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**BOY**  
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**FROM THE**  
**SKY**

**BENJAMIN DEAN**

**SIMON & SCHUSTER**

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*For Mum, of course, and for Ellen, my best friend.  
I'm so happy you fell into my world. You make it so  
much brighter. I love you endlessly, always.*



## PROLOGUE

*And so our story begins. Not here on Earth, although we'll get there soon, but in a place just out of reach. Here, concealed beyond the sky and hiding within the very stars of the galaxy itself, is a boy.*

*Away from Earth's harm, the boy is safe. But every so often a shooting star escapes from the gilded cage it's kept in, slipping away from the Herders who try to tame it and dashing through the night, ripping open the sky. Through this tear, the world above and below become connected for a brief time, until the wound heals into a scar, closing the void once more.*

*It happens every single day all around the globe. Down on Earth, humans hear a thunderous sound as the shooting*

*star escapes. It's a warning. Hunters far and wide assemble, ready to protect Earth from the monsters that will soon fall into our world. And, as the star completes its journey, the Hunters raise their weapons.*

*Now a shooting star makes a break for freedom, awaking chaos from its slumber. It moves at a frightening speed, whooshing through the sky as if it's being chased, and soon there's no hope of catching it. The sparks from the star's tail seep into the folds of the night, cutting through the sky like a knife and tearing it apart. It lasts for just a moment, but a moment is enough.*

*The sky begins to split.*

*The Hunters take aim.*

*And*

*the*

*boy*

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **Welcome to the Authority**

I don't want to start this story off on a negative note, but if I'm being completely honest, which I've promised myself I will be, I knew the day I met Dad's boss for the first time was going to be a disaster.

There were a few possible reasons why I thought this before we'd even left the house. For one, I can be real clumsy, especially when I'm nervous, and I could already see myself tripping over my own feet and breaking something irreplaceable. I also talk a whole lot when I'm feeling under pressure, and so what if I said the wrong thing? I could end up looking silly, or,

worse, embarrassing Dad. I didn't want to disappoint him. I wanted the exact opposite. But the final reason seemed the most likely of all – I was worried about the Assessment.

The Assessment was kind of an unofficial test, although not like one you might do in school. There were no papers or pens or even questions. I think that's what made me so worried in the first place. There was *nothing* you could do to prepare for it. It didn't matter how many books you'd read or how much you knew about the stars. Once the child of an Authority employee turned twelve, like me, you were brought in front of the Superior, Dad's big boss, to be assessed. The whole thing was supposed to highlight your best qualities, something I was pretty sure I had few of. I don't think sneaking snacks from the fridge counts. Still, one day I wanted to be just like my favourite Hunters: Aurora Blaine, Larry Lewis and, most of all, my dad.

We'd come back home especially for the Assessment. We'd just spent a month on the south coast while Dad trained up some new apprentices. Dad's status as the

First Hunter, a title he'd had for even longer than I'd been alive, meant we moved around a lot, never really staying in one place long enough to settle properly. Shooting stars wreaked havoc all around the world and each time they did Dad and his squad were on hand to help smaller local Authorities protect humans from *them* – the Demons that fell from the sky. They were heroes to some, more like celebrities to others. Hunts had become something of a sport over the last few years. It was all about how many Demons you captured, how skilled you were at doing it, how charismatic you were when being interviewed afterwards. I think even Dad saw Hunting as more of a sport than a public safety role. He loved the spotlight and adoration it gave him, and he considered himself the best there was. The numbers in the Hunting League, which ranked every Hunter based on their number of captures, more than proved that. Dad had the most by nearly double. It was in my blood to be just like him when I grew up and I was determined not to let him down. I was praying that the Assessment would prove that.

That morning the sky was bright and blue, haloing the Authority headquarters that loomed in the distance. It was a large and menacing building, all sharp, straight edges that looked like they'd been carved out of dark stone. Only one circular shape jutted out from the middle of the roof, topped with a glass dome – a sculpture of the Hunter and the Star, the emblem of the Authority. The same image in platinum was pinned to Dad's lapel, shimmering in the morning light. He was the only person who had the platinum medal, although every Hunter wanted it.

Dad was trying to act like he wasn't nervous as we got closer to the Authority, but I could see his knuckles turning white as he gripped the steering wheel hard, focusing on the road ahead. I tried not to think about what waited for us when we arrived. It would be my first time meeting the Superior, the person in charge of the Authority. I had to make a good impression for Dad's sake. That meant not letting my mouth get me in trouble.

