Fate/Retrograde

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Fate/Retrograde

by siccentry

Summary

In the year 2121, Mystery and magical energy have dwindled more than ever before and the number of magi and active magi families has gone down year by year. Kieran Corvus, a descendant of a British magi lineage, is dragged into “The Last Holy Grail War,” a conflict initiated by a magus looking to revert humanity back to olden times in order to return Magic and Magecraft to their former glory.

Notes

The first chapter is an edited version from the one on AO3 (which I'll also update when that's back up). The plot didn't change, but there's a lot of improvements to the writing, especially in the first part.

Chapter 1: The Last Holy Grail War / Night of Fate

Part 1 - The Last Holy Grail War

“You’re a genius, Atlas,” a young magus said, green eyes shining and a palpable excitement to his tone. He spoke to an older man whose figure was shadowed by a black cloak which pooled around his feet and obscured his shape. The glass doors of the elevator gave a view of floors cascading at a speed which left their contents indecipherable.

“Markus, it’s not my intellect which gave way to this possibility,” Atlas replied as the elevator began to slow, brushing his hair back, dark brown with streaks of white, like one would do before an important meeting. The whirring of the elevator’s electrical engine grew louder until the machine came to a halt, and the sound dissipated faster than it came.

The doors opened on an underground oasis, an imitation of nature built hundreds of meters under ground. One wouldn’t be able to distinguish it from a real boreal forest save for the segmented metal walls which marked the perimeter. Trees stretched far past where the eyes could see. Roughly one hundred meters from the elevator was a lake where an assortment of creatures, predator and prey, had gathered. Lions, wolves, roosters, llamas, peacocks, and dingos. A wild assortment which fit no biome in specific, who all sat, stood, or paced without disturbing one another.

However, the unnatural nature of this underground forest was not what stunned the young man as they exited the lift.

“It was the contribution of all these souls who permitted us to carry out our task.” Atlas’ eyes lingered on the tree branches, scanning one at a time, taking in the features of what hanged from each with careful consideration.

“Are those..?” The young man’s eyes widened as they darted between hanging pods, thin cylinders of glass, topped and bottomed with dark metal casings, and carrying men, women, and children — all suspended in a bright green liquid. The pods hung from all the branches available, some high up and the contents unclear, others at eye level. The faces of the occupants, frozen in time, faced those who observed, their expressions varying from fear, anger, shock, and the neutrality of sleep. What appeared as the roots of trees on first glance turned into wiring upon closer inspection.

“Indeed. They're the sacrifices who will resurrect the great era of magic. The catalysts for the last Holy Grail War.” Atlas stepped towards one of the pods, laying a comforting hand on its side, the young woman inside carrying an anguished expression. “They are the substitution of the leylines which this area lacks. It wouldn’t be possible to sustain Servants, or the Grail itself, without them.”

“Was—” Markus began to speak before cutting himself off, taking a deep breath, and brushing back his blond bangs. “Never mind. I understand.”

“Good.” Atlas said with a slight smile. He looked one last time to the pod in front of him, a contemplative look on his face, before taking his hand off it and stepping towards the nearby lake.

Markus followed in step as Atlas moved towards the lake. At the shore, there was a large summoning circle transcribed on the ground, drawn in what was unmistakably blood. Strangely, none of the wildlife, predators or scavengers, displayed any curiosity for it. They simply observed the two magi who now stood by the south end of the circle.

“The archive,” Atlas ordered, extending his right hand. Markus swung his book bag from his side to his front, and produced an old, lengthy tome.

“Why don’t you just use the scanned one?” He sighed as he handed over the book. The pages were classically strewn, the cover made of leather which had clearly weathered many years, and the title was written in a foreign, mostly defunct, language: German. “I mean, we’re probably the only ones in this country who own something like this.”

“It’s for my peace of mind.” Atlas flipped through the pages, taking the occasional pause to find his footing, before landing on the one he was looking for. “It’s easy for those traitors to access a digital copy.”

The text on the page was alien to both of them. Atlas adjusted his glasses, a blue light shining through the lens and onto the book, causing a holographic copy to dance and rearrange itself before displaying the page in plain English.

The old man gave an approving nod before reaching into his coat, producing an old axe. Its handle was humbly designed and just longer than a forearm’s length, the blade nimble and curved down at the end, the back a steel pommel curved like a vase. He inspected the weapon, the remnants of dirt which couldn’t be wiped off, the design a remnant of a lost culture.

He took his eyes off the weapon, and focused on the centre of the circle. In the over one hundred and fifty years Atlas had lived, he’d never held such an object before, only seen them behind glass in museums. In fact, that was where he’d acquired this weapon. He hurled it into the middle of the circle, the back of the blade notching itself in the dirt.

