

Alien Salvation
Chapter 1

Lindsey McInness peered through her binoculars from the top of the office building, staring at the Fort Lauderdale beach three blocks away. The object she watched, a silver oblong shape, lay unmoving on the shore.

The Kalquorian shuttle tilted drunkenly on the sand. A landing strut was badly bent. The vessel had landed hard half an hour earlier, skipping across the blond sand like a stone skipping across the water.

Lindsey's father Aaron squinted through his own set of binoculars. Her mother Tara crouched between them, her expression peaceful as always. The sharp sea breeze lifted Tara's and Lindsey's matching chestnut locks and Aaron's gray strands. The breeze was cooling in the heat of the early spring sun.

Tara asked, "Any signs of life?"

"Not yet." Lindsey put the binoculars down. Despite Tara's serene expression, her appearance made Lindsey wince. She was too thin, her tank top and shorts accentuating her starved appearance. Her arms and legs were matchsticks. Food had been hard to come by lately, and none of them had possessed an extra ounce of fat when Armageddon had struck Earth six months earlier. With Aaron injuring his back after falling down the stairs a few weeks ago, the situation was desperate for the family.

Desperate enough that Lindsey had decided to approach the Kalquorian ship the moment she saw it careening through the powder blue Florida sky. With no sign of life coming from the craft, it was time to make her move.

"I'm going down for a closer look."

"I'm not sure that's a good idea." Aaron frowned, putting down his binoculars too. The past two years had been harsh to him. He was in his mid-fifties, but living in hiding, then seeing most of Earth demolished in cataclysmic explosions, had aged him badly. His eyes were sunken, his visage skull-like. Lindsey's heart broke to see him look so old.

"It isn't a good idea, but those Kalquorians probably have food. If they survived, they might be willing to share. If they're dead, they won't need it."

Before Aaron could argue any further, Lindsey hurried across the roof to the door leading into the building. As she moved, she kept her gaunt frame huddled in a crouch. Kalquorians, other Earthers, whatever was out there—she had no intention of advertising the family's presence to anyone. Her parents followed, Aaron shambling awkwardly with pain.

At least he could walk, Lindsey thought. Maybe there was a Kalquorian doctor on that shuttle. Maybe the Kalquorians were friendly, having nothing to do with Armageddon. And maybe Santa Claus was with them, handing out presents to well-behaved children. Help was too much to hope for, but Lindsey had lived on little more than hope for a long time.

They entered the stairwell, finally able to straighten and walk normally without the fear of hostile stares upon them. Tara also existed on hope, which was obvious in her next statement. "They might know Jessica."

Aaron's voice echoed in the stairwell as they climbed down the six flights. "We don't know for sure the Kalquorians weren't behind the attack on Earth. We were at war with them, after all."

Lindsey saved her reply until they reached the ground floor. She entered the office building's lobby, which had been looted. Graffiti was scrawled on all the walls, charming notes

such as ‘God is Dead’, ‘Traitors Die!’ and the darkly humorous ‘My Parents Visited Earth and All I Got Was This Lousy Mushroom Cloud’.

Broken furniture lay in huddled piles, some blackened by fire. The poorly ventilated area blasted heat like a furnace, and Lindsey was grateful for her tank top and shorts.

The family made their home on the top floor and roof where looters and refugees were less apt to discover them. With government and law enforcement a thing of the past, it was every man for himself. Survival depended on one’s ability to defend herself and her supplies.

Lindsey picked her way over rubble to get at a small storage closet, though her steel-toed boots offered protection from the metal and glass pieces scattered about. She cast careful glances at the entrance doors as she went, now just glass shards clinging to metal frames. They hadn’t blockaded the entrance. Nothing attracted looters as quickly as the appearance of defense.

Lindsey had saved her booby traps for the top two floors.

She tried for a comforting smile to ease her father’s fears. “If the Kalquorians are as desperate for Earther women to breed with as the underground claimed, it makes no sense they’d have set off those bombs. Why would you kill off the species needed for your survival?”

