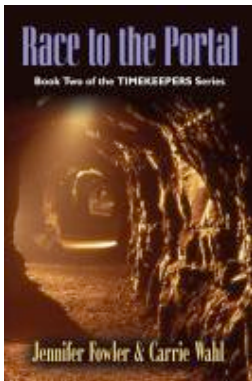


# Race to the Portal

**Book Two of the TIMEKEEPERS Series**

**Jennifer Fowler & Carrie Wahl**



*The six Timekeepers have learned the secret of their true destiny to save the world, and even greater dangers await as they face off with the children of Chantu. Now, someone has followed them out of the portal, while new hints to the ancient past surface that may help them protect the future, and Chantu's children begin to realize the secrets the Timekeepers are protecting. It becomes a race to reach the portal in time.*

# **Race to the Portal**

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## **Timekeepers Series**

Book Two

# **Race to the Portal**



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## Prologue

### Just Before the Great Deluge, Memphis, Egypt

Aapep the priest marched through the chaotic palace, his feet kicking up water, his face set in intent lines. The crash of thunder shook the stone walls, but no one paid any attention. The sound had been shivering down from the sky for days now, and they had grown accustomed to it, along with the furious pounding of unending rain that had started six days ago following the earth-shaking sound of an eruption to the west.

Adding to the madness, communication had been lost with Atlantica that first day of rain, when the shaking and rumbling of the ground had heralded the beginning of the end. Now local communication systems were down—even though it was dry season, the Nile was heaving far beyond usual flood stage. Once the cavities beneath the pyramids had completely flooded and the induction chambers inside the pyramids themselves had filled two evenings ago, Aapep had lost transmission on his crystal set and the city lights had darkened.

The previous day there had been an angry uprising of nobles who blamed the short but troubled reign of the king for the upheaval. They had murdered him, but Queen Nitocris had wrested back the helm of government and had imprisoned the murderers in a half-flooded prison. This morning, Nitocris had relented to the inevitable and had made the announcement that the palace occupants would be packing up essentials today and traveling to higher ground the following morning at first daylight. At that time she would issue a proclamation letting the kingdom know that they should vacate as well. Naturally, she wanted to give the royal entourage a head start. As far as Aapep could see, there was already

a steady stream of panicked citizens making their way south. It was just as well, since the only method left of broadcasting her executive order would be to shout it from one rooftop to the next.

The palace occupants were each intent on his or her own business, scurrying about like mice. Looting had not officially begun, but the servants were adding pieces of royal jewelry to their bags of food. It hardly seemed like stealing when they would be escaping with the royal family. Once the palace was vacated, it was a matter of time before everything was taken. If there was any time left for stealing, that is.

Queen Nitocris might care only about saving as much wealth as possible, but Aapep had other ideas. His pleas to Hathor had gone unnoticed; he had appealed to Osiris, Isis, and Horus, even to Set, to no avail. The suspicion that Menachem's God—the one who had threatened the calamity and instructed Menachem and his sons in the building of a super-ship—was really in charge of this catastrophe had hardened into certainty as the water began to seep under doors. A sense of inevitability had finally set in, and Aapep had set a plan in motion.

For forty years he had been Guardian of the Records. With this position came the duty to protect certain secret knowledge. He alone knew the location of a Doorway, and he knew that there were at least two other Doorkeepers in Atlantica. He had never used this Doorway himself. The owl amulet that he wore around his neck was the key, and he had been instructed by the previous Keeper that it could only be used once every century.

So far the entrance was above flood level. He had assembled the lesser priests and put them to work carting records. He had selected what he felt to be most important: history, science, technology. These were the records he felt would be most useful in reestablishing civilization as it had been. These were now piled in the antechamber. His fellow priests did not even realize that the solid metal wall at the far end of the dug-out room was in reality a door.

Aapep had returned to the palace to pack up food, instructing his brethren to do the same. His plan was to use the amulet to open

the Doorway, then he and the other priests would quickly transport the records past the Doorway and then they would seal up the door and wait safely on the other side for the deluge to pass.

The water that had run in little rivulets through the palace that morning was now past his ankles. He kept his head down and moved fast, taking back halls and passages. Nitocris was angry with the priests for their failure to appease the gods, and it was best to avoid the queen. There was a tight feeling of dread in his shoulders that eased as he slipped past the palace gates. He hurried down the streets, leaving the capital city behind and hurrying toward the pyramids towering to the northeast.

He was not far from the city, leaning forward into the rain, when a breathless priest stumbled to his side.

"Nitocris has imprisoned the rest of the priests," he said between gasps. "She is feeding them to the crocodiles tonight as a final offering to Sobek!"

"Then we must go with haste!" Aapep exclaimed.

"I know where a whirlybird is hidden," the young priest informed him. "It is my uncle's, but he is very old and will not need it."

"Let's go, then!"

The young priest led the way to an old out building with empty barrels stacked in front. They pushed these aside and shouldered open the huge, heavy door. The young priest threw aside a large blanket, revealing the wooden frame. The blades were stacked against one wall. It took both of them to maneuver the machine out the door. With hands shaking from adrenaline, they snapped the blades into place and seated themselves in the harness. It took some exertion to get the pedals pumping and the old gears spinning, but finally the blades were rotating and the machine lifted through the rain.

The young priest had obviously flown often, and he skillfully directed their path toward the pyramids. They set down on top of a stone base near the flooded causeway to the lion-bodied sphinx. They had to swim to reach a ladder up the chimney-like structure that had passed for a well for the past several decades. They

scrambled down the rungs lining the interior, the water lapping uncomfortably close to the top of the bricks. Inside, the shaft leveled out to a horizontal passage that opened high over their heads. They came out into the antechamber and Aapep ran to the back wall. He raised the owl into place, and the wall seemed to turn to gel.

"I don't know how long we have until the water starts running in here, so let's start moving these records," Aapep commanded. The young priest looked around at the overflowing room and sighed before moving to the closest pile and picking up a heavy load of bound pages. After a time of moving back and forth through the liquid metal wall it seemed that the job would never end, but they continued to pick away at the stacks. There were only a couple of armfuls remaining when Aapep noticed a small stream of water pooling around his feet. He snatched up a pile and ran for the wall, only to slam into solid metal.

With wide eyes he turned to the young priest, who raced up beside him and began banging hopelessly against the wall. With sickening realization, they turned and ran for the passageway, but it was too late. The water poured down the shaft and swept them back toward the wall, pinning them against it for the duration of the flood.

NOTES:

- Nitocris is listed by Herodotus and Manetho as the last pharaoh of the sixth dynasty, and is said to have killed her husband's murderers by sealing them in a room that was then flooded (some sources say it was her brother that was murdered).
- This queen ended the sixth dynasty of Egypt, and the country fell into total chaos, leaving behind very little evidence of what occurred in this era called the First Intermediate Period.



