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about 2,500 words

## Galactic Food Chain

by Diorgo Jonkers

The Telorrey arrived on Earth eight years ago in their fancy spaceships. Their planet had become uninhabitable and they needed a new home. They were happy to live in the remote regions of Earth, where there were little to no humans. Our governments signed a treaty with them and declared them citizens of Earth. They were allowed to stay if they agreed to disarm and share their advanced technology with us.

Everything went well until the Telorrey discovered human meat tastes good. They declared humanity a food source and ordered us to accept our fate. They stated they will allow us to live freely with little interference from them, as long as we deliver enough livestock to them each month.

They even said they will make our lives easier so that we

only have to focus on reproduction. This plan involved providing free housing, food, healthcare and entertainment. The aliens also committed to eliminating all deadly diseases, destroying all our weapons of mass destruction, and ending all civil wars and genocide.

Of course we disagreed with them and decided to fight back, but our weapons were feeble against their technology. They wiped out a few cities across the world to show their might.

(Apparently they lied about disarming, which some politicians pointed out afterwards. The aliens later opposed the accusation by stating they did not disarm fully because they did not trust us. We have a history of ending treaties when it suited us, and they cited a list of examples.)

The aliens were careful not to waste food. They used a pulse weapon which instantly killed everyone in the targeted cities. The weapon simply switched off people's brains, leaving their bodies intact. The aliens then turned the cities into blocks of ice and were happy for us to first deliver the dead from the cities to them each month, until they were all used up. During that time there were groups of aliens who preferred fresh meat, which led to black market deals.

As the years passed the masses slowly accepted their fate. A few countries used national lotteries to decide who will be sacrificed, some used a draft system and some allowed for volunteers. One country implemented a system whereby each family had to produce one baby per year.

A few of the more powerful countries tried to turn the

weaker countries into breeding pens so they themselves could be spared. This almost led to a war between nations, which the aliens quickly stopped.

A few religions tried to make sense of the aliens' arrival and what it meant for people to be a food source. Two opposite cults formed. The first worshipped the aliens and were joyful to be sacrifices. (The rest of the world had no problem with this cult's existence.) The second cult believed their bodies were unclean and not worthy of consumption.

Once, a bunch of vegans and vegetarians went to the aliens to seek amnesty. They were never heard from again.

There were always those who refused to accept humanity's fate and fought back, which eventually evolved into a global resistance movement.

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Sandra September joined the resistance at the age of twenty-one. She was thirteen when the aliens arrived. Back then she lived with her mother and older sister in a run-down neighbourhood. Her sister was the only one employed, and her mother spent most of her time in bed or in front of the television.

Sandra was in awe when the aliens arrived. She did not understand the full impact it had on humanity when the aliens started eating people. Not until one hundred people were taken from her town, including her sister. It took a toll on her mother's health, who passed away three months later. But she was never buried, because the town gave their dead to the aliens. It was primarily her anger at losing her family, but

also the uncertainty of her future, that made her join the resistance.

Sandra is seated in a dark room with Monika Fory, her superior, and Carl Rimm, one of the resistance leaders.

"Monika told me what happened to your mum and sister. I'm sorry to hear it," Carl says. He has a sad, but stern expression on his face. "Most of us have lost someone to the aliens, including me. It's a common denominator that unites us and keeps us committed." He studies her face. "Before we continue, I need to know that you're committed."

"I am," Sandra says.

"Good." He motions to Monika, who holds out a box to him. He takes a syringe out of the box. "Monika has explained to you the extent of commitment required for this mission."

"Yes," Sandra replies. She flinched slightly when she saw the syringe.

He inserts the needle into a bottle and draws a liquid into the syringe.

"Tomorrow morning a group of people will be taken to a collection point, where the aliens will pick them up to be processed," he says.

Monika helps Sandra roll up her sleeve. Carl moves the needle to Sandra's arm and continues, "You will be among those people." He pauses before injecting her.

"Ow," she flinches, but Monika holds her arm firmly in place.

"The virus is harmless to humans, but fatal to the aliens. If we're lucky it will kill at least a few thousand of

them before they can contain it." He removes the needle and presses a swab against the puncture.

Monika motions for Sandra to get up. Without warning, Carl embraces Sandra and says to her, "We thank you. All of us."

He steps back and nods to Monika, who leads Sandra out of the room. There is a small queue of people waiting in the passage. They are all young and have solemn expressions.

"Next," Monika calls out as Sandra walks down the passage, out of the building into the cold evening air.

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The next morning she and a group of people are standing in a large open field, near a makeshift landing pad. They are surrounded by a few human, UN soldiers. She looks up and sees a large spaceship heading towards them. It lands and a group of aliens emerge from a large doorway.

They order the people to stand in a line, then start examining them with a hand-held scanner. After the examinations the aliens start marching the people into the ship. Suddenly a man runs off in the direction of the nearest trees. One of the aliens nonchalantly fires a weapon at the man. The weapon fires a set of wires that wrap around him. He falls to the ground, screaming. The alien walks to the man and drags him into the spaceship. His sobs fade away after a few seconds.

The door closes after everyone is inside and seated on the floor. The spaceship takes off. On the ground the UN soldiers watch the ship fly away. One of the soldiers sits

down on a stump and lights a cigarette. He hates his job.

