

Chapter 11 – Beginnings

“The people at the portal are not doing their job,” Ray Danforth said to his partner. Both of them were bundled against the chill of the New Zealand mountains, though Felicia hardly needed it. It was the sixth unregistered fae enclave they’d been to in the past year, though it might have been more apt to call it an infestation. Unlike most places, the surrounding terrain had hardly been altered at all, but the landscape had already been almost fantastical. He was pretty sure that the fae had settled there *because* of the natural beauty and how similar it was to Faerie’s inherent aesthetic.

Not that the creatures Taisen’s mages had captured were beauties themselves. They weren’t even proper fae as such. Instead they were some of the terrible beasts that lived deep in Faerie, the Cold Children and the Shadows of That Which Dwells Beneath. A real fae would have adopted some of the local legends – there were plenty – but these types hadn’t bothered.

“I suspect they did not come through the portal,” Felicia replied, putting her bare hand on the flank of some abomination of spider and hound, stiff white hair rustling audibly under Felicia’s touch. It shivered, completely cowed, which was a far sight from the hostility the barely-thinking Cold Children showed to mages. Besides which, it would have frozen Ray’s hand right through if he’d tried the same thing.

“They dwell deep in Faerie, and they’d hardly wander through on their own,” Felicia said at length. “But with the connection to Earth, there might be other paths some fae could travel to get here.”

Ray raised his eyebrows. The fae were notoriously closemouthed about a lot of their abilities. Everyone figured they had ways to move around that were close to teleportation, but with the limitations any faerie magic had that could mean anything. It could be something they could do at will, or something that only worked under a full moon at midsummer. Even Felicia didn’t elaborate on such things usually, despite how close they’d been over the years.

“So there’s some kind of backchannel trafficking road into Earth from Faerie now?”

“I suspect so. If I knew *where* it was I could just send them back.” She patted the abomination again. “Without it, moving them will require a breacher portal and likely some discussion with GAR.”

“Above our paygrade,” Ray observed.

“Yes. But they should go back. They don’t belong here,” Felicia said. If they couldn’t be returned, they would have to be exterminated like the things that had been riding the

Cold Children's shadows. Ray was vaguely aware that things were not so simple as there being Winter and Summer Courts, but that characterization wasn't terribly far from the truth either. Both of the invading species could be thought of as things from the Winter side of the scale, but at least the Cold Children had physical bodies.

Ethereal beings were generally rare and difficult to deal with, but the shadowy parasites were completely helpless against mages with control over light or darkness. The fae animals had been fairly simple to subdue for Taisen's team, even without the Archmage in attendance, but they'd only *properly* gotten settled down once Felicia had been brought on site. There actually weren't that many fae in *Defensores Mundi* with a working knowledge of creatures from Faerie proper.

"At least we didn't need any outside help for this one," Ray sighed, hands in his pockets. It was freezing, no matter how beautiful the mountains looked. "You know we're going to need to track this down. Find this origin point." He knew it was true, but it also appealed to Felicia's detective instincts.

It'd be healthier than finding trouble spots, too.

The idea of pursuing something substantive after they'd been stymied on their investigation into GAR – mostly by no longer being part of it – visibly perked her up. She seemed to lose ten years in an instant, and very well might have. The way fae magic worked was weird.

"We may have to talk to some fae kings," Felicia said. "If the Archmage will back us."

"I think he will, since I doubt anyone else wants to deal with them," Ray said.

"I don't even want to, but I will," Felicia said, then dug her tablet out of her bag as the transportation team came by. Some earth and light mages had whipped up large, lit cages for the creatures, big stone boxes that were proof rending claws and jaws — and any intangible shadows that might be still in hiding.

"It's under control," she wrote on her tablet as the multi-ton cage was set down on the ground. *"I'll guide it in."*

"If you're sure, ma'am," said Captain Yang. Neither Ray nor Felicia were part of the pseudo-military structure of House Taisen, but people more or less listened to them in their areas of expertise. Which hadn't always been the case in the Department of Arcane Investigation.

