

Thalos 376

Chapter 376: Athena's Unease

Returning from the depths of Tartarus, Athena—rarely one to show emotion—felt a rare wave of agitation.

That powerful god-king Odin hadn't let slip a single useful piece of information. Instead, it was his smug demeanor and mysteriously confident smile that triggered in Athena a deep, instinctual unease.

Especially his parting words: "Go on, Athena, strut while you still can! I can't wait to see you groveling at my big brother's feet, serving him like a lowly maid. Just like you expected me to kneel before you! But tell me, do you have the pride I do? Hahahahaha!"

He wasn't bluffing.

Several hellforged chains—once meant to bind Titans—had been magically shrunk, bored through Odin's collarbones, and threaded through both his forearms.

These cursed chains inflicted constant, agonizing pain on a True God, every second of every minute of every day.

And yet, the more intense the pain, the more Odin seemed to revel in it.

All of this had unfolded the moment Athena arrived.

Unlike Odin's mocking, unyielding attitude, Athena—the goddess of wisdom—had noticed far more subtle shifts than her fellow Olympian gods.

Aside from what survivors had reported—that the enemy Aesir heroes were equipped with vastly superior gear—what disturbed her most was the enemy's numbers and their apparent coordination under a highly unified polytheistic order.

This meant one thing: after years of rampaging across the chaotic universe, the Greek world had finally encountered an opponent that could match them.

The Greek pantheon didn't fear a horde of mortal heroes. They feared an adversary with both quality and quantity, one backed by a large, disciplined, battle-hardened divine coalition. That was what truly terrified her.

Athena immediately made her way to Mount Olympus, determined to inform Zeus of this alarming development.

A thought, and her avatar appeared at the summit.

From the mountaintop, sheer cliffs dropped away into swirling seas of clouds, and above her loomed the warped starscapes of the mutated stellar zones beyond the realm's barrier.

She didn't even need divine senses to know: in the void above, countless spatial cavities were flashing in and out of existence. Across the forward base world of Hatti, brutal duels between mortal heroes were breaking out everywhere.

Athena turned her gaze back to the sacred temple.

Thunder still clung to the pillars—twelve massive Corinthian columns piercing the mist, each groove glowing with frozen lightning that occasionally sparked against golden lintels.

The air hummed with remnants of shattered thunder. The gold seized from conquered worlds had long since been reforged by Hephaestus into bricks that now paved the sacred floors.

Athena walked along the golden path into the temple.

One by one, beautiful women radiating divine power bowed low in fearful submission.

They weren't nymphs of the Greek pantheon. These were actual goddesses, captured from defeated pantheons and now enslaved.

The fine, transparent garments they wore—called chitons—left their shoulders exposed, and each shoulder bore a lightning-shaped brand, marking them as Zeus's personal slaves.

Athena silently spat, Dirty old man.

Every one of those captured goddesses had been defiled by Zeus.

Athena's heart tightened with rage, and Odin's "curse" echoed in her mind.

If Odin had hurled that taunt before battle, she might've ignored it. But he'd done it after facing down her, Apollo, and Ares for three days and nights, resisting them until the bitter end—then dared to suggest she would one day bow and fawn before his brother.

She couldn't ignore it.

That powerful god-king had seen firsthand the might of the Twelve Olympians and still concluded that Zeus couldn't compare to his brother.

In a brief, unguarded moment, Athena imagined herself clad in silken veils, seductively submitting to that so-called "big brother"...

"Hmph!" She violently shoved the vile image from her mind.

Unbeknownst to her, the slave goddesses misread her expression—thinking they had angered her—and all fell to their knees, trembling in terror.

When Athena reached the central hall, she found it empty, just as she'd expected.

The divine emperor's throne stood alone.

Seated beside it was a goddess Athena would rather not see: Hera.

"His Majesty Zeus is away," Hera said coldly.

It wasn't hard to sense the suppressed fury in the queen of the gods' voice.

Despite her exalted position—worshipped by countless minor pantheons and revered by millions of mortals—her relationship with Zeus hadn't changed one bit since the beginning.

She could never control Zeus's lower half. Look away for a moment, and the bastard was off chasing skirts across the realms.

On top of that, Hera hated Athena—her too-clever, too-beautiful stepdaughter.

As one of the Three Virgin Goddesses, Athena was both stunning and brilliant. It was no secret that Zeus had long harbored inappropriate desires for her. Yet Athena was also one of the few gods who could

actually help him manage his affairs. When Zeus was away, it was almost always Athena who handled the coordination of the subordinate pantheons.

"It's just a mortal skirmish. I'll report to Father another time. Farewell, noble Queen of the Gods," Athena said coolly.

She bowed, turned, and left.

Hera muttered a curse under her breath.

That kind of venomous jealousy was simply Hera's default state.

Athena ignored her, giving her nothing but the back of her head as she walked away.

Today's events had truly shaken her. And yes—technically—it was just a mortal battle.

But that was exactly the issue.

Even during their conquest of the New Mayan pantheon, Zeus's only real interest had been Odin's so-called wife. And when Zeus realized Odin couldn't even remember her name correctly, he lost all interest.

If anything, Zeus might be more intrigued by Odin himself...

The very thought sent shivers down Athena's spine.

She had long since given up hope on her father's depraved whims.

Leaving Mount Olympus, Athena immediately issued a flurry of divine commands.

Soon, heroes from across Greece and Asia Minor were answering her summons, heading for Hatti to confront the invading mortal champions from another world.

In this life, there had been no Trojan Horse. No sack of Troy.

The reason? There were simply too many lesser worlds to conquer. The various Greek city-states didn't have the appetite to attack a well-fortified Troy.

Why waste effort on a stronghold when so many smaller realms offered fertile lands and easy spoils?

After all, Prince Paris of Troy had only abducted Helen due to divine manipulation—a scheme by the Greek gods to stoke war between the Greeks and the Trojans.

But this time, there was no need for civil conflict.

There was too much cake outside the gates. No reason to fight over crumbs at home.