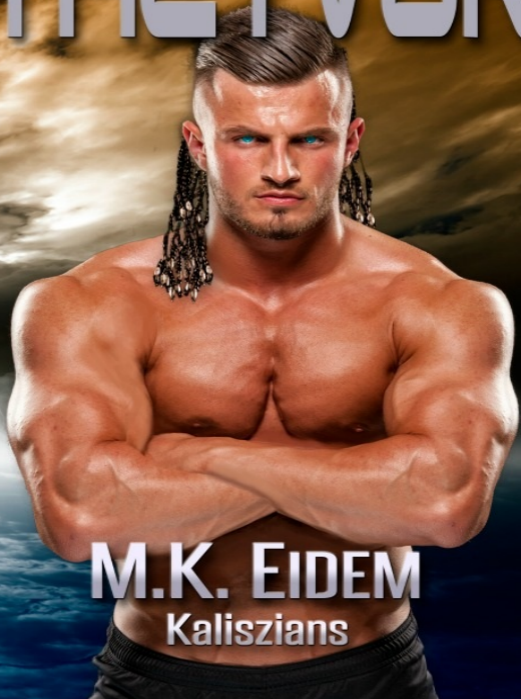


USA Today Best Selling Author **MKE**

TREYVON



M.K. EIDEM
Kaliszians

Treyvon

By M.K. Eidem

Acknowledgments

I'd like to thank my family for all their support during this exciting time of my life. I couldn't have done it without you. I'd also like to thank all my friends that have been there for me, answering questions, and helping guide me: Reese, Susan, Sally, Julie, Fern, Beth, and Narelle. Thanks, ladies!

Treyvon: Kaliszian Series

By
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Synopsis

General Treyvon Rayner is the Supreme Commander of the Kaliszian Defenses. He is the cousin and trusted friend of the Kaliszian Emperor, Emperor Liron Kalinin, in spite of Treyvon's ancestor being one of the causes of the Great Infection so many centuries ago. It is never far from Treyvon's mind, and he

vowed he'd spend his entire life trying to make things right.

Chef Jennifer Neibaur dreamed of traveling to exotic places, of experiencing different cuisines, and learning how to prepare them. Her dream came true, but at a high price. She lost her sister. Her husband died. And she was severely injured. All that was enough for her to

welcome death. But for a chef to end up in a place where food was just sustenance, and never something enjoyed, was the ultimate punishment.

Two strong, honorable people are both trying to find forgiveness and redeem themselves for things that were out of their control. Neither is looking for love. But if they can accept it, the forgiveness they find might

be for more than just
themselves.

Chapter One

General Treyvon Rayner is the Supreme Commander of the Kaliszian Defenses. He is a seasoned Warrior that has been in hundreds of battles and has seen and delivered more than his share of violence and death. He is strong and feared, but right now he has never felt more helpless in his entire existence.

It has been two weeks since the Zaludians attacked his base on Pontus, and the female, he hadn't even known was there, still hadn't woken. She had spent over eighteen hours in the deep-repair unit, yet Luol wasn't sure if she would survive.

How was that possible?

No Warrior, even with the gravest of injuries, had ever needed so much time in the deep-repair unit.

Looking down at the female, whose name he learned was Jennifer Neibaur, he couldn't help but wonder how one so tiny, so fragile, could have the courage to attack the larger and stronger Zaludian Captain.

Squad Leader Nikhil's Ashe and True Mate, Mackenzie, had told them how Jen had done it to save Mackenzie from the Zaludian that had been choking her. They'd

even found one of the two blades, Nikhil had given his Mackenzie, embedded deeply in the Captain's back.

But it had come at a significant cost to this female. Luol informed him that the repair unit had found she had a dislocated shoulder, broken ribs, and a severe skull fracture. And those were just the injuries she received during *this* attack. The unit also found multiple, older,

healed injuries. The most obvious and startling had been the savage scars that riddled the left side of her face. While they had healed, they still retained a raggedness that spoke to the brutality of the injury.

Treyvon had been grateful to learn that Tornian steel had not caused the injuries and that the unit could eventually repair them, as it could the other scars that riddled her

pale, thin body. Her worst injury, though, a shattered ankle that hadn't healed properly, the unit could do nothing for, and that infuriated him.

No female should ever suffer, especially not like this. Tryevon knew Warriors that would never survive what she had. And others that weren't brave enough to attack a Zaludian Captain with the small blades that she had

held.

The spikes the Zaludians embedded in their gloves were kept razor sharp and could eviscerate a male if he didn't know how to protect himself properly. Mackenzie admitted to them that the spikes were what had caused the injuries to Jennifer's face.

Treyvon found he had to restrain himself not to reach down and touch her. It had been this way ever since he

had carried her into the medical unit.



Treyvon had been working non-stop since the Zaludian attack that severely damaged a portion of the old base. It had been a strategic strike; one meant to kill as many of the survivors as possible while causing mass chaos.

It had succeeded in its goal.

But it would have been much worse if not for Warrior Gulzar's routine action of informing Treyvon of an approaching ship. If not for that, all might have been lost.

The approaching ship hadn't been the Fenton, as Gulzar was informed. Treyvon had realized this because he'd talked to the Fenton's Captain Darzi earlier in the day. Darzi advised him that they would be late in arriving due to

problems with their orders.

Treyvon, and the majority of his Elite Warriors, had been away from the base at the time. Drawn away due to a transmission from the mine where they found the human survivors. It was then he realized they were deceived so the base could be attacked. But that realization had come too late. Particularly for the female lying so still and silent before him. She'd had to

protect herself, and her friend, when *he* should have been protecting *them*. It didn't matter that he hadn't known about her. She was still his responsibility, and females were always protected.

They had yet to discover who gave the codes to the Zaludians that allowed them to enter Pontus' atmosphere under the guise of the Fenton. The Emperor was demanding answers and Treyvon was

unable to supply them. All they knew was the transmission was activated remotely, and they couldn't track where it originated from, even though Gryf had been working tirelessly to try and find out.

Then there was the rebuilding of the compound and the transport of the survivors back to their home worlds. They'd lost the surviving Jerboaians during

the attack on the base, something Treyvon found inexcusable. They were under his care, his protection, and he had failed them.

Just as he had this female.

Just as he had Nikhil's Mackenzie, who had also been injured during the attack.

