

Guardian gods 791

Chapter 791:

Ikenga was the last to arrive. His siblings were already positioned on their massive thrones, their auras filling the hall with the weight of fundamental laws.

As he stepped toward his seat, Mahu watched him emerge from the direction of Keles's realm. She raised a brow, before calmly looking away to focus on the center of the hall.

"You have kept us waiting, brother," Crepuscular noted.

"I had a few matters to deal with," Ikenga replied, smoothing out his expression as he settled into his throne. Then, the sheepish smile he had been trying to suppress broke through. "Also, it pleases me to tell you all, my brothers and sisters, that the child I share with Keles is expected anytime now."

The atmosphere in the hall shifted instantly. The formal air of a divine council evaporated, replaced by the resonant power of the Origin Gods offering their favor.

Jaus leaned forward, his voice cutting through the celebratory murmurs. "If you don't mind, brother, I would like to be present when Keles goes into labor. This is something I wouldn't want to miss, this will be our world's first-born True God."

Crepuscular's eyes flashed with a sudden, deep interest. The birth of a being born of two Origins was a never seen before phenomenon. "It must be a sight to behold, brother," he added, his voice resonant. "We would all like to be part of such a moment."

Ikenga, still feeling the lingering warmth of his son's voice in his mind, turned to the veiled queen beside him. "That would be for Keles to decide. I have no issue with our family bearing witness."

Keles, however, ignored the brothers entirely. Her gaze pierced through her veil, landing squarely on Mahu, who had remained uncharacteristically silent amidst the chatter.

"Sister," Keles spoke, her voice steady and grounding. "If you don't mind... I would like you beside me during this child's birth."

Mahu met Keles's gaze. A soft, knowing understanding passed between them. "If you would have me, I see no reason to refuse, sister," Mahu replied. "It is my duty to you not just as your sibling, but as the Goddess of Motherhood."

The air suddenly grew warmer, smelling of summer heat and ozone. Crepuscular let out a boisterous laugh, his golden hair sparking like living flames against the backdrop of the realm.

"Since we are on this topic," he said, his radiant smile practically glowing, "I would like to share some good news as well."

The hall fell silent as the others turned to him. Crepuscular beamed with pride. "Xerosis is with my child."

The news hit the room like a burst of light. Keles, hearing that her own daughter was now carrying the next generation, could not suppress the joy radiating from her essence. Even through the veil, the sudden change in her aura from cold shadows to vibrant, maternal pride was unmistakable.

Nana, the mother of them all, watched her children with a gaze of pure love. She couldn't help the smile that graced her face.

She stood from her seat and pulled Crepuscular into a firm, grounding hug. "Congratulations, son," she whispered, her voice carrying the pride of a grandmother-to-be.

Jaus broke the silence with a final, lighthearted grin. "It seems our small pantheon is growing well," he remarked, though privately, the sight of his brothers' happiness stirred a new thought: perhaps it was time he found a woman of his own to share in this expanding legacy.

But as the laughter faded, a cold aura settled over the council. The time of celebration was over and now the time of governance had returned.

Jaus fixed his gaze on Ikenga and Keles. "We know how restless you both can be. How much have you learned of what transpired in this world while you were away during our small rest?"

"A lot," Keles answered, "But knowledge is a matter of perspective. We wish to see it through your eyes. You all see the hidden thread of this world and hear the whispers of the wind far better than the most ever could."

"True enough," Jaus conceded.

Jaus closed his eyes, and like a chain reaction, the other Origin Gods followed suit. A hum of pure, raw energy filled the hall as a Memory Link manifested, a psychic bridge connecting the minds of the pantheon.

In an instant, years of history were compressed into heartbeats. Ikenga and Keles bore witness to the shifting of borders, the rise of new gods, and the subtle rot of corruption that had festered in the shadows of the Nwadieube and Osita kingdoms. They felt the prayers, the changes, and the quiet evolution of the world's magical essence.

Simultaneously, Ikenga and Keles pushed their own experiences back through the link. The other gods were suddenly thrust into the cold, terrifying expanse of the journey Ikenga had taken. They felt the weight of Zarvok's presence, the struggle for the Universal Translation, the key to the cosmos and the sheer mental toll of navigating realms beyond the reach of their own sun. For the gods experiencing this, it wasn't just a story, it was a sensory overload, as if they were reliving every second of the perilous trek themselves.

When their eyes finally snapped open in unison, the air in the room had changed. The confusion and gaps in their knowledge were gone, replaced by a crystalline, shared understanding of the past, present, and the dangerous potential of the future.

Every brow was furrowed. The silence that followed was heavy, as each god took time to digest the implications of what they had just seen.

Ikenga addressed the assembly, his voice resonating through the void like chamber. "You have all witnessed my recent actions since my return, and now, having peered into my memories, what are your thoughts?"

"Extermination of the human race," Crepuscular replied, his voice cold and absolute.

Nana shot them a sharp glare, her brow furrowing in instant defiance, yet she remained silent. She understood that the gravity of this deliberation had transcended her right to intervene.

Across the circle, the other gods remained motionless. Not a single expression shifted; not a soul offered a word of dissent. The revelation found within Keles and Ikenga's memories regarding the "First-Born Child of the World" had cast a long, unforgiving shadow.

If the humans held this sacred status, the consensus was clear: they were unworthy of the title. It was not merely that they did not deserve the honor, it was that they were fundamentally untrustworthy, inherently fragile, and far too easily swayed by the lure of petty, fleeting benefits.

