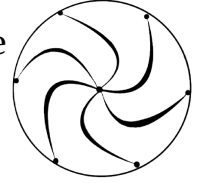


The Dark Door Series Book One
Heir to Moon's Secret
By Sam Groveman



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Heir to Moon's Secret

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First Edition

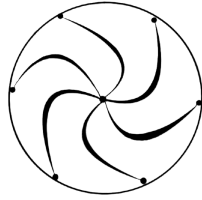
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This volume is dedicated to Davida Stockton,
thank you for all your help and your faith in me,
and to my loving family, for all your support.

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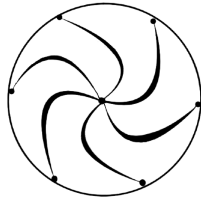
Prologue Concerning Worlds and Veils



Sometimes, in some places, the veil between worlds becomes thin, whether the world is in another universe or merely in a distant corner of the current one. This is when ghosts are seen, creatures of another world viewed briefly through a thinned veil, but always this thinness passes within a matter of seconds. In some places the veil is thinner more often than others. And sometimes the veil is ripped open and hurled asunder by unnatural forces. It is in the time between when this fabric is ripped and when it reseals that fear should be felt. For this is the time when things may pass between the worlds, despite the chances that something would randomly wander through are insurmountably small. But chance had little to do with what happened.

One such hole was thrust open in the dark, late afternoon woods not too far from civilization. One teenage boy was hurrying home through the woods for his family's trip south, his passport and plane tickets clutched tightly in his hands. He was drawn inexorably towards the rift and, without seemingly conscious intent, stepped through, leaving behind only a fallen passport and tickets rustling on the leaves in the heavy autumn breeze as he disappeared....

Chapter One First Glimpses



I regained consciousness slowly, and my first thought was that this did not feel like my bed. Something was amiss, cliché as that sounded. Lying there with my eyes closed I felt as if I had run ten miles in five minutes; every muscle I had screamed in agony and my head throbbed with a dull constant pain. Not only was my body suffering, but my mind was fatigued and slow as well. Every sensation and thought I had seemed to come to me through a damp fog. I had no recollection of my immediate past. What was I doing lying down?

I tugged my eyes open with a phenomenal effort; each one pulled on me as much as any weight I had ever lifted. The first thing I saw surprised me immensely: a low flat roof of stone, that I was sure I'd never seen before, rose above my head. Arched windows in the walls to either side showed me that I was on a ground floor. On the other side of the room, a solid door of plain wood, bracketed with strips of black metal, stood slightly ajar, letting a cool breeze wash in. Warm air wafted in from an open window on my right. From the light streaming in I thought it must be sometime in the early afternoon. I lay back and tried vainly to relax and recollect where I was and why.

I heard a shuffling to my immediate left and realized, with some embarrassment due to my current state of affairs, that I was not alone. Sitting in a cushioned chair on the bedside to my left was a young... person. It was strange; I felt that I had never before seen a person like this, on the other hand, if these are the people that live here, then I must be one of them,

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logically. I remembered all the animals I had ever seen or heard of, and as I looked at my silent companion, I had a strange thought: *She looks like a vixen*, though no vixen I could remember. Her figure was almost the same as mine; I made the comparison between her and me without thinking. Her long reddish-blond hair was hanging loosely about her shoulders, her fur was mottled in a myriad of colors, ranging from dark brown to a pale cream on her chest, with mostly a brownish-red on the whole of her body. Her tail, looking soft and slightly bushy, lay curled in her lap; its colors fading from a dark red near its beginning, to a creamy-white at its twitching tip. On the end of her slightly whiskered muzzle was a small black nose, and two long ears curved gracefully away from either side of her head. Under the top of the casual looking, sky-blue dress she wore I could see the gentle swell of her breasts, which told me that she was well into her adolescent years. The dress's gold hem reflected what sunlight hit it from the open window, blinding me at times as the figure's shoulders rose and fell with her breathing.

Her age was also surprising to me, she looked to be about my age—and again I made the comparison without thinking. Her large blue-green eyes had a slightly worried expression with a touch of relief, as with someone who had found an injured animal and had just learned it would live, but her face wore an expression of slight annoyance or resentment, as if my appearance here might have somehow caused her trouble.

