

RE: DEITY - THE BREATH OF CREATION

1.10 The Birth of Cultivation

The day I had been anticipating, the day I had been dreading, had finally arrived.

One of the Fae was about to truly discover cultivation.

I hovered above the tribe, unable to get too close and cursing my lack of skill for it. I had desperately wanted to be there in person for this, some incarnation of myself sitting beside them as they first began to cultivate in the xianxia sense of the word. Even if distance was a non-factor for me and this was a strange personal whining moment, I had *wanted* it, that close personal proximity. But it was not to be, and so I had to make do with a bit of distance.

Shifting slightly from my position in the sky, my perception making it seem like I was sitting right beside the cultivator in question, I forced myself to just observe. The woman herself was neither old nor young, beautiful nor ugly. In many ways she was unremarkable, at least to the mortal eye. To her fellow tribe members she was a mediocre hunter, a decent mother, and a passable clothes-maker. I, however, saw a soul with astoundingly good karma, especially for a race so young. Only three generations old now and she had

racked up just enough good karma that spirits started to draw closer to her in the day to day, her presence and the energy her soul produced soothing to both positive and benign spirits.

Yet what truly set her apart was her affinity for the wind. Despite living a largely average life, travelling the plains with her tribe, raising a family, and so on, her spirit was as free as the wind. She lived the way she pleased, and to her, that did not mean roaming free as a strong gust, seeing all the world had to offer. It meant drifting along like a gentle spring breeze, comforting and kind, filled with pleasant scents and the promise of warmth. It meant taking a moment to enjoy the world as it was, and the company whom she spent that moment with. It was a moment meant to sit beneath a tree and listen to the rustling of grass in the wind, and the song of the earth.

And the wind spirits loved her for it.

Like little faeries the spirits danced about her as she sat on her bed of furs, her two little children slumbering peacefully beside her as she performed her nighttime ritual; a meditation exercise taught to her by her father. Cross-legged she sat, back straight and shoulders set, clearing her mind of all thoughts so her sleep was uninterrupted and peaceful. She breathed in, and the qi around her started to react.

“Gently,” I whispered, eyes fixated on her soul and dantian and resisting the urge to aid her. I wanted her to accomplish this herself, without my aid. It was important she did. I had given her people all the help and hints they needed to start this path, but the choice to do so *had* to be theirs, and theirs alone.

Her soul churned, positive energy flowing out of it in gentle waves of white. The wind spirits caught what escaped with little giggles, riding the waves and taking the excess, sending it to the earth below to be absorbed. The woman breathed in again, absorbing her own energy and filling her dantian with it. And carefully, almost accidentally, she breathed in the qi of the world. The wind spirits laughed, feeding her more, filling her cultivation passageways with wind-flavored qi until, with a small burst of power that filled her little hut with the smell of flowers, she “evolved,” breaking through to what I knew would eventually be called the next stage of cultivation.

The woman settled back down with a smile, opening her eyes and gazing at her children. She didn’t even realize what she had done. All Fae grew stronger over time, by the nature of their existence. As they lived the energy their soul created pooled in their bodies and strengthened their core, cultivating passively. Like this they could live for hundreds of years. But by meditating and absorbing some of the energy of the world around her, she would grow stronger faster, maybe even gaining some “magical powers” if she played her cards right.

Her children would follow in her footsteps, learning her nighttime ritual as she had learned from her father, eventually her tribe would take notice of the increased power of her family, and the rest, as they say, would be history.

A warm feeling filled my chest as I watched the woman lay down in her bed, curling up with her children as she fell into a light, peaceful slumber. Was this pride I was feeling? Yes, I think it was. Strange. For how much I dreaded the idea of cultivators in the beginning, I never would have thought I would feel pride for them now.

I wondered how long it would take for the rest of the Fae to figure out the secrets of cultivation, and immediately the answer came to me. An indulgent smile spread across my face as I watched the information being spread before my very eyes. The wind was far too talkative.

Wind spirits giggled and darted about, spreading the news far and wide. They told it to the mountains and rivers, and to the very earth itself. Soon enough all spirits on the planet knew and they shouted it to the heavens, so the sun their planet circled knew. Light spirits carried the information even further and wider, chatty gossips they were, so the information reached Pangaea and the Life-Giving Tree. Soon enough even the Heaven Realm would know of the first cultivator, from the lowliest of spirits to the greatest of gods.

It had spread far too fast though, and I frowned, pulling my perception away from the woman. Only then did I smell the fresh scent of spring rain carried on a gentle breeze, my hair ruffling in a wind that should not exist in space. I glanced to my right and was greeted by a shock of green hair and a mischievously smiling face.

“Aeriel, you little troublemaker. *You* spread the information far and wide, didn’t you?” I admonished good-naturedly, the goddess of wind giggling at me. “And what do you think of all this?” She lifted one finger to her lips in a shushing motion, winking as she drifted away, hair swirling as she shot down into the darkness of space, heading for the Karmic Realm. I shook my head at her. For a goddess of wind, she was awfully quiet, preferring to listen rather than speak.

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“Still,” I mused, standing and glancing at the Life-Giving Tree, where Reika was currently holed up. She had grown very interested in making new life, ever since she first figured it out. Her garden was bigger than mine now. “Maybe I should pay Reika a visit, tell her the good news.” Even before I had finished talking to myself, I had decided that was exactly what I was going to do. Alexander probably already knew, and Elvira and Keilan would know by the time I finished telling Reika. My children probably wouldn’t think much of it, but, well...I, for one, thought it to be monumental.