The earth mage opened the cage by simply removing the stone from one side and Felicia ushered the Cold Child into it before the cage was sealed again. Out of Felicia's

influence it let loose a shrill and terrifying cry, muffled by the confines of its box. Ray winced, rubbing at his ears by reflex.

“Anyway, think you can figure out where they came from locally?” Ray asked. “I doubt they swam across the ocean.”

“*I can try,*” Felicia said, and made a motion at Ray. In reply he whipped up an air cushion so they could get around quicker, rather than hiking over the rough terrain. They floated about the area as Felicia turned her head left and right, scenting for the origin of the fae incursion. They had already determined that the place the creatures had laired wasn’t where they’d emerged, but they’d been there long enough any original tracks were long gone.

The two of them left the last of the cleanup behind, to mages who were more equipped for the job, and ventured out into the countryside. They weren’t stupid about it, of course. Ray called in with a scry-com, and if they were to run into anything untoward they wouldn’t tackle it on their own. But the region had been fairly well surveyed for threats, so he wasn’t worried.

They followed a zig-zag path as Felicia played bloodhound, over mountain ridges and down valleys. The things had gone quite a way, but eventually Felicia waved them to a stop by a large and lonely tree growing at the top of a cliff. Up close, Ray could see the disturbance in the mana, though to his eye there was no order or consistency to it, save that it focused on a circle of bare rock framed by gnarled roots.

He stood back as Felicia prowled around the circle, for a moment looking more primal and animalistic than normal. She stopped after three circuits and turned toward the center, speaking words that Ray could sense but couldn’t actually hear. It was a display of pure fae magic unexpected enough that she had finished before he had fully realized what was going on.

“There was a path here,” Felicia said, walking across the circle toward him. “But it’s gone. I think it was closed on purpose, but I couldn’t swear to it.”

“We need to make sure it won’t open again,” Ray said, running his fingers over his focus band. Faerie magic was affected enough by the environment that there were simple ways to disrupt it. He simply pulled the tree off its perch and relocated it at the base of the cliff, tapping into his earth-moving focus to bury the roots. It would have been faster and simpler to just destroy the tree, but Felicia wouldn’t have liked that.

Only then did he doublecheck the GPS coordinates before logging them for his report. If other things had come through, they might have gone in another direction, so there

would be some teams sweeping out to see if there was anything to follow up on. For all anyone knew, the creatures were a distraction from something more insidious.

“Thanks,” Felicia said. It wasn’t clear whether she was referring to his removal of the faerie path or preserving the three. She came back to stand next to him once again, looking around with those sharp black eyes that so easily captured him when he wasn’t being careful. “I don’t think there’s anything else for us here.”

“I suppose not,” Ray agreed, because there *was* something for them elsewhere. Ever since they’d found out Wells’ real identity they’d been stuck in a kind of a vague muddle, without a clear goal to chase. They merely had busywork to do. Finding out who was smuggling deep Faerie creatures into the world, though, that had some meat.

It would be nice to have something to sink their teeth into.

“We have no desire to move against The Ghost or the American Alliance,” Archmage Hargrave said flatly. Gayle bit her lip, still not used to being present when high-powered discussions were being held. The library at House Hargrave was a completely different setting with four different archmages arguing. Besides her own grandfather, there was Archmage Janry, there as a neutral observer, Archmage Taisen, there in solidarity against GAR, and Archmage Corrilon, as GAR’s representative.

She wasn’t the only non-archmage present. Everyone had staff along, some recording the proceedings with notebooks and cameras, others there as advisors or strategic assets. Gayle fell into the last category, as House Hargrave’s sole healer. The library was large enough that it didn’t really feel crowded, but hardly anyone besides the Archmages were noticeable.

