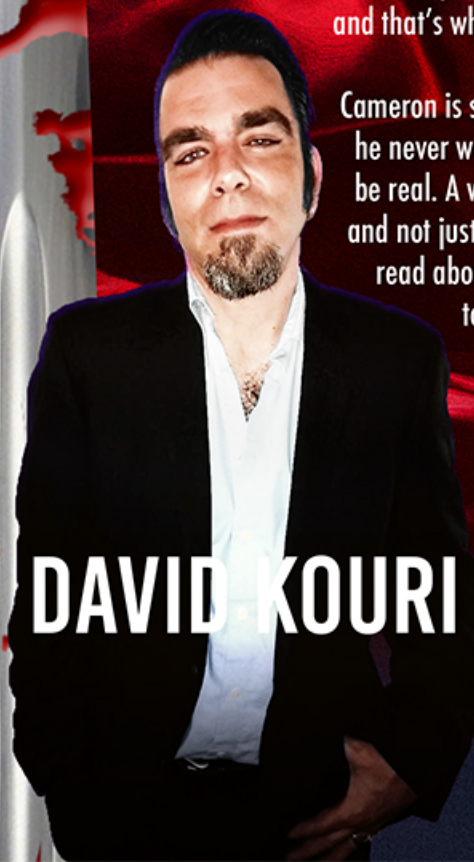


ELYRIA

Cameron is your average, run of the mill, seventeen-year-old kid. He did have some random thoughts over the years that he wasn't quite like others, but never talked about that with anyone—he didn't want to be labeled a "freak." Aside from that, everything about his life is about as normal as could be. He goes to school, has friends, has fun with girls at parties, and just enjoys his altogether normal life, until the night that everything is shattered.

Just before he turns eighteen, Cameron's parents are murdered by home invaders wearing masks; and that's when all hell breaks loose—literally.

Cameron is shoved head-first into a world that he never would have believed could possibly be real. A world where monsters truly exist, and not just the human kind, but the kind you read about in books and see in films. It's up to Cameron, and a select group of freedom fighters, not only to save the earth, but also to save the galaxy and, along with it, his true homeland—Elyria.



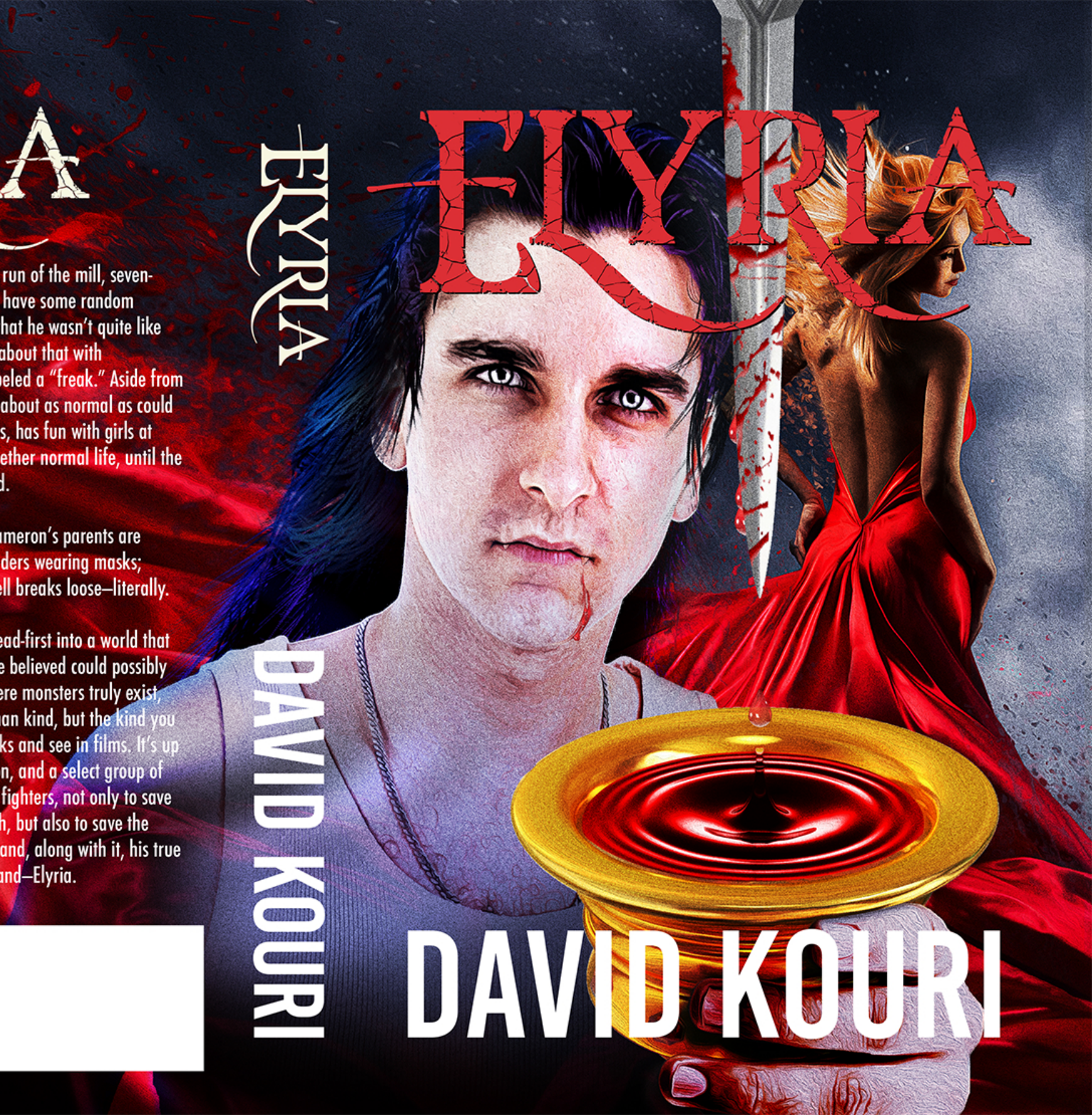
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by

