

## RE: DEITY - THE BREATH OF CREATION

1.13 "You DARE?!"

I lost control. The power I had been amassing exploded outward as I shot to my feet, divine incarnations vanishing as my waking mind returned, the meditation chamber and much of my palace turning to dust. Randus stood stock-still in what used to be the kitchen, a stricken expression on his face, and I spared him only a glance to ensure I had not harmed him before focusing the entirety of my attention on that which incurred my wrath. A hole had appeared in the shell of primordial chaos surrounding my Realms. Something had come through.

That thing now attacked the Life-Giving Tree.

My voice thundered.

"You DARE?!"

Space warped around me, thunder boomed, and an inhuman scream shook the heavens.

Reika hurtled from the boughs of the Tree, dress smoking, hair in disarray, and fury wrought across her face. Golden blood spilled from a wound in her side, staining her dress and raining down upon the leaves of her Tree.

I saw red. A dragon roared.

I appeared at her side in a single step, wrapping one arm around her shoulders. She flinched and lashed out, elements of all kinds lashing against my skin before she realized who I was.

I spared her a moment, to ensure her wellbeing.

Her eyes were puffy and red, filled with anger, confusion, hurt, and fear. Her injury was superficial for a being of her power – it was probably more surprising than painful – and a small wave of relief passed through me. But that moment passed, and rage returned.

“Randus, take care of her,” I said with a calm I did not feel. Gently I pushed my daughter away, her cries falling on deaf ears as I looked down upon the intruder.

To my shame, my children had beaten me to the fight. Alexander snarled and snapped as he flew around it, the foreign being cackling madly as it danced about. Its four arms were a blur of motion, each clawed hand grasping a bone-white, fishhook-like weapon. Its snout was split in a mad grin, long fangs dripping venom and saliva, its snake-like lower body thrashing to and fro. Keilan and Elvira darted about, harassing the being with blows or lashes of power that struck uselessly against its golden skin, leaving only scorch-marks.

Blows it returned tenfold.

“You may be strong, young gods!” It laughed in a foreign tongue, striking Alexander so hard one of his scales cracked, sending the dragon hurtling away. “More powerful than I! But you fight like a god, and power without skill is a flailing hammer!” It blurred in motion again, slapping Keilan away with its tail before diving on Elvira, who stood frozen in shock, eyes gleaming and weapons poised to deliver a finishing blow.

But I was there.

Space warped as I struck, distance meaningless as I bitchslapped the being with a single thunderous blow. It flew backward like a kite with its strings cut, managing to catch itself just before it crashed back into the canopy of the Life-

Giving Tree, its aura flaring outward and giving me a good look of what it was doing. Bits of Void flecked its being, corrupting its soul, while its own, foreign power tried to sink its very self into my Realms, to subvert control and make it its own. It was trying to take over the Realms.

The words of my children fell upon deaf ears as my rage heightened, every ounce of my being dedicated to two purposes; destroying the interloper, and keeping my power under control. This would be my first big fight as a god. It was already taking a vast effort of will to keep my aura in check – who knows how much damage an unrestrained me might cause.

“You dare invade my home,” I boomed, stepping forth once more, appearing before it and driving an elbow into the being’s gut. Its breath left it with a whoosh, blood splattering my face. “Assault my children,” I snarled, avoiding its wild swings and backhanding it away from the Tree, toward the primordial chaos and the Void. “And then try to tell me this house is *yours?!*”

I teleported directly in front of the being, a snarl on my face and fist ready to strike. It was ready for me, however, its four fish-hook like weapons flashing down to drive themselves into my shoulders and sides, the being’s face twisted into a savage snarl. The strikes did little to me, and I sneered. The kinetic energy of the blows flowed into my body, thrumming through my muscles in a pleasant way, not unlike a massage – energy I could control, and turn back against the being.

I laid a finger on its chest, shocked as it was that its attacks did *nothing*, and returned the energy of its strikes to it tenfold. Its sternum cracked as it was, once again, sent hurtling away from me, crashing through the primordial chaos and into the churning abyss. I followed sedately, each footstep traversing an immeasurable distance as I kept the being in sight. It righted itself just outside of my Realms, one foot in the endless empty Void, one foot in the destructive chaos of the primordial abyss; creation and destruction in an endless, perfect harmony.

“You think you can do all this, without consequence? You don’t know how high the heavens truly are.” I thundered, veins throbbing in my forehead, a great and terrible power surging just beneath my skin. The Void shuddered at my very presence, lightning crackling along my arms, reality warping from my rage.

“You...do not fight like a god,” the being coughed, spitting blood, mad eyes locking onto my own. “You must be the Origin. I heard about you. But I won’t go back. I won’t go back! No matter what any of you decide!” it laughed madly, charging forward, and my frown deepened. I stepped inside the being’s swing, slamming my palm into its chest. Power surged within me unbidden, reacting to my fury, flowing out and sinking into the foreign god. Cracks of white and black radiated out from where my palm touched it, racing across its body as it was sent hurtling backward into the Void, its body disintegrating before my eyes.

