

RE: DEITY - THE BREATH OF CREATION

2.11 Introductions

“So...introductions?” Yueya, the beautiful elf, said, twirling one lock of hair around her finger. “How do we want to do this? Go in a circle, say your name, domain, what your world is? An interesting fact about yourself?” It was at that point that I understood she was being a little derisive, not serious. The inverted pyramid made a strange beeping sound that I almost attributed to being a laugh.

“That would be...amenable. Gathering data should not be done for free. Trading information is wiser.” It intoned.

“Or, and hear me out on this,” Reilly interjected. “We could turn it into a game.”

“A game?” The stag asked, cocking his head to the side. The dragon yawned, lifting one clawed foot to pick at its teeth.

“Boring,” it muttered.

“Yes, a game! We try to guess each other’s domains. Everyone here’s been suppressing their auras anyways, so why not?” Reilly drawled. I nodded along, sitting back in my chair a little. That would certainly make things more interesting than just introductions. “That said, there should be stakes to this game. If you guess wrong, you have to share something about yourself. Some piece of interesting or important information, maybe. Or even just share some booze! If you guess right, then the other one has to share something about them. Nice and low stakes to get things started.”

“I agree,” I said with a nod. Turning this into a guessing game would make things far less tense – the continued construction of our universes was a group project, after all, not a competition.

There was a round of muttered agreements from around the table, a few seeming uninterested but, guessing by how they stayed at the table, willing to play along for now. The question was, then, what kind of information to reveal, and who would go first? I didn’t really see the point of hiding too much information, as we were all still baby deities and collaboration would make our efforts bear more fruit. Mr. Boxes had purposefully designed the encounter this way so we got to know each other a little bit first, and then our universes would be compared. Which meant I should probably share something personal rather than some hidden nugget of information I had learned, to build camaraderie...

I blinked as I looked around the room, assessing everyone’s auras. I could see them fluctuate and change, their purposes clear as day to my eyes...Ah, crap. This wasn’t really going to be a game at all if I got involved, was it?

“Who will go first, then?” the butterfly asked. “And what about our plus-ones?”

“Why don’t we try to guess them, as well? Or should they do their own thing?” The stag asked, the centaur behind it shifting its feet nervously and fiddling with the furs on its shoulders. I, for one, glanced over my shoulder at the Mad Scientist, who cocked an eyebrow at me, seemed to realize what I was asking, and shrugged.

“I don’t have a problem with it. For one, I am curious to see if they all will be able to figure me out as easily as you did. Is this some quirk of your existence? Or a benefit to being an origin deity? I suspect there is more to your eyes than mere sight.” she mused, scratching her chin. The feathers of her wings ruffled a little as she looked about the room, squinting her eyes, curiosity surging forth in her emotions. The apathy was nearly gone, now, replaced entirely by curiosity and excitement.

“Let’s add them to the fun. Guess who and what our plus ones are, and, for bonus points, see if we can figure out why we brought the ones we did.” I said, turning back to the group. At my words everyone seemed to nod, a few focusing in on each other – only Reilly and the dragon focused on me, Reilly peering curiously at the Mad Scientist, while the dragon licked its lips. She merely raised an eyebrow at the beast, decidedly nonplussed.

“Getting eaten is a boring way to die.” She whispered, and I snorted a little. She was probably being serious, which made it both sad and funnier.

“I suppose, the next question is, who will go first?” the ball of light asked. “And, if there is, a time limit?”

“We get one minute. The person being questioned can try to hide their domain any way possible. Try not to cheat and analyze people beforehand. Any volunteers?” Reilly said. I blinked at him. Try not to analyze the others beforehand? Oops. “Why not you, since you saw through my disguise so easily?” I glanced about at the others for a moment before, with a little jolt of surprise, I realized Reilly was talking to me. He had leaned forward, juggling his dice in his hands and looking at me with a smirk and half-lidded eyes. I held up my hands.

“Uh, I should probably go last,” I said slowly.

“Why is that?” The inverted pyramid asked.

“It won’t be much of a game if I go first, and I’d hate to ruin everyone’s fun.” I said sheepishly. The silence that followed was deafening, broken only by the Mad Scientist doing her damndest to hold back a laugh.

“Are you saying,” the skeleton spoke up for the first time since arriving, steepling its bony fingers before its face. “That you have already analyzed each of our domains?”

I nodded, flushing. “Well, yes. I have. Though I haven’t analyzed all of your plus ones yet,” that was mostly because, to my shame, I hadn’t really cared to fully analyze them, so absorbed with the origin deities themselves as I was.

“Bullshit.” Reilly said, eyebrows furrowed. “I call bullshit.”

“I, too, doubt the accuracy of your statement.” The inverted pyramid said. I sat back.

“So you want me to prove myself?” I asked, to a round of nods. Well, they asked for it. I pointed at Reilly, who blinked and pointed at himself innocently. “Ok. We’ll start with you, Reilly. Introduce yourself and your plus one, if you would.”

“I am Reilly, Origin Deity of the Seven Heavens. This is Pyrah.” He said, gesturing behind himself at the gleaming, silver-armored, multi-winged angel that was his plus one. She formally bowed her head, and I smiled serenely at her.

“Yours was tricky, I have to admit, but Luck. You are the origin deity of Luck.” I told Reilly. His presence seemed to fluctuate wildly, shifting between fortune and misfortune at a moment’s notice, which was what had originally thrown me off. But the longer I had looked at him, the clearer it became. “Pyrah, on the other hand, is likely some sort of God-Queen? A ruler. That’s the kind of vibe I get from her.”

“His domain is not luck. It cannot be.” The butterfly objected. “It is not chaotic enough.” I did not respond, holding Reilly’s gaze as he gaped at me. The man heaved a sigh and took a long draught from his – *my* flask, leaning back in his chair.

“...what the hells. And here I was thinking my luck was good today. You’re right on both counts.” Reilly drawled. “Damn. It is as you said, my domain is Luck. And, since I lost, here’s a little factoid. I do not actively run my universe, instead letting Pyrah here maintain most of it. I just make sure things don’t fall apart, leaving the rest up to chance.” *That explains the beggar look.* I mused, nodding to myself. Sounded more hands-off than even me, though. I did tend to take a fairly active role in aiding my Realms, even if I wasn’t officially the ‘leader.’ Well, I said fairly active, but I know for a fact that many gods and powerful beings saw me as whimsical.

“Nyxteria is next.” The great space-bird said, fluffing up its feathers and cocking its head at me. Its four wings spread out a bit as its beak clacked, nebulas swirling beneath it. “Nyxteria’s name is Nyxteria. Nyxteria Krotan, creator of the Starry Ocean universe.” Starry ocean...I glanced up at its flag. It did look like a sea of stars, if I squinted and looked at it funny.

“Space and time. Sorry, that one was pretty obvious; it’s written all over you.” I said, shaking my head. Its whole theme screamed space and time. “Your sun-deity is curious though. I don’t see any divinity within it; is it perhaps truly a sentient star? Is it immortal? No, that’s not important. Are you using it as a conduit for time to flow through?” Nyxteria’s time, to my eyes, appeared as a tangle of strings that flowed from the bird to the living sun, before flowing off into nothingness. Likely back to its universe. There was more to it than that, but my vision seemed to be limited in that regard.

“Indeed it is, and indeed Nyxteria is. Sua here was Nyxteria’s first sun, made immortal by It. Sua acts as a time-nexus, though Nyxteria will explain no more than that. Instead, Nyxteria will admit that Nyxteria’s favorite thing to do is collect interesting things, and add it to Nyxteria’s Timeless Collection. Nyxteria wishes to collect some things from you all as well, if you allow. A memory to be stored in timeless crystal.” It crowed, bobbing its head and picking up another bit of food with its beak.

“Perhaps,” I allowed, nodding to the bird and sensing no hostility to the suggestion, no matter how ominous it may sound. The Mad Scientist shuddered.

“Timeless crystal is very unique. It can literally seal away moments in time.” She said in a mental message. *“Only the owner of the crystal would ever be able to see it.”* Well. That was...something. Potentially terrifying, actually.

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“That one was easy, as you said. I do not believe Nyxteria even bothered to hide its domain.” The Stag said sagely.

“No point.” Nyxteria agreed.

“Myself next, then.” The stag said. “I am Rising Wind, Crashing Waves, originator of the Cosmic Planes universe.” Cosmic Planes? I looked at its flag. A five pointed star. No idea what that could look like. With a small shake of my head I refocused on the great stag, double-checking my understanding of its domain. It seemed timeless and deep, like a pond... “Have I thrown you off? Should’st I-“

“Wisdom.” I interrupted, firm in my assessment. “You are the God of Wisdom. And your plus one...” here I trailed off a bit again, narrowing my eyes. The centaur refused to meet my eyes, looking away and plucking at the furs draped across his chest. His horse tail flicked nervously, dappled coat shining in the light. “Is he a god of the hunt? Truly? Please don’t tell me he hunts you, the great stag.” I asked.

Rising Wind, Crashing Waves chuckled and bobbed his head, the gems in his antlers reflecting multicolored beams of light. “And here I was, about to say something arrogant. Thy perceptiveness is humbling, truly. To answer you question, young Arche is indeed a god of the hunt, although his arrogance was in need of temperance. Our games are quite entertaining. He seeks my wisdom and my hide in equal measures.” *What a power move, to bring the god that’s hunting you to a meeting.* I thought, raising my eyebrow. Slowly my gaze slid to the next being – the Dragon.

