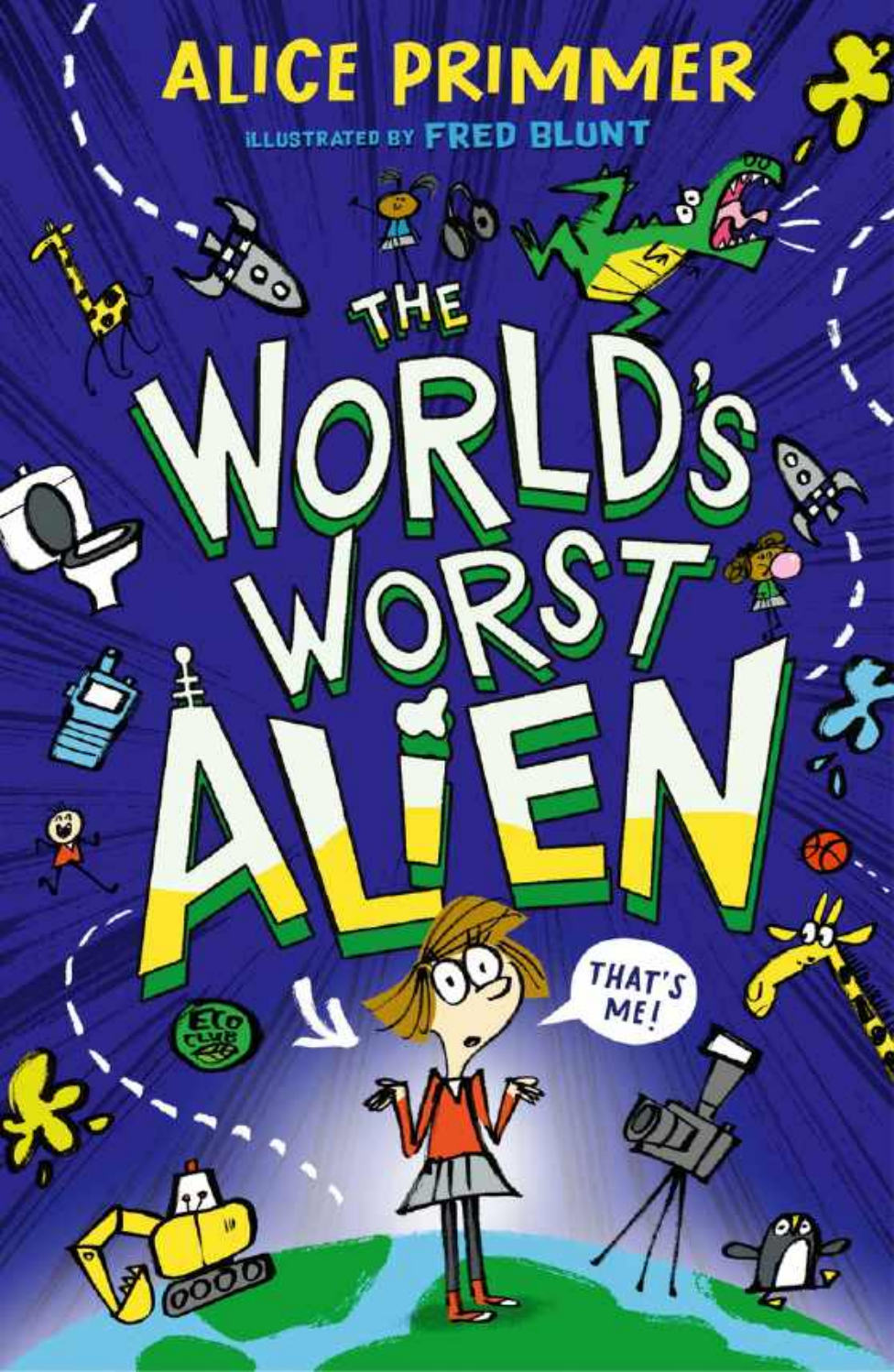


ILLUSTRATED BY **FRED BLUNT**


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THE  
WORLD'S  
WORST  
ALIEN

THAT'S







# For Sylvie and Rupert

A.P.




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**ALICE PRIMMER**

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**THE  
WORLD'S  
WORST  
ALIEN**









In the beginning, there was nothing.

That was boring.

Then there were the first cells, splitting and combining and growing until they evolved into weird creatures.

That was pretty boring too, and it took so long for anything to happen, it was easier to wipe most of them out.

Next came the fish. So many fish. Lots of them were kind of funky looking, but nothing special. So they had to go, too.

Things got a bit more interesting after that: big creepy-crawly things in steamy forests, and then proper four-legged beasts roaming round on the land, like I'd heard about on some of my

T





classmates' planets. Everything was looking up.

That extinction wasn't totally intentional. Long story short, you leave lava unattended and it gets *everywhere*.

