

## CHAPTER 1

### *Black and Mysterious*

“God didn’t intend anyone to travel this far out in space.”

Ace Diamond Xiang spoke assertively into the com-system, selfishly needing everyone on board the Battleship Diamerica to know exactly what he thought because, outside the window of the Command Room where he sat, space unlike anything Earth had ever recorded waited for the battleship to draw closer and destroy it.

“Are we parked?” he asked suddenly, turning his gaze toward the pilot, the crew’s only Senfeer.

Leoon heard the question and stood because he could no longer sit. He stood thirty-one feet tall. Compared to Ace’s small five-foot-four frame, he knew he saw things outside the window Ace couldn’t. Although he answered calmly, the membranes of his nostrils fluttered; his life core vibrated with trepidation that everyone on board would soon meet their death if the battleship got closer to what he also assumed waited for their approach. “We’re parked. What are the noises?”

The Japanese features of Ace’s face pulled taut as his fingertips rubbed thoughtfully at his mouth. “Our ship being pulled into whatever we’re looking at.”

“Our hull being ripped apart?” The dry patches of Leoon’s eyes darkened in disbelief that anything in space could be strong enough to drag a Senfer battleship into its gravitational pull. “Should I pull us back?”

“Hold your ground.” The voice came out of the com-system, spoken firmly by their female captain. “I’m on my way, you two. Give me a few minutes. I’m walking instead of transporting.”

As Ace expected, the crew began entering Command. The captain’s three sons entered first. Although their mother had been born on Earth, the brothers were three-pers, the result of their mother’s interspecies marriage to the future King of Babis. The sons had an individual, unique appearance, each of them demonstrating in different ways what Reedosia, Babisian, and human DNA looked like when genetically combined in the womb.

On Earth, Ace had been classified as one of the greatest geniuses born of his generation. Seeing the brothers relaxed him a little. The brothers had only a part of Reedosia DNA, but paired with their human and Babisian DNA, it gave them more intelligence than Ace had seen in any other species.

Rallel, Jooz, and Cozin stood in front of the window. Neither said anything as they took in the occurrences happening outside of the glass.

“Anything?” Ace prompted.

The BS Diamerica had drifted in Aceyer’s meteor-filled cryo-ring for five years. All of its crew was wanted on criminal charges on one or more planets. That morning, the decision had finally been made to leave Aceyer and collect supplies before traveling to the hidden planet of Shieleer. They had only been in deep space a few hours before coming upon the spectacle they now approached.

Rallel looked back at Ace and shook his head. “There’s no explanation for what we’re looking at.”

The rest of the human crew entered the room. One-armed Wiley, Farzad, and Callum rushed into Command in the gait doctors once used when hurrying to critical patients.

Wiley did something no one else did. He lifted his nano-arm to shield his eyes from the light coming in through the window. “How can light penetrate the glass?”

“Why are some parts bright and other parts green?” Callum added.

Cozin lifted his eyes toward the ceiling and listened to the noises being picked up by the hull’s audio system. Loud static, the burst and release of radioactive gas, and what sounded eerily close to a gurgling, popping, alien growl.

“It can’t be an event horizon,” Jooz said. “There’s too much sound.”

Ace focused on Cozin because he was more intelligent than his brothers. “You have an opinion?”

“Some of us are getting ready to die,” Cozin answered. “I hear a voice. I don’t think our system is able to pick up on its language.”

“A voice?” Ace questioned, rising out of his chair because Cozin hearing a voice changed everything. “What we’re seeing has qualities of a black hole. You can’t hear a voice. It’s impossible.”

Cozin studied the spectacle outside the glass and smiled. “Something alive is inside what we’re looking at.”

Callum, who made it a point to be watchful of those around him—including people he considered as family, like he did the crew—trained his eyes on Cozin. Something about Cozin's behavior rang suspicious to the nth degree. Folding his arms, he decided to stop watching the occurrences outside the window and keep his eyes on Cozin instead.

Cozin pressed his hands and face against the glass, then closed his eyes. "What's out there doesn't need some of you."

Callum nudged Ace in the side, then gestured with his chin toward Cozin. "Something's gotten into him," he whispered. "Has anything gotten on the ship? Something infectious?"

Ace shook his head. "Redessa would have sounded an alarm."

