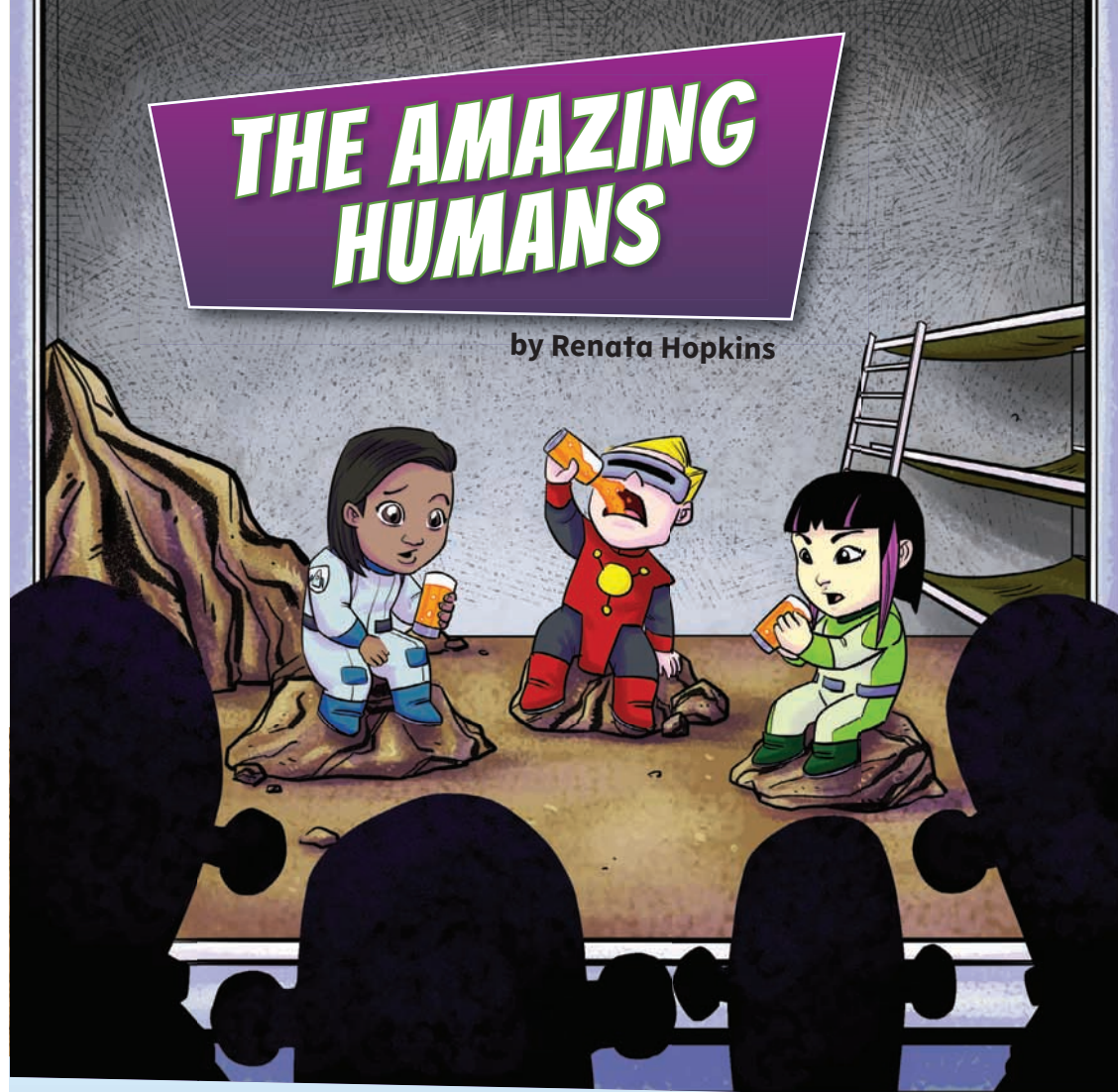


THE AMAZING HUMANS

by Renata Hopkins



It was feeding time at the zoo. A big crowd had gathered to watch the animals eat their lunch. Mere, James, and Lin stared back at all the people.

“I used to like zoos,” said Mere.

“Me too,” agreed James, “... before I got put in one!”

Two weeks earlier, the three friends had won a competition. The prize: a trip to visit a zoo on the planet Zeelon. When they arrived, the Zeelonite zookeeper showed them around. They looked at the beevack, the glow bears, and the mooalas. The last enclosure they came to was empty.

“Welcome to your new home!” said the zookeeper, opening the gate.

“Excuse me?” said Mere.

“Um, you guys,” said Lin. “Look.”

She pointed to a sign that read:
NEW EXHIBIT – THE AMAZING HUMANS!

“Wow,” said James. “This is ... unexpected.”



