

## 167 – Dots on a Map

The world passed by in a blur when viewed through the windows from inside the carriage. It was a new interior than when we’d travelled from Fortress Major to Evergreen, appearing like a cozy tavern, perhaps because Saoirse had gotten inspired. It was all caramel-brown wood and grey stonework.

The ground floor had a bar with beer kegs and bottles, and there were tables with little U-shaped benches around them, creating ‘booths’. Taking all the seating space into account, it seemed the tavern could fit more than five times the number of people currently within the carriage.

Elye was standing atop one table, using a keg as her target, while practicing her precision by curving shots around one of the four pillars holding up the second floor. Saoirse was walking around creating dummy humans with her powers, populating the space with statues, which was somewhat unnerving.

A set of stone steps with a wooden railing led upstairs, and there were more seats up there, but also rooms for us to sleep in. There was also a staircase leading down into a basement behind the bar, and Mortl was currently arranging some bones for a skeletal servant down there. Given that she was using her Second Vessel, she didn’t have access to the lantern weapon that she’d used in Helmstatter to move around an entire army of undead, so it seemed she was being creative.

I’d already gotten a bit of sleep in one of the comfy beds, and afterwards I’d explained the situation with Potts to Ludwig. He had not taken the news of Prince Hother’s death well, but applauded our quick-thinking, while stressing the fact that we should get Potts out of this mess sooner rather than later.

Given that he was the foremost expert on Demons amongst the lot of us, I took his advice to heart. Although the Capgras Demon was bound within a vessel formed of its own body, it was obviously not good for one’s soul to be wrapped up in that of another.

“I was a fool for not believing in him,” he then said, sadly. “But, I cannot change the past, and that bastard still owes me for the shit he broke, so we’re getting him out of there, even if we have to stage Hother’s death.”

I nodded. “I was thinking the same thing.”

“The fact that there was a Capgras Demon living in Evergreen all this time though... it gives me shivers. Those things are so fucking dangerous, hence why there are all these systems in place to detect them early. Or well, there ought to have been systems in place. Either some lunatic taught the

Demon how to avoid detection long ago, or it exploited a vulnerable moment in the city’s defence, before learning how to obfuscate its own trail.”

Before I could comment on what I thought had happened, he then added, “It was a good thing you didn’t cave in to Oliver’s demand. I’ve got kind of a crazy thing I need to show you.”

Armen and I sat next to each other, while watching the Incarnate pulling out scroll after scroll, until he had four maps that he then started laying out on the floor, overlapping them to create an image of the Hallem continent.

“See these red marks?” he asked.

I got down from the bench and knelt in front of the maps. I wasn’t a cartographer, but I could tell the dimensions and such were a bit off. After all, I’d travelled through many of the places he’d marked. Actually... I’d been to almost all of the spots.

“These are...”

“All the places with major bloodsheds happening within the last year or so.”

I looked at the map. At the bottom was Silvermarsh near the top of Harrlev’s territory.

“That’s where Leopold had me contain the Siren in a music box.”

“And where his Envoy-possessed body went on a total rampage, killing about four hundred people before he was stopped by our old pal Owl at Mortl’s behest. That guy was quite adept at dealing with Visitors, too bad he was also fucked in the head.”

I swallowed hard. “I didn’t realise *that many* people died because of me.”

“Mortl explained what Leopold was after: The Keening’s Choir. If he had been allowed to use that spell, it most certainly would’ve killed way more people, perhaps even dooming half the continent, if not more.”

I didn’t feel that much better, truth be told, as my actions had still gotten a lot of people killed.

**“You tried your best to warn the people in the nearby Town,”** Armen commented. **“It was not your fault.”**

“Thank you,” I told him, but it still didn’t wash away my sudden guilt.

My eyes moved north from Silvermarsh.

“Helmstatter,” Ludwig said, putting his finger on it. It was a separate map from the one with Harrlev on it that showed just Arley. There was, unsurprisingly, also a spot in Ochre.

“What’s *that* spot?” I asked, pointing to something off to the west of Arley’s shoreline.

“That’s Goldentide. It was initially believed to be the origins of the Demon that appeared in Ochre.”