His face went grayer, if that were possible. “That’s another reason to not rush over to that ship. You don’t know what they’ll do when they see you. They might rape you. Abduct you.”

Lindsey reached the supply closet and opened the door. Pulling out the false floor, she grabbed a percussion blaster. The larger stockpile of weapons was upstairs, within easy reach of where they lived. “I’ll be careful.”

Tara winced, her aversion to violence rippling through her calm acceptance of life’s rough treatment. “A blaster?”

“You’d prefer me unarmed?”

Lindsey watched her mother struggle. Her fears for Lindsey’s safety warred openly against her Buddhist beliefs against armed confrontation.

Lindsey leaned down to kiss her mother’s elfin features, unable to watch the moral conflict duking it out in her expression. “I won’t shoot them on sight, Mom. I’ll give them a chance to be nice.”

“Do what you have to,” Aaron said, but he lowered his gaze when Tara looked at him. His voice low in apology, he added, “Losing a daughter was more than I wanted to bear. I can’t cope with losing both.”

Tara nodded her understanding, hugging him close with skeletal arms. Unable to witness their pain, Lindsey turned and crept to the double doors, alert for any sign of others in the area.

“Get upstairs,” she ordered. “Stay out of sight. The crash might attract some desperate characters to the area, and I don’t want to lose what little we have.”

Nothing outside stirred except the palm tree fronds holding up the blameless blue sky. Lindsey stepped through the doors, angling her body to avoid the dagger shards of glass that reached to spill her blood. She darted to the dubious cover of a burned-out hover shuttle on the street in front of the building, watching for any enemy, be it Earther or Kalquorian.

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Bacoj was out of the ship and down the ramp the moment the main hatch opened. Japohn’s growl followed him. The brawny Nobek was on his heels in an instant.

“Bacoj, wait until I’ve determined we’re clear!”

The young Kalquorian turned to his clanmate. "You've been scanning for hostiles for the last thirty minutes. How much clearer can we be?"

The massive Japohn stood over him, his blue-purple eyes scanning the windswept beach on one side and the tall buildings on the other. Long, loose black curls spiraled to his muscular shoulders, left bare by his red-trimmed black formsuit. Japohn was a behemoth by even Kalquorian standards. He appeared big and clumsy with three hundred pounds of bulky muscle, but his agility was not to be underestimated. The man was quick and vicious in a fight. Japohn's scowl, nearly hidden behind his mustache and goatee, might have given Bacoj pause had the Dramok not been so angry.

Bacoj inspected their surroundings. On the street bordering the beach, abandoned hover craft transports and archaic automobiles on round black wheels dotted the surface on which they had once traveled. Almost all of the vehicles were blackened, burnt hulks of metal and molded plastic. None of the nuclear explosions that had wiped out most of Earth's inhabitants had happened here. The surviving Earthers had obviously turned on each other in an orgy of destruction.

Japohn's sharp stare examined everything, suspecting every piece of the landscape of harboring enemies. "We may be under observation from a distance. Let me protect you."

Nobeks were the clan defenders, and Japohn took his position seriously. Too seriously, in Bacoj's opinion. He twitched, shaking off Japohn's heavy hand on his shoulder. "I'm already outside. I need to check the engine to see what damage was done."

Bacoj strode over the rippled skin of sand, hearing the soft grind of his knee-high boots against the grainy surface. He restrained a groan at the damage to the underside of their shuttle. It looked as if Japohn had used it for a punching bag. He opened the engine compartment, wincing in expectation. "We took a direct hit from that magnetic surge. It can't be good news."

Japohn ran his hand over the hull. "The whole skin is crumpled. It's my fault. We should have taken the long way and avoided the portal like you wanted."

Yes, we should have, Japohn. But we always have to do things your way, don't we? Bacoj bit off the angry words. His clanmate sounded sincerely upset with himself, especially since their other clanmate Vax had been hurt in the crash. And who was really at fault? He knew who his superiors would blame.

Bacoj took a deep breath. "I was the pilot. I'm clan leader. The blame for this is mine." He raised his voice to a yell. "Vax, hit the ignition."

