



Tinderbox

W. A. Simpson

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W. A. Simpson's fantasy novel *Tinderbox* invokes magical powers and the possessive motives of the ruling elite.

Isbet returns home and finds that her grandmother, a powerful witch, has been killed, and the killer stole the Box, a powerful item that can summon three hounds of immeasurable power. Meanwhile, in the kingdom of Rhyvirand, Prince Bram oversees a ceremony in which a young prince is transferred to the service of King Wilhelm. Bram is keen to protect the boy, having been kidnapped himself after Wilhelm murdered his own father, the king of Tamrath. As an outsider, Bram faces pressing dilemmas: whether to betray his brother to prove his loyalty to Wilhelm; whether to fight for the greater good. Both he and Isbet are motivated by vengeance and self-preservation.

Supernatural beings, including Isbet's soul-eating staff, Gaemyr, add a mischievous, entertaining twist to this world that's dominated by religion, politics, and gendered rules. Isbet and Bram are on opposite sides of this division—until they realize that the Celestial Vine, the source of all magical power, has begun to grow. Many factions seek to abuse its power—snakelike creatures called naga and humans among them.

The duo's descent into the Underneath, a secret society where all manner of magical creatures dwell, introduces malicious Serval, whose lecherous desires for Bram reveal the thorny politics of the Underneath—and Isbet's and Bram's place in it. Battling magical beasts and his own insecurities, Bram frets over Wilhelm's dominion over him and his own helplessness; and as one of the Gifted, Isbet is torn between her desire to avenge her grandmother, her duty to the Celestial Vine, and her growing affection for Bram.

Tinderbox is a riveting tale about personal strength and hidden magic.

ALI ORTIZ (July / August 2022)

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