

Chifu is looking through the eyes of her familiars. Quite a number of them, at the moment, spread across the multiverse. At the moment, we will be focusing on just one.

It is in a world tucked away in a back corner of a universe in the back corners of reality. This world does not seem particularly exciting. It's got a bit of magic, but overall it's all cars and suburbs and skyscrapers. Not the kind of world where she'd be likely to find any worthy competitors. Then again, she's found diamonds in the rough befo-

She feels a familiar gaze, eyeless, ancient, cold, and vast, staring through the familiar straight at her. There are things that even Gods are afraid of. One of the worst of these is looking right at her.

Chifu gets her familiar the fuck out of that world as fast as divinely possible. While there's still a world to get the fuck out of.

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Oblivia is drawing on her tablet in her apartment. It's a cozy place, full of fluffiness, anime posters, and oversized stuffed animals that she probably spent unreasonable amounts of money on. It's a sunny day outside, the light streaming in through the window and landing on her skin. Oblivia will never get used to how good the warmth of the sunlight feels, like the best blanket ever invented.

Blankets are also very nice.

Warm is very nice.

What is not very nice is the way that this left eye is simply refusing to cooperate. Every time she tries to draw it, it turns out wrong.

Why does symmetry have to be so difficult? Why can't things just line up?

It feels like it's mocking her.

OmegaButtercup

this eye feels like it's mocking me

why cant i just d r a w g o o d ?

An online friend (she doesn't have any irl ones) responds to her Discord message

Smilez

SHUT

u are an excellent artist

better than me

OmegaButtercup

:flushed:

no, your so much better

HarvestMOON

EVERYONE SHUT UP

YOU'RE ALL PREFECT AND NOONE CAN TELL ME OTHERWISE

*perfect

JUSt think about how far you've all come since we first met

Your like grown ass adults now

As she's still working on that forsaken eye, she thinks about that statement. The hands that are holding this tablet pen were once the hands of a child. Now they are the hands of a young lady. Soon they will be the hands of a very old woman. Then they will be not hands at all, they will be bones and they will be dust.

She doubts she will be able to stay within such a decrepit cage. It is such a very nice cage, it has skin that can feel sunlight and eyes that can see flowers and a mouth that can taste cupcakes and hands that can hold a drawing tablet.

If it dies, there will be no more drawing tablets, no more cupcakes and no more flowers. Not here. Not anymore.

Even that lovely, warm sun she'll probably snuff out. Like putting out a match.

And that is also not very nice.

It is really not very nice at all.

Smilez

hey omega???

u doin alright

OmegaButtercup

yeah, just thinking.

Oblivia finally just decides to copy and flip the other eye. It looks pretty alright.

She looks out the window to take in the sunlight. She sees a beautiful day, the flowers in her window garden bright as anything, the leaves of the trees planted by the side of the road a vibrant, emerald green.

And a small white fox. A fox in the middle of the city in broad daylight would be strange enough, but that is not the strangest thing about this small white blur of a mammal.

No, the strangest thing about this fox is that she recognizes it.

Not the upbeat little carnivoran that the eyes of the cage see. The power behind it, beneath it. The strange geometries of the thing wearing that darling little creature like a mask.

She doesn't see it with eyes at all, but with a sight far older than eyes, older even than the light they need to function.

A gaze of pure darkness.

This on its own would be quite the event. Anything that the true Her, the endless dark behind her eyes, is even capable of taking notice of is something very impressive indeed. God levels of impressive.

But this is more than just impressive, this is the only thing that ever really defeated her in all her old, sad, inexorable majesty.

Not counting her current caging, though whether that can be considered a defeat is highly debatable.

OmegaButtercup

omfg

Smilez

what

OmegaButtercup

Just saw...
just saw a friend from elementary
looks like their a doctor now
crazy how that works
:lol:

If anyone could fix this cage in place so that it would never have to release her, that would be it.
When she looks back, the fox is gone, but it has left a trail, and its home is somewhere Oblivia has been
before, albeit under vastly different circumstances.

