

Sentry

By CountingIvory

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When the Erics are brought to a nervous-racked town, their mission goes wrong and they spot a girl hurriedly attempting to leave the crowd. What is she doing, and why does she seem to pop up every time they get into serious trouble?

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1 - Firefighting

“Fullmetal, how many times have you failed in one year?”

“I wouldn’t know,” Ed replied, “With experience comes skill, I suppose,”

Roy sighed at the 13 year old boy, slapping down one of many disappointing manila folders to come.

“I’m becoming afraid to send you out on your own,” Roy sighed, rubbing his temples, “What would they say to me if I got the kid killed. . .”

“Rest assured, sir, I promise it won’t happen –“

“You said that last time, Fullmetal,”

“I did?”

Roy just nodded, “I’m almost thinking I need to give you two a bodyguard,”

Ed’s eyes widened, “With all due respect, sir, that’s crazy,”

Roy glared at him, “Are you questioning my authority, *Major?*”

Ed clenched his teeth, “Sir –“

“N-No, of course not, sir,” Al butted in before his brother could get angry, “He’s just a bit, uh, confident that we can do it on our own, and as the child prodigy, I suggest that you . . . maybe . . .”

“What, Alphonse?” Roy urged.

“Maybe . . . trust that instinct?”

Roy still wasn’t convinced. He stared at the two, beat-up brothers for a few moments.

There was no way he’d get them to cooperate.

Roy sighed, “Fine. You get one more chance, but then I’ll be sending someone,”

“Sir, what are the chances we’ll find the Philosopher’s Stone in one more go?”

“I’m not saying one more chance to fail, Fullmetal,” Roy explained, “Just don’t get yourself so beat up. If you die, I’ll have more paperwork,”

Ed stared at the Colonel for a moment, but then nodded, “Right,”

With that, he and Alphonse left.

"I'm beginning to hate that man," Ed sighed.

"Well, yeah, brother, he's irritating, but it's for our own good,"

Ed just sighed again. What he didn't know was that Roy was in his office, still scheming.

He wasn't planning on giving them "one more chance."

Chance was a gambler's game, anyhow.

He picked up the telephone and dialed a phone number, let it ring, and then waited for someone to answer.

"Yo, Lieutenant Havoc speakin',"

"Havoc, you know that new alchemist that came in about a month ago? The one that we've been using as more of a toy than a mercenary?"

"Colonel, don't you think that's kind of mean to say that?"

"Absolutely not, it's the truth," Roy replied, "Anyway; do you know where they are?"

"Somewhere around the city, getting a coffee,"

"When they return, tell me immediately,"

"Roger,"

"This place seems strange to me. . ."

"Yeah, I got that feeling, too,"

Ed and Al had arrived at a new town. It was dusty and the streets were deserted, but there were lights in windows and smoke coming from chimneys, signifying that people still lived there.

"I've got a bad feeling about this. . ." Ed mumbled.

Even though no one walked the streets, there were shops and buildings all around. There was even one multi-story building to their right.

"The Colonel said that there was a library in this town where we could possibly find some information on the Stone," Al said, "He also wanted us to look into some recent arson attacks,"

"I'm not here to find out about some lunatic with kerosene, I'm here to find the Stone,"

"Well, brother, being under the Colonel, we have to follow his orders,"

Ed groaned, "Yeah, I officially hate that guy,"

Al nodded understandingly, following his brother.

The people around the entire town seemed scared out of their minds. They were all nervous and jumpy, and when Ed and Al arrived at the giant library, the elderly woman at the service desk hid under the table.

Ed quirked an eyebrow, "What's up with these people?"

"There's been more than 20 arson attacks," Al rationalized, "They're probably all nervous that they'll get hit next. Probably makes them very untrusting towards strangers,"

"Whatever," Ed said, "Let's just find those books and look around. After we do some reading, we'll find out more about those attacks,"

"Okay,"

It took them three hours to find what? Nothing.

It was aggravating, to say the least. Ed had slammed down over 30 hard-cover books on that one mahogany table and swore he had left a dent. They had found random bits of information on the town, but nothing about the Stone. On geology and stones found around the town, yes, but nothing about the Stone they were looking for.

Ed kicked open the door of the library in aggravation as he and Al exited.

"Brother . . ."

"Why would he send us here if there was no good information?!"

"Well, it's not like he knew," Al mumbled.

The skies were dark by now, though neither brother had noticed.

