

# Void 1731

## Chapter 1731 Race [1]

It was indeed a mechanism to protect the geniuses.

Damien revisited Zenith when the invasion began. During their first meeting, they'd already planned the race for the crown. At that time, Damien hadn't scanned the world so he didn't know about the forsaken dragon clans or Rose yet. Still, he knew that there would be a massive change soon.

After all, he was the one who asked Serena for help with the time array. Though he couldn't tell exactly what they were doing, he could feel the changes in the world. Arulion was just as affected as other places. In order to include the secluded plane without alerting its people, the array lines were run through the Western Region itself and connected to the hidden realm through more esoteric means.

When Damien felt their presence and inspected their mechanisms, he learned of the mana vacuum concept that Serena used to power them. The Dragon Emperor's message was originally planned to air right after the wave, pushing the geniuses into a sudden race for the throne.

However, when the forsaken dragon clans were brought into the picture, everything changed.

Zenith knew well that Damien was unwilling to help unless the situation became too extreme.

It was hard to call him indifferent to suffering, but he definitely had the demeanor of a Supreme.

The Dragon Kingdom's issues were for the dragons to solve. He would not step in and alter their fates unless he was left with no other option.

Damien stood too high above the clouds. To him, it was not his right to change such large events. He was not a person to take sides based on good or evil because his opinion of evil had changed.

His scale of thinking had become disconnected from the reality that others lived in.

Was it a good thing or a bad thing...? That was up for debate. Regardless, it remained true that if he wasn't dealing with matters that were of his caliber or entertaining to him, then he would only intervene with worldly affairs for the sake of his family.

The greatest evil, the person who was willing and able to turn entire cosmos worth of people into his slaves and destroy any other cosmos that stood in his way...no, the man who toyed with other cosmos for fun and saw others as nothing more than playthings who existed to cure his boredom, that was the man Damien saw as evil.

His scale of thinking had become disconnected from the reality that others lived in.

Was it a good thing or a bad thing...? That was up for debate. Regardless, it remained true that if he wasn't dealing with matters that were of his caliber or entertaining to him, then he would only intervene with worldly affairs for the sake of his family.

Damien was currently acting as August's helper. He was shaping the world so it would be ready for him when he became the Emperor, but unless August was truly in an unavoidable situation, he was not going to help his son.

This journey belonged to August. The happenings in Arulion were his to solve as long as he was enough to solve them.

And to Damien, August's strength wasn't an issue. The forsaken dragon clan was a threat that he could absolutely handle if he played his cards right.

Nevertheless, the race for the crown was a perfect way to provide August with a chance. At the same time, with the geniuses finding their way to the crown, they would move further away from the conflict.

Zenith wanted to protect the younger generation as much as possible, and this was the best way he could think of. Only, Damien did not agree.

If Zenith's goal was to help the largest number of people, then creating a competition that only involved a group of ten or twenty geniuses was no longer the right move.

Wasn't this a message better presented to the entire kingdom as a whole? If even enemies found themselves blinded by greed and aiming for the crown, then wouldn't fewer people be killed on a minute-to-minute basis?

Only the geniuses had compasses leading them to the right location. The general public did not need to know that information.

So, perhaps property would suffer as people ransacked every possible location in search of the treasure, but the people would stop killing each other to focus on greater things.

Damien told Zenith his idea and let the old Dragon Emperor decide what he wanted to do. It was his kingdom, after all.

His choice was clear, yet it did not leave him untroubled.

In that way, he was similar to a certain genius who would later be placed in a similar situation.

A choice with a clear answer that may not have been the right one...

August was facing one too.

\*\*\*

Right, it was a matter related to what kind of ruler he wanted to be.

The choice was obvious in his mind, but he didn't like it at all.

'I have to aim for the crown.'

There currently wasn't a way for him to reliably deal with the forsaken dragon clan without incurring losses that invalidated his efforts. For him to properly face the threat with his measly strength, then he needed surety that he could control those stronger than him.

The position of Dragon Emperor was an empty one. It was a shell of what it was meant to be. All of the Holy Clan geniuses who aimed for the crown knew this and were only trying to take the position into their clan's grasp. If one looked at who was in the competition that actually had the goal of becoming Emperor and changing Arulion, there was only August. Perhaps the crown would not give August control over the Holy Clans. Perhaps his holding it would only create a bigger grudge between them, putting him in an extremely difficult situation.

But, at the very least, August was sure that the current Dragon Emperor's people would listen to him. The powerful people who had only ever been known as the "tournament administration" would be there to help him fight against the ongoing threat.

And, more importantly, the people would see the crowning of their next Emperor. They who still filled the title with value would heed his call and raise their arms.

Commoners usually didn't have much power, but it wasn't rare for them to reach at least 3rd class for the purpose of living longer. Those people had enough mana in their bodies. As long as August could equip them with the tools to use power above their means, he was confident that they'd gain enough fighting spirit to defend their homes.

It was a good plan in August's eyes, but looking for the crown was a time-consuming task. They couldn't just blindly follow their compasses until they found it, as they'd never reach before others.

To first triangulate its location, then find the fastest path to that general area, then enter the race to find it, and finally fight it out with the others to claim it would take far too long.

Too many people would die in that time. It didn't sit right in August's heart to just leave them to fate before he got a hold of the crown.

'A way to do both...'

It existed.

'But I'll need a lot of help to pull it off.'

He chose not to make a choice between the throne or the people.

Because, at the end of the day, they were one and the same.

August steeled himself. He had big dreams, and he didn't plan to give up on them.

The connections he'd made, the friends he'd made, even the enemies that he didn't find so unappealing anymore...

...he needed to call as many of them as possible to put together the wild scheme that was brewing in his mind.

Chapter 1732 Race [2]

August first proposed his plan to Melania. It had many elements that she didn't have much information on, but August assured her that he could make it all work.

It was an assurance that one could only believe if one had blind faith. Melania may have resolved to follow August and be his sword, but she did not want to blindly follow his words. She was her own person with her own thoughts. If she wanted to assist him, she had to be ready to counter him when he was saying idiotic things.

Even this time, she got the urge to tell him that his dreams were not possible. He was proposing something far beyond what people of their caliber were capable of. If he failed, then Arulion would be doomed to fall.

Did she want to go along with it despite her opinions...?

At first, the answer was a flat no. However, when she saw the look in his eyes, she began to waver.

'He's serious about this.'

It wasn't just some whim or some childish ideology that couldn't be supported by reality. August had a look in his eyes that said he had put a lot of thought into his plan. He truly believed it would succeed. Not because he was dreaming, but because he had assessed the rationality of every moving piece with a tactical mindset.

August's thoughts were filled with that same hope and unreasonable compassion that they always had, but his eyes were utterly cold.

This was a war, not a playground.

Any heroism he wanted to pursue needed to be weighed on a scale of possibility. He learned personally in Bastille what would happen if he tried to save everyone without thinking.

Melania sighed to herself.

"What are you going to do about the fort?"

If she left this place, then they would be left with only a ragtag group of individuals of varying power levels. Most of the dragons in the city focused on more human-like specialities like finance.

The few strong soldiers they had would leave when a uniting presence like Melania left, and everyone else would be doomed.

She wouldn't allow that to happen even if it meant parting ways with August here.

August smiled. He could sense her worries.

'That's exactly the reason.'

