

Excerpt From:

# Q-16 and the Eye to All Worlds

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As soon as she hit the enter button on the keyboard it began. Annetta fell for what seemed like an eternity. As she plummeted, she felt as though she was being assaulted by ocean waves all around her. The next thing she knew, she was on a steel floor, completely dry. Getting up and feeling a little disoriented, she looked at her surroundings. They were extremely plain, covered in the same silver steel plating as the floor. She turned around to see a massive door, marked with the same font as the card key, also spelling out 'Q-16' in large characters. It looked like it took a dozen men to move.

There was a light hissing noise. Moments later, Jason materialized on the floor behind her. He got up and shook his head as though he had a bad fall, then looked around with wide eyes.

"Wow, this totally beats what I pictured," he said to Annetta, then noticed the door she was looking at. "Uh...that the way in?"

"I guess so," she responded, "But I don't see how we'll be able to get in anyways. I mean...it's so big. I don't think any of us can move it."

"That's kinda obvious," Jason snorted. He began patting the cold steel with his hand. "Maybe there's a switch or something we gotta press, or a password."

"But don't you think my dad would have said something about it?" she asked him.

"I don't think your dad was too keen on us coming here in the first place," Jason said as his brow furrowed. "Although if that was the case, then he could have let us know how to get back. I don't see anything to swipe this thing on here either."

Annetta felt a surge of panic go through her. She had never been placed in a situation where going home was not an option. Now the concept of it was frightening. Amidst her thoughts, she heard something shuffle lightly, making her heart race even more.

"To open the gates of old, use that which the mind has bestowed," an eloquent male voice said from the shadows.

Annetta and Jason both jumped upon hearing it, realizing they were standing in a large hallway and not just a small square of metal. However, neither of them wanted to explore the dark without a flashlight.

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" Jason grunted, trying to be tough.

Annetta scrunched up her face in concentration and mulled over the words in her head, realizing they were being given a riddle. She'd read plenty of books where speeches like this were used in challenges or in prophecies. With everything that had happened, why not have a riddle get them through the door?

"Uhm...is it reason?" she asked the voice.

"No, use that which was given to you through birth right," it answered her.

"Intelligence? Brains? What? There are only so many words I can think of for a person's head. What do you expect us to do, open the gate with our minds?" Annetta questioned the voice, hoping for a more straightforward answer. Maybe what was written in fantasy books was overrated.

Before Jason could say anything to his friend a tall man with shoulder length black hair came out of the shadowy hallway. He was dressed in robes of deep blue that were piped in gold. He carried with him a large gnarled wooden staff, the tip of which was covered in what looked like a fine green moss. He was the palest person the children had ever seen, which made his angular featured face all the more frightening to look at. Even his deep-set eyes were a shade of blue that looked almost inhuman.

"Something like that...they did teach you how, did they not?" he looked at Annetta and Jason, examining them both. "I was expecting you'd both be older when we would meet, but I suppose the Unknown had his reasons for sending children..."

The man circled the two of them and took a step back so he could study them both again. The youth huddled closer together when he did this, not feeling comfortable at the two sapphire spheres glaring back at them. They felt unnerved by this, Jason, more so than Annetta.

"And who are you? Pretty sure there's no magic conventions around here, so why are you dressed like-," Jason went on the defensive. He did not like being called a child.

"I am Puc Thanestorm, also known as Puc the Mage, Water Elf of Aldamoor, and former advisor to Orbeyus of the Axe, Lord of Castle Severio and protector of Earth," he announced, "And you will do well to remember that."

"An elf? I thought they were all blonde, skinny, and super tall with pointy ears, right?" Jason snorted.

"I would have you know, boy, that elves do not have pointed ears," Puc said, sternly. "Otherwise people would be easily able to distinguish us from them. In these times that is not wise. And save the childish commentary for the schoolyard."