I clenched my hands and tamped down my shock. I...hadn't meant to do that.

The being didn't seem to care about its impending death, its arms and chest turning to dust as white and black light raced beneath its skin, laughing manically the entire time. I took a few quick breaths to calm myself, resolving to stay and watch its final moments before returning to my children, perhaps even grab the being's soul – my eyes flew wide open, and I hurled myself backwards as far and fast as I could, dread piercing my heart.

The foreign being vanished in an instant – down to its very soul, which I refused on principle to destroy – returned to nothingness alongside a truly massive swath of the primordial chaos, as if something had taken a great big bite out of it. Visually, there was nothing there. But I could sense it. A non-entity, something that should not, could not exist; the Void had awoken, and it could hurt even me. Panic surged through me as I burst through the chaos and into my Realms, imagining what this thing, this Paradox would do to my children.

Panic was quickly replaced with grim determination. I roared out my defiance, another portion of primordial chaos vanishing into nothingness as the void beast pushed into the Realms.

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“FUCK OFF!” I bellowed, flinging myself forward despite all my instincts screaming at me to do the opposite. The true depths of my power surged as I let go of my control, putting everything I had into pushing this thing out of my Realms. It clashed against the void-beast with a tremendous roar, a golden Taiji symbol swirling into being and blocking its advance, shielding the Realms. But it wasn’t enough to stop it, not completely. Once more I charged forth, slamming my shoulder into the Taiji symbol, pushing the paradox back with sheer force of will.

Tendrils of primordial chaos reacted to my will, lashing out and encircling the paradox, protected from annihilation by my power, dragging the beast back into the Void.

“I said,” I ground out, feeling the shield start to break, my power being drained away by the paradox. Space began to shatter around me, fractures forming in the fabric of reality as the full brunt of my might, combined with the destructive nature of the Paradox, began to unravel creation. “FUCK OFF!”

The Taiji symbol detonated, a massive explosion rocking the paradox and driving it backwards – I pushed through it, punching with all my might to get it that last distance out of my Realms and back to the Void. The blow was

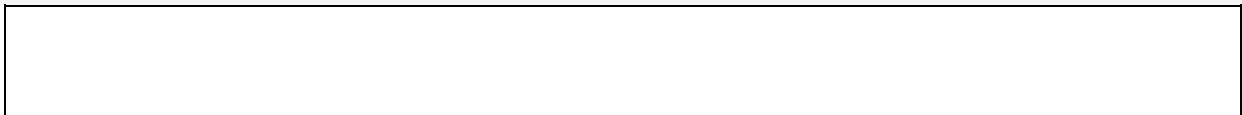
mighty, cracks forming in reality from the sheer force, even as it knocked the paradox back into the Void. It was not without sacrifice. A pained scream tore its way out of my mouth as the paradox lashed out, severing my right arm at the shoulder. In an instant the limb was completely obliterated, golden blood pouring from the stump.

The beast was not finished yet. I could feel it. Returned to the void though it was, it now pushed back to the Realms again.

I grit my teeth through the pain and waved one hand, droplets of my blood circling together and igniting in an explosion of divine force, a part of my power being sacrificed in the process. The paradoxical void beast shattered, bits of intent-laden void, like broken glass, drifting toward me. I did not react, only watching, waiting for the next shoe to drop, expending enough effort only to stop the bleeding, pain blurring my vision.

Something had drawn that beast here. Same with the foreign...rogue god, or whatever the hell the four-armed thing was.

*DING!*





Defense!

You have successfully repelled a juvenile void-beast. Repairing damage caused by this beast will fall to me. The Primordial Chaos will be restored. Go tend to your children; another beast will not be forming within the barrier I erected.

“I expect an explanation. What the hells was that thing?” I said, gritting my teeth through the pain, reading and re-reading the message. The Four Realms still trembled beneath the weight of my rage and the damage caused, even as the primordial chaos swirled and condensed once more, that which had been destroyed replaced just as quickly. “...what, no restoration for the foreign god intruding upon my realms? I thought you said we would be protected from other universes and the Void.”

Even as I said it, though, I knew the answer to my question. It had been lurking in the back of my mind for far too long; my anger had finally lifted part of the veil.

*Ding!*

An explanation will be given. But later. Tend to your Realms.

Restoration will not be provided for damage directly or indirectly caused by the actions of a universe's denizens.

I spun on my heel, floating through the primordial chaos, my rage cooling to a low simmer. When I emerged on the other side I paused, taking a moment to just observe. The Life-Giving Tree was still smoking, branches splintered and shattered, a large scar on its trunk, and a number of its planet-sized leaves falling to the land below. The mortal lands were in absolute chaos, spirit beasts gathering and fleeing the destruction in droves, driven into a frenzy by dark spirits and the chaos. Those who were light, those who were helpful, fought back. But they too were frantic, unable to deal with the chaos. With a grunt I collected the drops of my blood that had scattered about this area of space, noting, briefly, that a few drops had vanished.

