FFXIII REMINISCENCE ~Tracer of Memories~ Chapter 8: Hope Estheim

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Aoede recalls what Hope said to her at the end of his interview…

"Come back to me when you find out the truth behind "that other world", and I will tell you everything I know." That was the beginning of Aoede's journey; in her quest for memories of a world that no longer exists, she met his friends, and in the midst of it all recovered her half-forgotten memories.

Aoede:
"My name was "Aoede", back in that other world. You and I, we were part of the same era, and I was also caught up in the Purge."

Aoede begins her introduction in this manner on her second visit, and Hope Estheim smiles quietly in response.

Chapter 8: Hope Estheim

Before they begin their second interview, Aoede sums up everything she's learned from the interviews so far – the Purge, the battle for Cocoon, Serah and Noel's journey to fix Time, and so on. Aoede does this to prove that she did, in fact, "discover the truth behind that other world", as Hope asked her to. She wraps up the story, at length, and Hope nods, deep in thought.

Hope:
"I'm impressed by your research. There were even a few things I didn't know. So you really did meet everyone."

Aoede wonders if this means she's passed the test, but at the same time she can't find it in herself to accept the compliment.

Aoede:
"Not everyone. In the end, I wasn't able to meet the most important person of all."

Hope:
"I see, so you didn't meet Light…."

There's a hint of disappointment in his voice; Aoede wonders if Hope is disappointed in her, for ultimately not having what it takes to meet Lightning – or if he doesn't know where Lightning is either, and had hoped that Aoede would be

able to track her down. She doesn't have time to puzzle out the answer, however.

Hope:
"Allow me to honour the promise I made. You learned of the truth behind that other world. I will tell you everything I know."

Hope produces a thick folder, and leaves it on the table. There is nothing on the cover save for the title, which is short and to the point:

'Chronicle of Chaotic Era'

Hope:
"These are my memories."

Conseil de Renaissance

Aoede and Hope begin by talking about the dawn of the Chaotic Era.

Hope:
"I assume you already know what happened after Serah and Noel defeated Caius Ballad."

Aoede:
"The world was flooded by an outpouring of the Chaos because of Caius's schemes, and Serah lost her life. That was the beginning of the age of ruin. Eventually "that other world" began to sink into the ocean of Chaos, and, for mankind, the cycle of life and death was also destroyed – that's pretty much what I gathered from everyone else."

Hope:
"That's right, humanity lost their ability to age, and it was no longer possible to die of old age. But in exchange, new lives – children, they were no longer born. This unusual phenomenon was confirmed right after the Chaos began to invade."

Aoede:
"So it didn't take a few years for you to discover this."

Hope:
"No, as soon as the fight was over, I assembled each and every one of the Academy's scientists and had them investigate. At the time, all citizens had been evacuated and were living inside the manmade Cocoon, but even though everyone was safe for the moment, it was necessary to draw up plans for the long term. That was why we hurried to analyse what was happening to the world, and what kind of effects the endless outpouring of Chaos was going to have on the world and the human body. We couldn't let the public know of our findings without a firm grasp on what kind of reality we were facing."

Aoede:
"How did the citizens react? I assume some may have been happy to be rid of the effects of aging, but I heard that even though nobody was getting any older, it was still possible to die of sickness, or by accident. And with no new children, the population can only decrease. In the long run, mankind will surely –"

Hope:
"Face extinction. An obvious conclusion, not exactly rocket science."

Aoede:
"Surely a lot of people must have despaired when they learned of the truth?"

Hope:

"Yes, we knew that as soon as we announced this, people would stop caring about anything and everything, the crime rate and number of suicides would sky-rocket, riots would break out everywhere… We predicted that it would be disastrous to publish our findings. So we took preventive measures, made sure it wouldn't turn out like that."

Aoede:
"…You're not saying you concealed the fact that no one was getting any older?"

Hope:
"No, of course not. Even if we hid the truth, it was going to be obvious to everyone that no one was getting older after a few years. We told the public the truth, all of it, held nothing back. But we embellished it with "hope", and that "hope" was Conseil de Renaissance."

