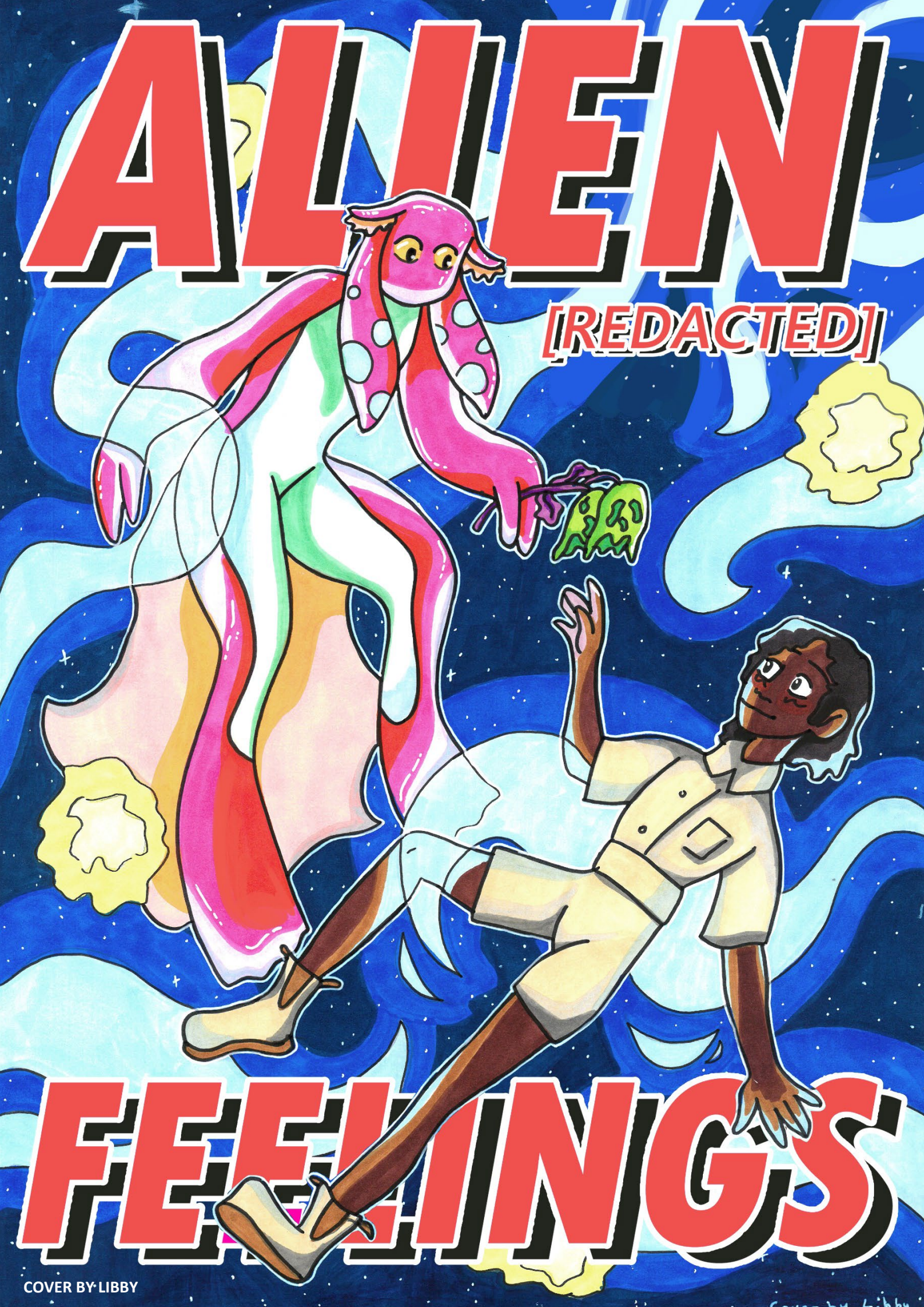


ALIEN

[REDACTED]

FEEELINGS

COVER BY LIBBY





Write a Book in a Day



**THE KIDS'
CANCER
PROJECT**

Science. Solutions. Survival.

