

Tilly Greenway  
& the  
Secrets of the Ancient Keys

Book One

WATCHERS

Essi Tolling

Illustrations by Meraylah Allwood



## What readers are saying...

*Since Watchers was first published in 2011 it has been loved by readers of all ages and from all over the world. We thank everyone who has taken the time to write to us at Katy Press and directly to Essi. We include some of the comments here...*

“A wonderful array of characters, both human and not; a quest, a mystery and a great mix of myth, legend and magic bound together in a fascinating story. Tilly Greenway is here to stay!”

*John Matthews (author of Pirates and Arthur of Albion)*

“If you think you would enjoy C.S. Lewis’s Chronicles of Narnia or J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series mixed in with a bit of detective and alternate history then this book is a must read for you. Watchers is a nice twist on standard fantasy and I can assure you that in the end you will be surprised by the subtlety of the tale that Essi Tolling writes. I, myself, cannot wait to start on the next part of the series.”

*Jasper de Joode [fantasybookreview.co.uk](http://fantasybookreview.co.uk)*

“At last! Something as good as Harry Potter AND Lord of the Rings! I loved it! Please get the next one out soon!!” *Rebecca*

“Your book was the definition of awesome with dragons and cherries on top. Just without the cherries. I don’t want to start another book I’m so attached to this one.” *Jess.*

“I thought the book was AMAZING!!!! And I’m not just saying this, I’ve read a lot of good books and your book was better than pretty much all of them! I thought the characters were believable, I thought the plot was outstanding....!!!! I can NOT wait for the next book to be out! And I’ve already recommended your book to like all of the kids in my year.” *Gráinne D*

“This is the kind of book you couldn’t put down as Tilly and Zack go on a whirlwind adventure! It’s enchanting, gruesome and breath-taking all rolled into one.” *Emma*

“The mixture of mythical creatures and hi-tech inventions was genius! I can’t wait to read your next book and to find out who controlled (...)! And what’s next for Tilly and Zack! *Caitlin H*

“Everything a lover of YA fantasy might want.” *Susan.*

“I haven’t been this excited about a magical book since Harry Potter!” *Elise*

“Be prepared to be spell-bound, mind-jogged and heart-stopped as you follow Tilly Greenway and her half/brother Zack confronting the forces of evil who are trying to tip the balance of the world towards destruction. With ancient Guardians and bejeweled dragons who cast magic with minds that can see far beyond sight, Tilly and Zack lead us into the intimacy of a deeper world than perhaps we have ever known to exist. A book for children of all ages!”

*Carolyn North, Author, USA.*

“So many things from dragons, to England and Wales, to numbers, to the spiritual magical “unseen”, to the challenges of dark and light..” *Triza S (adult)*

“I love Tilly. Your descriptions of time and the cosmos are the best I have ever read.” *Polly, Australia (adult)*

“It reignited my desire for reading. A must for any family bookshelf.” *Claire.*

“Outstanding book! Hope it’s made into a mini-series. It’s so visually stunning.” *Aparna.*

“Watchers is a masterpiece! Thank you, Essi, for giving literature of such great quality.” *Gaenor.*

“Can’t wait to read your second book. Your imagination and writing are superb! You can hold your own with any science fantasy writer out there.” *Persia.*

“It’s a new and refreshing plotline, far different from anything I’ve ever read before. Zack is quickly becoming one of my favourite characters. I love him! I’m at Chapter 19 and loving every second of it. The short chapters help in keeping it fresh, as I can read them during break or before morning tutor starts.” *Holly (UK)*

The flow of the story is brilliant and you very quickly get drawn into the different worlds.” *Treena.*

“You are giving my favourite author, JK Rowling, a run for her money!” *Holly (USA)*

“Let’s just say if you love fantasy books, you’ll love the adventures of Tilly!” *Lee.*

“I don’t think I ever thanked some one for a well written novel, but this book deserves a lot more than just thanking for. I’m looking forward for the next series. Thank you for this wonderful story and I hope half of it is untrue, because if it is our world is one hell of a scary place.” *Mark, USA. (adult)*

