

# Not So Normal

by Eirlys Hunter



Dad found Normal wandering down our road. He was cold and hungry, so Dad brought him home, lent him a jacket, and made him beans on toast.

“So, Normal, where are you from?” Dad asked cheerfully.

“From far away,” Normal said. He sounded weird, like he was really tired. Maybe he was.

“Good-oh,” said Dad, without any curiosity. He thinks everywhere is far away from Eketāhuna.



“I am assessing your resources,” Normal added.

“Excellent,” said Dad. “Well, I’ve got a mountain of paperwork to get through – but TJ here will show you round the farm, won’t you, TJ?” He gave me a no-arguments look, so I went to the porch and pulled on my gumboots.

Normal wanted to see “meadows”, so I took him to the top paddock. That’s when I realised he was seriously weird. He produced a metal stick from somewhere and started swishing it through the grass. He even poked at cowpats, flicking over the dry ones and prodding the squishy ones. Was this guy even a grown-up?

“What exactly are you doing?” I asked. Unlike Dad, I was definitely curious.

“I am locate home transport. This is aerial,” he said, holding up his stick.

“It’s what?” I said. Normal sounded weird – but his grammar was worse.

Then Normal explained. He wasn’t from Japan or Romania or South America. He wasn’t from Earth at all. Normal was, he said, from T27 – a planet in the Andromeda Galaxy.



Of course I didn't believe him straight off ... but then he started to glow. The sun had gone behind the ridge, and as the sky got darker, Normal's skin was looking anything but.

"I am dropped off six weeks ago. Now I am spaceship meeting," he said.

"Was," I said stupidly. Besides, it seemed the easiest place to start. "Was dropped off."

But Normal wasn't interested in tense. He held out his "aerial" and started walking quickly across the paddock. "Come!" he called. "I receive signals."

I ran after him. "I don't mean to be rude or anything, but you don't look like an alien. You look, well, ordinary ... kind of."

"Ha," he said. I think he was pleased. "I adapt. Dominant species to resemble. Every planet visit. Called Normal, look Normal."

"Except for your voice," I thought, "and your glowing skin and wandering around poking cowpats with aerials. Not so normal there."

"Are there many planets with life on them?" I asked.

"Too many! And many resources. We harvest."

Interesting. I needed to keep the alien talking. "So where is this spaceship anyway?"

Normal waved his aerial and strode off again. "Signal say near."

I looked around. There was the shelterbelt on the north boundary, the patch of bush in the gully, and the old macrocarpas by the water trough. If I were a spaceship, where would I land?

"I can't see anything," I said.

"This does not surprise." Normal held out his finger and thumb.

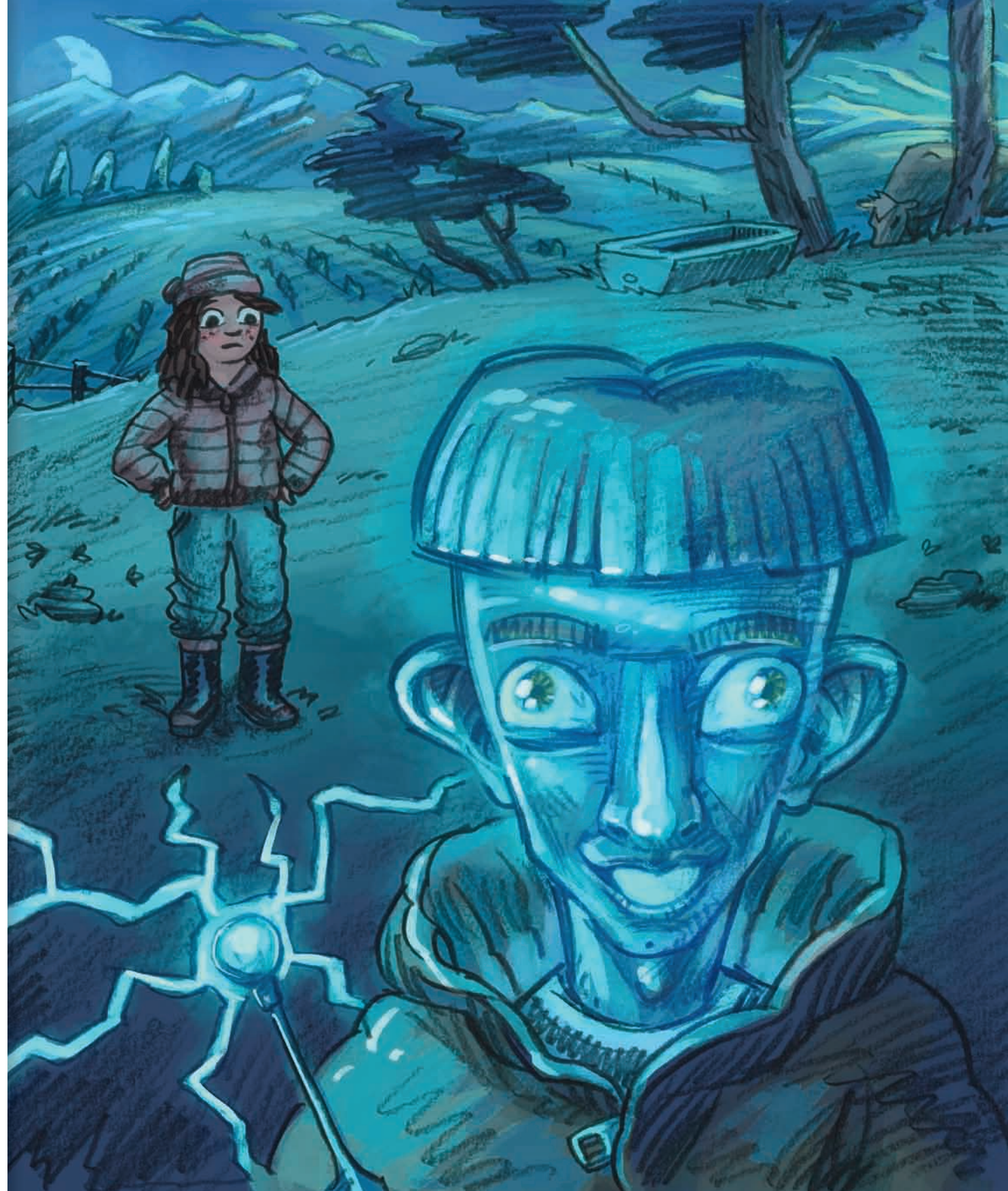
"It is this size."

