

Alien Invasion and the Apocalypse

By Shannon Collins

It was the year 2025. Aliens were living on the icy moon, Europa, unbeknownst to humans. These lanky creatures stood seven feet tall on two legs with two long, dangling arms, and large, 6-fingered hands with claws in place of fingernails. They were hairy, and slimy to the touch due to their use of cyanobacteria on their body. They required it to protect themselves from the sun, which they were allergic to, and from predators in the icy ocean waters who could not ingest the toxins the bacteria produced¹. These aliens survived on sea creatures, from small gobies to large sharks, and they were experts at using their claws to dig deep holes in the ice to reach the ocean underneath, and climb up the holes with their kill. The aliens had adapted to hunt at night, because this is when the fish migrated to the surface of the ocean. Therefore, they slept during the day in ice shelters they built for added protection from direct sunlight. The ice did not completely reflect the sunlight, however, which is why it was essential for them to collect cyanobacteria and cover their skin with it. The cyanobacteria appreciated this relationship just as much, because it got a wet environment to live in and protection from predators. Despite the somewhat gruesome nature of their appearance and lifestyle, these large extraterrestrial creatures, who called themselves gnyls, were a peaceful, caring species, and worked together to catch food and build shelters. We will

¹ Gnyls and cyanobacteria are obligate symbionts, where one gnyls depend on the other to survive.

follow the story of Patek and his younger brother, Wiley, two gnyls who experienced something no being ever had in the history of the universe.

Patek was climbing up the last mile of ice with an eel in his mouth when he heard the explosive sound. It was not like the normal cracks and thunders of the shifting ice, but a reverberating noise that crept into his chest and vibrated his whole body. He raced up the ice in seconds, adrenaline driving his movements.

I need to find Wiley, Patek thought.

The moment he reached the surface of the ice sheet, he saw what had made the deafening sound. An enormous asteroid had crashed into his home, large chunks of rock scattered everywhere. Panic raced through Patek's mind. He couldn't think straight. All he did was let the eel slip from his mouth and stand there, still, watching his gnyl family and friends attending to wounds and helping each other up from the ground. Luckily it was nighttime, which meant most of the gnyls had been hunting in the ocean when the asteroid hit. But all were up at the surface now, wondering what had happened. Large sharks and fish of all sizes lay out on the ice, abandoned. Some gnyls were just beginning to throw them back in the ocean so as not to waste food sources, when Patek noticed another asteroid headed their way. It was approaching quickly, and a rushing sound was becoming more intense every second.

He shouted, "Wiley!!"

Just then Wiley appeared in front of Patek and grabbed him by the shoulders, his claws digging into Patek's back.

“We need to move!” Patek shouted over the chaos of screaming gnynls surrounding them.

Wiley and Patek headed away from the incoming asteroid toward an opening in the ice. Right before they were about to dive into the hole, something very strange happened. Wiley and Patek experienced a tight, crushing sensation that they couldn’t control. They were lifted off the ground, and their minds temporarily melted, making them see colors and hear sounds completely foreign to them. When their bodies returned to their normal states, they opened their eyes to an unfamiliar landscape full of tall, brown, stationary structures emanating from the fluffy, cold white ground. Little did they know they were the first organisms to successfully pass through a worm hole.

“Daddy, can we make s’mores?” Echo begged her father.

“Sure, sweetie. Could you go find some sticks so we can toast the marshmallows?”

Echo, a seven year-old girl, and her parents were visiting the small town of Romulus, New York from Germany for the summer. “I wonder what New York is like. Did you know they have the largest population of white deer in the world? It’s located in the old Seneca Army Depot, and you can even camp in an abandoned bunker!” Echo’s mother, Delta, had said. Delta was involved in aquatic biology research, and had been invited to attend a conference in New York on harmful algal blooms in Seneca Lake, which had grown much worse in the past decade. They had been here only a few hours and had yet to see a white deer. Echo was determined that she would be the first to

spot one, so she was excited to go exploring in the woods. She took her time gathering sticks, and made sure to keep quiet so as not to scare away the deer.