I looked down at myself and was immediately confused further. I noticed that I did not look like her. At all. I ran my hands over my face, feeling all its contours. I was devoid of fur and had no tail, my ears were short round things on the sides of my head, my nose was a stubby small mass between my eyes, and the only real collection of hair I had was bunched in a dark-brown mess on the top of my head. My clothes were soft, but they looked durable: I wore an average tan belt that held up a

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roomy pair of dark-green pants; underneath a black sweatshirt I had on a plain white tee-shirt. On my wrist was a watch that was erratically flashing patterns on the round face; I supposed it had broken, for I could make nothing of it. I was enormously confused, how could I look so different?

I decided then merely to accept what I saw for now, for the holes in my memory might explain my questions. Then again, they might not, but to assume so would stop some of the questions I could go insane trying to answer. Although it posed questions of its own, such as why I could not remember anything about these people or myself; it seemed the more questions I answered, or pushed aside, the more I had. I heaved a resigned sigh.

"Where am I?" I asked her abruptly. She jumped, startled at the suddenness with which I spoke. Evidently, she had not been aware that I had awoken. She regained her composure quickly and responded slowly, as if to a child, in a soft surprised voice that also had a slight edge; she sounded as if tractability was not her foremost quality. I looked at her again, more closely. She was slender, but not frail, that loose dress hid her figure, but from what I could see, she looked strong. Strong in a practical way, as if she worked out regularly, not absurdly muscular or painfully frail and slim, a person who lived in the real world. I got the sense that she was not one to push around. I could not understand a syllable of what she said; *I don't understand her language, but why don't I understand?* I thought, becoming more baffled by the second. She spoke again, and I listened intently, trying desperately to understand any part of what she said. I understood... nothing. I sighed again.

She was looking at me oddly, as if considering what to do, so I decided to take the time to do the same. I couldn't think of anything. She spoke again, but I was too lost in my own thoughts to respond. *Where did I come from, what should I do? How do you speak with a person you can't even understand?*

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Somehow, I knew this was not my home, I was different from her, and she looked a little scared at what she saw. This place just didn't *feel* right to me. I decided to push those thoughts aside again and focus on more immediate problems. *What am I going to do now? I can't communicate with her, yet. I'll have to learn her language. Where am I? Why don't I know her language? Where did I come from if not here?* My thoughts came in frantic bursts as I tried to sort everything out at once. *Damn I'm hungry. I guess now's as good a time as any to learn a new language.* I cleared my throat and, with my index finger, pointed to my chest.

"Garmas" I said very slow and articulately. She stared blankly for a moment, caught off guard by my sudden self-introduction. Still a bit shaken, she pointed at me and tried to repeat my name. "Germas."

"Garmas." I corrected.

Again, she looked a little uneasy, but attempted my name all the same, "Garmas." I nodded, she pointed at me saying "Garmas." I smiled. She then pointed at herself and said "K'thira." also in a very slow and articulate manner.

"K'thira." I repeated. This time she nodded, and I smiled to myself; maybe she now saw I also was an intelligent person, anyway she stopped looking at me in suspicion and fear, or at least fear, it was hard to tell.

K'thira walked off a little and proceeded to call excitedly, in that strange yet pleasant speech. She was quickly surrounded by a small knot of people like her, though none dressed as finely as herself. As the group of females chatted away about me—I knew they did from the furtive glances they sent from time to time—I tried to figure out just what to do.

I was in a strange place surrounded by people, about whom I knew nothing. If I acted as a pet of some sort, I would be generally ignored by the greater portion of the household, after all, who pays that much attention to a pet anyway? Furthermore, as a pet I couldn't be perceived as a threat, from

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the suspicion and fear I saw in K'thira's eyes I was most certainly considered a threat for the time being. Time for my debut as a pet. I sat up straight and said "K'thira" in a "pet-like" voice.

The other females surrounding K'thira came over and seemed to praise me for my accomplishments at name repetition. I was forced three more times to repeat K'thira's name and was taught a few others on the side. I half expected to be taught to sit, stay, and roll over.