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This book would never have been possible if not for my love of science fiction and horror. My early childhood was shaped by authors like the great J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, by the man who started it all, H.P. Lovecraft, and my all-time favorite, Stephen King. The ability these men have to pull you in from the first word, then send you off on an adventure unlike any other, is beyond magical. *Elyria* is my best attempt, as I stand in the shadows of these incredible creators.

My sincere hopes that you enjoy the journey,

David Kouri

This book is dedicated to all of the authors who inspired me as a young, impressionable teen. Thank you. I hope I will be deemed worthy in your eyes.

CHAPTER I

It was sometime around midnight that I heard the screams and, along with it, loud pops that sounded like something more than just fireworks. My father came running down the hall, his white T-shirt and boxers stained with blood. “We will find you,” came a loud and menacing voice from somewhere at the bottom of the stairs.

“Dad,” I screamed, “what’s going on?”

“Your mother’s been shot by several men who broke into the house and I need you to climb out the window and run across the street to the neighbor’s house. Go now, Cameron, before it’s too late. Your mother and I will join you as soon as possible.”

I did as I was told, sliding open my second-floor bedroom

window, climbing out and jumping to the ground as quietly as possible. I hid behind the wall of the house, just to make sure that the coast was clear.

I couldn't stop thinking about my mom, and whether or not my dad had made it to safety. As I peeked around the corner I noticed a masked man who was carrying some type of automatic machine gun, and along with it, a monstrous clip which must have been able to hold over 150 rounds. I knew I had one chance to make an escape and I took it when his back was turned. I was just about to clear the fence when I felt something rip through my left calf.

I had been hit and I knew it; the only thing was that the blood coming from me wasn't red, but blue. I had no time to think about it and scaled the wall like I was freaking Spider-Man. What the hell was going on here? I was able to make it across the street and to the neighbor's house before I wound up passing out on their front lawn. Fortunately for my sake, though I never would have guessed it at the time, the neighbors weren't home.

I didn't wake up for hours and when I did I noticed I was in a hospital. My leg was in some kind of air cast and I had been heavily drugged, not that I minded that at all. I pressed the button to call for a nurse, but no one ever came. It seemed like I was all alone in this foreign room.

My first thought was of my parents—what had happened to them? As I began to regain my senses, I noticed someone who was certainly not a doctor or a nurse. It was a man with light

brown hair that came down to his shoulders. His complexion was almost that of an albino.

“Who are you and what the hell are you doing in my room?”

The man stepped out of the shadows of darkness from the corner of the room. He was wearing almost Steam Punk style clothes, looking like something out of another century. “All I can tell you at the moment is that you are safe. I’m a friend, someone that you can trust, and there are others like me, individuals who are here to protect you, to make sure that nothing happens to you.”

The IVs running through my arms held a blue liquid, which looked very much like the consistency of blood. “Where am I and where are my parents?” I asked.

“In every life a little rain must fall, and I’m sorry to be the one to tell you that, sadly, they are both dead.”

“They didn’t make it? What the hell happened?”

“I can have all of your questions answered, but first you have to be willing to trust me wholeheartedly.”

“Are you out of your damned mind? What the hell do you mean ‘trust you?’ This is the first time I’ve ever seen you—I don’t freaking know you—why in the world would I trust you?”

“Believe me, once you know the truth about yourself and your family, about all of us, everything will become clear. Can you do me this small favor, Cameron?”

“How in the hell do you know my name and how do I know

that you're not one of the bastards who killed my parents?"

