

## Void 1681

Chapter 1681 Victor [8]

BOOM!

August refracted another burst of light and returned fire with another tsunami of foaming water.

He was using mainly brute strength against Mikael. For one, this force was his strongest ability. It was also the best way to counteract someone who responded so poorly to water in general.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The swirling water became sharp, adhering to the properties of swords. They became projectiles that acted in direct opposition to the ones Mikael was using, but their effect was far greater.

Beams of light went everywhere.

Some of them flew into the walls, others hit the remaining terminals, and others more went into the inner ring and struck the beast and Eris Noct.

Her eyes darted over for but a second. Seeing August fighting Mikael, she made no move to interrupt.

Eris wanted August to take the consequences of the terminals in her stead, which meant she technically needed him to remain in the game.

However, she wasn't obligated to actually do anything to help him.

Unless he was on the verge of losing, unless she absolutely needed to save him to further her own goals, she wasn't going to go out of her way to bail him out.

It was up to August to prove whether he was actually worthy of a podium finish or not.

Besides, it wasn't like she had the freedom to do anything about it.

The information she received wasn't entirely correct.

Originally, she thought that the beast would only weaken as the terminals were solved. However, as she fought it, she realized that it had several phases.

In its first phase, it just clobbered around and shot flames wantonly, trying to kill everything without putting in too much effort.

Now, it was in its second phase. It had gotten stronger and sharper. It was specifically targeting her and learning how to adapt to her darkness.

She didn't even want to know what its third phase was.

Regardless, she could tell that her attacks were starting to work better, so she was still confident that she could beat it.

After all, when the sixth terminal was activated, it would become a pig on the chopping block. Its strength wouldn't matter at that point.

It was just like Mikael in a sense.

No matter how strong it was, it was destined to be defeated.

BOOOOOOOM!

August knew how to use water to the best of its capabilities even without connecting it to a higher element.

There were definitely ways to make water mimic life, death, or even time. However, those weren't the paths August wanted to take.

He was something of a purist, as were the rest of his bloodline. They could be as intricate as they could ever possibly want, but they would do so with the base properties of water, proving that it alone could match laws of the highest class.

August glanced towards the fifth terminal before glancing back at Mikael.

Eris' current situation wasn't in his best interest.

He needed her to be challenged, but he couldn't let her feel like the situation wasn't in her control.

After all, at this point, it was practically confirmed. Eris had received information about the boss room beforehand.

Essentially, she was cheating.

August didn't plan to call her out. It was too much to draw the entire Noct Clan's attention right now.

However, he had to punish her actions somehow.

In the end, Mikael was just a roadblock. The real target was always Eris.

'It's better if I end this fast, but I don't think that'll be possible.'

If there was one thing he could credit Mikael with, it was his resilience.

He would probably find a way around the refraction problem soon enough. After that, the battle would only get longer and longer.

'Should I try to restrain him again?'

It probably wouldn't work, but it was worth a shot.

He would be fine even if it failed, since he had everything under control.

August restrained the waves under his control and prepared another trap, this time built to last for ages.

However, he didn't have the time to do so.

It had been roughly ten minutes since Mikael appeared. It passed fast since most of it was spent with him being corralled away and pushed back, but some time had indeed passed.

It wasn't a lot. The audience was still at the edge of their seats, unable to take their eyes off the action.

Still, it was more than enough for a certain someone to find a way to the center.

Valerie didn't even know how she got here. She ran and ran. She somehow found a path that made her suffer quite a lot, but got her to the center in the shortest amount of time possible.

Perhaps she really was lucky, or perhaps it had been rigged so she'd arrive here and give the audience the most entertaining show possible.

Either way, it didn't matter.

Valerie was here.

And since she was here, there was no way she wasn't going to join the excitement.

\*\*\*

Valerie's situation was the exact same as Mikael's.

She arrived late and was forced to immediately assess her options.

On one side, there was Eris Noct and the labyrinth boss. Both of them were far beyond her level, so she didn't want to go anywhere near them.

Another was August. He was her friend, and even if he wasn't, she didn't want to fight him right now, especially not after both of them had gotten so much stronger.

That left only one option, didn't it?

And it seemed like that option was also bothering August.

Valerie shot into the room. Every step she took cracked the tile and caused an overgrowth of flora in the natural ground.

She leapt forward just as Mikael encroached on August, and before he could reach the younger genius, he was body-

slammed into a nearby wall.

BOOOOOOM!

Her eyes went to August, who was staring at her blankly.

"What? It seemed like the easiest thing to do."

August blinked a few times and shook his head.

"Fair enough. Just distract him for a while and I'll take care of the rest. We can charge to the finish once we've dealt with everything here," he said.

He didn't even have to ask if they were allying themselves.

"Everything?" Valerie echoed.

"Everything."

August replied with a grin.

Since the two of them had made it to this point, both of them would stand on the podium.

They could compete to see who came first and who came second once they had the freedom to do it casually.

Until then...

Valerie charged towards the man she'd body slammed, giving him no time to comprehend the situation.

And August rushed to the fifth terminal, continuing his plan to take care of Eris Noct.

The dynamic duo, two people who had entered this war through the elimination round for commoners, two people who had fought each other until the end of that round...

Now that they were on the same team, every single observer wanted to see what they were capable of.

And they were going to show them exactly that.

Chapter 1682 Victor [9]

The fifth terminal was another massive change.

It and the last station were far more important than their predecessors. If the others unlocked the potential for them to activate, these two terminals were the ones that actually guided and facilitated the activation.

When August activated it and saw the puzzle for the first time, he was a bit confused.

The difficulty level had shot up, and the actual contents had changed completely.

From two dimensions to three dimensions, August was already expecting a four-dimensional puzzle to present itself here.

But that wasn't the case.

The puzzle was still defined within a three-dimensional space, however, it was more of a world now.

There were tiny individuals on a tiny planet that presented itself as nothing more than a hologram.

Still, they had lives and emotions, personalities individual to each and every one of them.

August was just seeing the world from an outside perspective, but for some reason, he could feel their presence, the breath of life emanating from their bodies.

Yet, he also knew they didn't exist.

'This doesn't seem like it could be done with just the power of the Holy Clans.'

Even if it was just an illusion, it was still too vivid for any dragon to produce.

August was immediately suspicious of the terminal's origins, but for now, he focused on the puzzle itself.

Which, by the way, wasn't forgiving at all.

It didn't tell him what to do.

Clearly, his goal wasn't the same as it was when the puzzles really were just puzzles.

There had to be something for him to solve in this world to make it whole. Only then would he be able to move on to the sixth terminal.

However, it was completely up to him to figure out what it was.

He could zoom as he pleased and even follow a single person through their daily life if he wanted to. He could also zoom out and see the entire universe from an overseer's perspective.

August had been given a godly omniscience in that world.

And he needed to figure out exactly how to use it.

His mind would definitely receive a workout here, but he definitely wasn't the one struggling the hardest in this space.

After all, not only was there Eris, whose fight was slowly reaching a level that August couldn't stand, but there were also Valerie and Mikael, who had only just started fighting.

