

THE NEW KID: BOOK TWO

THE RISING

Temple Mathews



BENBELLA

DALLAS, TEXAS

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BenBella Books, Inc.
10300 N. Central Expressway
Suite #400
Dallas, TX 75231
www.benbellabooks.com
Send feedback to feedback@benbellabooks.com

Printed in the United States of America
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available for this title.

ISBN 978-1936661-89-3

Copyediting by Oriana Leckert
Proofreading by Erica Lovett, Gregory Teague, and Stacia Seaman
Cover design by Laura Watkins Matura
Text design and composition by PerfectType, Nashville, TN
Printed by Bang Printing

Distributed by Perseus Distribution
perseusdistribution.com

To place orders through Perseus Distribution:
Tel: 800-343-4499
Fax: 800-351-5073
E-mail: orderentry@perseusbooks.com

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For my angels:
Manon Lucy Mathews
Lucy Lydia Mathews

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Chapter One: The Power Rod

Will was running hell-bent through the pitch-black forest, his heart hammering in his chest, the blood roaring in his ears. He wanted to stop and rest, but he couldn't. Because *they* were trying to kill him. Even though he had time-bending speed, they were gaining on him. Mainly because he had a sixty-pound body pack strapped to his back. He considered ditching it, but that would be suicide, pure and simple. He needed the pack, knew that at this point it was the only thing that gave him a rat's chance in Hell of staying alive. He kept on running, feet pounding the ground, his night-vision contacts helping him see like no other human, or rather *half-human*, could. The thought of who—or *what*—he was, haunted him.

The universe had tossed the dice and they'd come up snake eyes for Will Hunter. He'd never be a normal teenager. He would always be what he was: a half-breed. He knew tons of kids who were of mixed heritage, and lots of the combinations were pretty cool. Kids who were half Italian and half Costa Rican, half Nigerian and half Swedish. That was the beauty of America: nearly everyone was a refined mutt of some sort or another. But Will's particular brand of half-breed was totally and utterly unique. His mother was English

with a little French thrown in, and his father—well, his father wasn't just from another continent, he was from another time, another place, another world.

His father was the Devil.

It was a fact Will was still processing, a fact he'd learned at a critical moment during a skirmish with a few demons. More than a few, actually; there had been 277 of them. And truth be told, it had been much more than a skirmish; it was a battle royale, a war in the bowels of Mount St. Emory only minutes before it erupted, destroying much of the quaint little town of Harrisburg, Washington. The explosion, which was captured by the United States Geological Society and a half-dozen amateur videographers, was number one on YouTube for six weeks straight. It made most 4th of July fireworks shows look safe and sane by comparison. The skies had belched smoke and leached wet ash for days. How Will had managed to survive was a glorious twist of fate. It was providence. It was his destiny. Now, exactly *what* his destiny held for him, he did not know. All he knew was he wasn't going to sit around waiting for it to come knocking on his door.

The creatures weren't far behind him now. He could hear them. He could smell them. He could sense them. He didn't know how many there were, only that there were too many for him to stop and make a stand, even with his cache of weapons. To have any chance at wiping out an entire horde of *them*, he needed his Power Rod, which was not currently in his possession. Finding his precious Power Rod was what had brought him out here in the first place.

His Power Rod was one of three potent crystal shafts that formed the mystical Triad of Power, and it had been blown out of the cone of the volcano of Mount St. Emory along with everything else. Will had returned to the site of the blast weeks later. He'd had no idea if the Triad of Power had survived the eruption, if it was intact, or if the three crystals had been blown apart. The only thing he knew was that he had to make every effort to find his Power Rod. The

first thing he did was to attempt recovery of the rod by tapping on the flesh-colored retrieval-transmitter patch on the back of his neck. For years this had served him well; all he had to do was tap a code, and the sleeve he'd built for the Power Rod would activate and his blessed weapon would come soaring down out of its hidey hole in the clouds—as if thrown by mighty Thor himself—into his waiting palm. When Will activated the laser saber function on the rod, he could chop down an evergreen with two strokes. Switching into another mode, he could shoot fireballs capable of exploding boulders. And he could activate the freeze beam and turn an entire raging river into a sheet of ice. All in all, it was a pretty fine piece of weaponry. His Power Rod wasn't just an extension of his arm or his hand, but of his being, of his very soul.