I tossed what blood I had collected out at the Realms, willing them to merge with the fabric of reality to mend it, the divine power within stabilizing things as best I could in such a short moment. But it wasn't enough. With grit teeth I tapped into that deep well I had within myself, drawing out the power I had been saving up to create the Lunar Star and sending it out into the Realms as well, soothing the cracks in reality and hastening its healing. Then I turned my attention elsewhere.

"You test my patience," I ground out, fixating my gaze on an indeterminate point in space. I could feel the Shadow's gaze, and for the first time nothing stood in the way of my sight or thoughts. Whatever filter prevented me from recognizing it was gone. I still couldn't find it, wherever it hid, but I knew it was there. The Boxes' words rang in my ears as I stepped forward. "You will not like my response."

Silence was my answer. Silence marred by the sounds of shouting from my children.

Space warped about me, my patience worn thin and in pain as I was, appearing silently above my children as they fought and argued with one another. Almost all the gods of the Realms had gathered in the space just outside my destroyed palace, where Randus had taken Reika. Said deity of dreams stood off to the side, and was the only one to notice my arrival. He took one look at me, paled, and said nothing.

“Why didn’t you tell us something was coming?! Isn’t that your duty, Sol?! What were you doing!” Reika shouted, red-faced and angry, tears streaming down her face. Sol, the bronze skinned god of the Sun, stood stoically before her, face a mask.

“I am sorry,” he said genuinely, if a bit monotone. “I...didn’t know what it was.”

“Has anyone seen Mistress Statera...?” another god muttered.

“What was that thing?” the gods of water and fire said together, holding hands and hovering near Alexander.

“It is my fault too, sister,” Alexander rumbled, shame-faced as he licked his wounds. One of his horns was still cracked, his scales broken in many places. “I was weak.”

“At least you did something!” Reika shouted. “Sol –“

“SILENCE!” I roared, shocking all into utter quiet as I descended to them. Elvira and Keilan’s gaze fixated on my missing arm and they began to surge forward, but a single glare rooted them in place. Reika was pale-faced, eyes puffy and red as she clutched a blackened thing to her chest, eyes flickering between my missing arm, my face, and everywhere else, tears still streaming, a sob half-held in her chest. “Sol is not to blame for this! What are you doing, bickering like children, why are you not –“ I cut myself off as I really looked at what Reika held, my anger snuffing out like a candle in the wind.

“Oh, dear.” I said sadly, softly, voice cracking with emotion. “Let me see.”

With a sob Reika unfurled her arms to reveal the baby she held. She was small and not breathing, twisted by whatever power that damnable foreign spirit had unleashed. But I could still see what she was meant to be. Reika had been creating a child, her child, born of her soul and Realm, crafted using the purest of elements. It had been a fox-child. A kitsune, with eight tails. A

true Queen of all the elements, as compared to Reika's mortal children, masters of only a few. That had been her secret project...her very own, true child.

I laid my hand upon the baby's head, and breathed life back into it with the last dregs of my power. It wasn't quite enough, and part of my very essence flowed out to finish the job, touching the soul Reika had nurtured and coaxing it back to wakefulness before flooding the child's body. Its skin returned to a healthy tan, hair remaining black while its furry tails turned a brilliant orange, the large fox ears on its head twitching as it wailed out with strong lungs. Nine swishing fox tails curled around Reika's arm, condensed versions of the elements – the ninth bursting into being with a flash of gold, made of the purest divine energy. My own energy flagged, eyelids drooping heavily as I stumbled back, only to be caught by Keilan and Elvira.

"Mother!" Reika cried between sobs, clutching her crying child to her chest.

"Go, tend to your realms. I'll be along shortly. And don't be too hard on Reika, Sol, the injury of a child is hard on a parent." I muttered, then repeated the command again, forcefully, pushing past the foggiess. The assembled gods did as they were bid, scattering like the winds at my command. All save for the first Four and Randus, who stayed faithfully at my side. "Your mortal children need tending. Help them."

"We need to help you." Elvira said firmly. "And you need to rest."

"I'm fine. We have work to do," I snapped back.

"We have work to do." Keilan countered, gently pulling me away from the others, back to the remains of my palace and toward one of the surviving, spare bedrooms. "You have done more than enough. Please, rest." I opened my mouth to protest, argue that there was no time, but one look at his face – filled with hurt and anger and concern – had me reconsidering.

Only for a moment, though.

"Fine." I allowed. His expression twisted in concern as I settled back into the bed he laid me in, my other children gathered around, the cries of my grandchild echoing in my ears.

Grandchild. What a strange word.

That was my last thought before unconsciousness took me.