

Thalos 436

Chapter 436: A Blow to the Heart

Why does he know so much?

How did the simpleminded Paul and the even simpler Bestla manage to produce a monster like Thalos?

Now there's an answer to everything.

Thor didn't know what to say.

Thalos gave him a comforting hug. "Silly child, don't overthink it. First we flatten Olympus."

"Right! Flatten Olympus!" Thor swore, clutching his father's arms even tighter.

When you think about it, three generations of Zeus's line all got to the top by overthrowing their fathers. That kind of mess is rare not just in Greece—it's rare in the whole universe.

Children born in the raw, ignorant ages tend to feel simply and truly.

Thalos floating the idea that he might one day leave wasn't a crisis to Thor—it was a test, a spur.

Truth is, Thalos is a little tired of the same scenery. Once Zeus falls and he holds the supreme authority of this chaotic cosmos, he really does want to see if there's a way to go back to Earth for a look.

Home is in Asgard, sure.

But if his homeland still exists, of course he'd go home in glory.

And if the super-Earth was destroyed, then don't blame Thalos for raising the banner of revenge and erasing whoever did it.

A wanderer yearns for home. Nothing strange about that.

Thalos's divine sight crossed space, peering through a fine rift at that egg-like Greek world. He murmured, Zeus, do something flashy. If you go down without much resistance, I'll be bored.

Everything that happened in the hall today would remain top secret.

Thor and the Valkyries sealed their lips as if none of it had happened.

All anyone else noticed was that afterward, Crown Prince Thor seemed even more driven.

Then came the quiet before the storm—the space lanes at the front offered no large corridors for a full month.

Bored, Thalos devoted himself to "the cream puff goddess."

As the saying goes: tend the flowers and they won't bloom; stick a willow twig in the mud and it sprouts.

One evening after dinner, Artemis suddenly threw up—hard.

"Aiya, how improper," teased Amaterasu, who'd been coaching Artemis—until she noticed the other goddesses at table blanch.

Seeing the bewildered huntress, Thalos dabbed his mouth with a napkin and said mildly, "Oh? What a surprise."

"What's... happening to me?" Artemis still hadn't caught up.

Freya, seated closest to Thalos, sighed softly. "Well, well. Congratulations, little sister—you're with child."

His consorts had mixed reactions.

Those who'd already borne Thalos's children mostly just looked curious.

The one who reacted the most was Artemis.

She knew now she probably could never return to Olympus. Zeus had treated her like a treasure—he wouldn't touch her himself, and he wouldn't let anyone else touch her. Whatever the reasons, surrendering to the enemy God-Emperor was the biggest slap to Zeus's face imaginable.

She was no fool. Zeus could lust after anything that moved.

But he would also give thunderous punishment to any who defied him.

Whether she liked it or not, bearing the enemy's child was the ultimate act of treason.

Which meant that even if Olympus somehow won, returning home would likely be a tragedy.

On the other hand, the goddesses who'd pledged to Thalos seemed to fare well—especially those who'd borne him divine children. Their sons might rise to be god-kings, and then the mother's rank would rise with them.

For some reason, Artemis burst into tears.

She was grieving, but on the surface, she played the part. "Your Majesty, I'm just... so happy."

"Oh? Then I'm happy too," Thalos said with a smile.

He didn't know why Ginnungagap had obligingly welcomed a new god now—but Artemis could be a model, a wedge to pry open the rest of Olympus.

And when he thought of what her dear little brother Apollo would face next, he was delighted.

He turned to Brunnhilde. "Send word to Loki—I want this news on Olympus as fast as possible. I'd like to 'share the joy' with my good father-in-law Zeus."

The two world-clusters were still separated by the mutated stellar belt.

That didn't mean all contact was cut. Tiny, flickering tunnels still appeared—useless for moving a living body, barely fit for a wisp of divine thought, but perfect for sending weak messenger-aspects to carry a word.

Soon enough, the news sprouted wings—first in mortal Athens, then, inevitably, in Athena's ears.

"This is bad," Athena went pale.

The slave gods of Greece only knew Olympus still looked strong. Only Athena, who knew the inside story, understood how fragile the Twelve were.

Losing Artemis had already been headache enough.

If her brother Apollo now got caught up in it—that would be fatal.

If the God-Emperor Zeus could give Apollo full trust, fine. What Athena really feared was Hera's poison.

Hera had no talent for doing things well.

But turning good things into bad? She was the best on Olympus.

Athena hurried up to Zeus's temple on the holy mountain. Before she even entered, she heard him thunder, "Apollo's loyalty to me is absolute. You shut your mouth!"

Zeus usually put on a big show of fearing Hera in public, kept up the conjugal harmony for outsiders, and was happy to share power with her. For him to scold her openly like this meant he was furious.

Athena watched Hera stalk out white-faced. She bowed, secretly relieved: as long as Hera's sabotage failed, the god-kings could at least keep up appearances.

Half a day later, Zeus issued an edict—promoting the mighty Heracles to god-king.

Athena's face changed. She asked herself: Did Zeus really not listen to the slander?

He didn't listen—and yet he listened.

In his mind, he believed Artemis hadn't betrayed him. But in his heart?

Three generations had taken the throne by betrayal. Zeus himself had no rightful claim. Would he not fear being usurped?

He feared it—feared it to death.

In Zeus's view, Thalos getting Artemis pregnant meant seizing hold of Olympian bloodlines. He could win hearts with it—especially Apollo's.

Zeus could go on trusting Apollo on the surface, but he had to guard against him.

So raising loyal Heracles to god-king was Zeus's insurance policy.

Not realizing, of course, that this was the killing blow—straight to Apollo's heart.