

The lift doors part at DS Forty, and he beckons her to follow. As Noah said, the data storehouses down this far contain no equipment—just bare floors and curving windows with views into the belly of Charybdis. Since it's built on an incline, the storehouse is terraced, with beaten plastic ramps laid over the sets of stairs. Tread scuffs from loaders and Polaris ATVs mar the tile. Much of the wiring is exposed in the ceiling, and Shy doubts the lights down here are ready for commissioning.

Kamran looks shocked to see the state of it.

They walk down the terraces, through three more storehouses to Forty-Four, and find tons of staged gear. Personnel bustle back and forth, and a few of them stop to regard the newcomers. Noah wasn't lying; the work is in full swing down here. When Shy looks to Kamran for his reaction, he's staring, open-mouthed. Whatever this construction is, it doesn't look to her like he's been in the loop.

"*Agha!*" A woman shouts at Kamran.

"*Lajani khanoom,*" he answers, then whispers to Shy, "That's Fatemeh Lajani. She's the foreman for—"

Fatemeh strides toward them, and brings a couple of fellows with her. She starts to talk, and whatever she's saying, it's not pleasant. Kamran grows more agitated, and their voices rise above the din. Shy's escort makes a scene in Farsi, and she really, really wishes she could understand what's happening—or get while the getting is good.

The other workers drop what they're doing to pay attention, and Shy sees a lot of clenched fists. She shouldn't have come down here, because if they beat the fuck out of Kamran, she's probably next.

She makes out a familiar word, “Hosseini.” Kamran said Reza Hosseini left the company, so why bring him up?

Fatemeh’s radio squawks, and everyone goes silent as a breathless voice cries something in Farsi. Most of the workers rush for a passage that leads deeper down—a place Shy has been strictly forbidden to enter. A man seizes Kamran by the elbow and tries to escort him for the door. Fatemeh grabs Shy.

Fatemeh shouts something at Kamran, quick words accompanied by an angry gesture toward the door. Despite the language barrier, Shy understands that they’re being kicked out. Kamran shrugs free of the man dragging him, and gives the guy a fierce shove.

*“Velam kon!”*

The guy stumbles back, nostrils flaring, fists balled. He’s about to take a swing, and Kamran drops into a formidable-looking boxing stance. Then a door slides open and a crew of four workers comes rushing by with a stretcher. It’s quick, and everyone is panicked as they come tearing ass through the data storehouse.

The person on the stretcher is screaming, olive skin gone ashen gray. Black veins crawl across his neck like tree roots. The white of one eye has gone blood-red around the iris, while the other is solid black.

Whatever is wrong with him is inside.

Then they vanish through the other side of the storehouse. Something stinks like a fart. Maybe the guy voided himself. She saw a lot of dying animals do that in her veterinary program.

“Come on.” Kamran ushers her toward the lift.

They have to wait for it to return, since it left with the unfortunate worker on the stretcher. Shy had looked up the huntsman spider after everyone told her not to worry. Those were supposed to be brown. The one she'd seen was black as night.

*What the fuck is down there?*

*Is it biting people?*

She's trying to puzzle through how she's going to bow out of this job when the elevator doors open. On the other side stand three HCC security guards with stun sticks drawn. "Cheyenne Hunt," one intones in accented English. "Come with us."