

## Chapter 4-5 – Threats

Life, Callum reflected, was what happened when one was busy doing other things. Under any sane rationale, it was not time to start a family. But time moved forward and made fools of everyone. He had been perfectly happy living with Lucy, learning about magic and tending his garden, and not worrying about the long term future. Now he had a lot more to worry about in the future, though he considered it a blessing rather than a complication.

He gave Lucy a squeeze, the two of them cuddled up on the couch reading their respective literature. Technically studying, though Callum was starting to reach the point of diminishing returns struggling through the notes he'd gotten on structural theory. It was late enough that his brain just wanted to turn off.

Lucy responded with a happy little noise and shifted her position against him, tilting across his lap with a thump and giving him a cheeky wink past her own book. He snorted and tossed his tome on the table, readying a counterattack that would keep them pleasantly distracted for an hour or so when her laptop chirped. It was the tone Lucy had set for an official business message from Lisa.

"Gonna let me answer that?" Lucy asked, eyes sparkling as she dropped her book to grab his wandering hands.

"I guess so," Callum conceded, helping her back upright so she could grab the laptop. Lucy tapped the keyboard a couple times and the chirping stopped as Lisa's face appeared on the screen.

"Hey Lucy," Lisa said. "Oh good, Callum's there too. This was unusual enough that we figured we'd pass it on right away. You know about Archmage Taisen, right?"

"I know that he broke away from GAR and stripped out a good chunk of the BSE," Lucy said. "Unfortunately I don't have access to *his* servers so I don't know much."

"Well, his organization before it became BSE was called *Defensores Mundi*, focused on the threats out of the portal worlds," Lisa said. "So that's what his new House is aimed at too, and they think they've run into something really nasty down in India. Nasty enough that they want Callum's help."

"I'm not exactly a combat mage," Callum objected. "I mean, I'm glad that *someone* has that philosophy, I'm all for it. But I'm not sure what they expect me to do if real mages can't manage it. My tricks go only so far."

"It's more a matter of *finding* their target," Chester's voice came, the picture on the laptop shifting as Lisa turned the camera to include him, too. "They sent over actual reports to

try and convince you, so they're serious about this. And get this — Gayle Hargave added a note.”

“That’s not a name I ever expected to hear again,” Callum said in surprise. “I guess she’s doing fine, then.”

“They’re *also* not on the GAR servers anymore,” Lucy said. “Most of what I see in the GAR networks about the Hargraves is pretty uncomplimentary, but that hardly means anything.”

“Send it over,” Callum said. “It won’t hurt to see what they have to say.”

“It’s all on paper,” Chester said, and Callum shook his head. After dealing with the Guild of Enchanting and the way *they* had everything on paper, rather than digital, that should have been his first thought.

“Right, I’ll have a drone there shortly.” He told them. “At this point it’s almost worth it to just park an anchor by your property.”

“We should discuss that later,” Chester agreed. “I think we’ll need some more transportation work from you once you look over this Taisen stuff.”

“No problem,” Callum agreed readily. To some extent, he wasn’t even comfortable with charging Chester for the work anymore. They were friends – if mostly Lucy’s friends – and the godparents for his child. The Alpha still needed to cover material costs, but spending a few hours enchanting was hardly an issue. The scribe couldn’t do the teleportation cores he used, but the transmitter and receiver pads were *far* easier now that he had some infrastructure.

The nearest drone was actually parked on a rooftop in a town not too far away, as part of Callum’s efforts to have anchors placed where he could respond to anything in reasonable time. So it was only a few minutes to get it to Chester’s place and in range to grab the missive. It was a set of stapled reports with two letters — one from Taisen and one, as promised, from Gayle. There was no residual magic clinging to it, or any enchantments, so it seemed safe enough. He unfolded Gayle’s first, which was written by hand on some high-quality paper he didn’t recognize, with almost calligraphic lettering.