It bared its fangs at me. “Tell me, oh little god? What am I? What is my domain?” I frowned at it and shook my head, reaching up to rub my forehead just below my horns. “What? Is your tongue tied in the presence of one as mighty as I?”

“No. Merely that any answer I give would be incorrect.” I said, biting back the heat that threatened to rise in my tone. Wow, this one really rubbed me the wrong way, didn’t it?

“What is that supposed to mean?” Rising Wind, Crashing Waves asked.

“Simply that the...sorry, I didn’t get your name,” I paused.

“I am the Primeval Dragon.” The Dragon huffed, craning her neck up so she could look down upon us all.

“Right. The Primeval Dragon is the only one among us Origin Deities who could not be considered a god.” I continued. I suppose ‘Origin Deity’ is an incorrect statement, now, though I had no doubt that the Primeval Dragon was the creator of her universe. “She is power. She is savagery. She is destruction and creation. She is -” I cut myself off, a realization striking me like a thunderbolt as I stared at her. My eyes grew wide. My fists clenched. And she laughed at me. She is *Shadow*.

That was part of why I had reacted to her so. She is the creator of her own universe, but she is also its Shadow. I glanced up at the incarnation of Mr. Boxes, though he did not visibly react, the little nerve ending not even pulsing at my realization or gaze.

“Not a god?” The king-god said, folding his arms across his broad chest. “What kind of fool would not wish to be a god?”

“Do you know how much power I would have to surrender, to become something as mere as a god?” The Dragon countered with a sneer, smoke pouring from its scales. The king-god gaped at her, and I shook my head.

“Let us not, fall for, cheap provocations. She is, not wrong, however. We all gave, up something to, become a god.” The ball of light said. The Dragon glanced at it, huffed again, and lowered her head to rest upon her front foreclaws as she gazed about disinterested. The king-god settled back into his own chair, glaring at the Dragon. “Would you, mind, continuing? I believe, I am, next. You may call me, the Progenitor, and I tend to my Garden.” I tore my gaze away from the Dragon to stare at the Progenitor, forcing myself to refocus.

“You gave me a bit of pause, I admit. But you are a Creation god.” I told it, then looked at the faceless, feather-covered, six-legged beast it called its plus one. This one was throwing me for a loop, if I was being perfectly honest. It was suspiciously blank, in its aura and design. “I do have to ask, did you truly create that being solely to come to this meeting?” It was some kind of divine beast, but it had no real purpose to it besides to absorb and analyze some of our energies. Quite curious.

“Yes, I, did.” The Progenitor replied, flashing once. “And yes, I, am. Your perceptiveness, is something, to be admired. As for, myself, I was a god. Even before, I became an, Origin Deity. That divinity, has since, become my sub-domain.” *It makes more sense for a god to become an origin deity than a low-to-mid rank angel like myself.* I thought, nodding along.

“Next would be -“

“There is no need to play this game with me. I am sure you all have already guessed who I am and what I stand for, as I have never once attempted to hide my status. I am Emperor, and I am a God-King. This is my faithful Jester. He is mad at me and not speaking with me for the moment. Our

kingdom is Heaven Above, Earth Below.” The golden-skinned Emperor interrupted, nodding his golden head. I smiled at him and chuckled a little. The honesty was, in a way, kind of refreshing. Especially since everything about him screamed “king.” Behind him his jester rolled his eyes, meeting my gaze once before quickly looking away.

“Right. Thank you, Emperor. Should we do a quick little speed round for the rest of you?” I asked, drumming my fingers on the table impatiently. A few grumbles rose up from them, and my smile widened as I pointed to the butterfly. “Chaos. That is your domain. As for your companion, it is a growth and fertility deity. A counter to your presence, I assume? Something to help balance you out.”

“That is correct.” The butterfly said. “My name is Sylphina. This one’s name is Scarlet. It was my third creation as an Origin Deity, though I was not a butterfly at the time. Perhaps my form was a happy accident. My universe is a Chaos Universe.” Sylphina’s antennas twitched, lightning arcing between them as it spoke, while the flower rustled its petals. Next, I pointed my finger at the inverted pyramid, and immediately frowned. There was a green sheen about its aura now, as it tried to mix something else into its domain to throw me off. But at this point I was far too confident in my perceptive abilities.

“It’s too late to try and cover up your domain, my friend. You are Order. The sphere behind you seems like some sort of data collector? I believe it has something to do with memories, but it doesn’t have the aura of a true divinity either, even if it is divine in nature.” I mused, rubbing my chin. The sphere behind the pyramid felt more like a holy machine than an actual divinity. Did that make it similar to Fu Hao and Stilicho then?

“...your assessment is correct. I am designated MR-10. My companion is Memory Unit A-8. It is responsible for the management and data collection of timestream A-8, as it is part of the multiple timelines we manage. My universe is a Clockwork universe.” MR-10 stated. Honestly, the fact that everyone’s universe ended up sounding so different was beginning to excite me. Will Mr. Boxes let us see each other’s universes? My finger drifted to the next; the black-robed skeleton.

“...the cycle.” I said after a brief moment of hesitation. The skeleton tilted its head to the side curiously.

“Which cycle?” It asked.

“The Cycle.” I told it firmly. “And your companion seems to be aligned with rebirth. Her power is to be commended, though.” I estimated her to be on-par with Keilan in terms of raw power. She fell short of Alexander, though.

“My name is Shin,” the skeleton, Shin, said with a nod. “And had you said anything other than The Cycle, you would have been incorrect. Ze is my faithful companion, and the face of my Wheel Realm. I prefer to act from the shadows, while my subordinates handle the more overt things. It makes moving...easier.” It explained. Finally, my finger drifted to the beautiful elf, who smirked at me.

“I am Yueya Oshun, Origin Deity of the One World.” She told me, then gestured to the hooded elf behind her. “And my companion is Astraea.” The hooded elf bowed her head, though I saw her hands tremble a little. It was no mere nervousness I saw within her, though, but genuine fear. I frowned.

“I want to say you are Beauty, Yueya,” I started. “But that would be incorrect. Beauty is a large part of you, but I would daresay you are a goddess of Art. Anything that can be called an art; even war.” Yueya’s grin grew wide, and even that was dazzling. I nearly had to shield my eyes as she laughed and nodded her head.

“I am, yes. I am beginning to believe my Beauty is of the same nature as your eyes; some unique feature of myself that separates me from a standard god, and from the other Origin Deities. Will we all have our own little quirk? I do not know. Now, about my companion?” she asked. I fixated Astraea with a look, the young goddess looking up to meet my eyes. Of all the plus ones, she was the one to hold my gaze. And in it was a silent request.

“A goddess of stars, clearly. Though I do not think I’ll say why you brought her, Yueya, as I am not entirely certain beyond her power as a god.” I said with a small smile. Then, quieter, I continued in a voice only Astraea could hear. “All you had to do was ask.” She held my eyes for a moment longer, her pupils shining like stars in the darkness of her hood, before she bowed her head again in thanks.

“...well, I’ll be honest. I didn’t expect my game to backfire so badly.” Reilly drawled, taking another long swig of his whiskey. “Guess it’s your turn to introduce yourself, then.”

“Oh yes.” I agreed, leaning back. “My name is Statera Luotian, Origin Deity of the Four Realms. And I do believe it’s time for you all to guess my domain.” I’d spent a lot of time learning to restrain and hide my aura so I could mingle with the mortals of my realms. It was time to learn just how well I really could hide myself.

I was under no illusion that I would be able to hide my nature for long; however, it would be a perfect test of skill. Of course, I planned to tell them what it was at the end of this, assuming no one got it right.

“Truth,” the stag, Rising Wind, Crashing Waves, said. I shook my head.

“Change,” said Reilly. Again, I shook my head. Had we forgotten about the loss condition? That they had to share something else about themselves? Ah, guess it didn’t really matter.

“...chaos and order,” Sylphina, the butterfly guessed. I shook my head again. Silence reigned for a long moment, all the deities staring at me – save for the Primeval Dragon, who didn’t seem to care – while the seconds ticked by. I timed it, and only when forty-five seconds had passed, did Yueya snort and shake her head.

“I’ve been looking too hard. Your domain has been staring me in the face, and I haven’t been able to see it. Is it Balance?” she asked, and I clapped my hands together, nodding happily and meeting the beautiful elf’s eyes.

“Indeed it is! Good eye. I was hoping I’d make it to the end of the minute, to be honest.” I complained.

“Unfortunately, I did cheat. I have been analyzing your domain since I got here. And especially after you claimed to have already seen through our own domains.” She admitted with a sigh. “So it doesn’t feel very satisfying.”

“That is alright. Can anyone tell me what my plus one is, and why I brought her along?” I asked, turning back to the group assembled. Most shook their heads, though many peered at the Mad Scientist curiously.

This time, it was Shin, the skeleton, who leaned forward to answer. “I cannot say what she is beyond mortal. But I do believe I have an answer as to why you brought her. It is because it would be beneficial for her.” He claimed. I was struck by him for a second and the accuracy of his statement, then laughed and nodded.

