

Thalos 444

Chapter 444: Odin Is Loving It

Tartarus?

The moment Zeus uttered that word, Hades nearly lost his composure.

Seriously, brother? Don't you think your suggestion is a bit much?

Under Hades' rule, the Underworld had always leaned toward neutrality—an extension of Hades' own temperament.

Nearly every underworld across the divine realms followed a similar structure.

In the Greek world, the Underworld began at the Gates of Hell, guarded by the three-headed dog Cerberus. After that came the Acheron River, which all souls had to cross to reach the Fields of Truth, a vast gray plain.

This field led to two paths: one toward the joyful Elysium, and one toward the painful depths of Hell. There, the souls stood before a tribunal of three judges—Zeus's sons—who determined their fate. The guilty would be punished according to their crimes, and the innocent would be sent to the blissful Elysian Fields, where they'd live worry-free lives, enjoying art, song, and peace.

The problem? With the recent explosion of deaths, the judges couldn't keep up.

Even after delegating their authority, it still wasn't enough.

By protocol, every Greek soul—citizen or slave—was supposed to be judged.

But Zeus's new command meant that Hades would now have to skip judgment altogether for all slaves and foreign warriors killed in Greece. They'd be dumped directly into Tartarus. As for Greek citizens? Judge them if possible. If not? Into Tartarus they go, too.

This... seriously challenged Hades' principles.

For once, the Lord of the Underworld showed clear displeasure—his facial muscles twitched, and his gaze turned cold.

"My brother, this is a temporary solution. You should know that once we defeat the *Æsir*, we'll be flooded with enemy souls too." Zeus didn't finish the sentence—but the implication was clear: those enemy souls? They'll all be dumped into Tartarus too.

Hades knew all too well that the Ginnungagap world had a population far greater than Greece's. What Zeus said was brutally honest.

Better to torment the dead of your enemies than your own people.

There was no other choice. Foreign souls would have to suffer.

"...Very well. For now."

The Underworld was the realm of the dead. Tartarus was the prison for the defeated Titans—guarded by the hundred-handed giants.

In ancient myth, both Uranus and Cronus had locked away the Cyclopes and Hecatoncheires in Tartarus, fearing rebellion. Over time, Tartarus became more than just a Titan prison—it also held mortal evildoers like Sisyphus and Ixion.

Zeus himself had once threatened to cast disobedient gods into Tartarus, banishing them forever from the light of Olympus. Tartarus was not just a place—it was a being, a primordial god who fathered Typhon with Gaia. He was also one of the elemental building blocks of the cosmos: the Abyss.

So yes, Tartarus could house souls—but under brutally harsh conditions...

Encased by three layers of divine-curse-enchanted bronze walls and triple curtains of darkness, Tartarus was now strung with thousands upon thousands of rusted chains falling from the black sky. At their ends, vicious barbs pierced into the collarbones of wandering souls, pulling their translucent forms into grotesque contortions.

Countless guilty—or even innocent—souls were herded forward by Underworld guards, stumbling over charred ground. Some tripped and fell into bottomless pits of molten lava, their severed spiritual limbs absorbed into the burning chasms.

The smell of sulfur, mixed with chilling screams, funneled into the souls' decorative nostrils, solidifying into phantom pain deep in their throats.

Torture devices lurking by the roadside or within ruined buildings would suddenly snap open like beasts, driving rusted spikes into the chests of unlucky spirits. When these metallic traps crushed their ribs, the agony would cause their ethereal forms to re-condense into near-physical shape—just to suffer anew.

The punishments once reserved for infamous sinners like Ixion were now inflicted indiscriminately upon every newly dead soul from the Greek world.

Pitiful spirits, driven by instinct, tried to huddle in the center of the crowd—only to have their ankles seized by skeletal hands reaching from cracks in the ground. The rotten, blue-jointed fingers belonged to half-buried figures with hollow eyes dripping with soul-fire.

Despair surged like a tide.

All around were pale arms flailing in blood-pits, clawing at the roadside, trying to pull down more victims to share in their torment.

Even some of the Underworld guards began to look uneasy.

"Isn't Lord Hades being a bit harsh?"

"Shh! They say this was Emperor Zeus's idea."

"But tossing the dead in here without even judging them, that's just..."

"Sigh. What else can they do? The Underworld is full."

Tartarus overflowed with apocalyptic torment. Suspended souls collided in the hot winds of purgatory, fragments of soul-stuff raining down like an eternal meteor shower.

But none of the guards noticed—some of the souls glowed with a faint, special light.

These luminous spirits were gently pulled away from the masses and disappeared into the blood-pits.

Were they truly gone?

Just as they felt themselves being squeezed into oblivion, losing even the last wisps of awareness, these souls suddenly realized—they were somewhere else.

There was no pain here. Only warmth.

They found themselves in a strange, gentle realm.

High above, on a platform five stories tall, stood a being wearing a mask that their ancestors would have recognized. He spread his arms wide.

"I am Ah Puch, god of death. You have fulfilled your duty well. Now... rest."

In the next instant, the battered, tormented souls smiled. Their forms dissolved into scattered light, flowing like spirit-streams and merging into Ah Puch's divine body.

The being known as Ah Puch exhaled softly, then turned toward a hidden plane of the spirit realm. Ignoring the divine radiance beside him, he bowed deeply toward the massive, three-story-tall figure seated upon the high throne.

"My lord Odin! The eighteenth wave of souls has been successfully gathered. My divine power has now returned to half its peak."

"Excellent," the translucent Odin smiled faintly. "Same procedure as before."

"Yes, my lord." Ah Puch obediently refined the newly absorbed power into streams of divine energy and distributed it among Odin and the other Mayan gods.

Normally, converting god-power between different pantheons was extremely difficult. Divine energy carried the imprint of its source god. To reuse it, you'd have to erase that imprint—and even then, the conversion losses were massive. If you started with ten units, you'd be lucky to keep three.

But as a god of death, Ah Puch could voluntarily erase all divine imprint from the collected energy and reprocess it into neutral power—greatly simplifying the task.

At the head of the throne, Odin raised his eyebrows slightly.

"So... does anyone still have objections to my brother—God-Emperor Thalos Borson's—brilliant plan?"