



PORTAL WATCHERS OF TELBA BOOK 6

SUM OF ALL
EXPECTATION

SUSAN LYTTEK



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Telba Book 6

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Characters

Portal Watchers—Garth Vieta, Ne-tel Di'in, Bern Fallon
Tel—Holy and perfect creator of the world
Nevv Vieta—Prophet. Brother of Wirth and Murenn
Subja—Semi-eternal queen of Telba
Let—The king of demons
Vil—Once human servants of the queen
Wirth and Mara Vieta—Garth's parents.
Jana Vieta—Garth's sister
Quizon Vieta—Garth's baby brother
Murenn Vieta—Oldest Vieta brother
Filia Vieta—Murenn's wife
Kattya (deceased) and Som Fallon—Bern's parents
Gunston Di'in—Ne-tel's father
Telya (ne Fallon) Di'in—Ne-tel's mother, Som's sister
Alatel Di'in—Ne-tel's twin
Foon and Bela (ne Di'in)—Ne-tel's uncle and aunt
Fortuna and Ki'ri—Ne-tel's cousins
Jata—Foon's loyal servant
Captain/Shipmaster Yom—A seafarer
Dral—Firstmate of Yom
Masa—Leader of the children of the North
Tilee—Masa's sister
Nelas—Queen of Telantia and Bern's grandmother
Nellie—Granddaughter of Nelas and Bern's cousin.
Crown Prince Xant and Princess Merinda—Nellie's
parents, Bern's uncle and aunt
Java—Telantian priest
Fallon—Boy of the North whose family crafted ships
Prophet Quizon—Prophet who wrote the Advice
Maeve—Leader of a band of pirates
Aidan and Anah—First people on the first world
Parep—Son of Amma

Amma of Telantia—Parep's mother

King Evad—Historical leader of Telantia and prophet

Wal—Prophet and leader across the stars

Fent—Elderly soldier

Haime —Elderly bard

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 people that I've forgotten to mention. When a series of books is over twenty years in the making, so many touch it in different ways. Fellow authors read passages, critique groups made suggestions, and agents recommended strategies. All of these steps, successful and not, changed the books into what they are now. I am grateful for all of you.

1

“Moments of respite, moments seized out of time itself are gifts of Tel who is outside of time. Enjoy them to the fullest!” Prophet Nevv

Garth wasn't sure where the demon had gone. It seemed as if Let had left them alone in this vague nothingness.

“Nellie?” he touched her shoulder. “Nellie?”

She sat up, pushing against the nearly colorless foam that surrounded them. “Where...? Where on Telba are we?”

He scooped up a handful of the grey and threw it into the void above them. It immediately splatted back to rejoin itself where he had taken it from. “Not Telba. Definitely not Telba. But not where Let was trying to take us either. He was raging terribly against someone, Tel, I'm guessing, although he always refuses to use Tel's name, for interfering in his rule and domain.”

Nellie hummed in thought. “You'd think he'd realize that Tel gave him his rule and domain? But no. You can't think those thoughts if you want to replace your creator, can you?” She surveyed the area and tried to move the thick froth just as Garth had. “This stuff feels...”

“Intense, right?” He couldn’t think of another way to describe it. Under his fingers, it felt almost alive, yet not.

Nellie agreed. “As if it was bundles of potential.”

An immense hand, easily four times the size of the two of them together, reached into the whatever was surrounding them, filled its massive palm with bunches of the grey stuff, and threw it into the void. “Be!” Someone shouted.

Nellie grabbed Garth’s arm. “No! It can’t be.” Her voice dropped to a whisper. “We must be at the great beginning. That would explain why Let couldn’t stay with us. Then, he was still with Tel and required to be in his presence. Maybe the fallen version of Let and the holy version couldn’t stay in the same moment?”

Garth rubbed his eyebrows. He was totally confused. She knew so much more history than he did. The crazy thing was she always acted like everyone should just automatically know all the histories and legends. And when he didn’t... Well, he wouldn’t tell her now, would he? If he ever had an opportunity, he would ask his Uncle Nevv. If the world ever grew calm again, maybe he could even spend some time looking through his uncle’s library.