“It’s only a matter of time before they move against you,” Corrilon said, his voice so lifeless and insipid that Gayle could barely pay attention despite the stakes. “The latest attack against GAR shows that they will not brook any power but their own.”

“That’s not true,” Gayle said, cutting in. Even six months ago she wouldn’t have dared, but after working more closely with her grandfather and shouldering some responsibilities of her own she had more self-assurance. “The Ghost has made it very clear what he objects to. *We* aren’t going to have any problems.”

“You still have relations with the vampires in major city centers,” Corrilon replied, the argument uninflected as if he were reading off a checklist. Which perhaps he was. Even Gayle knew that everyone believed Corrilon was someone else’s voice, though opinions were mixed on exactly whose.

“Relations which are nobody’s business,” her grandfather said, before she could argue. It was hard to remember that it was better to never explain or make excuses. She had always preferred being reasonable, but reasonableness wasn’t how things were done at the top. “I’m hardly surprised that Constance was eliminated. Even within GAR she had made enough enemies. For all I know The Ghost didn’t even do it on his own account.”

“You will regret not neutralizing such dangerous people while it is still possible,” Corrilon said, though the threat was undercut by the monotonous drone of his voice. “As GAR is made weaker, there will only be more problems. Inaction now means chaos later.”

“We’ll take our chances,” her grandfather said.

“Not all chaos is bad,” Archmage Taisen observed. “It represents opportunity, not just randomness. House Taisen is not and has never been in favor of the Department of Acquisition. Why risk mundane threats when we don’t need them?”

“Leaving this be will generate internal threats like other rogue mages,” Corrilon replied. Gale could swear she saw his eyes tracking like he was reading a line off a page.

“Now that there are other options aside from GAR, I very much doubt it,” Taisen said.

Apparently Corrilon ran out of lines, because his little group took their leave soon after that. Janry had barely contributed anything during the whole discussion, and was the only archmage that looked appropriately bored by Corrilon’s dreary voice. Once the GAR representative was gone, her grandfather sighed and shook his head.

“As annoying as he is, eliminating Constance *does* change things. There’s a difference between going after vampires and directly striking at important mages.” He turned to Gayle. “Do you know why he did it?”

“Why, no, but I can ask the next time I see him. It won’t be long. Mrs. Wells is almost due so I’m seeing them fairly often.”

“Do so,” he said.

“Far be it from me to point out the obvious,” Janry’s assistant piped up. “But if you have access to Wells’ wife and soon to be child, isn’t that a good way to control him?” Gayle scowled thunderously and opened her mouth to object, but closed it again when she saw her grandfather’s expression. He was studying the man with the particular mix of interest and disgust that someone might use to regard a rather loathsome insect.

“You’re suggesting that we coerce someone who is willing and able to assassinate *archmages* and give him every reason to turn his attention to us,” her grandfather said,

his voice flat. "Does Janry employ you so he knows which ideas *not* to entertain?" The man colored, but didn't reply.

"Head on back to the House, Jameson," Janry muttered, voice just as sleepy as his expression.

"Yes, sir," Jameson said, and stood up to leave. Unlike before, he couldn't simply teleport out. House Hargrave *did* still have some teleportation pads, but they only linked with their closest allies. Jameson was forced to actually leave through the front door and make his way to wherever it was that he had come from. House Janry hadn't actually left GAR the way her House had, so she wasn't sure how good an idea it was to have them at this kind of meeting, but they were still maintaining a sort of reserved support of House Hargrave.

"Since I assume nobody else is going to repeat that kind of idiocy," he grandfather said. "Is there any real issue with this development? We don't need anything that Acquisition did anyway."

"Constance may be gone but the apparatus is still there," Taisen said. "Someone else will be put in charge of it. Though..." His lips tightened. "I know she ran it more through personal connections than proper channels. The actual reach of the Department of Acquisition may not be nearly as far as it has seemed."

"Which doesn't seem like our problem," her grandfather replied.

