

Zodiac

By Romina Russell

Download now

Read Online

Zodiac By Romina Russell

The *New York Times* bestselling novel ZODIAC is the first book in a breathtaking sci-fi series inspired by astrology that will stun fans of *The Illuminae Files* and the *Starbound* trilogy.

At the dawn of time, there were 13 Houses in the Zodiac Galaxy. Now only 12 remain....

Rhoma Grace is a 16-year-old student from House Cancer with an unusual way of reading the stars. While her classmates use measurements to make accurate astrological predictions, Rho can't solve for 'x' to save her life—so instead, she looks up at the night sky and makes up stories.

When a violent blast strikes the moons of Cancer, sending its ocean planet off-kilter and killing thousands of citizens—including its beloved Guardian—Rho is more surprised than anyone when she is named the House's new leader. But, a true Cancrian who loves her home fiercely and will protect her people no matter what, Rho accepts.

Then, when more Houses fall victim to freak weather catastrophes, Rho starts seeing a pattern in the stars. She suspects Ophiuchus—the exiled 13th Guardian of Zodiac legend—has returned to exact his revenge across the Galaxy. Now Rho—along with Hysan Dax, a young envoy from House Libra, and Mathias, her guide and a member of her Royal Guard—must travel through the Zodiac to warn the other Guardians.

But who will believe anything this young novice says? Whom can Rho trust in a universe defined by differences? And how can she convince twelve worlds to unite as one Zodiac?

Embark on a dazzling journey with *ZODIAC*, the first novel in an epic sci-fi-meets-high-fantasy series set in a galaxy inspired by the astrological signs.

Download Zodiac ...pdf

Read Online Zodiac ...pdf

Zodiac

By Romina Russell

Zodiac By Romina Russell

The *New York Times* bestselling novel ZODIAC is the first book in a breathtaking sci-fi series inspired by astrology that will stun fans of *The Illuminae Files* and the *Starbound* trilogy.

At the dawn of time, there were 13 Houses in the Zodiac Galaxy. Now only 12 remain....

Rhoma Grace is a 16-year-old student from House Cancer with an unusual way of reading the stars. While her classmates use measurements to make accurate astrological predictions, Rho can't solve for 'x' to save her life—so instead, she looks up at the night sky and makes up stories.

When a violent blast strikes the moons of Cancer, sending its ocean planet off-kilter and killing thousands of citizens—including its beloved Guardian—Rho is more surprised than anyone when she is named the House's new leader. But, a true Cancrian who loves her home fiercely and will protect her people no matter what, Rho accepts.

Then, when more Houses fall victim to freak weather catastrophes, Rho starts seeing a pattern in the stars. She suspects Ophiuchus—the exiled 13th Guardian of Zodiac legend—has returned to exact his revenge across the Galaxy. Now Rho—along with Hysan Dax, a young envoy from House Libra, and Mathias, her guide and a member of her Royal Guard—must travel through the Zodiac to warn the other Guardians.

But who will believe anything this young novice says? Whom can Rho trust in a universe defined by differences? And how can she convince twelve worlds to unite as one Zodiac?

Embark on a dazzling journey with *ZODIAC*, the first novel in an epic sci-fi-meets-high-fantasy series set in a galaxy inspired by the astrological signs.

Zodiac By Romina Russell Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #190352 in eBooks
- Published on: 2014-12-09
- Released on: 2014-12-09
- Format: Kindle eBook

Download Zodiac ...pdf

Read Online Zodiac ...pdf

Download and Read Free Online Zodiac By Romina Russell

Editorial Review

Review
"Russell's narrative mixes intrigue, romance, and adventure." ---Publishers Weekly

About the Author
Romina Russell is a Los Angeles-based author who originally hails from Buenos Aires, Argentina. As a teen, Romina landed her first writing gig-"College She Wrote," a weekly column for the Miami Herald that was later picked up for national syndication. When she's not writing, she can be found producing movie trailers.

Rebecca Gibel, an award-winning stage, television, and voice actress, has worked across the country at theaters such as Trinity Rep, Cleveland Play House, and the Arden Theatre Company. Rebecca has narrated over fifty audiobooks and is facile in a wide variety of genres.

Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Group (USA) LLC

345 Hudson Street

New York, New York 10014

USA / Canada / UK / Ireland / Australia / New Zealand / India / South Africa / China

Penguin.com

A Penguin Random House Company

Copyright © 2014 Penguin Group (USA) LLC

Penguin supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes free speech, and creates a vibrant culture. Thank you for buying an authorized edition of this book and for complying with copyright laws by not reproducing, scanning, or distributing any part of it in any form without permission. You are supporting writers and allowing Penguin to continue to publish books for every reader.

ISBN: 978-0-698-14613-6

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author’s

imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, businesses, companies, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

WHEN I THINK OF HOME, I see blue. The swirling blue of the seawater, the infinite blue of the sky, the brilliant blue of Mom's gaze. Sometimes I question if her eyes were really that blue, or if the blue of House Cancer colors them in my memory. I guess I'll never know, since I didn't pack pictures of her when I moved to Elara, the largest moon in our constellation. All I brought was the necklace.

On my brother Stanton's tenth birthday, Dad took us nar-clamming on his Strider. Unlike our schooner, which was built to cover long distances, the Strider was small and shaped like a clamshell half, with rows of buoyancy benches, clam-cubbies for the nar-clams, a holographic navigational screen, and even a diving board that stuck out from the front like a tongue. The vessel's underside was coated in millions of microscopic cilia-like legs that scurried us along the surface of the Cancer Sea.

I always loved leaning my head over the side and staring down at the tiny whirlpools that occasionally formed, swirling in various hues of blue. As if the ocean were made of paint rather than water.

I was only seven, under the legal deep-diving age, so I stayed topside with Mom, while Dad and Stanton dove down for nar-clams. Mom looked like a siren that day, perched on the peak of the diving board as we waited for the guys to surface with their spoils. Her long, light locks spilled down her back, and the sun glinted off her ivory skin and orb-like eyes. Lying back on my springy seat, I tried to soak up the heat and unwind. But I was always aware in her presence, always ready to recite facts about the Zodiac at her command.

"Rho." Mom leapt gracefully off the platform onto the carved clamshell floor, and I straightened my spine as she approached. "I have something for you."

She drew a pouch from her purse. Mom wasn't the type to buy gifts or remember special occasions; those responsibilities usually fell to Dad. "But it's not *my* birthday."

A familiar, far-off look fell over her features, and I regretted saying it. I opened the pouch and pulled out a dozen nar-clam pearls, each one a different color, all strung together on a strand of silver seahorse hair. Each pearl was spaced equally apart and bore the symbol of a different Zodiac House, inscribed in Mom's delicate calligraphy. *"Wow"* was all I could say as I slipped it on.

She flashed me a rare smile and sat on the bench beside me. As always, she smelled like water lilies. "In the early days," she whispered, her electric stare lost in the blue of the horizon, "the original Guardians ruled the Zodiac together."

Her stories always eased my nerves, and I settled into my seat, closing my eyes so I could focus on the sound of her voice. "Yet each of the Twelve prized a different strength as the key for keeping our universe safe, which caused disagreements and rifts between them. Until one day, a stranger arrived promising to restore balance. The stranger's name was *Ochus*."

