

I Am Zeus

#Chapter 121: Council Meeting - Read I Am Zeus

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"Hermes," Zeus called, voice low but carrying. Lightning cracked once in the rafters. The messenger appeared in the next heartbeat, caduceus humming.

"Summon everyone," Zeus said. "Major and minor. Council now."

Hermes didn't ask why. He vanished in a gold streak.

The sky amphitheater woke.

Sigils lit along the ring of thrones—storm, sea, hearth, hunt, sun, moon, forge, war, wisdom, wine, love. Benches rose for the lesser gods. A dome of aether sealed overhead, open to the night.

They came like weather.

Poseidon strode in with surf at his heels, trident wet and bright. Hades unfolded from a slit of shadow, cold and still. Athena arrived in bronze; an owl settled on her shoulder. Apollo's steps spilled daylight. Artemis followed with the scent of pine.

Ares came bandaged and angry, sword in hand out of habit. Hephaestus limped with sparks in his beard. Hermes zipped by everyone twice for no reason. Hestia was last among the majors, small flame cupped in her palms; when she sat, the room steadied.

Demeter entered softly, wheatheads nodding along her hem. Aphrodite drifted on perfume and trouble. Dionysus yawned into a purple cup and conjured a vine as a chair.

The minor gods filled the tiers. Nike's wings flashed. Nemesis rested a dark blade across her knees. Themis set scales that ticked with every lie. Iris painted a thin arc of color. Eris rolled a golden apple across her knuckles. Pan trotted in barefoot, pipe between his teeth. The four winds whirled to their seats; Boreas scratched frost on his own chair. Thanatos took the highest shadow. Hypnos leaned on a rail and almost slept. Tyche spun a little wheel. Asclepius tapped his serpent staff. Persephone crossed a doorway that wasn't there a second earlier, winter at one shoulder and spring at the other; flowers opened in her wake and froze into glass. Helios blinked and withdrew quietly beyond the rim of light.

Zeus took the storm throne. The Storm Crown rose behind him, faint and cold. When he spoke, the dome itself seemed to inhale.

"Olympus."

The word found every ear.

"We meet for four matters," he said. "First, Hera's betrayal. Second, the Primordials. Third, the state of our realms—sky, sea, and under. Fourth, law."

A ripple went through the tiers. Ares stiffened. Hades's mouth twitched at "under." Poseidon rapped his trident, impatient already.

"Hera," Zeus said, "step forward."

Feathers burst and were a woman; Hera arrived in green, chin high, eyes bright. She did not bow. Several minor gods stopped breathing.

Zeus didn't raise his voice. "You allied with Tartarus. You used our son as a lever. Whatever your grievance, that crime is not excused."

Hera's jaw flexed. "You left me on the steps while Metis wore a crown."

A murmur. Eris smiled, pleased.

"This is not about crown," Zeus said flatly. "This is about endangering Olympus." He lifted a hand. The scales before Themis clicked; the beam settled even.

"Punishment," Zeus said. "By my right and by the Styx, you are stripped of council vote for one zodiac cycle. You are barred from treaties and from trafficking with anything born before night and day. A geas will bind your hand from Primordial contact. You will dwell in the Heraion; you will not set spies in my halls. Swear it."

Nemesis's blade rang softly. Themis inclined her head.

Hera did not move. Ares shifted, fury rising warm off him in waves.

"Mother," he said, low.

"Quiet," Zeus said, without looking. Thunder made the benches hum.

Hera's lips flattened. "You exile me from power and keep your bed full?"

Aphrodite coughed a laugh. Demeter did not look up. Hestia's flame flared and calmed; the air found its balance again.

"This is not a bed argument," Athena said. "Swear, and we move to war."

Hera's eyes flicked to Ares, then to Hades. The Lord of the Dead stared back like a door. She lifted her chin.

"I swear," she said. "By the River. By my name."

The air chilled. A black thread of Styx-water wrote itself around her wrist, sank into skin, and vanished. Nike whispered, "Bound."

Zeus nodded once. "Done."

He did not soften. He did not look at her again.

"Second," he said, and the dome dimmed as if listening.

"The Primordials have taken notice. Gaia told me so. Erebus wants first strike, Ananke watches, others wake. More beyond our story will move."

He opened a hand. Above the amphitheater, stormlight wove an image: a hollow older than halls, a black sea like glass, stars like fruit. Shadows formed—Nyx, Erebus, Gaia—then bled away.

"Some stand with us," Zeus said. "Some do not."

Poseidon snorted. "Let them come. My walls are the horizon."

Hades tapped a finger on his chair. "The pit screamed when you wounded it. I've sealed what you shattered, but pressure remains. If one of them tries the lower doors, they won't knock."

"We're not waiting to be hit," Athena said. A map in bronze light spread over the floor—leys and crossings, temples and gates. "We build bastions at the weak points. Skyward at Ida, Parnassus, Hymettus. Seaward at the Pillars, Crete's strait, the Hellespont. Underworld thresholds get triple warded."

Hephaestus grunted. "Give me a week and a river of ore. I'll cast a net in the sky—nodes that drink lightning and spit it as spears. Call it Aegis Above." Sparks leapt and stitched a little glowing lattice before winking out.

Hermes twirled his staff. "I'll weave routes around the bastions. If anything bigger than a boar sniffs them, we know early."

Iris raised a hand. "I can carry parley banners to thrones that might listen. Not all, but some. Better a web than a wall."

Apollo rested his lyre. "Prophecy's fogged. Something heavy sits on the line. But the sun can still burn ships. Give me coordinates."

Artemis nodded. "I'll keep mortals clear of any field you name. If old things step into the woods, they won't like what hunts there."

Asclepius edged forward. "Expand sanctuaries. Any god-wounded comes to me and lives."

Demeter's voice was soft but sure. "I'll thicken the roots. If they pull at the earth to crack our roads, it holds."

Pan grinned. "And if they touch my valleys with old cold, I'll play till trees walk."

The winds pledged the air to throw anything heavy back where it came from.

Nemesis stood. Her shadow doubled. "Price: anyone here who deals with the old ones after this hour pays. I don't care what crown they wear."

Eris sighed happily. "Drama."

Ares pushed to his feet.

"You want war?" He thumped his sword. "Good. I've been starving."

Athena's map snapped shut. "You'll starve longer unless you learn where to swing."

Ares smiled without warmth. "Show me a throat."

"Enough," Hestia said, barely above a whisper—and yet the amphitheater settled as if a hand pressed it down. "We stand or we scatter. Choose."

Zeus raised his hand. The Storm Crown brightened.

"Orders," he said. "Poseidon—you own the seas against anything that crawls out of the deep. Ward the trenches. Bind storms that aren't mine."

Poseidon's trident hit stone. Foam erupted and sank. "Done."

"Hades—lock the lower gates. If something breaks through, send me its name before the scream is finished."

Hades's eyes warmed by a shade. "You'll have more than a name."

"Athena—war council. Hermes—lines. Iris—tongues with other thrones. Hephaestus—the lattice. Apollo, Artemis—sun and shadow on call. Asclepius—triage. Demeter, Pan—leys. Winds—listen for holes. Hestia—keep this room steady while we shake it."

Hestia bowed her head. The air lifted a degree.

"And law," Zeus said. Silence closed.

"Edict of Olympus," Themis intoned.

Zeus nodded. "No Primordial pacts. No god here raises a hand against Olympus on another's promise. No bargains below the old night. No one drags mortals into our quarrel for sport. Oath by the Styx, here and now."

He held out his hand. Lightning coiled like a living rope.

One by one, they touched the light. It didn't burn. It marked. A faint sigil crawled under each wrist—storm-cut, binding. Even Dionysus sobered. Thanatos's black feather singed and was whole. Tyche's wheel clicked; the mark appeared on its rim. The Muses hummed; the note settled into the seal. When Poseidon pressed the rope, it hissed like rain on coals. Hades touched it last among the majors.

Hera stepped, too. The lightning marked her beside the darker band of the Styx oath already there.

"Punishment stands," Nemesis said, satisfied.

"Speak," Zeus said then, opening his hand to the tiers. "Counsel or grievance—bring it here, not to corridors."

Aphrodite flipped her hair. "Fine. Your army's ugly. Let me handle morale." For a heartbeat every scar in the room looked like a story you brag about.

Hephaestus snorted. "Make 'em beautiful after they come back."

Persephone said, "The dead are restless with rumor." Hades's head turned, softer for her alone. "I'll keep them still," she added.

Hermes, writing three letters in the air at once, nodded toward Zeus. "And your guest?"

Several faces shifted. Ares gripped his hilt. Athena measured.