Both were in conflicts that would determine their fates.



And when it came to Valerie specifically...

While she entered the central area in high spirits, it was fair to say that she wasn't in the best state.

Fighting Remelia took a lot out of her, but for the sake of her and August's victory, she got up and fought again.

Luckily, she'd made a lot of progress during her previous battle.

Mikael wasn't nearly as much of a threat as Remelia was.

Not only because of her growth...

...but because their elements were complementary.

BOOM!

Mikael didn't ask questions. Since Valerie decided to attack him, he was going to fight back.

He could always worry about August later. The threat in front of him was always the most dangerous one.

After all, in this situation, all four of them were competing for the podium, and only three of them could take their places on it.

Mikael didn't care if it was August or Valerie.

One person had to be eliminated. Whichever one served themselves up for slaughter was the one that would go.

He spun in the air and kicked, creating a manifested dragon of light that rushed at Valerie.

Several roots immediately jumped out of the ground and blocked his attacks.

BOOM!

There was indeed a loud sound as the two forces made impact, but it was really caused by all of the wind pressure that Mikael created.

The light itself...

Well, everyone knew how wood reacted to light.

It was absorbed, turned into nutrients that boosted the roots' vitality.

The only thing that Mikael's base attacks could do to her was enhance.

Of course, it wasn't like he couldn't harm her.

Elemental advantages were always useful to have. It would lead to an inherent advantage that could only be surpassed with pure skill or absolute strength.

Mikael didn't have absolute strength in this situation, but he certainly had skill. It was the exact thing that let him beat out the rest of his clan's geniuses to compete on this stage.

He attacked again.

Light was a difficult power to manipulate.

Elena had a light affinity as well, but without her connection to Valhalla, it would have been discarded long ago.

Life was simply far more powerful. Light had potential, but Elena couldn't find ways to bring it to a level powerful enough to support her on bigger stages.

It could be used to heal, sure, but that was not a combat ability.

It could be used for speed, sure, but that left one's actual power in the hands of their physical fitness.

When it came to manifesting light, there weren't a lot of options.

Stars, balls, beams, and other simple structures were the only real mediums that a genius like Mikael had.

Still, he made do with those restrictions and turned his power into something valuable, just as every other member of a light dragon clan did.

It worked well enough if one could do it properly. Otherwise, the Aurora Clan could've never become one of the six Holy Clans of Arulion.

When Mikael attacked again, he used properties of fire within his light.

His body surged with power as he wrapped himself in a layer of the element.

Speed was still important. The weaknesses of this technique could be filled in by other techniques.

And, heat was always an important factor of light.

Valerie had just finished dealing with someone whose entire identity revolved around that concept, so she definitely wasn't happy to encounter it again.

Still, that was how the situation turned out.

Valerie instantly summoned a massive forest that took up a defeat chunk of the central area.

Practically the only things left uncovered were August and the terminals, and Eris and the beast.

The heated light beams that blasted towards Valerie were stuck in the forest. They struck a few trees and burned through them, but they couldn't reach Valerie through the thick foliage.

That wasn't necessarily a problem for Mikael.

With his speed enhanced to such a degree, he could move like he was teleporting:

With a level of dexterity that only light could possess, he shot straight through the forest, phasing through any obstacles that he couldn't avoid directly,

BOOOOOOOM!

The light of the explosion as he struck towards Valerie was extremely bright, enough to almost blind the spectators outside.

If it wasn't for the intervention of the tournament staff, there truly would have been injuries.

A massive forest, and in its midst, a dome of pure golden-white light.

It was already a mystifying scene, and it became even better when audiences realized that it was only half of what was happening in the central area.

Thisreallywas the fight to end it all.

The outcome of this altercation would determine the final rankings of the heir wars' first round.

And though all of the participants, except for Eris, of course, seemed like they were evenly matched...

...this fight would end sooner than anyone in the audience expected.

Chapter 1683 Victor [10]

The fifth terminal was extremely intuitive. When August questioned what he needed to do, he found himself in a bottomless pit of questions without answers.

However, when he started acting just to see what kind of privileges he had in this simulated world, he almost instantly figured out how to solve the puzzle.

In fact, the focus of the puzzle wasn't even the world that he saw when he first activated it.

There was a second world, a dead one, not far from that one.

It had all of the necessary elements to create life, but it didn't have the means to undergo the proper reactions.

August's job was to use the first world as a guideline to help the second world grow.

Once it birthed society, he succeeded.

It was tough.

August didn't have to comprehend other laws to put them into use. Since he had omnipotence in this world, he could put them in place without actually knowing how they worked.

It was like a game.

Still, August had to learn how the different laws worked together to support life. He had to learn how they leaned on each other, conflicted, and found harmony in a system that simply couldn't be created by an individual.

The universe was beautiful, and though August was never meant to marvel at its beauty, he couldn't help but do so.

After all, he was, in a sense, comprehending its inner workings with a puzzle like this.

Nevertheless, he took it in stride and did end up finishing the fifth terminal. This was just a few minutes after Mikael's massive explosion.

The problem was what happened next.

Valerie and Mikael were off doing their own thing. As the entire forest was Valerie's domain, their battle wouldn't be leaving it any time soon, if at all.

In the midst of so much continuous action, people tended to forget about Eris.

She was the one doing the least. She was struggling, but against a beast that was created to make her struggle.

Her fight simply wasn't as exciting as what everyone else was doing. Her goal was to corral the beast, to wear it down so that she could eventually unleash her full power and kill it.

That meant she was only using the most basic attacks, never transmuting her darkness too far away from its original oceanic form.

When Eris was the one in front of it, the beast looked like a glamorized punching bag no matter how hard it tried.

But the completion of the fifth terminal removed all of its aggro from her.

The beast instinctually knew that there was something wrong. There was only one terminal remaining, and that piece of technology was paramount to its survival.

If that was also completed, then it would die.

Even if it didn't have much sentience, it could understand that much.

Eris was a threat that it had already registered. It didn't need confirmation to know that she was dangerous.

But August, the person who was manipulating the terminals, was a threat that it had only discovered now.

And one that was far more dangerous than Eris.

OOOOOOOOOOH!

The beast bellowed, its flaming eyes blazing to another level.

It turned its body as a wave of power shot through its bones and nerves. Its eyes were now focused on August.

His eyes widened in response.

'Oh no.'

This wasn't in his predictions, but now that the situation was in front of him, he had to admit that he should've considered it.

He was the only one who could activate the sixth terminal.

Which meant that from now on, the beast's full attention would be on him.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

They were not attacks, but footsteps. Each one caused the ground to rumble and tear as the beast charged towards August.

It shattered Eris' swamp of darkness instantly. Nobody watching could believe that it was being restricted by the power just moments ago.

Still, regardless of where it got its power, the beast found a way to reach August at any cost.

To it, he was the most important person in the room.

'Tch!'

August quickly leapt out of the way.

He was lucky that it was slow, but its power made up for that weakness.

BOOOOOM!

The elephant stomped into the ground. A wave of earthen spikes erupted forth and chased after August, forcing him to jump out of the way.