Ikenga nodded slowly, acknowledging the silent verdict. "I arrived at the same conclusion when I first unearthed the truth of that term. But I have since realized the flaws in such a radical path, not least the staggering amount of time it would take for our world to recuperate from such a cataclysm, or the sheer impossibility of selecting a suitable successor to the mantle."

His expression hardened, his tone dropping. "If our world continues on this trajectory, it will not just be the humans who fail us. Even the godlings, our own creations will eventually pose the same existential danger to this world as the humans do."

"Hence why I propose my radical action," Ikenga said.

The chamber plunged into a suffocating silence, the air heavy with the weight of his suggestion. Jaus was the first to break the stillness, his voice measured but laced with caution. "Your proposal is bold, brother, but the cost to our world would be ruinous. It is too great a price to pay."

"We are still here, Jaus," Ikenga countered, his gaze unwavering.

"We are, and that is exactly why we need not resort to such extremes," Jaus argued, his expression tightening. "As long as we remain present, we hold the balance of power."

Mahu shook her head slowly, a grim smile touching her lips. "You do not seem to understand, brother. Based on everything we have witnessed, the coming battle will not be decided by us. We are not the masters of this conflict, we are the last stand."

She turned toward the others, her eyes searching theirs. "You speak as if we could simply exert our will whenever the War of Worlds arrives. If we intervened so clumsily, we would gain nothing. Look at Keles and Ikenga; they stayed low, played the long game, and ultimately returned with victory."

Mahu gestured toward the two of them. "Do you truly believe they could not have brought a swift end to the invaded world, much like what you seem to be proposing now, Jaus? If they had chosen that path, they would have rendered the entire purpose of the War of Worlds meaningless."

"It was not just them, brother," Mahu continued, her voice sharp. "The mages they fought could have easily brought an end to their world, but none dared. They understood that the war exists precisely because there is more to be gained from a world kept intact, the value of the conquest far outweighs the sacrifices required to claim it."

Chapter 792:

Ikenga stepped into the silence, his presence commanding the focus of the room. "In a conflict between two worlds, the objective is not mere annihilation. The goal is for the victor to absorb the origin and the very core of the defeated world, integrating it into their own to expand their foundations and transcend their current limitations."

He turned his gaze toward Jaus, his expression unreadable. "We have reached the absolute limit of the power our current world can sustain, hence the current slow growth. A victory in the War of Worlds would shatter that ceiling, allowing us to grow faster and more. But none of that growth is possible if the world we conquer is reduced to ash, which is exactly what would happen if you were to force your hand, brother."

Ikenga leaned in closer, his voice dropping to a low resonance. "Such a war cannot be fought by us directly, Jaus. If we intervene, we forfeit the prize. If we destroy the foundation in our haste to win, we are left with nothing but a graveyard."

Jaus listened, his jaw tight. He closed his eyes for a long moment, the silence in the chamber stretching thin before he spoke, his tone cold "I understand the mechanics of this coming war, but I spoke as I did because your proposal treats our children as expendable pawns. Their livelihoods are at stake."

A heavy, suffocating silence descended, only to be cut through by Crepuscular. "They are already at stake, Jaus," he said, his voice devoid of warmth. "They would be involved regardless, thanks to the machinations Murmur has set in motion. I stand with Ikenga. If suffering is inevitable, I would rather it come from our own hands than be dictated by our enemy."

Ikenga glanced at Crepuscular, a silent acknowledgement passing between them. It was clear he was not the only one who recognized the looming shadow of Murmur's ambition.

"If the human gods begin to appear as Murmur intends," Ikenga continued, turning back to Jaus, "our children, the ascended gods will be the first to fall. These human-born deities will rise with terrifying speed, fueled by the sheer, overwhelming tides of faith their kin will shower upon them."

He leaned closer, painting the bleak reality for his brother. "The coming conflict will reach a scale where we cannot simply intervene. By the time we attempt to step in, our children will be crushed beneath the weight of those human gods."

Ikenga's expression softened, "My proposal ensures that our children's strength grows in lockstep with the human population. We are not discarding them, instead we are forging a connection that will withstand what is to come. If we act now, the bonds they will build with the humans will be too deeply rooted to be shaken by the ascent of these new, ascended human gods."

"My proposal may seem wicked, even monstrous," Ikenga admitted, his gaze scanning the circle. "But brother, consider this: if we were to face a civilization as ruthless as the goblins, how do you think the powerhouses of our world would truly fare as we are now?"

"This world of ours requires a cleansing in blood. The lifeforms that inhabit it have forgotten how fragile they are; they have grown complacent in our shadow. We could continue to shelter them, but for how much longer?"

Jaus made his final stand, his voice trembling with a rare flash of vulnerability. "Have you considered what you are asking of our sister, Mahu? You speak of withdrawing her grace. You are asking her to look away while mothers face the agony of labor, uncertain if they or their children will even survive the night. Is that the 'cleansing' you desire?"

"Of course I considered it," Ikenga replied, his voice rising "Mahu's domain is exceptional. What I described was a worst-case contingency, a dark thought I entertained, but one that remains entirely within her discretion. It would be hers to decide whether the world must endure such a trial."

Jaus fell into a heavy silence, his expression caught between a reluctant contemplation. Before he could voice his surrender, Ikenga stood abruptly. He crossed the chamber, his footsteps echoing in the void, and placed a steadying hand on Jaus's shoulder.

"I have had a long time to wrestle with the necessity of this proposal," Ikenga said, addressing the room at large. "I know my words and my actions come across as cruel. I know they strike at the heart of everything you deem wrong."

He looked at each of them in turn, his eyes searching. "You deserve time to process this. If, after reflection, this path does not sit well with any of you, then it will not be taken. We will set it aside and find another way to transcend our limits. I will not force this burden upon this house."

