

RE: DEITY - THE BREATH OF CREATION

3:44 Epilogue: Rot

It was a Rot.

Not just any rot. Rot with a capital R.

Not that it had any concept of what capital or lower case letters were, all it understood was that it was more than the base fungi and mold that grew and dissected and destroyed the natural world so other things could grow. It didn't want to just destroy.

It wanted to grow.

Seeking tendrils stretched out through the earth, filling pockets, wriggling its way into the lesser creatures of the world and adding them to its own self.

It dug and ate and grew, bits of itself burned away by those who found it until, one day, it made a discovery. It didn't have to take things over right away. It could leave little spores of itself inside things, and let them carry it across the world faster and further than it could manage itself. Better yet, these spores persisted and didn't have to completely take over a being, protecting it from the burning.

Then, it discovered another new thing. It could seize control.

It started with a little fox. A predator who had eaten a mouse who had eaten a bug who had eaten grass that was infected by spores. The fox had missed a rabbit – a horned thing – time and time again, and the Rot had sensed it. The spores grew within the beast, not overtaking it, merely latching onto that delicious emotion of frustration at missing a hunt.

The fox became obsessed. Constantly hunting that one rabbit, its frustration bleeding to obsession, obsession that let the rot dig its way deeper into the beast, driving its obsession further until it forgot to sleep, drink, and eat anything other than that rabbit. It had died of dehydration, but the damage was done. The rot had learned its lesson.

Carrion birds descended upon the dead fox, feasting upon its flesh, giving the obsessive rot more room to spread. More room to grow.

With each new beast, each new entity it corrupted, it grew further and further, never assimilating all of a beast, but bits and pieces.

Then, it was discovered.

A god found it. One it somehow recognized, with its limited consciousness. It poked, and prodded, and burned the rot with silver light, rooting it out in all the places that touched the skies – the Rot screamed its pain as it was unmade at the most basic of levels, every inch of what it had taken from other beings sent screaming back to its originators. The Rot hissed and retreated but found, shockingly, the god had not pursued it. She – for it now could understand the concept of gender – did not even seem to notice what she had done.

She was content to stay up in the above world, where she could move freely through the skies. The Rot huddled in its spot, watching, waiting, digging through the earth but no longer content with that.

It wanted *more*.

The opportunity came with discovery, once again. This time, however, it was not discovery by the one with the burning light, but rather, of one of the Three.

The Rot did not know them.

Not really.

But it did feel a connection to them. One it didn't understand; and as it was too simple, it did not think about it. Instead, it focused on that which they represented. *Power*. The power to never feel that pain again. No – the power to *think*. It writhed with desire, but had learned from the silver light. No overt motions. No pushing hard. And it learned from its spores – the longer it sat within something, flaming its desires, the less likely it would be disturbed, and the more it could take from things.

So it allowed itself to be taken. Prodded and poked, never lashing out like it had before – not until its chance came.

The one who had discovered it was one with black hair and curiosity to her – it could have infected her many times over, but didn't. For one reason or another, it feared infecting that one too early; it felt like being stared at by a hawk, and it was a mouse; it would be noticed if it moved too fast, too quickly. The rot settled, instinctually waiting for its chance.

It came in the form of obsession.

When the world started crumbling its spores spread far and wide, its roots digging into the soil and crust unopposed, taking full advantage of the chaos. The Three managed to get a handle on the collapse fairly quickly, much to the rot's annoyance, but with this sudden collapse came the unexpected opportunity. The redhead, the one they called the Heart, knelt by a tree, coaxing it back to full health. Her heart was filled with melancholy, longing, emotions it could use – it took a risk, and planted a spore in her hair.

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She didn't notice.

The Rot had its foot in the door, now it had to seal the deal.

Over the course of the next number of eons, it worked its way deeper into the Heart, learning so, so much from her. It learned how to hide itself from the silver light that burned. It twisted her desires slowly, ever so slowly, careful to not alert any of the others. It made her fixate on the *Green Eyed One*; using her beauty to blind Him, so He did not notice, its own fear leeching into Yueya's, its mother's, mind to make her do the same. She fixated on family, and the rot dug deep into that, driving her to pursue that, to pursue the Green Eyed One.

It hadn't expected her to make something, another life, within herself.

It hadn't expected Yueya to protect the child so fiercely. Some part of her recognized the Rot's presence, and carefully bound the child in the untainted parts of her power. Protecting it from the Rot, no matter how often or how hard it tried to worm its way into the child. For the first time, her

obsession worked against the Rot – actively keeping the infection out of that she so desperately tried to protect.

