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Opening extract from

Letters from an Alien Schoolboy

Written by

Ros Asquith

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Letters from an Alien Schoolboy

EARTHLINGS, PLEASE PAY ATTENTION. This is a cosmic book. Open it at random. Select a word within ten lines from the top and within the first ten words of that line. MAKE A NOTE OF IT. Then double the number of that page, multiply the result by five, add thirty, add the number of the line you selected, add five, multiply by ten, add the number of the word in the line, take away three hundred and fifty, and the remainder will give you the page number, line and word in that order (sorry about this Rokbumme, but it is the sort of thing Earthlings find awfully brainy).

To Lenny Bruce

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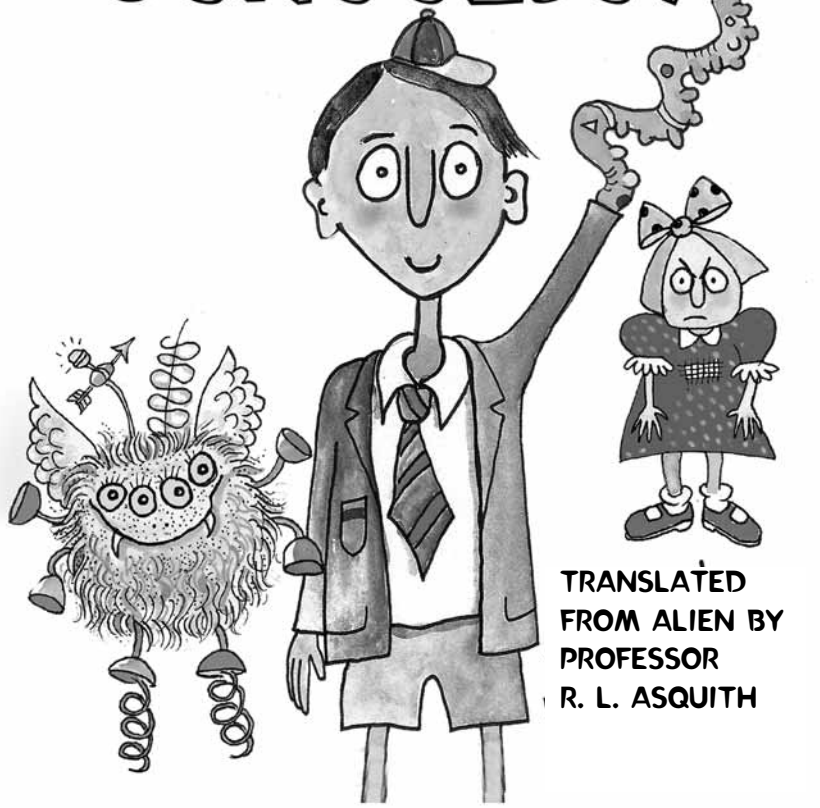
LETTERS from an ALIEN SCHOOLBOY



TRANSLATED FROM ALIEN BY PROFESSOR R. L. ASQUITH

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MISSION EARTH: DAY ONE SUNDAY

