

## **World 1271**

### **Chapter 1271: An Avenging Force**

In the projection above the war table, John saw the neutral force rush to the battlefield. They charged directly into the side where the Cult of Phobos was decimating the Themisphere army. Once they did, this force turned into green dots.

John exhaled a huge relief breath upon seeing that. He couldn't handle additional enemies.

He saw that the dots representing the Cult of Phobos completely stopped their offensive once this new ally made contact with them. The two forces were now fully engaged with one another, completely ignoring the Themisphere army near them.

The more surprising thing was, this ally could hold its ground against the cult, even when the cult outnumbered them. This cult had made short work on the Themisphere army but was unable to do so against this new ally. This showed the newcomer was not simple.

John sent an instruction for the Themisphere army nearby to move to the opposite side of this ally and hit the cult from the back, causing the cult to face assaults from two opposite sides.

With the cult fully occupied, the Themisphere army could now fight on more equal ground with the Liguritutum army.

The Liguritutum army still outnumbered them but this was the only advantage they had. In terms of average quality, the Themisphere army was better. This was because the Themisphere army had four advantages.

Firstly, the enchantment of level 3 Arcane Armor and Weapon. This enchantment gave all soldiers a boost on their damage and defense. Hence, a Themisphere soldier overpowered the Liguritutum soldier of the same level.

Secondly, better maneuvering and tactical positioning. With Linda taken out of the board, only the Themisphere army made tactical movements. The Liguritutum army simply stay in the same formation and just fought relying on their number.

Thirdly, Each of Themisphere soldiers had basic martial arts. The entire army had routinely followed drills designed by Domon and Jet, making them more efficient combatants at the individual level.

The last advantage was the army's morale. All the army's divisions had native leaders who had been a long time comrades with their troops. The morale was high since the army started marching to Hydrurond's territory. Even though they lost during the first half of the battle, the native leaders managed to keep the morale from decreasing too much. Hence, the army could still fight effectively.

As such, the battle which had been heavily favoring Liguritutum from the beginning was slowly turned into a stalemate. John believed if he could maintain this situation for a longer time, the scale would subsequently tip in Themisphere's favor.

With such hope, he redoubled his effort.

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Near where the Cult of Phobos was, Mihos cut through the Liguritutum soldiers and charged in the cult's direction.

Paytowin had warned him and called him back, but the champion wasn't listening. Mihos continued barging through the enemies, knocking them down, slapping them to the side, and maintaining a steady pace toward the cult.

Paytowin's brave techno suit was still on cooldown, so he lost access to his flying ability. He was now riding on Brave King's back while providing support using ranged attacks for Mihos who was still charging at high speed.

Paytowin gave up asking Mihos to stop, so he was doing his best to not let his companion die from a blind urge for revenge. He didn't understand why Mihos became as if possessed all of a sudden.

He then saw, from the sky, the cult busily fighting a large group of golden armored troops. He identified these troops at first glimpse. He knew then why Mihos charged over here. Mihos wanted to join his brethren, the warriors from the Council of Virtus!

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In the past few months, Mihos had been working hard to gather his scattered comrades as mandated by Callan. Many had heeded his call and joined his quest in looking for the other lost members of the council.

They built a temporary base in the wilderness where they brought the members they had found and bided until it was time to either rebuild the council or exact their vengeance.

When Paytowin summoned Mihos to fight in the defense of Messephyria, Mihos fought the dread knights. From the aura he felt from the knights, he knew Liguritutum had a close connection with the Cult of Phobos. The outworlders commanding the Liguritutum army were also ones who were there when the cult destroyed his faction. Hence, Mihos knew the time for vengeance might come first before the rebuilding.

After the fall of Messephyria, Mihos had called his brethren over to Hydrurond. The war had not ended, and he knew the longer it lasted, the bigger the chance for the cult members to show themselves. He was right.

The council's warriors had departed immediately once Mihos sent them the call. It took them some time to arrive. Luckily, they managed to arrive at the time when they were most needed.

Leading the council's warriors were two figures. One of them was someone Jack knew, Pallas. This divine champion survived the fall of the council. During that past battle, he was wounded after getting surrounded by many enemies. His wings tool was damaged and he was thrown from the edge of Daminos Square Garden. He fell from a great height but survived.

Mihos was extremely happy when he found Pallas. Pallas could be said to be his mentor. Mihos asked Pallas to be the leader of their gathered brethren, but Pallas refused. Pallas knew Callan had entrusted

this role to Mihos. He acted as Mihos' second in command and led the other members when Mihos was not around.

The second figure who led the council's warriors alongside Pallas was a level 85 mythical elf named Animus. He fought using claw weapons. His ferocity intimidated even the cultists who sent many of their members to deal with him.

Animus used Beast Form when surrounded, transforming into a werelion with dazzling golden furs. His roar shook the battlefield, stunning the enemies and rallying his allies. His fighting style turned even more feral after transforming. The enemies couldn't retain their formation when he came rampaging.

Strah and Korku who led the cultists engaged Pallas and Animus. After the first few clashes, it was apparent that Pallas and Animus were the stronger combatants.

The same could be said between the golden warriors of the council and the cultists. The Council of Virtus' warriors was a class above the cultists.

Without the surprise ambush and the support from World Maker's tools, the cultists were not the golden warrior's opponents. Furthermore, the council's warriors were fueled by the thirst for vengeance which made them fight even fiercer. Even when the cultists had twice the number of the council's warriors, they still had difficulty defending against the golden warriors whose frenzy was fueled by an avenging zeal.

To make matters worse, the Themisphere army was harassing them from the rear. The cultists now experienced a situation that was completely opposite from when they first entered this battlefield.

### **Chapter 1272: The Fall of a Cultist Leader**

In the battle between the council's warriors and the cultists, Arlstraxx, the cardinal of Phobos, supported Strah and Korku against the council's two fearsome leaders, Pallas and Animus. As Arlstraxx cast his spells for support, he felt intense pressure from the side which caused him to turn. He saw a young draconian rushing at him. This draconian wore golden armor with a lion head carving on his chest plate.

"Despicable cultists! I will have your blood today to appease our fallen comrades...!!" Mihos roared and swung his golden greatsword in Arlstraxx's direction.

Mihos was still a distance away from Arlstraxx, but the cardinal felt the pressure from Mihos intensifying. A golden wave appeared on the ground after Mihos swung his greatsword. This wave rushed at Arlstraxx leaving a trail of golden line.

The cultists on the way were blown away when this wave went through them. Ones with already low HP were even sliced apart.

Arlstraxx wanted to erect his psychic shield but he had been staring in Mihos' direction all this time. He saw Mihos' eyes shining with golden light. He was unable to move due to Mihos' petrifying gaze.

The golden wave struck him and sent him flying back. Mihos used a super jump assault, covering a huge distance, and then used a normal jump assault. He landed right in front of Arlstraxx with a cleave right on top of the cardinal's head. The heavy blow sent Arlstraxx plunging to the ground.