Despite only knowing her for a short period of time, August felt like he could truly trust Melania with his life. She was a person who liked to think pessimistically, but her core was the same as his. Just like that day when she found him on the street and allowed him to spend the night at her house, she begrudgingly sacrificed herself for the sake of these people.

"Don't worry," he said reassuringly.

"Fort Halleya is where the Sea Tribes can make landfall. It'll be secured before anywhere else."

The most obvious aspect of the plan was the Sea Tribes. They who retained their old traditions as they lived lives separate from Arulion would be more than happy to help in a situation like this.

They would be August's vanguard. His first real followers were a part of those tribes, and the rest were happy to repay him for the things he'd done when he was exploring the oceans.

"You're sure that everything will go as planned?"

"Well, I can't be sure of it, but I'm sure that everyone involved will try their best to do what they need to."

Melania stared into his eyes as if to read his soul. Her own pupils narrowed, but in the end, she conceded.

"Fine," she said. It wasn't like she had a choice in the first place.

Her heart was always going to follow him, because something about his needlessly kind and dreaming self made her feel like her own spirits were being lifted.

If he wanted it, then he'd find a way to accomplish it by any means.

Was it baseless to believe so? Melania didn't know. However, as long as the Sea Tribes secured the city before she left, she didn't have a reason to refuse.

"We need to get to work."

If they were going to go through with it, then they needed to start putting the pieces in motion as soon as possible.

August nodded his head with a smile.

"Let's start making calls."

From this random room in the walls of Fort Halleya, a small ripple spread.

It was a ripple now, but soon enough, it would spread and spread until it became a tsunami that changed the shape of Arulion forever.

Today marked the first time August proved to the world that he would be the best Dragon Emperor that would ever stand at the head of Arulion.

But that was a story to unfold from now on.

\*\*\*

It was a day later when the Dragon Emperor's message struck the rest of the world.

At that time, all of the geniuses who received it earlier found themselves shocked.

They believed this opportunity was unique to them. In the current climate, many of them were thinking about sitting out of the race and just observing from the sidelines until some progress was made in the search.



The number of forsaken dragons wantonly slaughtering the masses dropped significantly. Hell, even some relationships between their people and the people of the overworld budded as they worked together to reach their mutual goals.

The situation morphed into one where anyone who wasn't moving was missing out. What may have taken months to find would assuredly be found much sooner with such a massive population participating in the search.

Those plans were instantly thrown away. The moment the Dragon Emperor's face appeared in the skies of Arulion and announced the presence of the crown to each and every individual within, the entire war situation was flipped on its head.

A majority of the forsaken dragon clan's people were drawn to the race. Some of them wanted it for themselves, but for the most part, their goals were two.

First, they wanted to make it impossible for someone from the Holy Clans to get their hands on the crown.

Second, they wanted to gift the crown to their King. With him at the head, they could claim the surface world as their own. The number of forsaken dragons wantonly slaughtering the masses dropped significantly. Hell, even some relationships between their people and the people of the overworld budded as they worked together to reach their mutual goals.

The situation morphed into one where anyone who wasn't moving was missing out. What may have taken months to find would assuredly be found much sooner with such a massive population participating in the search.

More importantly, the geniuses recognized a fact that they had to conceal from even their closest relatives and friends.

They had an absolute advantage.

They had compasses that directed them towards the treasure, so only they knew where to actually search.

If anyone else learned of this information, then their chances to get the treasure for themselves would vanish.

It was now or never. It was a free-for-all.

Though there was still a war going on, it was happening parallel to the rat race for the throne.

Arulion's chaos deepened. But, perhaps only out of this chaos could order truly rise.

Back in the walls of Fort Halleya, August and Melania were unaware of the kind of competition that they were now facing, but they'd already started looking for the potential location of the crown.

And somewhere in the forests outside the layer of the Wood Dragon Clan, Valerie rushed and fought against a horde of pursuers she'd gained as she made her journey.

The group of friends was separated for now, but it would not remain that way for long.

And, it looked like they were alone now, but they'd have many, many reinforcements soon.

#### Chapter 1733 Race [3]

The compass pointed directly to the southeast, which made life much harder for them.

With Arulion's shape, the land to the southeast of Fort Halleya was either mountainous to the point where flat land was hard to find, or submerged below the sea as a result of the conflicts that took place in Qinglong's era.

For a group of twenty geniuses, it was an extremely large swathe of land that they wouldn't be able to easily explore. The sea was August's territory. If the crown was within, then he'd feel it as soon as he got close. Otherwise, it would take more than just some planning to figure out exactly where it was.

The benefit of a starting point like Fort Halleya was that it was closer to their intended destination than anyone else's starting points, so August and Melania weren't forced to move immediately.

Instead, they waited and planned the other aspects of the overarching scheme and waited for the people they called to arrive.

It was almost entirely familiar people.

Valerie came first. After defeating her enemies and calling upon her clan, she immediately returned. Naturally, August had to explain everything to her as well, but that was beside the point.

The Wood Dragon Clan was already on the move without a real direction. They were originally just going to help where they could help and do what they could within their means, but with August hatching such an elaborate plan, Valerie was forced to contact them with new orders.

They were now playing a much greater role in the kingdom's troubles than intended, but they didn't have a problem with it.

After all, Alcharist was already one of August's greatest supporters. He sent Valerie into the world to aid him, and he had already promised his clan's help when the time came for August to face the world.

Lucas and Ophelia arrived next. As they knew that they wouldn't be able to compete for the crown on their own, they accepted August's invitation to work as a team.

The two of them were similar to Melania in a way. They joined the heir wars originally so that they could gain sponsors and better lives for themselves.

Truthfully, both of the young geniuses knew that they weren't fit for the throne. It was a position that only gave one a compilation of hardships. What benefit was there in joining the ranks of high society people who would never respect their opinions? What could they change if they found themselves in that position?

The resounding answer was nothing. They wouldn't gain anything and would instead trouble themselves more.

Instead of taking the throne, wasn't it better for them to be content with what they had?

They did have ambition, but they did not strive for that particular position. Still, they wanted to support a new friend they'd made in the recent months.

If August had that desire, then they were more than willing to support him in it. Plus, this kind of expedition would be great for their growth and could provide benefits of its own, so rather than fighting against a powerful enemy in the kingdom, they preferred going on an adventure.

Unfortunately, they were all who remained from the originally formed alliance.

August was tempted to call the friends he made from the Holy Clans like Iridia, Seryius, and Cera, but he knew that it was impossible.

No matter how friendly they were, they would not support him in flipping the kingdom upside down and taking power away from the Holy Clans.

It was a shame, but they were competitors and enemies at their core.

The rest of those joining him in the race were his friends from Bastille. Juno and the rest were nearby already. They arrived soon and completed the main raid team.

There were many more individuals who received calls from August. Most of them responded, but none of them were going to help in the fight for the crown.

There was only one more person who was coming for that purpose, a hidden card that August had called in preparation for the worst.

Everyone made it to Fort Halleya within three days. It was just enough time for the first of the Sea Tribes to breach as well.

August met them at the port as the rest learned of the plans he'd prepared.

There were 10 Sea Tribes living in this area of the ocean. Of them, the Surge Dragon Tribe was nearest to the shore.

They were pure dragons, however, their bodies were more similar to seahorses. When they turned into their human forms, they kept their unique fin-shaped ears that signified their clan identity.