“Indeed! While I am curious as to how you figured that out, I won’t pry. Moreso than any of my other children, she would benefit the most; and I find her potential very intriguing. As for why my interest in her was enough to bring her here, well...I’ll keep that my little secret.” I admitted, glancing back at the Mad Scientist. She had her eyes narrowed as she looked up at me, but I, for the most part, ignored that. Mr. Boxes had sent her to my Four Realms for a reason, I assumed. Hopefully this would help me figure out why.

But, more importantly, now it was time to mingle, and I stood up. Introductions were over. Conversations could now be had. And I was well and truly over everyone’s suspicion of each other.

2.12 Rankings

Shin was a naturally quiet being. He much preferred listening over speaking, for when one listened all kinds of things could be heard. For example, simply listening to the way Statera Luotian phrased things allowed him to understand why they would bring a seeming mortal to this meeting. Not to mention the occasional nuggets of information said mortal occasionally offered their God; Timeless Crystals were something even he hadn't heard about before.

He had also confirmed that there were at least four Origin Deities that had discovered their...Specialty, as he called it. Statera Luotian had their Sight; Yueya Oshun their Beauty; the Emperor, his Voice; and the Dragon, her Power. He had his suspicions about the others, but nothing concrete yet.

His gaze drifted about the room as the Origin Deities mingled, content to let the conversations wash over him. Three distinct groups had formed, not including the plus ones, with the Primeval Dragon sitting out the conversation. The Emperor masterfully steered his own conversation with Reilly and Sylphina, the golden-skinned god dominating in charisma and presence. Shin found himself standing beside The Progenitor and MR-10 as the two gods conversed. He felt wholly out of place beside the gleaming white pyramid and ball of light, especially considering his own, far darker color scheme, but thankfully he was not forcibly drug into their conversation.

The other member of their little group, however, was not so kind as to allow him his silence.

"I must admit, I am anxious to get to the rankings." Statera Luotian said, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. Shin mentally sighed, linking his boney fingers together behind his back. The purple-robed god cast his gaze about the room thoughtfully, various incarnations of himself engaging in conversation with each of the other groups. One laughed at something Reilly said, the other discussing something with Nyxteria in hushed tones – the great space-bird clacking its beak together thoughtfully – while others still talked to a few of the plus-ones.

He was the only god to deign to split their consciousness to speak with everyone. Was he really just friendly? Shin did not look away as Statera turned his gaze back to him, piercing green eyes just as steady as ever. His aura was open and honest, guarded in all the ways that mattered, but still clearly friendly.

Shin did not dislike that kind of attitude. It was simply exhausting to deal with.

“I do agree,” he said, nodding, turning his ears to other conversations. Statera’s plus one was having an interesting conversation with others – he truly applauded her skill in which she navigated the conversation she held with the Emperor’s Jester. Wheedling important information out of the man, while surrendering small nuggets of her own. He dared to say it was even more precise than the Emperor’s skill, which was far more domineering in nature. That said, he did have a question for the purple-robed god about that. “What is...cultivation?”

“A quirk of my universe,” Statera said with a long-suffering sigh, shaking his head helplessly. “I dare not call it a mistake, but its creation was an oversight on my part. Call it a method of achieving immortality.”

“I see.” Shin said with a nod. “In my Realm, immortality is largely false. Power extends life, but only I am eternal...so far. Death can touch all.”

“Seems lonely.” Statera said softly.

“I prefer solitude. It allows me to think clearer.” Shin allowed. “Though occasional conversation is...nice.”

“Is there a way for you to find solitude, in your realm?” Statera asked. “I find such endeavors difficult. This is my first time experiencing quiet in a long, long while.” He said wistfully. Shin

graced the horned man with a small glance, a sense of longing radiating from him. And, despite himself, found he wanted to answer.

“I made such a space.” He allowed, and said no more. Statera made a small hum in the back of his throat, stroking his chin thoughtfully, when another little bit of information caught Shin’s ears. Statera cocked his head to the side, glanced over at Nyxteria, who was still chattering away at a far more pale-looking incarnation of Statera, and shuddered. “Did Nyxteria truly just say it had frozen an entire solar system in timeless crystal just because it liked the way the planets orbited the sun?” Shin asked.

“Yes. Yes it did. Now it is asking me if I can make a copy of one of my eyes for it to freeze.” Statera said dryly, fixating his gaze upwards, above the round table that dominated the center of the room. Shin involuntarily shuddered. Scary bird.

Ding!

Announcement

The time for mingling has now passed. Please return to your seats so we can begin the analysis section of the meeting.

Shin bowed his head to the words of the Great One, immediately moving to his seat and settling in place. The others did as well, though only Statera, who muttered something about Boxes and being pushy, and the Dragon, seemed to be almost dismissive of the Great One’s decree...Shin hesitated for a moment as he watched Statera sit down, muttering to himself and looking up at the same spot above the center of the table as before.

He wasn't reading anything, simply staring at a spot in space. Could he possibly be able to see through the Great One's messages, to see their true form? Shin steepled his boney fingers before his face, resting his elbows upon the table, and hummed. Now, that was interesting. Interesting indeed. He glanced about the room at the others, wondering if anyone else was capable of such a feat.

It was time to listen, once again. Listen, and learn.

Yueya giggled to herself as she sat in her chair, almost giddy with excitement as the Overgod of the Multiverse displayed a whole bunch of information about their respective universes. To begin with, she was provided with a list of specs for her own world, the One World, that detailed everything from the number of species, to the stability of the barrier that separated her universe from the Void, and what she might do to strengthen said barrier on her own. It was all incredibly fascinating, and while most of it was information she could have gathered on her own, it was still nice to have it all laid out before her without her having to do much.

That said, as interesting as this was, she truly couldn't wait for the next bit.

The promised rankings.

She squirmed in her seat a little, glancing at the others. The Emperor flashed her a smile when she locked eyes with him, going over his own information as he was, but quickly returned to scrolling. Shin, the skeleton, stared hollowly out across the room, seeming more content to observe everyone else than think about his own realm. Or perhaps he had already learned everything he wanted, as she had.

Ding!

Now that everyone has finished looking through their stats, it is time for the ranking. Please be aware, this is a general ranking, and will be scaled based on various factors.

First will be individual power rankings, followed by size and density of one's respective universes. After which I will provide a ranking based on overall progression of one's universe; please note this is not only to inspire friendly competition between each of you, but to promote interest into "what each other is doing."

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Yueya hummed as she read the note, nodding her head. That made sense. It was the conclusion she had come to, as well. She had her own issues within her One World, so perhaps finding someone who had the opposite issues would help her solve them.

Ding!

Ranking 1: Individual Power

This is a ranking based off of one's individual power, taking away any influence a connection to your respective Universes may have. Some of you are far more powerful within your universe than without, or receive the benefits of various different power growth from said universe.

1. The Primeval Dragon

2. Reilly

3. The Emperor

4. Shin

5. Nyxteria

6. Statera Luotian

7. The Progenitor

8. Yueya Oshun

9. Rising Wind, Crashing Waves

10. MR-10

11. Sylphina

If we include various bonuses and boosts provided by the interior universes, the rankings do change. Sylphina, for example, receives a boost in power from their universe's chaotic nature, and Rising Wind, Crashing Waves, can greatly enhance his power based on the power of prayers. Taking this into account, the rankings look like this.

1. Reilly
2. The Primeval Dragon
3. The Emperor
4. Rising Wind, Crashing Waves
5. Shin
6. Statera Luotian
7. Yueya Oshun
8. Sylphina
9. Nyxteria

10. The Progenitor

11. MR-10

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Yueya blinked at the rankings. She was...number eight? That wasn't great, but it wasn't horrible either, she supposed...

"Statera Luotian is lower in power than I? How is that possible?" The Emperor demanded.

"Personal power, is not, everything it seems," The Progenitor rumbled.

"That beggar is more powerful than I only because he relies on outside help." The Primeval Dragon rumbled, clearly displeased with the results and taking an interest in the rankings for the first time. It sneered and Yueya chuckled – that, at least, was a better expression than the one of perpetual boredom it had been showing.

"Facts are facts, you overgrown lizard," Reilly taunted, taking a swig of wine he had snatched from Yueya and kicking his feet up on the table once again.

"I will devour you," The Dragon growled, the shadows of its wings deepening. Yueya felt power crackle in her fists in response, a part of her expecting a fight. But none came, fortunately, as the Dragon sat back, glowering at the smirking Reilly.

“Middle of the pack...that’s honestly surprising.” Statera muttered, turning her head to the side to listen to something her plus one had to say. The winged being – the Mad Scientist, as she was called – whispered something in her ear that seemed to mollify Statera, however.

Ding!

Next is the overall rankings of universal size and density. Size refers to overall area a universe takes up. Density refers to the density of power, life, and powerful beings within.

Size Rankings

1. Yueya Oshun
2. Rising Wind, Crashing Waves
3. The Emperor
4. MR-10
5. Nyxteria

6. Shin

7. Reilly

8. Sylphina

9. The Progenitor

10. Statera Luotian

11. The Primeval Dragon

Density Rankings

1. Statera Luotian

2. The Progenitor

3. Reilly

4. Nyxteria

5. MR-10

6. Shin

7. Sylphina

8. Rising Wind, Crashing Waves

9. The Emperor

10. Yueya Oshun

11. The Primeval Dragon

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Oh, so Statera and she had the exact opposite problems. Her One World was too big for the number of powerful beings within it, while whatever realm Statera ran must be too small. That...she wonder if they would be allowed to visit each other's domains after this? It would be far more beneficial than merely looking at statistics and such.