He had to find a way to make it up to all of them.

With all that going on, he'd still wake in the middle of the

night with the unexplainable need to check on this female. Before he even knew what he was doing, he would find himself at her side.

Mackenzie spent every waking moment, she wasn't with Nikhil, at the female's side. She had cleansed the blood and dirt from her friend's skin and hair, combing the thick, white mass until it glowed. Treyvon had never seen hair that color

before, and it seemed to call for him to touch it.

If Mackenzie wasn't at Jennifer's side, then one of the male human survivors was. And while the males took turns sitting with her, it seemed the ones called Paul or Eric were here most often.

He struggled every time he saw one of them close to her. Holding her hand or leaning in close to talk to her, trying to get her to respond. But he

also knew he had no right to feel that way. She wasn't his female. He didn't even know her.

So why was he so drawn to her?



"General."

Treyvon ignored the startled jerk from the male sleeping in the chair next to Jennifer and turned to see Healer Luol

enter the room.

"Luol," Treyvon responded.

"Craig, how are you doing this day?" Luol asked the human male that he had once again startled awake. Luol didn't like this Craig Collins, who seemed to be the leader of the humans, although Luol struggled to understand why. He was the only male that allowed himself to sleep when he was supposed to be caring for Jennifer. If he

couldn't do the duty assigned to him, then he should pass it on to one that could. What if Jennifer awoke while he was sleeping?

"What?" Craig asked, looking around groggily. "Is it morning already?"

"No, it will still be several hours before the sun rises," Luol told him.

"Then why did you wake me?" Craig demanded.

"My apologies," Luol said

even though he wasn't sorry at all. "I thought you were here to make sure that when Jennifer awoke, she saw a familiar face."

"I am," Craig immediately answered.

"I see." Luol moved past Craig to the other side of the bed so he could examine Jennifer. After a few moments he spoke, but it was to Treyvon. "There have been no changes, General."

"Why?" Treyvon demanded.

"Why isn't she waking?"

"I do not know, General. There is no biological reason for her not to."

"You're saying she's in a coma?" Craig asked.

"Coma?" Luol frowned at Craig. "What is a coma?"

"A coma is the state in which Jen seems to be. She can't hear, think, or see. For most, it means they never wake up. On Earth, when

people are in this state, they are hooked up to tubes to make sure they survive."

"What do you mean tubes? What do they use the tubes for?" Luol demanded.

"To make sure a person gets the fluids and nutrients they need."

"Why would you need tubes to do that?" Luol demanded.

"What do you mean?" Craig gave him a confused look. "How else are you supposed

to make sure they survive?"

"You put them in the deep-repair unit, and it will supply everything they need. Without tubes."

"Then why hasn't Jen been back in it?" Craig challenged.

"She has been. Once every day. Apparently, you have never been here when she was moved. Or perhaps you were just sleeping!" Luol spat out. "Obviously, our medical treatment is far superior to

yours."

"If it were, then why is she still in a coma?" Craig demanded smugly, giving Luol a superior look.

"She wouldn't be if you had informed us of her existence before the attack," Treyvon accused, glaring at Craig.

"That was Jen's decision," Craig fired back, refusing to take responsibility for it.

"*You* are supposed to be their leader! *You* are the one

in charge! It is *your* duty to make sure they are cared for and protected whether they want it or not!" While Treyvon's voice never rose, there was no doubting the rage in it.

"Do you think I don't know that?!!" Craig rose angrily to confront Treyvon. "Do you have any idea what it's like to have never doubted your place in society? Your worth in it or what you can handle?"

I never did. Not until the Ganglians!" The anger that had filled him quickly faded. Slowly he sank back down and stared at Jen. "Everything I thought I was, everything I thought I would and wouldn't do changed because of them. They stripped it all away, and for the first time in my life, I saw myself for who and what I was. And I didn't like what I found. I'm not strong. I'm not a leader, and if it hadn't been

for those Ganglians putting their educator on me first, no one would have thought so either. Jen and Mac... they were our real leaders. The ones that held us together. They took care of us, treated every injury. They fed us. They even fed us if we were too tired to feed ourselves."

"Yet you didn't do the same for *them*," Treyvon growled.

Craig opened his mouth to deny it, as he would have

before they were captured. But this wasn't before, this was after, and now he was a different man. "No, I didn't, and nothing I will ever do can make up for that."

"That is truth," Treyvon agreed.

"No, it's not!" Three heads turned and saw Mackenzie entering the room, Nikhil following close behind. She wore a green covering with hints of amber in it. It was

one of the coverings Maysa, Luol's Ashe, had sent on the Fenton for her. It fit her perfectly, made her eyes sparkle, and the True Mate and Ashe beads she wore stand out.

"Mackenzie, what are you doing in here so early?" Luol asked. "Is there something wrong?"

"No, I just couldn't sleep," she told Luol then turned her angry brown gaze to Treyvon.

"It's not Craig's fault. It's not anyone's fault what happened to me. I told them to let the Zaludians take me. And if you are going to blame them for Jen's injuries, then you have to blame me too, because I didn't do anything to prevent it either."

"Mackenzie..." Nikhil growled, knowing how guilty his Mackenzie felt about it.

Mac ignored them all. Craig stood, moving aside as Mac

walked up taking his place.

Looking down at Jen, Mac had to fight back her tears. They would do no one any good. Taking the chair Craig had vacated, she reached out, lifting Jen's hand to her cheek.

"Hey, Jen. Don't you think it's time you wake up and talk to me?" Mac spoke to her silent friend in English, not wanting Jen to have to struggle to understand her.

Jen hadn't used the Kaliszian educator yet because they were unsure what it would do to her in this condition. So the only alien languages she understood were Ganglian and Zaludian, the languages of the species that had kidnaped and imprisoned them. Mac didn't want to remind Jen of any of those experiences, so she spoke to Jen in English. Something Craig hadn't been doing when

she arrived.

"You need to wake up, Jen, because I need your help. Nikhil has been taking me to what they call Last Meal here, and honestly... it tastes like the last meal I ever want to eat. I have to force myself to smile as I choke down these gray, tough, tasteless chunks of meat they serve. For a Kaliszian, it is a great honor to be able to eat this 'fresh' food. They think it's

good, Jen. But God, it is so *bad*. I need you to wake up so you can show them how food is supposed to taste. If you do, I bet they'll make *you* a General." Mac found herself smiling at the thought.

