SPACE DETECTIVES

COSMIC PET PUZZLE

Books by Mark Powers

The 

series

Illustrated by Dapo Adeola

Space Detectives
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DAPO ADEOLA

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To Gareth Kavanagh,
happy times and places

With thanks to Jo, Kate, Zöe,
Dapo, Fran & David Slack
and all at Bloomsbury
– Mark

To all our readers, adventurers and
aspiring ***Space Detectives*** out there,
thank you so much for reading our books
and showing love ☺
– Dapo

PROLOGUE

What a confusing place this Starville is! thought the stranger. So different to the far-off planet it called home. While on that planet the rain fell whenever it felt like it, on the space station Starville it only ever rained on Thursday afternoons between 3.00 p.m. and 3.15 p.m. And while the stranger's planet was populated with plants it recognised, like five-leafed fire-nettles, Starville was overflowing with thousands of different species from every corner of the galaxy.



It was an awful lot to get used to.

The stranger suddenly felt very lonely. It wondered whether it would ever make any friends in this bizarre new place. *Oh well*, it thought, *I'll never know unless I try …*







Chapter 1
Smurble

'Wowowowowow!' barked Smurble, and pelted after the stick that Alfie had thrown along the leaf-strewn path.

It was a pleasant afternoon for a stroll in Starville Botanical Gardens. The sun was shining and the air was filled with the scents of flowers and plants collected from a hundred different alien worlds: little Neptunian shark-daisies, glittering rock orchids from Venus, vast elephant-sized murk-blooms from Cygnus B.

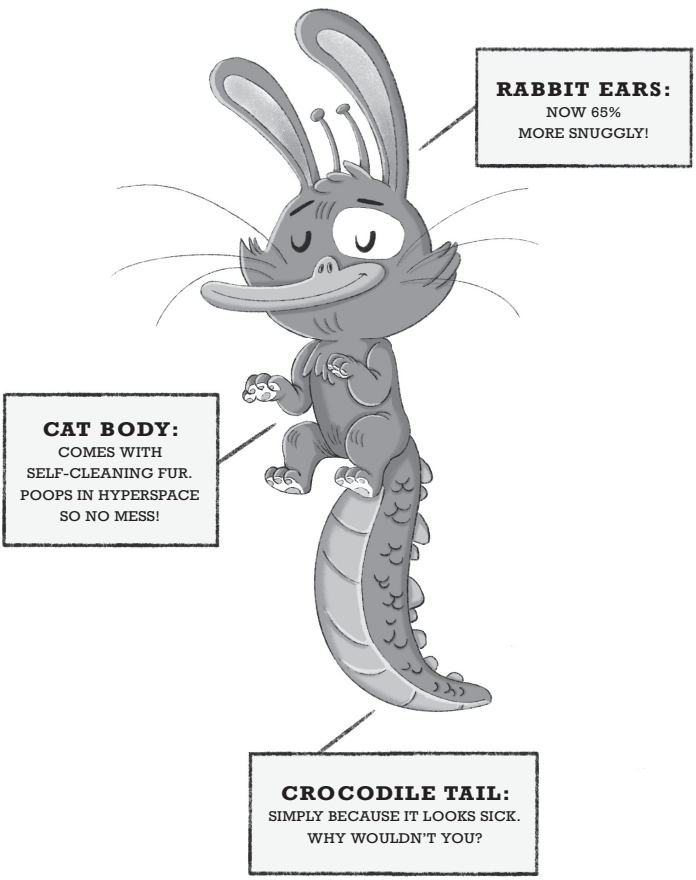
Skidding to a halt, Smurble picked up the

stick in his bill and trotted back towards his master, his long scaly tail swishing back and forth with happiness.

'Good boy!' said Alfie, wrenching the stick from Smurble's bill and ruffling the fur behind his large pointed ears. Smurble chirruped and clicked contentedly. Alfie flung the stick away again and watched as Smurble bounded happily after it, his tail sending up little blizzards of leaves.

Alfie was the first kid in his school to own a Synthpet, a fact that made him extremely proud and all his classmates extremely jealous. Synthpets were the latest craze on Starville. They were extraordinary artificial creatures made in laboratories by combining the DNA of different animals. You simply selected the animal parts you required from a long list a bit like a menu (otter's body with a rhino's head and writhing green

tentacles? No problem!) and the scientists at FluffyCorp Inc pressed a few buttons on their incredible DNA-printer machine. A few seconds later, out popped whatever bizarre form of life you had requested, all ready to take home and name.



Smurble was Alfie's Synthpet. He had the body and legs of a cat, a duck's bill, long rabbit-like ears, a pair of constantly twitching antennae and the scaly tail of a crocodile. He followed Alfie everywhere, made the strangest collection of noises Alfie had ever heard – from quacks to barks and grasshopper-like chirrups – and could do all manner of fun tricks like somersaults and walking on his hind legs. Alfie adored him.

Smurble had been a birthday present. Usually Alfie's birthday presents were nothing to get excited about – a deck of 3-D playing cards or a ticket to Starville Space Zoo. But this year, for his eleventh birthday, his parents had decided to get him something really special.

After racing back to Alfie with the stick, Smurble suddenly halted and raised his head, chirruping softly. His long antennae

began to wave excitedly back and forth.

'What's up, boy?' asked Alfie. 'Can you hear something?'

He took a step towards Smurble. There was a strange rustling nearby. A large shadow loomed overhead. Alfie looked up, his eyes widening in fear and astonishment, and gave a scream as everything suddenly turned black …