Finally, he took a deep breath, and began enunciating from the translated page:

“Let silver and steel be the essence.

Let stone and the archduke of contracts be the foundation.”

As he began chanting the mysterious chant, the inner markings of the circle lit up with a blinding blue gleam, highlighted by a rainbow glow. The light darted across the etched lines, making its way across the entire sketch and filling the forest with its glow. Atlas continued the chant, an almost imperceptible smirk forming at the edges of his lips.

“Let rise a wall against the wind that shall fall.

Let the four cardinal gates close.

Let the three-forked road from the crown reaching unto the Kingdom rotate.

Let it be filled. Again. Again. Again. Again.

Let it be filled fivefold for every turn, simply breaking asunder with every filling."

A pillar of blue and gold light burst from the circle, illuminating the entire forest. A torrent of wind pushed back against the magi, who braced with all their might. Markus squeezed his eyes shut, blocking his face with his hands, but Atlas squintes as much as he could, though the blinding light forced him to close his eyes when dirt and dust didn't. Their heels dug in to the wet sand under their feet until there was a high pile gathered behind their heels.

After a few long seconds, it began to settle, the light dissipating and the dust calming. When Atlas opened his eyes, he smiled sincerely for the first time in decades, for the project he had worked on for the better part of his life had finally borne its first fruit.

"I ask of you–" a tired, but commanding voice echoed throughout the forest, the visage which delivered it still hidden behind the smoke, only the contour of a strange armament poking through. "Are you my master?"

The Last Holy Grail War was now set in motion.

Part 2 - Night of Fate

London, State of Britannia, European Federation. December 9, 2121.

“Damn!” Kieran shouted in exasperation as a bullet just barely skimmed past his shoulder, catching the corner he was turning past and flinging rubble against his body. He couldn’t let that stop him, though; after all, five hired mercenaries, known officially as the police, were seeking his life.

“I told you it was a dumbass idea to fuck with the corpos again, Jarvis!” He complained in between breaths, eyes darting around the street for the next avenue of escape.

“Sorry, man. Didn’t think they’d *actually* try to kill. I mean, seriously, is it my fault they’re being so overkill? We didn’t even take anything this time!” Jarvis’ semi-scrambled voice sounded through Kieran’s ear pod. “Take the right after this,” he ordered after a brief pause and a contemplative hum.

The street the pursuit had disrupted was a footroad teeming with activity. Vendors lined the streets in the cramped spaces between the indoor shops, LED advertising boards illuminating the area in a way which made street lamps unnecessary. Buildings stretched into the sky; if it weren’t for the barrier of smog which characterized the southern ends of the city, the sight would give anyone vertigo.

Kieran’s eyes scanned his surroundings, looking for the right turn his strange friend told him about. Roughly fifty meters, a break between the buildings shone on the alleyway —

“Hey, that goes to Dad’s place!” The protest came between breaths as he ran, and another shot flew past his head and into the awning of a nearby shop.

“Yeah, and it’s the only spot nearby where you can lay low. Just don’t get caught heading in.”

“Don’t you have any better ideas?”

“Nope.”

With a hiss, Kieran kept running. If it was the only spot to end this misadventure, he had to go. Weaving to the right of a haggard man, then to the left of a propositioning woman, and past a few others, he made his best effort to obscure himself in the crowd. He couldn’t look back, but there was no doubt his pursuers had made it on the street by then; made evident by the shopkeepers who had begun complaining for the millionth time about trouble on the street killing their businesses.

The idea of going to his father’s apartment was conflicting. He hadn’t gone there since the day the man died; not that he had any business there, anyway. The man was odd, to put it

generously. Spending all day holed up in his study doing god- knows- what.

Kieran pushed a passerby out of the way as he turned into the downtrodden alleyway. One could say the place had seen better days, but in truth, it had probably been in disrepair since the day it came to be. Tiny balconies jutted out from all sides, and the floor was moist with a mixture of leftover rain and miscellaneous fluids trapped in potholes and cracks in the pavement.

Twenty yards later, he found the side entrance to the apartment complex. The door opened for him, giving way to a concrete corridor which continued out of sight, illuminated by just a few hanging lamps. Probably for the better, to hide the mysterious stains on the walls and large assortment of garbage littered along the floor. A few paces down the hall was the elevator. He entered quickly after a check over his shoulder, and pressed the number for the twentieth floor.

After the short ride, and a walk down the old hallway, he'd arrived at the inconspicuous doorway of his destination. It was like any other in the area. A flat metal gate with a number lock and button on the right side. His eyes glanced around before he quickly dialed in the code. One. Three. Nine. Seven. Pound. He pushed *Enter*, and the door dragged against the metal frame as it opened to the left.

