

Chapter CXXXVII: A Measure of Trust

Jekyll's parlor wasn't at all designed to host so many people at once, but somehow or another, we managed to squeeze our way in. Us three main Masters wound up squished together on the sofa where I'd woken up, with Mash in a chair next to it, Tohsaka in another chair on the opposite side, Jekyll in yet another chair, and everyone else essentially forced to stand, which left Mordred to lean against the nearby wall, arms folded across her chest. With what I'd seen of her personality so far, I didn't put it past her to think it made her look cool.

Even Fran had come to join us, despite how little she would be able to contribute to the whole conversation. I guess she just wanted to be involved, to see justice done to the men and the conspiracy that had killed Frankenstein. I couldn't fault her for that.

Andersen, at least, had conveniently marched off into the adjacent study and claimed it as his own, ignoring anything Jekyll said against it. Things would progress much more smoothly without a biting comment from him every now and again, and the less I had to think about why such a famous author had manifested in a form that looked barely old enough for middle school, the more comfortable I was.

Once everyone had settled in, Renée arrived with a tray containing a steaming teapot and enough teacups for everyone, announced that lunch would be ready in half an hour, and then left, all with the same stoic, unaffected expression on her face. I thought I might have detected an undercurrent of excitement, however. At the chance to feed so many people at once? I could only guess.

The tale of the mysterious magical tome didn't take all that long to tell, and the story of our following Nursery Rhyme and the confrontation that came afterwards didn't take that much longer. It wasn't as though the circumstances required all that much explanation, so the basic essentials of what had happened and why we'd done what we'd done were all that was necessary to cover what we'd accomplished and how it was we'd made an ally of Tohsaka.

"I see," Jekyll said when it was all over. I took the chance to sip at my tea and soothe my throat a little. "Then it would appear the case of the mysterious magical tome has been resolved, hasn't it, if...not in quite the manner I expected when I made the request that you investigate it. I suppose I ought to be grateful, in the very least, that no one was truly harmed by it. All's well that ends well, I believe the phrase is?"

"Something like that," Ritsuka agreed.

"It would have been perhaps more ideal if no fight erupted in the first place," said Caster, stroking his beard thoughtfully, "but I suppose the essential point is that indeed no permanent harm was done."

"Not for lack of trying," Mordred said bitterly.

"If it's an apology you're looking for, then you can have one," said Tohsaka. "If I'd known exactly who you all were, then I wouldn't have attacked you like that. But I'm not going to apologize for attempting to deal with what I assumed at the time was a group of enemies. I'm sure someone like the esteemed Sir Mordred can understand a concept like a preemptive strike."

Mordred's lips curled.

"You're lucky." But it was Jeanne Alter who drawled out those words. "If I was the one there, you would've been a f..." She faltered over the word, glancing once more at Nursery Rhyme, who looked back at her innocently. "...fudging crisp."

Rika smothered a giggle behind her teacup. Jeanne Alter tried to maintain her facade of disdain, but her censoring herself had robbed her of any momentum and she just wound up looking like she was trying too hard.

"If you were there," Nursery Rhyme said brightly, "maybe Mister Bandersnatch could have come out to play, too!"

Jeanne Alter shifted, and half the room tensed in response. "Yeah? That right?"

"Bad assumptions were made and people almost got hurt," Ritsuka said firmly, before things could kick off, "but the important part is that we're all here, we're all okay, and we're all allies now, right?"

Deliberately, I avoided glancing at Tohsaka. "Right," I agreed. "So there's no point in jumping down each other's throats about the mistakes we made."

The tension didn't quite drain out of the room, but the metaphorical knives were put away and everyone settled back down. A fight had been averted, at least for now.

Good job, Ritsuka, I thought. He was getting better at handling clashing personalities, and that was going to be only more important going forward. Especially if they kept going back out in the afternoons while I was stuck here in the apartment because of the fog.

"Plus, you know," said Rika, "this room's kinda cramped. If you guys start a fight, this whole place is going up. I like being un-exploded, you know?"

