

Thalos 156

Chapter 156: Advancing by Retreating

Thalos dropped all pretense and spoke plainly.

"Your Celtic World's intelligent beings—whether so-called gods or mortals with divine blood—are shackled by short-sightedness. They can't even see beyond their petty kingdoms, let alone grasp the disasters threatening your entire world. They continue to wage war for selfish reasons, which only accelerates the spread of Chaos. If this continues, they'll destroy themselves—and take you with them."

[...]

The will of the Celtic World fell silent.

"Celtic World! You can take this as a threat if you wish. I won't interfere. Just observe for a while and see if the Chaos within you continues to grow. Then you'll have your answer."

[What would you do, then?]

"Allow me to descend avatars of the Aesir gods with one-third of their divine power. We will crush or subdue all opposition, end the civil wars between order-aligned factions as quickly as possible, and concentrate our forces to wipe out the Chaos encroaching from the sea. If you're willing to grant me dominion over the ocean, I could even drain the sea and drag every abyssal chaos spawn into the light for destruction."

[No!]

The Celtic World refused immediately.

It wasn't rejecting the idea of eliminating Chaos—but rather, it couldn't accept Thalos annihilating all native opposition.

What a joke!

Letting a foreign god wipe out every opposing faction within would basically make Thalos the de facto Celtic God-King! If he then forced the world to rewrite its laws in his favor, who would be able to stop him?

But Thalos didn't mind—he had fully expected the refusal.

This was the classic tactic: ask for the moon so you can settle for a star.

Calmly, he replied, "Then I'm sorry. With my limited wisdom, I can't think of a better solution. For now, let's part ways. If you need me, just call my name from your world's boundary."

The will of the Celtic World immediately fell into anxious confusion.

It had just driven away the only god who might be able to help it. Was that the right decision?

And because Thalos had withdrawn so cleanly, the Celtic World couldn't accuse him of anything.

What it didn't know was that Thalos had already quietly done what needed to be done.

On the Tuatha Dé Danann's main island, Beowulf and Siegfried were trying to scrounge up dinner after a grueling day.

Twelve hours of lifting stones and building walls daily—it was brutal. Luckily, the bodies they'd possessed upon crossing over were physically strong enough to endure it.

"Ugh! Every day doing manual labor—I honestly don't know what the hell I'm even doing here," Siegfried complained.

"Wait it out. I've waited over ten years. You're already the best news I've had," Beowulf said with quiet resolve. No matter how hard this life was, it had been granted by the God-King himself—and Beowulf cherished it.

Just then, a rabbit burst out of the underbrush. Beowulf instinctively drew his bow and fired.

Whoosh!

He was confident the arrow would pierce the creature and pin it to the ground.

But just as the wind-charged arrow was about to strike, the rabbit stood up. Its snow-white forelimb reached out with bizarrely human dexterity and caught the arrow in midair.

"Wha?!"

Both warriors stood dumbfounded.

Even more astonishingly, a divine aura they both knew well radiated from the tiny rabbit.

"Well now, Beowulf, Siegfried—you two seem to be living it up."

Though it had been a long time since they'd heard that voice, the moment Thalos's avatar spoke, they recognized it instantly.

Ignoring the uneven forest terrain, both men immediately knelt before the rabbit.

"We greet Your Majesty!"

"Rise."

The two were overwhelmed with emotion. After playing deep-cover agents for so long, they had nearly forgotten who they really were.

But the Aesir God-King hadn't forgotten them. He had sent an avatar to speak personally.

"You two—building walls day after day. Tough work, isn't it? I want an honest answer."

"Brutal," Beowulf answered bluntly.

"Any resentment? I mean toward Bres."

"Of course!" Siegfried growled at the mere mention. "That bastard not only forces us—the loyalists of the former king—to break our backs, but he also lets that guy—who's probably Odin—whip the previous God-King Nuada!"

Beowulf added, "And on top of that, he taxes us like crazy. There are rumors that he's offering that tax as tribute to the deep-sea Fomorians."

"That's no rumor," Thalos's rabbit avatar gave a disturbingly humanlike grin. "Let me tell you a little secret. That tall, handsome Bres? He's not pure-blooded Tuatha Dé Danann. He's got Fomorian blood."

Both warriors fumed.

"No wonder! That beast treats us like enemies."

"That traitorous dog!"

Once they were done cursing, Thalos smiled again. "So... if you can't stand it anymore, don't. Do what loyal followers of Nuada should do."

"Even if... it sparks a civil war among the Tuatha Dé Danann?" Siegfried asked in surprise.

Thalos didn't answer directly. "Do you really think that even if you don't act, Nuada and his loyalists will put up with this forever?"

The Tuatha Dé Danann's internal rot was bound to explode eventually—even if Thalos did nothing.

All he had to do was light all four of the Celtic World's powder kegs—simultaneously.

The two warriors exchanged a glance, then nodded in unison.

"We obey Your Majesty's command!"

"Don't worry. You'll succeed. And... perhaps not all of Bres's faction will be purged in the end..." the transmigrated God-King added cryptically.

With that, the rabbit casually stabbed the arrow it held into its own chest.

In the next instant, Thalos's divine consciousness vanished without a trace.

"Ah!"

"The rabbit died?"

"So... do we still eat it?"

"Eat it! Why not? It's His Majesty's blessing!" Beowulf declared matter-of-factly.

The next day, as "Austine" lazily flicked his whip at Nuada again—creating noise but not pain—Siegfried suddenly stepped forward and grabbed the whip.

"That's enough! I won't let you insult my lord!"

Beowulf followed suit. He threw down the massive stone in his hands and raised a shovel high into the air. "Exactly! You've never treated us as kin! We work ourselves to death while Bres offers our taxes to those damn Fomorians!"

As one of Nuada's senior loyalists, Beowulf's statement won immediate support—not only from other divine attendants, but even from some Tuatha Dé Danann gods themselves.

The atmosphere on the worksite turned instantly and dangerously tense.