"I suppose density refers to the number of powerful being's we've raised up within our domains after all." Statera mused, scratching his chin.

“Why is Statera at the top of the density ranking, yet their power is so low? What is with the disparity in my own status, as well? I believed the strength of my army to be unmatched, yet based on this information I am falling behind.” The Emperor mused. “Of all of us, Shin seems to have the most balanced Realm in terms of density and size. The Dragon, of course, is at the bottom.”

“Bah. You all worry about these things too much.” The Primeval Dragon scoffed, rolling her eyes.

“It should be clear by now that we all prioritize different things.” Rising Wind, Crashing Waves commented, ignoring the Dragon’s statement. The great stag’s antlers glittered beautifully in the light of the room, wisdom oozing from each word. “The Dragon prioritizes power of its own over all else. The Emperor likely prioritizes the strength of his nation and army, as well as his own position. I am far more relaxed about such things. And Statera prioritizes the growth of their People.”

Yueya hummed to herself. *And I prioritized the size of my realm, creating the largest work of art I could. Yet there is beauty in people as well.* That, at least, was an important realization to have. It would help with her projects moving forward.

“How did you figure I did that, besides the ranking?” Statera asked, cocking her head to the side. Yueya shook her head at the god. The way they switched between genders at seeming random was both endearing and annoying at times – but, she supposed, they all had their quirks.

“Nyxteria knows! Nyxteria does not believe anyone else refers to their creations as their children besides the Progenitor.” The great space-bird cawed, clacking its beak and ruffling its feathers. Statera opened his mouth as if to protest, paused, then nodded and sat back, a complex expression on his face. *Children. I suppose I don’t really consider my creations as my children, do I?* Yueya mused, glancing over her shoulder at Astraea, the goddess she had brought along with her. The star goddess averted her gaze, and Yueya felt her expression soften. *I know at least one amongst my creations that feels differently, however. Perhaps I should put more thought into that, if it helps increase the density of power. Though I doubt I will ever truly change my view.*

Ding!

Progression Rankings

These are rankings as to how far you all have progressed in the development of your realms. While you are nowhere near completion, it is good to get a baseline for how you are comparing to each other. I will not provide information for how you all are comparing to other iterations of the [Deity Trials], but I will assure you that none are falling grossly behind projected results. In fact, I daresay most of you are well ahead of schedule.

As we are still in the early stages, however, please do not slack off, as that can quickly change.

1. Statera Luotian

2. The Primeval Dragon

3. Reilly

4. The Progenitor

5. Sylphina

6. MR-10

7. Shin

8. Yueya Oshun

9. The Emperor

10. Rising Wind, Crashing Waves

11. Nyxteria

Show more

Now what did progression mean? For someone like the Primeval Dragon to be so high, yet The Emperor and herself so low. What did progression even mean? A quick glance showed Statera Luotian only nodding to herself, closing her eyes. The Mad Scientist nodded as well, whispering a few words to Statera that she...couldn't make out.

Yueya hummed. Curious. Statera's universe, at least, was one that she would have to visit if given the opportunity. She turned her attention once more to the data set that was still before her, beside the list of rankings, and now started to compare it all. She didn't need to be first, as making art was no competition, but...well. She couldn't afford to fall behind now, could she?

I couldn't say I was surprised with the results of the rankings. Though I expected to be higher in terms of personal power, the Mad Scientist had put it in perspective for me; compared to the universes she had been to, there were far more powerful beings in a far smaller space than pretty much any universe she'd seen. That was only further expanded upon with the size and density rankings.

While I was aware of this problem and was taking steps to fix it with the Seeds, it was only further impressed upon me now. That, and the competitive part of me wanted to be top of the personal power rankings.

Ah, well. There was time to correct that.

But first...

I looked about the room with my arms folded across my chest. We had all mostly finished analyzing our stuff, and the meeting seemed to be coming to a close. Sort of. There was one last little bit that I was expecting, and – ah. Mr. Boxes' incarnation pulsed once, heralding his next statement.

“At this point you have learned all you can from a simple data analysis. Next will be a field trip to each of your respective universes; please note that it is not required to visit each universe, and in fact I encourage you to find your own groups. Some of you are inherently incompatible with other universes, such as with Sylphina and MR-10.” Boxes said. “I will not accompany you on these trips, nor will I provide insights. Portals will remain open to and from each realm, accessible only by the respective Origin Deity and those guests they deem capable of entering their Realm, and leading back to this room. They will close once each respective Deity is done.”

That got a shift of murmuring from the assembled gods, and I smiled. This was the part I had really been waiting for. Now, who to choose?

2.13 Welcome to the Seven Heavens

Reilly immediately glued himself to my side the moment I stood up from my chair. He hooked one arm around mine, pulling me close, while his other hand waved my now-empty flask in the air as he glanced about at the other gods.

“Dibs on going with Statera!” He proclaimed, then paused and squinted at me. His breath stank of alcohol, strong enough to even effect me. I wrinkled my nose, and he grinned. “You do have more booze, right?” he asked.

“Would you believe me if I said no?” I asked. Going with Reilly wasn’t a bad idea – in fact, I really wanted to visit the Seven Heavens. Reilly was the most powerful god in the room, besides maybe the Primeval Dragon, and from what I’d seen his universe was incredibly well-off. But the way he’d demanded to be part of my group meant I just had to challenge him a little.

“Nope!” Reilly said, popping the ‘p’. I chuckled and shook my head, looking over at Yueya, who was already approaching. She shot me a beatific smile, tossing her flaming red hair over her shoulder as I extracted myself from Reilly’s surprisingly strong grip.

“So long as Yueya can join, too. We seem to have the opposite problem, and I would very much like to compare notes.” I said, directing the comment to her. She nodded happily, clapping her hands together.

“If I may request we invite Shin, as well,” she said, turning toward the skeletal deity still sitting across the table. Said skeleton seemed surprised to be addressed, straightening up as he was addressed, the black smoke that poured out from between its bones shaking a little. “His Realm is the most balanced of all of us in terms of size and density of power.”

“That is true,” Reilly said, rubbing his chin. “Should we just invite everyone, make it a giant field trip?” That sounded good. Spend some time in each universe, maybe...? Though I got the sense that I shouldn’t go to too many.

The Mad Scientist tugged on my sleeve. “I cannot suggest you travel to either a Clockwork universe or a Chaos universe. Your specific domain could be more damaging to them than their polar opposites at early stages – or so I surmise.” She pointed to MR-10 and Sylphina, respectively. I looked over at the two, who were huddled together and speaking softly. Interestingly enough they seemed to me like they might try to visit each other’s universes, despite Mr. Boxes outright stating they were inherently incompatible.

That did remind me...I locked eyes with the Dragon, who had rebuffed Rising Wind, Crashing Waves’ attempt to enter into conversation. Now the great stag had wandered over to Nyxteria, who clacked his beak happily, while the Dragon smiled toothily at me.

...yeah, I was going to have to face this, wasn’t I? I couldn’t not.

“No, but I don’t think we need to keep the groups the same through every universe. Visit the ones you want or feel you need to visit, then close things off.” I said. “Though I will say, for those who wish to enter my universe, I must insist we enter last.”

“Why, is, that?” the Progenitor asked, pulsing with light.

“I am the furthest progressed. I need to visit the other universes first to figure out what that means specifically, and what information I can reveal to you without it being too detrimental.” I deadpanned. That got everyone’s attention, but it was also true. Information about the Shadow is sensitive, or so I’ve gathered. “So maybe we should go universe by universe?”

“Mine first, then,” Reilly volunteered. “Who wants to come to the Seven Heavens?”

Immediately a group formed around us; Shin, myself, Yueya, the Emperor, and MR-10. The others all glanced at each other silently, shrugging. I looked at them all closely, reading their auras as best I could. Most seemed just reluctant to join with Reilly, for whatever reason. Nyxteria, in particular, was clacking its beak and staring at the ceiling, while the Progenitor pulsed silently as it sat at the table.

“I, will stay, here.” The Progenitor said. “The silence is good for understanding, the nature of our connections to our universes and, the universal laws of the Great One. I am close to some insights, and would rather not, interrupt that.” It said. I couldn’t help but agree. I would want to spend some time in this room – and that was likely what the others were thinking, as well. Except for the Dragon. She appeared to be napping right now, head resting on her claws, eyes closed.

Just because some of us were staying out of the current ‘field trip,’ didn’t mean we weren’t gaining anything.

The Mad Scientist once more tugged on my sleeve.

“I wish to remain here,” she said, wings ruffling. “Travelling between too many worlds is exhausting, and this...this is the first time I’ve been able to find true silence in far, far too long. I could...use a little quiet.” I laid a hand on her head and ruffled her hair, smiling as I split an incarnation of myself off to stay with her.

After I returned from the Seven Heavens, it would likely be smart to send her home. As beneficial as it had been for me to have her unique perspective, she was still, technically, a mortal. This had to be taxing.

That settled, I turned back to Reilly and nodded to him. He flashed me a grin and spread his arms wide as a glowing gold portal appeared behind him, beneath his flag and in the archway he had

originally appeared from. His plus one, the angel Pyrah, promptly marched through the portal without waiting for anyone else.

“Then I, Reilly, God of Luck and a beggar of epic proportions, welcome you to the Seven Heavens!”

