

SECRETS OF THE SKY

THE
CHAOS
MONSTER



NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

SAYANTANI DASGUPTA

THE
CHAOS
MONSTER

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SECRETS OF THE SKY

BOOK ONE

THE CHAOS MONSTER

SAYANTANI DASGUPTA

Illustrations by SANDARA TANG



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To Kiru, Kiya, and Khushi: My magical and beloved crew.

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1



A Chaos Monster Destroys the Solar System

KINJAL AND KIYA Rajkumar were regular, normal brother-sister twins. They went to a regular, normal school and learned all the regular, normal things fourth graders learn. They lived in a regular, normal house with regular, normal parents at the end of a regular, normal street in a regular, normal town.

Or so they both thought.

And anyway, no matter what the stories say, amazing things don't just happen to heroes and demigods, those born with superpowers or magical abilities. Sometimes, they happen to regular, normal kids living regular, normal lives too.



Especially regular, normal kids from New Jersey. Which, if you didn't know, is a state where a lot of strange things happen and a lot of fantastical adventures begin.

It all began in a regular, normal way, at least for the Rajkumar family: with Kinjal (totally by mistake, or so he insisted) destroying his twin sister Kiya's science project, and Kiya (probably on purpose) deciding to pretend her brother didn't exist.

"Hey, can you pass me the toothpaste?" he said to her

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the next morning. When she didn't answer, but just kept brushing, he added, "Hello? Earth to Kiya?"

Kiya rinsed and spat without even reacting at all. Like her twin brother wasn't right beside her in their bathroom but had teleported through a wormhole and into some far-away dimension. But Kinjal was still right there in the same old ordinary dimension, so he just reached across her and took the toothpaste. He was trying not to feel hurt that his sister hadn't said anything about his smelly breath or rotten teeth or any other funny-slash-mean thing she might usually say.

"Do you want some cereal?" Kinjal asked as he was pouring his own later downstairs. But Kiya just ignored him, cooing and cuddling with their giant horse of a dog, Thums-Up, who was chocolate brown like their mother's favorite childhood soda, and just as sweet.

As Thums-Up gave Kiya's nose, cheek, and glasses some sloppy licks, Kinjal turned to Ma for support. But she just shrugged, giving him a look that said, *You made this mess with your sister, Kinjal, and you have to clean it up too.* Ma was sort of strict about the twins learning how to own up to

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their mistakes and take responsibility for their actions and that kind of typical mom stuff.

“Are you still mad at me?” Kinjal asked Kiya as they walked out together to the bus stop. “Because if it’s about your science project, I told you I’d help you put it back together after school.”

But Kiya didn’t change her expression at all. It was like every drop of feeling had been sucked out of her the night before, when Kinjal had accidentally thrown one of Thums-Up’s slobbery tennis balls into her papier-mâché model of the solar system, knocking it off the kitchen table and into a messy heap on the floor. At the time, Kiya had screamed. And also cried. A lot. Just remembering that made Kinjal feel bad, like his recently eaten cereal was riding on a loop-the-loop roller coaster in his stomach.

“Look, it’s only Jupiter and Saturn that really got messed up,” he said in what he thought was a helpful way, running a little to keep up with his sister’s stomping walk. But even though he was being sincere, his sister just glared at him.

Kinjal gulped, trying to smile. “I mean, and yes, Pluto also got a little destroyed, but come on, does anyone really care about Pluto anymore? So flippy-floppy, amirite?”

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He waved his hands in what he hoped was a funny, jokey way. “One minute it’s all ‘I am a planet’ and then ‘I’m not a planet’ and then ‘Oh, wait, I’m a planet again!’ I mean, make up your little galactic mind, my dude!”

Kinjal wasn’t sure why, but that was the thing that seemed to really get Kiya mad. She whirled, her perfect braids flipping over her shoulder and her eyes flashing behind her red-framed glasses. She poked her finger into her brother’s rumply T-shirt. Hard. “Who cares about Pluto anymore? I care about Pluto, you little monster, all right? I care about Pluto!”

That stopped Kinjal in his tracks. Okay, maybe he wasn’t a hero like in the fantasy books he liked to read, but that didn’t make him a monster. Did it? “Who are you calling a monster, you . . . you . . .” Kinjal racked his brain for a good insult, but all he could come up with was “galaxy lover!”