"Is it really that bad?" Craig asked.

"Is what bad?" Nikhil demanded, and Mac gave Craig a hard glare since he had spoken in Kaliszian.

"I was telling Jen how bad it

is not being able to talk to her," Mac quickly spoke, switching back to Kaliszian so Nikhil would understand. "Isn't that right, Craig?" she challenged.

"Umm, yeah. Sure, that's what you said," Craig replied, knowing he would be in trouble if he didn't agree.

"I was speaking to Jen in English hoping she would respond," Mac said pulling Nikhil's frowning gaze from

Craig's unconvincing response. There was no way she would hurt Nikhil by telling him she could barely tolerate something that he took great pride in being able to provide for her.

Few Kaliszians received 'fresh' food stores, only those holding high or vital positions such as Elite Warriors. When the real Fenton had finally arrived, later the day of the attack, it had been carrying

those fresh supplies.

"You believe speaking to her in your language will do this?" Treyvon questioned.

"I'm hoping so," Mac told him. "I'm hoping it will reassure her that she's safe, so she'll wake up."

Treyvon looked to Luol, who nodded his head slightly. "Hearing her native language would be less stressful for her. It is something I hadn't considered, but should have."

"You've been doing great, Luol," Mac quickly reassured the Healer. "Now, Jen just needs to find a reason to come back to us."

"Why would she not wish this?" Treyvon demanded, not sure why the thought of this female not *wanting* to return bothered him so much.

"Out of all of us, Jen was the one that suffered the most. She lost the most with being taken. Her younger

sister is still back on Earth and all alone. It was bad enough when the Zaludians had us, but now..."

"Now?" Treyvon asked, not understanding why it would be worse now.

"Now we're safe, but we're still no closer to getting home. She was injured again, and I just don't know how much more she can take."

"She has been treated," Treyvon began.

"Yes, but she doesn't know that," Mac argued back, cutting the General off. "And Luol wasn't able to heal her ankle."

"No, I wasn't," Luol agreed quietly.

"How was she so severely injured?" Treyvon asked. It was something he'd wanted to know since he'd first learned of it.

"It happened when..."

"Craig!" Mac's sharp

exclamation cut him off.

"What?" Craig demanded, frowning at her.

"That's not for you to tell. It's for Jen. And she will if she wants it known when she wakes up."

"Is there something we need to know?" Treyvon asked, his gaze traveling from Mackenzie to the male he knew he could easily intimidate. "Something else you've been keeping from

us?"

"Not anything that would matter to you," Mac told Treyvon shortly.

"Like not knowing there was another severely, injured female?" Treyvon growled, causing Nikhil to stiffen and take a step closer to his Ashe.

"It's Jen's story to tell, General." Mac looked up at the male she knew would intimidate most people, but she had Nikhil, the largest,

strongest male in the Kaliszian Empire at her back. "And if she wants you to know what happened to her, then *she* will tell you."

Treyvon didn't like that Nikhil's Ashe was defying him, but he had to admire the little female's loyalty to her friend. It took an enormous amount of strength and courage for one so small to stand up to him. But courage wasn't something these

humans seemed to lack... at least not the females.

"I will have your vow that it is not something that will continue to harm her. Something that we can prevent."

"I can't," Mac told him quietly.

"Then you tell me!"
Treyvon growled, and the step he took toward Mackenzie had Nikhil moving in front of his Ashe

and True Mate, blocking his General, and growling back even louder.

"Move aside, Squad Leader," Treyvon ordered.

"I will not," Nikhil growled, defying his General.

"Stop! Both of you," Mac rose and stepped in front of Nikhil. "I can't vow it, General, because even though you have been able to heal most of her physical injuries, it is the emotional ones that

still harm her. And neither you nor I can do anything about those." Mac looked back at her friend. "Only Jen can do that, and I think we both know there are some things you can't just get over. You have to learn to live with them and the pain. Or not. That's where Jen is right now. And unless we can give her a reason to live, she won't."

Moving from between the two Warriors, Mac sat back

down and picked up her friend's hand and began talking to her again in English.



Two weeks later

Treyvon stood on the newly repaired wall and stared out over the barren landscape beyond. How was it possible that Pontus had once been an important planet in the

Kaliszian Empire? It had not only supplied the powerful energy crystals that other worlds needed, but the abundant animal and plant life that fed the Kaliszian Empire.

That had all changed with the Great Infection.

Nearly five hundred years ago, one of Treyvon's ancestors, Chancellor Aadi Rayner, had been given the great honor of ruling this

planet. Because of that, and the planet's location on the edge of both the Tornian and Kaliszian Empires, he became close friends with the Emperor of the Tornian Empire, Emperor Lucan Berto.

When Aadi discovered that Lucan was abusing his two young females, and a Ganglian was involved, he should have reported it. Instead, he brokered a deal

with Lucan. He received extra credits for the food and energy crystals he supplied from Pontus and kept the extra for himself.

That greed set off a chain of events that the Kaliszians were still paying for today.

The Great Infection struck every race in the Known Universes in some way, but it struck the Ganglians, Kaliszians, and Tornians the hardest. It changed the way

they lived. The Ganglians were the first to notice its effects because Kaawa was the Ganglian who guarded the door for Lucan. Kaawa watched Lucan abuse his young females and was aroused by it. Soon he discovered he could not achieve a physical release unless he was inflicting pain. The affliction quickly spread throughout his entire race, causing them to be feared and

shunned by the rest of the species in the Known Universes.

The effects were noticed next on Pontus because of Aadi. The powerful energy crystals, so sought after, began to lose their power, and many of the veins simply disappeared. In just a few years, all mining halted on Pontus. Then all the plant life began to die, followed by the animals. All for no apparent

reason.

The rains still came. The sun still shone. But nothing grew or lived on Pontus.

This effect quickly spread to every planet within the Kaliszian Empire. Within fifty years, they were a race unable to feed their people. If not for the Tornians, their civilization would have starved to death and become only a memory.

Many thought it unfair that

the Goddess should punish the Ganglians and Kaliszians so harshly while the Tornians, who had caused the problem in the first place, were left unaffected. Some believed it appeased the Goddess when the Tornians executed Emperor Lucan, stripping his family of its power ever to rule again. The Kaliszians had only imprisoned Aadi, and the Ganglians had done nothing to Kaawa.

