



STEVE FEASEY

CHANGELING

DARK MOON

CHANGELING

DARK MOON

The place:

A luxury apartment in Docklands, London. HQ of Charron Industrial Inc. – a global empire dedicated to fighting the powers of the Netherworld

The time:

Spring. Five months after fourteen-year-old Trey Laporte discovered he was a werewolf

The characters:

Lucien Charron – vampire

Alexa Charron – daughter of above; sorceress

Trey Laporte – ex-ordinary teenager; last hereditary werewolf

Tom O’Callahan – human. Tough guy and enforcer

The bad guy:

Caliban – evil vampire brother of Lucien Charron; bloodthirsty beast, intent on destruction

The mission:

Read on . . .

Bloodthirsty books by Steve Feasey

Changeling

Changeling: Dark Moon

Look out for

Changeling: Blood Wolf

STEVE FEASEY
CHANGELING
DARK MOON

MACMILLAN CHILDREN'S BOOKS



First published 2009 by Macmillan Children's Books

This electronic edition published 2009 by Macmillan Children's Books
a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited
20 New Wharf Rd, London N1 9RR
Basingstoke and Oxford
Associated companies throughout the world
www.panmacmillan.com

ISBN 978-0-330-51168-1 in Adobe Reader format
ISBN 978-0-330-51167-4 in Adobe Digital Editions format
ISBN 978-0-330-51169-8 in Mobipocket format

Copyright © Steve Feasey 2009

The right of Steve Feasey to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

You may not copy, store, distribute, transmit, reproduce or otherwise make available this publication (or any part of it) in any form, or by any means (electronic, digital, optical, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of the publisher. Any person who does any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Visit www.picador.com to read more about all our books and to buy them. You will also find features, author interviews and news of any author events, and you can sign up for e-newsletters so that you're always first to hear about our new releases.

Contents

- [1](#)
- [2](#)
- [3](#)
- [4](#)
- [5](#)
- [6](#)
- [7](#)
- [8](#)
- [9](#)
- [10](#)
- [11](#)
- [12](#)
- [13](#)
- [14](#)
- [15](#)
- [16](#)
- [17](#)
- [18](#)
- [19](#)
- [20](#)
- [21](#)
- [22](#)
- [23](#)
- [24](#)
- [25](#)
- [26](#)
- [27](#)
- [28](#)
- [29](#)

[30](#)

[31](#)

[32](#)

[33](#)

[34](#)

[35](#)

[36](#)

[37](#)

[38](#)

[39](#)

[40](#)

[41](#)

[42](#)

[43](#)

[44](#)

[45](#)

*For my mum.
Thank you for all the love.*

1

The vampire Lucien Charron lay motionless on a high-sided bed in his Docklands apartment. The bleak early-morning light that came in through the window made the interior stark and unwelcoming. White sheets had been stretched smooth over Lucien's body, tucked in around the edges, tracing the hills and valleys of his body to create a miniature landscape of virginal snow. The covers would stay like this, intact and unspoilt, as he lay unmoving beneath them. It would be easy to think that the pale, still creature was indeed dead – the skin was the colour of grey pumice stone, and that essence of *being*, that you instinctively feel when sharing a room with someone, had all but vanished. The vast array of machines and monitors blinking and beeping from the other side of the bed were the only things to suggest that the vampire still defied the inevitable end that the doctors anticipated.

Lucien had woken only once in the five months that he had been in this state – a few weeks after he had saved his daughter's life from his evil vampiric brother, Caliban. Even then, he had regained consciousness for only a matter of moments – asking questions as to his daughter's safety and Caliban's defeat. Upon hearing the news of their success, he had sunk back into the darkness, diving back down into a coma from which it was unclear if he would ever return.

The doctor glanced up from his chart to his patient, and recorded the data that again signified no change in Lucien's condition. He returned the clipboard to its position at the bottom of the bed, and turned to the three people waiting just inside the door who were staring back at him with eyes full of hope and worry.

