible while keeping his movements as chaotic as possible.

BOOOOOOM!

A huge explosion rang out in the distance and echoed through the halls.

'There she is.'

He'd expected her to escape, but he definitely wasn't thinking that it'd be this fast. 'I need to hurry.'

August had already plotted a path to the center. With his knowledge of the maze, he could get there in just half an hour if he didn't encounter any challenges.

'Unfortunately, I don't think she's going to take that very well.'

He bought himself some time, but he'd also become a target of the Holy Clan genius he'd left in the dust.

'Is there a way out?'

He couldn't tell if she was chasing him or not. If she was, then he couldn't just move chaotically to throw her off.

Someone that much stronger than him couldn't be estimated the same way that others could.

'I have to read her.'

He had to get into the mind of a Holy Clan genius and understand what they would do in a circumstance like this one.

He had the experience to understand how those people thought.

Qinglong was close friends with many people who'd been in the same position. August could read them well after seeing them so many times, and based on their personalities...

'A stupid Holy Clan genius would've already been thrown off. A smart one...'

BOOOOOM!

As he expected, the path ahead was obstructed by an ocean of darkness.

It slammed through the connected corridors, blocking any escape path.

Eris appeared from within it, staring at him the same way she did before.

'...would've caught me already.'

August skidded to a stop, launching himself upward to gain some momentum.

He looked over the top of the labyrinth for a second to see if there was a way out, but he was particularly isolated from anything right now.

There weren't any traps in this hallway. Well, there was one, but it was already proving ineffective.

Xiu! Xiu! Xiu! Xiu! Arrows shot towards Eris. Without the element of surprise, however, they were meaningless.

The ocean of darkness behind her rose up and swallowed them all. It wasn't wrong to assume that they'd never be seen again.

"You..."

She spoke a single word.

Her voice actually contrasted her appearance a bit. It was just as beautiful, but rather than demonic, it held somewhat harmonious tones.

Still, they were spoken harshly, so August wasn't going to be stunned by them.

He was hardly paying attention at all.

The only thing he cared for was whether she was attacking or not. As long as she wasn't, he'd keep most of his attention on finding a way out of this place.

The thought of fighting never came to him. It was partially because it was obvious that he couldn't fight, but it was also due to August's special senses.

He could feel how dangerous she was.

It wasn't much compared to some others he'd met, but compared to him...?

Well, he was certain that he would be in the ground before he knew what was happening. Nothing more needed to be said.

If traps couldn't offer him anything, if other corridors couldn't offer him anything, then he needed to find something here that would help him.

In a single second, his eyes scanned the entire wall in front of him. By the time the second one arrived, he had already surveyed the floor as well.

"Ignoring me?" Eris Noct spoke again, but August was too busy investigating the last wall to hear her.

She flicked her hand forward. Two sharp blades of darkness appeared at her side and shot towards August.

Whoosh!

The sound of the wind as they barely brushed past his head was jolting.

It was clearly a warning shot.

August glanced at the genius at the end of the hall. He did hear her, and he knew that she was trying to talk to him. However, he didn't regret ignoring her at all.

Rather, he was going to keep doing it.

'I'm not losing here, lady!'

He didn't have the confidence to say it, but he definitely thought it as loud as possible.

He'd found a method.

...maybe.

August dashed towards the opposite wall and scaled it.

To Eris, it looked like a pathetic struggle.

She sighed as he scurried around like a rat.

There was clearly no escape path for him. What was the point of trying?

Someone with so much fear was just pathetic in her eyes, even if she understood what she represented to someone as weak as him.

'Perhaps he isn't the right one.'

She was interested at first because he'd managed to escape using clever means, but if it was just a one-off and not something he could do consistently...

Her thoughts didn't have time to reach the place they were going.

August reached the point he had been aiming for. He punched into the wall, wriggling his hand around until it found a switch.

He looked at Eris and smiled as he clicked it.

Before she could do anything to stop him, August was sucked into the rock. The hole he'd made, the switch he pressed, and he himself had all disappeared, leaving Eris alone.

'I change my mind.' Eris thought, a light gleaming in her eyes.

'He's the one.'

Nobody else she'd met had been worthy enough.

This one, however, had exactly what she was looking for.

So despite the ingenuity of his escape methods...

...he could give up any thoughts of getting away from her.

Chapter 1675 Victor [2]

August actually landed on his feet in an open space despite being swallowed by a wall.

What he found was a secret corridor that led him deeper into the maze.

It wasn't infested with a single beast and was actually quite different from the rest of the labyrinth.

The walls were cleaner. It looked like somebody had been working to manage the space for many years.

August didn't have time to admire it all. He dashed through the tight space trying to get as far away from Eris as possible.

If he could vanish from her radar before returning to the maze, then his life would become a lot easier.

'It would be better if I could just use artifacts, but there's no way I'm not being watched right now.'

