

Synopsis

If you thought being thirteen was difficult, try traveling through a portal to another land, rescuing a woman from a heavily guarded fortress, and saving your dying father, all while being tormented by the school bully.

For Samuel Peters, living alone with his widowed father is already tough enough. But when his dad is injured with a poisoned sword during one of his many “business trips,” Sam’s life gets even more complicated. He is immediately removed from everything he knows and is forced to travel to the land of Decapolis to rescue a woman named Kelly – the only person who can heal his father.

Accompanying Sam are his best friend, Fenton Brumley, Fenton’s sister Alexis, and Darius Poe. Fenton is a puzzle-solver extraordinaire. If there’s a clue, he’ll figure out where it leads. If there’s a maze, he’ll get them out the other side. He thoroughly enjoys this adventure until people start dying. Alexis, on the other hand, doesn’t want to be there at all. She’s willing to do whatever is needed to help Sam, but wants out as soon as possible. She’s the polar opposite of Fenton. Where he sees fun and exciting, she sees danger and unease. That is, until she begins to realize that this other world is having an amazing effect on her. She can sense people hiding in the forest. She knows when people aren’t telling them the full truth. She doesn’t know how she can do these things, and it begins to create an interesting tension in her. She wants to go home, but also wants to stay and see what else develops. And finally, there’s Darius Poe, a thirteen-year-old version of Sawyer from the television show *Lost*. His favorite pastime is tormenting the other three.

Aiding the quartet are three gnome-like creatures called Grinks – Glip, Horis, and Skoog. Glip is the wisest of the three, aiding and directing the kids as they embark on this journey. By contrast, Horis and Skoog are self-sacrificing simpletons who practically worship the four – especially Alexis. They’re endearing to watch, while also providing much-needed comic relief during this harrowing experience.

Glip explains to Sam and the others that the evil tyrant Hellius has captured Kelly and is holding her in his fortress. He also reveals that Sam’s father, Verne, was not injured while on a business trip, but was wounded by Hellius himself while leading a failed rescue attempt of Kelly. When Glip explains that the poison from Hellius’ sword is always fatal within five days, Sam becomes single-minded, even selfish, in his effort to save his dad.

Sam and his friends must discover a secret entrance to the fortress, navigate their way past a dragon, and fight their way through villain-infested passageways, all while dealing with the added pressure that they might be reincarnated versions of The Four Warriors who were prophesied to return to Decapolis. In addition, the constant harassment from Darius makes it even more difficult. At home it was possible to avoid him. However, in Decapolis his mere presence creates conflict and turmoil beyond anything Sam has ever endured.

And overshadowing all of this is the very real possibility that he may lose his father, which would make him parentless, just like Darius. This outcome is the worst possible scenario for Sam.

Relying on Fenton’s smarts, they solve a series of intricate puzzles leading to a long-lost tunnel, allowing them to sneak into Hellius’ fortress. They free Kelly and a handful of the King’s soldiers who were also captured during the previous rescue attempt, then try to escape from the fortress. A massive sword fight ensues against Hellius’ army, during which they discover they

have abilities that match those of the warriors from prophecy. Sam and Darius are thrilled to find they have sword-fighting skills well beyond their years, and Alexis is shocked when she realizes she is more accurate with a bow and arrow than even the king's men. During the fighting Sam is pursued by Hellius and sustains a hand injury almost identical to Verne's. Sam secretly knows he is now sentenced to the same death as his father.

They manage to get out of the fortress, losing all but one of the soldiers in the fighting. Retreating into the surrounding forest gives them a short head-start, and then with the aid of Alexis' expanding abilities, they evade their pursuers long enough to reach one of the portals back to Earth. Kelly and the remaining soldier depart for the castle to warn the king that Hellius is gaining followers and growing in power.

Then, before the kids can get the portal open, Hellius and his right-hand man arrive on the scene.

Sam, knowing he is condemned to die from his wound, puts the needs of others above himself and faces off single-handedly against Hellius. He's confident he can stall long enough, which will allow his friends - and even Darius - to get home safely. At this point, he's even willing to sacrifice his father to save the others. Sam accomplishes his goal and the other three kids enter the portal and Sam watches it close behind them.

Despite his advanced sword-fighting abilities, Sam is eventually outmatched and Hellius corners him. When all seems lost, Sam realizes his wound was healed when it accidentally came in contact with Kelly's blood during the rescue at Hellius' fortress. This revelation sends Hellius into a blind rage. His entire purpose for capturing Kelly had been to force her into revealing the secret to her healing power. And this *child* knows how she does it. The uncontrollable fury in Hellius creates an opening for Sam and he makes a run for it. Hellius releases a deadly bolt from his crossbow and it streaks toward the fleeing Sam. Surprisingly, the portal flashes open and Sam dives through just before being impaled. The others slam the portal shut from the Earth side and our heroes are safe.

Sam rushes to the hospital with a small vial of blood that Kelly had given to him before she left for the castle. The blood cures his father, the same as it did for Sam. Only *after* his father is healed does Sam read a letter given to him by Kelly. He is dumbfounded when he reads the words, '*To my dearest son...*'