

Void 1721

Chapter 1721 Duel [4]

Strangely enough, sparks flew.

They obviously weren't actual sparks. Neither water nor darkness in a situation like this could produce such an effect. The sparks that manifested were actually bits of mana that were produced by the collision of these two opposing concepts.

August's domain of pure blue water was only a few meters long. It was surrounded by Eris' darkness on all sides, and that darkness was constantly pushing against it as if to force it to turn into something it was not.

August gritted his teeth as he was forced to focus on maintaining what he had. If he let go of his focus for even a second, Eris would certainly take back everything he'd taken from her.

But, with the darkness in such close proximity, he was also presented with an opportunity.

All he needed to do was split his focus and divert a small part of his awareness towards the task of consuming darkness and turning it into pure water. It sounded easy, sure, but it was not anything close to simple.

Every drop of water was like a soldier. These soldiers were guarding the borders, making sure that the army of millions that sieged them could never break into their land. There were only a few thousand of them in this impossible defense mission. Even if they only sent a squad of five soldiers into enemy territory, they'd be losing a significant portion of their available forces.

They couldn't allow any weak points in their defense, no matter how minuscule. After all, the enemy was far larger than them. Such a small mistake would cost them everything.

What they needed now, logically, was external aid.

They needed troops to come from other nations and siege the back lines of the attacking army so they could gain a bit of time to make a proper move.

In a situation like this, perhaps it seemed like that was impossible, especially since August needed to pull those reinforcements in while commanding the troops in his base.

However, it was easier than expected...?

There was a lot of groundwater in this specific region of the world. The tournament administration didn't choose the area while knowing this, but it would have been the same no matter where the war took place.

Arulion was incredibly fertile. It hardly ever rained, but the climate and conditions still allowed for lush grasses to grow in almost every part of the kingdom.

For the third stage, the staff needed to find a plot of land large enough and separated enough from civilization to conduct a prolonged trial.

Any place that met those qualifications would have been closest to farmland. In other words, the subterranean world in these regions was filled with flowing and still water of every variety, both near and far away from the surface.

To create the lake as fast as possible, August summoned everything that could immediately answer his call.

But, there was still plenty of water below the surface that had been making its way closer and closer despite his call taking place many minutes ago.

When August sensed the presence of that liquid, coming from the deep underground cave systems that remained unexplored to this day, he couldn't help but grin.

'Perfect.'

BOOOOM!

It burst through the ground at the bottom of the lake and spewed into the darkness-controlled territory.

Immediately, August gained a maneuverability that was impossible in the previous stalemate. He controlled the spewing water to force Eris into corralling it, while simultaneously pushing outward with his original territory and consuming all of the nearby darkness.

For the next few minutes, the roles reversed and August was placed on the offensive. He aggressively drew the water out of her darkness, weakening her and expanding his domain until the lake was practically split into two halves for the two geniuses to control.

In the process, Eris' darkness became purer, resembling water despite being nothing like it.

The two seas crashed into each other. With each wave that splattered back into the surrounding liquid, their territories shrunk and enlarged as they constantly stole from each other.

Eris and August both had their teeth gritted and their eyes shut tight. In their minds, they had truly become those waves.

Each time they clashed, each time they hissed and exploded as they contrasted, the two young geniuses attacked each other.

In a sense, it was now a matter of mental strength. Who would be eroded first? Who would fall to the mental shocks they experienced when they collided?

August was just barely above her in physical strength, but her refined techniques made it relatively difficult for him to gain the upper hand.

His mana control might have seemed to be better at the start since he was the one to injure her before she could make an impact on him, but that assumption was disproved when their domain battle started.

Now that they'd reached this stage, it was clear that they were equal in controlling mana. No, considering that Eris forced August into this evenly matched situation from nothing, she was better.

Originally, this was his domain, after all. He was forced to destroy her power source when he was placed in the same situation, and he couldn't say that he'd be able to do something like this, taking control of her mana and turning it against her.

This duel went through many changes as it progressed. Through them, the two geniuses learned that their strengths and weaknesses were in different places, but their strength was roughly the same.

The battle of minds taking place now was the last thing.

As they were not Demigods with access to their souls yet, their minds, their bodies, and their mana were the three categories they could compete in.

The war imagery shifted. In the minds of the two, they had entered their true dragon forms. They imagined their opponent sending waves of conceptual law at them. They imagined the laws they would use to fight back, and when they lost, they reeled back as dull and sharp pain both struck their minds together.

Minutes passed and passed and passed. Eventually, their stalemate continued for over half an hour.

The waves had been getting larger with every clash. The huge pitch-black and ocean-blue waves were thousands of meters high now.

Both geniuses were sweating fiercely. Their eyes wriggled as they endured the monumental pain they experienced for the sake of victory.

August and Eris had done as much as they could in their minds. They were nearing a point when they'd be forced to take this clash to the extreme, to enter their true draconic forms.

Well, that was the thought in Eris' mind, but August was hoping to do anything he could to make sure that didn't happen. He hadn't yet figured out a way to hide his Azure Dragon appearance, after all.

If he had the power to do so, he would keep that reveal hidden until the last possible moment.

There was only one problem.

August did not have that kind of power.

VOOOOOOOOOM!

It was like time slowed down.

No, time truly did slow to a crawl. A strange wave of energy, completely independent of the heir wars and even Arulion as a whole spread through the hidden world.

Rather, that wave of energy spread through the entirety of the Heavenly World.

Everything it touched was disrupted, and as if it was an effect of the wave, all mana was dispersed.

The mana being used by anyone and everything.

Including mana-based trait that beasts used to transform their bodies.

August felt something push through his every molecule. It was a visceral and indescribable feeling, and it only gave him time to understand what happened after it had already passed.

'Ah...' he thought, a wry smile on his face.

For the first time ever, he felt the desire to curse.

As his body transformed and enlarged, a change he could not control.

'...I'm fucked.'

August uttered his first curse word in this life.

From any point of view, it was more than understandable.

After all, he said it better than anyone else could.

With this sudden and mysterious change destroying any effort that was made to keep his identity hidden...

...he was, by all intents and purposes, fucked.

Chapter 1722 Chaos [1]

Arulion had been moving at an incredible speed. It was as if August's appearance in the kingdom provoked all the small things that had been hiding in the shadows to come to light. Especially with him spending ten years inside of a time dilation, it was hard to believe that only a few months had passed in real-time.

In fact, it had been less than half a year since August first hatched out of his egg and latched onto Damien.

Unbelievable, wasn't it?

It was even more so for the people in the Heavenly World. None of them really had information on what was happening in Arulion, but if any of them knew that Damien somehow managed to find a son and raise him in this short period of time, they'd be bewildered beyond belief.

After all, the Heavenly World experienced these few months quite slowly. When Damien returned from his meeting with the Dark God, all Dimensional Cracks existing in the world suddenly disappeared. The foreign territories left in those places served as a reminder of the connection between the two worlds, but it seemed as if the Sacred Abyss had completely given up on their siege.

That, of course, was a misdirection. Those of Void Palace knew better than anyone that this was only the prelude to a much greater battle.

Perhaps it would even be the battle to end them all.

Nevertheless, ever since Damien went to Arulion, his people had been properly taking care of matters in the world he left behind.

The remnants of both the Divine Order and the Straea Clan were completely eradicated. Of course, aside from Malevalon Straea, who was now an eternal piece on the Dark God's board.