And considering that the mist was back in full force, that would be bad for at least me, Tohsaka, and Jekyll, even if everyone else would be varying shades of fine. There wasn't anyone in this room who wasn't aware of that.

Jeanne Alter snorted.

"Thank you for thinking of my home," Jekyll said politely.

"No prob," replied Rika. "We gotta live here, too, you know. At least for now. Going apartment hunting in this city would be a nightmare."

Ritsuka sighed.

"The next thing we need to worry about is how we're going to continue our investigation," I said, bulldozing past the joke. "We might have an extra Master now — temporary or not — but it doesn't mean much if we don't have anything or anywhere else to look. Jekyll, has there been any developments with your network that we need to know about?"

“Unfortunately, I’m afraid the answer to that is no,” said Jekyll. “Things have been quiet since you left. Reports have been coming in, of course, that the victims of the magical tome have been awakening — something I can only assume might be laid at the feet of Mister Tohsaka and the lady Nursery Rhyme —”

“Alice,” Nursery Rhyme interrupted with unusual firmness. “My name is Alice.”

Jekyll blinked and glanced at her, but took it in stride. “Something for which I assume we might thank Mister Tohsaka and Miss Alice. Beyond that, however, there have been no new reports of any phenomena which might be called unusual. All I can speak to is the expected patrols of our masterminds’ favored foot soldiers, and of course, they pose no threat to the populace as long as the good people of the city lock doors and avoid the streets.”

“More of these homunculi, Helter Skelter, and automata, I’m assuming,” Tohsaka said.

“Indeed,” Caster confirmed. “It continues to be a small mercy that they don’t enter homes and assault the people inside. That much, at least, we can be thankful for.”

“Ungh,” Fran grunted. “Un, un, ungh.”

“No,” I answered her. “We didn’t find any more clues about P, B, or M.”

Her lips drew tight, but her body sagged, disappointed, and she glared down at the floor. I sympathized, but I hadn’t really expected any better. The magical tome having some kind of connection to them was a longshot to begin with, and the instant Andersen had explained what it was and how it worked, I’d already ruled out the possibility.

It would have been too convenient to find the answer less than a whole day after we got here.

“What do we actually know about these masterminds?” Tohsaka asked.

When I glanced at him, his lips thinned and the skin around the corners of his eyes tightened. Yeah, I didn’t exactly trust him either, but that was fine. It wouldn’t be the first, second, or last time I found myself in a situation where I needed to team up with someone I didn’t fully trust. Most of my career had shaken out like that, one way or the other. It was old hat by now.

The only thing I needed to trust was that our interests aligned. For that, I just needed to look to the little girl sitting next to him.

“We’ve already told you what we know,” I said to him. “Right now, we really don’t have anything to go on, aside from the note Frankenstein left for us to find.”

Tohsaka grunted. “So just that they’re probably Servants. Not even a hint about their classes either, huh?”

“No,” said Ritsuka. “We’re assuming there’s at least one Caster for, well, I think it’s pretty obvious why?”

“Not sure where else you’re getting a fog machine that can cover the whole city,” his sister added wryly.

“It *could* be a Noble Phantasm,” Mash added uncertainly, “but, well...”

“Who and how would be the obvious question,” said Emiya. “It’s not impossible that the mist has something to do with Jack the Ripper. A Noble Phantasm like that would make sense for someone like him.”

“Just one problem with that,” said Mordred. “You think that guy would stop in the mornings or stick to a schedule all polite-like the way things have been so far?”

I wanted to have an argument for that, but frustratingly, the memories of his fighting style and personality were also among the things I’d lost in the aftermath of the end of the fight. The only thing I could remember clearly was the use of *a* Noble Phantasm, because Fou had taken the hit for me for some inexplicable reason, even if what it was and how it worked were cleanly excised, and while there was a general rule in Chaldea’s primer about how the average Servant had only a single Noble Phantasm...

Yeah. I didn’t even need to look at Emiya to see someone in the room who broke that rule. If I started looking back at the previous Singularities, that rule got even more laughably wrong. While it wasn’t a bad rule of thumb, I’d run into too many exceptions to assume it applied to Jack the Ripper, too.