“One of my favorite elements of the book is the way you mixed modern day life with mythical legends and history! Your book was the largest book I’ve ever read and the fastest I’ve ever read ANY book! I really enjoyed it, and can’t wait for the next one! It kept me wanting to read more every time, even at the end!” *Luca D*

“Just finished reading this awesome book, it really is quite unlike any other! I love the fact that all the locations are real, and the beautiful respect and love of nature is shared from every page. The finale was totally unexpected and hugely satisfying. I can’t wait to see what happens next.” *Stephen Davies, (adult)*

“Watchers was a breath-taking book to read, I couldn’t put it down. I loved the story because it was adventurous, challenging mind-blowing and magical.” *Miranda*

“I adored your book. Thank you for sharing it with the world.” *Momma K (USA)*

“I finished the book last night and would just like to say AWESOME! I love the ending and the whole book in general especially how you weaved fantasy into the real world.” *Justin V, age 13, Canada.*

“Superb story! Had me on the edge of my seat! I highly recommend it and can hardly wait for the next one in the series.” *Carol, UK.*

“Tilly Greenway” holds its own with glorious ease in the world of magic and fantasy in this first entry into the public eye. Thank you, for this fragment of the magic.” *AB, age 72, Canada.*

## FOREWORD

*Our world is full of secrets. Some have simply been forgotten or misplaced. Others have been deliberately hidden beneath layers of carefully-crafted deception. But the thing about secrets is that, no matter how deeply they have been buried, they cannot stay hidden forever. Like the bones of long-dead creatures they lie in wait, ready to push their way up through the sands of time just when they are least expected.*

*One such secret is that there are many things living here on Earth that are not of human kind: creatures of a different sort to you and me that come from their hiding places only when shadows grow in corners and fires dwindle in the grate. People say they don't exist. But they do. You may have met them in your dreams.*

*Another secret is that June 5th (the date on which our tale begins) is not just any old day of the year. Take a look inside any of the Witches' Almanacs of old and you will find that it is called *The Night of the Watchers*: a time when the veil between this world and the next thins and disappears.*

*In short, it is the perfect time to perform magic. And magic, as you know, can be both dark and light...*

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PART ONE  
Night of the Watchers



## PROLOGUE

*Somewhere in England. 00:06 a.m. Friday June 5th.*

Deep in the countryside, something remarkable was happening.

In a secret chamber hidden beneath a hill, a bright light pulsed. It rippled and shimmered, filling leaf and branch and root and twig. It gleamed and sparkled in the waters of a fountain that rose beneath the outstretched arms of an ancient upside-down oak tree. It glimmered on Amairisian: azure-gold and silver-green.

Unseen, but not unfelt, the bright light hosted magic of the deepest sort.

For a long time Amairisian had waited here, patiently keeping alive the light that he and his kind had seen on Earth so many aeons ago. Tonight, at last, he had seen the sign that he had sought so often in the mirror of his fountained pools. It was time for the light to grow once more.

As he looked into the golden waters, the chamber pulsed with extra brightness, casting pearls of silver-gold along its tree-lined walls. The next moment a girl's face appeared in surface of the pool: a girl with pale skin and long, red hair. She was sleeping peacefully, her eyelids fluttering. As Amairisian bent over the water, she stirred and looked up at him, her eyes as green as his were brown.

"Come with me, Tilly," he said, his voice as soft as waterside wind. "I have something to show you."

The girl sat up. Or at least, a part of her sat up; a shining, otherworldly part.

“Where are we going this time?” she asked, brushing her hair from her face.

Amairisian smiled. “Back and forth,” he said, “and to and fro.”

With that, the Keeper of Light stepped into her dreams.



She was standing on a beach beside a grey, hungry sea. Seals were playing in the foam and in the distance a line of mountains rose up from the water’s edge like ragged teeth. Nearer to hand an old woman was struggling along the shingle, her crooked body hunched over something that gleamed like a bar of silver.

Seeing Tilly, the old woman stopped.

“Oi! Lazybones!” she shouted. “Get the fire going!”

Tilly nodded and began to blow at the smouldering remains of a fire that had appeared at her feet. An old, black cauldron filled with dark liquid hung on a chain over it. As soon as Tilly had the flames blazing, the old woman stepped forwards and slid the silver object into the cauldron, taking care not to show Tilly what it was.