'There is no improvement, I'm afraid,' he said. 'As I explained last week, the lung seems to have made an almost full recovery following the surgery, and the wound where the stake was driven through his chest and back has also healed better than we had any right to hope for. But this bite wound . . .' He shook his head and glanced down at the dressing that covered the offending injury. 'It defies all attempts that we have made to treat it. The localized infection that we have been fighting since we first saw it is, I am afraid, getting worse.'

The wound was a result of Lucien 'misting' between his daughter and Caliban at the very moment his evil brother had attempted to kill her. The huge fangs that were meant for her young neck had instead buried themselves into Lucien's shoulder. Lucien had survived only because the young werewolf, Trey Laporte, had attacked Caliban and forced him to release his brother.

The damage to Lucien's shoulder refused to heal. Like all wounds inflicted on nether-creatures by their own kind, it would not mend in the extraordinarily quick fashion that 'normal' wounds would. The rejuvenating powers of vampires and other beings from the Netherworld made them almost impervious to injuries caused by humans and animals from the human plane. But the wounds inflicted by their own

kind were subject to different healing processes, and were more often than not deadly.

The doctor peeled back the dressing to reveal a raw, infected lesion beneath. The bite marks where the teeth had punctured the flesh were still wet, refusing even to scab over, and an acrid-smelling pus still oozed from the angry red craters, despite the huge doses of antibiotics that the doctors had administered. The skin surrounding the puncture wounds looked pinched; a purple lividity discoloured the flesh, making it look sore and tender even after all this time. And it smelt. It reeked of the rot that attacked the body – a parasitic infection that was all too eager to consume its host.

‘The sepsis that continues to seep into Lucien’s blood from this wound is not responding to any of our treatments I’m afraid that he appears to be losing the fight that he has waged for so long. The situation is very bad. If we can’t find a new way to stop this infection, then we will lose Lucien.’

Three pale and strained faces stared back at him. A mean-looking man with a scarred face, a tall, lean teenage boy and a fine-featured girl with jet-black hair all searched the doctor’s face for some sign of hope.

‘How long does my father have?’ Alexa asked in a small voice.

‘It is too hard to say, Miss Charron. To be honest, we’re amazed that he is still alive, so it is beyond me to predict how long he might be able to continue fighting. We really have run out of options. We will use any and all palliative care at our disposal to keep your father as comfortable as possible, but you should prepare yourself for the worst.’

The tall Irishman, Tom, stepped forward into the silence that followed and shook Dr Tremaine by the hand. ‘Thank you, Howard. We appreciate how hard you and your team are working.’ He gently guided the doctor to the door and followed him out, leaving Trey and Alexa behind.

‘Are you OK?’ Trey asked when the silence in the room became too much to bear.

‘No, not really,’ Alexa replied, trying to summon up a brave smile.

‘Is there anything I can do?’ he said, feeling utterly helpless as he looked between his friend and his guardian on the bed.

‘No. But thanks, Trey. I think that I’d like to be alone with my dad if that’s OK.’

Trey nodded and left the room, closing the door behind him. On the other side he sank back against it, closing his eyes and trying to absorb everything that the doctor had just said. He sighed and opened his eyes again, briefly taking in the opulence of the apartment that he now lived in – the fine furnishings, the artwork and tapestries that lined the walls, the vast array of technological gadgets and equipment that filled the luxury penthouse. It would not have looked out of place on a TV show about the houses of the rich and famous. But the apartment was only a tiny part of the empire that Lucien Charron had built up through the years, an empire that was dedicated to destroying the evil forces of the Netherworld and to protecting the human race from those creatures within it that would do them harm. It was a business that needed Lucien at its head to function, and Trey didn’t want to imagine what would happen if his guardian was not around to lead the fight. Tom and Alexa had been running things, keeping on top of everything as best they could, but Trey suspected that they had only been able to do so because Caliban had been so very quiet. Too quiet. They hadn’t heard from the evil Netherworld lord since they had returned from Amsterdam five months ago. The lack of contact with the vampire lord had led Trey to hope that he might have perished as a consequence of his own injury – Trey had bitten off

Caliban's hand in the battle to rescue Alexa – but he knew better. Vampires were hard to kill; Lucien was living proof of that. No, Caliban's silence was deliberate, and that could only be a bad thing – whatever it was that he was planning, it was something big. And they needed to hear from the vampire; Lucien's survival depended on them doing so and finding out where he was.