## **2020 AD, Higher Earth Level**

Four figures draped in dark, hooded cloaks huddled around a light projection. The small globe of light on the table barely lit the grotto deep in the mountain. Even through the layers of dirt and rock around them, the muffled sound of booming explosions could still be heard. Each was intent on the images flickering across the display, shaking their heads.

"Nothing has changed yet," a man's troubled voice muttered.

Suddenly one of them jabbed her finger at the stream of pictures. Her excited movement flung back her hood, revealing a tanned face, gray eyes, and hair twisted back on both sides of her head. One of her companions immediately pushed a button that froze the image in front of them.

"They are all there, S'tla," he agreed, "but that's still such a long way back."

"Read forward a little and let's see where we lost them," S'tla said.

The images scrolled again, this time in the opposite direction.

"There!" Her finger jabbed again, and again the button was pushed and the image frozen. The man slid his finger across the image and it began to play the scene out in slow motion.

"Somehow Ji made the call for them to get together. But only three Timekeepers came," S'tla said. "They were outnumbered."

The group watched the gruesome outcome in silent dismay.

"Shanti was there with the vial. Now *They* have got it," the man muttered.

One of the others pushed back her hood. She had the same gray eyes but her hair was in a single twist wrapped in whorls all around her head. "We've still got time to give them a warning at the portal and make sure this doesn't happen," she said. "We can still get a message in there before the time runs out."

"But in this light feed, they didn't find the serpent key," S'tla reminded her.

"Then we have to change the location where we have the Betweens place it. And we have to send a communication to one of the Timekeepers so that they will find it for sure." This was a deep voice from the largest hooded figure.

"T'kda, can we risk a communication?"

"You've seen the other alternative. We have no choice," T'kda continued in his deep voice. "Who is in the most remote location?"

The other man turned to a sleek screen secured in the rock wall and slid his fingers across it. "There are two of them there together. Tyro and Wayra," he said finally. "The only time period they are out of view of *Them* gives a very short window for the key to work, and they are the farthest from the portal. But the others are being watched too closely."

"Well, if it is our only good choice, it will have to do. Now, is there any place near enough that the Betweens can access?"

Again the man's fingers darted over the screen. "There is a fire temple that was buried in mud before their time."

"That will do. So we've got two communications to send back in time, one to the Betweens, the other to Tyro and Wayra. Find me discreet water sources." While the fingers moved over the screen once more, T'kda picked up the globe of light and blew on it. The light intensity increased, illuminating every corner of the rock grotto. Moving to the center of the room, he stopped before a cylindrical metal container, unscrewed the top, and shoved the light globe in its place. It swung crazily for a moment before spinning slowly as it hovered over the magnet inside.

The other man spoke up. "Water sources identified. Accessing AcTicom." As the screen changed, the globe of light changed color. "Ready for personal ID."

T'kda nodded and S'tla moved to the screen and placed her right hand flat on it. The globe changed color again. "ID accepted," the man stated.

S'tla pulled up her hood and moved to a stone platform near the globe. The light gathered from the rest of the room and concentrated itself around her. Quickly she explained the new instructions for the serpent key.

*Race to the Portal*

The fingers were at the screen again. "Message saved, message sent to the Betweens." The light sucked into the ball and all was dark for a moment, then the room filled with light once more. "Ready for message two." The light gathered itself and concentrated back around S'tla. Her second message was given and the room darkened as it was sent to ancient America.

A large boom shook the grotto, and all power dimmed down and died. T'kda took out a small globe that lit up independent of their small energy grid. It would take a little time for the effects of their messages to be visible on their screens; it would take longer to get the screens up and running again.

"And if they still don't make it to the portal? Tyro and Wayra are a long way from it, and their time to get there is short," S'tla reiterated to T'kda as they waited.

"We'll see. Perhaps it will create a needed change either way. Let's just hope this works."



**1792 BC**





## Chapter One

### Near Lambayeque, Peru

The sky above was a vivid blue, with a few stringy clouds stuck to it. Following the pebbly animal trail down the grassy hillside, Tyro had reached the valley before Wayra. A furry figure at the water caught his attention, and he paused behind a pine tree. The funny, dark face with light colored splotches covering the snout and circling the eyes was raised, and the bear sniffed the air before turning and ambling slowly downstream.

Tyro approached the water, pulling out his animal skin bag for a refill. The water was churning and brown, so he walked upstream to find a clearer spot. He finally found a place below a ring of boulders where the water was calm enough for the sediment to settle out. He reached out with the bag, when suddenly a shimmering glow rose above the water. Colorful points of light gathered together and formed a hooded figure of a woman. His mouth open in surprise, he watched as the small image spoke.

"There is a fire temple, buried in mud, a short journey from here." Here a quick image of a brown hill flickered before him. The woman's image returned. "Any local will be able to direct you there. You must find your way inside, and search for the next key to the portal hidden inside. Return home quickly with it, or the time for it to work will expire."

Before he could respond, the message repeated, and then the light dissipated and the image was gone.

He heard Wayra calling out his name, and he stood and hollered back to her.

"What's wrong?" she asked as soon as she saw his face.

"I had a message, I think from the woman we saw in the portal under our father's tomb. She told me where to find the next key, and then I have to go back to the Old Land."

Wayra felt her heart constrict, although she couldn't fully understand why.

"You'll come home with me, won't you?" Tyro asked expectantly.

For some reason the face of her nemesis—and ex-husband—flashed through her mind. She felt the conflicted tug on her heart that had kept her from leaving this land over the years, and she shook her head.

"I can't. Not yet."

Tyro looked at the emotions playing across her face and nodded.

It was late evening. Tyro walked across sparse grass toward a huge brown hill. He recognized it immediately from the image he had seen this morning at the river. An intense feeling was pulling him to the mound, and he clambered up the crumbly incline. The dirt stretched out before him unevenly. Natives living nearby had told him that an old fire worship temple, built from bricks shaped out of river mud, was buried beneath him. He picked his way across the mound until he found what he was looking for: a small, hand-dug tunnel that someone had made to burrow into the building, probably in a hopeful search for treasure.

It was a tight fit to get Tyro's thick, muscular frame down through the passageway, but he was rewarded with an open chamber at the end. It was dark, with one patch of floor illuminated by the shaft of sunlight piercing through the tunnel. He could see more light a little further on, and he felt his way forward through a doorway. There were steps, and the light was coming through a hole that had been punched through the mud-brick wall near the top of the stairs. As his eyes adjusted he could make out a painted design on the wall ahead of him. The bottom stairs were clear, but mud pushed its way down the higher steps. The top, which had once led out into the open, was completely blocked.

Something glinting at the base of the wall caught Tyro's eye. He pushed his fingers through the mud and pulled out the metal object. Then with one more glance around the empty room, he escaped back through the tunnel.

Back in the sunlight, he wiped the mud from the object and saw that it was covered in ash. But there was no mistaking the shape—it was the same serpent he and his siblings had been shown in the cave beneath his father's tomb, and that the messenger this morning had told him was in the temple. The key to the portal.