Kiya raised one eyebrow, which annoyed Kinjal because they’d both practiced together in the mirror a lot over the summer and he still hadn’t gotten the hang of it yet. Unable to decide what else to do, Kinjal was about to launch into a chorus of “Kiya and Pluto sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G” but he got distracted when his sister started to wave to their

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neighbor Lola. Who they'd never been friends with. But now, Kiya was acting like Lola was her best friend. Which only made Kinjal feel even worse. They were twins, after all. Not that he would ever admit it out loud, but Kiya wasn't supposed to need any other best friend but him.

But his sister seemed to have forgotten that. In the same way she'd forgotten him.

"Hey, Lola!" Kiya said in a best-frienderly sort of way.

The cereal in Kinjal's stomach started flipping around, like their dog doing dive-bombs on the lawn when she wanted to roll around in what was always usually poo.

"Hey, Kiya!" Lola smiled back, a little surprised.

"Looking forward to school today?" Kiya linked her arm through their neighbor's.

"Not really!" Lola laughed.

That's when their baba, who was in the front yard in his gardening clothes, laying down some stinky compost, called out, "Have a great day, kids!"

"Thanks, Dad!" Kiya answered, almost making Kinjal's eyes fall out of his head. I mean, since when did they call their baba "Dad"?

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“So, I’ve been meaning to ask you this forever.” Lola wrinkled her nose, like this was the first time she’d seen the Rajkumars’ weed-covered lawn. “What’s with all the dandelions? Also the clover? I mean, no offense or anything.”

Kinjal’s insides bubbled up like a boiling river. Whenever someone said “no offense,” it usually meant they knew they were saying something mean. And yes, okay, theirs was the only front lawn on the street full of the yellow-headed weeds, little white blossoms, and ragged clover. Everybody else’s lawn was green and lush—perfectly mowed and exactly the same. But so what? I mean, what business was it of Lola’s or anyone’s? But instead of saying any of that, Kinjal just started kicking the curb with his sneaker so it got more scuffed up than it already was.

Kiya gave a little fake laugh. “Our dad owns the gardening store on Route 46, Champak Brothers Gardening, and doesn’t believe in pesticides.”

“Our dad is a big fan of pollinators,” Kinjal said, hoping that maybe Lola wouldn’t know the word and he’d get to explain it. *Pollinators*, he’d say in a way that made clear he thought Lola was rude, *are things like birds, bats, bees,*

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and butterflies that carry pollen on their bodies and let the genetic material of one flower cross with another.

But Kinjal didn't get to define the word because Lola was all over it.

"Pollinators are cool." She bobbed her head, then adjusted the straps of her Shady Sadie the Science Lady backpack. "It's a bummer that I'm deathly allergic to bees."

"I didn't know that!" Kiya gave her a bright-eyed look, like having a deathly allergy made Lola way more interesting than she'd been just a few seconds ago. "Do you have to carry injectable medicine for that? Like an epinephrine pen?"

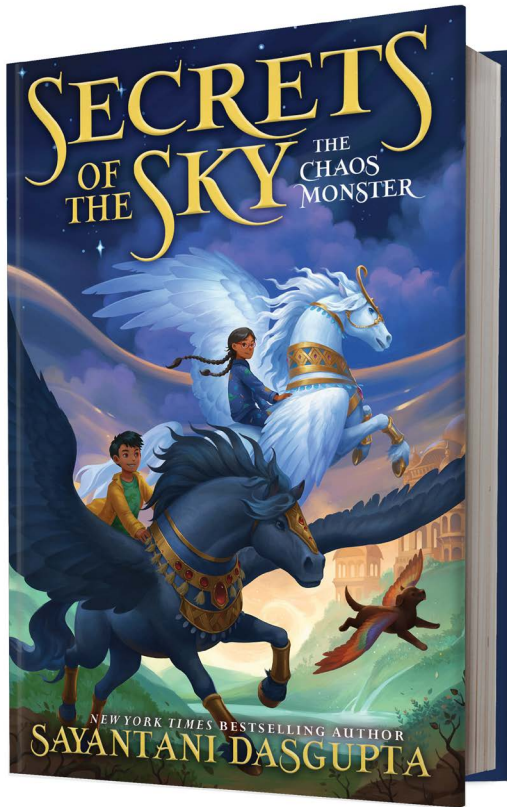
"How do you know about that?" Lola asked as the yellow school bus rumbled down the street. It ground to a stop before the driver screeched open the door.

"I like to read about different diseases," Kiya explained as she climbed the school bus steps after Lola. "Science is kind of my thing." Kiya turned around and raised her eyebrow at Kinjal again.

"I said I was sorry already!" he muttered.

"You ruin everything you touch, you know that?" she hissed back. "You are a complete disaster, a freak of nature!"

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