Chapter 92 Magic Hands

We hadn’t thought it through.  There was over a foot of snow in the Smokey Mountain National Forest.  We also didn’t have anywhere to park in the park overnight.  Iris eventually volunteered to drop us off; it would just be Artica, Bedelia, and myself going into the transit.  I almost wanted to go alone.  I could fly to the portal site in minutes instead of having all three of us trudging through the snow.

Iris dropped us off, and we hiked down to the ravine, falling about a dozen times but having good humor about it.  I could already see the transit portal with the prismatic column going into the sky, and led the group straight to it.  We were shocked to find a small hidden cabin when we reached the location to open the portal.  The cabin was overgrown and hadn’t been used in decades.  Since it was just ten feet from the transit, whoever lived here must have known about the transit. We started to gear up.

The first thing I did was pull out the three communication devices.  Bedelia’s eyes went wide as I handed her the band and earpiece.  Bedelia squeaked, “Did you just materialize that!?  You can exchange with your mind space!  When were you able to do that?  How big is your mind space?  What else do you have in there?”

She was bouncing all over the place.  I looked at her, amused, as I summoned my holster and buckled it to her wide-eyed amazement.  I took the communication band and pulled over my head, and put it around my neck.  I positioned the mic over my throat.  And put the earpiece in my left ear.  The device chimed in my ear, indicating it was live.  I looked at Bedelia and Artica, who followed my example.  We then checked comms. It sounded pretty clear.

Bedelia asked again, “So how big is your space?  You also should have gotten the WhisperLite 5.0 instead of these,” she held up the communication devices, “It has better fidelity.”  I just gave her a hard stare, and she said, “But these are more durable.  Thanks for getting them for us.”

I had no plans to tell Bedelia how large my space was and just kept gearing up.  I pulled out the Guardian Pistol and holstered it next.  Bedelia was going to say something about my choice in pistols but held her tongue when I looked challengingly at her.  “So what can we expect on the other side?”

Bedelia shrugged, “Don’t know.  This portal site was not in the public Magus Arcanum database. It could be dangerous on the other side, so we should be ready to return quickly.”  I nodded. I hooked my tetsubo to the belt and walked to the portal.

The rotting smell on the other side hit my nose. I oriented myself. The ground was spongy, and the trees all around me were dead. Mossy mounds covered the expanse of murky water around us. Ah, shit. We were in a swamp. Artica was right behind me, with her nose twitching at the smell as well. When Bedelia came through, she was on alert as well and finally figured it out as well.

I spoke, “Bedelia, use your scrying ability and see if there is any civilization close.” Her range was ten miles, if I remember correctly. I waited while her eyes went white. When her eyes returned to normal, she looked a little tired.

“There is some rocky terrain about three miles that way,” she pointed, “The rest of the directions are all swamp, like this. I did see one thirty-foot-long gator about five miles that way,” she finished by pointing.

“Did the rocky terrain continue, or is it just an island?” I asked, looking in that direction.

“I think it is a road through the swamp, but it has not been used in a while,” she said while slapping one of the bugs that had found us. Artica was still on alert but clear of the bugs.

“I really would hate it if this was one big waste of time,” I grumbled. I decided, “I will open the portal, and you two can go back through. I will fly and check it out and then follow. Let me give you two some bedrolls so you can use that shack and get some rest. I should be back in a few hours.” I produced two of the six bedrolls I had in my mind space. The bedrolls drained the occupant’s aether slightly to maintain a warm environment.

“How big is your storage space!” Bedelia asked again, taking the bundles, and I ignored her question again. I opened the portal, and Artica went through reluctantly. Bedelia was slapping bugs as she left. For some reason, the bugs left me alone. Almost as if they were afraid of biting me. I waited till the portal closed and then removed my top.

I transformed into my incubus form and took to the air in the direction Bedelia had indicated. As I flew, I noticed two gators and two massive snakes in the water. This was not a great location, and that is probably why the Magus Arcanum didn’t have it on their maps. When I reached it, the rocky area did look like a rough road cutting through the swamp.

