

The Blaros Massacre

A companion short story to *Amy the Astronaut and the Flight for Freedom*

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Yale Brown felt the dirt crumble under her feet. Her boots left minor impressions in the arid ground as she hiked through the thick woods. Trees, or what passed for trees on the planet Blaros, which orbited a large sun just outside the Milky Way, sprouted toward the green sky in tight groups. Yale could barely take two steps before another rooted behemoth was upon her. The twenty-year-old wiped sweat from her eyes, pulled her backpack up higher on her shoulder and hurried to keep up with her traveling companion. She shook her head in amazement at how easily Jake Tanner was navigating the rough terrain.

A winged-beast with blue feathers and a snarled beak flew overhead. Jake stopped and aimed his watch at the creature to capture its image on his device. He smiled at Yale and pointed to the bird. “Did you see that?” he asked. Yale nodded. He continued excitedly. “That’s a blue flatback orgle,” he said. “They’re rare in this part of the continent. I can’t wait to share that picture with my class.” Yale caught up to him and tousled his dark brown hair. “What?” he asked. “Too nerdy for you?”

She stood on her toes to kiss his right cheek; it was the only way to reach his face on his 6’4” frame. “You are never too nerdy for me,” she said, wrapping her arms around his waist. He showed her the image on his watch. The vivid colors stood out against the black background of the device. “You missed your calling, babe,” she said. “You should quit studying biology and focus on photography instead.”

Jake shrugged. "It is a good shot." He looked at Yale. "Ok, I'll quit biology and you quit your graduate work in economics. Deal?" She shook her head and kissed him again. "I didn't think so," he said, slipping his fingers between hers. "You've already made too much money as a junior financial advisor to quit now."

Yale hugged him tightly, enjoying the firm pressure from his strong arms. The flatback orge returned, flying so low that they both ducked to avoid it. "What was that about?" she asked.

"I don't know," replied Jake. "It looked terrified." They watched the creature circle above them before it darted toward Central City. A moment later, other birds flew overhead in the same direction, squawking and flapping their wings in a panic.

Yale quickly looked around. "Is there a fire?" she asked. She took a few steps away from Jake and removed her binoculars from her backpack. There was no smoke to be found. "What are they fleeing?" she asked. She continued scanning the area until she saw a massive dark patch in the southern sky. She handed Jake her field glasses. "What is that?" she asked.

Jake gasped. "They look like ships," he said. "Hundreds of them. And they're heading toward the city." He paused before looking back at Yale. "I don't recognize their design." He gave her back the binoculars. "Do you?" he asked.

She peered through the lenses again. "No, I don't. But they don't look like Union ships." She felt her voice quiver. "We should get back to the university." She stuffed the binoculars into her backpack and followed Jake along the trail. They were only a few minutes away from Barack Obama University, as the campus ended at the edge of the woods. They ran as fast as they could through the dense forest as the ships suddenly roared over their heads.

Before they could reach the school, Yale saw the ships drop bombs on the university buildings. The runners instinctively fell to the ground and covered their heads. Earsplitting explosions rocked them backwards. Yale curled into a fetal position and covered her ringing ears. The outbursts went on for several minutes. Yale felt Jake's hand as he reached out for her. He managed to crawl over to her and they held each other as they kept their heads down.

Smoke and dust filled the air. Yale heard sporadic screams in the distance. She brushed the dirt from her face and blinked rapidly as she looked at Jake. He wasn't moving. In a panic, Yale shook his still body. He remained motionless. She checked his pulse and detected a faint beating. Yale regained her composure and started performing CPR on her boyfriend. Before long, he regained consciousness.

The couple stayed put until Yale was sure Jake could walk safely on his own. Even then, they moved slowly and carefully through the rest of the woods, trying not to make noise. They finally reached the clearing, where they stopped and stared in horror at the devastation.

Most of the school buildings had been leveled by the bombs. The other structures had jagged slabs of metal and concrete aimed at the sky. Broken bodies were strewn across the campus. A few survivors ran here and there, while others wept over the dead. A rancid odor choked Yale as she observed the blood and the exposed body parts that littered the ground. It was hard for her to accept that this was real.

Sirens wailed as emergency rescue crews in ground vehicles raced toward the victims. Yale felt frozen to the ground, unsure of what she should do. Jake hugged her reassuringly but did not speak. She glanced at his face and saw the same shock that must have matched her

expression. Yale jerked her head to her left when she felt a stranger's hand on her shoulder. "Are you injured?" asked a female rescue worker.

Yale shook her head. The woman quickly examined her and Jake before moving toward other victims. Yale watched the worker tend to an older man in a white beard who was sprawled on the ground. It took a moment, but Yale recognized the wounded man. He was a professor of English named Davis. Yale had taken one of his classes during her freshman year. The rescue worker tried to revive Mr. Davis, but she ended up covering his body with a white sheet.

