

Thalos 399

Chapter 399: Nonviolent Noncooperation

The Ashanti world was destroyed.

If the last time, when the Hittite world was stripped of vast amounts of elemental power, it became like a sieve, then crumpled into a "paper ball," this time the Ashanti world was like a beehive smashed to pieces.

Once the spatial barrier was gone, the gods of Greater Greece could see through divine sight the countless massive holes riddling the world.

The holes were bigger than the supporting structure itself—there was no way such a world could survive.

"My world! My world—" The divine cry of former Ashanti god-king Nyame echoed in the ears of every Greek vassal god.

On the surface, the cause was obvious: the Aesir were too fierce, their gods too many and too strong.

The hidden cause was that the Greek god-kings had stood by and let it happen, forcing their vassal gods to die in their stead.

Athena's expression remained unreadable as she gazed at the collapsing Ashanti world. After a long silence, she turned away.

"Next, the Kusitik world will take its place," Athena declared, naming the next unlucky victim.

In the grand hall, the former god-kings shuddered. Those not named felt secret relief, while the named—former Kusitik god-king Ngandi—first paled, then stepped forward and bowed low to Athena.

"Great Lady Athena, forgive us... but the Kusitik pantheon cannot do it."

The words "cannot do it" sent shockwaves through the hall.

Had Ngandi lost his mind?

Did he not know the consequences of defying orders?

Athena might appear a beautiful and gentle goddess, but anyone who knew her understood she was powerful, decisive, and utterly ruthless.

In the last century alone, she had personally slain over a dozen gods.

Many minor pantheons had been broken by her hand, their gods tamed into obedience before being gifted to Zeus, then redistributed as fiefs to the Olympian Twelve.

Athena's brows arched sharply, her terrible divine aura flooding the hall. Without her even speaking, her subordinate—the goddess of victory, Nike—had not yet moved when Athena's high priest stepped out and barked at Ngandi.

"Foolish lesser god, do you know your place? Remember—you will answer for every word you speak!"

A mere mortal high priest berating a former god-king—it was a humiliating sight for the assembled gods.

Sometimes, the hierarchy of divine power was that naked.

Athena made no move to reprimand her high priest. The meaning was clear.

To everyone's shock, Ngandi bowed deeply.

"For the future of the millions of Kusitik mortals and the tens of millions of living beings in our world, I, Ngandi, am willing to die."

"Then die," Athena's red lips spat the cold verdict.

At her words, a divine curse activated instantly.

Before the gathered god-kings, Ngandi fell dead on the spot, his divine soul scattered. Only a single wisp of remnant soul remained, which Athena caught in her hand.

"You can spend eternity in Tartarus," she said cruelly.

For a god, death was not the end.

Being cast into the underworld to suffer endless torment—that was true horror.

Athena's high priest's face darkened like soot. He called out to the temple servants outside: "Have Kusitik send another god to receive the divine order!"

Before long, Caleba arrived.

This was Ngandi's right-hand man.

And to the gods' astonishment, the same scene unfolded again.

Caleba entered, bowing deeply. "Lady Athena, if it is to bring about the destruction of the Kusitik world, then please grant me death as well."

"Very well. You too—go to Tartarus!"

Two acting god-kings, dying in the same way, struck the gathered gods with very different emotions.

Ngandi's death meant little to the Olympians.

Acting god-kings were replaceable. Normally, there would always be some god willing to take the position. Athena's repeated executions should have been enough to cow disobedience.

The problem was... these black-skinned gods were truly stubborn.

A commotion rose outside the temple.

The one who should have come next was the third in line for succession.

Instead, the entire Kusitik pantheon arrived.

At their head was the goddess Nunanbi, Ngandi's daughter. She brought all thirty-one gods of her world, and they knelt en masse outside the temple doors.

"We truly do not wish for our world to be destroyed! If Lady Athena insists, then please grant death to all the gods of Kusitik!"

Behind her, the chorus rang out: "Please, Lady Athena, grant us death!"

This time, Athena could no longer hide the tremor in her heart.

Things... were getting out of control.

With her power, killing three or five gods from a vassal world was nothing.

But to slaughter an entire conquered pantheon—that was different.

True, nearly half of the Olympian Twelve did little to govern: Hera spent her days catching Zeus's lovers, Aphrodite indulged in affairs with Ares and others, Hermes busied himself as messenger and handled only his trade domain, and Hephaestus had moved from smelting copper to obsessively forging iron...

Many god-kings unskilled in administration had entrusted their conquered worlds to Athena, even granting her the power of life and death over those worlds' gods.

She had the authority.

But she did not have the political capital to wipe out an entire pantheon.

Such an act would collapse the world, cutting off divine power to its corresponding Olympian god-king.

Kusitik had pulled a nonviolent noncooperation, putting Athena on the spot.

If she didn't believe the other vassal god-kings had coordinated this, she'd be the first to call herself a fool.

Ngandi and Caleba had truly died to make their point.

In peacetime, Athena would have a thousand ways to break such defiance.

Not now.

The Aesir's external pressure was too great, and that pressure had given the conquered gods a chance to resist—no, to bargain for power.

If their worlds could be smashed to pieces, then they really were nothing.

Better to gamble everything, force the Olympian god-kings to make concessions.

It didn't matter who their master was—they'd still be dogs.

And perhaps the Aesir's dogs were treated better.

At least no one had seen slave collars around the necks of third-rate Aesir gods.

Athena laughed in fury. "Good! Good! You're all very good! Today ends here. But this account is only just beginning. Now get out!"

A golden wave of divine force burst from her, sweeping the former god-kings and Nunanbi's group into the air, tumbling them like gourds far away from the temple.