

RE: DEITY - THE BREATH OF CREATION

1.15 A Distinct Feeling...

Elvira quietly closed the door to Father's room behind her, watching Keilan and Randus walk off down the hall. Fury dwelled within her heart, burning through her veins like a poison, demanding she move, do *something*. She wanted to rage, to throw things, to be *violent*, despite the soft front she'd put up for her sister. She cursed that foreign being that had come to the Four Realms, she cursed the monstrosity that had taken Father's arm, but most of all she cursed her own weakness.

Three times she had struck the foreign god. Three times she had done nothing to it save annoy it; while it had taken only one blow to bruise her and her ego. It took a monumental effort of will to not smash her fist into the wall. Had this been what Father had been talking about, when He said the Four Realms had been at peace for too long?

Had she really been so unable to see her own weakness?

Was this what the future held?

She grit her teeth and teleported away, appearing above the highest domed peak of her own palace. Its golden statues and spires gleamed in the light of the Sun, untouched by the battle. Of all the Realms, hers had been the least effected by the fighting, even over the Karmic, as it would be dealing with the karmic aftershocks of the battle. Even now she could see all across the Heaven Realm, peaceful enough as it was, with just a hint of conflict to keep things moving. Her own People, the Avians, were beginning to flourish here, alongside the Peoples of Keilan and Reika. Spirit beasts roamed the wilds, and somewhere in the distance rain poured over the plains. It was idyllic. Peaceful.

But she could still smell the smoke of the Life-Giving Tree, hear Reika's pained cries, and see Father as He took apart that foreign deity with ease – only to lose an arm to what came next. Her fists tightened, fingernails digging into the palms of her hands painfully. She needed to become stronger; she had power, now she needed *strength*. Something to push her faster, further, stronger, to temper her body and spirit.

Her gaze once again drifted to the mortals of her realm, and the chaos that now plagued the Physical. Maybe, just maybe, the mortals had the answer to her question. After all, they fought all the time against not only spirit beasts, but also each other. Before that, however, she had to follow through with her promise to her sister and Father, and help stabilize the Realms. Starting with the group of deities below her, in her palace.

She descended through a hole in the domed roof to see them scattered about the grand foyer. Most of the deities the Four Realms had created were currently here; Sol, the sun god, was standing in the center, trying and failing to get those gathered to calm down. Elemental gods argued with each other incessantly, the younger gods – such as the god of storms, who flailed about uselessly – panicking as their elders did. Their auras fluctuated wildly, power being thrown about as their emotions spiked, their debates ringing through the halls of the palace and setting the walls to shaking. Powerful spirits darted about wildly, the amount of power in the room being casually unleashed clearly uncomfortable even for them.

They were all in a panic, unable to function due to fear and confusion. No one knew what to do, even her, but she knew better than to let it show. *Another lesson I learned from Father.*

“Enough!” Elvira shouted, hiding her own doubts and concerns behind the force in her tone and the flaring of her full might. Her palace rattled at the force, all at once the gods falling silent, Sol looking up at her in surprise. Even his brother, Gilles, the god of shadows, pulled himself from the shade of a pillar to stare at her. “What are you doing?! You are standing here squabbling like children while the Physical Realm is in tatters!”

Shame. That is what flooded all of their collective faces at her accusation. It was a bit of an exaggeration, tatters wasn’t quite the right word, but it got her point across.

“Sol! I need you in the skies. See how the damage to the primordial chaos is, and direct a bit of your light to the Tree. Help it mend.” She barked. The sun god hesitated for just a moment, bowed, and shot out of her palace in a flash of golden light. “As for the rest of you, get to work! You know what you should be doing, your domains demand it! Go!” she snapped, barking out more direct orders for those who were still panicking and unsure of what to do.

Soon enough all had left her palace, save for one. Gilles, the deity of shadows, who shifted a little awkwardly when her gaze fell upon him.

“Then I will be off, my Lady,” the gaunt man rasped, bowing slightly.

“No, wait.” Elvira said. He paused even as darkness rose up to swirl around him. “I have a more specific job for you, my secretive friend. And I’ll need your help locating these things.”

“Locating what?” Gilles asked, the shadows falling away as he turned to fully face her. Elvira flared her wings and gestured skyward, toward where Father had pushed the...void-beast, for lack of a better name, out of the Four Realms.

“Blood. I want to make sure Father didn’t miss any of His blood. There are also void fragments floating about up there we need to collect and contain.” Elvira explained.

“Void fragments?” he asked again. Elvira raised an eyebrow at him, tamping down her irritation as his two-word questions. He did not deserve her anger, not when it was meant to be directed at herself.