PARAMETERS FORM

TEAM DETAILS

STATE: WA
DIVISION: Upper School
SCHOOL/GROUP: Kalamunda Senior High School (KALAMUNDA)
TEAM NAME: Kalamunda 4
TEAM ID: 1220

PARAMETERS AND RANDOM WORDS

Parameters

Primary character 1 .. Singer
Primary character 2 .. Spy
Non-human character .. Rocket
Setting .. Forest
Issue .. Leaving school

Random words

Tiptoe
Fresh
Community
Delight
Bruised

INSTRUCTIONS

- Start at 8am
- Write an original story:
 - based on all **five parameters** (above)
 - including all **five random words** (above), and in bold type
 - with some identifiable **Australian content** (in theme or setting or characters, etc)
 - keeping within the allowed word count (remember every word on every page counts)!
 - include this parameters form in your book **immediately after the front cover**
- Remember: **Every** word on **every page** counts. This includes your front cover, back cover, blurb, acknowledgements and copyright form.
- **Be sure to give yourself enough time to submit your book and complete the following checklist before 9pm.**

Log on to the Team Coordinator Portal to:

- ☐ Check the spelling of your team name and team members' names (how these are spelt on submission will be how they are displayed on certificates)
- ☐ Complete the Declaration
- ☐ Submit your finished book in **both** PDF and plain text **format by 9pm**

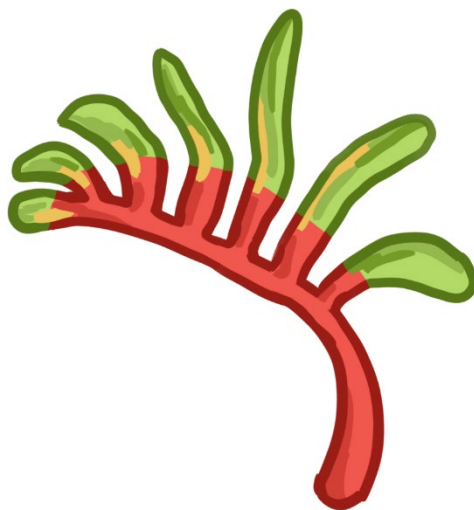
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*Chae Elkington, Ané Greyling, Libby Guy, Leah Kuckelkorn, Claire
Martin, Sean Paxman, Marc Rouillard, Felicity Smith, Kaijah Smith,
Toby Trent*

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Fish in a Bowl



Holden

I can't concentrate when it's staring at me like this. Every time I look up I see those yellow eyes staring right back. It never blinks either. It just sits there. Not moving. Staring.

The exit light over the door glows behind me, it's so tempting to just walk out, but my instructions were specific - complete the observation report before I go home.

I sigh and look at the next box to fill in - "Facial features of alien specimen".

Well, there's no avoiding those eyes now. I take a breath and straighten out the stack of books on my left. I place my vase of kangaroo paws on top of that. It looks like they need some fresh water. I'll do that before I go home.



Anyway, time to stop delaying and just do it. I stand up and walk over to the glass, taking my closest look at the alien yet. It gives me the shivers, but at least there's the containment unit between us. I'm glad the first part of the mission is over.

I start filling in the form. The eyes are large yellow circles, with blue irises and no pupils. No nose or nostrils, only a mouse closed into a thin line. The most eye-catching feature is the ears - long and drooping and speckled with blue. The rest of its skin is smooth and pink. Now that I'm closer I also notice the little frills for the first time - they poke out from its head just above the ears, like little antennae.

Looking at it close like this is off-putting but fascinating. I look closer at the hands - or at least where they should be. Instead, the arms end in stumps, like stubby tentacles. I flick over to the next page of the report and look up.

I freeze.

The alien stood up.

It's scarily tall. Its face looms above me, eyes glowing as they stare right into my own. It takes a graceful step forward. Despite the glass between us, I step backward in retreat. It steps forward again, now its face is right against the glass.



I shake my head and take a deep breath. There's no reason to be scared by it - the glass between us is bulletproof, it can't get through.

I turn around. I need to go get a drink, take a breather, go for a walk - anything to calm my nerves. I hurry over to the desk and pick up my access card. I head for the door, but just as I'm about to swipe my card, I hear a noise behind me. I stop and spin around.

A low hum fills the room, rising in volume until the tubes on the shelves start to rattle. The alien stands with its face almost touching the glass, throat vibrating as it sings.

I need to get out of here, I spin around to leave but before I can take a step I feel my knees begin to weaken and my head spin. What *was* I about to do? I look around disoriented. The alien is still staring at me, still singing, but the hum has changed to a slow melody that fills my head and makes my eyelids droop. My eyes flicker closed for a second, and when they open again the world around me is faded and blurry. The only thing I can see clearly is the alien, with its glowing yellow eyes, and its song still echoing around my head.

I don't know where I am, who I am, or what's happening, but I know what it wants, and so I obey. Hardly knowing what I'm doing I walk over to the containment unit, step up to the hatch and swipe my card. With a hiss, it swings open and the alien steps out.