“Now, stir that!” she said, thrusting a wooden spoon in Tilly’s face. “And don’t touch a drop, you hear me?”

She stared at Tilly for a second, her eyes shining beneath the hood of her russet-coloured shawl. Then she stomped away, muttering to herself.

Tilly began to stir the liquid. It had a strange smell, a bit like seaweed, honey and mashed potato all mixed together. The fire was hot by now and it was not long before the mixture inside the cauldron began to froth and bubble. Tilly was about to call out to the old lady that she thought it was ready when three droplets flew up into the air and landed on

the thumb of her left hand.

“Ouch!” she cried, putting the scalded thumb into her mouth.

As soon as she had done this, she knew she was in trouble, something inside her had changed. The old lady seemed to know it too. She let out a scream of fury and came running back towards the fire.

“No!” she cried, grabbing at Tilly’s throat with her gnarled fingers. “Nooooo!”

Tilly was too quick for her. Jerking herself away from the old woman’s grasp, she turned and ran helter-skelter away from the beach towards the shelter of small copse. Before she reached the trees, however, her path was blocked by a stream. Glancing back, she saw the old woman racing after her. *No problem*, she thought, jumping into the stream. *I bet I can swim faster than her!*

Everything was suddenly very cold: her scales, her fins, her gills... *So this is what it feels like to be a fish!* she thought as she sped away. *She won’t get me in here...*

But the old woman was not going to let Tilly go that lightly. Running remarkably quickly for someone who had been hobbling not long before, she too leapt into the stream, except that she was no longer an old woman. Instead, she was an otter, her lithe body powering towards her prey. Swivelling round, Tilly had a momentary glimpse of sharp white teeth as the animal opened its jaws. She gave a desperate flick of her tail and shot upwards, bursting through the surface of the water.

Then she flapped her wings and flew away.

*Wings? Where did they come from? What’s happening to me?*

She curved upwards, wind riffling her feathers. *I’m a bird!* she realised. *I can fly!* But her relief was short lived. A screech of anger from behind her told her that the old woman was still hot on her trail. This time she had turned herself into a

peregrine falcon, her eyes gleaming from a jet-black mask, her talons extended as she stooped for the kill.

Tilly banked to the left and jagged downwards towards a thicket of hazels. The falcon might be quicker than her, but it was not as agile, she could shake it off if she was smart. Down between the branches of the hazels she went, twisting and turning, her wings pressed against her sides until she plunged into the safety of a bramble thicket. Here she waited, breathing heavily, her heart thumping in her chest.

Under cover of the prickly plants Tilly found she could hear everything very clearly; from the rustlings of tiny insects to the harsh call of a raven more than a mile away. Glancing up, she saw that she now had a pair of long brown ears with black tips at the end. Before she could think about how they had got there, however, she heard a dog barking. Not content to let her prey slip through her fingers, the old woman had turned herself into a greyhound and was following Tilly's scent.

Closer and closer came the hound yelping excitedly as it quartered the ground. Now it was in the field next to Tilly. Now it was just the other side of the bramble thicket. Now it was so close that Tilly could smell its hot, sweaty breath. There was nothing for it. Tilly broke cover and darted away, realising as she ran that she had turned herself into a hare.

Over the fields she raced, through a hedge, up over a wall and into the open doorway of an old barn. She scanned the area quickly, her eyes looking both forwards and back at the same time. In front of her was a huge pile of corn, so high that it almost reached the ceiling. Tilly dived into the centre of the pile, slipping herself between the grains until she was buried right at the bottom. Nothing could get at her here, she thought to herself.

*Especially now that I've turned myself into a grain of corn!*  
But she was wrong.

Silhouetted in the doorway of the barn was a hen. Not just an ordinary common-or-garden hen either. It was at least

seven feet tall, its yellow eyes huge as saucers. The next moment, the hen's giant claws began to scratch at the floor, its massive beak jabbing downwards as it gobbled up the corn. Each mouthful was as large as a bucket-load and Tilly knew that it would not be long before she was in the next bucket.

Suddenly she felt herself being lifted up into the air. Then she was tumbling down again. Down, down, down into the darkness, spiralling slowly as she went, until she landed with a thud at the bottom.