"He remains a guest," Zeus said. "He does not sit on this circle. If he breaks our law, I break him."

That satisfied most. Themis's scales did not move.

Poseidon gestured toward the dome, where a thin horizon gathered. "Your training storms rip the edge. Keep them out of my currents."

Zeus met his gaze. "Hold your line, and I'll hold mine. Tear down a ward I place, and I'll nail it back with your trident."

Silence. Then Poseidon smiled like a shark. "There he is," he said. "Good."

Demeter spoke, gentle but stainless. "When you go to meet them—and you will—don't go alone."

He didn't answer her directly. But Athena saw the way his jaw set and knew he'd heard.

Iris lifted her prism. "I'm flying west first. They'll listen if we offer shared watch."

"Go," Zeus said. "Don't say our fear. Say our teeth."

Eris rolled her apple. "Want me to toss one at Erebus and see who stabs who first?"

"Not yet," Athena and Hestia said together.

Dionysus stood, suddenly sober. "When you need frenzy, call me. I can drown edges in joy or terror. Same drink."

Asclepius tapped his staff. "Leave me one body from the first thing you kill. I can learn from it."

Nike's wings flared. "Then give me the first charge."

Thanatos's shadow lengthened. "Do not call me for sport," he said to Ares without looking.

Ares grinned at the floor.

Zeus lifted his hands. The Storm Crown steadied.

"We're done hiding our spine," he said. "Olympus stands. We won't be the ones who blink."

He stepped down from the throne. The amphitheater leaned toward him.

"Go," he told them. "Seal gates, raise nets, sharpen names."

They rose like a tide. Powers crossed and did not clash. Winds carried words; iris light opened and closed; shadows folded up and were doors. Hephaestus's hammer rang before he reached the forge. Athena's maps walked after her. Artemis blurred into a

pale streak. Apollo's heel lit and was gone. Poseidon flooded the threshold and left it dry. Hades opened a slit and stepped through with Persephone's hand in his.

Hestia stayed until the last chair stopped swaying. Then she breathed once, and the room remembered itself.

Only Zeus, Hera, and a few lingering minors remained—Hermes, already writing; Themis, already judging; Nemesis, already waiting for someone to tip the scale.

Zeus looked to Hera. "You heard the law."

She met his eyes. "I heard."

"For once, keep it."

For a heartbeat, something older than anger moved behind her face. Then she became a bird and was gone.

The dome thinned. Night showed its bright bones. Far below, the mortal world breathed, unaware.

Zeus stood alone again at the center, the scorch mark of his earlier vow still smoking at his feet. Lightning stitched once around his fingers and went out.

Somewhere beyond sight, something old shifted to listen.

And the king of the sky smiled without humor, already planning the next storm.

Chapter 122: Primordial Meeting

In the seam between all worlds, the dark remembered something had been removed.

It knew loss.

They came, one after another, as if the void had knocked and old neighbors opened their doors.

Nyx stepped first, night drifting from her shoulders like silk.

Erebus gathered beside her, a cliff of shadow.

Ananke unwound from a ring that wasn't there, a serpent-woman with a thread around her wrist that tugged against nothing.

Hemera slid in as the gentlest morning. Her light was not bright; it was permission.

Pontus rose halfway, a black sea.

Gaia swelled from a low green hill that grew from air itself. Roots hung where there was no ground to reach.

Tiamat leaned through a hot rim, sea and teeth and mother in one slow breath.

Apsu followed, younger water with a long memory of being first.

Nun lifted like a broad tide the world had forgotten to name.

Ymir scratched frost from his beard and made a valley by standing still.

Pangu rested his axe on the line between nothing and more.

Rangi spread above them without beams, a bare roof of sky.

Nyx looked down into the missing shape. "He is gone."

"Tartarus," Erebus said, not asking.

Gaia's face did not move. "Yes."

Hemera's light cooled. "Mortals are sleeping through it."

"They will not sleep through what follows," Apsu said. He tasted the gap like salt, then spat into it. The spit never landed.

Tiamat's crown hissed. "A pit with a mouth is still a mouth. He snapped at the wrong lightning."

"It was not wrong," Nun said. "It was chosen."

Pangu's thumb traced the haft of his axe. "The boy chose to swing. The world did not break. That is worth a nod."

Erebus turned, slow. "A nod for killing one of us."

"A nod for not flinching when the floor tried to bite," Pangu said.

Ananke's thread trembled. "The line that led to this was braided, not straight. Promises were made and not kept. Pride touched pride. The knot hardened. Then it cut."

Rangi exhaled as a small wind. "We can name the reasons until morning. The important thing is simple. He reached up. He will reach again."

Pontus moved once, a swell without shore. "So speak the choice."

Erebus did not hesitate. "We end him."

Tiamat's teeth flashed. "Good. That word fits in the mouth."

Apsu nodded. "Cut the river before it becomes a sea."

Hemera angled her head. "That is one option."

"It is the only option," Erebus said. "If a young throne can tear a root, our quiet becomes noise. Kill him."

Nyx's smile was small and not friendly. "You could try. It would be fun to watch."

Erebus's darkness thickened. "You approve of him."

"I enjoy him," Nyx said. "He is interesting."

Gaia stepped forward until her toes hung over the absence like a cliff edge. "You are speaking of my blood."

"And?" Erebus asked.

"And you will not kill him while I breathe," Gaia said. No sound followed her words; the void simply held them.

Ymir grinned through his beard. "I like simple lines. Mother says no."

"Mother can break if the hand is big enough," Tiamat said.

Gaia did not look at her. "Try it."

The pause that followed was not fear. It was math.

Ananke's thread stilled. "We are gathered to weigh. Speak your reasons, not your thunder."

Erebus folded his shadow tight. "He set a precedent. The low struck the old and the old fell. That story travels. It will wake others who like the taste of it. We kill the story now or we live inside it later."

Hemera's light touched the edge of Erebus and did not vanish. "Or we write a different ending."

Apsu frowned. "You argue like a dawn—soft, full of promises."

"I argue that blood begets blood," Hemera said. "If we crush him for daring, every throne with a young god will dare sooner. If we test him, we learn what he is."

Nun turned. "Do you truly wish to watch?"

"I wish to avoid messes I don't have to mop," Hemera said.

Ymir's laugh rang like ice breaking. "Test him with a fist."

Rangi lowered an inch. "Fence him. Draw a line across the high air he claims."

Pangu nodded without smile. "If he cuts at pillars, I cut back. If he builds, I lift."

Tiamat clicked a tooth with a nail. "He killed one of us. A debt stands. If not his head, then his house. If not his house, then a price he can feel."

Nyx's eyes warmed. "He can feel plenty without our help."

Erebus looked at her. "You play."

"I watch," Nyx said. "And I play."

Gaia faced the circle. "He did not wake today hungry for you. He cast nets over his house, set law, leashed his own. If you step on him now, you make enemies you don't need."

"We do not need him either," Erebus said.

"You need balance," Gaia said. "You used Tartarus as a sewer. He rotted what you threw to him. Zeus broke the habit. Maybe thank him."

Apsu bristled. "Thank him for removing our drain?"

"For forcing you to clean your own rooms," Gaia said.

Silence opened like a hand.

Ananke raised her thread. "Enough speeches. We will not agree. We vote. The question is plain: death."

Pontus rippled. "Plain is good."

Ananke's thread split into many fine lines, each running to a hand, a fin, a claw, a wrist, a cloud.

"Speak."

Erebus: "Death."

Tiamat: "Death."

Apsu: "Death."

Ymir scratched his chin. "Let me think." He smiled. "Death."

Rangi, voice dry. "Death."

Nun's wave leaned, then settled. "Death."

Pangu's axe made a small sound. "Death if he cuts. Death not now." He glanced at Ananke. "That is not the line, I know."

"Choose," Ananke said.

"Death," Pangu said.

Hemera closed her eyes. "No."

Nyx: "No."

Gaia: "No."

Pontus watched, then said nothing. "Abstain."

Ananke's thread returned to her hand and the lines went out like embers.

"It carries," she said. "Death."

No light flared. The word floated and kept its edge.

Gaia's jaw worked once. "On what timing?"

"Not here," Ananke said. "Not now. We have chosen the word, not the hour."

Nyx clicked her tongue. "That buys him time to be even more interesting."

Erebus ignored her. He looked at Gaia. "You will stand in the way."

"I will," Gaia said.

Tiamat's crown dipped. "You will not always be where he is."

"I do not need to be always," Gaia said. "I need to be enough."

Rangi shifted, nearly a horizon. "He will hear of this—too late and all at once."

Hemera spoke softly. "He will also feel who said no."

Nyx grinned. "He will, if I tell him."