I want to break free~



Neris

I take a deep breath as I step out, the man is still standing idly, waiting for his next command. Sirens pierce my ears as light floods the room. I jump, using the rush of adrenaline to bound across the room. Smacking into the door, I hiss as the man hurries to my side and swipes his key card.

The door opens revealing a corridor, I barge through, breaking into a sprint. Rows of lights flick on, one by one, each one revealing my location. Two doors part at the end of the corridor, and my legs lock up as I fumble into the room with a crash. Dozens of bright numbered buttons line a part of the wall.

The human waddles through the corridor, painfully slow. Its pathetic eyes pass me as it comes to my side and pushes one of the buttons. We shoot up until the room draws to a stop as the doors part, we're greeted by a wave of people each holding a small yellow device, pointed at me.

"Unauthorised specimen, surrender now or we will use force" their leader yells. "Holden? What the hell are you doing there?" My frills flare out. Sucking in a deep breath, I focus on the air between me and them.

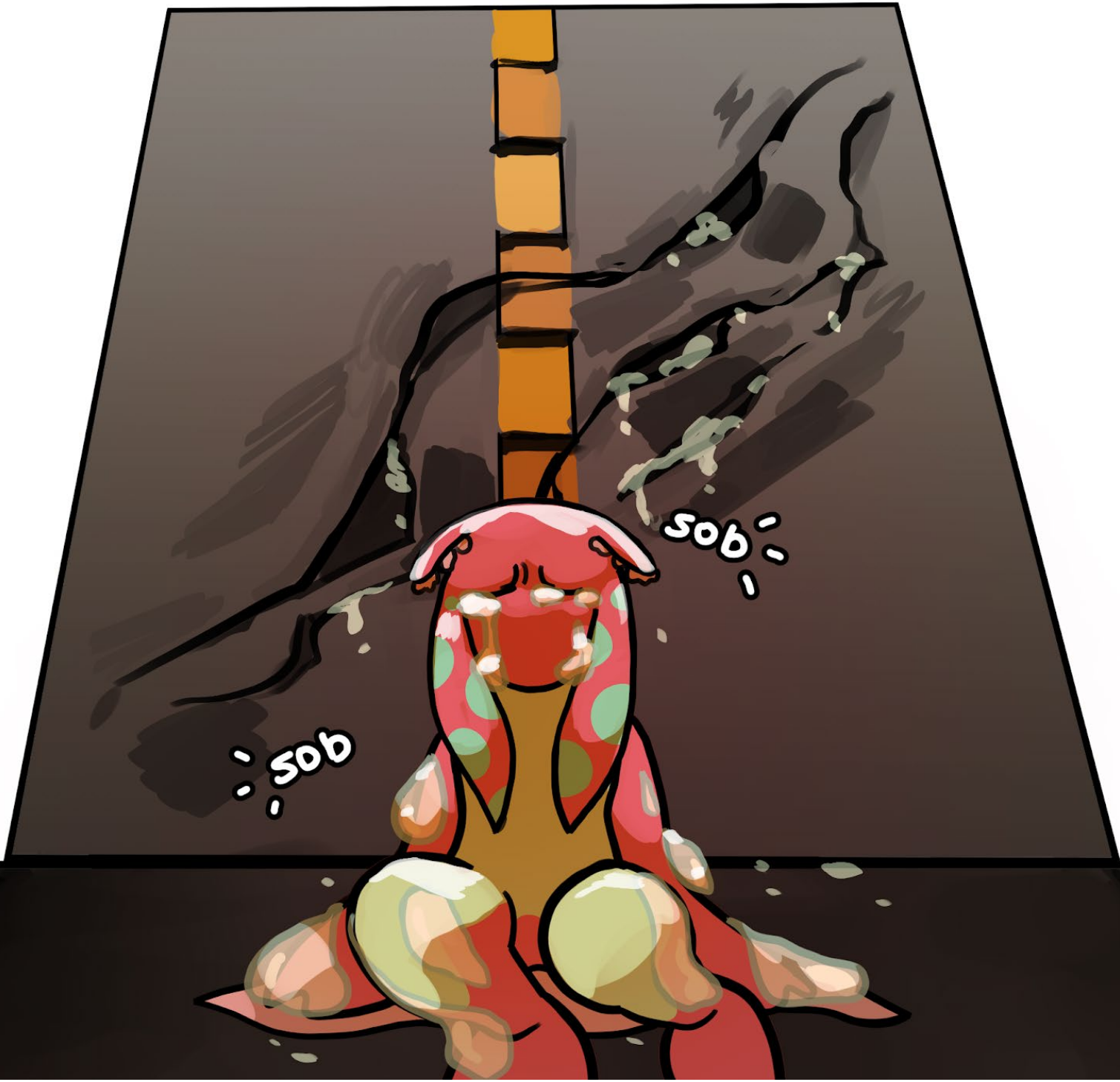
My voice fills the room. It's warm and vibrant, and it reminds me of home. For a moment, I forget where I am and enjoy the sound.