The Northern and Southwestern Regions were alleged as necessary. The Kyushu Federation was given their share of the profits, and the rest was turned into bases for newly born branches of the palace.

In these few short months, Void Palace managed to rise far above its peers in every possible way, and Claire Ellowyn found herself responsible for all decisions concerning this world's populace.

Dante was awake, but, plagued by nightmares and the stain of the Dark God in his psyche, he kept himself hidden and focused on helping Claire manage her workload. For now, the only people who knew he was awake were Claire and Serena.

Right, Serena was there as well, but she didn't have any time to help Claire.

She had an extremely important role of her own.

Every single day in the time that had passed was spent setting up a massive array across the entirety of the Heavenly World. Tens of billions of people were employed and spread across the lands to lay small parts of the whole, which didn't connect and form a circuit until the very last moment.

Forming the array wasn't the only thing that needed finishing, after all.

For context, this array was something Serena had to come up with after Damien revealed his wager with the Dark God to her.

It was made to slow time throughout the Heavenly World. Damien said they needed as much time as possible and left Serena to figure out what the actual amount of time they could gain was.

It really depended on her own ability. Since she, a Supreme Goddess of Time, was someone that even Damien acknowledged as more skilled than him in the manipulation of the law.

Serena spent several months brainstorming and putting all of her comprehension into gaining more time. She started at only five extra years. When an array needed to be at a scale that covered the entirety of a Universe World, its power was too spread out to work the same way it did on a smaller scale.

That was only a week into her research phase. It was a miracle for Serena to gain even five years on her first draft of the array.

With months of planning following that moment, with repeated testing and experimentation, along with a great understanding of laws that couldn't be matched, Serena increased that duration manifold.

The actual final time limit was unknown to even her, because the array that gave her the most successful results was also the one she had the least control over.

The base concept was simple. In one fell swoop, it would harness the entirety of the world's mana and use it to alter the folds of reality. This was a plan that could only be understood theoretically. By the calculations that could be made, Serena estimated that they'd gain anywhere between fifty and five hundred years.

After all, who could truly calculate how much mana the world had? Who could calculate how much of that mana would actually be siphoned?

Mana was originally a force that acted on its own will at times, so there was too much variability for any stable result to be produced.

Regardless, any other system would gain fifty years at most, so, in the time that she had, this was the best thing that Serena could come up with.

At least it had a chance of giving them more time. That was what remained most important.

In the several months of the array's creation, preparations were made all around the world.

Firstly, they needed a way to affect both the base reality of the Heavenly World and all of the hidden worlds that existed inside of it.

Secondly, they needed to secure any area that would be affected by the mana siphoning.

Mainly, prisons, vaults, and other establishments that absolutely could not be allowed to lose power.

The process would have taken an incredibly long time if the palace's forces had to do it all on their own. When the entire world was under their command, however, things were different.

The amount of power that Void Palace held nowadays really couldn't be underestimated.

Two great clans had been torn to the ground because they'd made an enemy of the palace. Whether they had help or not was a nonissue. Just that fact alone was enough to put reverence into the hearts of most and pure fear into the hearts of the rest.

The people of the Heavenly World could no longer refuse their orders. If the palace said something, then it was law.

Everywhere around the world, special devices were installed into the most important facilities to exist.

In a sense, that was the moment when the palace gained complete control over this world.

But, that was never their goal. It was merely a necessary privilege to have if they wanted to turn this world's people into an army that could fight against the Sacred Abyss.

Putting everything else aside, unlike Arulion, the Heavenly World was fully equipped to survive the mana dispersion without baring themselves to chaos.

Unfortunately, their draconic brethren were so intent on staying isolated that it was impossible to send them a message about what was happening.

The array was to be activated as soon as possible. Was there another reason to put such a small amount of time between the introduction of the idea and its inception in reality?

On that day, everyone in the Heavenly World stayed in their homes, awaiting the great change.

For the first time in history, there wasn't a single sentient being outside. It was silent on a worldly scale, with only the sounds of nature inhabiting every inch of the countless billions of kilometers of the world.

And, under Serena's direct supervision, the members of the Krone Clan installed the final link in the array.

The entire clan came together and transferred the entirety of their combined mana into the array.

The strip of runic letters they surrounded glowed with a bright golden light that immediately shot out into the world.

There were three hundred and thirty-four great rings that encircled the world from different angles.

The golden light spread through the ring it first originated from until it reached both points where all of the rings connected simultaneously.

That was the moment everyone had been waiting for.

The light exponentially multiplied and instantly spread through every single ring, and in that moment, a mystical thing happened.

The silence in the world was amplified to an extreme degree.

Even the winds quieted down as the atmosphere of the world transformed.

Time slowed to a crawl. A wave spread through the air, dispersing any and all mana and sending it on a path towards the runic lines of the array.

In the Heavenly World, countless individual specks of light illuminated the places where alternative energy was used to temporarily sustain function.

And though hardly anyone could actually sense the change, aside from their bodies being somewhat sluggish for a moment, the activation of the barrier was the start of something monumental.

Both for the Heavenly World, where an army of quintillions was soon to be raised...

...and the Dragon Kingdom of Arulion, where only chaos was in store for the people.

Chapter 1723 Chaos [2]

It all happened so fast that August couldn't even properly perceive it.

He changed. Eris changed as well. Everyone who wasn't in their dragon form was immediately revealed.

Eris' dark dragon form was definitely majestic. Her sharp and pristine horns, her ferocious appearance, those scales that seemed impenetrable by any and all means, and a wingspan that one almost couldn't believe belonged to a young dragon.

It was something that should have captured the attention of anyone watching instantly.

Though, nobody was watching anymore. With mana phasing out of existence for a second, the broadcasts and other similar mechanisms like the barrier around the two territories all shut down.

The only person to see Eris' transition was August.

And, at first, August thought that the only person who would witness his was her.

His shining azure scales, more beautiful than those of any other dragon, his magisterial crown and his aura that slightly surpassed Eris' dark dragon lineage, and that iconic facial structure that no dragon old enough to remember could forget.

The visage of an Azure Dragon. For the first time in millions of years, it had appeared in Arulion.

And though the barrier couldn't be easily replaced, as it was only created through the efforts of several dragons over many days, the projections were different.

They were maintained by a system that brought them back on the second mana returned to the atmosphere.

So it was not just Eris that saw what he had become.

No, his appearance and his aura were transmitted across the entirety of Arulion.

That was when the surreal events began.

Massive auras swarmed the sky.

They arrived in an instant. All of them knew where the third stage was being held, and all of them had unimaginable power.

They were figures that the dragon kingdom hadn't seen in many millennia, but they'd returned for one purpose.

They sensed that aura immediately.

"QINGLONG!"

A booming voice split the skies.

August's body was immediately frozen by a massive pressure.

Under the weight of a Holy Dragon's aura, he could only find it in him to do one thing.

"Go. Go back to the Sanctuary. NOW!"

It was a message transmitted through the team communicator, but only two people understood what it meant.

They also felt those auras. Nobody in the surrounding few million kilometers could ignore it, let alone the people at its epicenter.

Valerie and Melania both gritted their teeth, but they came to the same conclusion.

They didn't understand what was happening. August never explained his origins to them, after all.

But his message unequivocally meant that those auras were targeting him, and if they didn't want to be caught up in the madness, they had to leave as soon as possible.

The thought to help...

