

Thalos 443

Chapter 443: Surplus Souls

Zeus was putting on a fierce front, but no one could have guessed what was really playing out in the mind of this seemingly upright and glorious God-Emperor. In truth, his imagination had spiraled into an absurd fantasy: a virginal daughter forced into love, gradually falling for another male god's embrace, while the heartbroken father misses his chance to speak up and becomes secretly aroused by the thought.

Of course, Zeus might be unreliable in most matters, but when it came to serious issues, he could still think straight.

Still, he felt suffocated—like a wallpaper fixer in a crumbling house named Olympian Pantheon, running around patching up holes and trying to keep the whole mess from collapsing.

Some might ask: why not just tear the damn house down and rebuild?

But that wasn't possible.

The foundation, Gaia, was a traitor. The ceiling, Uranus, was a traitor too.

Without a foundation and ceiling, could it even be called a house?

Compared to them, Apollo—a potential rebel—barely counted for anything.

When practically everyone in the pantheon was a potential traitor... well, at least Apollo hadn't betrayed them yet, right?

Even when the venomous Hera dropped relentless, elegant hints, Zeus acted like an ostrich with its head in the sand: I don't see it! I can't see anything! You could chew my ass off and I'd still be blind!

That said, Zeus wasn't doing nothing—he was holding back, waiting to unleash something big.

But the current state of affairs wasn't yet suitable for revealing his trump card.

Instead, Zeus issued an order to the Olympian gods: retract their positions.

"The gods command—To resist the vile false gods of the Æsir, abandon this city and retreat to the designated refuge." Priests in various Greek city-states passed along this divine decree.

Retreat?

Retreat to where?

The order left the people baffled.

In some ways, the Greek world had always been somewhat decentralized.

Even though Athens was nominally the capital, it wasn't a true royal capital in the traditional sense. That was Athena's turf—not a place for other Greek God-Kings. Apollo's followers wouldn't scurry off to Athens, just as Athenians wouldn't flee to Sparta.

Each city-state had its own core, which naturally led to everyone fighting their battles alone.

Zeus wanted mortals to retreat not to protect them, but to deny Thalos more bargaining chips. As a deity who lived off elemental energy, mortal faith was largely irrelevant to him.

The ones who truly suffered from this were belief-based gods like Hestia and Hermes, who depended on mortal activity to generate faith, which in turn became divine power.

From this perspective, the Olympian foundation was eroding more and more.

On the other hand, Zeus did make some gains.

God-wars always came with casualties. No matter how powerful a pantheon, there would always be a bunch of mediocre or filler gods—especially among the Æsir, where many southern deities from South Asia were of questionable strength.

Lately, several Naga-like multi-headed serpents from the Khmer pantheon, known as Nek, had been slain.

Among the notable kills: Pyusawhti, a Burmese demigod son of the Sun and Dragon, was slain by Greek sun god Helios.

A Cambodian seven-headed serpent god, Naga, was taken down by the dawn goddess Eos.

The Slavic fire god Svarog fell at the hands of the Greek morning goddess Auge.

...

Casualties were inevitable.

Especially in clashes between True Gods. If a god happened to encounter another who naturally countered their domain, even fleeing might not save them.

The *Æsir* had lost 7 major and minor True Gods, and 19 Demigods, including one pure-blooded veteran *Æsir* god.

Greece fared even worse: 11 named gods, including Oizys (Goddess of Misery), Nemesis (Goddess of Retribution), and Aurora (a sea deity), had fallen, along with 38 slave gods.

No matter how you looked at it, Greece was taking a heavy beating.

As the losses mounted, even the lively halls of Asgard were a little quieter.

Thor, usually the most rowdy of all, now sat in a corner drinking in silence.

"Thor, feeling down?"

Hearing the voice, Thor looked up in surprise—it was his father, Thalos. He was so dazed he hadn't even noticed the other gods around them rising to salute.

Thalos raised his hand, and the renowned beauty Helen rushed to offer him a cup of whiskey. For someone as delicate as her, the oversized goblet used by Æsir gods was clearly far too heavy.

Thalos clinked glasses with Thor, then silently downed the drink in one go.

"Father... we've taken quite a few losses."

Thalos replied coolly, "There's no such thing as war without losses."

Thor sighed. "I always thought that if our casualties were high, it meant I hadn't fought well enough."

Thalos smiled faintly. "And if the God-Kings and Major Gods charging at the front fight well enough, the rest of the gods behind us won't suffer any losses? My child, I don't recall ever teaching you such naïve thinking."

"No, Father... I know the logic. I just... can't get used to it."

"You'd better get used to it soon. After all, the Olympians are a pantheon powerful enough to contend with the *Æsir*. Losses are to be expected." Thalos's tone shifted slightly. "Or... has my long history of using strategies and unconventional means to minimize *Æsir* casualties made you all believe we can crush any hostile pantheon without a scratch?"

"..."

"Let go of such unrealistic illusions. We must prepare for the worst—a prolonged war, lasting years, perhaps even centuries."

"Understood, Father!" Thor raised his freshly filled goblet and clinked glasses with Thalos once more, downing it in one gulp.

At this point, the two divine factions were like two thick-skinned titans slugging it out—neither capable of landing a killing blow, each slowly grinding down the other's lifeblood through relentless brawling.

Whoever inflicted more wounds, drew more blood, and bled the other out faster—would win.

After nearly three months of brutal warfare, the battle on Greek soil temporarily subsided, ending with heavy losses on the Greek side.

During this period, over a million people in the Greek world were either captured or defected—most were slaves. But even among the Greek citizenry, the true foundation of the city-states, more than 300,000 were lost. The total number of dead and wounded was incalculable.

Naturally, Hades's underworld had been very busy lately.

The fall of Thanatos, god of death, had caused serious aftershocks.

With Hades now distracted by mundane administrative duties, his combat effectiveness had taken a noticeable hit.

This was how Hades explained it to Zeus:

"The Underworld is full! A massive influx of souls is overwhelming our sorting systems. They're being hastily and roughly classified, then dumped wherever there's space. In fact, nearly every region capable

of housing souls is reaching capacity. Unless we have enough outlets to redirect souls into reincarnation... remember, for every life, there must be a death! If there are too many dead, it will eventually affect the living too."

Life?

Where could he find enough women capable of bearing life in such a short time?

Creating life? Zeus was good at that.

But even he needed mothers to do it.

So Zeus made a decision: "The surplus souls... shove them into Tartarus for now."