

Edge of the Multiverse

Old Man Fate dipped an oar into the pitch-black depths, and rowed. “Hup!” He gasped, pulled back, and went for another. “Hup!”

It made for a peculiar sight. A Godking, who had enough power in one finger to flatten a mountain, struggling atop a ratty old wood rowboat? But nothing here was ordinary—not the little old rowboat, which was in truth a divine treasure carved of the Tree of Eternity, perfectly buoyant, endlessly durable. Nor the waters—which seemed at once impossibly deep and utterly empty, as though there was nothing there at all. It depended how you looked at it.

From the outside Fate seemed a weary old man sailing a sea of stars. High above him the night sky was a great bowl flooded with tiny lights, like the gleaming heads of ten thousand pins pricking an infinite matte cloth. Below him the black waters ran out to all sides, melting into an inscrutable horizon.

He panted, wiping the sweat from his brow. “Phew!”

There was nothing at the edge of the Multiverse. This was all made aeons ago by a deranged Godking with a penchant for breeding cruel and unusual pets, pets he stored in this strange, far-off lair. This was an in-between, a space between planes, a pocket of the void. Fate had Voidwalked five days and five nights’ time merely to arrive at this strange midnight dimension. Even then its appearance was a matter of chance. The journey here had been hellish, but he had no choice.

The forces of good, the forces fighting for the very freedom of the Multiverse itself, were being overwhelmed! They were losing perhaps the most important war in all of history, and he’d all but exhausted his options.

And so he was here to seek an audience with a man who—by his choice of home here, at the very edge of the Multiverse itself—was hardly keen on visitors. It was doubtful whether he’d receive Fate at all! But as he gritted his teeth, throwing his old bones into another heavy row, he knew he had to try. He simply *had to*.

He'd been rowing for ages, it felt like. Where was the residence? He frowned, scratching at his bushy beard. Surely it was around here somewhere. He pulled out a frayed yellow star-map, squinting at it.

Then the waters started bubbling about him.

He started. *Eep!* The map slipped from his fingers.

He barely managed to heave his little boat out the way before a huge, slimy head burst out of the waters, a horribly ugly thing, eyeless, like one bloated inky tentacle—but a tentacle with a gaping maw of a mouth. It opened it now, baring rows upon rows of thick squat humanlike teeth.
Power Level—God!

Fate didn't have a clue what it was. He was very old. He'd seen all manner of awful creatures. And yet the grotesque things that plied the depths of this far-out sea astounded even *him*.

He caught himself. *Grotesque?* He hesitated. Perhaps that was a smidge unfair. He hardly knew this fellow. It might look a little unsightly to *his* eyes, perhaps, *his* aesthetic standards. But it was entirely possible, he supposed, that it lived a rich, vibrant inner life, that it had simply come by in friendly greeting—

It growled and lunged for his head. He yelped.

[Heavenly Dao: Fate]!

It was not so much a Technique as an invocation, a flexing of a psychic muscle.

The world slowed to a crawl, unraveled before Fate's eyes. The blacks and whites faded away until all was green threads knotted together, the whole of the Multiverse bound up in Fate. There were fewer threads here than there were nearly anywhere else. But there was nothing that could exist which could escape Fate, just as nothing could exist outside of Time and Space.

Fate's eyes now saw the inner Fates of the world—which was a little like seeing past the muscles into the bones and organs and muscles. It was a big ball of Fate-strings wound tightly together. He saw what made this creature tick. He saw its pasts, its creation in a cauldron of hot oil and gas—engineered by a long-gone Godking. And he saw its future. Left unchecked it would lurk here in the depths for millennia, preying on poor lost souls.

Fate reached in with his mind, gently grasped onto a thread, and *tugged*. The threads unwound, melted away one by one into the darkness. The ball of Fate unspooled.

The creature did not die. That was too violent. It simply ceased to exist. And not merely in the present—in the past and future alike it flickered out of being. It was as though the creature had never been at all. One moment there was this great hulking beast. And in that same moment, and in all moments future and past, there was not.

Fate sighed, bowed his head the nothing that now was—it was only proper—and kept on rowing.

