



PORTAL WATCHERS OF TELBA BOOK 2

HEARTBEAT  
OF FEAR

SUSAN LYTTEK

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Telba Book 2

Susan Lyttek

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**Heartbeat of Fear: Portal Watchers of Telba Book 2**  
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*The Portal Watchers of Telba Series*

**Portal Watchers**

**Heartbeat of Fear**

**Wrestle the Stars**

**Three Impossible Tasks**

**Outside Space and Time**

**Sum of All Expectation**

## *Dedication*

For all the Berns of our world, especially my dearest childhood friend. May you, too, realize your strength and value in Tel.



## PROLOGUE

Nevv paused from gathering nuts to watch the pterosaurs fly in slow circles. Sometimes, in cloudless skies, their light blue underbellies camouflaged them from his searching eyes. It never failed to startle him when the creatures suddenly reappeared in front of a cloud or in the shadow of a tree.

Today, however, was overcast. He had no difficulty watching the two creatures search for prey or admiring their graceful flight. *Probably tracking a rabbit.* In the last month, they had grown sure and confident in their new home. How Nevv enjoyed watching them explore the sanctuary! Sometimes he felt as if he were exploring it with them.

Yatela flew less these days. And she made the most bizarre noises. Wiren, however, never let the female out of his sight. Nevv chalked it up to parental instincts. There would be more pterosaur eggs soon. He was sure of it.

“Prepare!” A voice came from behind him.

The wise man dropped his satchel and assumed ready stance. No one could be seen in the forest. He shook his head to clear the cobwebs. Rumors from the palace city made him jumpy.

“Prepare!” The voice repeated, this time even louder. The sound fell from the clouds along with a

shaft of light. Nevv fell to his knees. Not only had his mind been honest with him, but he also now knew Who spoke to him.

“Prepare what, Tel?” he asked.

“My sanctuary.”

“How, my Lord?”

“Increase it. Increase it, my son.”

“Increase it?” asked Nevv. “But it is large and spacious. Your dinosaurs have ample room to roam free.”

“Not anymore,” said Tel.

Nevv tried to ask more questions, but Tel was done speaking. What did he mean, not anymore? What would Tel send through his next portal?

Nevv picked up the satchel and headed inside his secret retreat. Somewhere in the books, an answer waited. Somewhere, he would learn what type of creature needed so much space to live free.



# 1

*“Heat has a way of separating us. Whether it be the heat of the day, the heat of a trial, or the heat of emotions, it brings out the worst and the best in us. You must remember Tel in order for it to bring out the best in you.” Prophet Quizon in his advice to the children.*

The late autumn sun was unusually hot this year. Or, Bern thought, increasingly hot. Every year it seemed to stay hot longer. Every year there was less water to irrigate with and even less rain. But it didn't pay to think about that now. Their wheat was ripe and there was work to be done.

Bern Fallon swung the scythe using two hands. He longed for the day when he would have the strength and confidence to use one arm like his father. Sometimes it seemed as if that would never happen. Bern's friend Garth had grown an inch in the last month alone. His cousin Ne-tel was taller, too, though he always seemed to gain more of a stomach before he shot up. But Bern had not grown in over a year. He had not even gained a coin's weight on his father's trade scale.

*Swoosh!* The scythe sliced through the stalks. Bern felt rather than saw the wheat fall. If only Tel had

ripened their wheat next week, he mused. Next week was the week allotted to their family by the free village for the use of the communal tractor. But by that time, the harvesting would be done.

“Bern!” shouted Som Fallon, never slacking in his rhythm. His father pushed the sharp edge of the blade through the stalks as easily as a knife through fresh butter. *Swoosh*, step. *Swoosh*, step. “Stop daydreaming and keep moving.”

Bern was too tired to reply to his father. He just nodded his head and swung. But moments later, his mind roamed again. He couldn’t help it. There were a thousand places he’d rather be than in this hot field. He wondered what Garth was doing. It must be nice to have a merchant for a father instead of a farmer. Helping in a store or running errands with a wagon seemed so easy.

“Why?” he asked aloud, but too quietly for his father to hear. “Why must I be here?”

As if in reply, Bern heard a sound. The air around him seemed to sizzle. He stopped working and looked up. A bright light hung in the air from the ground to the few scattered clouds. Then it began to widen and stretch. It grew large enough to swallow half the town. By this time, Som, his father had stopped his gleaning. He had noticed it, too. So had the workers volunteering to help Bern’s family. No one was moving. They just gazed at the portal, transfixed,

The ground began to shake. Violently. Despite his attempts to remain on his feet, Bern suddenly found himself sitting in the middle of the field.

“What in the...?” Som Fallon refused to topple but took a wide stance and used his scythe as a third leg on which to balance. And he did not run.

Impossible as it seemed, the shaking grew more intense. Bern looked into the light and saw another place. “A portal,” he murmured. It was just as Garth had described it. An opening between two worlds or two times. The other place was lush, fertile, and green—everything the village was not without the precious water. But Bern did not remember Garth saying anything about this infernal shaking. “What on Telba is causing it?” he mumbled.

