

RE: DEITY - THE BREATH OF CREATION

2.5 Hidden Realm

I gripped threads of energy, winding them together to form four thick ropes tied to the core of each of the Realms. The elemental gods all floated around me, watching, aiding, each maneuvering threads and streams of their own, respective, elemental focuses. My muscles strained as I held everything in place, using nothing but my physical might to hold these streams of energy and preparing to heave one last time.

Sure, I could use my divine powers to do this, but it had been a long time since I had a good workout.

“Ready?” I asked.

“Ready.” Gilles called back, sweating as he kept his own thick rope of energy held. Grunting in acknowledgement I braced my feet and pulled my energetic ropes as tight as I could, twisting my body in preparation.

“Now!” I barked, and *heaved*. All at once the elemental gods dropped their ropes, scrambling about to redirect their streams of energy as I hauled on all four of the realms. They creaked and groaned as they moved, inching forward – though I described it as inches, the distance was far greater – before falling into the “holes” the elemental gods had dug. A cheer went up as the Realms settled in place once again, and I dropped the ropes I’d been tugging on, watching as a few of the gods flew forward, vanishing into the distance as they sought to inspect their work closer.

Elemental energy flowed freely about me, swirling in eddies and pools before spreading out to touch the rest of the Realms, guided by the Spirit River and pushed along by spirits and gods alike. Argent floated up to me, looking at the ropes with unrestrained interest.

“May I?” he asked. I gestured grandly at the ropes, smiling knowingly. The god of metal cracked his knuckles and bent, grabbing one of the glowing white ropes in both hands – not yet fading, they were made of pure energy and I hadn’t yet willed them to fade away – and lifted it with a grunt. He grunted and strained, sweating as he first struggled to even hold the rope, throwing its weight over his shoulder and heaving on it. Barely any pressure was placed upon the Life-Giving Tree as he tugged, and I kept a close eye on it, not that I thought he could actually do any harm.

“Don’t hurt yourself,” I told him, reaching out and grabbing the rope from Argent. The bronze-skinned god panted as the weight was lifted from him, looking at me with newfound respect in his silver eyes.

“You’ll get there eventually.” I told him, setting the rope back down, next to the others. With a snap of my fingers the four constructs exploded in a harmless burst of energy, immediately sinking into the fabric of reality to nourish it and encourage its growth. Argent grunted in acknowledgement, rolling his shoulders and bowing to me before floating off toward the Realms. I watched him go, musing to myself as he returned to his duties. There was still plenty of time until the meeting, but would Argent be a candidate to go with me...?

Perhaps. It couldn’t be ruled out just yet, but I got the feeling I’d find someone more suited to go meet the other origin deities than he. Elvira, Keilan, Reika, and Alexander were of course at the top of that list, but I didn’t rule anything out just yet. Something could pop up to change my mind. Humming to myself I turned to talk to a few of the other elemental gods who approached, when something else caught my attention. It was a small thing, however, and I split off an incarnation to go investigate while the main me focused on interacting with the elemental gods.

A small, tiny hole had opened up in the middle of the Realms, and it was leaking energy. Not just any energy, though. It was very specific, a singular kind of energy – which was weird, because through all the Realms energy tended to...blend. It was very rare to find energy as pure as what was being vented through the little hole; naturally, at least. The energy I produced could be whatever I wanted it to be, but that was beside the point.

“Well now, this is interesting indeed.” I mused, bending to peer through the little hole. Morgan’s Hidden Realm lay beyond, a tunnel of pure fire energy stretching far into the distance. It was neither positive nor negative energy, lacking those modifiers, and I could see little bitty hints of life starting to form in the intense heat and flame. For the most part I had closed off Morgan’s Realm; a few incarnations of mine kept tabs on it, and were still working on stabilizing the sections that were liable to collapse, but I had wanted to leave it alone. Let it evolve on its own, maybe even let Morgan take a crack at it again.

This section was, of course, stable. The interesting part was the life that was starting to take hold here. It was almost purely fire-aligned...to the point I doubted they’d be able to exist outside of this little tunnel, they were specialized to such a degree. None of the nascent life was more complex than an amoeba at the moment, and I looked through the passage of time, folding back the past until the moment of their birth, to spot the exact moment they had come into being.

“Only a few years old. Evolved from some of the life Morgan had cultivated in the other caverns...” I mused, scratching my chin thoughtfully. “...this is going to attract cultivators and the elemental gods alike. Morgan, Morgan, Morgan. You created something amazing, and didn’t even mean to.” There were a thousand things I could do with this hidden realm, thoughts and plans already swirling in my mind...and I sighed as I took a step back, carefully stitching the hole closed with a burst of pure energy, mending the gap.