Smilez

yeah small world huh
i saw my old teacher at the gym yesterday

HarvestMOON

WAit, you go to the gym?

Smilez

yea laugh it up
these twig arms can
BENCH

OmegaButtercup

smiles is a jock :pensive:

Oblivia finishes this illustration, it's not her best, but not her worst either. That thought sticks in her mind.
This body would not have to die. This world would not have to die. She could feel this lovely warm sun on
her skin 'til it ate this world itself.

HarvestMOON

thought u were one of us
really ur not a socially awkward misfit at all
your a sex-having chad
smh my head

Smilez

come on harvest,
no matter hw much i bench
ill never be able to bench my social anxiety about talking to pretty girls

HarvestMOON

LMFAO
:rofl: :rofl: :rofl:
DON'T WORRY SMILEZ
together we can bench press all of your social anxiety
also congrats omegs, that looks great!

OmegaButtercup

aaaaa

:flushed:
not my best
not my worst either
tried some new stuff, don't no how it turned out

HarvestMOON

IT
LOOKS
GREAT
when will u learn to take a compliment smh

Would the God-Eater offer aid to such an old enemy, even aid that could save a thousand worlds?
There are many who would, but there are also many who wouldn't. Oblivia cannot say she knows which category the God-Eater belongs to.
But it's worth a shot, at the very least it's worth a shot.

OmegaButtercup

thanks, harvest
you're always there for us

HarvestMOON

damn straight

Oblivia packs up her bags with all the things she needs for a trip beyond the bounds of this reality.
Headphones? check
Drawing tablet and pen? check
Plenty of changes of clothes? check
A lot of cliff bars and muffins? check
Positive attitude?
...well, maybe not that one, but besides that, she's ready to go.
Now to say goodbye to her friends. She doesn't think there's WiFi at the Crossroads of Reality.
This is probably the hardest part.

OmegaButtercup

hey everyone
i think I'm gonna be gone for a while

HarvestMOON

how long is a while?

OmegaButtercup

couple days
at least
health stuff

Smilez

well
stay safe
well miss u

HarvestMOON

^^

if you die I will hunt u down in the afterlife and kill you again
and then bring you back to life
and then hug you

OmegaButtercup

thx
don't plan on dying
:lol:

HarvestMOON

SRSLY
STAY SAFE
I Mean IT

=====

There are some things that even Gods are afraid of.
One of the worst of these is right at the door of Chifu's realm.

She was in The Fox's Den when she felt it again, the cold, empty, oppressive presence that she'd hoped never to feel again. Not so close to the kingdom she had built.

Before she felt it she had been getting extremely drunk and laughing her ass off at something another patron had said, that, in retrospect, wasn't really that funny.
But she couldn't let herself be in anything less than peak condition with something like that knocking at her door.
She flipped like a light switch from jovial drunkenness to sober seriousness.

Saki had never seen her do this before.
Even when she could barely walk straight.
For Madame Chief to willingly get less drunk, it must be something truly dire.

"It's here." Chifu said, more grave than Saki had ever seen her before.

"What's here?" Saki asked "What do you mean?"

But Chifu was already gone.

"Guess she isn't any less cryptic when she's bein' serious." the bartender said, and got back to polishing glasses. If this was the kind of thing that could worry someone like Chifu, there most probably wasn't anything Saki could do about it.

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Captain Alytra of the Crossguard was sitting at her post, drinking a black tea, when her boss made an unusually sudden appearance. Madame Chief has arrived via teleportation before, but never with such desperation in her eyes.

Desperation, fear, and grim determination are all emotions that, in Captain Alytra's experience, have not previously been shown to be within her bosses range. Honestly it was quite annoying. Those are usually the emotions a military woman like Alytra deals in.

But Chifu had reason not to feel them. The lady was practically omnipotent.

It was still a discombobulating attitude for the Commander in Chief of any military force to have.

It was more discombobulating by far to see all of those emotions on a face usually absent of them.