I glided about fifty feet off the ground in the direction that Kealon City should be. After about twenty miles, I noticed another portal location. I wondered where it came out on Earth but left it for now. I decided to land as I approached some hills. It looked like the swamp was a massive bowl, maybe the bottom of an old valley that was once a forest and filled with water. I started walking the road up into the hills. A few cat-sized lizards and one odd-looking fox with black and silver fur scurried away.

When I reached the top of the hill, I smiled. Rolling green hills dotted with trees spread before me, and the road clearly led to a village about two miles away. It looked like there were a number of farmhouses along the road to the village as well. I shifted back to my human form and put away my communicator. If Bedelia was right, then it should be a friendly elven village.

When I returned, I looked back on the brown and gray swamp to orient myself. I then descended in the rolling hills toward the town. I approached a farm fairly quickly, and the man in the fields raised a crossbow at me, and I held up my hands to show I meant no harm. My abyssal sight told me the man was a human, not an elf.

He spoke before I could, “We don’t get many travelers from Aberdeen.” My thought was if I had traveled in the other direction, I guessed that was where the road went.

I said, “I am just a traveler headed to Kealon. How much further is it?” He had a puzzled look, and I remembered my translation device worked one way. It took him a minute to understand that I had such a device before he waved me to follow him to the town.

The structures in town were stone and wood, but the craftsmanship was incredible. They looked like modern construction, except the roof had wood shingles instead of asphalt, and the windows were odd shapes and molded into the structure. I noted most of the villagers were human, but I did notice a number of elves. The deeper I went into the town, the more curious glances I got.

My military fatigues only looked slightly out of place. The townsfolk wore a huge variety of clothes like they couldn’t decide what era they belonged to. The center building in town was a large white cube, and a gray-haired elf exited it. The elf had deep blue robes and smiled as he came to meet me. I introduced myself, “My name is Apollyon, and I am on my way to Kealon. How much further is it to the city?”

He didn’t answer immediately, studying me first. “I am Alwin Vasandoral. Mayor of Hylora. A pleasure to meet you, traveler,” he bowed slightly. “Do you have any news from Aberdeen? You are two days walk to Kealon, Apollyon.”

Maybe they didn’t get many people from the transits, so they assumed I was coming from Aberdeen. I weighed my options and finally admitted, “I came through a transit in the swamps. This road led me here.”

Alwin’s eyebrows went up in surprise, “The swamps are not hospitable. I remember there being a transit gate or two within the depths.” He considered me, “Very good, then. If you wish to trade for local currency, you are welcome. Our inn is well stocked if you wish to stay the night. The mining town of Beekenshire is north of us, and the town of Thakor is halfway to the city.” His smile seemed genuine, and I knew he had to be ancient for an elf to have gray hair.

I nodded, smiling while he gave me the information, slightly surprised he was so trusting. I guessed two days walk was about forty miles. But I could fly the distance in about 40 minutes as I estimated my flying speed was between 60 and 70 miles per hour now. But going into Kealon without backup was not an option. Even in this little town of about five hundred, I felt surrounded.

I looked south. Maybe I could reach Danila in a few hours. I turned my attention to Alwin, “Thank you. I will see about trading, and then I will be on my way. My companions are waiting to hear from me in the swamps, so I can not stay.” I considered and then asked, “Are there a lot of beastkin barges in the area? Hunters?”

Alwin didn’t hesitate to reply, “The beastkin lands are far to the south, maybe a week’s travel. We rarely see their skyships this far north. Are you seeking mercenaries? There are usually good elven adventurers in Kealon that can be hired. Beastkin are notoriously unreliable,” he added with some distaste in his tone.

I sensed some racism from Alwin so I asked about the humans, “What about human adventurers? I see most of your townsfolk are human.”

Alvin shrugged, “The humans generally live in the surrounding towns as they pay higher taxes in Kealon. How long have you been traveling the transits?”

