

RE: DEITY - THE BREATH OF CREATION

2.6 Hearth and Home

“It’s very interesting, what’s happening to your Hidden Realm, Morgan.” I said conversationally, my hands working even as my eyes stared off into space. Bits of metal lay all around me as I fashioned them into chainmail, my fingers bending cold steel as easily as clay to make the little links. There was no purpose to my project here, not truly, I just enjoyed working with my hands.

“I don’t care,” Morgan groused, paws over its eyes as it lay on the floor of its cell. I pouted at it.

“Come now, don’t be like that. Take a look! I’ve got a couple incarnations running through it as we speak, cataloguing the changes – the fact that elemental energy condenses and purifies itself in your sub-dimensional Realm means that life is evolving in unique ways. There are amoeba that subsist off of fire!” I said happily. It was true, though. The negative energy farms that Morgan set up had already dismantled themselves without me needing to do anything to them; the volatile nature of negative-aligned energy made sure of that. However that also meant that the life Morgan had stolen away was now free to start spreading through the Hidden Realms...

And that wasn’t even including the myriad entrances Morgan had just left open, all over the Four Realms. Bits of life were slowly finding their way into the entirety of the Hidden Realms, though no cultivators had found their way inside yet. Not even devil cultivators.

“I’m thinking we’re going to have to set up a barrier or something over it to keep it isolated...hm, but I don’t want the dark spirits and dark angels to be deprived of their hiding places, either. The unique makeup of your Realm has some potential for some very interesting evolutionary developments, both on the physical and spiritual side of things. What do you think? Should I put Keilan and Alexander on it? I’m sure they’d enjoy the task.”

“Why ask me? And why even bother getting my siblings involved? You could do that in an instant, if you wished. Just peer through everything and divine the future.” Morgan grumbled. At this I paused, humming to myself.

“Yes, but also no. I could if I focused enough of my attention upon it, but the incarnations and gods I’ve assigned to watching your Realm don’t have the power or knowledge. My bigger attentions must be focused elsewhere, and I’d rather not interfere too much with your Realm until we know how it’s going to interact with the others. Assuming, of course, you intend to leave it open. As it is, the Abyss has been squirrely lately, what with the massive growth of the Four Realms and all, so maintaining the equilibrium there is my top priority. My true body should be monitoring that.” I mused, hands going back to work. The chainmail was almost done, and after this I’d probably take it apart and fashion it into...well, I wasn’t sure yet. A miniature boat? A jet plane? Who knew?

“And you cannot do anything else,” Morgan drawled. I sighed and stopped working once again, fixing the wolf-spider with a stern look. It shifted under my intense gaze, no doubt feeling the pressure of my attention even though its eyes were covered.

“Let me clue you in on a little secret, Morgan. My one great limiter is time. Or, perhaps, one of my greatest limiters is time.” I said. This got its attention, and it removed its paws from its face to look at me with all eight eyes. Light was returning to them, now, compared to the broken shell it had been after the war. “I know for a fact that there are beings who can manipulate the flow of time to such a degree that the past and future are indistinguishable within a frame of a thousand years. That they exist at a point that is both a thousand years in the past, and a thousand years in the future. And they weren’t even top of the totem pole! I cannot do that. Sure, I can peer into the future, and the past is laid bare for me to see, but travel back or leap forward? Undo the journey, or skip it entirely? No. Such is outside my jurisdiction.”

“Why? You are – “

“It goes against my existence.” I interrupted, setting the chainmail to the side and turning to fully face my child. “My entire existence, my dao, has been about progression, the wheel moving forward. To bend and manipulate time like that would run counter to my perception and soul – the wheel can backtrack, it can move to the side, but to go back in time? There is no concept of that within my soul, or domain. Hence, time is a limiter. My powers are vast, though nowhere near

omnipotent, so even they have limits. A part of my mind is everywhere at once in the form of the Heavenly Dao, but incarnations also run about keeping things maintained – if I were to focus on everything all the time always, instead of fixing problems, there would be no time for anything else.”

“That...explains some of your actions, and methods.” Morgan admitted, lifting itself up into a sitting position. “You are often reactionary, or contradictory. You say one thing, then do another.”

“Reactionary is the more correct word.” I corrected gently. Morgan glared at me.

“You said time is one of your great limiters. Is freewill another?” Morgan pressed. I spread my hands wide, smiling.

“Indeed.”

“That is why you do as you do, then. You allow people to live as they wish because it is part of your nature; never rewinding, and living with what has happened. And allowing people to make their own choices, even if you encourage them to take certain paths.” Morgan said. “But just as situations change, the rules in which you allow yourself to intervene change as well.”