A wave of dust blew out of the entryway. Kieran made a makeshift visor out of his left hand before trespassing, shutting the door behind with a press of a button to his right. His arm hand traced the wall from the door button, finding the light switch to illuminate the hallway.

As light filled the room, he took in a sight he hadn't seen for a long time, though now it was covered in dust from a couple years of inoccupation. The only reason it wasn't yet pawned off was due to the very reason Kieran was there and the intervention of his dear friend. The main corridor was bare save for a metal coat rack mounted to the wall. The end of the short hallway opened up on the main room, a mix of a kitchen and bedroom. On one side was a door leading to the bathroom, while on the other was a door leading to his father's "workshop." It seemed more like a library to him than what his dad called it.

Kieran took a seat in the living room, breathing hard, a hand wiping the sweat from his brow. "So, how long do you think it'll be?" He asked the man in his ear.

"Not long. Don't think they have any dirt on you anyways." Jarvis replied. "You're not worth the chase anyways, eh?"

"Hey..." Kieran stared ahead as if he was looking at his friend. And it wasn't a satisfied look he gave. "I'll beat your ass next time I see you."

"Yeah, yeah, like you'd ever–" Jarvis' voice cut off. Kieran raised an eyebrow. It wasn't the most unusual point to stop speaking, but it sounded to him like his friend had more to say.

"What's up?"

"Nothing, nothing." Jarvis' voice came back with a slight self deprecating laugh. "Just thought I was going to say more, but nothing came to mind, you know?"

“Weird guy.” he responded with a little yawn. He’d been up all day doing errands for his group. “Anyways, just let me know when they’re coming. This place is kinda cramped.”

“Mhm”

Kicking his feet up on the couch, Kieran looked to the door down the hallway. There was smoke coming through the cracks.

Kieran didn’t have the time to process anything before the apartment door was sent flying past his head as he rolled off the couch, and out the window, probably onto the head of some poor pedestrian down below. Cloudy dust was sent flying all around the apartment, but Kieran could already tell what was going on by the bright yellow light shining through the entrance.

“Shit!”

Grabbing the small handgun from his belt, he held it up over the coffee table at the intruder.

“No need for that, kid.” The man said. A mechanical whirr and hard thud sounded from each step of his foot. This wasn’t any normal police officer – it was what people in Kieran’s circles called *Terms*, short for Terminators. Officers fitted with modifications which made killing them with normal means pretty much impossible. Limbs were replaced by prosthetics which made them seem like human-sized mechas, all kinds of sensors to track anybody down, and an assortment of weapons which suited any situation. This particular one had a metal skull on top of all that. Kieran wasn’t even sure if he had a single bit of exposed tissue.

That piece of shit! It didn’t take much for him to put two and two together. That his ally had turned on him for some reason. Probably a sizable lump sum, or a temporary truce with the police. Regardless, he was on his own for now. In a space as small as an apartment, he had been set up in a perfect mouse trap.

His mind recalled the floor plan while his eyes scanned the area. The officer was still in the entry hall, while he had the kitchen counter and bed to his right, and the study to his left. Making the choice in an instant, he leapt over the coffee table and into the workshop, slamming the door behind him and bracing a simple wood chair against the handle. Though he knew in his heart that it wasn’t even a half measure to prevent the entrance of the assailant.

The room was the same as he remembered it from the last time he’d entered, a while before his old man died when he’d just left school to learn the ropes of his current business. His father wasn’t mad, or disappointed. However, he brought Kieran in the room while giving him a lecture, sitting behind the simply drawn wood desk and Kieran on the chair he’d just braced against the door for its assured destruction. His memories didn’t hold much of the event at the moment, as he was mostly fidgeting with a pen while distracted, and he was currently a bit too wound up to spend any effort recalling them.

Kieran was proven correct in his doubt in the rigidity of his precautions the instant he set himself up behind the desk. A steel fist punched through the aluminium door, followed by a second one, joining the first in pulling it far enough apart to reach through and twist the lock.

“Come on kid, you’re done.” The man said as he opened the door calmly, kicking the chair to the side. At least it didn’t break, though Kieran might not live long enough to appreciate that fact.

“Was it Jarvis?” He asked, gritting his teeth with an expression between anger and acceptance while bracing his pistol over the desk.

“Who? I just got pinged.” The terminator leaned against the door with a hand, the frame cracking slightly under the pressure. His posture was too casual, as if he’d done this a million times and this was just another clean up job. “I mean, maybe it was whoever you’re thinking of. We get rats all the time. Money, pardons, or just because they want their get back.”