“Yes. When Father fought that beast He detonated a large part of His power, injuring it. I noticed it earlier, but fragments of its being, slivers of pure *nothingness*, are now floating about in the skies above the Four Realms like shards of glass. We need to collect them before someone hurts themselves or does something stupid with it.” She explained. Gilles nodded.

“Right. That would be bad.” He agreed.

“Yes. Bad is the term I would use.” Elvira said dryly, stretching her wings. “Now follow me. Because of your connection to all things hidden in shadows, I thought you might be useful in locating ‘nothing,’ and I want to get this over with.” And with that she shot skyward, Gilles trailing behind her as she raced to the skies above.

“What about this one? I do not understand why the punishment is not heavier, even for a spirit beast.” Randus asked, presenting a small file to Keilan. He sighed and rubbed his forehead, lamenting Randus’ inquisitive nature. There were only so many times he could answer a different variant of the same question. But, because he actually had a bit of patience, unlike Elvira, he nonetheless took the file and quickly perused it.

“We already went over this, Randus.” He said, shaking his head and setting the karmic file down. “I’m not going to punish a cat for being a cat. Was it a shitty thing to do? Yes. Was it unnecessary? Yes. That’s why a bit of negative karma is being attached to it. But killing that bird is still part of the nature of being a cat, and I will not unduly punish it for acting on its own nature.” Of course, Keilan had simplified the situation for the sake of the argument, but the basics were still the same.

The laws of karma were pretty simple, in all truth. It was the beings and the situations they created that were complex.

“Besides, it's not like we really punish or reward souls at all. Such a concept that those who manipulate karma deliver punishment or reward is a misunderstanding from mortals on what karma is. I could talk for hours about all the finer details, but that’s beside the point.” Keilan muttered. He wasn’t a punisher or jailer. He hesitated to call himself a judge, even. It was all about directing energy, and getting souls into a place where they can accomplish their own goals and grow in their next lives. Karma was a reaction, it was an

energy buildup from choices and actions. His job was to help clean the pollution from this energy, purify it further, and direct it.

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Sometimes that meant spending time in the spirit realm, working or learning or earning karma in different ways rather than directly reincarnating. Or even working here, in the karmic palace; these realms weren't just places to simply pass through, they had more of a purpose than that.

"I see. I think I am beginning to understand. There is neither punishment nor reward for acting upon one's own nature; the hunter will hunt, the prey will be eaten. Karma enacts judgement when one's actions are outside of that circle of 'nature.'" Randus summarized, twirling his mustache. Keilan mentally groaned, cracking his neck as he looked back down at his desk, strewn with documents and designs as it was. Ever since the attack he'd been so busy...the aftershocks were worse than he'd imagined they'd be, and it was becoming apparent he needed to better manage the flow of souls into the karmic valley.

Not to mention he was still working on how to properly utilize the sea of memories...

“That is a basic, surface level interpretation that serves well enough to show a basic grasp on the concept. The truth is much closer to the idea of cause and effect. Every action has a reaction, and karma is what is built up from those actions. It flavors their souls, and the energy those souls produce.” He explained, tossing the file to the side. It flew neatly into one of the file cabinets lining the wall behind him, next to the massive bookshelves flanking either side of his dark wood desk. “Now I really must get back to work. We need to start separating the lines of souls out, especially with so much karma being accrued now.”

His only saving grace, at the moment, was that the act of gaining karma – be it positive, negative, or benign – was largely autonomous. What he, the karmic kings, and other karmic spirits did was help direct the energy of said karma, to aid souls. With a heavy sigh he spun his chair around, looking past Randus to stare out the large, wall-sized window behind his desk. Before him laid the sea of memories, its dark waters glittering in the light of the sun. Tall, rocky mountains ringed the karmic valley, keeping the ocean at bay, and from his position here he could see a few spirits drifting about over the surface. It looked simple. Keilan knew better.

Beneath the surface, on the ocean floor and in the water, which was not truly water, echoes of memories formed and faded. Ruins of buildings, echoes of creation, dens of long-passed spirit beasts all swirled into existence only to fade away in an instant. The memories of the entire Four Realms lay within the ocean, not just of the living beings, but of all creation. It made Keilan want

to go explore it, traverse the sea and see it for all it was. But there was too much work to do.

Unfortunately, it seemed he was destined to be interrupted today. Right as he turned back to his potential plans to sort the lines of souls and spirits, and potentially adding a few guiding ritual circles and such to expedite the process of directing karmic energy, the doors to his office were flung open with a bang.

“What now?” He groaned, looking up at the karmic king that had burst in. He was one of the oldest, and took on the appearance of a four-armed Fae, with jet-black skin, silver eyes, and a golden ring floating behind his head like some sort of sun. Most other karmic kings matched his appearance, with a few minor differences.

“Sir,” the king said, bowing. “The High Lady has been spotted in the grand entryway. She interrupted the cycle of souls for a few moments, before heading deeper into the palace.”

