

## CHAPTER ONE



### WHEN MONKEYS FLY

**E**ver wonder what it would be like if you were from another world, a hundred trillion light-years away from Earth? Only to find out you had been abandoned on a strange planet for your protection, discarded by your own parents, and left all alone to be raised by foster parents your entire childhood? No? Neither did I. Not until I met a quirky pinked haired girl named Serra who sent me and my two best friends, Aria and Miles, through a glowing portal called a Fold to another planet where I soon discovered I possessed remarkable and magical abilities—known as the Guild. A not so

magical gift on the planet Alyssum. After all, just about everyone here possessed it.

Once I arrived, I was quickly enrolled in a spectacular school for kids of all ages, the Grayson Academy. Unfortunately, during my first year at school and on this planet, I learned a few unnerving things about myself and who some believed I was. Even realized there were some that did not want me here or on Earth, or really anywhere. It was a lot to get used to for an eleven-year-old orphaned boy.

But nothing could prepare me for that hot and humid summer day where I found myself racing through the woods somewhere just outside of the Academy.

Dried leaves crunched, and forgotten branches snapped under the weight of my heels. I was blindly running through the dense island woods, dodging twisted tree trunks and crooked branches. I shouldn't have been here. I was about to begin my Third-Year and should have been preparing for my studies. Instead, I was giving chase to something I had not seen since arriving on this remarkable planet nearly a year ago. My breath was heavy, and my mouth felt like a desert landscape. I wasn't used to this kind of strenuous activity. Not only that, the blistering summer sun spying on me from high above was unlike anything I had been accustomed to back on Earth.

“This way, Cooper B,” said a small, colorful, furry animal with long ears, fluttering wings, and features of a tiny monkey. “Hurry!”

Its long tail swayed in the air as it took flight deeper into the woods, which were covered by vibrant colored leaves surrounding their gnarled branches.

“Who are you? And where are you taking me?”

The creature did not respond and kept pushing me deeper and deeper into the woods. It was painfully obvious that this flying monkey was going to ignore my pleas.

“Wait! I am not going any further until you tell me who or what you are and why I am in here?” I called out, digging my heels into the moss-covered ground, coming to a halt.

The curious winged creature slowed and flew back in my direction—suspended mere inches from my face. So close, I could almost taste the twigs and berries of his afternoon meal, coming from within his tiny, crooked mouth.

“I am truly sorry, Cooper B. You may call Wilkens. Others do. Well, not everyone—but that’s really not important. You must hurry up and follow me,” responded Wilkens, slightly winded from his flight. “You are in grave danger.”

It wasn’t too long ago that I had been faced with dangers not meant for a child my age. Now, according

to this tiny, winged monkey, my life was once again threatened. But by who? Chancellor Adimus had assured me at the end of the last term they had taken every precaution to prevent such a catastrophe, like the one in the Forgotten Corridor, from ever happening again.

It was beginning to seem as if Alyssum was not quite as inviting as I had once thought it to be.

“We are nearly there, and... and he’s about to arrive.”

Whatever or whoever he was rambling on about, I knew the only way to get the answers was to follow this peculiar animal.

Wilkins swung around and took flight, and I blindly followed.

With one of his three furless, gangly fingers, Wilkins pointed ahead, just beyond the clearing of the woods. “He means you great harm, Cooper B... We must move with haste. He’s just through the—”

Suddenly, something pressed down onto my shoulder and slowed my sprint to an abrupt standstill. Everything around me began to blur, and streams of colors raced by me. Then, as quickly as it all began, it stopped.

Slowly, I opened my eyes, and a familiar face, topped by strands of short, tangled red hair, was hovering over me.

“Hey, Coop? Where did you go?” asked Miles, moving his face closer to mine, waving his hands past my eyes, trying to get my full attention.

Jolting up and out of my bed, I found myself slightly dazed and confused.

“What do you mean?” I asked, with my eyes darting around the room.

“I mean, what were you thinking about? It’s like you were daydreaming or something crazy like that. You alright?”

*Had I only been daydreaming about that tiny creature, Wilkens?* It seemed so real. The scent of his breath, and the musk wafting from his tiny wings as he sailed further and further away from me, was still fresh in my nose.

