

Chapter 73: Missed Steps

I do not own Fate/Stay Night and stuffs.

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“So how many requests were made for Shirou were there in the end?” Rin asked as she curiously eyed the moderate stack of folders neatly placed on the living room table.

“Your inexperience betrays you, Tohsaka.” Lorelei calmly sat at the head of the table while calmly drinking some tea she had just been served. “What matters is not how many requests were made, but who is making them.”

“Mmm. Sometimes knowing what a major party is interested in the first place is valuable in itself.” Luvia nodded in agreement. The Clocktower was a place where secrets were hoarded and traded as a currency in itself.

Rin visibly strained from rolling her eyes, keeping herself to a certain minimum level of formality. “Any novice at the Tower knows that much, but quantity is a quality in itself as well. Sakura and I have studied with Shirou longer than anyone else here and know at least the basics of his mysteries. If there is an opportunity to exploit some of the more menial requests in bulk and amass some favors, I don’t see why I should let the opportunity slip by.”

“Nee-san.” Sakura sighed in disappointment, but not arguing against what Rin had shamelessly suggested. She could tell that it wasn’t the only reason why Rin was suggesting such a plan. Having the two of them run around would not just put their names out there and gain some clout, but also take some of the direct attention off of Shirou as well.

As much as he wanted to, Shirou couldn’t just vanish off of the face of the earth, resources or not. People would get suspicious, especially given who he ran with and the circles he brushed shoulders in. It had to be believable and done in a way that not too many people would look too deeply into once it did happen.

Plus, a little early networking before she moved to England wouldn’t hurt. Doing a few jobs that were meant for the Magus Killer would definitely spread her name about.

Lorelei gave Rin an unimpressed blink before turning to Shirou, who was quietly sitting at the other end of the table with his own drink.

The owner of the house didn’t say or do anything as a reply to her silent inquiry other than a half hearted shrug to indicate that he didn’t have any strong feelings one way or another about the idea. Which ultimately meant that Rin wasn’t stretching the truth and was capable enough to at least take some of the workload off their hands.

“He’s truly going above and beyond to endorse you.”

“Archer, be quiet, or should I have you debate with her?”

“I’d have better odds against Berserker. I have zero luck with women like that. Leave diplomacy to the professionals.”

“... You seem to have poor luck with women in general. Is there something you aren’t telling me?”

“Nothing you’d want-er, nothing particularly relevant to our current guest.”

“Glad to see my command spell is still working. It’ll give me ideas for later.”

“Rin...”

“Don’t worry. I know. You have limits. I’ll just stick to the humiliating stuff for girls’ night.”

“... Tch.”

“Regardless of the mountains of mundane requests that have been submitted for the fool’s services, these are the only ones that are worth recognizing as valuable.” Lorelei returned to the task at hand with the folders at her side, “Each and every one of these tasks are suitable in request and source to mask your eventual disappearance. The majority of them come from or are strongly sponsored by a reputable Lord of the Clocktower that can be trusted with your condition should you fail to keep it to yourself.”

Everyone in the room could practically taste her actually saying ‘when’ instead of ‘should’ in that sentence. Not that any of them blamed her.

“Meaning I’m picking two in the end.” Shirou nodded in understanding. “One for the Tower at large to know I undertook, and one for me to work on long term once I disappear.”

In other words, a borderline permanent house arrest and probation. A generous sentence all things considered, but still a jail away from home.

“I’m glad I do not have to spell it out for you.” The Vice Director began to spread out the documents. “As stated, your services are high in demand for various tasks. Both departments of Fundamentals desire you to host lectures on Reinforcement line thaumaturgy up to projection, but that is clearly a ploy by their factions to influence you.”

“That and they just want someone to replace McGinty for the introductory classes.” Waver threw his two cents into the mix, and was promptly ignored.

“Spiritual Evocation desires to examine the Servants in depth for their research.” Lorelei picked up a folder.