So now, here they were – on show in the zoo. Luckily, it had turned out to be quite fun.

“Look at the massive queue!” Lin said on their first day. She sounded almost proud. The crowd of aliens was walking straight past the glow bears and the beevack. Boring! They wanted to see the humans.

When a huge crowd is watching, it can be hard not to show off. After smiling and waving for a while, Mere did a handstand. The aliens loved that. So James joined in with a cartwheel. Lin juggled some rolled-up socks. The clapping was deafening – partly because the Zeelonites all had eight hands.

“Hey, you guys!” said Lin. “We’re stars!” She waved to the Zeelonite kids. They waved back so hard that some of their arms got tangled up.

At first, being a zoo animal was excellent. But even juggling socks for aliens gets boring after a while. Life in the zoo was always the same – nice enough, but always the same. The same crowds, the same tricks, the same orange gloop at feeding time.

“It’s like having a smoothie for every meal,” said James, taking a gulp of his gloop.

Lin finished hers and did a loud burp. The aliens cheered.

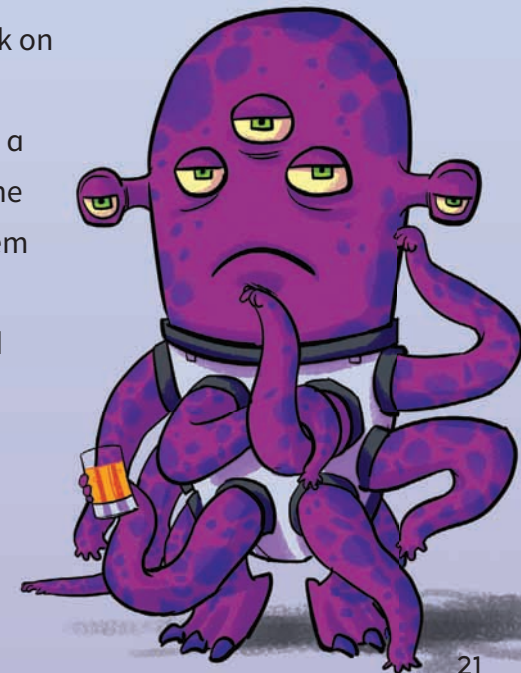
“I keep dreaming about cheese on toast,” Mere admitted.

“Crunchy apples,” sighed Lin.

“Banana muffins,” James said.

It was no use pretending – the three friends were homesick. They couldn’t even call Earth because their devices didn’t work on Zeelon.

It was then that Mere noticed a little Zeelonite standing off to one side. The alien was watching them with a sad look on its face. At least, they thought it looked sad – it was sometimes hard to tell with Zeelonites. That was when the humans heard the voice inside their heads.



“Is you happy here?” said the voice. Mere, James, and Lin stared at each other.

“Who said that?” Lin whispered.

“I think it was that little one over there,” Mere replied, pointing, “although it didn’t move its mouth.”

“It must have sent us a mind-message,” James said.

“We should send a reply.”

Mere pulled a face. “I’m really bad at mind-messaging. It’s my worst subject at school.”

“Let’s all think the same thought at the same time,” James suggested. “That might help.”

“What should we think?” Lin asked.

“Let’s try ‘We miss our home.’” Mere said. “One, two, three ...”

The three friends thought their message – hard. They waited for a reply, but nothing came. The little alien just stared. Then it turned and wandered off towards the beevack.

“Epic fail,” said James.

“I told you I was no good at it,” Mere added sadly.

“Maybe we should dig an escape tunnel,” Lin suggested.

“With what?” James asked. “It’s not like we have a shovel.”

They tried digging with their hands, but the dirt on Zeelon was like concrete. Instead, they did some cartwheels to take their minds off things. It didn’t really work.

That night, they all had the same dream. In the dream, a voice spoke inside their heads. It asked, “Is you ready to go?”

Lin snuffled. James rolled over. Mere snored. The voice spoke again, louder. “IS YOU READY TO GO?”

The three woke with a start.

“Did you hear that?” James asked.

“I think it came from outside,” Lin replied. She got out of bed and led the way out of the sleeping pod.

The beevack stood in the middle of the humans’ enclosure, which shone like silver in the light from Zeelon’s three moons.

