

Thalos 438

Chapter 438: Uprooting the Enemy's Roots

The gap between god-king and god-king can be vast.

As a combat-type deity, Artemis had been assigned a relatively large vassal world by Zeus; only by stacking her Olympian main-world domain of Hunt atop a mess of Nature, Protector of Newborns, and other minor jurisdictions did she amass a big enough power base to qualify as a fighting god-king.

Now that Zeus has lopped off her vassal world, it's easy to predict those non-core domains will be targeted next.

Without a source of power, she's just a beautiful divine vase—like Amaterasu before her.

She had steeled herself for that reality. She didn't expect Thalos to hand her the hunting mandate for an entire colossal continent.

New to Asgard, she'd spent most of her time in bed; the farthest she'd walked was between the White-Gold Palace and the Hall of Revels. "South America" meant little to her.

She figured at most he'd palm off some minor vassal world. But when she felt the envy around her, she knew something was different.

A heartbeat later, the voice of the world thundered in her ear:

[By the will of God-Emperor Thalos Paulson, you are enfeoffed as the Huntress of the South American continent!]

In the next instant, Artemis—newly invested—felt the cross-space senses that had been sealed since her arrival in Ginnungagap snap open. In her god-sight bloomed a vast, green-shadowed landmass.

It was so large that—no exaggeration—it outscaled the Greek world itself.

Artemis was stunned.

"Y-Your Majesty... how big is this continent?"

Thalos answered offhandedly: "Just shy of 18 million square kilometers. Call it a quarter of Atlantis."

She had no sense for "square kilometers," but "a quarter of Poseidon's power-sea" she understood at once.

Shock. Awe. A proud goddess suddenly a freshman inductee in the Ministry of Astonishment.

She knew he wasn't bluffing. As the South American Huntress, she could feel how fertile that land was, how rich its flora. Where lands and waters thrive, beasts abound.

On this vast continent—less than a tenth developed by humankind—the single Hunt domain alone furnished almost as much power as all her former domains combined. It wasn't an exaggeration to say Thalos had preserved her god-queen stature.

Within Thalos's harem, that level of godforce had few peers—only Freyja (love and beauty), Ereshkigal (death), and Scáthach (sleep) could match the new Artemis.

Sensing the court's glossy envy, Thalos glanced back at the divine ladies. "I'm buying bones at a thousand gold."

One sentence of explanation—respect enough. In Aesir lands, strength is king.

Beauty is baseline; Thalos's court had more than five goddesses of love and beauty.

Only those who can fight and work win Aesir favor.

Can't fight? Step aside.

A few divinities ducked their heads, abashed.

Artemis was too sharp not to see the larger play. She lowered her eyes. "That venomous Hera has always despised my brother and me. If a chance comes, I'll do everything I can to persuade Apollo to come under Your Majesty."

"Good. Ginnungagap still has plenty of empty seats in the pantheon."

On that point, Thalos deserved praise.

Since defeating the Maya triad, then India and Fusō, he had refused to parcel their huge territories into rigid fiefs.

Even Gilgamesh—god-king administrator over South America—was, in essence, a technocrat. War in his lands still fell to Týr; thunder to Thor. Air-dropping Artemis in as Huntress? No problem at all.

His meritocracy slammed the door on sycophants; no number of shapeshifts into perfect beauty, no eighty-one forms of kneeling worship would move him.

Because he'd kept so much in reserve, selection and investiture of new gods ran smoothly—and turned into fighting strength fast.

Seeing all this, Artemis could only sigh: Olympus wouldn't be losing unjustly.

During the lull, Thalos also drilled the mortal armies.

He had a hunch: what came next would be an all-scale war—mortals, demigods, lesser gods, up to god-kings—and perhaps even god-emperors.

Time swept by. Two months later—

"Beloved Majesty, a composite, giant spatial rupture ahead," reported Ishtar's avatar after probing.

"Oh?" Riding the empty husks of kraken souls cast ahead as scouts, Thalos clearly saw a chain of jagged, interlinked rifts.

Large and small splits would stabilize into a string of battle corridors between the parallel world-clusters.

There were broad low-tier corridors for mortal and demigod armies, mid-tier arenas for demigods and true gods—only one catch: this time there were three god-king corridors.

As expected, still no god-emperor corridor. The foul mutating starfield still sprawled too wide; Ginnungagap couldn't close, and the World Tree's roots couldn't be thrust across as in past wars.

Thalos scanned once and issued orders in a row:

"Proclaim—form three god-king battle groups led by Thor, Hela, and Gilgamesh to meet the Olympian god-kings. The other god-kings form reserve groups to answer contingencies."

"Proclaim—form a true-god and lesser-god battle group under Frey and Arthur."

"Proclaim—assemble a South American–South Asian–Indian mortal coalition. Iron weapons only. Prepare for a mass incursion into the Greek world."

With the edicts delivered, the Gold Palace stirred; the stir ran through Asgard, then the whole of Ginnungagap.

The quieted war engine began to turn again.

Soon, Thor strode in, armored. "Father, why press the mortal war so hard? They're only auxiliaries."

"No—they are the main force. This time, if we can, I hope the enemy finds no pure-blood Greek left."

Thor's eyes narrowed. "If the mortal war grows too large, the gods will strike. They can't bear that."

"At least," Thalos said, calm, "they won't be the most devout Olympian faithful."

Thor understood. Mortals would push the slaughter beyond Olympus's tolerance; Thalos intended to drown Greece in numbers. If the Greeks died out in the main, the faith-fed segment of Olympus would suffer first.

He was going to use a sea of men—to rip out Olympus's roots.