Every Cancrian child knew the tale of Ochus, but Mom's version wasn't the same as the poem we had to memorize in school. The way she told it, the story sounded less like myth and more like a history lesson. "Ochus appeared before each Guardian in a different disguise, claiming to possess a powerful gift—a secret weapon that would turn the tide in that House's favor. To the philosophical Aquarian, Ochus promised an ancient text that contained answers to the Zodiac's most profound questions. To the imaginative leaders of

Gemini, he promised a magical mask that would create enchantments beyond the wearer's beliefs. To Capricorn, the wisest House of all, he promised a treasure chest filled with truths amassed from worlds older than our own, worlds accessed through Helios."

I opened my eyes to see a blonde curl blowing across Mom's forehead. I felt the urge to brush it back for her, but I knew I shouldn't. Mom wasn't *cold*, exactly, just . . . distant.

"Ochus instructed each Guardian to meet him at a secret location, where he promised to deliver his gift. Upon arriving, each of the Twelve were shocked to learn the others had also been summoned. Their shock only grew as they each described the Ochus that had visited them: The Cancrian Mother had encountered a sea snake, the Piscene Prophet saw a shapeless spirit, the Sagittarian Guardian met a hooded wanderer, and so on. As no two had seen the same stranger, the Guardians distrusted each other's accounts. While they argued, Ochus silently slipped away, taking with him the Zodiac's greatest magic: the Houses' trust in one another. All he left behind was a warning: *Beware my return, when all shall burn.*"

"He stole our trust, and we've never gotten it back," I said, reciting the moral my teacher taught us. I'd just started school a week earlier, and wanting to impress Mom further, I went on. "Ochus was the Zodiac's first orphan. He didn't have a House to belong to and was jealous of the ones in our galaxy. That's why on Cancer we look out for each other and make sure everyone has a home."

Mom's brow dipped. "You mean, *All healthy hearts start with a happy home*? Rho, you know better than that. In our lessons, I've taught you about great individuals who came from broken homes, like Galileo Sprock of Scorpio, who developed the first hologram centuries ago, or renowned pacifist Lord Vaz, House Libra's revered Guardian." She looked hurt. "If you're going to let your teachers brainwash you, then maybe you're not ready for school."

"No—it was just something I heard," I assured her. Mom was always worried about the Cancrian school system *brainwashing* me. It's why she didn't enroll me when I was five like the other kids in our House. She decided to tutor me herself instead.

I waited for her expression to clear and didn't interrupt again. I knew Mom was only looking out for me, but I liked playing with kids my age too much to go back to her homeschooling.

"The *point*," she went on, "is our ancient Guardians chose to fight one another instead of admitting they were afraid of the same monster." When I met her gaze, her expression turned hard. "You will face fears in your life, and people will try to take them from you. They'll try to convince you what you fear isn't real, that it's just in your head—but you can't let them."

Her reflective eyes drank in the blue around us, until they shone brighter than the sky itself. "*Trust your fears,* Rho. Believing in them will keep you safe."

Her stare was so intense that I had to pull away. Whenever Mom got this worked up, I'd wonder if she was just having one of her strange spells—like the time she meditated on the roof of our bungalow and didn't come down for two days—or if she had seen something in the stars.

Instead of meeting her eyes again, I surveyed the water. A trail of bubbles broke the surface, and I arched my neck to look for Dad and Stanton. But neither emerged.

"Let's take a dip," said Mom suddenly, her tone light again. She leapt up to the diving board, and in one fluid motion, she was in the water. Dad always said she was a secret mermaid. I threw on his navigational glasses to follow her movements underwater and watched her spin gracefully around the Strider. Seeing her swim

was like watching a ballet.

Just as her head broke the surface, so did Dad's and Stanton's. Dad raised his net filled with nar-clams onto the diving board, and I dragged the day's catch into the boat. Still in the sea, Dad and my brother pulled off their facemasks. In my periphery, I thought I saw bubbles frothing in the water again.

"This thing's too tight." Stanton fussed, undoing the top of his suit to free his arms. I ducked as he tossed his wet mask into the boat. It landed with a squelch. I was just about to lose the glasses and jump in with them, when a black mass broke through the sea's surface.

The snake was five feet long, with scaly skin and red eyes—but I knew from Mom's lessons its power was in its poisonous bite.

"There's a Maw next to you!" I screamed, pointing at the sea snake. Stanton shrieked as the Maw shot toward him and—before my parents could reach my brother—the snake sank its teeth into his shoulder.

Stanton cried out in pain, and Mom dove to him, swimming faster that I'd ever seen anyone go. She hooked a hand under his healthy arm and pulled him toward Dad. I just stared, too terrified to think of a way to help.

Through the glasses' special lenses, I could see the snake was orbiting us, waiting for its poison to spread and immobilize its victim, so it could feed. Its glowing red eyes can cut through darkness, which is where Maws are supposed to live—in the Rift, hundreds of fathoms down. I didn't think they ever came up this high.

As Dad carried Stanton into the boat, Mom's bright blue eyes flashed and her lips curled. I'd never seen her look like that: so furious and *feral*.

Then she vanished beneath the surface. "Mom!"

I turned to Dad in desperation, but he was bent over Stanton, sucking out the Maw's poison from his shoulder wound. I found Mom again in the water: She was leading the Maw away from us, but the snake was gaining on her. It was going to strike.

I couldn't move, I couldn't even scream; all I could do was watch. My hands gripped the side of the Strider, and I wasn't sure if my body could take much more of my heart's beating. Then Mom stopped swimming and turned around to face the snake.

Something silver glinted in her hand. It looked like the blade Dad used to pry open the nar-clams—he always brought it with him underwater, and she must have grabbed it from his belt before diving in. When the Maw lashed out with its mouth to bite her, Mom raised her hand and sliced the snake in half.

I gasped.

"Rho!" called Dad. "Where's Mom?"

"She's—alive," I said, breathless, "and coming back." Seeing Stanton's pallid and unconscious figure, my panic resurfaced. "Is he—?"

"I got the poison out, but we need to get him to a healer," said Dad, starting up the Strider and steering it toward Mom. She pulled herself up by the diving board and landed lightly in the boat. As soon as she was in, Dad went full speed.

Mom sat beside Stanton and rested her hand on his forehead. I expected her to tell Dad how she sliced the Maw in two, but she just sat there in silence. I couldn't believe how brave she'd been. She saved us.

"What in the name of Helios was a Maw doing in the shallows?" mused Dad to himself, his eyes glassy and his breathing still heavy. He didn't speak again after that, reverting to his quiet nature. I helped Mom sort the nar-clams into clam-cubbies, and when we finished, we sat with Stanton.

"Mom, I'm sorry," I muttered, the tears falling before I could stop them, "I didn't know what to do. . . ."

"It's okay, Rho," said Mom, surprising me by reaching out to adjust the pearl necklace so the Crab was centered on my chest. "You're still young, so of course the world seems scary to you." Then she looked at me—looked *into* me—and everything outside her bulletproof gaze grew blurry.

"Hold onto your fears," she whispered. "They're real."

1

TWELVE HOLOGRAPHIC SYMBOLS DRIFT DOWN the Academy hallway, gliding through people like colorful ghosts. The signs represent the Houses of our Zodiac Solar System, and they're parading to promote unity. But everyone's too busy buzzing about tonight's Lunar Quadract to spare them a glance.

"You ready for tonight?" asks my best friend, Nishiko, an exchange student from Sagittarius. She waves at her locker and it pops open.