Ananke's gaze flicked. "You will do as you do."

Erebus lifted his chin. "When the moment opens, we end the boy."

Pangu sighed. "Simple things are rarely simple when they move."

Nun gave him a look that could have been a smile. "We will see how much river is in him."

Tiamat stretched, scales singing. "I want it done clean. If the word is death, I want a head to hold and a lesson to show."

Ymir rolled his shoulders. Frost fell off and turned to dust. "Or a fight that rattles the bones of the hills."

Rangi lifted. "Keep your storms out of my roof, then."

Pangu lifted his axe and put it down again. "No plans," he said.

Ananke's thread tugged once. "We part. The verdict lives without a schedule. Let the world shift. Let him try to stop it. We meet when the knot tightens."

They did not walk away. They simply were elsewhere.

Ymir became weather with bones in it. Tiamat slid into a sea that never asked consent. Apsu folded into a pool that was not a place. Nun settled into a calm that made other calms remember they were temporary. Rangi lifted. Hemera turned and took her permission with her. Pangu stepped through a line only he could see. Pontus sank with his eyes open.

Only Nyx and Gaia stayed a heartbeat longer.

Nyx peered into the missing shape and smiled like someone reading a line she liked. "He will preen when I tell him I said no."

"You will not tell him for pride," Gaia said.

"No," Nyx said. "For fun." She glanced sideways. "And for balance. He fights better when someone wants him to."

Gaia breathed. Flowers opened along the roots that had no soil. They faded when the breath ended. "He will need better than that."

Nyx's voice softened. "He has you."

"For now," Gaia said. "I am not a wall forever."

Nyx's grin thinned. "No one is."

They left.

The seam remembered the vote. It did not care. It had held other votes that thought they would last longer.

Far below, a young god on a high mountain drew maps on air with thunder, and a woman of night watched him from the corner of the sky and did not blink.

Chapter 123: A Brief Talk With The Devil

The high halls of Olympus hummed with a silence no one dared disturb. The seam between worlds had closed, but its echo lingered like smoke caught in the rafters. Zeus stood on the upper terrace, the winds folding around him, the thunderheads beneath like a restless army waiting for command.

He closed his eyes.

The visions came fast, jagged and cruel. Futures breaking against him like glass. The vote in the void wasn't hidden from him—he felt the weight of it pressing down already, old powers shifting, whispering the same word: death.

His death.

He saw flames spilling across fields where no mortals should walk. He saw oceans climbing too high, reaching for mountains. He saw the sky bending under a crown that wasn't his. And in the center of it all, shadows moved like chess pieces, the old ones testing, tightening their grip.

He breathed slow. His hand curled, lightning gathering between his fingers and fading again.

"They will come," he murmured to himself. "And I'll be ready."

A laugh, low and amused, slid through the still air behind him.

Zeus opened his eyes but didn't turn. "Of course," he said flatly. "You."

Lucifer stepped out from the darker end of the hall as if he'd been waiting there the whole time. His coat trailed behind him, his steps light, unhurried. Crimson eyes glimmered like coals in the dim.

"You make it sound like I'm an unwelcome guest," Lucifer said, voice lazy but edged.

"You are," Zeus said.

Lucifer smirked. "And yet, here I am."

He stopped a few paces behind Zeus, hands sliding into his pockets, gaze wandering across the terrace. "You felt it too, didn't you? That little gathering in the seam. Old family meeting. Shadows voting like gods in a council."

Zeus tilted his head slightly. "I saw enough."

"And?" Lucifer asked. "Scared?"

"Prepared," Zeus answered.

Lucifer chuckled, stepping closer, leaning a little so his shadow stretched across the marble beside Zeus. "Prepared. That's such a Zeus word. So tidy. So heroic. You don't fool me. I've seen gods who claimed preparation while fear chewed their bones. You..." He studied Zeus's profile, eyes narrowing. "You're too calm."

"I've been king too long to shake," Zeus said, finally turning to face him. His eyes sparked faintly, not anger—just stormlight waiting to break.

Lucifer's grin widened. "And this," he said softly, "is why I like you."

Zeus's brow arched. "Like me?"

"Yes," Lucifer said. "You don't beg. You don't bluff. You don't hide behind songs and prayers like the others. You stand, even when the seam itself whispers that your time's almost up."

"I don't need your admiration," Zeus said.

"You'll take it anyway," Lucifer said easily. "Because it's honest. And I don't give that freely."

Zeus turned away, eyes back on the horizon. "Then keep it. I don't need your help either."

That made Lucifer laugh—loud enough that it bounced off the stone and startled a few birds from the columns. "There it is. The famous arrogance. Tell me, king of gods, do

you really believe you can stand against all of them? Erebus. Nyx. Tiamat. Even Gaia is split, and her protection won't last forever. They voted death for you, Zeus. They want your head. They want your throne. Do you really think thunder alone will keep them back?"

"Yes," Zeus said simply.

Lucifer's grin froze for a beat, then curled sharper. "You infuriating bastard. You actually mean it."

"I do."

Lucifer's laugh softened into a low hum. He walked past Zeus now, standing near the edge of the terrace, letting the wind tug his coat. His red eyes looked down at the shifting storm-clouds below.

"You remind me of me," Lucifer said at last. "Too proud to bend. Too stubborn to share. And when the world sharpens its teeth, instead of retreating, you bare yours."

Zeus said nothing, but the corner of his mouth twitched.

Lucifer caught it. He smirked. "See? You know I'm right. That's why I like you. You're not a liar, not to yourself. You won't ask me to stand with you. Not because you think I'd betray you—though, I probably would—but because you'd rather win or lose on your own terms."

"Exactly," Zeus said.

Lucifer exhaled, a sound that was half a sigh, half a laugh. "Fine. Then I'll do what I do best."

"And what's that?" Zeus asked.

Lucifer turned his head, crimson gaze glinting. "Watch. From the sidelines. I'll sit back and see how the king of Olympus handles being hunted by the very roots of creation. Maybe I'll enjoy the show. Maybe I'll step in when it's fun. Maybe not."

"You're a vulture," Zeus said.

Lucifer bowed slightly. "Flatterer."

Zeus stepped closer, his height and presence pressing down like thunder about to break. "Understand this. If you get in my way, you won't just watch from the sidelines—you'll crawl back to whatever pit spat you out."

Lucifer met his gaze head-on, unfazed. "And that," he whispered, "is why I'll never get bored of you."

The silence stretched. Two predators, storm and shadow, staring across the thin line of something that wasn't friendship and wasn't enmity either. Something sharper.

At last, Lucifer leaned back, breaking the tension with a grin. "Very well, king. Stand your ground. Shake the skies. I'll be waiting to see how many of the old ones you drag down with you."

He turned, his coat flicking behind him as he started back toward the darkness he came from.

"Lucifer," Zeus called.

The devil paused, looking over his shoulder.

"When they fall," Zeus said, voice quiet but heavy, "don't pretend you didn't want to help."

Lucifer's grin widened, wicked and amused. "And when you fall, don't pretend you didn't want me to."

Then he vanished, fading into shadow as if the hall had swallowed him whole.

Zeus stood alone again, thunder whispering under his skin, the future pressing close. He closed his eyes once more.

This time, he didn't see fear. He saw war.

And he was ready.

Chapter 124: A Little Spar

The training grounds of Olympus stretched wide, carved into the mountainside with polished stone floors and ringed by towering columns. The sky above was clear, the kind of blue that seemed endless, broken only by drifting clouds. A faint wind moved through, carrying the scent of iron from the racks of weapons that lined the edges.

Athena stood at the center, her spear balanced loosely in her right hand. Her stance was precise, every angle deliberate. Across from her, Ares rolled his shoulders, the edge of his grin sharp as he spun his blade in a slow circle.

"You're tense," Ares said, lowering his sword into a ready stance. "You always were when you thought too much."

Athena's eyes narrowed. "And you've always mistaken confidence for carelessness."

She moved first, quick as a hawk striking. Her spear darted forward, a blur of bronze aimed at his chest. Ares twisted, catching the shaft against the flat of his blade with a sharp clang that echoed off the pillars. He shoved, she shifted, and they broke apart only to clash again in the next heartbeat.

Sparks flared as metal struck metal. Ares pressed forward with brute strength, each swing heavy enough to split stone, but Athena met every strike with calculated precision, her spear redirecting his blade just enough to turn killing blows into wasted effort.

"Still hiding behind strategy," Ares taunted, driving a kick toward her midsection.

Athena slid aside, the edge of his heel grazing her armor. "Still charging in like a beast."

They circled, breathing steady, eyes locked. It was a rhythm they both knew well. For all their differences, their bodies remembered the countless times Zeus had stood above them, demanding they push harder, faster, sharper.

