

CHAPTER SIX: The Portal

Alexis ran into the barn. “Horis!” she called out. “Please tell me you didn’t leave a note!” Her eyes widened with worry as she spoke, “We have to go back!”

Glip waited next to a trap door located in the middle of the barn. Horis and Skoog walked slowly through the barn looking around and making comments. “Mistress Alexis,” he Glip, “It will be all right. Trust me. Your parents will not worry. And pay no heed to what Horis said. He is easily confused.”

Alexis looked at Horis who had his head tipped back to look at the barn’s ceiling. “I didn’t realize how big it was,” he said. “We walked through so quickly on the way here that I didn’t notice. But now I can see that it’s just like the one in Decapolis.” He then leaned back so far that he lost his balance. He crashed to the floor, taking Skoog down with him.

Glip looked back at Alexis with a crooked grin on his face, “See what I mean?”

He shifted his gaze to the floor and pointed to the trap door at his feet. “Do you know what is through here?”

“Yeah,” said Fenton. “It’s like a storm cellar. But we don’t get the kind of storms here to need it.”

Glip smiled. “Let me show you where it really goes. Open it for me.”

Sam reached down and pulled the trap door open. He shined his flashlight into the hole. Rough steps could be seen disappearing into the darkness below. “It goes underneath the barn. If you walk through the cellar to the other side it comes up over there.” He pointed to a second trap door at the far end of the barn. Moonlight shone through one of the broken windows and cast a bright light onto the second trap door.

“Close the door, please,” said Glip.

Sam closed the door and looked at Glip expectantly. “Ok, now what?”

Glip pulled out a small worn book, “We use the diary.”

He opened it and a faint blue glow emitted from the pages.

“Whoa,” said Fenton quietly.

Alexis, seeing the diary for the first time, looked questioningly at Sam.

“It’s my dad’s,” answered Sam. “He had it with him when he came back from his last trip.”

Alexis could make out pictures of castles, maps, and lots of writing as Glip flipped through the glowing pages. Fenton leaned closer to Glip to get a better view.

“It is from Decapolis,” Glip said without looking up.

Sam spun to stare at the little Grink. “It’s what?”

A dozen questions shot through Alexis’ head. But before she could choose one, Skoog spoke up.

“It’s Wirt’s diary,” said the tall Grink. He had been brushing away dirt after untangling himself from Horis. But when the diary had emerged, he had frozen, his hand over his mouth.

“Horis, look, it really is Wirt’s diary.” He grabbed Horis’ arm to steady himself.

Blank looks passed between Sam, Alexis and Fenton.

Horis saw their confusion and spoke first. “Wirt is—”

“One of the greatest prophets ever,” interrupted Glip. “But we must not waste any more time.” He flipped through more pages.

The glowing pages drew their full attention. As Glip turned pages, Alexis noticed some of the writings appeared haphazard, almost like the person who had scrawled them couldn’t write

fast enough to keep up with their thoughts. Others were neatly printed with grand flourishes at the beginning and ending of each line.

And then there were the drawings. Pictures of amazing beasts covered dozens of pages. Large, winged monsters carried humans in their claws. Bigfoot-type monsters stood at the edge of a forest. And short, vicious creatures drawn in such detail that Alexis instantly knew they were evil. But a second illustration of these same small creatures stood out to her. It depicted a horde of these evil little monsters in a battle against a similar army of the same beasts. It almost looked like a mirror image of itself, with one exception. Instead of an evil aura, the second group of creatures had a completely neutral countenance.

Glip turned the page before she could ask about it, as Horis and Skoog continued to marvel at what they saw. “It’s the great Fortress of Beisan. Ooohhh, Fire Mountain.”

There were multiple castles, some with markings showing their size, others only as rough sketches. Numerous maps filled the diary. One showed a large body of water that connected to a lake via a long winding river. An enormous beast rose up from the lake, and Alexis was reminded of pictures of castles and moat monsters from storybooks. True to form, the creature in the picture appeared to be guarding a structure on an island in the middle of the lake. However, the building was a cross between a castle and a fortress, and didn’t look like it needed much protection.

The two Grinks commented on each drawing, mostly in awe, until Glip turned to a page that pictured a hideous looking creature hanging by one arm from a tree. Horis and Skoog both screamed, “DIRT MONKEYS!!” Together they stumbled backward and Horis yelled, “Turn the page, Glip! Turn the page!” Glip quickly flipped the page and immediately Horis and Skoog calmed down.

“And here is what we are looking for,” said Glip after turning a few more pages. “A key to Decapolis.” They looked at the page where he had stopped. It showed a picture of their barn. And next to it someone had drawn an intricate picture of an old-fashioned skeleton key.