This was one of those times where it would be better if I let it be, much as I wanted to step it. My other children needed to witness and observe these Hidden Realms’ natural evolution, and Morgan needed to watch it as well. I ran a hand through my hair, fingers dusting the horns that sprouted from my forehead to curl over the crown of my head, telling me I was in my male form. I had incarnations already watching the Realm, as well as some of the elemental gods, but there would soon be more things discovering the Realm. Hm. I’d better discuss this with Morgan. There are things that could be done to it, and with it now officially being part of the Four Realms, even as a Hidden Realm, it would influence the Realms, and they it, no matter what I did.

Fu Hao stood in line next to the Paragon Soul, watching him closely as he approached what he claimed would be his final, and fourth, life. The reincarnation cycle was, in her opinion, suffering from a terrible case of bureaucracy. Lines of souls stretched across the Karmic Palace, karmic kings and Asuras keeping everyone in line. Desks manned by spirits and karmic kings alike funneled souls through an intense process, analyzing karma, locations, family, and a million other things, including but not limited to the soul’s own, personal goals.

It was terribly detailed, and she swore that the same soul's paperwork passed through far too many hands before actually getting things done. Some lines moved far faster than others, too – the Paragon Soul's line did not move hardly at all. She hated it. Watching over the Paragon Soul was fun, because he fought her *constantly*. His intentions were good so he often took the righteous path regardless, but whenever she tried to guide him in a certain direction, or stopped him from doing something stupid, he thrashed and fought and complained – even if he didn't know he was fighting *her*, and just thought the world was out to get him.

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Which in some ways it was. He'd brought this upon himself.

At least the wait was almost over and they could get on with it.

"Lady Fu Hao." A sudden voice said. She turned to face the Asura who stood behind her, white eyes staring at a point above her head and hair tied up in a tasteful bun. "There are new orders. The Paragon Soul will be put somewhere else; you need to prep the area."

"Says who?" she asked, but she already knew the answer. She could feel it through their connection, now; this was an order that came straight from the top. What in the world happened for the Creator to take a direct interest in the Paragon Soul again? They had been pointedly hands-off with the Paragon Soul until now, claiming that he needed to do this on his own without Their hand; something Fu Hao agreed with, even if she had been put in charge of being his spirit guide. The asura bowed their head and handed Fu Hao a small folder, which she promptly opened...and immediately raised her eyebrows. Preparation for entering the Hidden Realm? That was...an interesting solution.

“Alright then. Keep an eye on him for me.” She said, floating upward. The asura bowed again and moved forward to stand beside the Paragon Soul. Satisfied that he would at least be watched, Fu Hao promptly flew off toward the Physical Realm.

The process of preparing an area for a soul’s arrival was, actually, fairly easy. It certainly didn’t involve any manipulation of mortals; they were going to do what they were going to do, and part of the reincarnation process was making sure the soul was fit for the area. The place the Paragon Soul was to be reincarnated into was a cultivator clan of some renown, on the very edge of the empire he had built as Dei. The hardest part was how often she had to double or triple check the area. But the most interesting part of the situation was that she was not alone.

The young goddess of light, Inesa, yelped in surprise as Fu Hao appeared above her, rings of golden light swirling about her arms as she worked to peer into the future and past of the area. The brown-haired goddess was living a mortal life in a little village overseen by the Cavan Clan; she had an herb garden out back, and a bit of dirt smeared on her face. Fu Hao frowned down at her, paralyzed for a moment in indecision.

What was she doing here...? Fu Hao narrowed her eyes. She knew, of course, of Inesa’s connection to the Paragon Soul. Was this some plot by the Creator to further influence the two of them, bring them together? Fu Hao was silent for a long moment as she stared at the goddess, searching through the threads of karma that surrounded her while she stood there frozen in either fear or shock.

...no. This wasn’t some plot by the Creator. Inesa was receiving guidance, though. She was searching for her own personal Dao, and through her connection to the Heavenly Dao was receiving gentle nudges here and there to guide her to locations she didn’t know she wanted to find. Most likely. Fu Hao couldn’t actually see all the nuances like the Creator could, but she could tell that They didn’t have a direct hand in things.

Satisfied, she turned away, power flooding through her hands as she gently pried into the fabric of reality, binding the Spirit and Physical realms together in a small spot to create a sort of nexus for past and present. A few dark spirits fled from her presence as she worked, though she hadn’t even noticed or cared that they were there. Her mere aura was uncomfortable for them, let alone when she flared it like this.

“Um,” Inesa said, appearing behind Fu Hao in her spiritual form, a physical copy of herself remaining behind in the village.

