



MARK LATHAM

BUG HUNTS

SURVIVING AND COMBATING THE ALIEN MENACE

Author

Mark Latham is a writer, editor, and games designer from Staffordshire, UK. Formerly the editor of Games Workshop's *White Dwarf* magazine, Mark has since become an author of speculative fiction, writing novels and short stories in the SF, fantasy, and horror genres. His first novel of Victorian science fiction, *The Lazarus Gate*, will be published in Autumn 2015 by Titan Books. Mark was responsible for several historical tabletop games, notably *Legends of the Old West* and *Waterloo*, and still turns his hand to games design when time permits.

Follow Mark on Twitter! @aLostVictorian

Cover Artist

Darren Tan grew up drawing spaceships, dinosaurs and the stuff of his imagination, which was fuelled by movies and computer games. Following a brief stint in 3D animation, Darren now works as a digital concept artist at Imaginary Friends Studios and is enjoying getting paid for his hobby.

Interior Artist

^a**RU-MOR** studied Fine Arts at the University of Seville, Spain specializing and working on artwork restoration. These days she combines her work as a miniaturist with her work as a freelance illustrator.

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INTERIOR ILLUSTRATIONS BY ARU-MOR
COVER ILLUSTRATION BY DARREN TAN

This electronic edition published 2015 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published in Great Britain in 2015 by Osprey Publishing,
PO Box 883, Oxford, OX1 9PL, UK
PO Box 3985, New York, NY 10185-3985, USA
E-mail: info@ospreypublishing.com

Osprey Publishing, part of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

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A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (print): 978-1-4728-1071-7
ISBN (ePub): 978-1-4728-1073-1
ISBN (ePDF): 978-1-4728-1072-4

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INTRODUCTION

They said there were no monsters, but there are.

Since first reaching out to the stars, mankind has wondered about the vastness of the galaxy, and asked itself the only question that really mattered: “Are we alone?” In the late 23rd century, after colonizing most of the solar system and visiting worlds even farther afield, we received our answer. But what we were faced with was not an advanced intelligence, nor even primitive beasts to be subjugated to humanity’s manifest destiny, but something altogether more terrifying.

Bugs. The term was coined by a private security detail who first encountered a sentient alien species on Draper’s World, in the HD 40307 system, in AD 2239. The encounter was brief and violent, and only a handful of the detail escaped with their lives, along with only one of the 13 astro-geologists they were protecting. Half of the survivors died of a mysterious illness before reaching the Kepler Deep Space Research facility, and those that survived underwent further alarming transformations in secure quarantine. As a result, their attackers were identified as a highly aggressive Xeno-Parasite, capable of infecting human biology with previously unknown viral contaminants, and of implanting its eggs into a living human host. Though the word “bugs” stuck as a catch-all term for the weird and varied beasts of the galaxy, it certainly does not convey the full weight of the threat carried by these creatures.

Over the next 50 years, as humans left Earth in greater numbers to form work colonies in distant systems, dozens more bug species were discovered. Of these, only two presented a threat comparable to (or even greater than) the Xeno-Parasites. These were the Centauran Araknyds and the Hive-Beasts of Klaatu – both of which seemed capable of higher thought processes, and, alarmingly, deep space travel. Unlike the Xeno-Parasites, which managed to spread to disparate worlds by means of infected human hosts, the other creatures were able to exist in the cold void of space, and to travel to systems before attacking them in vast swarms. As contact with these species increased, and battles raged, system-wide incursions by these bugs became more frequent, undoubtedly targeting human colonies with malign intelligence.

As soon as the Earth-based government, the Pan-System Authority, reluctantly addressed the possibility of an intelligent extra-terrestrial threat, they set about finding a way to meet it. Interstellar defense was an area with

(OPPOSITE)

STAR marine in full kit sweeping a research facility during the Io incident.