

RE: DEITY - THE BREATH OF CREATION

2.42 Epilogue: Kingdom of Conscience

There was a meeting being held between four Universes, hosted by the Overgod of the Multiverse himself. The fifth chair sat empty, a placeholder for the Twelfth Universe that had no worthy representative, a glaringly obvious hole in those involved in the catastrophe. And the tension in the room was just as high as it had been when the meeting began.

“The One World is on a collision course with the Four Realms.” I confirmed, leaning forward and steepling my fingers, elbows resting on the tabletop. Yueya and her other two selves, Alala and Curie, sat directly across from me, and all of them looked as stressed as I did. Dark bags hung under Curie’s eyes, Alala nervously flexed her arms all while Yueya sat silently in her chair, refusing to meet anyone’s eyes.

“There is no doubt.” Curie confirmed, running a hand through her dark hair. “I ran innumerable calculations. The formless nature of the Void makes things difficult to assess, but our trajectory is locked into collision with the Four Realms.” I took a deep breath to steady myself, running calculations in my head.

“Do we know who is at fault?” Alala asked, giving me a side-eye. The tanned, muscular woman almost sounded accusatory; I simply raised an eyebrow at her and waited for the rest. “We didn’t do anything Void related that could have caused this. Curie’s experiments were almost wholly dedicated to the rebuilding of the reincarnation cycle in the center of the One World, while I and Yueya worked on raising souls into godhood and other such positions of power.”

“Do not go casting blame where none may be at fault.” Shin snapped, the skeletal god leaning forward, the green flames that filled his eye sockets flaring. His teeth clacked together menacingly, silencing us as he stared about the room. “The Overgod’s statements should have clued you into the situation, vague though they might have been, but I will spell it out for you just in case it went over your head. There was a Void-based catastrophe in the godless twelfth universe that sent shockwaves through the localized Void. This led to a chain reaction that eventually caused the One World to shift and be sent hurtling toward the Four Realms – my presence here is because after the collision, it is possible that the One World could continue to roll towards one of our two universes.”

At this Shin gestured to the other occupant in the room. Sehuyun, the great Primeval Dragon, bared her teeth at us as she lounged, seemingly entirely unconcerned by the entire situation.

“Just when I was starting to try my claw at creating things, too,” she yawned, smoke curling up from her nostrils.

“Sorry.” Alala immediately apologized, bowing her head. Though she did not face me, I felt the apology was directed at me.

“No one can be blamed for being a bit accusatory in this situation.” I said, hiding the shaking of my voice beneath a veil of calm. “Is there no way to dodge each other?” the question was rhetorical; we wouldn’t be having a meeting like this if the situation was that simple. Plus, we were fighting the Void itself here. Not literally, but rather its nature; there was no direction or distance in the Void, so we wouldn’t even know if we were dodging left or right. The only distance there was, was created because of the One World and the Four Realms’ proximity, which may be the reason the two were colliding to begin with.

“As far as we are aware, no.” Yueya said softly. “Curie confirmed it. When my One World was struck by the Void – the Overgod’s barriers thankfully protecting us from the damage, as it was not of our own doing – it followed the only thing that gave it direction; a bond, a thread, between our two universes.” My heart skipped a beat. A bond...between our two universes? Was my relationship with Yueya to blame here? Had I done this?

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath, tugging on my newfound domain of Fate and feeling out the thick, rope-like chain that drug the One World in the direction of my Realms.

...no. It hadn't been just our connection that caused this – though it had been a contributing factor. That alone shouldn't have been enough to lock the One World in the direction of the Four Realms, so, what had? What was the link, here?

...it couldn't have been that connection, right? Suddenly I was unsure.

“Statera, what is your initial assessment of the situation? As in, your and Yueya's survivability?” Shin pressed, leading the meeting. I glanced at him, nodding my thanks for dragging me out of that spiraling thought-circle, and laid my palms flat upon the table.

“I cannot speak for Yueya, but the Four Realms chance for survival is exactly zero percent. We face total annihilation.” I deadpanned. “As you all are aware, the energy within my Realms is at the bursting point. We're getting better, but an impact of this magnitude would cause us to detonate like a bomb – my children and I might survive, but rebuilding from there would be...” I trailed off, shaking my head. “Not to mention how much damage an explosion of that magnitude would do to the One World. Big you might be, but I fear shattering is an option.”

“Like a ceramic pot, struck by a stone.” Alala supplied, grimacing. “Even if we did survive the explosion, rebuilding would be a bitch. Assuming the damage was repairable.”