"So, should we check out those attacks now?"

"Yeah, we --"

And that's when Ed noticed the sky.

"Well. . ." He said, "Do you think we could probably find some information inside?"

"I thought that was what we were doing anyway, but okay," Al said. He pointed to the large building that the brothers had spotted on their way in, "Apparently, according to one of those books, that's the center of this entire town. It's kind of like the Town Hall, but without a mayor. They keep all the most important information in there,"

"Alright, then, I guess we should check in there first,"

So, Ed and Al made their way into the building, to the service desk, and up four flights of stairs to a billing floor where they could find more information on the arson attacks in, of course, manila folders.

The room was blinding white with fluorescent lights beaming down from the ceilings. There were storage bins and file cabinets everywhere, and people were pushing around white carts filled with envelopes and folders, separating different documents into different bins and cabinets.

There was a single aisle that went straight down the middle of the room. It was devoid of any sort of piece of paper, person, or bin. It almost looked as though there wasn't even any dust on that one strip of floor. At the end of the aisle was a lone white desk, where a man sat, his hands folded, just waiting for someone to come up and ask him a question.

Al looked down at his brother, who just shrugged. They made their way down the longer-than-it-looked aisle to the desk. The entire time they walked, the man at the desk stared intently at them.

Ed got to the desk and stared at the suspicious man for a second before speaking awkwardly.

"Uh . . . hi," He said.

"What's your business here?" The man asked sharply, "We don't like strangers,"

"I noticed," Ed murmured, "I was sent from Central City under Roy Mustang. My brother and I are here to investigate the recent arson attacks,"

The man stared at him for another moment longer before nodding. He turned to a computer to his left and typed faster than Ed had ever seen someone type. He seemed to be typing more than just letters, too; just random symbols and numbers that meant nothing to the naked eye. He clicked here and there a few times before typing more, and then turned back to the brothers.

"Identification?"

"Excuse me?"

"I need identification that validates your position under the State's command,"

"You mean, like, an ID card?"

"ID stands for identification, yes,"

"Uh. . ." Ed stuttered, "I don't have an ID on me . . ."

"Then you'd best be on your way,"

"Wait!" Ed stopped him before he closed out of the file, "Does it have to be an ID card?"

"Sir, I don't even know your name. Anything that verifies that you are an officer under Fuhrer's King Bradley's bit and spur will qualify,"

Ed stuffed his hand into his pocket and pulled out the silver pocket watch. He showed it to the man, "Here,"

The man's eyes thinned for a moment, examining the pocket watch carefully. After a few moments of anticipation, he nodded for them to come behind the desk.

Edward and Alphonse went behind the desk at different sides as to get the same view and looked at the file on the man's computer. It was a lot of small text surrounded by gruesome photographs.

It wasn't like either of them were going to read it. They'd just ask questions.

"Have you noticed a pattern in the targets?" Ed asked.

The man shook his head, "Nothing obvious. None of us have really looked into it because we're all too scared to do it alone. That's when we phoned for someone from the State to come in and take a look,"

"Cowards," Ed coughed.

"Excuse me?"

"Nothing,"

"What were the last five attacks?" Alphonse asked.

"We used to have two libraries, you know," The man sighed, "The other was destroyed not too long ago by the arsonists. Before that, it was a bookshop, a school, a laboratory, and a popular restaurant,"

Alphonse was beginning to find a trend, "Was there any suspicious activity at the restaurant before it was attacked?"

The man closed his eyes and nodded, "Yes, there was. People were spreading a rumor that the chefs were experimenting with some kind of weird chemical or mineral behind the kitchen doors. It made the food taste great, yes, but afterward, people experienced strange side effects,"

"Like what?" Ed asked.

"Supernatural attributes," The man answered, "Some of them said they could pick up heavy loads like they never could before, others said that they had flown for a split second, and some claimed to have even escaped death once or twice,"

The brothers looked at each other.

"What was the date when the restaurant was attacked?" Al asked.

"I think it was September 7th," The man answered blankly.

"What about the others?"

The man thought for a moment, "The lab was on October 7th, the school on November 7th, the bookshop on December 7th and the second library on January 7th,"

They're each a month apart Ed thought, *just enough to get everyone so on edge that they can't do anything about the next attack.*

Then he remembered that the building he was standing in was a sufficient source of the same information.

He stayed calm to continue the interrogation.