BANG!

He had the wind knocked out of him by the pressure that followed those earth spikes.

But, he avoided being skewered, so he couldn't complain.

'That thing...'

August has a huge frown on his face.

He obviously couldn't handle it.

In the second of respite that he had, he glanced at Eris, only to receive a shrug.

"If you can bring it back to the inner ring, then I can take it from you."

In classic Eris fashion, she wasn't unwilling to help, but she wouldn't go out of her way to do it.

If August could earn his right to survive, then he could.

If he fell here, then that was that.

It was quite simple in her mind, especially when the other party was a stranger, moreover, a competitor.

But August clearly didn't take it well.

He gritted his teeth and faced the beast that was once again charging at him at full force.

'The inner ring, huh?'

That was doable.

'If I can read a Holy Clan genius, if I can read a God...'

His eyes sharpened.

'...then I can read a mindless beast.'

Eris thought she had given him a challenge, but she'd actually made August's job a lot easier.

Plus, since she'd said those words out loud instead of using sound transmission, the audience had heard them. She couldn't go back on her promise without breaking her image in their eyes.

OOOOOOOOOOH!

The elephant raised its trunk. Its eyes burned as energy gathered in its tusks.

Two massive beams of energy blasted towards August, surrounding a ball of flames that did the same.

All three attacks were simple on the surface, but the destructive force they contained was nothing to laugh at.

'Flexibility.'

That was the exact concept of water that he needed right now.

He took note of his surroundings.

Where the sixth terminal was, where Eris was, where Valerie and Mikael were...

By the time he already had them all noted, the energy was already upon him.

VOOOOOM!

He stomped his foot again. Mana burst from the ground and created a massive wall of white water that took most of the energy into its form.

August's arms shook as he manipulated it to the best of his ability, but once he actually felt the elephant's energy for himself, he gave up on trying to control it.

'This thing really is a mid-level 4th class at least.'

Even if it was mindless, its power was at a level that August couldn't fight against until he himself entered that mystical realm.

BOOM!

August let the power go loose.

Most of it had already been redirected, so he didn't have to worry about the consequences.

Just as when he retracted Mikael's light, the beams split and hit the walls, some of the trees in Valerie's forest, and even Eris.

BOOOOOOOOOM!

The elephant was already barreling forward by the time August finished dealing with its previous attack.

When the white water came down and August saw it again, it was already too late for him to do anything.

'It's too late.'

He crossed his arms in front of his chest, straightened his body, and prepared to take the hit.

'This is going to hurt.'

It would hurt, but he could use it to his advantage as long as he tried.'

As crowds watched on, as Eris, Mikael, and Valerie turned their attention to him for a split second, everyone saw the collision between August and the beast.

To say it was brutal was an understatement.

This was the first time August had taken a serious hit since the beginning of the heir wars.

And as he expected...

It really, really, really hurt.

Chapter 1684 Victor [11]

BANG!

August's body crashed against the far wall. It wasn't a sight that anyone wanted to see.

Blood shot out of his mouth, spraying into the air. That was something people were used to seeing. The real brutality was elsewhere.

The sheer force at which August hit the wall was enough to flatten a normal person.

His blood splattered all over it as his back was torn to shreds.

As he fell to the ground and collapsed on his knees, a wave of gasps dawned on the crowd.

August had been doing so well in this tournament that they'd forgotten what his actual strength level was.

He was able to fight against some of the weaker 4th class beings, but at this time, August was the only 3rd class participating at all.

After all, while the restrictions allowed anyone under 100 to participate, no sane person would send their weaker geniuses to compete.

There were people nearing the age limit who had been training for decades. They'd accumulated power that a mere teenager could never match, which practically meant that only those with the talent to reach the same level faster could properly compete.

Someone like Eris, despite being in her late twenties, qualified as this type of person.

Someone like August, on the other hand, was a real underdog.

Nobody expected him to win when they looked at things practically.

But, after seeing him fight for his place in this competition, they couldn't help but root for him.

That impact was terrifying.

It didn't just knock the wind and blood out of him, it shook his brain around and made him woozy.

The entire world was spinning, but August could still see the elephantine beast charging at him once again.

'Is this the end?'

It wasn't August's thought, but that of everyone watching him.

They couldn't see a way for him to get out of this situation, even with his knowledge of the labyrinth.

August didn't think the same.

His state was worse for wear. He knew better than anyone just how much his body was impacted by that strike.

However, he had a plan that he needed to follow, and he wouldn't stop until he'd completed it.

A grin spread across his face.

His blood boiled.

Death. He could feel it.

August wasn't like his father. He didn't get a rush out of being on the edge of death. He didn't chase the high that came with battle.

Still, when he found himself in that position, every bone in his body rebelled.

Every single cell that made up the organism known as August Void revolted, refusing to give up.

He stood up, wobbling slightly as he stared at the elephant.

'My mana still works.'

The activation of his energy hadn't been inhibited in the slightest.

'Then...'

August dashed out.

His speed was far slower than before, but he turned the ground to ice to help him move.

The elephantine beast just barely missed him, but the winds that followed it still pushed him away.

August looked behind him and smiled.

'Good. This is the way.'

He just needed to get that thing to the inner ring.

Eris was probably hoping for more of a show, but he wasn't going to give her what she wanted.

The beast was mindless. Corralling it wasn't an issue at all.

Since it was seeing red, it was attacking without a second thought.

It turned around when it realized that August had escaped and sent another slew of beam attacks rushing towards him.

This time, August was prepared for their power.

He summoned another wall of white water.

Recognizing the wall as the very thing that let it hit him before, the beast charged again, refusing to use the full capability of its energy-based attacks.

August couldn't stand its strength.

When it charged through that water wall, it would kill him once and for all.

Or so it thought.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Its steps rocked the entire arena once again.

It crashed through the white water nearly at the same time as its energy did, but when it got to the other side...

...it realized that August was already gone.

It was too late.

Instead of trying to block or disperse the energy beams, August had gone prone to the ground and expended a large portion of his mana.

He didn't create a thin layer of ice as he'd done before. That would just shatter under the beast's weight. August used the underground reservoir to destroy all of the earth between it and him, and when it reached the surface and created a river in the space that was left, he froze it solid.



What the elephantine beast found on the other side of the white water was a surface that had no traction, a surface that could support its entire weight without a problem.

And despite its massive strength, it did the same thing that a regular animal would have done.

It slipped.

The beast lost its grip on the ground and slid across the ice, panicking as it tried to stabilize itself.

It was already something of a miracle that the beast managed to keep itself upright, but, it couldn't stop its momentum in time.

It slid and slid and slid. August was already gone, but there was indeed someone in its path.

'That little bastard...'

Eris clicked her tongue.

The beast was gaining momentum with every second.

There was a massive elephant crashing straight towards her.

It happened in a way that nobody had expected, but August managed to trick the beast into sliding straight back into the inner ring.

And, because she'd already made a promise, Eris was forced to accept that she'd have to take the beast's aggro again.

August was already gone, far away from the beast's perceptive radius.

