

Void 1761

Chapter 1761 Succession [2]

"It's good to see all of you healthy," he said with a smile on his face.

"I can say the same to you, you bastard!"

Juno grinned and jumped on him, ruffling his hair.

"I had to go through a lot of shit for you. You better properly repay me later."

"What do you want?" August asked with an exasperated sigh.

"You know already."

He did. There was only one thing Juno would ever ask for in a situation like this.

"Fine," August said. "But only this one time."

Juno grinned. "You won't be disappointed."

"What are you two talking about?"

The rest also approached. Valerie was the one who asked the question, but the rest were also wondering. After all, August was acting like he was about to do something he really didn't want to do. It was surprising to see such a reaction from him.

Unfortunately, Juno wasn't going to give them an answer.

"That's a secret. If I tell you all about it, then he really won't do it."

Naturally, it was a statement that made the rest even more curious, but Juno was already in the process of crisis diversion.

"By the way, it's pretty obvious that you healed us, but what about Mikaela?"

None of them were particularly worried.

When August entered and acted like them being fine was normal, they understood that he didn't want to concentrate on his own good deeds. As such, none of them brought up Melania, who should have been dead.

August had put another shirt on, so they couldn't see the black scar on his chest. He didn't plan to show it to them either.

As long as Melania was fine, nothing more needed to be said. It was something they all silently agreed upon. Mikaela's case was different. They didn't necessarily worry. As they'd had some minutes before August's arrival, they had also taken the time to understand her situation.

A mental shock of the level she received couldn't be solved by people of their level, which was definitely not something they liked to see. However, Juno and Raul gave the rest assurance that it wouldn't be a problem.

After all, the solution to Mikaela's problem was in her own clan. Her grandmother would easily be able to bring her back, so what was the use in worrying about her?

For now, it was better to let her rest and cure her mental fatigue. By the time she awakened, the world would be at peace.

August explained that to them as well, and afterward, he found a place to naturally segue into the elephant in the room.

"...by the way, I grabbed him and incapacitated him to find out the truth. He succumbed eventually, probably because his backer is a corpse. I wanted to kill him when he told me what he did, but I figured it was better to leave it to you guys."

He threw Lucas at them. He landed on the floor with a subtle thump. He was still completely fine in both mind and body. Only, August had blocked his ability to move or speak.

The latter of those was given back to him as he was thrown.

"Right, this guy."

Valerie frowned.

He was the cause of everything to an extent. Without his betrayal, Wilhelm wouldn't have found the opportunity to catch them off guard and trap them.

And, he was the reason why a certain member of their team was turned useless.

She was still in the cavern. In fact, she was watching them as they spoke.

However, not a single other person acknowledged her presence.

The others experienced it personally. August learned it through Lucas and confirmed it through the others' behavior.

Ophelia had left them to die. Because she was busy pitying herself, she refused to lend a hand in such a desperate situation.

She was free to do whatever she wanted. She was her own person, after all. If she wanted to sit there and die, then she could do it on her own.

Just, if that was the person she decided to be, then she no longer had anything to do with their group.

She lost the privilege of calling them friends. As for what she would do with herself from here on, she could figure it out herself.

The only assured thing was that it would have nothing to do with them, and it would have nothing to do with Lucas.

This was his moment to die. August did well to bring him in front of the people he betrayed. They had quite a few words they wanted to say to him.

As the world was filled with a variety of curses and the disgusting sounds of a dragon being beaten and killed, August looked outside and began to wonder.

'How is it going out there?'

They faced many setbacks before reaching their goal. Was it the same outside?

Had the Sea Tribes managed to push the forsaken dragons out of Arulion yet? Had the larger battles already started?

Unknowing of the fact that there was a time dilation separating him from the outside world...

...August was only just worrying about things that happened quite a long time ago.

Right, when August was three years into his trial against the First Dragon Emperor, the battle outside had become one that needed to be viewed in terms of hours, not weeks.

Hendricks was already being confronted. The Holy Clans were gone. The nobles had been prosecuted. Now, enough time had passed for August to exit his trial and solve the situation outside. Naturally, even more time passed in the real world.

August really brought together too many powerhouses for any individual force to resist. The forsaken dragons were cornered and killed as necessary, and the nobles were quelled until their few hundred clans turned into a few tens instead.

The nobles were a force that had been scrutinized by the world for a long time, so they couldn't escape persecution. The forsaken dragons had caused so much pain, but somehow, they didn't face extermination.

August had two requests for his helpers.

The first was to spare noble clans who didn't deserve to be killed.

And the second was to only kill the forsaken dragons when it was necessary. Once Hendricks was defeated, the necessity disappeared.

They were placed in a prison with their strength completely suppressed as they awaited trial for their misdeeds.

Not many people understood why August wanted to give them a chance, but it wasn't their problem. They were just following orders, after all.

The forsaken dragons were taken away. The nobles were gone. There was nothing else holding the kingdom back.

The people had now been awakened to their new bloodlines, and with their berserk states dispelled, they were now free to do as they wished with the gift they'd received. The population rose rapidly as well with the many dragonkin who became True Dragons and joined the kingdom's people.

Arulion was in ruins, but it was more peaceful than it had been for the past month at the very least.

And, to bring a true end to the crisis that struck them, a single dragon rose from the ashes.

With wings that were no longer filled with holes, with a form filled with vitality rather than one that was withered, the Dragon Emperor took his place in the sky.

He no longer had to fear the Holy Clans.

That freedom meant the world to him.

In order to give his kingdom something to remember him by, something other than his failures, he showed himself in front of them today.

Because after this day, his throne would be someone else's to bear.

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It was not a projection of him, but the Dragon Emperor himself.

He did not try to hide his form. As such, he was large enough to cover the whole kingdom with his wings alone.

He stood upright, using his wings to keep himself hovering in the sky. With his size, even those at the very edges of the kingdom could see him.

"My people...you may not recognize me as it has been many years since I have shown my face to the public."

He started with quite a downplaying statement. Everyone knew what the draconic appearance of the Emperor was even if they hadn't seen it in person.

Even if they hadn't, his face had been broadcasted across the kingdom just some weeks ago, so how could they forget?

Some people were still trying to find the crown he told them to chase, but his appearance now made it clear that it had already been claimed.

"Many of you may be wondering why I have appeared. In part, it is indeed to acknowledge the successor who has gained the approval of the Emperor's crown. However, I have also come to reveal a truth to you all, a truth that has been kept hidden for dozens of millions of years."

Zenith had three objectives in his appearance. The first was to calm the public and end the ongoing war. The second was to bring August to the podium and have him recognized by the kingdom as its future ruler, and the third...

The third was to apologize with all of his heart and tell the world about what had been kept in the shadows for so long.

"Dragons were never meant to be lowly beings. Dragons were never meant to have such a strict system that kept us contained within the same bubble that humans and other races occupy. By nature, we are independent, but in the past, the Dragon Emperors had a dream of bringing our kind together and creating a haven for it to thrive."

"The First Dragon Emperor followed this ideology, and many who came after him, such as Emperor Qinglong who has been forgotten in history, attempted to do the same."

"Unfortunately, power is a corrupting force. While many Emperors did try to lead this kingdom and create the utopia it was meant to be, the majority decided to instead lead it into ruin."

As the common people watched, the Dragon Emperor told them everything.