Her family was the only one in the depot for the night, the opening night of the summer season. It was the fifth year the Seneca Army Depot had been open to tourists and allowed them to camp in the bunkers, which used to hold thousands of pounds of bombs each. Echo's family was staying in bunker B0607, the original bunker that had been cleaned up and first shown to tourists.

Echo got bored collecting sticks, so she started humming a sweet little song, and caught the attention of another.

"Buxetagep ti?" whispered a voice in the woods.

Echo thought she heard something, listened for a minute, and returned to her humming and stick collecting.

"Who is there?" said the voice a little louder this time. It came from behind her.

Echo paused, then shrugged and kept about her business. She assumed it was the man she had seen patrolling the depot that morning.

Without turning around, she casually responded, "My name's Echo! Don't worry, I'm just collecting sticks for toasting marshmallows tonight."

She turned around to face her new friend and invite them to join them for s'mores that night. But before she could get any words out, she saw not a fellow camper, but a terrifying creature, with green, slimy, hairy skin and long claws that were clutching a tree. Echo tried to scream but no sound came out. She tried to run but her feet were glued to the ground, both shocked and fascinated at the same time. After a few seconds

of staring at the creature, she noticed that it was cowering behind the tree, looking as frightened as she felt.

Echo gathered up all the courage she could muster, and asked the... thing... what its name was.

“W-Wiley. My name is Wiilleeeyyy!” The creature smiled at her.

It had a nasally voice that sounded like a chicken clucking and trying to speak English at the same time. Echo was comforted by the fact that this thing had a name--it meant that it was like her, and it had its own identity. She grinned back at the creature, and then immediately ran away with fear and excitement eating up at her insides.

“There are others out there,” Wiley cautiously told Patek later that night. They had been silently collecting cyanobacteria from the pond near their bunker, which they had been living in for only a few months, but had gotten quite used to by now.

Patek paused with his hand in the water, and watched a fish swim by without flinching to catch it. “Other gnyls you mean?”

“No.”

“Other what then?”

“Tiny two-legs like us, but without hair or slime. They’re weird. They pick up sticks from the ground and make pretty noises.”

“Stay away from them,” Patek said harshly.

“Oh, but they wouldn’t hurt us. They’re so small. The one I saw didn’t even throw its sticks at me.”

“Don’t show yourself to them again. They were probably the ones who sent those flying rocks and put us here.”

“How do you know that? Maybe they got sent here by the flying rocks too!”

“I told you already, you need to keep yourself hidden. No more day walks.”

“Fine. No more day walks.” Wiley stood up and lunged into the pond, emerging with a large catfish seconds later. Without a word, he left Patek and walked in the opposite direction of their bunker.

“Honey, I’m sure it was just a figment of your imagination. No creatures here look like that, unless they were aliens!” Echo’s father, Charlie, laughed out loud, and patted her on the shoulder. “I thought you were going to tell me you saw a white deer. Maybe we can all go exploring tomorrow to try to find one. How does that sound?”

“Sounds fine,” Echo sighed. She knew what she saw, and she was going to find it again.

Early the next morning, Echo’s mother, Delta, went kayaking in the pond. She had been told there were clean kayaks available to use, but these kayaks were covered in green slime that looked like cyanobacteria to her. She studied harmful algal blooms in freshwater systems, and was curious to take a sample of it to have it analyzed in the local Finger Lakes Institute lab, which she had partnered with before.

Delta decided to head back to the bunker to get a water bottle for the sample. When she returned to the pond, the cyanobacteria had magically disappeared. Nothing else seemed like it had been disturbed, and the kayaks were in the same place they

were before, but were now clear of green slime and covered instead with long, silver hairs. This frightened Delta slightly, and she hastily left the pond, leaving her water bottle and forgetting to take a picture of the scene, which she would later wish she had as proof of her story.

While she was cooking dinner that night, Delta called Echo over to her.

“What exactly did you see last night? Was it hairy by any chance?”