Opening my eyes I see waves of humans fall over one by one, unconscious. The only human still standing is the hypnotised idiot next to me.

Grabbing his hand, I lead him forwards as I tiptoe around the bodies. There's a small door in the back corner of the room, my

feet launch off the ground, tearing through the door, it crashes down to the floor and I keep running.

A strip of stairs lay ahead of me, I bound across them, clearing a chunk of distance each time. Reaching the top of the steps, a large industrial door stands in my way. I scratch at it, each attempt proving to be just as futile as the last.



The sound of footsteps appears some ways behind me. Before I can prepare myself to fight back, the human appears from the step. His vacant eyes trail to the door. He swipes his key card, effortlessly parting the doors. Sunlight spills onto his face as he steps aside, gesturing for me to lead.

I swat his arm away, the brilliant red soil stretches out towards the horizon, white trees dotted around sparsely. The view almost distracts me from a looming shadow. An enormous, primitive but viable space vessel is stationed on a launch pad. We clamber in to find a bright white room. A gaseous mist fills the room, causing moisture to ripple down my back. My brain feels fuzzy, it takes no effort to breathe, I feel clean.

One-way ticket



Holden

“Welcome aboard the Australian Space and Spying Agency transportation ship. Mandatory detoxification complete. You are safe from harmful foreign material so long as you are aboard.”

“I couldn’t help but notice that your brain was working in overdrive, and there were some funky chemicals in your blood. I’ve removed those and I’ve immunised you for good measure. Be careful next time champ.”

I feel blood pumping back into my head. The white lights pierce into my eyes as I rub them furiously. A robotic voice rings in my ears from two overhead speakers, the ignition fires and the floor shakes with the vibrations from the exhaust. My stomach churns, I clash to the side of the wall and try to brace myself.

“Facial recognition protocol activated, welcome Agent Holden. I’m the curator, ROCKET, I hope you have a wonderful time on the ASSA ship.”

I look around the damp room, my mind feels like static and I spot four nozzles positioned at each corner, the ones that sprayed us with the mist. Two industrial doors at the end of the chamber open and the alien bounds down the hallway, racing towards the bow of the ship. I chase after it but a searing headache knocks me down. I see it in the cockpit at the control panel, pulling levers and pressing buttons, setting the ship to launch, “ROCKET, set course to Eriana Prime,” it says.

“Commencing your one-way flight path to Eriana Prime,” ROCKET replies. I grit my teeth, my head feels like it’s splitting in two.

“What did you do to me? Where am I?” I yell across the room.

“Stop distracting me,” The creature chirps.

“What, so you can speak? Did you find a damn dictionary down there?” I clamber to my feet.

The alien glares at me and mutters, “It’s a simple language”. My feet suction to the floor, and the static in my head tunes to thought. Could I take the alien down with pure strength? I break out of my thoughts to an oddly familiar sound, panting.

The alien’s arms are clutching at its stomach, it seems like it wants to sink into itself. It slides to the floor, trembling and covering its face. What do I do?

“Don’t cry, you’ll make everything worse,” I blurt.

Damn it, that didn’t come out right, why am I trying to help it anyway?

“What’s... wrong?” oh this is horrible, I should stop now before I mess everything up.

“What’s... your name... if you have one?”

Through short pants, it blurts something out, and a sound fills the room, I feel as if I’m lifted off my feet and my mind is fuzzy. I slam my hands on my ears and through gritted teeth I say

“What?”

The creature pants and churns for a moment before it flicks me a look.

“You can call me Neris,” they mumble.

“Oh, I’m Holden.”

I take a few steps towards where they are slumped on the ground, sobbing. I’m still afraid of them, but something about seeing them so weak and vulnerable almost makes me pity them.

“So, ummm, is everything alright?”

“Yeah, just... bad memories.” sniffles Neris.

“Well, it’s alright. Don’t cry, we’ll survive, I don’t know where we’re going, but we’ll survive.

Neris sniffs and then lifts their head.

“Eriana Prime,” they say.

“What?”

“You said you don’t know where we’re going. Well, I’m going home. I’m going back to Eriana Prime.”

It takes a moment for that to sink in. But then realisation hits.

“Wait *what*? So you’re telling me that I’m alone on a spaceship heading off to some alien planet?”

And then I remember what ROCKET said when Neris set the course - a *one-way flight path*. “And I might never come back?”

