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THEY'RE NOT THE HEROES
WE WANTED. THEY'RE JUST
THE ONES WE COULD FIND.

AURORA RISING

AMIE KAUFMAN JAY KRISTOFF

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BY AMIE KAUFMAN AND JAY KRISTOFF

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AURORA RISING

AURORA CYCLE_01

AMIE KAUFMAN &
JAY KRISTOFF



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Also by Amie Kaufman and Jay Kristoff

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If your squad was hard to find, or you're still looking, then this
one is for you.



PART 1

THE GIRL OUT OF TIME

1

TYLER

I'm gonna miss the Draft.

The *Hadfield* is disintegrating around me. Black arcs of quantum lightning are melting the ship's hull to slag. My spacesuit is screaming seventeen different alarms, the lock on this damn cryogenic pod still won't open, and *that's* the one thought blaring in my head. Not that I should've stayed in my rack and gotten a good night's sleep. Not that I should've just ignored the damn distress call and headed back to Aurora Academy. And not that this is a really stupid way to die.

Nope. Looking death right in the face, Tyler Jones, Squad Leader, First Class, is thinking one thing, and one thing only.

I'm gonna miss the damn Draft.

I mean, you work your whole life for a Thing, it's only natural the Thing be important to you. But most rational people would consider getting vaporized inside a derelict spaceship drifting through interdimensional space just a little more important than school. That's all I'm saying.

I look down at the girl sleeping inside the cryopod. She has shortish black hair, with a strange white streak running through her bangs. Freckles. A gray jumpsuit. Her expression is the kind of blissful you only see on babies or the cryogenically frozen.

I wonder what her name is.

I wonder what she'd say if she knew she was about to get me killed.

And I shake my head, muttering over the scream of my suit alarms as the ship around me begins to tear itself into a million burning pieces.

"She better be worth it, Jones."

.....

Let's back it up a little.

About four hours, to be exact. I know they say to start your story at the exciting bit, but you need to know what's going on here so you can actually care about me getting vaporized. Because me getting vaporized is totally gonna suck.

So. Four hours ago, I'm in my dorm at Aurora Academy. I'm staring up at the underside of Björkman's mattress and praying to the Maker that our training officers throw some kind of grav-failure or fire drill at us. The night before the Draft, they'll probably just let us get some rest. But I'm praying anyway, because:

(a) Even though he never snores, Björkman is snoring now, and I can't sleep.

(b) I'm wishing my dad could be there to see me tomorrow, and I can't sleep.

(c) It's the night before the Draft, and I. CAN'T. SLEEP.

I dunno why I'm so worked up. I should be cool as ice. I've aced every exam. Finished top of almost every class. Ninety-ninth percentile of all cadets in the academy.

Jones, Tyler, Squad Leader, First Class.

Goldenboy. That's what the other Alphas call me. Some throw it as an insult, but I take it as a compliment. Nobody worked harder than me to get here. Nobody worked harder once they arrived. And now all that work is about to pay off, because tomorrow is the Draft and I've earned four of the top five picks, and I'm gonna have the best squad a senior class in Aurora Academy has ever seen.

So why can't I sleep?

Surrendering with a long sigh, I climb out of my bunk, drag on my uniform, drag my hand through my blond hair. And shooting a look at Björkman that I wish could kill—or at least mute—I slap the door control pad and stalk out into the corridor, cutting off his snores behind me.

It's late: 02:17 station clock. The illumination is set low to simulate nighttime, but the fluorescent strips in the floor light up as I mooch down the hallway. I ping my sister, Scarlett, on my uniglass, but she doesn't answer. I think about pinging Cat, but she's probably asleep. Like I should be.

I wander past a long plasteel window, looking at the Aurora star burning beyond, gilding the frame's edge in palest gold. In old Terran mythology, Aurora was the goddess of the dawn. She heralded the coming of daylight, the end of night. Someone back in the day gave her name to a star, and that star gave its name to the academy now orbiting it, and the Aurora Legion I've given my life to.

Five years I've lived here. Signed up the day I turned thirteen, my twin sister right beside me. The recruiter on New Gettysburg Station remembered our dad. Told us he was sorry. Promised we'd make the bastards pay. That Dad's sacrifice—all our soldiers' sacrifices—wouldn't be for nothing.

I wonder if I still believe that.

I should be sleeping.

I don't know where I'm going.

Except I know exactly where I'm going.

Stalking down the corridor toward the docking bay.

Jaw clenched.

Hands in my pockets to hide the fists.

.....

Four hours later, I'm pounding those same fists on the cryopod's seal.

The chamber around me is filled with a hundred pods just like it, all rimed with a layer of pale frost. The ice cracks a little under my blows, but the seal isn't opening. My uniglass is running a wireless hack on the lock, but it's too slow.

If I don't get out of here soon, I'm dead.

Another shock wave hits the *Hadfield*, shaking the whole ship. There's no gravity in the derelict, so I can't fall. But I'm hanging on to the cryopod, which means I still get whipped around like a kid's toy, smashing my spacesuit's helmet into another pod and adding one more alarm to the seventeen already blaring in my ears.

WARNING: SUIT INTEGRITY BREACH. H₂O RESERVOIR COMPROMISED.

Uh-oh...

The girl in the cryopod frowns in her sleep like she's having a bad dream. For a moment, I consider what it's gonna mean for her if we make it out of this alive.

