

**THE
WRATH
OF THE BLOB**

DASHE ROBERTS



Praise for



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CHAPTER 1

Message Received

Far off, in a star system 13 light years away, in a red crescent-shaped spaceship the size of Paris orbiting a dry and dusty planet twice the size of Jupiter, a yellow button began to flash.

“Commander Sgrkapat,” declared Lieutenant Kaz, the alien creature stationed by a hexagonal window overlooking the planet’s asteroid rings, “we have an incoming message.”

Kaz was the communications officer of the starship Xaxglox 12. Like all members of the Kalixtori species, their six-limbed body was completely covered in biomechanical implants arranged like metallic tattoos across their flesh.

The blue, salamander-slick skin of the creature could best be seen through the stylish gaps around their narrow waist, wide mouth and four beady, bionic eyes. The technological enhancements meant that the creature didn't need to wear anything that Earth creatures would recognise as "clothing".

"Who is it from, Lieutenant?" A second being marched across the dimly-lit bridge. This one had pale green skin beneath its implants, and was taller than the first. Both aliens would be considered giants on Earth, each easily as tall as a giraffe, yet they were average height for their sleek, genderless race. The language they spoke was articulated primarily with hisses and harmonic vibrations.

Kaz pressed the flashing button with their middle right hand and a series of hieroglyphic symbols popped up on the holographic display. Kaz gasped. "It's from the Nagalons."

Commander Sgrkapat read the message's contents, a dour expression on their broad face. "They say their existence is threatened."

"How can that be?" said Kaz. "Who would

want to harm the most revered species in this quartillion of the universe?”

“I cannot imagine,” Sgrkapat responded. “The Nagalons were one of the first lifeforms to evolve in this region of space. They are masters of adaptation, blending in with those around them and nurturing interspecies harmony.”

A whirring noise sounded from above. “It’s that planet of primates they’re stranded on,” hissed an authoritative voice. “Those mop-topped Earthlings are a threat to the entire Intergalactic Alliance.”

Sgrkapat and Kaz scrambled to their feet and stood at attention as a tall figure with glittering gold implants studded across their orange skin floated down the nearest crystalline graviton tube.

“Captain Achblatt,” Sgrkapat saluted.

The superior officer stepped out onto the command bridge.

“I read the Nagalons’ distress call in my pod chamber,” said the captain. “Disturbing news, but I cannot say I am surprised.” Achblatt clasped

both pairs of hands behind their back as they stared out of the window. Outside the ship, a cluster of asteroids swirled in an icy orbital dance. The glow of the red sun glinted off the captain's exoskeleton like a scattering of rubies. "The humans' planet," said Achblatt, "what do they call it?"

"Earth," Kaz responded.

"Earth has been in a downward spiral for millennia." Achblatt shook their head. "Ever since the primates overtook the proboscidea, the cetaceans and the cephalopods."

Sgrkapat joined the captain at the window. "Greedy, scarcely modified organisms, fearful of that which they do not understand." They shuddered. "Such a primitive stage of life, is it not?"

"It is hard to believe our species started out that way," said Kaz.

The captain snorted. "A hundred thousand years ago, perhaps. But we were never so crass as the humans."

Kaz booted up the search engine at their

station. A second screen appeared, displaying the same kind of glyphs used by the Nagalons. With a series of eye movements, Kaz input the symbol for “humanity”: an upside-down Y hovering over a half-darkened circle. In an instant, terabytes of information popped up on the hovering display.

“Can you imagine what it must be like to live on such a barbaric planet?” said Sgrkapat. “Using the life forces of other organisms for food instead of converting energy directly from starlight?”

Kaz read the flow of data, a look of revulsion creeping across their face. “The materials that spew from the Earthling’s many openings are disgusting.” Fortunately for Kaz, their own race no longer had such a rude digestive system. “How can the Nagalons stand to take such forms?”

“They are the noblest explorers in the galaxy,” said Sgrkapat. “They feel it is their duty to guide other species to lives of dignity and grace, free from suffering. The Nagalons have never before failed in this enterprise. Until now.”

Kaz stuck out their forked turquoise tongue.

“Did you know that humans excrete leftover digestive matter into pots and flush it into the very water system that they use to clean their teeth?”