“It’s not impossible,” Caster said. “After all, the legend of Jack the Ripper is one of an unrepentant madman who was surprisingly meticulous in his killings. It isn’t out of the realm of possibility that he might have a Noble Phantasm of this sort *and* the temperament required to use it in the manner we’ve seen so far, particularly if it’s being treated as a game with the populace.”

“But it’s unlikely,” I said. “And it doesn’t fit with the evidence we have so far. Whatever Project Demonic Fog is, I think we can safely assume that Jack the Ripper doesn’t feature in it as a central figure, let alone the lynchpin to its success.”

Ritsuka sighed. “Hence the fog machine. Yeah. I’m not an expert, but I can’t think of anyone else who might have fog as a Noble Phantasm.”

Neither could I.

“And that’s why you think there’s a Caster of some kind involved,” Tohsaka noted. “I’d ask what it is you’re assuming they want to use this fog for in the first place...but I’m going to guess you don’t have any ideas about that either.”

When none of us had an answer that would satisfy him, he let out a deep sigh.

“Great.”

Nursery Rhyme awkwardly patted his thigh as though to offer him comfort, but it didn’t seem to help.

It was to this general atmosphere that Renée returned a minute or so later, and in the same monotone voice I'd gotten used to from her, she announced, "Lunch is ready, Master."

"Very good. Thank you, Renée," said Caster. He drained the rest of his tea, then to us, he said, "I think it would do us all some good to fill our bellies with food, and once we have had our fill, we can return to such dour topics. Wouldn't you all agree?"

My stomach rumbled quietly in my gut, and next to me, I heard both of the twins' answering grumble, as though their own were agreeing with mine. With the mist outside keeping me confined to the apartment and nothing pressing to otherwise occupy our attention, there was no reason not to cut the conversation short for the moment and put some food in our bellies.

"That's fine," I said. "Maybe a little time and a meal will help give us a different perspective on things."

"An excellent idea!" said Jekyll, smiling broadly. He stood. "Come, come! Mister Tohsaka, I can't say as I have the foggiest idea what sort of food to which you might be accustomed — having never been to the Orient myself, you understand — but I'm certain Renée's cooking will be quite the treat!"

Tohsaka climbed to his feet, too. "Well, when you put it like that, I suppose it's only polite to take you up on such a generous offer."

"My good man," said Caster, "if you trust me on nothing else, let it be this: you won't regret it."

We all filtered out of the parlor and into the even more crowded dining room, which felt much more cramped than it had the night before, when it was just me, Caster, Jekyll, and Arash, or even this morning, when we'd had the twins, Mash, Emiya, and Fran there, too. Despite the vanishing space in the room itself, however, there were exactly as many spots as we needed for each of us to sit down and eat.

"No Andersen?" I asked.

"Mister Andersen has elected not to partake," Renée answered me stoically. "He requested that he not be disturbed."

"His loss," said Mordred. "Pipsqueak can go hungry, for all I care."

I wondered why, but didn't give it too much thought. Maybe he just liked taking advantage of the fact that he didn't *need* to eat as a Servant. Who knew?

Lunch was a warm and hearty soup, great for coming in from the chilly streets of London, where the constant fog blocking the sun had sapped away any real warmth that might have been left in the city. It was not bad enough to freeze, but the heat of the soup settling in my belly was a comfort all the same.

It didn't hurt that it tasted good, too. Renée really was a good cook. Different than the kind of meals Emiya preferred to make, but no less quality for that.

“It’s not fair!” Rika complained. “My house-husband is supposed to be the best there is, and yet...!”

“A new challenger approaches, huh?” her brother teased. She groaned, but at no point did she stop eating.

“The soup is wonderful, Miss Renée,” Mash said politely to the homunculus in her maid outfit.

“Thank you,” Renée replied, completely deadpan, but there was a satisfied air about her as we ate. If she smiled, it wasn’t while I was looking.

