

PLANET X91  
THE BLACK HOLE

CHAPTER ONE

“COUNCIL MEMBERS, I’d like to make a start,” announced Josh.

The eight men and the four women who made up the elected members sat on a seat at the round table set up in the sunshine next to the Piper’s hull. Josh stood, and leaning on the table; glared at the men and women staring back at him. At the ripe old age of thirteen, he wasn’t positive what he was about to announce would go down well with the other members. The sea breeze fanned the sweat on his brow. For the first time in his life, he felt nervous. The emotion took him by surprise. Then he realized for the first time he had no control over his future. Before making any important decision, he always knew every fact, and if something went wrong he always knew how to fix the intended task. Somehow, he needed to relay the facts to the people staring at him that his proposal was a solid idea. Karen Fawkes’ life depended on his success.

“You look and sound like you’re telling us we must listen only to you,” growled Sergey Swires. “Josh, we aren’t in school. In fact, we are all adults, except for you.”

“Sergey, please control yourself. What Josh is proposing is extremely important,” insisted Florian. She turned her head slightly so she could gaze at the man. His blood shot eyes gave away the fact he hadn’t slept too well for at least a week.

“All I’m saying is; every human on this planet should be seen and talked to as an equal.”

“Seeing how this is true, please be mindful of how you talk,” said Reltso, interrupting. Seeing Sergey glaring directly at him, Reltso stood. “Before you jump down my throat, I’m on your side. You have a valid point, but so does Florian. Our weekly council meetings are important, but his extra meeting is extremely serious. The council of twelve was set up to represent every person on this planet. Petty squabbles will see you and anyone else who doesn’t think the meetings we hold are important, off the council.”

“I apologize,” moaned Sergey.

“What’s so important this extra meeting can’t wait for another five days?” questioned Clay. “We had our weekly council meeting two days ago.”

“Something extremely important has come forward,” said Josh.

The twelve members of the council started moaning simultaneously.

Nara slammed the palm of her hand on the table top. The noise made everyone seated at the table jump.

Josh cleared his throat and again looked at each of the council members in turn.

“The clock is ticking. We need to vote on the important issue at hand.”

“If it’s so important you’d better spit it out,” said Nara.

“I’ll start by saying this; since we won against the sleeping disease four weeks ago, a new problem has surfaced, brought forward by the sleeping disease. We have to save the life of Karen Fawkes, Florian’s mother. She has days to live.”

“To me, she appears to be okay,” blurted Sergey.

“On the outside, my mother is,” Florian interrupted. “The sleeping disease has sped up the tumor in her brain.”

“I can’t see how we can do anything,” said Reltso. “There isn’t a surgeon capable of such a delicate operation here on Planet X91.”

“Which brings me to what I’ve been thinking about,” said Josh.

In the sudden hush, all eyes were again boring into Josh. Florian noted he looked nervous. Deep down she was proud of the teenager. Hell, she was proud of Clay and the all the colonists too. They had come a long way in the shortest allotted time.

“Josh, if you don’t tell the council members the solution to this problem, I will,” whispered Florian.

“The only way to save Karen is to get her back to the Earth for a lifesaving operation in the shortest time possible.”

“There’s no way we can get back to the Earth in a rush. The trip will take five years,” grumbled Sergey. “And I for one refuse to be frozen again.”

The silence from the council members was nauseating. Josh realized the wind speed had increased and the temperature was cooling.

“I only speak for myself here,” said Nara. “I have to agree with Sergey. “I don’t want to be frozen again.”

“Florian, I’m sorry for your imminent loss,” said Sergey. “Unless Henry can do something, we’ve hit a brick wall on this problem.”

“I vote yes to going,” announced Clay.

“I do too,” echoed Florian.

Reltso sighed heavily before bowing his head to look at the ground next to his chair.

Nara grinned. “I’m up for a challenge. Before I vote yes or no, I think I speak for everyone seated at the table when I say we need to hear all the details.”

“Now that’s a great idea, mumbled Sergey. “Tell us why you want to freeze the woman for another five years or longer and please, tell us how we are going to get her back to the Earth and who will be going? Do you expect volunteers or is Reltso going to order several people to go?”