The entire event was being televised. If a path like this was placed in the labyrinth, it would also be riddled with cameras that let them see what he was doing.

The path continued for quite a long time. There was a steep decline towards the beginning, which must've put August underground. Otherwise, the amount of distance he'd covered was nonsensical.

At the end of the path, it opened up into a small room with two doors on the left and right. Against the back wall was a desk with a book and several stray pieces of paper on it, illuminated by a small flame that rested on a side table nearby.

There was nothing else present. August walked over and looked through the contents of the papers.

Most of them were unintelligible scribbles that didn't mean anything to August, but the diagrams they contained looked interesting.

'Hmm...'

August furrowed his brows.

He turned to the book and flipped through it, trying to see if it could give him anything.

'The same. I can't tell if his handwriting is bad or if it's written in a completely different language.'

Whatever it was, August decided to store the papers and the book in his spatial ring so he could go over them later.

'They might just be a whole bunch of nothing, but if they do end up showing me something magical...'

That was all August could hope for.

Since he was young, he'd loved research. A challenge presented to him like this was welcomed with open arms.

Nevertheless, the room didn't have anything else of note. August tried to see if there was anything in the walls or any other hidden mechanisms that could take him into other hidden corridors.

Unfortunately, his efforts were pointless.

'It's disappointing since this seems like a reward area, but I can keep my hopes up and assume that these pages are the reward...for now.'

It was best for August to return to the labyrinth now that he was a ways away from where he left Eris.

He chose the door on the right side, since that was the one that would give him more of an advantage.
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At least, that was if his position was as he expected it to be, but that was something for him to worry about when he was back.

'Now, as long as I don't run into that crazy woman again...'

August swung the door open.

He was immediately back in the maze. It was probably some kind of spatial magic.

That part was fine.

The real problem was...

"There's actually no way."

BOOM!

August's body abruptly shot back and slammed into the adjacent wall.

Darkness turned into a web that blocked his movements, and a suppressive aura locked onto him, making his mana sluggish.

"Khhh...!"

August gritted his teeth and glared at the woman who had just entered the room.

He really did a good job escaping. He thought he did, at least. He knew that anyone else wouldn't have been able to track him after he disappeared, but as he was learning now, this woman was different.

"You're quite rude."

Eris Noct closed the door behind her and glanced at August.

"Did you truly think you could escape?"

It was a question that was posed more out of curiosity than gloating.

"I mean, yeah. I think it's weirder that you caught me."

Since his fate was sealed anyway, August spoke freely.

"Bold," Eris replied, a small smile rising up her lips.

"However, I am not as hostile to you as you believe."

She wasn't lying. She may have originally approached him with hostile intentions, but now that she'd seen him in action, her intent had changed.

"Boy, how do you feel about working together?"

August's eyes immediately widened.

"What?"

"You heard what I said."

"Yeah, but also, there's no way you said what I think I just heard."

"I did."

August's expression became even more stupefied.

"You? Want to team up with me?"

It just didn't make any sense.

But, with Eris nodding to confirm his thoughts yet again, he was forced to accept it.

"Why...?"

That was all he could ask.

Aside from their clear power differences and the other factors that led to his confusion, August did have a previous perception of Holy Clan geniuses that... wasn't the best.

Seeing how he was a commoner, he only expected them to ever discriminate against him. For one to ask for his cooperation was not in his cards.

Eris shrugged as if she couldn't understand his confusion at all.

"The reason is simple. You have a good brain. I need the help of someone who has a good brain. The others were stupid, but since you actually have worth, I want to form an alliance to challenge the central boss."

Eris was strong enough. She was smart enough as well, but "smart enough" wasn't enough for a challenge like this.

So why had she decided to create an alliance with August instead of destroying him?

It was precisely because of how fast he located a trap and activated it to distract her while he ran away. He was even able to create a way out of a situation that she thought was sure to entrap him.

The fact that there were hidden corridors in the wall was something even she didn't know.

That led her to only a single conclusion.

August had a better understanding of the maze than she did, and he was smarter in exploiting it.

In a challenge where both brains and brawn were necessary, she couldn't just push through everything alone.

More importantly, the heir wars weren't just a stage for individuals to shine.

There were times when geniuses would need to work together. At times because they couldn't do things alone, and at times because they needed to show the crowd that they were benevolent or agreeable.

Putting it clearly, Eris had no idea who August was. She didn't bother to learn about her opponents in this round since none of the geniuses on her level were participating.

But, even if she knew he was a commoner, it wasn't like she cared.

To enter this stage meant one was leagues above one's peers.

Anyone who was here competing had an ounce of her respect. They would only lose it if they proved to her that they were never worthy enough to step foot on this holy stage.

August had done the opposite. He had shown her why he, a mere 3rd class, was able to arrive at a place where nearly everyone was several lengths ahead of him in power.