He revealed the schemes of the Holy Dragons and the Holy Clans. He revealed how every good emperor was destroyed and defamed, and he revealed how the people were oppressed until their bloodlines thinned into nothing.

Everything that had ever been done, every bit of misconstrued history was being rewritten as it was always meant to be in his speech. It was to the extent that the common people couldn't even be angry.

They listened silently as they learned the history of Arulion. They scorned the Holy Clans in their minds and pitied the people who tried to do good. They wondered why it was being revealed now and what it meant for their future.

Zenith knew that giving them too much information was never a good thing. If they wanted to learn, then he just needed to make the information easily accessible. At this moment, he only told them what they needed to know so as not to overwhelm them with too much world-shattering knowledge. "...the forsaken dragons who invaded our home; even they are nothing more than victims of the Holy Clans, forced to act on an instinct placed in their body without consent."

"I do not mean to defend them, nor do I mean to downplay their sins. However, you all must know the truth before deciding on their punishment."

It was something that needed to be mentioned, but not something that needed to be focused on. The Dragon Emperor continued his speech, saying a few more things before bringing it to a conclusion.

"Now, along with the nobles and the corrupt authorities of our dear kingdom, the Holy Clans have also been quelled. There will no longer be such a thing as oppression in Arulion! Under my reign as long as it will last, under the reign of those who will follow me, there will only be prosperity for dragons!"

"I have failed you as an Emperor, for I was suppressed by the Holy Clans and forced to watch as you all suffered in silence. I know that I cannot make up for my wrongdoings through just a simple gesture, but I would still like to offer an apology."

The Dragon Emperor looked to his side, a gesture that went unnoticed by the masses who watched him.

However, by the time his head turned back to face them, energy was already spreading through the kingdom.

The dragon people looked down at their own bodies in wonder. The wounds they'd accumulated, both new and old, regardless of severity, healed as if by a miracle of the heavens.

They couldn't comprehend how their Emperor managed to do something so miraculous, but the gesture definitely helped cement his position in their hearts.

Even the most average individual understood that such power could not be displayed without sacrifice. If he was willing to take that risk for their sake, why would he lie to them? Why would he mislead them?

The Dragon Emperor may not have been able to support them, but they were living so deeply in oppression that they didn't realize what it felt like until they gained bloodlines of their own.

Now that he had returned with such a promise, they were willing to wait and see how he delivered on his claims.

"I am truly sorry," Zenith said sincerely.

"From this point forth, I will only be your Emperor in name. I will dedicate the rest of my life to training the boy who has become my successor, the descendant of the 5th Dragon Emperor, the Azure Dragon Emperor, August Void."

A projection appeared in front of the world. They saw a stage that was empty at first, but within a few moments, a blue light of transportation brought a group of people to stand on it.

The boy at their head, with dark blue hair and eyes, looked around in slight confusion. He was teleported in front of a crowd that had gathered around the Dragon Emperor's body. At first, he didn't know how to react, but he was lucky enough to hear Zenith's final words as he arrived.

He firmed his expression and looked into the crowd.

He could hear their cheers clearly. They were saying his name, screaming it with hope for the future he would bring them.

Judging from their expressions, the words that needed to be said had already been spoken. There was nothing left for August to do but greet them.

He smiled as he felt their embrace. The feeling that ran hot through the crowd, the feeling of finally having a chance, was intoxicating. August had big dreams for the dragon kingdom. He always did, from the moment he was old enough to choose his path.

He was always looking for ways to improve Arulion, so he knew exactly what to do when he became the Emperor.

His only worry was that the people weren't ready for change.

Now, there was much he didn't understand, August was still unaware of the fact that the Holy Clans had been taken care of.

However, seeing the spirit his future people possessed, his final worry disappeared.

This was a people ready for change, a people who would actively contribute to the benefit of their kingdom.

As such, there was only one thing for him to do.

August bowed, the smile never leaving his face.

After everything he and his friends had been through, it was an extremely refreshing feeling to come back to a kingdom at peace.

Only...

It couldn't be truly appreciated until they learned how it was able to reach this point.

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August and his friends had minimal participation in the ceremony. It was indeed mostly August's effort that saved the kingdom, but that wasn't for the common people to know quite yet.

The information would be released slowly as August's reputation grew. For now, it was best to introduce him and keep his feats to what he accomplished in the heir wars. That event turned August into a voice for the commoners. As he showed a performance that surpassed all of the other geniuses in the competition, people rallied behind him and became more confident in themselves.

The reason the common people were able to stand up and fight was also because of people like August, Valerie, Melania, and the rest. If it weren't for them, the spirit of hope would have never planted its seed in their bodies.

August was a young genius in their eyes, not a tactical mind capable of gathering forces to suppress all enemies in the kingdom. If the fact that the Sea Tribes and Wood Dragon Clan were August's allies rather than the Dragon Emperor's came out now, it would only spread fear.

After all, someone with such connections couldn't just be a commoner, right? Was his presence just a ploy to gain their trust while their regime changed into one that was equally as bad as its predecessor?

The kingdom had just gained a semblance of peace. It was important to retain it for as long as possible without giving any reason for evil or malicious thoughts to rise again.

Nevertheless, that particular part wasn't what confused August and the rest.

August's group was led off of the stage after a few minutes by a member of the Dragon Emperor's posse. He was a familiar face, as he was an integral part of the tournament administration before. Everyone present had been there when August explained the overall plan. In their eyes, when they exited the cavern, they would have to join the war and help bring it into its final stages.

What was all of this about the war being over?

Why did everyone look so happy?

Did someone say the Holy Clans were gone?

Just what was happening?

August's group was led off of the stage after a few minutes by a member of the Dragon Emperor's posse. He was a familiar face, as he was an integral part of the tournament administration before. He took them into a nearby tunnel before he started explaining the majority of what took place.

Aside from some more sensitive elements that needed to be explained by the Emperor himself, August's group was able to gain a comprehensive understanding of the events outside during the ten-minute walk to their destination.

'So it was a time dilation.'

The attendant didn't explicitly state it, but he told a story that lasted over a month, which made it more than obvious.

It made sense for the war to progress more if a time dilation gave it more time to do so, but there were several questionable things.

'First of all, the Holy Clans disappeared.'

'Second of all, the Holy Dragons disappeared.'

'Third of all, the Dragon Emperor healed an entire kingdom's worth of people?'

In August's opinion, there was no possible way for these three things to take place. It didn't matter what level the Dragon Emperor was at. Even Alcharist Revell wouldn't be able to easily accomplish a feat like that. If the Dragon Emperor was capable of producing miracles, then he never would have been suppressed by the Holy Clans in the first place.

Speaking of those Holy Clans, wasn't it impractical for them to be gone? Why were the geniuses that he was interacting with in the cavern not part of the vanished group?

Did someone...kill everyone in the Holy Clans? From the elders to the children; from those cruel to those innocent?

August didn't like it at all. He was glad that the kingdom was in a peaceful state, but until all of his questions reached closure, he wouldn't be able to accept it.

'Anyway, I'm being taken to meet the Dragon Emperor himself, so I might as well just ask.'

Indeed, the original tunnel somehow opened into a grand space made fully of a white mineral-like building material. There were golden arches hundreds of feet high that still weren't able to reach the dome-shaped glass skylight that was the roof.

It was an unreasonably detailed structure with countless natural mimicries making up its architectural design. It had to have taken hundreds of years to build, likely why there wasn't much furniture on the floor to fill in space.