Before he could finish his line of thought or respond to Nellie, light erupted from everywhere. Warm light filled not only the space around them but wove around them and through them, pouring joy into their very being.

“I feel almost as if I should sing,” Garth whispered.

Nellie giggled. “I know what you mean. It is glorious, isn’t it?”

The hand reached in again and threw it against the light this time. “Come forth!”

Color erupted against the light. Streams of it wiggled away from where the hand had thrown it. Gradually the colors separated, and then came together again in specific groupings. The green and blue became waters, while green and brown merged together to become land and trees.

Trying to describe what passed in front of his eyes did it no justice. It was like watching the universe being painted into existence. The colors were going every direction—across the newly formed land and out into the heavens. Since he was looking everywhere, or trying to, he didn’t notice the wave of color heading straight toward him and Nellie.

Nellie grabbed his arm to get him to move. But by the time he even began the effort, the color had flowed past them. They were now sitting in a field of sweet clover. Every plant and blade of grass was perfectly formed and precise. Each item of this world worked with the pieces next to it. On top of the wonder of it all, the soft grass cushioned their legs better than any bed or chair ever had. Trees sprang up behind them, shading them from the intense light overhead.

“This is beautiful. Absolutely beautiful.”

The girl next to him leaned back to gaze at the new clouds and sky above. “It is peaceful, too. I don’t think I’ve ever known a day so calming. It rather feels like when your mom says everything will be OK and you

know it's true."

His soul echoed what she had said. He leaned back as well. It had been a very long day. Perhaps a bit of rest. The gentlest of breezes brought both the sweet smells of the freshly blooming flowers and a caressing warmth. The ground seemed to move to be just where he needed it, forming a pillow under his head.

Garth had never felt so assured of peaceful and restful sleep as he closed his eyes.

~*~

When he awoke, he wasn't certain if he had slept days, hours, or minutes. But he felt newer somehow. It was as if the slumber in this new world had infused him with its power. Hoping, he reached down and pulled up his pant leg.

His stomach dropped when he saw the twisted and sunken remains of the ghost spider. "I had thought..."

A golden, musical voice answered him. "This place would heal the mark of your trial?" Someone familiar stepped out of the shadows. Or at least he seemed familiar.

"Parep?"

"Some things could be healed, yes, but shouldn't be. You need the mark to remind you of lessons learned. You need it to help you become who I have always wanted you to be." The man's voice was so intense, vivid, and strong. It was like honey flowing over his ears. It was every bit of sound as it was meant

to be.

Yet, Garth couldn't help noticing this being had avoided his question. "Why do you look like Parep?"

The man laughed loud and long. The richness of the laugh made Garth feel as if he needed to rejoice, but he couldn't exactly say why.

It was the laugh that woke Nellie. The smile which spread wide across her face glistened in loveliness. Garth liked her more than he ever thought he would. Someday they would marry. Not for quite a while, but the clarity of this place made it as certain as his next breath.

When she opened her eyes and gazed up at him, he could see she thought the same thing.

Until the day when they would make it official, neither would ever mention it again.

There was no need.

She then gazed beyond Garth to the source of the laugh, her eyes creasing into little questions.

"Tel?" she asked.

Garth again assessed the man who stood in front of them. While Parep resembled him, it was as if Parep was veiled, partly hidden, and this man was more of... everything. Well, at least as much of everything as his eyes were capable of seeing.

The man didn't disagree. He extended a hand to each of them to help them to their feet. "You have rested and refreshed your souls. Now, before the next moment of the beginning, walk with me." His touch exuded such power Garth felt as if he could walk for

days on its strength.

Garth tried to say with his nod, 'whatever you want me to do, I will do it.' Offering up the words, though, seemed pointless.

The new world flowed beneath their feet. For a time, a time Garth could not have quantified in minutes had his life depended on it, they moved in companionable silence.

The man ended the silence when they neared an overlook. "What you two will soon experience is not holy."

A shudder of disquiet race through Garth's body. It wasn't as intense as it might be because of the peace of this place, but he understood.