Matters of who the final winner would be or what came next could be handled later.

Eris had seen the central boss with her own eyes, and she knew that she wasn't enough to defeat it by herself.

Gathering a team was out of the question, but if it was just a single genius who could fill in the places where she was lacking...

Anyone in her position would've made the same decision.

So, in her opinion, August's confusion and surprise were completely unjustified.

Chapter 1676 Victor [3]

She thought that because she wasn't completely aware of what her own status was to the people watching this competition.

August's surprise was matched by the entire crowd that watched the two interact.

Every question he asked was met with thousands or even tens of thousands of nodding heads as people wondered the exact same things.

And every answer that Eris gave surprised them even more.

Holy Clan geniuses were existences that were like the heavens to normal dragons in Arulion. The social hierarchy had become so embedded in their minds that seeing one of such godly beings talk to a commoner as an equal was preposterous to every single one of them. Hell, it wasn't even them alone. From commoners to other Holy Clan members, everyone was dumbfounded by the interaction between the two. She didn't think much of it, but to everyone else, her words were a direct acknowledgment of August's talent.

For a Holy Clan genius to say those kinds of things to a commoner was something that had quite literally never happened before in Arulion's written history.

It was only natural for everyone to be surprised.

Compared to the audience, August was actually applaudable for being able to regain his senses so fast.

"So basically, what you're saying is that you saw the final boss and you need help fighting it."

He summed it up well. Eris nodded in response.

"And, you chose me because everyone else sucks."

Eris nodded again. That was right about the best way to put it.

"What do you need my help with?"

"You'll find out when we get there. I don't feel like explaining."

It was a poor excuse, but what was August supposed to do about it?

At the end of the day, Eris was still far too strong for him. Her offer to work together was really a demand that he didn't have the right to refuse.

"If I say no, I'll die, right?" He asked just for confirmation's sake.

"You won't die since we're in the arena, but the next time you wake up, you'll definitely be in a hospital bed," Eris confirmed casually.

"That is, in fact, a situation that I don't want to be in."

August sighed.

Well, looking at the bright side, it was beneficial for him if they teamed up too. He would have an easy time getting to the center of the labyrinth with a 4th class protector, and if the final boss fight was going to be scaled to Eris' level anyway, it was better to be on her side than to fight alone.

As if she sensed his acceptance, Eris released the restraints holding August down.

Her pressure also disappeared, giving his mana freedom of reign. 'Dangerous.'

The most dangerous part was her bloodline.

The Azure Dragon blood lineage was amazing. It was beyond many others, but, it was still the lineage of a Holy Dragon.

In terms of bloodline alone, the first Dark Dragon was just as powerful as Qinglong.

Even his massive bloodline strength could only be equal to theirs.

'I'll have to learn more about Holy Clan geniuses.'

A lot of his stigmas about them were disproven with Eris' existence alone. If he was going to properly fight them and perhaps even recruit them to his cause, then he needed to stop viewing them through a colored lens. "Great. It's good that you're agreeable. It would have been a pain if you said no."

Eris was in a situation where she needed him to say yes, because she didn't want to waste time looking for other people at this point in the competition.

After all, judging by the amount of time that had passed, they were likely in its final stretches.

There were bound to be only a few people left.

August cracked his neck with another sigh.

"Do you know the way back to the center?"

"When we get back to where I was, sure, but I lost a lot of ground while I was chasing you," Eris replied.

It made sense. Disregarding August's original random movements that took them further away from their goal, she probably had to do a lot of twists and turns to perfectly end up on the other side of the door when he opened it.

August nodded without much of an expression since he somewhat expected it.

"Follow me, then."

The path back the way he came wouldn't work again. When the wall swallowed him, the mechanism he used to enter was also broken.

It didn't matter, though, since August understood how to get back there through the righthand door that he'd opened before.

He led Eris out of it and rushed through the halls once more, this time with a far stronger genius on his tail.

They took one turn after the other, arriving on a completely different route than the one they were both taking before.

Still, it rejoined to their previous trajectory eventually, and only at that point did Eris realize where they were.

She had let August lead her because she knew he would only be sabotaging himself by playing any tricks at this juncture.

Yet, she found it hard to believe that they were actually making progress. In her eyes, August's movements seemed random, and they cut through many barriers that would've caused others to turn around.

He was able to manipulate the maze to his advantage unlike anyone else. And, with that ability, not only did he get them back on track, he even returned them to their previous position without a problem.

In this ever-changing maze where the corridors they saw were never the corridors they traversed, this was more impressive than August could ever imagine.

The two made their way through the final stretch before the boss room when it happened to them.

Maps that showed them where the other participants were appeared before them, causing them to stop in their tracks.

"This is..."

"Well, it's obvious which ones are us. The two over there seem to be fighting, and the last one...well, I guess he'll be a problem later," August said.

Eris nodded.