But . . . the retrieval sleeve or the patch must have been damaged in the blast, because no matter how many times Will tapped in the code, no Power Rod. Logically, he concluded that the rod—possibly even the Triad itself—was therefore, if not destroyed, earthbound, maybe even buried somewhere deep in the ground. So he began programming his computers, calculating the probable trajectory of the rod from the blast, taking into account the fact that adding intense heat to an already potent power source such as the ancient Power Rod crystal would result in a considerable boost. So whatever the original numbers were, they had to be modified and graphed accordingly. The bottom line was, Will had a ton of ground to cover. Fortunately, he had equipment to assist him in the task. He'd used the Thermal Sweep Telescope and the Gamma Ray Spectrometer, but he'd only gotten trace readings that had led him to this particular forest quadrant, which happened to be crawling with demons no doubt looking for the Power Rod, too. Will took the danger in stride. What else could he do? Nobody ever said being a Demon Hunter was going to be easy. He missed his father Edward, cursed the foul beast that had taken Edward from this world. Even though Edward was not Will's biological father, he would always be Will's *real* father,

the man he loved, the man he missed every minute of every day. The beast would pay for killing him. Will would make sure of that.

Cruel winds lashed the forest, whipping the pine trees into a savage dance. The sky above roiled in thunder-cracking anger. Sheets of rain began to hammer down. Will had already been on the move for over an hour, and even though he had—on account of his lineage—über-human strength and endurance, he was starting to tire. One of his boots caught a root and he went down hard. He jumped back up and was running again in a flash, but the two seconds had cost him: he saw an ugly blur to his left, another to his right. And he heard snarling. Angry, deep growling. Whatever manner of demon beasts these were, they were intent on malice. He sensed what was about to happen and whipped his wrist. A Flareblade snapped up into his palm. His instinct had been right; the creature on the left pinballed off a fir tree and sprang right at Will, knocking him sideways. His head slammed into a boulder. The creature had drawn blood and Will was down, seeing double.

As the creature swooped down, Will slashed upward with the Flareblade. The moment it made contact with the demon's chest, the Flareblade shot out a dual-directional red-hot burst of flame. The creature howled, doubled over, and jawed down, trying to take a death bite out of Will's forehead. But Will crouched out of harm's way as the demon particle-vaporized. Will retracted the Flareblade and took off running again.

Thunderbolts began to rip down out of the clouds, one striking a treetop. The ensuing howl made Will smile; one of the creatures waiting to ambush him had been hit by lightning. *Well, that'll teach you*, he thought. But there was no time to gloat. He could feel them gaining on him as he scabbled up a rocky incline toward a plateau. He made the mistake of looking back. What he saw caused his blood to curdle. Eyes. Evil yellow eyes like molten lamps, at least two dozen pairs, maybe more. He was ridiculously outnumbered. If he stopped now and tried to fight them hand to hand without his

Power Rod, he'd be dead in under a minute. He had to reach the plateau.

Bam! He was hit from behind and rolled through a tangle of blackberry bushes, the unruly northwest variety, Mother Nature's mutants, vines thick with brutal thorns that tore into his face. The attacking demon, a teen male, wielded a rusty scabbard and he swung it at Will with all his might while howling for backup. Will rolled left—*wham!* Then right—*wham!* He was barely avoiding getting chopped in half. Not fun. Will popped a Flareblade up into each of his hands, and with a cross-swipe he beheaded the creature, taking care to step quickly away from the geyser of toxic blood that gushed out of the beast's neck. Now *that* was fun.

He knew the others would smell the kill and come swarming after him, so he hauled himself up the hill and then kicked it up a notch, running as fast as he possibly could—right toward the edge of a sheer cliff with a six-hundred-foot drop. And they were right behind him, their nostrils flaring as they smelled his blood. Will glanced back. There were even more of the monstrous demons than he'd thought—at least four dozen. No way was he going to let them catch him and tear him apart, because he knew that they wouldn't be in a big hurry. No, they'd flay him slowly to cause the maximum amount of pain possible, probably keeping him alive for days in the process. The cliff ahead seemed a much better option. He only hoped all his hard techno-design work would pay off. If it didn't, he'd be dead for sure.

With the throng of demons bearing down on him, he dove head-first off the cliff, plunging down, dropping like an anvil. And then he yanked the cord on his chute.