Redessa operated as more than the ship's voice. She was also a living computer. Nothing happened in or outside the ship without her detecting it first.

The door of Command opened.

Khlygers were from the planet of Khlygoor, one of the coldest planets in the multiverse. All of their males were born alongside their spirit guides, a rather large size species that resembled a prawn at birth but transformed over time. These guides were known as Reemin and once they were born, neither Reemin nor the Khlyger it was born to could live without the other.

That's who had come through the door, Osic and Stauis. They entered with their Reemin, Cincu and Niklo.

Khlygers stood upright. On appearance, their bodies looked like they were made from craggy, shiny blue rock, but was actually their form of muscles. They had two legs, two arms, a close to human form, four stubby fingers, and a face that extended at the mouth. White nodules protruded out of their joints. Ice horns grew out of their feet. Stand next to one of them and a species' body temperature slowly dropped from the Khlygers' subzero cores. Rods that were implanted in their chest were used as weapons of war.

Their Reemin looked entirely different and walked on all fours. A cross between a hyena and a lizard, they had paws with nails sharper than a raptor, and skin like leather often covered with the ice spores their bodies constantly secreted.

Before joining the crew, Osic and Stauis had been raiders and had visited more galaxies than anyone else in the room.

"What is that?" Osic asked, leaning closer to the window.

“Shit,” Ace muttered when Stauis turned to him and also waited for an answer. “I thought at least one of you would know being you both have traveled further than any of us have.”

The last of the crew finally arrived, and the sight of them caused everyone to shed a little of their fears. Their captain and her husband walked in a hurried gait that kept them side by side.

Prince Hamut Margas looked as unique as his sons. Skin like a thin film of water, the electricity he was made of darted to the surface like shooting stars. Red and white eyes that had pupils like sparks of electricity. Black hair hung past his shoulders. His two eyes, nose, mouth, two legs and arms made him walking high-voltage in human form.

His wife, who captained the BS Diamerica, was known to all species other than human by her Babisian given name of Princess Hamutita, but to her crew she was known by her Earthly given name of Ericka Martin. In appearance, she looked, for the most part, like a typical African American, but was far from it. Abducted by the Babisianx after they invaded Earth, she was genetically modified then given to Hamut as his mate.

Her hair had grown long, of which she kept neatly braided and in a bun. Her modified eyes set her apart from all humans. Shaped like honeycombs, they almost glowed from their red background. Directly in their centers were reptilian-like irises, a three part slit like an upside down Y. The rest of her appearance usually drew people away from her eyes. Nut brown skin, round breasts, shapely legs; she behaved humanly, alluding many to believe she still was, although the crew suspected she had never been entirely human, but a direct descendant of Eaglestoon, the ruler over the Spirits of Eglexx. Born with a rare and strong ability in extrasensory perception, people on Earth called her clairvoyant, a psychic, a precog, a retrocog, and other similar names. After her abduction by the Babisianx, they began to believe what other species now also believed, especially after Ericka defeated the Babisianx by killing their King and freeing Earth from Babisian domination after luring her Babisian husband, who had been next in line for the throne, to fight on her side.

She was and will always be the greatest esper in all the multiverse.

Bypassing everyone while her eyes stayed on the occurrences happening outside the window, she pressed her palms against the long panel and leaned closer to the glass.

Ace stared down the front of himself because his knees suddenly felt weak. "What's happening?" he asked and dropped unconsciously to the floor.

## CHAPTER 2

### *The Mystery Deepens*

No one bothered checking on Ace because outside the window deep space came more alive.

Spiral arms similar to those found on the edges of galaxies broke apart and burst with sharp, blinding light before fusing together again and repeating the process. Meteors spun dizzily in circles while others sped in all directions, crashed and burned. In the center of everything happening, nebulas erupted large and billowy in brilliant white, gold and poisonous green gases. In between the nebulas, a mysterious black behemoth with nine arms crawled through space to reach the ship.

"Too much is happening at once," Hamut said. "Space doesn't act like this."

"Should I pull us back?" Leoon asked.

"No!" Ericka yelled.

"Why not?" Osic questioned. "It gives us a chance to escape."

"More of what's out there is behind us," Ericka answered, stressing the last word.

Cozin closed his eyes and ran his hands along the glass. "It's beautiful."

Callum pointed a stern finger across the room. "That boy ain't actin' right. Haven't been since he entered Command."