The cultist's priests rushed in with their maces, determined to save their cardinal.

Mihos' body exploded with a shockwave explosion, stopping them in their paths. He then performed double whirlwind slashes and followed with Sword of the Braves. His sword of the braves had increased to nine golden swords. These swords stabbed the surrounding priests and sent them reeling back.

Arlstraxx used the time bought by his priests to gather his power. A black fog exploded from his body. This fog formed multiple tentacles that punched Mihos, forcing him to back off.

Mihos' greatsword burst with a golden flame. The tentacles that came at him were repelled when they touched this golden flame. Mihos swung madly. Each slash took out one tentacle. The fog that formed the tentacles was evaporated by the golden flame.

Arlstraxx knew he was not Mihos' opponent. He might still be able to fight Mihos in the past even with Mihos being one grade higher, but now Mihos' level had come close to his. He could only rely on numbers to deal with this champion.

Arlstraxx cast Bone Prison to lock Mihos' movements. This bone prison could only hold Mihos for one second. One slash and all the bones were cut clean in half. Arlstraxx added a bone wall between him and Mihos before calling his cultists for help.

Mihos used Charge and broke through the bone wall as if a bull through a weak wooden fence.

Arlstraxx couldn't deny he was terrified by Mihos' ferocity. It even affected his casting speed. He tried to cast a big spell to deal with Mihos but his casting was not as fast as usual. A laser beam hit his head. His devouring fog was unable to protect him. The laser beam penetrated through the fog that shielded his head. With his mental state already riled, his concentration wavered from this hit. His spell formation fizzled.

The one who shot him was Paytowin using his Brave Rifle on top of Brave King. His brave rifle had a cooldown of only one hour, so he could use it often.

Paytowin had learned from his previous mistake. He didn't rush into the midst of enemies. He jumped down and landed behind Mihos, giving him ranged support while Mihos wreaked havoc among the cultists to get to Arlstraxx.

Brave King continued flying forward. It fired its projectile punch at Arlstraxx who was regaining balance. This time, Arlstraxx's devouring fog managed to cushion the attack. Brave King's detached fist was stopped by the fog tentacles.

Mihos was still charging toward Arlstraxx, sending any cultists who tried to block him flying away. Arlstraxx cast a quick spell. Multiple gravity bombs headed to Mihos. Mihos tanked through the bombs. The damage from the bombs' explosions wasn't much, but their gravity pull effect slowed him down.

Arlstraxx used the reprieve and cast another spell, Gravity Lock. Intense gravity restrained Mihos' movements, but not for long.

Mihos uttered a yell. The spirit of the divine lion materialized above him. He had activated his Ancestral Possession.

His strength stat became so high that even the intense gravity was not able to hold him down. He tore through the gravity hold from Arlstraxx's spell.

Arlstraxx was extremely startled his spell was nullified with such brute force. He started casting another spell when Brave King landed beside him. He paid the techno golem no mind. His fog tentacles would take care of the golem.

However, his fog tentacles recoiled when they touched Brave King's metallic skin. He turned and saw the golem's body glowing. It then exploded with intense bright light.

Brave King's brave blast had been able to destroy Arlstraxx's devouring fog in the past. It was even more so now that Paytowin upgraded the techno golem's parts.

The powerful explosion not only stripped Arlstraxx of his protective fog but also caused him to stagger. Whatever spell he was preparing was canceled.

When his vision cleared up, he found Mihos already in front of him. Mihos swung his greatsword and produced mighty turbulence. Arlstraxx's body was lifted into the air against his will.

Within the turbulence, his body flew around while Mihos' sword energy continued to assail him. The divine lion spirit above Mihos joined in the assault. Countless swings and claws landed on Arlstraxx's body while he was helpless, producing damage with each hit.

Even after the turbulence ended, Mihos didn't stop. He used one hand and grabbed Arlstraxx, preventing the cardinal from escaping. His greatsword and the divine lion spirit above him ceaselessly struck Arlstraxx.

Paytowin and Brave King dealt with the cultists and stopped any from coming to the cardinal's rescue.

Eventually, the cardinal fell.

Arlstraxx was only one of the cultist leaders whom Mihos remembered leading the attack on Daminos Square Garden. Mihos didn't feel slaying Arlstraxx was enough for his vengeance. He now turned to the other leaders responsible for the destruction of his faction. Two of which were currently battling Pallas and Animus.

He headed over to them.

### **Chapter 1273: The Everlasting Hope**

The arrival of the Council of Virtus' champions had caused the balance of the battle to shift. John could now fully utilize what army he had left and whittled down the enemy's overwhelming number.

In the sky, another incident tipped the scale further. Broidrireg finally defeated Suzaki. The immortal phoenix was unable to approach Broidrireg and used her immortal prison. Instead, she got trapped by Broidrireg's spell and was no longer able to flee. When she died, her fiery body burst into countless flame tongues before disappearing quietly into the air.

After slaying Suzaki, Broidrireg pondered about giving aid to Eoranth, but his responsibility was to the Themisphere army first. Additionally, he was sure Eoranth would be offended if he went to help.

Without a high-level eternal opponent stopping him, Broidrireg rained spells onto the Liguritudum and also Aurebor armies below, reaping countless casualties.

On the other side, Jack and the Archdemon lord did the same.

Master, who saw from afar how the battlefield situation changed to such a degree, was extremely displeased.

With the arrival of Arlcard and Therras, he was unable to break through the defense. However, even with so many opponents, they also didn't appear to be anywhere near defeating Master. With the help of the Necronomicon, Master's spells seemed endless.

Even though the zombie soldiers had been greatly culled during the battle, there were still more than enough for him to sacrifice to reduce his spells' cooldown.

Seeing the stalemate, staying around gave no benefit. Master chose to retreat. He left his minions to hold the enemies while he flew away using his demonic wings.

His demonic wings had no duration but consume stamina or MP each second. He had exceptional MP recovery which offset the wings' MP consumption. This allowed him to maintain the demonic wings indefinitely.

John watched all this progress through the projection above his war table. Though the battle had not ended, he heaved a relieved sigh. The most critical part had ended. As long as they could maintain this condition and no more nasty surprises appear, they should win.

He sent Jack a message, "Hey, give my thanks to your country guardian. Ask him if he could speed up his spell castings to quickly wrap this battle up. I prefer it to end sooner rather than later before any nasty surprises happened again."

"Dude, he is casting several spells at the same time. Is that not fast enough already? Don't ask unreasonable requests," Jack replied. "But I will pass your thanks."

Jack sent his thanks using his king badge. Broidrireg simply responded with a harrumph.

Without stopping his casting, Broidrireg glanced at the distant sky which was covered with colorful turbulence. He was one of the few who was aware that while the mortals were fighting their war down here, the divines were having theirs up there.

Broidrireg didn't think any of their victories down here meant anything if the battle up there went in the opposite direction.