The spaceship lands on the outskirts of an alien city in the Sahara desert. The humans are marched out of the ship into a large building, which looks like a warehouse. They are stripped naked and forced to go through a decontamination room, where they are sprayed with a powder and a liquid, then washed off. Afterwards they are dried off and given drab outfits to wear.

Each is given an injection in their upper arm. The people are separated into groups. One of the aliens, a male, directs Sandra to a set of white, sterile boxes, which look like coffins.

"Get in," he says to her. Pointing at the nearest box.

"Why?" she chokes, suddenly worried.

"For transportation." He pushes her into the box. She lies down and watches him put the lid on the box. She hears it seal and suddenly it is deadly silent and completely dark. She can only hear her own breathing and heart beating. After a few minutes she wonders if the box is moving and if she is going to run out of air.

Time passes. She starts to feel a mild panic. She tries to move, but there is not enough room. Her one leg starts going numb. She wonders if this is how they kill people to eat them, by letting them run out of air. The silence starts to become unbearable.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven..." she counts out loud to break the silence. She stops after she reaches two hundred. She has not felt the box move at all. Is she still

lying on the floor in the warehouse? Sandra wonders if she made a mistake joining the resistance. She shakes her head and convinces herself it was the right choice.

In front of her it seems the darkness stretches out into the distance. In the dark she imagines her mother sitting in front of the television. She turns her head and sees her sister, Sherees entering the room with a tray of food. She hands the tray to her mother and tells Sandra her food is in the kitchen. Sherees returns to the kitchen. Sandra looks to the kitchen door and hears her sister opening a cupboard. She can smell the food. The memory makes her feel both happy and sad at the same time.

They are the reason she joined the resistance. And soon she will join them in the afterlife. At least she will get some kind of revenge. She thinks to herself, "If we're lucky it will kill at least a few thousand of them before they can contain it."

More time passes. Sandra does not know how long she has been in the box, or whether she has fallen asleep during that time or not. Suddenly she hears a scraping sound. The box's lid is pulled back and a bright light blinds her. She closes her eyes. After a minute she slowly opens them. High above her is a grey ceiling with a spinning fan. Soft music is playing somewhere. She sits up in the box, rubbing her eyes.

She is in a large office. A female alien is sitting at a big desk, studying Sandra.

"A virus. Really?" she asks Sandra. She has an amused look on her face.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Detecting diseases was one of the first systems we put into place when we decided to eat your species. Have a seat," she says, pointing to the empty chair on the opposite side of her desk. Sandra continues to sit in the box, feeling uncertain.

"Don't worry, the virus has been neutralised. I'm pretty safe." She points at the chair again. Sandra climbs out of the box. Barefoot she walks across the cold floor to the chair. She sits down.

"Why haven't you killed me yet?" she asks, her voice trembling a little.

"It's my job to gather intel about the resistance," she replies. After a pause she adds, "But to be honest, I was curious to meet you."

"I don't know anything about the resistance."

"You can tell me everything you know. Or we can extract it from your brain via a mildly painful process that might leave you brain damaged."

"What do I care? You're going to eat me anyway," she replies defiantly.

Suddenly the female alien laughs. It catches Sandra by surprise. This was the last thing she expected when she woke up this morning. An alien laughing at her. Her only expectations were that she would be killed, eaten and then the virus would do its job.

"Why did you join the resistance? Did we eat someone close to you?"

Sandra looks away for a second.

"I see," the alien continues. "That's a valid reason to hate us." She taps her finger against her chin for a few seconds. "Some of your religious leaders say we are evil. Would you call a lion evil?" She looks at Sandra.

"Do you think we are evil?" she asks Sandra.

"It doesn't matter what I think or believe. The bottom line is that you eat us."

The alien sits in thought for a while, then asks her, "How old are you?"

"Twenty-one."

"When we arrived you were probably too young to see what was happening to your world. Your species polluted this planet, used up all its natural resources and continued to reproduce at an unsustainable rate. Another decade or two and the planet's equilibrium would have tipped. The same thing happened to our planet."

She continues, "When we landed, we knew our stay here could not be long. There was not enough food to sustain your species and ours. We either had to come up with a solution, or leave. If we leave, we have no guarantee of finding another suitable planet before our ships run out of energy. And the probability is high that you will eventually destroy this planet."

"The irony is that your species started the rumours that we were eating you. One of our leaders thought, 'Why not?' So we tried human meat. It tasted great. The rest is history, as you would say."

Sandra looks at her in disbelief. She asks, "Are you trying to tell me that you saved us?"

"Yes. It's not the type of saving any species wants, but it's the best solution at the moment."

"There has to be some other way," Sandra says.

"I'm sure we'll find a better solution, after your numbers are down to a point where the planet is no longer in jeopardy."

"Why are you telling me all this?" she asks the alien.

"I enjoy my meat more after I've had a good discussion with it," she smiles broadly at Sandra, revealing her teeth.

A cold fear runs over Sandra. She jumps out of the chair and runs to the door. The door opens and a male alien enters, carrying a rope and harness.

"No need to get excited," he says to her.

"No!" she screams.

"Shush, calm down." He tries to grab her. She evades him and falls to the ground near the white box. For the first time she sees the text on the one side of the box, written in one of the aliens' languages and in English.

"Prime Meat"

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