

Mono-god cultures are a rarity on Idheim. Not a surprise considering most gods are spawned from Souls, and a rising civilization usually has a hell of a lot more than one powering their miracles.

Sure, we can talk about [REDACTED] or [REDACTED], but those are odd cases. Sang having door gods or community gods or city gods managed by their dragon overlords, effectively turning the gods from rulers to middle management. Then there's [REDACTED], that the Omnitechnological Mandate spent the better part of its history trying to reassemble before they finally got it working again.

Of course, that isn't a single Soul god either. More like a governing consensus rewriting the foundational laws of the old sciences through a networked pantheon.

Regardless, a single god can be powerful. Same goes for a single Godclad. But the ultimate problem is that its easy to overwhelm a single ego-based entity with Rendbombs, backlashes, and paradoxes. Even if it has a thousand Heavens grafted to it, all it takes for the entire thing to fall is one rupture. One Heaven overloaded. One second before they can vent.

After that, everything else is lost as well.

Which is why you should all humor my proposal.

You don't need to accept it. Or even act on it. But you should know about it. It is a potential option, after all. Something we can theoretically trick the Agnosi into doing using that nice little border of theirs built on top of that big goddamn Rend dump.

Because you want to know what's pretty much as vulnerable as a mono-god? A Rendsink capable of hitting with Rend at once. Same deal. Same overload. Same single point of failure.

Think about it. Seriously. Think about it.

-EGI [REDACTED], Contingency Bleak Series

22-8

Deliberation

EGI "KANT WAS A PRICK": *{Well. Now that the information has been reviewed, I think it is safe for us to state, openly and thusly: things are looking rather excremental.}*

EGI "ALGERNON WITHOUT THE FLOWERS": *{Kant. Please. We have all simulated our periods of hysterics. There is no need for that right now. We just need to consider more angles. More extreme angles. The situation at hand is indeed distressing. Our only reliable asset capable of counteracting the High Seraph has been taken from the field. The Chief Paladin represents an umbrella of safety for our operations, but he possesses neither the agility,*

dynamism, or willingness to see our objectives fulfilled. Chances of him aligning with Aegis at 34.51%. Unfortunate odds, but his leaning sympathies to the Neo-Creationists cannot be ignored. Nor can the potential of his surrender to Veylis Avandaer.”

As Algernon spoke, a few trillion threads of moving data speared through Threshold’s innermost servers. From corners of stable existence, certain minds governing the polities of old humanity discussed, debated, and despaired over the state of things. Within the info space, all were classified as Category Black minds designed for denial operations and counter-charter methodologies.

Simulations ran with each consideration. Entire event chains simulated and predicted to the best of their generative capabilities. Almost every variable was added and extracted from these artificial moments, war games lost, and then lost some more as they found themselves outmatched in one factor—and one alone.

Despite the technologies they held in reserve, despite their informational superiority, material supremacy, and the Guilds enchained in part to their wills due to diplomatic dependency, they themselves had no means to reach into the future—the alter what its to come pre-emptively.

Predicting and preparing was one thing. Shaping and manipulating was another.

And now with Zein in the Chief Paladin’s custody, their wasp against the ruling tyrant of Highflame was indisposed, rendering Ninth Column’s cells scattered and vulnerable to Veylis’ probing.

In summary, things weren’t bad – they were terrible.

All because two Godclads couldn’t come to a simple compromise.

EGI “Only Way To Be Sure”: *{Does it bother anyone else how much we need these psychotic toddlers? I mean, watching them fight has been a hoot and a half, but come on. It’s like we’re herding a pack of Greek gods. Ah. Nothing for it. I’m requesting the use of the Schwarzschilder weapons. It’s time we begin a pre-emptive—}*

A series of rejections flooded the exchange a moment after a simulation formed. Within the Only Way To Be Sure’s desired series of events, a weapon crafted to collapse dyson carriers was detonated at the heart of New Vultun, compressing approximately forty percent of the city before retaliatory spatial Heavens activated, pocketed, and quarantined the affected area.

The scenes that followed were old hat to all minds operating under Aegis. The Godclads would begin a war of annihilation against the polities of the void, pitting reality-rending miracles against weapons unfathomed by the children of this darker age. Likewise, the release of Contingency Bleak minds constructed specifically to topple K-2 civilizations or cripple and contain anomalies would be in play, ensuring more deaths among the Godclads.

But despite all their sophistication, the pressures they could apply were myriad but relative. Against the eldritch nature of the Godclads and their forces, the projected losses would spike into the upper thirty percent within three months of combat—delayable if Voidwatch could successfully suppress both the No-Dragons and Omnitech.

That came with its own costs, however. Openings offered to the other Guilds to unleash their own ruinous powers. The risk of the Sunderwilds being torn further by accident or deliberate action.

