

CHAPTER 2

Settling in

August 11, 2026

The 4th of Ascending Water, Mercuryday, Realm Year 762

Orphiology, it turned out, was the ‘Study of Deepness.’ In this case not referring to physical depths, but spiritual ones. At the most shallow layer, it talked about how Least Gods interacted with the objects they were attached to. At deeper levels, how Sanctums and similar things existed, and then how gods were attached to concepts.

Honestly, the best analogy I had for gods was that they were strings. Little gods were small strings that were then bundled into sets, that were then bundled into cords, and so on, all leading to heaven. Reality didn’t really depend on them. The little god of my teacup wasn’t necessary for me to drink from it. What it did was make sure that the teacup remained firmly tied to fate. Considering that fate getting entangled was what appeared to lead to the cosmic error that dropped me into Creation, I was firmly on team ‘have fate work right.’

Vevin said my analogy was fine for a basic understanding, but would become less accurate as we investigated deeper layers. That there was a good reason fate was the force usually explained with string metaphors. Also that we wouldn’t be really talking about fate, because that was a whole confusing topic itself and not actually involved in Orphiology. And that while she wasn’t always on the side of those who tried to turn fate into prophecy, she too was on team fate. As was anyone sane.

“So you were appointed to your seat as an apology?” Vevin asked, as she organized her notes.

“Yep. Had nothing to do with gods or... anything supernatural before all of this,” I told her. She was really easy to talk to. Honestly the first normal person I’d met since coming here. Hell, I could almost pretend she was human—enough people dyed their hair. Though an Amazonian punk-chic cosplayer would have totally been out of my league back on Earth. “I was just a normal person.”

“That’s some apology. I’ll admit, you’re not what I was expecting when I heard there was a new god in the Court of Seasons. I’m not entirely sure what I was expecting when I saw the curriculum they had set up. But not you. Who exactly

screwed up enough to feel they had to arrange something like... well... *this*? Don't get me wrong, it's admirable to take responsibility for your wrongdoings, but it's not what I expect of heaven these days."

Well, I'm pretty sure that was super heretical; if true from everything I saw. I wasn't going to tell the censors though, so I just shrugged and went over to my bedside, found the folded letter by my nightstand, and handed it to her as I sat back down.

It was short. Two paragraphs, a closing, and two signed names. I would call it perfunctory. Living in this world for almost three weeks hadn't actually given me enough context to *really* understand the importance of those names. That was something that would only come from years of living. But I vaguely understood.

"... why do you have an apology letter from *Saturn* and *Mercury*?"

"It was something they felt needed to be apologized for? Why does anyone have an apology letter?"

She blinked several times, shook her head. "Okay, I know I was told to keep it to myself, but really, what happened?"

I opened my hands in surrender. "I'm not insulted you asked, but I really can't say. As in, I can not say. I can't speak the words. While the existence of the apology is no secret, the details are. They have been sealed to secrecy by the Maiden of Secrets. No one still bound by fate can speak them, nor hear them."

She sat there for a minute, just thinking. There was a stillness to it that I found momentarily suffocating, something of deep still waters, and the threats that dwelled beneath their too-still surface. Then, like a switch it was gone, and she sighed. She handed the letter back, though she kept looking at it like it was something dangerous.

"Well, I think you'll need more than basic Orphiology if you're involved with such things, but everyone starts somewhere. Let's go over Racha's exclusion principle. It's fundamental to understanding when a subject will be governed by a single god, or multiple. The important thing to understand..."

The next several hours wandered from topic to topic. Whenever I started struggling, she picked up on it. Often the analogies she used left me confused, but she was always able to switch over to a new one, figuring out a better way of explaining it to me. Lake god... it made me wonder what secrets her lake had

hidden in its depths. While gods *could* grow beyond their task, I had already learned that few did so. If she was so aligned with knowledge and the occult, there probably was a reason.

Still, I did not ask. She probably wouldn't tell me, after all.

"You obviously are already lettered. It would make it easier for me to teach you if I knew what scripts you already have."

I hummed, grabbed a sheet of paper half covered with my poor attempts at writing Old Realm, and quickly jotted down, "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog."

She stared at it, quirked an eyebrow, then gave an 'ah.'

"What does it say?"

It took me a moment to organize how I wanted to say it. While I seemed to just be able to automatically *speak* Old Realm, it didn't organize the same way English did, and color terms were *complicated*, because colors were associated with magic and metaphor. There were about a dozen ways of saying 'brown fox,' and most of them would add context that I didn't want, but I settled on how I would translate it. It sounded subtly awkward, but it worked.

"Huh." She thought for a moment. Looked over the letters again. "Ah, this is a pangram."

I was the one who blinked several times in surprise. "Ah... yes. All the standard letters at least. There are a few others that get occasionally used in loan words or for historical purposes, but this phrase teaches all the standard letters."

"That puts you at something of a disadvantage. There's an elegance to phonemes, but we all inherited the Old Realm's logographic approach from those who came before, and Heaven's never going to go through the effort needed to change it. Can't, really, it's been woven into the foundations of reality. I don't know your lettering, which just makes me more curious, but it also means I don't know any easy cheats here to get you started. So we'll just have to do this the hard way."

I was disappointed to see her go, and even more disappointed to be paraded out before the Court once again for everyone to gawk at me over dinner. It made me feel like a zoo exhibit.

The 7th of Ascending Water, Saturday, Realm Year 762

I had days to settle into a routine before the Cold Roars finally finished their hunt. It was late into the evening when they returned to once again hold court. With all three reigning seats—the current month and its neighbors—in attendance, the Golden Stars had their position on the dais displaced, and so withdrew. Not alone, I noted. Two of them were trailed by new suitors.

I sort of had the feeling that they had been trying to pull me into their orbit, and... Well, I had seen one of their blowups. I wasn't going to sign myself up for that. I was glad that their month wasn't next to Calibration.

I was instructed to stay. I was supposed to be learning, after all. The Dreamer, looking particularly masculine today, had me sit next to him so that he could continue explaining everything going on.

Honestly, at the heart of it, I don't think his plan was much different than the Golden Stars'. I just found 'Teacher' a more tolerable bribe than 'romance.' Considering some of the gifts the Golden Stars gave to their paramours, maybe that said something judgemental about me? I guess I didn't really care in this instance.

The Cold Roars were two giant bears, though that phrase was somewhat misleading. I'm unsure if the sloth bear existed in my old world, but they were a smaller species of bear in the South in Creation. The Cold Roars were albino, oversized sloth bears. They were 'only' slightly larger than the average polar bears, with delicate and clever claws. So giant for sloth bears, though only frighteningly large on the scale of big bears.

The younger brother, Cold Wind, was using those same clever claws to sew the coats of slain Omen Dogs into a tapestry using only his natural tools and skill. For my part, I was happy to discover that Omen Dogs were not dogs. They were sort of dog-like, but bigged up quite a bit, and much less friendly looking. Saber-Toothed too, which somehow seemed wrong on a not-a-cat.

The other gods who had gone out hunting were circling Sleet Wind, the elder of the two bears. He was regaling the room with tales of their hunts. I was just wondering how many Wind names there were; they seemed weirdly popular. The Dreamer seemed bored, eating what I now knew was hair. Dying people's hair.

Gods were weird.

I was half dozing, wishing I didn't have to be at these things, when something

Sleet Wind said caught my attention. He was laughing loudly, boisterously, his voice carrying across the room.

“That’s right, that’s right! You’re completely right. We really should, we really should. In three days, we’ll take Nathan with us on our hunt. He needs to learn these things! He needs to learn these things.”

... *The fuck.**

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