But it worked out OK in the end, because all this made way for the dinosaurs – aka the coolest thing to appear on any planet, ever. They were top-mark material.

So I left them to it. It was the first time I'd ever finished my homework on time, and the first time I was confident I'd actually produced something good. Which is why I was so surprised when I returned to my planet the day before it was due to be handed in, to find ... well. Not dinosaurs.

And THAT was where the trouble started.

Humans, they were called. And they were making a mess of everything.

I'm not one to panic, but I was getting dangerously close. This was the one project I was counting on to drag my grades out of the realm of "suspension imminent" and back into the more familiar territory of "disappointing".

The dinosaurs had been perfect. What on Earth (literally) had happened to them?

I looked through the uniscope again, hoping that things might have somehow improved, that maybe the dinosaurs were just hiding.

Nope. Still humans.

I studied these creatures that had appeared all over my planet. At first, I had hoped that although they weren't dinosaurs, they might still be something that my teacher would regard with surprised satisfaction, rather than regular disappointment. That hope had quickly fizzled out.

Sure, these humans had built a civilization. They'd developed technologies, spread out across the entire planet, built monuments and even sent a few (pretty pathetic) rockets to explore their universe. But they were also killing everything they came into contact with. Which explained where the dinosaurs had gone.

There were wars going on everywhere. And even on a smaller scale, there was violence, since humans seemed unable to resist killing



each other – and not even for food. They killed other animals for that. Because yes, there did seem to be a few other species on Earth, not that there was much point looking at them too closely. The way the humans were going, there wouldn't be many of them left soon.

Even worse, the humans seemed determined to kill the planet itself – something I obviously took very personally. They'd worked out which chemicals would destroy the atmosphere and were pumping them out as quickly as they could. Humans were increasing the planet's temperature so drastically that it was unlikely any kind of creature would be able to survive there soon. It was almost like they *wanted* my project to fail.

Things were bad. So bad, I was going to have to do something I had never done before.

I was going to have to make an effort.

My homework was due tomorrow. I didn't have time to start all over again. So that gave me exactly one night to fix this planet. Thankfully, time is relative, and now that I'd

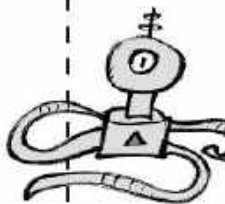


fast-forwarded through the boring first billions of years on planet Earth, one night in my dimension translated to roughly one month in Earth-time. One month to save the world.

My parents had an old trans-dimensional transporter. It was dusty, but it still worked, and they wouldn't notice it was missing. Or that I was missing, hopefully. In seconds, relatively speaking, I would be standing on the surface of my school project.

I took a look at myself, and hesitated. It had just occurred to me that the human race looked nothing like me. In fact, my form was so far beyond human comprehension, my arrival might trigger some kind of mass nervous breakdown.

Luckily, my parents had an old physical manifestation calibrator, which they sometimes got out at parties. I strapped it on and hesitated again. It wasn't enough just to be a human. I needed enough power to change the course of the human race in just a month. What human had that kind of influence?





I returned to the uniscope. As Earth-time passed, I watched the leaders that humans followed. They called them politicians. I watched them for a long time, but they didn't seem to get anything done. There was no way they could change the world in one month.

I tried watching the people that the humans worshipped instead. Unfortunately, from what I could gather, I was a couple of thousands of years too late to be picked as the head of one of their religions.



Getting more desperate, I watched another group the humans seemed to worship, called “celebrities”. But these celebrities mostly wandered around smiling and looking shiny, and I couldn't see how that would help me.

This was going to be harder than I'd thought. I watched and watched, until the area of my form that humans would call my head hurt.

And then I noticed something. The screens. So many humans were watching them, for ridiculously long portions of each day.



I zoomed in. I watched what they were watching. And I worked it out.

The best way to get people's attention was through something called YouTube.

I calibrated my physical form. I configured the trans-dimensional transporter. I went to Earth.





I was in London, England. London was cold. That was the first thing I learnt.

I had modelled my human clothes on the outfits worn by the YouTube influencers that I had watched. Unfortunately, it turned out that most of these YouTubers' videos were filmed indoors.

And I later found out that I had landed in October,

one of the coldest months (although they seemed to have a lot of those in London). That was how I ended up on the streets of London in a skirt and short-sleeved shirt, exposing my new human limbs to sensations that were uncomfortable even to an inter-dimensional being.



The videos had been more helpful for the rest of my appearance. Hair tutorials were not in short supply on YouTube. My bobbed hairstyle and subtle tousled bed-head were, I was told, the perfect low-maintenance look for everyday school wear.

Because school was where I was heading. Why? Good question, and one I should have spent much more time thinking about before I switched on the trans-dimensional transporter. Basically, the YouTubers often talked about school. One of them mentioned London. So here I was, in London, arriving at Oak Lane Primary School and hoping for the best.