“Yes? Can I help you? I am busy; there’s a soul incoming that I need to prepare something for.” Fu Hao said, not turning to face the young goddess and placing her hands together in a pose reminiscent of praying. Not that she prayed. Her connection to the Dao and Creator ran far deeper than that. Golden light began to spread out from Fu Hao’s hands.

“You...you are Fu Hao, r-right? Can I...can I ask you a question?” Inesa stammered, twirling her hair between her fingers nervously.

“I am not the best person to ask for advice or revelations. I am no emotional bedrock of support; bluntness is my language.” Fu Hao said in warning, pausing her work to give the goddess an appraising look. Soft blue and yellow light radiated from the girl, her eyes cast downward, refusing to meet Fu Hao’s gaze. Her expression softened, and she sighed. There was a reason she had been selected to guide the Paragon Soul over even her brother Stilicho. The two of them were very similar personalities; all fire and bluntness. That didn’t mean she couldn’t try to be understanding, though. “But yes. I can try to answer a question or two.”

“W-why...” Inesa paused and took a deep breath, then stared straight into Fu Hao’s eyes with a worried expression. “Why does the Dao reject dark spirits?” This question caught Fu Hao off guard, and the spell she had been building up fizzled out.

“It doesn’t,” Fu Hao said, brows furrowed in confusion. “They reject the Dao. Which isn’t actually inherently bad, I know someone who rejects guidance from the Dao *constantly*, but they way they do it is...different.”

“Why?” Inesa pressed.

“Because they let darkness consume them. A dark spirit isn’t dark because it’s a spirit of shadow or physical darkness. ‘Dark’ is a modifier, just as ‘angel’ is a modifier. It’s just far more consuming. If you took away my ‘angel’ I would still be some kind of spirit...though I honestly do not know what, as I was created an angel.” Fu Hao explained with a shrug. “If you took away the ‘dark’ they’d still be spirits. They’re dark because they actively work against the Dao. I mean, just look at the energy they produce as souls!”

To prove her point she cast about for a second, then dove down to the earth. There, floating between a few tall, leafy trees, sat two little drops of energy that had been created by dark spirits. She scowled as she grabbed it, the sticky, icky energy clinging to her skin as she floated back up to Inesa. Every fiber of her being screamed at her to purify the energy right then and there, but she didn’t. Instead she shoved the drops in Inesa’s face, scowling at the feelings this energy tried to produce in her.

She was naturally angry and aggressive. She didn’t need any help feeling more of it, much less in a way that directed her emotions in a foul light.

“Just look at it! It’s nasty! Sure spirits can use it just like other energies, but for it to be worth anything we have to burn off all the impurities first so it become benign. Otherwise it will only serve very specific functions, none of them being inherently progressive! Shove a house full of that stuff, and see what happens to the people inside. And this is just a little spirit – we don’t actually care much about these, a bit of negativity is natural, it’s the big fuckers that cause real problems.” Fu Hao ranted. She’d spent a lot of time in recent years dealing with the energy of dark spirits, and a lot of the residual damage from the War.

To say she was a bit opinionated about it was an understatement, but she had no sympathy for them after seeing just what their crap did to others.

Fu Hao sighed and dropped the energy, a burst of golden light cleansing her hands. Inesa had taken a few steps away from her during her rant, eyes wide.

“But – but there can still be...that doesn’t seem...the small things are...” she trailed off.

“If you want a better answer, or someone who is actually sympathetic, go ask the Creator.” Fu Hao grumbled. “They have all the information. They’re the one to go to if you’re truly concerned about this. Who knows. Maybe you have a point.” The words tasted like ash in Fu Hao’s mouth, but clearly Inesa needed some comfort. The young goddess bowed her head and backed off, spiritual projection fading as she returned to the mortal life. Fu Hao watched her for a moment, frowning to herself.

...maybe she had a point. There was a lot of anger there, within Fu Hao, that was clearly directed at the dark spirits of the world. They may be anathema to the Creator’s balance, but a little bit of that was to be expected. Natural, even. A sigh escaped her as she started building up her spell again. *Don’t forget about the small things, Fu Hao. A small act of kindness may mean nothing to you, but the world to someone else.* The Creator’s words echoed in her mind, during one of their talks. Another sigh, this time exasperated and annoyed, escaped her.

Damn it. She had been focusing too much on the bigger plots lately, hadn’t she? Fu Hao’s gaze drifted back to Inesa, who sat inside her little home, staring dejectedly at the wall. *Little things. Small mercies.* And she smiled.

“What an interesting girl, to make me doubt myself while hardly saying a word.”