For all he loved to play the part of a beggar and drunkard, the one thing Reilly loved more was putting on a show. Which was why the portal to his Realm opened directly onto Pyrah’s announcement balcony, or whatever it was actually called, the entirety of the Seventh Heaven’s population laid out before them and roaring with cheers. These were the most powerful beings in his Realm, and their auras towered skyward as they screamed out their adoration. Pyrah had her wings spread and one fist raised into the air at her people, as if she had conquered some great foe, when in truth they had only been gone for a year at most.

A quick scan showed everything was still working properly, even in his brief absence, and Reilly once more returned to the theatrics of the situation.

Their cheers were deafening, and her army raised gleaming swords heavenward as the other Origin Deities and their plus ones stepped through the portal. The noise from the crowd shook the God Granite the holy palace had been constructed of, golden decorations rattling from the force. Yueya sucked in a breath, wholly ignoring the noise in favor of admiring a guard’s ornate breastplate – the woman was practically sweating as Yueya ran her fingers all across the almost-white metal.

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MR-10 blinked its light once and just floated there, its orb-like plus one orbiting it.

Shin pulled his hood up, stepping back into the only shadow on the entire veranda, in a little corner.

The Emperor laughed and crossed his arms across his chest, admiring the crown that Pyrah had placed upon her head.

And Statera whistled as they knelt, touching the floors.

Reilly deflated, shoulders sagging. None of them were reacting to the right things. What did he expect, though? These were Origin Deities, like him. They were bound to be odd.

“High Empress Pyrah has returned!” the announcer boomed, earning another round of roaring cheers from the crowd. Reilly sighed and stepped off to the side, motioning to a little door set in the side of the palace. It was made of a dark wood, and layered with magic that made it so even the palace guards didn’t know it was there. Only Pyrah had ever been able to find it – Pyrah and one other. That was why she had been nominated High Empress.

Through sheer luck, she had found his inner sanctum.

Statera Luotian, predictably, marched right over to the door and swung it open, peering down the long corridor that lay on the other side. This seemed to snap the other gods out of their respective inspections, and, to Reilly’s immense pleasure, seemed surprised to see a door where Statera now stood.

“Well, don’t wait for the cheers to die down. They’ll last a week if we let ‘em.” Reilly groused, sticking his hands in his pockets and stomping through the doorway, leading the way. It was a short jaunt to his central chamber, located at the very center of the Seven Heavens. Contrary to his physical appearance, the entry hall of his abode was clean and well kept.

The grey-stone floor was spotless, various knick-knacks and curios dotting the walls. Things that were lucky, or unlucky, enough to fall through the gate at the very top of the tall ceiling – though he called it a gate, it was more of a giant ball of multicolored energy, rotating at high speed.

“Whoa,” Yueya breathed, and Reilly was satisfied as everyone looked up at the ball of energy, mouths agape – or whatever passed for that, in MR-10’s case. Yes. That was the proper reaction.

“Is that all...Luck?” The Emperor boomed, cape fluttering in an impossible wind.

“Yes it is! All luck in the Seven Heavens flows through that spot.” He said, pointing at the great ball of writhing energy. To his eyes a thousand million streams of luck-based energy flowed into and out of the ball, pushing down through the floor to eventually merge with the entirety of the Seven Heavens.

MR-10 beeped in approval. “I can sense the effects of random chance throughout most of the Seven Heavens. Nothing is as streamlined as my own universe, but that is what gives your Realms the necessary change to continuously evolve. Intriguing.” Reilly grinned at the inverted pyramid, reaching out and snagging a gourd of wine from the wall.

He popped the cork and sniffed the contents, then tossed it to Statera, who snatched it out of the air and took a swig. The black-haired god sighed appreciatively and nodded to Reilly. *There. Now he'll give me even better booze when we get to his Realm.*

“Luck plays an important part in the Seven Heavens,” Reilly waved his hand in the air. Another gourd of wine appeared in his grip at the same time a 3D layout of the Seven Heavens appeared

midair, glowing gold. It was seven flat discs laid on top of each other, growing larger the further down they went. It was a live projection, and he could even see Pyrah flying about above her palace if he squinted at the top layer.

Each was different; the bottommost layer, and also the largest, was what he called a “space” layer; with floating islands of land suspended in empty space, each having their own sun circling them. The top was a single flat piece of land. Each layer in-between was a mix of the two, with varying sizes of the floating islands and the space involved.

“We are currently at the very peak of the Realms. It’s the best place to start.” Reilly began.

“I thought I sensed some spacial manipulation,” Yueya mused, scanning the layout. Behind her, her plus one stared up at the ball of luck, the stars woven into her hair shining brilliantly. “We walked sidewise, but now we’re at the peak.” Technically speaking the door to his sanctum could appear randomly anywhere in the Seven Heavens, but Reilly figured they would find that out on their own.

“These streams of ‘luck’ are essentially just random chance that is woven throughout everything in the Heavens. Karma, reincarnation, the movement of energy...size of land...it takes a lot of stress off of the Will of the Seven Heavens, while also introducing an element of chaos that keeps movement happening between layers.” Reilly explained. The Emperor leaned closer to the 3D projection, tapping his foot against the ground.

“Did you make a pyramid scheme?” he asked, and Statera snorted out a laugh. Reilly cocked his head to the side, taking a long draught from his wine.

“Are you asking about the movement of souls between the layers?” MR-10 pressed. “That is ridiculous. While I am curious as to what criteria promotes a soul to move up or down, it is no scheme. It is very orderly.”

“Not cyclical in nature,” Shin muttered, skeletal jaw not moving as he spoke. “It’s more chaotic than that...”

“Thank you, Martin, and you are correct, Shin.” Reilly said. “As I already said, I do not run the Seven Heavens. I am not the ruler here; I merely keep everything from imploding. That ball above us is a representation of all the luck in the Seven Heavens; sometimes it goes bad, sometimes it is good, and there are always a thousand different ways to interpret it. What is bad luck for one, might be good luck for another. Or not bad luck at all.” he explained, digging into his pockets and pulling out a pair of bone dice.

They weren’t anything special. Simply a pair of dice he sometimes used as a focus for his powers.

“From here I can observe the overall state of the Seven Heavens. From the number of gods appearing and their overall nature, to the number of souls moving up and down. As I’m sure you’re already aware, the higher up the Heaven, the stronger the energy. The Seventh Heaven is where the most powerful beings and purest of energy congregates.” He snapped his fingers once, and seven incarnations of himself, each in varying states of drunkenness, appeared. “Everyone, if you would make a few incarnations, I will lead each of you on a quick tour of my Realm. Our main bodies will remain here so we can continue discussing things and focus on the big picture.” *That, and I don’t want their raw power messing things up. The Overgod may be suppressing some of their powers and preventing overt manipulations, but their mere presences will effect things.*

Such was the danger of welcoming beings of great power into the Seven Heavens. Even now he could feel the way their power bent the fabric of reality around them, their auras threatening to clash against the Will of the Seven Heavens. Reilly huffed as he made seven incarnations of himself, one for each Heaven, and grouped them up with the incarnations of the other gods.

Only MR-10 didn’t truthfully split itself. Instead, seven little drone-like things split off of its main body, looking like little pentagons, and floated around with each of the groups.

“Steward!” Reilly called, clapping his hands together. On cue a new being entered the room; it was dark and shadowy, its body comprised of mist as it flooded down from a vent in the wall. The shadows condensed and coalesced into a solid form; a scrawny humanoid that shimmered and shifted the longer you stared at it. Reilly’s gaze snapped to Statera, observing their reaction closely. Everyone else was only mildly curious.

Statera was downright riveted, eyebrows arched in surprise as he gazed at Steward, the deity flexing his body oddly, as if he was still getting used to it. Reilly grinned, juggling his dice in his hand. *I knew my luck was good today.* He thought. *Statera knows what I've been feeling from Steward. Maybe he'll even be able to tell me what the hells it is.*

“You called?” Steward asked, bowing slightly.

“Yes. You’ll be joining us. I would like you to help guide everyone through the most important or interesting bits of the Seven Heavens.” Reilly said, clapping his hands together. “Right! Let’s start this field trip!”

2.14 Luck

“So there are two kinds of gods,” the Emperor mused from his spot in the Sixth Heaven. Reilly paused in his explanation of the movement of luck – which was less of an explanation and more of a rambling about how he can’t and doesn’t want to control it – to look up at the golden-skinned Origin Deity. His Jester stood behind him, and muttered something that set his God-king to howling with laughter.

Two other gods stood before him, ones of Reilly’s universe. One was like Pyrah, with golden wings and a radiant aura of light, though she only had four wings and her aura was far dimmer than the Empress. The other god was a Shade, a being of shadow and darkness, muscular and humanoid in form with glowing red eyes. It, despite appearing bolder both in nature and in aura, had stepped behind the winged god to shield itself from prying eyes. Behind them cosmic dust swirled, slowly condensing into planets and stars...or perhaps not, and would instead remain dust.

“Yes. Creation and destruction.” Reilly said, nodding and gesturing to the winged and Shade god, respectively. Those were the only kinds of gods to have appeared in his Seven Heavens so far.

Statera and Yueya’s incarnations moved over to investigate the two gods next, who stood there looking very uncomfortable. Yueya immediately started circling the two, looking them up and down, while Statera simply stood there stroking his chin thoughtfully. Shin, on the other hand, remained next to Reilly, quietly listening.