*At the bottom of what?* she wondered as she picked herself up and peered into the gloom. *Where am I?*

The answer to that question was not at all obvious. It seemed as though she was in an underground tunnel of some kind. It was hot and dark. Musty air pressed in on her like a damp cloth. In front of her she could vaguely make out the shapes of a set of stone steps that led upwards. Should she climb them? She felt she ought to. But what if the giant hen was up there?

Then she heard a voice calling to her, as though from a long way off.

“Climb, Tilly! Climb! There is no time!”

“What?” she called out. “Where are you?”

“There's no time!” came the voice again. “Climb!”

Tilly began to mount the stairs. It was so dark that she could see only a few inches in front of her nose. The higher she climbed, the lower the ceiling became. Soon she was stooped over almost double. Her breath was coming in short gasps now and she was so hot that she could feel the sweat running down her neck.

“Yuk!” she said out loud as she paused to wipe the droplets from her forehead. With a shock, she realised that she no longer had any hair. Her fingers had run across a hot, bald head!

*Come to think of it,* she thought, looking down at the strange sandals on her feet, *I've no idea who I am right now!*

She plodded on up the steps. On and on into the darkness until at last she saw a tiny orange glow, way up ahead. As she drew nearer to it, she saw that it was coming from an oil lamp attached to a bracket in the wall. The flame guttered slightly as Tilly reached out and took the lamp from the bracket. Now she could see more easily and the climbing was not so hard.

It was not far to the top and soon she was stepping into a large, cool room. Silver-blue light was filtering down from two holes in the ceiling, filling the place with a pale gleam. In the centre of the room was a long wooden box, its sides polished and smooth. Walking over to it, Tilly saw that a series of strange markings had been cut into its surface. More of them were on the wall behind. They looked like letters of some kind, but in a language Tilly had never seen before.

A sudden wisp of wind blew the lamp out and the next second Tilly felt herself being lifted off the floor as though by some enormous invisible hand, straight towards one of the holes in the ceiling. *I can't squeeze through that!* Even as the thought crossed her mind, her body evaporated into thin air. Then she was through the hole and travelling up a long, smooth-sided shaft until she came out into the night sky beyond.

The stars were shining brightly out here, but there was a corridor of even brighter light that led upwards, like a shining ladder. Up she went. Up and up, following the ladder higher and higher. The higher she went, the stiller the air around her became. From somewhere she could hear a noise like thousands of birds singing.

Now she was passing the moon (which looked a lot less white close-up), drifting almost in slow-motion outwards into space. She breathed in deeply, enjoying the calmness that began to filter through her. Ahead a row of stars formed a long belt that reached across the sky. One star in particular, just off to the left hand side, shone more brightly than the rest.

As she came to a halt, a gentle voice spoke beside her, a voice that reminded her of sunlight on deep water.

“This is the Gateway, Tilly,” it said.

“Gateway? What gateway?”

“The answers are all around us,” continued the voice. “But the question to ask yourself is this: since the beginning of time there have been many, many Watchers, but how can we ever know who watches them? Who watches the Watchers, Tilly? That is the question to ask!”

“Who watches the Watchers?” murmured Tilly, yawning.

“Yes, Tilly! Who watches the Watchers?”

“What kind of question is that?”

If the voice answered her, Tilly did not hear it. As she drifted into dreamlessness, she thought she heard it say: “It is time for the light to grow!”

But she couldn't be sure...



Some time later, or perhaps it was no time at all, whilst Amairisian watched Tilly sleeping, the waters of the pool shimmered and turned once more to gold. Smiling, he rose to his feet.

A single standing stone stood on the hill above the chamber. Moss clung to the base of the stone as though it had stood untouched for many years, but suddenly it began to flicker in and out of view. Then, without a sound, it vanished altogether to reveal a tunnel from which the bright light poured onto the hillside.

Framed in the opening, Amairisian stood looking out over the grey fields.

Stars spangled the sky above and dew lay thick on the grass. The moon was no more than a sliver. A sudden shooting-star flashed as it fell to Earth. At this, Amairisian cast his head back and sprang forwards. Like a flash of lightning he



flickered over the fields, his feet barely touching the ground. He was free, he was happy and his spirit sang.