"Do you remember?" Athena said suddenly between strikes, her voice calm even as her spear flicked toward his throat. "Father throwing mountains at us when we were young?"

Ares barked a laugh, knocking her spear wide with a heavy slash. "I remember him yelling every time you corrected his form mid-lesson. You were unbearable even then."

Athena smirked faintly, stepping in close to drive the butt of her spear into his ribs. He grunted, stumbling back a pace. "Unbearable," she echoed, "or better?"

Before Ares could answer, a shadow swept across the ground. Both of them looked up just as a massive boulder—twice their size—hurtled down from the cliffs above.

"Duck!" Athena snapped.

They moved in perfect unison without a thought. Ares raised his blade, Athena leveled her spear, and together they slashed upward. Lightning sparked from her weapon, raw force exploded from his, and the boulder shattered mid-air into harmless shards that rained down around them.

A roar of laughter followed from the ridge. Hermes leaned lazily against a pillar, golden sandals gleaming, while Apollo stood beside him, bow slung casually over his shoulder.

"Still sharp, sister, brother," Apollo called, voice warm with mischief. "Father would be proud."

"Or furious," Hermes added, tossing a smaller stone up and catching it. "Depends on how much of the courtyard you break this time."

Ares growled, pointing his sword toward them. "Throw another and I'll ram it down your throat."

Hermes only grinned wider. "Promise?"

Athena shook her head but didn't hide the faint smile tugging at her lips. She turned back to Ares, twirling her spear once. "They're doing us a favor. Distractions make for stronger focus."

"You always did like pretending chaos was a lesson," Ares muttered. But he didn't complain when another boulder whistled down.

This one was bigger, tumbling end over end, casting a long shadow across the floor. Ares snarled, charging forward, blade flashing. He split the rock down the center with one mighty strike, fragments exploding outward like a storm.

Athena was already moving, her spear lashing out to scatter the shards before they could hit the nearby racks of weapons. Lightning rippled along the stone, disintegrating the smaller pieces into dust.

When the dust cleared, both stood unharmed, weapons raised.

Hermes whistled. "Elegant."

Apollo clapped once, slow and mocking. "Almost as good as Father used to do."

That drew silence for a moment. Even Ares's grin dimmed. The memory of Zeus's training—his booming voice, the sheer weight of his presence—still lived in all of them. He had made gods out of children, and the lessons had been written into their bones.

Athena lowered her spear slightly, her gaze drifting. "He taught us to fight together. Not just against each other."

Ares snorted, though his tone softened. "And yet, here we are. Still at each other's throats."

"That's because you mistake violence for purpose," Athena said, steady as ever. "War isn't just blood. It's strategy. Discipline. Victory isn't won by the loudest roar—it's won by the sharpest mind."

"And yet without my blade, your plans crumble," Ares shot back.

Their words cut, but there was no true malice in them. It was the same argument they'd had since childhood, each convinced their path was the truer one.

Another boulder came—this time flaming, Apollo's handiwork. It streaked like a meteor toward the ground. Athena and Ares didn't speak. They just moved.

Ares launched upward, blade swinging with raw fury, cleaving through the fireball in a brilliant arc. Athena followed immediately, her spear lancing through the heart of the broken mass, lightning consuming the flames until nothing but smoke remained.

They landed together, back to back, the ground trembling beneath their feet.

For a moment, there was quiet. Then Hermes clapped. "Beautiful. Truly. Should I fetch Father so he can see the happy reunion?"

Athena glanced at Ares over her shoulder. His smirk had returned, sharp but tinged with respect. "Not bad," he admitted.

"Not bad yourself," she replied.

The sparring resumed, lighter now, less like enemies and more like siblings who understood each other's rhythms. Blades clashed, spear struck, but their movements carried a strange harmony—as though they weren't just training, but remembering what it meant to be gods forged in the same storm.

And above, on the highest balcony, Zeus watched. Silent. His eyes followed every strike, every block, every shared moment. Lightning flickered faintly in the clouds below, but he didn't move, didn't call out.

He simply watched his children fight like the warriors he had shaped them to be—together, even in rivalry.

Chapter 125: The Night 1

The courtyard still rang with the sound of metal, the clash of siblings testing one another. Hermes and Apollo leaned against a column, tossing pebbles back and forth, grinning at every near miss that forced Athena and Ares to adjust. The mood had shifted into something lighter, playful almost.

Then it hit.

A weight rolled across Olympus, thick and vast, like a tide of black velvet poured from the sky. It wasn't wind, it wasn't thunder—it was older, heavier, a presence that didn't belong to marble halls or clear skies.

The training grounds froze. Ares straightened mid-swing, blade lowering instinctively. Athena's spear steadied, her eyes narrowing as a strange chill wrapped around her. Hermes dropped the pebble in his hand. Even Apollo's smirk slipped, his golden aura bristling in answer.

The aura pressed against the skin of every god in Olympus. A reminder. Something primal, something that existed before their father's throne, before the war, before even Titans roared across the world.

"...What is that?" Hermes muttered, voice thin.

"Not what," Athena said, her eyes lifting to the horizon. "Who."

The sky darkened unnaturally. Clouds that hadn't been there before spread like ink across the blue, blotting out the sun until the world dimmed into twilight. Stars flickered faintly, too early, too wrong. And at the heart of it, shadows moved with deliberate grace, coiling down like smoke forming into a figure.

Every god that wasn't on the training grounds felt it. Doors slammed open across Olympus as divine figures stepped out into balconies, plazas, towers. Demeter and Hestia emerged near the great garden. Poseidon appeared at the lower tier, trident glowing faintly. Hephaestus paused mid-forging, hammer clutched tight. Even the minor gods—Nike, Hebe, Thanatos, Eos—looked up in wary silence.

An intruder was here.

A primordial one.

Only Zeus didn't move. He remained where he was, high above, arms folded, his eyes calm as if none of this surprised him.

The shadows touched the training grounds. They folded, shaped, and in the middle of them, a woman appeared.

She was tall, draped in a cloak woven of pure starlight, hair like the endless void spilling behind her, eyes glowing with the faintest silver. Her face was unreadable, serene, her steps silent as night itself.

Nyx. The primordial Night.

Athena raised her spear. Ares's knuckles whitened around his blade. Hermes swallowed hard and muttered, "Oh, great. This is how we die. Crushed by Mom's favorite bedtime story."

Apollo didn't speak. He just drew an arrow, golden flame crackling along the bowstring.

Nyx stopped in the center of the courtyard. Her aura thickened, suffocating, pulling every breath slower. Her gaze drifted across them—Athena, Ares, Hermes, Apollo—and then she tilted her head slightly, her expression unreadable.

"You've grown."

Her voice was deep, calm, the kind that wrapped around them like smoke, both soothing and terrifying.

Nobody answered.

"You train, you fight, you pretend at strength." Her silver eyes lingered on Athena's spear, then Ares's blade. "But shadows will always outlast steel. Night will always outlast day."

The gods tensed. Muscles coiled. Divine auras sparked faintly, ready to defend Olympus.

Then—

Nyx broke into a grin. Wide. Mischievous. She snapped her fingers, and the suffocating weight vanished instantly, like someone had thrown open every window in a stuffy room.

"Ha!" she laughed, hands on her hips. "Did you see your faces? Oh, priceless. Absolutely priceless. I should've brought a painter to capture that. 'The mighty Olympians, frozen like startled goats.'"

Apollo blinked, his arrow faltering. Hermes's jaw dropped. Ares scowled, face red with anger rather than fear.

"You—" he growled. "You made me—"

"Scared?" Nyx teased, cutting him off. "Adorable. You looked like you swallowed your own tongue. Do it again for me."

Hermes burst out laughing suddenly, clutching his side. "Gods, she's insane. She's actually insane."

Athena, however, kept her weapon raised, though her eyes narrowed differently now. "You hid your presence until the last moment. That's not a prank. That's a test."

Nyx wagged a finger at her. "Always the smart one. And yes, dear, a test. I like to check if the 'new generation of gods' still remembers what fear feels like. Otherwise, you get too comfortable sitting on marble chairs, sipping nectar, acting like the world isn't trying to gut you."

She flopped casually onto one of the weapon racks as though it were a bench, her starry cloak spilling around her like liquid night. "Don't mind me. Go back to hitting each other. I'll just watch. It's been ages since I saw children spar. Reminds me of my little ones."

"Your little ones?" Hermes asked cautiously.

"Oh, you know." Nyx waved a hand. "Doom, Misery, Sleep, Death. The usual bedtime crew." She smiled sweetly. "Good kids. Never talked back."

