I Am Number Four
The Lost Files

NINE’S LEGACY

THE LORIEN ➞ LEGACIES

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CHAPTER ONE

There are rules for hiding in plain sight. The first rule, or at least the one that Sandor repeats most often, is “Don’t be stupid.”

I’m about to break that rule by taking off my pants.

Spring in Chicago is my favorite season. The winters are cold and windy, the summers hot and loud, the springs perfect. This morning is sunny, but there’s still a forbidding chill in the air, a reminder of winter. Ice-cold spray blows in off Lake Michigan, stinging my cheeks and dampening the pavement under my sneakers.

I jog all eighteen miles of the lakefront path every morning, taking breaks whenever I can, not because I need them, but to admire the choppy gray-blue water of Lake Michigan. Even when it’s cold, I always think about diving in, of swimming to the other side.

I fight the urge just like I fight the urge to keep pace with the neon spandex cyclists that zip past. I have to go slow. There are more than two million people in this city and I’m faster than all of them.

Still, I have to jog.

Sometimes, I make the run twice to really work up a sweat. That’s another one of Sandor’s rules for hiding in plain sight: always appear to be weaker than I actually am. Never push it.

It’s dumb to complain. We’ve been in Chicago for five years, thanks to Sandor’s rules. Five years of peace and quiet. Five years
since the Mogadorians last had a real bead on us.
Five years of steadily increasing boredom.
So when a sudden vibration stirs the iPod strapped to my upper arm, my stomach drops. The device isn’t supposed to react unless trouble is near.

I take just a moment to decide what to do next. I know it’s a risk. I know it flies against everything I’ve been told to do. But I also know that risks are worth it; I know that sometimes you have to ignore your training. So I jog to the side of the runners’ path, pretending that I need to work out a cramp. When I’m finished stretching, I unsnap the tear-away-style track pants I’ve been rocking every jog since we moved to Chicago and stuff them into my pack. Underneath I’m wearing a pair of mesh shorts, red and white like the St. Louis Cardinals, enemy colors here in Chicago.

But Cards colors in Cubs territory are nothing to worry about compared to the three scars ringing my ankle. Baseball rivalries and bloody interplanetary vendettas just don’t compare.

My low socks and running shoes do little to hide the scars. Anyone nearby could see them, although I doubt my fellow runners are in the habit of checking out each other’s ankles. Only the particular runner I’m trying to attract today will really notice.

When I start jogging again, my heart is beating way harder than normal. Excitement. It’s been a while since I felt anything like this. I’m breaking Sandor’s rule and it’s exhilarating. I just hope he isn’t watching me through the city’s police cameras that he’s hacked into. That would be bad.

My iPod rumbles again. It’s not actually an iPod. It doesn’t play any music and the earbuds are just for show. It’s a gadget that Sandor put together in his lab.
It’s my Mogadorian detector. I call it my iMog.

The iMog has its limitations. It picks out Mogadorian genetic patterns in the immediate area, but only has a radius of a few blocks and is prone to interference. It’s fueled by Mogadorian genetic material, which has a habit of rapidly decaying; so it’s no surprise that the iMog can get a little hinky. As Sandor explains it, the device is something we received when we first arrived from Lorien, from a human Loric friend. Sandor has spent considerable time trying to modify it. It was his idea to encase it in an iPod shell as a way to avoid attention. There’s no track list or album art on my iMog’s screen—just a solitary white dot against a field of black. That’s me. I’m the white dot. The last time we tuned it up was after the most recent time we were attacked, scraping Mogadorian ash off our clothes so Sandor could synthesize it or stabilize it or some scientific stuff I only half paid attention to. Our rule is that if the iMog sounds off, we get moving. It’s been so long since it’s activated itself that I’d started to worry that the thing had gone dead.

And then, during my run a couple days ago, it went off. One solitary red dot trolling the lakefront. I hustled home that day, but I didn’t tell Sandor what had happened. At best, there’d be no more runs on the lakefront. At worst, we’d be packing up boxes. And I didn’t want either of those things to happen.

Maybe that’s when I first broke the “don’t be stupid” rule. When I started keeping things from my Cêpan.

The device is now vibrating and beeping because of the red dot that’s fallen into step a few yards behind me. Vibrating and beeping in tune with my accelerated heartbeat.

A Mogadorian.
I hazard a glance over my shoulder and have no trouble picking out which jogger is the Mog. He’s tall, with black hair shaved close to the scalp, and is wearing a thrift-store Bears sweatshirt and a pair of wraparound sunglasses. He could pass for human if he wasn’t so pale, his face not showing any color even in this brisk air.

I pick up my pace but don’t bother trying to get away. Why make it easy on him? I want to see whether this Mog can keep up. By the time I exit the lakefront and head for home, I realize I might have been a little cocky. He’s good—better than I expect him to be. But I’m better. Still, as I pick up speed, I feel my heart racing from exertion for the first time in as long as I can remember.

He’s gaining on me, and my breaths are getting shorter. I’m okay for now, but I won’t be able to keep this up forever. I double-check the iMog. Luckily my stalker hasn’t called in backup. It’s still just the one red dot. Just us.

Tuning out the noise of the city around us—yuppie couples headed to brunch, happy tourist families cracking jokes about the wind—I focus on the Mog, using my naturally enhanced hearing to listen to his breathing. He’s getting winded too; his breathing is ragged now. But his footsteps are still in sync with my own. I listen for anything that sounds like him going for a communicator, ready to break into a sprint if he sends out an alert.

He doesn’t. I can feel his eyes boring into my back. He thinks that I haven’t noticed him.

Smug, exhausted, and dumb. He’s just what I’d been hoping for.