Trey nodded to himself and strode towards the elevator set in the wall to his left, heading for the research rooms on the floor below.

Moving to her father's side so that she could hold his hand, Alexa fought to stop the tears from falling. She leaned forward and whispered to the prone figure on the bed, 'Don't you listen to them. There is something that can be done for you. Trey, Tom and I are still working on it. So you . . . you just hang on in there, OK? Do you hear me? You just keep on fighting for a little while longer.'

She reached out and ran her hand across his bald, smooth head, the way that she had done since she was a little girl, sitting on his lap and listening to stories about the things he had seen during his incredibly long existence. As far back as she could remember, he had always been bald, and she found it impossible to imagine him with hair. She leaned forward and kissed his cool cheek, before placing the hand that she had been holding back on top of the covers.

She left the room and wasn't surprised to see Tom waiting just outside for her. She nodded to him and smiled sadly. They had only one option left. They were going to have to steal Mynor's Globe – an ancient object with incredible powers to heal nether-creatures. But to do this they would have to enter the Netherworld and take it from right under the nose of Gwendolin, Alexa's mother, the most powerful and ruthless sorceress in the realm.

If they failed, her father would die.

2

‘Ah, here he is,’ Tom said in his broad Irish accent as Trey plodded into the kitchen the following morning. ‘I was debating whether to wake you from your much needed beauty sleep and get you to face the world – it being your birthday and all – but, knowing how you like to lie in for obscene lengths of time, I figured that I’d wait it out, and that you’d rise of your own accord when the sound of your belly growling became louder than that of your snoring.’

Trey squinted, screwing up his face against the strong light that flooded in through the floor-to-ceiling windows that made up one entire wall of the kitchen. He nodded in the direction of Alexa, who was sitting at the kitchen table, a small pile of gifts and sealed envelopes arranged in the centre. They had hung a banner up in the centre of the room – Happy 15th Birthday picked out in silver and blue on a black background.

‘How did you know that it was my birthday?’ he said, sitting down opposite her at the table and helping himself to orange juice. ‘I didn’t tell anyone.’

‘Are you kidding?’ Alexa said. ‘You think that because you tried to keep it secret that we wouldn’t find out?’

‘So how did you know?’

‘It’s logged in Dad’s calendar. Tom has access to all my father’s computer files, and guess what popped up as an alert three days ago? Fancy not telling anyone it’s your birthday! How lame are you, Trey?’

‘I’ve just never really been one for birthdays, I suppose. In the care home they’d give you a card signed by all the staff and kids, a cake and an extra few quid in your allowance that week. So it was never really a big deal.’

‘Well, now it’s a big deal,’ Tom said, moving towards him. ‘Here, that’s from me.’ He indicated the largest present on the table and nodded at Trey in a way that suggested that he was to open it first. Trey looked up at the tall, fierce-looking Irishman and picked up the gift, hefting it in his hands as if trying to guess by weight alone what it could be. He looked down at the package – it was long, just over three feet in length, and quite heavy.

‘Oh for God’s sake! Are you going to open the bloody thing or sit there and gawp at it all day?’ Tom came and sat down next to him, the look of anticipation on his features made somehow horrific by the ugly, puckered scar tissue that dominated the side of his face nearest to Trey.