There were miniature cakes that went along with the meal, wedges of sweet bread with some kind of fruit spread sandwiched between the upper and lower layers, and it was kind of strange to eat them, because I was pretty sure I had read about them somewhere in one of the classics. Trippy, that was a good word, but then, my whole life the last few months had been meeting one figure from myth and legend after another. Eating a snack that could have come from the pages of *Pride and Prejudice* was a little pedestrian by comparison.

We sat around for a little while after we were done eating, satisfied, and let our food settle. Mash continued to nibble on a second of those miniature cake wedges, and Mordred looked like she would have leaned back and put her feet up on the table if she wasn’t sure that it would get her yelled at.

At length, Tohsaka heaved out a sigh. “Alright,” he admitted. “It was a little different from what I’m used to eating, but it was just as good as you promised it would be.”

“Thank you, Mister Tohsaka,” said Renée, still monotone. “I’m grateful for your kind words.”

Tohsaka didn’t seem quite sure how to take that, whether she was serious or not, and considering I’d said before that she emoted about as much as a rock, I couldn’t blame him for the confusion.

“An excellent meal, Renée,” Caster told her. “Thank you for all of your hard work.”

“Truly,” added Jekyll.

“I am glad that I can be of service to you, Master,” said Renée.

Turning back to the rest of us, Caster continued, “Now that we’ve all had some time to digest — both our food and what we discussed earlier — shall we continue where we left off?”

“Yes.” I sat up a little straighter, and so too did the twins and Mash. “Let’s.”

Even Mordred stopped slouching in her chair.

“I believe we left off on the matter regarding avenues of investigation, yes?” said Caster.

“Namely, the lack thereof,” Emiya added.

Caster smiled grimly.

“Quite.”

“You mentioned attempting to track the Caster through the magical energy spread throughout the city?” I suggested.

“One that bore little fruit, I’m afraid,” said Caster regretfully. “As I explained before, the mist has made it too diffuse to attempt tracking it back to an origin point. I fear if I attempted to follow it all the way, I would find myself walking in circles.”

“So if we were to get rid of the mist, it might be possible to find the Caster behind it,” Mash concluded, and then she let out a sigh. “Unfortunately, the only way to do one is to do the other, so doing either one winds up being impossible, doesn’t it?”

A real chicken and the egg problem. We needed to find the Caster to get rid of the mist, but we needed to get rid of the mist to find the Caster. In the process of doing one, the other would be accomplished as a matter of course, which really meant that we needed to find a different way of doing one or the other first.

“Is there another way we could track this Caster down?” asked Ritsuka.

Caster stroked his beard thoughtfully. “There might be,” he allowed, “but the question of managing it is another matter.”

My brow furrowed and I leaned forward a little. “If you have any ideas…”

“An idea, yes, but it might be a little bit of a stretch,” Caster admitted. “You see, so far, I’ve been content to let Sir Mordred do what she will with the Helter Skelter and such and raised no concern about her treatment of them —”

“Didn’t hear you complaining when I offered to go out and thin their numbers a little,” Mordred grunted.

“— but depending on their composition and the methods of their construction, I might be able to find traces of their creator upon them and use that to locate a…source, if you will, for where it is they’re all coming from. They would have to be relatively intact, however,” he added swiftly. “As you might imagine, bringing one of them in whole and undamaged is a bit of a tall order.”

Especially with Jekyll in the apartment, I saw immediately. He was an ordinary human, after all. If Mordred dragged one of those Helter Skelter or automata into the apartment, still fully functional and everything, then it might very well do a lot of damage not only to the apartment itself, but also to Jekyll.

“I mean, they weren’t giving us much of a choice,” said Rika. “Kinda hard to be nice to a bunch of robots trying to kill all humans when you happen to be one of those humans.”

“Now you’re going to ask me not to kill murderous *robots*?” Jeanne Alter drawled, disgusted.

“Technically, murder is defined as one human being killing another,” Ritsuka said, “so robots can’t actually be murderous, can they?”

Rika turned to her brother, horrified, and demanded, “Why were you the one who thought of that first? It should have been me!”

Jeanne Alter and most of the rest of the room were just varying shades of confused, so Rika said to Ritsuka, “Put *I, Robot* on the list, Onii-chan.”

“Before or after *Terminator*?”

