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Opening extract from

Letters from an Alien Schoolboy: Cosmic Custard

Written by

Ros Asquith

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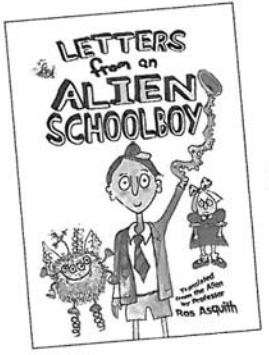
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Ros Asquith started out as a photographer, became a theatre critic for *Time Out*, *City Limits*, and *The Observer* before emerging as a cartoonist. She draws regularly for *The Guardian* and has written and illustrated over sixty books.

Ros lives in London with her jazz critic partner and two sons. She has stroked a tiger, cuddled a wolf, caught an escaped tarantula and juggled in a circus, but mostly prefers reading, eating fudge and learning the violin.



Find out what happened on Flowkwee's first trip to Earth!

LETTERS from an ALIEN SCHOOLBOY

Cosmic Custard



Uncorrected Book Proof

Translated from Alien by Professor R.L.Asquith

Piccadilly Press • London

TO LOLA BRUCE

and with big thanks to
my lovely editor Ruth Williams,
my excellent husband John Fordham
and my dear agent Rosemary Canter

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Cosmic Custard

Earthlings are hopeless duffers who cannot balance a ball on their beaks like the friendly seal, or open a packet of 'crisps' without them exploding. BUT FEAR NOT! The grown up ones are about to be Improved.

Get your aunties, dads, uncles, mums, teachers, grannies and grandpas to follow the instructions on our magnificent Improver – the machine for Improving Earthlings – and they will be Improved beyond their wildest dreams. This means you, my friendly reader, will be allowed to stay up all night eating sweeties.



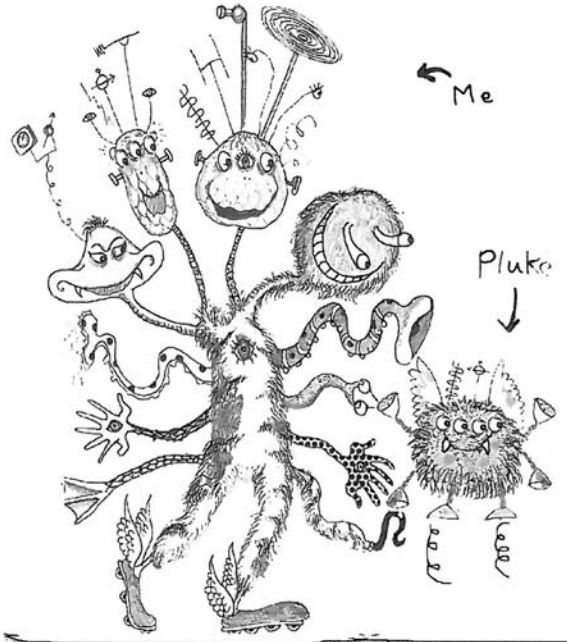
MISSION EARTH:
DAY ONE - THURSDAY

Same old Measly Dwelling
Row of Identical Dwellings
Titchy 'country' called England
Insignificant Blob called Earth
Small, dim Solar System
Forty-third Galaxy from the Right
Virgo Supercluster
Still at the Wrong End of the Universe

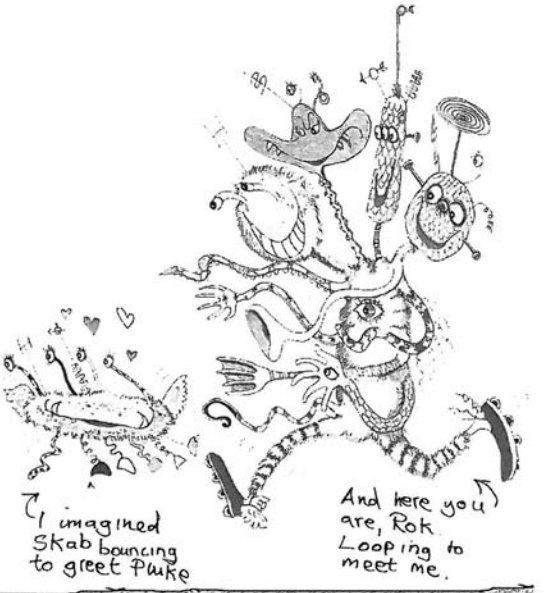
But at least we're not still inside Cell 9,000, Vilest Prison in Universe.

Dear Rok,

Bad news – we're not coming home to Planet Faa yet. I was longing to wrap seven tentacles around all my mums and dads again. And I couldn't wait to see you, my dear old friend.



I imagined this magical scene.



Instead, we're back on the freezing, grumpy old spaceblob Earth – the *flarrmsnaarg* ('armpit' is the Earth word for it) of the Universe.

Here are the full horrible details.

Flyzoop, the Worst Pilot Since The Big Bang, was flying the spaceship back to Faa at well over the three kazillion light-years-per-second speed limit, as usual. I was just hoping we didn't get stopped for speeding when the in-flight panic signal told us something was wrong.

'ENEMY APPROACHING! REVERSE INTO FOURTH DIMENSION!' bleeped our trusty robot *Bertiolboom-flinglebuntusdyoliusfloopfloop*. (I always call him Bert for short.)