He closed his eyes and replayed in his mind the message they had been given in the tomb. The key was made to work one century from their last visit to the tomb, with a ten year window for them to get to the portal and use it before it was no good. As best as he could figure, the one hundred year mark had been nine years ago. The window was closing fast, and he had a very long way to go.

Stuffing the talisman into a leather pouch he kept hung round his neck and under his tunic, he headed into the cover of the trees. Although he hadn't seen his sister Wayra's awful husband Nimra since he had helped her escape from him over fifty years earlier, Tyro always felt he had eyes watching him here.

His first thought was to return south, find Wayra, and convince her to come with him back to their homeland. But when he had told her he had to find the talisman, she had been firm in her refusal to accompany him. He knew she felt that her home was here now, and crossing the ocean was never a sure thing. She might reach the Old Land, only to be stuck there. An uncharacteristic feeling of melancholy settled over him at the thought of leaving his sister behind. Wayra had been the reason he had ventured across the ocean in the first place.

This brought him to his current predicament—finding his own way home. After he had been instructed to come to Turtle Island to save his sister, it had taken him a few decades to find anyone who would attempt the journey. He was not new to sailing, so he knew well that the Phoenicians had partial maps handed down that included the shores across the ocean, but these were from accidental crossings. Their travels were confined to the Mediterranean, or

Great Sea, and the waters just beyond the outlet from that sea to the ocean were treacherous, as if some cataclysmic event were still sorting itself out under those waves. So they stayed to the known seas unless they were blown far off course. He had met sailors who had made the weary, and lucky, trip back, but they were unwilling to trust in chance and try the passage again. They knew that most ships that wandered out onto the ocean were never seen again.

He was finally able to purchase a ship and an adventurous crew in Nubia. They had passed down stories of brave sailors who had been pulled by currents to the New Land. Following these tales, his ship was sailed or rowed, depending on the winds, down around the tip of Africa. Coming out into the Atlantic, it caught a current that sent it northwest. It was a long journey, and the food and water became precariously low, but the current was so steady even a coconut could have made the trip on course. When land was finally sighted, the excited men used the oars to pull themselves in. Tyro set out on foot to find his sister, while the daring sailors loaded their ship with trade goods and set back out to sea, praying they would catch the top half of the current that would send them northeast and into the mysterious north of the Old Land. There they could hug the shorelines and feel their way southward and home. It would be another long and dangerous voyage, not one they would likely repeat again, but something they would tell their grandchildren about.

Tyro did not know whether or not that ship had made it home. He knew there was little chance that he would find another ship willing or able to make the journey. But at this point it was the only way he knew to get home.

### **Mouth of the Amazon, Brazil**

The wide river spewed mud out into the ocean as far as Tyro could see. It had taken him several moons to cross the mountains and canoe down the massive river, but after traversing its length once before with Wayra, he found it easy this time to identify the

edible plants and fish while avoiding the dangers of the waters and lonely jungle.

He had reached a large village built near the banks of the river. His plan was to rest here for the night while asking for any news of seagoing vessels.

Pulling his canoe in, he stepped out onto the muddy bank, unconsciously scanning for snakes before placing his foot. A young boy approached him, brown eyes wide with curiosity. The youngster held one end of a sinewy string in his hand, the other was tied to the leg of a colorful parrot, one wing held crudely together with a splint. Tyro unloaded his meager cargo from the canoe. Slinging his bow over his back, he lifted the larger of the two skin bags. The boy eagerly reached for the other, and Tyro nodded with a smile. Halfway up the trail to the village he had to reach over and retrieve the bag that was now dragging behind the boy.

A group of villagers came out to see him, suspicion in their faces. He glanced over the crowd and made eye contact with a smooth skinned brown beauty; flashing a smile at her, he turned his attention to one of the older men.

"Hello, friend," he boomed. "I seek rest for the night after a long journey."

The man looked at him intently. "You are the brother of the trader woman; you came through here once before many years ago."

Tyro was surprised the man recognized him.

"How are you still so young?" the man asked. "I was younger than you then, but now I look much older than you do."

"Perhaps I found a magic fountain up the river," he joked with a quick laugh. The villagers looked at each other with round eyes. He held up a small bag of copper Wayra had given him to use. "From the north. I'll pay for supper and lodging."

Several people jostled to get close enough to offer their homes. The old man held up his hand. "First I think you should come see someone who has been waiting for you."

Tyro made a fist to keep himself from instinctively feeling for the talisman hanging from his neck. He gave one last look at the long-

haired beauty, then followed the old man over some logs that had been laid over the soggy ground.

They reached a large hut built on poles. The old man indicated that Tyro should climb up alone. Inside, his hand on his dagger and a smirk on his face, he looked at the figure seated in the shadows. But then the figure leaned forward and light from an opening in the wall fell on him, and Tyro's face changed to puzzlement at the leathery, dark skin.

"Not expecting me, were you?" the aged man said in a raspy voice.

Tyro shook his head. "I expected someone else," he admitted. "I'm not sure I know who you are."

The old man's smile revealed toothless gums. "Fifty years ago I captained a ship—a ship that you had hired to make the perilous journey to this land." Tyro's eyebrows raised in surprise. The old man continued. "When my men and I attempted the return crossing to our homes and families, we met a fierce storm that destroyed my ship and killed most of my men. A few of us survived and made it back to land. We've been waiting all this time for word of another ship to take us home, but this has not happened. We dare not make the journey in the local canoes." Deep frown lines cut into his dark forehead. "You are the reason I have never again seen my homeland."

Tyro brushed off the words. "You were happy enough to agree to the adventure and the money when you were young. But you say there has been no word of another ship in all this time?"

The old man shook his head fiercely. "Not a word. You made this sound like a well-traveled route, not a death trap."

"If you were any kind of sailor, you knew the risks. A man accepts the consequences of his choices, rather than blaming others." Tyro looked around the hut, noting the intricately designed weavings on the walls, the colorful pottery in the corner, and the stack of rolled bed mats under the window. "Besides, it looks as though you are well off in this village, and I'm guessing you have a family?"



"As a matter of fact," the old captain said, leaning back and crossing his arms, "I have five grown grandsons here to help me apprehend you." Tyro looked down the ladder he had climbed and saw a dark-skinned man waiting at the foot. Another stood on the ground below the window behind him.

Tyro smiled. "Before the fun begins, I think I have a right to know if this is really just about an old grudge. Have you been waiting for me here all these years because your ship couldn't make it home?"

The old man shook his head. "I've thought of you every time I've looked out over those waves," he pointed his chin in the direction of the ocean heaving beyond the river's mouth. "But I never thought I'd see you again. No, it wasn't until word came through the village that there was a reward to capture you that I saw the opportunity to even an old score and increase my wealth at the same time."

It was starting to make sense. "And the person offering the reward?"

