

## Thalos 431

### Chapter 431: The Aesir Version of Tian Ji's Horse Race

The Hall of Revelry was as boisterous as ever.

With Thor and a band of giants in the mix, it never went cold here.

At first there were only dwarven musicians; as the Aesir expanded, the musicians' races multiplied. They usually took turns in residence: one band per night, seven days a week, with a different themed band in the main hall.

On ordinary days other bands could play in the side halls, but by custom—on major days, the band in the main hall had to be dwarves.

Today clearly counted as a major day.

Halfway through the banquet, some deities who couldn't hold their drink would normally retire; this night, not a single god left. Even the lowest-ranked sub-gods shamelessly stayed on. Everyone craned their necks, waiting for the one to arrive.

They weren't disappointed. With a ripple of commotion, everyone realized the evening's main figure had come.

"Paying respects to the Most High God-Emperor—"

Rituals could not be neglected!

Especially on a day that proclaimed martial might! The conductor took the hint, flicked a hand, and the music in the hall shifted, turning solemn and majestic at once.

"My beloved ministers, this is the Hall of Revelry. Be at ease."

Amid the full-bodied music, the colossal Thalos strode in front. As the gods lifted their eyes, they indeed saw behind him the goddess-king of the hunt, Artemis, being led by the goddess Amaterasu in a resplendent feathered mantle.

Formerly girlish to the core, the goddess-king's black hair was no longer worn loose like a maiden's but pinned up in a matron's coil. Though she wore a leather hunter's kit brimming with vigor, every step she took was unsteady.

Not "as if"—if Amaterasu didn't actually support her, she'd fall flat.

Sensing the surging, god-king-level power still pouring off Artemis, then seeing her awkward, boneless gait, hundreds of Aesir burst into thunderous laughter.

"Oooh—!"

"So this is the goddess-king who claims she'll wipe out our Aesir? Such ambition!"

"Hahaha! That collar really suits you!"

The countless jeers nearly crushed Artemis on the spot. Her pointed chin was almost poking into her own ravine. But the lower she held her head, the louder the jeers swelled around her.

Then, unexpectedly gentle, Amaterasu comforted her: "Lift your head, Artemis. Face the present bravely. You can't go back."

Artemis trembled all over and said nothing.

Amaterasu continued in the same tone—words that stabbed the heart: "If you truly had courage, you should have taken your own life the moment you strayed into Asgard. Lacking the courage to face annihilation, and lacking the power to defeat His Majesty, you should obediently be a conquered one—learn how to please the God-Emperor, who stands supreme in the universe!"

"But..." Artemis began, aggrieved beyond measure, then fell silent.

"Don't worry. You're the first Greek god-king to surrender, but you won't be the last," Freyja said with a touch of cool pride behind her.

Just then, having thoroughly accepted her new role after being "put through it" alongside Artemis, Atalanta brought over a set of Festival of the Hunt attire and said earnestly, "Please, my goddess, change and take the stage to offer a dance."

Hunting has its seasons. Hunters who worship Artemis often end the season by offering her the fattest game as sacrifice and dancing a passionate hunt-dance around the bonfire.

Artemis had never imagined there would come a day when she would be the one to dance it, to curry favor with her new master.

Closing in were not only Atalanta, but also Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons—divine-blooded and one of Artemis's core supporters. Now the three of them had been swept up together.

At that moment, the nymph goddesses wore looks both sorrowful and pleading.

"Please, Goddess, take the stage!"

The voices of her subordinates and believers were no different from roasting Artemis over the fire.

The situation left her no room to refuse!

Amid the rising chants across the hall and to the music, Artemis stiffly began her offering-dance.

The Aesir were delighted.

On stage, Artemis showed imperfect technique, but it didn't dampen anyone's excitement.

One goddess-king had yielded—were the rest far behind? In war, the worst is seeing no prospect, feeling no hope.

Now that they could glimpse the dawn of victory, even those with private schemes would quickly strangle them.

Thor, holding a slab of boar, sidled up beside Thalos's throne.

"Father, how is it?"

Thalos of course knew his good son wasn't asking about the goddess; he was asking about the war.

"Other than Gilgamesh, the rest are a bit green. But it's fine—we can afford mistakes. As for a god-king of Artemis's class—one less on their side is one less forever."

The succession gap was actually severe in the Olympian pantheon.

Zeus had no answer.

He certainly hoped his sons and daughters could dominate all comers, leaving him free to run around carousing till he went missing.

In reality, he had few gods he could trust.

In the treachery-ridden Olympian system, his hotheaded grandpa and shameless father, plus Zeus himself, had long since scrubbed the word "integrity" right out of Olympus's dictionary.

Without enough trustworthy new gods, you can't grant them powerful portfolios; without that, you can't train them up.

It's a dead loop.

When all was said and done, Zeus could most rely on his brothers Poseidon and Hades.

Today each side fielded six god-kings. It looked like the Aesir underperformed; in truth, this was the Aesir version of Tian Ji's horse race.

These divine children were Thalos's "low horses."

Since Gilgamesh won, he naturally qualified to be regarded as a "middle horse."

Don't forget—Thalos still had a heap of powerhouses who hadn't moved.

Not to mention Thor.

Below Thor there were the dread underworld goddess Hela, the god of light Freyr, the knight-god Arthur, the forest god Vidar, and the war god Tyr—renowned top-tier powers who hadn't been deployed.

In sheer number of top deities, the Aesir far exceeded the Greeks!

The only question was how much power Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades would erupt with once the fight entered the Greek homeland proper.

Those three were of the same tier.

Down the order, Apollo and Athena weren't weak, but bound by their domains their room to maneuver was limited, capping their combat ceilings—hard to surpass the trio who held the world's fundamentals.

As for the war god Ares—forget him.

A war god who got traded down by a god of wealth—Thalos truly looked down on him.