“Fascinating that divinity is manifesting itself in different ways. I have elemental gods, you have gods of creation and destruction.” Statera mused. “I do wonder how that influences the mortals...”

“Um, Reilly, are these the guests Empress Pyrah brought back? Could you tell them to be more respectful with their prying?” The winged creation god asked, folding her arms across her chest. Yueya chuckled.

“Don’t worry, we’re just looking.” She promised, while Reilly scratched himself and shrugged. These two were two of the older deities amongst the gods, they could use a little bit of pressure.

“They truly do not hold great respect for you,” The Emperor said from off to the side, having moved off from the deities to observe an entire solar system as it was moved down from the Fifth Heaven to the Sixth. The system still had the energy density of the Fifth, but its luck had caused it to move down. Would it be good or bad? Who knew?

He knew.

“They respect me as the creator, but their functions are different than mine.” He admitted. “They help expand and clarify what is within, I dictate what is without.” The Emperor said nothing, gaze turning up to the Fifth Heaven above. From here it looked just like more space and worlds, starlight filtering through the blackness of space, but there was, of course, more to it than that. The barrier between Heavens was more than just empty space; there was a pressure there that could crush a soul if it didn’t follow the correct channels.

“Do not sell yourself short, Lord Reilly,” Steward said, bowing slightly as he appeared beside them. “You are not Her Highness Pyrah, but your role is incredibly important.”

“Thanks, Stu,” Reilly said, taking a deep swig of wine and glancing at the shade god out of the corner of his eye. He appeared relatively calm, all things considered. Acting as guide hadn’t affected him as much as he’d hoped, and Statera had been annoyingly tight-lipped about his reaction.

“The real question is, and I do not believe even our real bodies have discussed this yet, but I do not see any attempts to expand into the Void,” The Emperor continued. Reilly smacked his lips thoughtfully, toying with his gourd and acutely aware of the attention of most of the other gods falling onto this conversation.

“The dice haven’t rolled that way yet,” he admitted, taking another sip of wine. The creation and destruction gods took this moment of inattention to escape, fleeing in a flash of light and swirl of shadow. “Sometimes it does, and we experience a surge of growth. Sometimes not.”

“A steady expansion rate is preferable,” MR-10’s drone beeped. “Is it not? The Void is emptiness, yet I have discovered that fluctuations occur within it while a universe is expanding. I have multiple drones dedicated to the study of these disturbances, and a steady, slow expansion rate limits them. Or is a sudden burst more effective?”

“I find sudden bursts to be most effective,” Yueya chimed in. “It causes some fluctuations, like you said, and makes the edges of your world crinkle a bit, but the sudden burst creates far more energy. Smoothing the wrinkles takes time, but it’s nothing to worry over.”

“Fluctuations in the Void?” Statera asked, sounding alarmed.

“I would put more effort into expansion.” The Emperor spread his arms a little, his cape flaring dramatically. “One of a country’s greatest limiters is its size. It doesn’t matter how fertile the valley if you can only access a small percent of it.”

“No no, let’s go back a bit. Fluctuations in the Void?” Statera parroted again.

“Yes,” Reilly said, taking another sip of wine and watching the purple-robed god closely. “When you do a big expansion all at once, the Void fluctuates a little. Never really thought much about it.” He’d only done a massive expansion twice, though, and the next one was a while away yet.

“Your reaction indicates fear, Statera.” MR-10’s drone noted monotone. “Why would this conversation induce fear?” Reilly squinted at Statera after MR-10’s words and noticed that he was, in fact, a bit paler than usual. He seemed to consider how to answer for a moment then, with a sigh, rolled up the sleeve of one arm all the way to his shoulder.

“The Void is dangerous,” he said, and his arm melted away. Reilly sucked in a breath at the grievous wound – his arm up to a few inches above where the elbow should be had been completely eradicated. The flesh itself seemed to suck inward, a line of golden light, spewing little sparks, marking the end of his limb and also where it was regenerating. “This was given to me by a Paradox – a beast created by the Void itself and designed to return all creation into nothingness. Pushing the Paradox out of my Realm cost me my arm all the way up to my shoulder; that was many eons ago, and I am still recovering. I am not saying we do not need to expand. I am merely saying we need to be careful while doing so; creating massive fluctuations in the Void sounds like a great way to prompt the creation of a Paradox.”

Statera's arm slowly reformed, what Reilly could now identify as primordial chaos coalescing to remake the prosthetic limb.

"...I see. That must be what The Overgod meant by 'threats from the Void.'" MR-10's drone said. "This is good data, and must be properly analyzed. Thank you." And with that, the drone turned away. The Emperor was silent, staring at Statera's arm, even as the purple-robed god turned back to observing the flow of karmic luck through the Sixth Heaven.

"That's terrible," Yueya said softly.

Ding!

Notice!

It is also true. The Paradox Beasts are one of the largest threats the Void can produce. The one Statera repelled was created accidentally, and was merely a Juvenile, but the threat they represent is not to be underestimated. My barriers protect you from the worst of the influence of the Void, including but not limited to Paradox Beasts, but they will, eventually, have to come down.

Reilly shuddered. A being that can inflict a permanent – even if it is slowly healing – injury upon an Origin Deity was only part of the Void's influence? That was terrifying to even consider.

"It seems, out of all of us, Statera has the most experience." The Emperor noted casually. "It is wise to heed the advice of those who know, but unwise to claim it the end-all be-all. We must understand such problems ourselves."

"So long as you understand that there is a threat, I cannot complain or control what you do. I just wanted my experience to serve as a warning." Statera called over his shoulder. "Reilly, would you resume your conversation about Luck? Keilan would like this...it's something I need to discuss with him when I get back,"

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Reilly blinked, took another swig of wine, and once again resumed his lecture. Yueya was front and center, aggressively scribbling notes in a little notepad she had conjured, in particular paying attention to those little nuggets Reilly gave about how random bouts of luck could boost a soul to a higher plane of existence. But every once in a while he would turn his gaze to Statera, who listened intently and nodded along.

...I am disappointed we are saving his for last. He admitted to himself. *I have to know what kind of a universe a being like that has created.*

To me, Steward was a fascinating change from the Shadow I knew. The little destruction god was neither overly powerful nor outright malicious – in fact, it seemed to respect Reilly greatly, often countering the beggar deity whenever he tried to play the humble card. It honestly made me wonder if my estimation about Steward being Reilly's Shadow was wrong, but my eyes didn't lie to me.

Whatever trial Steward was going to cause for Reilly in the future was doubtless to be a big one – and it was his unassuming nature that I felt was the cause, at least for now.

Though it was hard to imagine Reilly being outmatched in terms of power, especially after his casual displays of strength. His manipulation of matter was as effortless as my own, but could be done on a far grander scale. His incarnations were able to perform feats that I had to leave to my main body, and the way he interacted with his own universe was...effortless. The power he wielded was immense and, in some ways, I was beginning to suspect that might be part of the problem.

Not least of all because he had separated himself from karma.

No, that wasn't right. I shook my head a little to clear my thoughts. While it simply appeared like he had separated himself from karma, it wasn't actually true. It was simply that he was so powerful that most of his universe's karma could not touch him, and he willingly let it go. Even the karma of the Seven Heavens was separated from him. In fact, the only karma I could see connecting him to anything was that which bound him to Mr. Boxes – and that was karma from the most powerful being in existence, the Overgod of the Multiverse. *Which means karma is a multiversal existence, not just my own creation.* I realized, then refocused on my thoughts. Reilly.

As far as I could tell, he always had kept himself separate. That, in and of itself, was what I saw as partially an issue; Reilly wanted to simply maintain things, but that wasn't his personality. He took too much of a hand in maintaining the universe, building up his relationship with those within, to keep himself completely free of karma. I sighed and ran a hand through my hair.

Such a thing had its positives and negatives, but looking down at the Seven Heavens I resolved myself to at least try to free myself from karma more. Entering the meeting room had been eye-opening for me – I was allowing myself to be bound too much by my own creations. Again, while not inherently bad, such a thing was limiting both myself and my children in worrying ways. Ways I had to overcome. But this was going to be a cyclical thing, to my estimation. There would be times to remove myself from karma, and times to bind myself to it again; the pendulum swings, as it were.

It was, at least, almost time to leave the Seven Heavens. Reilly juggled his dice in one hand and laughed as our incarnations returned to us, MR-10 accepting the little drones it had sent out and flashing its light. Yueya was practically vibrating in her seat, rubbing her hands together in anticipation.

“I already have so many ideas!” She said. “Thank you, Reilly, for showing us all this!”

“Of course! I apologize we could only spend so much time here, but it is time for us to move onto the next universe.” Reilly said, shaking his head. We had only spent about twenty or so years talking about and exploring the Seven Heavens – longer than my initial estimate that it would only take ten – and now it was time to move on. I, at least, had gleaned all I could from this universe in such a short time-frame.

Luck was going to have to be bound into the Will of the Four Realms as a fundamental...thing. The interactions between it and karma were too interesting to ignore. But only I could do that, it wasn’t something I could leave to any of the rest of my children. Keilan was the closest, and I would show him what I was doing, but he didn’t have the insights to look at luck as a fundamental force of reality. Even then, I still had to study the effects of it on the Four Realms before fully implementing things...