Sgrkapat burst out laughing.

“That is not the worst of it,” said Captain Achblatt, gazing solemnly into Kaz’s electronic eyes.

“What could possibly be worse than that?” Kaz held all four hands to their face.

“Humans take themselves incredibly seriously,” said the captain. “They’re unaware they are in a larval stage, on the brink of becoming something better, something new. They believe they’ve already achieved their ultimate form, and are the rightful owners of the universe.”

“The entire universe?” Sgrkapat could hardly breathe through their neck gills, they were laughing so hard. “How can they possibly be so deluded? Their skin burns from exposure to the very star they orbit. They procreate without the use of biopods. I’ve heard that many of them,” Sgrkapat took a rattling breath to compose themselves, “eat their

own nasal mucous excretions.” They guffawed even harder.

“If they did not cut their hair, they would trip over it.” Kaz cracked up.

“They die of old age!” Sgrkapat snorted.

All three of the creatures laughed at that. Captain Achblatt doubled over as Kaz pounded on their console.

Achblatt used an eye movement to activate their collective respiration control, and all laughing ceased. “And die they must.” The captain straightened their mechanically enhanced spine. “It is time. Humans have been given a great many chances to peacefully coexist with other species, and they have failed again and again.”

Sgrkapat balked. “Is the situation really so dire? We generally do not interfere with life-bearing planets.”

Achblatt nodded. “The Alliance has entrusted us with the difficult but necessary task of maintaining strict order in this sector. The Nagalons cannot leave their current home without our help. I believe

it is best to provide them with a fresh start.”

“Is it not possible to save any other species of Earth?” asked Kaz. “I have heard good things about otters...”

The captain shook their head. “You saw the distress call; there is no time to waste. And in any case, the humans are doing a fine job of exterminating the planet’s native life without our intervention. Full clearance is the most logical solution.”

“Understood.” Sgrkapat clicked their heels, then glanced out of the window. “Shall we finish this demolition job first?”

“Please proceed,” said Achblatt.

The commander gave a two-handed salute as the captain left the bridge. Using Kaz’s console, Sgrkapat opened a channel to the lieutenant in charge of the ship’s Magneto-Neutronic Laser Array. “Commence destruct sequence Z’arth’Rop Nine.”

“Aye, aye,” came the rasped response.

The colossal spacecraft tilted on its axis,

pointing its mountainous cannons at the barren planet below. A low hum permeated the ship's outer hull as the weapons charged.

"Activate," said Sgrkapat.

Eighteen blasts erupted from the laser array, striking the desolate orb in staggered slashes across both poles and along its equator. The icy rings encircling the celestial body evaporated in an instant and, in a fierce gust of fire and ash, the planet split into pieces like a cookie dropped carelessly on the kitchen floor. Chunks of rock and dust spewed out in all directions. Several large fragments bounced harmlessly off the fortified forcefield of Xaxglox 12, causing the Kalixtori officers to sway gently in their seats. The planet was no more.

"Excellent work," Sgrkapat said, cutting off the communication channel with an eye flick. They turned to face Kaz. "Lieutenant?"

Kaz stood to attention.

"Head down to astrometric navigation and inform our comrades of the new mission." Sgrkapat

held up a hand and Kaz placed their bionically augmented palm against it, uploading a packet of orders.

“Right away, Commander.” Kaz saluted and scurried over to the graviton tube, where they smoothly descended. The instructions had registered loud and clear:

Operation Garg’Zot 23
Total Annihilation of the Planet Earth
Timeframe
Five Earth Days



CHAPTER 2

The Blob

Everything was chaos. Bolts of lightning blasted across the muddy lakeside path through air thick with sweet-smelling yellow fog. Nu Co. mercenaries shouted panicked orders, firing dart guns at their supernatural prey. A swarm of drones buzzed across the night sky, as loud as locusts. But the only thing Lucy Sladan could hear was the sound of her own voice, screaming so loudly it drowned out all else.

Her thick purple hair blew wildly in the wind as she knelt by the edge of the crater that had once held the murky waters of Black Hole Lake – now drained after Nu Co.’s CEO Mr Fisher

had flushed the Nagalons, an ancient race of shapeshifting aliens, out of hiding. Fisher's security agents scrambled frantically in the shadow of the Borealis Bridge, firing their weapons at the impossibly huge gelatinous mass that now lay exposed at the bottom of the lake.