Their dots were moving until they stopped. As for the other two, they'd been in the same spot for several seconds and were still there despite the change.

If the two of them were able to instantly recognize what the map was, then it was the same for everyone else.

"But, only five left, huh...?"

August was definitely surprised, but it made more sense when he remembered that there were only thirteen of them at the start.

'Plus, there aren't many important people.'

Most of the noble clan geniuses participating in this round weren't worth much.

Nevertheless, August and Eris were the closest to the center of the labyrinth by a large margin.

And now that they knew where everyone else was, they surely weren't going to stop. Now was the best opportunity they'd have.

If they waited any longer, then the others would arrive and they'd have to deal with many more annoyances.

Looking at each other and nodding, the two started running once again.

With every second, they approached closer to the last step.

But they weren't the only ones.

Unlike Valerie and Remelia, who were still fighting, Mikael was using the map to its fullest to find his way to where August and Eris were.

It wouldn't be long before he arrived.

The only question was...

Would those two be able to defeat the boss before he did?

Chapter 1677 Victor [4]

At that point, they were only a few minutes from the final boss room.

It was separated from the rest of the labyrinth by a massive set of stone doors. They looked like they weighed several thousand pounds, which meant pushing them open was a declaration of war against the being inside.

Somehow, though, Eris had caught a glimpse of that being.

No, even more than that, she'd understood it to the point of knowing that she needed a smarter teammate to help her fight it.

Since they'd arrived in front of the door, it was too late for August to run or pull tricks. Eris was comfortable enough to tell him what they were dealing with now.

"Inside there is a beast in a room far larger than what you're expecting," she said as he listened.

"I'll say it now. You don't need to focus on the beast. Unless it's attacking you or trying to stop you, don't pay any mind to me or it."

"What am I supposed to do, then?" August questioned, confused by her "orders."

"There are six stations around the room. Each one contains a puzzle that needs to be solved. Unless they're all completed, the beast will be invincible. Your job is to take care of them while I fight so that I can actually kill the thing."

"I see..."

August nodded his head.

If it was like that, then it made sense.

Solving complex puzzles while fighting a beast meant to be the final challenge of the labyrinth was practically impossible. The challenge was designed specifically so that at least two people had to be present to complete it.

And, because both of them were vital to the success of the operation, they couldn't betray each other or scheme.

'It's a good deal for me. If she wins, I get second. If she leaves any openings, I have a chance to steal the top spot.'

There was no reason for him to refuse. As long as Eris did her job properly...

'No. I can't rely on that.'

As long as he did his job properly, it would end as he expected it to, even if Eris tried to get him killed.

'Okay.'

The only troubling part was the way Eris was keeping him in the dark about most things.

The way she phrased her sentences made it obvious that she knew more than she was willing to let on.

Perhaps it was unintentional, but August was definitely not happy with the conclusion he'd made.

'We'll find out for certain when we get inside.'

He couldn't see Eris gaining this kind of information by using honorable means, but he wasn't going to say anything about it. "I'm assuming you'll protect me while I solve the puzzles?" August asked for clarification.

"Of course. My victory also relies on your actions, so I won't do anything stupid," Eris responded matter-of-factly.

"Hm."

August made a sound of acknowledgement as they approached the stone doors. "Are you ready?" Eris turned to him.

"Well, as ready as I can be."

August responded as half-heartedly as he had to every single question she'd asked thus far.

It seemed to be enough for Eris since she didn't press for anything more.

Just as much as August didn't want to work with her, she didn't want him here either.

They were somewhat forced into a cooperation, him more than her, and despite not outwardly expressing ill intent towards each other, neither believed that the other party would play fair.

Their only security was their shared goal. For the time being, it was all they needed.

The duo approached the stone doors. Eris pushed them with just a bit of strength, but they swung open like she'd put all of her power into it.

That was the first time August saw the beast and room in question.

His eyes strayed away from the elephant in the room to confirm the positions of the stations Eris had mentioned prior.

He saw six immediately. There was some distance between them, so it would be difficult to move from one to another without being targeted by the enemy.

And, August felt that there was more to them than what he saw at first glance.

That, however, was something for him to learn as he interacted with him.

For now, his thoughts were so rudely interrupted by a certain elephant, both metaphorically and literally.

After all, that beast was indeed an elephant.

It raised its trunk and bellowed, forcing those who intruded on its space to pay attention to it.

Of course, since it was Arulion, the final beast was draconic. It had scales covering its entire body like a coat of armor, and its eyes glowed with flames as if it were a demon from the depths of hell.

It stomped its feet, making the ground rumble under its weight. Flames billowed from its every movement, and even its tusks were equipped with what looked like energy weapons.

The beast was created for combat specifically in the space it inhabited.

From its body shape, it clearly didn't have the best capabilities in terms of movement and dexterity, but the room was relatively small.