I nodded. “The Herald Demon. I was there.” The details were slowly coming back to me.

“I only learnt of this recently, but there was an incident with a Possessed Weapon in their capital city. Quite a lot of people died, even Otherworlders.”

“I’m starting to sense a pattern,” I said. Every marked spot was some calamity or mass casualty event.

Armen, who was apparently ahead of me, said, “**Is the intention to create a massive ritual sigil?**”

I blinked, taking in all the dots on the maps. Even without lines drawn between them, it was hard not to get a sense of what its shape would be like. I wasn’t well-versed in sigils, but it felt like there was something missing.

At the top of the overlapping maps was Meteorite Valley, which also had a mark, but it felt like there were two points missing between that place and Fortress Major.

“Evergreen and Redmoss Enclave are missing,” I muttered.

“You noticed as well, huh?” Ludwig said.

“**How can you tell?**” Armen wondered.

“I think it’s a byproduct of our Hymnal skill,” the Incarnate guessed. “As if we can almost picture the full image from the clues we’re given.”

“What happened in Meteorite Valley?” I asked.

“Some idiot found a slumbering Earth Drake. It woke up and wiped out an entire village. I thought it was unrelated, but if you add a dot on Evergreen and Redmoss, then it feels impossible to not also add one in the Valley, so it has to be related, even if I don’t yet know how.”

“I just realised something,” I said, remembering how he’d introduced the maps. “You said that it was a good thing Oliver didn’t get his way, because it would turn Redmoss Enclave into another one of these dots where mass deaths happened, right?”

He nodded.

“Some of these marks, they would’ve happened with or without intervention.”

Ludwig frowned. “I know. That’s been bothering me too. I’m fairly sure that Carmine is a man with contingencies for his contingencies, and I get the feeling that we’re about to walk into one hell of a trap.”

“He tried at least three different plans for making a massacre in Evergreen,” I said.

“Three?”

“The Music Box, the Dullahan, and the Capgras Demon. Although maybe that last one wasn’t meant to cause a lot of deaths, but instead just lead to the head of the Royal Family changing their laws.”

“...You’re saying Carmine made a deal with the Demon?”

“**He wanted it to lift the restrictions on Librarians’ Advancements,**” Armen quoted.

“That must’ve been a feint,” Ludwig commented. “It’s believed that if King Egil did perish, then his brother and daughter would end up in a struggle for succession. Evergreen could be a battlefield. But I suppose that, if the Princess, or well a Demon pretending to be her, made such a drastic change, it would definitely spark conflict.”

“Do you think Carmine’s ritual will work without Evergreen?”

“I have no idea. I never studied Hymnal magic.”

“I did,” Mortl said, making all of us look up from the map we’d been huddled around.

Behind the Necromancer was a tall brutish skeleton without a head. It looked like it could pulverise my skull with a single punch.

“What’s your take on this?” Ludwig asked her.

“You should’ve shown me this earlier,” she scolded him.

“Sorry, I just thought you’d think I’d gone looney.”

“I would’ve thought that, yes, but we’re dealing with an unpredictable foe, so ‘looney’ is perhaps the best frame of mind to have, when trying to decipher his intentions.”

“Do you know the sigil?” I asked.

“I do. It is called ‘Unmake’. Depending on the verse used to activate it, its effect can be a myriad of things. However...”

“What?” Ludwig and I both said simultaneously.

“With a sigil of this scale, the effect will be world-encompassing.”

“And what would happen if Evergreen doesn’t mark a point on the sigil?”

Mortl seemed to consider it for a moment, drawing in the air in front of herself. I wondered why she wasn’t drawing it physically, but guessed that perhaps it would be a bad idea, since many sigils, like the ones I’d used in the past, could activate without any accompanying verse.

“Without that bit, and depending on how you draw out the shapes across the various marks on the map, you could end up with the sigil for either ‘Disassemble’ or ‘Reconstruct’. All three of these sigils need a target, and I’m curious what sort of world-spanning consequence Carmine is seeking.

—Patreon-exclusive Copy—  
—Kristoffer Pauly (aka “Dosei”)—

“One thing is certain, however, regardless of which of the sigils it is, it cannot exist without Redmoss Enclave being a dot on the map.”