With that, he turned and returned to his throne, leaving the silence to settle once more.

Most of the gods saw the cold truth in Ikenga's proposal, they understood the necessity of the transformation and the ultimate benefit it would yield for their world. Yet, acceptance remained a bitter pill.

It was agonizing to contemplate watching a civilization they had cultivated for millennia descend into chaos and bloodshed. Their pride, however, was the deepest wound. They were a divine collective; the thought of their own creations, the godlings being dragged into the mire of mortal conflict was an affront to their station.

The prospect of sitting in their celestial realm, masked in apathy, while their creations cried out for grace and intervention, stung these prideful beings. To the gods, it was an insult that their very divinity and status were no longer enough to shield their subjects from the coming tide.

Crepuscular was the first to break the heavy silence. "I support Ikenga's proposition," he stated, their voice cutting through the tension. "This was inevitable, if the world must bleed, it is better that the blade be held by our own hands."

Mahu followed, her voice softer but no less resolute. "I, too, support the proposal. However, I will not withdraw the grace of motherhood. The sanctity of life must remain protected by my divinity. The Moon's grace, however..." She paused, her expression hardening. "That, I can withdraw. Let the world grow cold in the darkness; perhaps they will learn to value the light once they have lost it."

Keles, who had remained a silent observant until now, offered only a few words: "I stand with the proposition."

It was finally Jaus's turn. He looked around the circle, his initial resistance having withered under the weight of the consensus. With a resigned shrug of his shoulders, he murmured, "I have no issue with his proposal."

Seeing the unanimous agreement, Ikenga extended a hand. At his gesture, a multifaceted crystal shimmered into existence, hovering in the center of the chamber. It pulsed with a complex, hypnotic light, a key to the architecture of the cosmos itself.

Before them lay the path to quantification, the method by which they would finally force their world's origin to expand and harden. They were no longer willing to be sitting ducks, shivering in the dark, waiting for an inevitable calamity to descend upon them.

Instead, they would be the architects of their own evolution. By taking the initiative now, they were choosing to forge their strength in the crucible of conflict, ensuring their world would be an apex predator, not a victim, when the next true challenge arrived.

"How do we use it?" Crepuscular asked, eyes fixed on the pulsing light.

Ikenga offered a knowing smile. He remained silent, waiting for them to reach out. As their fingers brushed the cool, humming surface of the crystal, a collective jolt surged through them. The chamber vanished, replaced by a shared premonition, a vivid window into a destiny tied to the stone.

Their collective focus shifted to the lone figure within the vision. Jaus let out a low, dry chuckle. "Such a lucky fella, that one."

Mahu's expression softened, her voice carrying an uncharacteristic warmth. "He deserves this grace. He has endured much, and his past trials have forged him perfectly for such a role."

A solemn murmur of agreement passed among them. They watched the figure, the first being to successfully map the breadth of their ever growing world. By sharing the gift of the Great Map, he had ignited an era of unprecedented expansion and restless curiosity across the realms.

"So, are we all in agreement?" Ikenga asked, his voice grounding them back in the present. One by one, they nodded.

Ikenga rose to his feet as a shimmering rift to his realm tore open in the air. He stepped through the threshold, followed in silent procession by the others, even Nana, who moved rarely.

They stepped through the rift and into a sun-drenched clearing. The first thing that struck the divine assembly wasn't the scenery, but the overwhelming, pungent scent of fermented spirits. Their gazes drifted downward, landing on two figures sprawled in the grass, snoring in a rhythmic, uncoordinated duet.

Chapter 793:

Even in the depths of a drunken stupor, Tweet and Boros seemed to be nursing their grudge. Between heavy snores, one would lazily attempt to kick the other, while the second would shove back with a limp, uncoordinated arm, trying to reclaim his personal space.

Ikenga felt the heavy, judgmental weight of the other gods' stares. Crepuscular reached out, tapping Ikenga's shoulder with a distinctly mocking grin. "You truly are unique, brother. It stands to reason that those in your orbit would possess... similar quirks."

Ikenga didn't miss a beat, glancing sideways at him. "Does that assessment include you, then? Seeing as you consider yourself so close to me?"

The question caught Crepuscular off guard. He stammered, floating backward a few inches as he raised his hands in a defensive gesture. "I... I believe I must have worded that poorly."

Ikenga rolled his eyes and knelt in the grass beside the sleeping Tweet. He reached out and poked the man's cheek. Tweet blindly swatted the finger away, murmuring into the dirt, "I'm home... just let me sleep."

A genuine smile touched Ikenga's lips. He reached out again, his fingertips beginning to pulse with a vibrant, golden-green light. He pressed a finger to Tweet's forehead, and the divine blessing surged forward, instantly washing away the haze of the alcohol and clearing the man's mind.

Tweet's dream fractured, the hazy comfort of sleep stripped away as his senses surged back to life. The first thing he felt wasn't the grass beneath him, but the crushing weight of five vast, celestial presences. They pressed against the air like a physical force, one of them looming directly over him with a sharp, familiar intensity.

Cracking his eyes open, Tweet found himself staring directly into Ikenga's smiling face. He blinked, looking past his patron to find the other four Origin Gods watching him with unblinking, ancient eyes.

Instead of fear, a spark of electric excitement ignited in his chest. He had felt this coming. Ever since his return home, a restless shadow had followed him, a nagging sense that he was drifting, under-accomplished and stagnant. While he watched Boros fulfill her grim but necessary function for the cursed spirits, he had simply sat and let the days dissolve into drink.