I followed a group of humans who looked roughly the same age as my new human form through a door with a sign that said YEAR 6. Beyond it was a room that looked enough like what I had in my dimension for me to recognize it as a classroom.

I copied what everyone else was doing and sat down at a desk.

The chatter of the class died down. The teacher looked up.

“Who on earth is that?”

I turned to face the boy with slicked-back hair who had asked the question.

“Hello, I’m ΔοΑΔ-Κεω,” I said.

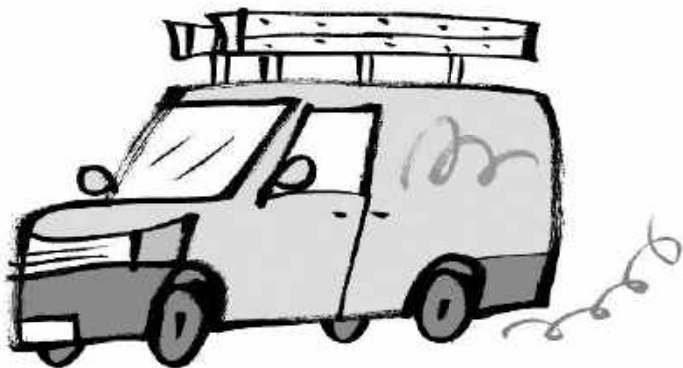
At least, that’s what I tried to say. The calibrator was supposed to make me speak the language of wherever I went in the universe. Unfortunately, there was no translation in any human language of my own name. The best I came up with was a throaty gurgle.

It didn’t improve the situation.

“You what?”

Once again, I was actually being forced to think. It was exhausting. I looked round for inspiration.

Outside the window, a van drove by with bright lettering on the side. I picked one of the words at random.



“Hello, I’m Sky,” I tried again. The boy seemed to accept this. I wondered if I’d got lucky, or if “Satellite” or “Television” would have worked just as well.

“Huh.” The boy looked at the teacher. “Who’s this then?”

The teacher looked down at his register, then back up at me. He shrugged.

“Are you sure you’re in the right class, Sky?” he asked.

I copied his shrug. “I don’t think it makes much difference.”

The teacher frowned. “Er, it makes quite a lot of difference, actually. Are you new this term? Or are you on the exchange programme?”

“What’s that?”

“I think she’s meant to be in the class for the slow kids, Mr Martins.”

“Jaden, that’s extremely rude and you’re on a warning.” Mr Martins turned back to me. “*Are* you from the special class with Mr Jones, Sky?”

“No. I’m just visiting.”

“Oh, so you *are* on the foreign exchange.” Mr



Martins glanced at his laptop screen. "Sorry, I must have missed the email. Welcome to London. Where are you from? Your English is wonderful."

I hadn't got as far as memorizing the names of countries. I'd learnt the seven continents that the humans had divided the planet into, but when I discovered how many countries were inside these continents, I'd given up. "Why don't you guess?"

Mr Martins looked at me blankly. "OK... Yes. Icebreaker. Good idea! Class, who can guess where Sky is from?"

"Give us some clues," the girl next to me demanded.

"It's far away."

"Outside Europe?"

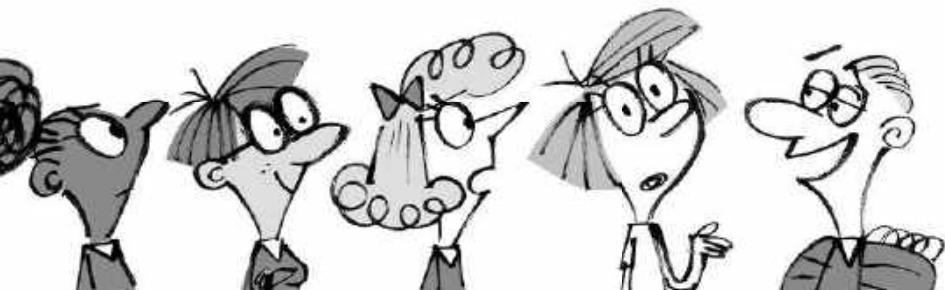
"Very much so."

"Big?"

"Yes."

The boy Mr Martins had identified as Rude Jaden shouted, "Antarctica!"

"Sure."



“Woah,” Rude Jaden cried.

“You can’t be,” the girl next to me snapped.

“Why not?” I said.

The girl turned to Mr Martins. “Sir, Sky is telling a lie.”

Mr Martins didn’t seem to be listening. He was looking at the classroom clock, as though it wasn’t moving as fast as he expected.

“I know why,” whispered Rude Jaden, leaning towards the girl next to me.

She looked at him through narrowed eyes.

“Why?”