He limped as fast as he could and made it to the sixth terminal.

All he needed to do was solve it.

He needed to solve it and cross the finish. Only then could he pass out.

As his left leg flailed around, as blood dripped from his back and created a river, as his wounds became worse and worse, this motivation was the only thing that kept him going.

This win...

The crowd now understood just how badly he wanted it.

His determination was infectious.

Valerie felt her blood rush as her own desire to win grew to mimic his.

She looked at Mikael, who was already falling to her advantages, with cold eyes.

Valerie was already rushing their battle, using cheap tricks to wear him down.

But now that August had shown something like that, she wasn't going to keep doing the same thing.

Mikael needed to go down now because she needed to get to August as soon as possible to support him.

It was an opportunity for Valerie to show the crowd exactly what she had as well.

Just...it was unfortunate for Mikael.

He was trying his hardest, but the remaining enemies were all the banes of his existence.

No matter what he tried, he couldn't gain an advantage against any of them.

His power wasn't enough to overcome them, and his skill was being equally matched by theirs.

Unlike some of the other geniuses who'd participated in the labyrinth challenge, Mikael really did deserve to be here.

Unfortunately, he really was going to be manhandled and thrown away.

That was the tragic future that had been written for him in the books of fate.

And there was nothing he could do to change it.

Chapter 1685 Victor [12]

The battle between Valerie and Mikael was entertaining, but not nearly as much as what August was doing.

People watched it because it was quite even at first, but the gap started to show itself as the minutes flew past.

Mikael had a domain out as well. The entire forest was backed by a rising sun that enhanced Mikael's power.

The problem was that Valerie stole his energy and used it to enhance her own as well.

It wasn't something he allowed. As they fought, Mikael realized that his control wasn't anywhere near Valerie's level. He tried to stop her, but he really couldn't do anything about it.

He had to go home and train specifically to fight people who had elemental advantages against him.

He knew how to deal with dark dragons and he knew how to deal with water dragons, but he'd never interacted with wood dragons before in his life.

The fact that her clan had been cast out of Arulion gave Valerie an unexpected advantage, and as she exploited it for everything it could give, she took the edge over Mikael.

Her every attack made him more weary. Her every attack drew away just a little bit of his vitality.

It wasn't much in the moment, but with the passing of time, it stacked up and created a massive gap between them.

Mikael was tired. Not because he ran out of energy, but because Valerie kept stealing it.

Mikael tried to fight, but no matter what he did, Valerie always maintained the upper hand.

Towards the end, it became a bit depressing to see him continue to fight.

Even Valerie felt the same.

That was why she ended it fast.

She appeared right in front of Mikael, who could no longer use light to increase his speed.

She bashed his head in with the trunk of a dead tree, and when she saw that he was barely standing, she wrapped him with roots and buried him in the ground.

At that point, it didn't even matter if Mikael was still in the competition.

Valerie had already left him and the first as a whole.

She arrived near August, who was pushing himself to finish the sixth terminal, and put a massive wooden barrier around him.

August didn't look up from the terminal, but Valerie could feel his gratitude.

He also wanted them to win together, so Valerie being here was perfect.

'It's all been set up.'

August had a lot of ups and downs since he entered the central area, but everything was put in place before Mikael ever arrived.

He just needed to finish the terminals to activate everything he set up when he was at the third one.

And though the sixth terminal was also nuanced like its predecessor, August didn't need to think anymore.

The maze had been completely dissected by him. Everything it did and everything it could do was within his expectations.

BOOOOOOOOOOM!

A massive explosion rang out as Eris kept fighting the beast, which, by the way, was still trying to get to August.

Valerie also held it back, creating barrier after barrier to completely separate it from him.

August did his best to move as fast as possible, but he was currently half-crippled. His speed was naturally slower, especially when he couldn't enhance it using mana.

BOOOOOM!

The beast crashed against one of Valerie's barriers.

Eris was somewhat leading it to them to put pressure on them, but she was making sure it didn't get too close.

After all, she needed August to finish too.

Subtly, he was being supported by both other active players in the central area.

Maybe that was why he was able to do it without inhibition.

The sixth terminal had a challenge similar to the last. August was forced to raise the society he created in the fifth terminal and help them thrive.

It was hard to be a ruler, but through the terminals, August was able to gain a little bit of practical experience.

And since he completed each and every one of them, he showed everyone that he was worthy of the throne.

No, he showed them that he was born for it.

There was a subtle beep as he finished the sixth and final terminal.

It sunk into the ground as August and Valerie watched on.

The entire array shined. A mechanism was activated, though very few knew what it was meant to do.

"What now?" Valerie asked.

She felt rushed, but August had a relaxed demeanor that didn't originate from his injuries.

He actually looked relieved, like he'd already won.

August grinned as if to confirm her suspicions.

"Now, we fall."

But those words did anything but.

"...!"

Valerie didn't have time to respond. The ground opened beneath them and swallowed them whole.

It was an abrupt change, one that nobody in the crowd was expecting.

Wasn't this the final portion of the labyrinth?

Why had they been transferred elsewhere, and why weren't the screens showing what happened to them?

A commotion spread through the onlookers, but they really were the only ones confused.

Eris immediately felt the change.

The beast halted for just a second, and a red aura covered its entire body.

She knew exactly what that meant.

It had entered its final phase.

For most beasts, that would be the most threatening part of their transformation.

But for this one...

BOOOOM!

The sea of darkness broke through all of Valerie's barriers.

And what was revealed when they fell...

'They're gone.'

Eris grinned.

It seemed that not only August but Valerie had also been caught in the trap mechanism connected to the terminals.

'This is my win.'

She glanced at the beast.



Its aura was far more massive than it had ever been before, but that aura came at a price.

All of the tiny wounds that it had accumulated were now bleeding profusely.

The beast was huffing furiously as it finally felt all of the wear it had gained during the battle thus far.

Eris clapped her hands together.

'Emptiness.'

She released the entirety of her power.

The central area went dark.

It was pitch-black, even to the viewers outside.

They only understood what was happening when Eris lit a small light to illuminate herself and the beast.

It was frozen in time, unable to move or even think.

Its flaming eyes were filled with emotions that nobody expected to see, emotions that could only present themselves in conscious entities.

Confusion, panic, terror.

Nobody understood why it was showing them such emotions.

And nobody would get the chance.

The small light that Eris created illuminated that thing.

A blade bigger than the entire length of the central area.

It swung down in the silent room, melding in with the darkness.

And the instant it made contact with the beast...

SHIIING!

A sound like metal whizzing through the air.

With it as the only indicator of what happened, the beast's head fell to the ground.

The darkness cleared, giving the crowd full visibility again.

They saw Erisa standing over the fallen beast's corpse, and, in the next second...

...she disappeared as well.

The screens went black and disappeared before being replaced with only two projections.

One showed Eris.

And the other showed August and Valerie.

The only question was...

Now that they'd all left the central area, just what were they doing?

Chapter 1686 Victor [13]

Eris knew she would be transported when the beast died, but she expected to be in a corridor.