There was just enough space for an outer ring of stations to exist around a battleground. While August did the puzzles, Eris would be stuck in the range that best fit the beast's fighting style, pulled into its momentum.

Nevertheless, the two of them didn't plan to lose this battle.

They glanced at each other and nodded without another word.

From here on, they'd focus on their own parts more than each other.

Eris dashed at the beast and slammed her foot on the ground as she skidded to a stop.

A domain of darkness enveloped the beast and all of the space within the inner ring. The battle had probably already begun inside, but it wasn't August's concern.

He immediately rushed to the nearest station and inserted his mana into the terminal.

His eyes were graced with a holographic image of the puzzle he was to complete.

This first one was actually very simple.

It consisted of five rings of varying sizes that were layered within each other. They had divots and patterns in them. August's task was to line them up so that a ball present in the middle of the pattern could make its way out.

This kind of pattern could be solved by anyone. Even the stupidest of geniuses could just turn every ring until they eventually found the right configuration.

As such, August finished solving it within just under a minute.

Voom!

A wave of energy spread from the terminal as its lights turned from red to green.

It sunk into the ground, becoming a glowing pattern in the outer ring, one of six that would eventually inhabit it.

August moved to the second terminal without worrying about anything else.

He didn't experience the changes personally, but they were indeed reflected.

Only...

Perhaps it wasn't in the way that he was expecting.

After all, while Eris was telling the truth about needing his help to take down the beast, she hadn't been entirely honest with him.

His manipulation of the terminals did more than just weaken the beast.

Those stations had another purpose that he was completely unaware of.

Chapter 1678 Victor [5]

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Regardless of what she'd said, Eris was still dominating in the battle against the beast.

The elephant mainly used fire and pure energy in its ranged attacks. When enemies got close, it would use its brute strength, which was quite impressive, to attack and neutralize them.

It was a beast that was able to attack with the power it was assaulted with.

Since Eris immediately set up a barrier using her full strength, it immediately turned into a mid-level 4th class beast.

Unfortunately for it, Eris didn't just have mid-level 4th class power.

BOOM!

Waves of darkness sloshed through the space. Every time they slammed into the beast, the darkness turned permeable and stabbed into its scales.

The beast roared, stomping its feet to try and disperse the waves.

They hadn't been able to penetrate its skin. They wouldn't be able to until August finished his job. But, Eris kept attacking to keep it at bay.

'I feel a bit bad for that boy, but it's fine.'

At the end of the day, she didn't lie to him.

He was definitely weakening the beast. She felt the tremor from the first terminal being activated, and with it, she felt the beast's aura disperse to a small extent.

The remaining terminals would cause an avalanche that would topple the beast, but they didn't do so without consequences.

August would be the one dealing with those drawbacks, while Eris would avoid them, since she didn't have any interactions with the terminals.

Her job really was the easy part.

Still, she couldn't make it seem too obvious that she wasn't struggling.

BANG!

The beast raised its head. Energy charged into its tusks and shot out, striking Eris square in the chest.

She shot back and slammed into her own barrier. It rippled visibly even to outside observers, letting them see just how "perilous" the battle was.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Eris kept attacking and receiving attacks, putting on a show for the audience.

Meanwhile, August moved from terminal to terminal, dealing with the exterior challenges.

They did get harder.

From a simple two-dimensional puzzle where one only needed to turn dials to create an open path, the terminals turned into fully complex three-dimensional puzzles that needed to be perfectly aligned for them to even begin to make sense.

Still, with August's intelligence, getting through them wasn't the main issue.

Eris could try all she wanted to hide it, but August wasn't one to miss inconsistencies in mental challenges like these.

There wasn't anything wrong with the puzzles themselves. Solving them was quite fun, and since Eris had a barrier around the beast, he didn't actually have to worry about danger.

The problem was what happened when the terminals sunk into the ground.

'That energy wave isn't meant to weaken the beast.'

No, the beast was inherently connected to the array that these terminals were a part of. The instant he completed a puzzle, it was weakened without any sort of visible reaction from the environment.

The energy waves had a completely different purpose. August hadn't deciphered it yet, but he could clearly feel that the waves were sinking into the walls around him rather than the internal ring where the beast was.

There were only two real conclusions he could come to.

Either there was a treasure in the walls that he was being shown a path to, or...

'...I'm going to be in for a hell of a surprise when I finish this thing.'

More than likely, it was the second option. If there was any boon involved in this task, then Eris would've never given it to someone else.

'Since she doesn't expect a crazy performance from me, I can slow down and take time to figure it out.'

August had gone through two of the puzzles and was now undertaking the third.

This was where they switched from two dimensions to three, so he had just cause to slow his progress.

'As long as the barrier is up...'

BOOM!

It was as if Eris knew what he was thinking. At that exact moment, her barrier exploded, and she shot back, skidding across the ground until she came to a stop near the back wall of the room.