The gaggle of girls eventually left and I got up and walked over to the window. It was open, but had a sturdy black metal cage I had not seen before covering it. I saw the cage had hinges, but it was locked securely. I stood looking out over the grounds of the house. A warm breeze brushed my face, bringing with it the scent of flowers. There were gardens of bright flowers, birds and trees directly surrounding the house, and further out I saw crops. Further still I saw what I thought was the natural land, for it was uncultured and fenced off from the crops. It was a dusty, light-brown sand with a fine blood-red powder mixed in giving it all a reddish tint. Some scraggly, thorny, dead looking brown shrubs and trees grew in the sand. Thrusting up here and there were brown or red rocks, the tallest looking as if it reached only to my knee. The sun was rising near its zenith directly in front of me; the tall roof nearly blocked it from view. It looked hot outside my window, but inside it was comfortably cool, even though the window was open.

I turned from the window and walked to the door into my room. I reached out and gripped the cool, black handle, I pushed the lever down, *click*, it was locked. To my left was another door, smaller and bereft of metal bands. It was unlocked and peering inside I saw a low round bowl on the floor. Another bowl joined to a pedestal stood against the wall. I guessed that the low bowl was a toilet, and the taller, a sink. Realizing this, I also realized that I had to go, bad. I had no idea when I'd last went.

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Stepping out of the bathroom a few minutes later I felt extremely relieved, though I did have a bit of trouble. After completing my business, I couldn't find a flushing mechanism. I sat there for a while looking around, pushing and pulling anything that might do the trick. Finally, I got up to see if there was something near the door I had missed. As soon as I moved away from the toilet, I heard a dull roar. It was automatic. Going to the sink to wash my hands I figured it worked the same. It did. Placing my hands under a long, flattened faucet a stream of warm water gushed out.

I stood now looking around my room again; my gaze lingered on the metal-bracketed door. It was too solidly locked to force open, and if I did force it open, what would I do? Sighing for what seemed the hundredth time that day, I lay back down on the bed and locked my fingers behind my head. *What next?* I wondered.

For the rest of the day I hardly spoke, except when prompted by one of the household members, who either thought I was extremely funny, in which case they laughed, or extremely cute, in which case I got a pat on the head; either way I felt foolish. But I stuck to my plan, determined to get some answers. I spent the entire day in my room, which was locked when no one was in it with me. The rest of the people I saw that day were also vixen or fox-like, as K'thira was; some were tall, some short, some more brown or red than others, some with red, blond or brown hair, some with brown eyes or blue or green, and even some with gold eyes, which I found most surprising.

I first saw the golden eyes on one of the maids who brought in my lunch, which consisted of cold meat cut into pieces and a bowl of cool water. When I caught sight of her deep, golden eyes, I had to do a double take and couldn't help staring at her until she bustled uncomfortably out of the room. To my dismay, they all spoke the same incomprehensible language.

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When I finally crawled into bed late at night, thoroughly exhausted, I lay on my back, watching the stars twinkle in the night. *Wait a minute*, I thought surprised. *Has that window been there the whole time?* A section of the roof about a meter wide and running along the entire ceiling until it met with the windows on either side had become completely transparent. I was sure I could not remember seeing a skylight earlier; I must just not have noticed it. It offered a breathtaking view of the sky from horizon to horizon.

Who are these people? And for that matter, who am I? I wondered, the still night was perfect for wondering. I look different than them yes, yet not so different. It was as if we had evolved differently from a common ancestor. I started making a mental list of the physical differences and similarities between these people and myself. First off, our overall body structure is the same, two legs, two arms, two feet, two hands, one head and a torso, all in the same places. Each of our hands had five fingers, I didn't know about toes, but I assumed they would also be the same. Our faces were arranged the same as well, at the bottom a chin, directly atop that a mouth. Two eyes, one to either side of our noses. This was where things began to differ: the nose. My nose was... well, short compared to theirs. And my nostrils were on the bottom of my stumpy nose, while the nostrils I had seen were facing straight out on the end of their long, muzzle-like noses.

Moving on, they had hair on the top of their heads much like mine, well some of them. I had seen brown hair, curly hair, straight hair, long hair, short hair, blond hair, red hair, all of these hair types seemed familiar and normal to me. One of the biggest differences I had noticed was our ears. Mine were short, round things that stuck maybe a centimeter out from my head. Their ears were long, curved affairs that reached about twelve centimeters above the tops of their heads, just like the ears on the foxes I could remember, that is if foxes walked upright. I

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had seen their ears swivel and move; they probably had better hearing than I did.

