

57 — Ambush is a Valid Strategy?

Septimer observed the Great Hall from a raised platform, where other priests and missionaries of his level were gathered to watch the convocation of the Crusade and its thousands of Paladins. It was an awe-inspiring sight to see so many of the Church of Light's greatest in one place.

The Great Hall was the first layer of the Holy Dungeon that the Church of Light operated out of, and though this was Septimer's first time seeing a Crusader come together, the Hall had been used for such a purpose many times before.

Those near him were weeping tears of pride and muttering benedictions to their Lady Light, whose beauty and great sense of fashion was a daily source of inspiration for how they ought to live their days and how they ought to strive to improve themselves.

A few weeks back there had been a big hubbub about a lowly missionary claiming to be the prophet of their Lady, but no sooner had she set foot in the Holy Dungeon than a pillar of light had promptly appeared to smite her and *that* had been *that*. Incidents like that were not uncommon amongst his brethren in Lady Light's religion, but it was the first time he had seen their Lady smite an imposter personally, since normally that was left to her Peacekeepers.

"Have you heard?" asked one of the missionaries close to him, who he already knew had a gossiping streak.

"What?" he whispered back, without turning from the amazing view of the assembled Crusade below.

"They say that the Usurper God is a frog that turns Royalty into amphibians."

Septimer sighed. It was hard to tell exactly where the rumours were coming from, but he had often heard the tale that this new religion was turning all babies into frogs and toads, not to mention that they worshipped a many-headed goose that could breathe fire. It was honestly quite ridiculous that anyone would believe such nonsense. It was just a shame that he was too low-level to join in the Crusade so that he could find out for himself.

"I heard that their King rides around on a fluffy unicorn bunny," said another.

"Well I was told that they kidnap beautiful women to be the brides to their frog mutant spawn!" another insisted.

"Everyone," Septimer started, "please, for the Lady's sake, shut the hell up. Your idiocy is giving me an ulcer. Don't believe everything you hear."

“One of the missionaries from Lillebrünnr swears its all true!” protested one of the nearby priests.

“Yeah! They said an enormous frog came and tore down the mountain behind the city after killing its King!”

Septimer was about to turn around and slap whichever moron had just made such an absurd claim, when he saw something like spilled lamp-oil or ink form behind the orderly rows of Paladins in their white-and-gold finery and plate armour. The patch grew-and-grew, as though bubbling up through the floor.

Then *something enormous* broke through ink-splotch on the floor of the Great Hall, with five honking and roaring heads on long necks, all of which breathed different elements and which were connected to a central body that had five sets of wings and webbed feet. The monstrosity towered over assembled Crusaders and before they could even react to its sudden appearance, it had started tearing into them with its elemental breaths and devastating wing-chops and webbed-feet-stomps.

Septimer overheard one of the missionaries nearby mutter the word: “Hydra-Goose?” A moment later, half the gallery they were in was vapourised by a beam of scalding fire that instantaneously turned most people present into piles of ash, though he was somehow spared, whether by luck or a blessing of Lady Light.

His feet were frozen stuck to the floor though, and despite the smouldering walls and furniture around him, he could do nothing but watch the carnage unfolding below in the Great Hall. Then he noticed more figures emerging out of the ink-splotch: one was a tiny overweight boy, with dark skin like those accursed Elves, who rode a mustard-yellow toad, and the other was a metal amphibian taller than even the greatest of the Church’s Paladins.

Suddenly he could not tell if the rumours had been true or not.

I looked around at the massacre wrought by the Goose⁵ that the King had commanded us to bring along for our hunt for the Relic of Divine Power. Bel, who had stayed behind to oversee the arrival of more species to my Kingdom, had suggested that we ransack the Church of Light to find such a relic, and thus we were *here*, thanks to Imu’s shadowy teleportation magic that he had unlocked when I evolved into a Capital.

“How far did we just travel?” I asked him.

“Don’t worry about it,” he replied.

“Why not?”

“Because the sense of scale might blow your little toad brain out the back of your head, that’s why. Come on, let’s find this relic and get out of here.”

“Do you know what we’re looking for?”

A loud honk made the ground shake and I looked over to see the Hydra-Goose gleefully crushing eight armoured warriors under a webbed foot, while simultaneously slapping another man so hard that his armour folded around him and reduced him to one-sixth his normal size.

“How’s that even possible?” Imu asked.

“Maybe Pete is so powerful that his strength breaks the laws of reality?” I wondered.

Imu grumbled. I could tell he wasn’t happy about this, but at least the evolution requirement given to us by John Toadcaller the First was now completed:

[*Evolution Requirements*]

Capital => Nation

- ~~*Unleash the Hydra-Goose named Pete on the Church of Light’s Crusade*~~ -

“To answer your question, we’re looking for *Kevin the Big-Lipped’s Longsword*. It is said to be one of the most powerful relics of the Church of Light.”

“Isn’t Kevin the Big-Lipped the guy that dumped Lady Light?” I asked.

“How... dare... you...!” groaned someone nearby indignantly.

I looked down and saw an armoured man whose lower half had been flattened into a paste, with the armour he’d worn on his legs pressed paper-thin. He tried to say something more, but the effort was quite literally the end of him as he died a moment later.

“That doesn’t look like a fun way to die,” Imu remarked coldly.

“One of my cousins died like that,” I said. “And a few of my uncles. And some aunts. And my dad.”

“Is this your way of telling me that a lot of toads are crushed to death?”

“It’s very common,” I answered. “Wagons, horses, woodcutters, construction workers, children with big stones, the list goes on for the causes of toad-crushing.”

“Heart-breaking,” he replied sarcastically. “Let’s find this dumb sword and get out of here before Lady Light shows up and throws a hissy fit.”

“Do you think she’ll be able to defeat Pete in a fight?”

“I really don’t want to find out.”

“Why not?”

“Because the resulting aftermath will no doubt kill us, regardless of who wins.”

“I hadn’t thought of that,” I replied.

“I know you hadn’t, that’s why I’m here.”

“I love you, Imu!”

He grunted something, which I of course took as him reciprocating the gesture.