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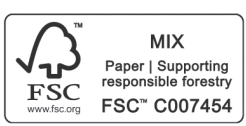
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To my Leo,

May the Light heal you

CONTENTS

1.	Space Truckers	1
2.	Anomaly	5
3.	Control	10
4.	Sunburn	14
5.	Wormhole	18
6.	Burnout	24
7.	Life-Craft	28
8.	Through the Wormhole	34
9.	Strange New World	39
10.	Cocoon	44
11.	The Luminites	48
12.	Library of Time	52
13.	Gravity Wave	57
14.	The Hole Home	61
15.	Crystal Ship	65
16.	Light Speed	69
17.	Five Years	73



CHAPTER 1

Space Truckers

The spaceship *Helios* shook hard and Max Nova missed the hand rail. He floated across the cargo bay and bounced off a crate.

"Whoa!" he shouted.

Darius, the ship's loader who was as strong as an ox, grabbed Max and pulled him to the rail. "You good, kid?" he asked.

The lights in the cargo bay flickered and a siren blasted out.

Max nodded. "Just a bit terrified. That's all."

Juno, the ship's engineer, floated past. She smacked the big fuse box on the wall of the bay with a spanner and the flickering stopped. "Company's cutting corners again," she grumbled. "This heap of junk's only held together by my hard work and sweat!"

Darius grinned. "Good thing we've got you, Juno. Or else we'd be space toast."

Another jolt shook the ship. Juno frowned. "Is the captain going to crash into *every* meteoroid in Space?"

Max's heart pounded. His father was the captain on the *Helios* and Max had joined him on this supply trip for an adventure ... not a disaster!

Max pulled himself up the ladder into the cockpit. His father, Captain Sol Nova, sat in the command chair. He was calm and focused as he stared through the cockpit window at the vast darkness of Space. Vega, the ship's navigator,

was hunched over her console. She looked tense, her gaze fixed on the spinning rocks ahead.

"What's happening?" Max asked.

"We're passing through a debris trail from a comet. It leaves behind all these bits of dust and rock," his father told him.

"Brace yourself, rookie," said Vega as she gripped the controls. "It's about to get bumpy."

Max strapped himself into his seat just as a shower of rocks hit the ship. The *Helios* shuddered; red warning lights flashed.

"The shields are holding up," his father confirmed.

"For now," muttered Vega.

A meteoroid struck the hull and the whole ship rattled. Max gulped. "You said space travel was safe nowadays!"

"I did?" His father winked at him. "Welcome to space trucking, son."