'Please try to keep your *witty* thoughts to yourself

today, Zed,' Dad said as if he'd read my mind, his voice a quiet rumble. 'You're to be on your best behaviour in front of the Superior. That means *no* smart comments. You understand?'

'Yes, Dad,' I murmured, shrinking back into my seat as the car pulled up in front of the enormous double doors of the Authority. The Hunter and the Star emblem was chiselled into the middle of the doors, so that when they opened the image broke in half, the Hunter going one way and the star the other.

Dad turned his head to face me as two suited men appeared by the front doors. He ignored them and stuck his hand out into the space between us, ready to make a pact. 'How about we grab an ice cream when we're done? No trouble and you get an ice cream. Deal?' His eyes – green like tiny pebbles, the complete opposite of my dark brown ones – met mine, urging me to agree.

I shrugged as if I met with the Superior for lunch every day. 'I'll stay out of trouble, Dad. Promise.' I kept the fingers of my left hand crossed as we shook on it. You know, just in case. I didn't *want* to break my promise,

but it wasn't like I could predict the future and I had a funny feeling about today.

Two men in suits appeared in the entranceway as we stepped out of the car, both swiftly bowing their heads in Dad's direction.

'Good morning, sir,' they said in unison.

Dad nodded an acknowledgement before throwing his car keys in their general direction. One of the men plucked them from the air and slipped past us like a shadow.

As soon as we entered the building, I felt a rushing sensation inside me, as if my curiosity had mixed with my fear and started to bubble like a potion. The Grand Lobby was impressive in every way. It was a large square with enormous archways leading through into separate wings of the Authority. The floor was tiled in dove-white marble, the opposite of the ceiling, which didn't look like it was there at all. Instead, above us was a glass dome that showed nothing but an endless sea of black.

'It mirrors the night sky and the galaxy beyond,' Dad said, catching my gaze and looking up himself. 'Mappers

use it to keep an eye on the stars so they can make sure one hasn't escaped.' He gave it another glance, as if a Demon was about to fall through the roof and land at our feet. Now Dad had mentioned it, I could see the faint wisp of clouds and the stars twinkling in the pitch-black sky. When stars weren't a sign of danger, they were pretty nice to look at.

Dad walked through the Authority with the confidence of a man with power, his nerves from before safely tucked away where nobody else could see them. He once told me that the key to success was not to let other people know how you really feel, so I tried to mimic him, pushing my worries away, jutting out my chin and puffing my chest. It felt . . . well, stupid really, but I tried anyway.

People melted out of our way and into the walls as they caught sight of Dad, some nodding their heads and others all but bowing before him, admiring the gleaming platinum medal on his lapel. He didn't pay anyone attention, nor did he take a second glance at any of the marvels we passed on our way to the Superior's office. As we hurried through the archway straight ahead, I

glimpsed a giant orb slowly rotating in mid-air in the centre of a cavernous room to my right. It was a model of Earth as it appeared from space. A huddle of people in long jackets holding clipboards were observing it quietly, making notes every now and then.

‘Morning, Alistair,’ a cheery voice called.

Dad turned, smiled and shook hands with a red-headed woman, with pale freckles scattered over her nose and cheeks. The medal pinned to her jacket wasn’t gold, silver or even bronze – instead, it was a simple black circle with trails of gold, the symbol of a Mapper.

‘Morning, Lizzie,’ Dad said. ‘How are those stars looking?’

Lizzie fell into step with us as we mounted a set of wide marble stairs. ‘Some interesting movement actually,’ she said carefully. Dad threw her a quick sideways glance. Lizzie opened her mouth to say more but caught me ogling like I didn’t know how to mind my own business and changed her mind, shrugging instead. ‘Just . . . you know, something to beware of.’ She gave Dad a meaningful look. He nodded, his jaw set.

When we reached the top of the stairs, we were met with a giant door that was open a crack, offering us a peek at a room drenched in darkness. The only light came from the black screen on the ceiling, where stars burned as brightly as they had done in the lobby. Some were tagged with names and co-ordinates, while others appeared dimmer, as if they were slowly dying. A dozen or so comfy-looking armchairs were positioned under them, illuminated by the glow of the stars. About half of them were occupied by Mappers wearing goggles, reclining backwards with their arms outstretched, their hands making funny flicking signs.