"Cozin, look at me," Ericka demanded, freaked out by the eerie tone Cozin had used.

It took some seconds, but he finally turned, dropped his arms, and looked at everyone as if nothing was wrong.

When their eyes locked on each other, the dread Ericka felt increased by ten. "Get away from that glass," she said, hoping what was outside the window was what she was afraid of instead of the son she'd given birth to.

Hamut heard the threat in her tone and stared at her, then at Cozin; his suspicion also piqued.

Cozin lowered his chin, but his eyes secretly swept the room to see where everyone stood and the expressions on everyone's faces before he gave a gentle nod and sat in his assigned chair.

Ericka stared at everyone individually as well, because the dread she felt intensified, not behind the ship, or in front of it, or above it, or beneath it, although something was definitely out there. The dread came from inside Command.

But how?

Feeling dread inside Command meant danger had already arrived. She refused to believe anything infectious could have gotten to Cozin, especially since of all of them she considered him and his father as the strongest.

"Everyone, take your seat," she said softly while still contemplating.

Crossing the room, she sat in the captain's chair. When in Command, she and Hamut shared the chair together. Made for a captain the size of a Senfeer, sitting side by side still left plenty of room for someone else to also sit with them.

“Leoon and Wiley, take us closer at light speed,” Ericka ordered, then spoke to the ship’s living computer, hoping if they could get away from what lay outside of the ship would make her dread go away. “Redessa, send out slippery probes 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11. Rallel and Jooz, connect to Redessa. Whatever’s out there, try and diminish its energy.”

Ace pulled himself from the floor.

Happy to see he wasn’t seriously injured, she asked, “Are you back with us, Ace?”

Reaching up, he touched underneath his nose, then stared at the blood on his fingertips. “Nothing outside this ship should have caused my reaction.”

“I see what’s behind us,” Leoon said, suddenly. “More of that black looking stuff. It’s getting closer. Are we ready?” He reached for the manual thruster controls.

Ericka gave a firm nod.

The noises from the hull grew louder as Diamerica began moving again. Drawing closer to the phenomenon, the ship’s front thruster reached the first of the spiral arms. The spiral arm continued its process of breaking apart. Light outside the ship became sharp, penetrating the glass and becoming blinding. Still, Ericka could see beyond the light. Studying the pattern of the behemoth-looking black smoke, she leaned forward with doubt when she saw what looked like a pair of eyes staring back at her.

The front thruster finally reached the smoke.

“Did you feel that?” Wiley asked in a low voice, looking at Callum, then at everyone else to see if they had also felt a tremor.

“My seat shook,” Callum answered.

“Mine, too,” Farzad whispered.

“Mine, too,” Osic said. “And stop talking low! Let us all hear and know what we all are experiencing.”

“Stay calm,” Ace urged calmly. “Keep your cool and pay attention. Ericka and Redessa will let us know if any of us is in danger.”

“The window,” Hamut said, his eyes narrowing as tiny cracks appeared, then began to spread.

Black smoke rose high, covering the window and blocking the light.

Redessa spoke in an unfamiliar, deep, slow, whispering voice, drawing out the last word in a tone that suggested something had breached her programming and spoke through her.

“I’m here,” the voice announced.

Outside the ship, metal screeched.

Niklo and Cincu slid across the floor to the door as Command rocked as if something had crashed inside of it. Leoon’s head slammed against the docking panels.

Ace panicked with concern because Leoon weighed more than a ton. How could his head have slammed when no one else in the crew had budged other than Niklo and Cincu?

Becoming suspended in the air, the nails of Niklo’s and Cincu’s paws tried to embed into the dense metal of the Command Room door against their will.

*The cracks in the window are in the same place Cozin had rested his hands, Ace thought. Hamut and all three boys can detect energy from an unidentified source, but aren’t saying anything. Neither did Redessa detect danger or sound any alarms despite the occurrences outside the window.*

“Cozin’s a corsai!” Ace stared at Ericka first, then at the rest of the crew. “No one’s detecting anything because this is all happening from inside of Command. Cozin has the ability to knock Leoon forward, and send Niklo and Cincu sliding across the floor. A corsai can cause what we see outside the window...”

“Shittttttt!” Callum screamed loudly, lifting one foot from the floor while gripping the armrests to make certain he didn’t fall out of his chair.