By the time the karmic king was finished speaking Keilan had already leapt from his desk, Randus falling in step behind him as he marched out of his workspace.

“Thank you for informing me. I will take care of Her. You may return to your duties.” He said, nodding to the king as he swept past.

He marched through the long, dark marble halls of the karmic palace with purpose, dark robes fluttering behind him as he followed the traces of Mother’s energy. He found Her hard at work in one of the lower levels. At first he felt relief that it was just an incarnation, not Her true body.

Then his heart clenched – even as a projection of Her will, the incarnation looked exhausted. Dark bags hung under Her eyes, and She was still missing an arm. Randus made a weak noise in the back of his throat, but stayed right next to Keilan instead of rushing to Her side. She stood in the center of a karmic array; a ritual circle designed to aid lesser spirits in guiding karmic energy, something he could do without such a crutch, and was sifting through karmic strings and memories like a Woman possessed. Karmic kings and spirits alike darted about in a panic, unsure how to handle Her presence and still a little riled up from all the chaos.

He’d need to sort them out and calm things down a bit, but for now he needed to deal with Her.

He couldn’t be sorting out this mess, his own feelings, keeping Randus entertained, and keeping Her contained all at the same time. Powerful though

he may be – *are you, though?* A traitorous part of his mind whispered – there was only so much he could deal with at a time without driving himself mad.

"Mother," he said, exasperated. She looked up at him as he approached, blinking unseeing eyes before turning away entirely. "Mother, you need to rest. Destroy this incarnation, please." He pleaded. She muttered something to Herself, holding up a string of karma like it was a toy, inspecting it with an intensity that gave him pause.

"I apologize," She said in a shockingly monotone voice, still holding up the karmic string. "This incarnation has limited functionality, and is therefore unable to answer or comply with most requests. Please limit your requests to questions within my functions."

This pulled Keilan up short, having never, ever heard Mother talk like that before. The incarnation had...limited functionality? What in Her name did that mean?

"That is new," Randus muttered under his breath. *An understatement.* Keilan added mentally.

"What is your function?" he asked.

“Searching for influences of the Shadow,” Mother stated, dropping the karmic string and drifting along the floor, toward the stairwell leading down into the archived memories. Keilan and Randus followed, waving off the bowing, inquiring spirits that paused their duties to pay their respects. An unnecessary gesture, but appreciated.

“If you are looking for Gilles, Ma’am, I am sure he is hanging around Elvira somewhere,” Randus said. “They were collecting Void fragments, last I heard.” Gilles had a strange draw toward Elvira, so that wasn’t surprising to Keilan. The mention of Void fragments, however, was. But Mother just shook Her head, drifting down the long staircase to the archives.

“Not Gilles. He is of darkness and shadow. Not the Shadow.” She replied in that same monotone, purple robes fluttering as She stared at the rows and rows of bookcases. Glowing blue books, each a record of a different soul, filled the shelves. Mother drifted along, touching books seemingly at random, only opening a few here and there.

“What is the Shadow?” Keilan asked, remaining just behind Her.

“Unknown. Potential threat. Believed to have summoned the foreign deity. Seeking answers.” Mother’s incarnation stated, holding open a particularly

thick book and nodding to Herself, snapping it shut and placing it back on the shelf. Keilan's eyes grew wide at the revelation all the same. Something had summoned that deity?! "Enough evidence has been gathered. Returning to main body for analysis. Farewell, Keilan." And She vanished with a pop, disappearing with little more than a shower of golden, divine power. Keilan frowned and grabbed the same book She had been perusing, flipping through the pages and scanning the memories within.

This soul had lived a fairly average series of lives, neither profound nor disastrous. He frowned and scanned the memories deeper, straining his senses to the limit and – there. It was but a moment from the soul's peripheral vision, but one that made a lasting impression on it. Something, moving in the corner of its eyes was a darkness that wasn't just darkness. A glimpse of something dark and dangerous, and had driven the soul into a life of hiding and fear. It was –

The book slipped through Keilan's fingers and he staggered back, breathing hard with sweat beading his brow. His vision blurred slightly and he pressed his thumb and forefinger against his forehead, stabilizing himself and his energy. *Fear*. That was what he'd felt. Raw fear. Randus raised an eyebrow at him, but he shook his head. Controlling his breathing and smoothing his robes, he carefully picked the book up, put it back on the shelf, and swiftly exited the archives, folding his hands behind his back. He had to resist the urge to look over his shoulder at every step, a chill running down his spine. He couldn't shake the feeling of being watched, not anymore.

This...this required looking into. Maybe Mother meant to show him. Maybe She didn't. Either way, he should have noticed something like this.

There was something lurking in the Four Realms, and he got the distinct feeling it meant to do them harm.