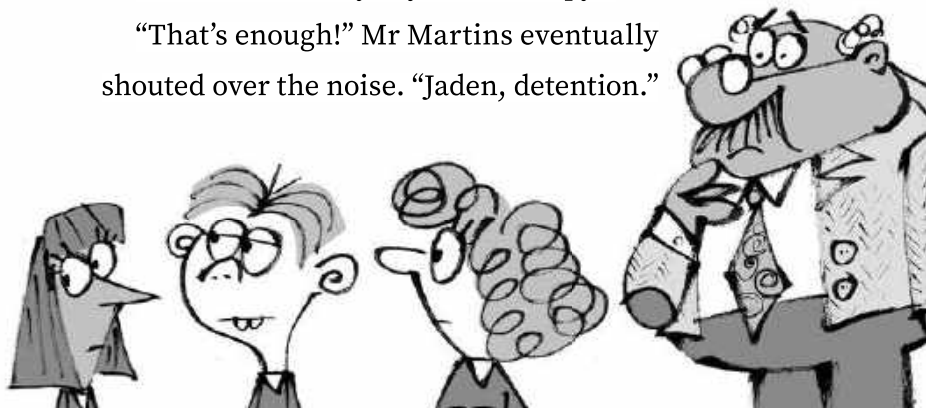
“Because Sky is a secret agent!” Rude Jaden bellowed.

For reasons I couldn’t understand, the class around me fizzed into a mixture of laughter and shouting. Mr Martins was still staring at the clock.

“Shut up, Jaden!” the girl was yelling.

“It’s obvious – Sky rhymes with spy!”

“That’s enough!” Mr Martins eventually shouted over the noise. “Jaden, detention.”



“I’m already in detention for sticking chewing gum on Miss Shepherd’s jumper.”

“Well then you’re doubly in detention.”

There was a loud ringing noise and everyone got to their feet.

“Is that the end of school?” I asked the girl next to me.

She scowled back. “Don’t they have school in Antarctica?”

“I don’t know.”

“It’s the bell for first lesson. Maths. We have to get our books.” She paused. “Could you sit somewhere else, please?”

I got up and moved to a different desk. No one sat next to me.

You may be wondering why changing the world through YouTube involved going to maths class. After ten minutes of maths, I was wondering the same thing. The numbers system the humans had devised was old-fashioned and pointless. Not to mention the fact I couldn’t do it. Even on the planet I’d created, I was still bottom of the class.

The truth was, I was at school because I had no

idea how to become a YouTube influencer. Yes, I'd watched a few videos, but I didn't know how to get on YouTube myself. I thought school might teach me. I was wrong. I soon discovered that school was not going to teach me anything useful at all.

The bell rang again, but it was *still* not the end of school. I followed everyone outside for what they called break time. I watched as the humans ran around aimlessly, screeching, laughing, occasionally kicking a ball. How had these idiots managed to defeat my mighty dinosaurs?

Back in the classroom, a girl took the seat next to me.

"Hi, I'm Zana."

Zana had blue hair. Even with my limited knowledge of human hair, I could tell this was unusual. She had an enthusiastic glint in her eye, which I would later understand was the look of someone who has finally found someone else to take the role of weirdest person in the class.

"Hello. I'm Sky."

"Yes, I know. The Antarctic ... girl?"



She waited for me to confirm. I did the shrug I had learnt from Mr Martins.

“I guess,” I said. I’d set my calibrator to make me a young human, but I hadn’t really thought about the details. It seemed best not to mention that to Zana.

“So what do you do for fun in Antarctica?”

Before I had time to make up a bad lie, Zana continued talking. This was the point I learnt that Zana didn’t need another person in order to have a conversation.

“I’d like to go to Antarctica. I didn’t know anyone lived there. Maybe I can do an exchange to your school? Travel is my favourite thing. I mean, I haven’t been anywhere yet, but that’s what I want to do. I want to see everywhere. I’m going to be an explorer. Well, actually, I’m going to be a coder first, to make money to be an explorer. I’ve already made my first app. I’ll show you later...”

The only thing that stopped Zana talking was the teacher starting the lesson, and even that was only temporary. As soon as we were set some work, she was off again. I realized I was going to have to interrupt.

“Do you know anything about YouTube?”

I blurted out.

“I guess. Why?”

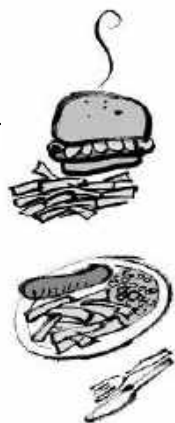
“I want to be an influencer. But I don’t know how.”

Zana’s eyes widened. “That’s. So. Cool! I’ll help you. I can be your director, editor, whatever. We can set up your channel right away. What are your videos going to be about?”

“I hadn’t got that far yet.”

Needless to say, Zana had some ideas. A lot of ideas. So many ideas that at lunchtime I had to shake her off by going to the only room where it seemed like pupils were allowed to be alone: a place called the toilets. I stayed there for three hours. In my true form, I very rarely needed to pass waste, and I wasn’t familiar enough with human biology yet to know if this was a long time to spend in the toilet. I hoped the other pupils might think it was an Antarctic thing.

