

GUARDIAN
Awakening

Second Edition
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Chapter One: Alien.

The sun dipped below the edge of the moor, the distant clouds formed red fingers that reached across the sky, heralding in the night. After a warm summer's day, the air was still and cool. Tristan Taylor shivered as faint stars started to appear in the emerging darkness, a darkness that leached into his mind.

"Tristan, you're not listening to me, are you?" Sarah stood with her fists clenched, leaning slightly towards him, her face distorted with anger.

Tristan swallowed, his mouth dry. "I'm sorry, but..."

She did not let him finish. "I've had enough of this, Tristan! Either you give up this stupid isolation -" She waved a hand at the sweeping moor. "- or it's over, and I'll return to London on my own." She paused for breath. "Well?"

Her demand for an answer hit Tristan like a physical blow to the chest. He stepped back and shook his head. "Sarah, you know I can't do that, not yet."

Tears glistened in her eyes, reflecting the redness of the sky. She wiped them away with the back of her trembling hand. With a final toss of her head she turned, her high heels clicking on the stone patio. "I've packed my things; the rest is junk."

The anger in her voice seemed to echo in his head; he had waited too long. He rubbed his temple, his hands cold and clammy. The slamming of a car door made him jump. His eyes started to water as he collapsed into a patio chair. The sound of a screaming engine and spinning wheels became almost deafening as the pain took control of his senses.

His hand shook as he fumbled in his pocket for his painkillers. He broke two from the blister pack and gulped them down with a shudder. He rocked forward, holding his head in his hands; *damn the Navy and their experiments!*

The pain increased, and he shivered; *twenty minutes before they start to work*. He pushed down on the arms of the chair, forcing himself up. He stepped through the open lounge patio door, and slid it shut grunting with pain. He staggered to the settee and flopped down with a deep racking sigh that shook his whole body.

Tristan opened his eyes and blinked as faint watery moonlight filled the room with a gentle silver glow. He rubbed the scar on the side of his temple. The pain had passed. With a sigh, he stood and walked over to the light switch, the sudden blaze of light hurt his eyes. He glanced at his watch; this time he had been unconscious for over two hours.

The memory of Sarah's sudden departure came flooding back and he shook his head. She had finally given up on him. He walked over to the mantelpiece. A young Lieutenant in Royal Navy dress uniform with his arm around a slim, pretty, dark haired woman, smiled back at him. His eyes started to sting, and he wiped them with a trembling hand.

"Shit!"

With a sweep of his hand, the picture went crashing to the ground, glass shattering into a thousand pieces on the stone hearth. If only he hadn't volunteered for the experimental weapons program things would have been so different!

He turned, ignoring the shards of glass that crunched under his slippered feet, and he flopped back into the lounge chair. He stretched, staring through the window at the dark moor, the scene somehow unreal in the dim silver light as the moon faded in and out of the clouds. He had to have peace, silence, and isolation; why couldn't she accept that?

The phone rang. He reached over and picked up the receiver. "Yes, hello?"

"Tristan?"

"Yes mother," he sighed. From the tone of her voice, he knew a lecture was in the offing.

"I've just been speaking with Sarah. You're being cruel and unreasonable, why don't you see sense and at least come home to us? We can consult some different doctors, and get that damn thing out of your head."

"It's not possible mother, we've been through this before!"

"Come home, Tristan. Apologise to Sarah."

"Mother!" Tristan rubbed his temple.

"She's such a nice girl Tristan. She doesn't deserve to be treated like that."

"Whose side are you on?"

"I'm not on anyone's side dear, but you're just... Well, you're being unreasonable"

"Damn it, mother!"

Tristan glanced at the remains of the photo frame. Two faces looked up at him through broken glass. He slammed the receiver down, pinching his fingers on the phone rest.

"Fuck." With a sharp jerk he ripped the phone from the socket and threw the receiver at the wall. "Now leave me in peace!"

He slumped back in the chair, and his gaze returned to the still silent moor as a few spots of rain splashed against the patio doors, the start of another shower. Through the broken cloud, a shooting star streaked across the sky.

The small red light blinked on the instrument panel incessantly demanding attention. Aesia ignored the pulsing red glow; there was nothing she could do about it anyway. She shivered, her breath forming ice crystals on the cockpit canopy. She had shut everything possible down, including life support.

She hoped the metallic rock of the asteroid would hide her from the enemy's instruments as they passed overhead. She glanced at her hands; they were shaking, not from cold, but the stress of battle. She placed one hand over the pulsing light. The smallest thing might give her position away.

Far above her a vast black ship, the stars as bright points of light were winking out as the ship moved across them. A faint mist, and flashes arching out from a hole in the side of the ship, showed her where her missiles had struck. She smiled; at least she had done her duty. Now, she must get away, and find somewhere to repair the damage to her fighter.

The dark shape stopped and hung motionless. She stiffened, bracing herself for the impending flash and the burning, as the weapons of the vast ship above turned her to hot vapor.

Her heart thumped in her chest, counting her life away almost in sync with the faint red light pulsing under her shaking fingers. The dark shape started to move; the stars started to reappear. Each new star increased her hope that maybe she would survive.

She waited until the dark shape was no longer visible then restored the power to her computer and life support. Her systems did not detect any enemy ships, so they must have engaged their Star Drive and moved away. *One small fighter in an uncharted system far from home, and rescue was not worth bothering about.*

With trembling hands, Aesia removed her helmet and shook her head, her long white hair falling down over her shoulders. She rubbed her ears; *I must get this helmet adjusted.* She laid the helmet on her lap and turned her attention back to the instruments.

Increasing her craft's power, she switched on the scanners. The neural interface took a moment to lock with her mind. She directed her attention to the planets of the system that she now found herself in. The first two planets from the star were out of the question, but the third planet had a breathable atmosphere. All the parameters checked out, and she could survive on the surface without any problem. The computer warned her that signs of early technology were present on the surface. The planet was inhabited by primitive beings. Still,

she was more than capable of looking after herself, and they were probably far too primitive to be of any threat.

