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The Reflection Heist

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Table of Contents

- **Introduction**
- **Chapter 1** Assembling Shadows
- **Chapter 2** The Technomancer's Code
- **Chapter 3** Silent Connections
- **Chapter 4** Cursed Bonds
- **Chapter 5** Bottled Lightning
- **Chapter 6** Blueprints and Betrayals
- **Chapter 7** Mirror Mazes
- **Chapter 8** Hunted By Sight
- **Chapter 9** The Clockwork Guardian
- **Chapter 10** Fractured Paths
- **Chapter 11** Prism Prisoners
- **Chapter 12** Echoes in Glass
- **Chapter 13** The Witch's Bargain
- **Chapter 14** Reflections Unbound
- **Chapter 15** The Dark Twin's Offer
- **Chapter 16** Shattered Trust
- **Chapter 17** Enforcer Storm
- **Chapter 18** Double-Crosses and Dead Drops
- **Chapter 19** Masks Off
- **Chapter 20** The Vanishing Act
- **Chapter 21** Mirror's Edge
- **Chapter 22** Crossing the Divide
- **Chapter 23** Hearts of Glass
- **Chapter 24** The Spiral Unravels
- **Chapter 25** New Reflections

Introduction

The city of New Avalon pulses with a current both familiar and alien: electric lights flicker in sync with arcane runes, and the crowds that fill its rain-slicked streets hide more secrets than most would dare to imagine. Every surface is watched, not just by the city's ever-present cameras but by the magic that lurks in every shadow and reflection. In New Avalon, trust is currency, and nothing—not gold, nor jewels, nor even magic itself—can buy it cheap.

Against this backdrop, step Cass Reed: thief, exile, and—once—magician of mirrors. Cass was the name whispered in alleyways and spoken in anxious tones at closed-door meetings; she could step through any glass, surfacing in hidden rooms, council vaults, or forgotten safehouses, all with only a fingerprint left behind. But every legend eventually shatters. Betrayed on the job that should have secured her place at the top, Cass found herself not just outcast but blacklisted, debt and danger shadowing her every step.

Now Cass keeps mostly to the dark corners, skirting both the magical elite and the criminal underworld. She knows the hazards of looking too long in mirrors—her own reflection is haunted by memories and regrets, echoing the choices that brought her low. Even in hiding, her talents are in demand. When rumors surface about a vault rumored to hold not mere treasures but the actual reflections of powerful magical beings—echoes of souls, bound like coins in a jar—Cass knows the job is impossible, and that's precisely why it draws her in.

A shadowy benefactor reaches out, offering Cass a shot at redemption—or perhaps something even more dangerous: revenge. But no one steals from the Reflection Vault and walks free, not when the city's enforcers, rival crews, and invisible powers watch every crack in the glass. Cass must assemble a crew as unusual as herself: a technomancer who can hack both code and enchantments, a silent shapeshifter haunted by their own secrets, a witch who dismantles curses but can't escape her own, and a driver whose car is lightning in a bottle. Each has their own reasons to risk everything, and every alliance is as fragile as spun glass.

Beneath the neon lights and steeped spires, in a city where every surface could hide an eye or doorway, the line between self and shadow blurs until it threatens to vanish entirely. The reflection Cass chases may not be her own, and what waits in the vault could remake the world—if it doesn't break her first. Welcome to New Avalon. Look closely, and you might see yourself reflected in its mysteries.

CHAPTER ONE: Assembling Shadows

The aroma of stale coffee and desperation clung to the air in The Velvet Mirror, a speakeasy tucked beneath the bustling streets of New Avalon's Forgotten Quarter. It was the kind of place where magic seeped into the grout, and every patron had a story they hoped no one would discover. Cass Reed nursing a lukewarm tea, felt right at home among the shadows. Her current story was written in the scuffed leather of her jacket and the wary flicker in her eyes.

Her anonymous benefactor, known only as 'M,' had promised a team, but Cass preferred to vet them herself. Trust, in New Avalon, was a luxury she couldn't afford twice. The first target on her list was a technomancer named Jax—rumored to be a ghost in the city's digital and arcane networks, capable of turning magical wards into parlor tricks and firewalls into open doors.

Cass knew Jax frequented the Shadow Market, a labyrinthine bazaar that only truly came alive after midnight, when the city's official enforcers were distracted by their own nocturnal pursuits. She arrived as the moon was at its zenith, casting the market's winding alleys in eerie silver and deep violet. Stalls peddled everything from enchanted trinkets to bottled luck, and the air buzzed with bartered spells and hushed negotiations.

Finding Jax wasn't difficult, not if you knew where to look. He operated out of a perpetually flickering stall at the market's edge, ironically selling "antique" analog devices—rotary phones, gramophones, typewriters—all subtly infused with enough hidden tech and low-level enchantments to make them worth a fortune. His sign, hand-painted and peeling, read: "Jax's Relics: Where the Past Meets the Future (and Gets a Glitch)."

He was hunched over a dismantled pocket watch, its gears glowing with faint, internal energy. Jax had a mess of dark hair that looked like he'd run his hands through it a thousand times, and eyes that darted with restless intelligence behind thick-rimmed glasses. He wore a frayed hoodie that looked three sizes too big, and a collection of wires and small, glowing components poked out of its pockets like strange flora.