That was where the path to the finish line was. It was where she rightfully deserved to be.

But what was this?

Why was she stuck in eternal darkness, unable to decipher anything?

Those questions really only existed in her mind for a few moments. Almost instantly, her mind processed exactly what had happened.

'That little...'

"BASTARD!"

She roared.

There was only one person who could mess with the mechanisms of the central room, and that was the one person who had interacted with them.

August Void.

The genius that was originally supposed to be her stepping stone...

Had he used her as a stepping stone instead...?

"Unbelievable..."

She truly couldn't fathom it.

Some random bastard from a clan she didn't care to know the name of dared to provoke her?

He dared to play her for a fool?!

This was the space where he was supposed to end up. It was a place where he'd be trapped until everyone else in the trial had finished.

But, now that it was her prison instead...

'See what happens.'

Her eyes were practically bloodshot.

She meant it.

He would see what happened when someone decided that a member of the Noct Clan could be messed with.

This place couldn't hold her.

Nothing could hold her.

Nothing could stop her from finding him and slaughtering him.

That much, no matter what her circumstances were, she could guarantee.

Eris' power roared to life.

The blackness around her started to shrink as she consumed it, taking it into her body.

August thought he'd gotten off easy because he didn't understand the exact nature of the trap he'd sent Eris to deal with.

Little did he know that his troubles were far from over.

Whether it be the last few moments of this event or the remainder of his life once he left...

...Eris would ensure that he'd suffer.

\*\*\*

As expected, August and Valerie ended up in the corridor that Eris was expecting to see.

"Huu..."

August took a deep breath.

"We made it!" Valerie exclaimed.

"We made it, but we still need to hurry," August replied.

He was certain that Eris wouldn't come for them any time soon, but it was best to not take risks when dealing with people like her.

"Hey, help me out a little. Let's get to the finish. We can decide who goes first and who goes second once we get there."

August couldn't necessarily walk on his own at the moment.

Luckily, Valerie was something of a healer. She wasn't the best yet, but her element allowed her to do basic healing even without experience.

She used her mana on August's leg, which allowed him to move properly.

It wouldn't function if he had to do more than that, but it was enough for now.

"Let's go."

August nodded.

He and Valerie rushed through the corridor. The blue light was only around 500 meters away. They could cross it in a matter of minutes.

It seemed like an anticlimactic finish, but this was exactly what August had been working towards.

A calm run to the finish, unobstructed by threats.

That was how it went.

At least, for the majority of the distance.

Five steps.

She appeared when they were only five steps away from the finish line.

In her full glory, with fury in her eyes, Eris Noct appeared at the end of the corridor.

And her aura was nothing to scoff at.

August had severely underestimated her. What he assumed would take her at least half an hour to escape was dealt with in a matter of five minutes or less.

And somehow, not only had she dealt with it in that short span of time, but she'd also made her way here.

August didn't know if she was cheating or if she did it legitimately, but it didn't matter.

Eris was already here, which meant that if they couldn't make these last five steps in time, they would lose.

August and Valerie were several hundred meters away, yet they still felt suffocated when she appeared.

"You. Dirty. Little. Bastard."

Her words echoed through the corridor. Each one was enunciated clearly, and somehow they all landed before August and Valerie could take another step.

They did take that step, though.

Four steps remained until they crossed the finish line.

The moment Eris appeared, time slowed immensely.

It was sluggish as if even it couldn't exist properly in her presence.

Every single moment was excruciatingly long. Every step took ages to touch the ground.

They had only taken a single step, but Eris was already acting.

"DIE!"

VOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

Her aura raged. Pure blackness enveloped the entire corridor, leaving only the soft blue light of the finish line visible.

They crawled out from the walls, the floor, and the emptiness above; creatures undefinable by common means.

They were pure manifestations of Eris' power. Each and everyone was deadly.

August only had time for one thought.

'She was lying.'

The entire time, Eris had been hiding a large portion of her talent and power. Perhaps it was to throw off the other Holy Clans, but it didn't matter anymore.

Eris was mad. She was so furious that she didn't even care if others learned how powerful she was.

She didn't give a single ounce of thought to the fact that the people she was attacking could both be ended with just a slight move from her.

Consumed by rage, Eris just acted.



And this was the result of that.

A massive horde of dark beasts, loyal to her command, charging through the tight corridor that led to the finish line.

Three steps.

There were only three steps left before they crossed it, but that wave was already upon them.

Two steps.

August and Valerie rapidly put up any defenses they could, but the swarm tore through them like they were made of paper.

August felt something tear off of his leg. Luckily, it was the leg that was still dysfunctional from his previous injuries, so it didn't affect him much.

But, when one of those things gripped his other ankle in its mouth and thrashed around, August truly felt the pain.

"Khhh...!"

He put mana into that ankle to temporarily ignore the damage.

One step.

One step was all there was separating August and Valerie from the finish line.

That space filled with soft blue light, that very obvious indicator that their challenge would end in but a second, was right in front of them.

They could feel it. If they reached out, they could touch it.

But, that one step couldn't be covered.

Eris was already here. She teleported through the hall and arrived above them in the two steps they'd taken since the swarm appeared.

And she was still attacking.

August gritted his teeth and made a decision.

His foot was already moving to complete that last step, but instead of letting it touch the ground, he pushed off of his other foot and turned his body.

Bang!

"Ah...!"

Valerie made a small sound as his body collided with hers.

She stumbled and flew forward. She thought that was the end of her, but her fall was orchestrated with a purpose.

As Valerie flew forward, August's body naturally concluded its turn to face the incoming horde.

He couldn't see what happened to her, but he grinned anyway.

It wasn't like he could check.

The only thing he could feel, see, sense, and hear was the immense force crushing down on him from above.

It overloaded his senses and tried to drive him insane, but his mind didn't suffer the effects of its corrosion.

His body, though...

He tried to move his eyes up to see what was about to hit him, but he was perceiving time in milliseconds. He didn't have nearly the opening to do it.

August's body flew through the air, just barely touching the finish line as he fell towards the ground.

And...

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

That was the last thing he saw.

The terrifying beasts in front of him, Eris above him, and a wall of darkness crushing him flat.

His vision went black.

His mind left the world of the living.

And that was the end of it.

That was the last memory August had of the labyrinth.

## Chapter 1687 Allegiances [1]

"Hnngh..."

August's mind returned to consciousness in an extremely groggy state.

He actually came back to the world of the living before his body did, so for a few seconds, he sat there and did his best to open his eyes before succeeding.

Still, he eventually did.

Luckily, the few seconds he spent with them closed let him register the light shining through his eyelids and adapt to it. He wasn't immediately blinded when he opened them, but it did still hurt.

He sat up, curiously feeling his body.

'I'm...fine?'

The last thing he remembered was being murdered by Eris Noct. He didn't expect to wake up with not a single indication of injury on his body.

But, that was the case.

It was the power of draconic healing. August's body was a mess when he came out of the labyrinth.

He'd been protected by the mechanisms in place, but his limbs were severely injured and his chest was caved in. An average person would have died to such injuries, but his "death" to Eris still took place under the restrictions of the labyrinth.

