

SAM

T*his is it. No more outrunning my nightmares.*

Sam forced his eyes open, willing himself to face his enemy. Solaris' blackness filled his vision.

"You lose," Solaris growled, his arms stretching out toward Sam.

Sam grit his teeth and pulled his hands free from the ejector seat to defend himself, pointlessly, bravely. But then—

"Nooooo!" There was a blur of movement and suddenly daylight blinded Sam, and Solaris was gone.

Sam stumbled free from the seat and crashed to the ground, struggling to see what was happening as a gush of hot blood burst out from under his hairline. His vision swam sideways and sticky blood trickled into his left eye . . . *no, no, I have to get the Gear . . . Xavier . . . must get . . .*

And then he passed out.



He blinked his eyes and came to a moment later. Blurry feet rushed toward him.

He rolled onto his back. He tasted blood.

A face filled the sky above him. Someone was close, looking down into his eyes. They looked familiar, those eyes.

Alex?

Then he focused on the mouth. The person was saying something but Sam couldn't hear the words. He tried to talk but wasn't sure if any sound came out. His head turned to the side and he could see Xavier standing there, dripping wet and shivering. Sam tried to tell them to search for their backpacks.

Who has the Gear?

Sam tilted his head again, but he could not see Solaris.

He must have it, that's why he's gone.

Sam tried to sit up, but he couldn't move.

He saw that familiar face above him talking into a phone.

In a moment of clarity, he knew for certain he was looking at Alex. He tried to smile, to say hello, but he still couldn't talk.

It's Alex. Alex who was dead.