It definitely appeared, but it disappeared immediately. No matter their current strength, they could not do anything against the auras that were now hovering above the two nameless territories.

If they stayed and instead became hostages...then they would directly cause the ruination of August Void.

Their feelings didn't matter anymore.

They had to do as he said.

They had to retreat.

Valerie didn't continue her sacred duel, nor did Melania continue to push the geniuses she was fighting. They instantly put mana into the rings that Damien gave them and disappeared.

August...was not so fortunate.

Because those auras were locked onto him. Because they would not let him go.

In the single instant it took for him to send that message and for Valerie and Melania to receive and act upon it, the Holy Dragons in the air had already lowered themselves so that they could be seen.

Each and every one of them was large enough to dwarf the heavens. When six of them came together as one, the sight was beyond horrifying.

Andromedus, the Holy Dragon of Light.

Noctum, the Holy Dragon of Darkness.

Ignatius, the Holy Dragon of Fire.

Shuulong, the Holy Dragon of Water.

Noxus, the Holy Dragon of Space.

Aion, the Holy Dragon of Fate.

They were beings that could only be seen in legends, but now they all stood before August, staring at him with different eyes.

Only Noxus seemed indifferent to his existence.

The rest, particularly Shuulong, stared at him with only the intent to kill.

And at their level, that was enough.

"KAHAK!"

August coughed out a mouthful of blood. Merely being in the presence of these dragons made it impossible for him to do anything.

As for Eris who was next to him, she could only watch on with widened eyes.

'Qing...long...?'

Did she hear it right?

Was the holy ancestor of the Liqua Clan saying that the same August that she had been fighting was a descendant of that Azure Dragon?

"Boy, identify yourself."

Noctum was the one who spoke.

He eased Shuilong's aura somewhat with his own so August could talk.

But it was merely an empty gesture.

'Kindness from one of them?'

August wanted to laugh. It was pathetic even to believe such a thing possible.

They just wanted him to reveal how he arrived in Arulion, how he managed to appear even though the ancestor whose bloodline he carried was long dead.

They wanted to know what happened to Qinglong, because if he managed to survive somehow, none of them could feel safe.

"I..."

August responded nonetheless.

With a grin on his face that lacked a fear of death, he responded.

"I am August Void, direct descendant of Qinglong, and the true heir to the throne," he said, refusing to stop even though Shuilong's aura once again became unbearable.

With blood leaking from his lips, he continued.

"I am the person who was fated to stand above all of you. I am the person who will kill all of you traitorous bastards in the future, so if you value your lives, then you should kill me now."

His eyes were like tsunamis of energy, forcing his opinion on everyone around him.

If he believed it so, then it could be no other way.

That kind of light, that kind of mentality...

'...is exactly like Qinglong.'

Perhaps Noxus was the only one able to have such calm thoughts at the moment. After all, he was the only one that didn't participate in the battle against Qinglong.

'Nevertheless, it is too early for you, young one.'

It was an undeserved attitude, because as he said, this was the moment that he would die.

There was nothing in the world that could prevent them from taking his life. After all, Qinglong was the demon that lived in the hearts of these emperors, forever eating away at their souls despite being a figment of the past.

Still, August grinned.

No matter how perilous this situation was, it didn't affect him.

Because he had a backer that even these Holy Dragons could not match.

If they truly made the decision to end his life...

...then he could guarantee that they would not meet happy endings.

Damien was the source of August's confidence, and it wasn't an unwarranted feeling. Damien would not allow August to die.

However, in this particular case, he was not the person coming to August's rescue.

Perhaps the mana wave had created an opportunity, because when the Holy Dragons moved to suppress August, someone else moved as well.

All mana systems slowly roared back to life, and that revealed one fact to the world.

Well, to Aion specifically before anyone else.

His body jolted as the information poured into his mind.

Despite being covered in scales, one could almost see his face turning pale.

Something more important than even August's existence had revealed itself.

Something detrimental to Arulion.

'The vault...'

Aion's eyes widened, showing an expression that he had not expressed in millions of years.

'The vault has been emptied.'

Chapter 1724 Chaos [3]

"...you shall perish for the sins of your ancestor. Your bloodline shall not be allowed to exist in this world for even a moment longer."

Shuulong was in the process of monologuing when Aion returned his attention to the conversation.

It was clear that he was planning to revel in August's death. The grudge with Qinglong originally started with the Ligua Clan. His emotions in this moment were more heated than any of the rest.

However, they did not have time.

It would take but a moment to kill August, but they did not have even a single moment to spare.
"Shuulong, wait," Aion said sternly.

"For what reason? There is no reason for you to protect this boy, is there? Or could it be that your guilty conscience is disrupting your thoughts again? Aion, now is not the—"

"NOW IS NOT THE TIME!" Aion roared.

They were the same words that Shuulong wanted to speak, but with a completely different meaning.

"A thief has broken into the ancient vault. I cannot sense the presence of any of the artifacts stored there." Shuulong's expression remained blank.

"Mere artifacts. It does not matter if we lose them. Killing this child before Qinglong's blood can bloom is more important."

Aion scoffed. He looked around at the others, and, frankly, it irked him to see the same expression on their faces. His aura turned serious to the point where the other Holy Dragons were forced to listen to him. "Did you all forget what it means for the vault to be emptied? It was not merely treasures that we lost! Whoever was bold enough to enter that place...has taken the Book of Truth and the Scales of Fate."

The expressions of everyone present changed.

"And the fruit of the Primeval Tree?" Ignatius asked. "Gone."

It was a response that left even these Holy Dragons shaken.

Nobody else understood what the treasures in the ancient vault meant. It was a secret kept between Holy Dragons exclusively.

Without those treasures...

'...everything will fall apart.'

Even Shuilong understood the dangers presented by the theft of those items.

He gritted his teeth, hesitant to accept it, but he had no choice.

"Noctum, place him in Eternal Darkness. We will return to this matter later."

Noctum's slight nod was the last bit of the conversation that August could see.

His entire world disappeared as he was surrounded by a blackness deeper than anything he'd seen before.

This was a prison he could never escape from. Not until Noctum himself returned to free him.

With August in such a place, the Holy Dragons did not need to worry about him fleeing. They could return to this same place and decimate him when they found the rat scurrying around their kingdom. The Holy Dragons immediately departed, turning into blurs of light streaking through the sky

And as everyone in the vicinity of the third stage arena was left in confusion about everything that happened, August only had one question:

Just what could possibly make Holy Dragons rush away so hurriedly? ***

'Whew, that was surprisingly easy.'

Sure, the atmosphere was tense everywhere else, but that did not apply to Rose.

She was cruising, to say the least.

That energy wave came out of nowhere and made everything confusing, but the moment Rose realized that the ambient mana was dispersed, she rushed to the vault she'd been eyeing.

As expected, it was wide open without a single security measure protecting the items inside.

All she had to do was kill out the guards, quite an easy maneuver when they couldn't fight back, and run inside.

She took everything. Originally, her goal was only a single item—

'—but when in Rome, right?'

This was a great opportunity.

Even secret areas that were secured behind many barriers, arrays, and protection mechanisms were completely open right now.

Rose thought it was interesting for items to be hidden behind so much security, so without a second thought, she took them.

Truly, she had no idea what kind of mayhem she'd just caused.

But it didn't really matter to her, did it?