All around them, under the mind-controlling influence of Nu Co.'s latest chemical weapon, the Nagalons fought among themselves. Attacking one another with webs of energy channelled from their fingertips, they soon fell into the hands of Fisher's minions. The soldiers captured them easily, striking them with darts filled with Nu Co. Pink serum to prevent them from using their formidable powers, then dragging the pacified creatures to the armoured SUV's on the bridge above.

Amidst the maelstrom, Lucy could think of nothing other than the fact that Milo Fisher, Mr Fisher's son and one of her dearest friends, had been caught in the crossfire and knocked into the waterless pit before her, disappearing into

the mysterious blob thirty storeys below.

No, no. This can't be happening.

Fisher's deep voice rose above the fray. "Milo!" he cried into his megaphone. "Somebody get down there and save my son," he implored his men.

In a daze, Lucy looked up to see Fisher glaring at her from the bridge, an expression of unbridled fury on his handsome face. Dark clouds gathered overhead. "Sladan," he roared. "Milo came here because of YOU."

Lucy heard the steady beat of footsteps behind her. She turned to see a line of tactical soldiers marching toward her in rapid rhythm. Their faces were obscured by beetle-black helmets and they carried heavy electrified weapons in their hands. *They're coming for me.* In just a moment they would reach her. A soldier halted ten feet away and pointed his taser straight at her chest. Lucy crouched and threw her arms up to shield herself.

A deafening crack of thunder rang out and

Lucy was enveloped in a cocoon of bright light. Instead of the sting of a taser, she felt as if all the cells in her body were being sucked into a vacuum cleaner. *What's happening to me?* With a POP, the sound of the commotion ceased, a feeling of numbness encompassed her, and she blacked out.



In a puff of smoke, Lucy rematerialised on the woodland path by Arnold the A-shaped pine tree, just outside the Sladan property. She was still huddled protectively against the onslaught. *What the—? How?* She felt her legs and arms to make sure they were still there. *It's like I disappeared and then reappeared in a flash of—*

“Lightning,” she croaked. She pictured the electricity coursing out of the Nagalons’ hands when they used their alien powers. She’d seen them use lightning as a means of travel before, too. Was that what had happened? Had the

Nagalons found a way to save her?

But if they were all mind-controlled and captured by Fisher's goons, how could they have helped me? Disoriented from the unexpected journey, Lucy tripped over a prickly fern and skinned her palms on the twig-laden forest floor. She rolled over on to her back as she fought back tears. *Milo's in the blob. What do I do? Milo's in the BLOB!*

With trembling knees, she forced herself up and stumbled back to her family's modest log cabin, which she'd snuck out of just a few hours before. She entered the house through the garage and tiptoed past her best friend Tex's older brother, Grigori, who was curled up under a blanket on the couch and snoring like a dump truck. He was babysitting Lucy and her sister while their dad underwent emergency surgery at the local hospital.

Earlier that day, Silas Sladan had been trapped in a cave-in at Fisher's Nucralose mine. Lucy and Milo had managed to rescue him with help

from their shapeshifting friend Gus, but Silas's injuries were extensive. The last Lucy had heard, the doctors were doing everything they could for him, but her father was likely to lose his right hand.

Lucy ventured down the hall, pausing at the open door to her younger sister's bedroom. Willow was fast asleep beneath her unicorn duvet, her arms around their wolfhound Errol, who was also snoring. With a deep sigh, Lucy crept up the creaky stairs to her attic bedroom.

At every step, her mind was bombarded with images from the incredible, terrifying events she'd experienced over the last twenty-four hours: underground explosions at the Nu Co. mine, mind-controlling agents that overwhelmed the senses, her wounded father crumpled on the ground and fighting for his life. She'd finally uncovered the extraterrestrial origins of her mysterious neighbours, then promptly seen them attacked and hauled off against their will. Worst of all was the memory

of Milo's face, frozen in fear as he fell, flailing for Lucy's outstretched arms that were just too far away to reach.

When she entered her room, Lucy collapsed into her bed and sobbed into her pillow, unable to sleep until morning.