"It might be *mine*," Taisen said unhappily. "The BSE has been kind of operating, but if there's a significant disruption in how people interact with mundanes, *someone* has to clean it up. At some point we supernaturals might have been powerful enough to not worry about the mundane reaction, but that's certainly not the case today."

"Shouldn't we be thinking about how to interact with mundanes openly?" Gayle asked, and all eyes went to her. "I don't mean *right now*," she added hastily. "Just as something to start thinking about. I've been looking around on the internet on what can be done and even with glamours there's probably a point past which we can't hide."

"Don't be so sure," Taisen grunted. "The idea that there's nothing outside of technology has gone both deep and wide. Half the stuff the BSE cleans up would probably be attributed to fanatics of various stripes even without our intervention."

"People do not like the idea that there are those different from them, especially if they're better," her grandfather said without any shame at all. Though it was hard to argue that mages didn't have an advantage over those without magic. "There is and was no way to live among mundanes without it ending badly."

Gayle nodded, but she wasn't entirely convinced. Not only was it wrong to just take the advancements the mundanes had made without giving back, but she didn't think everyone was as blind as Taisen thought. They couldn't hide it forever, and to be exposed without being prepared would be catastrophic. She just had no idea what on Earth could be done.

"I have to wonder why an organization as powerful as GAR, even after the withdrawal of its militant houses, has so much trouble dealing with one man."

Teller Janry suppressed a frown as he regarded the Master of Weltentor. It was a complaint he was growing tired of, though it was usually directed at GAR by Archmages or fae rather than vampires. Possibly because usually there were no vampires left to complain when Wells acted, and Weltentor was their only superior.

"Not even Alpha Chester knows where Wells is located," he explained patiently. "He doesn't use any of the normal supernatural channels, and he doesn't even appear in public. Even mundane methods of tracing him don't have anything to start from."

"Don't tell me you're just going to sit there and take it," Weltentor said scornfully.

"No, indeed," Janry said. There was no knowing what exactly Wells had used to remove Constance. The eyewitness had not been very useful, just testifying to a sudden burst of magic and thunder and then Constance – and her desk – were gone.

Duvall had, after much pestering, been convinced to look at the remnants of the spatial magic. He hadn't personally been present, but the report had said she'd decried it as leading to some uninhabitable place only a heretic would conjure. She had flatly refused to open an actual portal. From the way the report was worded, he gathered she'd been rather more curt than the bland description he'd gotten.

"We have acquired some of the mages from House Fane to work on countermeasures, but it requires more time and material," Teller said diplomatically. "Even if we can't find him, his targets are fairly predictable. Which is one reason I'm here. Extra mordite will help expedite the process."

"I see." Weltentor's expression didn't give anything away. Teller found most vampires to be rather simple-minded, but the Master of Weltentor had been around for a long time. Long enough to learn some subtleties. "And will you be offering additional freedoms from the Department of Acquisitions as well?"

"Not for the moment." Teller grimaced. "In the current chaos, it has seemed best to let other powers fight for that particular post. We can always capture it later. No, we rather

hoped you would see this is as being in your own interest as well. After all, vampires are his primary targets. We will, of course, share any usable protections we come up with.”

His House was extremely wealthy, of course, but developing an entirely new class of defenses took materials that just weren’t available in quantity. Even working with the Guild of Enchanting in absolute secret, there was only so much bane material to go around at any given time. Experimental enchantments were the worst too, since they usually had to be broken down and recycled, rendering the enchanting medium useless very quickly.

“Yes, I suppose it is for both our benefits,” Weltentor conceded after a moment.

“However, I want more license to send new nests through to Earth. Not only to replace that which has been displaced by The Ghost and the American Alliance, but I am well aware of the considerations you’ve been giving the fae.”

Teller blinked, but otherwise schooled himself not to react. He wasn’t sure if Weltentor’s source was Constance herself, who was a perfectly competent tool but sometimes overreached, or his own contacts inside of various agencies. House Janry had long suspected Weltentor had more control over the Earth-side vampires than he was purported to have.