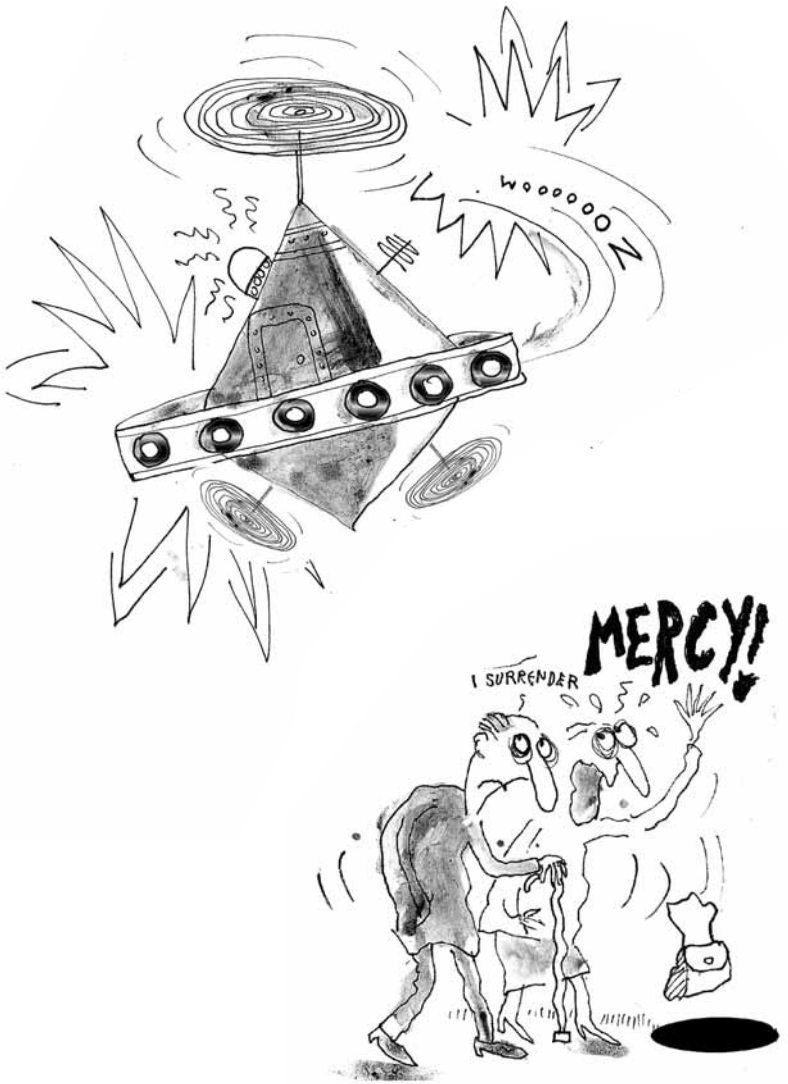
Measly Dwelling
Row of Identical Dwellings
Tiny 'Country' Called England
Misshapen Islands Called Britain
Insignificant Dot Called Earth
Feeble Solar System
Forty-third Galaxy from the Right
Virgo Supercluster
Wrong End of the Universe

Dear Rokbumme,

Here we are squashed inside a repulsive 'house' on the most ill-tempered, ugly planet in the Universe – Earth. The weather is grey and freezing, which is not surprising since Earth has only one sun, and that seems to be covered up most of the time with wet floating blobs called 'clouds'.

I am as cold as a *ploogle* and as cross as a bagful of *scratchflackets*.

We arrived here unsafely, nearly beheading two ancient Earthlings, which was all the pilot's fault.



Our unsafe arrival

Flyzoop crossed eighty-two galaxies on the way here without once watching where he was going. It's amazing we got here at all.

We were all trying to relax in the spacecraft's comfort zone, and make the most of our last few days as Faathings before we had to put on our Earth disguises. We were eating the remains of a toasted *flaaark* we'd picked up at that fuel station just to the left of the Crab Nebula, playing pong-ping, flexing our suckers and twirling our antennae – when dozy old Flyzoop screamed,

'METEOR ATTACK! FIRE ALL MISSILES!'

Me and my sister Farteeta looped over to the vision zone and there it was – a huge blue meteor heading straight for us! Our in-flight robot, Bertiolboomflinglebuntusdyoliusfloopfloop (I'll just call him Bert from now on) went mental.

'That's not a meteor, that's Earth you **********!'* he said. And it's not heading for us, we're heading for it.'

Bert rolled down the central aisle, smashing up all the seating and ripping our pong-ping net to shreds. I've never seen him move so fast. He tore the controls out of Flyzoop's suckers and zapped all twelve *ABORT* buttons. Too late – one missile had already launched. We watched it zooming towards Earth.

'That's our mission finished before it's begun,' said Papa.

It turned out Flyzoop's aim is as hopeless as his piloting. The missile shot past Earth and exploded on an even more insignificant dot called Pluto.

'I don't think Pluto is inhabited,' said Papa. 'At least, not by intelligent life as we know it. But then neither is Earth.'

** Editor's note: This book may be read by younglings. Please insert the word 'nincompoop'.*

ANTI-GRAVITY BLASTERS ON! ACTIVATE ANTI-MATTER SHIELDS! INITIATE REPULSION MAGNET! MOBILISE HOVER MODE!

Bert was a blur of flashing lights and robot arms spinning in all directions. It was just as well we'd brought him with us, because Flyzoop was crouching in the cockpit with his suckers covering all seventeen eyeballs and moaning, 'We're going to *die*! I want my mums.'