"I diverted Let to this place. You two needed..." he paused. "You needed many things, things only this place, this time could give you. You needed truth beyond what is visible in your world, so far after the door, and so far after the escape." He waved his hand to show the life surrounding them. "Here, things are still pure." He studied the two teens. "You two, as good as you are and as noble as you are, are not pure. So as much as I would offer to let you stay longer, I cannot. As it is, I will have to undo everything your presence did to this world."

Garth considered the view and then the being next to him. While he was certain the form he saw in front of him was not the true one, even this limited version exuded so much majesty he was hard to look directly at for very long. And there wasn't anything Garth could say in response either. He felt very, very small

next to this one.

But he also felt loved.

This man, this being of glory, had to be Tel.

The man continued. "Let was taking you where he has the most power. He goes there whenever he needs to feel his evil nurtured. It is the only time beyond your own that he can travel to. Like you, he lives sequentially, except for this nest in the past. I warn you now that it is a time of great depravity, great evil."

Nellie panicked. "If this is so, why must we go there? Why can't we stay here or go home?"

The man pulled Nellie into a hug. "Do you trust me?"

"Yes, Tel."

Garth had to admit the idea of going somewhere so awful didn't sit well with him either. "Is there a reason for us to go? Does it serve you if we do?"

The man smiled warm and long. "Yes, Garth, it serves me. Remember, even when darkness reigns, look for the light. There will be light and hope and that is why I allow Let to take you there." He stretched out his hands to both again. "Be strong."

Suddenly they were flying through the void again, wrapped and immobile in Let's invisible net.

2

“Some moments of extreme darkness oppress not so much because of the darkness itself, but because of your focus. You may feel the night overwhelm because you continue to look to it. Maybe you should turn around and look toward the sunrise.” King Evad

Bern was present when the runner came up to his grandmother. They had taken the largest of the tunnels and turned it into a command post. A long natural shelf of rock became their mission central where her leaders had laid out their maps and other intelligence. Guards stood diligently at either egress. With only two ways of entering, this portion of the tunnels was easily defensible. An additional defense was their obscurity; not many outside of Telantia knew of the existence of the tunnels.

They had been dug out of the rock and earth almost a millennia ago under the realm of King Evad. While many had used them over the years to keep an eye on the queen and her servants, no one knew for certain why the famous king had dedicated so much time to the project.

Maybe it was for now? They did say that he was a prophet as well as king.

Nelas definitely seemed more like a warrior than a queen at the moment, but since she was leading an army it was to be expected. Rather than her elegant gowns and a crown, she wore her ceremonial uniform. The knee length riding skirt was wrapped with rope forming holsters to hold a variety of weapons, including her favorite sword. Instead of a crown, she wore a half helmet to protect her skull. Even so, she maintained her regal bearing.

“How many dinosaurs must we to deal with?”

He gave as much of a bow as his exhausted body could bear. “Your majesty, according to reports one of the evil creatures was killed on the south end of the Gold Coast. Another one is near there, was reported as a nesting female, but is cornered by a woman who calls herself the pirate queen. In addition to the oversized T-rex...”

“I believe they called that one spinosaurus,” interjected the queen.

“Yes.” He actually seemed grateful she had interrupted. It gave him a moment to take a breath. “Yes, the spinosaurus that you killed within the castle walls, and there was another slain near the old port in the northwest.”

“So those are the ones killed, correct?”

He nodded. “It appears Subja brought in another dozen aggressive carnivorous creatures. They are not as big as a T-Rex, but they are all predators.”

Bern glanced up at his grandmother. The messenger caught the look.

“You have a question, prince?”

“What about the people? What has been happening to the people of Telba? Why is some pirate defending the Gold Coast, for instance? Where did its people go?”

The runner seemed at a loss. He'd been sent to retrieve information on the dinosaurs. But something was not right as far as the citizens of this world.

“I can answer that,” said a voice from behind Bern, from the direction of the exit no one was supposed to use.

Bern pivoted quickly, dagger at the ready, only to see Prophet Nevv in the torchlight.

The man smiled and lifted his hands to demonstrate he carried no arms.