"A king from the north by the name of Nimra. Seems to have eyes everywhere; he knew you were coming down the river, anyway. But enough of this. It is time for you to go. My grandsons will escort you on your trip."

Tyro's pulse quickened and his eyes gleamed. This was the kind of excitement he really enjoyed. "I'm not in the habit of following orders," he said. He started down the ladder then flung himself out away from it and the man waiting at its foot. The five men were positioned on different sides of the hut. They all spun to face him and fanned out to catch him as if he were one of the many roosters strutting down the village paths. Instead of backing away from the trap as expected, he charged forward to meet the closest man. "Let's even the odds," he said as he delivered a powerful punch to the jaw that left the man slumped on the moist earth.

He turned to the left and kicked out the legs of the man on that side, twisted to the right and delivered an elbow to the temple of the third man, then turned back to finish with the man on the left just as someone leapt on his back and put a choke hold on his throat. A foot

in the face dropped the man trying to scramble to his feet. Feeling light headed, he reached behind and grabbed the hair of the man choking him. He bashed the man's face against the back of his own head, then jerked the hair hard, twisting the man's neck. The last man standing came at him in a running tackle, and all three bodies went down together. He fell face up, and his weight was enough to cause the man beneath him to release his choke hold. He lunged forward and pinned his tackler to the ground. Hearing a noise behind him, he looked up and saw that the other man had regained his breath and was coming at him with a blade.

Rolling to the side he pulled the pinned man up as a shield. A scream and blood dripping from that man's arm told him the blade had missed its mark. He was about to deliver a blow to the bleeding man's neck when the man's eyes rolled upward and his head lolled to one side. He shoved the body off him and looked up to see the fifth attacker lying on the ground with blood pouring from a gash in his temple. Standing over them all was the young woman he had seen earlier, a bloody rock in her hand. Behind her stood the boy with the parrot.

Tyro rose and brushed himself off. "Thank you for your help," he said with a charming smile.

The young woman looked him boldly in the eye. "You didn't want help," she stated calmly. "You were having fun."

Tyro raised an amused eyebrow. "Then why did you jump in?"

"I needed you to be in my debt. I have a favor to ask."

He crossed his arms over his broad chest and leaned back, waiting for more.

"This is my little brother," she said, pointing to the boy. "Our village in the trees was destroyed and we were taken captive. We need to escape, so we would like to go with you."

"Why escape? You don't look ill used. And you have no home to return to."

The young woman looked down for a moment, her long lashes brushing her cheek. "At the full moon, I am to be the virginal sacrifice. This will ensure safety for the village for the coming season."

"And I take it you don't care enough about their safety to sacrifice your life?" Tyro said in a sarcastic voice. "Well, if you need to escape, I don't see that anyone is stopping you. You don't need me."

"The villagers know, as I do, that one night in the jungle alone would be the end of us. But you survived a trip down the mighty river. You would protect us."

"As you protected me from the thugs," he said mockingly. Her face fell; seeing her disappointment, the little boy's lip began to quiver. "Come now, I'm not leaving you here to be butchered. But we best get moving." Two of the men were moaning as they began to revive. Tyro scooped the boy up onto his shoulder; the parrot dangled from the string for a moment before righting himself with a squawk.

The young woman had to trot to keep up with Tyro's long stride as they moved off into the tangle of the trees.

"Where are we going?" she asked breathlessly.

"I am going far to the north where ships sometimes strike the coast. The two of you are going to the first friendly village we come to."

He laughed at the scowl that crawled over her face.

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Tyro swatted at the buzzing in his ear and smacked at the sting on his arm. The plants around them were all dripping from the last round of never-ending rain. It had been a full moon since they had escaped, and their slow progress through the trees had not brought them in sight of any village. He felt a desperate push to get home as fast as possible with the talisman, but it was much more difficult to travel with the young woman and boy.

He looked over his shoulder to see that the young woman, Taina, had halted to wait for the boy lagging behind. Tyro carried the boy, Kai, whenever possible, but right now he needed his hand free to swing his blade through the thick undergrowth blocking their way. With a sigh, he touched the metal serpent hanging from

his neck. It was going to be nearly impossible to make it back in time.

His arm swung the blade again, hacking a fat piece of vine out of the path. Just a little farther and they would stop to eat and let Kai rest. When traveling alone, Tyro rarely stopped during the day to eat, relying on whatever animal he shot or roots or fruits he found in the morning to sustain him until nightfall. But his travel companions were less accustomed to being constantly on the move and needed more breaks and nourishment.

Taina was a great help with the food, but she was little company. For the most part, she ignored Tyro, but Kai plainly adored him.

His thoughts were interrupted and he spun around as the sound of the parrot's frantic squawking grated his nerves. Taina was shouting and running toward Kai, but Tyro could not see what was happening. Tearing his pack off his bare, sweating back, he flung it aside and hurried through the trees. Taina had thrown herself on a huge, coiling snake wrapping itself around Kai. She was screaming and tugging hopelessly at the writhing serpent. Without thinking, Tyro pushed Taina aside and shoved his blade into the thick muscle. He sliced into it several times before it released its grip.

Kai was purple and unmoving. With a mounting feeling of panic, Tyro rubbed fiercely at the boy's limbs, willing life and blood back into them. Finally, as he pushed on Kai's chest in a last effort to force life back into him, Kai stirred and gasped air into his lungs. It was a few minutes before his eyes opened.

Taina pulled her brother close, her tears dropping onto his face. Tyro's throat tightened. He cleared it and stood up. As he reached out to take Kai, he was irritated to see a slight tremble in his hands. He tucked the boy over his shoulder, retrieved his pack, and motioned for Taina to follow, but his thoughts were troubled. He had been in battle and seen grown men, his own companions, bleed to death of ghastly wounds. He had fought worse beasts than this lowly snake. Through it all, fear was a very unfamiliar feeling. Today, it had touched him, and it took him time to realize it was fear that he couldn't save someone he had come to care about, someone weak and dependant on him.

He wasn't in the habit of growing close to people; he liked people but seldom truly cared about them. With a rueful smile, he imagined his brother Momburu's voice philosophizing, *it's part of the experience of being human*.

Thrusting thoughts and feelings aside, he found a grassy clearing, set the boy down gently, and went about making camp for the night.

The moon came up full, casting silver light on the grass. Its light barely penetrated into the thick trees, and the strange, unidentifiable night noises of the jungle made Tyro toss another thick chunk of wood on the dying embers. He leaned against a tree, watching Taina and Kai sleep. His eyes finally grew heavy and closed.

In his dreams he saw a familiar face. Long dark curls framed a smooth, light brown face with full lips and beautiful, impenetrable green eyes set in lush black lashes. She was almost as tall as he was, a mature woman, but eternally youthful. She was wearing a scarlet robe and bending her head as a gold band was lifted to top her hair. Standing with a smile, she held her hand out to a large man with his own gold head band holding back thick curls. The image disappeared and Tyro woke with a start. Staring into the orange coals, he felt a strange heaviness settle in his heart.