“I only have so much latitude for what I can promise,” Teller said. “But very well. Let us discuss it.”

Callum held his son carefully in his arms, breath stuck in his throat as everything changed.

Perhaps that wasn’t quite right. There was no seismic realignment of his priorities, no sudden revelations. Just a slow settling in of how it was real and what that meant for the future.

The entire process of birth had been entirely without drama, mostly thanks to magical healing. Between Gayle and the shifter midwife there had been no surprises, no worries, and Lucy had barely broken a sweat. It wasn’t anything like how things were portrayed in media, but that was for the best.

They were still at Chester’s compound, at least for the moment, settled in a private suite until the midwife cleared them. With magical healing that really shouldn’t be long, but he wasn’t going to take any risks at all. He was glad that Chester’s compound was equipped for the purpose, though considering how large the pack was, it wasn’t all that much a surprise. It meant no need for a hospital and all the risks those entailed.

“Hey, you had your time,” Lucy said, relaxing in the chair next to his. “Gimme.” She made grabby fingers at her son and Callum laughed, carefully passing him back over.

“So, Alexander or Robert?” Callum asked, since those were the names they’d gotten down to.

“Hmm.” Lucy pursed her lips as she snuggled the sleeping baby up against her. “Alex. I don’t want my son being *Bob the Mage*.”

“Fair point,” Callum laughed. “Alexander it is.” Since Alexander was going to be a mage, considering the amount of vis in his body. It was significantly denser than Lucy’s, though not as much as Callum’s. Though Alexander was only a few hours old, so that was only to be expected.

It was far too early to know what kind of mage Alexander was going to be. Even mages from the primary Houses didn’t really start showing any kind of ability until elementary age, and the standard test was done around four or five. If manifestations started earlier, a smaller version of the vis-drainer bracelet was often employed simply to keep the child from harm.

That was all stuff they’d gotten from Gayle, and it was a bit of a relief to know they wouldn’t have to worry about their infant setting fires before he could speak. That was assuming that he didn’t inherit Callum’s predilection for internal vis use, anyway. Which they would need Gayle to deal with if it did happen, just in case that vis loop had to be broken.

For better or worse, the first couple years weren’t very different for mage kids and normal kids. Considering most mage children were raised inside a portal world, with absurdly abundant mana, they probably started manifesting magic earlier than anyone raised on Earth would. That gave himself and Lucy a grace period where they only had to worry about the usual new-child issues. Which were hardly minor. Despite being married before, he’d never been a parent.

“Here’s my new phone number in case you need any healing done,” Gayle said, as they prepared to head back home the next day. She offered Callum a little business card, something that had clearly been recently printed. “Now that I have a real mobile phone.” Callum took it and flipped it over, seeing Gayle’s name along with what he took to be the House Hargrave crest.

“I can manage pretty much any type of medical emergency,” Gayle elaborated as he looked at the fine print. “I have mostly magical training, but I’ve been taking courses for mundane medicine too!”

“Thank you, Gayle,” Lucy said cheerfully, handing Alex off to Callum so she could give Gayle a hug. “Definitely glad we didn’t have to do all this the mundane way.”

“Yes, thank you,” Callum agreed. “I also have something for you.” It was just as well he could use magic since his hands were full. He pulled a linked pair of teleportation plates from the cave-cache, ones that he’d made very recently. As such, they were far more efficient and pleasant to use than his first few designs.

“I figure you should leave one here, with Chester’s permission of course,” he said, floating the plates down next to Gayle. “It’ll save you all a lot of time to be able to connect up directly. I’ve got another set I’ve been working on for you that I’ll give you later for payment.”

“Oh, excellent,” Gayle said happily. Glenda, off to the side, nodded with more analytical speculation in her eyes. Callum wasn’t sure how hard it was to get ahold of new spatial enchantments now, since Duvall was trying to retool them all, but it sure wouldn’t hurt to have a link between the American Alliance and House Hargrave.