If Fear was the one victorious, that God could easily wipe out the Themisphere and Hydrurond armies.

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High in that distant sky ravaged by multiple conflicting energies, six divine beings were contesting and one giant black ball was inert.

Serenity battled Wrath. The energies they released blanketed all the spaces around them. Green and Red intertwined, causing spatial distortion and time to collapse.

Love was battling Pride. Pride should be more powerful, but he was somehow reserved. He was unable to use all his power. Love knew that and used it to her advantage. Pride was aware but he could do nothing about it. His guilt had truly eaten him up. It was most so when he caught a glimpse of the black ball floating not far away. Love knew this and kept their battle close to the black ball.

Fear fought Greed. These two who used to be comrades now fought on opposite teams. Fear was extremely vexed by Greed's action. His plan almost came to fruition, but this Greed just had to spoil it. Fear's face was constantly scowling.

Greed had an opposite expression. He was constantly smiling as if pissing Fear off was something fun.

"Stop this, Greed! We are finally going to be free. Why are you acting like this? You are being a fool," Fear scolded.

"If anyone is a fool, it is you, brother," Greed replied. "You have been used and lied to, and you are just happy about it."

"Nonsense! No one uses me! It was even more unthinkable for someone to dare to lie to me!" Fear yelled. The air around him was covered by corrupting energies that ruptured everything they touched.

"No? You have been dancing on that outworlder's palms ever since he sold you that lies about giving you access to the real world," Greed uttered. All the corrupted energies Fear discharged were absorbed by his, refined, and then directed back at Fear.

"How dare you! It is I who is using him! He is just a pawn."

"Really? Then tell me. Did you plan this? Did you entice Pride? Or did he? Do you know that although what he said that the outworlders came from the real world is true, it is also true that their world is no more? That our world right here is now the real world and the outworlders are here to stay?"

Fear stopped a brief instant from the words. This short window was exploited by Greed. Greed's energy penetrated Fear and sent him reeling back.

"You, vile traitor...!! I will tear you to pieces!" Fear howled. His power grew and he directed all this overwhelming force toward Greed.

Suddenly, all six of them heard a voice that caused their very being to tremble uncontrollably, "This ends... NOW...!!!"

The black ball that had stayed still for some time exploded into countless pieces. A blinding luminance showered everything within miles. Even the six Gods had to close their eyes from the radiance.

When they opened their eyes again, they saw Hope floating above them. His body glistened with brilliance. Holy light showered the spot he was floating at.

His glowing eyes locked with Fear's, who found himself difficult to move.

Hope spoke, "Your scheme has failed, Fear. Do you think you can take me out? It was but a fool's errand. I am Hope! And I am everlasting!"

## **Chapter 1274: A Forceful End to the War**

The instant Hope finished speaking, Fear felt his entire essence being gripped by an invisible hand.

"AARRGGHHH...!!!" A painful shriek escaped Fear's mouth. The other five Gods were shocked. Never did they hear any of them uttering such a sound, much less from pain.

Fear was then flung down to the land far below. Hope followed closely behind. All other five Gods felt an invisible power grabbing them as well and they were forced to follow after Fear and Hope. They were again astounded. They knew Hope was the most powerful among them, but they never imagined the gap to be so wide.

Fear slammed into the ground. His fall caused an earthquake, a shockwave, and a huge dust cloud.

He landed right beside the battlefield where the four armies had been fighting. The tremor caused almost everyone on the ground to fall, while the ones in the air were swept by the shockwave. Everyone stopped fighting then.

Hope descended and his brightness garnered everyone's attention.

"Everyone...," His voice reverberated for miles. Every soldier on the battlefield heard his voice both in their ears and inside their minds.

"I command you to stop fighting."

His voice was gentle, but no one dared to disobey except for the zombie army.

When the zombie soldiers continued their offensive gestures, Hope grunted. These zombie soldiers then burst into piles of broken bones and armor. None were spared.

The others became even more compliant after seeing this. Some even held their breath in fear that they made a wrong move and were interpreted as being disobedient.

Hope continued, "This battle has ended. Both sides are to stay away from one another and no side is permitted to come into conflict for one week. Now, start moving away from each other!"

The soldiers looked at each other before both sides started retreating. Even the champions from the Council of Virtus didn't dare to defy Hope's order. They glared with their vengeful eyes at the cultists who were somehow glad by this ceasefire.

Strah and Korku were especially so. They had been suffering under Pallas and Animus' aggression. When Mihos barged in, they were even more struggling.

However, their relief was replaced by horror when they saw the figure on the ground next to Hope. It was their terrifying God, Fear.

"As for you," Hope looked down at Fear who was still wearing a painful expression on his face. The invisible force that was gripping him didn't let go.



The other Gods had also descended and were now floating not far from the two. Those who had just now aware of these divine beings' presence were extremely shocked by the revelation. They didn't understand why these Gods came to this place. Not just one of them, but all of them!

"You will be punished!" Hope made a grabbing motion at Fear.

A blinding light slammed into Fear from the sky. Upon the impact, Fear uttered another painful howl for the second time today. In fact, for the second time in his entire existence.

Both players and natives were deeply shaken by the howl, especially the members of the Cult of Phobos. They couldn't believe the God they revered so much, act the way a mortal was.

When the light ended, Fear was seen panting on the ground. His state was pitiful.

"I won't kill you, Fear, but it will take you a long time to recover," Hope said.

Fear looked at Hope with mixed emotions, primarily confusion and... fear. He couldn't believe he who held dominion over this emotion could also be subjected to its power.

"Go, and stop interfering with mortals' affairs," Hope said.

"You... You truly letting me go?" Fear asked, his voice quivering.

"Don't make me change my mind," Hope replied.

Fear stood up with much difficulty. He was still looking at Hope with fear in his eyes. Even when he turned around, this feeling didn't disappear. He was afraid Hope would go back on his words and strike him on his back.

Hope didn't do so.

Before leaving, Fear glanced at where the Liguritutum army was. Another emotion gripped his heart. Anger. He then vanished into thin air.

"Brother Hope, why let him go?" Serenity asked.

Hope lifted his hand and signaled for Serenity to be silent. He then turned to Greed.

Greed was still smiling, but inside, he was also restless. He also never expected Hope's power to be this vast.

Hope simply gave Greed a simple nod. He then turned to Pride, who had his head down this entire time.

When Pride sensed Hope's eyes on him, he stammered, "Bro... Brother, I..."

"Stop," Hope uttered. "Ever since you decided to betray me, we are no longer brothers."

Pride looked down again. He stayed silent, waiting for his punishment to come.

"Go."

"What...?" Pride looked up. He didn't believe what he had heard.

"Go! Go and hide somewhere. If you dare cause any disturbance to this world. I will come for you. This is the only time I will show mercy considering we were once brothers."

Hope then turned to Wrath, "That goes for you as well. Don't let me catch you interfering with mortals' affairs."