His eye fell on the two sleeping forms. Kai breathed a little unsteadily still, but his face was peaceful. Taina looked suddenly young and immature, a little girl compared to the image in his mind. All at once he felt like a father, protective and lonely.

He looked out over the silver-moonlight-tipped tree tops stretching toward the sea. *Good night Kallisto*, he whispered into the dark.

### **Off the coast of Tobago, Caribbean**

Tyro reached over to ruffle Kai's dark hair blowing in the salty breeze as the fishing boat he had hired bounced through the waves. He was happy to see the boy was as much a sailor as Tyro himself.

Taina was quiet as usual, but Tyro sensed she was unhappy that they had left her native land and were headed to the islands. Tyro's plan was to island hop until he reached the south shore of the northern chunk of the mainland. If there had been any recent ships from the Old Land, he would certainly hear about them there.

The opportunity to leave Kai and Taina in a village had arisen, but he had made up excuses to bring them further north. Now he leaned over to Kai. "Why does your sister hate me?" he asked.

Kai showed his bright teeth in a wide smile. "You are a warrior. She hates all warriors after they destroyed our village." He shrugged as if to say, *women!*

"I wouldn't destroy a village, she should know by now I'm not that kind of man."

"At our village she would not be very friendly to you anyway," Kai added. "The chief was our father. She would only talk to men who were important, from powerful families."

"How does she know I'm not?" Tyro asked, thinking of his father, Gilgamesh, whose name was still a legend in the Old Land.

Kai looked at him excitedly. "You are, aren't you? I knew it! I'm going to tell Taina!"

Tyro held up a hand. "No, don't tell her."

Kai's face was bewildered. "Why not? Then she'll like you, maybe."

"I don't want her to like me for that. She should already like me for who I am."

The boy frowned as he thought about it, but then he had to nod in agreement. "Too bad for her," he said finally.

The young fisherman rowing at the rear of the boat had been trying to catch Taina's eye since they had hired the boat. Now he excitedly pointed out a large sea turtle bobbing its head up out of the water near the side of the boat. Even Taina smiled as she watched the large, platter-shaped body paddling in the crystal blue water. Tyro watched as her eyes met the fisherman's while he explained the yearly turtle nesting that was just beginning again on the islands. Her eyes dropped shyly, and Tyro wondered if her high



expectations would soon be lowered enough to include a man who caught fish for a living.

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After more than a moon of island hopping, Taina seemed to be loosening up. They spent most of their days either on the fishing boat rolling over waves or enjoying a stretch on a sandy beach. The wind in her hair, the sand on her brown toes, and the undivided attentions of the young fisherman had painted a smile on her usually serious face.

Now they had reached the last string of small islands set like stepping stones on the way to the main land mass and she was suddenly quiet again.

The bright sky had darkened like the spreading stain of spilled berry juice when they paddled to shore for the night. This small island was inhabited by one tribe, and their evening fires made welcome beacons. As they clambered out of the two connected canoes of the fishing boat, the smell of flowers wafted on the wind, mingling with the scent of cooked tortoise. Over the past weeks they had developed a taste for this meat, and they moved forward with anticipation.

After a hearty meal at the tribal chief's home, where, as always, the larger than life Tyro was the center of attention, Taina shook her head when the fisherman offered to take her for a starlit stroll along the beach. To Tyro's surprise, she turned to him and asked him in a low voice if he would accompany her instead.

Once they had gone down the path that led out of the village and past the palm trees toward the water, Taina turned to face Tyro and looked him squarely in the eye. "Kai and I have reached the end of our journey," she said firmly. "I appreciate the fact that you helped us escape and that you have been a good friend to Kai, but we cannot follow you forever on your endless chase after who knows what. We need a home, a new family."

"Is this about the fisherman?" Tyro asked, feeling strangely panicked.

She nodded. "Partly. And partly because I am happy on the islands. I want to settle down here. I've lost my life in the forest, but I'm ready to move on."

"But Kai won't agree with you. He'll want to go on with me."

"Kai is too young to know what is good for him. He is my brother. He is my responsibility. The restless life you lead is not right for a child."

The truth of her words stung, and her unchanging calm and serious demeanor somehow rankled him, pushing out combative words. "You decided from the beginning that you didn't approve of me. I think Kai sees me as the father he needs. You won't be doing him any favors by taking him away from me."

She looked at him speculatively, and her words came out measured as always. "Actually, I believe you make an excellent father figure. But it is true that I am not impressed by your charm. I'm sure you are used to women swooning at your feet, because they cannot see that your attentions are not really for them, but for the excitement of the moment and the preening of your own feathers. I've seen many men like you. If you can get women to pay attention to you, it makes you feel better about yourself. You could never truly love a woman because it will always be about you and your next conquest."

His reply stuck in his throat. Her words were an echo of words he had heard over a century earlier from the woman who still haunted his dreams.

"And even when it comes to Kai," she pressed on, "I can see that you love him as a son, but you still can't see beyond what you want to what is best for him." She looked at him for a moment with her face set unyieldingly before brushing past him toward the huts of the island village. He turned and watched her go, part of him wanting to roar like a lion, demanding that Kai would accompany him northward. She turned in the torchlight and mumbled, "I'll explain to him that you'll be leaving us in the morning. I'm sorry." Then she hurried off to put Kai to bed.

His hand lifted to the talisman tied at his neck and his thoughts turned to his life purpose, fighting the children of Chantú to protect

the earth. His shoulders drooped as he recognized Taina's wisdom. It was a dangerous life not meant for a child.

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The screams tearing through the walls of the hut woke Tyro. Disoriented, he jumped to his feet, turning back and forth to find the source of the yells. His heart leaped to his throat as he recognized Kai's voice.

Outside the hut, he was joined by a throng of villagers rushing toward the sound. The men had spears, and the way they ran made Tyro sure they knew what to expect. They passed the hut where Taina and Kai had been sleeping and pushed into the flowering shrubs just beyond it. The screams had stopped, and Tyro's limbs felt leaden with dread.

A woman grabbed his arm, sobbing. "I'm sorry," she said. "We didn't think to tell him. All the children here know."

He turned to face her. "Know what?" he choked out.

"Not to go outside the huts at night. He must have had to make water, and that is all it takes."

Still confused, Tyro forced himself to where the men had stopped and grouped together to spear an animal low on the ground. His stomach clenched as he saw the huge, sharp-toothed crocodile slowly writhing around, trying to bite at the men. It was quickly dead, and the man next to Tyro stood back breathing hard and wiping his sweating face.

"We've been hunting them down, only a few left," he explained.

Tyro wasn't listening. His eyes had found the figure of little Kai. Taina was kneeling, the lifeless boy in her lap. She looked up, and as her eyes met Tyro's, her face darkened with anger.