Above her, stars glinted cold and bright, but no dark shadows moved overhead. She took a deep breath and commanded the ship's computer to start the engine ignition sequence.

Of the three main engines in her fighter, only one fired. The flashing red light on the console was joined by others, each insistent, each demanding attention. She shook her head; this was an unexpected setback she had not bargained for. Her craft would be hard to handle, and manoeuvring within a planetary atmosphere almost impossible. However, she had no choice. She would be unable to go far with her damaged craft. She dropped the tight fitting helmet behind her seat and grabbed the controls.

The flight from the asteroids had been difficult, and her arms ached from holding the damaged craft steady. The stabilization and auto pilot systems couldn't cope with the engine damage, forcing Aesia to fly manually. She flexed her shoulders to ease the ache.

The sensors identified a primitive electromagnetic detection technology. She checked with the computer, ensuring that her fighter's basic cloaking systems were functioning correctly. Something under the dashboard sparked, and the weapons targeting system went dead. She groaned; there was nothing for it, she had to land before anything else failed. With a firm grip on the vibrating control stick she guided her fighter into the planet's upper atmosphere.

The computer had shown her a large island off a much larger continent as a possible landing site. Her sensors showed a few deserted areas that had the advantage of moving into the darkness of night, so her descent would not be detected by anyone casually looking up.

Aesia made her choice, and she pushed the stick forward. Her craft began to buck, throwing her against her straps as it entered deeper into the atmosphere. The noise from the thickening air became a roar. The control stick tried to rip itself from her grip. She bit her lower lip as her aching muscles strained against the violent movement; she needed all her strength to hold the craft on her chosen course. She commanded the braking thrusters to fire.

The seat straps tightened around her as the forward rush of her decent was checked. At least the thrusters were working. As she neared the ground, she pulled the stick back, straining; sweat ran from her brow, stinging her eyes. The control stick was like a live animal in her hands trying to escape. She just missed a small, low building before she hit the surface of the planet. She was thrown forward hard against her harness and as her head struck the main console one last thought passed through her mind; *my helmet!* Blackness engulfed her.

A roar rattled the windows and shook the house as something flew low overhead, followed by a dull thud, then silence. Tristan leapt out of his chair. *An aircraft in trouble!* The ache in his head forgotten, he grabbed a torch from his hall cupboard, threw open his front door and ran to where he thought the craft had gone down.

He barely avoided tripping over the uneven ground in the faint light cast by a cloud covered moon. His stomach churned as he rushed to the crash site. *What was he going to find?* He cursed his stupidity for ripping his phone off the wall. If the occupants were in a serious condition, he had no way of contacting the emergency services. Even if he had one a mobile was useless, no signal in this local area. He cleared a small rise, his breath coming in ragged gulps. A cloud cleared the moon, flooding the moor in silver light. He skidded to a halt, his chest heaving. The silver light faded into the matt black of the aircraft. This was unlike anything he had ever seen before.

Three round exhausts protruded from under a stubby tail. The fuselage tapered from the engines to a pointed nose, partially buried into the peat of the moor. Short wings attached to the centre of the fuselage, had two tubes projecting from them. They reminded Tristan of cannon barrels. He scrambled down the slope. Just in front of the wings he noticed a canopy,

presumably where the pilot sat. His trained eye glanced over the craft's markings. They were weird shapes, totally unrecognizable as any country roundels or writing Tristan had ever come across during his days in the Navy. The whole thing, with its sharp angular lines and matt black colour, exuded an aura of purposeful menace.

Faint trails of smoke curled away from the side of the stricken craft. Orange flames crackled and danced under a broken panel forward of the engines, and the falling raindrops steamed and sizzled as they hit the hot metal.

The pilot was visible through the canopy, unmoving. The air shimmered from the heat of the fuselage. Tristan hesitated. As if sensing his reluctance, the flames suddenly leaped higher. He clenched his fists. *I have to do this now.* Taking a deep breath he jumped up on the stubby wing. The plastic of his boots started to melt on the hot metal, causing him to slip. Without thinking he put out a hand to steady himself. "Oh Shit!" The pain shot up his arm as the palm of his hand blistered.

Through gritted teeth, ignoring the pain from his hand, he felt carefully round the canopy. Panic tightened round his chest. *Oh God, how does this thing OPEN!*

A sudden stabbing sensation in his head made him gasp, almost pitching him forward against the canopy. A whispering, strange, alien, but compelling, filled his mind. With a faint click and hiss the canopy moved up and back into a recess in the fuselage. The pilot sat slumped forward; shoulder length, fair, almost white hair, reflecting the angry red glow of the instruments.

Tristan gasped and almost fell backwards off the craft. He grabbed the pilot's seat to steady himself, avoiding the hot metal of the fuselage. *My God!* He resisted the urge to turn and run. *Its ears!* They protruded from the pilot's hair, sharp and pointed. He hesitated only for a moment, and then he leaned forward and pulled the pilot back into the seat. *What the hell was it?* With a shrug he pushed away the questions racing through his mind, his hands shaking. He groped for the harness and found a buckle where the straps met at the creature's waist.

His searching fingers located a lever. He held his breath, and pulled, and the harness came free. He grabbed the pilot from around the shoulders and, grunting from the effort, pulled it from its seat.

Throwing the pilot over his shoulder, he did his best to avoid the hot metal of the craft's hull. He jumped from the wing. His feet slipped on the damp peat, pitching forward away from the hot craft; he dropped his burden. He cursed; his clumsiness could cost both their lives. He stood, the heat from the stricken craft hot on his back. In one fluid movement he bent down, scooped up the fallen pilot and threw it over his shoulder. Holding it steady, with an arm around its legs, Tristan ran. The added weight caused his feet to sink into the soft moorland peat. Each tuft of heather threatened to trip him as he carried the unconscious form to safety. Tristan glanced back, and flames were now leaping higher, spreading along the fuselage. Loud cracks and bangs rent the night as parts of the craft succumbed to the consuming heat of the fire.