Eventually the bell rang for home time, so I left the toilet cubicle and headed for the school gates.





And stopped. I had nowhere to go. School had been the first and only step in my plan.

“How long until we can come back?” I asked the pupils dashing past me to the gates. Most of them laughed, or ignored me, or laughed while also ignoring me, but one of them eventually whooped, “We have exactly seventeen hours of FREEDOM!”

Seventeen hours where I had nowhere to go.

Opposite the school was a park. At the edge of the park was a bench. I sat on it. How long was seventeen hours anyway?

I closed my eyes.

I opened my eyes.

Zana was standing in front of me.

“You’re homeless!”

I’d shrugged enough today, so I nodded.

“That’s awful!” She clutched her hands to her heart. “Did the school not organise anywhere for you to stay? Let me guess – was Mr Martins supposed to sort it out? No wonder it didn’t get done.”

Zana was amazing at thinking up my own excuses for me.





“Well, you can’t stay there all night. You’ll die or be mugged or freeze. You can stay at mine.”

It was easier to agree than think of an excuse, so I followed Zana. And as she led me onto the human form of transport known as the bus, and then to her front doorstep, I didn’t need to say a word. I should probably have been worried that Zana might ask me some difficult questions that would blow my cover, but that would have involved Zana stopping chatting. And she never did.



# 3

As Zana put her key in the lock, she looked at me over her shoulder. “Don’t worry about my parents – I’ll do the talking.”

I wondered why she even felt the need to explain that.

We went straight upstairs to her bedroom. I had seen quite a few human bedrooms in the background of YouTube influencers’ videos, but I’d never seen one like this. I assumed there were walls, but I couldn’t see them through the leaves of the plants that surrounded us. With the curtains drawn, it was like walking into the dankest depths of the tropical rainforests we’d learnt about in geography class. Her bed was raised, with the area underneath covered by heavy drapes. A light

glowed eerily from behind them.

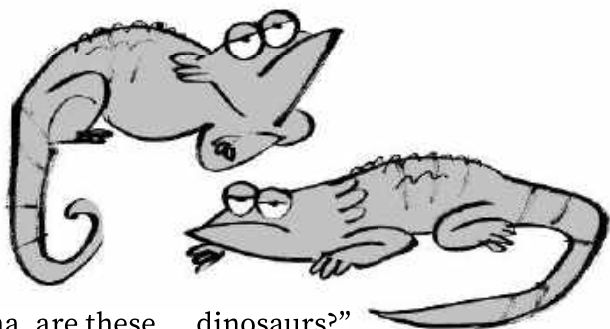
Zana flung the drapes back with a flourish.

“Meet Turing and Berners-Lee!” she cried.

“What are they?”

Zana frowned. “Have you never seen a lizard before?”

I crouched down to look inside the glowing container. The scaly green creatures regarded me lazily. I felt a trembling hope inside me.



“Zana, are these ... dinosaurs?”

“Ha! No.”

“Oh.”

“Now, while you’re staying, we can get started on your YouTube channel.” She clambered onto her bed and grabbed her laptop, then plonked herself down cross-legged on the bedroom floor. “First we need to—”

“Susan? Is that you home?”

Zana flung her head back. “Ugh. You’d better come with me.”

I followed Zana back downstairs and into the room she called the kitchen. A woman was standing looking out of the window. When she turned and saw me, she gave such a jump of surprise that I thought my calibrator had glitched.

“You have a friend!” she exclaimed. She covered her mouth. “Sorry, Susan, that didn’t come out... I mean, who’s this?”

“This is Sky. She’s an exchange student from Antarctica but the school forgot to sort her accommodation, so she’s staying with us for a bit.”

I looked back and forth between them. “Who’s Susan?”

Zana rolled her eyes. “Mum doesn’t respect my ‘nickname’.”

The back door opened, and a man walked in with an armful of what I would later identify as carrots. He hid his shock at seeing me better than Zana’s mum had.

“Oh, hello,” he said, blinking very fast.

Zana's mum clasped his arm. "Darling, this is Susan's friend, Sky. She's an exchange student from ... Antarctica. She's going to stay with us for a while. Isn't that marvellous?"

Zana's dad mouthed "*Antarctica?!"* to Zana's mum. In English class we'd learnt about using "*?!"*. This was the first time I'd seen "*?!"* expressed on a person's face.

"Lovely to meet you, Sky." Zana's dad gave me a weak smile. "Dinner will be ready soon."

I later worked out that if I ate every meal offered to me during my month on Earth, it would be the equivalent of me eating about once every six minutes in my real time. I didn't know whether that would have a dangerous impact when I eventually calibrated back to my normal self. But I also didn't want to be rude, so I sat down with Zana's family to her dad's speciality – vegetable stew.

"So, Sky," Zana's dad said, "you're from Antarctica?"

"Yes," I said.