I pushed my palm against my forehead and felt the sweat begin to leave its pores. It was as if I had actually been running, but that would have been impossible. Just moments ago, Miles and I were studying the map our Famulus, Avantha, offered me just before Serra returned to her home for the First-Quartam break.

“Um, I’m not sure,” I answered, trying to regain my composure. “I—I, guess I was.”

“Well, snap out of it, would ya? We gotta plan our day, and I really want to go to this little village here on the map. Do you think they have anything good to eat there?”

“I am sure they do, Miles. Considering all you have to do is tell a replicator what you want.”

“Oh ya, I keep forgetting about that. We’ve been stuck here for so long I couldn’t remember if everywhere has one.”

“What are you two nincompoops doing? We were supposed to have left ten minutes ago! Come on,” cried out Aria as she barged into our room. “It’s getting late, and we aren’t going to have much time to explore if we don’t leave now.”

Ever since our Summer break began, Aria, Miles, and I hadn’t explored the island as much as we had intended. Mostly because every time we tried, there seemed to be a Pedagogue who had other plans for the three of us. Especially Ms. Pedigree. We were all beginning to think no one wanted us to venture too far from the school grounds. For good reasons, I suppose. Since we were planning to find a way to leave this island and locate the whereabouts of my parents—and the reason why they abandoned me on Earth so many years ago.

Today was different, though. Today we convinced those responsible for our well-being that we were going to study in the library. A time considered to be well spent by up-and-coming Third-Year Graysonians.

“It’s not my fault, Aria,” bellyached Miles. “Cooper was off in some weird daydream, and I’ve been trying to wake him up.”

“Oh ya? What were you dreaming about, Coop?”

“A flying monkey.”

“A what?” chuckled Miles.

“I’ll explain on the way to the Village of Grayson Isle,” I told them both, grabbing the map off of Miles’ bed. “Let’s go.”

Slipping through the corridors undetected, we checked around every corner—Jerking our heads back and forth, we looked for any sign of those who would frown upon our desired adventure outside of these walls. Finally, we made our way to the wooden doorway that adorned the Grand Gallery that led to our freedom.

I reached out and pulled on the large cast iron door knocker. It was locked—preventing us from fulfilling our quest for the day.

“Now what?” asked Miles, slightly frustrated.

“Can you open it, Coop? With your ability, I mean?” Aria asked.

“I don’t know. Probably, but do you think anyone would hear it open if I did?”

“Who cares? Try it! Unless you think you can’t,” shouted Miles in a whisper.

I closed my eyes and pressed my hand against the cold steel that bound the wooden planks together, and with all my might, I imagined the lock moving away from the latch that kept the door secured. And just as I feared, the grinding of the metal mechanisms let out an awful cry, echoing down the empty corridors that surrounded us.

But I didn't stop. I was so close, and with any luck, which I had seemed to be without my entire childhood, no one would be alerted to our disobedient ways.

*CLICK! CLICK! CLUNK!*

It worked, and the double doors slowly crept open, revealing the sprawling garden of the Grayson Academy grounds just beyond the threshold.

"You did it!" said Miles joyfully. "I never doubted you for a minute."

"Thanks, Miles, but we better hurry and go before someone comes to see what that noise was."

The three of us made our way outside, looking back over our shoulders and up into every window of the Academy that peered down on our location. It appeared that none of the Pedagogues left behind for the First-Quartam break had been tipped off to our daring escape. With our map in hand, we raced toward the thick tree line that bordered the stone walls of our school in search of a new adventure.



We were surrounded by familiar scenery. Not from my ventures into the Nemus Garden a year earlier, but from the daydream I had just experienced. As we walked down the cobblestone pathway, leading away from the academy, the rustling of the colorful treetops whistled in the gentle breeze. The further we traveled, wildlife hidden behind the thick trunks of the trees grew curious of our presence. But there weren't any warning signs that the three of us were in danger. Unlike the daydream Miles woke me from, there was only peace without urgency.

"Wilkins? His name was Wilkins? Who even names a monkey?" asked Miles as I finished telling them both about my apparent daydream.

"I think it's cute. It's what I would name my monkey if I had one as a pet," Aria chimed in. "Anyway, what do you think he was talking about? And why are you in danger?"

"I am not sure. That's all he told me."

"Geez, Coop. You have got one of the most active imaginations of anyone I have ever known. But say it's not your imagination. What if you weren't daydreaming? Then what?" added Miles.

