

## Nick's Dream (From Book Two)

### THE HYPERSCAPE PROJECT

Karg and two Meth crew members hammered away at the massive outer door in hopes of freeing the stuck mechanism.

"Karg!" Nick yelled over the noise.

The big Rakoizan stopped his two right hands in mid-swing and turned to look in Nick's direction, a pipe wrench and large hammer still raised high in the air. "Huh?"

"I have an idea." Nick yelled down the bay. "Stop that and come here a minute."

"Did they get the power back to bay one?" Karg asked, wiping his hands on a rag as he walked over.

"No, I just came from there. The power conduits need a complete overhaul. But I was thinking... we have the module, right? So what if we opened a tiny jump-point and sent a transmission through it? The Resistance would be able to pinpoint our location and send help."

Karg's face crumpled up into the strangest look Nick had seen yet.

"I thought you told me you couldn't open a jump-point from within the bay?"

"I can't. At least I can't open one outside. But I think I can adjust the range to more like a hundred yards or so."

"You want to open a hyperspace window *inside* the ship? Are you furbots?" Karg boomed.

"If we position it to open in the dead-space of the hangar, and make it small enough, we should be able to avoid placing too much stress on the hull."

"*Should* be able to? Dead-space is right. That's exactly what we're going to be! I like to have jump-points *outside*, in space, where they belong."

“Karg, we open tiny jump-points within containment vessels all the time, in our hyperspace beacons.”

Karg scratched the top of his head. “Oh, right. But I still don’t like it,” he said, looking downright nervous.

Nick pointed to some nearby crates. “Come on, we need to slide these crates under the module.”

“You make less sense every day, ya’ know that?” Karg replied, shaking his head.

Nick sighed. “Just trust me on this. I have to point the nose up a bit so the window forms up there, far enough away from the floor and walls.”

Karg looked over to where Nick was pointing. “Got it.” He gave the crate that Nick was leaning on a quick shove. Nick stumbled over onto the floor as the container slid out from under him. Karg shoved the crate under the module and turned around to head for the second crate, when he glanced down at the human on the ground. “Shouldn’t you be programming that thing?” he muttered, gesturing back at the module.

Nick shook his head. “Yeah, right.” He jumped to his feet and clambered into the cockpit. He was still hoping he could actually get the hyperspace generator to focus close enough, and small enough, to do what he planned. Hyperspace beacons were designed to keep a miniscule hyperspace window open within the tri-tanium casing. But rigging the module to do it was a whole different story. He’d never be able to get the diameter down to anywhere near the tiny diameter in the beacons. Spatial distortions grew exponentially with window size, so he would have to be damn careful. Too large of a jump-point could be devastating. In fact, it was the weapon of choice they had been using against the Mok’tu. And a damn scary, powerful weapon it was. Nick tried to shake the thought from his mind.

“Now what?” Karg queried, looking into the cockpit.

“If you take the weight off the rear, I’ll pull up the rear landing gear.”

Karg walked to the rear of the module, grabbed the back of the delta-winged craft with all four hands and yanked it off the floor. The sound of moving hydraulic actuators echoed throughout the still bay, and then came to a stop with a clunk.

“That’s it, now set it back down nice and easy on that crate.” The rear of the module lowered slowly until the nose faced the ceiling at the far end of the bay. The sturdy crate creaked and crunched as the module came to rest on its surface. Much like it did when Karg sat his massive weight on it. “Perfect!”

Nick looked around. “Karg, it will take me a few minutes to make the final calibrations. You should probably clear the bay.”

A loud whistle burst from Karg’s giant mouth as he signaled the workers to evacuate. Nick’s rear left the seat as the shrill sound split the silence. He threw his hands up to protect his ringing ears. “Christ, Karg! It’s a damn good thing I’ve got a strong heart. Give me some warning next time.”

With the bay cleared and the ringing in Nick’s ears finally subsiding, it didn’t take long for him to finish his calculations. “I sure wish I could test this first,” he muttered to himself as the cockpit canopy closed and latched. He reached into the neck of his shirt and pulled his lucky amulet out by its chain. He held up the golden pendant and watched the light reflect off its elaborate surface as it twisted between his fingers. He brought the amulet to his lips, gave it a quick kiss, then reached over and flipped the switch.

A small jump-point formed right where he had planned, hovering in the center of the huge bay. Nick released a huge sigh of relief. No major catastrophes yet. The tiny halo of the hyperspace window glowed softly, illuminating the bay with its distinct bluish hue. Nick stared in silence. It wasn’t often that he stopped to consider the sheer beauty of the space-time rift. How things had changed. He’d started out as a pure scientist, only interested in learning and bettering mankind. Now, out of necessity, he had become the very thing he despised—a military leader using the technology for mass destruction.

Something suddenly caught his eye, a movement from within the tiny hyperspace window. He peered harder, trying to determine what it could be. A blob-like shape squeezed its way through the dimensional rift. The long, glowing, translucent form continued to wiggle its way out, until it finally sprang from the window and hovered momentarily before zipping off.

