

Thalos 25

Chapter 25: Three Fates, Missing One

This... was the power of Fate.

Because of fate's intervention, all physical interactions were bent toward one outcome—the fulfillment of Gungnir's wielder's desire.

This forceful imposition of irrational laws over rational ones ensured that no matter how a target might dodge, parry, or block under ordinary rules, they could never evade a strike from Gungnir.

This was a bug.

Originally, Thalos had figured that Odin would follow the epic's narrative—head to the center of the World Tree, snap off a sturdy branch to forge Gungnir, and then, as written in the legends, pierce his own chest and hang himself upside-down for nine days, ultimately comprehending the runes of mysterious power. That would be the end of it.

But an unexpected development left Thalos momentarily at a loss.

No sooner had Odin departed than news arrived—Mímir's wife had given birth.

Twins. Both healthy. Named Urd and Verdandi. And they apparently possessed divine power.

Wait a second—

Where was the third?

In mythology, Mímir's three daughters were the Norns—the goddesses of Fate!

Eldest daughter Urd governed the Past, second daughter Verdandi governed the Present, and the youngest, Skuld, governed the Future. The trio didn't just preside over human destiny—they could foresee the fates of gods.

And now, they were two?

The one responsible for Future... didn't show up?

This news made Thalos frown deeply.

Having lived in the world of Ginnungagap for some time now, Thalos had begun to grasp how its will operated. When the world instinctively felt a need for a thunder god, one would be born as the son of the God-King. Whether that God-King was Odin or Thalos didn't matter to the world.

Each new god's birth was necessary.

So, if the goddess of the Future, Skuld, was absent, what was the world trying to say?

That the future... didn't matter?

Or had the god who governed the future already been born?

If so—who was it?

The question gave Thalos a headache.

"Set it aside for now." Thalos chose instead to summon the master dwarven smith Dvalin, instructing him and his craftsmen to prepare for the forging of the divine spear.

As for himself, he would personally accompany Odin to the heart of the World Tree.

When they arrived, Odin was stunned.

In what he thought was an eternally unchanging place—the core of the World Tree—he saw countless chaotic tendrils, visible to the naked eye. They were almost material, coiling around the trunk like writhing serpents.

Though silent, they somehow gave off the illusory shff-shff-shff of snakes slithering.

The dense, vein-like strands of chaos made even the vibrant green glow of the World Tree appear dim.

Odin gasped. "This is..."

"Chaos never left us," Thalos replied. "It's always been here. Beyond the sky, and at the very core of the World Tree. The tree purifies chaos, giving all beings a space to live."

Odin shivered. "What if one day, the tree's purifying power fails?"

Thalos lifted his head, eyes distant—though in truth, he was peering toward a world faintly tethered to this one, but could not see it clearly. He spoke slowly, "If the World Tree weakens... that would mark the beginning of the world's end."

Odin visibly paled. "What would we do?"

"We either accept the world's decline and struggle on in a lower realm's cycle... or find a new path forward."

Odin fell silent for a long time. He lowered his head. When he looked up again, Thalos saw a strange light in his brother's eyes.

"Brother, you're incredible. You really are the one best suited to be God-King."

"Hm?" Thalos raised an eyebrow.

"You always call me foolish. I never wanted to admit it before. But over time... I've realized you were always right. I've run out of arguments."

"..."

"Think about it. Back then, life was hard. Us, the giants—everyone lived primitive, filthy, and vulgar lives. But when you became God-King, you suddenly seemed to know everything. Mortals come to you with questions—you answer them all. When gods, giants, and mortals fight, you mediate and deliver fair judgments. Honestly, Brother... I admire you."

"No need for that. Study hard. One day you'll carry the weight too."

"No need, Brother. I'm actually fine helping you from behind the scenes."

"...?" Thalos wasn't quite buying that.

"I love this world. We named every piece of land we stand on. It raised us, and it will one day nourish our children. We brothers rebuilt this world with our own hands. We know every inch of it. We watched the mortals begin to thrive. We watched them revere us as gods. Since I love all this, of course I'm willing to give everything to protect it."

"That's the right thinking! The world has gifted us with power—we must return all its blessings with responsibility."

"I'm glad you understand, Brother. But what I'm about to do... don't tell Father or Mother. I don't want them to worry."

Realizing the depth of Odin's resolve, Thalos nodded.

Clearly, fate had already nudged Odin to come here before. He had felt the power hidden within the World Tree's core and understood that sacrifice was needed to draw it out.

Right before Thalos's eyes, Odin stepped forward and broke off a six-meter-long branch—taller than himself—from the World Tree. Then, he leapt high onto a thicker segment of trunk, pulling a fresh shoot down and binding his ankles with it. Dangling himself upside down, he pressed his back to the bark.

Then, with the thick branch in hand, he drove it straight through his chest, pinning himself to the tree.

To gain mysterious power, one must offer a sacrifice.

Odin's offering was pain and blood.

Drops of divine blood flowed from his chest and fell onto the bark of the World Tree.

As blood loss and frigid winds took their toll, Odin began to drift into a trance-like, mystical state.

Silently watching, Thalos knew—Odin was about to comprehend the legendary runes.

These ancient symbols held the foundational power of the World Tree. The runes were their conduit—but merely obtaining them wasn't enough. They were only vessels; one had to later learn the accompanying incantations.

One day passed.

Then two.

Then three.

And then...

Fate played a colossal prank on both Odin and Thalos.

Because Thalos suddenly realized—

The runes were appearing in his mind, too.

Wait, wait, wait...

Wasn't there some mistake here?!