

Thalos 397

Chapter 397: Wounding the Gods at Their Core

If you only counted the number of gods, Thalos estimated that Greece wasn't far behind.

Both sides had emerged from the chaos era, cutting down countless minor pantheons on their way to the finals.

As for cannon-fodder gods, neither side was short.

The question was whose fodder was stronger, and more willing to act on their own initiative—that was a deeper art.

After running the simulations, Thalos issued a divine edict.

In an instant, all of Ginnungagap erupted in excitement.

Seeing the God-Emperor's command, even Thor licked his lips. "If I were just an ordinary subordinate god, I'd still go berserk charging forward."

The edict was a single, simple line: "[Any god who sends an avatar to assault the Ashanti world will have their divine power losses replenished by Asgard.]"

A god's incarnation was a splinter of divine thought, shaped into an animal or strange being. How strong it was depended on how much soul essence and divine power the god invested.

An avatar, however, took the god's own form and could hold far more soul and power—its combat potential was higher.

The price for such investment was that if your avatar or incarnation was destroyed, your soul fragment would likely be captured; your divinity and godhead shards could be extracted, devoured, cursed, or reforged.

Soul damage hurt badly.

For a true god, it was a serious wound; but for the lowest-ranked gods, it wasn't their soul injury they feared most—it was the loss of their divine power reserves.

These lowly descended gods bore the title of "god" but lived miserably. Usually stuck with some barren, profitless divine office, they had to squeeze their believers for centuries just to gather enough power to send out an avatar for one fight.

For them, attacking the Ashanti world through a spatial chamber was as big a gamble as sending their true body.

Win, and they might be promoted.

Lose, and they might never again have a chance to become a true god.

With the God-Emperor covering their losses this time—who wouldn't go all in?

And so, the Ashanti pantheon entered its darkest hour.

"This is absurd!" Former Ashanti god-king Nyame stared at the terrifying scene in the spatial barrier, nearly struck speechless.

When the heavens tore open, the first thing to rush into the world was a flood of multicolored divine light.

Unlike mortal heroes' chambers, when an avatar flooded with divine power crossed over, unstable parts of the spatial structure would leak vast amounts of elemental energy.

Days of battle had already turned the Ashanti world's soft white clouds into ugly violet-black from the spilled elements and leaking divine power.

As the purple-black clouds rolled away, countless sharp, blinding lances of light stabbed into the land like spears of judgment.

Nyame sat hunched on his god-throne—long since stripped of its \\[King] ornament—his fingernails digging into the bronze armrest seams. The silhouettes hidden in those spatial chambers were just outlines, yet already scorched his divine sight.

When he had been god-king, he could burn divine power with such abandon too.

Since bowing to the Olympian gods, who had treated him as a king?

And now these petty little gods could squander divine power like this?

The sight made Nyame nearly rabid with envy.

Over a hundred large-scale divine spatial chambers fell—and Nyame could do nothing.

This was the Starfield Law, standing above even world-law!

Unless the Ashanti world could send an equal number of godly avatars to face them, the worst outcome was that the duels would be forcibly "downscaled" by the Starfield Law.

Counting on Greater Greece's demigod heroes to stage a god-slaying miracle? Forget it.

Miracles were called miracles because they were so rare.

A subordinate god sidled up to him. "Your Majesty, how should we respond?"

Nyame's mouth twisted bitterly. "All gods—send avatars to meet them. And when your soul starts to falter, come with me to beg Athena to withdraw our forces."

The Ashanti pantheon erupted in uproar.

Win? Not a chance.

When the enemy openly fought by burning their own essence, no cunning scheme could help.

They'd force you to grind yourself to death against a stronger foe with a longer health bar.

Unless you could overwhelm them with a qualitatively superior pantheon, you'd just be waiting for their greater power reserves and sheer flood of gods to crush you into collapse.

This was an open strategy.

And an open strategy often meant no counter existed.

The first Aesir avatar descended on starlight, the golden armor's hum slicing the air so sharply that Odysseus nearly dropped to his knees.

Odysseus, king of the western Greek island of Ithaca, had been the one to devise the Trojan Horse in myth, leading the Greek coalition to sack Troy.

Now, seeing the hardened steel shield he had seized melt under the enemy's divine might—molten steel running to his feet, scorching black patterns into the dirt—he knew all his resistance was futile.

The second goddess raised her hand and scattered light-dust—an eye-shaped spring evaporated into a vast blood mist, and magma burst from an old tree's hollow, drenching Diomedes, bronze sword raised in charge, into a screaming roasted corpse.

The third, a brutish god, casually smashed Little Ajax into paste.

One after another, heroes who had shone in the Trojan War met humiliating deaths at the hands of nameless third-rate Aesir gods who didn't even warrant an introduction in the Golden Palace.

But with all the Ashanti-led gods locked in duels against Aesir avatars, these bullyings of the weak by the strong were happening all over their world.

It wasn't that these third-rate Aesir wanted to stoop so low; the imbalance in numbers of participating gods made such slaughter of "children" inevitable.

Even the victors weren't pleased—they were only killing "mere" Greek heroes, so even with victory, they wouldn't win much territory or elements to take home.

Was there truly no miracle?

There was.

In one spatial chamber, a ninth-rate Aesir god with no name opened his eyes wide, silver beard swept straight back by the shockwave. His mighty divine hands could not stop Achilles from driving a gem-studded, god-cursed steel sword into his chest.

A surge of oceanic power poured from the wound, its trickling streams acting like a meat grinder, shredding his divine armor to pieces. His godly body disintegrated to powder, mingled with his resentment, and hung in midair as a strange blood-red river within this isolated pocket-space.

"This time, I really have to thank my mother," Achilles murmured, still shaken.

If not for his mother, the sea goddess Thetis, fiercely protective of her son, begging Poseidon to bless the steel equipment Achilles had seized, he could never have killed a divine avatar.

Fortunately—he had.