“No. They’re run by the Sophia-Ri, and they are still sore about what happened during the Fourth War. My predecessor, Lancer’s Master, was the current Lord’s sister. If Rufeus’ treatment of the El Melloi is any indication, they would not hesitate to extend their displeasure to Shirou. Aristocratic faction or not.” Waver shot down that idea firmly.

Lorelei took a moment to pause and look at her fellow Lord skeptically before surprisingly taking his word for it and placing the related documentation to the side. Personally she had no issues with the Sophia-Ri, and they were under her influence, but she supposed she was too accustomed to dealing with yes men and the capable under her direct command to truly factor in the human factor of things.

Among the scant things that Waver Velvet was her superior to her in was reading the connections between parties from the perspective of someone without influence. Everyone wanted to behave in front of her. Nearly nobody cared about their image in front of the El Melloi these days, and that sloppiness was often their downfall if the stories were correct.

“We can discuss potential projects with them later then.” She moved to the next document with only the slightest bit of attention. “Then there’s the request from Lore-”

“PFFFT!!!” Shirou choked on his tea and coughed heavily.

“Shirou?” Sakura and Saber rushed to his side.

“Lore?!” Luvia balked.

“What on earth does the Department of Lore want with him?” Bazett was of the same mind as her.

“That’s... definitely a surprise.” Rin grimaced, with Illyasviel nodding in rare agreement.

“Uh, context for the ones that don’t know the in’s and outs of your group?” Lancer materialized, voicing the concerns of most of the Servants present.

“ To put it simply, the Department of Lore deals with “Angels and Demons”. Entities and artifacts that originate from outside the world in its entirety. Extraterrestrial.” Rin elaborated. “The bulk of their research by nature can’t be considered traditional magecraft since what they work with falls outside of all established systems on Earth.”

“Even more notable is the fact that it is the Department under the Director of the Tower himself.” Luvia looked at Lorelei knowingly. “All members are essentially hand picked and approved by him.”

“Meaning this is one of *those* requests.” The Servant knowingly nodded while giving Shirou a look of pity.

Shirou, still clearing out his throat, drank some more tea to buy some time...

... Eighty seven.

That was the number of ceremonial daggers, knives, swords, and weapons that had notable extraterrestrial origins. Most of which were benign and unremarkable, however there were a couple of outliers that would catch unwanted attention if he used in front of others... or used at all.

Even then, those outliers had factors in them that he couldn't replicate properly, and deeper investigations only made his head hurt.

It did not help that the Department of Lore was infamous for possessing artifacts that literally drove people mad just by looking at them with normal eyes.

Damn it. His eyes must have shoved more through his skull than he thought when he was dealing with Gilgamesh. He strongly suspected if Saber hadn't been in direct contact with him during the fight, his mind likely would have overloaded long before Ig Alima cleaved the castle roof off.

He looked at his boss warily, and noted that she was blatantly looking for a satisfactory response or even excuse to the request.

“... Tell the Director...” He licked his lips and went for the only relatable excuse he could think of off the top of his head with the scores of information he gleaned from the annals of swords and history in his soul, “Tell him that my limits barely examine the samples left over from the Gigantomachia. I won't be as of much use as he suspects.”

“The Gigantomachia?” Waver wasn't the only one confused by Shirou's cryptic response.

“Hoh? Then... interesting.” Surprisingly, Lorelei seemed to be the only one that had the slightest inkling of what he was referring to before dismissing the matter altogether. “Very well. I'll inform them of your rejection and reasons. I cannot say what his response will be.”

“I've always assumed that the most I'd ever be involved with Lore was acting as an intermediary between them and Archaeology if they got into a particularly bad dispute on who owns what

artifact again.” Shirou sighed helplessly, sagging back into his chair. He only hoped that he had at least avoided this potential disaster.

“Ah, yes. I suppose Meluastea put in a few requests as well.” Nobody missed how Lorelei dismissed that detail.

“You’re still hung up about that.” Waver shook his head.

“About what?” Illya asked in confusion.