Earth hurtled closer – a horrible sight.

'Back in the days of the Eighth and Ninth Quadratic Wars there were real pilots, who could land a burning battle cruiser even if two of their heads and most of their arms had been shot off,' said Papa. 'But this *flurfling* apology for a pilot even forgot to switch on the anti-matter shields!'

He messaged back to Faa: *Mission aborted. We are about to die. Goodbye*.

Mama and Farteeta looped about uselessly. Pluke and I helped Bert, because I am brave, as a true Faathing should be, and because Pluke is my noble pet who would lay down his life for me.

We managed to activate the Hover Mode just four metres from Earth's surface, and the hover blades missed the ancient Earthlings by 0.2 centimetres and set light to a bunch of 'trees' (unfriendly green vegetables, not a bit like the chatty *urqflurbles* in which you and I first learned to climb back home on Faa.) None of us could find the memory-blaster in time to wipe the memories of the two old Earthlings, but luckily for us, once the anti-matter shields were up, we became invisible, so it didn't matter how much they shouted and screamed about an alien attack, because no other Earthlings believed them.

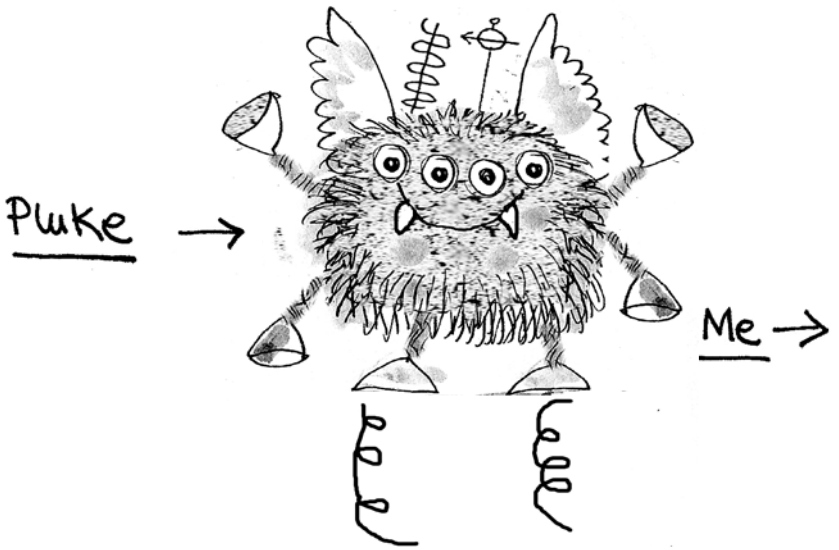
So now we've transformed into our Earthling disguises and are 'settling in' to our unpleasant

dwelling. All you can see from its portholes are rows of identical dwellings and grey 'streets'.

The first message from home was your mindscan of me and Pluke on Faa just before I left.

Thanks for that, although it makes my hearts ache to look at it.

See? Back on Faa, even my sad face looks happy.