"Have any of your people seen anything..." She pauses for a moment, seemingly looking for the right words and not finding them "off, recently?"

"Off, how?" Alytra asked

"Ominous darkness on the horizon, inexplicable feelings of emptiness and dread, that kind of thing."

"Not really. I mean Calvin has feelings of emptiness and dread all of the time, but I'm not sure they're inexplicable. He's taking meds for them."

"Are you absolutely sure?" There is an intensity in Chifu's eyes, and not the predatory intensity Alytra has seen from her before. She doesn't look like a fox that has seen a mouse. She looks like a fox that has seen a wolf.

"...well...nothing like that, but if you're asking about anything that's the slightest bit out of the ordinary then I guess we've got a girl at the gate. The big one."

"What?"

"I don't know, just a kid. Like 20 or something. She doesn't seem like much of anything special, but I thought I'd, y'know, mention it."

"Nothing else? No other visitors?"

"No. Quiet day."

This seemed to concern Chifu even more.

"I need to see her." Chifu said, with the same fearful, determined intensity.

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Oblivia is waiting at the gate of the Crossroads. It took a bit of time to get here. She's not used to maneuvering this body like this.

She had to be a lot more careful, take an indirect route. She's glad she brought snacks.

Now she's here.

There are a lot of gates to the Crossroads, though at the same time there is only one. There are a couple of physical ones, leading into the city itself, but those are not the true gates. The true gate is everywhere and nowhere at once. It exists concurrently in any number of dimensions, in the space between spaces. Whether travelers come to the crossroads by land or by sea, from East or from West, from North or from South, they all pass through this gate. Most don't even know they've gone through it. They are traveling, and then they see the Crossroads in the distance.

The One Gate is much easier to notice for someone like Oblivia. Easier especially when it is locked.

Oblivia is, in terms of what her human senses can perceive, is sitting in the middle of a wide road with grass rolling out in both directions forever. It's a lovely day, just warm enough with a slight breeze and nothing but a few renegade wisps of clouds sharing the sky with the sun. Somehow Oblivia feels like it's always a lovely day, here.

That is what the cage sees, but the thing inside knows what this place is beneath its picturesque surface. As she admires the beautiful scenery with her eyes and with her skin, the other part of her admires the beautifully composed fractals of hairline cracks in time that radiate out from the city. There's an artistry to the work of the Time-Breaker Who Laughs at Fate that she didn't appreciate last time she was here. To be fair, she didn't really have a concept of art then.

Now, with the eyes of an artist, she sees in the Crossroads the intricate work of another creative, albeit on a larger scale than she has ever worked. This is a scale on which she is only capable of destroying.

Maybe someday she will be able to create on this scale, to turn her immense destructive potential to a more constructive purpose. Maybe someday she will be able to make tapestries like this, writ upon the fabric of the universe itself.

Maybe someday...

For now she has her drawing tablet, a free art program and a pen without ink. That's enough for now. Anyway, she should probably get comfortable working with digital ink before she graduates to the fabric of spacetime.

Speaking getting comfortable with her medium, and speaking of sitting back and admiring the God-Eater's great work, the city behind the gate looks as beautiful from an architectural standpoint as it does from a spatiotemporal one and it is framed rather fetchingly from Oblivia's current position. Oblivia has been meaning to work on her backgrounds. She begins with composition and looks up periodically to reorient herself. She gets comfortable in her rhythm: down at the tablet, up at the city, down at the tablet, up at the city, down at the tablet, up at the...

It takes Oblivia a couple of seconds to register that her view of the city is not as clear as it was before and that this is due to an obstacle in her vision and that this obstruction is a person. More specifically it is a lady. An elegant and imposing lady in a very pretty dress with fox's ears and hair the same color as the upbeat little carnivoran she saw from her window not so long ago. As if that wasn't clear enough she's also got a weird sigil dyed into her bangs like a third eye and the flowing transparent scarf that flows around her like a living thing, defying gravity to form something like a golden halo framing her head and, of course, nine big fluffy white tails held behind her like the backrest of a throne.