Rather, there was one large roundtable that could seat up to sixty people. At the current moment, there weren't anywhere near sixty people at that table.

The Dragon Emperor, Zenith Aurora. He, in his human form, sat at its head. In the seats next to him were an array of familiar figures.

Alcharist Revell, the executive members of all thirteen Sea Tribes, Oskar Piana and the representatives of Bastille, and most importantly...

'...Dad.'

August breathed out a sigh. He didn't know if it was relief or something else, but his father's presence pretty much explained everything.

The elements that he couldn't handle himself were taken care of in his stead. He was definitely grateful, as he didn't have nearly enough time or power to take down the Holy Clans without being at conflict for years.

However, he was also a bit regretful.

In the end, he couldn't have achieved much without his father's help, huh?

"Stop thinking useless things and come sit down. We'll talk about it later."

Damien's voice suddenly rang in August's ears. He looked at his father for a moment before nodding and doing as he was told. Right, this wasn't quite the setting to have that conversation.

Since he'd shown himself here, however, it was clear that he did plan to have that conversation with August from the start, so at least that was nice.

Nevertheless, as August was caught up in his mixed feelings, he and his friends were guided to their seats at the table.

Most of them were confused. They didn't personally recognize the Dragon Emperor, and half of them were unaware of what his position really meant, but as they knew what he symbolized either fully or to an extent, they didn't know how they were supposed to greet him.

"I am Zenith Aurora, the current Dragon Emperor. It is nice to meet you, my successor."

August bowed his head slightly.

When they were sat at the table without the need to give anything like a greeting, they only became more confused.

"This is our first time meeting, isn't it?" Zenith said with a warm smile on his face.

"I am Zenith Aurora, the current Dragon Emperor. It is nice to meet you, my successor."

August bowed his head slightly.

"It is a pleasure to meet you as well."

He tried to be as formal as possible. It wasn't really his strong suit, but he also wasn't terrible at it like a certain person in the room.

Zenith nodded.

"We have all come together today for reasons you are likely already aware of. You have already been crowned my successor, however, you have yet to accept me as your master. Today, before all of these people. We will host your crowning ceremony and officially grant you that position."

The people close to August had been gathered, including his father and first master, in order for him to take that next step.

To take the Dragon Emperor as a master...it was an honor for anyone, even someone who had received as many opportunities as August.

However, as August glanced around, a slight frown formed on his face.

It was definitely to his benefit to immediately agree and go along with the ceremony, but he couldn't help but feel a little selfish.

"Sir Emperor," he started. It was definitely an awkward way to call him, but it was enough to convey respect.

"If it's possible...may I ask for something before we proceed with the ceremony?"

A request at a time like this.

The Dragon Emperor was surprised, as were all of his guests.

Only Damien smiled slightly as he read his son's intentions. In that moment, only a single thought came to his mind.

'His idea of selfishness is completely different from mine.'

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"A request, you say?" Zenith repeated curiously.

"That is right. Before I accept you as a master, I want one thing from you."

It was a little blunt for someone asking another for a favor, but that was just August's way of speaking.

"Alright, then. Let us hear it."

Zenith entertained his whims. After all, he wasn't the only one curious about what August was scheming. This room was filled with people who supported him. Rather than feeling offended by his request, they were intrigued by what August possibly coveted enough to use as a reward for taking the throne.

August nodded, took a deep breath, and spread his arms.

"As you can see, I have come here with my friends and allies who have helped me immensely in my journey to take that throne. As such, I cannot possibly take the benefits quietly while they are forced to watch from the sidelines. Sir Emperor, instead of just receiving me as your disciple, could you take all of us instead? I would prefer if they received the same treatment so they can grow and achieve their own dreams in the future."

It was a request that left everyone shocked, even Valerie and the rest.

It was preposterous to ask a master to take multiple unwanted disciples already. When that master was someone of Zenith's caliber, it became insane.

They were all grateful for August's thoughts, but they really didn't help him for benefits. The six of them were happy enough seeing him gain recognition like this, but to be mentioned was completely out of their expectations.

"To ensure that I heard you clearly, are you asking me to accept six disciples and raise all of you into Holy Dragons?" Zenith asked.

"Yes. That is the essence of my request," August responded confidently.

"That is quite bold. How are you certain that I will be able to teach them all? Even you will mainly learn how to lead from me. Your strength training will mostly be taken care of by the memories of your ancestor, no?"

"Maybe, but it's enough if they have access to the same amount of resources as the imperial prince. You can do your best to teach, and if you find that you are incompatible with anyone, then we can just search for teachers who are."

August looked at his friends with a smile.

"Whatever path they decide to walk, I want you to support. That is my request."

Rather than selfish, wasn't it selfless?

In a sense, perhaps. However, August posed it in such a way that the Dragon Emperor couldn't refuse.

If he was saying that he wouldn't accept the throne unless his friends also received benefits, then wasn't it impossible to deny him? Arulion was in desperate need of change. From the moment he was placed in front of that crowd, August had become the face of hope and change.

It was necessary to have him officially become a successor and start acting within the kingdom to prove his worth. If he didn't, the dragon kingdom would likely start moving towards another era of chaos.

"Hahaha!"

Zenith laughed as he considered it.

"You are indeed a smart child. I have no choice at all, do I?"

He sounded exasperated, but it was clearly a friendly tone.

"Very well then. The friends you have brought with you, including, of course, the child who was taken to the medical center, will receive the same amount of support from Arulion as you do. As long as they stay on paths that do not harm the kingdom, I will spare no expense in aiding them in their journeys. Is that enough?"

"If it's sworn on a pact, then it is enough."

The Dragon Emperor grinned.

'Right, it's his child, after all. This boy already has the necessary framework to lead a people.'

He did nothing without assurance and leveraged his worth properly in order to gain as much as possible. That was the trait of a businessman, not a ruler, but it still portrayed the ability to make decisions properly.

If he could do the same thing on a larger scale to bring benefits to the kingdom, it was more than enough.

Their small negotiation was over, which meant all that was left to do was carry out the ceremony and crown August on a broadcast that covered the entire kingdom.

A momentous occasion was about to begin in Arulion.

It was an event that would heal, an event that would bring the people, both new and old, closer.

And it was the event that would mark the start of August's reign over the kingdom.

His dreams...

...they weren't so far away anymore, were they?

The ceremony wasn't anything more than that. Even in the culture of dragons, certain official procedures had to be followed for things to be properly recorded. The ceremony gave everyone a defining moment of August being crowned to latch onto, which solidified his position.

It only took half an hour at most. Afterward, August's friends wanted to barrage him with many questions and words, most of them warm, but they didn't get the opportunity. August was swiftly whisked away by the Dragon Emperor. It was something they wanted to contest, but Melania and Valerie held the rest back for one reason.

"See the man who was walking next to the Emperor? That's August's dad."

Since there was something of a family matter going on, they saved their words for later. They had all the time in the world, after all.

They allowed some nearby attendants to lead them on a tour of the palace they were in. Meanwhile, August finally received the chance to speak to Damien in private. The Dragon Emperor was present as well, but he was related to most of what they needed to talk about, so it was fine.

"Did you heal those people?" he asked.

"You already knew that, didn't you?" Damien responded.

Since his son was older now, he was definitely more comfortable speaking casually. He really only had to watch for curses at this point. The rest of his demeanor could easily shine through.