Up on the cliff, the gathered demons burst into a rabid frenzy, some fighting among themselves, others grunting as they sprouted their own hideous fleshy wings and took flight, swooping down after Will. But Will's body pack contained far more than an ordinary parachute. Pulling another cord transformed the chute into a

hang glider. And with a short burst from a small jet pack, Will jettisoned upward and caught an updraft, sky-riding into the clouds like a human hawk. Michelangelo would have been proud.

By Will's prior reckoning, demons could only sustain flight for short distances and at a maximum altitude of five hundred feet. So he was literally able to fly up and away from them. The only problem was that he was heading straight into the roiling bowels of a lightning storm. Anvil crawlers—long, sideways, in-cloud bolts—were erupting with frightening frequency at the very spot Will was flying toward. He veered left, but the sky was lit up in every direction. He knew he should start descending, just abort and tuck into a dive and get the hell out of there. But something was drawing him into the vortex of the maelstrom. So he flew higher, climbing right into the center of the ongoing explosions. It was madness, like a fireworks show on steroids, the clouds erupting with bursts of ball lightning and heat lightning and sprites and jets. The atmosphere was breaking all the rules; the clouds were alive with pure malevolence. Will had an ugly thought that somehow he would meet the Dark Lord up here. How ironic that would be, to face the Lord of the Underworld on a celestial battlefield.

He continued to be inexorably drawn upward, deeper and deeper into the heart of the churning, explosive storm. His body was overcome with a vague yet powerful yearning, a desire to reach into the light. Maybe he hadn't escaped after all. Maybe the pursuing demons had killed him and this was his death flight and he was on his way to meet his maker. At least he was going in the right direction. He sailed higher, up toward the flashing lights. A bolt of lightning crashed past him, so dangerously close it seared his leg. *Damn*, he thought, *that hurt! Good news: I'm definitely alive. Not-so-good news: I'm alive in the middle of the whup-ass mother of all lightning storms.*

He kept flying up and up in an arc, over the blinding tumult, and found himself looking down at the pulsing mass of white-hot energy that he concluded could only be the Dark Lord. He was losing

strength. He was getting dizzy. He cursed himself because he'd miscalculated again, underestimated his enemy's prowess. This was it. He'd been lured to his doom. He was going down for good this time. His brain buzzed from the proximity of the electrical energy. He felt weak and he knew he was going to black out any second. He could have used the jet thruster to boost himself sideways, but the clouds . . . they wanted him . . . they beckoned to him. *Come to me.* With the last burst of energy he had left, Will went into a tuck and dove straight into the core. *You want me? Well, here I come.*

He knew he was going to die. He took a deep breath and did his best to hold on to consciousness, but he felt it slipping away, his past mistakes racing by him in a kaleidoscopic blur. Will said goodbye to everyone and everything. *I'm sorry I wasn't able to kill off the Dark Lord, Natalie, so that we could be together.* He wished his life had been longer, wished he'd accomplished more, wished he'd been able to love Natalie the way she deserved. Instead, it was all over now. *Hasta la vista, baby.*

But then he saw something, something that sent waves of tingling relief racing up and down his spine. There it was! His Power Rod. Shimmering like Excalibur, waiting for him in the clouds like the best friend he'd ever had. There was no sign of the other two crystal rods, but for all he cared right now, they could have been blown to bits. The only thing that mattered was that his rod, his Power Rod, was intact, and waiting for him. As he dropped down, closer and closer, he reached out for it. It was agonizingly close . . . there! His fingers curled around it and he held it fast to his heart. He was home again.

His batteries suddenly recharged, and infused with a new hope, a new energy, he adjusted his glider and swooped down out of the sky to land on terra firma. He looked around and saw no demons converging on him. Up above there were a few of them circling, still looking up into the lightning storm. Hopefully they thought he'd been killed within it. That would buy him a little time. He quickly

folded up his glider and ran through the woods. So far, so good—no demons. He ran another half-mile to where he'd hidden his rocket on wheels, his Mitsubishi EVO. He whipped the camo tarp off it, stowed his gear, and climbed inside. His hands were shaking as he fired up the 300-horsepower engine and gunned it. As he sped away, the forest retreating in his rearview mirror, he realized he'd made it. He'd managed to find his Power Rod, save his life, and kick some ass in the process. Not bad for a day's work.

Now all he had to do was save humanity from the greatest evil the world had ever known.