

BLUE ORB CHRONICLES



PETER HAMBLE

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By: Peter Hamble

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CHAPTER ONE

The Invitation



From the time he was knee high, Peter knew he was special. Praised as gifted by his parents and teacher he always knew he possessed incredible potential. Kind. Handsome. Athletic. Intelligent. It seemed that Peter had it all. And he did. But he also had a little more. Something so subtle and seemingly harmless that few could predict the suffering it would bring him. Peter had a limitless imagination and a hunger for greatness.

Now, there is nothing wrong with wanting to improve yourself, but one must be careful when allowing unrestrained fantasies to fuse with desire. More damage has been done by seemingly innocent dreams getting out of hand than by the most brutal of hardships. But we'll get to that later. For now, let us enter the wholesome world of Peter Wheatman and the simple life he lived in the village of Hamble, a small farming community where people still mended their clothes by hand and sat in candle light when the sun went down. There was a gentle magic to this place, one far different to the advanced magics

that had brought the nearby megakingdom of Tropolis the great prosperity it now enjoyed. Apart from Mr. Silverman, no one from Hamble had been to Tropolis. Perhaps this was the reason that in their relative poverty, the people of Hamble were blissfully happy.

It was just another day in the Wheatman house. After rising from their beds at sunrise, Peter and his parents gathered in their cold living room beside the embers of last night's fire.

Joining hands, they prayed together in a circle. They asked for a good day, for a long happy life filled with friends and family and for everyone in the village to maintain their good health. When their good intentions were said his mother hugged and kissed them, "Now you boys work up an appetite. I'm going to be making a special bread today. Mrs. Carpenter gave me some tasty seeds yesterday and I know how you like them."

"Sure thing, mum," said Peter, "Yesterday I planted thirteen rows of wheat. Today I want to do fifteen."

"Don't kill yourself, kid," said his father in a calm and steady voice grounded in the rhythms of nature, "They'll always be more planting that needs to be done. You work at your own pace."

"This is my own pace," beamed Peter, "Planting wheat is fun." His father chuckled, "Okay, kid. Then let's get going."

In the fields Peter and his father worked in joyful silence. When his father worked, he gave his total attention to the act of planting wheat.

He spread the seeds as evenly as possible paying close attention to any area that received too many or too few. When he was satisfied with their distribution he gently ran his hand over the area, sweeping a protective layer of soil over the seeds. On the rare occasion that his mind wandered from the task at hand, his thoughts were about how much water the seeds would need or how to get it if it was a dry summer.

Peter's thoughts were far more sensational. While his physical body planted wheat, his mind travelled to distant lands. One moment he'd be in a jungle, fighting monsters and saving princesses. The next he was a powerful Warlock conjuring magnificent artwork with his powerful magecraft. In his fantasies everything was effortless. He could slay a dragon with a single arrow or summon a bolt of lightning with the click of his fingers. He never thought about his creations in detail, only that they were finished and they were perfect.

When Peter burst through the front door he was greeted by the delightful smell of freshly baked bread and the sizzling of eggs frying in a pan. His mother had diligently and with total devotion made their breakfast like she always did. On rainy days when it was too wet to work the lands Peter would help her. He could watch for hours as she kneaded the dough, mesmerized by her perfect technique, with a rhythm and grace so effortless it looked as though the bread was kneading itself. Even Peter's most determined attempts fell short of imitating her.

“Guess how many I planted today?” exclaimed Peter. “Well it sounds like you got your fifteen, honey.” “Nope. Sixteen, mum. I did sixteen!”

She laughed and shook her head, “You never fail to amaze me. You put your mind to anything and nothing can stop you.” Peter beamed, allowing himself to fully soak up the compliment as visions of godly achievements flashed before him.

It took several minutes before his father casually strolled through the door, “You just don't stop, do ya, kid?” he chuckled, moving to the sink and washing the dirt from his hands.

The three of them sat around the table and said grace before breakfast. Everything on the table had been made in Hamble. The bread and eggs from their own farm and they had traded some grain with the neighbour for the butter.

“You know son, it's coming up to your eighteenth birthday,” said his father, “Do you have any idea how you want to spend the next year of your life?” A thousand dreams of greatness flashed through Peter's mind. And he wanted all of them. But it was not the type of desire most people feel. Peter lived with so much joy that the idea of needing anything was foreign to him. After all, how can one want anything when you feel complete? Whenever he dreamed he felt like he already possessed that which he dreamed about. If he never received it so be it, there was always another dream waiting around the corner and that wasn't going to stop anytime soon. “Nothing

comes to mind," said Peter. What he meant was nothing specific comes to mind. A thousand dreams came to his mind but none was so prominent as to command his attention above all the others.

