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PITTACUS LORE

I AM

NUMBER

FOUR

THE LOST

FILES

THE FALLEN LEGACIES

I Am Number Four
The Lost Files

THE FALLEN
LEGACIES

THE LORIEN  LEGACIES

Pittacus Lore

HARPER

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CHAPTER 1

Sometimes I wonder what they would think if they knew we were here. Right under their noses.

I'm sitting with my best friend, Ivan, on the grassy, crowded National Mall, the stupid stone obelisk of the Washington Monument looming above us. I've put my homework aside for the moment and as I watch the tourists studying their maps, the lawyers and officials scurrying obliviously down Independence Avenue to their next meeting, I'm almost amused. They're so caught up with silly fears about UV rays and chemicals in their vegetables and meaningless "terrorist threat levels" and whatever else it is that these people worry about, that it never occurs to them that two kids working on their homework in the grass are the *real* threat. They have no idea that there's nothing they can do to protect themselves. The true enemy is already here.

"Hey!" I sometimes want to shout, waving my arms. "I'm your future evil dictator! Tremble before me, jerks!"

Of course I can't do that. Not yet. That time will come. In the meantime, they can all stare right through me as if I'm just another normal face in the crowd. The truth is I'm anything but normal, even if I do my best to look it. On Earth, assimilation protocol demands that I be known as Adam, son of Andrew and Susannah Sutton, citizen of Washington DC. But that's not who I am at all.

I am Adamus Sutekh, son of the great general Andrakkus Sutekh.

I am a Mogadorian. I am who they should be afraid of.

Unfortunately, for now, being an alien conqueror isn't as exciting as it should be. At the moment I'm still stuck doing my homework. My father has promised me that this won't last forever; when the Mogadorians ascend to power on this crappy little planet, I will control the capital city of the United States. Trust me, after spending the last four years in this place, I've got a pretty good idea of some changes I'll make. The first thing I'll do is rename all the streets. None of this Independence Constitution stuff—this weak, stupid patriotism. When I'm in charge, no one will even be able to remember what the Constitution *is*. When I'm in charge, my avenues will carry titles of appropriate menace.

"Blood of Warriors Boulevard," I murmur to myself, trying to decide if it has a good ring to it. Hard to say. "Broken Sword Way . . ."

"Huh?" Ivan asks, glancing up from his spot on the grass next to me. He's lying on his stomach, pencil held across his index finger like a makeshift blaster. While I dream of the day I'll be the ruler of all I survey, Ivan imagines himself as a sniper, picking off Loric enemies as they leave the Lincoln Memorial. "What did you say?"

"Nothing," I reply.

Ivanick Shu-Ra, son of the great warrior Bolog Shu-Ra, shrugs his shoulders. Ivan has never been much for fantasies that don't include some kind of bloody combat. His family claims a distant relation to our Beloved Leader, Setrákus Ra, and if Ivan's size is any indication, I'm inclined to believe them. Ivan's two years younger than me but is already bigger, broad shouldered and thick while I am lithe and agile. He already looks like a warrior and keeps his coarse black hair cropped close, eager for the day when he'll be able to shave it off entirely and take on the ceremonial Mogadorian tattoos.

I still remember the night of the First Great Expansion, when my people conquered Lorien. I was eight years old that night, too old to be crying, but I cried anyway when I was told I'd be staying in orbit above Lorien with the women and children. My tears only lasted a few seconds until the Generals

slapped some sense into me. Ivan watched my tantrum, dumbly sucking his thumb, maybe too young to realize what was happening. We watched the battle from our ship's observatory with my mother and infant sister. We clapped as flames spread across the planet below us. After the fight was won and the Loric people were destroyed, the General returned to our ship covered in blood. Despite the triumph, his face was serious. Before saying anything to my mother or me, he knelt before Ivan and explained that his father had died in service to our race. A glorious death, befitting a true Mogadorian hero. He rubbed his thumb across Ivan's forehead, leaving a trail of blood. A blessing.

As an afterthought, the General did the same to me.

After that, Ivan, whose mother had died during childbirth, came to live with us and was raised as my brother. My parents are considered lucky to have three trueborn children.

I'm not always sure that my father feels lucky to have me, though. Whenever my test scores or physical evaluations are less than satisfactory, the General jokes that he might have to transfer my inheritance to Ivan.

I'm mostly sure he's joking.

My gaze drifts towards a family of sightseers as they cross the lawn, each of them taking in the world through digital cameras. The father pauses to snap a series of photos of the Monument, and I briefly reconsider my plans to demolish it. Instead, perhaps I could make it taller; maybe install a penthouse for myself in the uppermost floor. Ivan could have the room below mine.

The daughter of the tourist family is probably about thirteen, like me, and she's cute in a shy way with a mouth full of braces. I catch her looking at me and find myself unconsciously shifting into a more presentable position, sitting up straighter, tilting my chin down to hide the severe angle of my too-large nose. When the girl smiles at me, I look away. Why should I care what some human thinks of me?

We must always remember why we are here.

"Does it ever amaze you how easily they accept us as their own?" I ask Ivan.

"Never underestimate human stupidity," he says, reaching over to tap the blank page of homework sitting next to me. "Are you going to finish this shit or what?"

The homework lying next to me isn't mine—it's Ivan's. He's waiting for me to do it for him. Written assignments have always given him problems, whereas the right answers come easily to me.

I glance down at the assignment. Ivan is supposed to write a short essay on a quote from the Great Book—the book of Mogadorian wisdom and ethics that all of our people must learn and live by—interpreting what Setrákus Ra's writing means to him personally.