Aoede:
"That was the organization that grew out of the Academy, wasn't it? You were the leader, and Snow and Noel were part of it, too. From what I understand, it served to protect the citizens from the threat of the Chaos, and was an organization that functioned much like government – but what did you mean by it being "hope"?"

Hope:
"Conseil de Renaissance's mission, above all else, was to save humanity from despair. When we made it known that mankind no longer aged, we also announced the creation of Conseil de Renaissance. I made a speech, tried to reach out to the better judgment of the people. "If children are no longer born, mankind will eventually die out. Therefore I ask you for your cooperation, that we may overcome these desperate times together. As we make our stand against the invading Chaos, science will reveal the true nature of the Chaos to us, and we will find a way to welcome children to this world again. There will come a day when a new life is born. To this end, Conseil de Renaissance will do whatever it can." – that was more or less how it went. Fortunately, the citizens didn't take it too badly. The fact that we were all unaging was now out there in the open, but we saw virtually no adverse effects on society."

Aoede:
"Well, you lived up to your name, you gave the people hope."

Aoede means it as a joke, but Hope's reaction surprises her: his mouth twists into a self-deprecating smile.

Hope:
"Or you could say I distracted them, made them look away from despair. In actual fact, our research on the Chaos and our unaging bodies was then rudimentary at best, and we hadn't the least idea when and how we were going to come upon the solution. I couldn't see hope anywhere, but I pretended it was there and in clear view. I gave them a band-aid for their wounds."

Aoede:
"Everyone was living in fear of the Chaos, and you had to shield them from despair. I don't think there was any other way to go about it…"

Hope:
"You're right, and that's what I told myself. After creating the council, I was no longer a scientist intent on finding the truth. Instead, I found myself acting more and more like a politician, making compromises, accepting them. And around then, the fal'Cie suddenly appeared."

False Hope

Aoede and Hope quickly go over what they know of the fal'Cie; at the time, everyone lived in the manmade Cocoon, but eventually even Cocoon began to show signs of erosion from the effects of the Chaos. Left as is, the manmade Cocoon would eventually cease to function, and mankind would lose the only safe place to live in – just when the

people were beginning to feel uneasy, fal'Cie Pandemonium showed up, without any warning. It worked the lands, made them habitable, constructed cities, produced food and resources.

Hope:
"In other words, it was going to mother us like we were a brood of chicks, give us the comforts of a nest and a constant supply of feed. It was a siren's call to the people shut away in the manmade Cocoon. "The fal'Cie will generously shelter you and feed you, so come out, come out of the manmade Cocoon" – it was a baited hook, and an obvious one at that."

Aoede:
"You knew it was trying to bait you, but in the end mankind still moved to the surface. That's what I heard from Snow."

Hope:
"That's right, I was the one who made the decision. The manmade Cocoon was beginning to deteriorate from the effects of the Chaos, and it was no longer possible to continue to shelter the number of people we had. It was necessary to move the people out, even though we knew there was a risk the fal'Cie might devour everyone."

Aoede:
"There must have been quite the backlash when you told the citizens to leave the safety of the manmade Cocoon and descend to the Chaos-infested surface."

Hope:
"Yes, the debates and persuasions took several years. In the end, I made a declaration: "We have no future if mankind continues to hole up in the manmade Cocoon. We must cultivate the lands and make our stand against the Chaos. We will use everything we can get our hands on, fal'Cie or not. We will not discriminate, we will not choose who to turn out. All citizens will go, as equal men and women, and to prove it I will be the first to descend to the surface" – that was more or less what I said."

Aoede:
"And the people were persuaded because you showed them you were prepared to go first."

Hope:
"…I thought it was a complete farce, myself. The words coming out of my mouth sounded noble, virtuous, but in the end, all I did amounted to nothing more than political posturing to win the people over. I sold them false hope… again."

Once again, a self-deprecating smile briefly touches his lips.

Hope:
"With that, all of humanity descended to the earth, and the manmade Cocoon was left deserted… on paper, at least."

Aoede:
"Only on paper?"

Hope:
"A team of scientists, a very small number of them, remained in the manmade Cocoon. I wanted them to make full use of the energy and the state-of-the-art facilities the manmade Cocoon supplied, and find a way to fight the Chaos. Their existence was highly-classified information. We were afraid the fal'Cie might try to do something to us if word somehow got out. That was why the scientists kept all contact with society at the absolute minimum, shut themselves away in the manmade Cocoon and gave everything they had to the research."

