

Thalos 311

Chapter 311: [The Scales]

Another "Momotaro" climbed onto the bank, staring at his own hands. He watched as what had been thin, shriveled palms filled out with blood and flesh at a speed visible to the naked eye. As his hands grew to adolescent size, the final wisps of black mist between his fingernails were seared away into blue smoke by sunlight filtering through the leaves.

A reflection in the creek shattered as another youth splashed through the water and leapt onto a rock. Droplets rolled down his bronze-toned back, unnoticed by all—just as the ferocious bony spur that had once protruded from his spine faded into a pale golden birthmark.

The miasma shrouding the creek dissipated, and every leaf touched by the peach's aura began secreting sweet nectar.

The first girl to complete her transformation knelt beneath the largest peach tree, her eyelashes still clinging to droplets of purification water. As she gently blew on her palms, three peach pits rolled between her fingers and fell into the soil—instantly sprouting into bright emerald shoots.

"So this is rebirth? How miraculous."

"I can't believe I'm not two-headed anymore."

"And I no longer have five arms."

The boys and girls exchanged glances and shared knowing smiles.

Just then, a squad of warriors on horseback arrived, accompanied by a shrine maiden in white robes and red hakama pants.

"You're the ones from beyond this realm?!" barked the lead samurai, still mounted, wearing a red demon-faced mask and puffed up with arrogance.

One hot-tempered boy stepped forward instinctively, but was held back by a companion.

A girl instead stepped up and performed a complicated yet elegant ritual gesture.

Was that... a greeting?

The samurai was momentarily stunned.

The girl spoke calmly and clearly. "In life, we served as battle angels under Baralan. We are grateful to Amaterasu Ōmikami for granting us rebirth as humans. We shall dedicate all that we are to the Yamatai pantheon—even if we must die again. As long as we perish as humans, to be reincarnated within Yamatai, we shall have no regrets."

The samurai, finding himself completely unneeded, could only nod blankly and throw out a rote line: "It's good you know your place. Come with us. Time to gather."

Despite having no divine power, no elemental aura, not even a strong soul—just a plain mortal—his arrogant tone still rubbed several of the "boys" the wrong way.

Nevertheless, these mysterious "Momotaros" and "Momomiys" chose to comply.

Similar events were unfolding all across the Yamatai world.

What Amaterasu didn't know was that the same phenomenon was occurring in Shiva's domain on the other side.

Compared to the Yamatai gods, who at least spent divine power to purify these chaos-born souls and grant them new human bodies, Shiva's approach was... considerably rougher.

Two heads?

Three legs?

Four arms?

No problem!

Didn't they see their new master—Shiva himself—had four arms and three eyes?

Shiva had always had a penchant for commanding monsters. For these creatures capable of regaining their reason after emerging from chaos, Shiva didn't care if they were refined or grotesque—he accepted them wholesale as fodder and threw them straight onto the front lines as shock troops.

The war between the two world clusters suddenly escalated. But in an eerie unspoken agreement, these reincarnated former chaos beings seemed to only target the opposing side's subordinate factions with lethal precision...

Meanwhile, as the Ginnungagap world broke through the fog of chaos and drifted ever closer to the two battling clusters, a new situation arose.

Hel—rarely one to initiate—invited Thalos to the Underworld. "Your Majesty! Something's come up. You should come to Helheim."

"All right," Thalos replied, surprised.

Life and death were distinct domains. Even though Thalos held some authority over death as a god-king, he preferred not to set foot in the Underworld. His overwhelming elemental presence risked disrupting its delicate balance.

This time, he conjured a projection of himself and brought along projections of Enki and Gilgamesh, plus several Valkyries.

At the gate, as expected, two of his women—Elé and Scáthach—were waiting.

To Thalos, the supposedly eerie atmosphere was nothing.

"What happened?"

Elé and Scáthach exchanged a look before Elé, the more professional of the two, explained: "Your Majesty, you may consider them deceased beings from other worlds. But I prefer to call them former chaos demons."

"Oh?"

Scáthach added, "Hel is holding them at bay for now. Please follow us."

A massive wooden boat, resembling a ferry from the River Styx, suddenly appeared in the air. Below it churned a dense tide of death energy, as though the ship truly sailed the river of the dead.

They boarded, and Scáthach used the shaft of her [Gae Bolg of Death Flight] to guide them. A gentle thrust sent the boat hurtling through space like a missile.

After several twists and turns, they didn't arrive at Hel's palace in Helheim. Instead, they veered downward—toward the very bottom of the Ginnungagap world.

Even Thalos, well-traveled as he was, was stunned by what he saw.

"This is..."

Given the direction of gravity, this should technically be "beneath" them.

It was a horrifying sea of skulls!

But this wasn't merely a sea of death.

These skulls, separated from the group by only a paper-thin membrane of "water," had living human eyes staring out of their grey-white sockets—filled with fervent, almost worshipful longing.

With Thalos' arrival, the entire sea of the dead stirred in silent reverence.

Countless skeletal arms—or perhaps clawed limbs of monstrous chaos beasts—reached upward, trying to break free.

They writhed and tangled together like centipedes with human hands, like vipers in a nest, twisting and merging into grotesque forms.

Thousands... tens of thousands... perhaps even millions of tormented souls?

Due to the strange combination of Underworld waters and spatial barriers, even Thalos' divine perception couldn't penetrate very far.

If this were the physical world, he'd be able to probe them in seconds.

But this was a subspace spun from Helheim—it played by different rules.

He turned to the tense-looking Hel. "Explain."

"Yes, Your Majesty!" she said, bowing deeply. "I was the first to discover them. Given that all our forward-facing planes have suffered chaos invasions and spatial cavity incursions, I didn't report this immediately. But these creatures from the depths of chaos space are different. They're lucid. And they keep repeating one word."

Thalos focused. Despite their various tongues, all their minds echoed one unified term:

"The Scales."

Enki gasped sharply and said, "Your Majesty... they're saying that if you sacrifice a set of souls of sufficient weight, you can redeem them from the chaos hell."