“Yes. Maintaining the Four Realms is like rolling a wheel down a street and running alongside it. The actions of those big and small within the wheel make it wobble and shake, go faster or slower, and so on and so forth. It is my job to make sure it keeps rolling; which is why I seem so reactionary. Because, at the moment, I am. Things change, especially in the heat of the moment. Of course, to make it more accurate, I would also say that I am simultaneously trying to build a wagon around the wheel as it rolls so I no longer need to be as focused on keeping it upright. And now, after the War, I’d argue that there’s now an axle and a second wheel to keep things stabilized, but that’s beside the point.” I said with a wave of my hand. There were numerous metaphors I could use for the situation, like a garden, or a fishtank, but, well. I liked the wheel one, and none actually hit the nail on the head.

The scales, however, were slowly balancing. The wheel no longer so wobbly. I was in a decent position now to stop being so reactionary.

“Even in the beginning you did not create the universe. Or rather, you did, but my siblings twisted your creation into what it is now.” Morgan said, slowly. “You balanced their creations, to keep it from collapsing.” Morgan might be getting something more complex out of this conversation than I really intended, but that’s beside the point.

“There is no going back.” I said, nodding. “Even if you were to destroy everything, the memories, the dreams, of all that had happened would still remain. Even time could not erase that; in some capacity, since it has happened, it will always exist.” Morgan stared at me.

“Why are you telling me this.” It stated, bluntly.

“I am rehashing a tired old conversation if you ask me that question. You wished to understand me. What is my balance, Morgan?” I pressed. “Why do I do what I do? Why do I allow people and things to act freely, yet still push in one direction or another? But we’re getting off track. Your Hidden Realm! There is a lot of interest in it, and I wanted to ask if you were alright with me using it for various purposes. Nothing major, just a few experiments with souls and the like as I mostly want to let it develop naturally, but I am willing to keep the gods hands out of things if you do not wish it.”

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“You will just do as you wish.” Morgan grumbled.

“In this case, no. Not unless your Hidden Realm starts to become a threat to stability, which I do not foresee happening save for under very specific conditions. Your connection to the Hidden Realm is important, Morgan, and despite your punishment you are still my child and I wish to see you grow.” I couldn’t use the word happy. I doubt Morgan will be happy in the classical sense for a number of eons. But as long as it continues to grow and change, that should be enough.

“...fine. Do as you wish.” Though Morgan said it derisively, I could see a few of the emotions rolling off of it. Apathy was one of them, but also a touch of curiosity. Morgan was curious as to what would happen with its Hidden Realm.

“Thank you. Now, before I leave, I do have one last question for you. How has your little project been going?” I asked, standing and gathering up the chainmail. With a simple glance it deformed, the metal mixing itself back together into a stainless steel ball. Morgan huffed and opened its maw, yakking up a glob of green slime. I wrinkled my nose at the foul smell it produced, and shot Morgan a glare. A touch of sentience emanated from the slime, but its entire existence was pain.

This was hardly the life I had tasked Morgan with creating. With a sigh I bent and picked it up, examining it thoroughly before snapping my fingers and wiping it clean. A pool of primordial chaos fell back to the ground at Morgan’s feet.

“No. Do it again. You only made that to annoy me, and you know it. Do it properly, or not at all. I simply gave you the option.” I told it, drifting up, to the ceiling. “But it would be interesting to have a People of your own roaming your Hidden Realm, would it not?” And with that, I vanished from sight.

Let Morgan stew on that for a bit.

Inesa was trembling as she approached the Creator's Palace, floating in the empty void as it was. The journey was difficult for her, as weak as she was, and so Randus, the God of Dreams, aided her journey. It shamed her to have to ask him a favor as such, especially when he likely had so many other things to do, but this was important to her. She had to know. She was becoming increasingly concerned about the state of the Four Realms, and...she had to know.

Her instincts were screaming at her that she was missing something important.

"You'll find the Lady in the grand entryway. She is expecting you." Randus said as they landed on the great, stone landing of the Creator's Palace. The great, double doors of the building stood tall and imposing, though cracked slightly open, revealing the grand interior. Inesa stepped inside, shuddering at the way the ceiling hid the light of the Realm Sun and Lunar Star, casting her gaze about for the Creator.

She was almost immediately distracted, however. Thousands of little curios and paintings hung from the walls or in display cases, but she found herself drawn to a little stone fountain, placed just to the left of the entryway. It was cracked and ancient looking, not even able to hold water anymore, yet Inesa felt an inexplicable draw to it all the same. She waved a hand over the stone. It had...nothing to do with light. It felt...nostalgic?

"Interesting little thing, isn't it?" The Creator said suddenly, from directly behind her. She yelped in surprise and jumped, whirling to see the smiling face of the Creator looking down at her. He was at least a head taller than her, and she felt herself bowing her head in His presence instinctively. "That was the first fountain the Fae ever created. I'm surprised that, of all things, this is what drew your attention first. Is it the nostalgia that drew you to it?"

Inesa shuddered a little at the Creator's insight. How had He known that nostalgia...? No. That was only to be expected of the Creator.

"T-this one..." she trailed off, words sticking in her throat, her tongue tied.