She looks like the very picture of power.

She also looks angry. Not yelling angry, but the quietly composed kind of anger that simmers behind the surface like a shark in placid waters or a fox waiting in the tall still grass to pounce.

"Whatever you're trying to do, it's not going to work." Her voice is quiet and composed, but full of the anger of a vixen defending her litter, the anger of a goddess defending her people, the anger of an artist defending her creation. "Whatever trick it is you're trying to pull, it's not going to work. I may not be as old or as strong as you, but if there's one thing I know it's tricks.

Deception runs in my blood, I live and breathe puzzles and double-talk. I talked a God into giving me his heart to eat, and I've only gotten cleverer since then.

Whatever your strengths are, no matter how ancient and terrible and unknowable and absolute you are, subtlety was never your strong suit. As far as I know, this is the first use you've made of it in all your countless eons of life.

So, whatever this is, whatever gamble it is you're trying to pull, know that you are playing my game now. And know that it is a game that I

Never.

Fucking.

Lose."

As she enunciates these last three words, she leans forward through the gate towards Oblivia. But Oblivia can see that she's careful not to actually let any part of her cross outside of it.

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"Wow, that was a really good speech!"

Of all the possible responses she could have gotten from Oblivion, the Omega Entity, the Hungry Dark, the End of All Things, Chifu has to admit that was not one she had been expecting. It's even clapping, and not an ominous, mocking slow clap either. It's sincere, genuine and awkward.

"If I was actually trying to do whatever you think I'm trying to do, I'm sure I would have n- I'm sure I would have run away by now." She sounds just as anxious and unsure as Chifu feels, like she's aware of how

strange and flimsy this is, but she's sincere in her attempt to connect to Chifu and can't think of anything better to say or do.

This is wrong.

This is deeply and utterly wrong.

Uncertainty was more alien to the thing Chifu fought all those millennia ago than subtlety was. And it was not at all subtle.

"You're the God Eater, right?" the thing says hesitantly, like it knows it's a stupid question, but just wants to be sure.

"Please, call me Chifu." Chifu says, lost, confused, and afraid, but letting only strength and confidence come anywhere near the surface.

"That's a pretty name. I'm calling myself Oblivia now. That's my new name. I mean, I guess I didn't have a name at all before, but I don't feel like this is a name for what I used to be, I feel like it's a name for something new that I am now but that I didn't used to be." It's running on and on, apparently out of panic

"Anyway, it's a combination of Olivia and-"

"I think that's enough for now. Maybe you can tell me more later." Chifu says, the very picture of patience and composure.

"Uhhh... I know this is... weird.. especially considering, you know.." Oblivia says "But I wanted to ask, I wanted to ask you to help me with something? I-I understand if you don't want to, but.."

"What could you possibly want from me?" Chifu asks "Some final coup de gras on the universe itself? Some kind of scheme to finally consume all things and snuff out the light at the center of creation? Perhaps just some little, insignificant spark of a world that refuses to go out?"

Oblivia looks ashamed and embarrassed, she hides her face from Chifu for a moment. Finally she says quietly "Oh nononono, no, it's, it's nothing like that. Nothing at all like that. It's just,, it's just..."

I was bound to this body like 6 years ago and..."

"You want me to release you." Chifu says

"No! Oblivia says "Actually the opposite of that..."

"Meaning?"

"I actually really like being a person. It's nice. But the binding... it was kind of a sloppy job. It takes all of my concentration to keep it from breaking randomly at any moment. And this body is mortal.. and when it dies,,,

the binding breaks."

Oblivia looks at Chifu meaningfully behind her sunglasses.

"I was, I was hoping you could help with that?"

"Hmmm, sounds like you really want that."

"Yeah? I mean I feel like you should probably also really want it."

"Would you say you want it with all your heart?"

"Sure?"

"Would you say it's your wish?"

"I mean, I guess? Are you in the business of granting wishes? Is that a thing that you do?"