Apollo lowered his bow, though his lips twitched. "That's... comforting."

Ares still looked furious. "You come here, drown Olympus in your aura, just to laugh at us?"

"Correct," Nyx said cheerfully. "Oh, don't pout, war boy. You should thank me. Fear sharpens the blade."

Athena lowered her spear at last, though her eyes stayed sharp. "Why are you really here?"

Nyx tilted her head, eyes glinting with starlight. For a moment, her playfulness dimmed, and the weight of her presence bled back into the air, not crushing this time, but undeniable.

"Because the seam is open," she said quietly. "And when it opens, old things stir. Some of them are not as friendly as me."

That sobered the courtyard.

Zeus's voice rumbled from above, calm but carrying across Olympus. "Enough, Nyx. You've made your entrance."

Nyx looked up, her grin flashing again. "Zeusy! Still brooding on balconies? What is it with you and dramatic heights?"

A flicker of thunder rolled through the clouds, but Zeus didn't answer. He only watched her, eyes steady.

Nyx leaned back against the rack, crossing her legs. "Relax, everyone. I didn't come to eat your temples or toss your thrones into Tartarus. I just thought I'd stretch my legs, see how the children are doing. And maybe," she added, smirking at Athena, "poke at their pride a little."

Hermes finally let out a relieved laugh, flopping onto the ground. "Gods above, I thought we were about to fight night itself."

"You were," Nyx said with mock pride. "And you lost. Without me lifting a finger."

Even Athena couldn't help the faint twitch of her lips at that.

The tension slowly ebbed, the courtyard alive again with small murmurs, but every god across Olympus remained wary. Nyx might laugh and jest, but she was still what she was. A primordial, older than them, older than Titans.

And yet she lounged in their training grounds like a mischievous aunt, teasing, smiling, eyes glinting with secrets no one dared ask about.

Only Zeus stayed calm, arms folded, his gaze locked on hers. Because he knew—as much as she played, Nyx never came without reason.

And this time, the reason was tied to the seam, and the vote, and the whisper of death that followed him everywhere.

Chapter 126: The Night 2

The air over Olympus grew heavy. It wasn't just a shift—it was a plunge, like the whole mountain had been dropped into an endless night.

Every god froze. Every minor deity, every nymph and spirit in the courtyards below lifted their heads as the sky itself dimmed. Torches bent, their flames stretching toward the ground, shadows pulling longer and sharper as if the world itself feared to stand straight.

An aura filled Olympus. Ancient. Boundless.

Athena's grip on her spear tightened. Ares raised his sword instinctively. Hermes's easy grin faltered, and even Apollo, who thrived in radiance, looked uneasy as his light dimmed.

Only Zeus stayed calm. From the high balcony, his eyes narrowed, patient, knowing.

The night itself thickened at the heart of the training ground, swirling like ink spilled across marble. From it, she stepped.

Nyx.

Primordial Night.

Her robes shimmered like a starfield stitched into shadow, her hair flowing black and endless, swallowing light at the edges. Her silver eyes gleamed with the weight of eternity. She moved without sound, yet every footstep rang in the gods' bones.

For a moment, none dared breathe. The sheer gravity of her presence pressed into their skin, made their hearts drum faster. Even the air was afraid.

Then she smiled.

"Ahh... children." Her voice was velvet, soft but carrying through Olympus with ease. "How you've grown. Bickering. Training. Pretending you're ready for the world outside Daddy's mountain."

The oppressive weight lightened at once, like someone opening a window in a suffocating room. The silence cracked. A few minor gods exhaled loudly, relief spilling into the air.

Athena straightened, her tone cool. "Why are you here, Nyx?"

Nyx tilted her head, pretending to consider. "Hmm... do I start with the scary part, or the fun part? Ah—fun, definitely. Let's warm up."

Her silver gaze landed squarely on Apollo.

"You. Shiny boy."

Apollo blinked, already wary. "...me?"

"Yes, you." Nyx made a dramatic gesture, outlining him with her hands. "Golden hair, golden aura, golden everything. My, my, don't you ever get tired of blinding people? Or is the hair part of the strategy? Walk in, glow so bright they can't aim, then loose an arrow?"

Hermes snorted before he could stop himself. A few minor gods outright laughed.

Apollo's jaw tightened. "It's called radiance. Mortals pray for it."

Nyx leaned closer, smirking. "Mortals also pray for night so they can sleep. Guess who they thank then? Not you, sunshine." She thumbed at her own chest. "Me."

Laughter rippled around the courtyard. Apollo's face flushed. He muttered something that sounded suspiciously like "jealous hag."

Nyx only winked. "Don't pout. You're pretty, but not that pretty."

Her eyes slid next to Hermes.

"And you," she said, zeroing in on his sandals. "Oh, look at those little birdie shoes. Do they chirp when you walk?"

Hermes froze mid-step. "...they don't chirp."

"Are you sure?" She bent down mock-seriously, hand to her ear. "Flap-flap, flap-flap. Honestly, you sound like a goose chasing grain."

Apollo burst out laughing this time. "She's not wrong."

Hermes's face turned crimson. "They're for speed! Stealth! They're legendary!"

"Sweetheart," Nyx said sweetly, "I can cross the void in one blink. Your sandals are cute, though. Maybe get a matching beak?"

Hermes groaned and covered his face.

Nyx clapped her hands once. "This is fun."

Her gaze shifted again, this time to Athena.

"And here's the brain." She conjured a tiny constellation above Athena's head like a crown. "Always calculating, always scowling, never smiling. Tell me, do you whisper bedtime strategies to your pillow?"

Athena's eyes narrowed, her voice steady. "Discipline is not the absence of joy. It is order. Something you wouldn't understand."

Nyx gasped theatrically, hand to her chest. "Order? From you? Oh, sweetling, you're one battle away from turning into Cronus with a better vocabulary."

Even Ares barked a laugh at that.

Athena didn't flinch, though her jaw flexed. "Your humor is wasted here."

"Nothing's wasted on me, darling. I invented wasted time." Nyx giggled, spinning once as if to show off the sky stitched into her gown.

Then she turned to Ares.

"Ohh, my favorite little hothead."

Ares bristled immediately. "Don't."

"Oh, I must." Nyx stepped closer, her grin sharp. "You think you're war, don't you? Fury, blood, fire. But you're just a toddler with a sword, throwing tantrums until someone pats you on the head."

Ares's aura flared, blade rising. "Say that again."

Nyx leaned forward, whispering with deliberate slowness. "Tan-trum."

Ares roared and swung. His sword cleaved air where she stood—but shadows drank it whole, rippling like water. The strike vanished into her aura.

She blew him a kiss. "Cute. You almost scratched the paint."

Hermes was wheezing from laughter now, while Apollo shook his head in disbelief.

Nyx clapped again. "Honestly, you children are delightful. Training, sparring, roasting each other—it's like theatre, but with shinier props."

Apollo muttered, "You're insufferable."

Hermes added, "And hilarious."

Athena's eyes narrowed. "Enough games. Why are you here?"

The air shifted instantly.

Nyx's smile lingered, but her aura swelled again, pressing heavy. Shadows spread farther, swallowing half the courtyard in dark. Her silver eyes burned brighter, colder.

"The Primordials are watching," she said, her voice no longer playful but vast, echoing with the first darkness of creation. "Chaos stirs. Erebus listens. Even Tartarus dreams. And you—" her gaze lifted to Zeus above—"you have been noticed."

Silence. No one moved. The laughter and teasing seemed like it had happened in another world.

"The storm you prepare for will not be of your making," Nyx continued, softer now but heavy. "They see you as a threat, Sky King. They see all of you as pieces on the board. And pieces... are meant to be moved."

Her words settled like ash. Athena's knuckles whitened on her spear. Hermes swallowed hard. Even Ares's anger cooled into wary silence.

Zeus alone did not flinch. He stood on his balcony, gaze steady, unmoved.

Then Nyx's smile returned, playful once more, as though the weight she'd dropped was nothing. She twirled, robe flaring like a galaxy. "Well! That's the scary part done. Back to fun. Now—" she leaned between Athena and Ares with a sly grin—"are you two going to keep fighting like siblings, or finally admit you'd make a cute couple?"

Both gods recoiled instantly.

"Absolutely not," Athena snapped.

"Over my dead body," Ares growled.

Nyx clutched her heart. "Oh, the denial! Delicious. I'll be writing fan-poems about you later."

Hermes collapsed laughing again. Apollo groaned into his hand.

And through it all, Zeus remained still, calm, watching. He knew what the others didn't. Nyx's laughter wasn't just mockery. It was a veil, covering how close the Primordials already were.