Flyzoop lost his heads as soon as he heard Bert. He flung up his suckers, whimpering, **'I surrender! They made me do it.'**

The door imploded and six savage *barflesplurkers*, dribbling luminous slime, burst in followed by



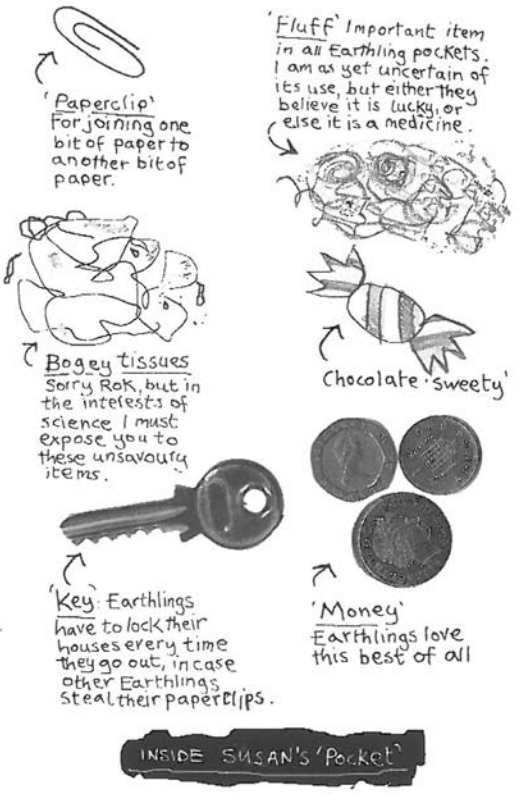
customs officials pointing those weapons that can vaporise all four of your heads at once.

'Citizens of Faa! You are a disgrace to the name of his Holy-roly-poliness the Emperor! You have betrayed his mighty cause and landed yourselves in the soup.'

My sister Farteeta and me hid behind Bert, pulling Susan with us. Susan is my Earthling friend who we were bringing back to Faa.

'We have reason to believe you have an illegal Earthling on board,' snarled the chief, spotting Susan cowering behind Bert and yanking her out. 'Hah! Just as we thought – a puny Earthling. The worst kind too – from England,' he muttered, holding his nationality-scanner at full tentacle length, as though she was infectious. Then he spoke to her in perfect English: 'Where are your documents?'

Susan emptied her 'pockets' (peculiar pouches Earthlings use to carry their important stuff) but there was no intergalactic passport in there.



The chief used all his four heads to snuffle the chocolate, making slurping noises like an Earthling at lunch.



'Anyway, you're all nicked, me old *flackersnicks*,' he said when he'd finished.

'We can sort this out,' said Papa, drawing himself up to his full eight metres. 'The Earthling is just accompanying us home to Faa for a short visit —'

'SILENCE when you speak to an Imperial Officer,' the chief yelled. 'They all pretend it's a visit, then they steal our jobs and our homes and before you know it they're everywhere. It'll have to be deported.'

He turned to Susan. 'You are under arrest. I warn you that everything will be taken down and used in evidence, including your socks.'

'Will I be sent back to Earth?' asked Susan, happily.

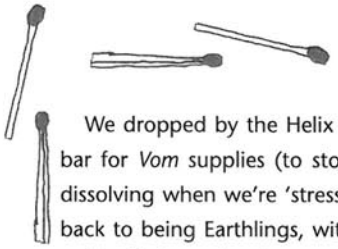
'Punished first. Maybe we'll make you walk the plank into the well of despair, where there are no mobile phones or hairdryers. Unless you have more cocoa solids?'

But Susan didn't have any more chocolate so we were all bundled into a prison cell on the police ship.

Papa messaged home to explain the situation to the Secretive Services he works for, hoping they could explain to the customs officials that we'd been on a secret mission. They were not pleased.

YOU HAVE CAUGHT ONE FEEBLE EARTHLING? YOUR MISSION WAS TO CAPTURE AND IMPROVE HUNDREDS OF EARTHLINGS FOR USE AS SLAVES ON FAA! RETURN TO EARTH IMMEDIATELY TO DO YOUR DUTY. HAIL TO THE EMPEROR.

'Shame, it would've been fun to make 'em walk the plank,' said the chief, shoving us back into our spacecraft.



We dropped by the Helix Nebula's Happy-Snax bar for *Vom* supplies (to stop our Earth disguises dissolving when we're 'stressed'). Then we shrank back to being Earthlings, with just one head, four useless limbs and only two eyeballs.

I have to be a schoolboy again, called Hoover Bogey Nigel Custard Toilet Hercules Namby Pamby Harmonica Hedgehog Coldplay Bugspray Cro-Magnon Colander Junior (Nigel Colander for short). And I have to pretend to have a brain that can't even price up the kids' menu at a fly-in *flaaark* branch, let alone begin to think about why time bends.

'It's nice to have you back as Nigel,' said Susan. 'You're really scary as Flowkweewee or whatever.'

I don't think she liked my four handsome heads, or my suckers.

Flyzoop dropped us off an hour after we'd left Earth, using the space/time coordinates that Earthlings have no clue about. (They cannot do even the most basic time travel, not even a second forwards!)

'It's still Thursday!' said Susan. 'My mum won't even know I've been gone.'

Farteeta pointed the memory blaster at her. 'And neither will you.'

'It won't work now she's been out of Earth's atmosphere,' said Papa. 'What *do* they teach you in school? Anyway, no one will believe Susan if she says she's been in a spaceship with a bunch of four-headed aliens and a giant robot.'

So here we are, back in our wretched little Earth 'rooms' called 'bath' or 'kitchen'. Earthlings are fonder of their rooms than they are of their own children. They are always buying them presents of curtains (for shutting out moonlight!!) and carpets (to warm their floors) and complicated furnitures.

Remember how cold Earth was? Well, it's worse now. Mama is trying to light a warmer-upper with primitive twigs called 'matches'. She is rubbing

