

INVINCIBLE (PIERCING THE VEIL #2) EXCERPT

*Out of Northumbria there rises a king,
Born of a union that rent the nation.
His sword, Excalibur, was forged in Avalon
Whose blade can sever body from spirit.
He shall take it up from the stone,
And cast it away into the depths,
Bearing with it the spirit of the Shadow Lord.
For seven ages and eight, it shall pass out of all knowledge.
In the days of the Child of the Prophecy,
The Shadow Lord shall rise once more.
The child shall come from the line of the King,
The firstborn of his surviving heir,
Born in the seventh seven less eleven,
Under the sign of the Taijitu.
Nearest kin shall be locked in mortal combat.
Both shall fall
Yet the one who holds the blade that was broken
Shall emerge victorious.*

Prologue

A stealthy pair of eyes scanned for any sign of life on the banks of the Lake of Avalon. Although the Fata Morgana and most of the footbridge had been destroyed in the battle, there would still be penumbra guarding the lake. The Watchers had long believed that both Excalibur and Sargon were somewhere in the depths of this water....and now so was Kane. Hidden amongst the trees in this world-between-worlds, Achen peered through the fog hoping for evidence that Kane has survived.

An eerie light from the distant world of men dappled the water through patches of fog. *Come on, Kane, Achen thought, give me a sign that you made it!* At just that moment, Achen caught a flash of gold from the lake.

He caught his breath. Was that just the reflection of the light on the water? Or was that... could it be...*Excalibur?*

Another roll of fog passed over his hiding place just at that moment, and Achen decided to risk it. He morphed, sprouting wings, and very cautiously followed the roll of fog as it meandered over the water, hoping the penumbra would not see him.

He lowered himself as close to the water's surface as he dared, peering down below as he skimmed across it. Wreckage from the former Fata Morgana littered the bottom of the lake, but he saw none of the bodies killed in battle. It was as if those that had fallen into the water had simply vanished from existence. Achen tried not to shudder at the thought.

At last he reached the spot where he had seen the gleam of gold, and bit his lip to keep from crying out. It had not been a mirage after all: he *had* seen Excalibur.

Then, beyond the sword, Achen saw Kane.

Suspended near the bottom as if a weight had been tied to his feet, Achen saw the frame of a skinny teenage boy with white-blond hair billowing out around his head. A jagged scar marred his right cheek. His skin was pallid, and his body limp. But then Achen realized that Kane's open eyes were *moving*.

"Kane!" Achen hissed as loudly as he dared. "Kane!"

There was no response. The glassy eyes appeared fixed on something invisible to Achen, and Kane's expression was beyond terror.

Forgetting stealth, Achen hissed again, "Kane! Come on, look up at me!"

Then, for the first time in his immortal life, a sharp pain pierced Achen between the shoulder blades. At first, he registered only surprise. Whipping around, he saw a sentry poised above him, ready to attack a second time. It was a penumbra with the head of a man and the body of a bird, its talons outstretched. On instinct, Achen summoned and thrust a ball of light towards the belly of the shadowy enemy. It ducked, opening its mouth and letting out a terrible cry like a falcon as the bolt struck home. From the banks, four other penumbra sentries instantly alighted to join the battle.

Achen steeled himself, casting one more glance below him.

"Hang on, Kane," he whispered. "I'm coming!"