I sighed and filed that thought away for later, literally storing a few blueprints some plan ideas in a little subspace I had created just for this.

“This was even productive for me,” Reilly noted as we all began the short walk to the portal, scratching his chest. “Honestly, all these different perspectives have given me so many new ideas to test out, or to give to Pyrah. MR-10 was surprisingly helpful in providing more consistent data on the movements of the mortals.”

Surprisingly, Reilly had a very young mortal population. Only a few ten thousand years old. Seems he did the opposite of me, and focused on building up the gods and such first. There was a hint of magic amongst the mortal populations as well, though nothing so intense as my own.

“That said, what did you think?” Reilly asked. I cocked an eyebrow at him in confusion, wondering if he was talking about a specific part of the Seven Heavens, or as a whole. Then he gestured to Steward, and I understood. I was quiet for a moment, observing Reilly and the shade-like destruction god, peering into the potentials of what I had to say about the entire situation.

Reilly had gotten lucky. Incredibly so, to notice Steward before he had fully blossomed into a Shadow. It was there, brewing, but not yet fully formed like Morgan had been – and Steward was different from Reilly, even. I could not see the destruction god really desiring the annihilation of the Seven Heavens like Morgan had; the destruction gods, at times, seemed more moderate than the creation gods.

The question was what I could say. What would be beneficial? What would be harmful? We still didn’t know what Steward would turn into, and the wrong word could make the calamity even worse. But it still had to be a warning...

“It’s too early to tell, but...at this rate, you’ll lose.” I said softly, and left it at that. Reilly took a swig from his gourd and didn’t say anything else, instead passing me another bottle of wine, which I gratefully accepted. Lucky wine, he called it. Distilled essence of luck. I took a big swig and sighed happily at the way it swirled in my gut, walking through the long hall and back out to the Pyrah’s palace in the Seventh Heaven. Small talk filled the air all the way back through the portal, where we met up with everyone else in the meeting room.

“How did it go?” Rising Wind, Crashing Waves asked from where the great stag was meditating.

“Well,” Reilly drawled, one hand in his pocket. Steward stood beside him, surprising me, as Pyrah had been his previous plus one. We were allowed to change them out? “Ten out of ten, would recommend.”

“Then, if you all would not mind, I would like to do mine next.” MR-10 beeped. “It is unlikely I will be able to stay away for much longer, and would like to implement some changes as soon as possible.”

Good. That would give me some time to internalize the information I'd learned from Reilly's universe. I stepped away from the group as they gathered together, Yueya and Shin both slipping off to the side to go meditate in a corner, while Reilly and a large number of others gathered around MR-10. I, myself, moved over to the Mad Scientist, who was sitting silently beside the incarnation I had left with her.

"Are you ready to return?" I asked her softly. She met my eyes, ringed with dark circles as they were, and nodded.

"I thank you for the opportunity." She said. The apathy within her was nearly gone now, the dark blackness that had been slowly consuming her soul fading away to more neutral colors. Reds and greens and blues, all tinged with her natural curiosity, swirled about her in a pleasant rainbow.

"It was my pleasure. Where would you like me to return you to?" I asked, mentally sending a request to Mr. Boxes. The portal to the Four Realms opened before me, swirling with a myriad of colors.

"I would like somewhere...quiet." She admitted. I nodded and picked her up with my power, sending her through the portal with but a thought. It snapped shut behind her and I let out a long slow breath, reviewing everything I'd learned in Reilly's universe, as well as the conversation I'd had with the Mad Scientist while she was here.

I sat cross-legged on the ground, not bothering with the seat Mr. Boxes had given me. Shin nodded at me from across the way, looking as if he had something to say, but knowing now wasn't the time. The Primeval Dragon watched me with a calculating gaze, popping her jaw with a massive yawn. And Yueya kept glancing my direction, the desire to talk bubbling up within her but knowing I wasn't ready for it.

A few others remained in the room with us, but I closed my eyes and pushed them out of my mind, clearing my head to meditate. There was time for that later.

We had nothing but time.

The Mad Scientist appeared in a familiar library, sitting in a plush armchair with a crackling fire before her. Hundreds of bookshelves rose all around her, filled to the brim with all the literature the Four Realms had ever produced; be they books, or scrolls, or even stone tablets. The warm scent of tea wafted through the air, accompanied by chocolate chip cookies that appeared on the little table set beside the velvet armchair she reclined in.

Her chest tightened.

“Thank you,” she said softly, to the butler god she knew had set them out for her. She’d met him only once or twice before, and he always seemed the pleasant sort. Her hands trembled as she grasped the steaming teacup, bringing it to her lips and taking a quick sip. It was a nostalgic flavor. Black tea, flavored with just a bit of lemon. No honey.

It was one of the few things she had shared with Statera Luotian; a flavor she longed for, from one of her past lives. Their meditation and discussions in the meeting room had been mostly professional, but the Mad Scientist still occasionally let slip such things. Things she would rather keep secret if for no other reason than her own sanity.

I should have been able to stay longer. I neglected my cultivation far too much; and now I don’t get to see the other universes. She chided herself, resolving to rectify that problem as soon as possible. A shaky breath escaped her as she looked about the room, and came to a sudden, terrible, horrible realization. One that froze her breath in her throat, and made her heart clench in abject terror.

This is bad. This is really, really bad. She realized, clutching her cup tightly. The image of Statera's eyes flashed in her mind, full of warmth, kindness, and understanding. I'm starting to care again.

2.15 Welcome to the Wheel Realm

It was a mere fifteen years that the other gods spent in MR-10's clockwork universe. Which was enough time for me to meditate on some things, but not nearly enough time for me to fully internalize what I'd been learning. I had to stop myself from falling into a deep state of enlightenment on more than one occasion just so I didn't miss out on any of the other universes I could go to. In the end, Yueya saved me by being unable to suppress her desire to talk any more.

Which ended up bringing us to what we were doing now.

"...and I win once again." She declared, moving her piece in place and taking my King. I sighed and shook my head, glaring at the game-board she had laid out before us. It was kind of like 4-D chess, but with far more moving parts, and in the shape of a glowing golden globe. Not all of the pieces moved in the way you wanted them to, indicating mortals, while others could only counter specific things, like the elements. The learning curve had been steep, but once I got the hang of it, it was fairly fun. Though there was just one issue with it...

It was hilariously difficult to defeat Yueya.

"I admit, you are a far better strategist than I," I told her. Her armies had strategically positioned themselves around the defensive formation I'd made – even the mortals had somehow come into line to assist in the assault, and I'd been completely and hilariously annihilated. She crossed her arms and tilted her head up, looking down at me smugly.

"You're getting better," she told me, words completely at odds with how smug she looked. I just chuckled and shook my head, dusting my robes off as I stood. The game before us vanished, the

four-foot globe it had been encased in shrinking down to palm size and coming to rest on a ring on Yueya's finger. She smiled at it, then beamed back at me. To the side, her plus one, Astraea, rolled her eyes and resumed her conversation with Shin's plus one, the samurai-looking girl sans armor named Ze.

And just like that, the portal to MR-10's world opened. Through it I could hear the ticking of clocks, my eyes catching sight of a giant clockwork mechanism in the center of a string of code – flowing through all reality in ordered rows – and then it was closed, and everyone was back in the meeting room. The Emperor muttered something to himself and sat heavily in his throne-like chair, while Nyxteria clacked its beak a few times, observing a tiny crystal that held what looked like a tiny clock within as it floated before it.

Nyxteria and souvenirs. I thought, folding my hands into the sleeves of my robes – only to stiffen as Yueya linked her arm in mine.

"Judging by your reactions to MR-10's clockwork universe, I believe it would be wise to enter my universe next," Shin said, nodding to the Progenitor, who pulsed once. "Am I wrong, Statera?" he asked. I blinked, looking down at Yueya, who was already tugging me forward toward Shin, then at the assembled deities, who were all watching me closely.

I narrowed my eyes at them. They wanted me to confirm? Or were they testing me? I focused on Shin as the portal to his universe opened behind him, allowing me more information, and nodded.

"Yes. For most of us. I would say MR-10, Emperor, and Reilly shouldn't go. But myself, Yueya, and the Progenitor should all absolutely go. The others have free choices, it would be beneficial for each of you, but equally beneficial to stay here." I explained.

"Not going to include me?" The Primeval Dragon yawned, startling me with the fact that she was, in fact, awake.

“I wouldn’t dream of telling a dragon what to do,” I said dryly, earning myself a genuine chuckle from the Dragon. The sound set the hairs on the back of my neck to standing on end, and a shot of adrenaline to pumping through my veins, my shoulders squaring.

“Then you begin to understand me.” She said, huffing smoke out of her nose.

“I have one amendment to that statement.” Mr. Boxes suddenly said. *“As impressive as Statera Luotian’s eyes are, things can be missed. There is no ill-gain for Reilly if he doesn’t go, and Sylphina should likewise refrain from entering the Wheel Realm.”* I blinked and nodded my appreciation to Mr. Boxes. Now that I was looking again, he was right. Sylphina, the chaos butterfly, flapped its wings once.

“Worry not. I had no intentions to enter Shin’s realm. I am enjoying conversing with those here for the moment.” Her piece said, she turned to resume her meditation on the back of her chair. I could see a hint of frustration swirling about her like an orange cloud – wait, no, that was actually an orange cloud that had been produced by her wingbeat. I furrowed my brows. Huh. I actually couldn’t tell what she was feeling. Who woulda figured a god of chaos would be hard to get a handle on?