*Mister Wells,*

*It has been some time since we last spoke, and I have had both time and cause to reflect upon everything that has occurred. I will confess I am not entirely convinced of the rightness of your view, but events have amply demonstrated that you have cause to believe as you do. It is those beliefs and your conviction in them that lead me to prevail upon you with a request.*

*Archmage Taisen, whom I have the great privilege of working with, has undertaken the task of defending the Earth from those threats that stem from the portal worlds – something that I trust you would find honorable. In this endeavor has been investigating places we may have missed here on Earth, and in the course of that investigation has run into some trouble. That trouble has caused a great many injuries which I am still treating at the time of writing, and I fear the situation may soon escalate beyond injuries and any aid I could render.*

*I beg you to take his request seriously. I know you, and I know Archmage Taisen, and I believe you have similar opinions on the rightness of the world. You will not regret helping him.*

— *Gayle Hargrave*

“Huh,” Callum said, and passed the letter to Lucy. “She doesn’t *talk* like that.”

“She’s a Hargrave,” Lucy replied by way of explanation, looking over Gayle’s missive while Callum cracked the seal on the envelope with Taisen’s letter. It was an actual wax seal, too, with *Defensores Mundi* and a shield-and-globe crest. The paper crackled as he pulled it out and unfolded it.

Unlike Gayle’s short, formal, calligraphic letter, Taisen had three pages of printed information. He was blunt, spending maybe a sentence and a half on courtesies before moving on to describing the situation as if it were a military briefing. Location, resources, incidents, all that, referencing the enclosed reports.

In a way it was straightforward enough. They’d traced rumors of disappearances and a spreading no-man’s-land to a place in the north of India, finding several abandoned towns that looked like they’d been overgrown for a lot longer than the rumors indicated. It was several hundred square miles of wilderness, and the mages combing the area hadn’t actually found anything despite sudden attacks coming from apparently nowhere.

The actual request was for Callum to investigate with his own particular talents. He couldn’t tell how much Taisen actually knew about the portal anchors and spatial perceptions, but at this point it was obvious what Callum could do. Which meant there was far too little he could surprise people with, and that was one reason he was working on building up his foundations with magical theory. He absolutely needed to have surprises.

“Are there any GAR records for that area?” Callum asked Lucy, showing her the written name of the region, which was not something he could pronounce. Lucy frowned and turned to her laptop, doing whatever magical search she had for the information from the GAR servers.

“Nope. GAR doesn’t even have a branch in India,” she said with a shrug. “At least not in the digital records.” Callum nodded. A lot of what mages did was on paper rather than electronic anyway, but he wouldn’t have been surprised if there was a lot of off-the-books development. Though without a portal world feed, India would not be especially appealing to supernaturals.

At least, that was his impression, and it was dangerous to think that was the whole story. Any official consensus was suspect, especially one that conveniently rendered huge swaths of land uninteresting to the powers that be.

“Well, whatever-it-is seems to have wiped out several villages so it’s definitely on the list. I actually like this,” Callum said thoughtfully. “I don’t have to *kill* it, I just have to find it or find out what it is, and call in people who are good at this sort of thing.”

“You’re plenty good at it, but yeah,” Lucy agreed, putting her hand on her stomach. “Best not to take chances you don’t need to.”

“Right,” Callum said. “Plus I guess it’s not a bad thing to open diplomatic relations with a mage faction that *doesn’t* want to kill me.”

“Definitely,” Lucy agreed, leaning against him to peer down at the sheets still in his hand. “How do we talk to them? Oh, there’s the phone number.”

“It kind of amuses me that with all this magic, phones are still the easiest way to talk,” Callum said. He handed the sheet off to Lucy and picked up one of the stapled reports, thumbing through it. The text was a photocopy of some handwritten documents, though the penmanship was good enough that it wasn’t too difficult to read, but the contents were fairly bland. It used a lot of unhelpful phrases like *proceeded to POI Delta* and *resonance levels normal*, which he could guess the meaning of but did not serve to paint a vivid picture. The reports seemed to be only corroboration for what was in the letter, so he only skimmed them.

