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Opening extract from

Aliens Stink!

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Published by

Simon & Schuster Children's Books

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For Tobey & Amy
Little G

For Random Dad aka 'Papa-Razzi'
Jim Field

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ZERO

I sat frozen on the bed. Staring.

Three dark eyes stared back

and winked at me in sequence.

There was a living creature in my holdall.

It was like nothing on Earth.

It was **ALIEN.**

ALIEN, I TELL YOU!

But to be honest, I'm getting ahead of myself. We shouldn't really meet the **ALIEN** until page **76**.

DON'T FLICK THERE NOW TO SEE!

(Or if you must, be quick, OK?)

I need to tell you

how the whole thing came to happen.

And **YOU**

need to turn the page.

PART ONE

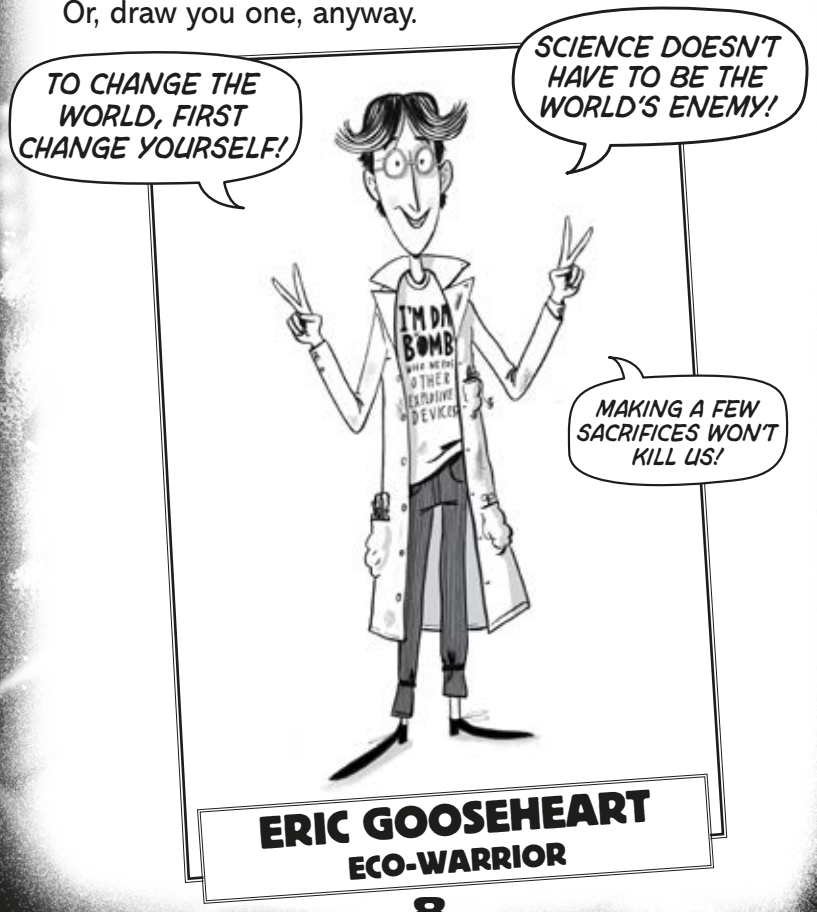
MY DAD, FIST-FACE and the early stages of the cosmic crisis soon to endanger our world

(and me)

ONE

Let me paint you a little picture of my dad and me.

Or, draw you one, anyway.





"How hard can it be?" you're thinking. "So your dad cycles around the place, hugs a few trees, goes on protest marches . . ."

YOU'RE THINKING WRONG.

I can see I need to give you examples.



Take our house for instance.

I always wished someone would. The binmen, if possible.

Because our house is RUBBISH.

Actually, it really *is* made out of rubbish, wrapped up in some weird eco-concrete stuff. Dad designed the place himself, so it makes its own electricity and even recycles our water. It took him years to build it on some wasteland he bought cheap, next to an old windmill. He started when I was nine years old, and finally finished building it when I was twelve. During that time, we rented a normal house like normal people.

Those were good years.

New Scientist magazine called Dad's dream-come-true, "The world's ultimate green home".

The local paper called it, **"FLOWER-POWER EYESORE HATED BY BAFFLED NEIGHBOURS"**.

And Darren "Fist-Face" Gilbert in the year above called it, "The stinking, mouldy freak-dump where gimpy Gooseheart sits on his own crying all night cos everyone hates him, then uses the tears to wash his bum because he's too poor to use normal water." Which, you know, wasn't so good.

And not even true. I've definitely never EVER washed my bum with tears. Tears are salty for a start. Who

wants a salty bum?

I know why Fist-Face said stuff like that though. Kids always pick on anyone who's different, don't they? I've tried telling this to Dad, tried telling him I want to be normal. But he's been daring to be different his whole life and wants me to be that way too. "Don't be afraid to stand out, Tim!"

Easy for Dad to say – well, unless he's saying it through a mouthful of organic tomatoes, which he probably is. Because, worst of all, Dad grows organic veg in our garden and that is **ALL WE EAT!**

Mmmmm.

I could go on – about Dad's jumble sale shopping sprees, about Dad's protest marches outside fast-food stores (where me and him are the only two who've shown up, and me only because he'll ground me if I don't), about how we can't have a car because that would make us evil polluters and so on and so on and so, **SO** on.

But you see how it is. Dad might be trying to save the planet, but **NOBODY** can save my rep!