Two immense creatures ran toward the portal. Seeing them, he understood what was happening. The one in the rear kept pausing to slap its tail on the ground. The dust it generated kept Bern from seeing what chased these huge creatures. The tail slap and the running, apparently, made the ground even in his world shake.

Bern tried to stand again to get a better look. Gingerly, he rose one iota at a time until he straddled the trembling earth. What could these great beasts fear? All he could glimpse of the third creature, their pursuer, was its huge teeth. The teeth had nearly reached the second creature’s side when the beast stopped and gave its companion a shove through the portal.

A different type of dinosaur was through the portal. And then, as the other creature turned to fight the teeth, the portal closed abruptly with a thunderclap of exclamation.

Bern stared up at the colossal beast standing on the edge of his father's field. It, in turn, looked behind for its companion. And seeing itself alone, it let out a monstrous howl. Bern's ears rang with the sheer volume of its trumpet. Great, he thought. Now all Telba knows there is a new dinosaur in its midst.

Not that he could hide something this big anyway.

## 2

*“Beauty—what the soul sees and the mind cannot fully comprehend.” Wisdom of the Kings, Book of the Fallen World, page 29*

Bern needed to run. In fact, he turned and started for the village.

“Aw-ug!” the dinosaur bellowed. It sounded so forlorn that Bern stopped, turned around again, and looked, really looked, at the Tel’s latest gift from the portal.

This creature was immense. A swipe of its tail would wipe out an entire field section’s harvest. And it was so distressed at the loss of its companion that it might just do that. Or go off running and trample their village.

The beast’s head blocked the glare of the sun. Its face was rather beautiful in a strange way. The skin glowed with all the colors of the rainbow as the light hit it. What was the word his teacher would use for that? Iridescent. That’s it. Its eyes were large, black orbs that could move independently. One eye, it kept focused on Bern. The other eye kept moving looking at Bern’s father, the field workers, and giving hopeful glances behind. Some of its fore teeth appeared larger

than Bern's hand. Nostrils were barely visible over the massive mouth, and it seemed to be without ears. A strange collection of body parts but put together they seemed almost graceful.

Calm swept over Bern as he stared at the creature's face. This wasn't a vicious animal for all its size. Its eyes reminded him of the cows in their pasture. If only its friend had gotten through, too.

*It just lost its mate.* Bern suddenly understood its terror. It was alone in an unfamiliar world. Alone Bern understood.

"It's all right," Bern said softly. He walked toward the great beast. "It's all right."

Bern's father ran toward him, knocking him back. "What do you think you're doing, son? Have you lost your wits?"

"No, Dad," Bern felt the peace of Tel steal over him. He stood up again and looked at the creature. "She needs me."

"She?" Som asked. "How in Tel's name do you know that?"

"I don't know," Bern admitted. "But I do. And she will lay eggs soon." He turned to the mountain of animal in front of him. "It's OK, girl." Bern took another step toward the creature. The exhaustion he had felt moments before fell away from him. Now there was only him and this beautiful beast.

Bern had told his dad about the earlier adventure. How Garth had found the three pterosaur eggs and helped them hatch. How they smuggled the eggs to the wise one's sanctuary—nearly getting killed by the Vil

and captured by the queen.

“Dad, this creature must be the next in Tel’s plan.”

From the expression on his father’s face, that knowledge didn’t make the situation any better. He stayed close. Bern knew his father would do whatever he must in order to protect his only son.

Bern was now directly beneath her head. In response to his constant, gentle voice, the creature appeared calmer. Bern could hear a low rumble coming from her long neck. If it weren’t for the volume of it, he would have called it a purr.

It seemed as if half the village had come out to the field following the sound of the noise and commotion.

The dinosaur bent her head down closer to Bern.

“That’s a girl,” he said. He stretched as far as he could and patted her chin. “Good girl.” He paused. “You need a name. I know,” he said. “I’ll call you the best name of all. Kattya. It was my mother’s name,” he whispered.

The dinosaur seemed pleased.

Bern still talking slowly, gently, moved to the side. He would try to climb up and ride on her neck.

But Kattya, not understanding what he was doing moved her head to follow his motions with her gaze. And looking back toward the village, she saw the crowd.

“Aaa-yee!” the creature screamed. Terrified, she bounded away from the village and into the desert.

### 3

*“Evil thrives on the heartbeat of fear. Therefore, do not be afraid. Wisdom of the Kings, Book of the Fallen World, page 316”*

*Subja knew.* She could feel a change in the very air around her. It trembled under her fingertips.

“Thank you, Let,” she said to the air. Her guardian was near and heard her thanksgiving. Of that she was certain. His power surged through her. He had told her without words what she needed to know.