The shuttle powered up with a grinding sound that masked its usual efficient hum. Purplish-black smoke roiled from the compartment, and Bacoj coughed as the fumes hit him. Still, what he heard was a relief.

"All right, shut it down!"

The ship fell silent again. Light thumps on the ramp claimed Bacoj's attention, and he turned to see Vax leaving the ship to stand at Japohn's side. The smallest member of their clan, Vax was somehow childlike and defenseless next to the Nobek. His well-formed features, usually gentle with a smile, were drawn. His brows pinched close to each other. Bacoj's Imdiko, the clan's nurturer, was in obvious pain. With a flush of guilt, Bacoj glanced at Vax's broken arm, which was encased in a hard shell and supported in a sling.

As always, the Imdiko didn't blame. Instead, he asked, "What's the verdict?"

Bacoj patted his shoulder encouragingly. "I don't see major damage to the engine. It's the power recharger that's the problem, along with the loss of all but one thruster. I can repair it well enough for a few short hops."

Vax, ever the optimist, answered, "It beats walking."

Bacoj peered towards the southwest, seeing nothing but dark, hulking buildings, the glass broken out of windows and doors and strange hieroglyphics painted on their exteriors. He'd learned some of the Earther language English. It was the dialect of the area he was assigned to. But he couldn't read any of the writings posted on the seemingly abandoned buildings. Bacoj was low in rank, a mere shuttle pilot, and he hadn't counted on a lot of interaction with Earth's native population.

"I'll have to repair the stabilizers. Once that's done, we might be able to reach the search teams southwest of here within three days."

Vax's blue-purple eyes widened. "There's no hope of restoring communications with the fleet?"

He must be in agony to be so worried. We'll have to make him take pain inhibitors. Bacoj swallowed. Vax never made waves, content with whatever life threw in his direction. The complete opposite of Japohn, in fact.

"The com panel is fried, along with environmental controls. We'll have to open the atmospheric vents and hope this mild weather holds." The gravity of their situation hit Bacoj with renewed strength. "My commander will have my head for this."

Japohn frowned. "I insisted we take the unstable Bermuda Triangle portal. If anyone is to be punished, it's me."

Bacoj regretted sharing his anxiety. "I'm the pilot and the clan Dramok. The responsibility is mine. How's that arm, Vax?"

The Imdiko tried for bravery, but he looked as if he might vomit. "Sore, but I'll survive."

"Take a pain inhibitor." When Vax opened his mouth to protest, Bacoj held up his hand for silence. "We've got plenty for you to last until we get to the search party's base."

"But if someone else needs it—"

"No one else is hurt. You'll take as much as you need." It was easy to be clan leader with Vax. He took orders with little argument.

Japohn stiffened, and they gazed in the direction that had his attention. Vax asked, "What's wrong?"

"Someone's coming."

Bacoj saw nothing moving among the refuse of the Earther landscape but didn't doubt his Nobek's claim. A bounty hunter before the war, Japohn could detect danger better than most. Bacoj's hand went to the dagger sheathed in his belt. "How many?"

"One. You two had better get inside the shuttle, just in case."

Bacoj let go of the blade, confident in Japohn's ability to handle a single Earther. "We're a rescue operation first and foremost. It may be someone who needs our help."

"We aren't in a position to help anyone, including ourselves," Japohn reminded him.

"Let's not be too hasty to attack if we're approached. We can at least give a good impression of our people."

Japohn snorted, his gaze riveted on a burnt-out husk of a transport vehicle. Bacoj couldn't be sure if he would obey his orders. Not for the first time, he wondered if he'd made a mistake clanning the assertive Nobek.

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Peeking through the filthy windshield of an electric car, Lindsey swallowed. Her dry throat clicked. All three aliens stared in her direction. She'd been spotted despite her best efforts to remain hidden.

She was a block away. Surely that was enough of a head start for her to evade the Kalquorians. If she were to abandon her plan to ask for help, now was the time to do so.

But her parents were starving, especially her father. Lindsey knew he'd been going without to make sure Tara ate. He wouldn't last much longer, not the way things were falling apart. None of them would.

