

Thalos 266

Chapter 266: The Triumphal Anthem (Part 2)

The grand triumphal procession seemed endless.

Bathed in the radiant glow of the Bifröst Bridge, the triumphant army marched through the city from south to north, receiving the cheers of the masses.

Except for the local garrisons, the army never paused—moving out of one city, disappearing into the shimmering rainbow light, only to reappear at the next.

One city after another, they proclaimed the glory of the Aesir pantheon and flaunted the unmatched might that had conquered entire world-level civilizations.

Eventually, the many triumphal contingents converged into a single column and arrived at the terminus of the Bifröst Bridge in due sequence.

As the Slavic gods emerged from the bridge, their eyes fell immediately upon a majestic golden palace standing at the very center of the divine realm.

Looking around, they saw the towering, magnificent wall encircling the divine city—on which the only signs of time's passage were the skulls of gods mounted on its towers. From old to new, from giants to great gods to deity-sized skulls, they bore witness to the Aesir's unparalleled military exploits in the chaotic cosmos.

The gates of the immense wall—taller even than giants—stood wide open, divine light of overwhelming sanctity radiating from within.

The divine warriors of the Aesir marched with steady, powerful strides through the gate, solemn and awe-inspiring.

The accompanying Slavic gods immediately felt they had entered a realm of overwhelming power and sacredness.

Beyond the gate, in the central square, towering stone statues stood imposingly on either side.

These lifelike sculptures depicted the God-King Thalos Paulson leading the Aesir through their many glorious campaigns—slaying the primordial frost and flame giants, subjugating the Vanir gods, absorbing Aegir, and of course, the famed "Ragnarök"...

Scene after scene of the Aesir's battles across various realms was brought to life in three dimensions through sculpture. Around the statues, ever-burning torches flickered, their flames dancing as though celebrating the return of the gods in triumph.

After years of construction, the buildings surrounding the square were imposing and grand. Their intricate carvings and embellishments embodied the craftsmanship and artistry of dwarves and gnome artisans. The streets and markets were broad and orderly—on any other day, they would be teeming with life.

Today, however, tens of thousands of mortals—considering service to the gods the highest honor—knelt before the triumphant Aesir army, bowing reverently.

Most of them were divine attendants selected by the major churches of the mortal realm. The Aesir were a martial pantheon; any divine attendant who made it to Asgard was already a famed warrior in the lower realms. Annual combat trials and profession-based competitions ensured that only the best remained. Over the years, mortal offspring had occasionally been born of divine unions, and as their bloodlines spread, they gradually formed a new elite class centered on demi-god descendants.

They were the cornerstone of the Aesir's rule over mortals.

Now that the Aesir stood as an unparalleled hegemon, their triumphant return pushed their prestige to an all-new peak.

Their presence, in turn, affected the newly integrated gods.

In a certain sense, these Slavic gods—newly freed from their status as enslaved deities—stood even lower than the Aesir's half-mortal descendants.

Everything would have to be earned by their own merit.

Perun, the Slavic god of thunder—who also presided over war and blacksmithing—knew that his domains would not remain intact in Ginnungagap.

Yet the Aesir offered the entire Slavic pantheon a new hope and a brilliant future. As he watched the imposing figures of the Aesir gods ahead, his eyes—and those of his fellow Slavic deities—were filled with resolve.

"Siwa," Perun whispered.

The goddess of love, beauty, and fertility instantly understood. To truly change the Slavic gods' destiny, martial prowess alone would not be enough...

The golden palace drew nearer.

Built to accommodate beings three times human height—or even towering giants—it made the Slavic gods, most of whom were human-sized, feel momentarily disoriented upon entry.

Fortunately, the Celtic and Sumerian gods had preceded them.

Seeing thrones sized for mortal-statured gods helped the Slavic newcomers feel less out of place.

The heads of the Mayan, Incan, and Aztec gods were now one by one presented before the assembly, each name called out by the valkyrie Brynhildr. With every name, the gods and giants roared in amazement and celebration.

When the tally of heads concluded, it was time for rewards and honors.

Thalos' sharp gaze swept across the hall, meeting countless heated, expectant stares.

His deep, magnetic voice echoed throughout the Golden Hall.

"Enki!"

"I am here," responded Enki, the former Sumerian god of wisdom and water, who had never expected to be the first named. He quickly stepped forward and dropped to his knees in formal salute.

"You supported my son Gilgamesh with your wisdom, claimed vast lands in the Egyptian realm, and helped Ginnungagap avoid a prophecy of destruction. You shall be heavily rewarded."

"What?!" gasped the assembled gods and giants. Only now did they realize how much Enki had done. That enormous crystal skull, which had seemed strange but not particularly dangerous—was actually that terrifying?

Why was Enki the one being honored?

Simple.

Gilgamesh, as the God-King's son, could not receive additional titles. Any reward would have to be something as grand as ruling an entire realm. His contributions hadn't reached that threshold yet—so Enki was the one receiving recognition.

Enki, ever tactful, bowed three more times.

"I am deeply grateful, Your Majesty."

"I hereby name you the God of the Ocean—you shall oversee all oceans in the world of Ginnungagap."

"Hiss—" Countless deities could not help but sigh in envy.

Enki, originally the Sumerian god of wisdom and water, held a prestigious position. But it mustn't be forgotten—he was the brother of Enlil, the former Sumerian God-King. In most pantheons, such a status would mark him forever as a remnant of the old regime, never again to rise.

But in the Aesir pantheon, Thalos had the courage and vision to reward true merit. Enki earned his honor, and Thalos recognized it.

At a glance, "God of the Ocean" might sound less prestigious than "God of Water." But that depended on scope. The total water element in Enlil's old realm could not compare to the vastness of Ginnungagap.

Now, with the Maya, Inca, Aztec, and Akkadian worlds all within their grasp—possibly soon to include the Egyptian realm as well—the total reached sixteen minor worlds!

Sixteen worlds' worth of oceans certainly dwarfed the elemental power of a single Sumerian realm. Though Thalos remained the true God of Water, and the Lady of the Lake (from the Celtic pantheon) held dominion over lakes, Enki's elevation marked a tremendous leap.

"Thank you, Your Majesty! I shall devote all my wisdom and loyalty to your service."

After Enki, the next great contributor was Hel.

"Hel, step forward."

"Yes, Your Majesty." The beautiful Hel stepped forth, offering a graceful bow.

"I have yet to decide your reward. Speak—what would you ask for, Hel?"

Hel blinked and, with a touch of mischief in her eyes, said, "I hope Your Majesty will lend me Skadi—to serve under my name as a 'Goddess of Death.'"