

3 SPELLCASTERS AND A POLITICIAN *err arachnica*

chapter 1

the rivalry of the three wasn't new, but the tiny local election of the town of deerhorn, was what drew it out to the fullest.

Skullface and two-eyes were a rebellious pair. The former had a full face tattoo of a bony skull over his caramel skin, but he was clever, and also unwise. The latter had skin paler than even an albino, but his eyes were mismatched. He was wise, dangerously so in fact. They passed around the area to various towns, getting by with magic shows and busking, at fairs, carnivals, and circuses. They would read fortunes and make doves vanish for a week or two, earn their fair keep, and drink it all away in an incident that would get them thrown out of town. And then, they would hitchhike to another small logging town in the middle of nowhere. The process would repeat.

Crystal was not of the same cut as what they were. Deerhorn was a town like any other town in this place, but she knew every way in which it was unique, given she that was born there. Her shop sold gems, crystals, incense and other new age bullshit. Even she had a low opinion of some of the customers that she served. no amount of sandalwood or spices could cure bad personality and being, limited was the word she used. It was something different, harder to learn. She was overall, an elitist without knowing it herself. it had been part of the reason her old friends, skullface and two-eyes, had given up on ever reasoning with her.

Close to two or three decades ago now, all three of them had done something in a dark forest grove one night, when they were all young. A thing that involved a knife, and blood from ones hand freely given. it had given all three of them considerable power. Their friendship had hardly survived another year. They were rivals now, even skullface and two-eyes didn't trust each other fully. That conflict might have laid dormant, and not harmed anyone. If only.

It didn't stay dormant, unfortunately. Everything just gets so complicated when politics gets involved.

Mayor elcline had no idea how to get re-elected this time around. Moonlight streamed through the windows, leaving his table lamp the only source of light.

He sat in his office long after the staff had gone home, trying to nurse out his election campaign this year, which was doomed to fail. He had so far served two boring and unmentionable terms on the mayors seat. His pervasive neutrality got called not doing a damn thing, but it didn't create controversies at least. His critics, perhaps, were correct though in saying he really did nothing. He was a rubber-stamper, a signature signer. He stayed his course. Everything that could help a man get elected either thought him too boring, or was already blaring support for his competitor. He didn't even have a campaign manager now, after his old one had jumped ship to some other minor candidate.

His opponent, some purple skirt-suit wearing, soft-headed, gender studies degree type would have the town hosting drag queens within a year, he swore. But never on camera. The words were controversial after all, and that might create controversy.

His chain of thought was interrupted by someone loudly attempting to pick the door lock. Smoothly, he placed down his brandy glass, and pulled out a pistol from the desk drawer. The pair that walked in were unruly and odd, but he knew them on sight. “you two” the gray-haired mayor said flatly, leveling the pistol at them. Skullface and two-eyes were both local delinquents. Every single authority figure worth his salt in the region, knew their faces and names, and if they didn't, they soon would. Skullface leaned in, placed his hands on the desk, and easily said “my partner had a hunch you’d be here, and that you need help”.

Elkline didn't react, but flatly said “oh, right, you’re the fortune telling magicians. I guess it pays better than knocking off small-time gas stations, like you used to get up to”. Two-eyes appeared at skullface’s shoulder and said “nobody can prove anything in those cases”. The mayor grunted skeptically. He finally said “i don't need your help here, boys. you’ll just make things worse”. Skullface grinned and said “oh so you do need help?”. Elkline hadn't lowered the gun, but he curtly said “i need a campaign manager, not showmen”. Two-eyes raised one clever eyebrow. The mayor squinted, had a moment of thought, and ran back over the sentence he’d just uttered.

The mayor lowered the gun down, but kept it ready. he asked them “okay, tell me how you’d get me elected again, then”. They both grinned like foxes eating shit from a barbed wire fence.

Crystal adjusted a tiny electrical device, that featured a lot of colored quartz, suspended in a light metal frame. She tapped the numbered gauge wired roughly to it beside a battery pack, to jostle the needle, fuming at the read-out it gave her. She muttered “which one now?”. The device had been a long, and complicated project, but the frame picked up magic at a range that went up to three towns away, according to her calculations. Ever since last night, the sensor had told her that something was actively in the town, locking the gauges needle to its maximum all the while.

The night was cold and dark, but so was her duty to the town.

People sometimes giggled behind her back regarding how edgy she always was. When the goth scene said you were trying too hard, that was probably an earned accomplishment. She tried extremely hard though, because on her end, none of it was a joke.

She carefully put the contraption down, standing up to look at deerhorn from the grassy hill. The reading here was stronger next to town, then it had been from its edges in three other directions. Something was down there, roaming around in deerhorn right now. It couldn't have been many things, she reasoned. There was a few non-humans and a couple gods that might be in the area, but those left other signs she could at least find traces of. Just a reading like this could only mean another spellcaster, but she only knew of two that would trip the sensor this badly.

Things watched her from the edge of the forest. Inhuman things which had the opinion that crystal, the nice girl did keep them well-fed with her offerings. Hired help was what they were. She sang out at the trees, in a language forgotten to mankind, venting frustration in tactical command. Things, big and small, moved about in the underbrush.

A small neon sprite flitted through a gap in the bush. Something with hooves the size of a ten foot man, stomped down the underbrush, still unseen behind the bushes. Something slithered down the grass, alight with a pair of reddened glowing eyes. Something whispered by in the wind with a howl of faraway death. What looked like a dryad girl shot away deeper into the woods on double hinged legs.

Right by the magic reader, there lay what looked like an ancient bronze quadrocopter, binding forever in glass a single dead eye. At her command it whirred off into the sky above the town, leaving a faint sparkling trail of loose energy. The eye twitched now, alert like a hawk but still gray and dead.

“not them, dammit!” she cried aloud in frustration. The first step obviously, was to find out what the pair was up to now.

TO BE CONTINUED