



Libriomancer (preview)

By Jim C. Hines



Libriomancer

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Libriomancer

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Chapter 1

Some people would say it's a bad idea to bring a fire-spider into a public library. Those people would probably be right, but it was better than leaving him alone in the house for nine hours straight. The one time I tried, Smudge had expressed his displeasure by burning through the screen that covered his tank, burrowing into my laundry basket, and setting two weeks' worth of clothes ablaze.

The fire department had arrived in time to keep the whole place from burning. I remembered digging through the drenched, dripping mess my bedroom had become until I found Smudge huddled in a corner. With steam rising from his body, he had raced onto my shoulder and clung there as if terrified I was going to abandon him again. And then he bit my ear.

The four-inch spider was a memento of what I had left behind, one last piece of that other life. If magic were alcohol, Smudge would be both sobriety medallion and the one whiskey bottle I kept around as a reminder.

While at work, he stayed in a steel bird cage behind my desk, safely out of reach of small children. More importantly, it kept the small children safely out of Smudge's reach.

According to a series of tests I had run with an infrared thermometer, Smudge's flames could reach temperatures in excess of thirteen hundred degrees, roughly the same as your average Bunsen burner. I suspected he could get hotter, but since he only burst into flame when scared or threatened, it seemed cruel to pursue that particular

research project.

Not to mention the fact that I was officially forbidden from doing magical research. My duties these days were much more straightforward.

I sighed and picked up the old bar code scanner. Age had yellowed the plastic grip, and the cord protruding from the handle was heavily reinforced with electrical tape. For the third time that afternoon, I played the red beam over the back of the latest Charlaine Harris novel.

The scanner's LED flashed green, and the computer emitted a cheerful beep as the screen populated with what should have been the details of Harris' fantasy mystery, a book our system insisted was actually *The Joy of Pickling II*, by Charlotte F. Pennyworth.

I tossed the useless scanner aside, cleared the record, and began manually entering the book's information into the Copper River Library database. Without the scanner, it took me a half hour to input the rest of the new books into the system.

When I finished the stack, I glanced around the library. Mrs. Trembath was two-finger typing at one of the public computer terminals, probably forwarding more inspirational cat photos to her grandchildren. Karen Beauchamp was huddled in a beanbag chair in the children's section, reading *The Color Purple*.

Karen's parents would be ticked to know she was reading books they hadn't personally approved. I made a mental note to save a nice, innocuous dust jacket Karen could wrap around the cover.

Aside from them, the library was empty. Traffic had been slow all afternoon, as people took advantage of the June sunshine.

I removed a fire opal pendant and set the orange stone on the center of the keyboard. The screen flickered, and a new window popped up on the screen. A simple circular logo showed an open book etched onto a medieval shield above the letters *DZP*.

This database had nothing to do with the Copper River Library. Having catalogued the new books for one library, it was time to do it all over again. I began with a book called *Heart of Stone*, a paranormal romance about a half-gorgon detective who got involved with a sexy mafia hitman. The story was nothing unusual, but the hitman wore enchanted sunglasses that allowed him to see magic and protected him from the detective's gaze. Those could be useful in the field. I entered the description and page numbers. The author also hinted that the half-gorgon's tears had aphrodisiac properties, and were potentially addictive. Something to watch for when the sequels came out.

One by one, I worked my way through the rest of the books.

Copper River was a small town, but we had the best science fiction and fantasy collection in the entire U.P. Not that Michigan's Upper Peninsula was the most populous place, but I'd match our catalog against any library in the state. I had read every one of the three thousand titles that strained the aging wooden shelves of our SF/F section.

Most of those books had been purchased through a grant from the Johannes Porter Institute for Literacy, one of the cover corporations for Die Zwelf Portenære. That grant paid most of my salary and kept the town well-stocked in speculative fiction. All I had to do to keep it was keep cataloging new books for the Porters.

Rather, that was all I was *permitted* to do.

"Hey, Mister V." Karen had lowered her book. "Is something wrong with Smudge?"

I turned around just as a piece of the pea-sized obsidian gravel that lined the bottom of Smudge's cage dropped to the tile floor. Smudge was pacing quick circles, and tendrils of smoke had begun to rise from his back.

I jumped to my feet and grabbed my worn canvas backpack from beneath the desk. Doing my best to hide the cage with my body, I pulled out a bag of Jelly Bellies and dropped one in beside the ceramic water dish nested in the gravel. "What's the matter, partner?"