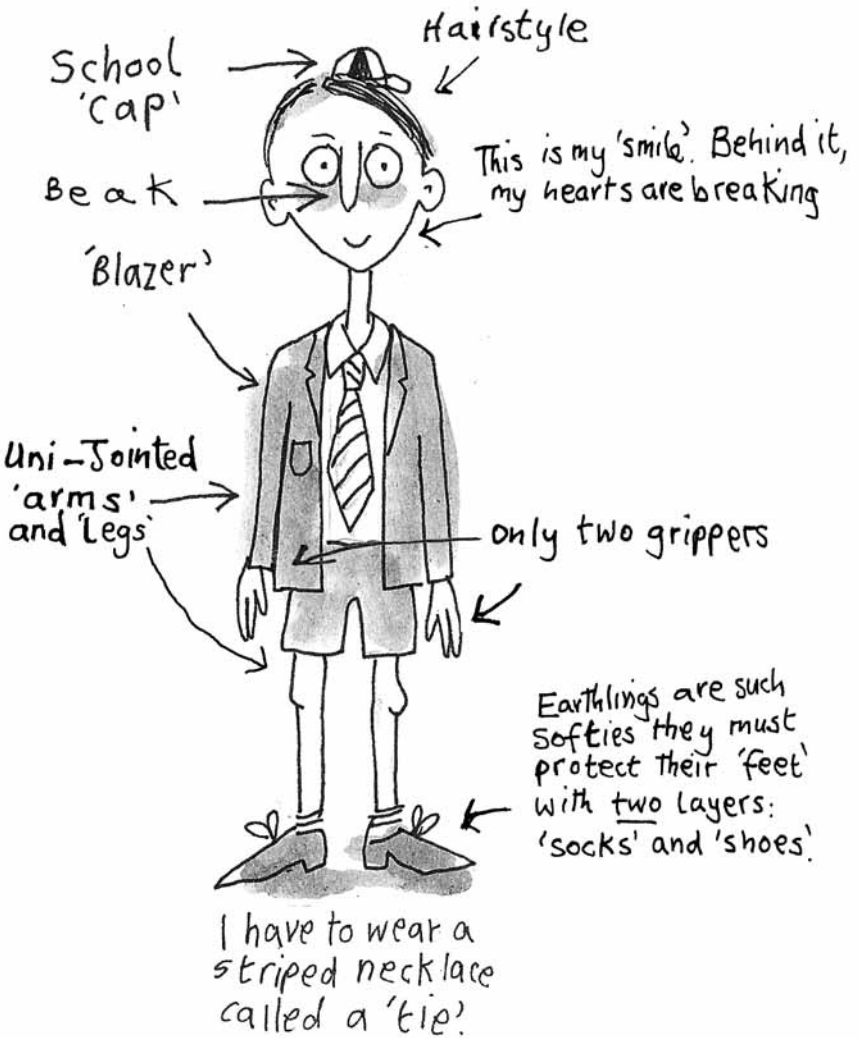
Now I look like this.

So you see the awful truth – *Earthlings have only one head.* No wonder they're so stupid.

And just two eyeballs. And those face *forwards*.

Earthlings start out in life less equipped than our most primitive *fluits* but think they're the most advanced species in the Universe.

I'm supposed to be here, looking like this, for a whole Earth *month*.



And I have to wear tubes and flaps called ‘clothes’.

'Cap' to keep 'head' from getting a cold

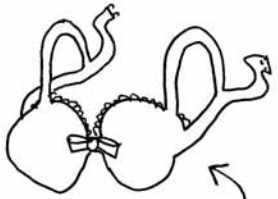
'Shirt'

'Buttons'
Don't even think about these

'sock'

'sock' again

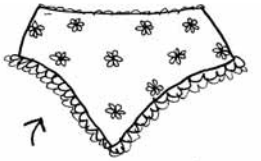
'Vest'



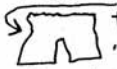
Chest protector ('Bra')
you have to fasten this at the back, using uni-jointed arms. Impossible.
Tip: Male Earthlings do not wear these. Thank Klong I discovered before I had to change for PE

'Tie' to keep head on neck

'Shorts' place on top of 'underpants' (why?)



'Underpants'
There is only one of these, so why don't they call it an 'underpant?'
Tip: If you ever come to Earth, Klong forbid, make sure you do not wear the above. Wear these instead,



they are called 'Boxers' after Earthling warriors.

'Belt'
Joins 'legs' to 'body'

'shoe'

Other 'shoe'

Earthlings can't grow fur like us. A lot of other creatures on their planet can, but Earthlings look down on them as inferior.

You've no idea how awful it is here, Rokbumme. Just think – you wake up in the morning expecting everything to be the same as usual, ready to unfold your aerials, give the old heads a bit of a scratch, rub your seventeen eyeballs . . . Then you realise you've got to say goodbye to normality because you're not yourself any more, you're a freak with just one head, two eyeballs, four limbs and no aerials at all. Sounds like a nightmare, doesn't it? Only it's real life!

But that's only the beginning. Then you've got to 'get dressed'.

The instruction manuals are useless.

You should have seen me the first time I tried to put clothes on – trousers over head, on both arms, on legs upside down, you name it. I even had the

Our instruction manuals for 'getting dressed' are very confusing. It took me six Earth hours to put on a sock.

underpants-over-the-head in the trousers-upside-down phase.