But seeing the Five gathered here, he knew the drift was over. His purpose had finally arrived.

Ikenga straightened, floating back to join the line of his siblings. Tweet didn't hesitate; he scrambled from the dirt and immediately dropped to one knee, his head bowed low in the grass.

"This humble one bows before the Origin Gods," he said, his voice steady despite the thrumming power in the air.

Crepuscular drifted forward, the crystal pulsing faintly in his palm. "Do you know what this is, Tweet?" he asked, his voice scorching that the hairs on Tweet's head fringed.

Tweet lifted his head, his gaze locked onto the stone. The moment he focused, the world around him dissolved. He wasn't looking at a crystal anymore; he was staring into the abyss of the cosmos. He saw stars birthing in nebulae, gas giants swirling in silent majesty, and endless, untethered worlds spinning in the dark.

With a flick of his wrist, Crepuscular closed his hand. The vision snapped shut, leaving Tweet breathless and struck dumb.

"This is the Key," Crepuscular declared. "It is our bridge to the infinite. It is how we reach out to claim new worlds, to draw them into our origin and bolster our strength through conquest."

Jaus drifted forward, his shadow looming over the kneeling man. "You have been chosen. You have been ordained to carry this duty, to sail the currents of the cosmos."

Mahu followed, her presence calming "To cast your eyes beyond the sky of our world, to scout the uncharted, and to find what remains hidden."

Keles moved into place, her voice resonating with his soul "To serve as the singular bridge that connects our divinity to the vast, terrifying unknown."

Finally, Ikenga stepped forward, his eyes bright with a rare, tempered respect. "You have mastered every map of this world," he said, his tone dropping to a quiet, earnest intensity. "But this world has become a cage, Tweet. To save it, we must look beyond the horizon of the stars."

As the last word hung in the air, the five Origin Gods spoke as one. Their voices overlapped, a layered harmony of thunder and starlight that resonated deep within Tweet's very marrow, sealing the pact.

The cosmic crystal surged, its rhythm locking pulse-for-pulse with the beat of Tweet's own heart. The gods watched in silence as the stone's multifaceted edges began to liquefy, bleeding into his form until they merged entirely with his feathers. Where there had once been simple plumage, there were now shimmering conduits of raw, bottled starlight.

As the crystal's core fused with his spirit, Tweet's physical form underwent a tectonic shift. He was no longer merely a creature of flesh and blood, he was shedding his mortal coil to ascend as a World Spirit, a living bridge between their stagnant reality and the vast, infinite reaping grounds of the cosmos.

"Your duty is no longer to trace the paths of men, but to map the destinies of worlds," Ikenga declared, his voice cutting through the ritual's crescendo like a blade. "You shall traverse the void to identify the domains we are to harvest. You are our scout, our herald, and the singular eye of our reaping."

The Five raised their hands in unison, their combined authority weaving a shroud of cosmic law around him.

"From this moment, your old name exists only in the fading songs of mortals," they intoned, their voices a singular, thundering vibration. "To the cosmos, and to us, you are Astraeus, the Navigator of Origins."

The cocoon of iridescent light that had enveloped his bird form began to fracture. Within minutes, the shell dissolved into nothingness, revealing the being who had emerged from the silence.

Astraeus stood before the Five, his form a breathtaking fusion of predator and celestial art. He retained the elegant silhouette of a great raptor, but the mundane reality of feathers had been discarded for something far more profound. His plumage was no longer opaque, it had transformed into translucent, diamond-like shards that caught and shattered the ambient light into a thousand prismatic slivers.

His primary feathers were now long, crystalline needles. With the slightest movement of his wings, the air didn't rustle; instead, it rang with the melodic, haunting chime of a thousand glass bells. Beneath the translucent structure of his wings, the pulse of the Cosmic Crystal remained visible, a living, shifting map of the cosmos. Intricate, glowing silver lines traced patterns across his skin, eternally connecting distant, flickering points of light that pulsed in time with his own heartbeat.

His eyes had become twin orbs of polished silver, devoid of pupils yet seeing more than any god. They didn't merely perceive distance; they pierced the very fabric of space to discern the "Origin" of distant realms, reading the potential of worlds before they were even reached.

A faint, shimmering nebula of violet and gold dust clung to him, trailing from his tail feathers like the train of a royal mantle. It was a beautiful, spectral veil, the concentrated essence of his home world, serving as both a mark of his origin and a protective ward against the crushing, airless void of the cosmos.

Astraeus let out a piercing, melodic cry that fractured the very air around him; space buckled and snapped shut like a closing door. He turned back, his silver-orb eyes lingering on the still-slumbering form of Boros. Even amidst the thunderous wake of his ascension, she remained deep in a divine, forced sleep. He was grateful; he had no words for a goodbye, and this silent parting felt, in its own way, like the best.

He turned toward the Five, bowing his crystalline head in a final gesture of fealty. He then pivoted to Ikenga, who offered a solemn, steady nod. Astraeus nudged his beak gently against Ikenga's upturned palm, a final tactile connection to the god who had set him on this path.

With a sharp, resonant cry that vibrated not just through the clearing but across the marrow of the planet, he launched himself into the sky.

The movement was effortless, defying the laws of nature. With the first beat of his wings, he tore through the boundaries of Ikenga's domain. With the second, he had breached the atmosphere, leaving the sky behind for the cold, velvet dark of the stars.

As he hung in the silence of the void, his form began to expand, shifting and growing until he seemed as vast as a constellation. He beat his wings one final time, a silent motion that rippled through the fabric of space. Then, he was gone, his shimmering, starlit silhouette merging seamlessly into the fabric of the night, becoming a part of the cosmos he was now destined to map.