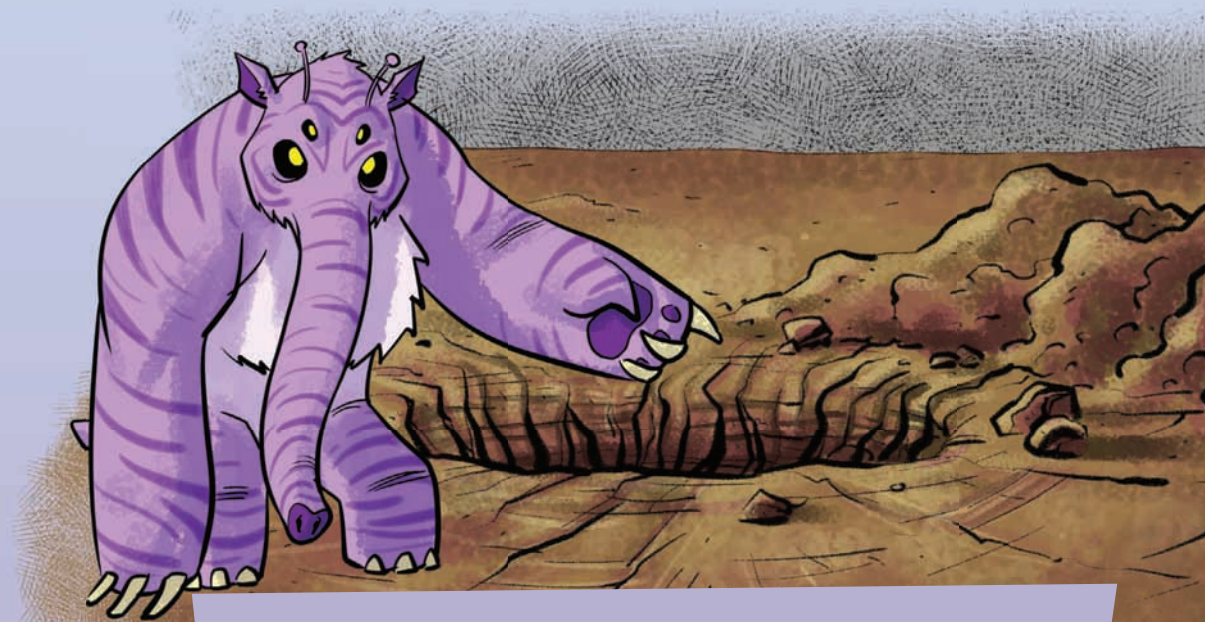
“Time to go,” said the beevack.

The humans gaped at each other.

“Um ... go where?” James asked.

“To your home – that you miss,” said the beevack.

Mere gasped. “It was you who spoke to us!” The beevack nodded. Then it pointed to a big hole in the ground.



“Whoa, it’s dug a tunnel!” Lin whispered.

“You has good escape idea,” the beevack said, “but I has sharper claws.”

James, Mere, and Lin whooped for joy. They knew how to get to the spaceport. And Mere could pilot a Zeelon spaceship, no problem. She always got top marks in flying. She could fly anything. It wouldn't really be stealing – more like borrowing.

“Let's go,” said James. “While it's still dark.”

“Wait,” said Lin. She turned to the beevack. “Do you want to come too?” The beevack wagged its spiky tail.

“Excellent,” said James. “Cheese on toast, apples, and muffins, here we come!”

“What is muffins?” wondered the beevack.

“They're an Earth thing,” said Lin. “You're going to love them.”



illustrations by
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by Renata Hopkins

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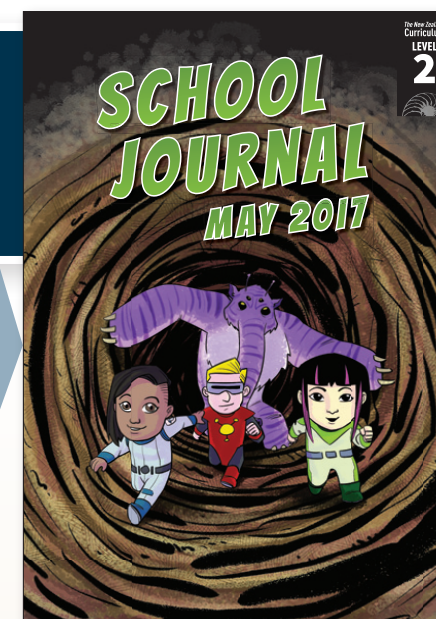
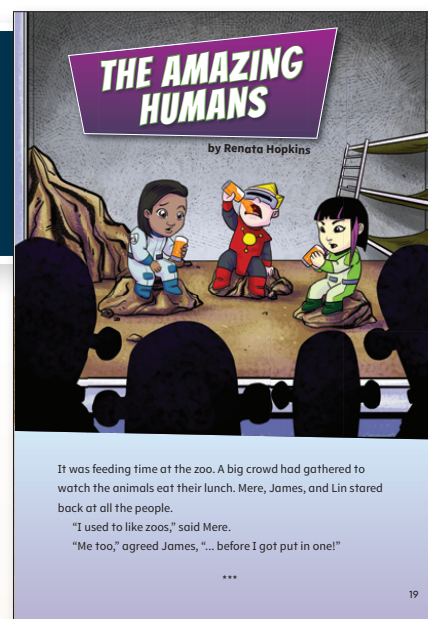
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