August nodded without caring much. It made sense. He was only questioning why Damien allowed the Dragon Emperor to pretend like it was his power, but there was probably some deal between them.

"Did you take care of the Holy Dragons?" he asked next.

"Nope," Damien responded.

It seemed August was a bit grumpy at the moment. He understood why, but it really was unwarranted.

"The Holy Dragons left on their own. If you remember what happened back then, the vaults of the Aureat Clan were emptied out by...someone. Anyway, among those artifacts are the ones that allowed the Holy Dragons to convert the Fate of Arulion and the lineages of its people into their own power. Those artifacts are the reason why the common populace degraded so much over time, and without them, those old dragons will die as their bodies reject their foreign souls."

"Oh...okay?"

It was more of a bombshell than August expected. Clearly, the schemes in Arulion ran deep. This specific one was solved strangely by an outsider, which was definitely anti-climactic, but...

Well, the Holy Dragons would eventually return in either victory or defeat, right? He just had to make a mental note to prepare for it.

"Then...what about the Holy Clans?"

August's somewhat cold exterior was definitely melting as his assumptions turned out to be no more than that, but he stood stalwart on what he thought he believed.

Damien shook his head with a smile.

'This brat...'

He obviously cared most about this point, but he refused to admit it.

"You could say yes or you could say no depending on how you look at it," he responded mysteriously.

He could tell that his son was feeling extremely disappointed when he returned and found his main enemies gone. He had corralled the Holy Clans to support August's plans, but he didn't get rid of them, did he?

Even he knew not to steal other people's prey.

Still, he didn't like that August came back with such an expression. He had been through a lot. Clearly, the world didn't treat him amazingly. He did so much so that he could stand up to those people and rule the dragon kingdom on his own, both for the people and to make his father proud.

He could still do that. Damien didn't want to inhibit his son's journey.

But, before he did that, he figured he'd try to lighten the mood a little.

He looked at Zenith and then back at August.

"By the way, he's my subordinate now. I think I forgot to mention that."

August nodded casually.

"Oh, the Emperor? Yeah that makes—"

His words were not interrupted. He just realized what he was saying a little late.

He looked at his father with eyes as wide as saucers and a mouth wide enough to fit a horse inside.

"WHO is your WHAT?!"

A set of words said with such hilarity that Damien couldn't hold in his laughter.

Really, no matter how he looked at it, there was no better way to react to that kind of information.

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It was information that was meant to be revealed later, but Damien dropped it suddenly to snap August out of his strange state.

It was too random, after all. Plus, what reason did Damien have to take the Dragon Emperor as a subordinate?

As August stared at him with the same bewildered expression, Damien grinned.

"It's just for safety. He's not actually listening to my orders or anything. But, he can request my help if he needs it and he will properly dedicate himself to training you and your friends. It's good to have insurance, right?"

August nodded dumbly. He would've done the same if he was in Damien's position. This information didn't necessarily concern him. It was just an insane thing to hear. Damien flicked him on the forehead, continuing as if it was no big deal.

"You brat, do you think I don't know what you want? I'm not going to run around ruining your dreams just for my own convenience. I only moved the Holy Clans to a different realm temporarily. The final decision on what to do will be left up to you."

"The...final decision?" August repeated inquisitively. "Right, let's get back to that. If the Holy Clans interfered while you were gone, a lot of things would've gone to s— crap. Now, they've been placed in a void where time does not flow. I'll give you three options now. Think carefully about what you want to do."

Damien's eyes turned somewhat stern, bringing August's mood back to a stable state.

"What are my options?"

August resigned to his father's words.

In the end, it was better for the Holy Clans to be contained while he grew, so he couldn't be ungrateful about it. He definitely couldn't fight against Ancient Dragons or even the several lower dragons below them yet. If he wanted that kind of power, then he needed a lot more time.

"The first, though I think it's inconsequential at this point, is for me to kill them all right now," Damien started.

"No, I refuse."

August's answer was instant. As Damien said, with August's attitude until now, that particular option had become meaningless. Still, he stated it since it was indeed still an option.

"The second is to leave them sealed for a period of time. I'm thinking around two hundred years or so. Hopefully, you'll have enough strength to deal with them then."

While August's talent allowed him to grow rapidly, nobody could say how strong he would be in two hundred years. To take on the Holy Clans, he needed to properly become a God before the time limit

ended. And, when they returned, there probably wouldn't be such a thing as good and bad Holy Clan members.

They would all be teeming with feelings of revenge aimed directly at him.

Was that a battle August wanted to fight? Was it one he could prepare for in two hundred years' time?

"What's the third option?"

He didn't know, but he wanted all the facts before he considered it.

Damien nodded and held up his third finger.

"The third option is to release them now and place them under slave contracts. Their movements will not be inhibited, but they will be forced to display absolute loyalty when it comes to you or the kingdom."

'In that case, it'll be up to me to turn oppressive loyalty into something true and take hold of them.'

August understood the choices Damien gave him well.

The first was an easy way out in case he wanted to focus on Arulion's rebirth more than anything else.

The second was a path of revenge that he could take if he truly felt like he had a blood debt with them.

And the third...

'...the third option is a way for me to gain control over them. It will be assisted for a period, but if they are forced to act against their will for long enough, it will fester a negativity that they will find some way to exert on the world.'

If August failed, they'd become just as much of a threat to the kingdom as they were before their imprisonment.

However, if he succeeded, then he could convert those who he felt didn't deserve to die into loyal followers of Arulion and kill off the ones who posed a threat.

He would be able to conserve the majority of Arulion's fighting power, but he would also need to put in a lot more work to bring the kingdom into a new era.

'The second option sounds nice, but if I choose it, then I will be no different than them.'

Seclusion separated from the world in an insanity-inducing darkness was the very thing that created the forsaken dragons. Even they who once held valiant motives were turned into belligerent beasts by their circumstances, so what would happen if the Holy Clans experienced the same?

August didn't want to deal with it. More importantly, the Holy Clans were a benchmark for him to surpass and a force he needed to defeat for the sake of the kingdom. They were not objects of revenge that he wanted to dedicate his entire life to defeating.

At least, not all of them.

"Am I confined within these three choices?"

"Elaborate."

"I want to choose two of them, however, to different capacities."

Damien nodded as he understood August's meaning.

"If it's them, then it's fine. I also have a debt to repay to Qinglong, after all."

August grinned.

"Then, that's obviously what I'm doing. I choose the third option for everyone else. However, the Liqua Clan...let the people from that place rot until I'm strong enough to kill them myself."

"Wow, my son is all grown up now. Who taught you how to talk like that?"

"Wasn't it you? Dad, you really don't hold back when you're telling stories, you know."

"You...!"

When was the last time the, "You...!" came from Damien? Likely never. After all, August was one of only a few people who could gag him like that.

Nevertheless, with Damien covering the most critical matters, August didn't have many questions left that he needed answered immediately. His mood had also improved considerably now that he knew that he could still deal with the Holy Clans the way he wanted to.

It was wrong to say he had friends there, but it wasn't wrong to assume that there were many possible friendships awaiting him in their ranks. People like Iridia, Seryius, Cera, and even Eris could become his closest allies if the barrier between them was broken.

Having something akin to a slave contract binding them would definitely make it harder for August to gain their trust, but, as long as he used his privileges wisely, he was confident in forming that kind of bond eventually.

