



Firestorm by David Klass

Subjects: Space and time—Fiction; Ecology—Fiction; Dogs—Fiction; Science fiction—Fiction

Award: Best Books for Young Adults

Book List: Gifted

Props: Football



It all started because he broke the high school rushing record, actually the league rushing record. Then he appeared on the news and now—they—are coming for him. He used to live a normal life in a normal town, having a normal senior year. His name is even normal—Jack. But he is far from normal. He is so good at sports and school work that his parents encourage him to be average. “Don’t try too hard in sports,” they would say, “let the other guys do better than you.” It confused him. He didn’t understand. His parents wanted him to fail intentionally, to try not to do his best? What kind of advice was that?

But now, he is about to find out why. (*Bring out football*) He’s in the Hadley Diner with his girl P.J. celebrating the football team’s victory and his new rushing record. (*Put down football*) A man walks by his table. Tall. Gangly. Adam’s apple sticking out of his throat like it wants to be plucked. He passes all the high school kids but doesn’t glance at anyone which is weird ‘cause they are making a lot of noise. Then he turns his head and looks right at Jack. For a half second. Not at anyone else. Just at him. Like he knows him. And Jack sees the man’s eyeballs roll around in his head. Now they look like normal eyes. Now the pupils disappear. Something flashes. Like a flashbulb. Or a computer scanner. A sudden burst of white light that turns silvery. Then the light is gone and he is gone too.

At home, later that night, he tells his parents about the weird man in the diner. He thinks they will laugh. But no. His mom hugs him, says goodbye and there is a tear in her eye. Then his dad grabs him and yanks him into the car. They are on a dark, empty two-lane highway. Curves and strightaways. His dad is going fast, way too fast. He turns to Jack and says, “I’m not your father, you’re mother is not your mother.” The tires screech

and the car nearly flies into an oak tree. Jack’s fingers are gripping the armrest. He can barely get the words out, “You’re saying I’m adopted?” “No,” his father replies, “more complicated than that. But there’s no time to explain. I need to unmark you.” Still driving at a suicidal rate, his dad pulls out a little metal cube. There is a high pitched whine. Greenish flash. A strange sensation flows all over Jack’s body. As if an outer layer of skin is being removed, tugged off, the way you peel off sunburn. It’s painful. Very. Jack yells. “Sorry,” his dad says, “But I had to. They are coming here now to kill you. But you must survive Jack, we are counting on you. Never forget that. You are our beacon of hope.”

What is his dad talking about, has he lost his mind? But then, Jack sees them. Motorcycles coming closer. His dad hits the brakes hard. Bone-jolting torque. Screeching grinding howls, burning rubber. Car spinning wildly, then stops. His father gets out and tells Jack to run, run to the marina and find a boat at the end of pier three. The key is under the cushion on the driver’s chair. Go! His dad has a gun, he fires at the motorcycles, wide, sweeping tracer patterns. Not bullets, lasers. “Go find the boat,” his father yells, “I’ll hold them off. Get away. That’s your destiny.”

Jack takes a step away, he doesn’t know what he is doing. How can he leave his dad? “Go!” his dad says, “For years I’ve told you to hide your abilities. Now you must use them all.” Incoming fire rakes the ground in front of them. A rock is vaporized. His dad fires back. Jack runs.

They want to kill him. But why? Why is Jack special? Who is he, who are his real parents? His fake dad called him the beacon of hope. But what does that mean? Find out, (*Hold up book*) read *Firestorm* by David Klass.