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Politics is a dangerous sport for heroes...

DEVIL TAKE THE HINDMOST



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the Hindmost

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藏书章

The Hollow Men

Every city has its favourite blood sports. Some cities prefer the traditional cruelties of bearbaiting or cockfights, while others indulge their baser appetites with gladiators and arenas. The city port of Haven gets its thrills from the dirtiest, bloodiest sport of all: politics.

It was election time in Haven, and the shutters were going up all over town. It was a time for banners and parades, speeches, and festivities, and the occasional, good old-fashioned riot. The streets were packed with excited crowds, pickpockets and cutpurses were having the time of their lives, and the taverns were making money hand over fist. Work in the city slowed to a standstill as everyone got caught up in election fever. Everyone except the Guards, who were working double shifts in an increasingly vain attempt to keep Haven from turning into a war zone.

It was autumn in Haven, and the weather was at its most civilised. The days were comfortably warm, and the nights delightfully cool. There was a constant breeze from off the ocean, and it rained just often enough to make people grateful for the times when it didn't. Just the kind of weather to make a man dissatisfied with his lot, and determined to get out and enjoy the weather while it lasted. Which meant there were even more people out on the streets than was usual for an election. The smart money was betting on a complete break-

down of law and order by mid-afternoon. Luckily the city only allowed twenty-four hours for electioneering. Anything more than that was begging for trouble. Not to mention civil war.

Hawk and Fisher, husband and wife and Captains in the city Guard, strolled unhurriedly down Market Street, and the bustling crowds parted quickly before them. Patience tended to be in short supply and tempers flared quickly around election time, but no one in Haven, drunk or sober, was stupid enough to upset Hawk and Fisher. There were quicker and less painful ways to commit suicide.

Hawk was tall and dark, but no longer handsome. A series of old scars ran down the right side of his face, pale against the tanned skin, and a black silk patch covered his right eye. He wore a simple white cotton shirt and trousers, and the traditional black cloak of the Guards. Normally he didn't bother with the cloak. It got in the way during fights. But with so many strangers come to town for the election, the cloak served as a badge of authority, so he wore it all the time now, with little grace and even less style. Hawk always looked a little on the scruffy side, and his boots in particular were old and battered, but a keen eye might have noticed that they had once been of very superior quality and workmanship. There were many rumours about Hawk's background, usually to do with whether or not his parents had been married, but no one knew anything for sure. The man's past was a mystery, and he liked it that way.

On the whole, he didn't look like much. He was lean and wiry rather than muscular, and beginning to build a stomach. He wore his dark hair at shoulder length, in defiance of fashion, swept back from his forehead and tied with a silver clasp. He had only just turned thirty, but already there were thick streaks of grey in his hair. At first glance he looked like just another bravo, past his prime and going to seed. But few people stopped at the first glance. There was something about Hawk, something in the scarred face and single cold eye that gave even the drunkest hardcase, pause for thought. On his right hip Hawk carried a short-handled axe instead of a sword.

He was very good with an axe. He'd had plenty of practice, down the years.

Isobel Fisher walked at Hawk's side, echoing his pace and stance with the naturalness of long companionship. She was tall, easily six feet in height, and her long blond hair fell to her waist in a single thick plait, weighted at the tip with a polished steel ball. She was in her mid- to late-twenties, and handsome rather than beautiful. There was a rawboned harshness to her face that contrasted strongly with her deep blue eyes and generous mouth. Somewhere in her past something had scoured all the human weaknesses out of her, and it showed. Like Hawk, she wore a white cotton shirt and trousers, and the regulation black cloak. The shirt was half unbuttoned to show a generous amount of bosom, and her shirt sleeves were rolled up above her elbows, revealing arms corded with muscle and lined with old scars. Her boots were battered and scuffed and looked as though they hadn't been cleaned in years. Fisher wore a sword on her left hip, and her hand rested comfortably on the pommel.

Hawk and Fisher were known throughout Haven. Firstly, they were honest, which was in itself enough to mark them as unusual amongst Haven's overworked and underpaid Guards. And secondly, they kept the peace; whatever it took. Hawk and Fisher brought in the bad guys, dead or alive. Mostly dead.

People tended to be very law-abiding while Hawk and Fisher were around.