"Maybe when Serra gets back, she can tell you. Who knows, maybe it's something to do with your abilities," said Aria with a slight bit of uncertainty in her voice.

“Ya, Coop. You are the Vestige after all,” chuckled Miles.

“Quit it, Miles,” I said, scolding him quickly. “I told you we aren’t talking about that anymore.”

I had made a pact with Aria and Miles that I did not want to discuss the whole Vestige thing that was dropped in my lap by Ms. Pedigree. It was technically Summer, and all I wanted to do was have fun, and if possible, find my parents. It wasn’t as easy as I thought it would be, considering all of our Pedagogues did everything they could to keep us busy. Deep down inside, I had a feeling Chancellor Adimus was behind their successful attempts during his absence.

“Sorry, Coop. I was only saying that the way everyone keeps everything from you might have something to do with that little monkey and the warning he gave you while you were daydreaming—”

“—Daydreaming? You were not daydreaming.”

“Holy smokes, the monkey can talk!” called out Miles as Wilkens descended from above and landed right in front of the three of us, blocking our path.

“I am not a monkey!” bellowed Wilkens. He stood motionless, scratching the wispy hairs on the top of his round head. “I guess... I guess I do not know what exactly a monkey is, but—”

“—It’s you!” I shouted, looking down at Wilkens, standing just a head above my knee. He was a great deal shorter than I had imagined. “But how did you—”

“—My humble apologies, Cooper B., but I had to warn you. So, I pulled you into a Spectral in order for you to discover who was arriving on Grayson Isle. I know I should have gotten your permission, but someone who wishes to bring you harm has come to the island of Grayson, and I... I just felt the wrong thing was the right thing to do,” responded Wilkens anxiously.

“You made yourself a Spectral? How cool is that? Is there anything you can’t do?” asked Miles enthusiastically.

“I—I don’t know. I didn’t mean to.”

Wilkens stared curiously through his black, large round eyes—lost in his thoughts until he finally broke the silence and softly spoke, “Haven’t you ever performed a Spectral? No. No, of course, you haven’t. You’re merely a child. No matter how powerful you are.”

“Who means him harm?” demanded Aria, stepping between us.

“That I do not know, for the forest has not revealed his true identity,” responded Wilkens through quivering lips with his head hung low.

“The forest? Now the forest speaks?” asked Miles. “This planet is getting creepier and creepier.”

Wilkins lifted his head and glared at Miles. “We were so close to learning their identity, but this boy, covered with... with red *strings* on his head, interfered before we could find out the answer together. Selfish he is. His little adventure couldn’t wait a few more seconds.” Wilkins took a few steps closer to Miles as though he was looking for a fight. “That pale boy, with little dots all over his face, is surely impatient.”

“Red strings? Little dots? Who do you think you are?” growled Miles, inching closer to Wilkins.

Wilkins clenched his three fingers into a fist, and with a nasty scowl, squared off with the pale boy covered in little dots and puffed out his chest. But Miles didn’t seem worried. In fact, the display of anger made him let out a giggle.

“Quit it! Both of you. Wilkins, tell us what is going to happen to Cooper. What do you know?” snapped Aria.

Wilkins relaxed his shoulders, took a step back, and began to sob. “I’ve said too much. If they discover I’ve warned you, they will have my wings dipped in bronze. I must go now but be warned, Cooper B, danger awaits you. Trust no one.”

“What are you talking about? Who can’t I trust? Just tell me already—”

Wilkins never divulged the answer. He spread his wings and swiftly soared high above, beyond the treetops, and toward the sky—becoming lost in the blinding light of the Alyssum sun. And once again, I was left with even more questions, with no answers.

The only thing I knew for sure, Wilkins was an odd creature of sorts, full of mixed emotions.

“Well, that’s just great. The flying monkey is just as confusing as everyone else around here. Why can’t anyone just give you a simple answer? What’s with all of the mystery?” asked Miles.

“I have a feeling it’s going to be like that my whole life.”

“Don’t think that way, Coop. Besides, who says they have to get us the answers. We can find them ourselves like we always do,” said Aria optimistically.

“And look on the bright side,” intruded Miles, pointing off in the distance at a row of rooftops nestled on top of one another within a valley. “We found the Village of Grayson Isle!”