They were all wrong.

The Goddess's punishment for the Tornians, while slower to materialize, was far worse. She began to withhold her blessing for what brought forth life. Females. First, non-Tornian females stopped being able to present fit and worthy offspring with Tornian males, creating yet another divide between the races. Then ever so slowly, the number of Tornian

females being presented also decreased. By the time the true scope of the Goddess's punishment became apparent, Tornian males had outnumbered Tornian females two hundred to one.

It gave their females an enormous amount of power. Because of this, Tornian females no longer stayed with a single male. As soon as a female presented offspring to a male, other males would try

to lure her away with the jewels the Kaliszians exchanged for food staples.

There were those within the Kaliszian Empire who believed that even though the Tornian males were stronger and outnumbered the Kaliszians, the Kaliszians should attack the Tornians. If they took the food bearing planets the Tornians had, like Vesta, the Kaliszians could once again support their

people.

Emperor Liron refused to do this. As far as he was concerned, the Tornians were still their allies. They had come to the Kaliszians' aid when they needed them, and he would not repay such a fit act by attacking a friend in their time of need.

Once Emperor Vasteri and the female he discovered on a Ganglian ship were located and sent on their way,

Treyvon had ordered a detailed search of Pontus. He wanted to know what was going on here on Pontus. Why had the Ganglians been in the area? Why had the Zaludians come to their aid? He still had no answers.



Gryf stood silently behind his General, letting his gaze travel over the barren

landscape that was Pontus. It was hard for him to visualize that all this had once been fertile ground, a paradise beyond all others in the Known Universes. As the old texts claimed, it was filled with such life and beauty that people traveled great distances just to see it. It was also hard for him to believe that the dishonorable actions of just one male had been able to destroy it all.

"General."

"What is it, Gryf?" Treyvon asked. He'd immediately known when Gryf had approached. He also knew what Gryf wanted to talk about, but Treyvon still wasn't sure what he was going to do.

"A decision needs to be made about the human survivors," Gryf told him.

"I know." Treyvon's glowing, blue eyes moved

from the desolate landscape before him to his second-in-command.

"There is no reason for them to remain here. They contribute nothing and consume resources meant for Kaliszians."

"Did they not help clear and repair the damage caused by the Zaludians?" Treyvon questioned. "Are we not obligated to support them after what they endured on a

planet that we were supposed to be protecting?"

"They did," Gryf admitted, referring to the work the males had done, "but there is no longer any reason for them to remain here."

"Where would they go, Gryf?" Gryf's silence told Treyvon that his second had no answer for that. "Then there is the question of the other female, Jennifer. What of her? Do we separate them

before she's woken up? Or do we send her with them and just pray to the Goddess that she recovers?"

Again, Gryf had no answers, knowing it was Treyvon's decision.

"She may never wake up, Treyvon," Gryf murmured.

"Which means we have failed another female under our protection. How long can this continue before the Goddess finally turns her

back on us forever?"

"She is not one of ours to protect, Treyvon! You can't possibly believe the Goddess would hold what happened to her against us!"

"Emperor Berto's female offspring weren't Kaliszian," Treyvon reminded him quietly.

"But Chancellor Aadi witnessed a crime against young females, and chose not to protect them."

Treyvon thought back to the female Emperor Vasteri had claimed, and how *he* had done the same thing. Something he had shared only with Liron.

"You see abandoning a female in need as different than abandoning one that is being abused?"

"In this... yes," Gryf told him. "She will still be cared for. Just not here."

"Perhaps," Treyvon said

noncommittally.



Jen rolled over, a small smile darting across her lips as her back sank into the soft, sun-warmed sand of the beach. God, she loved that feeling. It was as if two strong, powerful arms were surrounding her, keeping her safe. She hadn't felt that way for so long.

Her small smile slowly turned into a frown. Why was that? Sitting up, her gaze traveled to the gentle waves lapping at her toes and her frown deepened. Why was the water purple?

"Because that is the way you wished it," a melodic voice told her.

Twisting around, Jen found nothing but more sand and water. Suddenly, she realized she was sitting on the only

land for as far as the eye could see. Where was she? Why was she here?

"Because you refuse to leave here," the voice replied again.

"But where is here?" Jen demanded.

"Where you choose to be instead of where you should be." Somehow the speaker's disapproval was easily heard through the melody that seemed to come from

everywhere. And nowhere.

"Where should I be?" Jen asked.

"Look to the horizon," she was instructed.

Jen did and saw the dark, turbulent clouds that seemed to be fighting to get closer to her haven.

"What is that?"

"Where you should be. Where you need to be. Where those you need to be with are."

"No one needs me. They are all gone."

"Are they?" The question hung in the air. "How can you be sure?"

"Because I saw him die!" Jen's anguish had the waves, which before were gently lapping at her toes, begin to crest over her knees.

"Your mate."

"Yes."

"Are you sure he was? Your True Mate that is? Or did you

just convince yourself of that?"

"What?"

"True Mates are bonded. Linked. If the bond is strong, if it is true, one rarely survives long without the other."

"I didn't want to... " Jen whispered.

"But you did," the voice argued. "Why? For who?"

"What do you mean?"

"Who did you survive for?"

Jen frowned as she tried to remember. "I... Mac found me... The guys needed me. I... *Kimmy!*" It all came back to her.

"Yes, but none of that should have mattered if *he* was your True Mate. You would be unable to survive without him."

"*He* has a name!"

"Yes. What is it?" the voice challenged.

"It's... it's..." Jen couldn't

believe that she had to struggle to remember it. "Todd!" she finally shouted.

"*He* was your True Mate?"

"He was my *husband*."

"A Dasho is not the same thing. Perhaps your True Mate is still out there. Still searching, still needing *his* True Mate."

"No!" Jen didn't understand why that thought caused her pain. She just knew she couldn't go through that kind

of pain again.

"Then why are you here?"

"I told you. It's because Mac wouldn't let me die. The guys needed me and then there's my sister."

"No. I mean why are you *here*?"

While there was no one besides her here, Jen knew whoever was behind the beautiful voice meant the tiny stretch of land where she was still sitting.

"Instead of with those that need you?"

"Because I don't know where they are!"