Looking up at Tom’s excited expression, it was almost impossible for Trey to reconcile the person in front of him now with the man he knew to be Lucien’s right-hand man – his enforcer. Tom was as hard as nails – a warrior who was always by Lucien’s side in the toughest of situations, armed to the teeth with an arsenal of guns and explosives – but here he was behaving like a kid on Christmas morning.

Trey let out a short breath of exasperation and pulled at the red ribbon that was tied

around the paper. He tore at the paper, frowning down at the long, zippered canvas bag in his hands. Unzipping it along its full length, he pulled the two sides apart, revealing the weapon inside. He quickly closed it again, as if the thing was in danger of leaping out of its own accord, and looked up at the Irishman.

‘It’s a rifle,’ he said, looking at the older man in horror.

‘Well spotted,’ Tom replied. ‘A Marlin Model 60, to be precise. And –’ he reached into his back pocket and pulled out an envelope that he handed to Trey – ‘I bought you a year’s membership to the Marylebone Rifle and Pistol Club. You can come down with me later on, and we can have a little go with it, eh? I’ll have to be with you at first, but after a few months you can go alone and practise when you like.’

Trey opened the carry case again and stared in disbelief at the wood and metal gun nestling among the canvas lining. Then he closed the zip, aware that Tom was leaning forward over him waiting for his reaction to the gift, so he obligingly donned a big, dumb smile and nodded his appreciation.

‘Fantastic, Tom, thank you so much. But I really don’t—’

‘I saw how you liked the guns and things that we took with us on our little sortie over to Holland to rescue the lovely Alexa here. So when I found out that it was your birthday, I thought it’d be just the thing. You’ll love it.’

Trey couldn’t even imagine picking up a gun, and was stupefied to think that his friend had actually gone out and bought him one. He placed the gun bag on the floor next to his chair and nodded his appreciation again. He hoped that Tom had not picked up on his dismay. The Irishman had never treated Trey with anything but kindness and respect, and the teenager felt a debt of gratitude to the man for everything that he had done for him since Lucien had taken him in as his ward. In addition, Trey was still more than a little nervous about Tom; there was a hard and ruthless aspect to the man that simmered just below the surface, which Trey hoped to carry on avoiding for as long as possible.

‘*Just humour him, Trey. He’s been so excited about the whole thing since he thought up the idea. I tried to talk him out of it, but he wouldn’t listen.*’ Alexa spoke directly into his mind, using the telepathy spell that she employed in situations like this. He glanced over and saw her smiling back at him in amusement.

‘This is from me,’ she said, stepping forward and holding out a much smaller gift that looked as if it had been wrapped by an expert in origami.

Trey took the package from her and carefully tore the paper away. It was a book. It appeared to be bound in some kind of skin that was rough to the touch, like very fine sandpaper. He went to open it, but Alexa stopped him with a gesture of her hand.

‘I’d probably wait to open it,’ she said.

‘Why?’ Trey asked, looking over at her suspiciously.

‘It’s a book of spells. *Most* of which are perfectly safe,’ she added quickly, holding a hand up to stop his objections, ‘but some of them have a habit of catching you by surprise if you are not quite ready for them. It’ll be better if we go through them together to start with.’

Trey wanted to go back to bed. He suddenly felt that the signed card and chocolate cake that he had been given for his last three birthdays back at the care home were infinitely preferable to the gifts he had been given this morning. Tom had bought him a lethal weapon, and now Alexa appeared to have given him a book that was likely to

kill him if he opened it unsupervised.

‘Thanks,’ he said. ‘Thank you both very much. It’s very . . . kind of you.’

‘There’s one more thing,’ Alexa said. ‘Obviously he isn’t able to give it to you himself, but I know that my father would have wanted you to have this.’

She handed Trey another present. He looked down at it and then back up at her, a quizzical look on his face.

Alexa smiled at him sadly. ‘It’s OK. You can open that one quite safely.’