After breakfast, Peter changed out of his work clothes and left for school. He marched and whistled for a while, until a sudden jolt of energy overcame him. He took off sprinting and before he knew it, he was outside the school gate hands on his knees, panting, grinning. His face was a flush healthy red. When he caught his breath, he straightened up and waltzed inside.

In the classroom Peter oscillated between being a well behaved student and causing the occasional disruption or two. One moment he was fully engaged with the teacher, taking notes, giving answers and asking a plethora of questions. The next he was chatting with his classmates, telling jokes and finding humour in the school work. This would occasionally result in a few of his fellow students bursting into uncontrollable laughter as Mr. Silverman reprimanded Peter while trying to keep a straight face.

"Sorry," Peter would say sheepishly, then immediately repair the situation by asking Mr. Silverman a question about where they left off. At the end of the school day, when the classroom had been tidied and the students were leaving, Mr. Silverman told Peter, "Stay behind for a few minutes Peter. I need to tell you something."

"Strange," thought Peter. This was quite uncharacteristic of his teacher. When the room was empty Peter approached him, "Yes, sir?"

"You don't need me to tell you what a bright and talented young man you are," said Mr. Silverman, with an air of pride and admiration. "This isn't something I'd recommend for most people," he continued, " But you have a great many gifts and it would be a shame for you not to have an opportunity to develop them."

Peter listened carefully. "Have you ever considered studying magic?" Magic! Half of Peter's life had revolved around fantasies where he was a great Warlock of some sort or another.

"Once or twice, sir. But I've never really thought about how I would do it." Mr. Silverman smiled, "Well then. You're in luck. There are hundreds of academies in Tropolis teaching every kind of magic you can imagine. And every single one of them would be delighted to have a man like you among them."

Peter blushed, "You think so, sir?"

"I know so. I met a great many people in my time at the Informos Academy of Higher Magic and not one of them was near half as talented as you." He curled his hand into a fist and affectionately pushed it against Peter's chin, "You're a real gem, Peter."

Peter was unsure what to say. "Can I think about it, sir?"

"Of course, of course. And remember, you don't have to go. A man like you could spend his whole life in Hamble and enjoy every minute of it. I just felt you deserved to know what was out there, so that you can make an informed decision about your future."

As he walked home from school, Peter was accompanied by a potent mix of nervousness and excitement. He rarely felt anything other than euphoria, but the possibility of going to Tropolis, of stepping into the unknown brought a strange uneasiness. He wrestled with the idea in his mind examining it carefully from every angle.

"What would I gain by going to Tropolis?" he thought. "Certainly, it would be an adventure. I'd meet new people. See new places. And discover all kinds of magic."

"Yes," he countered, "But do I really need to? Life is perfect here in Hamble. I've got a loving family. Wonderful friends. And everyday I wake up happy and excited to do something I love doing. Is it really worth risking all this for the chance to explore the world?"

"It wouldn't be much of a risk. If I don't like it in Tropolis I can always return. The village loves me and would welcome me back with open arms. I could give it a one month trial. Worst case scenario I lose a month of my life. In exchange, I'm guaranteed to satisfy my curiosity."

"But there are other risks. There could be dark magic in Tropolis. Magic I can't even imagine. It could be lurking in Tropolis as I speak watching me from afar and beckoning me to come to it."

"It's possible. But Mr. Silverman didn't give any hints that dark magic would cause me any trouble. And besides, haven't I always wondered how incredible it would feel to become the world's most powerful Warlock? If I go to Tropolis, that dream could become a reality."

Think of how proud I would feel? Think of how proud my parents and Mr. Silverman and the rest of the village would be? They'd tell stories about me for a thousand years to come. I'll never be a great Warlock if I spend the rest of my life in Hamble."

"But everyone is already proud of me. I have a great life here. Who cares if people say good things about me a hundred years after I'm dead. Maybe my dreams aren't meant to become reality. Maybe they're perfect just as dreams."

Peter waited for a counter argument but the thought never came. "Well," he sighed half disappointed, half relieved, "It looks like I'm staying in Hamble."

At that moment, he realized how slowly his thoughts had made him walk. "It must be time for dinner," he thought and took off sprinting, forgetting all about Tropolis and returning to his normal, happy life.