Smudge ignored me and the candy both. Not good.

Mrs. Trembath sniffed the air. "Is something burning?"

I searched the library, trying to figure out who or what was making Smudge nervous. Neither Karen nor Mrs. Trembath struck me as dangerous, but I trusted Smudge's judgment over my own. His warnings had saved my life three times. Four if you counted that mess with the rabid jackalope. "Furnace trouble. I'm sorry, but I'll need to close the library until I can get someone in here to check it out."

Karen was leaning halfway over the desk, searching for the source of the smoke. I grabbed a paperback and gently swatted her back. "That means you, too."

"I wish my parents would let me have a tarantula," she grumbled as I escorted her toward the door. "If you ever need someone to watch him for you—"

"You'll be the first person I call." I thought back to the last time Karen's family had been here and quickly added, "*if* you promise not to use him to terrorize your little brother."

"I wouldn't," she said, eyes full of twelve-year-old mischief. "But if Smudge happened to escape into the bathroom while Bryan was

brushing his teeth . . .”

“Out.” I gave her one final, playful thwap with the book. Unfortunately, while I was shooing Karen out the door, Mrs. Trembath had limped over to the desk.

She pointed her aluminum cane at Smudge’s cage. “Isaac, your poor spider’s on fire!”

“He’s not—” Aw, crap. Red flames had begun to ripple over Smudge’s back. I hurried over and took Mrs. Trembath’s arm, but it’s hard to rush an eighty-three year old grandmother. I managed to get her moving toward the door, then returned to check on Smudge.

That was a mistake. Mrs. Trembath came back moments later. She had left her cane by the door, and her wrinkled face was taut with determination as she raised trembling arms and pointed a red fire extinguisher at Smudge’s cage.

“No!” I stepped in front of her as frigid air whooshed from the extinguisher’s nozzle like an icy jet engine. It shouldn’t hurt our books, but I had no idea what it would do to a fire-spider. I held my breath and squeezed my eyes shut. I heard books and paperwork flying behind me. The instant the stream died, I reached out blindly to yank the extinguisher away.

My eyes watered. I had to stop myself from rubbing them, which would only make the irritation worse. White powder covered my shirt and hands.

“He’s still burning!”

I glanced at Smudge. As the chemicals from the fire extinguisher dispersed, Smudge’s flames flared even higher, taking on an orange tinge. All eight eyes glared up at Mrs. Trembath with what I could only describe as pure arachnid loathing.

Mrs. Trembath returned to the doorway to fetch her cane, which she raised in both hands like a samurai sword. “At least put the poor thing out of his misery.”

“He’s not burning. He’s . . . bioluminescent.” I doubted Mrs. Trembath weighed more than a hundred pounds soaking wet, but she had raised five kids, and could probably take on an entire wolf pack through sheer cussedness. Unfortunately, the last time I had seen Smudge this spooked, the threat had been far worse than wolves.

“Isaac Vainio, you get out of my way and let me help that poor creature.”

Magic would have ended our standoff, but I was already pushing things by keeping Smudge. Even the smallest spell could get me hauled

down to Illinois to explain myself to Nicola Pallas, the Regional Master of the Porters.

Instead, I folded my arms and said, “Smudge is fine, but I *really* need to take care of the furnace situation.”

“He’s not fine, he’s—”

“Are you questioning my authority?” I widened my eyes, hamming it up as much as possible. In a faux-military voice, I asked, “Are you aware that section six point two of the Copper River Library user agreement gives me the authority to revoke your library card, *including internet privileges?*”

She lowered her cane. “You wouldn’t dare.”

I leaned closer and whispered, “A librarian’s gotta do what a librarian’s gotta do.”

We stared at one another for about five seconds before she cracked. With an amused chuckle, she jabbed a finger into my chest. “So why haven’t I ever seen him glow before?”

“Diet,” I said quickly. “He escaped last night and got outside. He must have gobbled down at least a dozen fireflies before I caught him.” I braced myself, praying she didn’t know enough about biochemistry to see through my rather weak excuse.

She backed down. “Maybe if you gave him real food instead of candy, he wouldn’t have to sneak out on his own.”

“He gets crickets at home.” I glanced around nervously as I walked her to the door. I still didn’t know what had set Smudge off, and the sooner I got Mrs. Trembath out of here, the safer she’d be.

“See you tomorrow afternoon?”