Nobody said anything. I realized that most of my experience of human conversation had been



with Zana, and she obviously wasn't a very good example of how much each person was supposed to contribute. They were expecting me to say more.

I tried again. "You're from England?"

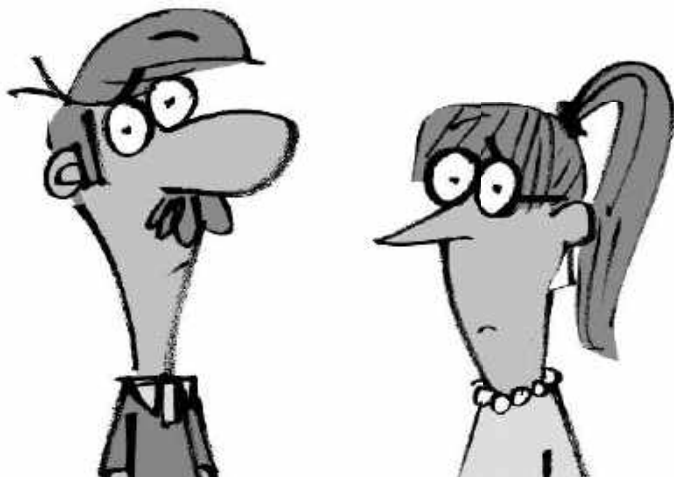
Zana's dad blinked. "Yes."

It seemed he wasn't very good at human conversation either.

"And what are you hoping to get from your visit to England?" Zana's mum asked me.

"I'm here to try to save the planet," I replied, wincing as I experienced the texture of an aubergine for the first time. I was trying to copy the family's behaviour, and as no one had spat anything out in disgust yet, I thought it best not to be the first.

I realized Zana's parents were staring at me.



I would get used to these looks. They were the human way of trying to work out whether you were joking or just deeply strange.

“That’s good,” Zana’s dad concluded.

Thankfully Zana took over the conversation, and no one else had to say anything for a while. This was just as well, as the vegetable stew was starting to cause some peculiar sensations. Every mouthful felt like it was producing hundreds of bubbles in my stomach. I wiggled around in my chair, trying to stop the gurgling.

Something fell out of my skirt pocket with a SQUELCH.

Zana stopped talking. She stared at the floor. “Is that slime?”

If there was one thing I had worked out from watching Earth before I travelled here, it was that my trans-dimensional transporter was so far ahead of any Earth technology that if any human saw it, their head would explode. (Probably. Like I said, I hadn’t got to grips with human biology yet.) But I needed to bring my trans-dimensional transporter with me, in order to be able to get back

home again. I may not be good at planning, but even I had worked that out.

And if there was one thing I had learnt from my YouTube viewing, it was that loads of humans made slime. From what I could gather from their videos, humans seemed to spend half their time playing with slime, and the rest of it opening boxes. So if I wanted to hide my transporter, slime was the perfect disguise. Or so I thought.

“Why do you keep slime in your pocket?” Zana asked.

“Doesn’t everybody?” I said.

Zana shook her head slowly.

This was how I learnt that you couldn’t always trust what you saw on the internet.

Back in Zana’s bedroom, we returned to her laptop.

“Let Turing and Berners-Lee out if you want,” Zana said, as her fingers danced across the keyboard. “It’s good for them to stretch their legs.”

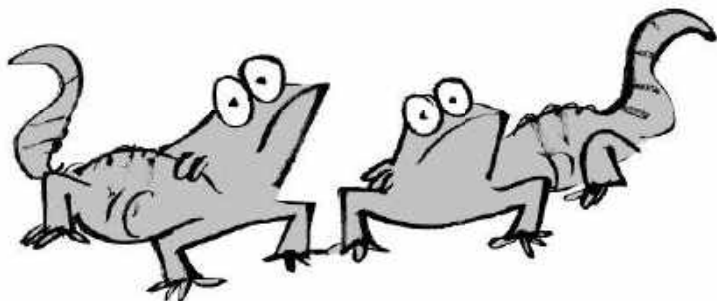
I lifted the two lizards onto the carpet next to us.

“Hello,” I said.

The lizards didn’t reply.

“OK. Here’s your channel. What do you want to call it? I have some ideas.” The Zana-chat was bubbling up again. I had to stop it before it boiled over.

“I don’t care what it’s called,” I interrupted, lowering myself down onto my stomach to get on eye-level with Turing and Berners-Lee. “But I have decided what I want my videos to be about.”





4

“We need to bring back the dinosaurs.”

Zana put her hand up from behind the camera.

“What?”

“That’s it?” She stood up.

“I was going to talk for a bit longer but if you think that’s enough—”

“No, I mean, that’s what you want to talk about?”

I frowned and looked down the lens of the camera that Zana had taken from her parents’ room. She said it was what her mum used when she went birdwatching, as she jabbed the “delete” button repeatedly. She’d positioned me in front of the drapes beneath her bed and fiddled with the position of the lamps around the room, all the while commentating that it would give us a

professional set-up. Now she flicked the lamps off and folded her arms, like I'd wasted her time.