The Holy Clans could reform and redeem themselves through loyalty if they wanted to. If they didn't, then he'd have the freedom to punish them and help them learn their place. The plans were already forming in August's mind, just as they always did at times like this.

Now, there was only one thing left to attend to before August could enjoy this peaceful kingdom.

The forsaken dragons.

His first move as the young emperor was to determine their fates.

Whether they'd be good or bad, whether they'd see life or death...

The power was in August's hand.

And, ever since he left to find the crown, he knew exactly what to do with it.

Chapter 1766 Succession [7]

August went off to deal with the remaining matters and find closure. He did somewhat apologize to Damien, but Damien didn't really mind, so it wasn't something they focused on. It was normal for August to lose his cool sometimes. It was normal for him to have mood swings as he grew. Damien was never going to punish him for anything like that.

The only reason they didn't take the time to catch up was because there was still a lot to do. As August left, Damien also did the same, but he was headed to a completely different dimension.

With August's choice made, it was time for him to enact the slave contracts he spoke of.

'I've been waiting for this moment. I was really hoping that he'd choose this method.'

Obviously, Damien gave August three choices that he could pick between, but there was only one right answer.

It was exactly as August said. To separate revenge from blood debt, to properly treat others as they were meant to be treated rather than viewing them as bugs.

Perhaps Damien himself didn't adhere to such ideologies, but the kind of person August wanted to be deemed that he needed to learn them.

As his supporter, Damien chose which lessons to teach based on the path he was following by choice.

Plus, this time, Damien had other plans as well.

'These few months have been beneficial.'

He left August to take care of Arulion to teach him responsibility and the value of life. Through his experiences, August learned to not take things for granted as he would have if he was coddled by his father for eternity.

But, he also stayed in the shadows for his own benefit. August was bringing the dragon kingdom under control. Damien didn't need to do much, as his main goal was to have their help when the final war arrived.

With August at their head, that problem was gone. To make preparations, he only needed a week at most.

The majority of Damien's time was spent in disguise.

The concept of "control."

It was the final barrier that separated Damien from controlling True Existence. The power he showcased made it seem like he had already attained it, but that was not quite the truth.

Damien understood how to control Existence already. He could do mystical things and his strength had already risen past the level of even a Holy Dragon. Only the true Supremes in the universe and the Unrecorded could stand against him now.

However, the sixth jewel refused to manifest on his crown.

He wondered why for a long time. He changed his genetic makeup and walked Arulion as a mortal for a very long time, even making some connections to the lowly people who populated its streets.

Through this ambling, Damien believed that he would find some sort of random inspiration that led him to the answer he sought.

In a sense, he did receive the answer he was looking for, but it was not immediately made available to him.

The concept of control, as the last piece of the puzzle, was a bit different from the others.

It had to be comprehended both individually and as a whole.

For Damien to gain its acknowledgement and bring Existence under his control, he needed to show it everything. He needed to prove to Existence itself that he was able to utilize all of its power, so that it would accept him and allow him to complete the Emperor's Crown.

Damien started interfering mainly for this purpose. He healed, he created, he manipulated, and he destroyed. He could feel in his own soul that he was on the verge of gaining acceptance.

The matter of the Holy Clans was orchestrated in part so that he could accomplish his objective.

As long as August chose the third option, he'd get another chance to use Existence while also helping his son, and he'd reach the peak he had been watching ever since he arrived in the Heavenly World.

The Holy Clans were none the wiser by the time he arrived.

They had made use of their short time in the void to create some sort of functional system through which they could cooperate and find a way out together, but it was meaningless now.

Damien didn't bother to say anything. Like August, he understood that not all of these people were bad and not all of them deserved to be punished.

However, that wasn't his problem anymore. August would hold the reigns. If he wanted to release them, he could. If he wanted to oppress them, he could. Just as August asked of the Dragon Emperor, Damien was willing to support his son as long as he didn't stray too far into degeneracy.

So, without remorse, he acted.

A mana spread through the void, unnoticed by even the Ancient Dragons who led the Holy Clans. It bore deep into the souls of the tens of millions of people in the realm and established itself as a statute that could not be disobeyed.

Right, they had been forcefully pledged to August Void. If they were to make any moves, direct or indirect, to damage August Void or the dragon kingdom of Arulion, then they would die.

Though they could not feel its induction, they did feel its presence when it appeared. The statute itself called upon them and informed them of their new circumstances.

Right, they had been forcefully pledged to August Void. If they were to make any moves, direct or indirect, to damage August Void or the dragon kingdom of Arulion, then they would die.

A meeting was held in the void. The highest authorities of the six clans came together and called all of their people collectively to relay the news.

These statutes were not to be interfered with at any cost. For they, who had the power to glance into their own souls, understood that there was no undoing the shackles they were now carrying.

That statute was more powerful than an Ancient Dragon; more powerful than a Holy Dragon. Even if all of the strongest powers of their clans came together and worked for countless millennia to find a solution, they knew it would be impossible to do so.

Not unless they could reach a level that no dragon had ever stepped foot on.

Naturally, there were a few who tried regardless. Still, it was only a few. The scene of their bodies turning to ashes in an instant as their existences were wiped was enough to scare anyone who had similar thoughts.

Only the Liqua Clan was separate.

As a matter of fact...where was the Liqua Clan?

It was a concern that could not be given any attention at the moment. A sudden disappearance was characteristic of their people, and there was a far bigger problem at hand. The Holy Clans had quite some time to rationalize what happened and cope with their situation in the void before they were returned to the world. After all, Damien was also going through something at the moment.

The statute he placed on their souls was extremely complex in its own right. The amount of particularity necessary to create a shackle that wouldn't randomly destroy its bearer or easily be released with some years of research was massive.

On top of that, to influence the souls of tens of millions without their knowledge was almost impractical. Especially when some of those people were Ancient Dragons, it should have been impossible.

Control.

In the sense of the concept, it meant control over the workings of Existence. But, it could definitely mean something like this as well.

There had been many grand events in the past few days. Most of the time, grand events were accompanied by phenomena. The world was quite adamant about announcing everything and being actively involved in such celebrations.

However, on Damien's level, the world was no longer worthy of producing phenomena. As the sixth jewel formed on a crown that technically did not exist, as the six jewels melded and shared energy to become six different faces of the same concept, a definitive change took place in the core of Damien's being.

Existence, one of only two great forces under the Void, manifested under his reign.

It was truly a perfectly timed entrance.

Chapter 1767 Succession [8]

The Holy Clans were eventually released from the void, but that happened much later. As Arulion first needed to reach a state where they could be brought out and people would trust that they were truly under control, they were left behind for the time being.

August was given access to the void so that he could connect with them until then and figure out what he wanted to do.

Though, that wasn't the only reason why Damien gave him access to that realm. He would be needing it for a long time in the future.

After all, the Liqua Clan would be stuck there, and rather than letting them rot and releasing them later, he thought it would be more fun to let August fight them whenever he wanted.

From now on, that entire clan was fated to be his training targets. They'd slowly be picked off or killed at once as he pleased, and the entire time, they'd be suffering the repercussions of betraying the Azure Dragon.

It would be even more fun when their Holy Dragon Ancestor himself ended up in that realm as well, but that was also a story unrelated to what was happening now in the kingdom.

August chose to follow Damien's method in dealing with the forsaken dragons. Obviously, he couldn't create the kind of slave contract that his father had access to, but he had Raul by his side.

