

CHAPTER

twenty-eight

FRIDAY, 5:12 P.M.

The warrior's high-pitched voice reached David as if through a pillow. He glared at David as though at the most hideous thing he had ever seen. His red-painted jaw snapped shut, and opened again, drawing David's eye to a mouthful of tiny, pointed teeth.

Before David could leap away and slam the door, a hand shot through the portal and grabbed his right wrist.

“Aaaaahhhhh!” David screeched. He yanked on his arm, but the warrior’s hand was like a vise. The man’s skin was brown and leathery. His fingernails were black and sharp.

David’s hand slipped off the wall and went into the portal, pulled in by the crazy man. The muscles in his legs strained to keep him in the antechamber. He squeezed his fingers around the edge of the door, but his broken arm throbbled and felt ready to pull apart, mid-forearm. He had no strength in that arm, and his fingers began slipping off the door.

“Heeeeelp!”

On the other side of the portal, the warrior held David’s wrist in both hands, tugging. He twisted his shoulders and bounced up and down to pull David through. Beyond the man, past the trees, the other warriors had sprung up, pointing and shifting their heads to figure out what was happening. They started for him.

“David!” Xander yelled behind him. David felt his brother’s arms wrap around his torso. Xander heaved back, pulling David with him. His hand returned to the antechamber, encircled by the warrior’s hands.

The warrior tugged, reclaiming David’s hand and wrist. Xander’s arms slipped higher, over David’s chest. The tug-of-war over David’s upper body caused his leg to slip out from under him. It swung forward like a pendulum—right through the portal.

The warrior released his grip on David's wrist and seized hold of his ankle.

David's leg went farther into the other world, and he could no longer keep his foot pressed against the wall. His foot swiveled, then slipped off the wall and through the portal. The man grabbed that leg as well. Now he had both of David's ankles in his hands.

Both boys fell, Xander to the floor, David on top of him. David went farther into the portal. He looked down over his body and saw that everything below his waist was in the warrior's world. His blue-jeaned legs appeared a few degrees out of alignment with the rest of his body, and a little blurry, as though they were under the surface of a clear lake.

Beyond his knees and feet, the man's eyes rolled insanely. His teeth flashed as his mouth opened and closed, opened and closed, like a snapping dog's.

"I can't help you like this!" Xander yelled from under him. He shifted and pushed himself out from under David, keeping one arm over David's chest. He got to his knees at David's shoulder and grabbed David's arm—right at the break.

David let out a howl of pain.

Xander shifted his grip to David's bicep.

Something sailed over David's face and made a thunking sound in the wall behind him. He looked through the portal to see the other warriors in the forest now. One raised a

wooden straw. He put one end to his mouth and pointed the other end at the brothers.

*A blowgun!*

“Xander!” David screamed. “They’re shooting at us!”

“What?” Xander said and looked.

As if by magic, a knitting-needle-sized dart appeared in Xander’s chest—up high by his shoulder. He cried out, but he did not release his hold on David’s arm. He gaped at the thing protruding from his chest.

“Xander!” David said. He felt his brother’s grip loosen.

“I . . . don’t feel . . . so good.” Xander fell forward, on top of David’s arm. But he was still moving. His hand found David’s chin and pushed. He was continuing his fight, trying to keep the man from taking David.

Two more warriors rushed up to the portal. Their arms came into the antechamber, grabbing for Xander. One of them got a grip on his hair and pulled. Xander slid toward the other world.

“No . . . !” David yelled.

A big foot stomped down next to him. Keal leaned over Xander, held the barrel of a pistol inches from the arm holding Xander’s hair, and fired. The sound sent clattering bells through David’s brain. And that was all right, for it had freed his brother. Keal pulled him into the middle of the antechamber.

The man holding David’s leg pulled. He went through—

stopping only when he snagged his arm against the doorjamb. Everything below his chest was in the other world. The portal itself messed with his insides. His stomach rolled, seeming to tighten and loosen, fast as a hummingbird's heart. He gagged, feeling the contents of his stomach start to come up.

A shocking, blinding flash of pain kept him from puking. He raised his head. The man was *biting* his leg. It dawned on him: these weren't just warriors, they were *cannibals*.

Keal lowered his knee onto David's chest, pinning him down and blocking his view. He pointed the pistol.

"Keal, no!" David said, pushing the words through clenched teeth. He wanted Keal to shoot, but at the same time he *didn't* want that. David had intruded into the cannibals' world; as bad as the situation was, somehow it didn't seem fair to just *kill* them.

The gun roared again, and David thrashed his legs. Pain still shot up from the bite wound, but he was free! Keal grabbed his waistband, rose, and half pulled, half tossed David back into the antechamber.

The gun spoke again: *Bam!*

Then Keal backed away from the portal and slammed the door.