“Mister Wells?” The sound came from Lucy’s laptop as she connected her VOIP to the provided number. Considering that it was one of the magical phones, he wasn’t sure how she’d managed to make an internet version, but it worked so he wasn’t going to complain.

“This is Wells,” Callum said, dropping the reports back on the living room table.

“This is Archmage Taisen,” the voice said, a strong, stern baritone. “I assume from your call that you wish to discuss aiding my House.”

“More or less,” Callum said. “It’s not so much about your House as it is about dealing with monsters that threaten people.”

“Yes, young Gayle said as much. I’m glad to see she was right.” Taisen’s voice was neither warm nor cool, but Callum didn’t mind. He wouldn’t expect friendliness from an established mage right off. “Though I admit we don’t know much about your capabilities save for what you have used against us in the past.”

“I hope you’ll understand if I prefer not to elaborate too much,” Callum said. “But from what I understand you just want me to see if I can locate your problem without alerting it. While I can’t guarantee success on that score, I think I stand a good chance and I’m willing to try.”

“Excellent,” Taisen said. “We should discuss how to coordinate. It’s one thing to find them; it’s another to relate that information back in a useful way, quickly enough that we can act on it.”

“Lucy?” Callum prompted.

“We’ll provide an electronic device,” Lucy said. “We’ll be able to communicate with you through it, or stream video from anything we find that’s interesting. Maybe even GPS, depending on what things are like.” She glanced at Callum, and he shook his head slightly. He *could* give them a direct portal, if he had anchors at both locations, but he didn’t want to commit to that before finding out what things were like.

“I won’t commit to being in your command structure as such,” Callum added. “But I’m not stupid, and I’ll do my best to keep you properly informed before I do anything unless some extreme emergency arises.”

“Understandable,” Taisen said. “I would prefer you stay out of any action anyway; confusion during combat, no matter well-intentioned, can be deadly for those involved.”

“Agreed,” Callum said. “When do you want to start?”

“In three hours, by preference,” Taisen said. “I see no reason to delay more than necessary to get my squad prepared.”

“Very well,” Callum said, checking the clock. “Tell me where you want me to send the electronics.” Three hours was cutting it a bit close, and maybe running a bit late into the evening, but he could probably get to India in time and hopefully he’d be able to comb the area relatively quickly. He agreed with Taisen: there was no reason to put off dealing with a problem.

Taisen recited a string of numbers – GPS coordinates – and Lucy hastily recorded them, fingers tapping her laptop keys. Then she looked up where that actually was, bringing up the map so they could start moving their drones. Callum nodded.

“Got it,” he told Taisen. “Expect a delivery soon.”

“I would warn you that our compound is warded,” Taisen said dryly. “But you’ve already shown how little that matters. I would at least ask that you leave your device at the guard post out front to prevent stirring up some people who are very much on edge.”

“No problem,” Callum assured him, and the connection went.

The staging base was in Nepal, which was not very far away from the target. At least for given values of far; with flight foci or Callum’s gravitykinesis, a few hundred miles was practically next door. Even halfway around the world was a fairly short jaunt now that Callum had more practice with transporting the drone. He still had to be careful not to send it too far out and thus launch the drone into space, but he had a better judge of how to use the insane Alcubierre movement.

When he reached the area, the mage’s redoubt was fairly obvious. Aside from the usual wards and glamours, it was clear that an earth mage had formed the small fortress, building it into the side of a sharp slope. It had much in common with the stone outpost he’d seen next to the dragonlands, where things were barely structurally sound and certainly not properly leveled or plumbed. But he wasn’t there to criticize their building prowess. At least not to their faces.

“He needs to train his mages on how to design a proper building,” he grumbled to Lucy. “This is just shameful.” She just laughed.