The dragons she'd seen while hiding in the Aureat Clan were pieces of shit. She didn't feel a single ounce of remorse for her actions.

And it wasn't like they could retaliate against her.

By the time the ambient mana returned and the projectors showing the heir wars turned on, Rose was already in the Sanctuary.

Damien was the only one barred from the hidden universe, after all.

When Rose returned to the True Void Universe, she would be back at the palace with Claire and the rest.

She had nothing to worry about.

Though, if there was one thing more special about Rose's experience than her theft of everything the Dragon Kingdom held valuable...

...then it was what she would learn when she returned home.

Damien was actually in Zenith's hidden territory, which had been abandoned for a long time, when chaos ensued.

His attention was naturally caught by the Holy Dragons surrounding August. In fact, he was just about to make a move and slaughter them, but something funny happened.

It was only for a single second, but he suddenly felt Rose's presence in Arulion. When it disappeared so rapidly, he knew exactly where she'd gone.

It was surprising to realize that Rose was present all along. Damien had been doing things slowly instead of understanding anything and everything about Arulion so he could have some fun and feel the spirit of adventure, but it led to him narrowly missing his wife.

Once he'd felt her presence, however, Damien immediately did a scan.

It didn't take long for him to comprehend the situation fully.

And that was why it was so funny.

How coincidental did it have to be for even more members of their family to be wreaking havoc in Arulion at the same time?

It was hilarious how Rose's actions accidentally saved August, and what Rose had done was even funnier.

Of course, it wasn't funny at all that they'd hurt August. That particular action made Damien want to kill them and everyone related to them. But...there was something vague, a kind of ambient aura that could only appear in times of chaos.

Perhaps that was why Damien kept the Holy Dragons alive.

Because even if they were a threat to his son, they couldn't do anything to him.

Instead, they'd be left scurrying around the kingdom, desperately picking up the pieces.

See, the energy wave that spread through the world did more than the Holy Dragons knew.

Rose and August weren't the only ones affected by it.

Actually, there was a specific group that found themselves empowered.

August's reveal, Rose's theft; they weren't the only interesting things happening in the kingdom.

There were two more big events about to begin.

And Damien desperately wanted to see how the Holy Dragons coped with them. 'This is going to be fun.'

Life had been a bit slow recently, but it was about time for things to pick up.

Chaos.

It wasn't an ideal environment in any sense, but it was the place where people with the surname "Void" thrived. Damien had proved it countless times, and soon enough...

...August would get the chance to do the same.

Chapter 1725 Chaos [4]

August's body disappeared from where he stood, but he was still in the exact same place. To make it absolutely impossible for him to escape, Noctum separated him from the true reality and placed him inside of a realm of Eternal Darkness.

That was a place where mana did not exist outside of Noctum's own control, and nothing aside from darkness itself could survive. August would not be directly harmed by the environment, but it was uncertain if he'd still be the same person when he once again saw the light of day.

The nature of that space that refused to change was somewhat similar to the outside environment as well.

Though the majority of them were too far away to actually witness what happened, every single genius in the vicinity heard the booming voices of those ancient Holy Dragons clearly announcing why they'd arrived.

They heard that August was an Azure Dragon. To most, this meant nothing. Even most of the nobles and Holy Clan geniuses didn't know why it was such a big deal. The most they could do was question the secrets August hid within his body.

Qinglong's legacy had been ruined in quite an orderly manner. First came the era in which Zenith was born. At that time, the ancient dragon's identity was being smeared at every possible opportunity.

Any records of his existence were burned and replaced by a false narrative. It went against everything that the scholars and sages among the dragon clans stood for, but the decisions of the ancients could not be challenged.

During that era, Qinglong turned from a respected hero of the dragons to the worst to ever live. Only after that did the era begin when his existence was completely phased out of history.

The Holy Dragons were thorough. They refused to allow anyone to find an ancient record that told the truth of their forgotten history. For the current generation of geniuses, the name Qinglong meant close to nothing at all.

Eris was different.

There had been many questionable changes in the ranks of Holy Dragons in the past. They actually weren't the same dragons that existed in Qinglong's era if one looked at their physical bodies alone. Instead, a unique method had been employed to ensure that the status of "Holy Dragon" was not given to anyone other than them.

Noctum was the only one who never changed from then to now. His physical form and his soul were the exact same as they were when he first rose to power in ancient times, and as Eris was his most prized successor, he'd told her stories of that time.

Eris didn't have any preconceived notions about the Azure Dragon. The way that Noctum described him was as such:

"A dragon with such power that it threatened draconic society as a whole."

It seemed like his opinion of the past's transgressions was different from most, but that was not something to be explored when Noctum wasn't present.

The only thing Eris knew about the Azure Dragon was that he was unreasonably powerful to the point where even the most powerful dragons ever to exist were threatened by his mere existence.

To hear that August was his successor and direct descendant...

Really, what she felt was confusion. She didn't quite understand how it was possible, nor did she quite understand why it was so significant.

Nevertheless, the real reaction to witness in this vicinity belonged to Wilhelm Liqua.

At least, that would have been the case if Wilhelm had the chance to react.

Their clan was the only one that refused to forget the Azure Dragon. The elders who knew the true history viewed him as a stain to their reputations, and the young ones who were raised by propaganda saw him as a traitor and a weakling who had to die in order for their clan to uphold their righteousness and dignity.

The battles all across the two territories naturally came to an end when the time array's energy wave spread through Arulion, which gave Wilhelm more than enough space to react to the ongoing situation.

The problem was elsewhere.

Right, even with everything that had happened thus far, it wasn't enough to call it chaos, was it?

Rose stole everything that the Holy Dragons held valuable, but she was already gone. They had no chance of regaining the things they'd lost.

In this climate, they'd eventually return and take their rage out on August, which by no means would be something he enjoyed.

There had to be something more, right?

If one had that thought while watching the situation unfold, then they were absolutely correct.

And as if to prove that point, destruction soon wrought the land.

It happened both close and far away. It wasn't close enough to perfectly perceive what was happening, but every single genius in the stage sensed the same thing.

Blood.

A gargantuan wave of blood with a stench that clouded one's nose was spreading through the closest settlements to them.

See, Serena kept evil in mind when she led the Heavenly World in their preparation for the array's activation. Prisons and asylums were specially cared for so that nobody dangerous enough to cause chaos in the world would be released by the event.

Arulion did not have prisoners. Not in prison systems, anyway.

For the most part, anyone who committed enough crime to be deemed a criminal in Arulion would either die or join a large group to have their actions justified.

But there was another group that had been hiding in the shadows for eons.

In the ancient days, when Qinglong was killed, there was heavy opposition from anyone and everyone. Dragons at the time had become used to the freedom of opportunity that he provided, and the entrance of an oppressive regime was not widely accepted.

Those who rebelled were destroyed without hesitation by the Holy Dragons and the influences they raised. Qinglong's plans weren't given enough time to properly eliminate the already existing status gaps in draconic society, so it was difficult for those rebellions to make any real progress.

Still, they caused damage. The forces of that time humiliated the Holy Dragons and left permanent stains on their histories.

As such, the Holy Dragons decided that death was too easy of a punishment.

They placed a seal on their bloodlines that would carry from generation to generation. The seal cursed them and turned them into mutilated beasts that could not exist in the sun, and forced them to endure great pain to live at all.

One would be led to believe that they'd give up on survival. The most rational thing was to end their bloodlines in that generation so that nobody else had to feel their pain.