Chapter 794:

The assembled gods, both the ascended and the Origin watched the void where Astraeus had vanished, a collective sense of satisfaction lingering in the air.

Yet, in the shadows, things were shifting. Deep within a hidden pocket of reality, Murmur stirred. He raised his head, and for a fleeting, moment, a jagged rift tore through the fabric of space. A colossal eye peered through the tear, surveying the cosmos before the rift snapped shut, sealing the intrusion as quickly as it had appeared.

In the wake of that gaze, a figure materialized. Osita stood there, his jaw tight, clicking his tongue in a display of raw, simmering annoyance. He made to lash out at the landscape, his fingers twitching with the urge to tear something apart, but he checked himself. The Origin gods were in motion, the gears of a larger game were turning, and he knew better than to reveal his hand so prematurely. With a flick of his energy, he vanished into the ether.

Back in the clearing, the air grew thin as the Origin gods prepared to depart.

"We now have to play our part," Crepuscular said, his voice cold and final before his form dissipated into stardust.

Mahu lingered for a moment, casting a long, unreadable look toward Ikenga. Without a word, she faded from existence. Keles followed suit, her presence dissolving like mist in a gale.

Jaus was the last to go, his silhouette already beginning to fray at the edges when Ikenga spoke. "Brother. It has been a long time since we truly spoke, just us. Would you accompany me?"

Jaus paused. He looked at Ikenga, his arms tightly folded across his chest, his expression guarded. After a long beat, he gave a curt, stiff nod. The two of them drifted together, gliding through the silent air, leaving the world below, heading for the stars.

"You must know why I requested this conversation," Ikenga said, his voice low, cutting through the silence of the void.

Jaus didn't break his stride, his gaze fixed on the infinite horizon ahead. "My actions during the meeting," he stated, his tone devoid of warmth. "They have you worried."

"I've been thinking about it," Ikenga said, his voice contemplative "Why you fought against all of this. You were worried about Tide. You knew that if he continued as he was, stagnant, unproven he would be among the first to fall when the new era comes."

Jaus didn't flinch. He turned to face Ikenga, his eyes calm, though deep within those irises, the telltale flicker of jagged lightning betrayed his internal unrest.

Ikenga offered a faint, melancholy smile and looked away, toward the vast, swirling curtain of the cosmos. "Have you spoken with him?"

"I did," Jaus replied.

"And?"

Jaus sighed, "Not everyone is like you, brother. You have a gift for knowing the right thing to say at the right time. You weave words as easily as you weave fate." He spoke without heat, there was no animosity in his tone, only the weary resignation of a parent watching a child walk toward a precipice.

Ikenga shook his head. If only Jaus knew. He didn't possess any innate divine wisdom, he was simply drawing upon the hard-won lessons and cold observations of his previous life, a perspective that felt increasingly alien to his divine siblings.

"I know my nephew, Jaus," Ikenga said, his voice dropping to a low, firm register. "He did not earn his position by being a man of faint heart. You are trying to shield him from the fire, but he is the one who must learn how to burn."

Jaus paused, as he looked at Ikenga.

"The era to come is his to define," Ikenga said, his voice steady. "As the world's first god of riches, he will shine once the people truly grasp the power and necessity of wealth. He is a conduit for a fundamental truth, Jaus, that in this new age, prosperity will be the engine of civilization."

Jaus remained silent, his gaze back on the distance.

"I doubt he will be the same after he sees what lies beyond these borders," Ikenga continued, glancing at his brother. "He is on the verge of relearning a lesson he seems to have buried, that profit and benefit is what drives the heart of every mortal. Look at Siren. Her choices were calculated, driven by a need for growth that simply could not occur while she remained in his shadow."

Ikenga softened his expression. "I have placed my trust in the boy, Jaus. I hope you can do the same. Trust the man you have raised."

Jaus offered a small, crooked smirk. "And there you go, proving my point yet again. You always know exactly how to turn the tide."

Ikenga let out a brief, genuine chuckle. "I only speak the truth as I see it."

Jaus's expression hardened, the levity vanishing as quickly as it had arrived. "What if he falls? What if his throne or another claim him?"

Ikenga merely shrugged, his calm demeanor unshaken. "He is already ahead of the curve. He has Keles to watch over him, his own aunt. He may even prove useful in the shaping of her budding world. You will not lose him, brother. You have us."

Ikenga stepped closer, his gaze

locking onto Jaus with an expression that demanded acknowledgment. "We are all tied to this path. I need to know you are with us, Jaus. I know how deeply you love this world, do not let that love blind you to what is necessary to save it."

Jaus looked at him, the silence between them heavy with the burden of gods and parents.

The scenery changed and both were back in Ikenga's realm. A sudden, violent flash of lightning tore through the air, and Jaus was gone, leaving behind nothing but the scent of ozone and a lingering crackle of electricity. Ikenga felt the fine hairs on his arms rise in the wake of the static, his expression uncharacteristically grave.

He had meant every word he said to his brother. He understood, perhaps better than anyone, that the world's vibrant vitality remained intact only because of Jaus. It was Jaus who sustained the cycle, whose mana-rich rains and constant, life-giving moisture acted as the silent bedrock of their reality. Because of such a brother, Ikenga felt a heavy, unspoken mandate, he had to ensure Jaus was supported, his hidden labors acknowledged even when the world remained oblivious to them.

Also the price of their decision was already manifesting. As soon as Jaus vanished, the change rippled outward. If the influence of their divinity on the world had been like a tap turned to its absolute limit, a constant, rushing torrent of life, the decision they had just reached felt like a hand tightening over the valve.