There were a number of smaller constructions along the ward line, basically single rooms that seemed to anchor the wards, which had to be the guard posts Taisen had mentioned. There was a mage in one of them and, while there was room to wiggle past the wards and drop one of Lucy’s boxes into the guard post itself, he decided to be polite and just teleport the box onto the ground just outside the wards.

It was a ‘donation box,’ according to Lucy, since it had a bad penny – an anchor – inside it. He’d taken all due precautions with the anchor, starting with using his personal brand of warding that would block off passive senses. He’d also put a potent vis-eater enchantment on the inside, and had small squib charge attached to the portal in the nexus. Perhaps it wasn’t perfect but it’d be awful difficult for anyone to use it to track him.

The rest of the box was taken up with a tablet, battery, transceiver to link up with their intranet, and higher quality audiovisual equipment than the tablet itself had. The speakers could be surprisingly loud, which was useful when trying to get people’s attention. Like the guard at the post.

“Delivery from The Ghost for Taisen,” he said, and watched through his perceptions and the extra screens Lucy had set up in what was originally meant to have been a basement office, and was now dubbed the war room – something he had made after dealing with

vampires, but hadn't used until now. There were a dozen screens on the wall for when Lucy's surveillance was fully active, though only a few were on at the moment.

The guard's head snapped around as he spotted the box on the ground, and to his credit he didn't seem at all confused by it. A chain-like telekinesis form reached out and grabbed the donation box, pulling it into the guard post through a hole that momentarily appeared in the wards. That was something Callum wished he knew how to do, but his were only a very simple on or off.

If he had time, he would see about copying some of the enchantment stuff while he was there. He was more aware of the value in such designs after working with the Guild of Enchanting, so he wouldn't be reselling most of his pilfered knowledge, but he would absolutely use it for himself. As it was, he was too busy navigating the other drone toward the area of interest to worry overmuch about miscellanea like that.

There wasn't much to the redoubt other than a lot of mage bubbles, plus a handful of shifters and fae. He noted there weren't any vampires, which could either be out of consideration for Callum or because Taisen shared his opinion of them to some extent. Interestingly, there weren't any feeder portals like he'd gotten used to seeing, just the charged crystals being used to augment mana intakes, though there was more ambient mana than he would have expected so far from any portals.

Taisen wasn't even in an office, he was in a common room having breakfast with a bunch of mages, something he could only tell due to the cameras on Lucy's box. The bubbles filling the room more or less blocked out his senses, but he could which one was Taisen right away but the diamond-hard quality of the mage sphere. Callum had partly gotten over the instinctual twitch whenever he sensed a bubble, but even through the anchor it was uncomfortable having so many inside his perceptions.

The guard handed off the donation box to Taisen with a few muttered words, and Callum had the odd and unpleasant experience of having his anchor pulled inside an Archmage's bubble. He couldn't sense out through the shell that surrounded Taisen, practically blinding him while Taisen carried the box. At least the bad penny itself seemed to exclude the Archmage's vis, though for all Callum knew that was something Taisen let happen, rather than trying to shove his power into and through a physical object.

"Mister Wells," Taisen said, after he'd taken the donation box aside and put it on a stone desk in an otherwise bare room. "I appreciate the help. While it wasn't discussed before, I assure you we will provide proper pay for your aid." Unlike most mages Callum had encountered, Taisen actually had a military bearing, rather like the veterans Callum had encountered years ago back in West Virginia.

“I certainly won’t turn that down, but we’ll see what’s necessary first,” Callum said. The drone had been drawing closer to the area in question and he had finally twigged to something that had been bothering him. The effect was far more subtle and far-reaching than the other versions he’d seen before, but he recognized the slowly accumulating mana pond of a fae enclave.

There was no swirly magic to accompany it, at least not yet, and most of the region had been barely above what he would consider the normal amount, but it was definitely the same phenomenon. What was more, the effect extended far enough that the redoubt was inside it. Or more likely, someone had extended it to include the redoubt, because there was absolutely no way it was coincidence.