“We’ve also got something for you personally,” Lucy said, taking Alex back from Callum with a knowing smile. Predictably, he started to complain at being handed around so much, and she made soothing sounds as Callum pulled something else from the cache.

“Copies of all my favorite books,” Callum said, as a rather large box appeared on the floor. Even if it was all paperbacks, that many books got heavy. “There are probably duplicates for some of the ones you have already, but I’m sure someone will read them.”

“Ooh!” Gayle practically squealed, flicking out her own telekinesis focus to open the box up and examine the contents. “Thank you!” She said, and he suffered himself to be hugged by the exuberant healer. Which was something mages didn’t generally do, so he figured his lack of bubble helped in that regard.

“You’re welcome,” he told her, awkwardly returning the hug while Lucy snickered at him. “If there’s nothing else, we’ll be in touch,” he said. They’d already thanked Chester and Lisa, who had business of their own to attend to and hadn’t even been around for a few days. It spoke volumes that he wasn’t feeling under constant threat from the shifters that lived in the compound with Chester gone.

“Sure,” Gayle said cheerfully. “And I’ll show him that stuff from Constance.” She waved in the direction of the filing cabinets full of documents he’d brought.

“Yeah.” Callum grimaced. That had been weeks ago, and only now was anyone asking *him* about it. The fallout for that seemed to be moving slow-motion, with the speed only

bureaucracies could manage. He was doing his best not to let it get to him, and it wasn't like they weren't busy with other things.

With a few other words of goodbye, Callum opened a portal back to the cave, then the house. Even with his vastly improved control and ability to use tubes nearly as well as threads, he wasn't going to trust his son's health to his still relatively shoddy teleportation. Portals were just safer.

Lucy slumped down on the couch, cradling Alexander against her and letting out a groan. Callum raised his eyebrows and settled down next to her, teleporting a glass into his hand and some juice from the fridge into the glass. He handed it to her and she took a long drink before leaning against him.

"Something the matter, dear?"

"Magical healing or not I am *tired*," Lucy said, and Alexander started fussing again. Lucy immediately handed her glass to Callum and he took it with some amusement while she fed little Alex.

"I'll take him for a while, and you can nap," he suggested.

"Good idea," Lucy said, transferring Alex over and promptly flopping onto his lap and closing her eyes. Callum smiled and shook his head, considering his son and the future that created.

Some people would want to use his family against him. Even ignoring how he was at odds with half the supernatural world, the reason that Houses were essentially sovereign nations was because they still operated on the old politics of centuries past. All kinds of nastiness was acceptable if it removed the competition.

It wasn't fair to raise his child completely separate from both mage society and normal society, which meant Callum would have to make *some* overtures to a normal life. His alliance – friendship – with Alpha Chester was a start, but it wouldn't be enough. There was time, but at some point he would have to resolve enough things that Alexander wouldn't have to be looking over his shoulder every minute of the day.

He really didn't know how to do that. Making nice with what remained of GAR wasn't exactly possible, but it wasn't like he was going to try and eliminate everyone who could possibly stand against him. Nor did he want to try and vanish, since even if that were possible that just meant he'd be waiting for the past to catch up.

Callum readjusted Alexander and rubbed his eyes, deciding to let go of the maudlin contemplation. It wasn't something he needed to answer that moment, and there were

more immediate worries. Like cataloguing all the baby supplies and making sure they weren't missing anything. Which they probably were.

Neither he nor Lucy got all that much work done over the next few months. Which wasn't to say there was no progress on any front. Callum kept up with his daily exercises and Lucy doodled designs for the space nexus, and both of them got as much sleep as Alexander allowed them. Then the last parts came in and their moon base was ready to be turned into reality.