"You know. You are just too scared, too weak of spirit, to go to where you need to be. The longer you delay, the more harm will occur to those you care about until it is too late, and all will be lost, including them."

Jen wanted to take exception with the accusation

but found she couldn't. Not when she just sat there, trembling, while the clouds in the distance grew darker and swirled more violently. Jen was scared. She had failed so many... her parents, her sister, her husband. She didn't think she could survive failing anyone else.

"Jennifer..." The wind carried the faint voice to her, and she struggled to recognize it.

"Kimmy?" Jen stood and took a hesitant step into the now foaming water, only to have a rogue wave push her back. She would have fallen, would have been dragged into the now churning waves if a strong gust of wind hadn't suddenly wrapped itself around her, keeping her on her feet. Her fear began to recede as the breeze continued to circle her, driving away all her doubt, all

her fear. Here was what she had been searching for her entire life... warmth, need, and acceptance. As the breeze slowly began to retreat, to travel back across the now foaming water, an emptiness filled her like she had never experienced before.

No! She would not lose this, too! She'd already lost so much. Without another thought, she dove into the water. She might die, but at

least she would die trying to get back to those that loved and needed her.



Treyvon looked down at the still unconscious female in the deep-repair unit, still conflicted about what he should do. Not that long ago, he'd been forced to remove his protection from another vulnerable female.

He wasn't being forced to now. The decision was entirely his.

Yes, the other female was now an Empress, which should mean she was safe from harm. But that still didn't mean it was true or absolve his guilt. He'd allowed food to matter more than the welfare of a female, just like his ancestor.

As the cover of the unit began to retract, he couldn't

stop himself from reaching down and touching the pale skin of a too thin arm. This was the first time he'd touched her, skin to skin. She'd been wrapped up in one of the gray capes they'd given all the survivors when he'd found her after the Zaludian attack. He'd scooped her up in his arms and run the entire way to Medical with her. Since then, one of her people had always been at her side.

Except for now, as Mackenzie had gone to tell Luol that the unit was nearly finished.

He'd dreamed about how soft her pale skin would feel, but his dreams hadn't even come close to the reality of it. It was silky and smooth, and softer than the finest Himroo coveted by so many females. Carefully, he allowed only the tips of his calloused, battle-hardened fingers to

move along her delicate skin, worried they might damage her as they would the delicate Himroo.

How had one so fragile been able to survive for so long? How had the Ganglians not known that she and Mackenzie were female when they had first taken them from Earth?

Ganglians were a large, hair-covered species that always carried a repulsive

odor. Worse than their odor was the pain they inflicted on others, needing it to find their sexual release. They were the known slavers of the universes, and all species considered them scum. At least he thought they had, but apparently, the Zaludians had been willing to work with them. He needed to find out why.

"Jennifer...", he let her name quietly slip past his

lips.

Hearing Luol and Mackenzie return, he quickly removed his hand and looked from where he had been touching her face and was shocked to find the most stunning pair of blue eyes gazing back at him. They were the color of the rarest and most powerful of all energy crystals, and they drew him in. He was just starting to lean in closer when

Mackenzie gasped and stepped between them.

Chapter Two

Jen found herself staring up into the most beautiful, crystal blue eyes that she had ever seen. They were so powerful she could have sworn they glowed.

"Jen!"

The sound of someone calling her name had her tearing her gaze away from them to see Mac stepping between her and the large

male.

Male? Why would she say male and not man?

And Mac... How did she know Mac?

What was going on?

Where was she?

"It's alright, Jen," Mac said, seeing the panic that was starting to fill her friend's gaze. "You're fine. Everyone is fine."

"Everyone?" Jen barely recognized her voice as she

croaked out the single word.

"Yes." Mac didn't try to stop the tears that were flowing down her cheeks.

"Then why are you crying?" Jen still wasn't certain who this person was, but she knew she was important to her.

"Because you're awake and talking to me."

"Wasn't I before?" she asked, her gaze widening as she looked behind Mac.

Mac turned her head,

following where Jen's gaze had gone, and saw Luol had moved up behind her. "That's just Luol, Jen. He's the Healer. Remember?"

"Healer... " Jen frowned at the male.

"You were injured, Jen. Don't you remember? The Zaludians attacked the base, and you jumped on one of their backs saving me."

Suddenly it all came back to Jen. All of it, and she felt her

own eyes begin to fill.

It was just supposed to be a fun weekend. A chance for old friends to get together and play 'Warrior' up in the mountains. Todd had been so excited about getting together with his old college buddies. He'd insisted Jen go with him, telling her it would be a life changing experience.

He'd been right.

It wasn't until they arrived at the camp that Jen realized she

was the only woman in the group. Well, except for the guide that had led them there. She'd told Todd she would just head back to town with the guide, but he refused to let her, telling her she would love it.

He'd been wrong.

She hadn't loved the baggy camo outfit Todd brought for her to wear. She hadn't loved the black gunk he'd insisted she smear in her white-blond

hair and over her pale skin so that they wouldn't give away their location in the forest. No, she hadn't loved any of it, but she'd loved Todd. So for him, she'd stayed, had done what he'd wanted, and it had saved her life... at least to a point.

Mac had been the guide that led them up the mountain. She'd taken pity on Jen when she realized she would be the only woman in the group and

decided to stay. The first day, things had been fine, and Jen had discovered why Todd had been so insistent that she stay. He wanted her there to cook for all his friends. She hadn't minded. It was something she loved to do, to take what some might consider raw, simple foods and make them taste their best. Some called it farm-to-table. Some, getting back to basics. All Jen knew was that she had a knack for

it.

Before her parents had died in a car accident, Jen and Todd had planned to travel the world. She wanted to learn how other cultures prepared food at the most basic level so she could come back and open her own restaurant. After her parents had died, she had to provide a home for her younger sister, Kimmy, instead.

The following two years

had taken a toll on her and Todd's young marriage, what with Jen putting Kimmy's needs before Todd's, as he regularly accused.

That was another reason Jen had wanted to head back to town. She and Kimmy had a huge fight six months before. Jen had just gotten home after a lousy day at work, and Todd wanted to go out, just the two of them. But it had been Kimmy's eighteenth

birthday, and Jen wanted them to do something together as a family. Jen knew her sister had taken the loss of their parents hard, and Todd's attitude hadn't helped. He hadn't been very understanding when she'd told him they needed to put their plans on hold until Kimmy was eighteen. He openly resented that Kimberly was living with them.