“I hope so.” Through the windows, I watched her make her way to the old blue SUV she affectionately referred to as the Rusty Hippo. As she pulled away, I spotted three people approaching the library. They were dressed far too warmly for June, even in the U.P. They kept their heads down and their hands in their pockets.

I locked the door, though if Smudge was right, that probably wouldn’t help. The trio stopped to study the address of the post office across the street. One reached into her pocket and pulled out a crumpled piece of paper. Her hand glittered like a disco ball in the afternoon sun as she scanned the buildings. She tugged her sleeve over her hand a second later, but that one glimpse was enough to identify them as *Sanguinarius Meyerii*, informally known as sparklers.

I returned to the desk. “You know, you’d be a lot more helpful if you could talk.”

Smudge continued running laps, flames flickering like tiny orange banners on his back. He was never wrong about danger, but he couldn't tell you if that danger was a meteorite streaking toward the roof or an amorous moose running amuck in the parking lot.

Or a trio of vampires.

I opened the cage door. Smudge scrambled out and immediately disappeared beneath the desk. "Careful," I said. "If you burn this place down, I'm out of a job."

Familiar adrenaline pounded through my limbs as I searched through the newly catalogued books from the cart. I might be forbidden from using magic in ordinary circumstances, but this definitely qualified as extraordinary. I grabbed Ann Crispin's latest book *Vulcan's Mirror*, an old-school space adventure set in a mirror universe, complete with evil goatees for everyone.

I didn't have an eidetic memory, but training and natural aptitude had put me pretty darn close. I flipped to chapter eight and skimmed to the scene where a lizardlike assassin was creeping down the corridor of his alien vessel, disruptor pistol in hand.

The author had described the scene in vivid detail: the hard, sharp-cornered metal of the weapon's grip, the low heat on the assassin's palm from the power source, the metallic blue sheen of the barrel as he sighted at a red-shirted security guard . . . detail after detail, each one painting the scene in the reader's mind. Making it *real*.

Libriomancy was in many ways a lazy man's magic. There were no wands, no fancy spells, no ancient incantations. No hand-waving or runes. Nothing but the words on the page, the collective belief of the readers, and the libriomancer's love of the story.

Love was the key to accessing that belief and power. And this series had been one of my favorites growing up.

My fingers traced the words, feeling the roughness of the paper, the curve of the page near the spine. My mouth was dry, and my heart pounded like I was a kid about to kiss a girl for the first time.

I thought back to the days when I had gone hunting with my brother and father. The slow, steady breathing as I lined up the sights of my rifle. Take a deep breath, exhale, and slowly squeeze the trigger.

My fingers slipped through the pages into another universe. I felt the hot, humid air of the ship on my skin. I flexed my hand, watching the movement of fingers that appeared to end at the knuckles.

I reached deeper until I touched the dry, scaly skin of the killer's arm. There was no true life in that alien flesh. This was merely the

manifestation of belief. Real or not, the assassin had a strong grip, and I had to tug and twist to free the weapon from his hand.

The disruptor was uncomfortably hot to the touch. It was large enough that I had to turn it sideways so it wouldn't catch on the edges of the book. As I withdrew my hand, magic and story became real. I now clutched a heavy blue-steel pistol with a thick grip and a barrel as long as my forearm. I slipped my finger through a trigger guard designed for digits the size of kielbasa and hid the weapon behind my back.

The library door slammed open, the oak frame splintering like balsa. Cold fear splashed over the excitement and wonder of magic, urging fight or flight.

Neither option was likely to work against sparklers.

I leaned against the desk, doing my best to appear unworried. "I'm sorry, the library's closed. Furnace trouble. If you could come back in the morning—"

"Isaac Vainio?"

So much for the faint hope that they weren't after me. The speaker was a teenaged girl, maybe fifteen years old. That was the age she had been turned, at any rate. She wore a bright orange hoodie and too much makeup. Short black hair poked from beneath her hood, and a red flannel scarf looped around her neck. An old backpack hung from her left shoulder. Her dull, red-black eyes never left mine.

Her companions were a burly brown-skinned man in flannel and a pale, middle-aged woman in an ankle-length raincoat. The raincoat was a bright floral pattern utterly at odds with the rage and hunger in her eyes. The man wore a Green Bay Packers cap, and looked like he had been custom carved to be a professional ass-kicker.