This is what I get for listening to my parents.

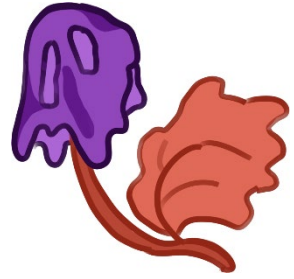
I rush over and start hitting buttons on the cockpit, desperately trying to find a way to turn the ship around, but none of it does anything. “Course locked. Ship in auto-pilot. Arrival at destination in 29 days, 11 hours,” says ROCKET.

I start pacing back and forth along the cockpit, my mind buzzing. Neris stays sitting on the floor, sniffing occasionally. I’ve had enough, I need to get out of here. I turn around and stomp down the passageway out of the cockpit. I take the first door on the left and find myself in a room full of neatly made beds – some kind of barracks or dormitory.

I walk over to a floor-to-ceiling window set into the wall and stare out, nothing but the blackness of space in front of me. Earth is already no more than a speck in the sea of stars. I sigh and flop down onto the nearest bed, with ROCKET’s words echoing around my head until I fall asleep.

Course locked... Eriana Prime... One-way flight path... 29 days, 11 hours...

Bittersweet



Neris

It's the first morning on the ship, at least I think it's morning, it's a bit hard to tell in space. I'm bouncing through the ship, hoping there's more to it than white lights and bleak walls.

I hear a whirring sound, it's repetitive and accompanied by continuous thumps. My ears shoot up. I've never heard anything like it and cautiously approach the wall it sounds like it's coming from. Pressing my ears to the wall I listen, I also hear this repetitive huffing sound, it could be a motor or a machine but I don't know, but I want to. I bound around to find the door. Sensing my presence, the door opened automatically, revealing the most peculiar sight.



It's Holden.
He's running on a moving
tarp, but going nowhere
huffing and dripping water.

“Need something?” he huffs.

“What is that?” I point to the machine he’s walking on.

“Treadmill, for exercising.”

“Why?”

Now he looks very confused.

“Why? To exercise, it’s 10:45, that’s my schedule.”

The treadmill stops and Holden crashes into the bars of the treadmill. The monotonous whirring of the ship dies down and the lights cut.

“ROCKET, maintenance stat!” Holden shouts.

“All systems are optimal, except your relationship. You cannot keep running from your problems Agent Holden.”

That’s when I hear the click of a door being forced closed. The gym is sealed off from the rest of the ship.

“Hey ROCKET? What’s going on?”

“There’s space suits in the cupboard over there, you two are going to have to be quick because of that airlock’s about to open, and it’s not opening until you two work things out between you.”

Holden and I dash over to the spacesuit cupboard and pull our suits on. We barely manage to attach our suits to the emergency ropes before the airlock opens. My entire world is flipped as I’m sent hurtling through the door as the vacuum of space yanks me outside.

The emptiness of space almost steals me away before a white reel unfurls beside me. Holden is stood on the outer hull, holding the rope, almost seeming concerned for my well-being. Using the rope as a guide, I float back to the ship, the engines are off and the body unmoving. I bang on the airlock door, trying to force it open.

“Nuh uh broski, that door’s staying sealed shut until you two work things out.”

“Screw you ROCKET!”

I glance over at Holden, he's already given up trying to get back inside and immediately gets back to working out - doing bicycle crunches floating just above the spaceship. I can see the moisture forming around the inside of his helmet. It weirds me out, how much he's controlled by his own imaginary rules. My frills begin to fan out as I hum a simple song. Holden stops his crunches and comes to sit beside me.

"What are you doing?" He mutters, breathing heavily.

"Doing nothing."

"You can't do *nothing*, there's no point"

"Sure I can, just look at the stars."

"It's so empty, there's no parents, no responsibilities." Holden floats down next to me.

"No school" I sigh.

We both look up at the nebulas scattered across the galaxy. It's hard to believe I'd never noticed space like this before. I was too caught up in rebelling, I just took my parent's ship and shot off. I didn't really have a plan, but crashing definitely wasn't part of it.

"Your planet is bigger than mine, did you know that?" I turn to him.

He's too caught up in doing nothing to answer.

"From far away, it's just a blue dot, dotted with strange forests, and everything is so dark and boring. It's so different from mine. My world is covered with huge forests, the Iromass trees tower over anything else, I miss it so much. But I'm glad I found someone like you, even with your imaginary rules."

"In a weird way, I'm glad you were my first assignment. I'm sorry about shooting you with a tranquilliser."

Those words rip through the emptiness between us and repeat themselves in my head.

"It was you."

"Excuse me?"