And Kimmy knew it.

It had all come to a head that night. The night they should have been celebrating. Todd and Kimmy had a huge fight. Over what, Jen no longer remembered. It ended with Kim storming off.

Kimmy was now an adult in the eyes of the law, and Jen felt she needed to let her find her own way.

Jen hadn't seen or talked to her little sister since. Todd

was dead set against her contacting Kimmy, telling her it was now ‘their’ time, and Jen was ashamed to admit she went along with him because it was easier.

Now she wondered why.

It had been on their second day when they’d been out playing combat that it had all gone to hell. She and Todd had been hiding in the forest, waiting to ambush their enemy, when they heard

terrified screams echoing off the mountains. Thinking someone was hurt, she and Todd had rushed out into an open field, only to be surrounded by a group of large, hairy beasts that were making strange hissing-clicking sounds. They also stunk to high heaven. Jen now knew they were called Ganglians, but back then she'd had no clue. No clue what they were, what they

wanted, or what was in store for them.

The Ganglians had pointed a small device at them, and she'd been sure they were all going to die. Instead, they woke up in a cage on some sort of ship, unharmed but without a clue what was going on. Across from them had been another cage containing about a dozen small, strange looking creatures. They'd only been

about five feet tall and covered in fur with long hind legs, very short forearms, and long tails. They'd been huddled together and had kept looking from them to the closed door at the far end of the room as if they didn't know who was the bigger threat.

When the far door opened, and one of the smelly creatures wearing a white collar walked in, the creatures

in the other cell all jumped up. Letting out high-pitched squeaks, they began circling a group in the center. White collar entered their cage, and several of the much smaller creatures tried to attack him. He just swatted them away as if they were annoying flies. He then grabbed one of the creatures from the center and dragged it out of the cell.

As he passed, Jen realized the struggling creature was

female and that she was terrified. Shortly after that, her high-pitched squeals could be heard, and they suddenly realized what was happening to her.

She never returned.

Jen didn't know how long they were on that ship, but the guys made sure the Ganglians never knew she and Mac were female. The only time the Ganglians ever paid them any attention was when they

fed them, which was seldom. During one of those feedings, White Collar grabbed Craig and held him down, forcing a device over his eyes. After several minutes, he removed the device and tossed it at Todd, then after a few more hissing-clicking sounds, he left.

Craig rose, pale but apparently unharmed. He told them that the thing they'd put over his eyes was a learning

device, that he could now understand what the Ganglians were saying, and that they expected him to make sure the rest of them used it too. It had taken some convincing, but eventually, everyone agreed to put on the device.

Even with the learning device, though, they didn't know why or where they were being taken. And the Jerboaians, who were the

creatures in the other cage, couldn't tell them because they still couldn't understand them. They had all been hungry, tired, and scared. They thought it couldn't get any worse... but it had.

The Ganglians had sold them as slave labor for the mines to the Zaludians, another species they could understand because their language had been included in the learning device. The

conditions in the mine had been even worse than on the Ganglian ship. The Zaludians had divided them into two groups and put half of them to work immediately, while the other half were led to the cave where they would live. Jen was sure they would die because what the Zaludians were demanding of them was a physically impossible task, at least for her and Mac. They weren't strong enough to do

the work the Zaludians demanded of them, and they had seen how the Zaludians handled those that couldn't. The Zaludians beat them to death, along with anyone who tried to defend them.

Jen had been trying to figure out how to keep Todd from protecting her when that time came for her when the decision was taken out of her hands. The guys had already decided that one of them

would always cover for her and Mac, working back to back shifts. The Zaludians didn't seem to care who worked as long as someone did.

Mac had found a narrow crack in the back wall of the cave that led into a smaller cave. She and Mac would hide there since they didn't know if the Zaludians would do to females what the Ganglians did. She'd felt like

such a coward, such a failure. The others were doing what she couldn't, and were suffering for it. And she could do nothing about it. After all, she was nothing but a chef. Someone who prepared food and made it taste good, but they weren't given enough for her to do anything with, let alone that.

Then it had happened. She'd taken what little the Zaludians had given them and

was heating it to make sure all the bacteria was killed, when something fell into it from the ceiling. Jen thought about stopping the guys from eating, but they'd been so hungry. And really, what did it matter if some unknown bacteria killed them. They were going to die in that God forsaken mine anyway.

Then something strange happened. They began to feel full for the first time in... she

didn't know how long, and no one died. After that, she would search the floors of the two caves for the feathery plants that typically hung from the ceilings lighting the caves. She discovered that the more she added to the food, the better the guys felt and the more work they could do.

She and Mac made sure the guys ate first, taking what was left for themselves. After all, the guys were the ones

doing all the work.

Every night, or at least after every shift Todd worked, she had slept beside him. She made sure to treat any injury he had, and that he knew she understood the sacrifice he was making for her, to protect her.



"Jen?"

Jen blinked, the concern in

Mac's voice pulling her back to the present. "I remember, Mac," she murmured.

"How are you feeling?" Jen's eyes went from Mac's concerned brown ones to the gently glowing, violet eyes of the large male standing behind her. The male she knew was the Healer Luol.

"I feel fine." She frowned at how her voice broke.

"Stop it, Jen," Mac ordered, then reaching to the head of

the unit, picked up a glass of water she'd placed there. She had put one there every day knowing Jen was going to need it when she awoke. Slipping a hand behind Jen's head, she put the glass to Jen's lips then ordered, "Drink."

Jen wanted to argue, but with the water barely touching her lips, she realized just how parched she was. She greedily swallowed as if

it were ambrosia.

"Take it slow, Jen. There's plenty."



Treyvon's short, blunt nails bit into his palms, stopping him from reaching out to unceremoniously shove Nikhil's Ashe away so that he could be the one caring for Jennifer.

He wanted to be the one

satisfying her thirst.

He wanted to be the one whose touch comforted her.

He wanted to be the one she trusted to do those things and so much more.

Instead, he had to stand to the side and do nothing.

Nothing...

Just as his ancestor had done all those years ago, causing the Great Infection.

"General?" Luol's quietly uttered word made him

realize he was lowly growling, and he quickly stopped.

