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BOOK ONE

A MUTINY IN TIME
JAMES DASHNER



A Mutiny in Time

James Dashner

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For Dad, who showed me the magic of science
and the wonder of history

- J.D.



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Prologue

DAK SMYTH sat on his favorite branch of his favorite tree, right next to his favorite friend, Sera Froste. *Not a bad way to spend a Saturday afternoon*, he thought.

Beyond the safety of the tree, there was plenty to worry about. The world was falling apart and the people in charge of things didn't seem to care. But Dak decided not to let little stuff like that bother him now.

Sera apparently agreed. "Feels good up here," she said. "Doesn't it?"

"Yeah, it sure does. Makes me kinda sad I wasn't born a monkey. Then I could live in one of these things."

Sera laughed. "You've got the personality of a monkey. And the smell. That's two-thirds of the way there, at least."

"Thanks," Dak said, as if she'd just paid him a tremendous compliment.

A soft breeze made the branches sway back and forth, just enough to soothe Dak into a partial trance. He and Sera climbed up the tree every so often when there was nothing else to do. It gave them a chance to talk, away from any distractions—distractions like adults, who complained constantly about taxes and crime rates and, in

whispers, about the SQ. With all the mental static, it was a wonder Dak and Sera managed to get any thinking done. Fortunately, they were both geniuses . . . although in very different ways.

"You excited for the field trip this week?" Sera asked.

Dak looked over at her, slightly suspicious. Their class was going to a museum, full of history—which he loved—and not a whole lot of science—which was her passion. But the question seemed genuine.

"Remember my last birthday?" he asked in return.
"When I got that replica of Thomas Jefferson's ascot?"

"How could I forget? You came screaming down the street like a girl who'd just found a bucket full of candy."

Dak nodded, relishing the memory. "Well, I'm even more excited about this trip."

"Gotcha. That's pretty excited."

They sat in silence for a while, Dak enjoying the breeze and the sounds of nature and the break from the rest of life. Gradually, though, he realized that Sera seemed far less relaxed. There was an unmistakable tension in her shoulders that had nothing to do with tree climbing. He followed her gaze across the yard to his front porch, where his parents had recently put up a new flag. The small flagpole affixed to the side of the house was usually used for seasonal displays—holiday flags in the winter, the forty-eight-starred U.S. flag in the long summer months.

Now, for the first time, Dak's parents had put up a stark white flag with a black symbol in its center.

That symbol was a circle broken by a curve and a thunderbolt—the insignia of the SQ.

“Don’t tell me your parents buy into all that,” Sera said, her voice solemn.

“I don’t think so. They said it’s easier this way. They’re less likely to be bothered if they just put up the flag.”

“The SQ—they make me sick,” Sera said. Dak had never heard such fierceness in her voice. “Someone has got to stand up to them eventually. Or someday it’s going to be too late.”

Dak listened to her as he stared out into the woods beyond his house. All that green, all those animals. There were parts of the world where these kinds of places had disappeared entirely. He’d read enough history to know that where the SQ went, trouble followed. He suddenly felt his own little burst of determination.

“Maybe it’ll be us who stand up,” he said. “You never know.”

“Yeah?” she answered absently.

“There’s an old saying,” Dak told her. “The times, they are a-changin’.”

“Ooh, I like that.”

“Maybe that’ll be our motto. Maybe we’ll change the times someday. Every problem has a solution, right? And our big brains have got to be good for something. What do you say?”

She looked over at him and stuck out her hand. He shook it hard.

Somewhere nearby, a bird chirped excitedly.



The Only Hope

BINT TAKASHI stared at the monitor and tried to remember a time when he didn't know the world was about to end.

Mari Rivera, his second-in-command, sat next to him, and the way she was slowly shaking her head back and forth, she seemed to be the second most depressed person on the planet. Bint was the first.

"Well?" Mari asked. "What do you think?"

"What do I think? I think we have a global catastrophe on our hands," Bint replied. "Volcanic eruptions all along the Pacific Rim. Blizzards in parts of South America that have never even seen snow before. If we're lucky, the tropical storm brewing in the Atlantic might put out the wildfires in the Northeast."

"Look on the bright side," Mari said, her voice grim. "At least people believe we're in trouble now."

"People still believe what the SQ tells them to believe. Because fear is always more powerful than truth." He ran his fingers through his dark hair and sighed. "Aristotle

would be *so* proud. Look what the Hystorians have been reduced to! The SQ is going to win—even if it means destroying the world.”

It wasn’t just the natural disasters that had him worried. Or the blackouts. Or the food shortages. There were also the Remnants. Every day when Brint went home and looked at the picture that hung above the fireplace—he and his wife sitting by a river, the sun glinting off the water behind them—he felt a disorienting twist in his head and stomach. A gnawing gap in his mind that made him extremely uncomfortable. Someone—at least one someone—was *missing* from that photo. It made no sense whatsoever, but he knew in his bones that someone was missing.

He wasn’t alone in suffering these types of sensations. More people experienced Remnants with each passing day. They’d strike when you least expected them. And they could drive you crazy. Literally crazy.

Time had gone wrong—this is what the Hystorians believed. And if things were beyond fixing now, there was only one hope left . . . to go back in time and fix the past instead.

Mari did what she always did when he was inclined to whine. She ignored him and moved on to the task at hand. “What’s the latest on the Smyths?” she asked. Of all the scientists the Hystorians tracked, they were the only ones who hadn’t been shut down by the SQ . . . yet.

Brint pulled up their file and pointed out the latest developments. All of the Smyths’ experiments, findings,

data—every little thing they did in their lab each and every day—it was all being monitored by the Hystorians. Without the Smyths' knowledge, of course. Brint would be sure to apologize for that *after* they saved the world.

They both fell silent for a minute, staring at the data on the screen as if hypnotized. The Smyths were so close. If only they could figure out the missing piece in their calculations. If only they could give the Hystorians a fighting chance at carrying out Aristotle's two-thousand-year-old plan to save the world.

"It's coming, you know," Mari whispered. "Sooner than I ever thought."

Brint nodded as dread squeezed his heart. "I never would've guessed it would be in our lifetime."

Mari continued, her words like a prophecy of doom from a wrinkled old oracle.

"It's coming, all right. The Cataclysm is coming, and we'll all wish we were dead long before it kills us."