"That's me," I said, tapping the plastic badge clipped to my shirt pocket. White powder from the fire extinguisher mostly hid my slack-jawed photo. "What can I help you with?"

"Information and payback." She pushed back her hood and craned her head, as if searching to make sure I was alone. Her lips curled, revealing crooked teeth, and I wondered briefly if braces would have any effect on vampires. "You should be more careful in your choice of friends, Isaac."

I studied the trio more closely. I was certain I had never seen them before. Not locals, then. Relatively young, since Meyerii had only begun popping up back in 2005.

I had read pretty much every vampire book ever written in English, German, Spanish, and French. In recent years, authors had

whittled away many of the more monstrous vampiric traits. More to the point, they had eliminated many weaknesses as well. Going after Meyerii with sunlight, garlic, or stakes to the heart was about as useful as trying to tickle them to death.

It took every bit of focus to shut out the voice in my head whispering that I was about to die. I reached instead for anger. “Two years, three months, and sixteen days.”

Red eyes narrowed. “Take him!”

The middle-aged woman snarled. Her coat flapped sharply as she moved, too quick for me to see. Her hands clamped around my biceps and hauled me off the ground.

“That’s how long it’s been since I last used magic.” My words were hoarse, squeezed out through fear and adrenaline. I jabbed the barrel of the gun into her side and pulled the trigger.

Green energy burned through her midsection. She dropped me, eyes wide with panic, and grabbed the hole with both hands as if trying to hold herself together. It took less than a second for the energy to devour her body, leaving nothing but a faint ozone smell in the air.

I pointed at the girl, hoping they would be so stunned by the loss of their companion that I could get off another shot. No such luck. The disruptor was ripped from my hand, and something the approximate size and power of a pickup truck flung me across the room. I slammed into the shelves and crumpled to the ground, paperbacks showering down around me.

Green Bay had tossed me into the romance section. Not much I could use here, even if the room hadn’t been spinning like a bad carnival ride, preventing me from focusing. If I squinted, I might have been able to pull a claymore from one of the Scottish Highland romances, but that would do precisely nothing against these two. Where was a good invisibility cloak when you really needed it?

Green Bay twisted his hand into my shirt and lifted me one-handed, pinning me against the shelves hard enough to compress my rib cage.

“If he so much as looks at another book, rip off his arms.” The girl walked over and plucked the disruptor from her companion’s hand. She stabbed the barrel into my side. The metal was hot enough to burn.

“If you want a library card, you’ll have to fill out one of the yellow forms,” I said. Good old banter, the last refuge against terror and imminent death.

Her face was dry and filthy. She was several inches shorter than

me, but the feral hunger in those red eyes made her seem bigger. “You should have left us alone, Isaac.”

I tasted blood. I must have bitten my cheek when I hit the shelves. I swallowed, hoping to minimize the scent. “You realize *you* broke down *my* door, right?”

Her voice tickled the inside of my skull, like millipedes crawling through my cerebral cortex. “*Tell me who among the Porters has been hunting us.*”

“I’m retired from the field.” Even after more than two years, the words stung. “And I never hunted vampires. We leave it to you to police your own kind. The automatons take care of any rogues your masters can’t handle.”

Her voice grew soft, and the millipedes dug deeper. Most Meyerii didn’t have psychic powers. This could be another damn hybrid. One of these days, vampiric experiments in transfusion were going to create something they couldn’t handle.

“*Don’t lie to me, Isaac. You will give me their names.*”

“I’m a libriomancer. Mind tricks don’t work on me. Only money.” When all else fails, fall back on movie quotes.

“Dammit!” She spun away.

“You’re new to the vampire thing, right?” I asked, doing my best to control my breathing. “You probably weren’t around the last time your kind went toe-to-toe with the Porters. It wasn’t pretty. Twenty-three rogue vampires marching down the streets of New Orleans versus one old mechanical warrior. All it took was a single automaton to reduce those vampires to twenty-three piles of dust and ash.” I might have been a mere cataloguer, but I was still a member of Die Zwelf Portenære. Killing a Porter was a death sentence. They had to know that.

She didn’t look at me, but I could feel the other one shifting nervously. “I have no idea what’s going on, but if I was involved, do you really think I’d let you march through my front door? That I’d allow myself to be captured so easily? That I’d be wearing a *name tag*?”

Her attention dropped to the plastic badge. She wiped a thumb through the powder and stared at the washed-out photo that made me look like a little vampiric myself.