The next few hours seemed to drag on for days. Yale and Jake assisted other rescue workers as they frantically tried to save as many people as they could. She gasped and tried not to vomit when she saw bodies of students and teachers that she knew. Then Yale used a mini-comp in her backpack to get some news. She learned from a news site that the attacking ships made four bombing runs over the school and the surrounding area before disappearing. The same tactic was used by assault ships in Central City, the farm lands, and the mining areas. There was no word yet on who the attackers were or why they struck the planet's settlements.

Exhaustion soon set in, and Yale followed Jake to a make-shift shelter in the school library. The roof was gone but the building stood firmly in the late-day sun. Tables were set up with food, water and medical supplies. Shattered people moved slowly as they grasped provisions. Pages of burned-out books drifted in the air, occasionally smacking people in their feet or legs. Jake picked up two apples and two cups of water before guiding Yale to a shady spot on the floor. They sat and ate in silence.

Yale suddenly awoke with a start, not even aware that she had fallen asleep on Jake's shoulder. Someone was pulling at her backpack. Yale blinked and saw a young man about her

age trying to steal her belongings. The jostling awoke Jake, and he shot to his feet, grabbing the would-be thief. The color went out the man's face and he screamed as Jake smashed his jaw with a right cross. The man went limp, still screaming. Jake pushed him toward the tables, where the man scampered off.

"Can you believe that jerk?" yelled Jake. He shook his head in disgust.

"He's just scared," said Yale, holding onto Jake's right arm. "I can't really blame him. I'm scared too." She sank into Jake's arms and allowed her tears to wet his shoulder. All of her pain and frustration poured out. "Why is this happening?" she cried. "Who would do this to us?"

Jake did his best to comfort her. He let her cry it out as he held her and kissed the top of her head. She finally calmed down and ran the back of her right fist against her face. "We should try to find out if there is anything new," she said. She took out her mini-comp and found the news site again. She read that the initial reports put the loss of life at nearly two million people. Central City and the mining areas were the hardest hit, while the farm lands also sustained heavy casualties. There was still no word on the identity of the attackers.

The report added that evacuation ships from Earth and other colonies were on the way to Blaros. They were expected to arrive by nightfall. In the meantime, citizens were advised to remain calm and follow the instructions of law enforcement and rescue personnel. She put the mini-comp away. "I guess we're lucky to be alive," she said. Jake nodded. "We'll be out of here tonight." She looked around and pressed her lips together. "I can't believe this happened. I've been here so long; it's like my second home. And now it's gone."

"Well, at least your family is safe on Earth," said Jake. "New Jersey, right?"

Yale smiled. "Yes, the Garden State." She took a breath as her expression changed. "They must be worried about me. I need to get a message to them, to let them know I'm ok." She slid the mini-comp back out of her backpack. She pushed several buttons on the device before she stopped. "There's no outbound signal," she said. "I can only get short-range, inbound data." She slammed the device against her right thigh in frustration. Jake took it from her and carefully put it back into her backpack.

"We don't want to break it," he said, zipping up the backpack. "It might be our only source of information." He looked up at the sky for a moment. "They must have knocked out cell towers all over the settlement. I wonder if we hit them back."

"No such luck," said a voice behind them. They turned to see a Union soldier walking toward them. He was shorter than Jake, but just as muscular. The soldier's uniform was ripped and Yale noticed blood stains on it, but she did not see any visible injury. He stopped in front of the couple. "We were taken by surprise. Somehow they managed to get past our satellites undetected. We didn't get one ship off of the ground." There was a combination of anger and regret in his voice.

"How is that possible?" asked Jake.

"It's not supposed to be," said the soldier. He then extended a hand. "I'm Private Luke Jefferson," he said. He shook hands with Jake and Yale. "When we do find out who they are," he continued, "you can bet your life they'll dread the moment they messed with us." Yale noticed that there was more than bravado in his voice, there was also anger and determination. "We lost a lot of good people today. Both civilian and military." He gently slapped Jake's shoulder.

“We’ll be in need of new fighters. Just something to think about.” Luke saluted them and walked off without another word.

Yale and Jake remained close to the shelter for the next few hours. It seemed logical to stay put until the evacuation ships arrived. They passed the time handing out provisions to those who wandered into the library. The temperature rose throughout the day, which made the stench from the dead bodies even worse. The couple also helped the rescue and recovery efforts just outside the building. At one point, Yale noticed an eerie silence in the air as they assisted a rescue worker who was digging out a survivor. The silence was quickly broken by the sound of aircraft engines.

“They’re back!” yelled someone. Yale looked to the sky and saw the enemy ships as they made a slower pass over the area. The ships did not drop any bombs. Instead they began to descend to the ground. Panicked people ran in all directions, trying to hide. Jake grabbed Yale’s hand and rushed toward the library doors. Once inside, they hid behind a fallen bookshelf.

Yale held her breath as she heard the enemy soldiers’ footsteps. She peeked at Jake and saw that he was trying to remain perfectly still. Yale tried to observe the invaders, but she could only see their uniforms and the helmets that covered their heads. They walked on two legs and held their weapons in two hands. When they spoke, their words were faint and garbled.