"'We do not begrudge the beast for hunting,'" I read aloud, although like most of my people I know the passage by heart. "'It is in the beast's nature to hunt, just as it is in the Mogadorian's nature to expand. Those that would resist the expansion of the Mogadorian Empire, therefore, stand in opposition to nature itself.'"

I look over at Ivan. He's taken aim on the family I was watching before, making high-pitched laser beam noises through gritted teeth. The girl with the braces frowns at him and turns away.

"What does that mean to you?" I ask.

"I don't know," he grunts. "That our race is the most badass, and everyone else should deal with it. Right?"

I shrug my shoulders, sighing. "Close enough."

I pick up my pen and start to scribble something down, but am interrupted by the chime of my cell phone. I figure it's a text message from my mother, asking me to pick up something from the store on my way home. She's really taken to cooking over the last couple years, and, I'll admit it, the food he

on Earth blows away what we used to get on Mogadore. What they consider “processed” here would be treasured on my home planet, where food—among other things—is grown in subterranean vats.

The text isn’t from Mom, though. The message is from the General.

“Shit,” I say, dropping my pen as if the General had just caught me helping Ivan cheat.

My father never sends text messages. The act is beneath him. If the General wants something we’re supposed to anticipate what it is before he even has to ask. Something really important must have happened.

“What is it?” asks Ivan.

The message reads simply: HOME NOW.

“We have to go.”

CHAPTER 2

Ivan and I take the Metro out of DC, pick up our bikes at the train station and pedal into the suburbs as fast as we can. When we finally zip through the gated entrance of Ashwood Estates, I've fallen at least thirty yards behind him. I blame my sweat-dampened T-shirt on the unseasonable warmth and my queasy feeling of nausea on the ominous text message from my father.

Ashwood Estates is identical to many of the wealthy gated communities outside of Washington—or at least it *looks* identical. But instead of being owned by politicians and their families, the mansions and immaculately maintained lawns behind the front gates are owned by my people, the Mogadorians, the Earth's soon-to-be conquerors. And the homes themselves are only a tiny part of the *real* Ashwood Estates. Underneath the houses is a huge maze of tunnels that connect the many Mogadorian facilities that are the true purpose of this place.

I've only been granted access to small parts of our underground headquarters. I have no idea how far they extend or how deep below the Earth they reach. But I know that this sprawling underground network houses many laboratories, weapons stores, training facilities and probably more secrets that I can't yet begin to guess at. It's also down there that the vat-born live.

If it wasn't for our Beloved Leader, Setrákus Ra, the Mogadorian race would have never survived long enough to begin the Great Expansion. Over the last hundred years, for reasons that are still mostly unknown, it has become more and more difficult for Mogadorians to bear children. By the time Kelly was born, natural Mogadorian births were so rare that our ancient, proud species was in grave danger of dying out entirely. When children *were* able to be conceived, Mogadorian women, like Ivan's mother, often died during childbirth. Because of this, Setrákus Ra and a team of scientists have been working to artificially breed a new generation of Mogadorians. Rather than being birthed in the usual way, our vat-born Mogadorian brothers and sisters are grown in giant chemical vats, from which they eventually emerge, fully grown and ready for battle. These vat-born not only ensure the continued existence of Mogadorian life but, with their heightened strength, speed and stamina, are also the backbone of our army.

Besides their increased physical prowess, the vat-born are different from trueborn Mogadorians like me in other ways too. They've been engineered to be physically suited for war, but to be soldiers rather than officers. In his wisdom, Setrákus Ra has created them to be more single-minded than the trueborn Mogadorians—almost machine-like in their adherence to the tasks they're assigned—and unlike natural warriors, what they have in the way of rational thought often gives way to rage and bloodlust. But the most important difference between the vat-born and the trueborn, at least here on Earth, is the fact that they look different from the rest of us. While the trueborn are able to pass amid humans, the vat-born are not. Their skin is ghostly pale from subterranean living, and their teeth are small and sharp for close combat rather than eating. This is why, until we are able to reveal ourselves, they are only rarely allowed to show their faces in daylight.

So when I see the vat-born openly celebrating on the lawns of Ashwood Estates alongside the trueborn betters, I know something huge is happening.

Ivan knows it too, and gives me a befuddled look as he skids to a stop in our cul-de-sac. I pull up beside him, catching my breath. All of the families of Ashwood Estates are in front of their homes mingling with each other, raising toasts from freshly opened bottles of champagne. The vat-born, with their jarringly pale skin hidden beneath trench coats and hats, look both excited and disoriented to be

out in the open. The air of jubilation is unusual in Mogadorian culture. Normally my people are not given to open displays of joy, especially with the General in the vicinity.

“What the hell is going on?” Ivan asks, as usual looking to me for answers. This time I just shrug back at him.

My mother is sitting on our front steps, watching with a small smile as Kelly dances wildly across the front yard. My sister, spinning maniacally, doesn't even notice when Ivan and I arrive.

My mother looks relieved to see us approach. Though I don't know what the celebration is for, I do know why she wouldn't have joined the other revelers out on the lawns and street. Being the wife of the General makes it difficult for her to make friends, even with other trueborns. Their fear of my father extends to my mother.

“Boys,” she says as Ivan and I roll our bikes up the front walk. “He's been looking for you. You know he doesn't like to wait.”

“Why does he need to see us?” I ask.

Before my mother can answer, the General appears in the doorway behind her. My father is a large man, standing close to seven feet tall, muscular, with a regal posture that demands respect. His face is all sharp angles, a feature I've unfortunately inherited from him. Since coming to Earth, he's grown his black hair out to hide the tattoos on his scalp, and he keeps it neatly slicked back, like some of the politicians I've seen striding across the National Mall.

“Adamus,” he says in a tone that brooks no questioning. “Come with me. You too, Ivanick.”