Her eyes were still on the beast, but she could see August in her peripheral.

'Well, there goes my chance.'

He sighed to himself, but he didn't show any emotion on his face, acting as if he was fully concentrated on the puzzle.

Eris didn't pay more attention to him after confirming his actions.

She shot back into the inner ring and continued her fight, but the barrier never returned.

'Is she suspicious?'

No, she just wanted to put pressure on him.

"Tch."

August clicked his tongue and got back to work.

'There might be something within the terminal that can help me.'

It was his only hope at the moment.

He wasn't keen on facing the consequences of other people's actions. He also wasn't keen on suffering so his opponents could find success.

August wanted to be a hero, which meant that his morals leaned more towards self-sacrifice than someone like Damien.

But, that wasn't a privilege that everyone had access to.

Those who were just, those who were innocent, and those who were worthy would receive his heroism.

Those who schemed against him, those who did evil, and those who betrayed others would not.

August delved into the third terminal as deep as he possibly could.

Instead of just completing the puzzle, he tried to understand what its actual purpose was.

The goal was to find out exactly what the consequences were and how he could exploit them to strike back at Eris.

The data was all encoded in the array.

And August...

Well, August had a hidden talent for array creation.

After all, it was an entirely intelligence-based skill, and it could be learned through study alone.

When fiction became tiring, when nonfiction became boring, when a new research subject was necessary to satiate his curiosity, August would explore anything that Damien gave him.

He didn't take a particular interest in arrays, but that didn't mean he wasn't good at making and deciphering them.

This was the same as those, only in a more modern format.

August dug deep into the schematics of the terminal.

He manipulated his mana so the information it showed him was more than it was supposed to. And, as he scoured the "files," he eventually found out where all of the inconsistencies within stemmed from.

'So that's it.'

August grinned.

'What a devious woman.'

He understood why Eris tricked him.

Even with her strength, if she ran into what stood at the end of these terminals, her round could be completely ruined.

'In the end, I'm going to make enemies with a Holy Clan genius, aren't I?'

There would be more chances to make friends in the future.

Since Eris decided to mess with him first...

'...I'm not going to feel guilty at all for what I'm about to do.'

Without a word or a shred of change in his demeanor, August returned to solving the puzzle.

By the time all six were finished, Eris would be in for the surprise of her life.

And August...

Well, to be frank, August was quite excited to see it happen.

Chapter 1679 Victor [6]

BOOM!

Two bodies slammed to the ground, one on top of the other.

Remelia had her hands around Valerie's neck. She gripped it tight as her hands burst into flames.

Valerie's teeth were gritted hard enough to draw blood.

It wasn't like Remelia was the one who had the advantage here.

She was fighting back with the same amount of strength. Her roots grabbed the woman's neck from behind, reining her backward, trying to take her into the forest.

The two had been in battle for over an hour now.

In most cases, Remelia would be completely done with an enemy by now. Valerie was different from the rest.

The problem was that she was growing with every passing second.

She entered this battle as someone who couldn't even withstand the residual heat of her haze. By now, they were practically on the same level.

Valerie had been a 4th class for a decent amount of time now. Yet, it was only now that she learned how to properly use all of the power she had access to.

Remelia was a perfect opponent for her. She abused this opportunity just as she'd planned to when they first saw each other, and she'd grown more than she ever expected.

The realization she had about life and death was monumental, more than she realized at the time.

As she was given the situation to put it into practical use right away, it grew exponentially in a short period of time.

Valerie obviously didn't want to be here.

She could see on the ever-present map that those other two dots were already in the center of the labyrinth.

Didn't that mean their chances of winning were already nonexistent?

The two of them were as far as they could be compared to anyone else, and no matter how much time passed, Remelia refused to give up.

There was definitely something wrong in her brain.

Knowing it didn't help Valerie, though. If she wanted to place anything special in this competition, then she just needed to find a way out.

As she had been trying for the last hour.

In the end, the two of them ended up on the floor like this, in a showdown to see which one would survive.

Remelia had more immediate power.

She was draining Valerie's mana faster as Valerie was forced to focus more on healing than attacking.

However, since Valerie had to be more conservative, she definitely had more longevity in each attack she used.

The vines and moss that continued to grow out of the walls could become her ammunition, so unlike her opponent, she didn't have to constantly put out mana to maintain her mediums.

Nevertheless, despite their individual weaknesses, the two were relatively even at this point.

It was really just a battle of who could last longer.

At least, that was what Remelia wanted to turn it into.

She couldn't be as versatile as Valerie, sure, but she was confident that she had more mana.

In that case, Valerie had no choice but to give up and lose.

That wasn't something Valerie could allow.

She was actively trying to pull Remelia off of her, but the woman had her in a death grip.

She wouldn't move no matter what, and it was like she didn't need to breathe at all. No matter how long or hard she gripped her neck, Valerie couldn't knock her unconscious.