The John Hancock Building rises above us. The sun blinks off the skyscraper’s thousand windows. One hundred stories and, at the top, my home.

The Mog hesitates as I breeze through the front door, then
follows. He catches up to me as I cross the lobby. Even though I’d been expecting it, I stiffen when I feel the cold barrel of a small Mogadorian blaster pressed between my shoulder blades.

“Keep walking,” he hisses.

Although I know he can’t hurt me while I’m protected by the Loric charm, I play along. I let him think he’s in control.

I smile and wave at the security guards manning the front desk. With the Mog dogging my heels, we climb into the elevator.

Alone at last.

The Mog keeps his gun aimed at me as I hit the button for the 100th floor. I’m more nervous than I thought I’d be. I’ve never been alone with a Mog before. I remind myself that everything is going just as I planned it. As the elevator begins its ascent, I act as casual as I can.

“Did you have a nice run?”

The Mog grabs me around the throat and slams me against the wall of the elevator. I brace myself to have the wind knocked out of me. Instead, a warm sensation runs down my back and it’s the Mog who stumbles backward, gasping.

The Loric charm. I’m always surprised at how well it works.

“So you aren’t Number Four,” he says.

“You’re quick.”

“Which are you?”

“I could tell you.” I shrug. “I don’t see what it would matter. But I’ll let you guess.”

He eyes me, sizing me up, trying to intimidate me. I don’t know what the rest of the Garde are like, but I don’t scare that easy. I take off the iMog, laying it gently on the floor. If the Mog finds this unusual, he doesn’t let on. I wonder what the prize is for capturing
a Garde.

“I may not know your number, but I know you can look forward to a life of captivity while we kill the rest of your friends. Don’t worry,” he adds, “it won’t be long.”

“Good story,” I reply, glancing up at the elevator panel. We’re almost at the top.

I dreamed about this moment last night. Actually, that’s not quite right. I couldn’t sleep last night, too keyed up for what was to come. I fantasized about this moment.

I make sure to savor my words.

“Here’s the thing,” I tell him. “You’re not making it out of here alive.”
CHAPTER TWO

Before the Mog can react, I punch a series of buttons on the elevator panel. It’s a sequence of buttons that no one in the tower would ever have reason to push, a sequence that Sandor programmed to initiate the security measures he installed in the elevator.

The elevator vibrates. The trap is activated.

My iMog floats off the floor and, with a metallic clang, sticks to the back wall of the elevator. Before the Mog can blink, he’s flung backward too, pulled by the blaster in his hand and whatever other metal objects he might be hiding in his pockets. With a crunch, his hand is pinned between his blaster and the wall. He cries out.

Did he really think we wouldn’t have protected our home?

The powerful magnet Sandor installed in the elevator is just one of the fail-safes my Cêpan secretly built into the John Hancock Building. I’ve never seen the magnet work as intended before, but I’ve definitely screwed around with it enough. I’ve spent hours with the elevator door wedged open, the magnet on, trying to bounce nickels from across the penthouse and get them to stick to the walls. Like I said, things have been kind of boring lately.

It was a good game until the tenants on the lower levels started complaining.

The Mog tries to wiggle his fingers—which are most certainly broken now—from underneath the blaster to no avail. He tries to kick at me, but I just laugh and hop away. That’s the best he can
“What is this?” he cries.

Before I can answer, the elevator doors hiss open and there is Sandor.

I’ve never understood my Cêpan’s affinity for expensive Italian suits. They can’t be comfortable. Yet here he is, not even noon on a Saturday morning, and he’s already dressed to the nines. His beard is freshly trimmed, clipped close. His hair is slicked back perfectly.

It’s like Sandor was expecting company. I wonder if he was watching my run on the lakefront, and my stomach drops at the thought.

I’m going to be in deep trouble.

Sandor is twisting a silencer into the barrel of a sleek 9mm. He glances at me, his expression inscrutable, then stares hard at the Mog.

“Are you alone?”

The Mog jerks against the magnet again.

“He’s alone,” I answer.

Sandor shoots me a look, and then pointedly repeats his question.

“You expect me to answer that?” snarls the Mog.

I can tell Sandor is pissed. But the Mog’s answer causes a glimmer of humor to flash in my Cêpan’s eyes. Sandor’s mouth twitches, like he’s fighting a laugh. I’ve sat through enough of my Cêpan’s beloved James Bond movie collection to know this Mog just provided a perfect one-liner opportunity.

“No,” Sandor says. “I expect you to die.”

Sandor raises the gun before looking at me again.

“You brought him here,” he says. “Your kill.”
I swallow hard. I planned this whole thing out. It’s been all I could think about since that red dot appeared on my iMog a couple days ago. Still, I’ve never killed one before. I don’t feel sympathy for the bastard. It’s not that at all. But this feels like a big deal. Taking a life, even if it is only a Mogadorian. Will it change me?

Whatever. I grab for Sandor’s gun, but he yanks it away.

“Not like that,” he says, and drops the gun.

I don’t let it hit the ground. My telekinesis developed last month and we’ve been practicing with it ever since.

I take a deep breath, focusing my mind, steeling myself. I levitate the gun until it is level with the Mog’s head. He sneers at me.

“You don’t have the ba—”

With my mind, I squeeze the trigger.

The gun releases a muffled thwip. The bullet strikes the Mog right between the eyes. Seconds later, he’s a pile of ash on the elevator floor.

Sandor plucks the gun out of the air. I can tell he’s studying me, but I can’t take my eyes off the remains of the Mogadorian.

“Clean that mess up,” says Sandor. “Then, we need to talk.”