They made their way unhurriedly down Market Street, enjoying the early morning warmth, and keeping an eye on the street traders. The election crowds meant good pickings for the fast-food sellers, souvenir stalls, and back-alley conjurers with their cheap charms and amulets. Stalls lined the streets from one end to the other without a gap, varying from tatty affairs of wood and canvas to established family concerns with padded silk and beaded awnings. The clamour of the merchants was deafening, and the more tawdry the goods, the louder and more extravagant were the claims made on their behalf.

There were drink stands everywhere, competing with the

taverns by offering cheap spirits with the traditional sign: DRUNK FOR A PENNY; DEAD DRUNK FOR TUPPENCE. There was beer as well, for the less adventurously minded. That came free, courtesy of the Conservatives. On the whole, they preferred the electorate to be well the worse for drink on polling day. That way, they were either grateful enough to vote Conservative in the hope of more free booze, or too drunk to raise any real opposition. And since the populace was also usually too drunk to riot, the Guards liked it that way too.

Everywhere Hawk and Fisher looked there were more traders' stalls, crowding the streets and spilling into the alleyways. There were flags and fireworks and masks and all kinds of novelties for sale, every one of them guaranteed to be worth a damn sight less than what you paid for it. If you wanted more upmarket souvenirs, like delicate china and glassware tastefully engraved with designs and slogans from the election, then you had to go uptown to find them. The Northside might have been upmarket once, but if so, it was so long ago that no one could remember when. These days the Northside was the harshest, poorest, and most dangerous area in Haven. Which was why Hawk and Fisher got the job of patrolling it. Partly because they were the best, and everyone knew it, but mainly because they'd made just as many enemies inside the Guard as out. It was possible to be too honest, in Haven.

Hawk looked wistfully at a stall offering spiced sausage meat on wooden skewers. It looked quite appetising, if you ignored the flies. Fisher noticed his interest, and pulled him firmly away.

"No, Hawk; we don't know what kind of meat went into those sausages. You can't afford to spend the rest of the day squatting in the jakes with your trousers round your ankles."

Hawk laughed. "You're probably right, Isobel. It doesn't matter; if I remember correctly, there's a tavern down here on the right that does an excellent lobster dinner for two."

"It's too early for dinner."

"All right; we'll have a lobster lunch, then."

"You're eating too many snacks these days," said Fisher sternly. "It's a wonder you can still do up your sword belt."

"Everyone's entitled to a hobby," said Hawk.

They walked on in silence for a while, just looking around them, seeing what there was to be seen. People in the crowds waved and smiled, or ostentatiously ignored them. Hawk and Fisher gave them all the same polite nod, and walked on. They couldn't trust the smiles, and the rest didn't matter. Hawk's attention began to drift away. He'd been in Haven for five years now, and some days it seemed like fifty. He missed his homeland. He felt it most of all at autumn. Back in the Forest Kingdom, the leaves would be turning bronze and gold, and the whole sight and sound and smell of the Forest would be changing as the great trees prepared for winter. Hawk sighed quietly and turned his attention once again to the grimy stone houses and filthy cobbled streets of Haven. For better or worse, he was a city boy now.

Explosions shook the air ahead, and Hawk's hand went to his axe before he realised it was just more fireworks. The Haven electors were great ones for fireworks; the louder and more extravagant the better. Bright splashes of magically augmented colors burst across the sky, staining the clouds contrasting shades until they looked like a rather messy artist's pallet. There were several attempts at sign-writing in the sky, but they all got entangled with each other, producing only broken lines of gibberish. The various factions quickly grew bored, and began using the fireworks as ammunition against each other. There were shouts and yells and the occasional scream, but luckily the fireworks weren't powerful enough to do any real damage. Hawk and Fisher just looked the other way and let them get on with it. It kept the crowds amused.

Sudden movement up ahead caught Hawk's eye, and he increased his pace slightly. The crowd at the end of the street had turned away from the fireworks to watch something more interesting. Already there were cheers and catcalls.

"Sounds like trouble," said Hawk resignedly, drawing his axe.

"It does, doesn't it?" said Fisher, drawing her sword. "Let's go and make a nuisance of ourselves."

They pressed forward, and the crowd parted unwillingly before them, giving ground only because of the naked steel in the Guards' hands. Hawk frowned as he saw what had drawn the crowd's attention. At the intersection of two streets two rival gangs of posterers were fighting each other with fists, clubs, and anything else they could get their hands on. The crowd cheered both sides impartially, and hurried to lay bets on the outcome.