They began to pull back. It was not a sudden cessation, but a slow, deliberate tightening. In three years, the rushing flow would be reduced to nothing more than the occasional, mocking drip from a dry faucet.

Those three years were a final, silent grace. It was the only window of time they would grant the mortals. The few who possessed the vision to perceive the thinning of the veil would begin to stir, to prepare, and to ready themselves for the harsh, uncharted realities of the New Era. The countdown had begun.

The Oracle retreated into the profound silence of his library, a physical manifestation of his inward focus. To the outside world, the gates of his domain slammed shut; the seekers, the desperate mages, and the power-hungry lords who had long battered against his doors found themselves barred from his sanctuary.

Inside, the air grew thick with the static of cosmic realization. The Oracle worked with a feverish, monomaniacal intensity, transcribing the General Method Ikenga had gifted him and weaving it into a chain of his own accumulated lore. He was synthesizing, refining the raw, brutal truth of the "Universal Translation" into a structured, pedagogical system.

He had achieved something that would impress the mage who created the general method in a matter of months. He had created a General Transcript of the Elements.

Where before, a sixth-tier aspirant would spend decades, sometimes centuries agonizingly translating their personal Law into the syntax of the universe, the Oracle's method provided the lexicon. It was a bridge. He had mapped the fundamental frequencies of existence, essentially turning the chaotic, impenetrable "Original Law" of the universe into an accessible, alphabetical language.

He had turned the "World Domination" process into a study of syntax.

But as he stared at the final, pulsing glyphs of his magnum opus, a cold realization settled in his chest: he had hit a wall. To refine this further, to unlock the nuances of the sixth tier and beyond, he needed data. His own store of knowledge, vast as it was, had been completely exhausted to birth this singular, world-altering script.

The Oracle sat back, his eyes hollow with the exhaustion of a creator, yet his lips curled into a hungry greedy smile. He didn't need more time in isolation. He needed the world to be his laboratory.

Chapter 795:

Just as the world's collective hope began to flicker and fade resigning itself to the idea that Oracle and his legendary library were lost to them, a profound shift occurred. That deep, seeped hunger for knowledge, which had long clawed at the minds of the desperate with no release, suddenly found its docking station once again.

The connection was restored, and with it, a surge of renewed purpose.

For the Sixth Tier Seekers, the change was visceral. Along with the return of an outlet came a sharpening of the senses, a new book like scent lingered in the air, and a deep intuition that the object of their lifelong pursuit was finally within reach.

This psychic feedback loop reached Oracle long before he manifested physically. Within his domain, the library began to warp and distend, expanding far beyond its physical dimensions to accommodate the sudden influx of mental energy.

Oracle felt the shift in his very marrow. He was standing at the precipice of the Sixth Stage, his power swelling to meet the horizon of ascension and then, the growth abruptly stalled.

As the personification of the Arch-Curse of Knowledge, Oracle knew a fundamental ingredient was missing. He was currently an unbalanced equation, embodying only the primal, greedy side of his nature, the hoarder of secrets.

To ascend, he had to reconcile his two halves just as he did before he became an arch curse.

The Hoarder aspect that craves the accumulation and preservation of truth and the Scholar aspect that understands knowledge is a thing and gift meant to be shared.

Until he opened the gates and disseminated his hoarded treasures, he remained incomplete, a to be god-in-waiting, anchored by his own greed.

Oracle did not fret over this limitation. Instead, he stood amidst the shifting shelves of his infinite library and took a slow, deep breath, savoring the raw sensation of his own potential before the inevitable release.

With this newgrowth came the awakening of a lower form of Omnipresence. Oracle realized that he was no longer bound where he actively has to be present for each seeker. He could be everywhere at once, more importantly, his domain his vast, labyrinthine library could manifest itself across the entirety of the world simultaneously.

Acting on this revelation, Oracle cast his consciousness outward. He sensed the millions of threads of inquiry, the desperate prayers of scholars, the frantic questions of mages, and the quiet yearnings of the lost. He felt himself splintering, his presence dividing into countless manifestations, yet he remained singularly aware, a single mind anchoring a thousand different points of contact.

For the first time, the sheer scale of the world truly dawned on him. It was a staggering, beautiful complexity that he had previously only viewed from a distance.

Under the veil of a quiet night, Oracle finally stepped out of the shadows.

Before, he had only ever presented himself as an impersonal gate, a cold barrier between the seeker and the secret. But tonight, he chose to be different. Having studied the true nature of a Sixth-Tier entity, Oracle understood the precariousness of his position. Wisdom dictated that it was far better to cultivate a world of allies than a world of enemies.

As the mediating mages and seekers gathered in the darkness, waiting with bated breath, the air began to hum. The space before them shimmered, with the warm, shifting light of a physical presence.

For the first time, Oracle allowed them to see who and what they had been chasing.

Among the millions of Fifth-Tier seekers currently gathered, not all would see the next step but many stood on the precipice of true transcendence, figures who had begun to brush against the abstract, unraveling the fundamental concepts that wove the universe together.

Because of this, the dynamic had to shift. The casual, transactional nature of his past interactions, when they were still weak and he was merely a distant benefactor could no longer stand. The price they had paid for his knowledge, a cost once obscured by his mystery, now demanded absolute clarity. Both parties needed to understand exactly what was owed.

Six months after the Convocation of the Origin Gods, the world was formally introduced to the Arch-Curse known as "The All-Knowing Oracle."