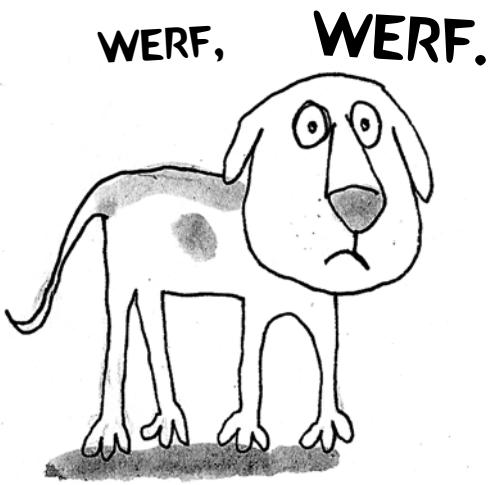
What a waste of time! You could visit the Pleiades for a game of *snaaark*, stop off to

download an encyclopaedia or two at the Infinite Knowledge Base by the Timeless Labyrinths' burger bar, and even drop by Aqua Orbius 9 for a quick swim before breakfast, in the time it takes to get dressed here.

Mama and Papa have given me an Earth name – Hoover Bogey Nigel Custard Toilet Hercules Namby Pamby Harmonica Hedgehog Coldplay Bugspray CroMagnon Colander Junior. I like it, but Papa says he thinks it might be best if Earthlings just call me 'Nigel'. They did a check on all the books written about Earthlings by the cleverest humans, averaged out all the names given to the human species, and threw in a couple of other randomly selected names as wild cards. So that's what I ended up with.

Poor little Pluke has had the worst of the deal – his Earth disguise is that of a horrible smelly human pet called a 'dog'.

He has to run up and down with his mouth drooling spit, cough all the time when he isn't ill (they call it 'barking' here, but it's just the same) and drop waste products all over the place. The sound Pluke makes is like *oozles* mating, and it goes like this:



Pluke's Earth name is Rhubarb. I am beginning to wish I hadn't begged Papa to bring him, he looks so sad.

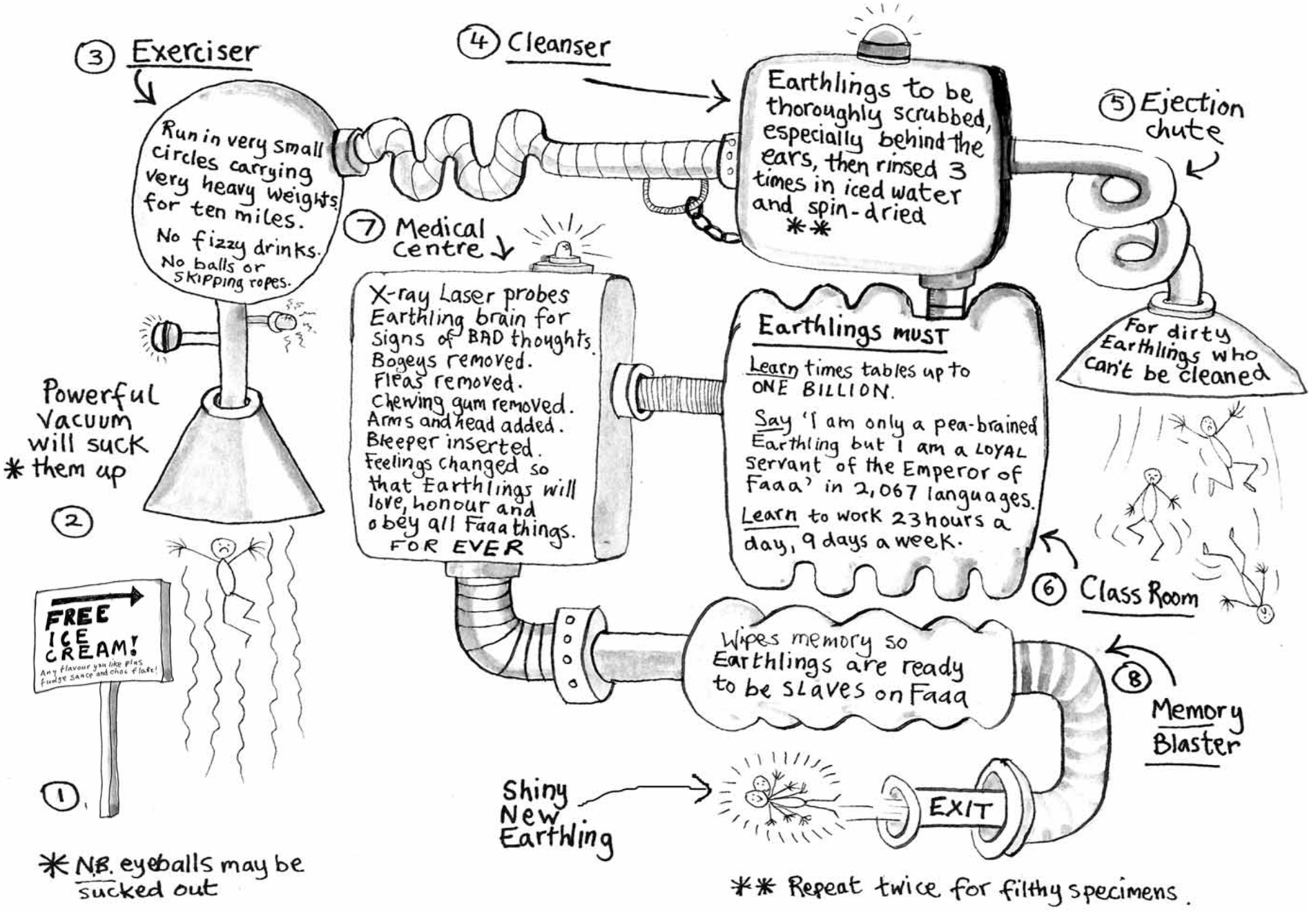
My annoying little sister Farteeta is furious because she has to be an Earthling toddler called Sultana Toilet Hercules Namby Pamby Harmonica Hedgehog Coldplay Bugspray Cro-Magnon Colander, but wants another name too.