Since most of the electorate was barely literate, the main political parties couldn't rely on pamphlets or interviews in Haven's newspapers to get their message across. Instead, they trusted to open-air gatherings, broadsheet singers, and lots of posters. The posters tended to be simple affairs, bearing slogans or insults in very large type. COUNCILLOR HARDCASTLE DOES IT WITH TRADESMEN was a popular one at the moment, though whether that was a slogan or an insult was open to interpretation.

Posters could appear anywhere; on walls, shopfronts, or slow-moving passersby. A gang of posterers moving at full speed could slap posters up all over Haven in under two hours. Assuming the paste held out. And also assuming no one got in their way. Unfortunately, most gangs of posterers spent half their time tearing down or defacing posters put up by rival gangs. So when two gangs met, as was bound to happen on occasion, political rivalry tended to express itself through spirited exchanges and open mayhem, to the delight of whatever onlookers happened to be around at the time. Haven liked its politics simple and direct, and preferably brutal.

Hawk and Fisher stood at the front of the crowd and watched interestedly as the fight spilled back and forth across the cobbles. It was fairly amateurish, as fights went, with more pushing and shoving than actual fisticuffs. Hawk was minded to just wander off and let them get on with it. They weren't causing anyone else any trouble, and the crowd was too busy placing bets to get involved themselves. Besides, a good punch-up helped to take some of the pressure off. But then he saw knives gleaming in some of the posterers' hands, and he sighed regretfully. Knives changed everything.

He stepped forward into the fight, grabbed the nearest pos-

terer with a knife, and slammed him face first against the nearest wall. There was an echoing meaty thud, and the posterer slid unconscious to the ground. His erstwhile opponent rounded on Hawk, knife at the ready. Fisher knocked him cold with a single punch. Several of the fallen posterers' friends started forward, only to stop dead as they took in Hawk's nasty grin and the gleaming axe in his hand. Some turned to run, only to find Fisher had already moved to block their way, sword in hand. The few remaining fights quickly broke up as they realised something was wrong. The watching crowd began booing and catcalling at the Guards. Hawk glared at them, and they shut up. Hawk turned his attention back to the posterers.

"You know the rules," he said flatly. "No knives. Now, turn out your pockets, the lot of you. Come on, get on with it, or I'll have Fisher do it for you."

There was a sudden rush to see who could empty their pockets the quickest. A largish pile of knives, knuckle-dusters, and blackjacks formed on the cobbles. There were also a fair number of good-luck charms and trinkets, and one shrunken head on a string. Hawk looked at the posterers disgustedly.

"If you can't be trusted to play nicely, you won't be allowed to play at all. Understand? Now, get the hell out of here before I arrest the lot of you for loitering. One group goes North, the other goes South. And if I get any more trouble from any of you today, I'll send you home to your families in chutney jars. Now, move it!"

The posterers vanished, taking their wounded with them. Only a few crumpled posters scattered across the street remained to show they'd ever been there. Hawk kicked the pile of weapons into the gutter, and they disappeared down a storm drain. He and Fisher took turns glaring at the crowd until it broke up, and then they put away their weapons and continued their patrol.

"That was a nice punch of yours, Isobel."

"My strength is as the strength of ten, because my heart is pure."

“And because you wear a knuckle-duster under your glove.”

Fisher shrugged. “On the whole, I thought we handled that very diplomatically.”

Hawk raised an eyebrow. “Diplomatically?”

“Of course. We didn’t kill anyone, did we?”

Hawk smiled sourly. Fisher sniffed. “Look, Hawk, if we hadn’t stepped in when we did, the odds were that fight would have developed into a full-blown riot. And how many would we have had to kill to stop a riot in its tracks?” Fisher shook her head. “We’ve already had five riots since they announced the date of the election, and that was less than two days ago. Hawk, this city is going to the dogs.”

“How can you tell?” said Hawk, and Fisher snorted with laughter. Hawk smiled too, but there wasn’t much humour in it. “I don’t think that bunch had it in them to riot. It was taking them all their time to work up to a disturbance of the peace. We didn’t *have* to come down on them so hard.”

“Yes, we did.” Fisher gave Hawk a puzzled look. “This is Haven, remember? The most violent and uncivilised city in the Low Kingdoms. The only way we can hope to keep the lid on things here is by being harder than everyone else.”