Could I really be blamed for being nervous? And excited? Nervously excited? Me above, no, *Mr. Boxes* above, please don't let there be too many xianxia clichés. Please, please, please.

Space warped around me as I took a single step, crossing light-years of distance in but a moment. The top of the Life-Giving Tree lay just below me, its wide, oak-like leaves, each as large as a continent and growing fast, rustling in an unseen wind. Eventually, maybe, there would be beasts and people that called the foliage of the Tree home. But not yet. None had quite reached that height, unable to bear the change in energy that came with climbing the tree. After all, the leaves alone produced enough life energy to fuel the growth of the entire physical realm, as it currently stood. Great elemental storms rolled along the canopy, dancing along the leaves and branches, devastating in their intensity yet doing little more than rustle the leaves of the Tree.

Reika's home sat at the very peak, taking up the entirety of the highest branch. A large wooden longhouse sat in the very center, with a garden that stretched for miles and miles extending from it. Trees and flowers of all kinds bloomed in intricate patterns, hedges and ferns creating mazes, all of which were protected from the elemental storms by Reika's presence. Plant spirits happily played in her garden, hundreds of thousands of them as they darted about, tending to their plants and enjoying the serenity.

Her garden was, honestly, smaller than I remembered. She must have downsized.

Humming to myself I descended, skipping through most of the garden to silently slip into the main longhouse. The interior was much as I remembered, the walls themselves growing up out of the branch the palace rested on, the floor smooth polished wood. A fire crackled in a log fireplace at the far end of the grand foyer, numerous paintings and full-bodied mounts of animals hanging from the walls. Reika wasn't a hunter, she didn't actively go out to kill beasts, but she did enjoy displaying examples of her favorites. Somewhere off to the left the god of earth appeared, yawning and scratching the back of his head.

He froze when he saw me, brown eyes going wide, dirt falling from his dark hair. I winked and made a shushing motion, silently padding through the winding hallways. Reika's presence was deeper in the longhouse, and I waved to the few spirits and things I passed by as I made my way there.

I found her in her workshop, as I had expected, muttering to herself as she played with a group of elements on one of the long wooden workbenches. It was reminiscent of my own workshop, albeit the walls were all unpainted wood, instead of the multi-colored stone and wood I preferred. Thousands of jars containing all different kinds of energies and combinations of energies lined the walls on shelves, various tools, beakers and such, scattered about the place. One piece in particular caught my eye, however – one of the very

first flowers she ever made herself grew in a pot in the very middle of the room, its petals gleaming in the dim light of the chandelier. I smiled at it as I silently drifted inside, sneaking up on my daughter.

"Reika!" I cried happily.

"Yeep!" she yelped, losing control over whatever energy she'd been playing with and whirling, pale-faced and frantic. "Mother! You're here! What are you doing here?!"

"Guess what! The mortals finally discovered cultivation...what's that I smell?" I cut myself off, suddenly more interested in Reika's desperate attempts to cover up what she was working on. The energy she'd lost control of drifted through the air, and I reached out to snag a strand of it. "Is this an illusion? Have you been playing with illusions, Reika?" I asked curiously, putting the strand of energy in my mouth. As with all the different types of energy in the universe, illusion magic was just another flavor of pure energy, or true qi, as I called it. Illusions always had a different flavor each time I tried it, though.

This strand tasted like white chocolate and basil, with a hint of spice. Weird, but not bad.

“No – Yes! Yes I have! That’s all! Nothing else!” she lied horribly, putting herself between me and what she was hiding behind her back. Her body puffed up a bit, growing to better hide her little project, and I grinned, unable to resist the urge to tease her a bit.

“Now, what do we have here?” I mused, stepping around her childish attempts at hiding things to peer at what was behind her. Eight clusters of elements and energies sat on the workbench. I could see space-time, that was a weird one; a combination of the five Chinese elements, water, fire, earth, metal, and wood; illusion; a swirling mixture of psionic and karmic energy; as well as –

“NO!” Reika shrieked, all but tackling me away. I cackled a bit as she shoved me back, a cackle that died in my throat when I saw the fury on her face. Her face was red, cheeks puffed up and brows furrowed in frustration as she set her hands on her hips, rising up to her full height to try and look intimidating. She only reached my shoulders, and despite her best effort her anger really only made her look cute.

Didn’t change the fact that she was actually mad at me. I backed down, smiling nervously and holding up my hands in surrender.

“Sorry, sorry. Just wanted to share some exciting news.” I muttered, refusing to meet her eyes. “But, I mean, c’mon. That ‘yeep’ was pretty cute.” I joked.

“Out.” She said, pointing to the door. I blinked at her, rubbed the back of my neck sheepishly, and promptly marched out of the workshop. She slammed the door behind me, pausing just long enough to hang a wooden sign with the words “No Peeping! (That means you, Mother)” carved into it in rainbow letters. I stared at the door for a moment, scratching my cheek.

“Well, that’ll tell me. Sheesh. Didn’t mean to do that,” I said, shaking my head. Oh well. I’m sure I’ll find out what that was about sooner than later. Must’ve been her secret project I’d accidentally gotten a peek of, the one she’d been trying so hard to keep hidden.

And now I felt bad. With a small shake of my head at my own thoughtlessness I warped away, heading to the Karmic Realm to help Keilan with the memory archives.

Now that cultivation had been discovered, I figured memories of past lives would be more important. Maybe that should be a reward for immortality? To recall your past lives? Or perhaps they should be forced to march to the Karmic Realm themselves if they want to truly recall. Food for thought, at the very least.