Inside was a silver photo frame. His mother and father were standing in front of a large lake with a dense and lush forest in the background. They were laughing straight into the lens of the camera, as if the photographer had just cracked some great joke that they’d enjoyed. There was another man in the picture, standing beside his father. Trey had never seen him before.

He kept his eyes on the photograph, breathing deeply to get his emotions under control. It must have been warm by the lake on the day that the photo was taken; his father’s shirt buttons were undone at the top, and Trey could just about make out the chain around his neck. His fingers snaked towards his own chest, and he fiddled with the silver amulet through his T-shirt. The amulet had been his father’s, and Lucien had given it to Trey when they had first met at the care home. Eventually he looked up, nodding his thanks to Alexa.

‘Who’s the other guy in the photo?’ he asked with a gesture of his head in the direction of the photo frame that was still in his lap.

‘I don’t know. My dad will, he’ll . . .’ Alexa’s voice trailed away.

‘Come on, Trey,’ Tom said loudly, breaking the uncomfortable silence that followed. ‘Mrs Magilton has cooked you up some of those blueberry pancakes that you like so much, and I’ll make you a nice cup of tea. And after that, we’ll grab that peashooter of yours and I’ll take you down to the shooting range for a lesson.’

‘Mr Allen is coming today. I’ll have to be in for him,’ Trey said quickly, looking for any excuse not to have to go to shoot the gun.

Mr Allen was Trey’s tutor. He was a strange little man with a beard that he let grow into an unruly mess beneath his chin. It hung down almost to his waist and gave him an odd, dwarfish appearance. He had been hired when it was decided that it was safer for Alexa and Trey to be home-tutored rather than attend school – something that Alexa had vehemently fought against, but she’d had to acquiesce when Tom reminded her of the dangers that they had already faced following her abduction.

‘Ah now, there’ll be no lessons today,’ Tom said with a wink. ‘I’ve sorted the whole thing out. You’ve got a day off for your birthday. So wipe that miserable look off yer face and follow me. Blueberry pancakes and rifle shooting – perfect.’

3

The shooting range was not far from Docklands, where they lived, and Trey, trying to think of anything he could to delay the trip as much as possible, suggested that they go on foot.

‘I don’t really like the idea of walking around London carrying a rifle,’ Tom had said, and arranged for one of his men to take them by car instead. ‘Besides, the quicker we get there, the more shooting you’ll be able to do.’

Trey looked over at Alexa, who had sat smirking at him from the sofa throughout this exchange. ‘I suppose you think this is hilarious,’ he hissed at her when Tom had left the room for a moment.

‘Look, just go along with him and see how you get on. Who knows? You might love it.’

Trey shook his head and looked across at the rifle case that Tom had placed by the elevator. ‘I don’t believe this,’ he muttered, and stomped off to find his jacket.

In the back of the car on the way over, Trey had tried to think up as many different ways as possible to let Tom know that he had no intention of firing the gun. He was scared witless of the things. As they pulled up outside the gun club Trey was about to say something, when he noticed the Irishman’s face – excitement was etched into every feature at the prospect of what lay ahead, and Trey resigned himself to going along with his friend for one afternoon at least. He smiled back, hoping that his face portrayed the right amount of enthusiasm and none of the deep-seated anxiety that he really felt.

They entered through a small door, descending the steps into a foyer where Tom swiped a card into a slot by the door and entered a code on a keypad. A buzzing sound, like an angry wasp trapped in a tin can, signalled that the door was open, and they entered a short, poorly lit corridor. At the end of the passage, next to a giant cork board that held various notices and league tables for the club, they were met by a smiling middle-aged man, who introduced himself as David Rampton, the club secretary.

‘Pleased to meet you, Trey,’ Mr Rampton said, shaking him by the hand. ‘I’ll show you around our facilities here and then we’ll go through the safety talk. After that, I’ll leave you in the more than capable hands of Tom here, and you can have a go with your wonderful new present. I’m sure that you will enjoy it here at the Marylebone, and congratulations on your birthday.’