The bloody things going to blow in a minute. The thought went round and round in his head as he struggled back up the slope. His chest heaved, his breathing laboured, his heart crashing against his ribs. He cleared the rise and plunged down the slope towards his cottage.

He ran as fast as his burden would allow, praying with every step that there was no hole or crevice in the uneven ground to catch his foot. With the added weight and, the speed of his headlong downhill rush, he would surely break a leg.

Half expecting an explosion to knock him off his feet, he paused to catch his breath, his heart crashing in his chest with the exertion. He glanced back, expecting to see the glow and flicker of leaping flames, but all was dark. *That's strange.* He resumed his downhill rush.

His whole body shaking with effort, he finally reached the cottage. Sinking to his knees, he propped the pilot against the wall. Taking deep gulps of air he waited for his body to recover. After a few moments he stood, turned, and keeping low ran back up the slope to the crashed craft.

Expecting an explosion at any moment, Tristan dropped to his knees then slowly edged forward to peer over the rise. The craft was covered in thick steaming foam. The flames were smothered, and the fire extinguished.

Thank God, an emergency fire control system. He stood, turned, and trudged back to his cottage. The pilot had not moved. Tristan opened his cottage door, and then bent and picked the creature up, as he did so his unconscious burden stirred and groaned.

Tristan hurried through the door, but in the hall he hesitated for a moment. Not knowing the extent of the pilot's injuries, he decided that the couch was not the best option. He carried the pilot upstairs, and laid it on his bed.

Right. Now, to see what you are!

With trembling hands he fumbled with the light switch, and blinking in the sudden brightness he took a step back. For a moment, primitive instinct took over like a giant hand gripping his chest, twisting and squeezing. He took a shuddering breath to quell the unreasoned urge to turn and run. What the hell had he rescued? The creature's skin was fair, almost translucent, with a faint, mauve tinge. The eyebrows were very thin and fine, almost nonexistent, a thin slightly turned up nose, high cheekbones and long pointed ears completed an ethereal, elf-like appearance.

"There's an alien in my bedroom. THERE'S AN ALIEN IN MY BLOODY BEDROOM!" He swallowed. The wind rattled the bedroom window, causing the raindrops to sound like a myriad tiny tapping fingers against the glass. *For God's sake Tristan, pull yourself together!* Red blood had trickled from the side of the alien's mouth and nose, an angry purple bruise spread across its forehead where it probably hit something during the crash. The creature was breathing without any difficulty, chest rising and falling in a gentle rhythm. Tristan looked at the creature's body, realisation sinking into whirling thoughts. The one piece jumpsuit it was wearing did not hide the curves. *It's female!*

He ran a trembling hand through his hair as he slumped down on his bedside chair. He gazed at the alien on his bed. In the silence he became aware of a tingling, whispering in his thoughts not under his control. He ignored it like the dull ache in his temple that had been a constant companion since the failed naval experiment. He returned his attention to the unconscious creature on his bed. The insignia and colour of the jumpsuit gave it a military appearance, confirming Tristan's impression of the crashed craft. A gun of some sort strapped to her thigh caught his attention.

"Better get rid of that quickly."

The sound of his own voice made him jump. He glanced at his burnt hands then back at the creature lying on his bed. "Aliens, and I'm talking to myself. I must be going mad!"

He stood and walked over to the bed, bent down and carefully removed the weapon while trying not to touch anything that might be a trigger. The weapon was pistol-shaped, with a thick, lethal looking barrel. He turned it over in his hands, the metal, polished and worn showing signs of use. He locked the thing in his safe at the bottom of his wardrobe. At least when she regained consciousness, if she did regain consciousness, she couldn't shoot him with it.

He returned to the bed and looked down on the creature. *What now?*

He loosened the collar of her suit to help her breathe. He fumbled for a moment with the fastening then pulled. The neck fastening came apart with a ripping sound like Velcro. A pulse on her neck looked strong and even. The skin was soft and warm to the touch, just like

human skin. He glanced at her hands, four fingers, and a thumb; except for the faint mauve tinge, quite human looking. The body shape was in proportion and human-like too.

He carefully ran his hands down her limbs, checking for any obvious wounds or breaks. A small pocket on her hip, opposite to where the weapon had been strapped, contained a small flat box the size of a mobile phone. It looked harmless enough so he put it back. He checked the creature's boots; they had a side fastening similar to the Velcro on her suit's collar. He pulled and the fastening came away with the same ripping sound. He removed her boots. Her feet, like her hands, were small and slim, each ending with five human looking toes.

Well that's surprising; an alien that could, at a pinch, pass herself off as human. What were the chances of that? Tristan shook his head and stepped back. Satisfied that there were no other obvious injuries, Tristan pulled the covers over her and turned out the light. He started downstairs and then thought better of it, and he returned to the bedroom, closed and locked the door. He had no idea what she would do if she came round and found herself in a strange place. She was probably military, so could be dangerous. He went back down the stairs and sat down.

He tried to order his thoughts. Was she really alien? Had he jumped to conclusions because of her strange appearance and the unknown configuration of the craft? No, he was certain she had not originated from any country on earth. Might she be the prelude to an invasion? Maybe a whole troop of aliens would burst in at any moment brandishing those lethal looking pistols. Perhaps she was lost and alone just needing help? Oh well, she was here now so what should he do next?

He could not take 'her' to a doctor or hospital. They would immediately report it to the authorities, and there was no telling what they would do. In all probability they would dissect the creature. Anyway, as she was an alien, doctors probably would not be able to help. A vet perhaps? He smiled to himself. *Be serious!*

Reporting the incident was out of the question, as was taking her anywhere there were people. They would panic; most would not have the same open mind as he had. He glanced at the model starship on the windowsill he had built as a child. He firmly believed there were many other beings in the vast universe. He believed that the people who thought humans were the only ones suffered from unforgivable arrogance.