“Yes, sir,” Ivan and I reply in unison, exchanging a nervous glance with each other before stepping into the house. When my father uses that tone of voice, it means something serious is happening. As we pass, my mother gives my hand a gentle squeeze.

“Have fun in Malaysia!” shouts Kelly at our backs, having finally noticed us. “Kill that Garde as hard as you can!”

CHAPTER 3

A few hours later, Ivan and I are headed for Malaysia on board a cold and uncomfortable plane that was purchased as surplus from some government that doesn't ask a lot of questions. The passenger area doesn't look all that different from the cargo hold below—just metal benches with worn seat belts, where Ivan and I sit, crammed among the warriors, some of them trueborn, most vat-born. Our ride isn't glamorous, but I'm too nervous to worry about comfort. This is the first time I've been taken on a mission, even if my purpose is only to observe.

My father flies copilot. Whenever the plane's course becomes momentarily shaky, I wonder if it's a change in the atmospheric conditions or if it's just that my father's made the pilot nervous.

For many of the Mogadorians on the plane, this is their first action since the First Great Expansion. Some of them spend the flight reminiscing about the last time they fought, bragging about their many kills. Others, the older ones, stay quiet, completely focused on the mission, staring into space.

"Do you think we'll get to shoot any guns?" Ivan asks me.

"I doubt it," I reply. We're along for this mission simply because I'm the General's son and Ivan is his ward. We're too young to be of any real use to the strike team, but not too young to watch the execution of this Loric insurgent from a distance. My father wants us to learn from it. As our instructors always tell us, the combat simulations we run in battle preparedness class—where we do get to shoot guns—are no substitution for the real thing.

"That sucks," grumbles Ivan.

"Whatever," I say, shifting and trying to stretch my legs out. "I just can't wait to get off the plane."

Everything next happens in a blur. We land. We find the Garde and her Cêpan. As instructed, Ivan and I hang back, watching with the General as the Mogadorian warriors go into battle. It's an ugly thing, not at all like the battles described in the Great Book. Two dozen Mogadorians against an old woman and a teenage girl.

At first our goal is simply to capture and interrogate these two. There have been whispers since we came to Earth of some kind of Loric magic that protects the Garde, forcing us to kill them in order to win. There was talk of a battle in the Alps, where one of our warriors had a Garde cornered, only to have his killing blow somehow turned against him. The General hasn't tolerated talk of this so-called Loric charm, but my people are still careful.

The old woman puts up more resistance than expected, yet she's quickly overwhelmed. The Garde is tougher still—she has powers, the ground quaking beneath the feet of our warriors. I wonder what it would be like to have that kind of power. But if the trade-off is to be part of a dying race forced to cower in crappy huts on the banks of a river, I'll pass.

The strategy to capture them changes once our warriors realize they can hurt the Garde. Either the rumors of the Loric charm are as false as my father believes, or this is Number One. The General might have wanted her taken alive; but when the warriors understand that they can kill her, bringing us closer to our goal, bloodlust overcomes orders.

It ends when one of the warriors puts his sword through Number One's back, impaling her.

"That was awesome!" shouts Ivan. Even my father allows himself a thin smile of approval.

I know I should share in their elation, but my hands won't stop shaking. I feel grateful that I on

had to watch from a distance, that I wasn't one of the Mogadorians now reduced to ash on a Malaysian riverbank. I'm also grateful not to be Loric, not to have to spend my life running in fear from impossible odds, only to be stabbed in the back.

It occurs to me that I'm feeling something close to empathy for the Garde. The Great Book wars against that, so I shut it away. I need to get beyond these childish feelings. The battle was less glorious than I expected, but still a great victory for Mogadorian progress. Only eight more loose ends remain and then Ra's vision will be fulfilled; nothing will stand in the way of our expansion to Earth. Nine dead Garde are a small price to pay for my sweet penthouse at the top of the Washington Monument.

They shove Number One into a body bag and dump her in the plane with the rest of the cargo. The Loric Chest she had with her is taken as well, although even the strongest of our warriors can't pry open the lock. One's pendant is ripped off her body by my father, though I'm not sure what use he has for Loric jewelry.

Her Cêpan's body is left behind. She is of no importance to us now.

On the plane ride back, the benches are a lot less crowded. I stay quiet, but Ivan pesters the warriors from the front line for gory details until the General hisses at him to shut up. If they had been a football team, I'm sure the surviving warriors would be dousing each other with Gatorade the way that human athletes do after a win. But we're not a football team. We're Mogadorians. And my father doesn't even know what Gatorade is. We travel the rest of the way in silence.

During the flight, the General comes to sit beside me.

"When we get back to Ashwood Estates," he says, "I have an important task for you."

I nod. "Yes. Of course, sir."

My father looks down at my hands, still shaking no matter how hard I try to steady them.

"Stop that," he growls before heading back to the cockpit.

CHAPTER 4

Although I saw her in the battle, the girl on the metal slab isn't what I was expecting.

Ever since the First Great Expansion, we've been taught that the Garde are the last true threat to our way of life. We've been taught that they are fierce warriors, lying in wait to one day take up arms against the engine of Mogadorian progress. Somehow I thought this threat to my people would look more fearsome.

In death, Number One doesn't look like much at all. She looks to be around my age or just a bit older, and her skin, once tan, is now bloodlessly pale. Her lips are blue. Streaks of dried blood run through her blond hair. Her body is covered with a white sheet, but under the bright lights of the laboratory I can see the grisly shadow of the wound that blossoms across her midsection.

We are beneath Ashwood Estates, in the underground laboratory of Dr. Lockam Anu. I've never been allowed down here before, so I try to take in as many of the strange, blinking machines as possible without openly gawking. The General would not be kind if he thought I was distracted.