“Yes! It was gross-looking. It had hair and was covered in green slime. But it was really nice, and had a funny voice!”

“We need to tell someone.”

“What? Why? Are they dangerous?”

“They could be..” Delta pondered this for the rest of the night, and worried that her family might not be safe in the bunker. She planned to have them pack up the next day and tell the depot authorities about her suspicions.

A few days later, Wiley was wandering around the woods keeping an eye on the strange creatures. He discovered that there were more of them, and they were larger than the first one he saw. Most of them seemed harmless. Gnyls can sense emotions very easily, and Wiley could tell that these creatures were kind and caring towards each other. But this morning, Wiley woke up with a start. He sensed a strong feeling of fear in the woods. He hadn't seen Patek since he left the night of their argument, but he did not want to bother Patek with this, if he hadn't already found out himself.

Wiley could sense that the other gnyls in the area, who had also taken over the

abandoned bunkers², were not the source of this fear, and that it was something else. Eventually, he spotted a creature that almost blended in with the trees as Wiley did. The creature was holding a long brown stick, and Wiley watched as it held it up and pointed it in his direction. A loud “bang” pierced through the air and rang in Wiley’s ears. Wiley didn’t flinch. He knew he was hidden well enough in the woods that the creature could not see him, but he was nervous nevertheless. The creature put down the stick and turned around in response to a small snap of a twig a deer made behind him. In the second the creature’s attention was diverted, Wiley made a run for it. Wiley ran and ran until he reached a tall fence that he hadn’t come across before, but the gate was wide open. Sensing the anger of the creature he had encountered, he ran through the gate and closed it behind him to prevent anyone from following him. He heard more bangs behind him, and remembered Patek. It was too late to go back now, but he hoped Patek would be alright if he camouflaged himself well enough with the cyanobacteria.

Bravo was a 23-year old man assigned to investigate the Seneca Army Depot for suspicious activity. This was his first real assignment besides patrolling the depot, and he was frightened, as no others wanted to volunteer, and he didn’t know why. The first person he came into contact with was a little girl named Echo, who he had seen before. Echo told him everything she saw, but Bravo was smart enough not to believe her

² Other gnyles had arrived at the depot through a worm hole along with Patek and Wiley, and due to the abundance of unoccupied bunkers available, the gnyles were able to expand their population in the years to come. This demonstrates the fluctuating resource hypothesis, in which areas with an excess of resources, in this case the bunkers, are more prone to invasion.

outrageous story. He ensured her that no aliens lived in the depot, but instead of being relieved, the girl ran away crying.

Echo ran all the way to the pond where the kayaks were, and stood there by herself skipping rocks for awhile under the bright, warm sun when she heard a noise. She quickly turned around and saw who she thought was Wiley, but this creature was taller and hairier than she remembered. He also wasn't as green. The creature paused, as still as a statue, and then ran straight towards her, its claws outstretched, ready to grab her. Echo screamed, "Wiley! Wiley is that you?" The creature stopped dead in its tracks, inches away from her. It retracted its claws and stood up tall, hovering over her. Then it slowly walked toward the pond, and began to scoop up the green slime and spread it over his body.

"Where is Wiley? Did you take him?"

"No! No I didn't, I swear! I don't know where Wiley is!"

Without another word, the alien, who Echo later learned was Patek, Wiley's older brother, grabbed Echo by her hair and swung her over his shoulder. He ran as fast as he could, past the other alien bunkers, past Echo's bunker, which was empty at the moment, and all the way to the tall fence that Echo remembered driving through the day they arrived. Patek seemed to know exactly where he was going, and he didn't hesitate before climbing the fence with Echo still on his back.

The moment they touched the ground on the other side of the fence, everything went black. The whole world around them disappeared from sight. Everything became silent. The stars in the sky were the only source of light, because the sun had just died,

and the moon was no longer visible. Echo fell off of Patek's back onto the soft ground, and Patek whispered, "Is this normal for your planet?"