“So it begins!” he said to himself as he sped through the moonlit grass.

“So it begins!” said the flinted fields at the touch of his flickering feet.

“So it begins,” whispered the wind, warm in the midsummer leaves.

“It begins,” murmured the deep, rich earth. “It begins...”

## THE ENEMY WITHIN

*London, England.*

*7:38 a.m. Friday June 5th*

For most people, the dull, rainy Friday on which our story begins dawned much the same as any other. Millions of chins were being shorn of their stubble. Countless kettles were boiling. Parents were stressing, children were yelling, tooth-brushes brushing and toilets flushing. Yes, it seemed like just another ordinary day.

But things, as you are about to find out, are rarely what they seem.

The rain itself would not have been remarkable (this was England after all) except that it had had not stopped for thirty-nine days. Heavy grey clouds had camped themselves over the capital and appeared to be in no hurry to be on their way again. London was as bedraggled as could be and everyone was sick of it. Even the city's umbrella-sellers were getting fed up. After a month of record-high sales, they had run out of stock.

Day number forty of the downpour was set to be no exception. The great welt of cloud hung ever lower, sending wave after wave onto the sodden streets of Central London.

A mile away, a woman with steel-framed spectacles and a

face like a preying mantis was staring at her laptop screen, her china-blue eyes glinting as the film she was playing came to its end – the film of her latest experiment. She had already watched it through half a dozen times, so there was no real need to do so again, but she was enjoying herself.

*No harm watching it again. Just to make sure.*

She leaned forwards eagerly as the boy on the screen opened his eyes in terror, his body rigid, his face covered in sweat. Yes, it was all going perfectly. Just as she knew it would. She could even see the shadowy figures gathered round the bed. Whispering. Feeding off him in the dead of night.

The boy slumped back onto his pillow again, tears running down his cheeks as he fell into a fitful sleep. Just as she had intended.

The woman pressed a keypad, saving the file onto a memory clip. Then she stood up and crossed to a window to look out over the rain-soaked streets.

*Soaked by the rain that I have created!*

Today was a big day for Cordelia Leer. It was the day when all her years of planning would finally pay off. In just a few short hours she would brief ISIS for a final time and the announcement of the impending flood would be made to the general public. Panic would follow. And after that: the evacuation of Britain's largest city. Then she would be free to put her devious plan into action.

*At last!*

She had chosen the timing deliberately, of course. She was well aware that various ancient scrolls referred to June 5th as *The Night of the Watchers*; a time when otherworldly creatures visit Earth. What's more, she knew that the public had no idea of the significance of the date, because she had seen to it that all those ancient scrolls had long since been destroyed. She and ISIS were the only ones who knew what was coming.

*And even they don't know half the story!*

She smiled thinly, pleased with her ingenuity. Cordelia Leer was a woman who knew all about secrets. Secrets and lies were the watchwords of her success.

Glancing cursorily at her reflection in the window, she tucked the memory clip into her jacket pocket and walked out into the early morning rain.

“Where to, Ma’am?” asked her bodyguard, Brian, as he opened the door to her waiting Mercedes.

“The Savoy,” she said, levering herself into the back seat. “And step on it!”

## UNEASY FEELINGS

*London, England.*

*7:23 a.m. Friday June 5th*

The first thing that Tilly Greenway was aware of when she woke up was the rain hammering on the roof. She grimaced. Like everyone else, she was sick of it. Getting soaked on the way to school and then spending the day in a classroom full of damp children was not her idea of fun.

The next thing she noticed was that she was feeling uneasy about something. In fact, she had full-blown butterflies. An image suddenly flashed into her mind. She was standing looking out over the sea. Seals were playing near the shore and in the distance she could see a line of mountains.

*That's right. I had another weird dream...*

On the ceiling above her a spider scuttled about, its wispy trail following it around. As Tilly watched it, more of her dream began to come to her.

An old woman had told her to stir a cauldron, but some of the brew had got onto Tilly's thumb. *She tried to kill me! I hid somewhere. Where was it?* Tilly frowned, trying to remember what had happened next, but the dream was already slipping from her mind.

*I remember being chased. A dark tunnel. Steps...*

It was no good, she was too awake now. The only other thing she could recall was a vague sensation of floating high in the sky. It was night-time and the stars were shining brightly and someone was asking her a question. What was it?