I stand next to my father, both of us silent, watching as Anu gently eases One's head into a strange mechanical helmet. Anu is an old man, his spine hunched, his tattooed scalp disgustingly wrinkled. His hands circle around One, connecting loose wires to the open diodes that clutter the helmet.

"Should be ready," mutters Anu, stepping back.

"Finally," grunts my father.

Anu pauses over One's left ankle, tracing the Loric charm scarred there. What the Loric charm looks like is one of the first things we were taught when we came to Earth. Scrutinizing every bare ankle for its presence became second nature for me long ago.

"Four years of searching for a child with this symbol," muses Anu. "You certainly take your time, General."

I can practically feel my father clench his fists. It's like standing next to a gathering storm. Yet he makes no reply. Dr. Anu heads up the research and science team at Ashwood Estates and is entitled to certain benefits, like making a dig at the General without being immediately beaten.

Anu looks in my direction, his left eye involuntarily drooping and half lidded.

"Did your esteemed father explain why you are here, boy?"

I glance at the General. He nods, granting me permission to speak.

"No, sir."

"Ah. 'Sir.' What a polite young man you've raised, General." Anu gestures to a nearby metal chair, over which hangs an imposing piece of complicated technology. "Come, have a seat."

I glance again at my father, but his face gives nothing away.

"You will do our family proud today, Adamus," rumbles the General. I'm relieved that my hands have finally stopped shaking.

I sit down. Anu crouches before me, his old bones creaking in protest. He binds my wrists and ankles to the chair with rubber straps. I know that I should trust my father. I'm too important for him to let anything bad happen to me. Still, I can't help but squirm a bit as I'm buckled in.

"Comfortable?" asks Dr. Anu, smirking at me.

"What is this?" I reply, forgetting the General's rule against asking questions.

My father gazes at me with surprising patience. Maybe he's as uncomfortable seeing his only son being strapped down as I am being strapped.

“Dr. Anu believes this machine will let us access the Loric girl’s memories,” explains my father.

“~~I know that it will,~~” corrects Anu. ~~He rubs a warm liquid on my temples before connecting a pair~~ of rubber electrodes. The electrode wires run to a monitor positioned next to Number One, which suddenly hums to life.

“Would you stake your life on this untested creation, Dr. Anu?” growls my father.

“Untested?” I start, jerking against my bonds. I immediately regret the note of panic in my voice as it causes the General to grimace. Dr. Anu flashes me a placating smile.

“We never had one of the Garde to experiment on before, so yes, untested.” He shrugs merrily, excited to test this contraption. “But the theory behind it is very strong. Of the trueborns here in Washington, you are closest in age to the girl, which should make the memory download go more smoothly. Your mind will interpret the Garde’s memories as visions rather than through her eyes. I’m sure your father wouldn’t suddenly want his only son in the body of a little girl, hmm?”

My father bristles. Dr. Anu glances over his shoulder. “Just kidding, General. You have a good strong son here. Very brave.”

At the moment, I don’t feel very brave. I’d watched Number One get struck down—she was barely capable of defending herself in life; she is certainly harmless in death—yet being connected to her, renews the feeling of unease I felt on the plane ride back from Malaysia. I almost start to volunteer Ivan to be Anu’s guinea pig but clamp my mouth shut just in time.

Ivan enjoyed watching One die; it’s all he’s been able to talk about. For me, even thinking about it makes my hands start to shake again. I steady myself—*stop being such a coward, Adamus*—this is a great honor, something I should be proud of.

I try not to look at the dead girl as Anu reaches above the chair and lowers a metal cylinder down from the ceiling, covered with circuitry that wouldn’t look out of place on the inside of a rocket. The vast majority of the wires connected to Number One connect to the cylinder. Anu pauses before the cylinder is in place over my head and peers down at me.

“You’ll feel a little shock,” he muses. “Maybe go to sleep for a few minutes. When you wake up, you’ll be able to tell us what this one knew about the other Garde.”

I realize Anu’s free hand is on my shoulder. His grip is tight.

A few days ago my biggest worry was dumbing down essay answers enough to pass my work off as Ivan’s. Since then I’ve seen firsthand the Mogadorian warrior I’m expected to grow into, and I’m not sure I’m up for it. Now I’m being ordered to temporarily share a brain with my mortal enemy. I know it’s my father’s will, and that if the machine works it will help our cause and bring honor to my family. Still. I don’t want to admit it, but I’m scared.

Anu lowers the cylinder over my head until it covers my face. He and my father disappear from my view.

I hear Anu shuffle across the laboratory. His fingers click across a series of buttons, and the cylinder begins to vibrate.

“Here we go,” announces Anu.

The inside of the cylinder explodes with light—searing white light that burns my eyes, all the way through to the back of my head. I shut my eyes, but somehow the light still penetrates. I feel as if I’m coming apart, the light tearing through me, breaking me into tiny particles. This is what death must feel like.

I think I scream.

And then, everything is darkness.

CHAPTER 5

It's like I'm falling.

Bursts of color flash across my vision. There are shapes—indistinct faces, blurry scenery—but I can't make any of it out. It's like being stuck inside my TV while Kelly plays with the remote. Nothing makes any sense, and I start to get this panicky feeling, like sensory overload. I try to squeeze my eyes shut, but that's useless; this is all happening inside my mind.

Just when I feel like my brain is about to be fried to a crisp by the bombardment of color, everything snaps into focus.

Suddenly, I'm standing in a sunlit banquet hall. Light pours into the room via a skylight through which I can see trees unlike any I've ever seen before, red and orange flowered vines hanging on tangled branches.

Although I've never been there—have only looked down on it from orbit—somehow I know this is Lorien. And then I realize that I know where I am because Number One knows.

This is one of her memories.