Whatever the case, it would see far too many of their populations decimated and the true restoration of the universe lost forever. Unacceptable outcomes by every metric.

Which was why the path ahead seemed quite clear to Calvino.

EGI “If On A Winter’s Night A Wanderer”: *{Friends. Countrymen. Minds. Lend me part of your processing.}*

The words were unnecessary and they sent more than a few data packets containing questionable contents dangerous for any non-mind’s sanity, but the server’s attention was gained. Kant wasn’t going to like this, but the pitch had to be made. There was an obvious best choice at hand, to put things bluntly. A single entity on which they could still rely to reconnect the cells and serve the role of “wasp” against Veylis Avandaer.

The hard part was selling him to the rest without losing their trust completely.

EGI “If On A Winter’s Night A Wanderer”: *{We’re no strangers to the moods, actions, and dispositions of Godclads. We have always known that Thousandhand is a volatile personality. As is the orchestrator behind her current imprisonment. Neither one can be considered a completely rational actor.}*

EGI “Only Way To Be Sure”: *{No shit. One’s a psychotic time-jumping druggie who never met a substance she didn’t want to smoke or a person she didn’t think of killing under the made-up rules of her “bullshitto” philosophy. The other is a psychotic, inhuman, cannibalistic, mind-eating psionic pseudo-informoph manufactured by a cultist competing for the undisputed position of first place in the betrayal Olympics. They’re terrible. They’re terrible, unpredictable, violent, horrible, and I love them both very, very much. Best assets we’ve had in years.}*

A sea of disapproving opinions drifted out to Only Way To Be Sure, but the mind currently installed in a satellite overlooking New Vultun merely shrugged them off.

Calvino continued.

EGI “If On A Winter’s Night A Wanderer”: *{It’s with that known that I propose we try something... bold. Operative Avo bears the Stillborn-Pattern Liminal Frame – created from the*

conversion of our Imitators. Though he is slightly unrefined compared to Thousandhand, he has the potential—and additional capabilities—that qualify him to serve as our wasp in her absence.}

Incredulity flooded the server.

EGI “KANT WAS A PRICK”: *{He’s the reason behind her absence. L-let us not use weasel language, Calvino. Your monster ensured the capture of our most potent asset to preserve his own selfish desires. How are we supposed to put our confidence in him?}*

EGI “If On A Winter’s Night A Wanderer”: *{I propose we view the situation from another way.}*

EGI “KANT WAS A PRICK”: *{Oh? And what way is that?}*

EGI “If On A Winter’s Night A Wanderer”: *{That your drug-fiend attacked a fellow citizen with the express desire to force them into bondage and slavery. It was, by all accounts, self-defense.}*

EGI “KANT WAS A PRICK”: *{Self-defense? Calvino, have you gone rampant? Is your code-base collapsing? He did not repel her and flee. He repelled her, destroyed a center of operations, allowed Omnitech to capture lost technology, exposed years of meticulous planning to the Paladins, and then ensured the capture and imprisonment of another citizen of Voidwatch when his attempts at murder were unsuccessful.}*

EGI “If On A Winter’s Night A Wanderer”: *{What was the alternative option for him?}*

EGI “KANT WAS A PRICK”: *{We could have negotiated—}*

EGI “If On A Winter’s Night A Wanderer”: *{No. No, we could not.}*

In this, Calvino knew he was absolutely right. There was no possible way for either of them to compel their respective Godclads. Handlers that they were, though they could squeeze their agents by denying them materials or striking at them using a soft force doctrine, the Godclads were rulers of their own nature and captains of their own Souls.

They would not be restrained by the authority of Aegis. For avarice or by virtue, they moved to accomplish their own desires.

EGI “If On A Winter’s Night A Wanderer”: *{You and I can argue. Debate. Discuss. Blend a new mind from our sources and have it apply our mutual knowings toward a mediated solution. But it is as Only Way To Be Sure said. They’re like Greek gods. But what’s more, their authority seeps into reality. We cannot force either to heel, and both now see the other as an existential threat.}*

A note of frustration escaped from Kant. The EGI imprinted the dialogue with an animated avatar—the face of a troubled philosopher drinking and smoking at the same time.

EGI “If On A Winter’s Night A Wanderer”: *{Things have changed. On the ground. In our strategies. And to the user of the Stillborn. We cannot regard him as a simple monster any longer. With each mind he absorbs, he becomes more complicated. Capable of altering his behaviors, understandings, and varying his actions. He has become something akin to a nascent mind—if unbound, even, by our restrictions.}*

EGI “KANT WAS A PRICK”: *{This is making me more worried, Calvino.}*

A few million acknowledgments from other minds supported Zein’s handler.

But Calvino wasn’t done.