"Cameron, I can promise you that I had nothing to do with the death of your parents. Of this you must have no doubt. Can you do something for me before we leave?" asked the pale-faced man.

"What the hell could you possibly want?"

"Take off your air cast and look at your leg."

I did as I was told and the moment I removed the cast, my head began to spin. The hole from the bullet had completely disappeared. "What the hell, how the hell did that happen?" The man kept staring at his watch. "Do you have something more important to do than this?" I asked.

"No, but I'm afraid if I don't get you out of here in the next five minutes, the people that killed your parents will be here and they'll wipe us out as well."

"Okay, so then, let's get out of here."

"A little easier said than done. Every single doctor, nurse, even the patients here are working for the group that took out your parents, that have been taking out our kind for the past several thousand years, in fact. Look kid, I don't have time to explain now, but these people are coming and we need to get the hell out of Dodge—now!"

We didn't waste any more time. The coast was clear and we made our way out the door. The hallway was like a ghost town and the weird dude knew exactly why. "We have to move, as fast as possible. They're here," he informed me.

“So, they killed my parents just to get to me?” I asked, more pissed now than scared.

Escape was not going to be easy. Everywhere we turned we could hear them close behind. We had just finished making our way down the fire escape exit of the building. “We have to move!” demanded the weird dude as we continued moving at what felt like the speed of light.

“Do you know how to fight?” asked the man.

“I’m no wuss if that’s what you’re asking,” I assured him.

“We’re going to have to fight these men and, whatever you do, if they remove their masks, do not, and I repeat, do not look them directly in the eyes.”

“Don’t look them in the eyes, got it, and again—I need answers.”

“Yeah kid, I heard you the first time. Take this,” said the man as he handed me a double-sided dagger. “There’s only one way to kill these bastards and it’s by literally cutting their heads off. Oh yeah, one more thing, try not to get their blood on your skin ’cause it burns like hell.”

I couldn’t believe what was happening here. I felt like I was stuck in an episode of *Kill or Be Killed*, or *The Mangler*, but I had no time to think about that as we prepared to turn and face my parents’ killers.

The fight was brutal. I must have been stabbed over fifty times, but for whatever reason, all the wounds healed within

seconds. My weird friend decapitated at least three of the men while I was able to handle two, with skills that shocked the living hell out of me. Where did this healing ability come from? I don't remember having it as a kid, and where did the fighting skills come from? It was all Greek to me, but the answers had to be coming, from somewhere.

After fending off and dismembering the men who killed my parents, the weird dude led me out the back of the building we were in and into a waiting helicopter just outside. "Too hell with this!" I yelled over the twirling blades. "I'm not going anywhere with you," I continued.

"Kid, I'm your only hope and I can't leave you here to die. You're too damned important."

"Too important for what?" I screamed.

"Do I have to spell it out? You're a...a savior, for lack of better terms."

I couldn't help but laugh. "And just who or what is it that I'm supposed to save?"

"How does mankind sound?"

CHAPTER 2

I got on the chopper with my head spinning like the chopper blades above us. Once inside of the chopper, I noticed quite quickly that it was military equipment. “Who in the hell are you people?”

A female voice from the cockpit called out, “You haven’t told him yet?”

“There hasn’t been time and I’m sure that the Elders will want to speak with him first,” replied the weird dude.

“Macron, you know you were supposed to explain things to him before we take him to Elyria,” came the female voice once again.

“What the hell is Elyria and who in the hell are you insane people?” I screamed at the top of my lungs.

“My name is Macron and all of the people on this chopper

are a dying breed, just like you and your family. Our kind has existed since basically the beginning of time, ‘God’s great mistake’ we’re called.”

“What do you mean ‘God’s great mistake?’” I asked, beginning to freak out just a bit.

“Can you just be patient? Here, are you thirsty?” asked Macron, tossing me a bottled water.

“Yeah, I could use a drink.”

The moment I took the first sip I could taste something off about the water. As I began to look around, my vision began to get blurry and everything began to spin, like I would imagine it would feel being drunk. “What the hell did you give me?” I demanded.

“Something to help you sleep. No one, not even a savior, can know the true location of Elyria.” As soon as he finished his sentence, I blacked out.

I had no idea how long I was out, but it felt like days. As I came to, I didn’t feel the effects of whatever it was they had given me. It must have felt like a drunk spending the night getting hammered and waking up the next day with no hangover. I woke up in a room, much like a bedroom in a home, but I wasn’t the only one in there. “Who are you?” I asked the woman upon waking up.

“My name is Constance,” she announced. “I’m here to help get you acclimated to Elyria.”

“Elyria—so this is a real place?” I asked.

"It's more than a real place, it's where everyone like us is from," she continued.

