

ESCAPE FROM  
NETHERWORLD

DAVID KUKLIS

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*This book is dedicated to my family and friends, who mean everything to me. Without them, this book would not have been possible. Special thoughts go out to my father, Vince, who passed away several years ago and was the original Twiggy.*

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## MAIN CHARACTERS

Dave: Borhai, human fighter

Joe (brother of Dave): Flerick, elf/fighter/thief

Vince: Twiggy, dwarf fighter

Mike: Zach, human archer/fighter

John: Miles, human cleric

Nora (wife of John): Hazel, human magic user

Kerri (girlfriend of Dave): Piper, elf fighter/magic user

## CHAPTER 1

A loud clap of thunder, which seemed to shake the whole neighborhood, awakened Joe from a deep slumber. He sat up and heard his brother, Dave, in the bathroom talking to the mirror again. Dave had carried on conversations with himself ever since he hit his head on a steel beam in the basement of their home. Dave's excuse was that he would not forget anything important that way.

As Joe walked past Dave's bedroom, he peered in and saw Kerri still asleep. Dave and Kerri had been seeing each other for close to three years. Marriage for the two of them seemed inevitable.

Joe started to make breakfast when Dave walked in.

"I hope you're making French toast," Dave said.

"Always do before we hit the caves on the beach," Joe replied over his shoulder.

"Is Vince going to be able to make it?"

Joe told him that Vince was running late and would meet them at the caves. The caves were right along the Ocean Front in North Carolina where Joe, Dave, and the rest of their friends lived.

Each month all seven friends would go to the caves to play Dungeons and Dragons™, dressed in full garb and calling each other by their character names.

Everyone enjoyed the break from the daily grind. Joe especially needed that break, with a job that kept him going about twelve hours a day. The games helped him release a bunch of energy stored up throughout the month.

Today all seven friends would venture to the caves and engage in battle.

“Wake Kerri up because it takes her the longest to get ready,” Joe said as he finished up eating.

“She already has her outfit ready and she molded your ear pieces yesterday,” Dave replied.

Kerri and Joe would play elves in the games, meaning of course that they would have to have pointed ears. Vince was the only other non-human in the games: as a dwarf, he would wear a massive beard and a helmet with horns.

Dave left to wake Kerri while Joe went off to shower.

“Honey, it is time to get up,” he said gently. “Today is the day we have waited all month for.”

Kerri stirred and turned over, away from Dave. “I need just five more minutes,” she murmured.

Dave pulled the sheets off and admired her toned body. Today was the day he planned to ask her to marry him at the top of the cliffs above the caves. Joe was the only other person who knew of Dave’s intentions. Dave tickled the back of Kerri’s knee, and Kerri jerked awake and sat up.

“Why do you always insist on tickling me?” she said in mock anger.

“Because I know that is what bothers you the most.”

Kerri got up and slid into Dave’s arms. They held each other while Dave explained that Vince would meet them later.

Kerri smiled. “Great! I was hoping we wouldn’t break the streak of everyone coming each month.”

“I can’t wait to see how sexy you look all dressed up like an elf,” Dave said.

“You just like imagining me as someone else.”

“I can’t help that elves are exotic creatures!”

“Well, you are stuck with me!”

Dave went off to check on Joe who had showered and was starting to get his outfit ready.

“Nora and John are on their way over,” Dave told Joe.

“Good, then all we need is for Mike to be on time,” Joe said.

“We can take my truck and John’s van. The two vehicles should be able to carry all of us and our supplies.”

Kerri showered while the brothers talked. She had a feeling that today was going to be special. There had been hints lately that Dave was going to propose at any time. Kerri knew she wanted this with her whole heart and was ready to start a family with the man she loved so dearly.

As she looked in the mirror, she put on the long black wig that would cover her blond hair to help her become her character, Piper.

She overheard Joe talking with Dave. "I live for this day each month on the caves," Joe was telling him.

"Yeah, me too. I always felt like we were born in the wrong time period," Dave responded.

"I sometimes dream as if I am living in that time," Joe said.

"What about me?" Kerri interrupted as she came out of the bathroom.

"You could have been a wench," Dave replied, dodging to the left in case she took a swing.

"Do you think we would have been in a king's army or fought against a king?" Joe wondered.

"I always imagined us as hired henchmen," said Dave, "working for whoever paid us the most and not answering to anyone. Ah, life in medieval times! We wouldn't have had to deal with the worries people have now, like mortgage payments and school loans."

