

Thalos 146

Chapter 146: The Bait Named "Odin"

Loki didn't sleep a wink all night.

Before the sky even began to brighten, he was already anxiously pacing outside Thalos' bedchambers. Yet he didn't dare ask the Valkyries to wake their king. He waited in silence for three whole hours until, at last, around eight in the morning, a Valkyrie told him, "His Majesty is awake."

Loki immediately requested an audience—and was promptly granted one.

"Supreme and glorious God-King, good morning," he greeted, even though he himself looked utterly disheveled. Still, he forced himself to maintain the proper tone of reverence and etiquette toward Thalos.

"You're up early. What's the matter?" Thalos raised an eyebrow at Loki's visit.

"Last night... I, uh, I went to see Odin's remnant soul. He—he begged me to rescue him."

Loki was surprisingly honest, recounting every detail of the previous night without leaving anything out.

After everything that had happened, the Loki standing before Thalos now bore none of the trickster god's usual air. He was meek, obedient—almost pitiful.

When Loki finished, Thalos laughed. "Rescue him? Even if he returned, even if he were resurrected, there's no place left in all Nine Realms for him to stand."

Loki chuckled nervously. "I guess he just doesn't want to stay trapped in that soul-prison. It can't be pleasant."

"No," Thalos shook his head. "That crystal prison is an exact replica of his old palace in Asgard, recreated one-to-one."

Loki's face twitched. Maybe that's the very reason it's tormenting him—what kind of executioner murders a man's soul and also his pride? Thalos was relentless.

Loki continued smiling weakly. "N-no real reason for the visit. I just thought it proper to inform Your Majesty of what happened. If there's nothing else, I'll take my leave—"

"Wait."

"Uh?" Thalos' sudden halt caught Loki off guard. He had no idea what this all-knowing, all-powerful monarch might be thinking.

Thalos stroked his chin in thought.

He, too, was pondering something important: Odin had already been stripped of his soul-core and soul-body. What little remained of him now was no different from an ordinary mortal's soul—less than even a hero-spirit. Whether he was kept imprisoned or obliterated entirely... it really didn't make much difference anymore.

After all, Thalos was just a "foreign" god-king who had usurped the throne.

He never truly hated Odin.

Their enmity had reached its natural conclusion. If his scribes were ever to pen a chronicle titled The Foolish Brother Odin, then everything beyond this point would require a name change.

More pressing was the matter of how to deal with the other world.

He'd already sent three waves of scouts—including Beowulf himself—into that realm. None had returned.

Thalos couldn't risk launching a full-scale assault without any intelligence. That would be suicide.

Yet he also couldn't ignore the presence of that world. It loomed too close to Ginnungagap to disregard.

The problem was, Thalos had honed Ginnungagap into a world of overwhelming Order.

It was a place of trust, of honor, of sacred law and oaths.

This had its advantages—it was easy to govern. But its weakness? Lack of aggression.

Had it been the old Aesir, the ones worshiped by pillaging Viking raiders, Thalos would've simply sent an army across to kill and conquer.

But now? He needed a reason. A *casus belli*.

Transitioning a world rooted in order into an expansionist power was not a simple leap—it required a careful process.

And that process...

Might as well be pushed along by his foolish little brother Odin.

It wasn't hard to imagine. If Odin were released into that other world, fueled by spite and a lust for revenge, the first thing he would do is slander Thalos—paint the Aesir as broken, corrupt, weakened by civil war.

The rulers of the other world would surely take the bait, believing Ginnungagap to be ripe for conquest.

They would fall into the trap of diverting domestic strife with foreign aggression, a strategy that's been practiced by primitive civilizations for millennia. Conquer others to unify the people. Feed the masses the spoils of war to pacify their anger.

It's not like Odin could leak any real intelligence, either. He was a glorified illiterate—there was no way he could comprehend the intricate physical laws Thalos had encoded into the fabric of his world during its recreation.

That kind of knowledge was far beyond the grasp of a god-tier caveman.

With Ginnungagap now larger than the other realm, and Thalos holding the advantage of home turf, he could wait for them to attack and respond with righteous fury—a campaign he would call The Wrath of Order.

Whether or not this was part of some masterplan was beside the point.

It was simply reality: the twin worlds were too close. If he didn't preemptively manage things, and the other side fell into chaos, Thalos would have a headache either way.

All of this churned through his mind in less than thirty seconds.

Then he made up his mind.

"Loki," Thalos said at last, "let me tell you a secret about our world."

With a flick of his hand, a twin-world star map unfolded within Loki's mind.

"...What is this...?" Loki's eyes widened in astonishment.

Thalos gestured toward the Valkyries. "Leave us."

"Yes, Your Majesty!"

Once they were gone, Loki finally recovered from his shock.

"There is another world across from Ginnungagap," Thalos explained. "Since my foolish little brother's ambition is still burning, let him go there. If he manages to incite them to attack us first, it will save us a lot of trouble."

"This... this is Your Majesty's grand design?" Loki muttered in awe.

Thalos casually mentioned he'd already sent a few hero-spirits there as scouts—but omitted that none had returned. Instead, he said calmly, "If Odin establishes a foothold, I know exactly what he'll do. And the damage he caused to Ginnungagap will finally be atoned for."

It was true.

The chaos Odin had unleashed on the central realm had hurt.

Even though it had now been eradicated, the scars ran deep.

If Thalos could absorb that other world and use its core to heal Ginnungagap, surely even the world's will would rejoice.

Loki no longer knew what expression to wear.

Looking back, Odin's rebellion now seemed utterly laughable.

Had Odin ever stood a chance? Or had he merely danced in Thalos' palm, dying the moment Thalos decided to close his hand?

The more Loki thought about it, the more he believed he had uncovered the truth.

He bowed his head deeply. "If Odin really does this... will Your Majesty forgive his crimes?"

"If Odin actually pulls it off," Thalos replied, "then regardless of his motives, regardless of the destruction he brings, he will have served the world well."

And so, with a smile as sharp as a blade, Thalos cast out a bait named Odin.

Now the question was: would the ruler of the other world take the hook?