“Did you know you were inside a fae enclave?” Callum asked, then muted his own microphone. “We’ve got to switch out the drone for the ball.” He hadn’t expected to need the wooden ball soon, if ever, but he hoped it still did what it was supposed to.

“Oof,” Lucy said.

“I did not,” Taisen said, his eyes narrowing as he looked at the box. “How do you know this? None of our resonators picked up anything, nor did our fae.”

“It’s very low level and very pervasive. There’s not really any mana movement to betray it, but I’m familiar with the signs. I haven’t checked the boundaries but I bet that it got pushed out to where you’re camped.”

“Likely so,” Taisen said grimly. “Now that I know, we can deal with that.” He stood and walked off, to take whatever steps he might, and Callum focused on swapping the anchor from the drone to the ball. He still hadn’t come up with anything fancier than duct tape for it, so some extra portals was all it took to secure the anchor, still in India, to the ball.

“Stupid ball,” Lucy muttered. “Can’t see anything through it.”

“Believe me, I’m no happier,” Callum said. He was absolutely spoiled by Lucy’s drones. As amazing as his perception sphere was, it lost enough detail that having a camera feed was practically necessary.

What was worse, he couldn’t teleport with impunity if he was trying to be stealthy. Considering the size of the area he had to cover, that wasn’t ideal. Someone might notice the ball floating around, since that was the only way he could move it, so he had to both guide it around physical obstacles and keep his senses stretched out in case some supernatural came close. Though for the most part all he could find was ordinary wildlife and the slowly deepening mana pond.



On the redoubt end of things there was a sort of a snap throughout the compound as something about the wards changed. The vague shallows of the fae enclave vanished, pushed away or consumed. Which was a handy trick, and something Callum would like to learn. Fae magic was so weird it would be great to exclude it from his home.

“Any progress?” Taisen asked, his shell cutting off Callum’s base-side perceptions again and just leaving the camera.

“Nothing yet,” Callum said. “I’m still tracking down the center of the enclave.”

“I would like to know how you do that remotely,” Taisen said. “It has something to do with your brand of perceptions? And these little enchantments you use — miniaturized portal anchors?”

“I’m hardly going to answer that,” Callum said dryly.

“I had to ask,” Taisen said. “Do keep me informed.” Callum agreed before muting his mic and turning his attention to navigating the fae wood ball about.

“He actually seems pretty reasonable,” Lucy remarked.

“Sure, but I’m giving him something he wants,” Callum said absently. “Plus he can’t actually get to me. I’m pretty sure he could shut down the portal anchor instantly, so even that much isn’t a threat. Of course he seems reasonable. He’s in control.”

“Anyone ever tell you that you’re kind of suspicious of people?” Lucy asked him.

“I think you’ve said something about that once or twice,” Callum replied.

He ran across one of the destroyed villages soon enough, and he had to agree it was bizarre. There were very clearly modern appliances, but the amount of overgrowth was like it had been abandoned for decades or more. Enormous trees growing through cars, streams cutting through houses, bricks crumbled to dust and sand. Since according to the reports the villages had gone incommunicado something like two or three months ago, it was obvious fae shenanigans.

Even with his perceptions, Callum almost missed the first fae inhabitant. He’d had a preview of how fae could skip around through some pseudo-teleportation mechanism, one that didn’t involve space at all, from his dealings with Jissarrell. This was another version of that, a figure just fading out before he could get a good sense of what it was.

For a moment Callum thought that somehow it had sensed the ball or maybe even his perceptual sphere, but when he actually looked at the area there was a flowing circle of mana through a trio of standing stones. So he’d probably just happened upon someone using a faerie circle or whatever. Part of him was tempted to simply camp out at the

circle, though it clearly wasn't anywhere near the center of the enclave, but if he was being responsible it wasn't his choice alone. He turned the mic back on and described what he'd found to Taisen.

"I don't think it's worth it to move anyone on it yet," Callum concluded. "You're only going to get a surprise raid once and I haven't finished searching the area. If I don't find anything I can always come back."