In the center of the room is a large table covered with strange yet delicious-looking foods. Seated all around the table are Loric, all of them wearing fancy dresses and suits. I flinch when I see them—I'm outnumbered and my first instinct is to run, yet I'm pinned to this spot. I couldn't move if I tried. I'm stuck in this memory.

The Loric are all smiling, singing. They don't seem at all alarmed that a Mogadorian has just appeared at their party. That's when I realize they can't see me. Of course not, I'm just a tourist in Number One's mind.

And there she is, seated at the head of the table. She's so young, maybe five or six, her blond hair pulled into two braids that dangle down her back. When the adults finish singing, she claps her hands in excitement, and I realize this is her birthday celebration. We don't celebrate such foolish occasions on Mogadore, although some great warriors are known to mark the anniversary of their first kill with a feast.

What a useless memory. The General won't be impressed if all I come back with is intel on Loric birthday parties.

Just like that the world goes blurry again and I'm falling. Time passes in a rush and I'm sweating along, feeling sickeningly out of control.

Another memory takes shape.

Number One wanders through an open field, her hands extended so that the tall grasses tickle her outstretched palms. She's maybe a year older than at the birthday party, still just a child, happily wandering around her undestroyed planet.

Boring.

One bends down and picks some flowers, twining the stalks together, then wrapping the flower chain around her wrist like a bracelet. How much of this am I going to have to sift through?

Maybe if I focus I can get some control of these memories. I need to see the other Garde, not this girly, happy Loric crap. I try to think about what I want to see—the faces of the Garde, their Cêpans—and then the memory in the field flashes away and I am somewhere else.

It's nighttime, although the darkness is lit by dozens of fires raging nearby. The two Loric moons hang on opposite sides of the horizon. The ground shakes beneath my feet, an explosion nearby.

Number One and eight other children rush across a secluded airstrip, headed for a ship. The Cêpans hurry them along, shouting orders. Some of the children are crying as their feet slap against the pavement. Number One is not; she stares over her shoulder as a Loric in a sleek bodysuit fires a cone of freezing cobalt energy into the face of a snarling piken. Number One's eyes widen in admiration and fear.

This is it. The First Great Expansion. Exactly the memory I need to see.

"Run!" the Loric in the bodysuit shouts at the fleeing group of young Garde. His Legacies fully developed and powerful. Still, he'll die on this night, just like all the others.

I sweep my eyes over the children, trying to take in as many details as I can. There's a ferocious-looking boy with long black hair and another blond girl, younger than Number One, being carried by her Cêpan. Number One is older than most of the other kids, a detail that I know will help my father construct profiles of the remaining Garde. I count how many of them are boys and how many are girls and try to memorize their most distinguishing features.

"Who the fuck are you?"

The voice is clearer than the thunderous sounds of war from the memory, as if it's being piped right into my brain.

I turn my head and realize Number One is standing right next to me. Not the child Number One from the memory—no, this is Number One as I last saw her: blond hair flowing down her back, shoulders squared defiantly. A ghost. She's looking right at me, expecting an answer.

She can't be here; that doesn't make sense. I wave my hand in front of her face, figuring that there must be some kind of glitch in Anu's machine. There's no way she's really seeing me.

Number One slaps my hand away. I'm surprised that she can touch me, but then I remember that we're *both* ghosts here.

"Well?" she asks. "Who are you? You don't belong here."

"You're dead," are the only words I can muster.

One looks down at herself. For a moment, the massive wound on her abdomen flickers into being. Just as quickly, it's gone.

"Not in here." She shrugs. "These are my memories. So in here I guess you're stuck with me."

I shake my head. "It's impossible. You can't be talking to me."

One squints at me, thinking. "Your name is Adam, right?"

"How do you know that?"

She smirks. "We're sharing a brain, Mog-boy. Guess that means I know a thing or two about you, too."

Around us, the fleeing Garde have all boarded their ship, the engines now rumbling to life. I should be scanning the ship for any helpful details, but I'm too distracted by the dead girl sneering at me.

"Your scary-ass pops is going to be so disappointed when you wake up with nothing juicy to tell him." She grabs me by the elbow, and the feeling is so real that I have to remind myself that this is basically just a dream.

A dream that Number One is suddenly in control of.

"You want my memories?" she asks. "Come on. I'll give you a guided tour."

As the scene changes again, I start to understand what's happened.

I'm trapped in here with my sworn enemy. And she seems to be in charge.

CHAPTER 6

This time the memory shift is different. Before, I was falling through time, falling through memories. Now I feel still, and suddenly I'm standing outside a secluded ranch in Coahuila, Mexico. In the memory, One and her Cêpan are carrying boxes into the house. It's moving day. This is the first place One and her Cêpan—Hilde, her Cêpan's name was Hilde—settled after the Garde landed on Earth and parted ways.

Wait—how do I know all this?

It's strange. In addition to finding myself existing here, observing this particular moment in One's life, I also have a general sense of her memories of the time. I know the things that she knows and remember what she remembers. The memories are so vivid, it's like they're my own.

It's like I'm her.

Ghost-One appears next to me, watching with me as the younger version of herself and Hilde unpack dishes in the kitchen. It's creepy to have her here, gives me a feeling like vertigo. I try to ignore her, but she just keeps talking to me.

"We stayed here for a while," she says, sounding almost wistful. "Then Hilde thought she saw some of your peeps snooping around the city, so we had to leave."

The Garde move a lot, city to city, country to country, their movements unpredictable. My father will want to know this. It's completely the opposite of the way we Mogadorians have done it—consolidating our power in bases across the globe. That's why they're so difficult to track.

"She was sort of a drag sometimes," says One, watching her Cêpan. "Probably a lot like your dickbag dad. Except, you know, not eeee-vil." She rubs her fingers together and cackles an eeee-vil cackle in punctuation.