Nick's mouth hung open in utter shock. *What the hell was that?* He fumbled for the switch and the window abruptly collapsed. *And where the hell did it go?* Nick peered out from the cockpit canopy for some sign of the elusive creature. *Creature? From hyperspace?* He swore the thing looked like a large, flattened snake with long fins that rippled down its sides. From the quick look he was able to get, the creature seemed to be using the ribbon-like fins to fly through the air, like a fish swimming through water. His gaze panned around the bay. "Come on, little...flying...um...snake...creature. Where are you?" He watched and waited for a few minutes, but still no sign of the slithery beast.

He blinked hard a few times. *Could it be him? Could the close proximity of the window forming within the ship have affected his mind somehow? Did he just imagine it all? A side effect of breathing coolant fumes, maybe?* He'd never had a hallucination in his life, except for that one time he drank too much of—whatever the hell that was—at his buddy's bachelor party. No, he couldn't have imagined it. The damn thing had to be real.

Nick slid the pistol from his hip holster and laid it in his lap. "Wouldn't you know it, the one time our comms are down and this shit happens." Peering watchfully over the edge of the cockpit, he carefully pulled the latch. The canopy swung upward with a harsh sounding click. Feeling supercharged and anxious, Nick sat motionless, watching and listening.

The open cockpit made him feel even more vulnerable. He began to second guess his decision to open the canopy. Maybe he should just stay put. Who knew how dangerous that beast could be? Minutes ticked by. Still nothing. Crap, he was going to have to get out and take a look around.

Cautiously, Nick climbed from the craft and down to the deck. With all the weird things he'd seen lately, he wasn't about to take any chances. His hand grasped the pistol tighter as he peered around the bay. A strange sound from somewhere behind him drew his attention. He spun toward it. The creature floated in the air about twenty feet away. Its movements reminded him of a Chinese dragon at festival time. The thing undulated one way, then the other, and then it turned towards him, releasing an unsettling growl. Nick whipped his gun up and fired three rounds. The creature sped away across the bay. "Crap, missed it."

*Thump...thump...thump.* "Nick?" Karg roared as he ran up. "I heard gun fire!" He spun to look around the quiet bay, and then turned back to face Nick. "Didn't I hear gunfire?"

"Karg! There was this creature thing. It came through the hyperspace window! It looked like a big snake. A big...flying snake! It growled at me!" Nick replied, all flustered.

Karg's brow lowered. "Right. A snake creature." His gaze panned around the open hangar bay. "Flying around." Karg glanced back down at Nick.

Nick caught Karg's odd expression. "I'm not crazy! I saw it. At least I...*think* I saw it. Karg, could the translator nanites cause hallucinations? I mean, if they can show visual translations in my eyes, then maybe they can do this."

Karg cocked his head. "I...don't know. Never heard of that kind of thing before. But then again, you are awfully alien. Still...no, I don't think so. Maybe you should go to the lab so we can check you out, just in case."

Nick was frozen, staring off over Karg's shoulder.

"Nick?"

Nick pointed into the air behind Karg. "I'm seeing it again. Look."

Karg turned, surprised to actually see something hovering some distance away. He pulled the pistol from his holster and raised it to take aim. The creature slithered toward him slowly. Karg paused,

gun at the ready, while he studied the beast. "Why can I see through it?" he said quietly out of the side of his mouth.

"I have no idea." Nick said shaking his head. "Holy crap, I must have punched through to some alternate dimension! That's the only thing that could explain...*that* thing."

"But we're in hyperspace. Isn't *this* already an alternate dimension?" Karg replied as he watched the creature approach.

"It is. But this life form must be from an alternate...um, alternate dimension."

"Oh." Karg rolled his eyes. "Of course."

Without any warning, the slithering beast bolted in Karg's direction. Karg flinched and fired a burst of rounds as the thing gained on him with lightning speed. The plasma bursts did nothing to slow it down. The glowing, transparent entity hit Karg square in the chest and then disappeared. Karg shuddered, then suddenly convulsed in some sort of weird seizure. His body shook violently as his four arms flailed about uncontrollably.

Nick took a few quick steps backward. "Karg? You okay buddy?"

Karg's head twitched and jerked and finally slowed to a stop. A grin formed on only one side of his mouth as his gaze turned to Nick. He had that same murderous, spy nanite stare that Arya had had on her face that day in the hangar. Dark, cold, not like Karg at all.

"Karg, buddy? Talk to me."

"Nick," the massive Rakoian answered, in a strangely different voice. His mouth quivered as he spoke, looking like some bizarre, out-of-sync puppet.

Nick took a few more steps back. His mind was now working on which way he should run. He would never be able to make it past the big lug to reach the exit and escape.