The person who stood at the head of the group of over a thousand was a man with a weak-looking figure.

He was young, at most somewhere in his early thirties, and everything about him seemed to beg others to underestimate him.

However, August knew personally just how deceiving appearances could be.

The entire Surge Dragon Clan had similar features to him, but they were providers for the entire ocean habitat and the ones in charge of making contact with the shore. They were given this position not particularly because they were intelligent, but because they were strong enough to force others into favorable deals.

These dragons had a connection to Fort Halleya and even had friendships with some of its people. When August called them, they moved instantly.

"It's been a while, Yusuf," August said with a smile.

"I cannot say the same to you, Young Master. Though it has only been a short time, you have improved immensely."

The man named Yusuf spoke with a warm smile, as if he was looking at a young nephew of his.

"Though, now is not the time for pleasantries, is it?"

His expression changed in a flash.

When he and his group left, Yusuf and his people would be in charge of communications between all of the Sea Tribes. The rest would encounter them first and learn the situation before moving to where they needed to go.

"You said that they are killing our comrades, didn't you? I would very much like to hear more about that."

August nodded seriously.

When he and his group left, Yusuf and his people would be in charge of communications between all of the Sea Tribes. The rest would encounter them first and learn the situation before moving to where they needed to go.

The Surge Dragon Tribe was one of two of the most important forces in this plan.

As for the other...

Well, it was obviously August's sectmates from Bastille.

As August walked Yusuf and his people into Fort Halleya, he explained everything from the start.

Yusuf's expression became darker and darker.

"Forsaken Dragons..."

It was the first time August actually heard the phrase.

The woman he spoke to naturally refused to use such terminology. She actually didn't use any sort of name for their clan and only told of what had happened to them.

"You know who they are?" August asked in surprise.

"Indeed," Yusuf said with a nod.

"As we have maintained the history passed down to us by our ancestors, I have personally read stories about the dragons who were later termed 'The Forsaken.' Their history...is an unfortunate one, but that is not of my concern."

He didn't take long to reach the same conclusion as August.

"Then, what do you want us to do?" he asked.

Reiteration was something August never experienced as much as he had today, but this was the last time he'd have to give the same explanation.

That job now belonged to Yusuf and his master.

Once he had passed Fort Halleya on to its new protectors, once he'd ensured that all of the moving pieces would activate properly without his direct supervision, August set out with his team to the southeast.

This time, meeting in a place where they were not protected by barriers or mechanisms, how would the geniuses interact...?

August was hoping it wouldn't reach that point, but...

...if they forced him to do so, then he was not unwilling to let them learn what it felt like to die.

#### Chapter 1734 Race [4]

Most of the land in Arulion's central area was flat. The places near civilization tended to have only a few mountains, rivers, and other natural formations.

However, when one moved further from society, one would find that there was more variety in the world's ecosystems than expected.

August's team passed through many a forest, jungle, and even tundra on their way to the mountain ranges of the south. The group used their dragon forms to travel. It was the first time Ophelia or Lucas saw what August was hiding. They couldn't help but be impressed with his majesty.

They were part of the crowd that didn't understand anything about what August's identity signified. They saw the Holy Dragons convene about him, but they still didn't seem to get what the big deal was. After all, August was standing here safe and sound. It was impossible for him to escape on his own, so the Holy Dragons must have let him go.

Lucas and Ophelia weren't privy to the details of August's life. They were his friends, but they were not life-and-death comrades. He didn't know how much he could trust them, so he only told them about the plans he had for the future rather than the events of the past.

Nevertheless, without knowing what questions to ask, the two naturally shut their mouths and focused on the current objective.

The lands were mostly clear. When they first left Fort Halleya, they came across many forsaken dragons and were forced to fight, but their combined strength was enough to easily defeat all of them.

As they moved further and further from society as a whole, the number of forsaken dragons they saw diminished heavily.



Those people, until recently, only had thoughts of slaughtering others. They would not be in areas without settlements.

Well, it wasn't that there were none.

The dragon kingdom had existed for a very long time. Over the course of its history, many clans had built their homes in its most distant regions as they desired a life outside of the kingdom's authority.

The journey was an educational one in that sense. Even if the encounters were brief, August and his friends were able to meet the ancient tribes in the forests similar to Valerie's people and even the ice and snow dragons who lived deep in the unexplored tundra.

Still, all of their stops were only made with the intention of checking their compasses to see if they were still moving in the right direction.

Eventually, they arrived exactly where August and Melania predicted they would.

What stood in front of them was a vast array of mountains that spanned a huge distance. They bordered the expansive seas and didn't contain any signs of life, as if this area was deemed the only place in the hidden realm unsuitable for life.

Aside from the fact that there wasn't anything but water past this point, the main clue leading everyone to believe that the treasure was here was the movement of their compasses.

The "needles," which were holographic rather than physical, were spinning chaotically. Now, perhaps on a real compass that would lead them to believe they were in a region with strange magnetism, but their devices did not use magnets to function, so that was no longer a possibility.

The effect was likely being mirrored to indicate that their compasses would not give them more clues. Since they'd arrived here, they needed to do the rest of the searching on their own.

At first glance, it looked like they were the first to arrive. Without any obvious life auras in the vicinity, it wasn't wrong for them to make such an assumption.

Still, they could never be certain until they checked for themselves.

While everyone else split up to search the mountain range for any signs of tampering or residual aura, August took to the seas. As an Azure Dragon, he had something of an absolute dominion over these territories. If he managed to reach Qinglong's level, then he would be invincible on the water.

At the moment, he wasn't quite there yet, but he had more than enough familiarity with the environment.

August's body shifted the moment he entered the sea into a draconic form more suitable for underwater travel. He connected to the water itself and used it as his eyes and ears, looking far and wide for anything interesting.

There weren't any civilizations here. Perhaps because temperatures were too cold for other living beings to survive, dragons refused to move here. No matter how great they were, they would still be affected by food scarcity, after all.

The sea floor was just rocky without any coral formations or beauties. As August approached it, he realized that even the earth disallowed life. The soil itself was already extremely hard, not to mention the rocks below. August tried to break through the seafloor out of curiosity only to learn that it was impossible for him.

Which, frankly, was a shame.

The vacuum presented by the lack of anything in the vicinity allowed August to perform a more concentrated search without obstructions, through which he sensed a strange aura deep within the ground.

He approached the location above that place and focused his senses into a line to see what lay below.

His awareness bounced off of the seafloor many times before he managed to penetrate it.

And when he did...

'That has to be it.'

All he saw was a shining mass of white light hidden in a cavern. He didn't know how to reach that cavern, and he couldn't find out through this method.

'My senses are being pulled in by the light. I can either pull out completely or let it consume me.'

Pulling out just enough to find the path to that place was made impossible. It was an inconvenience, but it wasn't necessarily the worst-case scenario.

'There has to be an entrance on the surface if it's like this. And, that entrance will be somewhere close to the shore.'

Receiving confirmation from the other side that they'd received it, he started making his way back to the shore so he could help with the search.

It wasn't easy for him to give them details about where the cavern was, but he could visualize its location which gave him an advantage in the search.

August immediately grabbed his communicator and conveyed his findings to the team.

Receiving confirmation from the other side that they'd received it, he started making his way back to the shore so he could help with the search.

It wasn't easy for him to give them details about where the cavern was, but he could visualize its location which gave him an advantage in the search.