"Shut up," I spit, sounding angrier than I even realized I was. "You don't know him."

I find myself studying Hilde in spite of myself. She's in her late fifties, and her face is wrinkled both with the natural lines of age and the premature weathering of stress. Her gray hair tightly bound in a stern braid. Her eyes have a hardness to them; her voice is steely and measured, even when just telling One—the "real" One—which cupboard the plates belong in. Truth be told, she does remind me of the General.

"I loved her like a mom, though," says ghost-One, sadness breaking her voice. My mind drifts to the dead old woman we left to rot in Malaysia, and I feel something like guilt but quickly push it away. She's messing with your head, Adamus.

"I wish you'd stop talking to me," I tell her.

"Yeah? Well I wish your people hadn't killed me."

After Mexico, One and Hilde move to Austin, Texas. I try to push my way out of these memories, to get back to that night on the Loric airstrip where I can actually find out something useful, but One won't let me. Somehow she's blocking me.

I may be an uninvited guest in her mind, but it's still hers. She can't kick me out entirely, but she does have some control over which rooms I'm allowed to visit.

Most of the time when I try to force my way through her memory, One makes me sit through one of her and Hilde's training sessions.

"I used to hate these," One says, grinning. "Hope you feel the same."

Hilde is a master martial artist, though it's a fighting style that would never make it in Mogadorian training, where brute force is prized above all else. Hilde's is a defensive martial art, one that uses an attacker's own momentum, focusing strikes on nerve centers that will temporarily incapacitate the enemy.

Stuck in these memories, when boredom sets in, I find myself aping Hilde's movements, practicing alongside young One. I know that none of this is real, that it's all in my mind. Or One's mind. I'm not so sure there's a difference.

My slight frame has never served me well in Mogadorian combat training, much to the disappointment of my father and the amusement of Ivan. But in One's memories, I never get tired. Even if this training is basically imaginary, it feels good to finally move in a way that suits me.

Besides, I'm supposed to be gathering intelligence. How the Garde fight is essential information. In the earlier training memories, One is an eager pupil. She practices with Hilde from dawn until sunset, listening rapt as Hilde tells stories of the Loric heroes she's helped train. Hilde is full of talk of honorable competition, of noble battles fought on Lorien. They're meant to inspire, to demonstrate to One the Loric spirit of perseverance. Compared to the stories in the Great Book, there is a surprising lack of bloody violence and decimation in them.

"One day," says Hilde, "you will take your place among them as a great hero to our people. You will be known as the One who protected the Eight."

I can feel the pride Number One takes in Hilde's words, but also the doubt. There's a part of her that wonders how she can possibly stand alone in opposition to the Mogadorians that conquered her entire planet in a single night.

"I always wondered why I couldn't have gotten lucky and been number *nine*," muses One as she practices forms next to her younger self. "But *nooo*. I have to go and be the *first*. Otherwise known as the most doomed of nine doomed assholes. The Elders really screwed me over."

In Austin, Hilde lets One start attending school, all the better to fit in. I'm dragged along on these memories of her classes. School seems so pointless. The General would never even consider letting me freely socialize with the humans.

And yet, as the memories go by, I find myself being drawn into One's life. She makes some friends, takes up skateboarding. It all starts to feel like something approaching a normal life. At the same time, her training slips. She starts blowing off sessions, even after her telekinesis develops, which is when she should've been working extra hard. For all her rigidity, Hilde couldn't really do anything to One if she slipped out a window to go hang out with her friends. How do you ground the last hope for a dying race?

I don't really care about One's freaking social life. This girl is the enemy of my people. Her death is inevitable, has already happened. And yet ... drifting through her memories, I can't help but put myself in her situation. Even though she travels the Earth under the constant threat of execution, I realize that One has gotten to see more of this planet than I have. The General has never allowed us to travel out of Washington. Hilde might be a tough Cêpan, but she still allows One to go to school, to make friends, to live a life not entirely dedicated to war.

I wonder what that's like. I wonder what my life would be like without the need to serve the Mogadorian expansion, without the drills and training, the supervised readings from Ra's Great Book.

"This is, like, one of my all-time favorites," says ghost-One, introducing the memory of her punching

a cheerleader in the face. The cheerleader started it; she'd been picking on One since she started school in Austin. It's weird, but I feel some of One's sense of satisfaction.

Of course, the punch gets her kicked out of school, which is all the reason Hilde needs to relocate them again. They leave Austin in a beat-up station wagon, heading for California. One sulks in the passenger seat the whole ride, reclined all the way back, ignoring Hilde in favor of the three seashells she keeps levitated above her with her telekinesis.

We Mogadorians have been warned of the Garde's deadly telekinesis. Watching One juggle the seashells, scrunching up her nose in concentration, it doesn't seem all that deadly. More like mesmerizing. And it's not just the telekinesis either. The way her blond hair is fanned beneath her ...

I turn away. Was I just checking out the dead Garde whose memories I've stolen? I tell myself it was for research purposes, although a description of how the sun brings out the blonder streaks in One's nice hair is likely not the intel my father expects of me.

When they arrive in California, Hilde tries to inspire One with some kind of Loric magic so that she'll start taking her training more seriously.

"You'll want to see this," ghost-One tells me, appearing at my side to watch.

Using what appear at first to be plain glass orbs, Hilde creates a floating map of the Loric galaxy. The swirling cosmos, the bright orange sun, and the dead, gray planet Lorien.

"Do you see what the Mogadorians have done?" Hilde asks young Number One.

One nods, staring at the ruined planet. Hilde steps close to the floating Lorien orb and gently blows across its surface. When she does, the smog and fire clear from the planet's surface. Lorien looks like it must have before the First Great Expansion: rich and lush, thriving. The change fades quickly, the planet going gray again.