However, they were far too vengeful to pursue such an outcome.

The ten thousand of them who didn't die in the first few days led an exodus into the subterranean world. They, along with their families, forsook the outside world for the sake of only a single goal.

Through all of their pain and suffering, they bred generation after generation. Each generation felt the pain of the curse, and every single one of them harbored the same vengeful spirit as if it was passed down by blood.

In that era, it would have been a miracle if their population didn't decline rapidly. They never would have expected that their descendants would continue to populate, creating an entire society in the underworld that maintained their original goal of destroying the existing hierarchy of the kingdom.

Only, the passing of what was millions of years at the very least diluted their values and amplified the vengeful spirit flowing through their lineage.

It was not a grudge held against the dictators who oppressed the common people any more.

No, it was a grudge against anyone who was able to live on the surface in peace while they quietly suffered in the shadows.

They would have moved regardless. They, like many others, took the heir wars as a chance to create a stage for themselves in the kingdom.

It would have already been chaotic if they had done so.

The problem once again came back to the time array, didn't it?

As its energy seeped into the ground and stole the world's mana, it detected the vile and plentiful energy hidden within their souls and siphoned it all away to be repurposed.

For the first time in eons, that population was able to breathe without feeling excruciating pain in their lungs, walk without their legs shivering and breaking, and exist without pain.

The skills they practiced were no longer just for decoration.

And the goals they had were no longer unattainable.

With not a single extraneous thought in their minds, they charged to the surface to see the sun for the first time in their lives.

And, if it truly did not kill them upon first contact...

...then the surface world would finally feel their age-old wrath.

Chapter 1726 Chaos [5]

That group of people wasn't originally one. They were many who acted for different purposes who ended up sharing the same tragic fate and bonding over it.

Generations of living as one and breeding into each other's families led them to create a diverse society of united people. They, naturally, needed a ruler. Not an entity like the source of their tragedy, but a fair and just ruler who truly cared for his people.

The system they employed was a branch of democracy created exclusively for the use of their society. It was strange, as they had to account for their curse and other matters exclusive to those who were enemies of the sun, but the essence was still the same.

The society itself chose who was worthy of standing at its head. Currently, it was a man named Hendricks Urson.

He was a large man. His skin was the color of earth, as were his eyes. He had a muscled body that had clearly been through countless hardships, and bright golden hair, the only feature he inherited from his original lineage.

The conditions of the underworld produced many different ways of survival. Some members of the society turned incredibly pale as the lack of sunlight affected their skin. Their physical bodies didn't adapt as well to the environment, but in turn, they were able to develop many new skills that eventually created their current semi-thriving society.

Others were dark, ranging from shades of brown to obsidian-black. These people came from family lines that took to the subterranean world extremely well. They adopted properties of the stone, metal, and earth around them into their bodies and wore their skin pridefully as an eternal sign of their great accomplishment.

As dragons, they all had specific elemental affinities within their bodies. However, those had been suppressed by the curse and disallowed from blossoming in newborns. These dragons developed entirely new methods of using power, taking inspiration from the environment and the legends of their time.

Hendricks was the man who revolutionized their skills in the modern era. He did not come from the metal or mineral factions, which were usually seen as more talented, but he proved that anyone from any faction could have power if they worked for it.

Those first few steps up a tunnel that had been long filled with boulders hiding what lay on the other side were terrifying. Knowing that he was experiencing something unheard of, he didn't know how to respond.

He came from humble circumstances so he was always considerate of the people around him, but he possessed the undeniable air of a leader that suppressed opposition.

In accordance with his personality, he left the underworld first. If he lived, then he would live with his people. If he died, then he died for their sake.

Those first few steps up a tunnel that had been long filled with boulders hiding what lay on the other side were terrifying. Knowing that he was experiencing something unheard of, he didn't know how to respond.

Still...

'My people must quell their thirst.'

Their curse had been lifted. In some time, the vengeful spirit that polluted their blood would clear away.

But, it was unknown whether that would be in a few weeks or a few generations. Hendricks sensed the growing waves of discontent from the populace. They were getting restless. More so after the plans to raid the surface were created. Many of them must have realized that they would heal with time, but their minds were too far gone for that option to remain viable.

Hendricks was not a man consumed by his thirst for blood, but as a member of the forsaken dragon races, he possessed just as much of it as everyone else.

He knew that they'd never be able to properly live if they couldn't vent the accumulated frustrations of millions of ancestors.

'That is why, though I am sorry for those who will be caught up in our madness, I must allow this to happen.'

One step after another took Hendricks closer and closer to the surface. He soon saw the creeping rays of sunlight shining into the tunnel from the outside world.

'It is comforting to know that my death may be painless.'

If it was instant, then he would not suffer.

His heart was calm as he took those last few steps. His muscles tightened slightly as he slammed out with his fist and crushed the last border separating him from the world, and...

He bathed in sunlight.

His eyes were forced closed by the immense light levels. They had evolved to be accustomed to underground conditions, so naturally, they didn't immediately function.

Luckily, through the experimentation of the root clans, those whose skin had turned pale, a technology had been developed to counter its effects.

Hendricks tapped twice on his temple and slowly reopened his eyes.

This time, he saw not only light, but also everything it allowed his eyes to process as information.

The sweeping meadows and plains of the most rural parts of Arulion, the mountains in the distance that were more plentiful than people...

It was a scenery that only existed in bloodline memories manifested right in front of his very eyes.

Just the fact that he could see it and survive meant that the wishes of their people had truly been granted.

There was nothing left to prevent them from bringing hell to the earth.

And for that...

'...I truly, truly am sorry.'

That was how it started; from a pitiful and unfortunate society with their own reasons for why they needed to commit atrocities.

But, that was not how it would be received from the people they were victimizing, was it?

When the forsaken dragon clans began their siege on the world, they hit the outermost western point of Arulion's central region. It was the first bit of society they came across, so it felt the brunt of their fury.

And, it just so happened to be near the same regions where the heir wars were currently taking place.

The first few cities they found were small, housing only a few thousand people at most. They were promptly burned to the ground, and every man, woman, and child present was left as nothing more than a corpse on the ground.

The original ten thousand dragons had more than enough time to multiply. With tens of millions of them alive today and several million equipped for combat, they spread out fast and immediately laid waste to every part of Arulion's west.

From there, they took many teleportation arrays and altered them to fit their needs. That unbelievably large mass of people had spread out across the entire kingdom with only one goal in mind.

They just wanted to slaughter anyone they came across.

They did so while smiling, laughing, and crying. They were ashamed of themselves, but so deeply enamored by the pleasure of releasing their hidden emotions that they could not stop killing.

The entire dragon kingdom entered hell. Those who could rise up to fight back did exactly that, and the common populace...

Well, they experienced the consequences of their oppression. Without power, without will, and without lineage, they were like a school of fish facing a much smaller army of sharks.

Numbers no longer mattered when there was such a difference in strength.

The chaos in the dragon kingdom worsened until even Holy Clans had to step in and take a stand against the invaders. A situation of such severity was created only one week into their invasion.

Melania and Valerie were currently defending Fort Halleya. The other geniuses had also left the heir wars stage on the orders of the people they followed. The entire event was practically canceled at this point, but there was still one person standing on that small plot of land.

August had not moved yet, nor had anybody come to find him. The Holy Dragons were too busy searching for their lost treasures to even pay attention to the kingdom's destruction.

