1 The Left Hand

Witchcraft has its uses. The Sweetwater clan learned this early in its existence, and has passed the power and the secrets of witchcraft down through the generations of the family, forming the network of covens loosely labelled the Left Hand of the Clans. Secrecy is important to the Left Hand -- if your existence were ever discovered, your own people would cast you out of the Clans.

This is extremely frustrating, since most of your people are loyal to the Clans. At the very least, you have finally managed to arrange it so you can use your craft to aid in the war effort -- through the efforts of Iris, your representative to the Clasp, witchcraft has been legalized under Clasp control and for Clasp purposes. It isn't perfect, but it's better than nothing, and at least it's a foot in the door. The Left Hand has remained in hiding, though, as the solution only seems temporary. Hopefully, soon magic will be legalized for good, and you can stop living in fear of being discovered and exiled.

Iris has been the Left Hand's CovenQueen for seven years, having been given the post by her sister Seamist when Seamist made her way over to the Realm to start a new coven there. The Black Hand, as Seamist called her organization, was designed to infiltrate the Realm and spy on its activities, and when the Realm's desecration of the Shrine of Mishael served as the trigger to war between the two groups, the Black Hand turned to sabotage and assassination to aid the Clan's war effort.

The last message between the two covens occured a little less than five years ago, when Seamist mentioned she and her Hand were going to assassinate the Realm's Justiciar. They succeeded in this, although he was promptly replaced, but the Black Hand hasn't been heard from since.

Shortly after Seamist went out, Iris sent out two other witches, Ivory and Jade, on a similar infiltration mission. They, too, have disappeared, after sending back a message that they found their apprentices and were beginning to consolidate their forces -- and that one of their initiates was the son of Mint Sweetwater, who was the first of your sisters to be captured by the Iron Gauntlet and declared OutClan in decades. This was astounding - Mint (who hated her name, if memory serves, and preferred to go by Dreamer, your common family name...) and her father Mandrake were the ones indirectly responsible for the Clans and the Realm meeting when they were exiled into the Realm thirty-five years ago!

It would be ironic if "Dreamer's" son had become a warlock, working for the Clans. It was, after all, her exile that brought the Clanlands to the attention of the Realm traitor, Lord Soeth, who then triggered the first Realm-Clan war by slaughtering his own troops. And Soeth was in his own way responsible for the Left Hand sending out the Claw in the first place.

When the traitorous soldier entered the Clanlands, he met one of your younger sisters, Raven. They and a young thief ended up in a battle for their lives against the Iron Gauntlet, in the course of which Raven's healing witchcraft was discovered, and Soeth took advantage of this information to meet the Left Hand.

You were suspicious of this outsider, but you didn't expect him to betray you as fully or as effectively as he did. Not only did he steal one of your most precious and powerful treasures, a page of the supposedly lost and destroyed Tome of Chthon, he also drained a talisman of transport in teleporting away from your island. When he returned to the Clanlands, he was leading an army.

Raven left the Clans in search of him, and never returned, and when the war was over and his treachery discovered the Clans closed their borders. But the Left Hand's memory is longer than that of the Clasp, and when it was decided to open those borders again, it was the memory of Soeth's betrayal that led to the formation of the two daughter covens.

Regardless of the irony, after hearing about Mint Dreamer's son's recruitment you heard nothing more from the Claw. And by that time, the war had begun and you were incapable of devoting many of your energies to discover them. Worse yet, you were unable to affect the Realm with your own magics from within the Clans; the same effect that protects your brethren from Realm magic makes it extremely difficult to cast spells *from* the Clans. Since then, you have been reduced to functioning as seers and diviners -- even so, you are the best at the job.

A week ago, for example, Iris discovered that a Realm mage was planning an attack of some kind on the Clans, unauthorized by his government. With this advance warning, Cord Sweetwater, along with a number of his Army colleagues, defeated and chased him away before he could destroy whatever hope the two nations might have had for achieving peace.

Recently you have suffered a major blow. A ritual was scheduled to summon a low-ranking deva to use to spy on the Wizard's Conclave, in an attempt to decipher the reasons for the mad attack. It was a desperate move, certainly, but it seemed necessary. Unfortunately, something went wrong -- nearly half a dozen of your best people were destroyed in an explosion of magical energy, along with several other workers and innocent bystanders at Castle Clearstone at the time. The general assumption is that this was a Realm attack, but that doesn't ring quite right; the Realm should still be unable to cast its magic into the Clans. Perhaps something went wrong with the ritual... in any case, one survivor of the explosion, Spade Greystone, is currently on the Castle. Maybe he can shed some light on it.

Of course, between losing a major portion of your active witches and having another group of them stuck on the surface when the teleport platforms broke, there are currently very few of the Left Hand here on the Castle to deal with whatever problems might arise. In fact, there's really just two of you -- Iris and Krys. Cord is here, as well; although he isn't a witch he is affiliated with the Left Hand and is loyal to it. Between you, you're going to have to get at the root of a number of questions: what was the meaning of the Conclave's attack against the Clanlands? What was the nature of the spell the wizard you chased off was trying to cast? Is the Clasp in danger of another magical attack on the Castle? What happened during the informational ritual to cause the explosion? What was the eventual fate of the Black Hand and the Claw?

It seems that before those questions can realistically be answered, you'll need to find some help. You also need to decide whether or not to support the war against the Realm -- if you could somehow assure that witchcraft would remain legalized after the war was over, ending it would be ideal for your purposes, allowing you to return to your own affairs. Here, in the midst of political deliberations on all sides, you should be able to find some way to assure that.

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