“You have made many fair comments,” said Josh. “To begin to answer them, I need the Piper’s hologram here. Henry, please materialize and put the unrest to bed.”

Henry appeared in a bright flash of light. Instead of the usual white light, this time around there was a green, red and a yellow aura surrounding him. His holographic image displayed a distorted grin.

“Keep trying to perfect the smile,” giggled Florian. “And what’s with the different coloured pyrotechnic show?”

“I was attempting to do something different.”

“Why?”

“When we land on the Earth, I want to appear friendly to the people in authority. It is not my intention to scare them.”

“How could anyone be scared of a Crenoxian hologram?”

“If I remember correctly the words you mumbled the first time you saw me, and I can replay the scene for everyone seated at the table, you were scared, to the point of an extremely elevated heart rate.”

“Forget what I said,” groaned Florian. “Shall we move on? Change the sour expression and let’s not reveal the words I spoke.”

“I’d like to hear the words,” said Sergey.

“Henry, don’t you dare,” ordered Florian.

“Your secret is safe,” advised Henry.

“Thank you. Please, let’s change the subject to why you are here.”

“Miss Fawkes, I thought you of all people would be taking Josh’s idea more seriously?” stated Henry.

“I am. I don’t care what the vote is; I’m going back to Earth with my mother. I’m ready to leave the moment this meeting is done and dusted.”

“Interesting metaphor,” said Henry.

“You want to pilot the Piper back to the Earth?” bellowed Sergey. “Good luck on that score. If you make it back, I’ll see you in ten years.”

“Tell us the facts,” blurted Reltso.

Henry floated to the middle of the table. Florian bit her lip to stop from giggling at see the lower half of his image vanish. Looking under the table, she lost the battle and giggled.

“This is no laughing matter,” grumbled Sergey.

“As an advisor, to this council, I will answer every question you have by starting with the facts about this idea Josh has raised about traveling through the black holes. When I have finished my report, all your questions would be answered.”

“All your fears will be put to bed,” added Josh.

Sergey switched his stares between Henry and Josh. The expression etched on his face looked worse than the thunderstorm with the alien life form in the vortex the trio had to try and live through.

“I have already heard enough,” bellowed Sergey. “I vote no, and I’m leaving this farce of a meeting. I have more important work to do than listen to fairytales.”

“If you stay and hear the facts I believe you will change your mind,” said Josh.

“Never.”

Sergey Swires marched away from the table shaking his head in disgust.

“If your wife were in the same predicament you’d agree to the try the black hole theory,” called Florian.

Instead of returning to the table, Sergey kept walking. The council members watched him enter his tent. In a few ticks of the clock, he was marching towards the force field, tool box in tow.

“Sergey has voted against the idea. That means the yes votes are behind by one vote,” reported Henry.

“I’ve already said I’m going,” barked Florian. “That puts the vote back to even.”

“I’m going too,” announced Josh.

“The ‘yes’ vote is in the lead by one,” reported Henry.

“Please, I want to hear more details,” said Nara.

“At last I have heard someone interested enough to at least hear how this idea will work,” said Henry.

“On behalf of everyone who is seated at the table you have the floor,” announced Reltso.

“The human race has many metaphors I have never heard before,” said Henry. “Josh, one day in the future I would like to hear them all and understand their meaning.”

“One day soon,” replied Josh.

“Can we speed things along?” questioned Florian. “In three minutes, I want to hear the Piper’s engines warming up.”

Henry nodded at Florian and commenced his confident report.

“Queen Mitta, the supreme leader of the Crenox, wanted to invade a planet fifty-three light years from their Planet, Silux, which you know as Planet X188. She gathered the best thirty Crenoxian scientists and ordered them to discover a way to get to the planet and back again in the shortest possible time. One Crenoxian Scientist came up with the idea of using the black holes. In less than four Silux years, the ship had been built and entered the black hole. Several-test runs to see if any living creature could survive and the invasion took place. One Crenoxian warship was all it took to desecrate the planet. The few thousand inhabitants who remained alive were taken back to Silux and eaten. Queen Mitta then sent three hundred juvenile Crenox to the planet where they thrived. Queen Mitta ordered more than thirty planets attacked, and the inhabitants wiped out. She had plans to colonize the entire galaxy and beyond.”