"Yeah . . . what I'm not ready for is this test," I say, still watching the twelve signs drift through the school. Acolytes aren't invited to the celebration, so we're hosting our own party on campus. And after Nishi's brilliant idea to bribe the dining hall staff into adding our new song to their lunchtime playlist, our band was voted to play the event.

I dip my fingers in my coat pocket to make sure I have my drumsticks, just as Nishi slams her locker shut. "Have they told you why they're making you re-
take it?"

"Probably the same old reason—I never show my work."

"I don't know. . . ." Nishi scrunches up her forehead in that uniquely Sagittarian *I'm-curious-about-everything* way. "They might want to know more about what you saw in the stars last time."

I shake my head. "I only saw it because I don't use an Astralator for my predictions. Everyone knows intuition isn't star-proof."

"Having a different method doesn't make you wrong. I think they want to hear more about your omen." She waits for me to say something more about it, and when I don't, she pushes harder. "You said it was black? And . . . *writhing*?"

"Yeah, kind of," I mutter. Nishi knows I don't like discussing that vision, but asking a Sagittarian to suppress her curiosity is like asking a Cancrian to abandon a friend in need. Neither is in our natures.

"Have you seen it again since the test?" she presses.

This time I don’t answer. The symbols are rounding the corner. I can just make out the Fish of Pisces before they vanish.

“I should go,” I finally say, flashing her a small smile so she knows I’m not upset. “See you onstage.”

• • •

The halls still swarm with restless Acolytes, so nobody sees me slip into Instructor Tidus’s empty classroom. I leave the lights off and let instinct guide me through the black space.

When I’ve reached the teacher’s desk, I feel along its surface until my fingers find cold metal. Though I know I shouldn’t, I switch on the Ephemeris.

Stars puncture the blackness.

Hovering in the center of the room, countless winking pinpricks of light form a dozen distinct constellations—the Houses of the Zodiac. Larger balls of colored light swirl among the stars: our planets and moons. In the midst of it all burns a ball of blazing fire: Helios.

I slide a stick from my pocket and twirl it. Amid all the sparkles in the glittering universe, I find the churning mass of blue, the brightest point in the Crab-shaped constellation . . . and I miss home.

The Blue Planet.

Cancer.

I reach out, but my hand goes right through the hologram. Four lesser gray orbs hover in a row beside my planet; if connected, they look like they would form a straight line. That’s because the Lunar Quadract is the only time this millennium our four moons will align.

Our school sits on Cancer’s closest and largest moon, Elara. We share this gray rock with the prestigious Zodai University, which has training campuses on every House in our galaxy.

I’m forbidden from activating the school’s Ephemeris without an instructor present. I steal a last look at my home planet, a whirling ball of blending blues, and I picture Dad at our airy bungalow home, tending to his nar-clams on the banks of the Cancer Sea. The smell of the salty water engulfs me, and the heat of Helios warms my skin, almost like I’m really there. . . .

The Ephemeris flickers, and our smallest and farthest moon disappears.

I fix on the black spot where the gray light of Thebe was just extinguished—and one by one, the other moons go dark.

I turn to inspect the rest of the constellations, just as the whole galaxy explodes in a blinding blast of light.

The room is plunged into total darkness, until images begin to appear all around me. On the walls, the ceiling, desks—every surface is covered in multicolored holograms. Some I can identify from my classes, but there are so many—words, images, equations, diagrams, charts—that I can’t possibly take them all in—

“Acolyte Rho!”

The room is flooded with light. The holograms disappear, and the place is back to being a plain classroom.

The Ephemeris sits innocently on the teacher's desk.

Instructor Tidus towers over it. Her old, plump face is so perpetually pleasant that it's hard to tell when I've upset her. "You were told to wait outside. You have been reminded of this before: Acolytes are forbidden from using the school Ephemeris without an instructor, and I can't imagine what you'll need a drumstick for during your testing."

"Sorry, ma'am." The stick goes still in my hand and joins its twin in my pocket.

Hanging behind her is the only disruption to the room's white walls, white ceiling, and white floor. Large letters in blue ink, bearing the Zodai's favorite precaution: *Trust Only What You Can Touch.*

Dean Lyll barges in. I square my shoulders, surprised to see the head of the Academy present at my exam. It's bad enough being the only student forced to take this test twice. Doing it under his curt supervision will be unbearable.

"Acolyte, take a seat until we are ready to proceed." The dean is tall and thin, and unlike Instructor Tidus, there isn't a pleasant thing about him. So much for Nishi's theory that they want to hear more about my vision.

I slide into a chair, wishing the room had a window. Mother Origene, the Guardian of our House, landed less than an hour ago with her Council of Advisors and the Zodai Royal Guard. I'd love to catch even a passing glimpse of them.

My friends and I are graduating this year, so the Academy has already submitted our transcripts for consideration at Zodai University. Only the top Acolytes in our class will be accepted.

The university's best-ranked graduates get invited to join the Order of the Zodai, our galaxy's peacekeepers. The best of the best are recruited into the Guardian's Royal Guard, the Zodai's highest honor.

When I was younger, I used to dream about being in the Royal Guard one day. Until I realized it wasn't my dream.

"Given that our moon is hosting tonight's celebration," says the dean, "we'll need to make this quick."

"Yes, sir." My hands itch for my sticks again. I step into the middle of the room as the dean activates the Ephemeris.

"Please give a general read on the Lunar Quadract."

The room plunges into darkness once more, and the twelve constellations come alight. I wait until the whole Zodiac has filled out, and then I try accessing my Center—the first step to reading the stars.

The Ephemeris is a device that reflects Space in real time, but when we're Centered, it can be used to tap into the Psy Network, or Collective Conscious—where we're not limited to the physical realm. Where we can read what's written in the stars.

Centering means relaxing my vision so much my eyes start to cross, like looking at a stereogram, followed by calling on whatever brings me the greatest inner peace. It can be a memory, a movement, a story—whatever most touches my soul.

When I was very young, Mom taught me an ancient art the very first Zodai used to access their Center.

Passed on from long-forgotten civilizations, it's called Yarrot, and it's a series of poses designed to mimic the twelve constellations of the Zodiac. The movements align one's body and mind with the stars, and the longer you practice, the easier Centering is supposed to become . . . but when Mom left, I gave it up.

I stare at the four gray orbs floating next to Cancer, but I can't relax my vision. I'm too worried Thebe will vanish again. My brother, Stanton, works there.

We Cancrians are known for our nurturing natures and strong family values. We're supposed to put our loved ones ahead of ourselves. Yet one after the other, my Mom, my brother, and I abandoned Dad. Abandoned our home.

"Four minutes."

I pull my drumstick from my pocket and pirouette it on my fingertips until the movement relaxes me, and then I start to play my latest composition in my mind, the beat growing louder with every rendition. Eventually, I can't hear anything else.

After what feels like forever but might just be minutes, my mind begins to rise, elevating higher, toward Helios. The lights of the Crab constellation start to shuffle, adjusting their place in the sky. Our four moons—Elara, Orion, Galene, Thebe—move to their future positions, where they'll be in a few hours, for the Lunar Quadract.

My instructors can't see the movement because it's only happening in the Psy Network, so it's confined to my mind. Skill level and ability determine what and how much a Zodai can see when Centered, so visions of the future are unique for each of us.

Once the stars in the holographic map have realigned themselves, their trajectories leave faint arcs in Space that fade fast. Using an Astralator, we can measure these movements and plug the numbers into equations—but if I have to solve for *x*, the Lunar Quadract will be over before I can predict it. And, as Dean Lyll pointed out, we *are* in a rush. . . .