Desperation made Lindsey bold. She stood up straight and walked towards the Kalquorians, putting on a brave face like a mask.

She studied them as she drew closer, staring at them as frankly as they stared at her. Her attention went to the tallest first. She'd known Kalquorians were big, averaging about six-and-a-half feet tall, but that guy was a monster. His clinging black outfit showed every bulge of his amazing physique. Black curls hung to his wide, bare shoulders. His and his companions' skin was dark, like people of the Middle East. He was handsome but the expression he wore, watchful with suspicion, made him brutish.

Fear licked through Lindsey's belly, turning her insides strangely warm. The big man was the most virile-looking creature she'd ever set eyes on. He could probably crush her with a single hand. She was insane to approach such a beast.

Intimidated, she moved her gaze to another of the waiting Kalquorians. The smallest was at least a foot taller than her own five-five height and well-muscled. The tense but gentle expression he wore gave Lindsey courage to keep going towards them.

Hair swept from his attractive visage in waves. She appreciated the strength of his chiseled jaw. He'd been injured. His arm was encased in a hard-molded gray shell, and a strap slung around his thick neck held it close to his chest.

The third alien was thicker bodied than his injured friend, striking despite his frown. He didn't appear unfriendly. His was an expression of concern, as if he had too many problems without an Earther showing up for who-knew-what reason. He tossed his head as a breeze blew an errant lock of his long, wavy hair across his unlined face. Lindsey wondered if the hair was as soft as it looked.

Lindsey had known the Kalquorians were similar to Earthers, but she hadn't expected them to be attractive. They were gorgeous examples of masculinity with wide shoulders, tapered waists, muscled thighs and...she warmed as her gaze skittered over the prominent bulges of their crotches. Their clothing left little to the imagination.

Considering what she was about to do, it was a good thing she found them handsome. Hopefully, she would be as attractive to them. She was clean, at least. Yesterday's rain had given her the opportunity to bathe.

Lindsey reached the curb across the street from the men. Without slowing, giving her mounting fear no chance to overtake her, she crossed Highway A1A. Her shaking legs brought her to the opposite curb and stomped over the beach sand to stand in front of the black-suited trio. She held her blaster loosely at her side. Lindsey wanted the aliens to know she wasn't helpless but didn't want to threaten them either.

She stared at them, trying to ignore her speeding heart. Three pairs of purple eyes regarded her, their pupils slit like cats'. That was the biggest difference she could discern between their races. She'd heard they had fangs, hinged similar to those of a rattlesnake. A Kalquorian's bite supposedly rendered his victim drugged and helpless.

They were so damned *big*. Lindsey had to force her blaster to remain at her side.

“Hello, Kalquorians. Can you understand me?” She enunciated each word.

It was the frowning Kalquorian with the sensuous lips who answered. “We speech some English.”

His voice was a gentle rumble, and Lindsey restrained a shiver. His gaze was so intense, she had to glance away. She nodded at the dented spaceship behind them. “It would seem you’re having trouble.”

The Kalquorian gazed at his ship, his frown deepening. His stare returned to her, and he stepped closer. Lindsey caught a scent that reminded her of cinnamon.

“Much trouble,” he agreed. “Portal unstable. Make damage.”

“The Bermuda Triangle wormhole? Yeah, it eats ships. None of ours can use it unless they’re double hulled with buffer fields.” She licked her lips. “Are you here to hurt Earthers?”

The Kalquorian held his hands up. “No to hurt. We to work containment for radiation.” He made a vague motion towards the northwest. “You understand?”

He must mean the Atlanta blast site. The Kalquorians are trying to contain the fallout? Lindsey nodded. “I understand. Do you have food?”

The biggest Kalquorian’s lips pursed. However, Lindsey saw compassion fill the others’ faces. The Kalquorian who spoke to her stopped frowning. “We supplied short time. You hungry?”

Some of her tension bled away. They were willing to share with one Earther, but their food was apparently limited. She had to make it worth their while to feed the rest of her family. Lindsey gave them a hopeful smile, trying for friendliness. It wasn’t easy when her legs trembled so hard.