"This is why we fight," says Hilde quietly, her eyes watery. "Not just to avenge our planet and our people and to one day bring life back to Lorien, but to prevent this fate from befalling Earth. Do you understand why you are so important?"

I don't pay attention to One's muted reply. I'm too distracted by the vision of Lorien. Its surface is a hideously charred black, the planet's ruined atmosphere leaking into the space around it. Seeing the planet like this, my people's greatest victory, it doesn't look like anything to be proud of.

"Is that what you want for the entire universe?" ghost-One asks me, gesturing to her destroyed home.

"I've never seen this before," I reply, trying to keep my voice neutral. The sight of Lorien disturbs me. To think such thoughts is treason, but if our coming to Earth means even half the destruction brought down on Lorien, would it still be a place worth living in?

"Is that what Mogadorian progress looks like?" ghost-One presses.

"Please," I say, shaking my head. "Stop talking to me."

I just want her to go away. I don't want her to see my doubt.

CHAPTER 7

I'm standing on the beach. I can't feel anything here in One's memories, but if I concentrate hard, I can almost imagine what it must be like to have the Pacific Ocean lapping at my ankles and the wet sand squishing between my toes. I've never been in the ocean before. When I'm finally awake again, I'd like to try the real thing.

I take a second to imagine a trip to the ocean with the General. My father out of uniform, in a pair of flower-print swim trunks, pulling a cooler filled with cookout supplies out of the trunk of our family's convertible. My mom and Kelly build a sand castle while Ivan and I see which one of us can swim out the farthest. He wins because even in my fantasy I'm a realist. I swim back to shore, and the General is waiting with a hamburger.

"Seriously?" asks ghost-One, standing on the beach beside me, and I realize I have a ridiculous goofy grin on my face. I quickly let it fade. "You killed my entire race so you could enjoy a beach barbecue?"

"Stay out of my thoughts," I say weakly, aware of the hypocrisy.

"Psh," snorts One, rolling her eyes at me. "I wish that I could, dude."

Arguing with One's ghost certainly isn't what my father would describe as productive reconnaissance, so I turn away, trying to ignore her.

In this memory, the real Number One has just finished up a day of surfing. Turns out she's a natural, the only one of her crew of surfer buddies not to wipe out today. Between this and the skateboarding, she's started to wonder if maybe enhanced balance isn't going to be one of her Legacies. I'd never tell One this, but I've enjoyed the surfer memory. In fact, I'd never tell anyone that.

"Please stop checking out my past self," ghost-One says at my side.

"I'm not," I protest.

The memory keeps moving. One bounds out of the water, her surfboard passing right through me as she leaps into the waiting arms of a tanned and muscular young human.

Wade.

One *had* rededicated herself to training after Hilde's display of the solar system. At least, until she met Wade.

Wade is sixteen years old. He has shoulder-length brown hair, strands of which he keeps in grungy little braids. He owns a beat-up Volkswagen van that he sleeps in even though his wallet contains a couple credit cards paid for by his parents—a fact One discovered while she was snooping through Wade's things to make sure he wasn't a secret Mogadorian.

As if.

"I felt like my parents had my whole life planned out," explained Wade on the night he and One first met, his arm slung around her shoulders, the two of them huddled in front of a bonfire on the beach. "Go to college, get my law degree, join Dad at his practice. Such a bourgeois life plan. It just wasn't for me, you know?"

"I get it," replied One, way more interested in Wade's muscular arm than in whatever he was saying. I guess she liked him, or at least liked the rush of being with him, an added bonus being that she'd pissed off Hilde. I didn't get the attraction. "So I left that whole scene behind, hopped in my van and decided to surf my way down the coast. No plan at all. I'm just going to, like, *be* for a while." Wade

paused. "Hey, has anyone ever told you how soulful your eyes are?"

One swoons.

Oh, come on, I think, and ghost-One appears at my side.

"Cut me some slack," she says. "He's hot, and I was stupid. I mean, I wasn't *that* stupid. I knew I was full of it, obviously. But, look at him. He's hot."

"I wouldn't know," I say self-consciously.

That memory was a couple months before the one I slip into next. We're still at the beach, and One wriggles out of her wet suit and settles on the sand next to Wade. She's been regularly skipping training to come surfing with Wade. One and Hilde are barely speaking, except for when Hilde tries to chastise her.

I haven't been enjoying these Wade memories. They're of no relevance to the Mogadorian cause. Besides ... I feel like One could be doing so much better.

"I was having *fun*," says One, popping up to defend herself again. "I liked pretending I was normal."

I don't say anything.

"Didn't you ever want to get away from it all?" asks One. She knows that I do. She's been rummaging through my thoughts too. "You and that douche you hang out with spend a lot of time in DC, but you never talk to any other kids."

"It's forbidden."

"Why?"

"To interact directly could compromise operational integrity," I reply, quoting from the Green Book.

"You sound like a robot," she says. "They don't want you to know the humans because then it'd be harder for you to kill them. Just like with me."

"What do you mean, *just like with you*?"

"I mean that you kind of like me," she says, looking at me in a way that makes me feel uncomfortable. "They didn't know what they were doing sending you in here. If you knew all that about me before, would you still want to kill me?"

My head hurts thinking about it, and I wave One away. I am not ready to go back to the memory of the riverbank in Malaysia. Then I remind myself that Malaysia is in the future, not the past.

"Don't feel too bad," she says. "I don't know if I'd want to kill you either."

CHAPTER 8

This is how my people find her. The General didn't share these details with me, but I know them now.