Unlike the others, Wrath wasn't intimidated by Hope's display. She talked back, "Why are you so stubborn? You know already that our world is fake, we should—"

Her words stopped when a powerful force slammed into her. She reeled back. The energy within her was in turmoil. From that one assault, she knew it was easy for Hope to eliminate her. To eliminate any of them.

She hissed in defiance before she also vanished into thin air.

Pride was still standing there with his head down, even his void face couldn't mask his feeling. He was then also gone without saying any more words.

After Fear, Wrath, and Pride were gone, Hope turned to the other Gods. "Follow me," he said, before adding to Greed, "That includes you."

Hope then disappeared from that place and reappeared somewhere isolated where no one was around. Serenity, Love, and Greed soon appeared next to him.

Once they did, he said to them, "I'm sorry. This will be my last moment. I will be leaving this world to the three of you."

### **Chapter 1275: Hope's Sanctification**

"Brother Hope... What do you mean?" Serenity asked.

"This Godkiller. It is still within me," Hope answered. "What you see now is me forcefully using all my divine power for one last time. It is very powerful but it will end soon, and so do I. I am like the last flame of a candle that burned brightly before it is extinguished."

"No...", Love was unable to say anything else. There were too many distressing things happening today.

"Are you sure you should reveal this to me?" Greed asked. "I'm sure this is meant to be a secret considering you have just threatened those other Gods. If they knew you are gone, your threat is meaningless."

"I have seen how you helped Serenity and Love. I believe in you," Hope replied. "I have high hope for you."

"You are unbelievable," Greed said.

"Is there nothing we can do?" Love said. She didn't want to believe another of the good Gods to disappear.

Hope shook his head. "Fear is right. Whatever this Godkiller is, it truly can kill a God. I can feel my existence dissipating. It won't be long now."

"Then... Then, shouldn't you kill Fear? After all he had done!" Serenity exclaimed.

"Vengeance is not the way. You who represent peace should know better," Hope said.

Serenity turned away. "If what he and Pride said is true, then we are all lies. I am not a God and neither do I symbolize peace..."

Hope grabbed Serenity's arm and said, "We are what we choose to be. Do not let Fear's words disconcert you!"

Hope let go and spoke to everyone, "My time is short, so please heed my words. It doesn't matter if Fear is right or if he is being fed lies. It doesn't matter whether our world is real or fake. It doesn't matter if all our beings are what our creator had chosen for us. What does matter is whether we choose to believe it to be our purpose. If you do, then you stick to it!

"I am appointed by our creator to represent the hope of this world. Fake or real, I choose to live by its virtue, and that's all that matters. I choose that to be my purpose and I will uphold it until the end of my time, which will be soon. For that, I will lay my hopes on the three of you to take care of this world once I am gone.

"If you choose that you no longer want to uphold the virtues that our creator had given you because you think they are fake, I won't hold it against you. You do what you believe in. But first, you need to know what you believe in. Don't take everything others said at face value. Even if what they said seems to be an irrefutable truth. If you have faith in your belief, then don't let go of it. For that is what we all truly have in the end.

"I will die with my belief intact. I have no regret about it."

Serenity and Love didn't know what to say. As divine beings, they were always detached from the feeling of losing someone. They might have felt it a little when they found out that Courage and Joy were gone. But now, when it was happening right in front of them, they weren't sure how to process what they felt. Even Greed somehow felt sad for Hope. He refused to show it, though.

"About killing Fear," Hope laid his hand on Serenity's shoulder. "I would have done it if I could. If I try, I will expend too much energy and die sooner. Wrath and Pride will see through my bluff then, I might not even successfully kill Fear. At that time, the conflict will continue again between the six of you. By scaring them into hiding, I can at least buy you all some time to think of a solution."

"Brother..."

Hope gave both Serenity and Love an assuring look. He then said, "What I'm more worried about is the outworlder who colluded with Fear. He has proven to be even a menace to us by providing this Godkiller to Fear."

"Then should we eliminate him?" Serenity asked.

Hope shook his head with a smile. "We are the good Gods. We don't interfere with mortals' affairs. If you wanted to go search for your belief and purpose, then do so. But if you consider me as your brother, please heed my request. Do not interfere with mortals' affairs directly unless another divine being is

involved. It is a code that governs us all. I implore you to stick by it. If not for you, do it for me. Take it as my last wish."

Serenity and Love stayed silent, but they nodded weakly.

Greed said, "I can't promise that. But out of respect for you, I will do my best to stay out of mortals' affairs."

Hope nodded. "Well, I did say directly. If you wish to help them indirectly, I guess that's acceptable. I know some of you have done so. I didn't approve then. But after learning about this outworlder with creator-level knowledge, I guessed we still need to do something about him."

Hope turned to Serenity. "Serenity, that outworlder you favor. He is the one leading the resistance against the outworlder group in league with Fear, isn't he?"

"He is," Serenity replied.

"Summon him here, please," Hope said.

Serenity made a gesture and Jack appeared with a flash of light. He was pointing at something and was in the middle of a speech.

"... came and stopped the fight, F\*ck these..."

He blinked a few times before realizing that he was no longer where he was before. When he recognized the ones before him, he at first panicked before quickly smiling broadly, bowed, and said, "Revered Gods and Goddesses, it is an honor for this lowly one to stand before you."

"Hm... I have seen that smile before, you must be hiding something," A voice came from Jack's side. Jack turned and saw Greed there.

"Holy mother of...! What are you doing here?!" Jack jumped out of surprise. Just as how his radar couldn't detect these divine beings, his mana sense also couldn't sense them unless they intentionally released their power.

Jack quickly ran to Serenity's side.

"You looked like someone who has done something guilty," Greed said. "Tell the truth, why did you panic?"

Jack panicked because of what he was saying when he was being teleported here. It was something that sounded like this, "Those Gods are truly annoying. They didn't come when we are losing. When we are winning, they came and stopped the fight. F\*ck these Gods!"

"You are imagining things!" Jack exclaimed while laughing awkwardly.

Someone suddenly stepped in front of Jack. That person was Hope.

"Storm Wind, are you the one opposing the outworlder Fear is in league with?" Hope asked.

"Uh... Yes... I fought against Master to stop him from conquering this world," Jack replied.

Hope nodded. "In that case, I will grant you my sanctification."

## Chapter 1276: The Old Trio and The New Trio

"Uh... Okay," Jack said to Hope. He then felt a hard slap at the back of his head.

"Ouch! Would you stop that already? My head is not your personal punching bag," Jack said to Peniel.

"You are being impolite! How can you respond so casually? Do you know how significant God Hope's offer is?" Peniel scolded back.

"How am I supposed to know? You are my personal guidebook. You are supposed to tell me," Jack talked back.

Realizing that they were making a scene, Peniel hurriedly made a curtsy to Hope and apologized. "I'm truly sorry, my God. We are truly grateful if you are willing to bless us with your sanctification."

"Yes, I'm truly grateful," Jack gave a deep bow. He at first thought Hope was simply giving him a word of blessing by approving his conflict against Master. After seeing Peniel's reaction, he knew then this was a big deal.