There were only two more major differences I could think of, one was the fur. While I had no fur, except for patches under my arms and on my legs and arms, they had fur covering the whole of their bodies. And mine was a uniform black; theirs was colored in the amazing reds, browns and creams I had seen. Well, I still had some fur, just not so much. The last difference was the tail. They all had a curved, bushy tail just above their rears, while I had none. I felt down my back tracing my spine to the point at which it terminated in a large, boney bump above my own rear. A tailbone, that was what that bump was called, I remembered. Could I be so like these people that even though I don't have a tail, I have the bone for it? I must be related to these people in some way, maybe a different race or type, but we were related nonetheless.

A thought occurred to me: I was looking at this entirely one-dimensionally. These people were as much like me as I was like them. Maybe from their perspective I was some animal that looked remarkably close to them. A different race, that's what I'll call it for now, a race. I'll still call them vixens and foxes, so as to keep them organized in my head. If there are different races than these people and myself, which seemed likely due to the evidence of myself, I would address them in the same way: categorizing them by the animal they reminded me of until my memory returns enough for me to remember their proper names. Still, they aren't animals; they're people, almost exactly like me, just with a slightly different appearance. After all, we both think and communicate, just not with the same language right now. I would do well to remember this if nothing else, no matter how many different races there are. And due to the remarkable similarities between the people I've seen and myself, we are likely all the same species.

Since that was settled, I turned my attention back to the skylight. I marveled at the multitude of stars that speckled the

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softly darkening deep-purple night. I knew none of the constellations here, or at least could not remember any, so as I gazed, I made up my own.

Searching the firmament for any possible groups of stars, their vibrant hues struck me. Reds, greens, blues yellows, every color I could think of ranging from dull to eye-piercingly bright. I finally found a group of stars that were arranged in a triangular pattern. One, the biggest and a bright white, was in the center, and spaced nearly evenly around the central star where the corners of a triangle would be, were three pairs of stars. In the three pairs, one would be almost directly behind the other on the line drawn from the center star to the first star in the pair. Each pair was a different color, one, and the closest together, was neon-yellow, another, nearly four times as far apart as the yellow pair, was an ice-blue and the last was spaced almost as far apart as the blue pair, and was fiery-red. It wasn't perfect, the stars weren't perfectly positioned and other stars were dotted in and around the constellation, which I had dubbed the Primary Triangle because of the color. I had just finished finding and naming this constellation when the moon rose.

It was as big as my fist held out at arm's length, and immensely bright like a suspended orb of molten-silver. The night became clearer as it rose. I watched it sail slowly across the sky, casting silver-gray shadows, until it reached its zenith, when another moon appeared. This second moon was blood red, and about a third of the size of the first one. It drifted lazily across the velvety night, until it reached half its peak, when a third moon started its ascent into the darkness. It was twice the size of the second one, and almost unnaturally not circular, like the other two, but elliptical, and a mysterious swirl of emerald-green and yellow-gold. The beauty of this perfect green and gold ellipse in the now jet-black sky mesmerized me. The swirls of the moon seemed to shift as it rose, and any movement of my head caused it to sparkle with inestimable colors. I lay in

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thought, transfixed, watching that strange display climb in a slow steady manner.

What was that? It couldn't have... but it did, it tumbled. As the moon approached its crest I noticed that it rotated, end over end. I watched it until it set around an hour later, the last to set after the blood moon, its slow tumbling pace and ever-changing swirl of yellow and green was hypnotic, and though I was exhausted, I did not sleep. Just before the moon set, it had made half of a complete rotation. When it had disappeared consciousness, at last, fled from me.

What was that noise? I thought irritably, *I don't have to get up yet, it's still summer vacation.* The noise persisted. Grumbling, I rolled over onto my back, "Leave me 'lone?" I mumbled, but when the annoyance remained, I opened my eyes and saw K'thira's startled face hovering six inches above my own. She said something like "*Na'rel-ta ko'dara.*" I sat there staring blankly, and slowly blinked. She repeated herself, gesturing up with her arm and pointing towards the door. I got up and she smiled and started towards the door, gesturing for me to follow. I looked up and saw that where the skylight had been there was only solid, gray stone. Had I imagined or dreamed the moons?