Karg raised his pistol toward Nick. "Shit!" Nick bolted for cover as a stream of plasma blasts sprayed the hangar right behind him. He dove over a nearby crate and landed on his nose, one arm

awkwardly pinned under his body. Nick rolled over onto his back, painfully aware of his broken nose. *Thump...thump...thump.* Karg was coming for him. He popped his head up and then quickly ducked down again as plasma blew chunks from the crate. He was pinned down. What the hell was he going to do? He couldn't shoot back. Karg was his best friend. "Karg! It's me, dammit!"

More debris rained down on his head as Karg blasted away at the crate with another burst of rounds. The behemoth was getting closer. There was no more time. Nick had to do something. Now!

Nick took a flying leap toward another crate, landing on his left side with his weapon aimed squarely at Karg's chest. He only had seconds to react as he slid across the slick floor, watching the stream of rounds from Karg's pistol quickly gaining on his position. That's when he came to a horrible conclusion. It was either Karg or him. If he didn't stop Karg, he'd be dead. Nick instinctively made the split-second decision to save himself. He fired four rounds into Karg's chest as he slid to a stop.

Karg faltered backward, his pistol still firing into the air. The huge Rakozyan stumbled back, dropping the gun from his hand as he fell to the floor, smoke pouring from his wounds.

Nick was frozen, staring down the barrel of his pistol at the spot where Karg had once stood. A wisp of smoke rolled from the barrel of the gun and drifted upward. *Oh, God. I just killed Karg!*

He quickly holstered his weapon and hopped to his feet. He paused at the sight of Karg lying on the floor, smoke rising from the four holes in his chest. *What have I done?* Nick forced himself forward, scooping up Karg's pistol as he approached the big Rakozyan's body. There lay his best friend, his four massive arms sprawled out on the deck. The sickening stench of burnt flesh filled the air, made worse by the fact that it was his buddy on the deck. The horrid sight was more than he could bear. A gut wrenching dry heave turned him around. Feeling sick, he slogged toward the exit to get help.

A creepy, almost otherworldly voice came from behind him. "That...was not...nice...Nick."

Nick turned, half glad to know Karg was alive and half in horror over the realization that the creature infesting his body had survived.

Karg pushed himself to his feet and looked down at his wounds. From under his boney, lowered brow, his eyes widened. He looked back up at Nick, showing his large teeth through a growing angry sneer.

Nick didn't waste any time. He raced around the nearby transport vessel and crouched behind a column, trying desperately to quiet his breathing. *Shit, now what am I going to do*, he thought. Normally four shots to the chest would have killed even a Rakoizan. *What is that thing?*

A soft snort from behind and Nick's blood froze. He had forgotten how stealthy the big lug could be. He turned slowly to face the alien entity inhabiting Karg's huge body.

"You attack us." Karg reached down and poked Nick stiffly in the shoulder. "We kill you...Nick...Nick...."

Nick was startled half-awake by the feeling of something big, hard, and harsh poking him in the left shoulder. He automatically lurched sideways and slapped at the thing that was poking him. He was prepared to fight off his attacker even though he was still battling grogginess and his eyes were barely open. He could hear Karg's voice, like some faraway sound echoing through his head as the last dregs of a very bad dream began to fade. Was it the dream, or was it really Karg?

"Garg," he muttered in his sleep.

"Nick!" Karg repeated. "Nick, wake up."

Nick peeled his eyelids open and felt another hard jab to his left shoulder.

"Nick!"

He looked up to find a massive head leering down at him. Nick jerked back and away, knocking over the cup of juice that had been sitting next to him on the desk. "Agh! No! Karg, don't kill me!" Nick fell out of the chair and into the puddle of juice with a splat. He scrambled backward away from Karg, slipping on the wet deck beneath him.

Karg looked at him, puzzled. "I'm not going to hurt you. You were having a freking dream."

Nick stared hard at Karg, confused over what was happening, and then rubbed his tired eyes.

“Karg?”

“Yeah. Karg. Now, if you’re done...*napping*, we need you on the bridge.” Karg grinned and stretched out his arm to offer Nick a hand up off the floor.

Nick hesitated to take it. His eyes scanned the room. The image on the display above him jogged his memory. He was in his ready-room. He had been studying the data from their last encounter with the Mok’tu. He must have dozed off. He twitched his painful nose and rubbed it with his hand. Damn, he must’ve been sleeping face down with his nose smashed against the desk. A sigh of relief left his lips. “It was all just a...*dream?*”

“Quite a dream, by the sounds of it. Why did you think I was going to kill you?”

Nick reached out for Karg’s hand and pulled himself to his feet. “I dreamed that we were in bay two, and I had this hair-brained idea to open a hyperspace window inside the bay, and this long snaky creature came out of hyperspace and...well...it went into you, and you tried to kill me, and I tried to kill you, and....” Nick broke off when he noticed the odd expression on Karg’s face. “Um....never mind...long story. I’ll have to tell you about it sometime. What did you need me for?”