Hope nodded. "My sanctification, however, is too powerful for any one mortal. Even for an outworlder. I will have to divide it into at least four others. Since Serenity trusted you, I will put my trust in you as well. Do you have four allies whom you trust with your lives? Outworlders preferably, natives might have trouble receiving my sanctification."

"Trust with my lives? Hm..." He actually had more than four. His grandfather certainly was on the top of the list. However, he figured what Hope was offering was significant. Giving it to one who didn't understand the game concept might be a waste if that person was unable to utilize it.

So, he decided on four others.

"I have them," Jack informed Hope. "I will send them our coordinates so they can come here."

"There is no need. Picture them in your mind," Hope said.

"Oh...? All right," Jack closed his eyes and pictured the four's faces.

A second later, four people materialized with a flash of light.

"Hm?" Greed responded when he saw one of the summoned players.

The four players were John, Jeanny, Grace, and Paytowin.

All of them were surprised because of the abrupt summon. Jack hadn't had the chance to send them a message. Grace's surprise turned soft after seeing Jack there. She also noticed Greed and smiled at him.

John was the only one maintaining a nonchalant expression despite also being startled by the incident.

"Ho... What is this? The old trio and the new trio rarely gather like this." He remarked.

"What old trio and new trio?" Jack couldn't understand what John said.

John pointed at Jack, Jeanny, and himself. "These are the new trio."

He then pointed at Jack, Grace, and Paytowin. "Those are the old, obsolete, and outdated trio."

"Hey! Whom do you call obsolete?" Paytwowin protested.

"Don't mind him. He is just jealous I have friends aside from him," Jack told Paytwowin.

"On the contrary, it's you who should be glad I bother to be your friend," John quipped back.

"Ehem!" Jeanny coughed. "Do you people realize who is around us?"

Peniel helped by hitting Jack's head another time. Grace giggled on the side.

Peniel forced Jack to apologize to Hope. The four others gave a proper greeting to the Gods and Goddesses.

Hope nodded with approval. "I can see how close the five of you are with a glance. It warms my heart to see such interactions. It also soothes me to know that I leave this world entrusting its protection to ones who understand the value of fellowship."

"Leave...?" Jack and the others asked in unison.

"My time is short. I don't want to waste it on explanations. It is sufficient to say I'm going to trust you all with my sanctifications. I have looked into the five of you and found which one is the most ideal to receive which of my five sanctifications."

"Paytowin!" Hope looked at the one he called. Paytowin straightened up as if a high school student who had just been caught doing something wrong.

"Ye... Yes, My God! Whatever you need!" Paytowin exclaimed.

"Your bravery and determination keep you going even in the most difficult situation. You saw your faction lost under your very eyes. Instead of letting that incident bring you down, it drives you to be better. I will grant you one part of my sanctification. You will have Unyielding Hope!"

A brilliant light fell upon Paytowin who was still unsure of what was happening.

Hope turned to Grace. "Grace! Your kindness and attentiveness give your allies the comfort they need in this turbulent world. You will be the Generosity of Hope!"

Hope went on to John when Grace was still being bathed by the same light as Paytowin.

"John! You are not exactly my ideal choice under normal circumstances, but I do see your care for your comrades. You provide them with the guidance and planning they need to chart their course. For that, you will require adequate knowledge. I appoint you as the Reason for Hope!"

"Jeanny!" Hope went on without stopping. "Your leadership inspires those around you. Your enthusiasm and optimism encouraged them to keep moving forward. Your understanding gives them something they can relate to. You will be the Beacon of Hope!"

"Last but not least," Hope turned to Jack. "Storm Wind! You come to your allies' aid without fear. You protect them and assume responsibility instead of choosing the easy way. For that, you will need the Strength of Hope!"

Similar light that fell on others fell on Jack as well. He heard a system notification then, "Congratulations! You have been chosen by the God of Hope. You receive his Sanctification, receiving an inherent skill, Strength of Hope."

The five rays of light that were enveloping them soon died down. At the same time, Hope's body became semi-transparent. Tiny starlight flooded out of his body which had turned slightly incorporeal. This starlight flew in all directions, but mostly they floated into the sky.

"Everyone... My time is up. I leave everything to you." Hope turned to Serenity and Love, who stared back with gazes filled with sadness. "Do not mourn me, sisters. The world still needs you. For that, I want you to be strong. I might be gone, but hope will always be with you for as long as you are willing to cling to it. Do not lose your hopes..."

With those last words, Hope's body slowly vanished into nothingness, leaving only a trail of starlight that formed a river that went up into the sky. This trail could be seen from miles away. Everyone who saw it felt in their hearts an overwhelming feeling of hope. That even when things were bad now, they would someday become better.

## **Chapter 1277: The Strength of Hope**

Jack and the others were still confused about what was happening. They gave the remaining Gods confused expressions. However, the two Goddesses' attention was not on them. The Goddesses were distraught by what had happened to Hope.

Seeing the situation, Greed came forward and explained what was going on to Grace.

The others were wondering why Greed was specifically talking to Grace instead of addressing all of them together, but they didn't dare to protest. They just crowded around Grace and listened.

They were very surprised after listening to the story. They never expected Master's machination to extend even to the demise of a God.

They knew that Master was also the reason for the absence of the other good Gods, Courage and Joy, but that was done due to program tampering before the world was turned. The feat of killing a God in-world, calling it a miracle was an understatement.

Even if it was not Master who did it directly, killing one indirectly was also an act not less inconceivable.

One thing they could be glad of was the fact that Fear had been wounded and the other two Gods colluding with him had been threatened into hiding. This would limit their interference for some time. They just had to defeat Master before those Gods realized Hope was gone.

When Jack thought of using this chance to ask Serenity to help them defeat Master's army, he noticed Serenity was staring at him with a weird look.

"Lady Serenity..."

Serenity stopped Jack before he asked anything. She asked instead, "Tell me, Storm Wind. Fear and Pride told us how this world is a fake one, that this world was created by the outworlders for entertainment purposes. Are you aware of this?"

"He does," It was Greed who answered.

Jack turned to Greed with an irritated expression. Why did this nosy God have to answer for him? This just made it look as if he was concealing information from her. But after thinking about it, that was indeed what he had done.

"Lady Serenity, I..."

Serenity stopped him again. She then said with a hard stare, "Just tell me everything you know. Do not try to hide anything!"

Jack saw the seriousness on Serenity's face. At the moment, she was not the gentle Goddess Jack was familiar with. Jack nodded at her and complied. He narrated everything he knew. All the truth that Wilted had revealed to him as well as how most of them came to be in this world.

He tried to add an explanation at the end of his tale, about why he withheld such information from her. It was very sensitive information, and she was a very powerful being. He told her that he feared how she would react upon finding out.

When Jack went silent after his tale, Peniel nudged him with a message via their minds. Jack quickly bowed and apologized to Serenity.

