

# Chapter I

Usually the interior of a space station is grey. That's just an accepted societal fact. It's so accepted, in fact, that when someone walks into a space station and is greeted with an amalgamation of surfaces all presenting a varying shade of grey, they simply don't notice. Just as the sky is blue, space is black, and gogo boots are painfully neon, space stations and all their spacecraft brethren are grey.

So when the interior is anything but grey, it's very unsettling. Yvonne laid on the floor and stared up at the soft cobalt ceiling of her prison cell. To be fair, it wasn't exactly a cell, and she wasn't even in a prison. But it was a room that she was locked in and not allowed to leave, so in lieu of having anyone to argue the point with, it was a prison cell. A prison cell painted in a lovely shade of blue.

Obviously one of the architects at HOUND had been reading up on the psychology of colors when this base was built. Blue was supposed to be calming, having a relaxing effect mentally, which presumably would make Yvonne less angry at her current predicament. Instead, it just caused her to run through this same train of thought every time she was left alone. She rolled over onto her side, grimacing as she attempted to get comfortable on the less than inviting floor. There was a nice cot in the corner free for the taking, but this was Yvonne's way of sticking it to the man. You can lock me in here, she thought vehemently, but you can't make me sleep on your cot.

Logically, that made no sense. HOUND didn't give a shit if she sat on her cot or stood on her hands all day. As long as she was alive, they would keep

testing, and testing, until either they succeeded, or her life was spent. Hours had blurred into days, which had blurred into weeks, making time keeping very difficult. There wasn't even a constant rising and setting of the sun to mark the passage of time, as the room didn't have any windows. One might think that was another clever design choice to keep the prisoner docile, but in reality, it was just damn expensive to pressure test the window housing to ensure that it was space worthy. Yvonne rolled onto her back again and let out an exasperated sigh. Even when money was no object, money was still the object. Windows might not have even helped, for there was no way to know where the nearest star was in relation to the station. For all she knew, there might not be ANY local star in view of her cell. Room. Whatever.

As she prepared to mentally grumble about the color of the walls again, Yvonne heard the faint sound of footsteps ringing through the hallway outside her door. Although she didn't have any way to know the time, she was quite certain it wasn't time for more tests already. She definitely had not bitched about her situation near long enough for the genetic technicians to be back. The footsteps were heading her direction to be sure, but they sounded like whoever was making them was running. Running? That didn't make any sense at all. Nobody ever ran around this station.

Something was wrong. Yvonne backed away from the door and looked around for something that she could use to defend herself if need be. Of course, there was nothing to be had, but it never hurts to take another cursory look.

The clanging echoing through the hallway was steadily growing louder, and definitely didn't sound like the discrete clicking of the technicians' boots that she was used to. These sounded heavier, like some sort of combat boot.

Fear began to creep into Yvonne's mind. Fear mixed with a healthy dose of curiosity. She hadn't felt afraid like this in quite some time. The tests had become routine and, although she didn't appreciate them, she knew what to expect. Being locked away in the same room for some indeterminate amount of time really lowered the threshold for uncertainty. Had she done something wrong? Had they decided she was no longer of use, and for whatever reason needed to be disposed of immediately? She noticed her hands began to shake, and as she looked down they were glowing ever faintly, swirls of light running

just under the surface.

Oh great, she thought, her mind darting to and fro, thoughts becoming more and more scattered. This is the last thing I need right now.

Though to be honest, it might help if she needed to defend herself. Imagination running wild, Yvonne steadied herself and faced the door, taking a deep shuddering breath. The footsteps increased in volume until they thundered to a stop outside the door. The electronic chirps of the lock code being entered filtered through the metal walls, followed by a joyful chime, signifying the correct code.

The door swung open and slammed roughly against the wall, shuddering as it slowly began to shut. Through the doorway stepped a man Yvonne had never seen before, holding a rather lethal looking rifle at the ready. His eyes flitted quickly around the perimeter of the room as he side stepped into the room, letting the door swing closed behind him. As he moved his gaze toward Yvonne, standing still as a statue in the middle of the room, a shadow of confusion seemed to pass across his face. His mouth opened slightly, as if he was going to speak, then he lowered the gun slightly. Staring intently, he finally made a sound.

“You’re not the commander of this base, are you?”

Yvonne was briefly taken aback. “Um, no. I’m not.”

“Well shit.” The man let his rifle drop to his side, held up by a sling across his shoulder. He pulled off his helmet and tossed it onto Yvonne’s cot, revealing a spiked mess of hair. Letting out an audible sigh, he lifted his arm and tapped on his gauntlet, causing a blue flash of light as a hologram was projected into the air.

Of course it was blue. Just like everything else in this room. Yvonne watched him silently for several seconds as he tried to adjust the image, which appeared to be a map. It kept fizzling out of focus, causing him to bang on his gauntlet until it steadied, grumbling under his breath. She could feel her fear swirling around inside, uncertain of what to make of this situation. Her hands were growing warmer by the second. It was time to determine whether her visitor was going to be on the receiving end of them.

“Hey,” she said forcefully.

He looked up, his brow furrowed in frustration.

“Are you here to kill me?”

He raised an eyebrow, then replied. “Are you with HOUND?” She shook her head. “Then no, I’m not here to kill you. I have other plans.” With that he returned his attention to the map, which winked out once again, eliciting a groan.

Yvonne breathed a sigh of relief. She relaxed her stance slightly, closing her eyes for a bit longer than a standard blink.

And then her arms burst into flames.