Everyone watched as Glip reached toward the picture. Alexis let out a small yelp when Glip’s hand made contact with the page. His fingers pushed into the page and turned from flesh and blood into a drawing that matched the style of the pictures in the diary. When his hand got to the key, he grasped it and pulled it back out. As his hand emerged from the page it transformed back into a flesh and blood hand, and with it came the key. Glip handed the solid iron key to Sam.

“Would you please unlock the door?” he said.

Sam half-turned and met Alexis’ eyes. “What are we getting into?” she asked.

“Master Sam,” Glip interrupted. “The door, please.”

Shaking his head, Sam bent down and reached for the lock. But instead of inserting the key, he first tapped it against the metal handle. A “ping” echoed through the barn.

Sam looked at the key again. “Incredible,” he muttered.

Without any more hesitation, he pushed the key into the lock on the door. It fit perfectly. He looked up at Glip who nodded. Sam turned the key and heard a resounding “click”. He pulled the key back out and handed it to Glip.

Glip laid the key back in the diary, and as it made contact with the page, it once again became a drawing of a key. Alexis tentatively reached a hand toward the pages, but Glip gave her a subtle shake of his head and closed the diary. The glow instantly disappeared. Taking the leather strap, he wrapped it tightly around the diary and tied it snugly.

He looked at Sam. “Never cross over with the diary open.” Sam, bewildered, just

nodded. “Now,” said Glip, “would you mind opening the door again?”

“Didn’t he just lock it?” asked Alexis.

“No. That key unlocked our doorway to Decapolis.”

Sam reached down for the door. Counter to what he expected, the door lifted with ease. As he opened it a bright light shone from the hole. At first, Sam thought a light had been left on in the cellar. But that was ridiculous. There were no lights in the cellar. Then he realized that the light wasn’t actually projecting *into* the barn. Light from the opening created a glow around them, but only because it was so bright.

And yet, this light was different than anything Sam had experienced before. Despite the entire opening pulsing with light, he couldn’t locate any source of illumination. It acted as if one solid beam of light was projecting out of each side of the opening, aimed toward the other side. As he continued to stare at the opening, his brain struggled to comprehend what his eyes saw. The light shimmered and rippled like water. It rolled across the opening in waves as if it was a liquid. He had the impression that the cellar was full of light, and he was looking at the surface. And even though he couldn’t see anything beyond the frame of the trap door, but it wasn’t so bright that he couldn’t look at it.

“Whoa!” cried Fenton. “What’d you do? What’s down there?”

Glip shook his head. “Down there is not what you think anymore. Follow me.” He handed the diary to Sam, then turned and walked down into the light. As his foot touched the light, ripples swept across the surface. Glip descended the steps causing the light to wash back and forth across the opening like waves crashing on the beach. They knew he was walking down the steps, but the light was so bright they couldn’t see movement of his body below the opening. Without slowing, Glip’s head dropped below the surface and he disappeared.

The three looked back and forth at each other, each refusing to take the first step. Finally, Sam pulled the diary tightly against his chest and walked tentatively toward the trap door. He dipped one foot into the light as if testing the water in a swimming pool. His foot disappeared as the light rippled around his ankle. He quickly pulled his foot back out and wiggled it around. Sam looked at the other two and shrugged his shoulders.

“Here goes nothing,” he said.

Alexis watched as Sam slowly stepped down into the unseen cellar. When his neck reached the glowing barrier, he instinctively took a deep breath, held it, and closed his eyes. He took the next step down and his head sank into the light.



Sam opened his eyes and for a split second couldn't tell if they had opened completely. He had expected to be enveloped by light, but instead was surrounded by almost total darkness. There was minimal glow from the opening, just like on the other side. But the only other source of light came from a small flickering flame held by Glip.

Sam turned back to the stairs and saw the same wavy light they had seen from the top of the stairs. It turned out to be only a thin membrane of light separating the barn from the cellar. The opening shimmered as the light rippled like waves across the doorway.

“Welcome,” he heard Glip say. As Sam's eyes adjusted, he saw nothing different. It was the same cellar he had played in for years.

“I thought you said the door led to Decapolis,” he accused.

“It does,” responded Glip. Sam opened his mouth to say something else, but Glip spoke

first, “And here comes Mistress Alexis.”

Sam spun back to look at the portal. Sticking out from the light was a pair of legs. But it couldn't be Alex. The person on the stairs wore leather boots and earth-toned trousers. Not the running shoes and jeans that Alex had on just moments ago.

Then a thought hit him. Sam stepped closer to Glip, to see his own clothes better in the torchlight. He looked at his right sleeve, then his left sleeve, and then he stared down at the rest of his body. His brain had a hard time wrapping itself around what his eyes were taking in.