As such, he'd been saved. Quite thoroughly, at that.

'I must be in the medical center.'

He was surrounded by empty beds in a small room with some equipment in it. There wasn't much else other than the door that led to the outside, but that was where his answers originated from.

It opened, giving way for a woman to walk in.

"Oh? You're awake?" She said as soon as she saw August.

"You are..." He replied, despite how obvious the answer was.

"I am the one who made sure that you wouldn't suffer from any lasting injuries. On that note, shouldn't you fix your attitude?"

She said it playfully, but August took those words seriously.

She was a healer, so of course she deserved respect.

"Thank you."

He bowed his head respectfully, causing her eyes to slightly widen in surprise.

"There's no need. I'm just doing my job."

August nodded.

"Is the competition over? How long have I been unconscious?"

He could understand the gist of it all with the context clues that he had, but he still didn't know how long he'd been out.

Nor did he know how that final moment actually panned out.

The nurse didn't answer him immediately. Instead, she took a device and scanned his body before looking over the information that appeared on a screen she held.

Her eyes went from side to side as she read through it, and when she finished, she nodded with a smile.

"I could answer those questions, but it's better for you to find out for yourself. Plus, you woke up at a perfect time."

She walked to his side and helped him remove some of the sensors and machines that were attached to his body.

"Right outside of that door is the arena that you were in before. If you want to find out how everything ended..."

"...then why don't you go see for yourself? The final ceremony is going to begin soon."

"Oh?"

If that was true, then he could've only been out for a few hours at most.

He stood up rapidly before realizing that he had nothing but a gown on.

"Ah...my clothes...?"

"They're on the table over there," the nurse said, giggling slightly.

"I will give you space so you can change. But, before I leave, I guess I should be the first one to say it."

She smiled, bowing slightly before opening the door behind her.

"Congratulations, August Void."

With that, she left.

August raised an eyebrow.

'Is that good news?'

Did he succeed in doing what he wanted?

If so, then he needed to get to the final ceremony as soon as possible.

August hurriedly put his clothes on and rushed out of the medical center.

He found himself in a tunnel leading to the arena. Even from here, he could hear the crowd and the announcer's voice.

"Look at this timing, everyone!" The announcer yelled, energy filling the air with his every word.

"I have just received news that our star of the day has awoken! He should be coming now, so may I present to you..."

August had been slowly walking through the tunnel while listening to the announcer, but hearing his words, he started to jog.

All he could see was a blinding light at the end of the tunnel, but he knew what he would find on the other side.

"A boy far younger and less powerful than everyone else, yet a man who found a place above them all!  
May I present to you..."

August rushed into the light.

He was swallowed by it, enveloped in all its glory as it faded and allowed him to see what was now around him.

"August Void!"

RAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!

Like a thundering volcano erupting, like an earthquake splitting the world, the crowd roared with such fervor that the entire arena shook.

The sun shined through the open roof above, illuminating the tens of thousands of people in the stands.

Tens of thousands of people who all had their eyes on him.

Excitement, adoration, respect...their emotions hit him like a tidal wave, instantly overwhelming his senses.

He stumbled a little as he took it in.

The labyrinth was gone. The arena floor was inhabited by only a podium and a set of seats prepared for the geniuses who didn't place and the elites who had the right to sit in such prestigious positions.

There were two people on the podium and one spot open.



August grinned when he saw it.

The feeling of the crowd's acknowledgement, that podium spot that told everyone that he had what it took to become the emperor...

He reveled in this atmosphere.

This feeling of being above ten thousand people, the feeling of knowing that even more were reacting the same way outside the arena...

It gave August another reason to become the Dragon Emperor.

These would be his people once he took that position.

With their overwhelming support, August walked up to the podium and took his place. The announcer couldn't even say another word over the cheers of the crowd.

"And that's it!"

Still, he put on a show worthy of his position.

"Our top three finishers in the first round of the heir wars!"

He waved his arm flamboyantly, and a massive projection appeared in the air.

"In third place, August Void!"

He looked a bit awkward, but perhaps that was his charm.

"In second place..."

"Eris Noct!"

If there was one thing that was clear whether through the projection or in reality, it was Eris' killing intent.

From the moment August appeared, it had been barely constrained. But, with the atmosphere being as positive as it was, neither August nor the audience took a single second to consider her emotions.

After all, she was the villain of this round.

And, she was only in second place.

The victor's position went exactly where it was meant to be.

"And in first place, our overall winner...Valerie Revell!"

She also looked awkward, but it was only because she felt conflicted about her win.

Still, seeing August smiling at her, proud that she'd made it to that place, she felt more comfortable as well.

She raised her arm in a pose of victory, and the crowd went wild.

It wasn't just about how thrilling the labyrinth challenge had been.

It was the fact that two of the three podium spots had been taken by commoners.

Above the noble clans, above even a Holy Clan stood a commoner.

And for a crowd made up of mainly people on their side of the class divide...

That meant everything.

Chapter 1688 Allegiances [2]

The final ceremony wasn't too complex. It was something that would be done after every round of the competition, so it couldn't be too much work to do.

The top three would be placed on a podium and celebrated as they were, and the next round would be announced.

That was the end of it.

The cheers of the crowd never seemed to fade, though.

August, Valerie, and Eris were led out into a separate tunnel from which they could covertly leave the arena. The rest of the geniuses also followed.

All the way, they listened to those cheers.

For some, it was motivation. For some, it was envy. For some, it was hatred. And for some, it was joy.

Their mixture of emotions would become the norm as the heir wars continued. The disparity in points would become larger and larger until only a select few could hope to feel the more positive emotions connected to this departing moment.

Unfortunately, not everyone could be happy with what they had.

Valerie, Eris, and August were respectively rewarded with ten, eight, and five points according to the heir wars system.

There wasn't a huge gap between them, but they were far ahead of anyone else.

And, they were the first podium finishers of the entire event.

This was huge for all of them, however, Eris was too caught up in what happened to feel any joy.

She had been thoroughly humiliated.

Even after using so much power on a mere third class dragon, she still finished only second.

It was unacceptable.

And it was all the fault of the boy who she just learned was a commoner.

Eris wasn't one to care about the class divide. It didn't matter to her at all.

But, she couldn't stand the fact that someone of that level, someone who had far fewer opportunities and resources than her, was able to make a fool out of her.

It didn't make sense.

No, it couldn't be allowed.

"You're dead."

She muttered it under her breath as they walked through the tunnel, but said it loud enough for August to hear her.

He didn't say anything in response.

August and Valerie glanced at each other as if understanding each other's intent.

"She's probably just talking big, but it's true that we'll be under a lot of pressure," Valerie said through sound transmission."

"Yup," August responded with the same method, "we don't really have the means or the time to deal with Holy Clans right now. I don't even think we can deal with noble clans yet."

August had performed above his means and naturally attracted attention.

Valerie was not only associated with him, but also the first-place finisher. Whether it was a product of her own efforts or outside help didn't matter.

If she wasn't valuable, then she would've never been in that last corridor at all.