I hope you can understand how, some nights, I would lie awake thinking,

"PLEASE, WON'T SOMEONE MAKE THIS TORTURE **END**?"

So maybe it's all my fault. Because, as it turned out, fact fans . . . Yes. Someone *would* make this torture end.

But not in a good way.

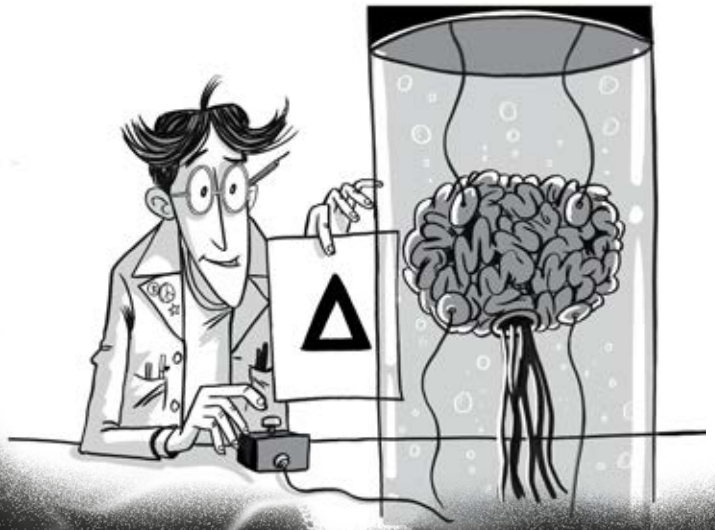
TWO

Dad works at the Space Centre. The Space Centre is not, in fact, the centre of space, but a place in the city where clever people do research into Crazy Out-There Physics stuff, and Amazing Things To Do With The Structure Of Space And The Universe.

Don't ask me what Amazing Things Dad did there – it was all a big secret.

Was he . . .

☐ Doing weird experiments on alien brains?



☐ Sending unwitting test subjects into space?

☐ Bunking off to Mars with his mates?

I wish I did know what Dad was getting up to. I was born around the time he started there, and every time I've asked, he's never once told me.

"You wouldn't understand, Tim," he says. "And if you *did* understand, I'd have to fire you into the centre of a black hole because it's super top secret and no one is allowed to know." And then he normally does his crazy-sounding laugh.

I still want to know, but other than Dad, there's not really been anyone else to ask.

"What about your mum?" you say.

Well, I don't have a mum. Thanks for bringing that up! No, really – **THANKS**. I appreciate it.

Nah, it's **OK**. Don't feel bad. Much.

I'm over the whole thing, really. I've had to be. Dad won't talk about it.

He looks shifty and says I was brought to this world by aliens and left on his doorstep.

I **THINK** he's joking, but who knows? Certainly not the other forms of life who've shared my home –

like Nanny Helen (that's "nanny" as in "childminder", not as in "grandma" or "goat") and Herbert, my pet goldfish. Neither of them knows a thing. (Or if Herbert does, he's playing it cool.)

It makes me think sometimes, when things feel hard here and I look up at the night sky . . . could it be that I belong out there?

Life has got to be easier out there in space.

Right?



THREE

So when does this story really start? Well, right now, with the Beginning.

And the Beginning began with the Big Heal.

You remember? That's what they called it – the Big Heal. Also known as the Green Miracle, or the Night the World Got Better.

You can see why.

There's the Earth as normal, in its usual not-great state – holes in the ozone layer letting through dangerous radiation . . . greenhouse gases poisoning the atmosphere . . . global warming melting the polar ice caps . . . all of that.

Suddenly, most of the damage was pretty much reversed overnight. The ozone layer was back – thicker than ever. No pesky holes in it any more. The carbon dioxide levels suddenly fell, as if a hundred

years of industrial pollution had been undone overnight. Acid rain became "placid" rain, calm and regular, all the sulphuric stuff squeezed out of it. And somehow, all that melting ice in the Arctic and Antarctic froze up again.

Impossible, yeah? **A MIRACLE.** No question.

Well, of course, there *were* questions. And everyone seemed to have different opinions as to what had happened.



We were still in our old, ordinary house back then.

I was woken up by the phone ringing – at five in the morning! The news was blaring from Dad's radio. It drowned out what Dad was saying on the phone, but he didn't sound happy.

He hung up and thumped down the stairs. I found him pacing around the kitchen table.

"What's going on?" I asked.



"I have to go to work, Tim," he said. "I've called Helen – she's coming in early to take you to school."

I shook my head. "I mean, what's going on with the planet!" The radio was still burbling with reports and facts and experts blabbing on:

"SOMETHING LIKE THIS DEFIES ALL THE NATURAL LAWS . . ."

"IT'S BIG BUSINESSES PULLING A TRICK. MUST BE . . ."

"MIRACLES NEED NO EXPLANATIONS . . ."

Dad stared into the distance.

"If something seems too good to be true, it very often is," he said.

FOUR

After the Big Heal, a lot of people thought more green miracles would happen.

Thousands gathered at the South American rainforests, waiting for Mother Nature to do her thing. They expected them to grow back overnight.

It was the same with the sea. People thought the pollution would suddenly vanish. Herbert in particular probably had his fins crossed; not for himself, being a freshwater fish, but for his ocean-dwelling brothers. He's that kind of fish – warm-hearted. Well, as warm-hearted as you can get when you're cold-blooded.

But anyway – it didn't happen.

What did happen was weirder. Wafts of strange-smelling air began to be noticed around the world.

It was a gentle, loving pong that sweet-talked your nostrils, married them in a short but moving