"You shouldn't be here. This wouldn't have happened if you had let us stay behind the first time I asked."

Tyro felt as if his heart had turned to ice and someone had then smashed it with a hammer; spiky pieces of it slid painfully through his veins. He turned on his heel and walked to the water's edge. He stood staring at the endless waves until the sun had risen and he was able to catch a boat to the next island.

CHAPTER NOTES:

- The Fire Temple at Lambayeque Peru was discovered fairly recently. The 4000 year old temple appears to have been intentionally buried. Among the most fascinating features are the well preserved murals.  
<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2007/11/photogalleries/Peru-pictures/photo4.html>
- The crocodile lived on the Bahamas until people hunted them off. On these islands without bodies of fresh water to live in, the crocodiles had become land hunters, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/22150064/>.
- While the archaeological record does not place people on the Bahamas until about 800 AD, the fact that neighboring Cuba and the Antilles were settled for several thousand years leads to the conclusion that humans would have settled the Bahamas as well, possibly not continuously. The climate was much as it is today, and would have been a draw to early adventurous types.

## Chapter Two

### Alaska

The wind whistled over the drift where Tyro huddled in the buffalo skin he had hauled on a bone sledge through piles of snow. The precious sledge was parked beside him, loaded with the lifesaving provisions he had carted into the teeth of a northern winter.

With the fur pulled over his head, he thought back over his decision to make this trip. Once he had made his last island hop and reached the mainland, he had moved north along the eastern shore, while constantly seeking out a seaworthy ship. He had found nothing, but while staying with a tribe on the rocky coastline of the northeast, he had met a man with a familiar face who told tales of a people far to the north who somehow eked out a living in the land of ice. He claimed they had come over ice and water, following the reindeer, from an ancient land to the west, spreading as far as Greenland to the east.

After visiting with the man he had recognized why the man's face seemed familiar; he had met the man's ancestors long ago while training among the horsemen on the steppes far east of the Caspian Sea. Their horsemanship had been incredible. Tyro decided he would have to find these people in the north and learn what they knew about a route between the Old Land and this.

The villagers he had been staying with had cautioned him against traveling north with winter approaching, but his drive to get the talisman to the portal was too strong. Besides, his mind, still berating him over Kai's death, did better if he kept on the move. So they had advised him to first head west and travel northward among the tribes that inhabited that coast. He had intended to, had started that route, first spending time among the impressive Copper

Kingdom people currently under the rule of a gentle, peace loving man. He had visited here before with Wayra, and she had described how she had been part of a battle for the kingdom, and the intrigue that followed after she left, but it was difficult to believe when he saw how harmoniously the artistic civilization was living right now.

From the Copper Kingdom he followed rivers toward the great mountainous backbone that rose in the west. He made it as far west as the Snake River, traversing up the treacherous, barren canyon for some distance before the pull was too strong. When the river turned west, he set out on foot northward, against the native advice. When winter arrived he was still moving north, so he loaded what he could on the sledge and trudged forward day after day, constantly dragging his lifeline behind him. For the past two weeks, the bitterly cold wind had swept in and the snow had rarely stopped falling.

The nights were long and cold, but if he bundled down into his layers of furs and skins and fell into a fitful sleep, it was some relief from the endless white and solitude. Sometimes the dreams were worse, though. He would dream that Kai was still alive, and, defying Taina, Tyro had brought him north, and the child was slowly freezing and starving to death beside him.

Tyro tried to soak up a little more warmth before rising for the day's long pull. He pushed his head up out of the buffalo skin and saw that the snow had died down and the clouds had blown past, leaving a clear, breathtaking view around him. Although the sun shone weakly across the wide sky, the blue expanse and brilliant sunshine glinting off of all the white around him dazzled his eyes. He had to squint to look around, but what he saw was beautiful. For a moment the cold was forgotten and he felt new life surge through him as the sunshine warmed his cheeks. Standing and shading his eyes with his hand, he peered off into the distance and saw jagged mountains scraping the gray blue on either side of him. The peaks to the west were closer, and spread like a skirt at the foot of these was a dark gray-green forest. The forest would mean food to replenish his quickly dwindling stores.

A small groan escaped from his throat and he shook his head as a closer look at the slant of the shadows made him realize that the

route he had been taking had veered to the northeast rather than northwest. How many days had he lost by traveling blindly through the snowstorm?

The silence around him was broken by a haunting wail. The sound of wolves had been following him for days, but the snow had kept him from seeing any sign of the creatures that slunk behind him. He moved quickly, knowing daylight was short. He rolled up the skins he had been sleeping in and strapped them to the sledge, then picked up the lines and began his steady drag forward.

It took him all morning to reach the first trees. Once he had entered the cover of the forest, he felt the hair on the back of his neck stand, as if eyes were hungrily piercing his skin, but as he looked around warily he saw only gray tree trunks and snowy ground spotted with needles that had shaken loose from branches. It took a moment for his vision to adjust to the abrupt change from the blinding glare of light endlessly fractured and reflected off snow and ice crystals. He walked forward until he found a trail winding through the snow. There were so many tracks on the trail that they covered each other and were difficult to read, but he made out a deep set of split hooves that belonged to an elk.

The narrow meandering of the trail made it nearly impossible to pull the sledge. He shoved it under an overhang of gray rock and crept forward much lighter without it, his bow slung over his shoulder. The light was fading quickly, and he had just decided to turn back for the sledge with the skins he would need for the night, when he heard sounds ahead. It was the whining yawn sound that dogs make when excited, and he moved carefully off the trail and stole forward more stealthily than before. Peering through branches, he saw his elk lying in blood-darkened snow, steam rising from its body. Three wolves were vying for position as they prepared to feast on their kill. It was disappointing to lose the meat, but he would not fight the dogs for it.

Backing slowly and silently until he felt he was a safe distance away, he turned and found himself staring into hungry, calculating, yellow eyes. Two wolves stood, muscles tensed, about the distance of two bounds. Low growls rose from their silver and brown throats.

While his eyes watched them intently for any motion, in his mind he knew exactly what was happening behind him. The wolves feasting on the elk were lifting their heads, pricking their ears, sniffing the air. At least one would soon be easing toward him to see what was going on. It would be best to deal with the two in front of him first.

Without moving, he slid his eyes around, searching for the best option. Part of his mind berated himself for going in search of meat so late in the day rather than setting up a safe camp for the night. Another part of him calculated that the wolves, unused to man, were wary and would attack only after assessing him and how he would react to them. They were too close for him to nock an arrow before they could reach him. He saw a tall rocky point to his right that would be high enough to protect him if he could scale it fast enough, but he would never reach it in time. The trees just around him were bare of branches until far above his reach. He had a knife strapped to his leg, but he didn't like his chances with more than one wolf if he had to go that close in hand to fang combat.