The Fifth-Tier seekers, long accustomed to interacting only with the cold, unfeeling threshold of the Gate, were struck into a paralyzed silence. When Oracle finally manifested, he was huge. Like the other Arch-Curses, he loomed over the mortals, his form vast and intimidating, dwarfing the mortals who stood beneath his shadow.

The humans and mortal-born seekers were caught entirely off-guard. His sheer physical presence, radiating a crushing weight of information, threw them into a state of instinctive defensive alarm.

In stark contrast, the godlings remained motionless. They did not recoil. Instead, they held their positions with a display of restraint and profound respect.

Having lived longer and peered deeper into the hierarchy of their world, they understood exactly what stood before them and precisely what the legacy of such a being implied.

Oracle's spoke, his voice vibrating simultaneously in the ears and minds of millions across the globe. His presence, stretched thin across the world, spoke the same words.

"The time has come to bestow upon you that which you seek."

As his huge form turned to pace forward, the seekers, godlings alike stood in momentary hesitation. But the gravity of his purpose was irresistible. One by one, they began to follow, a pilgrimage forming behind the giant.

"My Creator," Oracle continued, "along with the Goddess, has ventured beyond the borders of our world. They have gone to seek that which lies ahead, this world's next necessary step."

He paused, his silhouette casting long, shadows over the followers. "I have been deemed worthy to be the bearer of the knowledge they found, and with that title comes an inescapable duty, to share this gift with all of you."

The procession was a study in contrasts. A tense, suffocating silence gripped many, their minds racing to comprehend the implications of a departing creator and a newfound shepherd. Others, unable to suppress their volatile desperation, broke the silence with a barrage of inquiries.

Oracle did not care. Mindful of the intricate web of the future, he paced with clear intent, patiently entertaining every question. He answered what he could, carefully filtering the truths that would serve as building blocks for the new age, and shielding those that they had no need to know.

The atmosphere changed as the massive, familiar gate materialized, Oracle's stopped as he faced them.

He stood before the threshold, his form vibrating with the dissonant hum of his true nature. When he spoke, his voice shed its mortal approximation and took on the texture of a serpent.

"I am The All-Knowing Oracle," he declared, the air around him distorting with the weight of his confession. "The Arch-Curse that embodies the superiority of knowledge, the pride that curdles into

envy. The arrogance that demands one withhold truth to maintain the hollow crown of 'being the only one who knows.'"

He held the pulsing transcript aloft, the "Universal Language" glowing with an inviting light.

"You seek the Sixth Tier? You seek "World Domination"? I give you the map, but know the toll of the road. This knowledge is not a gift, it is a seed of my own essence. To learn the Universal Transcript is to invite the Arrogance of the All-Knowing into your mind. You will find yourself withholding your discoveries, hoarding your brilliance, and looking upon the world as a collection of inferior scripts."

He leaned forward, his eyes burning with the "Envy" he embodied.

"And for those of you who possess this script but fail to reach the Sixth Tier, those who learn the language but lack the breath to speak it, the price is steeper. You will be haunted by the perfection you cannot attain. You will look upon those who succeed with a soul-deep envy that blackens your every thought. Your intellect will become your own cage, a brilliant, shining prison where you will spend your days dissecting the greatness of others while your own potential stagnates, you will become empty husks, unable to speak, unable to create, able only to watch."

The Oracle's smile was sharp, almost paternal.

"Reach the peak, and we shall be colleagues in a world rewritten. Fall short, and you shall be the living monuments to the envy I represent. The door is open. Who among you is arrogant enough to believe they are the exception?"

The atmosphere grew brittle. The seekers, who had marched with such arrogance only moments before, now stood frozen, their minds dissecting all they had just heard.

They dismissed the first half of the curse with a sneer of practiced indifference. Arrogance? Withholding knowledge? To these elites, that was not a curse, it was their livelihood. It was the very foundation of their hierarchy, the secret "monopoly of knowledge" that kept the common folk beneath their boots. They were already hoarders, already gatekeepers; to them, Oracle was simply formalizing the status quo they had spent centuries perfecting.

Chapter 796:

But the second half of the price, that was the blade against their throats. The prospect of becoming an "empty husk," a hollow vessel of gnawing, soul darkening envy, paralyzed them. To lose their status was unthinkable, but to lose their minds? To spend the rest of their now long life as a silent, impotent spectator to the ascension of others, trapped within the sterile walls of their own intellect while their potential rotted?

It was a fate far worse than death for beings who defined themselves entirely by their own genius.

Countless oracle watched as the figures they have lead freeze. A ripple of retreat moved through the ranks as the weaker-willed stepped backward, their eyes darting nervously between the glowing transcript and the looming, shadowed form of the Oracle. Others remained rooted to the spot, paralyzed by a mixture of ambition and primal fear, too terrified to move forward, yet too obsessed to turn away.

Then, the static of the world seemed to tear.

No one witnessed the physical act of her movement, for she existed in a sliver of space and time unique to her and oracle. While the rest of the seekers stood frozen through the lens of Oracle's omnipresent gaze, she simply ceased to be where she was and began to be walk where he was.

She stepped out, a figure of absolute composure. The Oracle's, paternal smile deepened, acknowledging the first soul who did not merely want the knowledge, but who was willing to bet her entire existence that she would be the one to master it.

The name Nwadimma echoed in Oracle's consciousness. As she reached the door, her hand hovering mere inches from the cold, shimmering surface, a tremor passed through her, an invincible surge of waves.

Oracle felt it, too. But his shiver was not of the flesh, it was his very essence.

Before his eyes, the physical world blurred, replaced by the translucent, haunting image of a young man beckoning from the threshold of an unfathomable destiny. The Oracle's domain groaned as the vision settled, and when he spoke again, his voice was no longer that of a mentor or a trickster. It was the voice of a herald delivering a eulogy for the age that hadn't yet begun.

