

Excerpt

Touch of Frost

Magic, New Mexico book 1

By S. E. Smith

Frost settled the transport he had been given in the desert not far from the damaged vessel Taar had stolen. He quickly went through the procedures to shut down and secure the spaceship. Unstrapping, he rose stiffly from the pilot's seat.

Even with the advanced technology and engine system, he had arrived at least a day behind Taar. He cursed the Warden of the mining prison for the hundredth time. Not only had the male disengaged the self-destruct on the spaceship that he had commandeered from a pirate imprisoned there, the ship had been modified giving Taar the needed power and resources to travel this far.

Frost checked the readings on the console. The atmosphere was conducive for life. He grimaced when he noted the temperatures. It was dark and cold now, but it would heat up once the sun came up.

"Computer, scan for surrounding life forms," Frost ordered.

He opened a side compartment and pulled on a vest containing the necessary tools and weapons he would need. Taar was deadly. If he was lucky, Frost hoped to catch him before he reached any of the habitats containing the local species. If not, he would have to follow the line of dead bodies. There was no doubt in his mind that Taar would leave one. It was a pattern of the Learian; find, use, kill, move on to the next food source.

Frost checked the weapons. Blasters were useless. The energy pulses bounced off the thick, leathery skin of the Learian. The sharp explosives would stun him momentarily, but unless Frost was close, Taar would recover before he could strike. The only way to kill the beast was holding him still long enough to remove his head from his shoulders.

He had captured him by freezing the bastard the last time. It had taken him two weeks to recover from the amount of energy he had expended during the fight. If he had not laid a trap and been close enough to wrap the energy cuffs around Taar's neck, hands and feet, he would have been the sixth dead Star Ranger.

"Surrounding area shows four dead life forms," the computer stated. "Analysis indicates that death

occurred within the last hour. Tracking patterns and the remains show the fugitive you are seeking continuing in a north-by-northeast path.”

“Information confirmed. Computer, begin the comprehensive elimination of evidence of Tridbarrian transport. All evidence of vessel must be erased,” Frost ordered. “Set self-destruct of this vessel for five days, four hours, thirty-two minutes unless I give verbal cancelation.”

“Directive confirmed, the self-destruct sequence has begun, elimination of Tridbarrian transport has commenced,” the computer replied.

Frost rolled his head back and forth to relieve the tension before he pressed his hand against the panel to open the outer door. He stepped down the ramp as it lowered to the dry sand and gravel soil. Drawing in a deep breath, he let the cold, fresh air rush through his body. Re-energized, he glanced at the speckled landscape, documenting key formations as a reference point.

He skimmed down through the readings on the scanner. A small dot blinked steadily. There were life forms ten clicks from his position. Taar would be hungry and would head for the nearest source of

food. Nothing else showed on the close-range scanner.

Pocketing the device, Frost glanced up at the night sky. It would be light in approximately two hours. Taar would make it to the life forms before he did.

Hopefully, he would be able to catch him after he had eaten. The Larian would be slower and more lethargic if he was full. What would really help was if he came upon Taar while he was feeding. If he could catch the male when he was distracted that would be the best option, not to mention the safest.

Frost took off at a steady pace across the dark landscape. He concentrated on the terrain in front of him, ignoring the beauty of it. He had a lot of ground to cover if he was to arrive at the dwellings before the sun rose too high in the sky to give him adequate cover.

He focused on the different scenarios he might encounter with Taar as he ran. He needed to determine the most humane way to eliminate any of the native inhabitants he might come across if wiping their memories didn't work.

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Taar's lip curled back as he sniffed the air. His stomach rumbled, reminding him that it had been over a week since he'd had a decent meal. The few small creatures he had caught shortly after he crashed barely constituted a snack.

The fresh fragrance of meat and blood poured through him as he drew in another deep breath. He could feel the pounding of blood as it flowed through the veins of the creatures close by.

His dark eyes moved over the different buildings as he tried to determine which one to attack first. His mouth watered as he watched several large creatures move restlessly around in a small arena. He was about to begin with them when the sound of another creature broke through his concentration.

A small furry mammal with golden hair covering its body was sounding a loud alarm. He snarled and stepped out from the shadows of the small clump of trees. The creature backed up toward the large brown building behind it, growling menacingly at him.

"Ginger, what is it, girl?" A voice called out from the large white structure he had been eyeing as well.

Taar slipped back into the shadows as another creature belonging to this strange world stepped out

into the early morning light. The sweet scent of her blood danced in the wind, teasing him. Hunger burned through him like boiling acid, churning his stomach and heating his blood. This was the one he wanted to sink his teeth into last. He would savor the creature's sweet blood as he slowly drained it from her. He would need to feed on the other creatures first. His hunger was too great to control. His eyes moved to the golden creature that was whining and growling at him at the same time. He would start with that one.

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Lacey glanced around the courtyard. Something was there; something she had never felt before. A sense of unease swept through her. With a glance at the gate to the corral, she slid the lock back and the gate slowly opened. The two horses and one mule bolted out of the enclosure. She didn't worry about them. They would head for the open pasture area that separated her and her aunt and sisters' homes.

Her hand wrapped tightly around the steaming cup of coffee she had just poured when she heard Ginger's frantic barking. The hair on the back of the Golden was standing straight up and the sound of distress in her voice told Lacey that the unease she'd

been feeling was based on a genuine danger. Unsure of where the threat was, Lacey walked calmly over to Ginger and sent a wave of warmth to the young mother. She also muttered a swift protection spell for her and Ginger as a precaution.

“It’s alright, sweetie,” Lacey murmured, glancing around the open area. “Go back to your babies.”

Ginger sneezed and pressed up against Lacey’s left leg. Her dark brown eyes remained frozen on the shadows near the clump of Juniper trees. Lacey carefully turned her head to stare into the shadows. A shiver raced through her and she whispered for Ginger to return to the barn again.

“I’ve got this, girl. Go take care of your babies,” Lacey ordered in a slightly harder voice and with a ‘push’ for the Golden to listen to her. “Your babies need you.”

Lacey waited as Ginger reluctantly backed up before turning and slipping back into the safety of the barn. She never turned her eyes away from the shadows. Biting her bottom lip in uncertainty, she paused before deciding retreating was the smart thing to do. Whatever was hiding it was definitely different from anything she had ever felt before. All of her natural warning systems were going crazy.

Dropping the cup of coffee in her hand, she turned on her heel and took off running for the house. A loud snarl, like that of a feral animal, exploded behind her as she ran the twenty feet to the house. She practically flew up the steps in a desperate attempt to get to safety. A wave of her hand had the screen door opening outward even as the front door opened inward. The moment she was through them, the doors slammed shut and locked.

Lacey stumbled forward and had just turned to invoke a protection spell when both doors shattered inward. She cried out as small pieces of metal and wood flew toward her. Throwing her hands up to protect her face, she screamed when something hard and heavy hit her around the waist.

She fell backwards onto the wood floors of her living room sliding several feet before coming to a stop next to the end table. The fall knocked the breath out of her as she hit the floor, leaving her gasping for breath. She instinctively raised her hands to push against the weight pressing down on her. Sharp claws threatened to pierce the soft skin of her waist even as her hands moved to push the creature off her. Lacey's eyes widened when she got her first look at the creature on top of her.

“What...?” She gasped in shock.

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