He had bitter firsthand experience of the authorities and the medical profession! He rubbed the scar on the side of his forehead.

The only option was to keep her secret and care for her as best he could, providing she was not too badly injured and would recover. At first light he must cover the crashed ship. An old tarpaulin he had found in the woodshed would be ideal. He could camouflage it further with brush and bracken.

As Tristan sat quietly in the silence, he noticed again the whispering in his head. He strained to listen, to make sense of the faint voice and the occasional blurred images, but they were just out of reach. The tension and adrenaline had drained from his body, and now his hands, arms and shoulders ached. The palm of his burnt hand throbbed. He fumbled for his painkillers, swallowed two with a toss of his head, stretched and sighed. Everything can wait until the morning. He eventually fell asleep and dreamed strange dreams of alien planets and battles between vast black ships among the stars.

Chapter Two: Aesia

At first light, Tristan awoke. The quiet whispering in his mind invading his thoughts like the gentle touch of butterfly wings. As he rubbed the sleep from his eyes, realisation returned, and a chill shivered down his spine, entering his stomach in a twisted knot. A crashed ship in his back yard and an alien in his bed upstairs. He had to get the ship covered quickly. If anything got reported to the authorities they would be all over his secluded patch of England like ants.

He quickly washed his face in the kitchen sink to remove the remainder of sleep from his eyes. Taking a deep breath, he decided to check on the alien first. Tension like a knotted fist twisted in his stomach. He reached the bottom of the stairs and hesitated. The creature was slim and small but still... *Why am I being such a wimp!*

He swallowed, took another breath and climbed the stairs. On reaching the landing he paused, listening. He heard nothing except for the normal sounds of the moor, the faint bark of a fox, and a skylark in the distance. With a trembling hand he unlocked the bedroom door and cracked it open. His body tense, not knowing what to expect, he peaked into the room. She lay in the same position he had left her.

He swung the door wide and stepped into the room. Female surely, it fitted her body shape and features. *But, aliens could be a tricky lot, as most sci-fi blockbusters would confirm.* He smiled at his own humour, releasing some of the tension knotting his stomach. He moved to the bed, ready to leap back if she made any sudden movement, but she didn't stir. The jumbled incoherent whispering in his head became stronger the closer he got.

The slight bleeding from her nose and the side of her mouth had stopped. He remembered the first aid training he had been given years back when he first joined the Navy. *Damn, I should have put her in the recovery position instead of on her back. Oh well, she seems to be breathing regularly.* He considered washing away the dried blood on her face. *What if she should wake while I was touching her?* He shuddered at the probable consequences if that happened. *Best to leave her as she lay.* With nothing to be gained watching the unconscious creature, Tristan turned and walked out of the room, locking the bedroom door behind him.

Now, he needed to cover the crashed craft to hide it from prying eyes. He walked down the stairs, out of the front door, only pausing in the hall to put on a coat and boots. The old tarpaulin he had found in the woodshed out the back would be ideal. He pushed open the woodshed door, the rusty hinges creaking. The tarpaulin, folded over the saw bench, was an original canvas one, part green, part brown with age, it had been there when he brought the cottage. He picked it up with a grunt. *Damn, this bloody thing is heavy!* The dust and musty smell of age made him cough.

Tristan stepped outside and took a gulp of fresh morning air. The coughing fit passed.

As he approached the craft, puffing from the weight of the tarpaulin, he sensed power emanating from the ship. After his experience the night before, he experimented, fixing a question in his mind. *System Status?* Half expecting nothing to happen, Tristan dropped the heavy tarpaulin to the damp ground, raising another cloud of musty smelling dust. He froze, his mind now filling with a jumble of images. *Wow, too much!* He closed his eyes. Like a radio tuning to a new signal, the jumble cleared. The computer presented him with a type of head-up display, but without the helmet. *This is really cool!* A large part of the information he did not understand, but the systems he did understand had suffered extensive damage. The ship would need a lot of work before it would ever fly again.

He stepped up to the cockpit. The rain during the night had washed off the foam so he had no problem looking in without opening the canopy. A large portion of the instruments were still glowing and active. He formed a picture in his mind of everything shutting down. He gaped open mouthed, as the instruments shut off, and he also *knew* the systems had gone into

a stand-by mode. He rubbed the side of his forehead. *Bloody hell! This is amazing, like the implant is working!*

The Doctors told him that his brain had rejected the implant the same way his immune system would reject a virus. The experimental weapons interface had been designed to connect the human brain directly to a ship's weapons systems; nothing in the design would trigger a host to reject it. But his brain had. Even the designers couldn't explain how the rejection happened.

The headaches had started straight away. After undergoing tests, and after many people prodding and poking him, the doctors decided nothing could be done. During the rejection process the interface had been fused. To remove the faulty interface would in all probability damage his brain. The headaches had to be lived with until more advanced surgical methods became available.

That had been the end of a glittering career in the Royal Navy.

So why was the interface working now? Had something happened, had this craft's systems somehow repaired the implant?

Tristan shook his head; the continuous dull ache he had lived with since that day had now gone. *Maybe the crippling headaches might end too?* He hoped so. *Well whatever has happened I should get this thing covered.*

He unfolded the tarpaulin and proceeded to pull it over the stricken ship. He collected brush and bracken, arranging the branches through the holes and rips in the old canvas. As he worked, he thought about the alien. Maybe the jumbled thoughts and images from her came via an interface she had to communicate with her ship, and he could sense it? The physics of electronic circuits would have to be the same, alien or not, he reasoned.

After several hours toiling in the morning sun, he stood back and admired his handy work. Someone would have to get close to notice anything out of the ordinary laying there.

He walked back to his cottage, thirsty after his morning's work. As he walked in through the front door the faint whispering in his mind became apparent. Pictures came and went, everything indistinct. He shut his eyes trying to bring order to the random thoughts the same way as he had connected with the ship, but he failed.