"Go then," he whispered, the sound vibrating in the marrow of every seeker present, cold enough to freeze their ambition mind. His smile stretched, losing its paternal warmth and sharpening into something hollow. "Take the alphabet of the cosmos. Translate your wills into the laws of the world. Become the "higher being" you have always dreamed of being, untethered by the chains that keep the true divinities silent and still."

The chains binding his tome began to thrash, a frantic, metallic rhythm that underscored his words, as if the very knowledge within were desperate to flee the prophecy he was about to unleash.

"But know this," Oracle continued, his eyes drifting away from the seekers, fixing on a horizon only he could discern. "Your reign has a witness. Even now, in the silent dark of a divine womb, a child is forming. A union of Nature's growth and Death's finality. He is the Grave-Watcher, the one who crawls toward the light of dying stars just to hear their final breath."

He leaned forward, his massive, shadowy form leaning over the collective soul of the crowd.

"To you, the Sixth Tier is a throne of power. To Him, you are merely a beautiful story with an interesting end. He is the Time-Child who seeks the company of the falling. When his shadow falls across your "World Domination," it will not be as an enemy to be fought, but as a Reaper who has come to listen to the echo of your former glory."

A short, dry, mocking laugh escaped him, rattling the very air they breathed.

"You will come to believe yourselves to be the masters of reality. But the child is coming to remind you that every law you write into the world has an expiration date. Your end is his nursery rhyme. Now... come and take your power. If you dare."

With a final, shattering crack of displaced reality, the Oracle's massive presence evaporated. He left behind only the heavy, oppressive silence of the library's threshold, and a gathering of "higher beings to be" now haunted by the silhouette of a child who had not yet been born.

The already suffocating atmosphere from Oracle first words, shattered like glass. His final, haunting words, a promise of a Grave Watcher and the ticking clock of their own inevitable obsolescence ripped through the crowd.

For many, the weight of the prophecy was the final catalyst, the doubt that had been creeping into their minds solidified into cold, hard logic. They retreated, stepping backward into the safety of their familiar limitations, preferring a slow life of mediocrity to a fast death at the hands of destiny.

The crowd thinned rapidly, a mass exodus of those who preferred to remain masters of their own small, safe worlds rather than that of an uncertain future.

But others stayed.

For these seekers, the memory of Osita's power remained a searing brand upon their consciousness. They remembered the raw, visceral terror of being nothing more than a toy in the hands of a superior being, the absolute helplessness of watching their fate being dictated by another's whim. That fear had not diminished, it had curdled into an insatiable, ravenous drive.

They looked at the massive, inviting door, the threshold to the Universal Language and saw not a trap, but their only escape from the cycle of prey.

"Whatever comes in the future can be dealt with," one of them murmured, their voice a shaky but defiant prayer. "But today, we will no longer be the ones who crawl."

One by one, with a collective, grinding resolve, they stepped forward. The silence of the library was broken by the groan of ancient stone as they pushed the door wide.

They were now walking into a forge, they know the price, the Arrogance, the potential for an empty-husk existence, the shadow of the Grave-Watcher but they accepted the bargain.

They chose the gamble of the Sixth Tier over the certainty of their current impotence. As the first of them crossed the threshold, the light of the Universal Transcript flooded out, washing over their faces, faces set in expressions of grim, terrifying ambition.

The moment the Oracle's vision took hold, the world shifted. Ikenga vanished from his own realm, reappearing instantly beside Keles. She lay in a state of profound, unnatural stillness, a sleep so deep it bordered on a trance.

Ikenga reached out, his hand coming to rest gently against her stomach. He closed his eyes, reaching inward to sense the life within. Immediately, he noticed the change: the turbulent, psychic waves that had previously radiated from the child had fallen into a sudden, heavy silence.

Where there was once a rhythmic pulse of raw power, there was now only a calm void.

Despite the silence, Ikenga felt no alarm. As he felt the shifting energy of the womb, a quiet understanding settled over him. The child would no longer communicate through the echoes of the mind as he once had; the era of his pre-natal whispers had ended. From this moment on, he would exist as a normal babe should, wrapped in the quiet of the physical world.

His voice, once a psychic force, would remain unheard until he had grown enough to speak with his own lips.

Ikenga realized then that the violent fluctuations in time, the tremors he and his siblings had felt just before the Oracle's vision were the child's final act from within. It was a wordless, powerful declaration

of his existence. Before even taking his first breath, the child had announced his arrival to the world, marking the world before his birth.

Ikenga gazed down at the sleeping Keles, the Oracle's whispered title echoing in the silence of the room: "The Time Child."

"A pruner," Ikenga mused internally.

He began to dissect the child's essence with the cold precision he uses when viewing a pawn. If his theory held, this boy was not merely a son, but a powerful synthesis, the absolute extremity of his own Nature Divinity forced into a collision with the raw extremity of Keles's Death Divinity. Growth and decay, beginning and end, fused into a single point.

As he watched her, Ikenga's eyes turned cold, losing their fatherly warmth for a moment of detached calculation. A chilling thought took root, he had fundamentally misunderstood his own status as an Origin God. He realized now that being an "Origin" wasn't just a title of rank, it was a functional anchor to the laws of reality.

When he had eloped with Keles, it hadn't been a simple act of passion or rebellion. By bringing their two opposing forces together, they had inadvertently performed a cosmic surgery. A fundamental Law of their world had been rewritten in the dark, and that rewrite was now manifesting in physical form within Keles's womb.