Serenity continued being silent. Her gaze was slightly blank. Jack wasn't even sure if she heard everything he had said.

When Jack opened his mouth again to say something, Serenity just went and vanished.

Confused, Jack turned to the remaining good God who was there, Love. Love didn't look any better.

When Love noticed all the outworlders were staring at her, she said, "I need to think about all this... We both do."

She then vanished as well.

"Well, I can't blame them. It's a shocker news, after all. Still, I must say they are doing better compared to me when I first learned this truth," Greed said, referring to the time he tried to blast Master to oblivion when Master revealed the truth to him, Fear, and Wrath.

Jack sighed. Here he thought he could use the opportunity to ask Serenity to give them more direct aid against Master.

"Now that all those are out of the way, let us discuss an important thing," Greed came before Jack and stared at him with narrow eyes.

"What... What do you want?" Jack stammered. He remembered again that this God was still here. Would Greed drag him back to his sanctum? Or would Greed punish him here?

"God Greed. You promised...", Grace said.

Greed glanced at Grace before looking back at Jack. "You are lucky she is looking out for you," he said.

Greed turned to Grace and said, "Remember to come back once in a while."



"Thank you, God Greed."

Greed turned back to Jack again. "You! You take good care of her! If you let her get harmed, or worse, if you harm her or even if you simply make her feel sad, I will come for you! Do you get me, punk?!"

Jack nodded vehemently.

"Hm... All right. Take care!" Greed vanished. He was looking at Grace when he said the last two words.

Once the Gods were all gone, John made a sound, "They just left us here after dragging us here without permission. What a dick move!"

"John, they might still hear us!" Jeanny warned.

"They aren't real Gods. They are not omniscient," John countered. "Let me prove it. Hey, all you fake Gods! You are nothing but dicks!"

Everyone moved away from John, expecting a lightning bolt to strike him, and didn't want to get caught in the blast.

A few seconds passed without anything happening. "See? You, people, are too superstitious. Come on, let's go back. The army is already in chaos because their king and royal advisor just vanished into thin air. I've sent a message to Tip to calm them down."

"Wait! Wait!" Jack called. "Before that, let's show each other what we have just received."

"Receive what?" Paytowin asked.

"Hope's sanctifications, of course!" Jack exclaimed. "I will go first. This sanctification, Strength of Hope, gives me an inherent skill that has a passive effect and an active ability. Its passive effect gave me a 30% boost to HP and strength stat. As for its active ability, I gain a buff similar to the one given by Divine Might Potion for half an hour."

## **Chapter 1278: God-level Knowledge**

### **Strength of Hope**

Passive ability: +30% strength, +30% HP

Active ability: Fully restores HP, all attributes +300%, increases damage by 70%, all damage received is reduced by 50%, recovers 100 HP every second, HP +10,000. Duration: 30 minutes. Cooldown: 24 hours

\*

When Jack used the Divine Might Potion, it allowed him to fight Arther who was almost ten levels higher than him. The active ability of Strength of Hope gave him a similar buff. Even though it was for a shorter duration than the Divine Might Potion, this Strength of Hope would allow him to fight a much stronger opponent for half an hour.

"The leader of the good God is truly not disappointing, his gift is a godsend," Jack commented. He then asked the others, "How about yours?"

Paytowin answered first, "My Unyielding Hope gave me a 30% boost to endurance and defense. Its active ability also fully restores my HP. I will become invulnerable for two seconds. After that, I receive a 90% damage reduction for thirty seconds. When that is over, I receive a 50% damage reduction for five minutes, then a 20% damage reduction for the next one hour. All recovery effects on me are also doubled during the skill's active time. The cooldown is the same as yours, twenty-four hours."

Jeanny informed hers next. "My Beacon of Hope gave a 15% passive boost to dexterity, reflex, HP, and defense."

"Oh, your boost was less but affect more stats," Jack remarked.

"My active ability is the nerfed version of yours, but it affects allies," Jeanny said. Her active ability affected both her and all allies within a 25-meter radius. It fully healed HP, gave 50% buff to attributes, 10% buff to damage, 10% reduction to damage received, 1,000 to max HP, and recovered 10 HP each second. Its duration was thirty minutes and the cooldown was also twenty-four hours.

Peniel also added that the full healing of Jeanny's active ability affected allied natives as well. Their HP would be fully healed, not just the amount of her max HP like the Priest's Full Heal spell. This gave her a tremendous tactical advantage if she used this ability on wounded high-grade natives.

But in terms of healing effect, Grace's was even more powerful. Her Generosity of Hope gave a passive effect of +30% to Wisdom and +15% to HP and defense. Her active ability also affected allies in a 25-meter radius area. But while Jeanny's one took effect around her position, Grace could cast her active ability at a distant area. Grace could place her AOE at a distance of 300 meters away.

Her Generosity of Hope fully healed allies, including natives. Aside from that, it gave them a constant recovery of 100 HP each second for thirty minutes. Within these thirty minutes, if any of the affected allies were killed, they would be automatically revived with 70% HP. If none of the allies died in those thirty minutes, they would instead be fully healed again when the thirty minutes ended.

"What about yours?" Jack asked John.

"My Reason for Hope gives me a 30% increase in intelligence and MP," John answered.

"And...?" Jack asked again when John stopped speaking.

John shrugged. "That's it. My Reason for Hope has no active ability."

"Really? Are you getting the short end of the stick?" Paytowin asked.

"I don't think God Hope blessed us unfairly," Grace said.

"He did say this guy is not his ideal choice. Maybe that's why he only gave this dude half of what we got," Jack said. He then laughed at John, "Serve you well for being an a\*shole. Haha!"

John rolled his eyes. "I might not get an active ability and my passive ability only mentions the boost to my intelligence and MP, but I get something else not mentioned in the description."

"Stop trying to dress it up! Just take the loss," Jack uttered.

"It's pointless speaking to a brute," John said and turned to Peniel. "I know now about the solution you mentioned about the coin income for our country's coffer. It is the World Commerce Center, isn't it?"

"How do you know?" Peniel asked in surprise.

John grinned. "That's what I'm trying to tell everyone. I somehow know about a lot of the things about this world. I think Hope bestowed me with his knowledge. Hahaha. Now I no longer need you, tiny fairy!"

"Hey! Is that how you talk to me?" Peniel protested.

"See? This guy, when he no longer needs any benefit from you, he turned one-hundred-eighty. Remember to not be too nice to him," Jack said.

"What's a World Commerce Center do?" Paytowin asked.

"It doesn't concern you, old trio," John answered.

Paytowin had the urge to call Brave King out and teach this detestable fellow a lesson.

"Suffice to say it will grant the kingdom lots of coin income," Peniel was a bit more tolerable, but she didn't elaborate further either.

"So, you now have Peniel-level knowledge?" Jeanny asked John.

"I'm not sure about Peniel-level, but I think I have Hope-level knowledge," John answered.