“I’m not sure I believe that anymore.”

They walked a while in silence.

“This is to do with the Blackstone case, isn’t it?” said Fisher eventually.

“Yeah. That witch Visage might be alive today if she and Dorimant had talked to us in time. But they didn’t trust us. They kept their mouths shut because they were afraid of our reputation. Afraid of what we might do to them. We’ve spent too long in this city, Isobel. I don’t like what it’s done to us.”

Fisher took his arm in hers. “It’s not really that much different here than anywhere else, love. They’re just more open about it in Haven.”

Hawk sighed slowly. “Maybe you’re right. If we had arrested those posterers, I don’t know where we could have put them. The gaols are crammed full to bursting as it is.”

“And there’s still more than half a day to go before they

vote." Fisher shook her head slowly. "I don't know why they don't just have a civil war and be done with it."

Hawk smiled. "About forty years ago they did. The Reformers won that one, and the result was universal suffrage throughout the Low Kingdoms. These days, the lead-up to the elections acts as a safety valve. People are allowed to go a little crazy for a while. They get to let off some steam, and the city avoids the buildup of pressures that leads to civil wars. After the voting's over, the winners declare a general amnesty, everyone goes back to work, and things get back to normal again."

"Crazy," said Fisher. "Absolutely bloody crazy."

Hawk grinned. "That's Haven for you."

They walked on in companionable silence, pausing now and then to intimidate some would-be pickpocket, or caution a drunk who was getting too loud. The crowds bustled around them, singing and laughing and generally making the most of their semiofficial holiday. The air was full of the smell of spiced food and wine and burning catherine wheels. A band came marching down the street towards them, waving brightly colored banners and signing loudly the praises of Conservatism. Hawk and Fisher stood back to let them go by. A burly man wearing chain mail approached them, carrying a bludgeon in one hand and a collecting tin in the other. He took one look at their faces, thought better of it, and hurried after the parade. The crowd, meantime, showed its traditional appreciation of free speech by pelting the singers with rotten fruit and horse droppings. Hawk watched the banner holders disappear down the street with fixed smiles and gritted teeth, and wondered where the Conservatives had found enough idiots and would-be suicides to enter the Northside in the first place.

Nice banners, though.

"I'll be glad when this election nonsense is over," said Fisher as they started on their way again. "I haven't worked this hard in years. I don't think I've ever seen so many drunks and fights and street-corner rabble-rousers in my life. Or so many rigged games of chance, for that matter."

"Anyone in this city stupid enough to play Find the Lady

with a perfect stranger deserves everything that happens to him," said Hawk unfeelingly. "And when you get right down to it, things aren't that bad, actually. You're bound to get some fights during an election, but there's hardly anyone here wearing a sword or a knife. You know, Isobel, I'm almost enjoying myself. It's all so *fascinating*. I'd heard all the stories about past elections, but I never really believed them till now. This is democracy in action. The people deciding their own future."

Fisher sniffed disdainfully. "It'll all end in tears. The people can vote till they're blue in the face, but at the end of the day the same old faces will still be in power, and things will go on just as they always have done. Nothing ever really changes, Hawk. You should know that."

"It's different here," said Hawk stubbornly. "The Reform Cause has never been stronger. There's a real chance they could end up dominating the Haven Council this time, if they can just swing a few marginal Seats."

Fisher looked at him. "You've been studying up on this, haven't you?"

"Of course; it's important."

"No, it isn't. Not to us. Come tomorrow, the same thieves and pimps and loan sharks will still be doing business as usual in the Northside, no matter who wins your precious election. There'll still be sweatshops and protection rackets and back-alley murders. This is Haven's dumping ground, where the lowest of the low end up because they can't sink any further. Let the Council have its election. They'll still need us to clean up the mess afterwards."

Hawk looked at her. "You sound tired, lass."

Fisher shrugged quickly. "It's just been a bad day, that's all."

"Isobel . . ."

"Forget it, Hawk." Fisher shot him a sudden smile. "At least we'll never want for work, while the Northside still stands."