'IT'S NOT FAIR! I WANT TO BE CALLED NIGEL!'

Tomorrow I have to start my own special mission – going to a 'school' to collect Earthlings for Papa. Remember that collection of *flonkblatters* I used to have, and you used to ask why I bothered to collect such a low form of life? Well, eat your words, Rokbumme my old friend. *Flonkblatters* could stand on all their heads at once, blow stuff out of their beaks in an interesting range of colours, perform brain surgery on each other, and a quontillian other things. It isn't like that with Earthlings – they do nothing worth studying at all.

Still, all is not lost for them, because now they're about to be Improved, and that's why I have to collect them.

Papa's machine for Improving Earthlings is amazing. And Papa says it can do other top secret things that only he and the Emperor's Secretive Services know about.


③ Exerciser
Run in very small circles carrying very heavy weights for ten miles.
No fizzy drinks.
No balls or skipping ropes.
④ Cleanser
Earthlings to be thoroughly scrubbed, especially behind the ears, then rinsed 3 times in iced water and spin-dried **
⑤ Ejection chute
For dirty Earthlings who can't be cleaned
⑦ Medical Centre
X-ray Laser probes Earthling brain for signs of BAD thoughts.
Bogeys removed.
Fleas removed.
Chewing gum removed.
Arms and head added.
Bleeper inserted.
Feelings changed so that Earthlings will love, honour and obey all Faaa things.
FOR EVER
Earthlings MUST
Learn times tables up to ONE BILLION.
Say 'I am only a pea-brained Earthling but I am a LOYAL servant of the Emperor of Faaa' in 2,067 languages.
Learn to work 23 hours a day, 9 days a week.
⑥ Class Room
Powerful Vacuum will suck * them up
②
FREE ICE CREAM!
Any flavour you like plus fudge sauce and choc flake!
①
Wipes memory so Earthlings are ready to be slaves on Faaa
⑧ Memory Blaster
Shiny New Earthling
EXIT
* N.B. eyeballs may be sucked out
** Repeat twice for filthy specimens.

When Farteeta saw the Improver she asked, 'Will it hurt?'

'Not much,' said Papa. 'Earthlings don't have feelings like we do – either physical or emotional. They can't even look happy and furious simultaneously. They're hardly more intelligent than our pets.'