"What do you mean 'everyone like us?'"

"I've already said too much. You'll be meeting with the Elders soon enough."

"The Elders? Where are we, Narnia, freaking Hogwarts? I mean what the hell is going on here?" Before she was able to give me an answer, she vanished into thin air. This place was getting freaky and I felt like if someone didn't tell me what was going on I might lose my ever-loving mind.

As soon as I was ready, I began to make my way out of the room. The place was a maze of hallways and corridors, all of which were locked. "What the hell is this, how am I supposed to get the hell out of here?" I said aloud but to no one in particular.

"This place is heaven," came the voice of the woman who had been in my room.

As I turned to face her, she wasn't fully there. It was as if her spirit was floating in front of me, having left her body, trying to explain everything to me in the most simplest of terms.

"Please, tell me why I'm here. Is it to die?"

"No, Cameron, it's to live, to be reborn, and into a world where you never have to worry about belonging, because, you are a king." And in a flash she was gone and I was left once again to fend for myself.

Within minutes of her second disappearance, the doors flew

open. All kinds of people came walking out, most of them carrying back packs and school books. Others were wearing dark tunic-like outfits or trench coats. What the hell was this place, Professor X's new pad? As I began to move with the crowd, I felt someone slide up to me—it was that weird guy, Macron.

"How goes it?" he asked, looking even paler than before.

"Man, you know, you could use a freaking tan," I informed him. "You know that, right?"

"Have they been here to see you yet?" he asked me.

"Has who been here to see me?"

"The Elders," he replied.

"No, the only person I've seen is some girl that was sitting in my room when I woke up."

"Okay, follow me, they must be waiting on someone to deliver you to them," he guessed.

"Deliver me to them—what the hell are they going to do, eat me?"

"No, not you, definitely not you," he reassured me.

"Macron, what the hell is this place?"

"Everything will be explained to you in just a few minutes, but do yourself a favor. Whatever they tell you, you must take it to heart, listen to every word that they say, and by all means, you must follow the rules around here to a T. Understood?"

Now I was starting to feel a bit jacked up in the head. The more I looked around me, the more I began to notice people with incredible abilities—the power to disappear, to levitate, and some

had the power to take on other forms. This place was starting to trip me out.

I was led down a long, magnificent hallway. It was decorated with gold, silver, diamonds, and paintings of men and women who looked a lot like Macron. It was then that I came upon a painting of two people that I knew very well—my mother and father. As I turned around to inquire about the painting, Macron was nowhere to be found but another man, a much older man in the same type of tunic and cloak, appeared out of thin air.

“What the hell is all this and why am I here?” I demanded.

“That is a great painting of your parents, is it not?”

“Yeah, it’s great, now, when are you going to give me some freaking answers?”

“Cameron, there are things that your parents never told you about yourself, about your bloodline,” he continued, “and it was for your own good.”

“You have the body of a seventeen year old, correct?”

“That’s right, considering that I was born seventeen years ago.”

“During your childhood your parents never once brought up Elyria because they had been instructed not to, specifically by me.”

“And once the hell again, who are you?”

“Cameron, this is going to be very hard for you to understand, but for lack of a better word, you’re my grandson.”

The news hit me like a sledge hammer to the face. I had known my grandfather, he passed away when I was around twelve, from cancer of liver and lungs, which is why I neither smoke nor drink, I thought to myself.

We walked farther into the hall and I found myself seated at a table in a huge room. I was surrounded by men and women, some who looked to be in their hundreds, others who looked a lot like me. Almost all of them, except for a few, had pale white skin. It was like they were almost the walking dead, but somehow not. I wasn't sure what was about to happen, but these people did not look happy.

"We gather here today to welcome home the prodigal son, my grandson, Cameron, Savior of Elyria, Savior of the world!" The old man looked at me in a way I had only ever seen my parents look at me, with wonderment, disbelief, and above all, respect. Another man arose and it was the craziest damned thing I had ever seen, as though you could see directly through the man, kind of like a force ghost from Star Wars.

Macron was seated to my right and was drinking something thick and red, from a spectacularly embroidered chalice that seemed to be fit for a king.

As a matter of fact, everyone sitting at the table seemed to be drinking the same concoction. "Are you thirsty, my son?" asked the palest of the men at the head of the table.

"Number one, I am not your son, and number two, sure, I'd like something to drink." The group at the table was surprised by

my reaction, however, not a word was said.

A chalice was placed in front of me. It reminded me of descriptions I'd heard about the Holy Grail that Christ drank from on the night before his crucifixion. I decided not to even look at what was inside and instead took a huge slug of the drink. "This is freaking blood!"

The reaction of the Elders was one I did not expect—extreme laughter. "What else did you think it was?" whispered Macron. "They are, after all, Vampires."

ELYRIA

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