I was in my adult human form and thought about how to answer, “I just joined a dungeon team recently. I am the scout, and we are seeking a portal close to Kealon to begin trading.” My response got a big smile from him.

Alwin directed me to a small building that appeared to be a general store of sorts.  He remained as he was the only one I had met with a translator stone.  I walked around the shop, examining the merchandise.

The products were about half preserved food, a quarter of clothing, and a quarter of household items.  The items were a mix of handcrafted items, and the rest were clearly from Earth.  I picked up a pair of Levi’s jeans, and they were well-worn but in good shape.  Jars of Mott’s applesauce, Welches jelly, and Jiff peanut butter appeared popular from Earth in the food section.  Most of the household items in the store were for the kitchen and self-grooming, but nothing struck me as unique or magical.  I wasn’t sure if I should try to sell anything.  I didn’t want to reveal that I could pull things from my mind space.  I wandered the shop and pretended to be interested, but in the end, I left empty-handed, to the disappointment of the human proprietor, an older woman.

I thanked the mayor and left to return to the swamp.  I noticed a number of locals keeping an eye on me as I headed back into the hills.  I only noted four beastkin in the entire village.  They were using illusions to hide their true form, so maybe their species was not welcome in the town.  It was not my place to point them out.

When I cleared the hills and was out of sight of the farms, I took flight in my incubus form and headed directly for the portal.  I hovered briefly over one of the massive gators and fired my pistol, aiming for the back of its head from thirty feet in the air.  I wanted to test how powerful the pistol was, maybe harvest an aether crystal as well.  I missed and created a sizzling column of water.  The twenty-foot gator was alerted and jumped twenty feet out of the water toward me, which scared me.  Gators shouldn’t be able to jump!

When the gator discovered it couldn’t reach me, it fled.  The fact the monster was smart enough to flee was concerning.  I followed it and fired twice more, missing both times as it wove through the water before I gave up.  It wasn’t worth wasting the aether.   Aiming while hovering shouldn’t have been that hard, but I was only missing my target by about two feet each time.  Frustrated, I flew to the portal and opened a gate.

Returning to Earth, I found Bedelia and Artica huddled in the bags I had given them in the small shack.  Artica was alert as soon as I walked on the crunching snow to the shed.  Bedelia was snoring, blissfully unaware.  Artica was out of the sleeping bag and asked, “How did it go?” her hot breath causing whirling clouds in the frigid night air.

I sat on a rotting bench, “The good news is I confirmed we could get to Kealon from the swamp.  The bad news is I am a terrible shot,” I unhooked the belt and stored it back in my mind space.  Bedelia was just stirring now.  Her snoring had stopped, and she was sitting up. I think she was one of those people who could sleep anywhere.    
  
Artica pulled up her phone, “We still have six hours before we have to meet, Iris.  I think you can squeeze into my sleeping bag with me,” she smiled.  Bedelia rolled her eyes, and I thought it might be fun to make her jealous.

Instead, I offered, “We can hike out now and call her to pick us up at first light.”  I pulled out one of the light stones and activated it.  Neither of them looked anxious to hike in the cold up the steep incline we came down to get here.  It was extremely cold and dark, so I conceded,  “Fine, the bags should zip together.  We can make one big sleeping for all three of us.”  I had another four bags in my mind space, but I thought it would be fun.

Artica was immediately on board and was working on the zippers, getting the bags together.  I stripped off my Shockweave fatigues and just had on my combat spandex. I proceeded to get into the zipped-together bags.  Artica, who had been dressed, stripped nearly naked and got in with me without hesitation.  That left a still drowsy, and fully clothed Bedelia standing open-mouthed.  I enjoyed teasing her, and I could see her considering her options.  Maybe if she stripped, I would consider elevating her core right now.  Instead, she remained clothed and squeezed in between me and a disappointed Artica.