He threw his coat on the banister and went upstairs. He quietly unlocked the door and glanced in, trying to sense any change to the random chaotic thoughts. She lay still, although she had moved slightly. He hoped she was recovering. He pulled the door closed, and then turned the key in the lock. The covering of dust and grime from his morning's work made him uncomfortable. *I need a shower!*

After a refreshing shower and some clean clothes he returned downstairs to prepare himself some well-earned lunch.

Aesia stirred and opened her eyes. She let her mind wander, expecting the comforting tingle of her fighter's telepathic control system. Nothing, silence, the ship was out of range or dead. Panic, like a cold steel band, tightened across her chest. Taking a deep breath to regain control of her thoughts she glanced around. She was in a strange room lying on what? A bed? She moved her head. Yellow sunlight streamed through a small, open window. She reached for the grip of her side arm; it had gone. The cold tightness across her chest spread to her stomach, twisting like a snake. She gulped, forcing the rising nausea down. Her mind raced; if the enemy had captured her, she would now be locked in a cell on a hard floor or dead! So she had not been locked in an enemy prison. Her fluttering pulse stilled a little. *Then where am I?*

The question hung in her thoughts unanswered. She cast around with her mind; the ship must be close by. Without warning she touched another telepathic intelligence. She gasped, as the raw connection blinded her for a moment, sending lightning shocks through her body.

She blocked the connection almost instantly, but too late; the intelligence had sensed her probing. She tensed; it was far too strong for one of her own people, the mind had a strange raw alienness about it. *Not possible, no other species so far discovered has our abilities.* She missed the reassuring presence of her gun. She cursed, clenched her fists and lay back, staring at the uneven ceiling above with nothing to do other than lay still and wait for the alien to appear.

With muscles tensed, ready to fight, a cold detached calmness washed over her. One thing her training had prepared her for though, was to fight. She heard heavy footsteps. They stopped outside the door, then a click, a lock she guessed. The door opened. A tall, heavily built creature stood in the doorway. The creature's ears were small against its head, which was covered by brown hair; its eyes were also small with round blue circles and black centres. The clothing the creature wore seemed coarse, as did its overall appearance. So she had been captured by one of the primitive aliens from the planet she crashed on.

The alien's mind had no control. She had to shut off the jumble of thoughts, emotions, and sensations. It reminded her of an untrained yet powerful child. She had not expected a creature capable of telepathy, especially on a planet as primitive as this one appeared to be, from her scans.

She decided to bide her time before killing this creature and recovering her craft. She needed more information. She sensed nervousness tinged with concern from its stupid open mind. Maybe she was more or less safe at the moment. It looked muscled and strong, but it would be no match for her superior intelligence and speed. Still, she would wait to see what would transpire.

Tristan stood in the doorway, unsure how to proceed. At least the random jumble of thoughts had ceased. The alien turned to him and sat up. He stifled a gasp; her eyes! They were large, like the exaggerated eyes of a Disney cartoon princess, almond shaped, tilted upwards, blue like a cloudless blue sky, the pupils, like a cat, shone with an inner blue light. They had a magnetism about them that held him. He could not turn away. She blinked, the spell broke. He shuddered; this was way more alien than he had been prepared for.

Now she had regained consciousness she radiated an air of confidence and arrogance. He had to be cautious and watchful with this creature. The sensations filling his mind were strange, and it would be a while before he got used to them. Swallowing, he forced himself to be calm.

He broke the silence. "Hello, would you like some water?" As soon as he said it, he thought it a silly thing to say for the first words spoken to an alien. At least she hadn't asked to be taken to his leader... yet.

She said something in a soft low voice, and waited, watching him with those un-nerving eyes. He backed out of the room, keeping watch on her as he did so, and went to the bathroom across the landing. He picked up a glass he kept on the windowsill and, without turning, poured a glass of water. He *knew* she would attack him if given the slightest chance so he would not turn his back on her if possible. He walked slowly back to the bed and held the glass out to her.

She took it with a slender hand and examined the glass carefully before putting it to her lips. She took the smallest possible sip, hesitated for a moment then drank the whole glass.

Tristan stepped back as she pushed off the covers, twisted round in the bed, and put her feet on the ground. She tried to stand, but swayed and staggered forward. Tristan instinctively held out his arms. She grabbed him for support.

An unmistakable flare of anger filled his mind as she straightened, stepped back and stood on her own. Tristan held up his hands, palms open to her. "Wow, sorry!" *What did I do wrong?*

She was not as tall as he had first thought, being at least a head shorter than him. He noted that her long ears curved outward slightly at the tips. *Eat your heart out, Mr Spock.* A smile played across his lips. He realised too late, the alien had read his sudden amusement and her anger flared.

For a split second Tristan had a strong sensation she was going to hit him. He twisted back, blocked the blow and held her by the wrist. If he had not been forewarned of her intention, he would have caught the full force of the blow in the face, powerful enough to break his nose at least. He stepped back quickly after releasing her wrist, prepared for the next blow, should it come.

Instead, she shouted at him; he didn't need to see in her mind to know how indignant and angry she had become.

They stared at one another for a moment. Her eyes... his stomach twisted he sensed what? Hatred, loathing, and a deep rooted fear? No not fear, something else. He shook his head, his thoughts or hers? These new telepathic abilities were confusing. She made him nervous. He set his jaw and resisted the urge to turn and run.

Well, this is not getting off to a good start! Tristan stepped back, dropping his arms to his sides, hoping it was a non-threatening gesture. She glared and said something.

The tension and anger subsided a little. She seemed mollified by his outward sign of submission. Tristan had an idea.

"Are you hungry?" He thought clearly of eating and made gestures of eating with his hands.

She said something and nodded.

"I'll take that as a yes."

He motioned her to the door, stepping out of the room so she would have to walk down the landing in front of him.

Aesia noticed her boots were at the side of the bed but decided not to put them on. She did not want to bend down for them, just in case the giddiness should return. She did not want to show weakness in front of this primitive, inconsequential thing.