"Agreed," Taisen said grimly.

There was another good hour of following the subtle gradient before he found what he was really looking for, but it was really obvious when it came into his perceptions. An entirely out-of-place building, perched in the middle of the mountainside jungle, constructed in absolutely blatant Gupta-era architecture. It wasn't a temple though, since he was pretty sure Buddhist temples didn't have actual skull-cups festooning the stairs.

Part of Callum wondered why it seemed that the fae went for the overdone and macabre so often, but if they were patterning themselves after stories of monsters of course that would be true. Part of the reason the stories of monsters were so compelling was *because* they were extreme and macabre. Nobody was interested in the story of the slightly grumpy basically normal person.

"So, what story is it that has giant fanged man-eaters in a Buddhist temple?" Callum wondered aloud.

"Rakshasas," Lucy said, and he looked at her, startled. "What? I read a lot. So do you; you ought to know that."

"Well, there's a bunch of Rakshasas then," Callum said, rolling the ball closer in the undergrowth and surveying the place. There didn't seem to be any equivalent to a fae king, nothing that was as vis-dense as Jissarrell or Ravaeb had been, but every single one of the Rakshasas were massive, muscled, and clearly had a bunch of magic working for them. "And they have captives."

Fifteen people, mostly men, were in stone cells underneath the temple floor. Callum assumed they were the remains of the people who had been in the villages overrun by the fae enclave, and his fingers twitched with an urge to do something about it. But after Ravaeb he'd learned that dealing with fae was *very* risky, and besides he had an entire squadron of mages standing by.

"Found the target," Callum said, then realized he was muted and repeated himself after he switched his mic on again. "Can't give you GPS coordinates without possibly tipping them off, besides which fae areas are weird when it comes to location. I could open some assault portals for you though, if you're quick."

“Describe the target,” Taisen said tersely.

“Buddhist temple, bit like a pagoda, five levels. Thirteen fae – Rakshasas is our guess – with five, two, one, three, two, going from bottom to top. Fifteen humans confined in the basement. They’ll need medical care, and once you start I can shift them over to the redoubt.”

“I see.” Taisen pressed his lips together for a moment on the feed from the box. “We aren’t exactly equipped for mundane refugees here.”

“You’re mages,” Callum said, a touch impatiently. “How long does it take an earth mage to whip together a room, or a water mage to create a shower and something to drink? If need be that can be part of the price of my help. Take these people, clean them up, and see them back to civilization.”

“Very well,” Taisen said, without argument, which somewhat surprised Callum. “Can you provide four portals spaced around the pagoda?”

“I can,” Callum said, even more surprised that Taisen wasn’t questioning the safety or efficacy of said portals. Though to be fair, it wasn’t easy to falsify a portal destination, not like a teleport.

“Then we’ll be ready in five minutes,” Taisen said, and picked up the box as he stood from the desk. He placed it on a table in the common room and barked orders. Apparently he had something that let him communicate with everyone in the base, since people came running from rooms away.

In a matter of moments an Earth mage had sunk all the chairs and tables back into the floor, emptying the room. People assembled in the cleared area, forming quadrants with four squads of five. Callum thought that wasn’t exactly the sort of numbers advantage he’d prefer, but then, Taisen was number twenty-one and Archmages were supposed to be powerful.

Support staff started breaking out blankets, water bottles – which was amusing given that there was a water mage – and shaping shower cubicles against one wall while Taisen briefed his men. Which was basically the information Callum had already provided, with some additional tactical addendums Callum had no reference for.

“Portals ready,” Taisen said, half a request and half a command. Callum pushed out vis threads from his ball as fast as he could and snapped them open equally spaced around the pagoda. Taisen’s vis pulsed as he flashed something through the portals, faster than Callum could really parse, and then ordered his squads through.