“The Crenox are worse than I thought,” groaned Josh. “If they get to the Earth the human race could be wiped out.”

“Easily,” added Henry. “I will now explain how the black hole theory works. The Cynga species and the Crenox, and at least one hundred and seven other known species throughout the galaxies travel through the black holes. Simply explained; the black holes are used just like the veins in a human body. It is possible to travel to any planet in the universe. The Piper changes shape, so the crushing effect of the gravity inside a black hole can be used to push the vessel and not a squashing destructive force. Light speed times eighty is easily reached, provided the size of the spaceship is exact.”

“This can’t be true,” grumbled Nara.

“My dear Narahi, what I have just explained is one hundred percent correct and accurate,” stated Henry. “Need I say, traveling through the black holes is at the cutting edge of Crenoxian technology.”

“And on that note, us humans can never out smart or out fight the Crenox,” cautioned Josh.

“If we learn their technology we will be able to,” replied Reltso.

“Yes, in time, we probably will. We have plenty of ideas on how to kill,” said Florian. “We should have learnt how to control ourselves after the first world war back in the early 1900’s. Four world wars and we still want to kill ourselves. I’ll give it to the Crenox; they don’t kill any one of their species.”

“We’re getting off the subject,” said Josh.

“I think the members of the council need a few minutes to absorb the ramifications to the idea,” mentioned Reltso.

“Agreed,” echoed Nara.

The members stood as one then scattered. Each one to their private thoughts. A couple of council members wandered around the camp, while some walked over to the farming area and stared at the young crops beginning to grow.

Florian and Josh slowly walked to the beach where they sat on the sand-dune overlooking the water.

Clay came up and sat next to Florian.

"It's a nice view," said Clay. "I love the way the sea sparkles when the sun is high in the sky, and the sea is relatively flat."

"Yes, the peaceful lapping of the water onto the sand helps you to relax," added Josh.

"Come what may, I have decided to vote yes," advised Clay.

"Thank you," said Florian. She reached out and slipped her arm over his shoulder. "I wasn't sure if you'd want to come on another trip."

"I wouldn't want to miss any excitement."

Clay snorted back a chuckle. He leaned sideways and kissed Florian on the cheek.

"The three of us will make the journey even if nobody else wants to come along," added Josh.

"If the council members vote against the idea, they don't have the power to stop us volunteering to go," said Florian.

"Then it's settled. We go," advised Josh. "Come on; we have an adventure to create."

"To make history," added Clay.

The trio stood and swiped the sand from their flight suits. Florian watched Clay looking out across the sea.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing. I was admiring the beauty of this planet. We have a lot to explore. Since we crashed on this planet, we have only managed to see a small section. Who knows what's out there."

"And?" questioned Florian.

"I'm not changing my mind about going, but the idea of never coming back makes me feel slightly nervous."

"We'll get back to this planet even if I have to push the Piper here," stated Florian.

Josh and Clay laughed at her comment and serious expression. They grabbed an arm each and quickly escorted Florian back towards the Piper.

A full three seconds after the members returned to the table for more discussion, Josh informed them of what he had decided.

"I vote yes, and I'm ready to leave for Earth."

Florian nodded vigorously. "I'm going."

Clay grinned at thinking about Simone Ostler, the girl he met just before he entered the USS Lock. To him, it hadn't been a long time since he saw her last, but for her, it had been over five years. Still, the time was irrelevant. She said she would wait for the next trip so they could be together and that was enough for him. It would be great to see her again. He felt confident she will be totally surprised, and he hoped and prayed she would want to come back with him to Planet X91.

Reltso and Nara stood in unison and walked away from the table and towards the Piper. Seven steps into his walk, Reltso looked over his shoulder.

"Is anyone else coming? We have a long journey ahead of us."