Cozin’s chair shook violently, and in too fast a speed for the moment to be real. Loud clacking sounds were made with his teeth as his head wobbled, bounced and jerked. His hands clenched into

fists, the knuckles becoming pronounced. Electricity splintered out of him in long, twisting veins filled with blue, electrical blood, attaching to his chair and spreading across the window like a rapidly growing fungus. Black smoke burst out of his mouth, shot across the room and entered Hamut's eyes, nose and mouth.

Stunned by an attack, Ericka leapt out of the captain's chair, believing Hamut would have done the same thing. Although the chair stood fifteen feet off the floor and stretched eight feet across, it began to tremble as soon as her feet hit the floor to the point of being ripped out of its position. Hamut still sat on top of it, every muscle in his body shaking as violently as Cozin. Black smoke pooled from the corners of his mouth. Electricity burst out of him like sizzling, blue tentacles, shooting in all directions, and like an octopus that had suddenly grown a thousand arms.

Osic and Stauis leapt out of their chairs and pulled their weapons out of their chests, then fired blindly on Cozin and Hamut while fleeing at the same time, because both knew they were no match against father and son.

Hamut's electrifying tentacles reached Niklo and Cincu, twisting around their bodies like coils in a furnace. Scorching heat radiated in visible red vapors that burned holes through the door, pulling Niklo and Cincu through these holes until both Reemin fell out charred, in pieces, and no longer alive.

The moment Niklo and Cincu died, Osic and Stauis dropped dead to the floor, their rods still gripped in their hands.

Farzad threw himself out of his chair and hid underneath the massive bulk of Leoon's legs. Callum also climbed out of his chair and crawled to Leoon, hoping Leoon's size could shield him from danger.

Neither had seen that Leoon was unable to move. He sat as still as a mountain of stone. Blood dripped from the corners of his eyes.

Rallel and Jooz had also jumped out of their chairs. With their hands held out in front of them, they tried to attack Cozin, but their energy backfired, pinning them together and against the wall.

Black smoke shot out of Cozin's mouth. It forced its way into Ace's stomach with such force, Ace's arms flew in front of him and his body folded in half. A cord of energy shot out of Hamut's hand and sliced Ace down his center with the sharpness of a guillotine's blade.

Ericka had run one way then another unsure of who to try and help first when suddenly Rallel and Jooz give purulent screams. A cord of energy traveled out of Cozin's mouth, took the shape of a laser, then sliced rapidly in the pattern of a Z. One of Rallel's arms and part of a shoulder fell one way, his legs and head another. The upper part of Jooz's body pulled forward, then separated clean at the waist as both pieces of him fell on top of each other to the floor.

Ericka hurried to her sons and reached for Rallel's cold hand. Looking up, she saw smoke burst out of Hamut and engulf Leoon's and Wiley's chairs. When it retracted, Leoon, Farzad, Wiley and Callum lay with tiny white eyes. Terror had frozen on their faces. The large amount of ampoules in the smoke had charred their muscles, diminishing their size. Their clothes were baggy and lay almost flat. All that was left of them were thin limbs of taut skin pulled over brittle bones.

The sight made her want to puke. Standing to her feet because Cozin had risen out of his chair, she took steps back as Cozin and Hamut cornered her against a far wall. All Babisian had reachers, inner arms like red, slippery tentacles. Their reachers burst out of their bodies like nets used in deep sea fishing. The feel of them zapped at her skin and made her muscles stiffen. Unable to move, she could do nothing as the reachers entangled her neck, arms, waist and legs. Just when the zaps forced tears from her eyes she found herself flying across the room in too fast a speed. The reachers tightened. No longer able to see because of pain, a sudden yank and she was thrown back into the direction she had come from. Working together, with great force they hurled her toward the cracks in the glass Cozin had created.

Pain radiated across her shoulders and the back of her head. The window fractured into chunks and sharp pieces. The vacuum of deep space snatched her breath away. Frost crystallized and

accumulated along her hairline, turning her skin into ice. The circulation stopped in her feet. Her last thought was realizing space had a clogging, dusty smell like an old coffin closed tight for many years.

The scent traveled into her lungs and stopped her heart.

The last thing she saw was the poisonous gases of a nearby nebula seconds before the mysterious behemoth with nine arms crawled closer and open its mouth. It trembled as violently as Cozin had as it swallowed her.