I had barely time to think of those questions when K'thira gestured again impatiently for me to follow her. With no other choice I could see, I let her guide me past the sturdy bracketed door into a hall lined on either side with identical doors. The walls were white and slightly textured, as in my room. She led me down the corridor, which ended in a stone arch, carved with innumerable intertwined lines.

My breath caught at the sight of the room we entered with its high arched roof. A long wooden dining table, polished to a high dark-brown gleam, split the center of the room, and high-backed cushioned chairs lined the table's perimeter. Sitting at the head of the table facing us was a rather round fox in light

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brown robes and a low conical hat woven in bright colors. He bore a strong resemblance to K'thira.

"Sa'tar da?" he asked K'thira in a low rumbling voice.

"Sert marlta, tar'sa da." She answered patiently. They spoke back and forth a few moments and soon I became lost in the discourse. I decided to take this opportunity to study the language in a dialogue between two fluent speakers, instead of one of them talking to me as a pet.

It was strange, the speech seemed complicated at first hearing, but as I listened, I began to pick out similarities, certain sounds that popped up more than others.

"Morl'ta kodara si, K'thira, coujarm'sa rorla!" The round fox exclaimed, rather heatedly.

"Meer'lo te'harla! Darl-sa mas'fra mi nearlt'so'ka cherm tor'rot..." K'thira responded with just as much force, and I could tell that the action of their tails, both swishing violently – his behind the chair, hers whipping back and forth behind her – were playing a part, if a small one, in the conversation.

The aspect of the conversation I found most interesting was a strange... growl would be the only way to describe it, which emerged here and there in the conversation, making the r's and like sounds roll, or just filling a pause in the others talk. The growl became more guttural as the argument they were clearly having became more impassioned.

I guessed the argument involved me, for both K'thira and the round fox kept gesturing towards me. I blushed and clasped my wrist with my hand behind my back. I shifted my feet restlessly, forgetting to pay attention to the discussion in my attempt to avoid notice.

At a particularly loud comment from K'thira, I looked up and listened intently again, understanding no more than before. After a few more minutes of exchanging strong words, K'thira spun on her heel and huffed, *"Na'rel Garmas!"* I jumped at her

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sharp words, then followed her back to my room where she slammed the door shut behind her with a resounding crash.

I sat nervously in the chair that K'thira had sat in when I'd first awoke. K'thira paced furiously back and forth growling and mumbling in harsh tones, her tail whipped back and forth almost as violently as she growled. I huddled in my chair; a cold sweat broke out all over my body. *Are these people violent, will she vent her anger on me? She seemed nice enough before.* Thoughts leaped through my head as my fear grew in the same way that K'thira's anger had.

Abruptly she stopped her wild pacing, and I could see her visibly take control of herself, shaking with the effort. I started to shiver slightly; the waves of anger that washed out from K'thira had my teeth on edge. She whirled and faced me, fear spiked through my body, would she lash out at me now?

She looked at me and when she saw my pathetic state she put on a sympathetic expression, at least I thought it was sympathetic. She moved cautiously to the bed and sat on the edge near me. I uncurled my legs from beneath me and faced her straight on, looking her directly in the eyes; I would show no more weakness. I was a little ashamed of the fear I'd so openly displayed just a moment before, and vowed never to let myself regress to such a state again.

K'thira glanced down and said some soothing words. She seemed abashed at the way she had scared me, she gripped her tail tightly in her lap, and it twitched intermittently. When she had finished she gave me a pat on the head and walked to the door. Just before she closed the door behind her, she glanced back at me, when she saw me watching her she glanced away quickly closing the door with the soft click of a lock falling into place.

I spent the second day much the same as the first: in my room, not speaking, my only interaction was that with the serving girls who brought me meals of cold meat and water.

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As darkness fell, the skylight reappeared, offering the same breathtaking view of the sky. I wondered at how it could be here at night alone. I watched the moons again until I drifted into sleep, my last thought was wondering if tomorrow would bring any more answers, *if I have any at all* I thought wryly.