'This bitch...'

Valerie cursed again.

'She's gone completely insane.'

There was hardly a semblance of the cold and indifferent Remelia remaining in the eyes of the one trying to murder Valerie.

The only thing in her mind was victory, and that tunnel vision was exactly what would ruin her.

Valerie's eyes went just beside Remelia's head, looking behind her.

Pieces of the massive roots that suffocated her broke off, turning into projectiles that spun and spun until they were sharper than any blade.

Valerie's eyes refocused on Remelia.

"Crazy...bitch...!"

She squeezed it out.

This attack had to end things.

It had to.

In that second, Valerie removed mana from everywhere else. She stopped her healing and withstood the burns. Her forest disappeared, giving power back to Remelia's domain. The restraints on Remelia's neck loosened, though she barely noticed.

All possible mana that could be used was used to empower those shards, and when they were glowing with so much light that they looked like stars, they shot forward, covering the few inches that separated them from Remelia in barely any time at all.

SHIIIIK!

They made a disgusting sound as they ripped through her body.

There was nothing she could do to stop them, not after they'd been concentrated with such a huge amount of mana.

Her energy field was pierced in no time. The heat around her body couldn't do anything to ward at that level, acting as nothing more than paper armor.

Though the shards were thin, the wounds they left were gushing with blood. They were as large as tennis balls, holes present in her shoulders, stomach, chest, and leg.

"Heuk...!"

A hint of emotion appeared in Remelia's eyes.

It was pure surprise at the sudden pain.

She looked down, blood leaking from her mouth, and saw the wounds that had been inflicted for the first time.

Her grip weakened.

Valerie immediately broke free of her entrapment and dashed backward, away from the bleeding genius.

"You..."

Remelia tried to talk, but her throat was filling up with blood.

"Next...time..."

They were frightening last words, especially from an enemy that wasn't going to die.

Still, they were last words.

Carelessness still ended up as the end of an arrogant genius.

Her current wounds wouldn't heal easily. Those shards were filled with death energy and rot. Since she couldn't block it this time, it properly infested her body.

The energy she used to continue the battle for so long was instantly sucked away. The vitality she had was dispersed into the atmosphere, weakening her immensely.

And, in such a weak state, there was no way she could deal with wounds so severe.

As Remelia lay there, staring Valerie down with eyes filled with flames, a visible blue light covered her body in something like a bubble.

She was lifted out of the labyrinth, disappearing as the entire bubble transported itself to the medical center.

Remelia would be back for blood.

But that was a problem for a future Valerie.

Without another thought in her head, while nursing the burns covering her entire body, Valerie started to run.

A relative understanding of the labyrinth's shape and an extremely undefined map were all she had, but she was going to try as hard as she could.

If not first, if not second, then at least third.

Now that Remelia was gone, there was only one person standing between her and that position.

And he was about to become very familiar with a certain Azure Dragon.

Mikael arrived at the boss room right as August finished the third terminal.

He assessed the situation rapidly.

He had three choices.

A boss that was far stronger than him.

A Holy Clan genius that was a lot stronger than it.

Or a random kid who looked completely out of place in the current scenario.

If he had to choose which one he had to attack...

Well, his decision was obvious.

Chapter 1680 Victor [7]

The Dawn Dragon Clan was the strongest under the Aurora Clan's rule.

Their power was made to mimic the horizon as it shifted and changed.

That was why Mikael's entrance was so grand.

He immediately made a break towards August, who turned his attention over immediately.

'Tch!'

August jumped back and dashed towards the 4th terminal. He was barely able to activate it before an entire horizon bashed into him.

BOOOOOOM!

Mikael's thought process was simple.

There were four people left in the labyrinth according to the map. The fourth wasn't here, which meant this was a fight for the top three.

If the two who were here before he arrived were able to do as they pleased, then he'd be stuck in third place.

Like hell he was going to let that happen!

Especially when he saw that there was a 3rd class in the boss room before him?

He was obviously planning to end August in a single move, but he was soon to learn exactly why someone so weak was able to make it so far.

By the time he attacked, August was already gone.

He'd jumped into the air. His arm was already extended and mana had already been mobilized.

BOOOOOOM!

Azure Dragons were rulers of the sea. August could heat and freeze water, he could use it to create projectiles and barriers as well. But, his heritage was always meant to control the waters of the world.

It was strong, domineering, and oppressive.

That was something August had awakened to in the two weeks before the labyrinth challenge began. His previous opponents hadn't forced him to draw it out, and Eris was too powerful for him to even try.

Mikael, on the other hand, felt just strong enough to force August to try harder.

A massive tsunami of water blasted out of August's hand and flooded the nearby area. Mikael was immediately washed away along with his blazing horizon.

August landed on the water. He was able to stand on it easily and run uninhibited.