"No... I'm scared. What just happened? Where did the sun go?"

"I wouldn't worry about it. We just need to find Wiley," Patek said calmly.

"But how will we find him? We can't see!" Echo began to panic. Where were her parents? Had other aliens kidnapped them too? Did they know where the sun had gone?

"I can sense Wiley's emotions. Come on."

Patek threw Echo over his shoulder again, and they raced through the streets and crowds of people screaming and crying. There was so much pandemonium that the humans didn't notice them at all. They eventually reached the 5 points maximum security prison behind the depot, where the prisoners were banging at the fences and attempting to climb over the barbed wire, cutting themselves and falling on top of each other. Echo thought they looked like zoo animals gone mad. Suddenly, Patek stopped and turned sharply to the left, into the woods. Wiley jumped in front of them, and screamed "Patek! I got lost! What is going on? There is so much fear around here."

"The sun disappeared!" cried Echo. "And you're not safe here. If people find you, they might think you stole it!"

Patek and Wiley turned to each other with worried looks. Then, without warning, a sea of gnysls appeared before them out of thin air, falling over themselves on the ground.

“We are from the moon Callisto. We sensed great fear emanating from somewhere distant, and we think the sun’s death caused a wormhole to open up and transport us here. What is this place?”

Meanwhile, Bravo had run toward the gate of the depot to see what was going on, but when he reached it, he realized that someone—or something—had closed it, and it was locked from the outside. Being new to the job, he wasn’t sure which one of his keys opened the gate, and he became paranoid and scared in the pitch dark so quickly that he began to go insane, and wasn’t able to unlock it. He started hallucinating, and thinking that every noise and flicker of movement he heard or felt was an alien.

All over the world humans had entered a state of complete and utter chaos. The gnyls were not worried, and actually thrived without the harsh sun beating down on them. Because fear and panic were so overwhelming on planet earth, gnyls from neighboring moons to Europa, such as Ganymede and Callisto, could sense the emotions. The gnyls found ways to communicate to each other and choose to travel to earth through worm holes or other portals.

Only months later, abandoned houses became increasingly available to the gnyls outside the depot, allowing their population to grow and reproduce rapidly. With the death of the sun, humans were perishing due to vitamin D deficiency and lack of food. They were constantly killing each other and fighting for scraps of food. When resources were especially scarce, humans and gnyls alike turned to feasting on human carcasses

strewn all over the landscape. While humans were so busy fighting or trying unsuccessfully to bring back the sun, gnyls were learning to adapt and evolve.

The gnyls had depended on cyanobacteria, their obligate symbiont, for protection against the sun and against predators, but now that the sun was gone, they didn't need sun protection anymore and they were able to expand their range to living outside of shelters, something they were not previously used to³. As it was, the cyanobacteria was declining rapidly due to the lack of energy coming from the sun that they needed for photosynthesis, and the gnyls' food sources such as fish were declining due to the lack of primary producers available to them. The gnyls took advantage of the situation, and changed their diet to eat decaying plant matter. Humans found it inedible, but there was so much of it that gnyls successfully survived for years before the resource began to disappear.

A year after Patek and Echo found Wiley outside of the prison, Patek and Wiley were sitting alone in the quiet world by Seneca Lake, chewing on some dried-up Eurasian Water Milfoil that had washed up on shore. They were some of the last souls left on earth, which had become a dull, harsh place, suitable for no living species. A small, bright light appeared then, rising up in the dark sky like a shooting star moving in slow motion. The light grew and grew, and then burst open to reveal a small, furry white ball. The ball flinched slightly on the ground. Patek gave it a quizzical look, and just before his hand reached the ball to pick it up, it gave a squeak, and turned over to reveal a tiny face, with large blue eyes and a small red nose, and two stubby feet

³ The disturbance that the sun caused on planet earth allowed for increased invasion by the gnyls.

attached. "What is it?" Patek asked, turning to Wiley. It wasn't Wiley who responded, but the strange, innocent-looking creature. "I am Alpha, and I am from the future."

References

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