Aoede:

"You weren't part of the research team?"

Hope:
"I was busy keeping Conseil de Renaissance together. By that time I was all politician, inside and out."

Hope then talks about how he oversaw, in secret, the research being done in the manmade Cocoon, while making sure, as council leader, that human society continued to move in the right direction. The citizens made use of the supplies produced by fal'Cie Pandemonium, but they were careful not to be over-reliant, and made sure that men themselves continued to be the central pillar of support for human society. Their diligence paid off, and two cities came into being on the surface of the earth: Luxerion and Yusnaan.

Aoede:
"I know you had help from the fal'Cie, but I can't imagine actually going out into the wild and building a new city, what with the Chaos all around you – mankind must be a lot tougher than I thought. By the way, what was going on with the scientists in the manmade Cocoon?"

Hope:
"They were doing their best, but it was rough sailing. We had all the time in the world because we no longer aged, but even after 100 years of research, we weren't making any real headway."

Aoede:
"100 years with nothing to show for it… A lot of people must have felt it was pointless and gave up…"

Hope:
"But those who stayed were aware of the difficulties they had to face, and were all the more committed to their work. It was thanks to them that we were able to go on with the research. And finally, we had a breakthrough. Have you heard of "AMP Technology"?"

Aoede:
"Let me think… it was common back in Cocoon. Anti Material Principle – working with this principle, you can simulate magic, bend the laws of gravity, all kinds of things."

Hope:
"That's right, we discovered that we could control the Chaos with this technology. If it all worked out, the world would never be invaded by the Chaos again. We saw it was possible to stop the destruction of the world. More than 300 years had passed after the beginning of the Chaotic Era, and finally… finally we were able to see real "hope"."

Aoede thinks she knows how Hope must have felt back then; he had been the people's leader, but up till that point he had been lying to his people, against his wishes. He couldn't see hope anywhere in the future awaiting mankind, but he pretended it was there. Aoede wonders if this man who tried to prevent humanity from slipping into despair, who had to keep lying – she wonders if he had had to live with a guilty conscience for 300 years, even though he knew he had all the justification in the world. If that was indeed the case, when Hope saw it might be possible to prevent the end of the world with the technology to control the Chaos – when he saw genuine, honest-to-goodness "hope", it must have felt like salvation to him.

But Aoede already knows the ending to the story. She already knows, from her interviews so far, that the research was never completed. The "hope" Hope wished for was an illusion that never became reality.

The Rose-Coloured Phantom

Aoede:
"The technology to control the Chaos was already well within reach, so why was the research never completed? What could have happened? Was the research aborted because you disappeared, or, as they put it, because you

had been "spirited away"?"

Hope:
"That only happened much later. The scientists in the manmade Cocoon were the first to go missing. They were made to disappear, one after the other."

Aoede:
"Made to disappear? …You mean someone killed them?"

Hope:
"No, they literally disappeared. No bodies, not even a scrap of their personal effects, they vanished, just like that. The only thing they left behind were a few words."

'The woman with the rose-coloured hair takes us with her.'

"This was the message left by the scientists when they began to disappear, one by one."

"The woman with the rose-coloured hair" – the first person Aoede thinks of is Serah Farron, but she knows it can't be her because Serah was already dead by then.

But there's another person who shares Serah's hair colour, her sister –

Aoede:
"It couldn't have been Lightning who kidnapped the scientists… could it?"

Hope:
"That was what I suspected, at first. I wondered if, after a long disappearance, Light came back, and was taking them away. But at the same time, I didn't think the real Light would ever kidnap anyone. In any case, I started investigating, tried to understand what was happening… but it was too late. Before I knew it, all of the scientists had gone missing. The manmade Cocoon became a deserted ark, devoid of all human life."

The team of scientists disappeared, and the research to control the Chaos ground to a halt. This was when strange things began to happen to Hope, physically and mentally.

Hope:
"The research I had pinned my hopes on went up in smoke, and naturally I fell into a deep depression. That must have created a crack, an opening, in my heart, because I began to see the phantom too."