“Do you have names?”

The aliens’ speaker returned her smile, and warmth cascade through Lindsey despite her fear. The expression lit his handsome features, elevating him to mouthwatering gorgeousness.

“I am Dramok Bacoj.” Motioning to the suspicious giant, he continued the introductions. “My Nobek, Japohn. The injured is Imdiko Vax.”

Lindsey dragged her memory for the limited information she had on Kalquorians. “Dramok is the clan leader, right?”

Bacoj appeared pleased. “This is correct. Nobek is protector. Imdiko is caregiver. You name?”

“My name is Lindsey.”

She bit her lip. Was she really about to do this? She thought about her father’s drawn expression, her mother’s twig arms. Yes, she was. She had no choice.

Taking a deep breath, Lindsey plunged ahead. “I’ll be blunt, Dramok. My family is starving. All the food has been looted from the stores, and there’s precious little to hunt in Fort Lauderdale. We don’t even have anything to use for bait to catch fish, and—”

Bacoj held his hand up, stilling her stream of nervous words. “You fast speak too much, Lindsey. I no understand.”

Okay. Then we’ll just cut to the chase. “Kalquorians enjoy Earther women for sex, right?”

Three mouths dropped open in cartoonish shock. She almost laughed despite her growing terror. The expressions so didn’t fit the aliens.

Blinking fast, Bacoj answered, “We are need women for species survive.”

“Then the rumors of your imminent extinction are true.” At Bacoj’s confused expression, Lindsey said, “You like sex for its own sake?”

Bacoj exchanged glances with his clanmates and received very Earther-type shrugs. He returned his gaze to Lindsey. His tone was hesitant, as if afraid he would get the answer wrong. “We like sex.”

“With women?” Lindsey had heard so many stories about the Kalquorians that she had to be sure.

“We like sex with women.”

Lindsey couldn't help another nervous swallow. “Fine. I'll trade sex for whatever food you can spare. I can't say I'll be very good since I've never done it, but it's all I have to offer.”

The effect of her statement was instantaneous. Even as the men stared at her in surprise, the air turned thick with that cinnamon-y smell. The bulges at their groins swelled. Lindsey fought the urge to run screaming. The only male sex she'd ever seen belonged to a statue in an illicit art book she'd gotten from a friend. From the looks of things, her would-be lovers were far larger than Earther males. Frighteningly so.

The biggest Kalquorian, the scary fellow Bacoj had introduced as Japohn, spoke in a hoarse voice. “You give sex for us? All of clan?”

Lindsey forced her gaze to meet his. Blue-purple, they were beautiful and the least threatening feature he possessed. “That's the offer, big boy. Willing sex from me for food.”

Vax spoke next. “How many to feed?”

“Three. Myself and my mother and father.”

The tension in the men's exchanged looks told her she was asking a lot. Tears welled up in Lindsey's eyes. Where would she get food for her parents if they said no? Resolutely, she blinked back the evidence of momentary weakness.

Her tone was less than diplomatic as she snapped, “Do we have a deal?”

Vax spoke in his staccato language. Japohn answered, his glowering easing to show concern. Vax shook his head before delivering another burst of speech, his gentle smile growing. Both men turned to Bacoj, who nodded.

He grinned at Lindsey, suddenly bright with eagerness. “We make trade.” He reached for her.

Lindsey stumbled back a step, her guts flip-flopping. She thought of her parents on the rooftop three blocks away, watching the exchange. If Aaron knew what she'd agreed to on his behalf, he'd throw himself down the stairs again.

“Can we do this inside?” she asked, glancing towards their ship.

Bacoj nodded. “Good. Sleep mat inside.”

“Okay.” Lindsey's stomach churned with nerves, and she couldn't help but stare at the large bulges in the Kalquorians' pants. Handsome as they were, she wasn't going to enjoy their attentions one bit.

She turned to wave towards the office building where her family hid, letting them know everything was all right...okay, lying to them that everything was all right. Her heart pounding, Lindsey marched up the ship's ramp past the men and entered its interior.