Hawk and Fisher turned down Martyrs' Alley, and made their way out onto the Harbourside Promenade. The market stalls quickly disappeared, replaced by elegant shop-fronts

with porticoed doors and fancy scrollwork round the windows, and an altogether better class of customers. The Promenade had been "discovered" by the Quality, and its fortunes had prospered accordingly. Of late it had become quite the done thing for the minor aristocracy to take the air on the Promenade, and enjoy a little fashionable slumming. There were goods for sale on the edge of the Northside to tempt even the most jaded palates, and it did no harm to a gentleman's reputation to be able to drop the odd roguish hint of secret dealings and watch the ladies blush prettily at the breath of scandal. Not that a gentleman ever went into the Northside alone, of course. Each member of the Quality had his own retinue of bodyguards, and they were always careful to be safely out of the Northside before dark.

But during the daylight hours the Promenade was an acknowledged meeting place for the more adventurous members of the Quality, and as such it attracted all kinds of well-dressed parasites and hangers-on. Scandal mongers did a busy trade in all the latest gossip, and confidence tricksters strolled elegantly down the Promenade, eyeing the Quality in much the same way as a cruising shark might observe a passing shoal of minnows. Hawk and Fisher knew most of them by sight, but made no move to interfere. If people were foolish enough to throw away good money on wild-sounding schemes, that was their business, and nothing to do with the Guards. Hawk and Fisher were just there to keep an eye on things, and see that no one stepped out of line.

For their part, the Quality ignored Hawk and Fisher. Guards were supposed to know their place, and Hawk and Fisher were notorious throughout Haven for not having the faintest idea of what their place was. In the past, members of the Quality who'd tried to put them in their place had been openly laughed at and, on occasion, severely manhandled. Which was perhaps yet another reason why Hawk and Fisher had spent the past five years patrolling the worst section of Haven.

The sun shone brightly over the Promenade, and the Quality blossomed under its warmth like so many eccentrically colored flowers. Youngsters wearing party colors hawked the latest editions of the Haven newspapers, carrying yet more

details of candidates' backgrounds, foul-ups, and rumoured sexual preferences. A boys' brigade of pipes and drums made its way along the Promenade, following a gorgeously colored Conservative banner. The Conservatives believed in starting them young. Hawk stopped for a while to enjoy the music, but Fisher soon grew bored, so they moved off again. They left the bustling Promenade behind them, and made their way through the elegant houses and well-guarded establishments of Cheape Side, where the lower merchant classes held sway. They'd been attracted to the edge of the Northside by cheap property prices, and were slowly making their mark on the area.

The streets were reasonably clean, and the passersby were soberly dressed. The houses stood back from the street itself, protected by high stone walls and iron railings. And a fair sprinkling of armed guards, of course. The real Northside wasn't that far away. This was usually a quiet, even reserved area, but not even the merchant classes were immune to election fever. Everywhere you looked there were posters and broadsheet singers, and street-corner orators explaining how to cure all Haven's ills without raising property taxes.

Hawk and Fisher stopped suddenly as the sound of a gong resonated loudly in their heads. The sound died quickly away, to be replaced by the dry, acid voice of the Guard communications sorcerer:

Captains Hawk and Fisher, you are to report immediately to Reform candidate James Adamant, at his campaign headquarters in Market Faire. You have been assigned to protect him and his staff for the duration of the election.

A map showing the headquarters' location burned briefly in their minds, and then it and the disembodied voice were gone. Hawk shook his head gingerly. "I wish he wouldn't use that bloody gong; it goes right through me."

"They could do without the sorcerer entirely, as far as I'm concerned," said Fisher feelingly. "I don't like the idea of magic-users having access to my mind."

"It's just part of the job, lass."

"What was wrong with the old system of runners with messages?"

Hawk grinned. "We got too good at avoiding them."

Fisher had to smile. They made their way unhurriedly through Cheape Side and on into the maze of interconnecting alleyways popularly referred to as The Shambles. It was one of the oldest parts of the city, constantly due for renovation but somehow always overlooked when the budget came round. It had a certain faded charm, if you could ignore the cripples and beggars who lined the filthy streets. The Shambles was no poorer than anywhere else in the Northside, but it was perhaps more open about it. Shadowy figures disappeared silently into inconspicuous doorways as Hawk and Fisher approached.

"Adamant," said Fisher thoughtfully. "I know that name."

"You ought to," said Hawk. "A rising young star of the Reform Cause, by all accounts. He's contesting the High Steppes district, against a hardline Conservative Councillor. He might just take it. Councillor Hardcastle isn't what you'd call popular."

Fisher sniffed, unimpressed. "If Adamant's so important, how did he end up with us as his bodyguards?"