When Night herself came to play, it meant the world was already sliding into shadow.

Chapter 127: Surtr

The laughter still lingered in the courtyard. Hermes was doubled over, Apollo rubbing his temple in defeat, Athena glaring knives at Nyx while Ares looked like he wanted to break something but couldn't decide what.

Nyx spun in the middle of it all, arms wide, twirling like a dancer, her robe flaring with constellations. "Ah, Olympus," she sang, voice soft as a lullaby, "so stiff, so proper, yet so easy to rattle."

But then it came.

A sound.

Not thunder, not quake. A roar.

The air above Olympus split open like cloth ripped by claws. The sky groaned as if a wound had been torn in its very skin. Gods froze mid-laugh, their smiles dying at once. Even Nyx's spinning stopped, her silver eyes lifting.

Through the tear came a voice.

"ZEUS! COME OUT!"

The cry was so heavy it cracked the marble tiles of the courtyard. Statues trembled and split down the middle. Birds fell dead from the sky, their wings stiff mid-flap. The shout wasn't sound alone — it was law, command, the kind of voice meant for shaping worlds.

Every god staggered under it. Apollo clutched his lyre as if the strings might snap from the pressure. Hermes grabbed his ears, grimacing. Athena's spear hummed against the

weight, threatening to splinter. Even Ares bent one knee, his rage swallowed by sheer force.

Nyx's smile thinned. "Well," she whispered, "that wasn't me."

The wound in the sky tore wider, bleeding scarlet light. From it, a figure stepped.

He wasn't Greek. His aura was foreign, older in flavor yet sharpened by a different forge. His skin was bronze, carved with burning lines that pulsed like magma. His eyes glowed red, two suns of wrath. His armor wasn't forged of Olympus's light but hammered fire and shadow, jagged and cruel. His weapon was a spear longer than any mast, its head glowing like it had been pulled fresh from a star's core.

A primordial from another mythos.

"Who dares?" Athena's voice cut sharp, though it wavered under the crushing aura.

The being sneered, fire rolling off him in waves that scorched the grass to ash. "I am Surtr," he bellowed, "flame-born of Muspelheim, breaker of gods, ender of worlds. And I call for Zeus!"

The name hit like thunder. Every god turned upward, waiting.

Zeus remained still at his balcony, watching. Only his eyes shifted, narrowing.

Surtr jabbed his spear into the ground, and the earth screamed. Flames erupted, black and red, spreading like veins across the courtyard. Nymphs fled in terror. Statues melted where they stood. The air itself warped, heat shimmering, choking.

Ares roared back, his own blade igniting in crimson. "You dare step on Olympus—!"

He charged, swinging down with raw fury.

Surtr caught the blade in one hand. Just one. The clash sent shockwaves ripping through the courtyard, marble shattering like glass. Ares snarled, pressing harder, but Surtr barely moved.

"Child's strength," the fire giant spat. With a flick, he hurled Ares across the courtyard. The god of war smashed into a column, the stone exploding on impact.

Hermes blinked to Ares's side instantly, pulling him away just as molten fire swallowed the spot where he'd landed.

Apollo's eyes blazed, his bow forming in golden fire. He loosed an arrow that streaked like the sun itself, slicing the air toward Surtr's chest.

The primordial lifted his hand. The arrow struck his palm — and fizzled to smoke. Surtr laughed, the sound like boulders grinding together. "Your light is weak in the face of flame that ends worlds."

Nyx stepped forward, her smile gone now, her aura swelling. Shadows poured from her like rivers, twisting against the fire, dampening its spread. "Careful, foreigner," she murmured. "This mountain isn't yours to burn."

Surtr's gaze snapped to her, his sneer deepening. "Night. Even you cannot smother Muspelheim's fire. Step aside. I came for Zeus."

The gods bristled, forming lines around Nyx, weapons drawn. Athena raised her spear, eyes sharp, while Apollo's bow glowed brighter, Hermes shifting from shadow to shadow, ready to strike. Even Ares, bruised and bloodied, staggered back to his feet, blade shaking in his grip.

But Surtr wasn't looking at them anymore. His gaze locked on the balcony.

On Zeus.

"SKY KING!" His roar shook Olympus again. "Do you hide behind children? Or will you face me?"

For a long breath, silence reigned. Only the hiss of Surtr's fire and the crack of cooling stone filled the air.

Then Zeus moved.

He didn't stride. He didn't descend the stairs. He simply vanished from the balcony and reappeared on the courtyard floor, the stone beneath his sandals glowing faintly where lightning coiled.

The gods instinctively stepped back, clearing space.

Zeus stood, robe brushing the scorched marble, eyes locked on Surtr. He said nothing. He didn't need to. The storm gathering above spoke for him. Clouds rolled black, thick, rumbling with fury, sparks of lightning flashing across their bellies. The scent of ozone filled the air.

Surtr grinned, fire rising taller around him. "Finally."

The two forces clashed without a word.

Surtr swung his spear, carving a wave of fire that split the courtyard in two, flames towering higher than the palace itself. Zeus raised his hand. Lightning speared down in

an instant, shredding the fire into steam. The explosion lit Olympus brighter than day, sending shockwaves that flattened trees and shattered windows.

The gods shielded their eyes.

Surtr lunged through the steam, spear thrusting for Zeus's heart. The tip burned with starfire, reality itself warping around it.

Zeus twisted, his form blurring with lightning. The spear stabbed empty air, and in the same breath Zeus reappeared behind Surtr, palm sparking.

Thunder roared. Lightning burst point-blank into the fire giant's back, sending him crashing forward, molten blood spraying across the marble. The ground hissed and cracked where it landed.

But Surtr only laughed through the smoke. He turned, flames surging brighter, burning away the wound. "Good! Good! Worthy prey at last!"

He slammed his spear down. The ground split wide, rivers of fire tearing across Olympus, magma spewing upward as if the heart of Muspelheim itself had been pulled here.

Zeus leapt, his body a streak of lightning, soaring above the flames. The sky split open as bolts rained down like a storm of spears, each one exploding on impact, hammering the fire back.

Below, Surtr bellowed, spinning his spear. The flames rose higher, colliding with the storm, fire and lightning battling for dominion. The courtyard became a furnace, light and shadow clashing, each strike shaking Olympus's bones.

The other gods could only watch, awe and fear written across their faces. They were strong. But this... this was beyond them.

Surtr swung wide, his spear cutting a crescent of fire that slashed toward Zeus mid-air. Zeus lifted his arm, catching it with a shield of lightning that flared like a sun. The two forces clashed, pushing, straining — then exploded.

The blast shook Olympus to its roots. Columns toppled. The mountain itself groaned.

Zeus dropped back to the ground, eyes locked on Surtr. Sparks danced across his skin, his hair lifted by the charge. He finally spoke, his voice calm but edged with thunder.

"You crossed realms to challenge me. You've burned Olympus's stones. You will regret it."

Surtr grinned, baring molten teeth. "Show me, Sky King. Show me why they call you Zeus."

The storm howled. Flames rose higher. And Olympus braced for war.

Chapter 128: Killing The Second Primordial

The courtyard was gone.

Flames tore the marble into rivers of molten rock, while lightning split the skies in jagged veins. Olympus trembled under it, every column shaking, every statue shattering, as if the mountain itself couldn't decide whether to burn or be struck down.

At the center, Zeus and Surtr clashed.

The fire giant swung his spear in a brutal arc. The weapon's head carved through the air, and the flames it carried melted the ground to lava as it passed. Zeus lifted his hand, thunder booming as a lightning shield crackled into existence. Spear met storm. The impact exploded outward, blasting the gods back, forcing them to shield themselves.

Hermes dove behind a broken pillar. Apollo flared his aura brighter to block the searing heat. Athena's knuckles whitened on her spear as she anchored herself against the gale. Even Nyx's robe of stars rippled like a pond disturbed.

Zeus shoved forward, his shield bursting into a lance of electricity that surged into Surtr's chest. The giant staggered a step, smoke hissing from the wound—but he only roared in laughter, his flames rising higher.

"MORE, SKY KING!" Surtr bellowed. His voice shook the bones of every god present.

He stomped once. The earth cracked like glass, and a geyser of molten fire erupted beneath Zeus. The king of Olympus blurred away, his body scattering into lightning bolts that zipped across the battlefield. In the blink of an eye, he reformed above Surtr, fist drawn back.

Thunder cracked.

He slammed his fist down like a hammer of the storm itself.

The blow struck Surtr's helm, the shockwave flattening half the courtyard. Fire splashed out like a tidal wave, spilling into the gardens, torching trees into cinders. The mountain groaned under the force.