Jason smirked and rolled his eyes, before slouching against the wall nonchalantly. Already he didn't like Puc. He'd been down there waiting for them, and had clearly expected them to be something different, and this rubbed him the wrong way. He firmly believed a person should be all they are and not be looked down on for it. This was why he and Annetta had become such good friends in the first place. Despite his family's situation, Annetta was his friend because of who he was, not who he could be or should be.

"Have you finished?" Puc looked at him.

The boy looked around as though he were waiting for someone to tell the elf the answer to his question. Seeing Annetta do nothing but stand there in waiting, he shifted and stood up straight.

"Yeah, I think I'm done for now," Jason answered.

Puc moved from where he stood and went to examine the massive doors, running a hand down the cold dark metal plating as though he were looking for a hidden switch.

"Good. I am assuming by your lack of general respect that you have no idea what I was referring to before," the elf stated, continuing and turned again to gaze at the children.

"Nope, not a clue," Jason answered him in the same casual manner as before.

While Puc and Jason bickered, Annetta had been focusing on Puc's words. What he had said about using their minds to open the gate had reminded her of something from her childhood.

Five years earlier...

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A much younger Annetta played with Xander in their room in the apartment building. Back then, it was only filled with action figures of knights, ogres and dragons. They were one of the few things the two of them could agree on playing with together, so their parents allowed Annetta to indulge in her boyish playing habits. The two of them sat on the floor around a large toy castle. Xander played with a knight on a white steed while Annetta played with a red dragon, pretending to fly over the fortress.

"BOOSH! BOOSH! RARGH! Now I am king of the castle!" Annetta grinned, setting the dragon on one of the towers.

"You can't climb the castle and just say you're king. You need to go in," Xander said matter-of-factly to her, as he continued to pretend to make the knight on the horse gallop around the castle.

Annetta tried to withhold what she felt inside her. She knew he was younger and so she did her best to be the big sister and let him have his way. There were times however when she got tired and she wanted him to be on the same playing field as she was. Her grip on the dragon tightened slightly as she held her tongue.

Xander placed his knight in front of the gate, pretending to block Annetta's path.

"Now you can't get in. I win," he smiled.

The words made something stir inside Annetta. They upset her to the point where she was no longer able to let Xander have his way. Why should she? Was she not allowed to win from time to time too?

"Oh yes I can!" she snapped at him. At that moment the little toy gate behind the knight Xander was holding opened.

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Annetta stood before the massive steel gate with her friend and the elf. Puc and Jason continued arguing amongst themselves while she looked up at the large block lettering on the doors. They seemed so

big and overpowering that Annetta was not sure anything could get through them, let alone someone like her. Thinking back on the incident with the toy castle, she knew something strange had happened that day but the problem was she had no idea in the world how to make it happen again.

"What about telekinesis?" Annetta asked Puc, "Moving stuff with your mind? It sounds silly but I've read about it in books and seen it on television..."

Her voice died down, it was absolutely the most absurd thing she could think of but it fit what Puc had said.

Puc and Jason stopped arguing, hearing what Annetta had just said.

"You gotta be kidding me right?" Jason blinked a few times before turning to look at Puc, who gripped the staff with both hands while he observed the youth with a calculating gaze. "Besides, wouldn't we have like...tapped into them by now if we'd-,"

"Your powers were blocked until your first descent here," he answered them, "Both of your fathers were accomplished psychics who could move objects with their mind as well as many other abilities, that of course take a lot of practice and are for another time to discuss all together."

Puc moved closer to Annetta and Jason as he spoke, his staff hitting the metal floor created a hollow wooden sound that echoed all around them.

"You are both inexperienced but the matter of the fact is that you have the predisposition because your parents knew how to harness this gift. It will take both of you to open this gate," he said to them.

Annetta and Jason looked in shock and surprise, first at Puc, then at the gate and then at one another, before turning back to the mage.

"You're saying this like it's an everyday thing," Jason grumbled. "No wonder people thought my dad was crazy."

"It was an everyday occurrence long before you were born. It has simply been lost with time." Puc stated. "Now, both of you. Turn towards the gate and focus your thoughts on it."