“To say the least.” Yueya agreed softly, shaking her head. Silence descended for a moment, each of us with our own thoughts. Depending on the damage caused by the initial impact there was no telling what the next universe would do. Shin’s Wheel Realm could saw the One World in half as it flew by, with the structure compromised, or Sehuyun’s might just burn straight through it.

“Do we know the timeframe?” Shin asked, once again leading the conversation. I found myself thankful that the normally taciturn skeleton was taking the lead here, acting as the voice that kept everyone calm and on task. Me taking the lead could have led to even further heightened tensions – as one of the ones most directly affected.

“Could be a minute. Could be a billion years. Distance is meaningless in the Void.” Sehuyun yawned. Then, as if to prove her wrong, I felt the tell-tale buzz of Mr. Boxes coming in to say something. Hyper-focused as I was there was no escaping my sight this time, and I saw straight through the little boxes it made.

“Two to three million years is the estimated timeline.” He said, the shard of his existence not even showing up in the meeting room. His words, however, echoed in my ears, setting my soul to vibrating from the sheer power of them.

“That is likely the extent of the Overgod’s benevolence.” Shin surmised.

“You mean the Overgod is limiting the timeframe?” Curie asked.

“That at least gives us some wiggle room.” I mused, doing a few more calculations in my head. That was a little under half of how old the Four Realms themselves were right now, which seemed like a lot of time.

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I got the feeling it wasn’t. We hadn’t even gotten to the point where gaining the next stage of enlightenment took me hundreds of millions of years, let alone a few hundred thousand like it had taken me with the Void. My old universe had been around for trillions of years, even. What this really told me, however, was that there was an avenue for our survival hidden somewhere in that time frame.

“So we need to come up with plans and contingencies pronto, and begin enacting them as soon as we return to our universes. Shin and Sehuyun can’t really plan for much until they see the result of our clash.” Alala mused, nodding.

“Statera should start expanding their Realms as much as possible, to prevent an explosion, while we —“

“No.” I interrupted Curie, running a hand down my face and steeling my resolve. “I need to strengthen the borders of my Realm so they don’t explode. Expanding, for me, is the wrong choice here; there’s no way we can expand enough to fix the issue in the time we have. I currently see two options for survival. Either we somehow slingshot the Four Realms around the One World, using the chain of fate that binds us as a sort of...what’s the term, lever? Or I make the Four Realms durable enough to punch straight through the One World doing as minimal damage as possible.

“That means I will have to suppress the growth of the Four Realms so we are as small as possible, to create the smallest hole in the ‘Vase,’ to use Alala’s metaphor.” I explained.

“That’s not bad.” Shin agreed. “Not ideal, but not bad.”

“Though we don’t even know if the slingshot will be possible until later, your other option has merit. Perhaps there will even be a way to aim the Four Realms, and for us to create a hole for your Realms to pass through. Especially if we know the projected size.” Curie continued, perking up a bit.

“There are ways through this.” Yueya agreed. “But we won’t know more until the deadline gets closer.” I splayed my hands.

“I will start preparations on my end. I hope you all will do the same; I assume Mr. Boxes will allow us to communicate through this catastrophe, even if it is limited at the start.” I continued.

“I will continue to provide outside insight.” Shin said as we all stood, sensing the meeting was nearing its end. My stomach was still twisting into knots despite my brave front. Suppressing the Four Realms was going to cause a lot of problems, especially because it meant reneging on my promises to let my children grow and grow freely.

Not to mention, the Heavens suppressing cultivators in a Xianxia setting? I may be considered benevolent by many, but this is bound to cause issues. Damn it. We need people to work together to solve this, and cultivators are anything but rational.

“We will reconvene later.” Curie said as she and Yueya stood. “There is much to work on and plan, and when further details or thoughts come to mind we must share information.”

“Agreed,” Shin and I echoed.

As we all turned to leave, I met everyone’s eyes one last time, holding a silent conversation with each as we turned away.

Shin held my gaze a touch longer than most. It was steadfast and sturdy, as if telling me to not do anything rash, to not panic and remain calm. A cool head would prevail yet, despite my fear and nerves, I did have a calm mind. It was an unnecessary reassurance, but one that I appreciated all the same. He meant well.