“Then let us go,” Shin said, and vanished into the portal. I hesitated for only a moment, stopping Yueya from pulling me along. The Cycle. That was what Shin and, by extension, his Wheel Realm represented. The Progenitor followed Shin into his portal, and I closed my eyes for a moment.

I had not been wrong in leaving my children out of the meeting proper. But things had changed. I had been under the impression you could not swap them out until Reilly brought Steward back, and one of my children...I hesitated to say they would benefit from visiting the Wheel Realm. I could see it going both ways, and that made me nervous enough to almost toss away the idea then and there. But I couldn’t. I needed to have faith in my children, and this had the potential to resolve some of my karma, thus making it easier to free myself from it.

My other children, too, should speak to or visit - I mentally slapped myself. I needed to stop thinking about things from a cost/benefit point of view. There was really only one choice here. It was killing too many birds with one stone.

“Mr. Boxes,” I said softly, opening my eyes and spotting Yueya watching me with furrowed brows. “If I may make a request...”

It was noisy now, in Shin’s domain. So many had come. Rising Wind, Crashing Waves walked about in his inner sanctum, the great stag sniffing at the various blueprints and schematics that lined the workbenches. Nyxteria cocked its head at the gleaming white star that hung in the sky above, visible through a pane of black-tinted glass and illuminating his workspace. The Progenitor pulsed as he appeared above Shin’s desk, the ball of light simply floating there, observing the chaotic wall of storm-like wind that made up the walls of his home.

He had made his place in the center of the Wheel, hidden by the great churning storm that formed as the Wheel turned. The perfect spot for him to manipulate from the shadows.

Ze tried to corral their plus-ones, the great feathered beast that was the Progenitor’s creation seeming inherently intrigued by Shin’s desk.

If you discover this tale on Amazon, be aware that it has been stolen. Please report the violation.

“Is that everyone?” he asked, surprising himself with his disappointment at Statera’s absence. That disappointment was short-lived, however, as Yueya Oshun slipped through with a smile, still dragging Statera by the hand.

“Easy now, Reika.” He said, voice strong and firm as he looked over his shoulder. “Watch your step here.” Through the portal behind him stepped a dark-skinned girl with green hair, flowers of multiple elemental essences glittering in the light. Her expression was one of bewilderment and confusion, though she still managed to maintain a sense of calm decorum. Yueya squealed in excitement and released Statera, immediately dashing over to the storm, the raging winds calming in her presence for just a moment before increasing in intensity.

“You switched your plus one,” Shin noted dryly, meeting Statera’s eyes. He beamed.

“I did. Shin, this is Reika. Reika, this is Shin, the Origin Deity of this Realm.” Statera said, introducing the two. Shin watched the girl as she approached, meeting his gaze fearlessly and bowing her head. He took note of her power, first and foremost. She was...*powerful*. An equal to Ze, his favored attendant, if not slightly lesser.

“It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance. I admit to being surprised to have been called. I was under the impression that it would be unwise for me to see certain things for this...meeting.” Reika said, curtseying formally. Shin drummed his skeletal fingers together. Statera was not wrong about many things, it was starting to seem, so long as he could see it. Which meant Reika was likely here to improve some aspect of herself...Life. Her godly domain was life. Yet it seemed in flux. Ah, he was starting to understand now.

...then it was time for a carrot. A favor, for Statera. It was never bad to have favors owed. No, perhaps that was not quite right. Statera had done Reilly a favor with what they had discussed; it is perhaps better to call it an investment, in the hopes he can see something Shin has overlooked. The thing that made Statera’s progression higher than all others.

“You’re overthinking it,” Shin deduced, staring directly at her. She blinked her eyes at him, and he noticed they were nearly as expressive, if not quite as piercing as, Statera’s own. “Your domain. You’re overthinking it. It is not so different as you imagine, life and death.” And with that, he turned away, meeting Ze’s eyes as his faithful warrior moved over to collect Reika. Said girl sighed behind him, and he felt a shift in her domain. Though it wasn’t complete, now she was on the right

track again to achieving what he assumed she was going after. Good. He had not lost his touch, it seemed.

A quick side-eye at Statera showed the god smiling at his...daughter, as he called her, the more complex karmic strings that bound him to her slowly untangling. *He was inspired by Reilly.* Shin realized.

“Lord Shin,” the Progenitor began, pulsing with light. “I have many, questions about, the turning.”

“So do I!” Yueya chirped, perking her head up from where she’d stuck her head into the storm-like wall. Her fiery red hair whipped about her head madly, yet still appearing immaculately beautiful. Rising Wind, Crashing Waves snorted in amusement and raised his head, his antlers somehow avoiding the myriad shelves that hovered in the air above him.

“Follow me. We will ascend somewhere with a better view.” Shin said. Shadows swirled about his feet as he pushed upward, the glass ceiling opening up. The others all floated upward of their own power, save for the plus-ones, who respectively were protected by their deities. The storm outside was strong enough to destroy even them, after all – save for Reika and Ze, who ascended of their own power.

The materials of creation rushed by them in a howling rage, primordial chaos churning in an endless rage as they flew upward – finally bursting through the storm and into the empty sky above. Only when they reached the proper height, near the barrier that separated the Wheel Realm from the Void, created by the spinning of the Wheel itself, did he stop and look back down upon his Realm.

From their position here they could see the true structure of it all, as opposed to the churning, chaotic mass that was the usual sight.

The realm of life lay to the right, gleaming like a beam of white light. Worlds churned and spun, full of mortal lives that went about their days heedless of the truth of their lives. To the left lay the afterlife. To his eyes it appeared black, souls flowing about and mirroring the lives of the realm of life on their plane - albeit at a far slower pace. They rotated around each other, the great storm of primordial chaos in the middle fueling their growth, the great ball of light, that which he called the Guiding Light, floating above it guiding souls to and from their respective lives. And between the two lay a single line of grey; the space between the two, life and death, life and afterlife.

“This is the wheel realm,” Shin said, linking his fingers together. Ze came to stand beside him, hands clasped before her and expression neutral. “Everything here moves in cycles. Powerful souls from the afterlife can become stronger in life, and vice versa.”

Silence stretched for a brief moment as all the deities soaked in the structure of the Wheel Realm. Rising Wind, Crashing Waves lifted his head to fixate his gaze upon Shin, shattering the silence the moment he opened his mouth. “Is that it? All you have to say?” *I forgot to keep talking.* Shin realized with a start.

“I apologize.” Shin bowed his head sheepishly. “I am usually the one being asked the question, not providing comprehensive, all-encompassing explanations. Perhaps if you have any questions, I might be able to provide better insights as to what you are looking at.”

“So he’s an introvert.” Yueya said, smiling kindly at Shin. “I, for one, think your Realm is quite beautiful, Shin.” Shin nodded his thanks for the compliment, watching the turning of the Realm. It was quite beautiful, was it not?

“How do, souls travel, from life to life?” The Progenitor asked.

“Naturally. The spinning of the Realm sends souls from one to the other.” Shin supplied.

“Some must fall through the cracks though, or get stuck. How do you deal with those?” Rising Wind, Crashing Waves mused, stomping one foot and flaring his nostrils. It was not an expression of frustration, but of interest, Shin noted.

“That is where I and my subordinates come in,” Ze answered, stepping forward and giving Shin a polite nod. He gracefully stepped back and out of the spotlight, immediately feeling better now that not all the attention was placed upon him. “We keep an eye on those souls that slipped through the cracks, as you say, and bring them back into the cycle when they stray too far. The Grey area you see is the crack they fall into most often – Lord Shin has advised us to let it neither get too full nor too empty.”

“And how to souls react to being there? I imagine it is like stagnation.” Statera asked.

“Not too poorly. Many actually come to enjoy the space, and greatly resist being moved.” Ze said.

And so the conversation went, with Shin taking a back seat for much of it, and Ze providing a more in-depth commentary. He only occasionally stepped in to add additional information, or gently correct some of Ze’s statements. There were surprisingly many of those – it seemed he had to get better at communicating, because a few things he felt certain Ze knew turned out to be wrong. Thankfully she took his corrections in stride – he may be the true mastermind behind the Wheel Realm, but he wouldn’t dream of undermining her authority in front of her subordinates. In this case, however, they were in front of beings that were his equal.

He would not feed them misinformation.

“...hearing all that, I have only one suggestion, really, concerning the expansion rate of the Wheel Realm. Right now it’s very stable, but it could be bolstered more.” Yueya said during a lull in conversation. Ze stiffened, clearly a little miffed at the insinuation anyone could improve upon Shin’s design, but he laid a skeletal hand on her shoulder to calm her. “The grey area. Make more of them; I can visualize three more, criss-crossing the structure. Like the spokes of a wheel. See the edges far away from the current grey area? Space is bending there, threatening to collapse. A few

more structural supports between life and afterlife would stabilize the growth and rotation." She explained.

If Shin could feel embarrassed, he would have blushed as he looked down upon his realm. Such a simple solution. And she was, of course, correct. Now that he was looking, reality at the edges of his Realm, closest to the Void, was strongest near the grey line, and got weaker the further away one got. It was called the Wheel Realm. All it needed was a few more spokes.

"I thank you for your input," Shin said, bowing slightly to her. It seemed this would be a very productive session, indeed.