Surfacing and flying up a nearby cliff to make it back into the mountain range, August landed on flat land again.

Only, he was not alone.

"August Void..."

The woman who found herself face to face with him commented in surprise. August turned to her with the same expression.

"Iridia Ignis?"

He didn't sense her presence at all. More importantly, if she was here, then the other Holy Clan geniuses had to be somewhere in the vicinity as well.

'That isn't good news.'

It meant that they were outnumbered by enemies.

August lowered his stance. His eyes narrowed as he observed Iridia's posture.

They were clearly competitors and enemies.

So, why was she remaining so relaxed?

August was already prepared for a fight. If this was a move to catch him off guard, then it would not work.

However...

"Put your fists down. I'm not fighting you."

...Iridia's response was even more surprising than her presence.

It seemed she was here not for battle, but for conversation.

To August, though, it was strange.

He couldn't think of anything she could possibly want to talk to him about at a time like this.

But, he also didn't want to fight.

Slowly but surely, he brought himself out of his fighting stance and looked at her in confusion, asking her the question in his mind.

"Why?"

Chapter 1735 Race [5]

Iridia replied with a shrug.

"It would be a shame if either of us was knocked out before we even found out where the crown was. Since you're one of my strongest competitors, it isn't worth fighting you yet."

It was sound reasoning, but incredibly strange coming from someone like her.

"I'm one of your strongest competitors? Since when?" August reiterated, sarcasm oozing from his tone.

However, Iridia responded seriously.

"Since the moment you tied with Eris Noct."

That battle changed the way all of the Holy Clan geniuses saw him. "Wait, but none of you saw that happen."

"We didn't need to. Eris herself told everyone that you tied, and she definitely isn't one to lie for other people's sake."

"Eris did that?"

"She's more honest than you'd expect. She just has a shitty personality that makes it irrelevant."

"I see..."

August nodded his head, somewhat accepting the situation.

Eris was stronger than most of the other geniuses who had participated in the heir wars. If he was able to fight her to a tie and force her to unveil her dragon form, then the rest of them couldn't carelessly fight him.

Still, calling it a tie was a bit much.

'If we kept going, I'd probably have lost.'

After all, Eris had an advantage in experience due to her age. Unlike the rest, she had a decent amount of practical experience to back up her strength, which was what made her scary.

Even after Bastille, August didn't improve much in the sense of personal battles. War situations were completely different from duels.

Still, since Iridia seemed in a friendly mood, August wanted to take the chance to ask her the question that had been bugging him. "Why are you even chasing the crown?"

It couldn't have been as simple as what he expected, right?

Iridia responded to his question with another. "Are you asking because you know, or because you don't?" "The former."

"Then, for the most part, it's just that. People want to gain more influence, and even if the Dragon Emperor doesn't have real power, the position is still respected by the common people. If it's the Dragon Emperor's will, they won't raise a fuss no matter what."

August frowned.

"But you guys don't care about commoners at all, do you? Their actions don't affect theirs, and theirs don't affect yours. In my understanding, as long as they stay oppressed, you don't need to interfere, right?"

"Wrong."

Iridia shook her head.

"I don't know much about it since it isn't discussed as often as you'd expect, but it's something about fate. There's a cycle that affects both commoners and noble dragons that can't be interrupted. If you want more information, then you'll have to find one of the elders from our clans to tell you, because it's not information you get access to until you reach that stage." She continued to casually answer his questions as if she wasn't spilling the secrets of the Holy Clans like a leaky faucet.

Her attitude was confusing.

"Why do you think I'm chasing the crown?" August didn't know why he asked, but he felt the need to.

He was too curious about the other side's perspective. "Idealism, probably."

Iridia answered just as simply as ever. "If you think that you can change something because you're a commoner with some power, then you're wrong. If you think you can change something because of your lineage, then you're double wrong. From what I understand, you're the last living Azure Dragon. You won't be able to make an impact on the deeply rooted system that exists already."

She genuinely believed that there was nothing to be done. As she benefited from the system, she didn't speak about it negatively. Rather, she looked at it from his point of view and countered his possible beliefs with the facts she had the privilege to know because of her unique standing.

It was as August thought. There was something more to the throne of the Dragon Emperor than the Holy Clans wanted others to know.

Its importance was likely crushed by them so that nobody else would expect that taking hold of that crown meant so much.

Iridia didn't know everything, but that wasn't a problem. August could infer what he needed to from her statements, and he could find the rest out for himself when the time came. August responded to her with determination.

"It's not idealism." That was one thing he'd never act upon without reason.

"I'm confident that I'll change this kingdom if I get my hands on that crown. I'm going to follow in the footsteps of my ancestor and bring Arulion back to its former beauty, no matter who stands in my way. It isn't a claim I'm making based on childish ambition or unsupported arrogance. It's something I can say confidently based on the tangible advantages I possess and the cards I have hidden."

He did have a sufficient number of cards in his pocket, but if they were brought into the light by his enemies, then his advantage would disappear. Iridia could see the hatred for Holy Clans and the desire to stand against them in August's eyes.

Frankly, it was extremely stupid for August to be explaining something like that to Iridia. If she went back and told her clan, then he would face even more suppression.

He did have a sufficient number of cards in his pocket, but if they were brought into the light by his enemies, then his advantage would disappear. Iridia could see the hatred for Holy Clans and the desire to stand against them in August's eyes.



If it was a few months ago, she might've shown him a more unruly response. She might have taken offense to his sentiments and started a battle here.

But she wasn't the same person anymore. What she experienced in the heir wars, and more importantly, what she experienced after they were cut short completely changed her perspective on things. She could understand his feelings. "After everything that happened last time, I went home and asked about it," she said. "Your ancestor...it seems my clan didn't have any grudges with him. It is true that my ancestors participated in his downfall, however, it wasn't a personal matter. Our Ignis Clan functions on the property of strength over everything. He was not strong enough, so he fell. If we find ourselves in the same situation, then we will also accept our defeat with grace."

Her meaning was clear.

Suppose August believed that he had the proper means to take down the Ignis Clan. If he challenged them and won, then they would accept defeat and bend to his will until the moment he was not strong enough anymore.

That was the way of the world in their eyes.

This was a moment when August could also take offense if he wanted to. The fact that his ancestor meant nothing to them, their choice to participate in his death merely because of such a narrow-minded ideology was definitely an affront to his existence. But, since Iridia let his words go before, he decided to do the same.

"I hope you're prepared for that day to come," August said after a slight silence.

"I can be, but I'm sure my seniors are different."

"Is now really the time for jokes?"

"If not now, then when?"

Her changing tone was even more confusing than her nonchalance.

What happened to Iridia since the last time they'd met? 'Whatever it was, she's basically turned into a different person. Is it maturity...or something else?'

August wondered if she was still the same in her core or if something forced her to become something she was not.

Nevertheless, it wasn't something for him to concern himself with.

Since there was nothing left to talk about in this strange chance encounter, he could take his leave.

That was what he thought.

He assumed that it'd end with that.

But, as he moved through the mountains to regroup with his people, he was forced to voice his thoughts.

Once again, they cumulated into a single question.

"Why are you still here?"

He stopped on a random mountain and turned around to face the woman who had decided that she wanted to tag along.

August felt a headache rolling in. Was this going to be a bigger problem than he thought?