Kieran’s eyes looked around the room. He had three rows of bookshelves on the right, and the mysterious table laden with bottles of mysterious fluids and papers with alchemic symbols etched on. It wasn’t much of a plan, what he had in mind, but he wasn’t going to let this guy take him without a proper fight.

His hand reached to his pocket, where he kept a grey ball for these kinds of scenarios, and threw it to the roof. With a clang, it broke open, instantly filling the room with dark grey smoke. While the terminator was busy making sense of the new development, Kieran vaulted over the side of the desk and into the bookshelves.

“Nice trick, boy.” He heard from the attacker, who seemed to already know where he ran off to. Of course, these kinds of cops were equipped with heat seeking eyes as well.

Though, Kieran didn’t dare to answer. He knew there had to be some degree of failure, or a corruption from the smoke which clouded the heat vision, as the man moved to the middle aisle rather than the one to the doors’ side, where Kieran was.

He stayed facing the shelf, waiting. The steps from the terminator slowly marched through the smoke, each mechanical limb landing with a hard thud against the concrete floor. Finally, when his opponent reached the middle of the aisle, he raised his arms, pushing with all his might against the top of the shelf to topple it. He picked this side for a reason. The books on the top seemed more plentiful and full.

The structure came crashing down on the terminator. Of course, this wasn’t expected to take the man out, but rather to slow him. Unfortunately for Kieran, it did neither.

“Found you!” He exclaimed as he thrust his fist through the shelf, catching Kieran on his legs as he tried to leap out of the way. The door was so close, he could almost reach it, but, alas, there was no escape in his current position.

“Nice try, but...” the terminator approached into view, walking through the rubble and the everpresent smoke.

“Fuck you.” Kieran held a bitter look to his eyes as he lay against the wall, a mix of contempt for his misfortune and the betrayal he’d suffered.

The terminator shrugged his shoulders as he raised his arm, a watch shaped firearm on his wrist. It wasn't unusual for his targets to act like this, after all.

However, as his arm reached eye level with Kieran and before he could lower his hand to give headway to his weapon, a sudden burst of light shone from amongst the pile of books behind the terminator.

An uncountable amount of blue light beams began spinning around the room, accompanied by a swirl of mist which made the books form a tornado around a single page of a book Kieran hadn't seen before.

Unknown to him, the book which all the others swirled around was a mystic code in its own right, with a summoning circle etched onto the open page. As his eyes finally focused back onto the scene, a burst of energy emerged from the book, knocking even the terminator off balance.

"What the fuck is that..?" The terminator rubbed his eyes in confusion at what was happening. Though he came to kill Kieran, what was going on now was far more interesting.

The mix of his smoke bomb and the mist from the books made it hard to discern, however Kieran was certain of seeing the shape of a person. His doubts were nulled when she stepped forward. A pale woman dressed in a cream tunic and brown pants, covered partially by armor plating in select areas and a dark green cloak which waved in the wind. Her deep red hair free of any binding danced around as she exited the mist, standing in front of Kieran, the short sword she held in her right hand pointed to the floor.

"Are you the Master who summoned me?" She asked, her lime eyes locking on her target.

Kieran wasn't sure what she was talking about, but something about her made him think that the right answer was yes, for a variety of reasons he couldn't describe at the time. He simply nodded his head. After all, he didn't think he was lying, if his intuition based on the limited parting knowledge his father had given him was right.

"Then the contract is settled." She said plainly as she turned her face to the terminator. "Are you the one challenging my Master?" Her question didn't hold any particular tone. Just a question, as if there was no tension to the situation.

"Hah. What the hell, sure." The terminator answered with a slight laugh to himself at the absurdity of the situation. After all, a woman had appeared out of nowhere, dressed in medieval clothes and holding a sword. He had no concern.

Unfortunately for him, he should've been more on guard, or answered the opposite. Before he could set himself into a combative pose, the woman's sword had already crossed his heart, and she was standing behind him, knocking the butt of her sword into his back to push his body to the ground.

"Who... are you?" Kieran looked stunned. He was still on the floor, palm on the floor to sit up. He hadn't even managed to try and stand between her asking him the question and the terminator being dispatched.

“I’m Saber, at your service.” She said as she sheathed her sword on her side. “Are you not aware of your situation?”

“No..?”

She sighed slightly. It seemed she didn’t want it to be too apparent. “I’ll tell you. Once we’re out of this place.” She glanced down to the terminator. “By the looks of it, this man isn’t the only danger we’d face staying here.”

She didn’t waste a moment of time as she grabbed Kieran. “Your legs are injured.” She stated as she lifted him over her shoulder. Before he could retort, she moved to the general room, and leapt through the window, latching onto the tiny smoking balcony to launch herself to the rooftop, and into the smoky night of the city.

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