But Surtr's head only turned slightly, his molten grin never fading. He caught Zeus's wrist mid-swing, flames crawling up his arm. "Too slow."

He yanked Zeus down and drove a knee of magma into his ribs. The sound was like stone breaking. Zeus's body snapped back, crashing through the courtyard wall, rubble exploding into dust.

"Father!" Apollo shouted, raising his bow.

"Stay back!" Nyx snapped sharply. Her silver eyes never left Surtr. "This is his fight."

Zeus rose from the wreckage at once, no hesitation, no stumble. His robe was gone, torn away in the impact, leaving only the storm that clung to him like armor. Lightning coiled around his shoulders, dancing across his skin, every spark humming with fury.

He raised his arm. The skies split open.

A hundred bolts dropped at once, spears of raw thunder raining down like judgment. Each strike cracked stone, tore fire apart, burned the ground black. The air screamed under the assault.

Surtr crossed his spear before him, flames bursting outward in a shield. Lightning hammered it again and again, but he pushed through, roaring, his whole body glowing like a furnace about to rupture.

He charged.

The spear thrust forward, a comet of fire. Zeus caught it bare-handed, sparks screaming as lightning wrapped the blade. For a heartbeat, the two forces locked—the god of storms, the giant of fire, both shoving, both snarling.

The marble under their feet shattered into nothing. The shockwave lifted entire pillars from their roots and flung them aside like toys.

Then Surtr twisted. The spear slid free, slashing across Zeus's chest. Blood—bright, divine—spilled, sizzling as it hit the molten ground.

The gods gasped.

But Zeus didn't flinch. He seized Surtr's wrist and slammed his forehead forward, cracking against the fire giant's skull with a thunderclap so loud it shook the stars above.

Surtr reeled back, flames sputtering for the first time.

Zeus lifted both hands.

The storm screamed.

A colossal bolt, thicker than a temple column, ripped from the heavens and struck down onto Surtr. The giant's roar was drowned in the explosion, his entire form swallowed in light. The ground cratered, molten rock spraying upward like a fountain.

When the light faded, Surtr was still standing.

Charred. Smoking. But grinning.

"Good," he rasped, voice broken with fire. "Good!"

He raised his spear high. Flames gathered around him, twisting, screaming, merging into the shape of a wolf made of fire, its jaws snapping, its body towering taller than Olympus itself. Its howl shattered the clouds.

The gods staggered back in fear. Apollo dropped his bow. Hermes went pale. Even Ares, still standing, cursed under his breath.

Zeus looked up, calm, the storm raging louder around him.

He spread his arms.

The wolf lunged.

Zeus vanished.

And reappeared inside its throat. Lightning flared so bright it blinded the world. His body split into dozens, a hundred streaks of thunder ripping outward at once, each one a lance piercing the wolf's form.

The beast of fire detonated in a blaze that turned night to day.

Surtr roared, the force ripping through him, flames spilling from his mouth. He staggered, his molten skin cracking under the storm's onslaught.

Zeus landed in front of him, eyes burning like lightning itself. His voice rolled like thunder across Olympus.

"You should have stayed in your realm."

Surtr growled, his spear lifting one last time, trembling. His body cracked like stone, flames leaking through. "I... will... burn this mountain..."

Zeus's hand closed around his spear shaft.

Lightning surged.

The weapon shattered in two.

Surtr froze, eyes wide, molten blood spilling from the cracks across his chest. Zeus's lightning speared through him, tearing him apart from the inside. For the first time, the fire giant screamed—not in rage, but in pain.

The sound echoed down the mountain, across the seas, through every realm listening.

And then, with a final burst of light, Surtr exploded into ash and fire. His essence scattered to the winds, the wound in the sky closing behind him.

Silence fell.

The courtyard was gone, reduced to molten ruin. The gods stood in awe, bruised, singed, their breaths ragged. Nyx alone still smiled, her silver eyes glinting.

"Well," she murmured, her voice soft but carrying. "Seems the other pantheons are paying attention too."

Zeus stood among the ruin, his chest bloodied, his aura still crackling with lightning. He said nothing. His gaze lingered on the sky where Surtr had vanished, calm and steady, though his hand clenched at his side.

The war had not even begun. But the first stone had already been thrown.

Chapter 129: Trouble Times

The silence hung for a long moment. Smoke curled where Surtr had stood, the air still trembling with the memory of his roar. The courtyard was nothing but ruin, but in the middle of the rubble, something glowed faintly—burning against the dark like a fallen star.

Zeus stepped toward it, slow but steady. The others watched in silence. The light pulsed, alive in a way that was more than fire. When he crouched, he saw it clearly: Surtr's essence. The molten breath of his being, still raging in its heat. Alongside it, deeper, harder, lay the core—a shard of pure flame compressed to impossible density. Both hummed like hearts torn from a giant's chest.

Zeus stretched his hand. Lightning curled around his arm as he reached into the blaze and drew them out. The essence swirled like liquid fire in one palm, while the core, heavy as a mountain, burned in the other. Neither scorched him. They bent to him, surrendering their fury.

He rose, the gods' eyes following him as the glow painted his form. For a breath, he looked like the storm crowned in fire.

Then he turned. His gaze fell on Ares first.

The god of war was still gripping his sword, bloodied and bruised, but his eyes were alive, burning with the same hunger Surtr had carried. Zeus stepped before him and lifted his palm.

"This belongs to you," he said, voice quiet but heavy.

Ares blinked. "What—"

Zeus pressed the essence into his chest. The fire sank into him instantly, threads of flame burning through his veins. Ares staggered, teeth gritted as the heat spread, his aura flaring crimson. Sparks of molten light raced across his armor. His roar split the air, more beast than man.

When the glow steadied, Ares stood straighter. His eyes shone like red steel pulled from a forge. His sword vibrated, reshaped itself, lengthening into a blade licked with fire. He looked at his father with shock, then smirked, a feral grin.

"I feel alive," he growled, voice rough with power.

Zeus only nodded once. Then his gaze shifted to Apollo.

The archer god stood uncertain, his bow lowered. He still trembled faintly, the fire wolf's howl echoing in his bones. But Zeus didn't hesitate. He placed the core in Apollo's hands.

The young god flinched—the heat seared instantly, brighter than the sun itself. He almost dropped it, but Zeus's hand pressed over his. "Hold it," he commanded.

Apollo's jaw tightened. He clutched the core tighter.

The flame sank into him, burning upward through his chest, into his throat, his eyes. His aura exploded outward, flooding the ruined courtyard with blinding gold. His bow stretched, reshaped, glowing as if forged anew by the sun. His hair lifted, his whole body trembling as the fire fused with the light of day inside him.

When it settled, Apollo exhaled slowly, his breath smoking. He lowered his bow, then looked at Zeus, awe in his eyes.

"You... gave me the sun of another world," he whispered.

Zeus's gaze was steady. "Use it well."

The gods murmured among themselves, eyes wide. To take the spoils of a fallen Primordial and hand them away—none of them had expected it.

But Zeus turned without another word. His robe was gone, his chest still streaked with blood, yet he walked like a man untouchable. He stepped past the broken walls, up the ruined steps, until he reached the high balcony overlooking the mountain.

The night was scarred. Clouds still twisted overhead, burned and torn from the clash. Below, the world stretched vast and silent, watching.

Zeus placed his hand on the railing. His storm still hummed quietly under his skin.

That was when Nyx appeared beside him. She didn't step, didn't fly. One moment she wasn't there. The next, the stars of her robe brushed against his arm. Her silver eyes glowed faint, reflecting both ruin and fire.

"You are now really a threat to them," she said softly, though her voice carried. "Not one, but two Primordials have fallen at your hands. First Tartarus's spawn. Now Surtr."

Zeus's jaw clenched. He said nothing.

Nyx's gaze didn't waver. Her tone lost its teasing edge, cutting sharp instead. "They will come for you now. All of them. And they will not laugh at Olympus anymore. They will take you seriously."

Behind her, the air shifted again. Roots spread faintly across the floor, tiny vines pushing through cracks of molten marble. A soft green glow rose, warm against the storm's cold light.

Gaia appeared.

Her form was weary, her steps heavy. The earth mother looked thinner, her skin cracked faintly like dry soil. Yet her presence filled the ruin with life, even against the scent of ash. Beside her, another figure emerged—Rhea. Regal, calm, the Titaness who had defied Cronus, her eyes sharp as ever.

They both looked at Zeus.

"What Nyx says is true," Gaia murmured, voice deep as mountains. "You have tipped the balance. You did what we could not—you cut down a Primordial's champion and lived. That alone makes you a danger they cannot ignore."

