

**SAM**

**O**utside the room the fire raged. Sweat ran down Sam's face. He started to hyperventilate.

*Stay calm.*

Smoke seeped under the door, filling the room with a black haze. Sam returned to the bed and tore off the bottom of the sheet. He ran to the small sink in the corner of the room and soaked the cloth, wrapping it around his mouth and nose and tying it behind his head. He kept low, frantically searching the bare room for anything that might help him escape.

*The bed?*

He checked the bed frame and the sturdy legs underneath.

*Metal. I could try to break it apart, use part of the metal frame as a crowbar to prise open the door . . .*

*BANG!*

Sam looked at the door. Through the small window he could see a black mask staring at him through the billowing smoke.

*No!*

Sam paused.

*That's not Solaris.*

He rushed to the mesh grill to look closer. The mask was a gas mask, with a large clear visor covering the eyes. Even with his mind cloudy, he knew those eyes.

*Arianna!*

She pointed at him and then made a shooing motion.

*Get away from the door—right!*

Sam quickly jumped back to the other side of the room.

*BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!*

Tiny explosives detonated in quick succession and the door was blown clear off its hinges, flying across the room and hitting the wall opposite, mere centimetres from where Sam stood.

“Wow!” Sam said, impressed.

Arianna rushed into the room and, without speaking, pulled a dart pistol from a holster strapped to her thigh and shot him in the arm. He looked down at the dart.

*What . . . ? Why would she . . . ?*

He felt a rush of adrenalin, and was immediately more awake than he could ever remember feeling.

“Put this on!” Arianna yelled at Sam, taking another gas mask from her pack. “And stay close behind me!”

Sam put on the mask and shadowed Arianna as they made their way down the hallway through clearing smoke.

*Is the fire out now?*

In a large office two doors away, Sam could see Hans lying on the ground, unconscious. Just then, a Hypnos soldier staggered toward them from within the wall of dense smoke ahead, gun in hand.

Arianna reacted fast.

Swiftly, looking just like the gymnast he knew her to be, Sam watched as she cartwheeled in a heartbeat, kicking the guy with her flying foot. He fell to the ground unconscious. Two more soldiers followed close behind, and she moved just as quickly. This time Sam was with her. Together they jumped—a twist, a kick, dart guns firing and it was all over.

*Arianna's a gymnastic ninja! Glad she's on my side.*

"We have to go!" Arianna said, her eyes anxious through her visor.

"Wait!"

Sam bent down to Hans and took the small case he still clutched in one hand. Flipping the lid, Sam could see the Gears, retrieved from Brazil and Cuba, and also Cody's from the US. And there was one more—

"That's mine. Stolen from me, taken from my stolen dream. Now we take it *back*," Arianna said defiantly.

Sam nodded and smiled. He picked up the case, closing it carefully and tucking it under his arm. "Time to go."

*We're really back in the race now.*