Chapter 1736 Race [6]

Apparently, not in Iridia's eyes. "What? You're moving like you know where we need to go. On top of that, did you think you could say something that bold and not gain my interest? I want to see what you're capable of, August Void."

"Didn't you see enough during the heir wars?" August responded in exasperation.

"I clearly did not. In fact, the only thing I saw was the performance of your subordinates. You never actually fought in front of me, did you?" Iridia responded with a sound reasoning that he couldn't argue with.

August sighed as he said, "I didn't know you were a person like this."

And, as if it had been preloaded, Iridia clapped back in an instant.

"I'm a Holy Clan genius, not a homunculus. Even I have a personality."

"And you're showing it to me because..." August said, raising a brow.

"...I want to. Simple as that."

Iridia's eyes carried a certain kind of determination that August couldn't guess the origin of. For some reason, she was resolved to follow him and see how he took on this challenge.

August sighed.

"Is there any way to drive you away without fighting?"

"No."

"Not even if I act horrendously?"

"Have you met my clanmates?"

"Touche."

It really was a point that he couldn't argue against. Someone who grew up around a clan full of Raphaels wouldn't fold under any pressure that he could dish out.

"Haa..."

It seemed like he couldn't get rid of her after all.

'Well, it's not totally a bad thing.'

Iridia was one of the good ones. She and the Ether Clan geniuses were the only Holy Clan geniuses that August actually got a chance to form a connection with, so if it had to be someone, then at least it was her.

August made sure to notify his teammates that he was bringing a guest back, and to his surprise, they returned the exact same to him.

While Valerie and Melania were moving towards the rendezvous point, they happened to run into two more familiar geniuses. It was rare to actually catch them in the wild, since they often moved within the folds of space. Seryius and Cera Ether just happened to exit the spatial layers in front of the two girls, leading to their meeting.

Was it coincidence or was it something the two geniuses planned? Though Melania and Valerie had no way of knowing, they showed the two geniuses courtesy.

They were comrades, after all. They were divided by many external factors, but that didn't change the fact that they were people who liked working together.

August's teammates had decided among themselves that it was better to add more people to their group for now to expand the range of their search. They would definitely turn against each other at some point, but that would only happen once the crown had been found.

Glancing at Iridia as he received this information, August conceded to it as well.

"I know we all have at least some trust between us, but it isn't enough at a time like this. For the sake of safety, let's sign a pact. Nobody here will be able to hurt another person from the group, and everyone will have to cooperate and help each other until we've reached the crown. Once it's in sight, may the best man win."

It was indeed better to have more eyes for now. With the three people who they'd met being the three people he would feel least perturbed with including on this expedition, he lost a reason to disagree.

Still, precautions had to be taken.

August didn't say anything over communications, but that changed when the two groups met up.

After greeting Seryius and Cera and introducing Iridia back into their group, August made a statement.

"I know we all have at least some trust between us, but it isn't enough at a time like this. For the sake of safety, let's sign a pact. Nobody here will be able to hurt another person from the group, and everyone will have to cooperate and help each other until we've reached the crown. Once it's in sight, may the best man win."

Those were the two things he wanted to secure through a pact with the heavens. First, the safety of his people, and second, the distribution of information.

If he was going to share the existence of the underwater cavern, then he couldn't let anyone find something and refuse to tell the rest about it.

It was a bit hard on trust to suggest something like this. Wasn't it the exact same as saying that he didn't trust them at all?

Obviously, the people in his group knew that the pact wasn't meant for them. They were being included for their own protection.

The ones targeted by this suggestion were none other than the three geniuses who wanted to join them.

Knowing August's status and relationship with their clans, the three of them understood why he felt the need to propose it. They didn't feel good about it, but they begrudgingly made their pacts.

In the end, this would benefit all of them.

There wasn't much conversation within the group. Once the information about the cavern was spread, the geniuses split up again. They were on the cliffs bordering the ocean now. Though these cliffs were dense and without openings, the mountains nearby were different.

There were now twelve of them in the open and another helping them search from the shadows. For August personally, searching an entire mountain took roughly an hour. He could scan entire mountains with his awareness to locate any caves in their structure, but he had to investigate each cave individually to see if it led to a system and if that system was expansive enough to continue deep into the ocean.

At that point, he could only mark each possible cave system to return to later for a more intensive search. There was too much land to be covered to do otherwise.

Luckily, the mountain range was quite isolated. Most of its cave systems connected to each other and led away from the ocean. After six hours of surveying, he came back with only two good choices.

The rest were the same. Most of them found nothing, while only a few found one or two like August had.

In total, they had thirteen possible choices.

With twelve people, it lined up relatively perfectly.

Time flowed by as they entrenched themselves in the search. The twelve of them contacted each other on occasion only to say that they hadn't made progress. August's caves led close to the ocean, but connected and eventually returned to the mountain range's main cave system.

It was a tiring process, but this systematic approach guaranteed them success.

The main problem was whether it would come soon enough. The competition had already started, hadn't it? If Seryius, Cera, and Iridia were already here, the rest were definitely in the mountain range as well. For now, their group had an advantage presented by August's ability to search underwater, but it wouldn't last long.

Only after an entire day passed did they see results.

In a cave system found by Lucas, there was a small, tight area that none of them could fit through. It was no more than a crack just three or four feet wide, but when one sent one's awareness through it, one would be revealed to a gargantuan ravine submerged entirely in water. It had a roof where the sea was separated from what lay below, but there was a hidden connection point somewhere that kept the place filled with water.

August went there as soon as he heard the news to confirm if it was related to what he sensed from the ocean.

Since it was their only lead, it was highly likely to be the right location, but he had to be certain.

All it took was a single look to gain that assurance.

The second their group gathered again in the tight tunnel, they started their maneuvers to open a path to that hidden place.

They were indeed the first to reach it, but others weren't as far behind as they thought.

After all, though the ocean was not his domain, Wilhelm Noct was still descended from Azure Dragons.

Those under his control, and those watching from the sidelines to follow him when he found the right path, would all move into that same underwater ravine soon.

That was when the heir wars would truly continue from where they left off.

And, more importantly...

...it was about time for August to confront the Liqua Clan for the first time.

#### Chapter 1737 Race [7]

The crack had to be widened somewhat with mana to allow entrance through it. There was a level of care that had to be taken, as if it was widened too much, the water on the other side would flood this cave system and create problems.

August had to do it himself, using the natural water supply to create pressure and cut the crack just slightly wider so that they could fit their bodies through it. At most, the incoming water could create a tiny waterfall, but it wasn't enough to stop their group's progress.

Once again with August's help, the other geniuses were able to quickly adapt to the change in pressure as they squeezed through the opening and made it to the other side.

Everything relied on the young Azure Dragon now.

Other than August, the rest had no power in an environment like this. For people like Iridia or Valerie, it was worse than most as their elements didn't exist in the ocean.

The underwater ravine was several thousands of kilometers long. Most of it was engulfed in a darkness that would even impress a member of the Noct Clan, which made it impossible to search through ordinary means.

The group of geniuses could only survive in this environment by putting their lives in August's hands.



With his mana supporting them, they could breathe easily and maneuver without worry. It was comforting to know that they had this privilege, but things would have been different if it wasn't for the pact that August forced them to sign.

At first, it was insulting when he made that suggestion. Now, knowing that if it wasn't for the pact, August could kill them as he pleased, it had turned into the security that he wanted it to be when he suggested it.