After an extremely long, painstaking safety lecture, Tom and Trey went down to the range, picking up some ammunition on the way. The range was empty, and Tom explained that this was his favourite time to come to shoot, when the bays were not full of people and you could take your time to get things right. They entered one of the central bays, placing their coats and bags under the small table towards the rear. The walls on either side were high enough to block out any views, and Trey glanced down

the range spread out in front of them. Tom unzipped the bag containing the rifle and placed it on the table between them. He explained the workings of the rifle again, going through the checks with Trey, making him perform the same procedures over and over until his hands began to ache. After an hour of this, Tom clapped him on the back and reached over for the ammunition box.

‘Right, young Trey,’ he said, placing the box on the shelf, ‘do you think you’re ready to have a go?’

Trey sighed. He was uncomfortable handling the gun when it was unloaded, but the thought of having live ammunition in the clip and firing it simply terrified him. ‘I don’t know, Tom – it’s all a bit scary.’

‘You’re right,’ Tom replied. ‘It is scary, and it should be. These things are made for one reason and one reason alone. To kill. They really serve no other purpose. Yet more people are killed with knives every week than with guns. Guns don’t kill people – people do.’ He looked over at Trey with a warm smile. ‘I know you’re not one of those eejits that treat these things like a toy. But if you give it a go, and you listen to what I tell you to do, I’m certain that you’ll enjoy the experience.’

‘OK.’ Trey nodded.

Tom loaded ten cartridges into a small hole near the stock of the gun, inserting the tube and locking it in place with a turn of his thumb. He handed the gun to Trey. ‘Pull back on the lever like we practised and you’re ready to go.’

Trey looked over at Tom, who nodded in encouragement. He held the gun up to his shoulder, the barrel pointing down the range. Tom reached up and flicked the switch that sent the target away from them on the mechanized pulley system that was fitted to each bay and stopped it at the ten-metre mark.

‘Right, nice and close to start with. We’ll send it right back later, once you’ve got the hang of things.’ He moved over to Trey and placed the ear protectors and safety glasses on his head. He gently took the boy’s shoulders and manoeuvred him into a firing position, nudging his feet into place with his own.

‘Rack it up like we practised, Trey. Take the safety off, aim down the sights and gently squeeze the trigger,’ he said, before pulling the ear protectors right down over Trey’s ears and giving him a big, cheesy thumbs-up.

Trey was sweating profusely as he aimed the rifle at the target; a little rivulet of perspiration ran down his cheek, detouring around his mouth before picking up speed again and sliding down his chin. He thumbed the safety switch and tried to take aim along the rear and front sights, his hands shaking so horribly that the end of the gun bounced around, making it difficult to fix on the large black-and-white target ahead. Taking a deep breath, he steadied himself and gently squeezed the trigger.

The explosion was loud – even with the ear protectors – and the gun snapped back into his shoulder. He had expected it to recoil more than it did and was even more surprised at the complete lack of smoke. He shivered, the adrenalin that was coursing through his veins making his heart thump against his ribs as the thrill of the power that he had just controlled truly dawned on him. He sensed Tom step in behind him and he remembered what they had practised beforehand. He thumbed the safety back, checked the chamber to ensure that there was no ammunition, and placed the gun – barrel still pointing down the range – back on to the table.

Tom placed a hand on his shoulder, and Trey removed the ear protectors and turned

round.

‘How was that?’ Tom asked.

‘Fantastic!’ Trey said, grinning back at him.

‘I’m very impressed by the way you made that gun safe again at the end there. It’s easy to forget those things when you’re all hyped up.’ He put his hand on Trey’s shoulder and grinned one of his lopsided smiles at him. ‘Ready for some more?’ he asked.

‘Definitely,’ Trey replied, reaching out for the weapon again.