“When my predecessor died in the Fourth War, it left the position for the head of Mineralogy open. The head of the Archaeology, a member of a rival political faction in the tower, took it in the scramble while the other two were focused on one another. As of now, Karmaglyph Meluastea Deluc is the only Lord that’s head of two departments.” Waver elaborated.

“You don’t seem too bothered by it.” Rin pointed out suspiciously.

“We actually get along pretty well. Lord Meluastea’s one of my few peers that doesn’t actively try to sabotage or kill me at least once a year.” Waver dismissed her concern shamelessly. “He was the one I wrote your letter of recommendation to.”

Huh. If that was the case, no wonder Rin’s acceptance into the department had been faster than she had expected even with her scholarship.

“How convenient.” Luvia gave Rin a side glare.

“Unless you know what it’s like to deal with an amoral priest purposefully screwing with your family finances for a decade, shut up.”

“Sadly, the Edelfelt family has never been pushed to such humiliating lows.”

“Rin. Luvia.” Shirou all but groaned while ignoring the pointed stare that the Vice Director was giving him. Fortunately that was enough to quiet the two teens before another fight potentially broke out.

“... If I may surmise the rest of the Departments to save time, the Department of Creation wants you to serve on its full staff due to your proficiency and versatility in Projection. They have actually been making this request for years now and have only redoubled their efforts. Curses wants your time due to your exposure and use of the curses that your swords possess. And while Astromancy does not demand you for your skillset specifically, they are heading and conducting a long term mass department project that they believe you can aid in overseeing the security of. I believe it was called Chaldea...?”

The woman's exposition was interrupted as Archer materialized behind Rin unexpectedly. Partially because his actions were so sudden, and partially because...

"... I thought you said that your Servant's identity was pointless." She gave Rin a cold stare.

Those at the table grimaced. Of all the topics that the Vice Director had been updated on, EMIYA's identity had not been one of them.

"I told you he was an idiot Counter Guardian that had given up his name and identity playing hero and dying pointlessly as a mercenary." Rin flushed and looked away from her superior, damning herself for using Archer's words instead of going with the full truth... only to falter as Archer walked past her and to Lorelei. "Huh? Wh-what the heck are you doing?!"

"If it's any consolation, even if I don't remember everything, I certainly would have recalled being turned into a vampire or working under the top brass of the Association." EMIYA on the other hand had no shame walking up to the woman and looking down at her, no, looking down at the papers in her hand.

"And the reason why you decide to amend that mistake now?" She was not intimidated.

Archer didn't respond immediately before slowly holding out his hand. "... That last project you mentioned. Something about it rang a bell. The kind of deja vu that you instinctively can tell will lead to bad things if ignored."

"I thought she said you died a mercenary."

"I did."

"Archer? You told me you don't remember getting involved in any major Association projects."

"I don't. That's the problem." The Servant glanced at his younger counterpart with cool eyes. The two didn't utter a word to one another, but the look alone was enough of a message to indicate that something was off. "Normally I'd keep quiet and let everyone deal with it on their own time as it comes, but normally the nagging feelings I get aren't as obnoxiously glaring as Gilgamesh."

"Humph. That bad huh?" Lancer was the only one that actually laughed at EMIYA's offhanded jab at the King of Heroes.

"Worse. The problem is I can't hone in on it." Picking up the document that Lorelei skeptically handed him, the Counter Guardian scowled and examined what was on it. What was worse was that he wasn't joking about this feeling about this "Chaldea" project. It was like seeing Rin all over again when he was just summoned. He knew her, but he still needed to be reminded what

her name was to put it all together again. “Caster, did you ever make that memory potion we talked about during the war? The one to help with my memories?”

The Princess of Colchis materialized behind Luvia with a look of concern. “I made a small sample of it in passing just in case at first, but making more was put to the side as the war and the list of tasks grew. At best it will grant you some higher clarity, but given your condition...”

“It will do.” Archer flipped a page. Chaldea. Animosphere. Preservation of the human order. Rayshifting. Singularities. Spiritron engineering.