Nevertheless, it was now a matter of searching for the underwater cavern that August sensed at the beginning, but this effort wasn't nearly as involved as the scramble to find the right cave system.

They were in the ocean. It was a part of the ocean separated from the majority, but this ravine was still part of the saltwater biome.

As such, August's strength was enhanced, and his strength became unparalleled.

His eyes cut through the darkness, seeing each and every edge and ridge of the ravine. He traveled through it with his group in tow, staying roughly centered as he sent his awareness ahead of him to scan.

Unlike the almost full day of effort required to find the right cave system, it took less than half an hour for August to relocate the cavern he saw beneath the sea floor.

They entered through a hole in the ravine wall through which water flowed freely. As they followed it through its twists and turns and used openings that seemed impossible to traverse as doorways into less submerged areas, they arrived in a place where the water level reached no more than their ankles.

That was when August finally let go of his protections.

They were in quite a massive cavern. It was almost a kilometer long and tall enough for August to stack several clones of himself on top of one another over a thousand times.

It was filled with rocky formations at different levels of elevation, and beautiful stalactite and stalagmite formations made of materials unheard of in any environment that was not this one.

And, unlike its neighboring ravine, this cavern contained life. Small creatures that were at most palm-sized scurried across the floor, cautiously avoiding their first visitors in an eternity.

Everything about the cavern was interesting, but none of it came near what existed at its center.

That area was at the lowest elevation out of any part of the cavern and was only around twenty feet wide. There, a pedestal with a shining white crown inhabited the cavern, radiating an aura more majestic than any Holy Dragon.

It was an entwined aura of fate, authority, and responsibility; an aura that was impossible to understand unless one had worn the crown.

That...

"That's our end goal."

August spoke, breaking the silence that had enveloped their group.

It instantly became awkward. Whoever moved first would break the pact between them and start a war. None of them wanted to be that person, as that person was most likely to lose.

Luckily or unluckily, none of them would have to.

After all, it wasn't much of a competition at this point, was it?

In fact, there were many forces following from behind and waiting for someone else to locate the crown. The instant August's party succeeded...

BOOM!

...they broke the balance.

In that moment, the wall broke open and many people flooded the cavern. Raphael, Wilhelmm, Eris, and the rest of the geniuses from the heir wars along with their reinforcements arrived as one. August didn't have time to wonder how they possibly arrived here. The path wasn't one that others could traverse easily, so they shouldn't have arrived so rapidly.

Unfortunately, whatever logic August could come up with didn't matter, as they were here regardless.

It happened before he could consider anything. His body moved on its own, making a dash for the crown.

Everyone else reacted instantly.

August's group split up. Each of them went and challenged opponents they saw as soon as possible to keep them away from August, and those like Iridia or the Ether Clan twins waited at the back to see how the situation unfolded.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Sounds of battle filled the cavern, but August didn't pay them any mind. His eyes and mind were entirely focused on that white light in front of him, the white light moving closer and closer to him with every passing second.

Sadly, the enemies were too many. His people couldn't hold them all back.

August's vision was covered by the figure of a man who arrived in front of him before he could react.

His eyes widened as he tried to stop his momentum, using pure mana to create a wall around him.

BOOOOM!

His mana collided with the enemy, creating a huge blast. However, like an immovable wall, he remained motionless.

"Raphael!" August yelled, gritting his teeth.

"Words are unnecessary. Fight me, August Void."

Raphael's eyes were cold. It was clear that he didn't care about the crown in the slightest. He wasn't here to impede August either.

He was just reckless and brutish. He was a selfish man who didn't care to consider others when he acted.

After his defeat during the heir wars, he was extremely angry. He understood that it was entirely his fault, but that only made him angrier.

Raphael developed a sort of obsession with August. That boy came from nowhere and exceeded his potential in every possible way. Against this unknown threat, Raphael wouldn't feel content until they fought.

Whether he won or lost, the result didn't matter. He just needed to experience August's abilities for himself.

That was what made him choose this moment, the soonest possible chance he had to satisfy his desire.

August glanced around in less than a second to see what the rest of the battle situation looked like.

'The big players aren't moving yet. Everyone else is occupied.'

People like Wilhelm and Eris were still standing on the backlines as if they were waiting for something.

August had no choice but to keep a part of his attention on them, but he also had no choice but to fight here.

'Then, as soon as possible.'

He was going to take Raphael down without giving the other genius a chance to fight back, and he was going to claim that crown.

Nobody, not even the Holy Dragons themselves, could stop him.

Chapter 1738 Race [8]

August and Raphael, in normal circumstances, could be considered around the same level in power.

When August caught up to Eris, he caught up to all of them. If August wanted to fight Raphael properly, then it would likely take many hours for them to determine a victor.

However, this was an environment that catered towards August. Plus, it was a place where he didn't have to worry about collateral damage.

August liked to fight in stages. If he didn't know his opponent's power, then he would test them in each aspect before formulating a plan to defeat them.

He didn't have the time for that. With a preliminary understanding of what Raphael could do, he had to figure out a way to defeat him in the least amount of moves possible.

How?

Naturally, the answer was brute force. It was Raphael's favorite method, and it was a way of fighting that August learned deeply as he observed his father and ancestor.

Between water and fire, there was never a clear victor. Sometimes, they would overpower each other. Sometimes, they would exist in harmony. When it came to practitioners of the two laws, though one would assume that one had an inherent advantage, they were actually evenly matched.

It was purely a matter of who had better control and more power, just like a battle between practitioners of the same element.

As Raphael suggested, August didn't speak. He only attacked.

BOOOOOOM! This time, August summoned his own element. He only raised his arms and an insurmountable mass of seawater exploded outward, slamming into Raphael with extreme force.

The flaming genius gritted his teeth and raised his arms, producing a heat shield to block. All of the water that struck it evaporated into steam, and the rest was forced to go around the obstruction.

Raphael's feet dragged through the ground as he planted himself and withstood the pressure. His mana overflowed and sunk into the ground that he passed, setting itself up to go on the offensive.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Several massive bursts of flame cut through the incoming wave, presenting Raphael with an opportunity.

He scanned with his awareness to confirm that August hadn't moved before using the mana he left in the earth.

VOOOM!

The flames of the earth, residing deep below the seafloor, were called to the light. The spewing flame spouts that parted the seas also served as channels through which an even stronger flame could manifest.

It was something similar to a Heavenly Flame, but dragons did not need such external aids to produce flames similar to the heavens.

Their elemental affinities made them closer to the heavens than even the elements produced by that very force, after all.

Three huge meteors of magma formed in the cavern that could barely fit them. They crashed towards August at maximum speed, melting any and every ounce of water that had been summoned before.

BOOOOOOOOOOOM!

With a huge explosion, magma went flying through the air. Even some of the battles on the periphery had to move so that they weren't affected by the randomly flying flames.

Well, for Juno, it was actually helpful, since he could steal those flames for himself, but that was beside the point.

It looked like August had been caught in the explosion for only a second. When Raphael concentrated his awareness, he realized that he had been fooled.

The other genius had long disappeared from his previous position, leaving only a clone of mana in his place.

The real August had already moved past Raphael. He could have gone straight for the crown, but he didn't know what would happen when he touched it. Defeating the threats around him first was the best option, so August focused on doing exactly that.