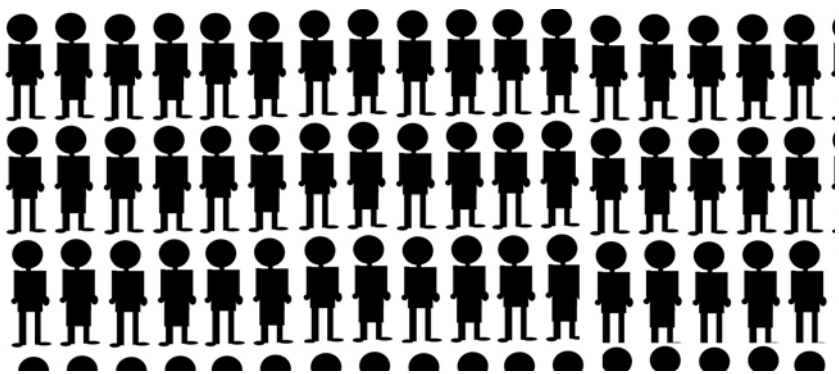
Pluke started barking so hard at this insult that his dog form began to dissolve. We'll have to be careful about this – there's a primitive brain confusion Earthlings get here called 'stress'. It seems to affect us too. Stress and excitement cause problems with our disguises. Anyway, Pluke's four eyeballs had appeared and his springs were growing back – he looked very happy, let me tell you – before we gave him a drink of *Vom*. (Thank *Klong* for *Vom*, the transforming liquid we must always carry in case our disguises slip.) It really won't do if we get discovered just because Pluke has no mental discipline.

'Do Earthlings get the free ice cream at the end?' said Farteeta.

'Of course not,' replied Papa, smiling.

'And what happens when they go down the ejection chute? Do they blow up?'

'Good question,' said Papa. 'They will probably scream very loudly, but I don't think they will explode. Anyway, there are plenty more of them – this planet is very overpopulated. There are 6,934,171,924 people here now.'*

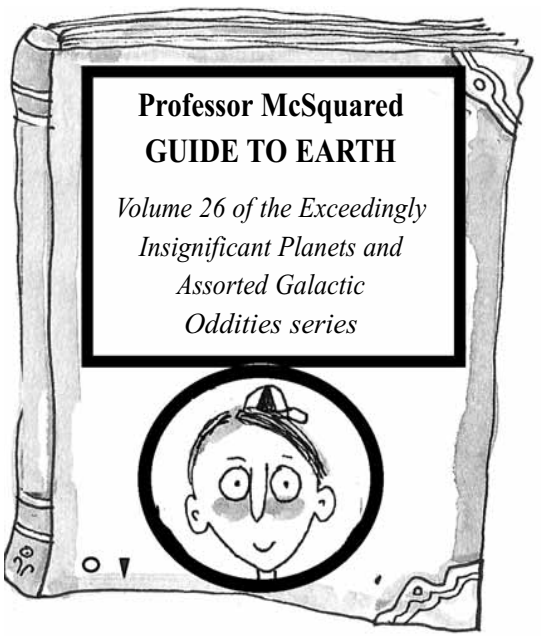


** The Earthling population goes up by one every second. So now it will be 6,934,171,932.*

Papa was frowning at his Universe population calculator. He gave it a whack. 'Hmmm. That's very high. Either this is wrong or we're in a different year.'

'It's all very well for you with your Improvers and calculators. I've got to iron the teacups!' Mama shouted, brandishing a long pole.

'That's not an iron, that's a broom,' sighed Papa, consulting his copy or Professor McSquared's *Guide to Earth*.



This is the Earthling I based my 'look' on →

'That *querfling* McSquared,' he fumed. 'He's good on imperial dynasties, worm-holes, dark matter, hyper-maths, even Earth clothes for some reason, but he only gives two pages to all this stuff about teacups and irons and pillows, because he's just not interested in it.'