Just to his left he spotted a thick branch on the ground. He saw one of the wolves tense, preparing to leap. He made one step to the left, bent and snatched up the branch at the same moment the wolf sprang at him. He came up swinging and connected with the wolf's jaw, sending it flying with a yelp. The other wolf was already at his leg, its teeth buried. He clubbed the wood down onto its back and then again onto its head. It let go of his leg but growled, lips pulled back from bloody teeth, and lunged for his face. He dropped and rolled to the side before it connected, and then was on his knees swinging at its legs. This time there was a snapping sound and the injured wolf backed off.

Leaping to his feet, Tyro raced to the rock face and found a fissure that he began scaling. The skin boots he had laced to his legs did not offer much traction for his feet, and there were teeth tugging at him before he had clambered high enough. He grunted as a leaping wolf caught him in the back, but its teeth closed around the leather quiver full of arrows, and the animal fell as the quiver tore free. A small ledge just above his head gave him a strong arm hold, and he hefted himself up out of reach. Looking down he saw four



pairs of eyes; he was not sure if the elk eaters had joined the man hunt or if new wolves had arrived. He continued to climb up the rock, and finally reaching the very top, he hoisted himself up and lay down breathing heavily and wincing in pain.

He could easily picture himself dying here, trapped by wolves until he starved or froze to death. Time passed slowly, but the wolves kept their vigil below. Dressed head to foot in skins lined in rabbit fur, his face chapped and burned by the cold wind except where it was covered in thick beard, he closed his eyes and dreamed of home. Bare feet in the sand, warm sunshine, the glittering emerald waters of the Great or Mediterranean Sea. He pictured a face bending down toward him, her tan face wreathed in dark tresses. She was frowning in tender concern, placing a hand on his forehead. Leaning forward, she placed her mouth next to his ear.

"Wake up, Tyro. You have to come home."

Her face dissolved into blackness. "Kallisto," he whispered. He opened his eyes and saw it was dark, but a full moon was casting light down through the trees and reflecting off the snow. A slight wind had picked up. Shivering, he pulled himself into a crouch and peered around him. In the moonlight he could see that the back side of the ledge he was on angled down and met the rock face of a larger outcropping of boulders. He inched his way down into this crevice and saw that the boulders jutted out of a tree-covered hillside, and a well-worn path made its way from the ledge, around the rock and up the hill. He backed up slowly, one hand on the rock face, wondering if the wolves knew of this trail, and if they had made their way up the hill and were coming down after him. Suddenly his hand seemed to fall into the rock, and he realized there was an opening, its gaping blackness hidden by the shadow of night.

He hesitated, unsure whether it was worse to move forward and risk meeting the wolves on the trail, or stay on the ledge not knowing what might be hidden in the black cavity of the rock. If it was occupied by one of the giant white bears he had heard of, he was in big trouble. He tucked his frozen hands into his fur coat to warm them while he deliberated. The truth was, he could not hope to find his way around well enough or protect himself in the dark,

and he was going to freeze to death if he slept out in the wind. He inhaled deeply, and not catching the musky scent of bear, he made his decision. With bated breath, he plunged into the darkness of the rock.

The relief from the wind was immediate. He wasn't warm, but the biting edge to the cold had been dulled. With one hand on the wall, he made his way a little distance into the cave and then hunkered down for a long, cold night.

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Morning light finally filtered into the cave. Tyro was chilled to the bone, and the bite on his leg ached. He limped out of the cave and clambered up to the flat part of the ledge; putting his face over the edge, he peered below. A pair of yellow eyes stared up into his. Excited, the wolf stood and whined. There were answering yelps from the trees. Tyro pulled back and scraped his way back down to the cave. His eyes followed the path that led from the cave, around the rock outcropping, and up the hill. Either the wolves had not found it or could not reach the other end. Then his focus shifted to the trees along the path. Hobbling, he moved painfully up the path and gathered a pile of branches and dried tree lichen.

The trail took one turn through the trees, then ended abruptly. He stood on the edge, looking down into a huge crater. Meteor, he thought. It must have happened a long time ago, as thick, full grown trees grew up from its floor.

It took a while to get a flame going at the mouth of the cave. He hovered over its warmth until he felt the chill leave him. Glancing back into the cavern, now lit by the dancing flames, he noticed figures painted on one wall. He scooped up a branch with one end burning and used it to light the figures more closely. He had often seen cave drawings depicting people or animals, but these were ordered characters. The first line consisted of strange symbols he did not recognize, but beneath these were a type of ancient glyph he could read. It stated boldly:

## DEAD DOOR

Holding up the torch, he saw that the back of the cave looked as if it had been sealed off by a wall of metal. He had seen this once before, at the portal beneath his father's tomb. This time, there was a giant crack from the top to the bottom of the wall, with the rock of the cave showing through behind. Moving around the cave he searched for anything else unusual, but found nothing. He returned to the characters and committed the top line to memory, in case it would prove useful in the future.

His stomach reminded him he had more pressing needs. He climbed again to the ledge and peered down once more. The wolf below him was nervous, his ears flattened and nose wrinkled as he sniffed the smoke. Tyro flung what remained of the burning torch at him and the dog raced toward the trees. He turned back and cautiously paced beneath the ledge. Tyro went back to the fire, and soon returned with more burning missiles. The wolf tucked its tail and trotted into the trees, glancing back and dodging as burning embers flew at him.

Tyro spent the rest of the morning keeping the fire going, watching for the wolves to make any appearance. When he had seen no sign of them by noon, he decided it was time to retrieve his sledge. Scaling down the rock seemed to be the only way to reach the forest floor. His leg was burning by the time he touched a foot to the snowy ground.

Searching around, he found his quiver half buried in snow that had been trodden over with wolf tracks. The arrows had spilled out, and he had to kick through the white to find them. As he made his way carefully back to where he had left the sledge, one wary eye on the woods around him, the chittering of a squirrel broke the quiet. He peered up into the trees and saw the red furry animal yelling at him from a high branch. With a quick motion he had set an arrow and sent it flying. He skinned the small animal out on the spot, but he would wait to get out of the trees to where he had more visibility before enjoying his lunch.

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With the low angle of the weak winter sun, it was difficult to find north, but Tyro trudged in what he best figured was a northwest route. His leg throbbed where the wolf had bit him, but in his hurry to get away from the wolves, he had still not cut open the pant leg to look at the wound. He put one hand on his chest, feeling the hard lump of the serpent talisman beneath the skins and fur. He was growing more concerned that he would never make it back in time for the key to open the portal. Chiding himself for not heading to the west coast as advised by the villagers, he scanned the white, empty landscape, looking far to the horizon in hope of seeing smoke. He needed to find people. Someone to tell him if he was headed the right way, to show him the fastest way to get across these vast, freezing lands. The feeling was strong, but he saw nothing.