‘This is me,’ Lizzie said. She gave Dad another *look* and disappeared inside. I wanted to ask him about it, but I could tell by his face that now wasn’t the time. We kept charging on until eventually we reached another narrower set of stairs that led to a solid door marked SUPERIOR. I fought the tremor that was threatening to erupt inside me, forcing one foot in front of the other until I was standing behind him as he knocked sharply three times. A small square of the door slid

away, revealing the eye of a scanner. Dad moved aside and nudged me towards it. I gulped as it flashed a holographic light over my face.

‘Name?’ an almost bored robotic voice asked.

‘Z-Zed,’ I murmured, throat dry.

‘Full name,’ the scanner said impatiently.

‘Oh. Zediah Smyth.’

The scanner blinked, its light mutating into a line that examined my face from top to bottom, then left to right and back again for good measure. In a split second, the light transformed until I was looking at a virtual version of my own face. Light brown skin, short black hair, dark brown eyes, ears bigger than I would’ve liked. Even though I’d tried to mask it, my nerves were clear to see too. There wasn’t a single part of me that looked like Dad, with his pale skin and blondish-brown hair. Well, aside from the ears. I’d clearly got those from him.

The light then turned green, but the door remained closed. Dad patted me on the shoulder, then stood in my place before the scanner.

‘Alistair Smyth. First Hunter,’ he said.

Once again, the light moved over his face, then reflected it back at him. ‘You are late,’ the scanner said when it was done.

‘It’s nice to see you too, Beverley,’ Dad snapped back. ‘If you don’t open the door, we’ll be even later.’

‘With that snooty attitude, I will not be opening the door at all,’ Beverley said haughtily. ‘And besides, I cannot proceed until the guests behind you have stated their name.’

We both turned round and groaned in unison at the sight of two people sloping towards us. Lilith Jones – better known as Lith – was one of the best Hunters the world had ever seen, second only to Dad. But while Dad was sent on missions to help other Hunts around the world, Lith’s job was to stay here in the city in case a Demon fell closer to home. She was known for her ferocious attitude and, although only one Demon ever fell through the sky at once, she’d famously captured seven of them in a row over a particularly chaotic period just before I was born, when shooting stars seemed to be escaping every other day.

Her daughter, Aro, looked almost identical, with sharp, pale features and a smug smile etched on her face. To say we weren't friends would be putting it lightly. She hated me simply because I was the son of the First Hunter, which to her made me competition. Meanwhile, I hated her because she was infuriatingly arrogant and unnecessarily nasty. Since I was home-schooled and away with Dad a lot, I rarely saw her, which was a blessing. But whenever I did, she always made sure to say some kind of rude comment to make her group of friends laugh.

They walked towards us with confidence, both dressed in black from head to toe. Lith wore a leather jacket that reached her boots and a gold version of Dad's medal was pinned to her chest. They had matching raven-black hair, although Aro's was cut shorter, a flick of unruly spikes on top, while Lith's shimmered down to her waist in a plait like a waterfall made from the night.

'Well, well, well,' Lith said silkily. 'If it isn't my *superior*, finally back in town. If you ask me, we were doing just fine without you.'

‘A pleasure to see you as always, Lith,’ Dad said, unmoved and unimpressed. ‘I hear you’ve been doing a great job in my absence. Huxley caught the last Demon the other month, right? And wasn’t it Willow who caught the one before that? I’m worried that you’re losing your touch . . .’

Lith’s jaw tensed. ‘The Demon should’ve been mine. I slowed it down; Huxley got in my way before I could finish the job.’

The corner of Dad’s mouth quirked into a smile. Lith narrowed her eyes, but only for a moment before that same smug confidence came back. She raised her eyebrows as if in challenge. ‘I see our Assessments have been booked in at the same time. What a coincidence.’

Dad’s smile dropped. ‘I’m sure you’ll allow us time alone with the Superior,’ he said, his tone hardening a little.

Lith barked a laugh. ‘Why? Worried your protégé won’t live up to his surname?’ Aro snickered behind her, fixing me with a glare.

‘I doubt it’s a coincidence,’ Lith continued. ‘The

Superior probably wants to see how our children measure up against each other. What fun.' With a sarcastic grin, she slipped past my dad and up to the door, letting Beverley scan Aro's face first and then her own.

'Lilith Jones, Second Hunter,' she said.

The light flashed green once more, and this time the door swung open.

'Welcome to the Superior's office,' Beverley said. 'Once you have stopped your bickering, please do come in.'