She sized him up. She had experienced his strength when he had blocked her punch and held her wrist. Even with her warrior training, she doubted she would be able to overcome him if he saw an attack coming and was ready for it. She cursed the empty holster at her hip. The creature had hidden her gun! She balled her hands into tight fists. A frown creased her brow. She noticed the creature visibly stiffen. Not wishing to fight when she was unsure of the result, she forced herself to relax and hold her anger in check. This... this thing, obviously did not realise its lowly position or the deference owed to her. She decided to be tolerant of it until she had taught it the correct manners and the way it should treat a superior being.

Tristan pointed downstairs, careful not to make any sudden movements. Her suppressed anger, and the arrogance, mingled with his own thoughts as she walked downstairs. He shuddered unconsciously, rubbing his forehead. It was not like reading her mind, but rather just sensing her immediate thoughts, or maybe not even that. A sort of sixth sense, an impression of what she was thinking.

At least this new ability gave him some warning if she tried anything against him, but it would take a while to get used to. It occurred to him that she could sense the same from him. He tried blocking off his thoughts by imagining a brick wall in his mind.

She stopped and turned to him a frown on her face. Tristan sensed for a brief moment a flash of fear, but the arrogance quickly returned as strong as ever.

They stepped into the hall, and he directed her across to the kitchen. He motioned to her to sit at his small kitchen table and pulled up a chair for her. She sat and looked at him. Her

blue eyes bore into Tristan's soul. Her eyes, rather than her long ears, made her look alien. They were eyes a human female would die for, beautiful but so strange. He took a plate, cup, and bowl from the cupboard and put them in front of her. She watched him as he moved around the kitchen. He sensed unease when he picked up a knife, then felt her relax a little as he used it to cut some fruit. He kept the knife on the work surface away from her and placed the fruit on a plate in front of her.

He noted to himself that he should hide the sharp knives when he had finished. If her anger flared as it had done before, he was sure she would not hesitate to stick one or two in his ribs.

She picked up a slice of apple in her slender fingers and tested it with her tongue. The apple must have been OK as she cautiously ate the slice. She tried the banana. This time she screwed up her face. It was the first time Tristan had seen any emotion in her other than a frown. He relaxed a little; perhaps she was not quite as alien as she appeared. While she ate the rest of the apple, he poured some water in the cup. He placed some bread and cheese in front of her and watched her tackle each in turn. She seemed to find them acceptable and proceeded to eat everything except the banana. She finally drank the water and sat back in her chair.

Tristan needed a cup of tea. The stress of the last few hours was starting to make his headache a little. He put the kettle on and made a pot of tea.

Aesia watched the creature work, making no move from her chair. The food had tasted strange to her, but was not unpleasant except for the flesh of the long yellow fruit; it had a texture she did not like.

He poured two cups of hot brown liquid and placed one in front of her then sat on the chair opposite her and took a mouthful.

Aesia tested the liquid, it was too hot for her, so she pushed the steaming cup aside. She had to know why this primitive alien animal appeared to have some basic mental ability. All the alien species her people enslaved had none.

She decided to try to take advantage of the creature's child like telepathic control and probe deeper into its mind. She pushed a little, as it seemed to relax while drinking the hot liquid. It was as if an iron barrier had just dropped shut. She almost fell backward off the chair. She knew immediately that if this animal had been trained it would be formidable. It did not fit well into her unshakable belief in her species superiority.

She must find out more about these creatures and their planet. But, first she had to ensure the creature learnt its place and to gain control over it.

Tristan had felt her push against his mind just as he was starting to relax. He raised the wall again to shut her out and continued to relax. He did, however, sense the feeling of fear and doubt emanating from her. He wondered what he had done to cause that.

He finished his tea without any further incident, sighed and stood slowly.

"Right, do you want to inspect your ship?" He gestured towards the front door. Had she understood him? He walked through to the hall and proceeded to put his boots on. He watched her as she regarded him with a slight frown. After a moment her face cleared, she stood, turned, and walked back upstairs. She returned after a short while, wearing her boots.

He opened the back door and waited for her to walk through. He then led her over to where her crashed ship lay under the tarpaulin. As they neared the ship he decided that since he had commanded the system computer to shutdown, he should get it to boot back up. So, he sent the ship a command. He found that it was easier than before. His mind must be getting used to this communication, and practice was making things easier.

Aesia almost stumbled when she sensed the command to her ship's computer. No one should be able to interface with it from this distance! Had she made a serious mistake in her brief assessment of this backward planet? Her mind raced. They may be a good resource for slaves, but if they all had this ability, perhaps they should be destroyed before they became more powerful. She put the thought to the back of her mind and continued walking to her ship.

Tristan pulled back the cover for her and stood back as she made an inspection. She climbed into the cockpit and scanned the instruments then climbed out, went to the rear, and opened an inspection cover. A mounting unease and gloom permeated her emotions. He decided to leave her with her ship. If she ran off now he would do nothing to stop her. She was not a prisoner. Anyway, he hated the constant undercurrent of arrogance in her thoughts, especially since he had tried to help her.

He turned and walked back to his cottage. He wanted to tidy up and see what old clothes Sarah had left when she had stormed out. If the alien needed time to repair her craft, if indeed she could, then she would have to fit in, especially if someone called or passed by.

He rummaged around in the airing cupboard and found some jeans, blouses, and woollens Sarah obviously had no further use for, and he laid them out on the bed. He went back downstairs and tidied up. Normally, he would go for a walk at this time. Today, he just sat down on his sofa and waited. He sensed her return before she entered the door. She would never be able to sneak up on him while he was awake.

She glanced at him as she walked in then turned and went upstairs. She must have guessed the clothes were for her. She returned shortly after, wearing the jeans, blouse, and jumper he had left for her. They were a little baggy since she was slimmer than Sarah, but it did make her look a little less alien. The ears and eyes were a giveaway. But with a woollen hat and some sunglasses, she could possibly pass as human.