I concentrate as hard as I can, and soon I pick up a faint rhythm reaching me from afar, echoing weakly in my ears. It sounds like a drumbeat—or a pulse. Its beat is slow and ominous . . . like something's coming for us.

Then the vision appears—the same vision I've been seeing for a week now: a smoldering black mass, barely distinguishable from Space, pressing into the atmosphere past the Twelfth House, Pisces. Its influence seems to be warping our Crab constellation out of shape.

The problem with digging so deep inside my mind without using an Astralator is there's no way to tell apart which warnings are from the stars and which ones I'm manifesting myself.

Thebe vanishes again.

"There's a bad omen," I blurt. "A dangerous opposition in the stars."

The Ephemeris shuts off, and the lights come on. Dean Lyll is scowling at me. "Nonsense. Show me your work."

"I . . . forgot my Astralator."

"You haven't even done the arithmetic!" He rounds on Instructor Tidus. "Is this a joke?"

Instructor Tidus addresses me from the other end of the room. “Rho, the fact that we’re here at all right now should indicate how crucial this test is. Our most important long-term planning depends on precise star readings. How we invest, where we build, what our farms grow. I thought you would take today more seriously.”

“I’m sorry,” I say, shame spreading through me as swiftly as Maw poison.

“Your unorthodox methods are failing you, and now I expect you to do the math, the way your peers do.”

Even my toes must be red. “Could I go get my Astralator?”

Without answering, Dean Lyll opens the door and calls into the hallway, “Does anyone have an Astralator for an unprepared Acolyte to borrow?”

Even, measured footsteps approach, and a man marches into the room, something small clasped in his hands. I suppress a gasp of surprise.

“Lodestar Mathias Thais!” booms Dean Lyll, reaching out to touch fists, our traditional greeting. “Wonderful to have you back on our moon for the celebration.”

The man nods but doesn’t speak. He’s still shy. The first time I saw him was almost five years ago, when he was still a student at Zodai University. I was twelve and just starting at the Academy. I missed the singing surf of the Cancer Sea too much to get more than a couple hours’ sleep those nights, so I’d spend the rest of the time exploring the city-sized, enclosed compound we share with the university.

That’s how I discovered the solarium. It’s at the very end of the compound, on the university side, a wide room with windowed walls that curve to form a windowed ceiling. I remember walking in and watching in awe as Helios came into view. I closed my eyes and let the giant orange-red rays warm my skin—until I heard a noise behind me.

In the shadow of an elaborate moonstone sculpture, carved in the shape of our Guardian, was a guy. His eyes were closed in deep meditation, and I recognized his meditative pose instantly. He was practicing Yarrot.

I came back the next day with a book to read, and he was there again. Soon, it became a ritual. Sometimes we were alone, sometimes there were others. We never spoke, but something about being near him, or maybe just being near Yarrot again, soothed my nerves and made it easier to be so far from home.

“That’s a marvelous Astralator,” says the dean, as the Lodestar holds it out to him. “Give it to Acolyte Rho.” I swallow, hard, as he turns to me for the first time.

Surprise registers in his indigo blue eyes. *He knows me.* Warmth spreads through my skin, like I’m being bathed in the light of Helios again.

The Lodestar must be twenty-two now. He’s grown—his lean body has a bigger build, and his wavy black hair is trimmed short and neat, like the other male Zodai. “Don’t drop it, please,” he says in a mild baritone, a voice so musical my bones vibrate.

He passes me his mother-of-pearl Astralator, and our hands brush. The touch tingles up my arm.

So low only I can hear him, he adds, “It’s a family heirloom.”

“She will return it to you when her exam concludes—and in one piece.” Dean Lyll doesn’t look at me. “Her

grade will rest on its safe return."

Before I can say a single word in his presence, the Lodestar turns and takes off. Great—now he thinks I'm a mute.

"Again," says the dean, impatience coming through in his clipped tone.

The Ephemeris takes over the room. Once I'm Centered and the moons have aligned, I gently hold out the cylindrical instrument and point it at the fading trajectory arcs. Cancrians have excellent memories, and mine is good even by our standards, so I don't need to write the numbers down. When I've taken all the measurements I need—enough to make a prediction about tonight—the dean shuts off the Ephemeris.

I'm still making calculations when the timer goes off. When I finish, I realize the dean was right—there's no opposition in the stars.

"The math looks good," he says roughly. "See how much better you do when you follow instructions and use the right equipment?"

"Yes, sir," I say, even though something is still bothering me. "Sir, what if using the Astralator is shortsighted? What if I didn't see the omen this time because the disturbance isn't near our moons yet—it's still at the far edge of Space? Wouldn't the Astralator be unable to account for a distance that far?"

The dean sighs. "More nonsense. Oh well. At least you passed." Still shaking his head, he yanks open the door and says, "Instructor Tidus, I will meet you at the celebration."

When we're alone, my teacher smiles at me. "How many times must we tell you, Rho? Your clever theories and imaginative stories have no place in astrological science."

"Yes, ma'am." I bow my head, hoping she's right.

"You have talent, Rho, and we don't mean to discourage you." She moves closer as she speaks, until we're face to face. "Think of your drums. You first had to master the basics before you could compose your own riffs. The same principle applies here: If you practice daily on your tutorial Ephemeris with an Astralator, I'm certain you'll see vast improvements in your arithmetic and technique."

The compassion in her eyes makes me feel ashamed that I've put no effort into getting better with an Astralator. It's just that her insistence on daily practices reminds me too much of Mom, and I like to keep those memories walled off.

But disappointing Instructor Tidus hurts as much as remembering.

• • •

I race to my dorm-pod to change, too crunched for time to find the Lodestar and return his Astralator. I'll have to search for him after the celebration.

The door unlocks at my touch, and I swap my Academy blues for the brand new space suit—black and skintight—I bought myself as an early birthday present. Nishiko is going to flip when she sees me.

Before heading out, I consult my Wave, a small golden device shaped like a clam. Cancrians believe knowledge is like water, fluid and ever changing, so we carry with us a Wave—an interactive way of recording, reviewing, and sending information. The moment I open it, holographic data blooms out and

streams all around me: news headlines, messages from friends, updates to my calendar.

Earlier, when Instructor Tidus turned off her Ephemeris, I caught only a brief glimpse of the holograms in her room. But it was long enough for one of them to register.

“Where do we come from?” I ask.

The large holographic diagram from earlier materializes in the air, larger than all the others. It represents an ancient exodus from a world far away and lost to time, a world called Earth.

Archeologists think our earliest ancestors came from there, and the drawing depicts them arriving at our galaxy through Helios—though no one believes that’s really how they got here. As the Wave runs through our history, an image of the twelve constellations materializes. Only in Instructor Tidus’s hologram, there weren’t twelve.

There were thirteen.

2

“RHO!” NISHI’S FACE BLASTS THROUGH all the data, and I jump back a few feet.

“I know, I know, I’m coming!” I call back.

She reaches her hands out like she wants to strangle me, and she looks so real I almost duck—but her holographic fingers go right through my neck.

The Zodiac’s traditional hand-touch greeting evolved when it grew hard to tell hologram from human. Our teachers are always reminding us that holograms can be manipulated and forged, and those who have fallen victim to identity fraud have lost fortunes, even lives. But it’s such a rare crime that the axiom *Trust Only What You Can Touch* has become more superstition than real warning.