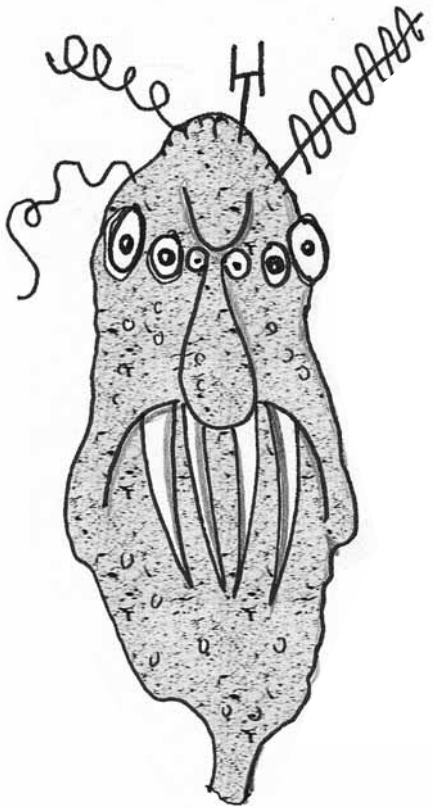
'Typical professor – hasn't a clue what a kitchen's for,' Mama said, as if she had the slightest idea herself. She hates the idea of being an Earth 'housewife' because apparently they're supposed to spend all day cleaning and flattening clothes. Normally she would be fanning herself in a nice pool of *aquanium*, ordering the slaves about, and now she has to do everything for herself – how exhausting. But here, we have to follow the Rules (*Interplanetary Health and Safety Guide to Exploring Other Planets*, p.981) and live as Earthlings do. But it is only half a life, Rokbumme. No – a quadzillionth of a life.

Even our month's training didn't prepare us for spending a whole day squashed together in a tiny 'house' as a 'family'. There is no space to whirl or loop. Frankly, I would rather spend a day *flooshple-blooping* than spend another day here.

And tomorrow, it's school. My task this week, Rokbumme, is to make a friend and lure him home 'for tea' so Papa can try out his Improver. If it works OK, then Papa's going to Improve all Earthlings, by making them cleverer. He says their feeble systems couldn't stand being boosted up to our level of intelligence, but he thinks they can be enhanced by a factor of one hundred. This should make them understand the errors of their ways so that they will stop fighting the World War and therefore have peace on Earth. Papa says even deadly dull planets like Earth should be saved if possible, to preserve the 'bio-diversity of the Universe'. If the mission works, then Papa will get a medal from the

Intergalactic Secretive Services Committee presented by the Emperor himself! We'll bring a few of the very best Earthlings back as slaves, too, so we'll never have to *bloople* a *flooshple* ever again.

Bert came into my room earlier, bleeping and buzzing. He has got a room to himself, but he isn't settling. He is even more lonely than us, with no robots to talk to and nothing within a quadzillion light years with a brain like his. He says he has been having visions of Threggs. Remember how your great-great-great grandpa gave us nightmares describing their oily purple faces? And how he told us they liked to eat sweet little Hunnybeams, the kindest creatures in all the galaxies? Threggs can't even digest Hunnybeams, they just enjoy seeing their little legs waving about. But I've been reading about Threggs and they're even worse than I thought.



Thregg: *Defeated by brave and noble Faathings in the Sixth Quadratic Wars.*

Papa says this shows a Thregg looking HAPPY. Why? He has just consumed 40 Kilos of spinach and 25 HUNNYBEAMS

THREGGS

Most destructive species in the Universe. Nastier than Klygons and Slxxgkpqrs combined but less subtle.

Colour: Purple with small turquoise pustules. Beige underbelly, pink overbelly.

Limbs: Forty-five posterior tentacles, sixty-eight anterior tentacles.

Heads: Singular.

Brain: Singular, therefore minimal.

Vision: Moderate (six frontal eyeballs, twin rear periscopes).

Velocity: Maximum.

Strength: Considerable.

Hearing: Acute. (Used the Noisy Neighbours legislation of the Second Quadratic period to justify their destruction of adjacent galaxies.)

Habits: Indescribable (see adults only section, p.9400).

Other notes: Addiction to spinach, an edible flowering vegetable. Once common, now almost extinct. Still prolific on only five small planets: Gleriz-boccoboppalus 20, DR2zz, Plim, Quaquaquoque, Thrubb. And, possibly, Earth.

I reminded Bert that we defeated the Threggs way back in the Sixth Quadratic Wars, before he was even a microchip, which seemed to calm him down. I think we made a mistake when we programmed Bert to have feelings.

Talking of which, I'm really missing Mum and Dad, as well as Mummy and Daddy and Mother and Father, although don't tell them or they'll think I'm not noble and brave. It is weird being here with only two parents and my most annoying sister. But that is how lots of Earthlings live.

Your friend
till *flooshples*
learn
self-respect.
Flowkwee