"How is she?" Treyvon demanded, quietly.

"I haven't had time to check her readings." The look the General gave Luol told him he had better do it quickly.

Mac heard none of what was going on behind her. She was concentrating on making sure Jen had what she needed. "Do you want more?" she

asked, blindly handing the glass back to Nikhil, knowing he would be there to take it.

"No. I'm good."

"Stop!" The harshness of Mac's tone had every male in the room stilling. "You don't have to lie anymore, Jen."

"I'm not... "

"You are!" Mac cut her off. "You're doing what we both did back in that mine. We made sure no one knew how badly we were hurting. Or

how hungry we both were because what was the point? It didn't change anything. But it's not that way *now*." Mac leaned down, so she was nose to nose with Jen. "Take a moment, Jen, and really think about how you feel. Don't just automatically answer."

Jen gazed into her friend's eyes, and for the first time in what felt like forever, she stopped saying what she knew everyone wanted to

hear or what she didn't want to admit even to herself and listened to her body. She was sore and had some pain, but it wasn't excruciating like before.

"I... I feel better," she admitted, her eyes beginning to fill, "not great, but better."

"You still have pain?" Luol suddenly appeared at her other side, his eyes glowing with concern even as he demanded. "Where?"

"I... " Jen looked to Mac for help, not understanding what the male was saying.

"You can tell Luol, Jen. He only wants to help."

"But I can't understand him."

"What?" Mac gave Jen a confused look, then realized Luol had been speaking in Kaliszian and that while *she* understood him, Jen had not. "Luol, you need to talk in Zaludian, so she understands

you."

"My apologies... Jennifer," Luol hesitated, not sure how to address this female. But when neither female protested his use of her first name, he continued. "I did not mean to speak in a language you do not yet understand. If you could tell me where you have pain, I will see if I can alleviate it."

"Tell him the truth, Jen," Mac said. "He can't help you

if you don't."

"My throat is sore," Jen admitted.

"And?" Luol questioned because he knew there had to be more than just that.

"My leg," Jen said grudgingly. "Mac told me about your repair unit. And while I'm sure you've done all you can, it still hurts."

Jen watched as regret filled the Healer's glowing eyes. "I am sorry that I can not repair

all the damage done to your lower leg. If I could, I would. But I can help manage the pain. There is no need for you to suffer needlessly."

"It doesn't matter," Jen said, and everyone could hear the stark acceptance in her voice.

"Jen... "

"Mac, it doesn't," Jen cut her off. "Whatever pain I'm feeling... I deserve."

"No!" Mac instantly denied.

"Yes, but you and the guys

don't. You did everything you could."

"If we had, you never would have been hurt!"

"Stop! It wasn't your fault. You weren't even in the outer cave when it happened. If it weren't for you, I wouldn't even be here. I..." a cough suddenly racked her frame and Jen found herself gasping for breath.

"Luol!" the exclamation came from Treyvon.

"Just relax, Little One," Luol encouraged, ignoring Treyvon as he moved to see the readings on the control panel. Frowning, he grabbed the manual injector and filled it with the appropriate mixture. Moving back to her side, he paused when he saw her eyes widen in fear. "It is only something to help you relax. It will not harm or hurt you. My vow." He waited for her stiff nod, then quickly

pressed the injector to her neck and pulled the trigger.

When her breathing immediately began to settle, he smiled. "See, I told you it would only help."

"I... thank you," Jen whispered.

"You are most welcome. Now, you need more rest."

"I... " Jen started to argue even as her eyes began to close.

"I'll stay with you, Jen."

Mac took her friend's hand and gave Nikhil a grateful look as he slid a chair up behind her so she could sit. "You just rest. We'll talk more when you wake."

With a nod, Jen squeezed Mac's hand, and as she closed her eyes, an exhausted sigh escaped her lips.



"What just happened?"

Treyvon demanded as the three males stepped into the outer room, leaving the females alone.

"It seems Jennifer is in the early stages of Churian fever," Luol told Treyvon, making sure his voice didn't carry into the other room.

"Churian fever?!!" Treyvon stiffened at the thought. "How could she have contracted Churian fever?!!"

"Her body has been severely

stressed, General, and we both know that Churian fever only strikes when that happens. It begins in the lungs, making it difficult for the person to breathe. If it goes untreated, it can be lethal. Hers is not," Luol quickly reassured Treyvon. "But I injected her with a booster that will stop the spread of the disease, and once we have replaced what was depleted from her

system, her body will be able to fight the rest of it off by itself."

"You're sure?" Treyvon demanded.

"Yes, General. What truly surprises me is that Jennifer is the only one that has exhibited its symptoms. We are all aware how the Zaludians treated those they enslaved."

"Jennifer is the only one?" Treyvon looked to his Squad

Leader. "Your Ashe did not suffer from it?"

"No, as terrible as my Mackenzie's condition was when I first discovered her, she never suffered from the effects of Churian fever."

"I believe it is due to the severity of Jennifer's previous injuries, General, and how long she has suffered from them. They have taxed her system in a way the others were not. "

"But you will be able to remove it completely from her system. Correct?" Treyvon demanded.

"Yes, General, she is only in the early stages. Once she is rested, I will give her a breathing treatment that will neutralize the rest of the virus."

"When will you finish removing her scars?" Treyvon asked. He hated seeing even the remnants of those terrible

scars on her face. Yes, they were better than they had originally been, but still, nothing should mar the utter perfection that was Jennifer's face.

"Once I'm sure her system can tolerate it," Luol told him. "I still don't know what caused her not to wake and want to do nothing unnecessary that might cause it to happen again."

"You consider the removal

of her scars unnecessary?"
Treyvon growled.

"In regards to her overall health? Yes. They can be treated once we are sure she has fully recovered."

"You will keep me informed, Luol," Treyvon told him.

"Of course, General."

With a stiff nod, Treyvon forced himself to leave.

Nikhil looked to Luol. "You will inform my Ashe that I

am with the General?"

"Yes," Luol told him then watched him leave.



The clearing of a throat had Treyvon looking up from where he was sitting behind his desk in his Command Center, reading yet another report. It was nearly time for Midday Meal, and he'd been reading reports since before

Pontus' one sun had risen. He was happy for the interruption.