She looked around the room, and then selecting the chair opposite him she sat. She said something he did not understand. Tristan noticed she had brought the small handheld computer from her pocket. She did something to it. Tristan was suddenly aware of its presence. It had the same telepathic control system as the ship. He could access it the same way. It was a general purpose personal computer that could act as a translator. He kept quiet and waited; no point letting her know he had access to her computer.

She looked at him and said with a heavy accent, "You will help me!" Even speaking an alien language didn't hide the arrogance in her tone.

Tristan frowned; emotion behind the words was plain. She regarded him as little better than a slave.

"I am already helping you." He waited while the computer translated for her.

She nodded then paused for a moment. "I am hungry, fr... fru... fruit and bread not enough."

Tristan sighed. He had a couple of trout he had caught the day before. He had intended to cook them for himself and Sarah.

"Can you eat fish?"

She frowned for a moment before replying. "Yes, I think so."

"OK". Tristan stood and walked into the kitchen.

Aesia sat quietly as he worked in the other room, preparing the fish. She had come to a decision. The alien had not made any threatening moves towards her, and he had laid out local clothes for her when she had returned. Despite his mental capability, he had not tried to use it on her. He had remained sitting comfortably and relaxed when she had come back from changing out of her uniform. He had smiled at her, and his actions seemed kindly. Maybe all it needed was the correct training. *Maybe I won't need to kill it after all.*

She wondered if her translator had been correct, what sort of fish it would be and if it would be edible? At least it smelt good. Her mouth watered. When it was prepared, he beckoned her over to the table. What he offered her looked like a fish. She tried it, and it tasted delicious, similar to the fish her father had caught in the river near her home.

Once she had eaten her fill she yawned. The events of the last two days had been exhausting for her, especially since the blow on her head during the crash still hurt. She should have kept her helmet on! A stupid lapse that might well have killed her.

She made signs to Tristan that she wanted to sleep, then without waiting for an acknowledgement she stood and went upstairs.

Tristan picked up one of his books and started to read. He heard her clatter about in the bathroom, then a short while after the faint sensation of jumbled thoughts returned. She must have fallen asleep.

While Tristan made up a bed on the sofa, the extraordinary events of the last two days went round and round in his head. He also practised shutting out the chaos of the alien's sleeping mind until he eventually fell asleep. He dreamt strange dreams again, but they did not trouble him this time.

Chapter Three: Storm

Tristan woke the next morning to the sound of clattering and banging from his kitchen. He sighed. "What is she doing now?" He pushed off the covers, stood, and walked through to the kitchen. Open tins and boxes, their contents scattered about, lay on the work surface. Some beans in tomato sauce dripped, forming a lumpy orange puddle on the floor. The Alien had finally settled on breakfast cereal and sat, quietly eating them from the box. Tristan groaned, but she just turned and smiled. He grimaced, shrugged, then with a sigh went upstairs to wash and shower.

When he returned to the kitchen she had left. He made himself some toast and sat surveying the mess that had once been his tidy kitchen. Almost an hour later, his kitchen now returned to a semblance of normality, he put on his boots and walked up to the ridge overlooking the crash site. He found her busy working on her ship. She glanced up for a moment before returning to her work. He left her to it and went for a walk.

When he got back, she was standing in the hall, hands on her hips and face flushed. She didn't wait until he had shut the door. "I did not give you permission to leave!" She paused as the computer translated the next sentence for her. "You will take me to one of your cities now! I wish to find out all I can." She jabbed a finger at his chest emphasizing each word.

Tristan gasped at her arrogance. "Screw You! You can forget it with an attitude like that!" He stepped past her and walked into the lounge.

She followed him. "You inferior being, you will treat me correctly!"

Tristan spun round. "OK, keep talking that way and you can fuck off, you ungrateful bitch!"

The computer translated, her face flushed red, mouth opened and shut, and she spluttered something in her own language then caught herself. "How...how dare you!"

Tristan glanced out the window. It had started to rain; one of those miserable rains that lasts the rest of the day, with a cold wind. He took several paces towards her then stood balanced on the balls of his feet. "I dare, you - you bloody alien cow!"

She backed away, clenching her fists. He sensed the vicious kick coming before she started to move. He dodged sideways, grabbed her foot at the top of her kick, and twisted. She landed flat on her back.

"You will need to be faster than that to catch me, bitch!" This time Tristan emphasised the word 'bitch'. She had given herself away by her strong emotion.

She rolled and pushed herself up. She swung at him again, but it was a feint; lightning fast she continued the spin going for his neck with the side of her outstretched hand. Every movement flashed in her mind a split second before she executed it. He caught her hand and twisted using her forward momentum against her. Again, she found herself on the floor.

With fast fluid motion she flipped herself up and round. Then attacked with another sweeping kick, powerful enough to kill if it had landed. Again, she gave herself away, and Tristan sidestepped, caught her foot and, keeping her off balance, twisted her round and pushed her out the still open front door. She fell backwards down his steps into the mud of his rough drive. Tristan immediately slammed the door and locked it.

"You can cool off in the rain!" he shouted. Clenching his fists he spun round to ensure all his windows were closed. With a sigh, he flung himself down in his lounge chair, smashing a fist down hard on the arm. "Fuck you!" he hissed between clenched teeth. He took a deep breath to still the pounding in his chest and rubbed his eyes with the heel of his hands.

He had never sworn at, or physically fought with a woman before. His father being old fashioned had brought his son up to be a gentleman. *Still, she is... it is an alien it's not the same is it?* He shook his head; it still didn't make it right. At that moment a gust of wind

rattled rain against the lounge window. Tristan shivered then smiled. "Thank you English weather." He busied himself lighting the fire.

Aesia stood up. She tried to brush some of the brown wet mud from her clothes. The fabric was not waterproof, unlike her uniform. She shivered and cursed herself for being so stupid and taking it off.