“It was *you*, *you drugged me*. You dragged me into a government facility, you put me in a cage!”

“I had a job! Not like you would understand. I have rules and order, everything my parents respect, if they want me to work for the government, fine! They want me to get stranded on a spaceship with an alien, perfect! But I don’t have to justify myself, especially not to you.”



Dreams and Silence



Holden

The silence between us seems unbreakable, I can't tell if they want to fight, run away or never talk to me again. I feel like such an idiot, my stomach aches with either nerves, hunger or both. "These doors aren't opening 'til you two brochachos talk it out, just so you know and your oxygen levels are getting a *little* low," ROCKET suddenly reminds us.

I almost jump, I completely forgot the AI was here too.

"Just tell me one thing, what was human school like?" Neris whispers.

"Useful." I say, glad the silence was broken.

"Useful?" Their ears raise up.

"I mean, it taught you what you needed to know."

"Yeah, but was it actually fun?"

I don't know how much I should be sharing with them, what will they think of me? Should I tell them about how my parents treated me? how I've never realised how to be happy with my life? No, that's too much. I can't tell them about that. They don't want to know all the trivial details of my childhood, it's in the past now, so there's no reason to bring it up. Think, Holden, think, what can I say? What's enough to be let back in?

"Well, the classes were okay on their own, but when they all stacked on top of each other, it became unbearable. With the long nights and parents breathing down my neck, I wanted to scream and run-away most nights. But just like everything else I want to do, I don't. I'm not afraid of confrontation, I'm afraid I'll become everything my parents say I'll be."

Neris glares at me, "Why does every single thing you do have to have to be meticulously planned out?"

"My life has had a set path. Doing *nothing* wasn't an option. My parents are neurosurgeons excelling in their careers. They've never given me a chance to be anything but successful. Even

in school, I had to take all the difficult classes that offer the best opportunities. When I was finally free of my parent's influence, I was thrown right under a commander and told to retrieve an alien. I just want to do something that I choose."

Neris sighs softly, staring at me in an attempt to be comforting, clearly not knowing how to help.

"Why don't you?" Their simple response, it almost came off cold.

"If I don't do what they want, what reason do they have to like me? What will make them care? If I'm not successful then I've let them down, my whole life I've been stuck working towards a career they can be proud of. I want them to be happy with me, maybe if I'm good enough in their eyes they can look at me and say they're proud of me *at least once*" tears float out of my eyelids, swirling around my helmet.



“If you’ve already done so much to fit their ideals, has it changed how they think about you?” they ask.

“No... no, it hasn’t, it will never be enough, will it?” I say starting to get annoyed. “I’ve wasted so much time trying to be what they want. I left school with straight A’s and more career opportunities than anyone else but it still wasn’t enough, was it?” I pause.

“Anything that could bring me any **delight** wasn’t enough for them. I’ve always loved the environment and being creative. When I was young, I would try to explain. They always said I would end up poor and alone being a florist, a painter or even a volunteer. Maybe a galaxy away, I can finally be myself.”

Neris stares at me warmly as we float in the nothing, the infinite expanse of space surrounding us.

“Radical!” says ROCKET. The airlock’s doors slide open with a hiss. “But I don’t want to catch you two busters fighting again.”

Flowers



Neris

I don't really know about Holden, I think that he could be okay, he still has his usual habits, but I'm more used to them now. "What's up, Neris," says ROCKET as I enter the kitchen.

"Hi ROCKET." I sit down next to Holden and eat an apple, avoiding the **bruised** parts. He and I talk. The conversation starts to pick up and we get to talking more about what we would have liked to have done after school, if things had turned out differently. The days pass by pretty quickly, filled with all different kinds of entertainment, there's quite a bit to do around here surprisingly.

"Do you want to draw with me?" Holden asks from where he sits, looking up from the sketchbook.

"Okay, but only because you asked."

I sit down next to him, listening to the peaceful scratching of pencils against the paper as Holden draws a fuzzy, red plant.

"It's called a bottlebrush, it's a flower from Earth. Here, you have a go," he says, ripping out a sheet of paper and handing it to me, along with a pencil.

I scratch away at the page, trying my best to copy the flower Holden drew. When I finish, I hold it up in admiration. I'm getting pretty good at this drawing thing. Holden begins to collect his drawings and pins them up over the walls of the barracks. It's nice seeing him brighten up at the sight of his drawings, it must remind him of his home. I hum a quiet tune and soak in the atmosphere.



I also use the treadmill with Holden often, it's actually kind of rewarding. He also makes sure to move anything valuable away from me when I sweat, it ruins things easily.

"You are not that bad you know," I say when we went to eat again.