"You could say that... for a certain price."

"What kind of price? I don't have any money on me, I didn't bring any with me. I mean I know it's probably not that but I don't really think I have a soul either, so..."

Chifu laughs a gentle, motherly laugh. It sounds like wind chimes.

"Oh I don't want your money. I don't want your soul either. All I ask is that you participate in a little contest of my own design.

A tournament, gladiatorial in nature. Whoever, in the end, stands victorious above all opposition, may ask one request, or wish, of me."

Oblivia's face lights up in recognition. Another surprise on a day full of them.

"Oh, so like an OCT?"

“What in the five faces of god is an OCT?” Chifu says, momentarily breaking her facade through sheer confusion.

Oblivia is full of that nervous, excited energy again “It stands for an Original Character Tournament. It’s an online competition in which-“

“Never mind, I don’t actually care.” Chifu says.

“But, wouldn’t it be a really bad idea for me to fight in something like this? I almost destroyed this place once before and I really don’t want to finish the job. It’s way too pretty.

And also all those people are, y’know, people,,, with families and stuff,, I dunno.

It just,, it could go really bad. It could go really bad for everyone involved.”

Oblivia has a point. What the hell was Chifu thinking, almost bringing the Opposite of Creation into the very heart of her kingdom?

But she needs some way to figure out whether she’s being fully sincere or not. Even something like Chifu can’t find anything in the endless expanse of the Nameless Void’s mind.

A test of character under pressure. But controlled pressure.

“You will fight and you will win, or you will get nothing. And if you do anything to harm my kingdom beyond the grounds of that colosseum, I will bind you in a prison from which not even you can escape.”

“That’s... probably for the best...” Oblivia says, quietly and meekly. Not the defiant response Chifu would expect from such a powerful entity.

“You know, you’re really taking the fun out of this.” Chifu says, half joking. Seeing the End of All so fearful and pathetic before her is stirring a whole lot less triumph and a whole lot more pity than she had expected.

“Oh, sorry..” Oblivia says “Should I be acting more scary?”

“I suppose that might help.” Chifu says humoring her. Whether she is legitimately as small and pitiful now as she seems to be or she is as good an actor as Chifu fears, this should be fun to watch.

It is not.

Oblivia clears her throat, and the voice that comes out is of the same vocal chords, the same native tenors and pitches, but it is different. It has the weight of infinity behind it, and it echoes with a silence so deep as to consume all noise.

“You think I fear you, Keeper of the Crossroads? Perhaps you managed to repel me, for a time, but it is one thing to keep something out and quite another to keep something in. Do not think for a moment that you could contain me if I truly wanted to be free.

You have grown frivolous and complacent in your diorama kingdom.

All walls crumble with time, God-Eater, and this one has been no exception.

It is only out of courtesy that I knock.”

The fear that Chifu had nearly forgotten is back in full force. Every part of her wants to turn and bolt, but she resists. She is no longer a scared little animal. She is a god now, and she will comport herself like one.

That resistance is made somewhat easier when Oblivia, after of a moment or two of ominous silence, asks anxiously

“Was that good?”

“Yeah” Chifu says, her voice shaking as she oh-so-slowly backs away from the threshold of the gate.

“Sure. Really scary.”

“I’m sorry.” Oblivia says “I guess I got a bit carried away there. My improv teacher just told me to take something true if you want to- I mean, not that that was true, you could totally beat me, absolutely, definitely a hundred per cent lock me up and throw away the key. I mean, you, you beat me before right? And, and like you said you’ve only gotten cleverer since then.

Also your monologue was way better than mine, so you- uhm- you’ve also got that point in your favor for that.”

“Yeah” says Chifu “Sure. Whatever. I need a drink. Ms. X will show you to the Inn where you can get rested up.”

And as Chifu walks, on foot, back to Saki’s bar, she thinks this was probably a bad idea. But it’s the best solution she could come up with.

And at least Oblivia’s never actually going to be in the tournament.