Yueya, Curie, and Alala all seemed apologetic as I met their eyes, just as much worry in Yueya’s expression as I felt. I flashed them a small smile, one that promised all the cooperation I could muster. We would have to work together to get through this; united we stood, divided we fell, and good relations, those threads of good karma we had made, could eventually come as a boon rather than a bane. Curie nodded to me in quiet affirmation, Alala winking as if to promise that she would do everything she could to help get everyone through this crisis. Yueya smiled back weakly, as if to say sorry.

Sehuyun's gaze was far stronger. Her question was one meant for the depths of my soul, to shake me and question my resolve and actions. Her teeth were bared as her orange eyes met my green, the words reaching me despite her never actually speaking. *Your children are at stake. You are a dragon. What will you do, if the worst comes to pass?*

The question was, in all honesty, an insulting one. My expression firmed, shoulders straightening as I vanished from the meeting room back to the Four Realms. I know who I am. That has never been in question, and I know what I need to do. If the worst came to pass?

I was a parent. I would protect my children, but more importantly, I had to be a good role model. An example of who they should strive to be. This had to be done *right*. If it was to fail, it would be through no fault of my own.

My footsteps echoed in my palace.

"Children, come to me!" I barked, words echoing through the long, dark hallways as I forcibly rebound myself to all I had been separating myself from, reconnecting heavily with the Will of the Realms and all the karma I had been cutting. The shift in the Dao was immediate and heavy, weighing down upon the Four Realms like a blanket. My Will was exerted upon all that existed, gently, not forcefully to start, but enough to let those who could feel it know

that something was coming. Almost instantly I felt my first children begin to move, dropping everything they had been doing to respond to my call. “And Randus, tell Xing Wu to quit messing around and ascend to godhood already.”

“Mistress?” My loyal child and butler stepped out of the shadows to give me a quizzical look, freezing in place when I locked eyes with him. My expression must have been something fierce to still even him.

“We’ll need him, Randus. We’ll need everyone in the coming days.” I told him. Calamity had come to the Four Realms, just as Calamity seemed to plague my universe since the dawn of its creation. This, too, we would survive. I would make sure of it.

In the Four Realms, only two other beings felt the approaching danger prior to Statera Luotian informing the first of their children.

The first was Morgan, the Shadow, who felt the approaching danger solely because Statera Luotian did. Their connection was not so severed as to completely blind Morgan to the Origin’s plights and feelings, and from what it was able to gather it came to understand something great and terrible was at play here. Morgan shifted in its stillness, darkness swirling about it as it slunk

deeper into its Hidden Realm, scowling as it began to take a hand in the functions of the Four Realms once again.

It did feel strange, though, to be taking a helping hand this time. At least it understood that the Four Realms themselves were a barrier to the dangers of the Void, ugly though they were.

The other was not a god. He was a man, even if immortal, and had never thought of himself as otherwise. Xing Wu sat in a dark room playing cards with a number of powerful beings. Old friends, he called them. One was Stilicho, the angel taking a break from his duties to relax a little. Another was a Captain of the Heavenly Host, Elvira's elite force and a naturally immortal people. Yet another was a draconian immortal about to develop his own Dao, a paladin of Alexander that delighted in taking everyone else's money. A few more were Dao progenitors of various martial ways, following in Xing Wu's footsteps. Their Dao's were intrinsically linked to his.

Xing Wu cursed and threw his cards on the table, the paladin chuckling as he raked in his earnings.

"Remind me to never play cards with a dragon." He complained.

“I am no dragon, but I appreciate the comparison.” The draconian rumbled, pulling the many valuable coins he had earned to his side of the table. Xing Wu opened his mouth to speak, when he heard it.

No, felt it.

That sense of danger that had been lingering in the back of his mind for a while now, ever since the gods held Elvira’s wedding, softened. Not because it had vanished, no, but because another call was stronger. The eyes of the Heavenly Dao turned themselves to him, and he stretched, yawning as he stood. The others watched him stand, even Stilicho not reacting to the call.

“Sorry, boys, but I’ve got to run. Duty calls,” he drawled, grabbing his spear from where it leaned against the table. The Captain grunted.

“Duty? What duty. You’re a slacker, won’t even take control of one of the Trees.” He said, earning a round of chuckles from the others. Xing Wu laughed along.

“Sorry, man, but I find the idea of controlling a mere Tree...beneath me. I’ve got to go see what Heaven wants.” The statement was never something he’d ever admitted aloud before, but the hidden declaration therein gave all of his friends pause as Xing Wu slipped out of the room, giving them one last salute.

Danger was approaching the Four Realms, and just as he had when he had been Dei, Xing Wu would rise to the challenge.