Rhea's gaze softened, though her voice held iron. "You will need allies, Zeus. Support from every corner of Olympus. Even those who do not yet trust you."

Zeus turned his head slightly, eyes flicking between them. His hand still gripped the railing, knuckles white.

"They think me a child still," he said.

"Not anymore," Nyx whispered. "You bled them. You bled gods of the old night itself."

Apollo and Ares stood below, still glowing faint with their gifts. Hermes shifted uneasily, while Athena's face was set, unreadable. The others whispered, some in awe, some in fear.

Gaia took a step forward, her roots crawling further, wrapping the broken stone. "The Primordials are not mortals, nor Titans, nor giants. They are older than sky and sea. You face them now because you have forced them to see you. And they will not forgive."

Zeus's eyes narrowed, staring out at the vast dark. Lightning flickered faintly along his arms.

Rhea's voice cut the silence. "This is only the beginning. The war you fought with Cronus was nothing. The storm that comes now will make the Titanomachy look like a child's quarrel."

For a long moment, Zeus didn't answer. His gaze was on the horizon, where the clouds churned and the stars shivered.

Then thunder rolled, low and distant.

Nyx tilted her head, her silver eyes catching his profile. "Tell me, Sky King. Do you feel fear?"

Zeus's lips curved, faint and cold. His eyes burned with stormlight as he whispered, "No. I feel the world holding its breath."

The balcony trembled under his grip as another bolt split the heavens, the light scattering across Olympus.

Gaia closed her eyes, weariness deep in her voice. "Then prepare yourself, child. For they are coming. And this time... they come for you."

The gods below fell silent at her words.

Zeus stood unmoving, the storm crawling across his shoulders, the night pressing in around him. For the first time since the Titan War, Olympus felt small under the weight of what loomed beyond it.

And yet, lightning still hummed in his veins.

Chapter 130: The Sky

The silence after Gaia's words stretched. The night was heavy, the ruins of Olympus still bleeding smoke, and Zeus's storm dimmed just enough for her voice to slide through.

"I may have someone who can help you," Gaia said at last.

Zeus's eyes shifted to her. "Who?"

Gaia did not answer. She only turned, her hand brushing the broken railing. Roots crawled up from the molten cracks, wrapping around her feet, glowing with a faint green light. The air thickened, humming with the weight of the earth itself.

"Come with me," she said simply.

The ground moved. Not like an earthquake. More like the world itself folded in, pulled around them. The sky vanished. The balcony, the ruin, even the gods still whispering below—all gone in an instant.

Zeus didn't flinch, though his hand still sparked faintly. When the shift ended, they were standing somewhere else entirely.

A plain of endless stone stretched before him. Dark, silent, yet filled with a weight that pressed into the chest. The sky above wasn't blue or black—it was a swirling canvas of gray, as if dawn and dusk were locked in a struggle that would never end.

In the center of the plain lay a being.

Massive. Larger than any Titan Zeus had ever seen. His body was stretched across the stone like a mountain given human form. His chest rose and fell in slow, deep breaths that seemed to shake the air itself. His skin glimmered faintly, not flesh, not stone, but something in between. His hair was like rivers of night, spilling endlessly around him. His eyes were shut, but even in slumber, power radiated from him—raw, ancient, endless.

Zeus froze, thunder quieting in his veins. His eyes narrowed.

"Who is that?"

Gaia's voice was almost reverent. "That is Ouranos. The sky before you. The one who came before you, before Cronus, before even me."

Zeus's brow furrowed, eyes never leaving the giant form. "Ouranos..."

"The Primordial Sky," Gaia said softly. "My first mate. My first king. The father of Titans... and the one who was cast down, torn apart by Cronus's sickle. His body scattered, his will bound, his essence sealed."

Zeus's jaw tightened. "I thought he was gone."

Gaia's lips curved faintly, though it wasn't a smile. "Gone? No. Forgotten, yes. The world does not forget the sky, child. It only pretends."

Zeus's fists clenched at his side, lightning snapping faintly across his arms. He looked again at the being lying in silence. The air around Ouranos was heavy, as if even sound feared to stir near him.

"And you brought me here," Zeus said slowly, "because you think he can help me."

"I know he can," Gaia replied, stepping forward. Her roots stretched across the stone toward the slumbering form, caressing the cracks in the ground like a mother reaching for a child. "But it will not be easy."

Zeus's eyes flicked to her. "He sleeps."

"No," Gaia whispered. "He dreams. His will is fractured. Cronus cut him, and each wound still bleeds in the bones of the world. If he wakes fully, his rage may shatter everything. He may not know friend from foe."

Zeus's lips pressed tight. The storm in him stirred, restless.

Gaia turned to face him, her gaze steady though her form looked frail. "But you carry the storm, child. The sky answers you already. You are closer to him than anyone else. If anyone can reach him, it is you."

Zeus stared at Ouranos. The sheer size of the being was staggering—like staring at a piece of existence itself given flesh. He remembered the wars, remembered how hard it was to break Titans, how much blood had been spilled just to fell Cronus. And this... this was their father. Something older. Something heavier.

"Why him?" Zeus asked finally.

Gaia's eyes darkened. "Because the Primordials will come in force now. And when they do, even your lightning may not be enough. You need the strength of what came before. You need the sky itself."

Zeus exhaled slowly, his breath faintly sparking. He took a step forward. The air thickened at once, as though Ouranos's slumber resisted his presence. The pressure pressed down on his shoulders, but he kept walking.

Closer.

Each step made the hum louder, like a storm building in silence. His heart pounded with it, his veins resonating.

He stopped a few paces from the giant's face. The closed lids were still, but Zeus could feel the power beneath them—a sea of it, stretching farther than he could comprehend.

Zeus lifted his hand. Lightning flickered faintly across his fingers. He paused. For the first time in a long while, he hesitated.

Gaia's voice came faintly behind him. "He may destroy you. Or he may raise you higher than any throne. That choice lies in his dream... and in your storm."

Zeus lowered his hand, placing it gently against the massive cheek of the sleeping sky.

The world shifted.

Light burst behind his eyes. He was not in the plain anymore. He was standing in a vast emptiness, a sky with no ground, no horizon, only endless stars. The storm in him flared, but it was small compared to the endless expanse.

And there, rising in the void, was a figure.

Ouranos. Awake. His eyes were like galaxies, burning endless and cold. His voice was not sound—it was the air, the stars, the pull of gravity itself.

"Who... dares disturb my dream?"

The weight of it almost crushed Zeus's knees. Sparks exploded across his body, holding him upright. He met that cosmic gaze without flinching.

"I am Zeus," he said, his voice raw against the void. "King of Olympus. The storm."

The stars trembled at the name. Ouranos's eyes narrowed, recognition flickering faintly.

"The child of Kronos..." the voice rumbled. "The usurper of usurpers..."

Zeus's jaw clenched, lightning bleeding from his skin. "I am not Cronus. I broke him. I will break worse."

Silence stretched. Then the vast figure leaned closer, his presence overwhelming.

"Storm-child," Ouranos murmured, the words shaking the void. "You smell of me. You are the sky reborn in flesh."

Zeus's breath quickened, his fists clenching. "Then lend me your strength."

Ouranos's laughter rolled across eternity, vast and echoing. "Strength? Or chains? If I rise again, the world will weep. Do you seek victory... or ruin?"

Zeus didn't answer right away. His storm swelled, wrapping him in light against the crushing dark. He lifted his chin, eyes burning bright.

"I seek what is mine," he said.

Ouranos was still. Then, slowly, his massive hand lifted, descending toward Zeus like the sky itself falling. Lightning arced wildly from Zeus's body, but he didn't move. The hand pressed against him—immense, heavy, crushing.

Yet in that pressure, something sparked.

The storm and the sky touched.

For a heartbeat, Zeus felt it—the true weight of the heavens, endless and eternal. The storm in him roared in answer, not crushed, but magnified.

Ouranos's voice rumbled, distant now. "We shall see, storm-child... if you are worthy of the sky."

The light broke.

Zeus staggered back into the stone plain, gasping. His hand was still pressed against Ouranos's face, but now it glowed faintly, blue-white lightning dancing across the Primordial's skin.

Gaia's eyes widened. She whispered, "He answered you..."

Ouranos did not wake. His eyes remained closed. But the plain itself hummed louder, the air vibrating with a power that hadn't been there before. The connection was made.

Zeus lowered his hand, his chest heaving. His storm flickered, stronger, wilder, restless under his skin.

He turned to Gaia.

Her tired face held the faintest smile. "The sky has not forgotten you, child."

Zeus's eyes glowed faintly as he looked back at the sleeping Primordial. He said nothing, but the storm in his veins answered for him—louder than ever.