With the Bastille genius' help, he was able to dispel the remaining madness in the forsaken dragons' blood lineage. At that point, he had a heart-to-heart with Hendricks.

He didn't want to kill them, but he wanted them to atone for their sins. The best way to plead forgiveness from their victims was to stay in the kingdom and aid it, becoming its loyal protectors once again.

It wasn't a bad deal for the forsaken dragons. They would be able to return to the light and live the lives they sought from the beginning, only, they'd be under the complete control of August Void through the pact he was proposing they sign.

If they were able to change the people's perception of them and reform, they'd be granted freedom. Even before he fought Alcharist, Hendricks was already regretting his decisions. It didn't take long for him to agree to August's terms.

One by one, the members of the forsaken dragon clan were taken into the main palace at the center of Arulion, which was no longer separated into a secret realm, and made to take the oath in front of notaries to verify their identities. In that way, August was able to gain another considerable force to support Arulion. The forsaken dragons who attacked the kingdom were only those physically able. They started with millions, but there were only a few hundred thousand left.

The rest, another few million people, were the brains behind their clan. The innovators, the architects, the potion makers. Those people also exited their cave once the agreement was made and joined the ranks of August's forces.

The people from Bastille were properly organized and finally given time to adapt to the world they'd barely come to know. The Wood Dragon Clan and Sea Tribes were given proper status in the kingdom to celebrate their achievements. Those straggling geniuses from the Holy Clans...they also ended up with statutes in their souls, but they were never transported to the void.

Instead, the group of them arrived at the palace to confront August about it.

He was very busy with the kingdom, but he definitely needed to inform them.

That conversation was not a smooth one, but, in the end, he got them to agree to staying in the palace for the time being.

A lot of things were sorting themselves out. The new population of True Dragons promoted from dragonkin integrated themselves into society, and within the first few weeks, Arulion was already showing a great change.

Their new society would bear almost no resemblance to the one of old. There was plenty for the citizens to get used to and plenty for them to cope with, but they were prepared for this.

Now, unlike ever before, the common populace also wanted to be part of the change they wanted to see. This was all accomplished under August's sole control with his elders and masters acting only as guides to show him the way.

However, Damien wasn't present to witness it.

After all, he left just a few days after he gained control over Existence. To everyone else, it was a sudden disappearance that came out of nowhere. August was seemingly left behind.

It was strange to see that he was the least confused out of all of them.

But, looking back at it, it wasn't a surprise.

The only person who knew Damien was leaving was him.

And naturally, Damien wasn't going to leave without saying goodbye to his son.

They met again while others were busy dealing with their affairs.

Unlike their last conversation, this one proceeded without tension in the slightest.

It started casually as August told Damien about everything he'd been through. They spoke about Arulion, about August's dreams, and about the future. Damien gave August a few life lessons while mainly acting as a listener to the son who wanted to be praised by his father.

The topic of Damien's departure was kept tucked away for many hours, but it had to come at some point.

"Dad, you've never told me about the outside world," August said.

They sat on the palace roof, staring into the stars as they spoke.

Damien often told stories of the Heavenly World and Grand Heavens Boundary, but he always refrained when it came to certain matters.

August caught onto it early, but only after seeing the chaos in Arulion did he begin to understand why his father was doing it.

"There's something you have to do, isn't there?"

Damien smiled wryly.

"Something like that."

Damien definitely got the urge to rant, but the kid didn't need to know that the fate of everything in existence as he knew it was in the hands of his father.

If Damien couldn't kill the enemy in front of him, he would be giving up everything. It was a battle he could not lose by any means.

"I have to get back there. Just like you, I'm a person who is responsible for a lot of lives," he said.

Leaving it at that was enough.

"Have I never mentioned it? You may be the future Dragon Emperor, but as it stands, you are also a direct descendant of Void Palace, the strongest clan in the Heavenly World."

"Void Palace?" August repeated.

"You've told stories about it. It's the clan Grandpa created, right?"

"That's right. It's the place where your family is. I know you can't leave Arulion at the moment, but as soon as you have an opportunity, I want you to visit so you can finally meet everyone else."

It was August's turn to smile wryly.

"If you're saying that, then you must be leaving soon."

"It has to be that way. If I could stay longer and see how you improve this place, I would love to. Unfortunately, now isn't the best time."

Damien stood up. It was a difficult parting for sure, but it was never meant to be permanent. The realms that separated them could be easily traversed. If they wanted to see each other, then the only thing stopping them was their individual obligations.

"One of these days, I'll need your help," Damien said, turning back to look at his son.

"My help?" August echoed.

"Correct," Damien replied with a grin. "I don't know when it will be, but I will eventually have to call on you and the people of Arulion for help. Will you come to my aid?"

He extended his hand. August only looked at it for a moment before grabbing it and standing up.

The chance to help his dad...

It was an offer laced with danger. Anything that Damien needed help with could not be simple.

However, it was also an opportunity that August had been looking forward to ever since he was a child.

He grinned and looked his father in the eye with an unwavering expression.

"Call us at any time. We'll be ready."

No matter what it was, no matter who they were facing, the people of Arulion would always stand by Damien's side.

That was August's promise to him as his son.

Chapter 1768 Succession [9]

It was an extremely extended farewell. August didn't want to let go, and though Damien knew he had to leave, he didn't want to do so without entertaining his son's whims as much as possible.

It had only been a few months in real time since August was just a ten-year-old boy who left home with dreams of majesty, but for him, it had been over six years of fighting and struggling for his goals.

He missed his father. He was still in his formative years, so Damien's presence in his life was important.

If Damien had the chance, he would have at least left Alexander in Arulion so he could maintain contact with August, but he didn't have access to the Sanctuary which took away many of his conveniences.

Plus, August probably wouldn't like it if he felt like Damien was giving him too much protection, so Damien went with a different method.

He erected a tower in the center of Arulion. As long as August wanted to contact him, he would be able to do so from the tower. Distance wouldn't matter. Time wouldn't matter either.

That was the best he could do.

And once the tower was created, there weren't many excuses left to keep Damien in the kingdom.

Damien was never much of a hugger, but in that moment, he felt the opposite.

He hugged his son dearly and told him how proud he was. He told him that he would always be there and that he was excited to see what he could accomplish in the future. He told him that he would miss him, and he told him to visit whenever he had the time, as frequently as possible.

When that conversation ended, there was really nothing left.

That night, as August slept, Damien disappeared from the kingdom, and his life went back to its usual routine with just a slight emptiness left in his heart.

"Just you wait, Dad." August thought to himself.

'Next time we meet, I'll surprise even you.'

August had big plans for Arulion. Though it seemed like he was being a little arrogant, there wasn't a single ounce of falsehood in his words.

The next time Arulion became prominent in the eyes of others, it would be a completely different kingdom than it was today.

And August...

Well, the rest could wait until the time was right.

After all, that moment wasn't all too far away.

The Heavenly World had gone through many changes since Damien left. It was far more than anything anyone in Arulion could imagine. After all, the main world was flowing at a speed that far exceeded all of the hidden realms incorporated into its folds. Selena was able to find a method to interfere in worlds that she could not sense, but it was naturally to a lesser extent than the main world.

The few months that passed in Arulion could be equated to around three years in real-time. For the Heavenly World, however, it had been almost twenty.

