

Thalos 425

Chapter 425: Artemis's Regret

The three remaining God-Kings of the Aesir fared no better.

Enkidu went up against Apollo; his immature attack methods were locked down from start to finish, and he hung on only by the power of the Sword of the World.

Brigid braced against Artemis, and the whole field teetered on the brink.

Yekaterina faced Hades head-on and was beaten so hard she had to bring out the Slavs' life-preserving divine relic.

No exaggeration—the way things stood, saying the Aesir were losing two to four wouldn't be wrong.

Especially the two Aesir female God-Kings at the end; if Thor and Hela hadn't rushed in to save them, they might well have fallen on the spot.

That sight scared the Celtic and Slavic deities witless.

Thus the last two matchups became Thor vs. Artemis, and Hela vs. Hades.

If the death-aspected pair were probing and cautious, Thor and Artemis cranked the dial to max the instant they clashed.

"Look into my eyes and answer me—what did you do with my Atalanta?" Artemis stepped on moonlight, violently burst forward over a dozen kilometers in one breath, and her divine bow spat out who-knew-how-many arrows wreathed in starlight, their tips carrying godforce that looked like it could pierce even the mutated starfield.

In the past, Thor would absolutely have chosen to take it head-on.

This time, he swung Mjolnir, his whole divine body turning into a lightning bolt that bent and jinked again and again, slipping past Artemis's shafts as he sped backward.

"Oh? You mean that long-legged little mortal girl with the wild air?" Thor's face broke into a sincere smile. "I saw her in the Silver Palace. She's already Father's handmaiden."

Thor didn't utter a single lie.

He likely didn't realize that precisely because every word was true, paired with that sunny, open face, it landed as the most exquisite irony.

Those words stabbed Artemis's heart like a rain of blades.

"She is mine—how dare Thalos Borson?" the huntress goddess screamed. A string of uncanny arrows from her bow traced impossible curves and, from an angle Thor never expected, pinned for his right neck... If he hadn't reacted at the last instant—jerking his head, letting the rim of his helm jam the arrowhead against his gorget—Thor might have been grievously wounded.

"Brother!" Brigid, who had fallen back a ways, cried out.

"I'm fine!" Thor laughed.

Truly, joyously laughed!

How long had it been—this kind of fight on the knife-edge between life and annihilation!

Even after the Aesir began expanding outward, Thor had fought plenty of god-wars. But a battle this closely matched—this was his first.

To find the last time you'd have to go back to Ragnarök.

Artemis had lit his whole being on fire. "Hahaha! That's it! Just like that! Now it feels right!"

"Hmph!" The huntress spat in disdain.

Such god-guided trick arrows only work best the first time. Once they miss, the opponent's on guard. Any follow-up tricks are much less effective.

There's no help for it—pursuing angle means sacrificing speed and power.

Especially since a pure-blood Aesir's true body is nearly three times her height; with that size difference, she had to pick her target zones with care.

Thor's fighting spirit was burning white-hot—likely not a good thing for Artemis.

"Your turn to eat one of mine!" Thor raised the divine hammer high. In the next second, the vault of the spatial corridor split and poured down a sky-river of violet thunder. Countless bolts, large and small, gathered into a single bundle and fell onto the Thunder God's Hammer.

This strike brought more than thunder. Above the square-headed relic, he dragged down a hail of starmetal—asteroid fragments from beyond the corridor—crashing in a roaring cascade.

A storm of lightning!

A deluge of meteors!

Facing a ludicrous thunder–stone maelstrom covering dozens of square kilometers, Artemis showed no fear. When she drew the string, a hundred li of cloud bellies collapsed into a ring and gathered into her hands.

The Goddess-King's eyes blazed with wildness and confidence. With a sharp exhale and a soft cry, the bowstring thrummed—and a liquid moonbeam shot forth, instantly congealing into a colossal golden-horned stag phantom, its size rivaling a town.

When thunder-and-meteor storm met golden-horned stag, the entire spatial corridor erupted in an almost world-ending blast.

Not only were the corridor's temporarily gathered earth, water, fire, and wind elements churned into a single mess, but the neighboring asteroid belt was caught up too—tens of thousands of rocks, great and small, were pulverized to dust in an instant.

"Good! Have another!"

Thor's golden hair stood on end, primal lightning runes danced in his eyes, and his war boots shattered the void as he surged forward.

At first, Artemis thought Thor was flying at high speed by his thunder power. Then she looked closely—and realized, not at all.

A dozen Swords of the World, each radiating overwhelming divine might, formed an outrageous World Passage and came ramming in like creation itself.

"What?" For the first time, surprise showed on Artemis's face.

She wasn't blind!

At first she'd taken the Aesir crown prince to be a 'simple' thunder god.

Now she saw—it wasn't like that at all.

He could not only call the thunder of an entire world at will, he could casually borrow world-origin from a dozen other worlds.

He had power to burn!

Next to Thor, Artemis was at a real disadvantage.

Her core divine office is the Hunt.

But hunting rises and falls with people—with how many hunters there are.

That office alone was never enough to bear her up into a God-King. So her true core office is actually Goddess of Nature. Beyond that, she holds midwife and newborn goddess, fertility and womb goddess, and the like.

At the end of the day, the core feeding her godforce is still Nature.

And there's the problem: Nature stands upon Earth Mother Gaia. Without the Earth Mother, there is no Nature.

That creates a conflict of offices; much of her power is, in a sense, stolen from the divine offices that leaked from Gaia.

Of course, Zeus refuses to acknowledge Gaia's domain.

He's happy to see his children pilfer divine offices and power from Gaia's purview—better that than Gaia birthing another Typhon to come for him.

Artemis made her own way, relying on herself to claw up into the Twelve of Olympus back then, and finally, through conquered worlds, to ascend among the God-Kings.

But even so, at best she commands the power of a single world.

Set against a crown prince like Thor, who can, at a whim, draw on a dozen small worlds—there's a resource gap you can't cross.

This time, Artemis truly regretted it.