

PLANET X91

DOORWAY TO TIME

Book 8

CHAPTER ONE

“JOSH, STOP staring at the computer monitor.”

Florian pushed the dark hair from her eyes. Walking towards the bridge of the Piper spaceship she appeared to be annoyed at being ignored. “What are you doing anyway?”

Thirteen-year-old Josh looked sideways at her. The expression on his face revealed he didn't seem happy.

“Tinkering,” he replied.

“Why?” she asked, leaning over the monitor directly in front of Josh.

“I've managed to boost the signal the long-range scanner uses by taking out several vital components from the scanner unit aboard the shuttle and electronically connecting it to the Piper's scanner.”

“I again ask why? What good did it do?”

Breaking out into a mischievous grin, Josh reported. “I've discovered the USS Lock's exact location.”

Florian's mid-teen eyes widened at hearing the wonderful news. Stepping onto the bridge, she placed her right arm over his shoulder.

“You've found the USS Lock?” she echoed, trying desperately to keep her voice in check.

“I did.”

Clay stepped onto the bridge wearing a scolded expression. “What's all the excitement?”

“Josh found the colony.”

“So, what's the big deal?”

Florian jabbed him in the ribs.

“What did I do?”

“You put a dampener on the exciting moment.”

“I did not. We can't go to the ship. Just in case you've forgotten, there's a hole in the dome directly above our heads. If I have to repeat Captain Rowark's last comments before he died, this ship will never fly in space again. In fact, we have to find something to help seal the bridge from the next bout of rain.”

“I don't care what you think,” snarled Florian. “I reckon Josh did a great Job.”

“Not so great,” he confessed. “The USS Lock is off course.”

Clay moved behind Josh so he could study the scanner. “All the technology onboard the USS Lock; how can it be off course?”

“The more technology onboard a ship, the easier it is to bypass it,” snorted Josh.

“Only if you're computer literate,” jeered Clay.

“Boys stop fighting,” hissed Florian.

“Put your nails back in your pockets.”

Florian stepped up to Clay, glaring at him almost nose to nose.

“You're a sore loser. The only thing you care about is the fact you think Josh has streaked ahead of you competing for my affection.”

“The thought never entered my mind,” Clay calmly replied.

“You are a liar Clay Silver.”

“Prove it.” He waited a few seconds for a comeback before stepping away from Florian to focus on his opponent.

Josh leaned back in his chair wearing a proud look at knowing he had won the competition between Clay and him. The fact Florian will one day be his wife made his smile widen.

“Are you positive the scanner is recording properly?” questioned Clay.

"I've checked, rechecked and even made the computer run a diagnostic check on the scanner. The USS Lock is definitely off course."

"How far off course?" quizzed Florian, still giving Clay dagger eyes.

"Far enough away to miss the orbit of planet X188 which I must add is her intended destination." Pointing at the monitor Josh explained further. "The white line on the screen represents the intended trajectory of the USS Lock. The red line represents the new course the ship is taking. If you look carefully at the two lines, you'll be able to see quite plainly where the Lock strayed off course."

"Where's the ship heading?" squealed Florian.

"Let me explain it this way. Sensors have picked up what I believe is a power surge at the front of the ship."

"How strong are we talking about here?"

"A considerable amount," hinted Josh, seriously.

"What sort of surge?"

"A beam just wide enough to pull the ship gently off course," explained Josh.

"A tractor beam?" quizzed Florian.

"Yes, I believe so."

"Where's the beam coming from?"

"It's being emitted from the alien planet where the cannibal creatures live. Unless the ship changes course, the USS Lock will be moving away from its intended landing site. In fact, the ship will never enter the orbit of Planet X188." Josh volleyed his stare between Florian and Clay. "She'll end up orbiting the alien planet directly behind planet X188."

"The colonists, our friends, and families will be captured, tortured then eaten," shrieked Florian.

"Yes. When the aliens have filled their stomachs, they will simply plot the trajectory of the ship right back to its origin. It'll be like ringing the dinner bell."

"We have to do something," blurted Florian.

"Forget it," barked Clay. "The three of us are teenagers. At sixteen, I'm the eldest of this threesome group. What chance do we have of ever stopping the inevitable?"

"We have to try something."

"Girl, we are on a strange planet in the middle of Orion's belt, light years away from another human being. We are inside an alien space ship called the Piper which Rowark stole from the aliens who now have a tractor beam pointing at the USS Lock. What do you think we can do?"

"I'll push my fist into the hole in the dome if it'll help to save the colonists."

"Forget it. This ship will be an airless vacuum before we break orbit," snarled Clay.

"You've already told us you might be able to weld a metal plate over the surface of the dome," yelled Florian. "Why don't you start?"

"What happens if I botch the welding job? We won't know till we're in space. We certainly won't be alive long enough to get back here to land again."

"So, telling us you can weld a plate over the dome, happened to be all crap?"

"I can do it easily," jeered Clay.

"Well get started," shrieked Florian, for the second time.

Clay leaned against the bridge wall. He said in a desperate voice. "I have to confess I doubt I could achieve such a precision welding job as to hold back oxygen from the vacuum of space."

"I believed you when you insisted you can build anything," jeered Florian.

"Almost anything," corrected Clay. He stepped off the bridge. All he could think about was walking away.

"We have to try something," insisted Florian walking after him. "I don't want to sit back and do nothing."

"I'm on your side," announced Clay. "I just don't know if I'm good enough to do the job. Putting your life and Josh's in jeopardy isn't something I'm willing to do."

"Clay might be right," echoed Josh, standing.

Clay and Florian walked back to the bridge, gluing their gaze on Josh.

"I'm open to suggestions," hinted Florian. "Mine is; weld the plate to cover the dome. We can don spacesuits, fill all the oxygen tanks we can find, fly the Piper at full tilt towards the USS Lock, entering the loading bay. Once we get onboard, we'll have all the air we want. Josh, you informed us the Piper spaceship could travel at fifteen times the speed of light."

"True this ship can."

"If you have another idea, tell it right now, or we'll vote on what I just said."

“I don’t think your idea will work. We might run out of oxygen before we arrive. I think we should try something less dangerous,” hinted Josh.

“What do you suggest; launch a rocket?” quizzed Florian.

“You’re so melodramatic,” snarled Clay.

“Forget the voting system. Boys start working on my idea,” bellowed Florian.

“There might be another way,” stated Josh, folding his arms.

Clay studied Josh through slits. “Here we go. The genius boy is at it again.”

Florian gave Clay a second dig in the ribs.

“What are you thinking?” asked Florian stepping up behind Josh.

“I’m thinking the only way to stop the aliens from getting their hands on the USS Lock is to either blow it up which will kill all onboard or use the time machine.”

“You have no idea how it works,” growled Clay, slapping him on the shoulder. “In theory, it sounded like a solid idea.”

“I don’t have to know how the time machine works. All I have to do is set the right time combination and let the machine do its thing.”

“So scientific,” barked Clay.

“If you have a better idea, please tell us,” taunted Florian.