"Oh thank you,... you're not too bad yourself" he mutters the last part before scooping something into his mouth.

All I've seen Holden draw are flowers, which is fine, but they're quite plain and look like they're wilting, he could just be sad or something but it's dampening the mood as they hang on the walls.

"Why don't you draw something less sad?" I say as I look over his shoulder, staring at his drawing which unsurprisingly, are flowers again.

"I'm just drawing flowers, how is that sad?"

"Because they're dying" I don't know how he doesn't see it.

"This is just how flowers look on earth"

Well that just can't be right, I spent the rest of the day and the next teaching him all about the different types of flowers on my planet, they are much more lively and colourful. Once he makes some more drawings he replaces his dark flowers with the new brighter ones, and the ship feels a bit happier.

We're closing in on our destination now. Hopefully, everything will go according to plan.

7. Things Don't Go According to Plan



Holden

It's been a month since we left Earth. One whole month. I've never spent this long away from home, and I've started to miss it. I hope someone's been watering my flowers since I left. I open my eyes and roll out of bed.

I walk through the doorway into the cockpit. The view never fails to astonish me, the light of millions of stars shining through the glass.

The intercom lights up and ROCKET's voice fills the cockpit. "What's up guys, we are as of today, 3 hours away from contact with Eriana Prime."

I look at Neris, they stare back. We're almost there.

"Hey ROCKET, how long will it take to prepare the escape pod?" Neris asks.

"If you start right now, it should be ready in two hours".

I walk to the back of the ship and begin the pod preparation sequence. It's only a precaution, but it's one worth having.



The collision warning echoes through the hallway. I'm clutching the emergency supplies in one hand, and the ship's last brownie in the other. I stare down the hallway. The planet now clearly in view, coloured with swirling pinks and greens. I take a deep breath and enter the cockpit. Neris is already seated, their hands on the controls, eyes glued to their homeworld.

"How long has it been?" I ask.

"Too long," they reply. "Hey ROCKET, how confident are you that you can land this thing?"

ROCKET doesn't reply.

“Uh ROCKET?” I say “you there?”.

“Uuh, this vessel was designed for landing on flat, open land. My scans of Eriana Prime show that there are not any suitable landing spots. Sorry guys. But we’re gonna have to use the pod, it might be a bit of a rough landing but you’ll be better off in there than in here.”

“But how will you make it out ROCKET?” I ask.

“Don’t worry, my AI will be preserved in the escape pod, there’re backup servers and a power generator in there.”

I look around at the cockpit, at the ship we’ve called home for the past month. The storage where Neris would practice their singing, the barracks where my art lines the walls, the gym where I exercised. Soon all of it will be gone.

I turn towards Neris and embrace them. We hold each other close as the ship plummets towards the planet in front of us.

“Alright brochachos, it’s escape pod time,” ROCKET says.

“C’mon, let’s go!” Neris gets out of their seat and grabs my arm. I leap up and run towards the pod. I turn my head and look into the barracks, my drawings and paintings of flowers and plants spread across the walls and ceiling. When we get to the surface I’ll be able to care for the real thing, I remind myself. I clamber into the pod, and Neris sits down in the seat beside me. They grip my hand.

“It’s gonna be alright,” they say.







The ship plummets towards Eriana Prime, its heat shield beginning to feel the effects of the atmosphere. The escape pod launches out of the ship's rear. Down on the planet's surface, Intelligent creatures of all different shapes and sizes gather in the great forests of Eriana, looking up at the sky above as the ship that has cared for its occupants for four long weeks attempts to make a crash landing.

The ship bursts through the canopy and crashes into the roots of the tremendous Iromass trees. The escape pod follows, its fall slowed by the parachutes that follow it, flailing in the wind. The inhabitants of Eriana gather around the pod as it lands with a thump in the undergrowth.



The lights stop flickering, I open my eyes and let go of Neris. We've landed. I pry open the hatch. Around me is the most incredible sight. Magnificent towering trees and plants of every colour cover the space around me. I look down and see dozens of creatures gathered around the pod. Some like Neris, and some different. I reach down into the pod and help Neris up to the pod's roof. They look out at the landscape, scanning the crowd gathered around us, but then they turn and see the couple gathered on the outskirts of the crowd.

"Neris!" call one of the two aliens. Neris slides down the side of the pod and races through the crowd, bouncing due to the reduced gravity. Neris embraces their parents, pulling them tight.