And then I feel something wet at the base of my skull. *Inside* my helmet. I twist my head and try to spot the problem, and the wetness sloshes across the back of my neck, surface tension gluing it to my skin. I realize my drinking tube has ruptured. That my hydration tanks are emptying *into* my helmet. That even if this FoldStorm doesn't kill me, in about seven minutes, my helmet is gonna fill with water and I'm gonna be the first human I've ever heard of to drown in space.

If we make it out of this alive?

"No chance," I mutter.

.....

“No chance,” the lieutenant says.

Three and a half hours earlier, I’m standing in Aurora Academy Flight Control. The flight deck lieutenant’s name is Lexington, and she’s only two years older than me. A couple of months back at the Foundation Day party, she had too much to drink and told me she likes my dimples, so I smile at her as often as possible now.

Hey, if you’ve got ’em, flaunt ’em.

Even at this hour, the docks are busy. From the mezzanine above, I can see a heavy freighter from the Trask sector being unloaded. The huge ship hangs off the station’s shoulder, her hull battered from the billions of kilometers under her belt. Loader drones fly about her in a buzzing metal swarm.

I turn back to the lieutenant. Dial my smile up a notch.

“Just for an hour, Lex,” I plead.

Second Lieutenant Lexington raises one dark eyebrow in response. “Don’t you mean ‘Just for an hour, ma’am,’ Cadet Jones?”

Whoops. Too far.

“Yes, ma’am.” I give her my best salute. “Apologies, ma’am.”

“Shouldn’t you be getting some rack time?” she sighs.

“Can’t sleep, ma’am.”

“Fretting on the Draft tomorrow?” She shakes her head, finally smiles. “You’re the highest-ranked Alpha in your year. What’s to worry about?”

“Just nervous energy.” I nod to the rows of Phantoms in Bay 12. The scout ships are sleek. Teardrop shaped. Black as the void outside. “Figured I’d put it to good use and log some time in the Fold.”

Her smile vanishes. “Negative. Cadets aren’t allowed in the Fold without a wingman, Jones.”

“I’ve got a five-star commendation from my flight trainer. And I’m a full-fledged legionnaire as of tomorrow. I won’t go farther than a quarter parsec.”

I lean closer. Push my smile into overdrive.

“Would I lie to you, ma’am?”

And slowly, ever so slowly, I watch her smile reappear.

Thank you, dimples.

Ten minutes later, I’m sitting in a Phantom’s cockpit. The engines heat up and the dock systems load my ship into the launch tube, and with a soundless roar I’m soaring out into the black. Stars glitter outside my blastscreens. The void stretches as wide as forever. Aurora Station lights up the dark behind me, swift cruisers and lumbering capital ships moored at its berths or cutting through the dark around it. I shift course, feeling a rush of vertigo as gravity drops away, replaced by the weightlessness outside the station’s skin.

The FoldGate looms in front of me, about five thousand clicks off the station's bow. Huge. Hexagonal. Its pylons blink green in the darkness. Inside it, I can see a shimmering field, shot through with bright pinpricks of light.

A voice crackles in my headset.

"Phantom 151, this is Aurora Control. You are clear for Fold entry, over."

"Roger that, Aurora."

I hit my thrusters, pushed back hard in my velocity couch as I accelerate. Auto-guidance locks on, the FoldGate flares brighter than the sun. And without a sound, I plunge into an endless, colorless sky.

A billion stars are waiting to greet me. The Fold opens wide and swallows me whole, and in that moment, I can't hear the roar of my thrusters or the ping of my navcom. My worries about the Draft or the memories of my dad.

For a brief second, all the Milky Way is silence.

And I can't hear a thing.

.....

I can't hear a thing.

The blob of water creeping up the back of my head has reached my ears by the time I get the cryopod unlocked, muting my suit alarms. I shake my head hard, but the liquid just slips around on my skin in the zero grav, a big

dollop pooling on my left eye and half blinding me. Doing my very best not to curse, I pop the cryopod's seals and tear the door open.

The color spectrum here in the Fold is monochrome, everything reduced to shades of black and white. So when the pod lighting switches to a slightly different kind of gray, I'm not sure what color it's actually turning until...

RED ALERT. STASIS INTERRUPTED. POD 7173 BREACHED. RED ALERT.

The monitors flash a warning as I plunge my hands into the viscous gel, wincing as the chill penetrates my suit. I can't imagine what dragging this girl out prematurely is going to do, but leaving her for the FoldStorm is *definitely* gonna kill her. And if I don't get this show on the road, it's gonna kill me, too.

And yeah, that's still really gonna suck.

Luckily, the *Hadfield's* hull looks like it was breached decades ago, so there's no atmosphere to leech the remaining heat from this girl's body. Unfortunately, that means there's also nothing for her to breathe. But the drugs they pumped into her before they froze her will have slowed her metabolism enough that she can survive a few minutes without oxygen. With my water reserves still leaking into my helmet, I'm more worried about myself in the whole Not Being Able to Breathe department.

She hangs weightless above the pod, anchored by her IV lines, still encased in freezing cryogel. The *Hadfield* trembles again, and I'm glad I can't actually hear what the FoldStorm is doing to the hull. A burst of jet-black lightning crashes through the wall beside me, melting the metal. The water leaking into my helmet is creeping closer to my mouth every second. I start scooping handfuls of goop off the girl's face, slinging it across the chamber to spatter against yet more cryopods. Row upon row of them. Every one filled with this same freezing gel. Every one with a shriveled human corpse floating inside.

They're all dead. Hundreds. Thousands.