

Thalos 428

Chapter 428: Time-Stop Series

The atmosphere on the scene was downright weird!

By rights—"if the sovereign is humiliated, the vassal dies." With their own lord falling within the enemy's range, Heimdall and the rest, each and every one of them, ought to be at fault.

The subtlety here was that Artemis was someone Thalos had named in advance as his target!

If, before she met Thalos, some retainer had taken her down and delivered her bound, then the merit would naturally belong to that retainer. Brigid and Thor hadn't taken her; she even "counter-face-rushed," charging all the way into Asgard. Now the gods didn't even have an angle from which to advise Thalos.

Besides, Artemis, honored as a Greek god-king—even if only "one of"—did, in any case, have the qualification to challenge the God-Emperor.

Silently, led by Heimdall, the guardians ceded a patch of open ground to her and Thalos.

At that, Artemis was both startled and secretly delighted!

Startled that these Aesir clearly possessed absolute confidence in their God-Emperor's strength.

Delighted that if she managed to kill Thalos, she and her attendant nymph goddesses might have a sliver of a chance to live.

Steadying her overly excited heart, she recalled the Aesir's way of speaking and chose words to provoke: "Long have I heard that Aesir God-Emperor Thalos Borson's battle-craft is exquisite. I, Artemis, Olympian goddess of the hunt, have come to seek instruction—"

On the word "battle-craft," she deliberately placed divine emphasis, implying a contest of divine technique, not a contest of total divine power.

She knew perfectly well she was in a desperate strait; under normal circumstances, Thalos would absolutely never allow an enemy god-king to leave alive. Nor did she have any chance of winning. If she couldn't withstand Thor channeling the power of multiple worlds, how could she withstand Thalos, whose permissions were broader and higher?

Unable to meet force with force, she could only win by guile!

Her phrasing actually made Thalos think more of her.

Beside Thalos, Ailé rolled her eyes at her silly little sister, as if to say: Learn from her! If you had half of Artemis's brains, you might not have lost so miserably back then.

Ishtar returned Ailé a blank look: "Sister, what are you saying?"

Ailé certainly wouldn't use mind-speech at a time like this; it would be discourteous. She fell silent and continued watching.

Thalos caught the implication in Artemis's words and smiled.

He flicked a hand, and the ten-odd World-Swords hovering behind him all drifted back.

Speaking as he swung his leg over and dismounted from the Loki-brand divine steed Asgard, Thalos strode forward. With a measured, steady cadence, he began to handicap himself: "You are clever. I vow this—In my duel with you, I will not draw world-force from any realm of Ginnungagap. I will use only my right hand, and no artifacts. So long as, before you fall, you strike my body or armor by any means, the victory is yours. I will release you and your followers safely. Do you accept?"

This wasn't just giving her a break; it was giving her an ocean.

Artemis felt no joy or relief—only a chill in her heart.

In her eyes, Thalos daring to make a promise so extremely unfavorable to himself meant he was either a frivolous blowhard—or he possessed absolute confidence in his strength! And by the look of him now, Thalos was the latter!

Artemis broke out in a cold sweat!

She could lose the fight, but not her bearing!

Outwardly, after a quick glance at Atalanta, she spat, hard: "Agreed! I'm staking everything!"

Truthfully, it wasn't as if she had the option not to stake it.

She was the meat on the block; Thalos was the knife and cutting board.

If she lost, wouldn't Thalos carve as he pleased?

In that instant, a grim thought even crossed her mind: Had she died under Thor's hand just now, it might have been better!

What she thought, Ishtar didn't know; she turned to ask Brunhilde, "Was I this dumb back then too?"

"..." How was Brunhilde supposed to answer that?

Soon, Artemis cast aside all distractions and shouted sharply, "I'm coming!"

Thalos placed his left hand behind his back, opened his right, and with a faint smile made a "please" gesture. "Come!"

Artemis knew she had only one chance to attack; once the arrow left the string, her life would no longer be her own.

Breaking finesse with raw strength was not her game.

Technique! Only the most extreme technique might give her fate a chance to turn.

She nocked four arrows on a single bow.

Each gap between the fingers of her right hand held a keen long arrow!

A moment's imagination sufficed to know that, under her divine arts, she could produce astonishing trickery.

To be honest, never mind the nymphs at her side, or Brigid opposite with the other Aesir rushing in—even Heimdall found himself sweating for Thalos.

A wave of divine power utterly different from Aesir divinity surged up in the Rainbow Bridge Hall, shooting thousands of meters into the sky, blowing aside the clouds and making the already bright heavens seem clearer still.

The vast divine force rolled far outward, drawing the attention of every inhabitant of Asgard.

Unfortunately, they only dared watch from afar.

Artemis was worthy of being one of the Greek god-kings; her aura kept rising. Every time it peaked, when it seemed she could go no higher, after a perfect turn it rose again!

Soon, the blooming divine fluctuations rapidly diminished.

It wasn't that she was weakening; rather, after kindling her power, she was truly pouring it into her divine bow, gathering it onto that seemingly delicate bowstring.

At last, the string thrummed!

With that shot, it wasn't only the bowstring that vibrated—every Aesir spectator's heartstrings were plucked!

No surprise!

This arrow's ferocity far exceeded the gods' expectations.

Even Ullr, the Aesir's old-generation bow-god, changed color in an instant.

In that one piece of archery from Artemis, he saw at least thirty-six variations—each exquisitely subtle, the kind a mortal archer could savor for a lifetime.

More crucially, there were at least as many variations he couldn't see at all.

Artemis's archery had reached the extreme of spatial exploitation!

In Ullr's view, these arrows wounding His Majesty the God-Emperor was unlikely; but if the goal was merely to touch him, the chance was quite high.

Unless His Majesty Thalos did something beyond imagination.

But anything beyond the Way of the Bow would, to Ullr, be a pity.

Unfortunately, he guessed right.

The instant the arrows left the string, the huntress with the sleek black hair saw her pupils contract sharply.

With dynamic vision maxed, she naturally saw the trace moisture around her condense into droplets under the surge of divine power.

What terrified her wasn't the droplets themselves, but that they hung in the air and did not fall. Not only the droplets—even the fine dust motes kicked up by the stirring power froze at a strange height and ceased to move, and the ends of the black strands on her high ponytail, lifted by her motion, fixed into a graceful curve.

A chill climbed up from her bare feet; goosebumps rose across her skin!