"What's the problem with dinosaurs?" I asked.

"They're dead."

"Exactly. *That's* the problem."

"You have the opportunity to build bridges of understanding between cultures. Most people have never met anyone from Antarctica. You could open their eyes to a part of the world that's suffering the full effects of climate change. We could change the world—"

"I don't want to change the world like that. I want to change it by bringing back the dinosaurs."

Zana flopped back down to the floor. "OK, you're going to have to help me out here, because it seems like you have a very particular sense of humour in Antarctica and I'm not sure I get it."

"I'm being serious."

"And how exactly are you going to bring back the dinosaurs?"

"I thought that's what being a YouTube influencer could help with. I make the suggestion, other people do it. The planet is saved without me

having to do much.”

Zana stared at me. At least I’d discovered a way to stop her talking.

“More importantly,” she said eventually, “*why* do you want to bring back the dinosaurs?”

“Is that a serious question?” I replied. “Look at this planet. It’s a total mess. Everything humans have done is terrible.”

“That’s not true. I mean, yes, there’s war, and climate change, and corruption, and...”

I smiled. “See? The dinosaurs didn’t have any of those things.”

Zana rolled her eyes. “You can’t say no human has ever done anything good in all of history.”

“I’ll have to take your word for that. I don’t know much about human history.”

“That’s the problem, then, isn’t it?” Zana looked pleased with herself. “There’s been lots of good stuff that you just haven’t heard about.” She pulled her laptop towards her, tapped on the keyboard, then spun it to show me. “This YouTube channel is great. It has a crash course in loads of different civilizations through history. You should catch

up. Although,” she glanced at the time, “maybe tomorrow – it’s getting late. I should get the camp bed out for you.”

“What for?”

Zana narrowed her eyes at me. “To sleep on,” she said slowly.

“I don’t want to sleep,” I said, clicking on the first video. “One of your nights is the equivalent of just a few minutes of my time.”

Zana hesitated. “Is there really that much of a time difference between us and Antarctica?”



Zana thought I was bluffing. She got the camp bed out anyway, and I obediently sat on it while I began my history binge. It was the first time I’d willingly tried to add information into my brain, and it wasn’t half as bad as I feared, although I didn’t want to make a habit of it.

By the time Zana’s alarm went off the next morning and she squinted blearily at me to check if I’d moved (I hadn’t), I had digested everything I needed to (including last night’s aubergine, which



my calibrated body had had some trouble working out. I was very glad Zana had been asleep while I discovered an alarming aspect of human existence known as farting).

As Zana hurriedly scribbled her homework on the bus, I sounded her out for my new plan.

“I heard about the space race.”

Zana frowned. “Oh. Yes.”

“It sounds like you can send all sorts into space nowadays.” I could see now that I’d been too quick to judge the human rockets I’d seen through my uniscope.

“Yeah, they’ve explored pretty far...” Zana shoved her maths book into her rucksack and pulled out her geography. “What’s your point?”

“My point is, if I can’t make my project better, I need to make everyone else’s project worse.”

Zana looked up. “It doesn’t count as a point if it’s incomprehensible to the other person.”

“What?”

“I don’t understand what you mean.”

“I mean I need NASA to send something into space for me.”



Zana gave up on her homework. "Please explain."

"As in, a missile. I need them to blow up another planet – more if we have the time."

Without looking up from their newspapers and phones, every single person on the bus chose that exact moment to shuffle as far away from us as they could.



“Before we get into why you would want to blow up another planet – or if that’s even possible – I’d like to make it known that I am a strict pacifist,” Zana said. “Violence is not the answer.”

“I wish it was. If I’d had more time, I could have just wiped out the humans and started again and saved myself a lot of trouble. This is me *not* being violent.”

We pulled into the next bus stop, which turned out to be a very popular destination. Everyone within earshot got off the bus very quickly.

Zana sat very still. One of the YouTube videos I’d watched the night before had been about a famous disaster called the Titanic. The expression on her face looked just like the one the lookout had when he realized there was an iceberg up ahead.

“Sky. I understand that different countries can often develop their own sense of humour. But – without wanting to be culturally insensitive – I think you might need to tone it down. Sometimes it’s hard to tell what the joke is.”

I gave a solemn nod. It was easier than arguing.

“If you’re interested in space, we have a group

research project this term. Maybe we could do that together?” Her face looked strange all of a sudden. It was an emotion I would later know as shyness. “If you don’t mind being paired with me, of course. I understand if you’d rather—”

“OK.”

“Really? You don’t mind being in a group with me?”