Jake’s right leg began to shake. The motion created a soft rustling sound as his foot was against a fallen beam. Yale glared at him, but he couldn’t make it stop. One soldier turned his head in their direction. He took two steps toward them before another soldier spoke, causing him to turn and walk in the opposite direction. Several minutes passed before Yale popped her head around the bookshelf and saw that the soldiers were gone.

“What do we do now?” she softly asked Jake. He shrugged, pulling up close to her. “Do we stay here and hope they don’t come back, or do we venture out there and find a new hiding place?” Yale wasn’t sure if she were asking Jake or herself these questions. He rubbed his right leg and tried to get the shaking to stop. Yale noticed his embarrassed look and she tried to ease his pain. She rubbed his shin. “Whatever we do, we will get off this planet. Nothing will keep us from those transports.”

Jake smiled as if thanking her for her support. Then his expression turned serious. “What if these guys are still here when the rescue ships come tonight?” he asked.

Yale let go of his leg and patted his shoulder. “Historically, sneak attackers like this don’t stick around for long. They tend to take off before reinforcements arrive. Like the Japanese at Pearl Harbor in the 20th Century,” she said.

“So now you’re a history buff too?” joked Jake. She lightly shoved his shoulder. “It’s fine. I know BOU likes to produce well-rounded students.” They both stopped as the loss of their beloved university sank in. Jake sighed. “I’m not one for sitting in the same place for too long. We should go.” He stood and helped Yale to her feet.

They carefully exited the library, keeping a sharp lookout for the enemy. Yale saw that the ships were still stationed in the same place, but she didn’t see any soldiers near them. She turned and whispered to Jake. “We should take a look at their ships,” she said. “We can take some photos and share them with the military. Maybe get some answers.”

“I don’t know,” said Jake. “It sounds risky. And we don’t even know where the military is right now.” He shook his head. “Let’s head for the woods. It will be hard for them to find us in there. We can hide until the rescue ships get here tonight.”

Ignoring his advice, Yale darted toward one of the alien crafts. She heard Jake call out to her, but she was determined to get some information. She ran fast and low, keeping her head down. When she reached the craft, she ran her hands along the outer hull. It felt smooth and metallic. That made sense. Then she looked into the cockpit. A clear glass shielding covered the area. Yale felt around the bottom of the glass and discovered a row of buttons. She pressed the first button and the glass shield rose up, giving her access to the ship. She was surprised that it hadn't been locked somehow, but maybe the aliens were too arrogant to think a human would try to hijack the craft.

Jake rushed over to her and tried to pull her away from the ship. She shook him off and removed her mini-comp from her backpack. Using the camera application, she took several photos of the interior. Then something else caught her eye: it was a pistol. She grabbed the weapon and took a quick look at it. It seemed simple enough to operate. Yale showed it to Jake. "This should come in handy," she said.

He nodded. "Just don't point that thing at me," he said. Jake looked around and continued to speak softly. "C'mon, let's get out of here before they find us." Yale nodded and followed Jake as he headed for the woods. They made it past the clearing and hunted for a place to hide. Jake found a partial ditch behind a patch of trees. They dug dirt out of the area with their bare hands to deepen the fissure before crawling into the crevice. Yale kept the pistol in her right hand as they hunkered down to wait for nightfall.

Two hours passed and the sky began to darken. The couple tried to remain still and quiet, but eventually Jake had to relieve himself, so he crawled out and found a private spot. He didn't take long and he turned to come back to the hideout. Yale suddenly saw an odd beam of light

appear on his chest. She called out to him just as a laser bolt knocked him off of his feet. She rose and saw a hole the size of a grapefruit in his midsection. His eyes were open and his mouth was locked in an expression of horror and pain.

Yale suppressed a scream and ducked back down into the ditch. Tears poured from her eyes as she kept her left hand over her mouth. She heard footsteps and the odd language of the aliens. She also heard the sound of something heavy being dragged along the ground. She knew what it was and it made her cry even harder.

Soon the woods were covered in complete darkness. Yale peeked out of the ditch and slowly crawled out. She only heard the sounds of nature, so she walked carefully toward the city. As she departed the woods, she saw Union rescue ships flying overhead, traveling toward the center of the city. She sobbed and wiped her face every now and then. Her body shook as she thought about Jake's death.

Yale arrived at the departure point where a medic approached her. She surprised the young man by collapsing in his arms and crying on his shoulder. Then she composed herself and told him about the alien ship. She handed him the weapon that she had stolen. The medic called over an officer and gave him the pistol. The officer asked Yale some questions before guiding her to one of the escape ships.

Once fully loaded, the craft rose toward the dark sky. Yale had a window seat on the ship and she shook her head as she observed the devastation from the air. She closed her eyes for a moment and pictured Jake's face. She already missed his warmth and his laughter. Yale opened her eyes and knew that very soon she would be wearing her own Union soldier uniform.