"Good, that should help you better in managing the kingdom," Jack said.

"Oh, yes. Especially the research paths. It's all in my head now. I can map out which techs to research first for the most optimal outcome."

"We better go back now. Everyone should be worried about us," Jeanny said.

Jeanny summoned her hippogriff. Jack summoned Pandora. Paytowin called his Pegasus.

"You people like the sky so much, I prefer the sea," John said and blew his steed whistle.

A horse covered in scales instead of skin appeared beside John. Its color was slightly greenish. Long dorsal fins covered its neck instead of a mane. Its four legs also had fins. Its tail ended with something that looked like a flipper.

When Jack and the others used Inspect, they learned that this horse was a Kelpie. It was a unique-grade steed.

"You also have a unique-grade steed already? Not bad," Jack complimented.

"I sent players to the merfolk to do trades and help them with quests. Their sea mother gave me this kelpie as a sign of appreciation for our friendship," John said.

None of them believed John's words. They thought it was more likely that John swindled the merfolk into giving him this Kelpie.

Everyone then turned to Grace, who was the last one to take out her whistle. Everyone else had at least unique-grade steeds. Grace would be left behind if she rode lesser steed.

Grace understood their expressions. She chuckled. "Don't worry, I also have a unique-grade steed. However, my steed is land-based."

She blew a whistle and a gorgeous white horse with a dazzling blue mane came into being. At the top of its head was a long golden horn. Jack and the others didn't need to use Inspect to identify this horse. It was a very famous fantasy creature. A unicorn.

Seeing everyone was ready to leave, Jack took the lead. "Okay, everyone. Let us return to the army!"

The five rode their unusual steeds. Three flew in the air while the other two galloped on land. All five traveled with incredible speed.

### **Chapter 1279: Next Move**

Even with their unique-grade steeds, it took the five almost three hours before they arrived back at the plains beside Daboga marshland. The place where Hope had taken the other Gods was apparently rather far away.

Jack saw the Liguritutum and Aurebor's armies some distance away.

"Hey, since we know Hope is no more. Should we resume our attack when the enemy is unaware?" Paytowin asked. "We were winning, weren't we?"

"We were, but our winning momentum was too short," John said. "We didn't cut down their number enough. We had already suffered major casualties in the first half of the battle. Our two main advantages are Broidrireg and Jack's archdemon lord. Both are now no longer available."

Once the battle ended, Broidrireg left. Jack needed to wait for one week before he could summon the country guardian outside of Thereath.

As for the archdemon lord, it only lasted one hour. At the time when Hope appeared and stopped the war, the archdemon lord had almost run out of duration.

"Without those two, we are actually at a disadvantage. Look," John pointed to one side.

They saw a bunch of people there. Those with better vision saw that leading the group was Master. He was lifting an ominous-looking book. It glowed an eerie purple and the fallen bodies around him stood back up.

"Maybe if we struck them right after the Gods left, we might still win," John said. "But it has been a few hours since then. Master started reviving the dead soldiers using his legendary artifact once the battle ended. By now, their number is back to outnumbering us."

Jack sighed. "The Gods truly picked an awful time to stop the war."

"So, what should we do now?" Grace asked.

"Let's regroup with Armstrong first and study our army's situation before we make any decision," Jeanny suggested. When they were unceremoniously teleported away by Hope, the army was still compiling reports of their losses.

Everyone agreed. They rode to the field command base of the Themisphere army. The army made way for John and Grace who were traveling by land. At the command base, they saw Emris, Armstrong, Alfredo, and Isabelle convene there. Queen Aldryth from Hydrurond and Pointy Tip were also there.

Emris and the others saluted when they saw Jack.

"At ease, everyone," Jack said and then asked Emris, "Do we have the battle report yet?"

"Reporting, Your Majesty. We have tallied our losses. Out of the 1,000,000 troops we brought into this country, only 300,000 were left."

"We lost so many...?" Jack asked dejectedly.

"The enemies focused their assaults on us," Emris answered. "We also lost eight high-ranking officers. Six knight lieutenants and two knight captains."

Jack was pensive hearing that. He would have to appoint new officers to these ranks when he returned to Thereath.

"Our guild army also suffered major losses," Tip informed. "We lost almost half of our guild army. Luckily, a majority of the loss is from the standard units."

"What about our guild heroes and guardians?" Jack asked.

"They all survive," Tip answered. "But we also failed to take down any of the enemies' guild heroes and guardians."

"As long as we don't lose ours, that's fine." Jack then turned to Aldryth. "What about your force, queen Aldryth?"

"My army only has the Aurebor native army to deal with," Aldryth informed. "All outworlder forces had gone to hit your army. My loss isn't as high as yours, I still have around 500,000 troops left."

"Do we know about the enemy's losses?" John asked.

"We can only estimate," Emris answered. "From what we can gather, the enemy lost more troops than us. Their biggest losses are on the last part of the battle thanks to our country guardian. Even so, they outnumber us originally so even with more losses, they still have more troops left compared to us."

"Our estimate put the Liguritutum army's loss at 600,000. Their number when the battle ended was 400,000 troops," Isabelle informed.

"Their number has increased again by now," Armstrong added. "The enemy's zombie army was completely obliterated by God Hope, but their leader has been busily using the Necronomicon to revive the slain soldiers to form another zombie army."

"Even before they used that artifact, they already have more numbers than us," Jeanny remarked.

Jack turned to Peniel and asked, "Can we do something to stop Master from reviving the dead? Like destroying the dead bodies? Or burning the bodies or something like that?"

"No. This is different from the high priest's resurrection spell where a complete body is needed. For the Necronomicon, it can still resurrect the dead even if the body is destroyed. The difference is that the resurrected zombie has only a skeleton for a body. It was only slightly weaker than the one revived with a full body."

"I see. This means we can't prevent Master from growing his army," Jack sighed. He then asked Isabelle, "What about the Aurebor's force?"

"The Aurebor army didn't lose much," Isabelle answered. "They only lost around 200,000 soldiers. They still had one million troops ready for battle."

"It is clear then. Resuming the battle is not an option," Paytowin said. He was disappointed. Mihos and the others were in the middle of carrying out their vengeance during the battle. They had been winning before Hope interfered. When he learned that Hope was no more, he thought they could resume the battle so the Council of Virtus' warriors could complete dispensing their justice onto the Cult of Phobos.

"Of course, it isn't an option. God Hope has declared that there is to be no conflict between us and the enemy for one week," Emris said.

Only Jack and his four friends knew that Hope was no more. The five kept that secret to themselves. The enemies also won't dare do anything to them during this one week.

"What is your plan, King Storm Wind?" Aldryth asked. This might be her country but Themisphere was now her lifeline.

"We are in no shape to continue fighting. Let's retreat to Lefkauselis. We can plan our next move there," Jack said.

"I'm about to suggest the same thing," John nodded.

With that agreement, Jack asked Emris to relay his order to prepare the retreat. Aldryth did the same.