Joe laughed. "Yeah, we would only have to worry about losing our heads every day!"

The brothers enjoyed every moment of playing the game each month. Dave and Joe became Borhai and Flerick respectively, building on the characters they played in games in their basement. Vince chose the name Twiggy because it suggested a dwarf's short

stature. John and Nora chose to become Miles and Hazel while Mike picked the name Zach. Dave gave Kerri the name Piper, but there was no backstory as to why he did so.

Kerri pulled on the tight black outfit that would turn her into Piper and admired herself in the mirror. Just a few more touches, like the ears and boots, and the transformation would be complete. When she went to the bedroom to get the rest of her outfit, Dave was already there.

“You look amazing, Piper,” he grinned.

Kerri looked pleased. “You always did like the long black hair.”

“I can’t wait to get there today. I feel like this is going to be a memorable adventure.”

“Then let’s pack the truck and prepare to leave. Vince and Nora are going to be here soon enough. Hopefully Mike will be with them.”

Nora and Vince were finishing up with their packing when they heard a knock at the door. Vince answered it, and Mike was standing there, loaded down with bags. “Ready when you two are,” Mike said.

“Let’s pack and go,” John said. “We’re meeting over at Joe’s.”

John and Nora had been married for ten years. They both were free spirits who did not stress about everyday life. Nora seemed to be more book-smart than John, while John knew a lot about the real world. They fit well together and seldom fought.

Mike, on the other hand, enjoyed bothering people and would argue his point to the end even if everyone else disagreed with him. Mike was Joe's best friend. He lived close to John and Nora so he decided to meet them there and then go to Joe's house.

"I forgot to call Joe and tell him I was coming with you guys," Mike said.

"I'll call him from the car," Nora responded.

The three companions pulled up to Joe's house a little while later and saw Joe and Dave doing battle with swords in the front yard. They all got out and watched the excitement from the sidelines with Kerri. Joe quickly got the upper hand when he slipped a knife out of his waistband and forced Dave backwards. Dave conceded and Joe listened to the cheers from the four bystanders.

"Hey, guys, just getting ready with some warm-up," Joe explained.

"Of course, I let him win so he will be overconfident later at the caves," Dave said. "We need to pick the teams before we leave so we can drive to the ocean with our teammates."

"Let's make it me, Dave and John, and Vince when he shows," Kerri suggested.

"I have no problem with that," Joe and Mike said at the same time.

"Maybe I do," Nora added, and then shook her head. "Just kidding... I'm good with that."

So with everything packed and ready, two teams left in

separate vehicles. Dave drove the truck with Kerri and John, while Nora drove the van carrying Joe and Mike. The beach was only two hours away so both teams started to strategize as they drove.

“We need better hand-to-hand combat this time,” John said.

“I’ve been working on fighting with two swords, but I don’t think I’m ready to try it yet,” Kerri replied.

“I like the idea of keeping John as a cleric with healing powers out of the fray,” Dave added.

“But I can fight with a mace and I’m known to hold my own,” John responded.

“It doesn’t count when you slap your wife around,” Kerri said.

All three people laughed, knowing that John was the last person who would ever raise a hand to his wife.

“I have been working on a reverse move against Joe,” Dave explained. “The way he comes in when we practice is the same all the time, so I think I can get him with it.”

“If you don’t slip making the move...” Kerri said.

“I am not clumsy.”

Kerri rolled her eyes. “Well, you keep thinking that, honey.”

John sat back and enjoyed the wind coming in the window. He wondered what Nora and her group were discussing.

“Dave has no chance against me,” Joe said. “I beat him about eighty percent of the time.”

Mike watched Joe's reaction while talking about Dave, as he swung a phantom sword around.

"I am really much better now with a bow, but I miss my crossbow."

Mike lost his crossbow in the last battle when he got knocked over while standing too close to the edge of the cliff. The crossbow shattered as it bounced down the side of the cave. He brought the long bow he made a while back to use today because there was no time to make a new crossbow.

"I can't wait to try out my new tricks," Nora said. She had been working all month on some pyrotechnics to use as magic missiles for her character. "They are all going to be surprised."

"We need to take advantage of Vince not being there right away," Joe added.

"We also have to keep John away from the group," Nora reminded them. "Remember, we said last time the rule is that the healing spells only work up to twenty feet away. So if he is cornered somewhere, he will not be able to heal Dave and Kerri in time."

"I'll take care of the cleric," Mike said. "He knows I always go after him when we're not on the same team."