The holograms disappear as I stuff the Wave up my glove, grab my instrument case, and pull on my helmet. When I leave the Academy, I’m semi-weightless in a subzero climate, facing a dusty gray expanse where a crowd is beginning to form around a crystal dome stage. The crystal is pitch-black, so no one can see inside yet.

I look up at the sky; our three other moons are lined in a row, bright as beacons. My vision from the Ephemeris still haunts me, and for a moment Thebe’s light seems to flicker. I shake it off and make for the dome.

In our moon’s weak gravity, I bounce out in long, flying leaps. The crowd around me is a sea of shapes and colors, an array of space suit fashion on full display. There are designer suits that sparkle with precious stones, gimmicky suits that do things like project holograms into the air, functional suits that light up in the dark, and more.

The farther I get from the compound, the thicker the night grows, its blackness interrupted only by the glimmer of glow-in-the-dark fabric or a holographic helmet. I steel my gaze on the crystal dome ahead, dazzling like a half-buried diamond. Once I’ve reached the small side door, I Wave Nishi to let me in.

“*Helios*, can you breathe in that thing?” As soon as I cycle through the airlock, Nishi holds me at arm’s

length to scan my outfit. “It’s about time your body came out of hiding and saw some action.”

I take off my helmet and shake my blonde curls loose. Deke whistles appreciatively from the other end of the dome. “Show the men of the Zodiac what we’re missing, Rho.”

I blush, already wishing I was back under the helmet’s shell. “I *date*.”

Nishi laughs. “If by *date* you mean endure a male’s company for fifteen minutes of stuffing your faces before you’re already Waving one of us to come rescue you—”

“Yes, that’s exactly what a date—”

“We get it, Rho, no one’s good enough for you.”

I stare at Deke, my mouth half-open with indignation, but he ignores my glare and turns to Nishi, holding something out to her. “I got them.”

“You didn’t!” Nishi springs over and inspects the four finger-sized bottles of bubbling black tonic in Deke’s hands. *“How?”*

I recognize the Abyssthe immediately. It’s a drink the Zodai take to improve their performance in the Ephemeris.

Centering requires an extreme amount of concentration and consumes a ton of mental energy because it requires a person to reach down into her innermost self and listen to the thing that connects her to the stars—her soul. Abyssthe helps lengthen the feeling so that a Zodai can read the Ephemeris for a longer stretch of time.

The three of us have taken it once before, for Instructor Tidus’s lesson on Macro Reads, under her supervision. Its sale is closely regulated, so it’s very hard to get. A smug smile steals over Deke’s features. “Nish, a true Zodai never reveals his secrets.”

“You totally stole it from the university’s lab,” she says, plucking a bottle. Abyssthe is produced in House Sagittarius. Nishi told me that if taken outside an Ephemeris setting, the tonic has a mood-altering effect, making a person feel light-hearted and less inhibited.

Deke hands Kai and me the other two bottles. I’m not sure how I felt about Abyssthe when we took it in class—the brain and body buzz was nice, but the disorienting effect lasted so long I started to panic it would never wear off. They only sell it to people seventeen and older on Cancer . . . which is what I’ll be in just a few weeks.

“What will it feel like this time?” I ask Nishi. She’s the only one of us who’s taken it recreationally before. Sagittarians don’t believe in age restrictions.

“Like *you’re* the Ephemeris,” she says, already opening hers and taking a whiff. I smell a hint of licorice. “You feel your mind broadening, like it’s expanding into infinity, the way Space swells out from the Ephemeris. Everything becomes tenuous and dreamlike, like you’re Centered, and there’s this body high that’s like being . . . weightless.”

“Which we pretty much are on this moon anyway,” Deke points out.

Nishi rolls her eyes at him. While most people study on their own planets, Sagittarius is one of the more

widespread Houses because they're natural-born wanderers. Sagittarians are truth-seekers who will follow a trail of knowledge to whatever end—having fun the whole way.

"How long will the effects last?" I ask, shaking the bottle. The Abyssthe bubbles and froths, like it's half liquid, half air.

The peak dropout point for students at Zodai University is when they get to Galactic Readings in the Ephemeris, and they're required to dose themselves with Abyssthe almost every day for a month. I read that students who've had prior experience with Abyssthe tend to endure it better and have a greater chance of graduating.

"It'll wear off by the end of our first set," Nishi assures me. "And *no*, it won't affect your drumming," she adds, guessing my next question. "You'll still be *you*—just a more relaxed you."

Nishi and Deke down theirs in one gulp, but I hesitate and meet Kai's gaze. He only joined the band two months ago. Since he's a year younger, he's never tried Abyssthe before, and his eyes are round with terror.

To take the attention off him and ease his fear, I wink and drink mine. With a worried smile, Kai nods and takes his, too.

The four of us stare at each other. Nothing happens for so long that we start laughing. "Someone marked you for a sucker," says Nishi, snorting, pointing at Deke.

Then, one by one, we fall silent.

Abyssthe begins with a body buzz I can feel down to my bones, and it makes me wonder whether the crystal dome has detached itself from the moon and is now floating into Space. Nishi was right: My consciousness is tingling, like I'm Centered, but the universe I'm diving through is actually my mind. My head feels so sensitive that it tickles when I think.

I start laughing.

"Countdown: five minutes!" booms a disembodied voice. It's Deke's pod-mate Xander, who manages the sound for our shows from his studio.

We all jump, and I unpack my drum kit, the Abyssthe making it hard to focus on anything in the physical realm. It takes me way too many attempts to fit four spindly metal pegs into their holes on the drum mat, a bouncy bed beneath my feet that has a plush burgundy chair at its center and a crescent of holes arranged around it.

When the pieces are in place and I sit down, the mat lights up and round metal plates unfold from the ends of each rod I've planted. They look like lily pads blossoming on tall stems.

"*Lily pads*," I say out loud, laughing. If metal is starting to remind me of organic life, I must miss home more than I realize.

"Rho's delirious!" shouts Nishi, collapsing in a fit of giggles on the floor.

So is Nishi, if she's risking damage to her imported levlan suit—but the words that come shrieking out of me are: "No, I'm not!" I pounce on her, and we play-wrestle on the floor, each trying to tickle the other.

"Yes, you are!" calls Deke. He's stuffed both feet into his helmet and is hopping around the dome, declaring

the exercise an “excellent workout” every time he falls.

“She can’t be delirious!” blurts Kai, who hasn’t spoken more than a few sentences our whole bandship.

Nishi and I pull apart and stare at him. Even Deke stops hopping. Then Kai shouts, “Delirious isn’t real if you can’t touch it!”

We all explode in howling laughter, and Deke takes Kai under his arm and scruffs up his hair. “My boy! He talks!”

Kai slips out of Deke’s hold, and Deke chases him around, until we hear Xander’s booming voice again: “One minute!”

We scream and scramble for our instruments.

I plop onto the plush chair and fit my feet into a pair of metal boots with pedals built in. Two stacked plates—*lily pads*—bloom from the tip of my left foot, my hi-hat, and the largest plate of all, the bass drum, emerges from my right boot, along with a pedal-operated beater.

I’ve tuned each pad to sound exactly the way I want, so I whirl my sticks in my hands in anticipation, while Deke positions his holographic guitar across his chest. He runs his lucky pick—a crab-shark tooth—through the color-changing strings, and an angry riff wails out. Even though it’s a hologram, his guitar operates on technology sensitive enough to trigger sound when Deke makes contact. It’s the same with Kai’s bass.