While they did that, Jack went with Paytowin. The Council of Virtus' warriors stayed with the Themisphere army after the battle. Paytowin told Jack that Pallas and Mihos would like a word with him.

"Sir Pallas! I'm very glad that you are safe!" Jack exclaimed once he saw the draconian champion.

"Your Majesty Storm Wind," Pallas greeted with a nod. "I'm both surprised and thrilled that a champion of our world tournament is now the sovereign of Themisphere. I represent my faction in extending our congratulation on your ascent."

"Thank you, Sir Pallas," Jack replied. "Is there anything I can help you with? Paytowin said you have something that you want to discuss with me."

"I do," Pallas uttered. "I've discussed with Mihos and my other brethren. We've paid attention to your rule after you became Themisphere king. We've seen your loyalty to your allies and bravery against a stronger enemy. Because of that, we agree that planting the root of our rebuilt faction in your country will be the right choice."

"Do you mean..."

"We would like to rebuild the Council of Virtus in your country, Themisphere. Do we have your permission?"

## **Chapter 1280: Froze**

Jack was blank for a while because the request had been so sudden and unexpected.

"I...", When he was just about to answer, Peniel beat him to it.

She pressed the top of Jack's head, forcing him to nod, and said, "He accepts! Of course, he accepts."

Pallas was unsure if he should treat that as a formal confirmation. He looked between Jack and Peniel back and forth.

Jack gave Peniel a peeved stare. He would have accepted even if Peniel didn't force him. Earning a favor from a divine faction was undoubtedly a favorable thing.

"I have no objection, Sir Pallas. You are welcome to settle inside Themisphere," Jack said. "Do you have a site where you want to rebuild your faction? Anything I can do to help you rebuild it?"

"Yes. If you can help us build our new base, it will be most appreciated," Pallas said.

Peniel again replied before Jack did, "Don't worry, your base will be up and running in no time."

This time, Pallas just treated Peniel's words as if they were from Jack's mouth. "In that case, I represent my faction to thank Your Majesty for your generosity."

"I'm glad I can be of help. I promise I will do anything to help you and Paytowin rebuild your faction," Jack said. "By the way, I didn't see Odvah and your faction guardian among your rank. Are they still missing?"

Odvah was the eternal-grade ancestor who blocked the Cult of Phobos from entering the Council of Virtus' main temple when the cult invaded Daminos Square Garden. As for the faction guardian, it was the titanic crimson lion with bat-like wings who had battled Fear's Primordial Hydra during the same incident.

Pallas' face became sad upon the mention. "Unfortunately, our divine ancestor fell during our faction's destruction. He just couldn't bear the assaults from so many foes. As for our faction guardian, the Fortis Lion, it was wounded and retreated when the battle was lost. We haven't found nor heard of its whereabouts since."

"I am very sorry to hear that," Jack expressed his condolences.

"As do I," Pallas said. "I will take my leave now. My brethren and I will follow your army for the moment. In the meantime, I will send a call to any of our still-missing comrades to come to Themisphere."

Jack nodded. He watched the divine champion leave to speak with the other council's warriors about their base relocation. He turned to Peniel then, "Hey. Seeing that you are so eager to help them, I bet you have an idea about how to build their new base?"

"It's simple, just go back to your throne and use the monarch system," Peniel answered. "A new wonder building should be available now."

"Oh? A wonder building from a divine faction? No wonder you are so excited," Jack said.

"This is not just any wonder building. It is the base of a divine faction. You will see its benefit once you build it. You better use your ruling power to complete it instantly."

"Hm, hearing you said it like that, I can't wait to do so. But first, let's talk about our next move for this war in Lefkauselis."

Although Hope had demanded a ceasefire for one week, this was only temporary. The war itself was not considered ended. The teleportation function between countries was still down. Hence, Jack couldn't waste time returning to Thereath to build the new base for the Council of Virtus. He would have to put this promise on hold.

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As was planned, what was left of Themisphere and Hydrurond armies marched to Lefkauselis. The Liguritutum and Aurebor didn't tail them. They remained on the battlefield while Master continued reviving the dead for his zombie army.

Before the march, Jack spared the time to catch up with Grace. As expected, she had been inside Greed's sanctum.

She spent almost five months inside that place. She had been spending her time using Greed's unending wave portal, which explained her high level. Her possession of a large number of mana cores was also from using one of the portals in Greed's sanctum, one that Jack haven't had the chance to enter during his time there.

Jack asked how she managed to escape Greed's sanctum.

"I didn't escape. God Greed let me out," Grace answered.

"Really?" Jack asked in surprise, but then he remembered the way Greed talked with Grace earlier today. They did seem close. This also reminded him of Greed's threat to take care of Grace.

"Yeah. It was he who brought me to this battlefield. I asked him to take me to where you are at the moment. He went away after bringing me here, saying that his acquaintances were nearby, and he wanted to greet them. I didn't expect at the time he was talking about the other Gods."

"I see... Well, I was glad that you arrived as you did. I was truly in a pinch at that time," Jack said.

"If you went all out, you won't need my help," Grace said.

"If I did that, I won't be able to help my army as I did. So, thank you," Jack said. "Anyway, why did Greed only let you out today and not any other day?"

"Because today is the day when I finally achieved the condition he set for allowing me to leave. You know about the portal with unending waves, don't you?"

Jack nodded.



"I finally managed to beat the wave with fifteen rare elites," Grace said. Her face beaming.

"You did?!" Jack asked with wide eyes.

"I'm sure you could have done it with no problem if it's the current you. I failed countless times. But today, I finally managed to do it."

"Impressive! But didn't you get a wilderness death if you die in that portal? How do you get so high level if you failed countless times?"

"Greed gave me lenience. He set the portal so I only lose the exp I gained during that session. So, if I die inside the portal, I retain the level before I enter that portal."

"Wow! This means that if you played it safe, your level will be even higher. You should have just continued collecting exp to level up until you get better skills when you reach a higher level. It will be easier for you to beat the fifteen rare elites then. Why force yourself to come out early?"

"Because I heard of your war. I wanted to come to your aid."

Hearing that, Jack felt a great sense of guilt. He said, "I'm sorry..."

"What for?" Grace asked, confused.

"I have suspected that you were trapped inside Greed's sanctum... I didn't at first, but I finally came to that conclusion. But even after that, I didn't come to rescue you. I have no excuse. You should hate me. I don't deserve you..."

Grace blinked a few times before she smiled. "I know how you are. You dislike responsibility. But when you have one on your shoulders, you will fully honor it. I know that if you were not the Themisphere king, you would surely come looking for me in Greed's sanctum, even if it meant getting trapped again. But since you are, I understand why you don't."

She then leaned forward and kissed Jack.

Jack was genuinely surprised by Grace's act. He froze.

Grace was still smiling when she let go of Jack. "If you truly feel guilty, then treat me better from now on, okay?"

She then walked away, leaving Jack who was still standing like a statue.