“After. Duh. You have to watch the classic before you dig into the junk food.”

I focused on the more important part.

“I’m not sure it would be a good idea to try bringing them back here anyway,” I said. “If you *could* use them to track down their creator, Abraham, that would be useful, but we don’t have any idea how closely he can monitor them. If any of them have a tracker of some kind built into them, then we’d be leading him and his allies right back to us.”

“If they don’t already know exactly where we are,” Emiya pointed out.

I acknowledged it with an incline of my head. True, it was entirely possible that P, B, and M already knew where we were and who we were, down to our names and the address of Jekyll’s apartment, and I’d had a thought about that before, but...

“If they *do* know, they don’t seem to be doing anything about it, do they?”

They weren’t attacking us where we sat, they weren’t keeping tabs on us — at least visibly — and there didn’t seem to be any ambushes lying in wait for us to come and go. All things considered, when I asked the question whether they were aware of where we were and biding their time or completely unaware, the latter answer seemed more likely.

But it still paid to act as if they knew where we were at all times. There were some dangers to preparing to face an enemy who was less competent than you assumed they were, but if you were expecting to fight a Thinker, it was better to find out you were wrong later than to wind up dancing to their tune.

“Miss Taylor makes a good point,” said Mash. “We’ve had to fight those automata and Helter Skelter several times now, but it doesn’t seem like they’re looking for us in particular.”

“If they were, wouldn’t they be waiting for us right outside the apartment?” asked Ritsuka.

Caster leaned back in his chair, stroking his beard thoughtfully. “And while I’ve been monitoring you, it doesn’t seem as though they’ve been paying any special attention to the areas where you’ve already felled some of their number. Hm. Perhaps they truly have no idea where we are, nor do their puppets even have the intelligence to search for us competently.”

Alternatively, none of what we were doing was more than a minor inconvenience for them. I would have thought we would face a reprisal of some kind for taking out that Caster, Mephistopheles, when Ritsuka and the others went to investigate Frankenstein’s silence, but unless Jack the Ripper

had been sent after us as retribution, P, B, and M seemed completely unconcerned to have lost a Servant from their roster.

“Ungh,” Fran said throatily.

“That *is* a question,” I allowed. “But if they attacked the Clock Tower, they might have gotten the information on Frankenstein there.”

Assuming that the attack on the Association had more than just the purpose of keeping them from interfering. I knew that if I’d been in their shoes, it would have been a good chance to look for information on persons of interest to keep an eye on.

“Sorry to interrupt,” said Tohsaka, “but you can *actually* understand what she’s saying?”

“Right?” Rika nodded vigorously. “See, I’m not the only one who can’t understand her! I’m not the weird one, here!”

“That last part’s up for debate,” Ritsuka said.

Rika stuck her tongue out at him.

“It’s hard to explain, Mister Tohsaka,” Mash told him politely. “It’s not... understanding a language of words so much as it is... understanding her intent. I’m sorry, but I really can’t explain it any better than that.”

“It’s still a shit explanation,” said Jeanne Alter. Mash winced.

“I don’t see anyone else offering a better one,” Mordred chimed in. “It’s something that can’t be explained. Nothing more complicated to it than that.”

And I wasn’t about to start explaining that my own stint of aphasia brought on by letting a biokinetic play around with my brain during an apocalyptic battle for the fate of mankind made it easier to understand what Fran was trying to say. That was a can of worms I would prefer to open up *never*.

“Tohsaka,” I said, changing the subject, “you were there at the Association not long before it was attacked, weren’t you? Aside from your missing mentor, was there anything else that stood out to you as unusual about that day?”

Tohsaka grimaced. “I...can’t say that there was, not at the time, at least, but...”

But that didn’t mean there wasn’t something there that he hadn’t paid any mind at the time. The human senses took in a mountain-load of information in any given moment, I remembered hearing somewhere, and everything that didn’t jump up and down and scream in your face got filtered out as a matter of course.

I turned to Mordred next. “Sir Mordred? While you were out patrolling, did you look to see what happened at the Clock Tower?”