"It needs an upward vector for six seconds," Lucy instructed, looking at the readouts in the war room. Callum complied. Intersecting the moon was not as simple as just pointing in that direction and letting the Alcubierre take over, since not only did the technique drain vis something awful but space was large and the moon was a lot smaller than it seemed. Despite the name he'd given it, his spatial drive was *not* faster than light. At least, not with the length of time he could keep it up.

With judicious use of both Newtonian momentum and inertialess movement, Lucy navigated their anchor probe around to the far side of the moon. He actually had no idea how the lack of mana would affect glamour, and whether they'd affect light or radar or every other wavelength that was used in space sensing. While glammers seemed to fool satellites, they also had miles of mana to interact with, not an incredibly thin shell. Which made the far side of the moon the best place to avoid scrutiny.

"Okay, love. Do your thing," Lucy said, as the cratered face of the moon stabilized in the camera feed. "Alcubierre it now."

"I don't think that's a verb," Callum said.

"Doesn't matter," Lucy said heartlessly. "You know what I mean. Just smack the moon."

"Yep, pretty sure I can't miss from this distance," Callum agreed, and formed matrix with his vis, tugging it directly forward for a few seconds until it collapsed of its own accord when it intersected solid matter. They were on the moon.

"One small spell for a mage, one giant task for dud-kind," Lucy said.

"How long were you saving that for?" Callum asked in amusement.

"Way too long," Lucy grinned.

The major issue with the moon was that it got completely unmitigated sunlight for weeks at a time, and it could get extremely hot. Especially metal, which was not exactly an insulator. On the other hand, blocking off the sun entirely would result in things getting

too cold, so Lucy had needed to rig up some thermal insulation, with the actual portal connection doing the bulk of the work keeping things reasonable.

In order to get the rest of the nexus in place, he had to use a small secondary portal without any shielding to spray mana over the place, supplementing it with vis to keep everything from collapsing as he moved the sprayer about the area. Then the actual nexus boxes went into place, each one spaced a hundred yards or so from the central one he used to access the nexus.

“Oh man, what a view,” Lucy said, looking at the intense starfield visible through the cameras. “If I can figure out how to get a spacesuit I totally want to go there in person.”

“Hard to disagree with that,” Callum said, making sure all the portal links were functioning. The mana was already dispersing away, but the little insulated bubbles where each of the portal links were still appeared to his senses as little bubbles among a void. Which didn’t make much sense to him, since he figured that mana would have been the carrier of the perception, but it seemed that magic did as magic would.

The next issue for the moon nexus was supplying enough mana to keep things open. Previously they’d only kept things going temporarily, thanks to the mana issues. While the insulating enchantment did a good job in keeping mana from escaping into the vacuum, it relied on mana coming in from the Earth link, and in most places there just wasn’t enough ambient mana around to keep everything fueled. For the moment he was just using his own vis to hold portals open when he needed them, since there was hardly a requirement to have all eight portals and their accompanying drones and anchors, but he had other plans.

The most straightforward option was tubes literally piping mana out from the central nexus point, but that would take a lot of enchanting materials. Shielding the moon anchors already took a lot more material than telepad pairs, along with a lot of his increasingly precious time. But there was another option: opening a dimensional portal. Eventually. When he figured that out.

After all, that was half the reason he’d moved into space. Experimenting with such portals on or near Earth was far too dangerous, but in the vacuum of space beyond the moon he didn’t have to worry about anything too terrible. Considering that portals formed naturally it was obvious that they didn’t do things like end the universe, though Callum wasn’t about to rule out thermonuclear-level consequences. Something like Tunguska could very well have been a portal of that kind.

“Gonna be the first mage on the moon,” Lucy teased.

“I might well be,” Callum admitted. “All I can think of is how big a deal this would be if I could be open about it. Magic is just an insane force-multiplier for technology.” He had no illusions that without technology, a portal the moon would be useless if not outright deadly.

“Maybe someday,” Lucy said.

“Someday,” he agreed.