His teeth grit with a frustration that he didn’t know the origins of. He knew he had been involved in this organization somehow. Shrouded memories that were just out of his grasp were taunting him.

“Archer?”

“Quiet.” He was close. Flickers of faded images flashed in his mind. The documentation was highly classified, no doubt only revealing even this much information because the Vice Director was involved.

Designer Babies. Intention to utilize Servants and Masters to address temporal anomalies.

~~Lostbelts~~

Singularities.

~~Beasts~~

Rayshifting.

~~Demon Pillars~~

A circle in the sky.

~~Seraph~~

The ~~Grand~~ Order.

Shit.

“ARCHER!!!”

Rin's shout snapped him back to reality, causing him to physically jolt as though being slapped.

"You okay? Never seen either of you so out of it outside of dealing with a major shitshow or planning to kill someone... or eachother." It must have been bad if Lancer was showing concern for once, before pointing at his face. "You got a little something there."

Archer lifted a hand to his face only to find out that he was actually bleeding from his nose. "... Been a while since something like that's happened. Can't say that's a good thing."

"What can you say then, Shirou Emiya?" Lorelei asked with an unreadable tone.

"Archer."

All eyes turned to Shirou at the end of the table, taking another sip of tea.

It didn't take much to tell for them others what their host was getting at, much to their discomfort.

"Pardon?"

"He's not Shirou Emiya. Like Rin said. He's just some thoughtless fool that managed to get the Counterforce's attention." Shirou replied in what would be a calm tone if it weren't for the underlying annoyed edge in his voice.

"Humph." Unsurprisingly, it was Archer that was the least disturbed by Shirou's insult, looking down on his alternate former self, "I couldn't agree more. Like I said, I was never sloppy enough to get turned into an Apostle."

"Probably because they knew that you were already used goods." Shirou didn't so much as flinch.

"Says Barthomelloi's dog."

"Speaking of, how's Alaya?"

"SHIROU! I THOUGHT YOU TWO HAD MANAGED TO GET A HOLD OF YOUR STUPID HATE BONERS FOR EACH OTHER TO FIX THIS MESS!! ENOUGH BOTH OF YOU OR SO HELP ME I'LL USE A COMMAND SPELL TO MAKE ARCHER PERSONALLY TAKE CARE OF YOU FOR THE NEXT WEEK!!" Rin snapped, completely

ignoring the genuine clash of killing intent that both Fakers were aiming at the other, lifting a fist with a glowing set of seals to underscore her point.

“Ngh.”

“Tch. Of course you’d go there.”

Both iterations of Shirou Emiya grumbled like children and looked away like they didn’t do anything wrong.

Lancer just earnestly applauded Rin’s solution to getting them to stop, blatantly ignoring the looks everyone else was giving him.

“Impressive.” Of course THAT was what made Rin finally stand out to the Vice Director in the end.

“I’ll give you notes on how to handle him later.” The Tohsaka grunted with a flushed face, half infuriated half embarrassed to eternity, clearly in no mood to play nice if the fact that she was still glaring at Shirou (who was starting to sweat now) and shining her command seals in front of everyone was any indication.

“... Putting aside that heated... revelation,” Waver coughed and made a pointed look at Barthomeloi indicating that it probably was for the best if they never touched on the topic of Archer being a version of Shirou Emiya ever again, “*Archer*, can you care to tell us what exactly is it that you remembered about Animosphere’s project that is so significant? Judging from your appearance and the project’s timetable, you could have been alive for its completion.”

The Servant looked at the guest lord with an unreadable expression. “I might have. I don’t know. It doesn’t matter.”

“Doesn’t matter?” Illya frowned slightly before realizing what he was getting at. “Wait, you mean-”

“Yes. I didn’t interact with Chaldea when I was alive. The fragmented memories I still have are from when I was summoned there. Alongside literally hundreds of other Servants.”

“... What.”

“Exactly.”

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