



Prologue

A trembling hand shakes you awake. “You all right, Elite?”

Your eyes snap open.

Wentworth is hanging beside your bunk. He lifts his hand away, worry etched into the shimmering brown scales on his inverted brow. “You were yelling again.”

You brush the hair out of your face and clamber up. Your concerned friend drops down lightly onto the steel floor, landing softly on all eight of his hands, and rears up into his usual vigilant stance. Towering over you. Top four limbs outstretched, bottom four on the floor.

You laugh. “You look like a scorpion.”

He chitters. The insectile sounds are ignored by the translator wired into your head. “What the hell is that?”

“Some alien I dreamed about. Claws, venomous tail... you’d love it. I’ll draw it for you sometime.” He chitters again.

You follow Wentworth out of the bunk room into the central corridor of the Freighter. You have no idea how the old ship got its name, but it’s terrible luck to ask its former owner, and even worse luck to change it.

In the cockpit, Tif is perched in the pilot’s chair, reading messages from whichever poor soul she’d seduced back on –

“Geez, you’re grouchy today.”

You rub your face as you take the seat beside her. “Nightmare. Cut me some slack.”

“Stop thinking so loudly then.” She pushes her thick orange hair back over her skin. Pale, today. “You still have another hour to wake up properly before we get there.”

“Great,” you say dryly. “Did you get in touch with the vendor?”

“Yep. She’s still there.” She clicks her tongue impatiently. “So, same nightmare? The needles? The footsteps?”

“You can hear my neurons. Do they sound like they want to talk about it?”

Wentworth chitters again.