Under Void Palace's influence and with their support, the people of the world were able to train at an unbelievable rate and gather great power. A new influence rose in the north to fill the void left by the Straea Clan, which just so happened to be fully created by Eyrissea Luminous. Rose generally understood that the array was being created, so she was aware that the Heavenly World would have changed by the time she returned, but she really wasn't expecting this place that looked like a utopia.

Void Palace was too strong for another major enemy of the world to rise. There were still petty criminals everywhere, but without real obstructions, society was able to progress at a magnificent rate.

Resources were available to all people, which led to revolutions in the many fields of research surrounding mana. Even the smallest villages were equipped with systems that would have been considered advanced ten years ago.

The world was now united under the palace's banner. The other influences were still present and had control over their individual regions as a sort of division of power, but Void Palace did have the final say in all important decisions.

As such, even the palace was no longer the same as it was when Rose left. It had been upgraded and improved several times. The overall aesthetic was still the same, but it was almost impossibly bigger and more technologically and magically sophisticated.

The most surprising thing, though, was the realization that her quest actually amounted to nothing.

Well, the artifacts she stole seemed to be pretty valuable, so it was still worth robbing the dragons. But shouldn't someone have told her that Dante Void was awake?!

She was only told about it since she was part of the inner circle of the palace that only contained real family members. Damien's other wives knew, but they happened to be invested in their own tasks at the moment so they didn't find the time to inform her.

Nevertheless, it was surprising to meet her father-in-law before his own son had, but she left a good impression as she delivered everything she'd taken.

When Dante saw those treasures, a grin lit up his face.

"Those old bastards are still at it? Well, that's good. I was just craving dragon meat."

They would undoubtedly arrive at the palace soon as they traced the signatures of these objects. And when they arrived, they'd promptly be dealt with.

Those pesky lizards were always holed up in the world they created so they could pretend to be the strongest. Now that their auras were present in the Heavenly World, did they think things would be the same?

There was a time when dragons were stronger than humans to the point where they could only be feared.

However, that was long in the past.

A dragon had never become Unrecorded.

Humans on the other hand had three verified members of their race who attained the unattainable.

Confidence was infectious, and the spirit of Void Palace even more. Ten years had produced enough improvement in the world's population to give everyone surety that they'd be well prepared in a hundred.

However, would they really receive the time they worked so hard to earn themselves?

Before even Rose's return, there were machinations influencing the universe from beyond.

A hundred years had been given, but they could be taken away just as fast.

From beyond the veil, the Dark God sneered as he sensed the change in reality. He peered beyond the nothingness of the Void and watched time change in the Heavenly World. [Foolish little things.]

He snickered. It was a sound made by countless voices that mixed into one, echoing through the starry sky and shaking the surrounding planets.

It was a respectable maneuver, but a foolish one nonetheless. [You have had your time.]

Did they want to find a loophole in the five-year promise?

Well, unfortunately for them...

[Mimic.]

He spoke a single word to the Existence he controlled.

A black fog spread from his body as it was forced to obey.

The time flow in the Sacred Abyss Universe changed and changed and changed until it matched the True Void perfectly.

Five years...

It was meant to have increased into over one hundred, but it was no longer so.

The two cosmos had never been perfectly aligned before now.

And, with five years passing multiple times in both places in tandem...

...the Dark God no longer had a reason to hold back, did he?

An army was summoned from nothingness. They readied themselves for war and opened portal after portal.

The war that was meant to be far in the distance was already beginning.

And Damien wasn't even slightly aware of it.

Chapter 1769 Return [1]

Right, while they gained a little bit of time while the Dark God laughed at them, it wasn't anywhere near what they wanted.

Before even Rose returned, the world was once again plagued by Dimensional Cracks, through which great enemies constantly flowed.

They were mostly Vanguard forces, however, many newly created Foreign Nobles also appeared one after another. Even those who were killed always found a way to return. The Heavenly World was not enveloped in war, but that was only because they were prepared for the invasion already. It came far earlier than expected, but the basic provisions were enough to keep chaos at bay.

There were several zones throughout the world, each of them tens of thousands of kilometers wide. They were clearly delineated by the cool blue barriers that separated them from the general populace. Several was the wrong way to number them. In reality, there were millions of them. They were all locations where cracks opened in the fabric of reality. Through the array that now covered the world, the palace was able to find them before they appeared and secure the area. These zones were heavily infested by Foreign Races. Practitioners would enter them and go to war in those specific areas. Their efforts kept the enemies at bay so that the entire world wouldn't be immediately doomed.

It was only for this reason that Rose could return and not sense anything too different about the world.

However, when Damien arrived, he immediately noticed.

He left Arulion a little after he said goodbye to August.

At the end of the day, that was his son. Even if he made it seem like he wasn't feeling too heartbroken by their separation, it did hurt to see him grow further away.

Nevertheless, August had a life path he wanted to follow and Damien knew that he would never forget about his family.

As long as August was doing fine, he had nothing to worry him over. He could cope with his own sadness alone.

He watched over the development of Arulion for around a week before returning to the Heavenly World. It was a good thing because he got some time to sort out his mood before he returned and it was instantly darkened.

His eyes turned cold.

His sense of perception was already far separated from the norm. As long as he willed it, any and all information in the True Void Universe would be made available to him.

As such, he instantly sensed the existence of every single foreign being in the world, the barriers that entrapped them, and...

"You."

Damien stood in the sky of the empty western region, staring into the horizon.

Others couldn't see it. Even for him, it was still vague.

When Damien attained Existence, it felt like something he'd always had was completed. He stood at a peak that nobody in his cosmos had ever reached, but even then, he saw someone standing at a peak above him.

That person who was peering beyond the veil naturally heard his comment. The fact that Damien could sense him was a surprise, but it was nothing too unexpected considering that Damien was already close to this level when they last met.

"I knew you liked to scheme, but this is a little much, isn't it?" He said, not expecting a response.

However, he did receive one. Just, in a form he wasn't expecting.

Words manifested in front of him in a deep black light.

[I merely evened the playing field. Did you believe that you would be allowed to exploit loopholes while I did not? Our promise was five years. That time has long passed. Do not get cocky, Damien Void.]

Damien sneered.

"I'm not the cocky one between us."

He took his attention off of that person. He would always be watching since he had nothing better to do with his miserable life, so there wasn't a point in entertaining him for too long.

'It's good news, though.'

The Dark God chose to send a message instead of communicating directly. It was a clear indication that while his power allowed him to easily observe the Heavenly World, he couldn't influence it at will.

He wasn't strong enough to directly crush the True Void Universe before Damien could put up a fight, and that was certainly comforting.

'They got ten years, huh.'

It wasn't a bad amount of time, but it still wasn't enough.

If he wanted to help the people of this world survive the coming cataclysm, then he needed to earn them more time to train.

'I'll have to eliminate all of the pesky bastards on my own for now.'

He wasn't around August anymore, nor was he in a place where he didn't necessarily have a say in the lives of the people.

He was the Young Lord of the palace who was pretty much just its Lord at this point. This world, unlike Arulion, belonged solely to him.

As such, he would not allow its people to die in vain during a war they had no say in.

'I just got to this level. It would be fun to test my power on strong enemies, but those don't exist anymore.'

Damien shook his head.

'Either way, slaughtering a mob is fun too.'

Damien had always been a fan of intricacies disguised as commonalities. Most of his attacks were like that, manifesting in common forms but containing huge webs of interconnected concepts that produced results that others couldn't replicate.