“Huh?” Mordred blinked at me. “Uh, yeah. Yeah, Jekyll and I checked in on that shithole the other day. Abraham asked us to look into it. Whole place was demolished, couldn’t get in or out. If anyone’s left down there, they’re stuck down there.”

“I thought it might provide us some clues,” said Caster, “so I asked Mordred and Doctor Jekyll to investigate while I constructed my little replica of the city. Unfortunately, they could tell me little that the newspaper had not already informed me of.”

“I see.”

It may wind up being a dead end, but...I didn’t see too much in the way of options. For the moment, aside from wandering about the city and looking for clues, we seemed to have run out of avenues of investigation, or at least ones that were obvious. We couldn’t rely on Jack the Ripper to show up at some convenient moment where we could capture and interrogate him, and P, B, and M didn’t look to have any interest in us specifically. There was no telling when or even if they would attempt to pressure another of Jekyll’s informants, so if we waited for that, we could wind up waiting for days or weeks for something that wasn’t going to happen.

Right now, there were two routes we could go to try and find out more about the enemy and what they were doing. Luckily, we could do both at the same time, and we didn’t even have to split up the group to do them.

“One of the things we’re going to have to do is take a closer look at the Clock Tower for clues about what the masterminds did there and what else they might have wanted to accomplish while they were destroying it,” I said.

Some part of me hated the necessity. The longer I could stay out of the sights of the Association and any of its members who might view me as a curiosity to be dissected, the better. Unfortunately, it was one of the only leads we had.

“Do you believe there might have been more beneath the surface than our eyes perceived?” asked Jekyll.

“I don’t know,” I admitted. “But it’s a possibility we can’t overlook.”

“Especially if that’s how they found out where Frankenstein lived,” Ritsuka added.

“Uhn!” Fran agreed.

Jeanne Alter chuckled, grinning nastily, “Oh, no way I’m missing out on this one. Especially if any of those pretentious English p...” She glanced at Nursery Rhyme, and her grin twisted into a grimace. “...pansies tries anything fishy.”

Nursery Rhyme just smiled at her innocently. At this point, I wasn’t sure that she wasn’t doing it on purpose to mess with Jeanne Alter.

“So I get to do some archeology in the British Museum?” asked Rika. “You’re not going to make me put on a tank top and a pair of short-shorts, are you?”

“A tank top and short-shorts?” Mash repeated, as confused as I was. Emiya and Ritsuka seemed to get what she was talking about, but everyone else seemed clueless.

“No.” *Don’t be ridiculous*, I managed not to say.

“Oh, good,” said Rika, breathing an exaggerated sigh of relief. “I mean, don’t get me wrong, I’m cute as the dickens, but I ain’t got nothing on Lara Croft.”

Ritsuka’s grimace said that he didn’t like the mental image she’d just given him.

“So we’re going to look through the wreckage of the Clock Tower and see if we can find any clues,” he said, trying to distract himself. “Are we...going to enter the Clock Tower itself? The Association’s headquarters?”

“We’ll see,” I answered. “It’ll depend on how difficult it is for us to make it down there, how long it might take to clear a path inside, even with our Servants there to do the heavy lifting. We may have to rely on the Director to lead us through once we get inside.”

I watched Tohsaka the entire time, looking for any signs of panic or distress, any indication that he knew what we would find down there and didn’t want us searching for it. Nothing. The grimace on his face was of someone who knew there was a tedious or distasteful task ahead and knew there was no avoiding it.

He didn’t even try to dissuade us from it, convince us it was too dangerous or to try something else. It still wasn’t proof that he was absolutely trustworthy or that he wasn’t hiding anything, but for now, it seemed like I was worrying over nothing.

Maybe I really *was* being overly paranoid.

“In any case,” I went on, “it’s not the only lead we can pursue. Abraham, I know you came up with a handful of those trackers for us to hold onto while we were out. If you can, I’m going to need at least a few more. A few dozen, if you can manage it.”

He blinked at me. “It...shouldn’t be that much trouble to accomplish, no,” he allowed, “but... What is it, exactly, that you plan on using them for?”