"Come now, there's no reason to call yourself that. You are Inesa, and you are my child. Walk with me," the Creator soothed, putting a hand on her back and gently leading her along, deeper into the palace. Inesa took a few moments to calm herself, mind racing, wondering what she was doing here, what she could possibly be doing questioning the Creator...but the further she walked into the palace, the more her concerns grew. It felt...empty. Hollow. There was no warmth in the hearth, no light in the fireplace. Nothing filling the home but memories.

"I-I apologize, but...i-if I could ask a few questions," Inesa began.

"Only if I can ask a few in return." The Creator said. Inesa stiffened as she walked beside Him, His long, purple robes trailing along the black-marbled floor.

"Wh-what could you wish to know?" Inesa managed to get out.

"Why you do what you do." The Creator said. "I wish to hear it from your mouth. From my understanding you travel the Physical Realm, living amongst the mortals. Why is this?" Inesa was silent for a long moment, chewing her lips.

"I-I wanted to...touch people, the same way I was once helped. All the other gods h-have focused on big things, but...I thought if I can help just one person, that my actions may aid one soul...isn't that worth doing?" she managed to get out.

"Beautiful." The Creator said, stopping and laying a hand on her head. "That way of thinking is simply beautiful. Not everything needs to be about huge actions. Simple measures can be just as, if not more, impactful." The words gave Inesa courage. Her spine straightened. Her trembling stopped, and her tongue suddenly became looser. The Creator approved of her. He *approved*.

“If I may,” she began, swallowing her doubts. “I...am worried. Why does the Dao reject dark spirits?”

“I don’t reject dark spirits.” The Creator said, pulling His hand away and cocking His head to the side curiously. That was the same thing Fu Hao had said, and Inesa’s heart sunk. “In fact, dark spirits are connected to the Heavenly Dao. Morgan twisted quite a few of them into an anathema for a time – turning them more into Chaos Spirits, I suppose? Those are the ones that actively try to derail the Four Realms. But now that Morgan’s no longer forcibly accelerating their creation and mass, I don’t have to worry about them as much. They’re still going to appear, of course, but balance is slowly being restored.” He said with a shrug.

“You, but Fu Hao said,” Inesa started.

“Yes. She’s been a bit aggressive about it lately – thank you for talking to her, by the way. My words often fall on deaf ears; many see me as too big, and thus never truly hear what I am saying.” The Creator said, folding His hands into the sleeves of His robes. Inesa bit her lip. “Dark spirits are a natural occurrence. Dark angels already exist, though they are undergoing their own tribulations in hiding as they are, without Morgan backing them, and I expect Thyia to eventually evolve into a true dark deity. This does not necessarily mean they are our enemies – the only reason we had the war in the first place was to keep the wheel from tipping.”

“The...wheel, from tipping?” Inesa was confused now. Hadn’t the Creator rushed angels into existence, to force the dark spirits to stop? She understood that they were dangerous, and the energy they produced limited in usefulness, but...

“Sorry. Got caught up in another conversation I was having. Or, one of my incarnations was. Anyways! Dark spirits are not rejected by the Heavenly Dao, although they have a propensity to more often reject it. And with the fate of the Four Realms no longer being so dire, I can stop urging souls to speed through the positive karma path to balance the scales. Things can continue to evolve at a more natural, less forced path. Honestly, this whole debacle truly opened my eyes to the

instincts and reactions; things I should be better able to control, now that I am more aware of them. Head back to the moderate middle,” The Creator muttered that last part, and Inesa fidgeted.

“Oh. Ok.” Was all she managed to get out. For a moment longer they were silent, the Creator waiting patiently until Inesa finally decided to suck it up and ask the real question she had come here to ask.

She bowed her head.

“I am concerned.” She admitted. “I have travelled the physical realm and seen homes of all kinds. Hearths of all sorts. I am afraid of yours. For one such as you, it seems...empty.” There. The words were out there. Inesa kept her head bowed, silently awaiting the Creator’s judgement or rebuke.

She did not expect Him to chuckle.

“That is because this is merely a house, not my home, dear. Come with me.” The Creator snapped His fingers, and suddenly they were no longer in the palace. Inesa jumped in place as she looked about, her back to the wall of primordial chaos and facing the entirety of the Four Realms as it spun in place before her, the Realm Sun and Lunar Star circling it. It was upside down right now, though, with the Karmic Valley above the Holy Mountain...and Statera Luotian standing before her, framed in the picture of all of creation. He spread His arms wide. “*This is my home, dear, and the Sun is my hearth.*”

In that instant, something clicked within Inesa. Everything swirled together before her, all the light and shadow, all the memories and experiences she’d seen...it was a simple thing, her enlightenment. There was no fanfare. No great fireworks in the sky, or surge of power. It was more like a sigh, running through her, and everything felt clearer. The Creator bowed to her, smiling broadly.

“Of all the gods, you are the first to develop your own Dao. One other beat you, though his is yet to be fully realized. I greet you, Inesa, Goddess of Light, Hearth, and the Home.”