"Squad Leader Nikhil, what can I do for you?" Treyvon asked leaning back in his chair. He'd always been impressed with Nikhil Kozar. And not just because of his size, which was immense, or because of his strength, which was greater than his own, but because Nikhil rarely spoke unless he had something to

say.

"It concerns the relocation of the humans."

"What about them? Minister Ruskin of Kalbaugh has agreed to accept them. Your True Mate will, of course, be staying here with you."

"I never doubted that, General. For not only will I not be separated from my True Mate, but she refuses to be separated from me."

Treyvon was shocked to see

the small smile that crossed Nikhil's lips. He'd never seen the male smile before.

"Also, I would not like to be the male that tried to do such a thing. For my Mackenzie is fierce. But she is not of who I am speaking of, although it does affect her." Nikhil's face returned to his usually stoic features.

"Squad Leader, you are not making any sense."

"I speak of the female,

Jennifer. My Mackenzie is very concerned about what is going to happen to her now that she is awake."

"Why is your Ashe concerned? Has something happened to Jennifer that I have not been informed of?" Treyvon demanded harshly, surging to his feet. It had been over a week since Jennifer had woken and he'd ordered Luol to give him daily reports on her progress.

The slight widening of Nikhil's eyes was the only indication he gave that his General's reaction had surprised him. "I would not know, as I do not know what you have been informed of, General."

Treyvon found his fists clenching and that he had to take a sharp breath before he could regain his control. "I know that she has been responding well to Luol's

treatments, although he still has not finished repairing her scars."

"Yes, but that is because Jennifer refuses to allow it."

"What?!!" Luol had not informed Treyvon of that.

"It is one of the things that concerns my Mackenzie."

"Only one of them?"

"Yes, General. My Mackenzie fears what will happen to Jennifer if she goes to Kalbaugh with the other

human males."

"Why? They are her people. And while they failed to protect her as they should have, I have Minister Ruskin's assurance that she will be protected on Kalbaugh."

"My Mackenzie refuses to believe that. She believes that if Jennifer leaves this planet, she will die."

"What...?" Treyvon felt his heart stutter at the thought.

He still didn't understand why this female affected him so. He had hoped that once she was off Pontus, it would stop her from entering his thoughts at inappropriate times. Stop him from wishing for what was impossible, at least for him. The chance of having a True Mate.

"Mackenzie is very concerned, General. And if she is concerned, then I must do all that is in my power to

ease that concern. She is my True Mate and Ashe."

"Of course you must, Squad Leader, but I do not know what you are asking of me."

"I am asking that you allow Jennifer to remain here on Pontus."

Treyvon had to stop from instantly responding. Then he found he didn't know how he would have responded. There was no reason for the female to remain on Pontus, but a

part of him wanted her here while the other part wanted her far, far away. "What would she do if she remained here, Squad Leader?"

"My Mackenzie has informed me that Jennifer has an important skill called Cheffing."

"Cheffing? What is that?"

"It deals with the preparation of food. Of making it... tasty."

"Tasty?"

“Yes. It means good. That you enjoy the food not just tolerate it.”

“Tolerate?”

“Yes,” Nikhil’s face began to flush. “It seems that while my Mackenzie has greatly appreciated the fresh food I have been able to provide for her, it has not been as... tastily prepared as the food on her Earth is. She asked, and I obtained my portion of Last Meal in its unprepared form.

Jennifer then prepared it in my quarters last night."

"In your quarters?"

"Yes. Mackenzie had commented before how there was what she called a 'kitchen' in my quarters. Jennifer was able to use it and produce a Last Meal."

"And it was... ?" Treyvon asked.

"Interesting," Nikhil told him carefully.

"So it was terrible, but you

did not wish to tell your True Mate and upset her."

"It was not terrible, General, but it was... different."

"In what way?"

"The meat... it was tender and juicy. Jennifer sliced it, but only cooked it for a short amount of time. She did the same with the vegetables provided."

"And?"

"And it was good. Vastly different than anything I have

ever tasted before. Mackenzie and Jennifer talked about all the different ways they could use the same meat and vegetables and make something completely different."

"Different? Using the same ingredients?" Treyvon questioned in disbelief.

"Yes, I found it... intriguing as did Luol."

"Luol?"

"Yes, he was concerned

when Jennifer did not return to Medical." Nikhil found himself frowning as he remembered. "They both offered Luol their share of the food."

"They... Their..." Treyvon couldn't believe it.

"Mackenzie and Jennifer. Mackenzie insisted that she and Jennifer split Mackenzie's share of my food stores, even though Jennifer tried to refuse. It only got worse

when Luol arrived. It was finally agreed that we would all share Last Meal."

"They are a strange species," Treyvon muttered quietly. "They can be starving, and still they offer what they have to others. At least the females do."

"Yes, it is something I have discussed in depth with my Mackenzie, but I still do not understand it."

"Our females would never

think to give up their share of their food stores, especially not to a male."

"I know. I find I have to watch my Mackenzie at Last Meal to make sure she is not placing part of her ration on my plate."

"She does this?"

"Yes. Mackenzie says there is too much for her to eat and that it should not go to waste."

"Wise, but she should still

eat more."

"I agree, she is too small. She says she used to be larger, but I am beginning to doubt that."

"They both need to be larger," Treyvon found himself saying.

"Yes, but I don't think that will happen unless they stay together."

"Why do you believe that?" Treyvon demanded.

"Because of my

Mackenzie's fears that Jennifer will continue to sacrifice her needs for that of the males until it causes her death."

"That can not be allowed," Treyvon growled.

"I agree, General, which is why I am here."

"I can't order her to remain here, Squad Leader. If she wishes to travel with her people, there is nothing I can do to prevent it."

“Mackenzie believes that if Jennifer is offered a task, something useful here... by you, that she will remain.”

“And what *task* am I supposed to offer her?”

“Cheffing, General,” Nikhil said as if it were obvious.

“You want me to entrust my Warriors’ fresh food supply to a female from another species that has no idea how to handle it?”

“With the greatest of

respect, General, I believe she does. I freely offer my food supply to her. Luol has also agreed, and I believe once others taste what she creates, her skills will be in high demand.”

“I will need to speak to her before I make my decision.”

“Of course, General.”

Treyvon is out February 28,

2017

To find out more about
Treyvon, go to

<http://www.mkeidem.com/trey-is-first-book-in-kaliszians-series/>