Above her, the spider finished off its web and settled down to begin its patient waiting game.

“Come on, Tilly!” she said out loud. “What was the question?” but the harder she tried to remember, the more her mind became blank.

Just at that moment, her alarm clock went off. Switching it off, Tilly got out of bed and crossed to the window. If anything, the rain was even heavier than it had been. Water was gushing from the gutters and rooftops all around her and the streets below were a mass of puddles. Her heart sank. It was going to be another sunless day.

But there was more to it than that. Something else seemed to be pressing down on the world, something dark and dangerous. She could feel it, pushing at her temples.

Shaking her head, Tilly turned away, not noticing the crooked figure of the old woman standing in the street below, muttering something under her breath, her eyes fixed on Tilly’s window.

Picking up her hairbrush, Tilly sat down at her dressing table. She was looking a little pale this morning, she thought as she looked at her reflection in the mirror. Then again, she always looked pale. It was her trademark, the ivory skin that contrasted so sharply with her long red hair and deep green eyes. It was the one thing she would have changed about herself if she could.

She winced as the brush caught in a knot.

*Well, that and my hair, of course!*

Tilly hated her hair. From a very young age she had been singled out for it. Gingernut some of the girls called her. There had been worse nicknames too, spiteful comments whispered behind her back. She could still remember the afternoons she

had spent in tears on the way back from school.

“It’s just not fair, Daddy!” she had said one day as they drove through the streets. “Why am I the ugly one?”

“You’re not ugly!” her father Michael had replied. “You’re beautiful!”

“Then why’s my hair so red?”

Michael had shrugged. “It’s in your genes, I suppose...”

“But you don’t have red hair and you told me Mummy didn’t either.”

“No.”

“So where did I get it from?”

Michael Greenway had looked at his daughter thoughtfully.

“It must have skipped a generation or two.”

“Well, I hate it!”

“No you don’t.”

“I do. Everyone says it’s stupid.”

“They’re just jealous. Trust me, Tilly, when you’re older, you’ll love your red hair.”

Looking at herself in the mirror now, Tilly smiled. She was lucky to have a dad who tolerated her outbursts. She knew it had not been easy for him, bringing her up on his own for the first six years of her life.

A flicker of sadness drove the smile from her face. Loosening her collar, she pulled at a silver chain that hung around her neck. On the end of the chain, set in a leaf-shaped surround was a beautiful amber pendant. It was Tilly’s most precious possession. The amber was not like any of the other pieces she had seen in crystal shops. They were usually dark orange and see-through, whereas this one was a pale, cloudy yellow.

But that was not the reason she loved it so much. She loved it because once upon a time it had belonged to her mother.

Tilly could not remember anything specific about her Mum. She knew from the photographs that her Dad still kept in his desk that Rosa Greenway had had dark hair and green

eyes, but the accident in which she had been killed had happened when Tilly was only a few months old. With no memories that went back that far, the necklace was Tilly's only real connection with the woman who had brought her into the world. Her father had given it to her on her fifth birthday.

"Your mother wanted you to have this," he had said, his hands trembling as he fastened the chain around her neck. "It was very special to her."

Michael Greenway had gone on to tell his daughter many stories about her mother that morning. Tilly had curled on his lap, hugging him until both their tears subsided.

Since then, Tilly had only ever taken the necklace off when she showered or took a soak in the bathtub. She loved the feeling of the smooth stone against her chest. She even wore it to school, where jewelry was forbidden.

Fingering the amber droplet now, she wondered (as she had done so many hundreds of times) what life would have been like if her mother had not died. Like all children who have lost a parent when very small, she could not think about it without a twinge of loss.

Suddenly the pendant throbbed and an image of a golden ladder, reaching up into a star-filled sky flashed into Tilly's mind.

"Who watches the Watchers!" she said out loud. "That was the question in my dream! Who watches the Watchers?"

But what did that mean? Who were the Watchers?

Frowning, she tucked the necklace back inside her shirt.

Why had she felt it was so important to remember something she didn't even understand? And why was the uneasy feeling in her stomach telling her that something else was wrong - something that was nothing to do with her dream at all?