“Sorry, Prophet. ”

“No worries, lad. These are difficult times.” Nevv, as usual, wore his ready smile. It stood out like an open beacon against his dark skin. Somehow, the combination made the holy man even friendlier, more approachable. Even so, Bern always felt a bit awkward when the man arrived. He knew too much.

His grandmother seemed to exude more calm about the prophet's arrival than Bern did. She had to have seen him entering the Telantian stronghold, but had not given anything away.

He would love to be able to conceal his emotions as she did. But right now, he was more curious about what the prophet knew.

The torchlight flickered behind the man making

his blond hair look almost white. He wondered how Garth was so at ease with a relative who was so connected to holy things. It made Bern feel a bit self-conscious and awkward. Curiosity overrode the other emotions. "So where are all the people?"

"Those who love Tel are migrating this way because they want to join the forces of Telantia or defend the dinosaurs. Or just be protected. Motivations are complicated things."

"And those who don't love Tel?" Bern didn't want to think about how many might compose that group.

"They are also headed in this general direction, but because they want to come alongside Subja. Most of those do not agree with her killing, but they just want life to go back to the way it was and they have deluded themselves into believing that's what she wants as well."

Bern held his dagger in front of him, parallel to the ground and polished the blade with his gloved hand. "Good luck to them in finding Subja. No one has seen her since I watched Let take her from the portal room. Our spies have been over the castle multiple times in the last few weeks and there's no sign of her."

The prophet's usual gleeful countenance fell. "Nor has there been any sign of Garth, Nellie, or Subja's demon." He pulled his cloak tighter as if fighting a chill. "As far as the queen, I'm guessing she forgot her human origins and overextended based on your testimony and vision from Tel. She has done that in the past, but it has always been covered up. I only know because I was in the castle during one of her 'resets'

and I managed to get one of the cooks talking. Why it is taking so long for Let to restore her this time, I have no idea."

The critical details were missing. "About how many in each group?"

The prophet shrugged. "Dozens? Hundreds? They are moving across the land and the desert in small family packs, primarily. Each group has whatever weapons were at their disposal to fight off the creatures if necessary. But none of these details seem to be the driving force behind the migration. I keep wondering if this ties into the end prophecies somehow..."

Queen Nelas took a step closer to the prophet, interrupting his trail of words. "But what of Nellie and Garth? My granddaughter? Your nephew?"

Nevv threw his hands in the air in a gesture of supplication. "I don't know. Tel will give me nothing."

"Nothing?" Her tone sounded almost accusatory.

"Well, nothing except they work together, which we knew from Bern. And they work for his purposes. I get a sense of extreme difficulty and extreme blessing but the pieces just don't fit together." He ran fingers through his pale hair and tried to look anywhere except at the queen of Telantia.

A squeak at his ankles made Bern sheath his blade and squat down to pick up the little dinosaur. "I think he heard the names of his caretakers and came running." Bern scratched Salty behind the eye ridges, exactly where the saltopus liked. He was careful to avoid the neck, not wanting to create the sound shield.

“He is a cute little guy,” the prophet cooed. “Are you finding enough fish for him? It’s not exactly a common food in the desert.”

Bern nodded, adjusting his hand to where the dinosaur moved his head. “Fortunately, the flavor of dried fish better matches the food he had in the old world. Uncle Tyrc and the other traders can easily bring large quantities of it from the north port.” He smiled remembering what his uncle had said. “The plesiosaurs even help them fish by swimming in a circle around the schools. It must be a sight to watch.”

“And one day, Tel willing, we will see the plesiosaurs in action again,” Nevv prayed. “When we get to the Telba where we are supposed to be, we will be able to have normal farms and corrals and pastures again. Won’t that be idyllic?”

Bern’s grandmother extended her hand, her quiet way of saying the meeting was over. “Would you care to join us for the evening meal, Prophet?”

Nevv shook his head. “Too many trainees back at the dinosaur refuge to leave them alone very long.” Nevv bowed over the queen’s hand and then nodded to Bern. “I’m sure one or both of you will be seeing me again soon.” He started down the tunnel, stopped, and turned. “You might want to prepare dinner for an extra twenty, maybe thirty. Your first group of refugees is arriving.”