

## Thalos 144

Chapter 144: Beyond the "Twilight"

In the center of the hilt of the final blade, the [Sword of Asgard], appeared a relief carving of Odin's face.

Such was the ruthless nature of the Swords of the Nine Realms.

Any top-tier soul that died within the Nine Realms would, without exception, be drawn into the swords.

Regardless of the will of the slain, their soul would be completely split and absorbed.

It wasn't that the swords erased their minds directly—instead, they employed a technique that separated the essence of the soul. Most of the soul—the "remnants"—remained, but the core of their consciousness was annihilated.

That's why Surtr, the raging fire giant, after becoming a sword soul, could still radiate fury, yet no longer knew why or against whom he was angry.

Now that all nine god souls had merged with the nine blades, the power of the divine sword set had ascended to an unparalleled level.

Ironically, Thalos no longer had a suitable opponent to test this power on.

Indeed.

With the core of Chaos—Odin—dead, no enemy remained who was worthy of Thalos himself taking action.

To strike now would only rob his subordinates of the merit due them. And that would be unbecoming of a king.

Thalos slowly descended from the sky. Just as he turned his gaze toward the two remaining monster duels, he was surprised to see a bloodied figure approaching: his father, Bor.

"Father," Thalos said.

"I... may I look upon Odin one last time?" Bor asked softly.

Thalos noticed that not far away, his mother Bestla knelt in tears, her clothes also soaked in blood.

For the Aesir, surviving the Twilight of the Gods was a victory worthy of grand celebration.

But for Bor's family, it was nothing short of a tragedy.

They didn't care who joined Chaos or why. All they saw was one son killing another over power—forcing the eldest into conflict, and in the end, brothers killing each other.

"Thalos," Bor said, "promise me—don't desecrate Odin's body, alright?"

"...Alright."

Displaying the severed heads of enemy leaders had long been a tradition of the Aesir.

Once, the eyes of the progenitor giants adorned the bridge of the rainbow. More recently, it had been Njord, Ægir, and Lan.

By all logic, Odin's head should now be added to that display.

But... hanging the head of his own brother held no appeal for Thalos.

He figured he'd use the heads of the eagle and two dragons instead. At least those monstrous visages were more symbolic, more... impersonal.

He could already imagine his priesthood would soon be busy rewriting things. Even if they didn't erase Odin's memory completely, they would definitely begin revising records of his earlier achievements in past divine wars.

The great Twilight War, which had nearly shattered the balance of the entire world, finally ended an hour later.

All five major Chaos beasts had been beheaded.

Odin, Hodr, and Vali were dead.

Bragi, god of poetry, had defected mid-battle. But seeing as he slew three Chaos frost giants, and thanks to the intercession of his wife Idunn, the goddess of youth, Thalos pardoned him for his earlier betrayal—merits balancing out his sins.

Then came the awards ceremony.

Aside from Thor—who had already reached the peak of status—the second highest merit fell to Loki.

His son Jörmungandr, his daughter Hel, and her hound Garmr had all performed brilliantly. Without these two beasts holding off their Chaos counterparts, the Aesir's casualties might have doubled.

Seated atop the supreme throne of the Silver Palace, Thalos narrowed his eyes.

"Loki! I always reward merit. What would you like as your reward? Even if you ask to be king of one realm, I will grant it."

This declaration caused an uproar among the gods and giants.

Surprisingly—no one protested.

As always, power dictated authority.

Since Thalos was clearly supporting Loki, and Loki's family had proven their loyalty in blood, no one could say much.

Even if Loki were crowned king, they'd just have to accept it.

But Loki stepped forward and bowed deeply.

"Your Majesty," he said, "my family is already deeply blessed by your protection. To be seated among the divine is grace enough. If I may ask for anything, let it be that my past tricks against the gods be forgiven, and that the divine court show kindness to my children in the future. That alone would bring me peace."

With those words, Loki ensured a wide, unobstructed path for himself and his descendants.

Not only did he refuse the conspicuous and controversial title of a foreign king, he made it clear he sought peace, not ambition.

Thalos nodded. "Very well. I will give you a contingent of men—you will govern Jotunheim on my behalf. And... I name Jörmungandr the holy guardian beast of the Aesir!"

Outside the palace, Jörmungandr—who had been waiting anxiously—immediately bowed his giant head low in submission.

"Thank you, Your Majesty!"

A holy beast!

Full redemption.

No longer a monster whispered about in fear—now he would be worshipped by mortals across the lands.

As long as he behaved, his future was secure.

Thalos turned to Hel, clad in a formal black gown.

"I promised you the soul of a realm's king. Pick one. Even if they've already become one of my sword souls—I'll allow it."

Hel's eyes lit up, then flicked to the side. "Then I want Nidhogg's soul!"

The death dragon—not only had it gnawed at the World Tree's roots, it had also regularly invaded Hel's realm, devouring souls and hunting corpses.

No spirit would benefit Hel more than this.

Before Ragnarök, having two titanic beasts under her command might've made Thalos wary of Hel's power.

But now?

Even if Loki brought his entire household together, they couldn't stir up any waves.

Thalos handed over Nidhogg's soul without hesitation and replaced it with Sköll's in the [Sword of Niflheim].

With the rewards given, the gods and carefree giants rushed to the Halls of Joy to throw a grand celebration.

Only Thalos remained seated on the throne.

Silent.

For a long, long time...

Finally, Brynhildr broke the silence. "Your Majesty... it's time for supper."

Thalos glanced around.

Nearly half the Valkyries were missing.

"Were our losses... heavy?"

Brynhildr hesitated, then nodded. "Yes."

"...Tomorrow, I'll speak with Hel. See how many we can bring back."

"Thank you, Your Majesty!" Brynhildr wasn't the only one who replied. All the Valkyries present dropped to one knee, eyes shimmering with gratitude.

Not every fallen Valkyrie could be retrieved from the underworld.

This had been a war against Chaos.

If a soul had been too heavily tainted, not even Hel could recover it.

Thalos would do what he could.

He glanced around the palace—many divine thrones had been removed.

Dozens of Aesir gods, names forgotten by epic poets, had perished. They, along with over a hundred giants, had fallen.

Irreplaceable losses.

Even after planning for fifty years, things had still turned out like this.

Suddenly, Thalos understood—

Why the Poetic Edda had described Ragnarök as the extinction of the Aesir.

Because truly... that's how close they'd come.