He was always someone who theorized and tested his techniques before using them in actual combat. Most of his training as a young practitioner was geared towards this particular aspect.

However, all of that was robbed from him. It was a sort of bittersweet realization, but that was just the truth of the matter. Now that he controlled Existence, complexity could not exist in front of him unless he allowed it to.

Even in this moment, he did not have to gather his mana or control its circulation. He did not have to infuse it with laws and weave them together. He didn't even have to make a gesture, but he did it for effect since he knew that his audience of one would be more irked if he did so.

Damien raised his hand and snapped, making direct eye contact with the Dark God.

That was it. His mana didn't explode outward or even acknowledge that it was used. The source of energy was practically infinite in Damien's circuits now.

From his point of view, nothing happened. That was only because the swathe of land around him was isolated and empty.

The Heavenly World felt the weight of that snap far more than him.

Everywhere, no matter how remote or close to civilization, at the same time, hundreds of millions of living beings turned to ash.

Every hostile foreign being in this world was eradicated with a single snap that nobody knew about but the two people who watched it happen.

The playing field that Damien and the Dark God saw was far beyond the comprehension of even the greatest minds in the world.

The battle they were fighting was of a completely different weight class.

"Foreign Beings." It was a blanket term that described every single individual or object in this world that did not originate from the True Void Universe.

And when "hostile" was used as an adjective to describe them, the victims all became followers of the Dark God.

Gods, Demigods, nine revolutions masters, and fourth-class practitioners.

Artifacts with the power to alter reality, Dimensional Cracks; it didn't matter what the actual level of those affected was or what kind of qualities they had.

As long as they fit the criteria Damien set, they died in a single instant.

Once again, Damien sneered at the Dark God.

His actions were something of a warning. "Do not think this war will end so easily," he said with his eyes.

And as he turned his attention away from that being, set on returning to his home, his eyes turned another shade colder. The adventures in Arulion were a good break. Those few months gave him a lot of mental clarity.

Now that he was back, it was go time.

The final war, the war to determine the fates of both the True Void Universe and the Sacred Abyss Universe...

'...it begins now.'

Chapter 1770 Return [2]

Every time Damien returned from a long journey, he would be a different person than he was when he left. He had a habit of growing when nobody else was around, so the people around him were forced to get used to never actually experiencing his growth.

This time, however, he was not the one who left for a long time. He only spent a few months away, but for everyone else, it had been ten years.

They grew and changed with the time, and he was the one who had to realize what it felt like to be in their position. When he returned to the palace, it was in an especially large uproar. After all, the phenomenon Damien caused was a huge deal. To him, it was nothing more than subtle provocation, but others didn't see it the same way.

Even Supreme Gods couldn't cause that kind of widespread damage to kill every single foreign being in the world. At most, they could go from zone to zone and individually take care of each one within only a few seconds.

Obviously, the people of the world had no interest in antagonizing a being who could create such a scene, but they had to find out his identity. He was too dangerous to be treated casually just because he was powerful.

The people who served the palace now stood at the head of the world. When something of this caliber happened, it fell on their shoulders to find a cause and inform the people.

It was a little funny how Damien's return went unnoticed in the chaos, but it was probably better that way. They couldn't have a huge celebration every time he came back, right?

He walked through the halls of the new palace, smiling as he saw how it had evolved since the last time he was here.

He scanned the vicinity for signs of his family or his wives.

Unfortunately, Iris, Elena, and Ruyue were all still away from home. Rose, however, was still present.

It was the same for his siblings. Only Hestia remained. Presumably, the rest of them were on the battlefield directly leading the forces of the world. Hesita... She was a small girl when he first met her. She didn't have much knowledge and the extent of her personality was the shyness she always displayed. To see that she'd grown into an adult and was commanding all of the palace's war efforts even at this moment made him extremely proud.

Damien's sense of time had truly been ruined.

He had been thrown around in time dilations for his entire life. Most of his aging was done in places where time didn't match the outside world in the slightest.

His heart had become somewhat dead to the feelings related to time. Seeing Hestia, seeing Rose, seeing the geniuses he personally chose all those years ago in different forms, he only felt a slight tingle in his chest.

If anything, he was proud of what they could do in only ten years' time.

'Only...?'

His own lifespan was not great enough for him to say something like that, was it?

He lost count at this point, but he couldn't have been more than a hundred and something. He was two hundred at most. To him, ten years was still quite a considerable period of time.

Just...

His mind had experienced so much more. He had seen millions upon millions upon millions of years of memories. He had the experiences of countless others living in his own mind.

It was a miracle that he was able to maintain a sense of self, but even that was only possible because Damien experienced hundreds of thousands of years of change when he was still in his twenties.

With Existence under his control now, his physical form had lost a lot of meaning.

He could change his age so he was as old as the universe itself, or he could revert to his childhood appearance and power. Existence always followed him, and as a fabric that supported the fabric of reality, its influence would not be removed from him even if he destroyed every power vessel in his body.

So, the current Damien was someone who manifested more as what he envisioned himself to be.

There wasn't an aura around him. He was still the same purple-eyed genius, but there was an odd quality that was not present in normal people.

The ordinary observer wouldn't even be able to register his face if he passed by. Only those who had deep personal connections with him could still feel the weight of his existence. He was disappearing from the world.

No, rather, he was surpassing it.

Nevertheless, the part of Damien that was still human cared deeply for his people. Only for this reason could they sense him no matter how he changed.

Damien put his thoughts to the side. Anyway, he didn't care how he changed as long as he remained the same in his core. The fact that he could still recognize his love for his family was enough.

He approached the inner palace and went to what could be considered a "family room."

It was the main place where everyone gathered. Though it was usually for serious matters, it was outfitted so it could be used casually as well.

Damien sat on a sofa and summoned Persia's Encyclopedia. As he read its pages, it told him everything that had occurred since he went to Arulion. 'It's mostly good things.'

The plans at hand were more than enough to protect the cosmos. If the Dark God hadn't interfered, then it would have been perfect.

'But it was stupid to think he'd just let it be.'

The Dark God was arrogant. Arrogance would usually be displayed by letting the enemy grow. This was what he was doing with Damien.

When it came to the common populace, on the other hand, his arrogance shined most clearly in his desire to toy with them.

They didn't know that their enemies were infinite in number. They couldn't know, or their spirits would be shattered.

'Will he force us to fight here, or will I be able to push into his territory?'

Hypothetically, fighting in his own realm was more beneficial.

That was only when his own realm was empty of innocent civilians.

The Sacred Abyss barely had a population of real living people. It would be a better place overall to have a reality-shattering battle.

'I have to plan that out, but I guess this comes first...'

"The Heavenly God Plane."

Damien muttered it to himself, but he raised his head in surprise as another voice joined him. His eyes immediately dilated.

"It's usually incorporeal so that only souls can enter, but every ten million years, it becomes corporeal for but a few days. It's a place that every Divinity wants to enter, since it's filled with countless treasures and a special energy that makes ascension and training far easier. As the rumor goes, anyone who enters will leave a God. But...this time it's a bit more special than that."

A man stood at the entrance of the room, leaning against the door frame. He smiled at Damien as he took a few steps into the room.

"It's nice to finally meet you in person..."

His blue eyes shined like sapphires. His face, a face that looked too familiar to belong to anyone else, made an expression of warmth.

"...my son."

Two words.

With the power of two words, Damien's mind was blown.

Was that really Dante Void?