When we settled, it was just a tight fit.  Both Artica and Bedelia were petite women.  We were all on our backs, shoulder to shoulder, and I said, “I think maybe we should try the crab cave tomorrow.”

Bedelia turned her head toward me. She had minty breath as she spoke, “What about the hunters?”

“That is what I mean.  We should check.  We can enter, and you can scan with your ability.  Getting everyone through the swamp is going to be too difficult.  Even though it is only about 70 miles away from Kealon, the swamp is full of monster gators and snakes.  Those gators are smart.  Every time we enter, they could be waiting on the other side.  There was another gate on the road, but I didn’t check where it led to on Earth.”  We discussed whether it would be better to go to the crab cave or for me to explore the other gate in the swamp and the crab cave won.   
  
Bedelia was exhausted, and she was snoring softly.   I felt Artica’s small hand on my shoulder, reaching over Bedelia.  Her hand moved down my shoulder to my hips and inside my spandex bottoms. I let myself become aroused, and she started giving me a slow hand job, and I think she hoped for Bedelia to wake up and react.

As her tempo increased, the action of Artica’s arm across her body woke Bedelia. I could tell because she stopped snoring. I was curious what her reaction was going to be. Artica was clearly aware Bedelia was awake as she stroked me. I could smell Artica’s familiar arousal wafting inside the enclosed sleeping bag. Soon Bedelia’s scent joined hers, but Bedelia remained frozen.

I moved my hand to Bedelia’s thigh and rubbed it slowly. I moved up to her waist and slowly unbuckled them. With her belt unleashed, I unbuttoned and unzipped her pants. Her breathing had increased, but she still didn’t move. I went inside and reached down to her bare thighs. Her muscles were tense as I rubbed her inner thighs.

I continued teasing her for minutes and smelled Artica reaching a release. She must have been administering herself with her other hand. Artica continued to stroke me, though. My hand moved up to Bedelia’s panties, and I found them wet with arousal. I traced her folds with my index finger and added a vortex to her aether core. Bedelia was being stoic and pretending she was still asleep.

I turned on my lust aura in hopes together to break. It worked as her tense muscles were suddenly relaxed, and I could now hear Artica’s hand administering to herself, impatient for a second release. Bedelia opened her thighs slightly to give me easier access. I took advantage and moved under her panties.

My fingers played with her labia and exposed her inner folds. I continued for a few minutes, trying to break her faking being asleep. When I slipped slightly inside her, she moaned, and her body trembled slightly from a small orgasm she couldn’t contain. Artica’s hand retreated from my shaft as she focused both her hands on herself. No, Artica’s small hand joined mine inside Bedelia’s panties.

We somehow came to a silent agreement with our hands. Artica was going to focus her efforts on Bedelia’s clitoris, and I was responsible for her pussy. While I caressed her folds and softly penetrated her Artica’s hand was more aggressive. I guessed that was what Artica preferred when she administered to herself.

I switched to my longer middle finger to get more depth into Bedelia, and her hips suddenly arched in surprise. She was tight, and I guessed she was a virgin and couldn’t resist coming with my lust aura and our constant attention. We didn’t stop as we tag-teamed Bedelia for the next hour and brought her to repeated orgasms. She had soft orgasms and not much of a release, but her entire body always clenched when she came.

I was surprised Bedelia just laid there the entire time. If she had participated, I might have pulled her onto my shaft and let her feel a real penetration. Artica apparently got bored with Bedelia her hand left the joint effort. I spent a few minutes helping her reach one last release before ending my vortex. I then fumbled to close the zipper, rebutton the pants, and reclasp the belt.

Bedelia was snoring happily a few minutes later, and I managed to get fourteen life essence from the efforts. Not a bad harvest. Unfortunately, my mind went to my sister, Paige. I couldn’t stop thinking that I had not had sex with Bedelia and probably had just raised her core slightly.

I didn’t have to have intercourse with a partner in order to raise their aether core. I just lay there the rest of the morning, considering arguments against making the offer to Paige.