

Subject 0234  
By Bernadette M. Martinez

“Catch it! Don’t let it escape!”

A tower of spare equipment crashes down as you run down the hall and turn the corner. You hear barrels, boxes, and glass crashing to the ground alongside the panicked shouts of those they meet on the way down. You need to find your partner and a place to hide or an escape route, but the identical halls and rooms of the storage facility create a never-ending maze before you. You’ve never split up in three years working together, why did you agree to it today? Panic rises in your chest as you stand along the wall, trying to make a move.

There’s a transporter ahead with a tarp loosely over the bed, which might be your best option. That may allow you to find your partner faster and get the hell out of here. Before you can bolt for it, you see a winged shadow engulf the transporter and adjacent loading area and a deafening roar vibrates the ground beneath you, causing more equipment to fall from the nearby shelves. It’s circled twice already. What is it looking for? Then you realize it.

It’s hunting.

Another roar shakes the area and it dives toward a group trying to rush into one of the storerooms. Its tail flicks back and forth and screams rise above the noise of the guards behind you. You see taloned hands grab at the uninformed crowd. The white walls and floor take on a red hue before your eyes. Radio static breaks through your terror.

“That way! Go! Go! Go!”

You turn to the right and run down the nearest hall and out of its direct flight path, hoping to make it to cover before it turns and sees you. They created it, let them deal with it. There should be boxes and equipment here, not that...that.... Your thought trails off. You can’t bring yourself to even think it. They don’t exist! You still hear screams from the other hall with the thing that can’t exist.

A light comes from a single open door and you race toward it. Boots on the lab floor cause you to stumble and you fall, catching yourself on a counter, hoping the noise didn’t attract any attention. You listen intently, sure the pounding of your heart and the raggedness of your breathing will lead them straight to you.

After a few seconds you lift your head and look into the eyes of your partner. The momentary joy is replaced with horror as your hands reach for the large jar that houses their head, eyes open, mouth forever agape with shock.

You turn to the rest of the room. Your eyes scan over medical equipment, humming machinery, cages with smaller experiments, and half a dozen tanks containing humanoid figures inundated with tubes and wires. Figures, realize, that look remarkably like you. You step toward them when the sound of radio static makes you remember the open door. You don't even have time to react when you hear the voice.

“Eliminate it.”

You hear a loud bang and you feel a sudden pain in your neck. You don't feel your body crumple to the cold floor until your head meets it with a sickening crack. Blackness creeps into your vision with a final order from the voice.

“It failed. Bring in subject 0235. This one can go to the dragon.”