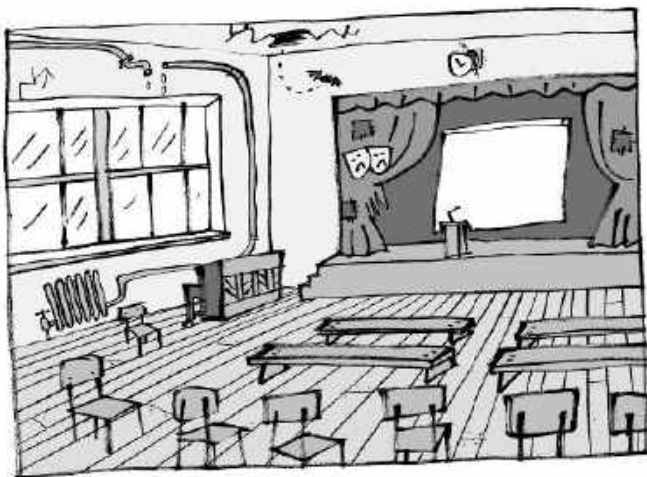
“Well, no one else at school will talk to me.”

Zana sighed. “Me neither.”

Our first stop at school was something called “assembly”. We didn’t have these back home. From what I could tell, the idea behind them was to get as many pupils as possible together in the same room at once, to make it easier to bore them all at the same time.

The hall where the assembly was held was on the edge of the school grounds. I’d borrowed some of Zana’s old school uniform, so I now had a jumper to protect me from the October weather, but the hall was the first building I’d been inside that somehow managed to be colder than outside.





“The heating is broken,” Zana explained. “It’s been broken for as long as I can remember, actually.”

“Heating?” I asked.

Zana’s eyebrows raised so high they nearly got lost in her blue hair. “You cannot tell me you don’t have heating in Antarctica. It’s the coldest place on the planet!”

Before I could make up a bad lie, we were distracted by a commotion. Something small, black and flappy was careering about above our heads.

“Not again,” Zana sighed.

“What is it?”

“A bat,” said Zana. Mr Martins, the Year 6 teacher, grabbed a net and wafted it in the general direction

of the bat. The bat ignored him. "Our hall may not have any heating, but it does have a bat problem."

Mr Martins managed to chase the bat out through the hall doors. We waited, but Mr Martins didn't come back in.



"Did the bat kill him?" I gasped.

"No, he'll be using this as a good excuse to sneak off for a coffee," Zana replied.

A woman was climbing onto the stage in front of our rows of chairs.

"That's Ms Ashworth," Zana explained. "She's the Head."

I wanted to ask what the body was called, but I was distracted by Ms Ashworth pulling down a rolled-up screen on the back wall. It pinged back up as soon as she let go of it. She tried again. It did it again. I wondered if this would be the whole assembly.

"Miss Shepherd!" the woman hissed, and another woman in a huge cardigan scurried up onto



the stage and held onto the bottom of the screen.

“Don’t let go.”

While Miss Shepherd crouched at the back of the stage and pretended she wasn’t there, the other woman tapped on her laptop until a projection appeared on the screen.

I had watched a lot of YouTube by now. I thought I’d seen all that human technology had to offer. But I was not prepared for what I was about to witness.

“Good morning, Oak Lane!” the woman said. “We’ll keep this assembly brief, as I’m sure all of you are a little chilly. I’d like to show you all the final plans that have just arrived from the architect for our brand-new school hall!”

The pupils around me chattered with excitement. The woman tapped her laptop, and the image on the screen dissolved, to be replaced with a picture of a large building. But that wasn’t all. Colourful writing zoomed onto the screen:

**FULLY AIR-CONDITIONED! TOP-OF-THE-RANGE  
ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM WITH SURROUND SOUND!**

When she moved onto the next picture, labelled **“HEATED SWIMMING POOL!”**, the image whizzed about the screen before settling in place.

“This is *incredible*,” I whispered to Zana.

“It’s great, isn’t it? We’ve needed a new hall for ages. I can’t wait to try out the jacuzzi—”

“No, not that,” I interrupted. “This video!”

“Oh, it’s not a video. It’s a PowerPoint.”

“*Power... Point*,” I repeated. “Amazing. I never saw anything on YouTube like this.”

“That’s because no one has bothered making these since the 1990s. Ms Ashworth is so out of touch.”

I didn’t bother arguing with Zana. Humans clearly couldn’t recognize the good things about their planet, or they wouldn’t have got rid of the dinosaurs. If Zana ever let me have another go at becoming a YouTube influencer, I’d be sure to use this PowerPoint idea. For now, it was time to try my next plan.







It wasn't until the afternoon that Zana and I got to start work on our group project. Before then, I had to sit through more lessons of no importance to me or, judging by everyone else's facial expressions, anyone else.

Finally, we were allowed into the computer lab for our "collaboration period". The other pupils gathered together in larger groups, and I peered at them as we walked past. One group was making portraits of important leaders from history, only for some reason they'd decided to make them out of cake, which Rude Jaden kept eating. Another group was discussing how to choreograph an interpretive dance about something called the periodic table. A smaller group of three pupils