But, now that Damien had finished plotting with the Dragon Emperor, it was about time for him to be released.

"Go," Damien said, looking off into the distance from his place in the skies.

"Show me the depths of your conviction."

With a snap of his fingers, the Eternal Darkness around August was dispersed.

For the first time in seven days, he saw the outside world again.

However, it was no longer the same world he left behind.

Chapter 1727 Chaos [6]

Whoosh!

The setting completely changed.

If there was a benefit to the Eternal Darkness, it was that time didn't exist. Its perception depended entirely on the individual, which meant that prolonged periods in the realm could lead to the perception of eternity and shatter the victim's mind.

August wasn't trapped for nearly that long. He was still exploring the darkness and trying to brainstorm a way out of his current predicament when it was solved for him.

So, he didn't realize that even a week had passed. In his perception, it had been only a few hours.

Perhaps that was why he faced such confusion immediately upon his return.

Eris was gone, and the environment was in shambles. He could sense in the distance that both castles and all cities in this area were now in ruins, and though there weren't many people present, there were a few.

'Those auras...what are they?'

Dragons, definitely, but a species he didn't recognize.

Why were they here?

What happened to the rest of the geniuses?

No, what happened to Arulion?

'This isn't right.'

August didn't take long to comprehend that the time he perceived was not what passed in reality.

The only question in his mind was if it had been too long.

After all, the stench of blood was overwhelming. Not just from the territories, but from everywhere in the surrounding area.

'I need to find the others.' Before he moved recklessly, he had to meet up with someone he knew to learn about what took place during his absence.

'But first...'

It was better for him to gain a preliminary understanding before moving at all.

From the looks of it, the people in the territories were scavengers who didn't have much individual power. The aura of blood around them served as proof that they had committed many murders before arriving here. It was easy to connect them to the stench in the air, but their low power levels made him think otherwise.

Regardless of their circumstances, August could definitely gain something from confronting them.

Boom!

He immediately sprung into action.

August was in his dragon form still, but there was no point in hiding it anymore. Whether it was the common populace or the Holy Clans, everyone knew his identity already. Those who didn't know better would only have no idea what to think of the information, so they'd just forget about it and move on to other things.

Those who cared would attack him whether he was in human form or dragon form, so it was more important to stay in a state where he could put up a fight regardless of enemy or circumstance.

In a way, it was freeing. Now that he was in the open, only his enemies had to be mindful of their actions. August could now do whatever he wanted without having to worry.

He flew through the air like a comet and immediately arrived above a group of scavengers. They had pale skin and scholarly appearances, as if they had never fought a day in their lives. Still, they kept in their hands artifacts with immense auras that made August wary.

"Ni he bansa stroel!" One of the pale-skinned dragons yelled.

Her voice was raspy and more of a hiss than anything else, and the language was not one that August recognized.

As someone who was able to study many languages in his youth, this came as a surprise to him.

'They're definitely dragons, and strong ones at that.' August commented to himself while glancing at the orbs in their hands that had started to glow.

Their appearances didn't give off auras of strength, but August could immediately tell through their eyes that they were intelligent.

"Who are you?" He asked without expecting an answer. He did receive one, but it didn't mean much at all.

"Rehavak!"

The orbs shined with a furious light as the ambient mana collected within. Suddenly, everything they absorbed was merged by strings of light connecting the orbs and outputted as one massive beam.

VOOOOOOM!

August's eyes widened slightly.

He flapped his wings to make some distance and released his own power. The power of a true Azure Dragon, that is.

CRACK!

The sky split open as a crack formed in reality. Through it, countless tons of seawater spilled to the surface.

The instant it came out of the fissure, it entered August's control and concentrated into a beam that matched the size of the one coming closer. In one smooth motion, August pushed himself out of the incoming beam's trajectory and fired his own, resulting in a huge clash.

BOOOOOM!

One almost wouldn't believe that August's power source was liquid. It seemed more like energy as it clashed against the beam of pure mana and pushed it back.

There was a concept of "solubility" that could be used here if it was twisted by August's intentions.

To perceive mana as something that could melt and merge into the water to become something greater took some work, but August in all of his power could do it easily.

His water devoured the pure mana from the incoming beam and empowered itself over and over again. The closer it got to the surface of the earth where the scavengers were, the stronger it became.

"If you don't want to die, then surrender!" August shouted.

These people seemed foreign, but they had to know the universal language. It was something provided by the system, and there wasn't a single sentient being in this land that was born outside of the system's influence.

They may have decided to speak their native language instead, and that wasn't an issue with August, but if they didn't want to be turned into ash, then they needed to stop being stubborn and start communicating.

If they cared about their lives, that was the rational choice.

But all August got in return were hostile hisses in a language he couldn't understand.

"Haa..."

August was never one to kill without reason. He didn't want these people to die by his hands without confirming that they deserved such a cruel fate.

In the end, August was a person who was willing to make tiring decisions like sparing his enemies. That was the nature that made him a hero, a part of him that Damien both respected and found himself unable to understand.

Looking into those eyes, filled with hatred and staring back at him as if he was their worst enemy, August understood that there must have been a story behind their appearance here.

The veracity and validity of that story could be determined later. Whether their lives were deserved or not could be determined later.

First, he at least wanted to hear it.

At the last moment, August recalled his mana and dispersed the force that it contained into the air.

He lowered himself to the ground and transformed into the teenage form he had used until today. He walked towards them with a smile, somewhat comforted by their expressions that were too fearful for them to attack again.

Conversation...

They didn't look like they wanted to entertain it, but August still wanted to try.

He really was a tiring person, wasn't he?

Chapter 1728 Chaos [7]

His smiling face was quite friendly. It was the type of expression that relayed his desire for peace to the people around him clearly, even if there was a language barrier separating them.

However, the forsaken dragon clansmen did not feel anything like benevolence from him. They hissed and sneered, backing away as he got closer. After all, there was nothing more deceiving than a trustworthy face. August's smile turned wry as he faced defeat before even trying to engage in conversation, but he had a goal in mind that he intended to accomplish.

At the very least, these foreign dragons wouldn't try to attack or run away, since he'd clearly shown that they would not be able to do so under his watch.

Since getting closer wasn't an option, August sat down where he was and looked at them.

"I know you can understand me. I don't know why you refuse to use the universal language, but life becomes more convenient when you can actually talk to people instead of considering everyone around you an enemy," he said.

Hissed and snarls were already starting to get annoying. That feeling was pushed to another level when they continued even after he tried to be friendly.

They were obviously a civilized people. If not, then how could they have created such great technologies?

The attack they used against him wasn't much in the grand scheme, but if that was possible for them because of some small trinkets that they carried around for safety, then what did the place they came from look like?

In August's opinion, it had to be a highly technological civilization at the very least.

The words they used to communicate seemed more ancient than what August knew, which was strange, but it wasn't uncommon for tribes and clans to preserve the language of their ancient ancestors.

More questionable was the way they presented themselves to him.

"I'm not quite sure what's going on, but I intend to hear it from you before I make any assumptions of my own. The auras around you...the aura covering the kingdom doesn't spell good news, but if we are going to be enemies, can't we at least understand why we're fighting?"

August wasn't dumb enough to believe that he could be on good terms with these people. They clearly had the blood of Arulion's dragons on their hands.

However, their position was important to him, because if they could be understood even in some capacity, then the entire meaning of whatever battle was ongoing would change.

