

From the *New York Times* Bestselling Author of *Fablehaven*

THE CANDY SHOP WAR



BRANDON MULL

PROLOGUE

JOHN DART



The airport shuttle squeaked to a stop in the parking lot of Leslie's Diner. The generic building looked like hundreds of other cheap restaurants where you could get breakfast all day. Judging from the outdated exterior and the heavysset man in the window attacking a syrupy waffle, John Dart concluded that most items on the menu, although filling, would taste mass-produced.

The shuttle driver trotted around the front of the van and slid open the door. John stepped down. He wore a weathered overcoat and a brown fedora with a black band. John handed the driver a twenty-dollar tip.

"Thanks. No luggage, right?"

"No luggage."

Had there been bags to carry, John, tall and broad-shouldered, would have seemed a better candidate than the slight Filipino driver.

"Sure you want to be left here?" the driver asked, studying the dim parking lot.

John nodded.

"There's no lodging nearby."

"I like pancakes," John said.

Shrugging, the driver got back into the van and roared out of the parking lot. John had been the last passenger. The driver used his blinker when pulling onto the road, even though the world seemed deserted.

The hour was late. There were not many cars in the lot. A couple of pickups, a gray sedan, a battered minivan, an old Buick, a little hatchback, and an SUV. A man with his hands in the pockets of a faded windbreaker exited the diner and made eye contact with John. He had disheveled hair clumsily parted on one side and the beginnings of a goatee on his chin.

The man sauntered over to the old Buick, which was flecked with rust and marred by numerous nicks and scratches. John joined him, and they shook hands. The man winced slightly at John's crushing grip.

"I set up a room for you in Barcelona six years ago," the man said with a slight Spanish accent.

"I recall," John said. "How are things here?"

The man licked his lips. "A new candy shop opened in town today."

"We may have a regular convention on our hands before long," John said. "You have my supplies?"

"All the things you can't bring on a plane," the man said with a wink. He thrust a key into the trunk's lock and opened it. A dozen straitjackets of varying size were stacked inside, along with a large suitcase. The man opened the suitcase, revealing a variety of weapons: cross-bows, knives, brass knuckles, truncheons, slingshots, tranquilizer guns,

customized toxins, throwing stars, boomerangs, explosives, and canisters of tear gas. John picked up a heavy crossbow and examined the firing mechanism. The weapon held a pair of quarrels. He replaced the crossbow and pocketed a can of Mace.

"Looks good," John approved.

"The Council wanted me to deliver this as well," the man said, holding out a sizable seashell with vivid markings.

John accepted the shell, blew into it gently, and whispered, "John Dart, in person and in truth." When the seashell began to vibrate, he held it to his ear. At first John heard a faint whisper, like distant static. The sound progressively became more like waves heaving against a sandy shore. The deep call of a foghorn added to the sea sounds, along with the cry of gulls, and then a voice began speaking. The man who had handed John the shell strolled away to a respectful distance.

"John, we're grateful you were able to arrive so promptly," said a dignified masculine voice. John recognized it as his mentor's. "We trust that Fernando has provided you with the pertinent equipment. Samson Wells has joined the other two magicians in Colson. We now feel certain that the secret has been revealed. We must proceed under the assumption that all three are aware of what has been hidden in town, and are in pursuit of the prize. As you know, we cannot afford to allow any of our order to lay hands on it. The consequences would be catastrophic to our common interests.

"All three magicians involved have neglected warnings from the Council, so the hour for enforcing our mandate has arrived. You are hereby authorized to drive our greedy associates from the area by any necessary means."

John shuffled his feet. He was seldom authorized to confront a magician directly. Such action could provoke serious retaliation.

Praise for *The Candy Shop War*

"Mull . . . dishes up a crowd-pleaser as delicious as *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*."—Kirkus Reviews

"A rollicking adventure, sure to delight young readers—especially those with a sweet tooth."—Midwest Book Review

- 2009 Beehive Book Award, Children's Literature Association of Utah
- Rochester Reads 2009 Junior Selection

Magical candies that give kids superpowers.



Trevor held up his Moon Rock candy, studying it. "I wonder what happens if we bite them?"

"I'll do it first," said Nate. He popped the Moon Rock into his mouth.

"Feel any different?" Pigeon asked eagerly.

"A little," Nate said. "Sort of tingly. It tastes really good. I almost feel . . ."

He moved to take a step and floated right up into the air.