While his enemy was still struggling to gain his bearings, he checked the terminal once more and did just a small amount of work on its puzzle.

Fighting Mikael was important, but it wasn't the most important thing.

After all, August still felt that he could beat him if they were to fight it out for first place.

Eris was his main problem, and to take care of her, he needed to complete the terminals.

All while not letting her catch on to what he was doing.

Mikael definitely made that easier.

It was as if August didn't have time to think about anything else.

Just a few seconds after his original attack, his attention was grabbed by a shining light at his side.

He didn't look directly at it since that was never a bright idea, but he did spread his awareness to locate its source.

Naturally, it was Mikael's power of light.

There was heat involved as well, but the light was mainly being used as a weapon on its own.

It shot through the air, barely perceptible in August's eyes. If not for his already mobilized awareness, he wouldn't have seen it at all.

Whoosh!

Whoosh!

Whoosh!

With minute movements, he avoided them, hearing them whizz past him.

'I'll have to at least trap him first.'

August wouldn't have the chance to do anything to the terminal until Mikael had been obstructed.

He could worry about defeating the genius after he'd finished the puzzle.

At that point, Eris would be in a situation where paying attention to his actions would cost her the victory.

'Okay, then, to immobilize him...'

It actually wouldn't be hard at all. The entire central area was filled with traps that would last him ages. It was packed so that if the fighters stepped out of the inner ring, they'd instantly be forced back inside.

Mikael was coming towards him, but he was severely limited in speed by the water that he was traveling through.

After all, water wasn't necessarily the best medium for light.

It gave August the time to locate the nearest traps and activate them one by one.

Just as Eris had suffered upon their first meeting, Mikael was subjected to a rain of arrows, stones, and pitfalls galore.

Everything around him became a weapon aimed only at taking him down.

Instead of charging forward, he was forced to push back, protecting himself with barriers of light.

His steps led him closer to the inner ring, but that was a place he absolutely didn't want to go.

Both Eris and the beast were far above his weight class.

'Good, now...'

August sent his senses into the ground.

For a while now, he'd been sensing the presence of an immense water source from underneath the surface of the earth.

It spanned over a large portion of the maze, but only here was it close enough to the surface for August to feel.

He stomped into the ground and sent mana crashing through its surface.

The tiled floors shattered instantly, and the bare earth below was littered with cracks.

August's control over the underground reservoir became far more fluid when there were holes that allowed him to access it without barriers.

BOOOOM!

Mikael eventually escaped the traps August set off.

His opponent wasn't playing fair, but now that he'd suffered twice to trickery, he wasn't going to do it again.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Four cannons appeared in the air, peppering it with light beams.

They were like turrets that zoned in on August and followed his every movement, making it impossible for him to do anything but dodge.

BOOOOOM!

August erected a large wall of ocean water to block and refract the light beams.

They split into countless pieces and shot into the smooth walls of the room, shattering them and interfering with the structure's overall stability.

August looked at his opponent through the wall with a grin.

'I finally have an elemental advantage.'

It wasn't direct, but it was definitely present.

Mikael could attack August with all the light he wanted, but as long as August could accurately refract it away from himself, it wouldn't be able to do any real damage.

That was why he was confident in making another move.

Mikael was still focused on trying to make it through the barrier.

Since he wasn't really paying attention to his surroundings anymore...

BOOOOOOM!

August's power flared, and the underground reservoir burst into the surface world.

August slid across the ground as it turned to ice under his feet.

Behind him, Mikael got stuck in the massive geyser of water.

It had formed something of a vortex cage around him, forcing him to do some puzzle-solving of his own if he wanted to escape.

Arriving at the 4th terminal once more, August glanced at Eris.

'I should be fine.'

He made sure to do a little bit here and there while he was still in combat with Mikael to make it seem like he was slowly putting things together and solving the puzzle. Perhaps Eris would still be a bit suspicious, but she wasn't in a position to do anything about it anymore.

The beast was getting more and more powerful. She was struggling to keep it at bay while being limited to the space in the inner ring.

She had to keep her focus on the battle at hand, lest she embarrass herself in front of everyone.

As such, when August approached the terminal and used the small amount of time that he had before Mikael escaped to solve it, she didn't see anything wrong.

It was easy. After solving the third puzzle, August understood the underlying nature of the three-dimensional challenges he'd been presented with.

The 4th terminal was definitely more difficult than its predecessor, but at the end of the day, it functioned on the same concept.

BOOM!

August had barely enough time. By the time he finished, Mikael was already charging at him again.

Mikael wasn't aware of it. His arrival put August in a one versus three situation.

Mikael, the beast, and Eris. All of them were targets that August was planning to eliminate.

But, with his newfound confidence, he wasn't worried.

He had a plan, one that would leave him as the last one standing.

And as long as nothing unexpected happened, he was absolutely certain that it would work.