Two excruciating days passed and Lucy still hadn't told anyone about what she'd witnessed at Black Hole Lake. For once, she didn't have to. The whole town could plainly see the mile-wide, opalescent black blob at the bottom of what had once been the largest body of water in the Big Crater Valley. Drawing even more attention was the frantic response from Nu Co. involving firearms, explosions and heavy machinery as they tried and failed to penetrate the entity's glossy surface.

Life in Sticky Pines, once again, ground to a halt. Schools were shut. Businesses were closed.

Those that weren't panic-buying toilet paper were busy gawping at the bulbous behemoth or throwing things at it as they shouted with glee, terror, or both – at least until Fisher's goons cordoned off the entire lakefront with plywood fences.

Local TV stations aired nothing but coverage of the blob, interviewing baffled scientists who said they'd never seen anything like it. Some experts guessed that it was some kind of enormous fungus. Others said it was the result of decades of built-up industrial waste. The few who dared suggest it might be something from another world were roundly mocked on late night television. Countless news crews pressed Fisher and his employees for an interview, but everyone at Nu Co. refused to comment.

So there it was. Lucy's wildest dreams were, at long last, coming true. Undeniable proof of the Unknown was officially Out There, and the public had no choice but to believe it because they could see it with their own eyes. But none of

it mattered, because all Lucy could think about was the havoc that had been unleashed on her friends and family as a result of her relentless investigations.

Be careful what you wish for.

What was happening to Milo? Was he okay? What about the Nagalons? *What are Nu Co.'s freakazoid scientists doing to them?* Nothing good, Lucy knew.

At least Dad's coming home from the hospital today. It was the lone sunny spot in a hurricane of overwhelming gloom.

Lucy peeled herself out of the sweaty knot of dinosaur sheets she called a bed and threw on the same clothes she'd been wearing for the last three days. Not bothering to look in the mirror, she zombie-shuffled down the stairs to the kitchen. Willow was in the living room, eating cereal on the rug with her feet up on Errol as cartoons blasted on the TV. Her freckled nose wrinkled when she saw her elder sister.

“When’s the last time you showered?” she

asked.

“Cleanliness is irrelevant,” Lucy mumbled. She grabbed a box of sugar flakes and a jar of peanut butter, mixed them together in a bowl and doused the concoction in milk. Slurping noisily, she plopped down on the couch behind her sister. “Where’s Grigori?”

“Mom and Dad’ll be back any minute, so he went home and told me not to set anything on fire.” Willow pointed at Lucy with her spoon. “But I’m willing to bend the rules and burn that grotty T-shirt you’re wearing, if you want.”

Lucy picked up the remote and switched the channel to a news station.

“Hey,” said Willow. “How’m I gonna find out if Mr Fudd caught the rabbit?”

“He never catches the rabbit.” Lucy shovelled cereal in her mouth as the anchor rambled on about everything he didn’t know about the blob, which was a lot.

She switched to another channel where a news helicopter hovered high above the dry lake. Lucy

tensed as she spotted a crew of men in hazmat suits guide an excavator down a long ramp and on to the strange object's shiny exterior. Though Milo had squished right through its "skin" as if he'd been sucked into a pool of molasses, the blob now appeared to be as solid as a slab of concrete.

The heavy machine's operator swung its tree-sized arm up and then hammered it down at the entity's steely shell. After five or six blows, a series of dark protrusions burst up from the blob, entangling the large vehicle in a wormy embrace. The newscaster cried out in alarm, narrating frantically as the operator leapt to safety and the mass of tentacles pulled the machine beneath the gooey surface. In a matter of seconds, the excavator had disappeared entirely and the hard shell had reconstituted itself, undamaged.

These donkuses have NO FLIPPING IDEA WHAT THEY'RE DOING, Lucy fumed. *They'll never rescue Milo this way, but they may*

well get themselves killed. She tossed her spoon on the coffee table with a clank and drank the rest of her cereal straight from the bowl, a dribble of milk trickling down her chin.

With a grimace, Willow handed the rest of her cereal to Errol, who eagerly slurped it up.