The hisses quieted down as he continued to talk. He looked bored but interested at the same time.

It was the first time any of them had seen such an expression from the people of this world.

Honestly, they had not been acknowledging the people they killed as innocents or civilians. In order to maintain their sanity and separate guilt from their consciousnesses, the people of the forsaken dragon clan had allowed their instincts to take over.

Their barbaric behavior was not characteristic of them, but even they knew that they were sinning.

In the end, their sin was directly caused by the Holy Clans. If not for them, then such a situation would have never arisen.

Their current actions were a necessity for the survival of their civilization.

That was the thinking of those with some rationality.

Those without it killed out of envy. Anyone who was fortunate enough to live happily on the surface was an enemy who needed to die.

It may have seemed impossible for them to justify their actions with anything but excuses, but they were not excuses in the minds of those who spoke them.

They were indisputable truths. "You...want to communicate?"

One of the women in the crowd spoke suspiciously, using a broken and olden form of the universal language.

Luckily, August was able to comprehend her words.

"Right. You must have a reason for killing, right? I want to know it."

The problem was that August didn't know anything yet. He was leading the conversation in this direction because he felt like it was the best way to make them talk, but he didn't even know what their people had done.

He had to assume that they were invaders.

He had to assume that they were hostile.

He had to assume that they were more than just a few and had caused chaos throughout Arulion.

All of his assumptions were correct, but was he supposed to act on them without confirming?

Still, he didn't lie. Assuming that the things he assumed were true, he really did want to know what their reasons could possibly be. There was a strong possibility that nobody else had taken the time to ask, after all. That same woman was the only one confident enough to engage with him. The rest hissed at her in their own language, expressing their discontent, but she acted without considering their opinions.

"You are young. Do not get involved, or else you will die."

August smiled slightly.

"It's nice to see that you care, but as you can see, I can look out for myself. More importantly..."

He used his eyes to reiterate his previous question.

The woman gritted her teeth.

"Very well. I cannot sense 'their' blood from you, so I will share with you our purpose."

Frankly, she didn't have a good reason.

August wasn't the most trustworthy person. He also clearly was not on their side. They would inevitably be enemies in the future, and they'd likely kill many people that each other cared for.

Still, the deepest emotion within each and every member of the forsaken dragon clan was their desire to be heard.

They wanted their story to be told to the world. They wanted their history included in the records. Not many would admit it, but the greatest shame they faced was not their curse or their migration.

It was the erasure of everything they fought for and everything they were and its replacement with lies. That was how August learned their story.

He heard a tale that had already been told before, a tale where Qinglong died and tragedy struck a group of people who only wanted the best for their fellows.

He learned of their unfortunate circumstances and their pain, as well as the unquenchable desire that forced them to slaughter others.

He heard the woman speak those words. He also heard her skirt around certain topics as if she did not want to stain the image of their people with the deeds they'd done.

"Haa..."

August sighed as he stood up. He could assume the rest from what she said.

The people of Arulion were now being slaughtered as a result of an eon-old grudge.

'As expected, it's not pretty.'

It was a shame that it was not a story he could relate to.

But he was glad he had the chance to hear it and understand how these events were perceived from the other side's perspective. 'They think I'm going to kill them.'

August could see in their eyes that they believed they would die the moment he got what he wanted.

It was the same reason why the people around that woman didn't want her to speak.

But...

"I will spare you this time."

It was useless compassion, but it was his nature, so August could not deny it.

"However, if we happen to meet again..."

There was nothing more to be said. Every single one of them knew which side they stood on.

If they met again, then one side would end up dead.

Only, that was not now.

August's body shined as he turned back into a dragon and shot into the air.

His next destination was already set. In order to meet up with his people and learn the same situation from their side, he had to go to the only place where he was sure to find them.

Fort Halleya.

That was his next destination.

Chapter 1729 Chaos [8]

August obviously didn't fly the entire way.

He merely left the area that way so as to not give the enemy any information. The artifacts he had on his person were incredibly powerful, and allowing people to lust over them was obviously something August refused to do.

When he was far enough away to be out of their perception range, he teleported to the Shadow Lounge and exited into the fort.

Even this place was different from the way he left it. The atmosphere had changed to the point where he almost couldn't see the bustling society that used to exist here anymore.

The streets were empty. If they didn't have the power to fight, then they stayed at home and refused to leave.

Those who had even a bit of ability were all within the fort's combat regions and walls, helping defend it from the forces beyond.

August's eyes narrowed as he scanned the city.

'The population decreased.'

Immediately, he found that there was only around half as much life aura as there was before the third stage. Such a monumental change could only mean that civilians died in droves.

"Haa..."

Once again, he was forced to sigh.

'Maybe if you didn't lay your hands on innocents, things could be different.'

It wasn't as if their cause itself was the problem. The Holy Clans had slighted the entirety of the dragon species. The people who had been killed in this place, the people who were being killed elsewhere, all of them were victims just like the forsaken dragon clan.

They did not deserve to die. Killing them immediately invalidated any sort of just cause that the invaders thought they were acting upon.

'Still, from the way that woman spoke, it doesn't seem like they're killing willingly.'

Didn't it sound more like they were being forced to kill by the insanity that polluted their bloodline?

'If I can find a way to cure them...'

August shook his head wryly.

It was just wishful thinking, and they wouldn't be absolved of their sins because of their circumstances. August just hoped that there was a way to end this conflict without spilling too much blood.

He was only able to hold such thoughts because he had not experienced the past seven days.

August rushed to the outer walls where he felt a familiar presence. She was on the opposite side of the water, which meant she was far away from his current location, but he couldn't find Valerie.

Melania wasn't particularly in the middle of anything. A wave of attacks had just ended and the troops were taking care of their losses and other matters to prepare for the next wave. Melania had some status after her short yet impactful stint in the heir wars, so she had been given a more exclusive position.

For the past week, she had been forced to put her everything into protecting this city. She didn't have time to think about anything else, not even her own inexperience in real battle. Her first time killing someone didn't even register in her mind, because the second, third, and fourth came just seconds later.

The war thus far had been brutal. Some were framing the ongoing events as a rebellion, but why rebel against the people? The noble clans and Holy Clans had only recently shown their faces and started suffering losses. Only those who were weak and oppressed were being slaughtered on both sides.

Melania came from the same circumstances. If it wasn't for the Shadow Lounge, her mother and siblings likely would have died to the forsaken dragon clans already.

If she wanted to protect her people, then she had no choice but to fight.

That thought wasn't far apart from her feelings towards training, but the difference in environment dulled her a little.

In the end, this was the life of a practitioner. One where killing became commonplace and lives lost all of their meaning.

She was just contemplating it. The same way she did after every wave, she looked down at the battlefield from atop the walls and watched the corpses of those who died as they were recovered.

She looked at the corpses of her enemies as they were burned and wondered just why they'd commit such cruelties and force her into such a position.

It was a depressing train of thought, and one that she didn't expect to be broken in the way it was.

With her hands and face still stained with blood, she turned around to sense a surprising aura approaching.

He arrived before she could question it in a flash of blue.

"August?!" Melania exclaimed in surprise.

She immediately forgot about everything else.

"What happened to you? Are you okay? How did you escape?"

She rushed to him and hit him with a barrage of questions. Both she and Valerie fled from the third stage, but they didn't take their eyes off of it until much later. They saw the deliberation of the Holy Dragons and watched as August was thrown into Eternal Darkness.