Aoede:
"A woman with rose-coloured hair – was it Lightning?"

Hope:
"I don't know. It only every showed as a flash across the edges of my vision. Whenever I tried to discover its true identity, it would be gone the next instant. When I tried talking to it, it disappeared before my voice could reach it. And then, when I'd forgotten all about it, it turned up again. This was how it went, over and over again. There was no end to it, so I decided to ignore the illusion. I pretended not to be bothered by it even when I could see it, and I tried to turn out the illusion from my head."

Aoede:
"But when you have to remind yourself not to care about something, you usually end up all the more affected by it. Am I right?"

Hope:
"Yes, that's exactly right. It backfired on me. The more I tried not to care, the more I was hooked, and my feelings

were slowly reeled out of me. In time, I found myself unable to think of anything but the illusion – and of Light. That may be why I began to relive the past in my dreams, with increasing frequency, and once that happened, the illusion I saw, it started showing up in my dreams too, and there were times when it talked to me like the Light I knew from long ago…"

"This continued for many years, and at some point I began to lose my ability to tell memory from illusion. When I tried to recall my memories of Light, it became increasingly difficult to tell if it was truly something I'd experienced, or if it was just a dream, a hallucination."

Aoede:
"You mean your memories of Lightning were mixed-up with the phantom with the rose-coloured hair?"

Hope:
"Not only that, it was getting harder and harder for me to separate dream and reality. I'd hear Light's voice in a dream, and then wake up to find that her voice wouldn't leave my ears, things like that… put simply, my mind was falling apart, bit by bit."

Aoede finds this difficult to believe, not when everyone she's heard from has spoken highly of Hope Estheim's intellect and rational mind. And yet someone was able to send him over the edge, to make him lose sight of the boundary between reality and fantasy. Who could have done it, who could have snapped Hope's mind, the mind of someone who had up till then steered humanity along, never giving in to adversity? Aoede knows there is only one answer.

Aoede:
"Bhunivelze, the God of Light, was behind it all…"

Hope:
"That was how God worked. He may be a God, but he has no direct control over the hearts of men. However, he was capable of creating illusions. He made sure that all who saw his illusions became obsessed as they tried to figure out what the illusions could possibly mean. The victim becomes unable to think of anything but the illusions, and eventually loses all sense of judgment. The mind, exhausted and with nowhere else to turn to, clings desperately to God's illusions."

Aoede:
"He drives you into despair, robs you of your reason, controls your mind – that's a terrifying enemy."

Hope:
"I fell into Bhunivelze's trap. And when I finally realized what was going on, I was no longer in any position to fight back. The rose-coloured phantom that appeared before me, I knew it wasn't Light, that it was a dangerous entity out to manipulate my mind, but my heart had already been taken over, and there was no defying it. I left the city, led by the phantom, and found myself lured into the manmade Cocoon, by then completely deserted. And there I remained, confined, never to be seen again by anyone."

Aoede:
"So that was what really happened when you were "spirited away"… Why did Bhunivelze make you his target? Was your existence that much of an eyesore to him?"

Hope:
"He wanted to use me, both as his agent that would make sure "the Saviour" acted according to God's plans, and also as his new "vessel"."

Aoede:
"Was that when you found out Lightning was "the Saviour"?"

Hope:
"Yes. Ironic, isn't it? I was trapped by the fake Light, and that was how I learned that the real Light was going to return. By then I was already a prisoner, but I wanted to at least send "hope" to my friends, to let them know that Light was coming back."

"So I used the manmade Cocoon's system to send a message to Snow and the others."

'Lightning will return as the Saviour, but beware the fake Lightning.'

"I wanted to send a more detailed message, but the communications system went dead just then. And right after that – my consciousness was stripped away."

Hope was then remade by God's hand; it took God 169 years, 13 years 13 times over, to turn him into a "pawn" that acted according to God's wishes. He was to make sure that Lightning, "the Saviour" set to awaken before the world ended, would behave according to God's plans. In the meantime, the Chaos continued to corrode everything with increasing speed, and the world rushed headlong into destruction.

And then, the fated day arrived.

Hope:
"13 days before the end of the world – she woke up."

That was the return of Lightning.