“Sound check!” calls Deke.

I roll my sticks across each pad, and then I press hard on the pedals in my boots. The bass drum reverberates menacingly throughout the dome. Nishi joins the percussion next, her voice throaty and soulful. Once Deke and Kai come in, the melody of Nishi’s song is haunting against our heavy and complicated compositions.

We only run through a few bars, enough to make sure everything’s working right, and then we go deathly silent as we wait for the crystal to turn clear. The nerves of playing are stronger than Abyssthe’s buzz, and soon I can’t tell apart the tonic’s effect from my own restless anticipation.

Xander’s voice cuts through the heaviness: “Academy Acolytes! You have been excluded from the big celebration, but you still deserve a good time! On that note, and performing now for your plebian pleasures, I present to you the incredible *Drowning Diamonds*!”

The blackness lifts, making the crystal window so clear it’s barely detectable, and the dome’s lights blast on, illuminating the night. Outside, hundreds of Acolytes are soundlessly rising and falling in the air, trying to jump as high as they can. Some are flashing holographic messages in the sky, all directed at the same person.

Marry me, Sagittarian siren!

I’ve been pierced by your arrow, Archer!

Wander my way, Truth-Seeker!

As a Sagittarian, Nishi doesn’t share our Cancrian curls and light eyes—her locks are straight and black, her skin is a creamy cinnamon, and her eyes are amber and slanted. Add a sultry singing voice to her exotic beauty, and she’s pretty much stolen every Cancrian guy’s heart at the Academy.

Cancer has the widest range of skin colors in the galaxy—something I've always loved about our House. Back home, I had a sun-kissed golden tan, but after being on Elara so long, I'm now pale and pasty. What we Cancrians all have in common is our curly hair—which spans every shade but is often bleached from so much sun exposure—and the color of our eyes, which reflect the Cancer Sea.

Cancrian irises range from the softest of sea greens, kind of like mine, to the deepest of indigo blues . . . like Lodestar Mathias Thais's.

Nishi flashes her adorers a winning smile and does a slow turn to show off her sexy red suit, the levlan twisting with every curve of her body. She waves me over so I'll join her, but I shake my head vehemently.

I hate the spotlight—I only agreed to be in the band because as a drummer I can hang farthest back, hidden by my instrument. Deke and Kai aren't crazy about being front and center either—it's a Cancrian thing—so they tend to migrate toward either edge of the dome while they play.

In the distance beyond the crowd, a freighter lands to refuel at our spaceport. The Academy/university compound now has armed Zodai standing guard at every entrance, checking people's identification as they file in to hear our Guardian's speech. It's hard to believe I've been on this moon almost five years, and soon I might be leaving it forever.

We won't find out if we've been accepted to the university for another month. This could be our last show here.

The Abyssthe's influence briefly grows stronger, just for a moment, and I feel myself slightly spacing out, like I'm Centering.

In that second, I see a shadow flit across Thebe. When I blink, it's gone.

"All right, *diamonds*—time to *drown* this place in noise!" shouts Nishi, her voice amplified in the dome and playing through the speakers of every helmet watching.

Another wave of soundless cheers ensues outside, holographic messages flicker, people soar higher off the ground, fists shake in the air—it's time. Nishi turns and winks at me. That's my cue to start us off.

I count four beats with my sticks, and then I come down hard on the snare and cymbal, simultaneously slamming on the bass pedal, and—

I blast backward as an invisible surge of energy smacks into me, hurling me off my chair. I hear my friends also taking tumbles.

My body trembles uncontrollably on the floor from the fiery pulse of electric energy. Once I stop seizing, I pull myself up.

I wish I hadn't taken the Abyssthe—it's making everything wobbly, and I can barely stand upright. As my vision begins to clear, I only have time to register the sight of our three moons, glistening like pearls strung on a string, when I see it: a fireball bursting through our Crab constellation, burning a path through Space.

With a scream, I realize I already know where it's going to land.

WHEN I OPEN MY EYES, the dome is dark. All I remember is a fireball . . . and then the world went white.

I reach out and feel pieces of my drum set scattered across the floor. “Nishi? Deke? Kai?” I rise and pick my way through the rubble of stuff, toward the others.

“I’m okay,” says Nishi, her back against the wall, head buried in her hands. “Just . . . dizzy.”

“A-live,” spits Deke from somewhere behind me.

“*Holy Helios,*” I whisper, scanning the scene outside through the crystal window. The sight is terrifying. The crowd of Acolytes that was jumping and cheering moments ago is now floating unconsciously a few feet off the ground. Whether they’re passed out or worse, I don’t know.

Chunks of metal, plaster, and other materials clutter the air, swimming along with the limp bodies. The debris looks familiar.

I try to see what’s happening by the compound, but I can’t. The window is fogging up fast.

A high-pitched noise grows louder, and I catch a crack creeping down the side of the crystal. As I watch, the fracturing spreads into a spider web of lines, and when the whinnying pitch reaches a new high, I realize what’s about to happen.

“RUN!”

I reach for my helmet and toss Nishi hers. Deke grabs his, and I cast my gaze around the room, realizing I never heard Kai answer.

He’s still passed out, his body a small heap. I shove his helmet on his head and pull him up. Hooking a shoulder under his arm, I take him with me through the door Deke is holding open.

Deke comes through last—right as the crystal window blows.

Nishi screams, and Deke shoves the door, slamming it shut just in time. Shards of crystal stab the other side.

As soon as we’re on the moon’s surface, the lower oxygen lightens my load. I try using my helmet’s communication system, but it’s not working. Since the dome is blocking our view of campus and the compound, I signal to Deke and Nishi that we should go around.

When we reach the crowd, the sight is so devastating my vision blurs, like my eyes don’t want to see more. It takes me a moment to realize I’m sobbing.

Bodies are everywhere. Floating past each other peacefully, three or four feet above the ground. None of them have woken up.

A pink space suit no bigger than Kai drifts past my head, the person light enough to rise higher than the others. I reach for the girl’s leg and pull her closer. Where a face should be, there’s only frost.

Her thermal controls stopped working. . . . She froze to death.

Shaking, I look around at the suspended space suits surrounding me.

They’re *all* dead.

Everything within me goes so cold, my suit might as well have stopped working, too. I suck in lungfuls of oxygen, but still I can't breathe. There are too many bodies here . . . more than a hundred . . . more than two—

I can't.

I can't count. I don't want to know.

A generation of Cancrian children who can never go home again.

It's only when I see Deke and Nishiko move in my periphery that I look up. They've both turned and are surveying the damage behind us, at the compound, their gloved hands gripping the sides of their helmets like it's the only way they'll keep their heads. My gut clenches with dread, and I already know what horrors await if I turn to look.

I know the debris in the air isn't all from Elara's surface.

There are papers and notebooks and bags. Chairs and desks and books. And other bodies . . . bodies not wearing compression suits.

Faint shadows move in the distance.

Squinting, I see a small trail of people bounce-jumping toward the spaceport from the far side of the compound.

I decide not to look back. Right now, I need to get my friends and myself to safety—and to do that, the suffering has to stay behind me. I have to wall off the pain.

If I turn around, I might not be able to.