“Right now, we don’t know much about the enemy’s patrol groups except that they exist,” I explained patiently. For the benefit of the entire team, not just him. “If they have predetermined routes, if another group is sent out to replace one that we eliminate, if their routes rotate or change hourly or daily — knowing all of these things would let us avoid them and make it faster and easier to get around the city. But if they return to their master and his home base, where the fog machine might be —”

“We could track them back to it!” Ritsuka concluded suddenly.

And then attack it while they were least expecting us. If we wanted to be even more cautious, we could set up a temporary base right next door, and during the grace period in the mornings, I could explore the enemy base with my bugs without P, B, or M being any the wiser. Hell, maybe I could even sabotage their fog machine without any of us having to go anywhere near it.

“Exactly.”

Forgetting my little stint with the fog when we arrived, this could wind up being the easiest and safest Singularity we ever cleared. The fastest, too, behind Fuyuki.

“Clever,” Emiya said approvingly.

“Damn,” said Jeanne Alter. “We could fu...” She glanced at Nursery Rhyme again. “...fudge them up before they even knew what hit ‘em.”

“You keep talking about fudge and I’m gonna want some,” Rika remarked.

“I’m not the one who brought a kid back to this place,” Jeanne Alter muttered mutinously.

“Brilliant!” said Jekyll, beaming. “An excellent plan!”

“It’s certainly feasible,” Caster agreed. “I’m afraid that making enough trackers for you to accomplish it won’t be quickly done, but... A day or so? If not tomorrow, then the day after, depending on exactly how many you would like me to make.”

I was honestly hoping it would have been a little faster. Having said that, it wasn’t like we were necessarily going to manage to tag every single patrol group in a single morning to begin with.

“We don’t have to do it all at once,” I reasoned. “Depending on what results we get with the first group, we might not even have to do it more than once.”

“And in the meantime, we just sit around and wait to see if they’ll lead us to their masters?” Mordred asked skeptically.

“In the meantime, we’ll investigate every lead we can find,” I countered. “And if we don’t have any leads, then yes, we sit around and wait. From this point on, the fewer patrol groups we engage and destroy, the better.”

“Which means less fighting,” said Mash.

“Goddamn.” Jeanne Alter clicked her tongue and folded her arms. “There goes all the fun.”

“You said it,” Mordred agreed.

“Then I guess we just have to hope that Doctor Jekyll’s network can find more leads for us to follow,” said Ritsuka.

Jekyll nodded. “One would hope. At the moment, however, I’m afraid that there has yet to be any new information passed amongst us. The magical tome — excuse me, Miss Alice — was the last lead on any further strange happenings within the city itself. The rest has been little more than reports of the movements of these patrol groups. In other words, nothing which we have not already learned.”

“If your informants could note down any patterns they might see in these patrols,” Tohsaka began meaningfully.

Jekyll inclined his head. “I shall endeavor to see it done.”

“So what about the Museum?” asked Rika. “Are we waiting, or...?”

It might have been safer to do the one plan first and *then* check the Clock Tower to see what we could find...but when following the path of the patrol groups could take several days to set up and record their patterns — if there even were any — it just didn’t make sense to wait. Doubly so, if it meant we might miss clues or if there was a trail that only got colder the longer we waited.

“We’ll wait until tomorrow morning,” I said, “when it’s safe for Tohsaka and me to come with you. Whatever Abraham has done by then, we’ll work with along the way.”

Tohsaka grimaced. “Well. I suppose I’d better earn my keep, shouldn’t I? Even if I’m only a temporary Master of Chaldea, I guess this is just part of the territory.”

“That suits my purposes just fine, as well,” said Andersen, striding into the room as though he’d been waiting for that exact moment. He hadn’t, I knew, but his sense of timing was impeccable. “Sorry to inconvenience you, but since our destination is the same and our goals align, I’m going to have to ask the lot of you a favor.”

He adjusted his glasses with a single thin finger, pressing the bridge further up his nose. The lenses glinted in the light.

“Take me with you to the Clock Tower. There’s a certain theory I need to confirm, and it may just hold the secret to the nature of this Demonic Fog.”