

Thalos 354

Chapter 354: Odin's Embarrassment

This time, fleeing through the cracks between the three great pantheons—no, making a "strategic victorious withdrawal"—was not thanks to wisdom or decisiveness, but purely due to bloodline. And that was what made Odin feel the most ashamed and humiliated.

After leaving Ginnungagap, Odin had been lost, full of hatred for his own blood. Day and night, he cursed his "good big brother" Thalos, and more than once attempted to build a force stronger than his brother's, to take back the Aesir Pantheon that was rightfully his.

"My brother started from nothing; so can I!"

That had always been Odin's belief.

But harsh reality beat it out of him again and again.

In the Celtic world, he briefly became god-king, only to be wiped out by Thalos and the Aesir shortly after.

In the Maya world, because of the deadly curse backlash from God-King Comu, he didn't dare act rashly. He hesitated—and before he could even sit on the god-king's throne, Thalos arrived with the Aesir, turning Loki to his side, corrupting the Slavic slave gods, and overwhelmingly defeating the three Maya pantheons in open battle—all while deftly dodging the world-ending curse of the Doomsday Prophecy.

Sure, being the victor came with momentum and snowballing resources—but behind it all lay invisible mastery over command and an unmatched ability to resolve inter-pantheon conflicts.

Odin had imagined himself in his brother's position countless times, and each time he had to admit: if he were god-king, he couldn't have done better.

He lacked his brother's combat prowess. He wouldn't be able to subdue the Vanir god-king Njord, and would likely be forced to compromise with the Vanir.

If the rot started there, the domino effect would be disastrous.

Compromise would lead to more compromise.

Eventually, outside of his own offspring, any campaign would require consultation with every faction and warlord in his tribe. How could he then subjugate other pantheons?

Even if he managed to conquer them, he'd have to divide the spoils with those internal power blocs.

The sheer chaos of it all made his head hurt.

It wasn't that Odin lacked wisdom—but if bogged down by such internal strife, he wouldn't have the energy to handle domestic affairs or enforce military discipline.

There are no "what-ifs" in this world.

Not only had Odin failed to retake the Aesir, but after being defeated repeatedly, his current base of power didn't even match what he once had ruling the Tuatha Dé Danann in the Celtic lands.

No matter how loudly he talked about retaking Ginnungagap and reclaiming the Aesir, it was no longer even laughable—it was just pathetic.

Odin had even entertained a malicious fantasy: if some even greater pantheon defeated the Aesir, perhaps then he could make a glorious return, seizing control of the Aesir remnants. But he quickly gave up on that too. If even his brother couldn't beat that enemy, then there'd be no value in Odin inheriting a shattered Aesir—it'd be utterly useless.

Besides, his brother just had too many kids.

All the critical divine positions were taken up by Thalos's powerful offspring.

No one but Thalos could command these proud and mighty sons of gods.

Even if the Aesir were crippled by an external enemy, Odin would never be able to step in—not unless every single one of Thalos's sons was dead.

"Ugh..."

A long, deep sigh summed up Odin's current predicament—awkward and helpless.

Technically, he was a god-king... but he had to rely on the name Borson to pose as a member of the Aesir in order to escape the universal law of pantheon conflict.

Odin had a grim premonition: Liranka, his tiny little world, wouldn't stand a chance in the next great pantheon war. It lacked the size and might to qualify as an independent force.

Worse yet, whether he liked it or not, enemy pantheons were likely to treat his new Maya pantheon as a vassal of the Aesir—and hit it accordingly.

He couldn't strike back against the Aesir, but would still get pounded by their enemies.

And judging by his calculations, the next enemy pantheon they'd encounter would be even stronger than India or Fusang.

In the vast chaotic cosmos, the rule was always the same: the strong play chess, the weak become pieces.

It sucked. He was just a poor pawn caught between two forces, getting squeezed from both ends.

"If only the Aesir hadn't cast me out... No, wait."

Odin's eyes narrowed suddenly, then he let out a bitter smile.

The Aesir hadn't really cast him out, had they?

Maybe once could be written off as luck—but again and again?

Sure, his brother had used him when it suited him—but in hindsight, wasn't that a kind of reluctant mercy?

Even though Odin always assumed the worst of his brother, after over a hundred years, even he had to admit—Thalos had never truly tried to kill him off.

Sure, returning as a traitor would mean distrust.

Odin was certain that if he walked back into Ginnungagap, his brother would probably toss him into some forgotten corner with a handful of followers and let him play warlord on his own.

With that realization, Odin finally relaxed: "After annexing so many pantheons, big brother must be like a God-Emperor by now. If my worst outcome is going back as a retired god-king... I might as well try one last play, and put together a proper tribute."

Just as he resolved himself, his newest favored goddess—Ranni, newly restored from chaos—knocked at the door.

"What is it?"

"Lord Ah Puch seeks an audience."

"Let him in."

Ah Puch had followed him long enough to count as a trusted subordinate.

Once inside, Ah Puch danced around the subject for nearly ten minutes before finally asking, cautiously, "Your Majesty... are we still planning to oppose the Aesir?"

It was almost comical. A full-blown Maya death god, scared stiff by the Aesir.

But you couldn't blame him. Their original pantheon had been annihilated—they had every reason to hold a grudge. But so much time had passed that most of that rage had turned into fear. And now, seeing India and Fusang both annihilated and absorbed, their anxiety was flaring up again.

If Odin really forced them into battle, they might summon the courage for one last try. But once they started taking hits, those old traumas would surface and they'd collapse even faster than before.

Odin stared at Ah Puch with a gentle look and asked, "Tell me—what do you think it would take to defeat the Aesir?"

Ah Puch replied timidly, "A world ten times our size... and maybe two hundred proper gods?"

"The Aesir already control a world a hundred times larger than ours, with over three hundred gods. God-King Thalos's power and intelligence surpass mine by a factor of a hundred. Both our pantheons are caught in the same universal current. Do you really think we could secretly gather enough strength to match them under their very noses?"

Ah Puch was stunned silent for a long moment before slowly shaking his head.

Odin turned away. Using the twin eyes he'd inherited from the Angry God Lau, he gazed through the windows of the divine palace at the lush, thriving land beyond.

"I used to be young and foolish. I thought I was destined to be a god-king. Greed blinded me, and I once cast myself into chaos, leading a rebellion against my brother... well, you all saw how that ended."

He let out a long sigh. "Big brother... he's always been softhearted. He's let me go, time and time again. After all these decades of struggling... I'm tired too."

Ah Puch understood—and finally felt at ease.