**Chapter 1**

The sky was a deep shade of purple, and the trees were a vivid shade of green. The air was thick and humid. Akori felt like she was breathing through a wet towel.

Despite the strange surroundings, Akori was excited. She had spent weeks studying the planet from orbit, waiting for quarantine to be over. As she walked through the bustling streets of the planet's capital city, she marveled at the sights and sounds around her. She soon found herself in a busy street lined with shops and restaurants. She decided to stop at a nearby bar for a bite to eat.

The tables and chairs, although clearly designed for creatures much different than humans, were oddly comfortable. She couldn't help but notice the eclectic group of patrons around her. One had skin shimmering like diamonds, another scales that changed color with their mood.

She perused the menu, but quickly realized that she didn't recognize any of the items on the list. The names were all in a language she didn't understand, and the pictures were equally confusing.

There was no way she could order on her own; she needed help. Akori looked around and spotted a friendly-looking alien sitting at the bar.

"Excuse me," she said, approaching him. "Do you speak Galactic Standard?"

The alien turned to look at her, his eyes widening in surprise. "I do," he said, his voice deep and rumbling. "How can I help you?"

Akori smiled gratefully. "I'm new here," she explained. "Could you recommend something for me to try?"

The alien nodded, and gestured for her to take a seat next to him. "Of course," he said. "Let me take a look."