He spotted the clock at the bottom of the computer. It said 8:58.

"What time were the targets attacked?"

"Each of them were attacked at 9:00 P.M."

"Are there any other buildings in this town that have looked suspicious or are sources of a large amount of information?"

"In terms of suspiciousness, no. The library has a lot of books, but all of the information in there is just scattered pieces of, well, nothing,"

"So this is the only building left in town that provides a large amount of relevant information?"

"Yes,"

Ed immediately turned to Alphonse, his heart pounding, "Al, what's the date today?"

Alphonse had come to the same realization, "February 7th."

Just as he finished, the power went out.

A few moments later, the room had been illuminated once again, but not in a way that made any of the inhabitants hopeful.

There was a large, red, caged alarm light that hung on the wall near the clock. It had lit up the room when it started going off, along with a deafening siren.

"You're all idiots!" Ed yelled, realizing what was happening.

"Everyone, get out!" Al yelled as he herded people out the door, "Whatever you do, don't take the elevator, and get down the stairs as fast as possible,"

A hunk of the ceiling suddenly fell down and hit the floor. There was a large hole above them, which further illuminated the room.

The flight above them was on fire.

The hunk of ceiling that had fallen, also being the floor of the flight above, was flaming. As people ran out the doors, they created such a ruckus that papers flew in the air and floated to the fire, catching on fire.

In a minute or two, once everyone had been safely evacuated, Edward and Alphonse were the only two people left. The room was completely ablaze, and all the exits were blocked.

"Are we gonna die, brother?!" Al asked nervously, looking around for an escape.

"No, Al, we're not!" Ed snapped, trying every way to get out. He even stomped on the floor, trying to break it and get out. The doors were blockaded with hunks of plaster and stone that had fallen and were too heavy to lift.

"Al, the windows!"

Most of the windows were blockaded, like the doors, but there were three that were still open. Ed ran over to one of them, relieved to have finally found a plausible exit.

It wouldn't open.

"What?!" He cried.

"The others won't open, either!" Al yelled.

"They sealed them closed?!" Ed cried in astonishment.

Ed could see that firemen had already arrived on the scene. They were outside, and water was pattering against the window. He started slamming his hand into the glass, but it wasn't glass. It was some stronger material, and it didn't make a loud enough sound, and it wouldn't break.

Even if they had heard the faint pounding, they wouldn't have seen anything. The room had filled up

with so much black smoke that nothing could be seen from the inside. Ed had been trying to not breathe it in, but he needed air and gasped in the deadly gas.

"Brother, don't breathe in the smoke!" Alphonse yelled, running over to his brother.

"Al, what are we gonna do?" Ed coughed.

Al hesitated. "I don't know. . ."

And then, the glass smashed.

Both Ed and Al looked up in surprise, wondering what broke the glass. They were suddenly surprised when they saw the gloved hand of a firefighter standing on the turntable ladder of a fire truck below.

"Get out!" The man yelled, gesturing for either Edward or Alphonse to grab his hand.

Edward was astonished that the firefighters had been able to see them from such a high floor, and through all the smoke. His revelations were broken when he realized that he needed to get out of the smoke, and fast.

"Come on, hurry up!" The firefighter snapped as he grabbed Ed's hand and pulled him onto the platform. Alphonse followed as they escaped the burning hellhole.

As the ladder was lowered back down to the engine and to a crowd of applauding citizens, Ed spotted a woman leaving the crowd quickly, obviously wanting to get away from something.

"How did you know we were up there?" He asked the fireman.

"There was a woman here a little while ago. She probably left already, because I don't see her anywhere, but somehow, she knew exactly where you two were,"

Ed narrowed his eyes. It sounded suspicious to him.

"Do you remember what she looked like?"

The firefighter quirked an eyebrow, "She wasn't too extraordinary. Had some nasty looking black hair and creepy eyes; the left one was dark blue, but right was a lighter blue. She was a bit taller than you, I'd bet, and had this dead serious expression during our entire conversation, even when I tried to crack a joke,"

"Well, maybe she was just worried," Al suggested.

"Then why would she just up and leave without seeing if we were okay?" Ed wondered aloud, and then shook his head, "I shouldn't be worrying about it. It's insignificant,"

"Well, if you see her around, make sure you thank her. It's pretty amazing that she actually spotted you two,"

Ed scoffed, "If events pan out like I think they will," He growled, "I just might have to smash her face in,"