He approached Raphael from behind and subtly prepared the environment as he'd done many times before.

The Ignis Clan genius spun around as he sensed his presence, but he found that his legs were trapped in ice.

It wasn't enough to hold him. The ice melted under the weight of his aura and before August could do anything else, Raphael was already countering.

Though, that was the moment August had been waiting for.

Three moves were made in quick succession to initiate the fall of Raphael Ignis.

First, a physical combat skill.

August used Qinglong's memories as a basis and developed a skill more similar to those of the Mountain God that Melania followed.

He took a stance with his fists upturned to his sides and slammed his leg into the ground.

The earth split. In normal cases, more magma would sprout from its depths. When August used the skill, however, it was seawater that took its place. The air was suddenly filled with mist as water flowed and flowed to fill the part of the cavern that he and Raphael were in.

Raphael's vision was blinded, especially when August imbued the concept of reflection into the water and made his opponent's awareness invalid.

If that wasn't enough to constitute a first move, August used the waves of natural seawater to create a barrier that dampened the other genius' power.

The second move was made with mana, but once again laced with the intent to suppress.

To make it absolutely impossible for Raphael to fight back, August needed to seal his mana. The best method for that...?

The method that August now had access to...



...wasn't it bloodline suppression?

From the beginning, Azure stood above Ignis. Qinglong waited until the bloodline he created reached absolute perfection before becoming a Godbeast, which ensured that his descendants would get the most out of his blood.

And, he only ended up having a single successor. Everything he had was given to August. The aura produced by such a concentration of original bloodline, for a child who came from its second ever generation...

VOOOOOOOOOOM!

August's aura suddenly became unbearable. The weight of the world fell on Raphael's shoulders and forced him to his knees.

He grabbed his throat as his breath was sucked away. The vacuum around him was caused purely by the aura of bloodline.

His own lineage tried to fight back. He was a proud son of Ignis. It had been many generations, but he was praised as the genius who shared the closest bloodline connection to their ancestor.

Only now did Raphael realize that "closest" didn't mean "close."

His bloodline wriggled and burned, injuring him in the process of fighting for its dignity. It tried to burst out and cause a scene, forming an image of the original Fire Dragon. However, in front of the true Azure Dragon, it could not put up a fight.

August's eyes had a different light to him when he entered this state, but they did not lose their rationality.

There were many enemies to come, and he couldn't allow them to prepare for this kind of aura.

In one rapid movement, August made his last strike.

A mix of both mana and physical combat, a strike that contained the pure essence of August's own techniques and the first iteration of what would later become his Divinity.

It was something he was realizing as he fought in this cavern, a kind of water exclusive to him, yet absolutely true to the Azure Dragon Blood running through his body.

XIU!

It was a short and zippy sound.

August's body disappeared and appeared behind Raphael again, in the same position he started this battle.

A clean, aquamarine line was drawn in the air, cutting through Raphael Ignis as if his body was made of butter.

BOOOOOOOM!

Only after a second of its manifestation did the effects appear.

Raphael was thrown to the side with blood flying out of his chest.

He slammed into a nearby rock pattern, crushing it as he slid down to the ground.

He was alive. He would not die any time soon.

However, there was no consciousness left in his body, nor would the will to fight August ever manifest again.

In that moment, something happened that only August and Raphael understood.

But, that was something to be explained at another time.

Currently, August was already rushing for the crown once again.

And once again, he was to run into an interruption.

Chapter 1739 Battle [1].

"It's about time for me to make my entrance, isn't it?"

They were whimsical words said with an even more whimsical expression, but the identity of the person saying it changed the entire context.

August narrowed his eyes. In front of him stood two people who arrived together: Wilhelm Liqua and Estavian, who didn't get much showtime during the heir wars.

For the two Liqua Clan geniuses to appear at the same time...well, it was clear that they hadn't come for the crown.

It was more like they came specifically to prevent August from getting it. Not because they saw value in its existence, but because they came from the clan that had the most hostility towards the Azure Dragon.

In the Liqua Clan where even the younger generation was bred to detest the man who created their lineage, letting someone like August go was not an option.

Now, it wasn't yet known to the world that August had escaped Eternal Darkness. In the eyes of most, he was supposed to be somewhere in Noctum's domain, suffering in silence until the Holy Dragons returned for him.

How Wilhelm learned that he was still alive, and why he had come here without reinforcements? August had no way to guess the answer. What mattered now was the fact that they were face-to-face.

The heir wars didn't provide the proper stage for settling grudges. It was a place where people couldn't die.

They were in the real world now. This environment was natural and unfacilitated. It was a location where one could die and nobody else would ever realize that they were gone.

In this place, August could truly face the Liqua Clan. Fighting them when he couldn't exact his revenge just didn't make sense.

Despite being outnumbered, August wasn't worried.

It was true that nobody was free to help him at the moment.

Faldren Aureat had confronted Valerie again, seemingly on the same basis as Raphael. He wanted to see an end to the battle they started back then.

The other Aureat Clan genius was not present, nor were the two from the Aurora Clan. While Eris, Iridia, and the Ether twins were still uninvolved with the battle, everyone August had brought was caught up in some sort of fight.

If August wanted to take the two geniuses in front of them, he had to do it alone.

But, that was how he preferred it.

Wilhelm seemed to be waiting for an answer from him. He had some sort of wild delusion that he was the main character and there was no way August could possibly beat him.

'He's disgustingly insane. That's the vibe I'm getting.'

And it wasn't incorrect. If Eris heard what August was thinking, perhaps they'd form a friendship on the spot.

Wilhelm Liqua was a crazed genius. Nobody recognized it because he hid his madness under a veil of charisma, but as someone who knew the true nature of the Liqua Clan, August wasn't fooled.

There wasn't a possible reality where August expected decency from his opponent. Rather than engaging in pointless banter with someone he despised, he would much rather just fight.

As such, he charged without responding to Wilhelm's whims.

"Rude."

What he got in response was a single word.

As he dashed to close the distance between him and the two Liqua Clan geniuses, Wilhelm snapped his fingers.

"Go teach him a thing or two."

Those words ignited something within Estavian.

Or were they just keywords for a puppet?

Estavian was definitely a real living genius of the Liqua Clan at some point, but he did not meet their standard.

People who weren't worthy of their name were repurposed.

In Estavian's case, the consequences were a bit more severe than others.

See, he possessed his own personality. He was, in essence, the same person as he was before.

However, deep in his subconscious, there was a seed that could take control at any time.

Technically speaking, Wilhelm didn't need to awaken that side of him. This was a battle that he could absolutely participate in without using the trump cards he had in his hand.

The only reason he robbed Estavian of everything he thought he had was because he wanted to crush August and show him that he was worth nothing.

In a single instant, all human and draconic features left in Estavian's appearance disappeared. His body was mutilated by an unknown force and his entire form was repurposed and changed. His skin turned into raw flesh and muscle as he grew several feet. He definitely became more robust, but in a way that looked disgustingly unnatural. His face contorted into a bestial abomination as all of his mana was turned into flesh to add to the mass that he was.

His transformation was extreme, turning the blue-haired genius into a monster, but it was over by the time August reached him.

**BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!**

The beast moved too fast for its size. August was immediately forced to move back in the direction he came from as his body was riddled with wounds.

Estavian followed him mindlessly, his fists flying too fast for August to dodge.

He had to block and block and block, but after the first onslaught alone, August could feel his arms breaking.