I nudge Deke and signal to the spaceport. Through his helmet's visor, his face is pale and wet. He takes Kai off my shoulder, and I get Nishi's attention, and together we follow the other survivors.

The spaceport's floodlights are dark, but when we reach the edge of the launchpad, there's a man directing us with a laser torch. When he sees Deke carrying an unconscious Kai, he motions for us to climb into the small mining ship parked in front of the hangar.

I help Deke get Kai on board, and when we've cycled through the airlock, we gently lay him down on the deck and remove his helmet. Then I yank off my own and take deep gulps of air.

We're alone in a cargo hold full of spherical orange tanks of liquid helium from Elara's mines. Frost webs the dark walls, and our breath makes puffs of vapor. The other survivors must have gone deeper into the hangar, toward a larger passenger ship.

The man who was guiding us emerges through the airlock and rushes up to Kai. His compression suit bears the insignia of the Zodai Royal Guard. When he takes off his helmet, I see a pair of indigo blue eyes.

Lodestar Mathias Thais.

Gently, he listens for breath, checks Kai's pulse, and peels open an eyelid. "This boy has fainted. Can someone pass me the healing kit?"

I reach for the large yellow case hanging by the airlock door and hand it to him. When his eyes meet mine, he holds my gaze an extra-long moment, the way he did forever ago in Instructor Tidus's room. Only this time, the surprise in his face doesn't warm my skin. I'm not sure I'll ever be warm again.

He rifles through the vials and packets, then breaks some kind of glass ampoule under Kai's nose. It must be wake-up gas, because Kai jerks up, swinging a punch.

The Lodestar dodges. "Relax. You lost consciousness, but you're going to be fine."

"Lodestar Thais," I say, my voice rough, "what's happened?"

His brow furrows, and he blinks like I just did something unexpected. Maybe he really did think I was mute.

"Please, call me Mathias." Even now, his voice is musical. "And I think it best that we wait to discuss," he adds, looking pointedly at Kai.

"Mathias," I say, a hardness in my tone that wasn't there before, "*please*—we have to know." When I say his name, color rushes to his face, like a match sparking, and I wonder if I've offended him. Maybe he was just being polite offering his first name. "Lodestar Thais," I say quickly, "does it have to do with Thebe?"

"Mathias will do." He turns from me and surveys my friends. I follow his gaze. They look as broken as I feel, and yet they're staring at him just as defiantly.

When his eyes meet mine again, I say, "We don't deserve to be kept in the dark after everything we just saw."

That seems to convince him. "There was an explosion on Thebe."

I turn my head so fast, everything spins. Somehow, I knew it the moment I saw the fireball. I knew it would land on Thebe.

Stanton.

My insides twist like sea snakes, and I snap open my Wave to reach my brother, but there's no connection. I try checking the news and my messages, but nothing's coming through. It's like the whole network has gone offline.

"Rho, I'm sure he's all right," says Nishi, massaging my back. She's the only one of my friends who's met Stanton before. The only one who knows how much he means to me.

Mathias stares at me questioningly but doesn't ask.

"What about the people on Elara?" I whisper. He shakes his head, and I'm not sure he's going to answer.

"The pulse killed the power in their suits . . . everyone outside froze to death." He takes a shaky breath before going on. "Pieces of Thebe entered our atmosphere and crashed into the compound. It's . . . hard to tell how many survived."

Something jolts our ship and knocks me into a helium tank.

Deke helps me up and we all look around apprehensively as the metal hull creaks and the orange tanks bump together. The vibrations intensify, building into a tremor, until the ship is quaking from side to side.

“Shockwave from the explosion!” Mathias calls over the noise. “Hold onto something!”

Nishi shrieks, but Deke steadies her. I grip a handrail and close my eyes. If *we’re* having moonquakes, what must be happening on Thebe? Close to three thousand people work at the moon base there.

Stanton told me they have shelters—please let him be in a shelter right now. . . . He has to be in a shelter right now . . . *please*.

With one last convulsion, the shaking ends as abruptly as it started. I watch Mathias move his lips, speaking soundlessly to someone we can’t see. Only the Zodai can communicate that way. When his invisible conversation is over, he says, “A meteoroid may have struck Thebe. This ship is launching now. We’re heading home to Cancer.”

4

THE TRIP WILL TAKE TEN HOURS.

Mathias moves us into the crew’s bunkroom, where we’re belted into oil-stained hammocks that stink of mildew, while he goes to the bridge. When we’re alone and buckled up, I can’t look my friends in the face. Somehow, seeing them will make the bodies on Elara real.

Every House has a different outlook on death. We Cancrians send our dead into space, toward Helios, the gateway to the afterlife. We believe those who pass on with settled souls are at peace and gone for good, while the unsettled soul lives on in the stars as a new constellation.

The hope is that one day, the unsettled soul can return to live again on Cancer.

I picture the girl in the pink space suit. Where will her soul go?

I chase the thought from my mind by trying to Wave Stanton and Dad, but there’s still no connection. I wonder if Dad even knows what happened. He doesn’t watch the news, and his Wave is so old he sometimes has to open and close it twice to get the holographic menus to pop out.

G-forces press us down as we lift off Elara. The ship’s engines rumble, loud and ferocious, but I can already hear the ocean’s everlasting breath. Maybe Stanton wasn’t on Thebe. Maybe he’s home right now, waiting for me. The last time we spoke, he told me he was visiting Dad soon.

The hull of the mining ship groans and creaks as we accelerate upward from the moon, leaving the past five years of our lives behind.

“It’s okay, Nish,” says Deke, squeezing her hand. She gives him a weak smile, her eyes rimmed red and puffy.

At last, the engines cut off, signaling our escape from Elara’s gravity, and in the sudden quiet, my ears tingle. Gripping my Wave, I unclasp my belt and float out of the hammock, weightless. So do the others.

“I don’t understand why Mother Origene didn’t warn us,” says Kai, speaking his first words since waking. He tries Waving his parents, but there’s no connection. “The stars must have shown signs.”

“To see a meteoroid that big, I doubt you’d even need an Ephemeris,” says Deke, scrolling through his Wave

contacts, trying to get through to anyone on Cancer. “Any telescope should have caught it.”

I’ve been wondering the same thing. The Guardian has two main duties: representing her House in the Galactic Senate and protecting her people by reading the future. So what happened?

“Rho.”

Nishi’s whisper is so frail, it’s the first thing about tonight that seems real. “The omen you saw during your test, the one you’ve been seeing when you read my future for fun, the one you won’t talk about”—she chokes back a sob, tiny weightless tears slipping from her amber eyes and scattering through the air—“could it be . . . *real*?”

“No,” I say quickly. Her expression hardens with distrust, which hurts because Cancrians don’t use deceit. “It *can’t* be,” I insist, spilling my evidence: “When I saw the black mass today, at my retest, even Dean Lyll said it was nonsense. He made me use an Astralator, and it confirmed—”

“*You saw it again today*,” says Nishi, like she hasn’t heard a word past that admission. “You’ve been seeing it for days, and then you saw it again today, and now *this*—Rho, take another look in the Ephemeris.”

“Why don’t one of you look, you’re better with an Astralator—”

“Because we didn’t see a dark mass in our readings.”

“I failed and had to take the test twice, Nishi,” I argue, my volume rising. “My reading was *wrong*.”

“Oh, really? So nothing bad happened tonight then?” Her voice breaks, and more tears slip into the air, like tiny diamonds.