If I hadn’t been two years out of practice, I would have had something better than a ray gun waiting for them. Back in the days of *Dracula*, humans had a fighting chance against the undead. But the more they evolved from monsters into angsty, sexy superheroes, the more the odds of a human being surviving an encounter with an angry vampire

shrank to nothing.

“He’s got a point, Mel.” Green Bay’s grip loosened ever so slightly. “He doesn’t look like much. He’s nothing but a librarian.”

“What do you mean nothing but a—”

He thumped me against the shelf without even blinking.

“He’s lying,” Mel insisted.

“I’m an awful liar,” I said quickly. “Ask anyone.”

Mel stepped back, setting the disruptor on the desk. “We’ll have a reader sift through his thoughts.”

Reader, slang for the different species of vampire who could absorb the thoughts and experiences of their victims. Maybe I had a few hours of life left after all. They’d have to transport me back to whatever nest they had come from—probably Detroit or Green Bay. If I could get my hands on another book, or even just make a quick phone call—

Mel opened her backpack and pulled out a large Tupperware container and a butterfly knife. “Drain him. His blood will give the reader the memories she needs.”

“Hold on, you’re supposed to give the prisoner time to bargain! It’s traditional. I’m a libriomancer, remember? You want money? Take me to the history section and I’ll give you the Hope Diamond.” I turned my attention to Green Bay. “Or how about a Packers Super Bowl ring? Give me two minutes in the sports section, and it’s all yours.”

He followed my gaze, but Mel punched him in the shoulder.

“What’s he going to do?” he asked. “Attack us with a football?”

“We are *not* giving the libriomancer more books.” Mel jabbed her black-polished nail into Green Bay’s shoulder, punctuating every word.

A lazy knock on the broken doorframe made both vampires whirl.

“Get out of here!” I shouted, trying to warn whoever it was. I grabbed Green Bay’s fingers, trying to break his grip, but it was like trying to bend steel. Kicking him in the stomach was equally futile.

“The library’s closed,” snapped Mel.

Footsteps crunched on broken wood and glass. When I saw who had entered, my body went limp with relief.

Lena Greenwood was the least imposing heroine you’d ever see. She was several inches shorter than me, heavyset but graceful as a dancer. I didn’t know her actual age, but she appeared to be in her early twenties, and was about as intimidating as a stuffed bear. A damned sexy bear, but not someone you’d expect to go toe-to-toe with your average monster.

Wisps of loose black hair framed dark eyes, a round face, and a

cheerful smile, as if she had walked in on a surprise party. She wore a motorcycle jacket of black leather, the kind with slip-in plastic shields to protect the shoulders, elbows and back. The T-shirt she wore beneath was filthy, as were her jeans and the red high-top sneakers on her feet. She carried a pair of bokken: curved wooden practice swords that matched the brown shade of her skin.

“Vampires?” she asked.

I managed a nod. “They didn’t want to pay their late fees.”

“I thought you might be joining us,” Mel snarled. To her companion, she snapped, “Make sure she’s alone.”

Green Bay released my shoulders and blurred across the library like the Flash. I didn’t see what happened next, being busy falling down and gasping in pain, but when I looked over the vampire was pinned to the wall like an insect with one of Lena’s bokken protruding from his chest.

He snarled and grabbed the hilt, trying to pull himself free. The stake-through-the-heart bit didn’t work on Meyerii, but he appeared unable to break or remove Lena’s weapon.

“What did you do to him?” Mel demanded.

His struggles grew more frantic as Lena turned her back on him and strode toward us. “The wood is alive,” she said softly. “It put out roots.”

I looked at Mel. “You still have time to run away.”

Mel rushed for the disruptor. Lena lunged, swinging her remaining bokken two-handed in an overhead smash that struck the weapon before Mel could pull the trigger. Green sparks spat from the barrel, but nothing more. Mel flung the disruptor away and seized my throat, her nails piercing my skin. “I’ll kill him!”

Lena rested the tip of her bokken on the floor, folding both hands over the hilt. Her eyes were bloodshot, and her lower lip was swollen. “I’m tempted to let you. What’s the matter with you, Isaac? Letting a pair of vampires get the drop on you like this?”

“There were three,” I corrected, my voice strained from the pressure on my windpipe. “I got one.”

“With your toy gun? The gun they promptly took away from you?” She shook her head. “An entire library, and that was the best you could do? How did you ever survive in the field?”

