

CIAN LEAHY SUCKED IN A DEEP BREATH and yelled his head off. “Daddy!” Waving his arms over his head, he hollered again, “Daddy! I’m here!”

Why didn’t he answer? Why didn’t he look at him? His father was right there by the fire! Uncle Sean and his brothers were right there too. Everyone’s mouths were moving, but he couldn’t hear their words. Michael was crying really hard. Uncle Sean walked right in front of him.

“I’m right here!” he called again, but no one seemed to hear him. Throwing himself forward, he hit an invisible wall and fell backwards onto his butt, landing hard enough to clack his teeth together. “Ow! What was that?”

Shaking his head to clear it, he shoved himself to his feet and rocketed forward, only to bounce backwards again. He sat on his butt for a minute, breathing hard and trying to make sense of things. The air before him was a little cloudy; fuzzy, sort of. He got to his feet more slowly this time and thrust his hand into the air only to have it hit something hard. There was some kind of invisible wall here. Where did it come from? How did he get stuck on this side? Why couldn’t his daddy see him?

“Daddy!” After pounding his fists against the wall until he was tired, he pressed his sweaty face against the thin veil that separated him from his family and swallowed the lump in his throat. His eyes brimmed with desperate tears, but he dashed them away with his fist. Now wasn’t the time to be a baby. He didn’t need to cry. His daddy would save him. He’d just have to wait. Any second now, they would see him and his daddy would cross over and pick him up in a hug. Everything would be okay.

Rubbing a hand under his nose and sniffing hard, he backed away and looked around. Next to the wall, the air still shimmered oddly and now he noticed a humming sound. Soft vibrations made his ears itch. Scratching absently, he scanned the area for a way out. Maybe he could walk around it. On his side of the wall, everything looked just as it had before the invisible wall appeared. The tall trees were bare. The ground was blanketed by dead leaves. It was snowing. The campfire was still burning inside the rock ring they’d made only a few minutes earlier. Everything was exactly the same except he was alone now. It was like he was a ghost or something. His hand tingled weirdly. Whoa! The tips of his fingers were invisible! That was sort of cool.

“Where are we?”

The growled question came from beside the tree. The monster was huge—bigger than his dad! It had leathery black wings and yellow eyes. With its crooked mouth pressed into an angry line, it staggered closer, weaving and stumbling until it fell to its knees with a grunt.