He had left his house wearing a windbreaker, jeans and sneakers. But now he wore a loose-fitting tunic with a rough-looking vest pulled over the top of it. The shirt was tucked into baggy pants. And those were tucked into tall brown boots. The gravity of the situation hit him like a ton of bricks.

Sam returned his attention to the person descending the stairs. It was Alexis and she had stopped at the bottom of the steps to take in her changed clothes. She shifted her eyes from her clothes to Sam, her eyes a mix of disbelief and terror. “Sam, what's going on?”

Glip answered in his calming voice, “Mistress, Alexis. Let us wait for Master Fenton and then I will explain.”

As he finished speaking, they heard Fenton's feet on the stairs. Sam watched as one of Fenton's boots missed a step and he slipped. Fenton fell hard through the portal, landing on his backside on the steps and bouncing down the last few. Alexis bent down to help him up.

“Are you ok?” she asked.

Fenton brushed himself off, “I've done worse.” His hands froze in mid-swipe and he slowly turned to Sam and Alexis. His hands grasped the vest that he now wore and pulled it away from his body to get a better look at it. He met Sam's eyes, a huge grin expanding across his

face.

All three of them now wore similar clothes. Fenton and Alexis also had boots with the loose-fitting pants tucked into them, each had the long-sleeved shirts, and their vests were variations of the one Sam wore. However, Fenton's was a dusty gray and Alexis' a light orange.

Fenton spoke first, "Glip, how did you do this?"

Glip shook his head, "I did nothing. The portal did it. All your clothes had a—" he paused, looking for the right word "I guess you would call it a partner in Decapolis. Your shoes became the boots, your pants were transformed, as were your shirts and jackets."

Fenton looked at him, "Does everything change?" he asked Glip.

"Most things do, yes. Your mechanical light became the torch. If you carried a small knife, it would become a dagger, jewels turn to acorns, dogs to dragons, grapes to orps."

Alexis reached up to lightly touch her neck. "My necklace is still the same," she said. She pulled a thin-chained necklace from beneath her shirt. On it hung a locket.

Glip smiled, "Very good. Not everything changes, because not everything has a match in Decapolis. Your locket for one."

"And my watch," exclaimed Fenton. He lifted his arm in the air and the sleeve slid down far enough to expose the watch on his left wrist.

"Yes, Master Fenton," said Glip. He looked back at Alexis, then to Sam, "Be careful with the things that do not change. They will make you stand out. These things will set you apart from the Decapolins and could bring you to harm." Footsteps drew his attention back to the steps.

"And here come Horis and Skoog," said Glip. Horis walked down the stairs with Skoog right behind him. The little Grinks were so short that as soon as they reached the fourth step, their heads popped through the light.

Skoog held his arms above his head and, as his hands appeared through the light, Sam realized he was supporting the trap door. As it closed, it snapped shut with a loud click and the light extinguished, leaving Glip's torch as the only source of illumination.

"Follow me," said Glip and he walked toward the far side of the cellar. They walked across the room until the flickering light from his torch fell across a second set of stairs that rose up to the other trap door. The Grink motioned toward the steps, "Sam, would you please go first and open the door for us?"

Sam replied, "Sure," and walked up the stairs. He stumbled slightly on one of the steps and called back over his shoulder, "Glip, could you hand me your torch so I can see up here?" Sam reached down and took the torch from Glip's outstretched hand. He held the torch close enough to see the latch and unhooked it, "You keep talking as if we're in some other place, but we're still in the barn." He passed the torch back to Glip then pushed the trap door up and out of the way. It crashed to the ground and light streamed through the opening, bathing Sam. Fenton and Alex gasped in shock. "Where did all that light...? Hold on!" Sam interrupted himself.

He turned to Glip. "Did the portal also change the – " Glip held up a hand to stop him and pointed up the stairs behind Sam.

"Go look for yourself," said Glip.

Sam bounded up the last few steps. "Same horse stalls, same lofts, same trap doors..."

Glip, who had reached the top of the steps walked up behind Sam who stood motionless, staring out at the bright light pouring through one of the barn windows. Glip smiled and placed a hand on his shoulder.

Sam spoke without turning from the window, "We're in Decapolis!"

Glip squeezed his shoulder in affirmation, "Shall we get moving?"

Sam nodded and called back, not taking his eyes from the window, “Alex, Fenton, get up here.”

Sam heard their feet on the steps as Fenton asked, “Sam, that light isn’t from the moon is it?”

Sam looked at Glip and grinned. Then he looked back at the window as Fenton and Alexis emerged from the cellar. “Nope. It’s from the sun.”