

Thalos 434

Chapter 434: It's Time for Thor to Stand on His Own

The new gods born from Thalos with deity partners of mortal stature were all human-sized. Luckily, they inherited the Aesir knack for enlarging or shrinking their bodies. Each divine child had different gifts, but compared to those with giant blood, their maximum size-up tended to be lower. For example, Thor could casually swell to a height of twenty meters, while Gilgamesh, even straining with all his might, capped out around six.

In combat, this new generation of divine children had a built-in disadvantage. On the other hand, they generally had better heads on their shoulders, were more well-rounded, and were better suited to rule than to lead from the very front as berserker shock troops.

You could say Thalos's brood came out each with their own strengths.

As bearers of their former-world pantheons' hopes, the six god-kings could not accept mediocrity. Coasting on pedigree simply wasn't an option. In an era that valued military merit above all, even the not-so-gifted in battle like Ekaterina trained themselves to the brink.

Meanwhile, in the White-Silver Palace—

Whenever there was fighting at the front, the great hall would run a live mind-projection feed. Not every battle warranted Thalos's presence. For fights below god-king level, Thalos watched as the mood took him.

The string of recent battles had clearly made Artemis recognize that the Aesir were not merely no weaker than Olympus—at any moment, it might well be the Aesir who won this grand divine war. Every shift in her attitude fell neatly into Thalos's eye: from not resisting yet resisting in her heart—performing "in character" from start to finish—to her recent prim, proper "yes, sir" to anything asked, and now the quiet, dutiful welcome along the aisle... Thalos felt genuinely fulfilled.

Broadly speaking, that was all she could do. As long as Zeus lived, she had something to hope for and would not completely give up. Which was exactly what Thalos wanted. Those goddess captives whose worlds he had annihilated had no way back; under such a brutal law of the jungle, their sulking never lasted long before they truly submitted. It was this in-between, half-reluctant, half-acquiescent phase of Artemis's that had the most flavor.

Just look at Amaterasu before—sigh. Once the Fusang world was destroyed, she went straight to zero-armor dogeza. She'd even taught the move to Artemis now, but the huntress really couldn't grasp the essence!

"Report, Your Majesty—the spatial throats between the two world-clusters are about to close." When Brunnhilde came to report, the dimming light in Artemis's eyes amused her.

"Noted."

Thalos rose, and the Valkyries helped him armor up. Soon he entered the great hall and took the Supreme Throne. A sweep of his gaze over the bowing deities told him all he needed: their joys and their sorrows.

Time to see who's a mule and who's a stallion.

Don't be fooled by all the factions cramming fresh gods under the six god-kings when they were elevated; once the armor was on and the banners raised, those vassal gods had to go to war with them. How much steel they really had—battle would tell.

The South Asian vassal gods fared the worst; roughly a third were gone. Ekaterina and Brigid, weaker in personal combat, couldn't protect their followings; each saw their vassal rosters halved. In the lull before the final battle, they needed to rebuild their staffs and lines.

This time, anyone with eyes could see which vassal gods could actually fight.

The new gods Thalos had personally cultivated—mortals who had ascended—every last one of them survived, and almost all had taken heads. Among them, Beowulf and Arjuna led with four enemy gods each, outstripping the vassal ranks. In the second tier, Gawain, Siegfried, Ramesses II, and several others each had three heads.

Whether most of those were Greek slave gods didn't matter; the deed of godslaying itself was glory enough. Thalos didn't stint—he announced in the Golden Palace that Beowulf and Arjuna were promoted to full Aesir gods.

The ripple effect was immediate: the "mortal-ascended" new gods became hotly contested by the six god-kings. No more sitting high in their palaces, sending messengers to recruit hitters. The six went in person to the new gods' residences and bid with resources.

In the process, some new gods, not vibing with a god-king's command style, requested transfers of service. This wasn't about loyalty or betrayal. From the start, god-king fiefs were not fixed; even the World-Swords were "bestowed," not "gifted" outright. Aside from a ban on holding posts in one's ethnic

homeland, any deity could theoretically transfer freely, since the only true object of their fealty was the God-Emperor Thalos*Paulson.

And because Thalos wanted a full integration of the conquered pantheons into the Aesir, he'd deliberately opened that door. So long as a deity's true self—or their backers—paid the cost, they could force a transfer. It was a matter of interests and voice at the table.

Rulers choose their ministers; ministers choose their rulers, too.

In that context, the weaker in war—and from weaker mother pantheons—Brigid and Ekaterina were the first out of the running. Nothing to be done about it; Scathach might be Celtic, but she wasn't of the Tuatha Dé Danann. The Slavic pantheon had joined too late; even with Perun and the rest working hard, the lack of homelands was not something you could patch overnight.

Next, since Gilgamesh and Enkidu shared lineage, and for the sake of concentrating resources, Ocean and Wisdom god Enki consented to placing the bet on Gilgamesh.

In reality, among the mortal-ascended, the most eager to enlist under were Gilgamesh, Baldr, and Anubis. Only, after one light, casual hint from Thalos, a large number of new gods began converging on Crown Prince Thor.

"It's time for Thor to stand on his own. My showdown with Zeus might be very long. When I'm away, Asgard goes to Thor."

With a single sentence, an invisible tidal wave surged through Asgard. If Thalos hadn't capped Thor at twelve vassal gods, those mighty mortal-born would likely have been scooped up in one sweep.

The shift caught Thor off guard. He hurried to Thalos. "Father, what do you mean by this?"

"Nothing more than what I said. When I can't free my hands from the fight with Zeus, final authority in Asgard passes to you. You're my designated Crown Prince. When the God-Emperor isn't present, the Crown Prince governs as regent—isn't that only natural?" Thalos said lightly.

Every word was right, and yet something sounded off to Thor. Before he could stop himself: "Father, don't tell me you think beating Zeus isn't a problem and you've already decided—after you smash him—you're going to take off and leave this whole massive Ginnungagap for me to run?"