And rowing.

And rowing.

And just as his old bones were starting to feel the ache, just as he was on the verge of giving up this whole silly ordeal, he glimpsed a bulge of deep blue against the black of the distance. *Could it be?*

He rowed closer and the bulge gained definition. A small island, blue sands, blue soil, studded with blue hills. On it was a simple, small village of thatched huts, smoke drifting from tiny chimneys. And behind that village was a tall bluff.

On the bluff, silhouetted against the blackness, was a greater blackness. A cloaked figure. Even from here Houyi could sense the breathtaking aura of power radiating off him. *It's him!*

He heaved a sigh of relief and kept up his paddling, now with renewed vigor.

Soon he drew near a neat set of docks. He was greeted by a plain-looking man in plain-looking robes with his hair bound up in a bun.

He only had two distinguishing features. The first was that he was red head-to-toe, skin, hair, eyes—red everything, everywhere.

The second was that he was about twelve feet tall.

His arms were crossed, and he was frowning mightily—a frowned that seemed only to deepen as Fate drew near the docks.

“Who the hell are you, interloper? What the hell do you want?!” the creature boomed. His voice was gravelly, deep, and totally hoarse, as though he’d just been in a drawn-out shouting match.

“Answer me!”

Fate was rather taken aback. “My name is Fate, good sire! I am better known by my moniker—Old Man Fate. I humbly seek an audience with the great Houyi!” he said. “Might I know your good name?”

The creature grew even redder, if that was possible. “*I* am Houyi, bastard!”

Fate blinked. “... You are?”

“What the hells is that supposed to mean?!”

“Ah—my most sincere apologies!” cried Fate, spreading his hands. “I had harbored some preconception in my mind, perhaps—some false idea—it is an honor, the greatest of honors to meet you!”

He tried to do a full kowtow but he was still in his boat, so he ended up squirming about awkwardly.

“It is *I* who ought to apologize to you,” said a softer voice.

Another creature, very much like the first, popped out behind it. Fate squinted. It was *exactly* like the first—down to the hairs of the bun! Same features, same face, same proportions. The only differences were that this one was light blue. And it was 8 feet tall.

It smiled at him. “You must be tired,” it said. “Please, come ashore. Rest. And then we can speak properly.”

“Fuck off, Kindness,” snapped the big red one. “You always were too soft on visitors.”

“It is our will, Rage,” said the blue one simply. “Kindly restrain yourself.”

“Pardon, good sires,” said Fate, glancing between them. “I remain a smidge confused. Are you perhaps Houyi’s twin? I was under the impression he had but one brother.”

The blue one laughed softly. “Oh, no. I am Houyi. *He* is Houyi. We are all Houyi.”

The red one grunted. “You think that clarifies things at all? Fool! To be precise, *I* am Houyi’s Rage. *He* is Houyi’s Kindness. Running around somewhere is Fear, Joy, Loneliness, Vulnerability, and so forth. There’s lots of us about.”

“So you are...his clones?”

“We are his emotions,” said Kindness simply. “Houyi—*I*—am the Eternal Sentinel. I am the final arbiter of Justice in all of the Multiverse. The Fates of countless lives rest in my hands. I cannot afford to make decisions clouded by sentiment. I must be a being of pure reason; I must embody the perfect ideal of Justice as closely as I possibly can. And so I have excised all of my emotions, writing them out in living diaries. These diaries are ever-growing artifacts which act as a release valve for emotional thought.”

Kindness looked down at his body. “And as the diaries grow... so do *we*. Their living avatars. Their spirits. To be precise: we are the inconvenient parts of Houyi’s soul which he writes out and stores elsewhere. In this way Houyi is a fragmentary being. Together we make the whole creature once known as Houyi.”

“Fascinating...” muttered Fate, eyes wide. Both of them radiated auras equivalent to a Godking, though Rage felt stronger.

“I suspect you wish to speak with my core body. The executioner. The one who holds the Heavenly Bow, as it were,” said Kindness. He beckoned, smiling. “Come ashore. I sense we have much to discuss.”