

Thalos 374

Chapter 374: Your Armor Is as Soft as Butter

Internal competition can be a terrifying thing.

When a world lacks new territory to expand into, all existing forces are forced into a zero-sum game—and the brutal infighting that results can be horrific beyond belief.

One can easily imagine what might happen between the giant-born Aesir gods and the various human-dominated, newly-subjugated factions under such circumstances.

The reason Thalos's greater Aesir pantheon managed to avoid this altogether boiled down to one thing: outrageous expansion.

In recent divine wars, Thalos had cleansed the Mayan Trinity, the Indian pantheon, and the Fusang deities. On one hand, their ideologies were deeply incompatible with the Aesir's direction; on the other, if he didn't wipe them out, there was no way to satisfy the ever-growing demand for divine power and godhood within his expanding empire.

After raising six new god-kings—and even while strictly limiting the number of true gods his own children could appoint, as well as restricting their domains—there were still nearly a hundred official gods.

These regionally confined divine seats not only helped ease tensions among the newly absorbed pantheons but also, once the original divine systems were dismantled and redistributed along lines of benefit, allowed the new gods to integrate more effectively into the greater Aesir structure.

Besides, aside from Balder, the other five god-kings were all normal human-sized beings, making them far easier for non-giant pantheons to accept.

And most crucially: an enormous amount of land still waited to be developed.

The South American continent, India, and Fusang together amounted to more than 15 million square kilometers.

Even with massive immigration from Midgard and encouragement for formerly loveless bachelors to purchase Mayan and Indian slaves as brides, the half-century of large-scale development had still only scratched the surface of this land and oceanic bounty.

Conservative estimates suggested that at the current agricultural level, it would take another 300 years before the population approached saturation.

For a faith-based godhood system, population meant a constant, surging source of divine power.

A rapidly expanding world always has the fewest internal contradictions.

That's exactly why Thalos so easily won the hearts of demigods and mortal heroes from across worlds.

Ultimately, it was all about hope.

And so, a grand host of legendary demigods and heroes, famed in Earth's various mythologies, gathered in the Lyranca world, waiting silently for their vanguard to ignite the powder keg on the Greek side.

At the same time, in the half-abandoned Hittite world—

A crowd of Greek heroes and their accompanying warriors were feasting and drinking.

They raised wine cups fashioned from red and black ceramics, sipping the slightly sour grape wine.

"This wine's awful."

"Deal with it. That's the best these little worlds can produce."

"Next time I'll bring you something from Asia Minor."

In the last battle, nearly every Greek warrior walked away with gains.

Slaves were wealth—and that wasn't even counting all the gold artifacts they looted from the enemy world, which had Greek soldiers grinning from ear to ear.

The original land of Greece had long since been carved up. Thankfully, the gods and most noble mortals of this Hittite offshoot world were already gone, leaving the Greek aristocrats plenty of land to parcel out as rewards for valor.

As they eagerly debated whether another fat sheep would be delivered to their doorstep, they were shocked to find that what came knocking wasn't a sheep—but a stronger thief.

"Enemy attack!"

Someone shouted it, and the entire camp exploded into action as alarm bells rang out in a chaotic chorus.

[Spatial cavity] duel battles—a concept the Greeks hadn't even understood a century ago—were now something they proudly claimed to have mastered.

In an instant, the whole camp was in an uproar.

Pages and squires rushed forward, fumbling to help the noble Greek warriors don their gear.

This particular camp's warriors wore the Dipylon cuirass, two bronze plates that covered front and back, stylized with "muscle-plate" etchings for aesthetic and practical effect. Donning them was simple—just four leather ties at the shoulders and waist.

They also wore the Chalcidian helmet, a straightforward design often adorned with bright feathers, offering good protection for the head and neck with open facial access and cheek guards. From the front, it left a T-shaped slit—combining visibility with breathability.

As for shields, they carried the Aspis—classic large round Greek shields made of wood and oxhide, reinforced with bronze rims.

With cuirass and helmet on, shield and spear in hand, there was no time for greaves, gauntlets, or bracers.

Hyllos, son of the mighty Heracles, should not have possessed immortality. But in this chaotic world, the Olympians had expanded during their conquests—and Hyllos had been granted demigod blood. At 136 years old, he still looked like a young man.

Just as he finished strapping on his armor, helmet, and left-arm bracer, the world shimmered.

A gladiatorial arena materialized before him.

The sun blazed down on cracked earth. A few dead trees stood far off. The sky was a flawless, merciless blue.

And across from him stood a silver-helmed, silver-armored noble knight.

The enemy was unfamiliar to Hyllos. He had never seen such armor before.

That foreign metallic sheen, the intricate carvings on the plate—everything about it suggested that the other world's metallurgy far surpassed that of Greece.

Yet his opponent made no move to attack.

Instead, noticing that Hyllos hadn't finished gearing up, he took two steps back, sheathed his sword, and opened his right hand in a gesture of patience.

"I am Gawain, holy knight under the great God of Chivalry, Arthur Pendragon! I do not slay the unready. Arm yourself properly, and let us engage in a grand and honorable duel!"

Hyllos, though he couldn't understand the knight's tongue, found that some kind of divine power—akin to Tongues—was letting him comprehend every word.

He nodded. Carefully maintaining distance, he planted his spear in the ground and began picking up the greaves and gloves his page had failed to deliver in time, calmly strapping them on one by one.

Only when he was fully equipped did he step forward, tap his bronze shield with his spear shaft, and let out a clear, resonant clang.

"You are a true warrior. Hyllos, son of Heracles, salutes you!"

"Gawain," the knight responded with a nod, drawing his sword once more and falling into stance.

By all accounts, this should have been a well-matched fight.

The Greek sprang forward, toes barely touching the earth, leaping high with several dozen pounds of bronze gear.

In his mind, his massive shield would block any attack. He planned to use agility to outmaneuver what he assumed was a heavy-armored target, forcing the duel into close quarters where he excelled.

Then—he saw a flash of cold light.

The world spun upside down.

He was looking at his own legs.

Huh?

Gawain's cold, upside-down face loomed into view in Hyllus's spinning perspective: "You—and your armor—are as soft as butter."