Annetta and Jason rotated hesitantly towards the gate. They felt silly doing this but something inside them, bade them to obey the strange request. The way Jason saw it, Puc would probably turn them into toads if they did not do as he said.

"Okay, now what?" Jason demanded of the mage.

"I told you, focus," Puc said to him in a stern tone, crossing his arms as he spoke.

"If it were that easy, don't you think doors would be opening on their own all the time?" Jason sighed.

"Not everyone is a psychic. Now focus, boy. I'm getting bored waiting for you to accomplish this simple task," the elf fumed, losing his patience with the doubtful youth.

Annetta shut her eyes and faced the gate. She tried to think of how she felt when playing with Xander and tried to picture the small castle doors flying open. The memory was faint from the passage of time. Yet she kept trying, recalling it over and over again, until it felt like she was back in that moment.

On the other hand, Jason thought Puc was a crazy man who'd somehow gotten trapped wherever they were. Who was he to make them think they had psychic powers? As far as Jason was concerned, the two of them were regular teenagers from Toronto who were in way over their heads. His train of thought was interrupted when Puc's staff made contact with his back, hard enough to make him feel it but not enough to do any real harm.

"I said to focus, not think about how you'd rather be at home playing video games," Puc sneered, "I might not be able to read minds, but I can tell you don't give a damn by the way you're staring vacantly at the floor. Now hop to it, or the next time I'll make sure to leave a lasting impression of my staff on your backside."

"You know that's called child abuse," Jason blurted out.

"Not down here it isn't. I'm afraid, Jason Kinsman, that you are a far way from home, and what simple taps you call abuse in your world down here, we call motivation and discipline. Now, stop stalling, and do as I have asked." Puc instructed.

Jason sighed, not really convinced but still trying to focus on the door. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Annetta, completely oblivious to what was happening as she concentrated. She had stuck her hand out and pressed it against the gate, as if hoping the gesture would move it. He almost wanted to laugh at how ridiculous she looked, but something inside prevented him from doing so. Closing his eyes, Jason pressed his own hand against the gate. He allowed his thoughts to flow into it, as though they were a single force that could open it.

With her eyes closed, Annetta was not really sure what had taken place between Puc and Jason. She'd heard Puc get angry with Jason about something and threaten him. Ignoring it, she focused on opening the door. She felt heat rising into her palms from the force she was pushing into them but nothing seemed to be

happening, and it was beginning to make her panic. Wasn't she supposed to be able to make it budge just a little bit at least?

Puc watched the children for a while longer before coming to a conclusion, something he had once heard from Arieus himself.

"Let's try a different approach," he suggested. "I want you to pick a moment in your life where you were very angry at someone. I want you to focus on that and then release that anger on the door."

Both the children opened their eyes and looked at Puc, slightly confused.

"You want us to hit the door?" Jason asked.

"Metaphorically," Puc stated. "Seeing as you are both new at using your abilities, I think it is best to assume that you can only harness it through intense emotions for now and since anger is more powerful than sorrow we will use that. Trust me and try it."

Annetta closed her eyes again and allowed herself to get lost in the memory of playing with her brother.

"You can't get in," his voice mocked her, "You can't get in."

She did not hate her brother. She'd hated the situation itself. She always had to let people have their way. In a fight, she wasn't supposed to fight back. Playing with someone, she had to let him or her win because she knew it was the right thing to do. She wished she didn't have to constantly let things slide. For once, she wanted to be the one on top.

*"You can't get in."*

As the thoughts ran through her head, the frustration began to build up inside of her. It was getting hard to breathe, to even be in the same skin as them. She wanted to escape. She wanted to make a difference.

*"You can't get in."*

The pressure continued to rise in the girl to the point where it became an uncontrollable force. Unable to contain it all any longer she opened her eyes, trying to escape the memory and then something occurred that the girl had not thought was possible.

Jason opened his eyes and jumped back, hearing sound of the enormous steel door as it opened. He looked over at Annetta who seemed to be in a trance, before she collapsed onto the ground.

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