"What! Are you telling me your intergalactic spacecraft is the size of a pea?"

He nodded. "If that is what you say."

"How can it be so small? That's ridiculous - you're bigger than me."

"Ha," he said, pleased again. "My size up, my size down."





Normal headed towards the macrocarpas, where a few cows were standing around, waiting for something to happen.

“So what are you doing here?” I asked.

“Prospecting. What to see. What to take. Sometimes many things.” He looked at Dad’s cows. “Sneak come, sneak go ... that is us. Then many will return.”

“But what about me? I know you’re here. That’s not very sneaky.”

He gave another alien-style laugh. “Ha! Consider. They believe you? T27? Ha!”

I considered. He was right. No one would believe me.

“There!” Normal suddenly shouted. “Bovine creature.” He pointed at a cow that was ambling past. “It is there.” Normal’s aerial was aimed straight at the cow’s stomach. Well one of them.

“Looks like she’s eaten your spaceship,” I said.

Something flashed. Normal was brandishing a lethal-looking knife. “I extract.”

“No!” I grabbed his arm. “Dad will go ballistic. Let’s wait for it to come out.”

I thought we’d better separate 382 from her mates – put her where we could keep an eye on her rear end. With the help of Normal’s aerial, we shooed her into the calf shed. Then we waited.

It got properly dark. Dad called from the house. I ignored him. Under the circumstances, I was sure he’d understand. The signals were definitely moving towards 382’s tail.

“Is close.” Normal took two masks out of his back pocket, the sort surgeons wear, and put one on. He gave the other one to me.

“What for?” I asked.

He looked at me like I was the alien! “You want spaceship in lungs?”

Before I could answer, 382 lifted her tail. Normal leaned forward.

I put my mask on.

Splat!





Normal crouched excitedly over the steaming heap and plucked a luminous green dot out of the brown mess with a handkerchief.

“Ha,” he said.

I was disappointed. A mucky hanky was hardly high-tech.

“What happens now?” I asked, following Normal out of the shed.

“Now? You go home. I go home.”

“OK,” I said. “Safe travels.”

But of course, I didn’t go anywhere. I just ducked down behind the water trough. I watched Normal walk to the middle of the paddock, spread his handkerchief on the ground, and stand next to it.

I looked around our dark, peaceful farm. *Many resources.*

Then, as I watched, Normal stopped pretending to be human. His limbs and his clothes, including Dad’s jacket, just melted away. Dad would be cross about that jacket.

Normal wasn’t a body any more. He was a formless blob, a glowing jelly that slumped to the ground. Normal wobbled for a moment, then started to shrink. Tyre-sized, plate-sized ...