“They kicked me out of the field, remember? Besides, I’m out of practice.” But she was right. There were shields that would have protected me from the vampires’ attacks, mind-control rays, and so much

more.

“Shut up, both of you.” Mel’s gaze flicked to her partner, who continued to writhe and struggle. I imagined tiny roots punching through his body, anchoring him to the wall, and shuddered.

Movement overhead caught my eye. I forced myself to look straight at Mel, so as not to call her attention to the fire-spider slipping slowly downward from the ceiling on a silken line. Smudge dropped the last foot or so to land ever so lightly atop Mel’s head like a fuzzy red and brown crown.

An angry, burning crown.

Flame whooshed through Mel’s hair. She shrieked and spun, launching Smudge through the air into the computers. I grabbed the top shelf, lifted both feet, and shoved hard.

Vampires might be strong, but Mel’s mass was merely human, and I had physics on my side. She stumbled back, and then Lena’s bokken smashed her forearm, shattering bone.

Mel’s good hand twisted into the leather of Lena’s jacket. The two of them seemed to fly through the library. Mel slammed Lena to the ground by one of the spiral book racks, which toppled over with a loud crash. Mel reached for Lena’s throat.

Lena grabbed the vampire’s arm at the wrist and elbow, then twisted.

Undead or not, Mel could still feel pain. I winced at the loud pop that signaled a dislocated elbow. Behind them, Green Bay let out an animalistic snarl and strained to free himself. The wall behind him cracked.

I retrieved *Vulcan’s Mirror*, skimming the pages until I reopened the magic I had used before. I picked up the disruptor with my other hand and thrust it into the book, letting the text reform the damaged weapon to its original shape and function before pulling it free once more. Not the safest move, but homicidal vampires qualified as “extenuating circumstances.”

Green Bay finally broke free with an animalistic scream, taking a good chunk of the wall with him. As he staggered toward Mel and Lena, I sighted and pulled the trigger. He vanished in a flare of green energy.

Lena hauled Mel upright. “Your turn. Who ordered the attack in Dearborn?”

“What attack?” I asked. Lena lived in Dearborn, making me wonder what exactly had brought her to my library.

“Shut up, Isaac.”

Mel clenched her fist and swung, connecting with Lena's jaw. From the way Mel cried out, the blow hurt her as much as it did Lena, but it was enough to let her break free. She spun toward me.

I fired one last time, and Mel vanished.

Lena picked up her remaining bokken. I had vaporized the other along with Green Bay. Keeping her back to me, she ran her fingers over the wood. "What did you do that for?"

Her flat tone took me aback. "Why did I shoot the woman who tried to cut my throat?"

"She was beaten. You didn't have to kill her."

"You ran her buddy through with one of your swords!"

"I stopped him. I would have stopped her." With a sigh, she turned to face me. "They used to be human, until magic changed them into something else. Do you think that girl truly understood what she would become?"

I picked up the butterfly knife Mel had dropped. With the immediate threat passed, I was feeling rather shaky. "I'd have more sympathy if not for the part where she tried to cut my throat."

"What did they say to you?"

"They thought someone from the Porters had been hunting vampires, and wanted me to tell them who was involved." I dropped to my knees and crawled beneath the computer desks, searching through tangled cords for any sign of Smudge. I found him hiding in a nest of blue network cables. From the smell of burnt plastic, we'd have to call the computer guy in the morning, but Smudge appeared unharmed. He scurried up onto my shoulder, searing tiny black dots on my sleeve.

"So what did you tell them?" asked Lena.

"Nothing. I'm retired, remember? Nobody tells me anything." I picked up *Vulcan's Mirror* again and flipped to chapter eight. I searched the inner edges for char, but this was a new release, and the pages were clean of magical decay. I dissolved the disruptor back into the text and set the book on its cart. "Thank you."

She picked up one of the overturned tables. "Any time."

I hadn't seen Lena since I moved back up north two years ago. The last I knew, she was the only dryad living in North America, and was currently serving as live-in bodyguard for Doctor Nidhi Shah, a downstate shrink who worked with a number of "unusual" clients. Myself included, back in the day.

"You mentioned another attack. What's going on, Lena?"

She returned to the doorway to check outside. "From what I can

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tell, the vampires have declared war on the Porters.”

Libriomancer, coming August 7, 2012.

Pre-order from [B&N](#), [Indiebound](#), [Mysterious Galaxy](#), [Amazon](#),
or your local bookstore.