

# Prologue

## *The Alpha Cephei Star System*

**2260 AD**

**F**lickering. Lights flickering. Lights flickering in the dark. Flickering. Burning... *Fire!*

Trixie Cutter woke with a gasp. She was on the far-ship bridge. The flight controls were spewing smoke. Wires dangled from ruptured panels. Sirens wailed and sparks rained. There was a stench of melting plastic. She tried to jump up, but the safety belt yanked her back.

“Zeke, help me,” she cried, wrestling with the belt. Then she saw them. Two figures in the stroboscope of flashing alarms. One still. One desperately moving.

The far-ship’s pilot was strapped across the motherboard. His name was Zeke Hailey, until recently a second-year student at the Ophir Chasma School for Psychic Endeavour. His head lolled to one side, with eyes white as glass. Trixie had never seen a corpse before. But she knew in an instant. He was dead.

“Over here, quick!” cried the other figure. It was Pin-mei Liang, struggling to undo his straps. Her face was lost in the shadows.

Trixie unbuckled and glided over, trembling like a leaf. A robotic voice spoke from the intercom. It was Albie, Zeke’s special transport app, uploaded onto the far-ship’s mainframe. “Impact in fourteen minutes.”

“What!” she shrieked.

“These straps. Undo them. Your powers,” Pin-mei shouted above the din.

“We’ve got to escape. We’ve got to—” Trixie’s voice trailed off.

They were lost somewhere in the galaxy. Where could they escape to?

“I can’t die,” Trixie wailed. “I’m too important.”

Pin-mei’s hand was a blur of movement.

*Slap!*

Trixie jerked back, her cheek stinging.

“Focus,” Pin-mei said in a voice harder than steel. “Tell her, Albie.”

“About what, Miss?”

“Zeke!”

“Master Zeke is dead,” Albie began in a calm, passionless tone. “Cause: synaptic overload. Every synapse in his brain burned out by the translocation to Alpha Cephei. With full nanotherapy, there is a three percent chance of recovery—”

Pin-mei broke in, “First, we must preserve his body, until we reach civilisation.”

Trixie stared blankly at Pin-mei, still rubbing her cheek.

“Albie, explain,” Pin said.

The software resumed. “We have the protoplasm onboard, used to amplify Master Zeke’s brainwaves. The protoplasm is in essence a part of him, constructed from the same DNA. They are compatible.”

“We’re about to crash and you’re fussing over a dead body,” Trixie cried.

“Albie said that giant cell will preserve Zeke indefinitely. But every second in the air more of his synapses shrivel beyond repair.”

“In sixty-five seconds, there will be zero chance of recovery,” Albie stated.

“So?” Trixie snapped.

Pin-mei fixed her with a hard stare. “Your psychokinesis. Better than mine. Undo the straps. Submerge him in that thing. Now! Then I can save us.” She glanced at the controls. “I know how.”

Trixie pulled a face. “Why didn’t you say so?” Her eyes lit up like bulbs. All the remaining straps undid themselves simultaneously. The body of Zeke Hailey rose up and headed for the auto-door.

Pin-mei watched his body glide out of the room. There was a fierce pain inside her chest. As if a black hole were sucking her life away. The

Spiral had won. He'd gobbled up the entire human race. Yet, she could have fought on. With Zeke at her side.

But why bother in a universe without Zeke? What point was there? She took a deep breath and balled her fists. This wasn't the end. She wouldn't allow it to be. After everything he did. They both did. No. She would turn this ending into a beginning.

Only first, she had to stop the far-ship smashing into an alien moon.