'Not good.'

"I'm here too, you know."

Wilhelm found the need to say something every time he was about to make a move. He definitely knew that it was inefficient, but he didn't really care. This was the way he showed August the difference in their power levels.

This was a time to learn how the Ligua Clan differed from the Azure Dragon Clan.

Azure Dragons were huge in their movements. They liked to use pure strength and brute force in a similar way to the Ignis Clan, but there was a subtlety within their moves. The sea was a terrifying place for those unequipped to deal with it. It was filled with things that only existed to kill, and the pure expansiveness of it all was hard to imagine for the average person's eyes. However, it was a haven for life. All things came from the ocean. Inside its deadly depths, many creatures and organisms found harmony. After all, if one could adapt to its dangers and return, one would realize that the seas were the most silent and peaceful places to exist in the world.

Azure Dragons were able to imitate both the good and the bad of the ocean. They were calm and benevolent, yet ruthless and cruel.

The Ligua Clan dragons only took half of that. They were ruthless, but they used small precise attacks made with the sole intent to cause pain.

What came at August while he tried to deal with the incredibly powerful puppet before him was an array of darts that couldn't be seen with the naked eye.

They were ethereal. August sensed them before he saw them and dodged as best as he could. Unfortunately, he didn't sense them all.

They were almost microscopic and packed tightly in a huge swarm of thousands, after all. He couldn't dodge just because he knew where they were.

"Khnhhh!"

August gritted his teeth as his eyes turned bloodshot. The pain was almost unbearable, but he tried to put it aside.

Still, the single instant that he spent distracted was enough.

BOOOOOOOM!

Estavian struck him with a blow that contained more power than any that came before.

And August...

August flew straight into the opposing wall, creating a thud that resounded through the cavern with such ferocity that it drew the attention of everyone present.

Chapter 1740 Battle [2].

"Kahak...!"

August coughed out a mouthful of blood. In that moment, he felt more than just a few of his bones break. The blood splattered against the shattered rock made it obvious just how much August's body had been impacted. Even with a draconic physique, he couldn't avoid it.

His mind was woozy for a second, but he bit his tongue and used the pain to force himself awake.

He was in the middle of a battle that he had to win. An injury like this couldn't be the reason he failed at everything he had been trying to do.



Those people in front of him were enemies of his bloodline, people who could not be allowed to live in this world.

Even if there were two of them, he wasn't going to let them walk all over him.

VOOM!

Before he even got to his feet, August was summoning water through the cracks in the earth.

It was impossible for him to do anything with the water that he summoned, but there was a reason why Azure Dragons could rule the sea.

The second their bodies came in contact with the water...

It was just a trickle at first, but even that felt like the healing touch of a divine. August's legs were healed first, and when the water flow became more pronounced, his body healed further.

But, that had not happened yet. August left the water spewing into the cavern so that it could fill the place and naturally heal him over and over again, but for the current moment, he was forced to dash the second he had the ability to move. BOOM!

Another fist slammed into the wall where August was once plastered. The entire area of the cavern crumbled, dropping some of the ongoing battles to a lower level.

August didn't focus on Estavian.

From what he could tell, the puppet's sentience was nonexistent in this form. It could only carry out orders given to it by its master, which made Wilhelm the more important target.

August made space between himself and Estavian specifically so he could focus on the other genius.

'I don't have to defeat him.'

When August felt Wilhelm's power for the first time, he learned that he wasn't an opponent who could be defeated as easily as Raphael.

If August wanted to win thoroughly, then he needed to take time and fight the man in their true dragon forms.

If not, he could try his aura again. Wilhelm was from a descendant clan and technically had a lower status than him. If he used his bloodline, he'd be able to properly suppress the other genius, but that still wasn't enough.

At most, that would put them on a similar level.

'First, I need to get to the crown.'

August had to remember that his grudge wasn't the only thing that existed. He was fighting for the crown not only for his sake but for the safety of the kingdom as well.

Even at this moment, thousands of commoners were dying from the onslaught of the forsaken dragon clans. August didn't want to use his aura because he didn't want to leave Wilhelm with a way to object to his loss. He didn't want to leave his opponent undefeated because he wanted to stomp this man to the ground and make him feel pain.

However, his main goal had to be the crown.

Once he had it, he could get all the revenge he wanted while also dealing with the kingdom's problems.

At the end of the day, August's path was that of an Emperor. He didn't live only for himself. Rather, he always put his own goals to the side for the sake of others. In order to do what he needed to do before entertaining this battle, August once again had to focus on speed.

'But, I guess if I can defeat him without killing him and throw him out of here, then it'll be a different kind of humiliation.'

August looked at the bright side as he started to formulate a plan.

Of course, the first thing he did was let his blood lineage loose.

The pressure struck both Wilhelm and Estavian. Their movements were slowed, which was particularly impactful on Estavian, and their mana rolled in a strange manner in response to the superior bloodline, which made it harder for Wilhelm to use his skills.

"So you want to use tricks!" Wilhelm spoke with a bit of excitement in his voice, but it was also a false emotion.

It was scorn, spite, and something darker swirling within the depths of his soul as he felt his bloodline undergo suppression.

As someone who had grown up being told that the Azure Dragon was nothing, that it was an ancestor unworthy of being connected to the Liqua Clan, he absolutely couldn't accept that his bloodline was inferior.

The facts were hard to deny when he quite literally could not escape suppression regardless of his efforts, but he could make up any excuse in his mind to change the narrative.

His brain was a world of fantasy where nothing had happened in a way that he didn't allow. It was a horrifying mindset when it was born in someone with the power to ruin the world. The water of the Liqua Clan had a property that best mirrored termites from Earth. It would chew through its target and leave holes in them like a plague, breaking them down until they were nothing but ash.

It was an incredibly painful way to die, which made their particular Holy Clan an enemy that nobody wanted to have.

But, as August was born their enemy, he was forced to face that mana head-on. Nevertheless, he had an easier time after using his aura to suppress his enemies.

Estavian's slowed attack speed made his blows more manageable. August was able to dodge more easily, and when Wilhelm finally got his mana in order to attack, August was able to move around Estavian and use him as a shield.

As such, he wasn't hit nearly as much as before.

He couldn't avoid everything, obviously. The snake-like movements of Wilhelm's attack patterns and openings made it difficult for him to predict where everything was coming from, but he was somewhat able to read the other genius, which helped.

August was different from other Azure Dragons in that way. He respected their fighting method and did use it as his primary technique, however, he was not averse to using smaller amounts of mana to achieve the goals he aimed for.

At the same time, he wasn't averse to expanding the range of his imagination into non-draconic territories to improve his attacks.

That was the only thing he could use to catch Wilhelm off guard and expressly take him out.

The end goal was his expulsion from the cavern, not his death.

And if it was just that much, then August could already see the path forward.

The cavern was starting to fill up with water. The previously nonexistent water level was already covering the soles of their feet and would soon reach their ankles.

With it enhancing his abilities, August swerved around Estavian once more and pushed his mana towards Wilhelm.

He must have been expecting some kind of wave pattern because he put up a wide shield that would divert its flow, but that wasn't what struck him at all.

Instead, it was a concept that dragons often looked down on and the strength of humanity.

Visualization.

The very essence of a human's ability to turn mana into anything and everything they could ever dream of...

What would it look like in the hands of a dragon?