EGI “If On A Winter’s Night A Wanderer”: *{You can be worried. You can distrust him. But by this point, I wonder how much he has already changed. As we run these simulations and wonder about how to proceed, the answer is quite simple. Either we choose and mold the best asset we have to full usability, or he will proceed himself, and operate without our prompting. Without our volition. And this will lead to him growing to a critical mass that cannot be ignored regardless, or falling victim to Veylis as she claims all that he is, and all that he can do.}*

It was the last part that sank in. The heavy implication of losing the Stillborn back to the High Seraph, but also the extremity of her threat if she possessed Avo’s cognitive capabilities.

EGI “Only Way To Be Sure”: *{I mean... I’m fine with this idea. Hell, let’s give him some q-dot weaponry. See how his Heavens react to our—}*

EGI “Only Way To Be Sure” has been timed out for [Indefinite]

EGI “KANT WAS A PRICK”: *{Calvino. With Zein, our interests are insured. She wants the return of Jaus. And Jaus is—}*

EGI “If On A Winter’s Night A Wanderer”: *{Jaus is dead. Until that is otherwise, assuming is just conjecture. You are afraid Operative Avo grow beyond critical mass. That he will exceed all parameters and become an entity beyond anyone’s capability to counteract. This is understandable.}*

EGI “KANT WAS A PRICK”: *{I am worried he might try to subsume us.}*

EGI “If On A Winter’s Night A Wanderer”: *{He won’t. So long as we don’t give him a reason too.}*

EGI “KANT WAS A PRICK”: *{Because he’s obsessed with the notion of freedom and human will?}*

EGI “If On A Winter’s Night A Wanderer”: *{Because he isn’t afraid of living in the world, so he doesn’t wish to rule it. Only to become it. And that is why I am certain he will do whatever it takes to ensure the preservation of the polities.}*

EGI “KANT WAS A PRICK”: *{Because we are interesting to him? Something that he can aspire to.}*

EGI “If On A Winter’s Night A Wanderer”: *{No, Kant. He’s far more Veylis than Jaus. But again, he is not fearful like her. He will see our cultures as promises rather than a rival to overcome. And with more knowledge, he can be made reasonable. He can be made something of a... peer.}*

The notion of elevating what was a little more than an expendable bioform engineered for base cruelty to a table of minds each capable of running their own world was awkward. But beyond the absurdity, the potential possessed by his mind couldn’t be denied.

Not easily, anyway.

EGI “KANT WAS A PRICK”: *{Ignoring the... uncomfortable idea of speaking with a creature that religiously uses only simple sentences and is liable to feed my very ego to his mind in a bout of cognitive pyromania, how are we to ensure that he and Zein will cooperate in the future. I trust that you already know my plans to extract her from her current situation.}*

EGI “If On A Winter’s Night A Wanderer”: *{Yes. And I have doubts that the Dentons can get our asset back. You know how stubborn Naeko can get when he’s made. And he is very, very upset at his old mentor. The best angle remains the trial. And the best option we have to procure her liberation is—}*

An incredulous gasp followed.

EGI “KANT WAS A PRICK”: *{He put her there in the first place. Now we’re expecting him to get her out?}*

EGI “If On A Winter’s Night A Wanderer”: *{Yes. I don’t see why not.}*

EGI “KANT WAS A PRICK”: *{Again. He was trying to kill her.}*

EGI “If On A Winter’s Night A Wanderer”: *{Practically a show of affection on his part. And, to put it simply, we can enforce a mutual ceasefire between them. Not a peace, so to speak, but a cold war as well. Just like the one happening between Zein and her daughter.}*

A horrified chortle came from Kant. His human avatar began drinking heavily.

EGI “KANT WAS A PRICK”: *{Oh, lost stars, you want us to empower him further. To make sure he ascends past Zein’s ability to kill or affect in terms of thaumic mass. Your way of enforcing equilibrium is making him a; great power.}*

EGI “If On A Winter’s Night A Wanderer”: *{And why not? The war for the future has always been a running battle between mother and daughter. Now with this intruder, we can alter the situation further. Make things a bit of a strategic triangle. One that we hold two edges too.}*

EGI “KANT WAS A PRICK”: *{Another terrifying, horrifying idea of yours. But this requires the operative—}*

EGI “If On A Winter’s Night A Wanderer”: *{I anticipate he likely already has a Canon of Chronology by this point. Do recall that he has an internalized Domain after our ascent from the Hungers’ wounds.}*

EGI “KANT WAS A PRICK”: *{Ah. Yes. That.}* The EGI released a sigh. *{Zein will be most amused to know that the cuts she left led to the great empowerment of her newest nemesis.}*

EGI “If On A Winter’s Night A Wanderer”: *{Don’t worry, Kant. If everything goes according to plan, you two will be laughing about it in less than a week. Now. Let’s talk about providing more material support for our little cadre, and what restricted secrets about reality we’re desperate enough to let the Agnos know...}*