The afternoon wore away, one foot in front of the other, step after step, endless ice crunching beneath him. Suddenly he heard shouting. Confused, he turned, looking for the source of the sound. He finally saw a small figure waving frantically at him from the top of a rise to his left, and shouting at him to stop. He halted, waiting for the person who was soon followed by others slipping and sliding their way down the hill toward him. When he moved towards them the yelling increased to a fever pitch, so he stopped and let them reach him.

They came to an abrupt stop about ten feet from him, yelling, "Not good! Not good!" Motioning for him to stay put, one of the men made a wide, circuitous route from behind to get to him. Then the man beckoned for Tyro to follow him.

"You mean follow the trail you just made?" Tyro asked.

The man, a good head and shoulders shorter than Tyro, looked startled. "You speak our language?" Tyro shrugged. Like his siblings, he spoke all languages without effort.

The man shook his head in surprise, but he only said, "Yes, stay on my trail." Tyro obediently followed. When he reached the group of men, they led him up the hillside they had come down. From the

vantage point of the rocky ridge top, he could see what had made the men so anxious. An opening in the side of the snow showed a deep crevasse over which the snow formed a treacherous, deceptive bridge. It was thin enough that had he taken a couple more steps, he and his sledge would have plunged through a gorge so deep it seemed to fall into the bowels of the earth.

"You were traveling on the crawling ice," the man who had led him away from the crevasse said, referring to the glacier that crept slowly down the valley.

One of the other men looked curiously at Tyro. "What brings you here? You are obviously not one of us, and no one else braves these snowy realms."

"I need to get home to the Old Land, and I was told that there is some way to reach its far eastern shore through these snowy lands." He looked around the group, but none of the men would meet his eye. It was obvious they knew the way but did not want to show him for some reason. He changed the subject. "What are you men doing out here in this cold place? I had just about given up hope of seeing anyone."

"We live nearby. You're lucky we were out, though. The way you were hiking, had you somehow survived, you would have gone right past, and we're the last settlement on this branch of the river for days. We wouldn't ordinarily have been out near the crawling ice, but the shaman woman told us we had to go today."

Tyro raised an eyebrow in surprise. He would have to thank that woman. "Do you really live around here?" he asked.

The men nodded eagerly. "It is a nice place during the summer. It is only in the winter that it is so difficult, but we have learned ways to survive," explained one of them.

Another of the men looked at the sun that was sliding at an angle towards the backside of the mountains. "Our homes are not too far. We should get going, before it gets dark." Tyro trudged along with the men. They hiked over several ridges and through a pass into a wide valley. A ribbon of icy water sliced through the center, and nestled along one bank was a cluster of rounded shelters.

As they drew close, the air was filled with the sound of yapping. Dogs that looked like short, thick wolves strained against ropes that tied them in bunches near each hut. Tyro was hustled into one of the huts and he soon reclined in a pile of bear skins with a belly full of dried fish and moose meat pounded with berries and bear fat, food that his hostess, a beautiful middle-aged woman with dark hair in braids and dressed in a beautiful skin and fur over-dress and slacks, had cached in holes in the floor. The smell of smoke snaked through the dwelling, but most of it curled up through a hole in the roof.

The village men waited until he had eaten, then entered with the shaman woman. The smile she directed at him through an aged, shrunken face was missing a few teeth. Her eyes were very black and shiny. "I never thought I'd live to see a Doorwalker," she bubbled happily. Tyro raised his eyebrows. She laughed at his surprise. "This was a land of Doorwalkers, way before my people came here." She swept her arms wide, one hand holding a thick wooden stick. "Their essence still fills the air. I can feel it." She moved her hands in front of her face and opened and shut them towards him. "It crackles." She hooted as if it were the funniest thing she had heard in a long time.

"They left marks on rock. Most of it we cannot understand," explained one of the men.

Tyro addressed the woman. "Then maybe you will understand that I must leave here, tomorrow. I still have a long way to go."

The men standing about in the round, shadowy room shook their heads. "He wants to go north," they explained to the woman.

She appeared to be deep in thought. "The door here?"

"Shut," Tyro replied simply. "Forever."

Her shoulders sagged sadly.

The men shook their heads. "You do not want to go north. It is always too cold; traveling there in winter is a death sentence."

With eyebrows lowered heavily, the woman shook her head. "You know the snows make it easier to travel," she reprimanded. "You will take him north, and you will not be afraid of those Ice Men. She held up a crooked finger and slowly pointed it toward

each of their downcast faces, finally stopping in front of a younger man in his early twenties.

"You, Nalren, you will take him. Go get your dogs ready to leave in the morning." She turned back to Tyro. "Now let's look at that leg."

Tyro used his blade to open the skin leggings. Her dark, bright eyes moved back and forth as she searched for signs of infection, then they looked directly into his. "Something of a self-healer, too, I see." Tyro shrugged. After the shaman cleansed and bound the wound, he retrieved his leather satchel and rooted around for something to act as payment. She eagerly accepted a chunk of blue turquoise rock he had collected in the dry red lands to the south. Then her eye fell on a folded parchment.

"It has been many years since I have seen scrawling. May I look at it?"

Tyro smoothed open the map, one he had received from Kallisto years before while living on Crete. "There's more picture than writing here." He handed it over anyway.

She glanced over it, then held it close to her face as if inhaling its aroma. "Have you looked this over recently?"

Tyro shook his head. "I keep it more as a memento, actually. I have a feeling it may prove useful someday, though."

The woman clucked her tongue, and carefully folded it back along its creases. "Well, you may as well put it away, you won't be needing it for a long time now." Tyro felt she was telling him something. Uncertain, he tucked it back in the satchel without a reply.

"One more thing before I go," she insisted. "I can see things about people, the energy around us speaks if we are willing to listen, and I have many years' practice at listening. May I hear what it says about you?"

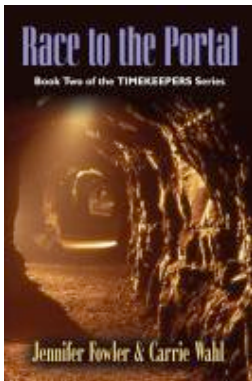
Intrigued, Tyro nodded.

She took his hand, then closed her eyes and rocked, a very faint humming sound coming from her throat. Finally she opened her eyes and looked into his, a bemused smile on her face. "You are a mystery. They say you are an old soul, but still too young in many

*Jennifer Fowler, Carrie Wahl*

ways of thinking. You have a deep hurt here." She placed a hand on his chest. "But they say you were not at fault, and you should stop blaming yourself. Also, you travel two paths, one on your feet, one in your heart. The one your feet travel will end too soon. But it will help you find the conclusion of your heart's path."





*The six Timekeepers have learned the secret of their true destiny to save the world, and even greater dangers await as they face off with the children of Chantu. Now, someone has followed them out of the portal, while new hints to the ancient past surface that may help them protect the future, and Chantu's children begin to realize the secrets the Timekeepers are protecting. It becomes a race to reach the portal in time.*

# **Race to the Portal**

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