Frustrated, but not cowed, the Rot turned its attention away from the child. Patience was key. It was just a fungus, despite the occasional bouts of clarity and thoughts it now had. It spread its spores, slowly, never quite activating them no matter how many gods it infected. No matter how many cities of mortals it destroyed, tearing people apart.

Lovers, fixating on perceived slights, ripping their family to pieces.

Leaders, obsessing over wealth and gold and power.

Obsession was its weapon, and that would be its most powerful tool.

The rot was content, especially when it infected the strong one, the Body.

Especially when its instincts screamed now was the time to act, to strike, just after the child's birth, no longer able or needing to hide it.

And now, once it found the Mind and consumed it, it had another Great Being to feast on. With each mind it leached from, with each power it absorbed, it became stronger – and now, it had a whole other universe to spread its spores to. And with the power of the Heart, Body, and soon to be Mind, it was only a matter of time.

The Overgod of the Multiverse watched as the Four Realms crashed into the One World, bouncing about the interior like a pinball. Tension radiated through its entire form as it was forced to observe, unable to intervene due to the collision's nature; it had been caused by the actions of the denizens within the universes, after all.

Shame.

This shard thought, unable to tear its eyes away even as statistics dropped rapidly. *The Four Realms were doing so well...and it's not even their fault. Am I certain I can give no aid?* It mused.

The answer, of course, was a resounding no. Not only because of the rules it, itself put upon interfering, but also because of the nature of the One World's Shadow. A infection like that, which can even infect Origin Deities is incredibly dangerous. To the point it would have had to continue to isolate the One World until it either succumbed to the Shadow, or the Oshun Trio managed to get rid of the rot to the best of their abilities. It hadn't been dangerous enough to warrant quarantining the One World yet, but now that it had two thirds of the power of the Origin Deity...if it managed to consume both the next third and the Will of the One World, then it would be dangerous.

The shard sighed again, trying to turn away but unable to.

It was missing something. What was it...?

It looked at the statistics and diagrams laid before it, paths the groups could take to survive. There was a decent chance Statera Luotian washed their hands of the One World, and burnt it all to the ground to save their children. Such an action would taint the nature of the Four Realms, no matter how necessary, and would turn them from a Heart Universe to a potential Mind. There was a non-zero chance the Rot infected Statera as well – obsession was dangerous, after all, especially to one

such as Statera Luotian, who was so hyper fixated on their family. Not to mention they were currently unconscious...

Combined with Yueya's tendency to blind, and the child born of them...

Maybe having the Rival and the First here was a good thing. They could handle the rot somewhat, as their scouts before the real cavalry was sent in. An infection like that couldn't be allowed to spread, no matter how small. The shard of the Overgod sighed heavily and went back to reviewing data on all the universes. But it kept coming back to the One World and the Four Realms, checking the progress despite it not having been long enough to do anything.

The Overgod shard frowned, pulsing once, then twice in confusion as it noticed another set of data it had pushed to the side, never to be looked at. It was simply so impossible that it had never occurred at it to look at the data. This time, however, it focused hard, tapping the little percentage screen once, then twice, then trying to refresh the calculations. It glanced up, looking to where Curie and Astraea were, the star goddess preparing her flight toward the Four Realms. It looked at the Four Realms.

And it panicked.

Oh. Oh shit. Oh shit! The Overgod's shard pulsed brightly, trying to keep itself under control, pushing a request for an escalation to the greater part of its mind. The response back was irritated, and annoyed. The shard insisted, bumping up the request to the highest degree it possibly could. This time a larger part of its main brain turned to the data the shard shoved its way.

It could feel the sudden pause. Then the spike of interest, followed by alarm followed by excitement.

Escalate? The shard asked.

No. The greater part of its mind insisted. Prepare cocoon protocols. We do not escalate unless the odds increase further – undue attention from the main brain could warp the decisions of those involved. I will be removing my memories of the event shortly, just to make sure I do not interfere. You have your orders – only if the odds increase, and the cocoon protocols are engaged are you to escalate again.

And suddenly, the shard was alone again, with the knowledge of what may happen, no matter how small. *Cocoon protocols. Not quarantine.* The shard shuddered in hopeful excitement, settling back down to watch, and observe, now completely focused. And it watched as Astraea took a third of her creator's Authority on a mad sprint to deliver it to the Heavens themselves, and the two universes now hurtled toward Sehuyun's Primordial Realm.

...it couldn't interfere. If it did, it may just mess it up.