

Thalos 446

Chapter 446: So Much Inner Conflict

If, before now, Cronus had regarded Odin as just a weak but oddly talented tool, at this moment, he was beginning to see Odin as a partner—someone who could negotiate with him on equal footing. Especially since, for now, Cronus was still stuck in this damned cage.

When your "partner" has big enough fists, even a proud Titan learns how to talk properly.

"Very well, my ally. How should I address you?"

"God-King Odin! Odin Borson, of the *Æsir* pantheon! Younger brother of the current *Æsir* God-Emperor, Thalos Borson!" Odin didn't forget to elevate himself by name-dropping his elder brother. "As for this death-aspected divine power you sense from me? I owe that to my big brother—he had his men eliminate the Greek god of death, Thanatos."

This intel came from the Ginnungagap souls that had entered Tartarus.

Before they charged into Greece, they'd been told: Even if you die, it may not be the end—Ginnungagap may still retrieve you.

Who would've thought it'd be Odin doing the retrieving?

No matter. The intel was accurate and had reached Odin in full.

As for Cronus, he was utterly fooled. With even less information than Odin, he had no way of understanding the changes unfolding in Tartarus, and saw no reason to doubt Odin's claims.

"Excellent. Then we're both God-Kings," Cronus acknowledged with resignation.

"Indeed. So let us now discuss—once we escape this wretched hell—what we'll do next..."

Naturally, Cronus wanted to storm Mount Olympus and take revenge on his beloved son, Zeus. In return, he "modestly" hoped Odin would tank all of Zeus's thunder magic for him.

Odin had lived long enough to know the horrors of divine lightning. Back during Ragnarök, one of his biggest failures was not neutralizing Thalos's eldest son, Thor. A god who could command thunder—like Zeus—was never weak. Odin had zero intention of being the lightning rod for this arrogant, cowardly, and washed-up Titan king.

Fortunately, the key to unlocking this prison of divine law was in Odin's hands—and he had already restored his divine power. Whether or not he could replenish it was another story, but for now, his divine reserves were enough to make him look like a true God-King. That gave him the upper hand in negotiations.

And with the next war still on the horizon, Odin had plenty of time to "polish" Cronus's temperament.

Elsewhere, Apollo was wracked with pain.

Unsurprisingly, he had received a letter from his sister, Artemis.

The contents were simple: Artemis confessed that she had originally been conquered by the *Æsir* God-Emperor Thalos, and that her bond to her homeland had been her last line of spiritual defense. But when Zeus cast her aside—stripping her of her God-King power source—she had no other choice. She fell in love with the damn conqueror, and now served the *Æsir*.

She also mentioned that Thalos had promised not to force her to fight against the Olympians.

That was the end of the letter.

But Apollo could read between the lines: "Not fighting the Olympians" didn't mean she wouldn't fight their subordinate slave-gods. Odds were, in the next battle, news would spread of Artemis wreaking havoc across Greek-held subrealms.

And the promise only applied to her. It meant her powerful demigod followers—like the Amazon queen—could still strike against Greece.

Apollo knew it clearly: he had been placed on the divine barbecue spit.

His father, Zeus, still trusted him. Hera's faction wished for his downfall. His sister wanted him to defect.

Apollo felt like a god with no place—neither inside nor outside.

He let out a long sigh. The moment of decision was drawing near.

"My Lord, are you troubled?"

"...Cassandra?" Apollo wasn't particularly surprised.

Cassandra, princess of Troy, was the third daughter of King Priam and Queen Hecuba—and one of Apollo's most devoted mortal priestesses.

She bowed gracefully, then gently spoke, "Is it about Lady Artemis?"

Apollo said nothing. That was answer enough.

"My father is troubled too. Troy is also on the verge of making a decision."

Apollo, softhearted as ever, didn't know how to console his priestess. "I'm... sorry about your brother."

Cassandra shook her head tenderly. "My brother Hector died in honorable single combat. His death was glorious. But Troy... has lost the favor of the gods. When the final hour comes, we will have to make our choice."

Apollo fell silent once more.

He knew: if not for this war against the *Æsir*, the Greek city-states might already have banded together into a coalition and launched an invasion of Asia Minor—laying siege to Troy itself.

With the major Greek powers locked in an uneasy balance, they either had to risk an internal war or seek external conquest. And in that scenario, rich yet non-Greek Troy made the perfect target.

Though the Trojans worshipped the Olympians, the blessings they received were always less than what the Greeks got.

And in a time when many Olympian gods no longer bothered to protect mortal believers, could anyone blame the Trojans if they surrendered to the *Æsir*?

Surrendering was never an easy decision.

Make the wrong bet, and if the Olympians won, Troy would likely be obliterated—wiped from the map by Zeus himself as a warning to others.

But if they didn't surrender and couldn't hold out, then what?

Troy's walls might have been forged by Poseidon himself, but that was only protection against mortals.

If a shameless Æsir god descended personally, it'd be a whole different story.

Cassandra seemed to be speaking about Troy, but in truth, she was speaking for Apollo.

Either fight to the bitter end—or switch sides.

There was no third option.

Apollo slowly shook his head. "My sister is my sister. I am me. I am Apollo, god of light and prophecy of Olympus."

His tone and words sealed the matter once and for all.

"As you command," Cassandra said, bowing deeply.

Soon after, Apollo sent his reply before the spatial portal closed again.

"Sorry, my dear... I couldn't persuade my brother."

Once the wild huntress of the woods, Artemis now nuzzled against Thalos's arm like a gentle kitten.

Thalos waved it off, unfazed. "No matter. If Apollo could be swayed so easily, he'd be unworthy of being the god of light."

A god's domain profoundly affects their nature.

If the god of light wasn't upright and righteous, they had no right to bear that title.

A light god could be inflexible. Could be fanatically loyal.

But betrayal? That was never allowed.

From the very beginning, Thalos's true target hadn't been Apollo.

His real aim... was to slap Hera's face.