Hawk grunted unhappily. The last time he and Fisher had worked as bodyguards, everything had gone wrong. Councillor Blackstone had been murdered, despite their protection, and so had six other people. Important people. Hawk and Fisher had caught the killer eventually, but that hadn't been enough to save their reputation. They'd been in the doghouse with their superiors ever since. Not that Hawk or Fisher gave a damn. They blamed themselves more than their superiors ever could. They'd liked Blackstone.

"Well," said Fisher finally, "you've always said you wanted a chance to study an election close-up, to see how it worked. It looks like you've got your chance after all."

"Yeah," said Hawk. "Wait till you see Adamant in action, Isobel; he'll make a believer out of you."

"It'll all end in tears," said Fisher.

They were halfway down Lower Bridge Street, not far from the High Steppes boundary, when Hawk suddenly noticed how quiet it had become. It took him a while to realise, being

lost in his thoughts of actually working with a Reform candidate, so the quiet hit him all the harder when it finally caught his attention. At first everything looked normal. The usual stalls lined the street, and the crowds bustled back and forth, like any other day. But the sound of the crowd barely rose above a murmur. The stall-holders stood quietly in their places, waiting patiently for customers to come to them, instead of following their usual practice of shouting and harranguing until the air itself echoed from the noise. The crowd made its way from stall to stall with bowed heads and down-cast eyes. No one exclaimed at the prices, or browbeat the stall-holders, or tried to bargain for a lower price. And strangest and most unsettling of all, no one stopped to speak to anyone else. They just went from stall to stall, speaking only when they had to, in the lowest of voices, as though they were just going through the motions. Hawk slowed to a halt, and Fisher stopped beside him.

"Yeah," said Fisher. "I noticed it too. What the hell's going on here? I've been to livelier funerals."

Hawk grunted, his hand resting uneasily on the axe at his side. The more he studied the scene before him, the more unnerving it became. There were no street-corner orators, no broadsheet singers, and the few banners and posters in evidence flapped folornly in the drifting breeze, ignored by the crowd. There should have been street-conjurers and knife grinders and itinerent tinkers, and all the other human flotsam and jetsam that street markets attract. But there was only the crowd, quiet and passive, moving unhurriedly between the stalls. Hawk looked up and down the narrow street, and all around him the empty windows stared back like so many blank idiot eyes.

"Something's happened here," said Fisher. "Something bad."

"It can't be that bad," said Hawk. "We'd have heard something. News travels fast in Haven; bad news fastest of all."

Fisher shrugged. "Something still feels wrong. Very wrong."

Hawk nodded slowly in agreement. They started down the

street again, cloaks thrown back over their shoulders to leave their sword-arms free. The crowd made way before them, their heads averted so as not to meet the Guards' eyes. Their movements were slow and listless, and strangely synchronised, as though everyone on the street was moving in step with each other. The hackles began to stir on Hawk's neck. He glared about him, and then felt a sudden rush of relief as he spotted a familiar face.

Long Tom was a permanent fixture of Lower Bridge Street. Other stalls might come and go, but his was always there, selling the finest knives any man could wish for. He'd sell you anything from a kitchen knife to matched duelling daggers, but he specialised in military knives, in all their variations. Long Tom had lost both his legs in the army, and stomped around on a pair of sturdy wooden legs that added a good ten inches to his previous height. Hawk had gone to great pains to cultivate him. Long Tom always knew what was happening.

Hawk approached the stall with a friendly greeting on his lips, but the words died away unspoken as Long Tom raised his head to meet Hawk's gaze. For a moment Hawk thought a stranger had taken over the stall. The moment passed, and he quickly recognised the size and shape of the face before him, but still something was horribly wrong. Long Tom's eyes had always been a calm and peaceful blue; now they were dark and piercing. His mouth was turned down in a bitter, unfamiliar smile. He even held himself differently, as though his weight and figure had changed drastically overnight. They were small differences, and a stranger might not have noticed them, but Hawk wasn't fooled. He nodded casually to Long Tom, and moved off without saying anything.

"What was that all about?" said Fisher.

"Didn't you notice anything different about him?" said Hawk, looking unobtrusively about.

Fisher frowned. "He looked a bit off, but so what? Maybe he's had a lousy day too."

"It's more than that," said Hawk. "Look around you. Look at their faces."

The two Guards moved slowly through the quiet crowd,