If Milo was going to get out of that blob alive, Lucy knew she was going to have to rescue him herself. But how? The entire lakeside was blocked off and crawling with Nu Co. operatives. She thought again about the lightning that had transported her to the path outside her house. Who was controlling it? An idea tickled the back of her brain. *Could it have been sent by the galactic gumball itself?*

“Mom and Dad’ll be home soon,” said Willow. She looked around the living room, which was cluttered with half-filled popcorn bowls and mugs sticky with the dregs of hot chocolate. “We should probably clean up.”

“Good idea,” Lucy agreed. “While you do that, I’ve got a call to make.”

Ignoring Willow's cries of "That's not fair", Lucy slid into the kitchen, picked up the landline handset and dialled a number from memory.

"Allo?"

"Hi, Mrs Arkhipov," said Lucy, "is Tex there?"

"Ah, Lucita, so nice to hear from you dear. I am afraid Tex is out. He went to the bowling alley with those nice kids from the newspaper club."

He's with the newsies? Where was my invite?
"Okay, I'll go find him at Sticky Strikes. Thanks."

"Have your parents made it home? Your poor father..."

"Not yet, they're—" Lucy heard a vehicle pull into the gravel driveway and Errol started barking like a madman. She ran over to the kitchen window. Sure enough, her mother's forest green minivan had just pulled up outside. "I gotta go," she exclaimed, hanging up.

She bounded over to Willow and Errol, who

were nervously waiting by the front door.

Miranda was the first to enter, her dark hair gathered in a loose bun at the nape of her neck. Yawning, she kissed her unkempt daughters, took one exasperated look at the state of the living room and headed straight for the coffee machine in the kitchen. Silas ambled in, his right arm secured in a sling at his chest, puffy bags under his bloodshot brown eyes.

“Dad!” Lucy and Willow screamed as he entered.

Willow threw her arms around her father’s legs as Lucy gingerly patted his shoulder, careful not to hurt him.

“Boy howdy, I’m happy to see you squirrels,” said Silas, grinning beneath his bristly moustache. He pulled Lucy close and gave her a squeeze with his uninjured left arm.

“How are you feeling?” she asked.

“I’ve been better,” Silas winced. He glanced longingly at the banjo on the stand by the rocking chair. “Guess I won’t be needing that

anymore.”

“Don’t say that,” said Lucy.

“Hate to break it to you, squiddo, but there’s no way to play a string instrument one-handed,” he sighed. “At least, not the way my fans are accustomed to.”

“Can we see your missing hand?” asked Willow.

Silas frowned. “You sure? It ain’t pretty.”

Lucy and Willow both nodded.

“Brace yourselves,” he warned. He slid his arm out of the sling and pulled back his sleeve. In place of where his hand should be, there was a heavily bandaged stump.

Willow gasped. Errol trotted over and licked Silas’s dressings.

Lucy peered closer. “Does it hurt?” she murmured.

“I can just about bear it,” said Silas. “Your mother made sure they took good care of me at the hospital.”

Miranda strode over from the kitchen, two

mugs of coffee in her hands. She offered one to Silas, but he yawned and shook his head.

“Sleeping in my own bed sounds like heaven right now,” he said. He ruffled Willow’s hair and tottered groggily down the hall towards the master bedroom.

Miranda set both mugs on the coffee table and collapsed on the couch. “More for me, I guess.”

Willow climbed into her mother’s lap. “Is Dad going to be okay?” she asked.

“It will be a big adjustment, that’s for sure.” Miranda smiled faintly. “But change is what we make of it, *mija*. Nothing stays the same for long in this world. That doesn’t mean it’ll be easy, though. For any of us.” She reached for the TV remote.

Lucy winced. “Uh... Have you seen the news lately?”

“No,” said Miranda. “Why?”

“No reason.” Lucy bolted to the entryway, shoving on a pair of scuffed sneakers.

“Where do you think you’re going?” her

mother asked.

“Sticky Strikes,” said Lucy. “Tex is there.”

“Brush your hair first,” Miranda ordered.

Rolling her eyes, Lucy dug a brush out of her mom’s purse and started hacking at her tangled tresses.

Miranda switched to her preferred news channel. Her eyes grew wide and she dropped the remote. “What on the round blue Earth happened to Black Hole Lake?”

Lucy tossed the brush back in the purse and hurried out the door. “No time to explain, Mom.” *I’ve got a boy to save.*