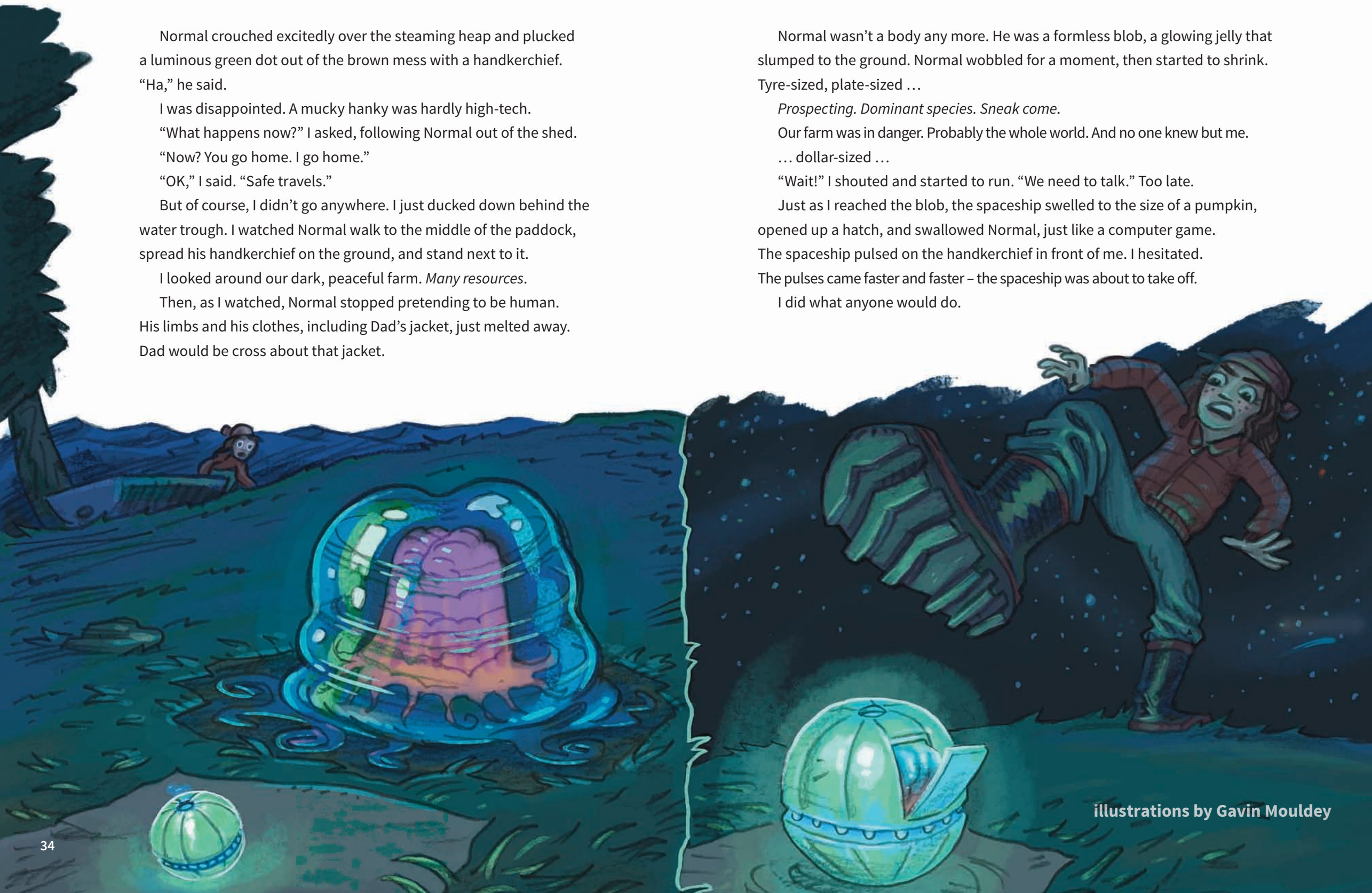
*Prospecting. Dominant species. Sneak come.*

Our farm was in danger. Probably the whole world. And no one knew but me. ... dollar-sized ...

“Wait!” I shouted and started to run. “We need to talk.” Too late.

Just as I reached the blob, the spaceship swelled to the size of a pumpkin, opened up a hatch, and swallowed Normal, just like a computer game. The spaceship pulsed on the handkerchief in front of me. I hesitated. The pulses came faster and faster – the spaceship was about to take off.

I did what anyone would do.



illustrations by Gavin Mouldey

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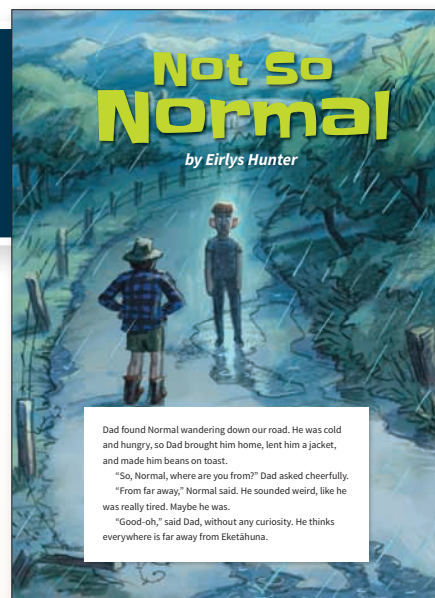
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