"Looking for a piece of history, love?" Jax mumbled, not looking up, his fingers deftly reassembling a miniature arcane circuit. His voice was rough, like gravel on a chalkboard.

"More like a piece of the future," Cass replied, leaning against the counter. She pulled out a small, intricately carved wooden bird—a common signal among those in the

know that you were looking for more than just curios. "I heard you can make old things new again."

Jax finally looked up, his gaze sharp and assessing. "Depends on the old thing. And the price." He flicked a switch on the watch, and a tiny, holographic phoenix flared to life above its face, then winked out.

"It's not about an object," Cass said, lowering her voice. "It's about a job. A big one. The kind that requires someone who sees the current like no one else." She gestured subtly to the wires snaking from his pockets, a tell-tale sign of a technomancer actively engaged in a live feed.

Jax's expression remained neutral, but his fingers paused their work. "I only do jobs that pay well and don't involve unnecessary explosions. Or emotional baggage."

"This job pays exceptionally well. And it involves a lot of hidden doors, both digital and arcane. Think of it as the ultimate puzzle. No explosions, unless we want them." Cass gave him a wry smile. "And as for emotional baggage, we all carry a little, don't we? Some of us just have heavier suitcases."

He considered her, his eyes scanning her face, searching for something. "You're Cass Reed, aren't you? The Mirror Walker. I heard you were... retired." The last word was laced with skepticism.

"The city has a funny way of pulling you back in," Cass admitted. "So, are you interested in a challenge, Jax? Or are you content fixing pocket watches for the rest of your life?"

He sighed, a long, drawn-out sound. "I'm interested in the details. Meet me at the abandoned factory on the old industrial docks, midnight tomorrow. Alone. Don't be late." He didn't wait for her reply, already turning back to his glowing components, dismissing her with the casual ease of someone used to dealing with shadowy figures.

Cass left the Shadow Market, a small victory humming beneath her ribs. Jax was in. One down. Next on her list: the shapeshifter. The elusive, silent kind who could slip into any form, any crowd, and vanish without a trace. Her contacts had given her only a vague lead: look for someone who communicated through gestures, frequented the city's oldest archives, and had an unusual affinity for ravens.

The New Avalon Arcane Archives were less a library and more a living repository of forgotten spells, cursed artifacts, and histories best left undisturbed. Cass navigated the echoing halls, the air thick with the scent of aged parchment and faint ozone. She found her target not among the hushed scholars, but in a dusty, seldom-visited annex, perched on a tall ladder, cataloging ancient grimoires.

They were slight, their form indistinct beneath a shapeless cloak. A cascade of dark hair spilled from the hood, almost obscuring their face. As Cass approached, a raven, startlingly intelligent, alighted on their shoulder, cocking its head to regard her with a beady eye.

Cass had prepared for this. She carried no weapon, no overt magical signature. Instead, she offered a small, silver locket, engraved with a stylized raven taking flight. It was an old symbol, signifying sanctuary for those who changed their skins.

The shapeshifter's head tilted slightly, mirroring the raven's curiosity. A gloved hand reached out, taking the locket. They opened it, revealing not a picture, but a single, perfectly rendered miniature feather, shimmering with faint, internal light. It was a secret sign, known only to a select few in the shapeshifting community, a plea for alliance, not a demand.

Cass knew their name was Whisper, though few ever spoke it aloud. She also knew that Whisper rarely spoke at all, preferring to communicate through subtle shifts in posture, eyes, and the occasional, eloquent gesture.

"I need someone who can go unnoticed," Cass began, her voice soft in the cavernous room. "Someone who can become a shadow, a mirror image, a ghost in the machine. A vault, heavily guarded. Magic and technology woven together. But the real challenge isn't getting in. It's what's inside. Reflections."

Whisper closed the locket, their eyes, dark and fathomless, meeting hers. They raised a hand, making a slow, deliberate gesture: a cupped palm, then fingers splayed outwards, like ripples in water. *What is the cost?*

"Freedom," Cass replied, understanding the silent question. "Not just for us, if we succeed, but for what's trapped inside. They're reflections, not just images. Beings, held captive. And for you... a chance to find what you're looking for." She didn't know what Whisper sought, only that they were constantly searching.

Whisper's gaze lingered on her, assessing her truthfulness. The raven on their shoulder ruffled its feathers, then dipped its head in a slow nod. Whisper's next gesture was concise: a thumb pointing downwards, then outwards, a slight inclination of the head. *Lead the way.*

Cass felt a jolt of anticipation. Two down. Jax, the brilliant, cynical technomancer. Whisper, the silent, adaptable shapeshifter. A strange pair, but both essential. The next target was the trickiest: a curse-breaking witch known as Elara. Elara was infamous for her exorbitant fees and her temper, rumored to be as volatile as the raw arcane energy she wielded. Finding her meant venturing into the city's oldest, most

dangerous magical quarter, where ley lines pulsed beneath cracked cobblestones and forgotten spirits whispered from ancient grates. This was going to be fun.

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