

PROLOGUE

Darcie didn't expect to live. With the hand she could move enough to reach them, she tore unit and command patches from her uniform shirt—left only her nametag, rank and flight surgeon's insignia. She drew out the chain from around her neck, yanked off the two crystal pendants hanging with her ID tags, and shoved them into the corner behind her.

"Mama?" The child stirred on her lap, trying to push himself back. "Why are—" She put a finger to his lips, her other hand cupping his head to prevent its bumping the metal bulkhead. "Hush, Tris."

She could barely whisper; she sat on the bottom of a locker meant only for a pressure suit—one of four

in the maintenance compartment—with the toddler held snug between her body and her drawn-up knees.

Outside ship noises reached her: the roar of engines crescendoing toward thrust into lightskip—the fourth attempt. She braced her head well back in the corner behind the pressure suit, hugged Tristan to her breast and locked her teeth.

REST OF STORY GOES HERE . . .

She lunged left into the cross corridor, her right fist punching the manual trigger on its bulkhead. The shield door dropped behind her with a whoosh that was lost in a crunch and her pursuer's garbled scream. She pressed Tristan's face to her shoulder and forced herself not to look back.

The cross passage opened on one parallel to the concourse she had sealed. It led to the lifepods—if they

hadn't already been jettisoned.

She pressed herself to the bulkhead to listen for pursuers and to peer into the concourse. It was empty, up and down, except for the smoke-obscured shapes of bodies on the deck. She tried to set the child on his feet, to rest her arm, but he only clung to her, wide-eyed with the recognition of her fear.

Darcie smoothed his hair and kissed his forehead. "Come on then, little soldier," she said, collecting him again, and slipped on into the passage. Smoke from screen grenades stung her eyes, making them run and blurring her vision. She stumbled over a body and paused, panting. One of the surface troopers, a young man she didn't know. Flung beyond his hand lay an energy pistol.