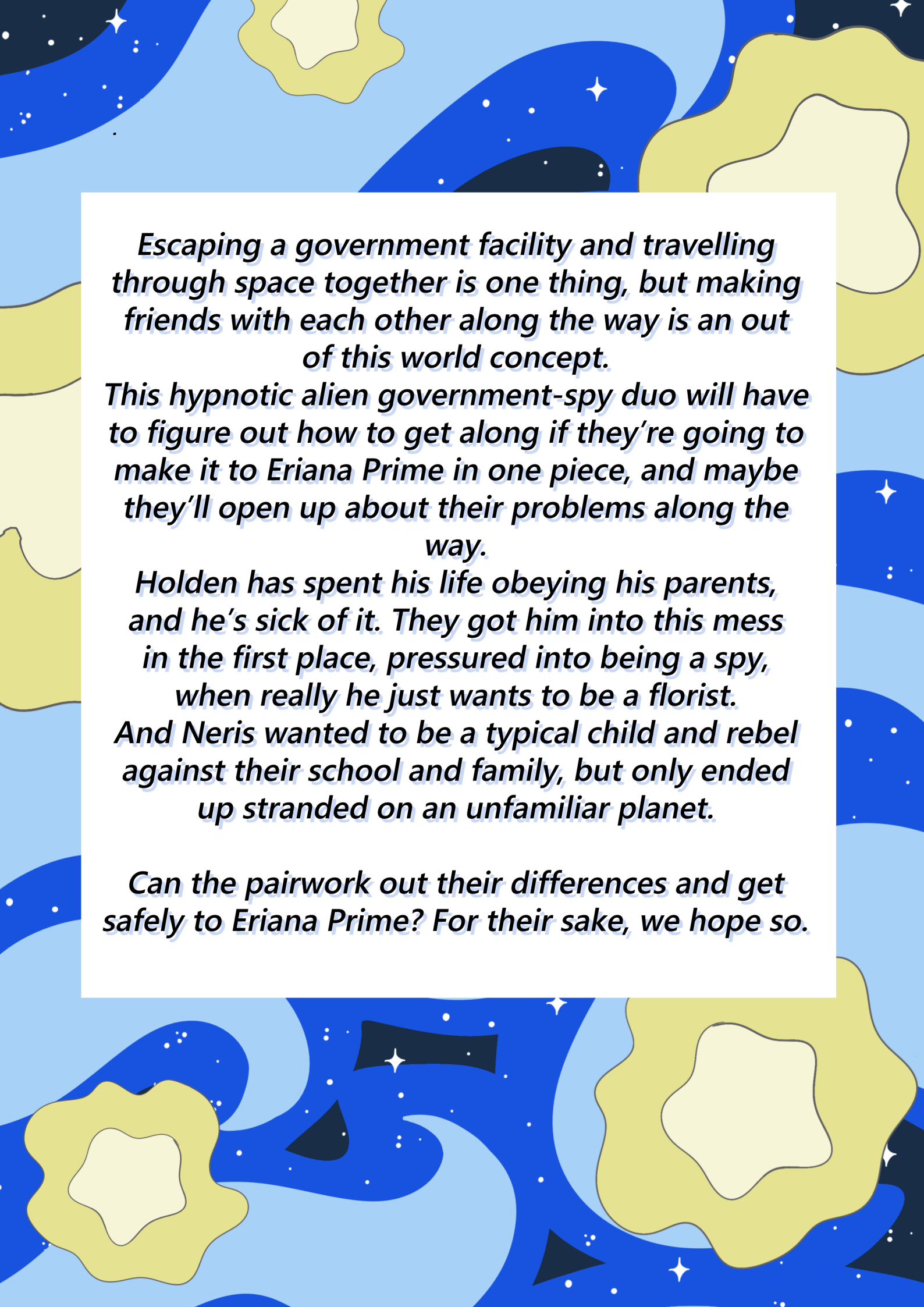
I stare out in amazement at the forest around me. Iromass trees, Neris called them. The multi-coloured trunks tower over me, the glowing vines wrapping around the branches, illuminating the escape pod with a brilliant green light.

I look around at the various structures built on and into the trees. A whole community of homes in the fores, surrounded by plants and flowers. Neris looks back at me, and I smile.

This is our home

The end





Escaping a government facility and travelling through space together is one thing, but making friends with each other along the way is an out of this world concept.

This hypnotic alien government-spy duo will have to figure out how to get along if they're going to make it to Eriana Prime in one piece, and maybe they'll open up about their problems along the way.

Holden has spent his life obeying his parents, and he's sick of it. They got him into this mess in the first place, pressured into being a spy, when really he just wants to be a florist. And Neris wanted to be a typical child and rebel against their school and family, but only ended up stranded on an unfamiliar planet.

Can the pairwork out their differences and get safely to Eriana Prime? For their sake, we hope so.