I look over at Deke, hoping he’ll disagree with her. After all, he’s always the first to dismiss my reads as silly stories.

Only he’s not paying us attention. He’s just staring at his Wave blankly.

He couldn’t get through to anyone.

“Okay,” I whisper with a sigh. “I’ll do it.”

I scroll through my Wave and find my copy of the Ephemeris. It’s just a tutorial version, so it doesn’t have all the detail of the Academy’s, but it still works. Stanton gave it to me last year, for my sixteenth birthday. When I whisper the command, the star map swells out in a holographic projection the size of a puffer fish. I relax my vision until my eyes cross, and then I reach into my pocket for my drumsticks.

Only they’re not there. Like everything else I own, they’re gone.

My eyes burn.

“I’m sorry, Rho, I shouldn’t have asked,” says Nishi, hugging me in midair. “Just forget it.”

“No, you’re right.” My voice comes out steady and determined. I give Nishi a squeeze back, and then I face the map again. “I have to do something. I have to help—if I can.”

I summon up one of my usual melodies, sans sticks—but the music reminds me too much of our show. I

can’t find anything in me to call on.

A blaze of blue flashes through the cabin’s small window, and I look up from the map to the real thing.

Even from this far, after so long of only seeing it in the Ephemeris, Cancer is breathtaking. Ninety-eight percent water, our planet is painted every shade of blue, streaked with barely perceptible slices of green. Cancer’s cities are built on massive pods that float calmly on the sea’s surface, like giant, half-submerged anemones. Our largest structures—buildings, commercial centers, schools—are secured with anchors.

The pods that hold the most populated cities are so vast that whenever I visit one I forget I’m not on land—except when a shift in the planet’s core triggers powerful ripples. We have security outposts in the sky, reachable by aircraft, and a handful of underwater stations that have never been used. They were mainly built for protection, in case life above water is ever threatened.

My home is my soul: Cancer is my Center.

I turn back to the star map, and I gaze into the blue orb as though I could see every detail, down to the tiny whirlpools of color that fleetingly form on the sea’s surface. The longer I stare, the deeper and wider the map seems to grow, until I’m Space-diving through the stars.

All around me, millions of celestial bodies ascend and decline, and as their paths shift in response to distant events like gamma bursts and supernovas, they leave faint arcs in the sky. They almost look like musical notes.

Music of the night, Mom said the ancients called it.

I look to the side of Cancer. Thebe is gone. Then I survey the moons we have left—and all three begin to flicker.

Like any one of them could be next.

Pulse pumping, I pan away from our House and search beyond the twelfth constellation, where the omen appears. It’s not there.

Has it finally disappeared? Or has it moved closer?

I scan the whole solar system, desperately searching for a hint of the writhing blackness, a sign of the opposition in our stars.

Nishiko glides over to me. “You see something. What is it?”

“I . . . don’t see the omen anymore. . . .”

As soon as I leave my Center, the map shrinks back down to the size of a puffer fish—the way it’s appeared to the others this whole time.

“*But?”* she asks. “Why do you sound bothered by its absence?”

“Because I still felt the sense of danger, only I couldn’t see the source. And there’s . . . something else.” I dread speaking the words, but I have to. Maybe if I’d spoken up earlier, we would have had warning. If I’d just told Instructor Tidus—

“What else? Rho, tell us!” Nishi squeezes my shoulder urgently.

“Sorry—I didn’t mean to keep you in suspense, I’m just—okay, listen. Earlier today, at my retest, I saw . . . I saw Thebe’s light flickering, and then it vanished. Like, disappeared from the map.”

My three friends exchange awed looks. Deke is the first to turn away. “Rho, this isn’t time for one of your tales.”

“Deke, you’re my best friend. Would I really be messing with you after what’s happened?”

He glares at me but doesn’t say anything. He knows I’m right.

“And what’d you see now?” whispers Nishi.

“Thebe is gone . . . and our other moons have started to flicker.”

None of us speaks. My friends are still caught in the gravity of my revelation, but I’m thinking of Instructor Tidus. She was the first grown-up since Mom who saw any potential in me.

Please let her have survived the blast.

Kai floats away from us, to a corner of the bunkroom. “I hope you’re wrong,” says Deke, following Kai and offering words of comfort.

“Maybe you’re not wrong,” whispers Nishi. “The omen and the flickering of the moons could be connected. Did you see anything else?”

“Nish, I don’t know anything,” I whisper back, growing unexpectedly angry. “None of what I saw was real. The Astralator *proved* I was wrong. I have no clue what you expect me to do.”

Deke frowns at us from across the room. “What are you gossiping about now, Nish?”

“I’m being serious,” she says. “I don’t care how, but Rho saw a threat, and we can’t ignore that.”

“It wasn’t in the stars, it was in my head,” I say, my words fueled by more hope than certainty.

“What about all the tragedies in the news?” she asks. The last couple of years, there have been a slew of natural disasters in the Zodiac. Mudslides in House Taurus. Dust storms and drought in the Piscene planetoids. Forest fires raging out of control on a Leonine moon. The past year alone, millions of lives have been lost.

“Maybe it’s the Trinary Axis again,” whispers Kai, like the thought itself is dangerous.

“Don’t even say that,” snaps Deke. “Events go in cycles, Kai, that’s all. It’s nature.”

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Angela Gagne:

You are able to spend your free time to read this book this book. This Zodiac is simple to develop you can

read it in the park, in the beach, train in addition to soon. If you did not have much space to bring often the printed book, you can buy the e-book. It is make you easier to read it. You can save the actual book in your smart phone. Therefore there are a lot of benefits that you will get when one buys this book.

Beverly McClendon:

Many people spending their time by playing outside together with friends, fun activity with family or just watching TV all day long. You can have new activity to enjoy your whole day by reading a book. Ugh, think reading a book can definitely hard because you have to use the book everywhere? It fine you can have the e-book, taking everywhere you want in your Smartphone. Like Zodiac which is finding the e-book version. So , try out this book? Let's view.

Angela Kiefer:

Don't be worry when you are afraid that this book may filled the space in your house, you can have it in e-book approach, more simple and reachable. This Zodiac can give you a lot of good friends because by you taking a look at this one book you have point that they don't and make you more like an interesting person. That book can be one of one step for you to get success. This reserve offer you information that probably your friend doesn't recognize, by knowing more than other make you to be great men and women. So , why hesitate? We need to have Zodiac.

Donald Foster:

Reading a book make you to get more knowledge from the jawhorse. You can take knowledge and information coming from a book. Book is published or printed or illustrated from each source in which filled update of news. In this modern era like currently, many ways to get information are available for a person. From media social such as newspaper, magazines, science publication, encyclopedia, reference book, story and comic. You can add your knowledge by that book. Ready to spend your spare time to spread out your book? Or just looking for the Zodiac when you necessary it?

Download and Read Online Zodiac By Romina Russell #HDN2T8WMKQE

Read Zodiac By Romina Russell for online ebook

Zodiac By Romina Russell Free PDF d0wnl0ad, audio books, books to read, good books to read, cheap books, good books, online books, books online, book reviews epub, read books online, books to read online, online library, greatbooks to read, PDF best books to read, top books to read Zodiac By Romina Russell books to read online.

Online Zodiac By Romina Russell ebook PDF download

Zodiac By Romina Russell Doc

Zodiac By Romina Russell Mobipocket

Zodiac By Romina Russell EPub

HDN2T8WMKQE: Zodiac By Romina Russell