It was relieving to see that he was still alive, but with his fate unknown, both of the girls were incredibly troubled until the moment they were forced to push their extraneous feelings aside to deal with conflict.

The fact that he was standing here was preposterous almost. He was imprisoned by a Holy Dragon, for crying out loud! It didn't make sense for him to be running around.

Melania scanned his body and made sure there was nothing wrong with him as she continued to question him. August couldn't help but crack a smile as warmth filled his body, but Melania's appearance was definitely cause for concern.

Nevertheless, before he could ask her about it, he had some things to explain.

Melania gave notice to a few nearby soldiers that she would be absent for a bit and took August to an isolated room inside the fortress walls where they could talk.

There, August told the story from the start. He told Melania the truth about his lineage and the story of his ancestor before leading into his childhood in Damien's care and the mission he'd gained from his ancestral memories.

Finally, he told of his experience in the Eternal Darkness.

"I'm pretty sure my dad broke me out, but he didn't say anything to me."

Melania nodded.

She was more familiar with Damien's power than anyone. It was the sole cause of her rapid growth. Still, while she expected August to be more than just a commoner, she didn't expect his origins to be so wild. August's personal story was something he had to tell her, but, in the end, it was not the main purpose of their current conversation. Melania was absolutely willing to support him in his path to becoming Emperor. However, that could only happen when Arulion was once again safe.

"Since you've been trapped for the past week, I guess you don't know what's been happening," Melania said with a sad smile.

August nodded heavily.

"I came directly to you when I sensed your aura so that I can find out."

"Huu..."

Melania took a deep breath.

"If I had to describe it in one word, it would be 'atrocities.'"

That was how she started her explanation.

Of the past week, of the killings that had taken place...

August was about to hear a story that completely contrasted the one he heard from the forsaken dragon clan woman from before.

Chapter 1730 Chaos [9]

What Melania experienced was hell.

The initial scare of the Holy Dragons was already a huge event. It wasn't discussed enough how much a collection of auras at that level could affect a young genius' psyche.

Unless one could properly cope with the experience, the trauma could lead to consequences beyond belief, even leaving some crippled.

Melania's mental fortitude was at a higher level than that of her peers. She wouldn't fold under pressure alone. Still, the impact of the potential death of a friend like August and the sort of inevitability represented by the Holy Dragons took a toll on her mind.

She didn't have time to process any of it which just made her life worse.

Just a few hours after August's situation occurred, the forsaken dragon clan attacked. The beginning of their siege was broadcasted live as the territories were struck. The geniuses within had to be evacuated by their clansmen to avoid death.

News continued to flood their minds. Soon enough, everyone in Arulion knew exactly what had happened, and not a single one of them could avoid it.

Images of the bloody endings of those who stood in the enemy's path were spread, and Melania and Valerie immediately jumped in to lend their strength to the closest territory to them, which was naturally Fort Halleya.

The first day was terrible. The entire fort was taken by the enemy, and the two young geniuses had to gather the forces left in the city to fight them off. They succeeded, sure, but not without losses. Too many people died meaninglessly that day. Melania and Valerie were unable to protect them as they protected the city.

In their memory, the two geniuses resolved to keep everyone else safe and do whatever they could to help end the conflict.

While Melania stayed in Fort Halleys and rallied those who remained to stand against the enemy, Valerie returned to her clan to recruit their help.

It was a tough journey for both of them.

Melania saw slaughter on a day-to-day basis and became used to it. Valerie was traveling a rocky path back to her clan, fighting through the groups of enemies she saw and risking her life to save those she met along the way.

A lot of tragedy had already affected them at a personal level.

Just a day ago, Melania received news that most of the members of their alliance from the heir wars had already died.

Only Lucas and Ophelia were still alive. Their sponsors supported them and kept them safe, but it was unknown what would happen when they actually entered the war. Someone like Damien could view this conflict as a shame and disregard it if he so chose. With the power he had, nobody in the forsaken dragon clans could even touch his toes.

However, for Melania and the other young geniuses, this kind of atrocity was unimaginable.

They never thought that they'd ever see so much blood. Even bloodline memories filled with such experiences could never give them the same feeling as seeing it in person.

"Anyway, I really can't tell you the entire situation. From what I've heard, the invaders kill anyone they see on sight. A guy named Hendricks is leading them. He and the other strongest members of the rebellion are Ancient Dragons, and the rest aren't weak either. They've taken hold of the west and are using it as a stepping stone to spread their troops throughout the kingdom. Anything more than that, I haven't heard. Communication hasn't been easy." "Hm."

August made a sound of acknowledgement. Simply put, people were being slaughtered with every second that passed.

'There's really nothing that can justify it, even if it's not something the forsaken dragons are doing willingly.' August was tempted to share the other side of the story with Melania just so she could know, but he didn't think it was right.

She had seen too much for her to feel anything for them. In fact, it might even make her opinion of them worse if she knew their motivations.

Rather than that, August had to think of a way to end this conflict. 'But is that even something I can do?'

He wasn't that strong. He was a 4th class dragon. It was hilarious for him to believe that he could damage or stop a force led by Gods.

'But, even if I can't fight them, I can at least do something, right?'

With the connections he'd built, he could definitely bring a fighting force into the battle and turn the scales in a few isolated areas. Was it worth making more people suffer by roping them into this conflict?

Was it worth fighting the battle at all?

As August contemplated it, another sudden change took place.

But this one...was less abrupt. It was something that had been planned long ago, but needed to happen in a different way considering the current situation.

A huge aura covered the entire world.

In front of every surviving participant that was once a part of the heir wars, a projection of the Dragon Emperor appeared.

They all recognized him immediately despite having never seen his face. That kind of aura was unmistakable, after all.

"You all must be confused."

Whether they were safe, struggling, or taking a break from the war, all of them were forced to pay attention to that voice.

"I am your Emperor, the man whose position you all strive to take."

He started with an introduction, but he didn't take long to get to his main point.

"Today, I present all of you with a challenge. As the heir wars were not able to conclude properly, this will act as its replacement."

August and Melania looked at each other in surprise.

Was now really the time to be doing this?

It was a thought they shared with many, but their opinions didn't change the Dragon Emperor's message.

"Somewhere in our kingdom, I have hidden my crown. It is the symbol of Arulion's ruler, and the object that will give you control over the kingdom."

"If you find it, then it is yours. If you take it, then you will become the next Dragon Emperor."

"Your candidate emblems will act as a compass. Your hearts will become deciders. If you have received this message, then you are worthy of my throne. However, if you cannot defeat those who are worthy alongside you..."

"...then you may be destined for nothing."

August's eyes sharpened.

Those were provoking words. They were meant to belittle the pride of a genius and force each and every challenger into accepting this race.

'I see...'

It was a move made both to provide an heir to the kingdom and to keep the geniuses away from the war.

In the end, when all other reasons and justifications were stripped away, it was a move made to protect the younger generation, the future lifeblood of Arulion. But, at the same time, it was a race for the throne and the simplest, most direct manifestation of what the heir wars were always supposed to be. The choice that August was trying to make had changed.

It was no longer about whether he wanted to participate in the war on a large scale or not.

No, it was much deeper than that.

August was forced to ask himself a question that he honestly didn't know the answer to.

What was more important to him?

The throne...

...or the people?