Some people would try to recruit them, while others would do everything possible to make sure they couldn't repeat the same scene again.

At the end of the day, to most nobles, the commoners were only participating in the heir wars to show crowds how great their own geniuses were.

For commoners to actually win was never part of the plan.

"So, basically..." Valerie said.

"Yeah. We're running."

August finished her thought matter-of-factly.

Eris hadn't taken her eyes off of them for even a second.

They would part when they made it out of this place, but she'd likely send people out to find them instantaneously.

They had to escape before that happened, and luckily for them, the method was already in their hands.

It happened just like that.

The geniuses were led to an isolated area where several people were waiting.

Those people would be responsible for transporting them anywhere they wanted to go.

Eris gave the two common geniuses a final glance before taking a portal back to her clan.

August and Valerie, on the other hand, took a portal back to Arragon.

It was just a temporary stop.

The instant they arrived, they found an isolated alleyway and teleported again, this time to the training island Damien had gifted them.

This was the perfect place for them to hide away until their turn to participate came again.

They could get all of the information they needed through the emblems anyway.

There wasn't much different about the island when they arrived, but there was one specific change that they noticed instantly.

Melania was gone again.

"It's starting soon, huh?" Valerie commented.

August nodded.



Now that the first round had ended, it was time for the second group of geniuses to show their worth.

Melania had another two weeks before her turn to compete, but she'd already left the island.

The two of them had no idea where she went, but after seeing how Melania had been changing in the time that they watched her train, they didn't worry in the slightest.

Melania was a different animal and the same beast.

She had blossomed into a heavenly genius on her own, and, needless to say...

Neither August nor Valerie could wait to see her on the big stage.

\*\*\*

Those last two weeks; Melania spent them well.

She didn't return to the training island because it couldn't give her what she needed. She spent all of that time in the world Damien gave her, a place where she could torture herself without interruption.

It was a brutal way to phrase her training, but that was the truth of the matter.

Melania had spent the past month enduring torture for the sake of growth.

She mimicked the boulder problem. She fought the deep seas and the depths of depravity as she starved and suffocated in a desert.

Melania was a case of someone who had an extreme desire for power.

As she had been living, she didn't have the opportunity to discover it. All of her actions had to be taken for the sake of others.

However, now that she was in this place where geniuses ran amok, where training was above all else, she was able to unlock her full potential.

After first hearing that she only had a month, she was perturbed, unable to see herself at a higher level in that time.

That opinion only changed when she experienced it.

As August and Valerie returned to their training on the island, Melania completed her own and returned to Fort Halleya.

It was now her turn to enter the arena, to compete against geniuses who stood above anything and everything she'd known until a few weeks ago.

Just as her comrades had done a few weeks before, Melania stepped through a portal and arrived in the arena.

She also saw her opponents on a screen in the small room she was provided. She also heard the announcer's voice introducing them.

And soon enough, she was also transported into the arena with the rest of her group.

The announcer's voice became clearer as she and her opponents observed the arena they'd entered.

It wasn't a labyrinth. The challenge was also completely different.

The reactions were mixed, as they always would be when the geniuses heard what they needed to do.

But for Melania specifically, the only thing she heard was good news.

This challenge...it was as if it had been perfectly tailored to her.

If it was like this, then she was confident in finding a way to the podium.

That was a thought that she never believed she could have before today.

Chapter 1689 Allegiances [3]

Unlike the first round, the second round consisted of three separate events. If one person could win multiple times, they'd be granted the win. Otherwise, the winners of the separate events would fight to determine their podium positions.

The first round was an obstacle course.

Sandstone walls roughly fifty feet high sectioned off the course and created a sort of labyrinth scheme for the geniuses to follow.

However, they only needed to follow the path. They didn't need to find the correct way through.

In this challenge, it was what lay within the paths that mattered. Challenges that tested their agility, dexterity, strength, balance, and other bodily strengths were everywhere.

There were no limits on how the geniuses could pass through these areas. As long as they could make it to the other side, their solution was valid.

The obstacles, of course, scaled to match the strength of the people facing them. This was to prevent stronger geniuses from just leaping over them.

Naturally, flying was also disallowed.

It was a sufficiently complicated course.

At least, for most.

Melania had an undeniable advantage in the first sector of this round.

She looked over the sandstone walls and walked through the path to see just what was waiting for her on the other side.

She found herself at the first obstacle quite soon.

The path broke away, separated from the other side by a massive river.

There were stone steps all across the river's surface, making it obvious that she was meant to use them to cross.

However, each one moved. Some bobbed up and down. While others moved several meters in random directions.

Since there wasn't an overarching pattern, it was a matter of both instinct and wits.

'Hmm...'

Melania furrowed her brows.

The others were probably already well on their way through this first obstacle.

'But do I have to do that?'

She looked at the walls around her again and had a thought.

'They said anything goes as long as I don't fly.'

Any solution she came up with was good, right?

Melania walked back to the start and once again stared at the wall in front of her.

The look in her eyes changed. The emotion within died, replaced by a sharp will to execute whatever action she was about to take.

She stepped forward twice and raised her leg.

Her muscles tensed, power flowed through her every fiber, and as she brought it back down again...

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

The entire course felt her wrath.

The earth split. Cracks ran up the walls and destroyed them, causing them to fall to the ground in massive chunks.

The tremor she caused only spread and spread. Her section of the course was enveloped in dust and the chaotic rumbling of countless structures falling to the ground.

The audience's attention was immediately sucked into what she was doing.

But there was nothing much to see until it was over.

After several minutes of pure cacophony, the dust cleared, revealing to everyone what just one stomp was able to do.

There was nothing separating Melania from the end of the course.

All walls, all obstructions, and all obstacles had been decimated.

The river from before was now filled with massive chunks of stone.

There were many sections of plain flat stone where the challenges likely lined the walls, and there were even more scenes of obstacles like walls of moving blades that were now just piles of scrap metal on the ground.

This...was not how the challenge was supposed to go.

This was a gross misrepresentation of just how hard it was to get through the course.



It was completely unexpected, but as the tournament staff took another look at the rules they'd established, they realized that nothing about her actions violated the rules.

She didn't fly, and technically, she didn't cheat by using her strength.

The restriction was specifically put in place so a 4th class dragon and a 3rd class dragon experienced the same difficulty on the same course.

It was meant to assure that they wouldn't abuse their power, but was that what Melania did?

She faced obstacles that were properly scaled to her power level.

Yet, with physical strength alone, she was able to destroy them all.

That was within her rights as a contestant. It was her way of showing the people running the tournament that she was more than what they marked her as.

And, as if to rub it in their faces, Melania followed the original path.

She casually hopped across the massive chunks of sandstone in the river and made it to the other side. She walked with ease through a chasm that suffered the same fate, one that she was meant to cross by climbing the walls.

She did every obstacle she found, but because she'd destroyed the course, it was practically just showing off.

Naturally, Melania was the first to finish.

The second didn't join her until almost an hour had passed.

Melania's training was anything but useless.

