

SAM

“**T**his is where you die, Sam . . .”

The veins bulged in Sam’s head as he grit his teeth in pain.

I am not ready to die.

Sam pounded at the arm wrapped tight around his neck but his enemy’s grip was too strong. He desperately tried to break free as the sound of the oncoming train grew louder.

Use your opponent’s force against them . . . that’s it!

Sam suddenly stopped struggling and leaned forward to take the weight of Solaris on his back. He staggered quickly toward the train tracks. With his last bit of strength, Sam heaved him over, finally breaking free of the stranglehold and reeling back from the platform edge. Solaris landed on the tracks with a loud thud and lay motionless.

Sam crashed to his knees, gasping, hungry for air. Turning, he stumbled to the bench seat, reached out to it and picked up the Star of Egypt. By the dim light of the emergency lighting system in the subway station, he saw his reflection in the smooth crystal surface and wiped

away blood from a cut on his lip.

Finally . . . Sam looked back in the direction of the tracks. No movement. *It's over.*

He began to walk away—then stopped cold. He felt a presence behind him.

Sam turned in time to see Solaris climb up onto the platform. *No! It can't be.*

“Going somewhere, boy?”

Sam edged back a step. *I don't think I have another fight like that left in me.*

He brought up his hands, forcing himself into a defensive stance as Solaris approached menacingly. *I can do this. I must do this.*

The train thundered past at high speed, the carriage lights flashing across Sam's face, throwing Solaris into shadow.

Sam braced in a side stance, ready for the onslaught as the dark figure started to run toward him.

PFFT! PFFT!

Sam ducked, his hands over his head.

Silence.

Sam looked up and saw Solaris crumple to the ground. Then there was no movement, no sound but Solaris' rasping breaths through the mask.

Sam could see two darts protruding from the exposed and suddenly very human-looking neck, the chest moving up and down slowly. Sam spun around to find the shooter but could see no one. He reached down for

the mask. *I have to know . . .*

As Sam's fingers curled around the bottom of the mask, he steadied himself, preparing for . . . who knew what? No one had ever seen this creature before.

He pulled hard and fell back as he recognized the face.

The female Enterprise Agent . . . the woman from the alleyway who fired the rocket launcher!

"She'll be fine."

Sam jumped at the sound of the voice behind him. He looked up and saw . . .

Shiva?

He was standing over Sam, dart gun in hand.

"She—" Sam turned back to the unconscious figure. "She, Solaris, was in my dream—she was going to kill us all!"

"No," Shiva said, "that's not Solaris."

"What?" *But the suit, the metallic, scrambled voice . . . that was Solaris, right?*

"That's not the *real* figure from your dream. She's an impostor." Shiva glanced around, alert. *Does he think the real Solaris might be close by?*

"But . . ." Sam gazed at the mask in his hands. It seemed about right, but now he saw it this close, he realized that it wasn't exactly as he had seen it in his dream. This mask was smaller, especially the respirator section covering the mouth. This was someone trying to dress like Solaris, to appear like him . . . it. "But how did she know what he looked like?"

"The Enterprise must have hacked into your dream recording at the Academy," Shiva said. "This woman, Stella, is in charge of the field Agents, the ones who go out on operations. She's wearing a second-generation Stealth Suit, adapted to mimic Solaris. And that mask—well, it's not standard issue. Looks like it's from the toy shop."

"A toy shop?"

"*The* toy shop—our research and development lab, they make all our equipment."

"Why didn't you warn us about her?" Sam asked.

"Because . . ." he looked down at his feet, "I had no idea. This doesn't make any sense. Either no one at the Enterprise knows, or I'm not cleared for that information . . ."

"No one at the Enterprise knows?"

"I don't think she's here representing the Enterprise. Not like this, shooting at you in the alleyway. Maybe she's gone rogue."

"She shot down our jet . . ." Sam said. His voice faltered. The sprinklers in the museum above continued to spray a steady stream of water that cascaded down through the gaping hole in the ceiling of the subway station, flooding onto the tiled floor around them.

"Well, she must have gone out on her own, with help, I guess. But this is not the work of the Enterprise, they . . . I . . . we would never do something like shoot down an aircraft. Never. We're not murderers."

"But Stella *is* Enterprise—and *you're* Enterprise!" Sam

said, standing up and facing Shiva. “And you tricked us at the café!”

“The police will be coming. Sam, you should go.” Shiva backed off, looking toward the ceiling.

“You gave us a fake Star of Egypt!” Sam yelled, anger burning through him. “You’re a part of this!”

“We’re all a part of this, Sam. I gave you that in order to buy time and get the real crystal to you.”

“Why?” Sam demanded.

“I figured someone was watching me.” Shiva stared down at Stella, whose Stealth Suit had changed back into a default charcoal-coloured suit now that her mind was no longer controlling its appearance. “And now I know why.”

Sam shook his head, disbelieving. “You set off that smoke grenade.”

“And it saved us all. If Stella knew that I’d met with you and Lora, I’d be done for . . .” The shouts of firefighters rang out above them. “You need to go, Sam. Take the Star and get out of here. Go, Sam—now!”

“Where do I go?”

“Wherever your dreams take you,” Shiva said.

“But . . .” Sam stammered, confused. “The dream is finished—it’s over. It didn’t even happen completely the way I dreamed it, the things we changed made it different. But that’s all I had to go by, how should I know what to do next?”

“There will be more dreams, Sam. You’re the first of the

last 13. There's a long way to go. In any case, you've got what you came for."

Sam looked at the crystal in his hand.

"You got what you dreamed, that's all that matters here. And remember," Shiva said, "be wary of who you trust. A secret's worth is calculated by those from whom it must be kept."

Sam nodded.

Shiva sighed, looking at the destruction all around them. "Time for you to go before there are too many difficult questions and more people looking for you and what you have," he gestured toward the Star. "And I'll make sure Lora is OK, don't worry. Good luck, Sam."