4

Trey had increased the target distance to the full twenty-five metres of the range and was now intent on increasing his accuracy as he fired round after round at the paper target mounted on the board in the distance. Every six shots he would press the button on the control panel to initiate the pulley system, peering intently at the large paper-and-board target as it slid back towards him on the overhead wires. He checked his shots, noting how many had found the black central area and how many had slipped into the white concentric rings on the outside – or missed entirely. When he had done this, and compared the scores to his previous best, he would replace the target with a fresh one and send it back down the range.

The shooting gallery was still empty. Tom stayed behind Trey, helping him to load the rifle and encouraging him when he had shot particularly well. It wasn't long before Trey had used up the entire box of cartridges. His arms ached and his right shoulder felt bruised from the recoil of the rifle. He placed the gun down on the table to rub the muscles in his forearms that felt tight and were starting to cramp.

'Had enough for one day?' Tom asked.

Trey grinned back at him. 'That was fantastic, Tom. Thanks so much. I honestly didn't think that I was going to enjoy it at all, but it really is very addictive, isn't it?'

'I'm glad that it was fun. You're actually quite a good shot, you know. I'm impressed with how well you picked it up. If you keep coming, we'll get you entered into a competition for your age group. Now, I'll take this,' he said, picking up the gun and checking that it was not loaded, 'and put it in the gun store with mine. Next time we come, we'll get you your own space in there.' He turned to leave, adding, 'Will you be OK here on your own for a couple of minutes? There is something that I want to talk to David about, and then I'll be right back.'

'Sure, Tom,' Trey said. 'I need to check that last target anyway, so I'll have a look at it while you're gone.'

Tom nodded and left by a door at the back of the range, taking Trey's gun with him.

The teenager turned and opened a bottle of water, relishing the feel of the cool liquid on his parched throat. Sniffing at his hands, he noted how strongly they smelt of an acrid residue from the gun, and he grinned again at the feeling that he had experienced immediately following that first shot – the rifle kicking backwards as it sent the deadly projectile hurtling towards its destination at impossible speed.

He glanced up at the target at the far end of the range and was about to start the machinery that would pull it towards him when he stopped, his finger hovering over the small green button. He frowned, squinting from behind the yellow lenses of the safety glasses at the concentric circles of black and white. He was about to dismiss the notion as a simple trick of the light when it *flexed* again, the shapes that made up the target twisting on the paper, the black centre bulging and squirming as if trying to pull

itself free of the white surface. It had grown. The target appeared to have almost doubled in size, and it continued to grow as the printed outlines writhed and distorted upon it.

Trey's heart knocked into his ribs, and he was vaguely aware that he had let the plastic bottle that he had been holding slip from his fingers, spilling water all over his feet and on to the dusty concrete floor. He wanted to shout out, make somebody aware of the unnatural happenings, but all he could manage was a small croaking sound that got wedged in his throat.

The target had grown again. Now at least a metre in length and still distending in every direction, it had begun to take on a distinct shape. The contours of a humanoid figure were clearly visible now, the head and shoulders stretching the surface outward as if trying to push through from the other side, and Trey thought that he could almost make out the vague outline of a face peering at him. A hand suddenly shot forward, its fingers splayed as it groped for a handhold on the now rubber-like membrane of the paper – except Trey had stopped thinking of it as such; he now believed it to be some kind of skin between this world and that from which the creature was trying to break free. Trey saw the target pucker as the creature succeeded in getting a good grip and briefly wondered how on earth the thing, which had doubled in size once more, was still being held by the small retaining clips at the top of the apparatus.

Trey glanced behind him at the door, praying that Tom would appear. His heart was thumping in his chest, and his mind raced through a thousand different thoughts, stopping at none as he fought to figure out what he should do. He wanted to turn and run away, but his legs stubbornly refused to move, his feet anchored to the floor. He stood and gawped as the creature's other hand shot out towards him, stretching the membrane almost the length of the arm so that it wrapped around the limb, revealing it in perfect detail. This hand was not the one that had originally been attached to that arm. It was a grotesque prosthetic substitute – the fingers replaced by long, hinged talons that appeared to flex by means of a series of metal rods that ran back into the flesh of the wrist behind them. There was a sudden tearing sound, and a talon ripped through the membrane. It slashed at the air in Trey's direction before pulling back in an attempt to rip a bigger hole in the skin between the two worlds and allow the whole of the creature through.