This alien had the better of her. All of her attacks had been blocked with relative ease, and it had ignored her superiority. She, like the rest of her people, took their superiority over other races for granted, but this creature had badly shaken her belief.

She stood outside the front door with water running down her neck, and shivered. The wind blew straight through her wet clothes, so she wrapped her arms tight to her chest and shivered again. She would not demean herself by banging on the door. She spun round; of course, she could shelter from the storm in the cockpit of her fighter. She ran to it, slipping on the wet mud, getting wetter and colder. She requested a system boot, but the ship did not respond. She shivered again as an icy blast hit her; the wet clothes offered no protection at all. Of course! She had locked it to prevent anyone from entering without her knowledge. She had left the electronic key with her uniform upstairs in the bedroom of the cottage. She stamped her foot. *Things are getting better and better!*

She cursed her stupidity. Ever since she had been on this awful planet, nothing had gone right. She crawled under the wet tarpaulin. At least it supplied some respite from the wind and rain. The rain beat on the tarpaulin in random rhythms as the wind took it in waves. Lightning flashed across the sky followed by a loud crack. It was dry underneath, but the wet clothes and the cold were getting to be too much for her. Shivering constantly she thought of her home planet, a warmer and far more pleasant place than this hellhole. She squeezed her eyes tight shut, and clamped her teeth together to stop them chattering. Tears burned her cheeks; she shook her head, ashamed at her weakness.

She had to get proper shelter and warmth soon. Her body was not equipped to cope with this. She was now in real danger of suffering from exposure. There was no option but to get into the building and get warm. She wriggled out from under the cover of the tarpaulin; the wind tugged at her wet clothes. Gritting her teeth her hands bunched into fists, nails digging into her palms, she walked back and up the steps to the front door. She hesitated, took a shuddering breath, then banged on the door and shouted to be let in.

She had to wait a few moments before she heard a muffled reply. "Only if you ask nicely! If you try to attack me again, you will go back out until you learn."

She opened her mouth to put the creature in its place, but she had no choice. She had to get warm or die. The computer told her what to say. "Please let me in. I'm cold and wet, and I promise to be good." She hoped she sounded contrite enough. "Please." She leaned against the door and the tears returned. The humiliation was almost too much to bear, even more than the cold.

Tristan opened the door to let her in. "You look like a drowned rat!"

She was crying and shivering uncontrollably, close to collapse. A small puddle formed on the floor around her. His heart missed a beat; had he gone too far? "Wait there." Tristan ran upstairs and got a warm bath towel out of his airing cupboard. When he returned, she had removed the wet clothes and stood before him completely naked and shivering. He stared at her for a moment before wrapping her in the warm towel. She was slim, toned and lean without an ounce of fat, her breasts small but firm, her body stunningly human like. He noticed a faint smile cross her face and for a moment her eyes seemed to shine. She knew the effect she had on him. His face flushed cheeks burning, he cursed his blunder.

She took a step and pitched forward. Tristan caught her, feeling her body shake. He put his arms round her, pulling her close. "I'm sorry I didn't mean to freeze you to death."

Without acknowledging his apology she pulled the towel tighter and snuggled against him. Wet hair covered her face as she shivered. Tristan gently brushed it aside with his fingers. He noticed she smelt slightly of an exotic musky spice. A warm flush stirred in him, spreading down his body. He tried not to think of her naked beneath the towel, but it made things worse. The uncontrolled shivering subsided and Aesia pulled away from him, a faint smile played on her lips. Realisation dawned: *good God, she knows what I'm thinking!* He imagined the brick wall.

He tried to cover his confusion. "Sit by the fire and I will get a small towel so you can dry your hair." She shook her head, not understanding what he had said, so he led her to the lounge and sat her by the fire. "Stay there." He ran back upstairs and took a hand towel, then returned, taking her small computer out of her wet jeans on the way back so she could understand what he said.

She took the towel and computer with a smile and proceeded to dry her hair. He went into the kitchen and made her a warm drink. She cupped the drink in her hands and sipped slowly. Tristan asked her whether she would like a warm bath. She nodded once her computer had translated it for her. He left her by the fire and went upstairs, relieved to get away.

She had let the bath towel slip, revealing rather too much of her body. He turned on the cold water tap first and splashed some on his face before turning on the hot for her bath. When it was ready he laid out more dry towels and the last of Sarah's clothes. He leaned over the banister and called her up. He stood on the landing out of the way as she climbed the stairs. She let the towel slip again, turned and smiled at him before stepping into the bathroom and closing the door. He let out a ragged sigh and left her alone. Later, he went upstairs and found her sound asleep in the bed. He tidied the bathroom and returned to the lounge.

He sat gazing at the flames as they danced around the last log he had put on the fire. She had let the towel slip provocatively while she had sat drying her hair and again as she had walked into the bathroom. Tristan knew she had done it deliberately, but why? "She is arrogant, unpleasant, bad tempered and an alien, for God's sake, Tristan!" He shook his head. *Think of something else!* He tried occupying himself by making up his bed on the settee. There was something about her, a kind of magnetism that attracted him, and those eyes! For a brief moment, he had actually wanted her!

The following morning it had stopped raining. The sun shining through the trees made dappled patterns on the curtains; it would be a pleasant day. The alien, still asleep upstairs, impinged on his thoughts so he shut her out of his mind and busied himself preparing breakfast.

Aesia heard Tristan moving around downstairs. The morning sun was streaming through the window as she pulled the covers around her and stretched. Sleep had refreshed her, leaving her warm and comfortable compared to how cold she had been the night before. She played the events over in her mind. The creature downstairs was annoying, savage, and it needed to realise that she was a Sicceian, the master species, superior to all species in the Galaxy.

But, it had displayed a weakness she could exploit; last night had not been a total disaster. She had a way to get this creature under control.

She had remembered a pet she'd had as a child. The creature was devoted to her although she was cruel to it at times. It followed her around, and she knew it would do anything for her without question. The creature downstairs was no different.

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