

Kinktober Preview

Shhhhhh it's a secret.

There is context for this, but y'all just get a snippet. A LOT more to come.

According to the schedule, this one should go up in full on 4 October.

It's a busy night at the Antebordellum when you're finally hit by the card shark the city's been talking about. The speakeasies scattered on either side of the river aren't precisely a close-knit crowd willing to swap information about the house funds or potential miscreants out to profit off the underground blackjack tables, but drivers sometimes have loose lips. You've heard already that some out-of-towner has brawled with the bouncer at the Stormlamp over his winnings and won, just a week after Matchsticks got taken by the same vagabond.

You've kept your eye out for the sight of a new face, waiting for a sign of the man coming into your territory. You are vigilant; owning an establishment such as yours demands a great deal of attention and wiles, as well as a hefty bribe cache.

The problem is that you are just one man, and there is no one you trust enough to look over the incoming stock when it arrives. So it's you who tallies up bottles and barrels, checking against your ledger. With the volumes of illicit goods you're dealing with, this process takes time.

So, you miss the initial infiltration of the shark into your pond, and go about your usual business as the Antebordellum hums with chatter and music.

It feels like a normal evening in every sense. You watch over your new bartender to ensure they're accurate in volume and technique. Then, there are transactions to oversee at the back of the house, where people rent private rooms and private *time* with some people in your employ. After, you send someone to escort a pair of drunken women home; it's a business expense, making sure people get home after their merriment in your establishment, but it's preferable to setting them loose on the street to gaily blab about the Antebordellum to any passersby.

When you've handled that, you take to the corner of the bar and quietly fix a drink for yourself. Elderflower gin, syrup, and tonic.

Propping up the wall next to the liquor shelves, you survey the floor.

It's dark enough for the patrons to feel safe down here. Dim lights and deep shadows loosen tongues and wallets equally. The only illuminated spots are the musicians' stand, where white light glints off the brass and strings, and the card tables.

Gamblers can't be trusted with sympathetic light. You sip your drink, holding the rim of your glass with your fingertips as you make eye contact with each of your dealers. Staring at each in turn, you wait for them to notice and return your attention. It's a silent check in.

You manage it with three of the four dealers before your bartender sidles over to you. "Strider, sir, 'cuze me."

"Don't lean over the bar," you tell them curtly, watching them sink back on their heels, off the rich dark woodtop. "What?"

"Sorry, sir. Someone just requested a... a Green Sun? I-- I don't know that one."

A Green Sun. You have an encyclopedic knowledge of any subject you give a half damn about, and liquor is your business. The name doesn't ring a bell. "Not a drink in this town. Get them something else."

The bartender looks *queasy*. "Are you certain you've not heard tale of it, sir?"

"It might be some regional drink. Why? What's the problem?"

They lean on the bartop again, lowering their voice. "This gent, he said it's his favorite, sir. Absolutely had to have it. He paid with a tenner, sir."

The most expensive tall drink on your menu was eighty cents.

This wasn't a drink order, it was a challenge.

"Who did it? Don't point. Tell me."

They tell you. It's someone at the blackjack table.

There's a lot of people here tonight. Plenty of regulars and a fair number of guests. The last thing you want is to make a scene. This needs to be handled carefully.

You take off your coat and hang it up on the hook next to the bartender's, then roll up your sleeves, snapping one of the spare black garters around each arm.

There's no one in the Grey City that ever left the Antebordellum unsatisfied with the drinks, and that isn't going to change today. So, you pick up a coupe, look over your options, and pour.

On a round tray, you place your concoction as well as another elderflower drink. You have a feeling you might need it.

The blackjack table is one of two you have. As you make your way towards it, you see a woman you vaguely recognize as a regular seated next to the stranger. You don't make it to the table before the woman gathers her bag and mink stole, glaring viciously at the stranger before storming away.

You are close enough to hear a low whistle, and the stranger leans back in his chair. Across from him, the dealer stares at him, then over his shoulder at you, eyes a little wild and plenty nervous.

"Tell you what, I was under the impression this quaint little basement had a surplus of spirits, what's it take for a fellow to get a pour?" he says, and he's not from the city at all, you don't know where he's from with a wandering accent like that, but he's not from *here*.

"Take a break," you tell the dealer as you reach the table.

Like a bullet from the chamber, the young lady bolts, essentially fleeing from the cards.

Circling the table, you set down the tray, keeping your eyes on your hands as you rest it on the black felt. Only then do you sit down, across from the stranger, and face him.

His elbows are on the table, and there are cards left between you. He has perfect blackjack while you have bust. He also has several stacks of chips, striped white and grey.

He grins at you, making crows feet leap out from the corners of his eyes. "Well, aloha. You are not just that poor card-shuffler's relief."

"No," you tell him curtly, and place his drink in front of him.

It's as green as his eyes, and your best approximation of his request: absinthe, soda, and a sugar cube sitting at the bottom. The cube is starting to lose shape around the corners, giving a fair approximation of a bright center to the drink.

He flashes a grin at you. "Oh, you are not the average gin mill, are you? This looks a treat compared to all the glasses of bubbles and mint I've been given at the other booze shelters." He lifts it to you. "Cheers! Pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr...?"

"Strider. Owner of the booze shelter." You toast him in return, then take a swallow of your drink.

He does the same, and his eyes light up in plain faced glee. "Well, you know how to mix a cocktail, Strider, I'll tell you that for free."

For a man sitting in front of the owner of the place he's trying to pull a fast one on, he doesn't look nervous. It's an even match then, as you don't so much as blink as he starts to turn chips over the backs of his fingers, showy and smug, his grin fixed firmly in place.

Setting your glass aside, you gather up the cards and start to shuffle them idly. "My dealers are trained to raise alarm if anyone starts to pull in too many good hands. How'd you manage this?"

"Oh this?" He looks adoringly at his pile of chips, as if it were a beloved pet or prized possession. "I mean, I didn't drag this out of *one* dealer, see, I hung around until the first one started to give me some looks, then excused myself for some floor flushing-- the music you've got here is the absolute jams, by the by-- then settled down at the next one. It takes a bit and is a little tedious, having to flit about 'til the suspicions gone, but..." He gestures at his chips proudly.

Goddammit. "Clever," you tell him mildly.

"Thank you! The other places didn't think so. It's not the simplest trick to pull, you know."

"How much have you accrued?"

"Oh, I'm not at all sure. Hang on a mo', I'll count the kitty." He starts counting out chips into ten-stacks. He's not very quick at it, taking too much time to stand them neatly up. In the meantime, you count for yourself.

Three forty. Jesus fucking Christ.

He stills, apparently seeing something in your face, and abandons his tower building. "Seems you're faster than me."

Not in the ways that counted. You grimace and spread out the cards in a fan across the table. Tipping one side of the fan on your finger, you flip it, and watch every card flip to back-side up, green curls of ornate ivy in heavy print gleaming up at you.

The stranger takes a swig of his drink, and makes a face. Which, of course; it's not exactly the sort of cocktail you *swig*. "What're you thinking there, compadre?"

"Weighing options," you tell him coolly. "Throwing someone out of the place looks bad, word gets around, fewer people want to come in." You flip the cards back the other way. "Losing several days of sales to a card counter who snuck into my tables also looks bad."

"Hey, now, you're already hopping ahead there!" His arm curls protectively around his chips. "Don't catastrophize anything just yet, Strider. I'm a reasonable man, maybe we can come to an arrangement."

🔒 31 flavors of green, fic

6 Likes

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