The queen left her room. She had not slept. As Let promised, she needed less and less sleep each year. In moments, she whipped through the halls of her palace and into her throne room. Her skirts danced about the floor in her impatience. An unfortunate Vil in her path was swept aside and to the ground with an imperial thrust of her velveteed arm.

“Find Murenn for me!” She shouted to the nearest moving body. The servant girl continued to clean. Subja kicked her into momentum. “Now!”

It did not matter that the girl had no idea who or where Murenn was. She was queen and must be obeyed. Instantly. Or else.

Queen Subja climbed up onto her high and gilded



throne. From there she could see every potential hiding space within the throne room. And there were no windows. More importantly, seeing the tops of every head made all bow before her—even those who would rather not grant her that honor. Even those who chose to worship her ancient and decrepit foe. At least, Let had assured her he was decrepit. Sometimes, a flicker of doubt would cross her consciousness. Her enemy had concealed a wise man from her in a former ally she thought long dead! And that one had used a group of sniveling boys to steal two dinosaurs from her. Never again! In fact, if she ever did come across that wise man in her territory, she had certain delightful plans for him. She smiled.

Moments later, the cowering servant girl barely opened the door. “Lord Murenn, your Highness.”

The queen waved her away, and the girl ran out. Obviously cleaning the delicate rooms was preferable to answering her queen’s needs and demands.

Murenn was groggy. They had talked late into the night about the dinosaurs and prophets. He had been sound asleep when a Vil had steered the hapless servant to his door. If the girl hadn’t been so terrified, he would have still been asleep. Subja did have that effect on people.

“Murenn,” confided the queen, “I felt a disturbance. He,” she spat out the pronoun with distaste, and left him with no doubt about whom she was talking. “He has been active again.”

From the rise of his brows she could see Murenn’s curiosity was piqued. “Another dinosaur?”

She nodded. "I'm sure of it. A big one. I've already sent a Vil toward your village."

The village where that idiot believed that he and his friends had been chosen to protect the dinosaurs. Protect? As if a bunch of young men not yet old enough to grow beards could thwart prophecy? Hadn't it been written long ago that she would use the dinosaurs to complete her conquest of Telba?

"So you have called me, Queen...?"

Subja scowled at him. "Fool! Back up. The Vil have proven themselves vulnerable. I want you to go to the village and make yourself useful. Pretend you have returned. The weakling you have married will be happy to escape my presence for a while." She saw the eyebrows lift again. "Yes, I noticed. I notice everything, Murenn. Remember that when you are among those whose sympathies are with *Him*."

"I will, my Queen."

"Find me that creature." She pointed to the door and waved him away. "Obey me or die."

## 4

*“Oh, that the gift gives mightily! Oh, that the blessing spreads itself across all lands! Can you not see Tel’s hand in the beat of our world? Can you not see his mind in the glory of morning? Oh, he is the gift that gives mightily!” Nosun, the bard, year 79*

Bern gazed toward town and saw the crowd that had assembled at the edge of his father’s field. Then he turned to the desert and saw the red dust churning beneath the great and powerful legs of Kattya.

“Great,” he mumbled, “just great.”

Bern’s dad stood at his side and put a hand across his shoulders. “Perhaps it’s for the best, Bern. Tel couldn’t want you taking care of something that big. And maybe the creature will find her way on her own.”

Bern looked at the tracks of dust and sand spray in the dinosaur’s wake. “Not if she keeps heading that way, she won’t.”

It wasn’t all that long ago that a wagon had taken him, Ne-tel, and Garth *that* way. That way headed to the queen’s city, her palace, and her subverter chamber. Bern shuddered. He remembered what had happened to Abya.

Last time three creatures had crossed through the portal, but this time only one dinosaur had come through. There was no margin for error here.

He looked at the field and his father. "Dad?"

His father sighed. "You may go. I am assuming you wish to find Garth and Ne-tel?"

Bern nodded. "I have to get help, Dad. And they're the ones that Holy Man Nevv said were singled out to guard the portals." *But this dinosaur is my responsibility. The window came to me in my father's field not to Garth on one of his father's treks.*

Bern took off for town. But he didn't have to go far. With all the commotion, Garth and Ne-tel were headed his way.

"Did you see that, Bern?"

Bern gave a nod of affirmation to cousin and his best friend. "The portal opened in my father's field," he said quietly.

"Your field?" Garth asked.

Ne-tel laughed. "If you were that close, I guess you did see it then! All of it."

Bern smiled slightly. "She's not that bad close up."

"She?" Garth asked. "How do you know it's a she?"

Bern shrugged. "I don't know. Tel told me, I guess. But I know it's a she. And I know she's skittish because she's going to lay eggs soon." He looked over his shoulder toward the desert. "And I know if she keeps going the way she started, she'll end up at the queen's palace."

The other two boys, alarm apparent on their faces,

gazed at Bern.

“But what can we do?” Garth asked. “How can we chase a creature that big, that scared, and that fast? We don’t even know what it is.”

“A brachiosaurus,” said a familiar voice from behind them.