Trey knew that he was looking at a portal between this realm and the Netherworld, and there was no doubt as to what or who was trying to break through from the other side.

Caliban had found him.

Caliban, the vampire responsible for the destruction of everything that Trey had ever held dear. Caliban, the reason that Lucien was lying in a coma, fighting for his life. Caliban, who would stop at nothing in his quest to subjugate the human race and turn them into little more than cattle to be fed upon at will.

There was a harsh screech, the motor on the retrieval system suddenly sparked into life and the entire thing started to advance down the long alley towards the teenager.

Trey stabbed at the stop button on the control panel, but the thing continued to rumble inexorably towards him, swinging slowly from the wires that carried it overhead. He began to turn his head to look for Tom, knowing he would not be there, when the vampire's face suddenly reared out at him, forcing itself against the

membrane and stretching it out in his direction until Trey thought that it must rupture and free the hideous death face behind it.

Trey could clearly make out the fangs protruding from the upper jaw, and he imagined those exquisitely sharp and deadly barbs tearing and rending at his flesh as soon as Caliban managed to break free of the portal. With the target no more than ten feet away Trey did the only thing that he could: he morphed into a werewolf and attacked.

The change was almost bearable now. The excruciating agony that had accompanied his early changes was now a brief explosion of white-hot pain as his cellular makeup mutated – his bones thickened and elongated, and the muscles attached to them hypertrophied, the myofibrils within them multiplying ten-fold as he transformed into the huge, hulking man-wolf. Thick coarse hair erupted from unseen pores, and huge black claws and fangs burst forth from his fingers and mouth. His clothes and shoes tore at the seams and fell like rags to the floor around him.

Trey leaped at the grotesque figure in front of him, springing forward on huge, muscular legs. A great bellowing roar escaped his jaws as he ripped and tore at the bulging figure of the vampire. He had little doubt that something was wrong with the portal and that his best chance was to attack the vampire now and stop him from breaking through the viscous shield. Trey's huge jaws opened wide and he clamped his teeth around the crown of the vampire's bulbous head. With one wolf-hand, Trey grabbed the metal claw, pushing it back away from him. His other hand grabbed the top of the target and he shifted his immense weight downward, trying to wrestle the entire thing to the ground where he could attack more freely. The insubstantial wire and metal tubing that made up the overhead apparatus finally gave way and it crashed to the floor, creating a huge noise as the devastated machinery collapsed into the firing range. As he fell backwards, Trey's jaws suddenly closed around nothing, snapping together in the empty air, and at the same instant the grip that he had had on the vampire was also lost.

Trey leaped to his feet and looked about him frantically, expecting the vampire to mist back at any second and attack him with taloned hands and fanged mouth. But the attack never came. There was no sign of Caliban. The air still rang with the metallic clamour of the broken equipment. But the vampire was not there. It was as if he had never been there. Trey had managed to drive him back to where he had come from. He looked at the ground, which was littered with the wood, metal and wires of what had once been the target retrieval machinery. In the centre of the mess were the ripped and broken pieces of the small wooden board and black-and-white target.

Tom burst in through the door at the back of the range, staring in horror as the seven-foot werewolf turned round to look at him.

'Change back, Trey. Quickly!' Tom said, looking through the door he had just come through.

Trey morphed back again just as David Rampton appeared.

The club secretary looked aghast at the sight of the boy standing naked in the firing range, surrounded by destroyed equipment.

'My God, what . . . what have you done?' he said. His voice was high and strained, accompanying the dark crimson colour that had flooded his face.

Trey looked at him and then back down at the wreckage around him. 'Er, there was