Another commoner shocked the world in the first few rounds of the heir wars, but she wasn't the only one.

Lucas was also a part of her group, and Ophelia would appear in the group after them.

As a group, including August and Valerie, the five of them were the ones representing the common people.

They were the only ones able to stand on equal footing with the rest of their competition.

No, perhaps equal footing was an understatement.

If it was this group of geniuses, who achieved great things with their earnest efforts and talents...

...there was a chance for the common people to start dreaming about defeating their oppressors.

\*\*\*

It was something that was always bound to happen.

Half of the reason for August to participate in the heir wars was to give the common people spirit. The other half was, of course, to take back his throne.

That throne was not empty, but it also was not held by an enemy.

For someone like August, the Dragon Emperor was an entity too far away to understand.

But to his father, it was different.

Damien stuck around to watch the labyrinth challenge. He was in the stands as August put up a valiant effort and beat out his competition.

The moment it ended, however, he was already gone.

August had returned to the island to do his own thing, which Damien expected.

Now that his son was properly established in the outside world, he could start focusing on his own affairs again.

An entire month had flown by since he slowed his search for the Dragon Emperor.

Coincidentally enough, it was during that month when he found proper clues leading to that man's location.

It wasn't much, but it was more than enough for someone with Damien's capabilities.

So, as soon as he returned to the search with his main body, it was already over.

The Dragon Emperor, a man whose true name had been forgotten by society, a man who was only ever known in reverence by the common people who told tales about his title.

Damien arrived where that man was hiding to have a proper conversation with him.

There were some things that needed straightening out.

And if the Dragon Emperor couldn't give an appropriate explanation, then it wasn't a problem to make him disappear.

#### Chapter 1690 Allegiances [4]

Well, it would definitely cause problems, but Damien never planned on actually killing the Dragon Emperor.

Still, he wasn't going to let the man go if he was truly a disappointment. In that case, there were far worse things he could do besides just killing.

At the end of the day, the Dragon Emperor was too important of an entity to all dragons. Even if he was just a figurehead, his life was still valuable. Even if all of the Holy Clans fell, the dragons wouldn't lose hope until their Emperor was taken as well.

Damien had a certain level of respect for anyone who held the title. It wasn't an easy one to bear, especially for the more recent Dragon Emperors.

At the very least, the heir was proved that he was still trying to influence the kingdom.

Or, he had given up and was looking for someone to take the burden off of his shoulders.

The current Dragon Emperor was a so-called "Aura Dragon."

He was a dragon without an element, a dragon born to control the skies themselves. When the current Dragon Emperor rose to the throne, the heavens sang and celestial phenomena decorated the skies for eighteen days and nights.

'Or, well, that's what people say.'

Damien didn't necessarily believe it all, but since he was here to meet the man, he didn't have to waste time making assumptions.

This search had taken such a long time precisely because Damien moved with those rumors in mind.

A person with that kind of ability would likely be hiding in the skies somewhere nobody else could reach.

As he searched both the overworld and the heavens and found nothing at all, Damien began to doubt everything he'd heard.

However, he also thought that perhaps the fact that he was in a cavern hundreds of thousands of kilometers underground was a testament to just how desperate the Dragon Emperor truly was.

'It might be true. At least, to some extent.'

He sensed that being's aura, and he allowed that being to sense his as well.

He could confirm that the Dragon Emperor's physique and mana did not adhere to any of the elements.

It was more of a combination.

Damien was able to use many elements as one because he trained for years and had the Void's support. He was able to use them in their base forms with enough skill to merge them easily.

The Dragon Emperor was different. He couldn't use his elements in their base forms. They were fused since birth and manifested into a power that others couldn't understand.

He was one of several Aura Dragons, but he was the only Sky Dragon to ever exist in the world.

And yet, he was here.

This location was more than just hard to find. It was nigh impossible.

Even the Dragon Emperor himself didn't believe he could find it a second time.

He arrived here through pure luck. It was so far removed from anything he stood for and anything the Holy Clans could expect. Its special properties allowed him to communicate with and witness the outside world without it doing the same to him.

The fact that anyone had found him...

No, the fact that he could only feel that being's presence because he'd been given express permission was enough to make him resign to his fate.

He didn't show any hostility.

There was no point.

He instinctively knew that his fate was in that being's hands.

It was an emotion he'd forgotten since the last time he felt it was several tens of thousands of years ago at the very least.

But, oddly enough, it didn't feel strange.



Perhaps this was always how it was going to end.

"Why have you found me?"

His voice echoed through the cavern. It was deep and rumbling, but the weariness and exhaustion of thousands of years of isolation rang clear tones within its structure.

He was in his original form, curled up as if he hadn't moved in ages, but he raised his head to look at Damien.

That was also when Damien properly entered the tavern and saw that being.

He had ashen-grey scales and a wizened face. His horns were long and dark, and though his wings were in tatters, their span alone was enough to impress anyone who saw them.

Damien glanced over his form.

The damage didn't end with his wings. He was covered in old wounds and scars. He was missing many scales, and the sharpness that he clearly used to have was worn and dull.

'He doesn't have the aura of an emperor at all.'

It had been too long since he could properly call himself one. He had lost everything that once made him great.

"I came simply to have a conversation," Damien responded, sitting down on a chair that appeared to catch him.

"A conversation? What could a being like you learn from me?"

The question was valid. The Dragon Emperor felt inferior, which allowed him to infer what kind of power his visitor had. And he was somewhat correct in his assumptions.

Damien definitely could just read his soul and learn everything for himself. In fact, that was always in his itinerary.

"I just wanted to hear what you have to say first."

It didn't make much sense to the Dragon Emperor, but there was nothing he could do about it.

"What would you like to hear?"

"Everything," Damien responded immediately.

It was a scary word.

The Dragon Emperor was far past his prime. He had lost all of his motivation and will, but he clung to life for only a single reason.

He wanted to at least maintain a modicum of stability within the Dragon Kingdom.

He couldn't fix it, but he could stop it from getting worse.

The problem was that a non-draconic being had entered this place for the first time in many, many years. If he wanted to claim this kingdom for himself and use it for whatever purpose he had in mind...

Even if he knew he would die, he still had to stand up and fight.

That was his mentality. It was a good mentality too. The Dragon Emperor wasn't even wrong. Damien did indeed plan to seize Arulion and use it as a fighting force to protect the Heavenly World from the Sacred Abyss.

But, he didn't have any plans to do it by force.

Mostly, at least.

"I'm here to learn your story, so tell it as you please."

Those were the words that surprised the Dragon Emperor.

Rather than Arulion, he wanted to know about the emperor himself?

About his life story, his experiences?

'As expected, the thoughts of a true supreme cannot be understood.'

Still, it somewhat put his mind at ease.

The sheer helplessness he felt in Damien's presence collided with the subtle desire that existed in the depths of his heart that begged him to let at least one person know what he'd been through and provoked his voice.

He started to speak without even knowing it, and eventually, he gave in.

Even if it was a being who didn't care at all, one who had arrived on curiosity alone, as long as that being was willing to listen, then he was more than willing to tell.