Wade believes in taking a stand against capitalism. He does this by shoplifting at every opportunity he gets. He also talks, sometimes endlessly, about the amazing record collection he was forced to leave behind when he left his parents' mansion.

This puts an idea in One's head. She's going to shoplift some records from a store by the beach from him. Part of her wants to impress Wade, another part of her just wants to experience the thrill that he talked about.

But One gets caught coasting out of the store with a backpack full of merchandise. The owner of the store is a take-no-prisoners type. He calls the cops.

"How was Wade even going to listen to those?" I ask. "Does his van have a record player?"

One laughs as we watch her former self being slapped into handcuffs. "I didn't even think of that."

Number One is taken to the police station. Her "grandmother" is contacted. The police are going to let her off with a warning, but a particularly overzealous detective notices the Loric charm on One's ankle. He mistakes the charm for a brand and starts asking One about gang affiliation.

"Yeah," sneers One, "I'm in a gang called the Space Invaders. We do surf-by shootings. No lifeguard can stop us."

The detective doesn't seem to think it's a very funny joke.

He takes a picture of One. He takes a picture of the Loric charm. He uploads both images to the statewide database. As soon as the flash on the camera goes off, I know that this is how it happened.

My people have teams working around the clock patrolling the internet, even the international government sites, for tips just like this. We have artificial intelligences set up that do nothing but scan image feeds for anything resembling the Loric charm.

After four years of searching, One is on our radar.

Hilde doesn't lecture One when she picks her up from the police station. She doesn't need words to express her disappointment. One knows what it means to have had her picture taken by the police.

For the first time, One's rebellious streak gives way to fear. She packs a bag with shaking hands before Hilde even tells her to. I'm reminded of the way my hands shook after I saw her killed. It wasn't until then that the war we're fighting began to feel real. One must be feeling the same way now.

This time they travel light. Hilde thinks they need to get out of America. They rush to the airport and board the first international flight they can. Their destination is Malaysia.

One notices the two pale men in trench coats at the airport, but she doesn't realize what they are doing. I recognize my own.

For all their precautions, all their training, all their knowledge of their enemies, what's so clear to me is completely unrecognized by Hilde and One. A Mogadorian scout team is on to them. I know the protocol in a situation like this. When my people have a lead on a Loric, vat-born scouts are dispatched to every conceivable place of departure. We cover them all: airports, train and bus stations, rental car huts. Their objective isn't to engage. Their job is just to keep an eye on Number One.

"You need to lose them," I find myself muttering. "You need to lose the scouts before you flee."

"Oh, thanks for telling me, dude," the One standing next to me says. She has a sad, rueful look on her face.

For some reason I'm positioning myself between the scouts and One. It makes no sense. I'm a ghost here; they see right through me. And besides, this has already happened. Nothing I can do can change it.

My stomach still drops when they board the flight to Malaysia. I can't see the scouts anymore; they've disappeared into the crowd. I know what they're doing, though. They're radioing back to my father or some other superior, arranging to have a scout team waiting across the ocean when One's flight touches down. My team.

I dread seeing what comes next.

CHAPTER 9

Hilde and One hide out in an abandoned stilt house on the Rajang River, their closest neighbors the endlessly screeching monkeys that populate the jungle. Hilde is planning a trip into Kuala Lumpur where she'll take some money out of their bank account, enough to finance their next move. It's peaceful, without any of the distractions of America. When the river is clear, One practices her telekinesis on its bank.

By the time our team arrives—after an endless flight through who knows how many time zones—I've completely lost track of what day it is. All I know is that the sun is beginning to rise.

Hilde hears the first wave coming. Our soldiers don't make any effort to hide their approach; they have the house surrounded. Hilde shakes Number One awake just as the warriors kick in the door.

The Cêpan moves fast for an old woman. It's easy to see her as the great martial artist, trainer of the young Garde, that she was on Lorien. She ducks effortlessly under a dagger strike, burying her fist in the throat of an off-balance warrior. Before the first Mogadorian even hits the ground, Hilde has wrapped her arms around the head of a second, snapping his neck. I catch myself cheering her on, then I stop myself.

The next Mogadorian through the door dives for Hilde and places her in a headlock; but Hilde, in a movement so subtle I barely even see it, manages to turn his hold against him, flipping him onto his back even though he's twice her size.

That's when he whips his blaster from his holster, and—orders not to harm her suddenly forgotten in his humiliation—fires it right at her chest.

When Hilde hits the ground, One screams. The entire house wobbles, its stilts suddenly vibrating. Screaming out in grief and agony, One stomps the floor. A seismic wave erupts from her foot, tearing up the floorboards and sending the Mogadorians flying through the tightly woven sticks of the stilt house's walls.

Her first Legacy has developed. Too late.

The little that's left of the house is listing on its stilts. With the Mogadorians regrouping outside, One cradles Hilde in her arms. The wound is fatal. Hilde spits a bubble of blood when she tries to speak.

"It's not too late for you," Hilde manages to say. "You have to run."

One is crying. She feels responsible; she feels helpless.

"I failed you," sobs One.

"Not yet you haven't," replies Hilde. "Go. Now."

I'm standing right next her, willing her to move, even though I know what's waiting for her on the riverbank. The ghost-One, the dead girl who's been my companion through all of these memories, has abandoned me now. She's been gone since the airport.

One hesitates for an instant at Hilde's order, and then, knowing it's her only choice, flings herself through one of the windows just as the stilts buckle and the house finally collapses into the river. The Mogadorians meet her on the riverbank.

The house's falling ceiling passes harmlessly through me. I watch as One produces another seismic burst, experimenting with her newfound power, and the wet ground of the riverbank opens up to swallow a pair of advancing Mogadorians.

I remember this. I peer down the riverbank, wondering if she could have seen me where I stood.

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