Thus far, Callum hadn't seen any real combat magery in action. There'd been some when he had rescued Lucy, but most of those mages had been surprised and had only a few seconds to react. Taisen's teams were primed, ready, and they were the ones surprising the Rakshasas.

At least a hundred different spells spun out from the twenty-one combat mages, but Taisen was the most terrifying. Callum wasn't sure what exactly the Archmage did but his spell encompassed the entire stone pagoda. It simultaneously cut the structure into brick-sized chunks and sent them flying outward; not by an explosion but in a controlled movement, like the entire thing was on wires that had expanded outward.

The Rakshasas were understandably startled. They recovered almost immediately though, the mana in the fae pond turning into a swirling maelstrom as individual Rakshasa scattered outward, bouncing off floating pieces of masonry in impossible athletic feats. Fae magic intersected with mage vis as Taisen's squad members targeted the Rakshasa in spell forms way too complicated for Callum to parse.

All the energy flying around shredded Callum's vis threads, closing the portals, but that was fine because he had another job anyway. While Taisen had disassembled the above-ground portion of the pagoda, the prison basement remained, though there was no telling for how long. He could only sense magic for the most part, but there seemed to be a lot of excess spellwork going off, destroying nearby trees and liquefying earth and stone.

He hurriedly pushed his vis thread down into the ground, snaking it through to where the captives were and opening portals back to the redoubt. It was a simple matter of sweeping the portals down over the people and delivering them to the waiting support staff. People made noises of obvious surprise and confusion, but he didn't speak whatever language it was in northern India so he could only guess at the contents. Thankfully there were people on the staff who spoke it, too.

Since he didn't understand a single word he only kept one ear on the goings-on at the redoubt and kept most of his attention on the fight. Though calling it a fight or a battle was pretty much overselling it. The regular mages seemed to be having issues with the fae magic; their bubbles couldn't quite keep it out. Taisen, though, was simply absolute on the battlefield.

Frankly he probably could have handled the whole thing himself. If anything, the reason he seemed to have brought extra mages was just because there was a limitation on multitasking. Taisen had vis walls up that utterly severed the connection between the pagoda area and the rest of the enclave mana pond. It was more vis than Callum could manage in an entire day, and was just one of the constructs Taisen had spun out.

It should have ended almost instantly, but they were delayed simply by the effort of taking prisoners. Three of the fae were definitely dead, torn apart in the short amount of time Callum had been distracted, but several others were imprisoned in magical boxes and one was getting what looked like vis-draining chains put on it. Callum was glad to leave them to it.

The roiling battle around the pagoda crunched to a halt after another two or three minutes, when Taisen brought the hammer down on a pair of fae that refused to stop fighting back. Callum knew that gravity was one of Taisen's aspects, and considering his own experience with the force he found it very instructive to watch. Also, horrifying, as Taisen's complex vis construct dropped down on top of the fae and turned them into actual paste.

As if Callum needed more reason to stay far, *far* away from other mages.

Once the surviving fae were all wrapped up in the chains, Callum popped another one of Lucy's boxes out near where Taisen was standing. The enclave pond wasn't going away just yet, but it was different from the ones with fae kings. He assumed that Taisen would know what was going on, now that Callum had alerted him to it. Or maybe there would be more nests of the things, though he hoped not.

"Thanks Lucy," he said, once Lucy gave him the thumbs-up that the new box was connected properly. "Need a lift back?" He spoke into the mic, and Taisen glanced at the box on the ground. Clearly it hadn't surprised him.

"I'll send two squads back. The rest of us will comb the area, now that we know what we're looking for."

"Portals coming up," Callum said, and then opened two portals back to the redoubt. He was already feeling a little drained, mostly because he was opening very large portals so people could go through three or five abreast. "If you find any other prisoners, I trust you'll rescue them."

"Certainly," Taisen said, almost impatiently as he watched his men return to base. "I'm not a monster. I hunt monsters."

"That's good to hear," Callum replied, then muted the mic. He glanced at Lucy and shook his head. "I hope he does."