

OLDEN DAYS

by Rachel Stedman

Last week was just an ordinary week – until Wednesday. Wednesday was different. That’s because on Wednesday, our principal, Mr Potts, was kidnapped by aliens – although he called them something else ...

They came in a spaceship and pointed a ray gun at Mr Potts. Mr Potts looked surprised, then scared, then a bit sleepy.

“He’s stunned,” whispered Morgan. “That’s what aliens do in movies. They stun people with ray guns.”

The spaceship had a set of stairs out front, and Mr Potts was taken up those stairs. Then the spaceship flew into the air and vanished.

“Did you see that?” said Mrs Hayes, the office lady.

The bell rang for the end of lunch, and we went back to class. We didn’t see Mr Potts return. We didn’t see him come down the folding stairs and go to his office, except for Morgan, who was coming back from the library.

“Mr Potts looked freaked,” he said, “like he’d seen a scary movie.”

The next day, we had assembly.

“Some of you may have seen something ... strange ... yesterday,” Mr Potts said. We nodded. It had been strange.

“You may have thought I was kidnapped by aliens,” he said. Some kids laughed, but I didn’t. Aliens do kidnap people. I’ve read about it on the Internet.

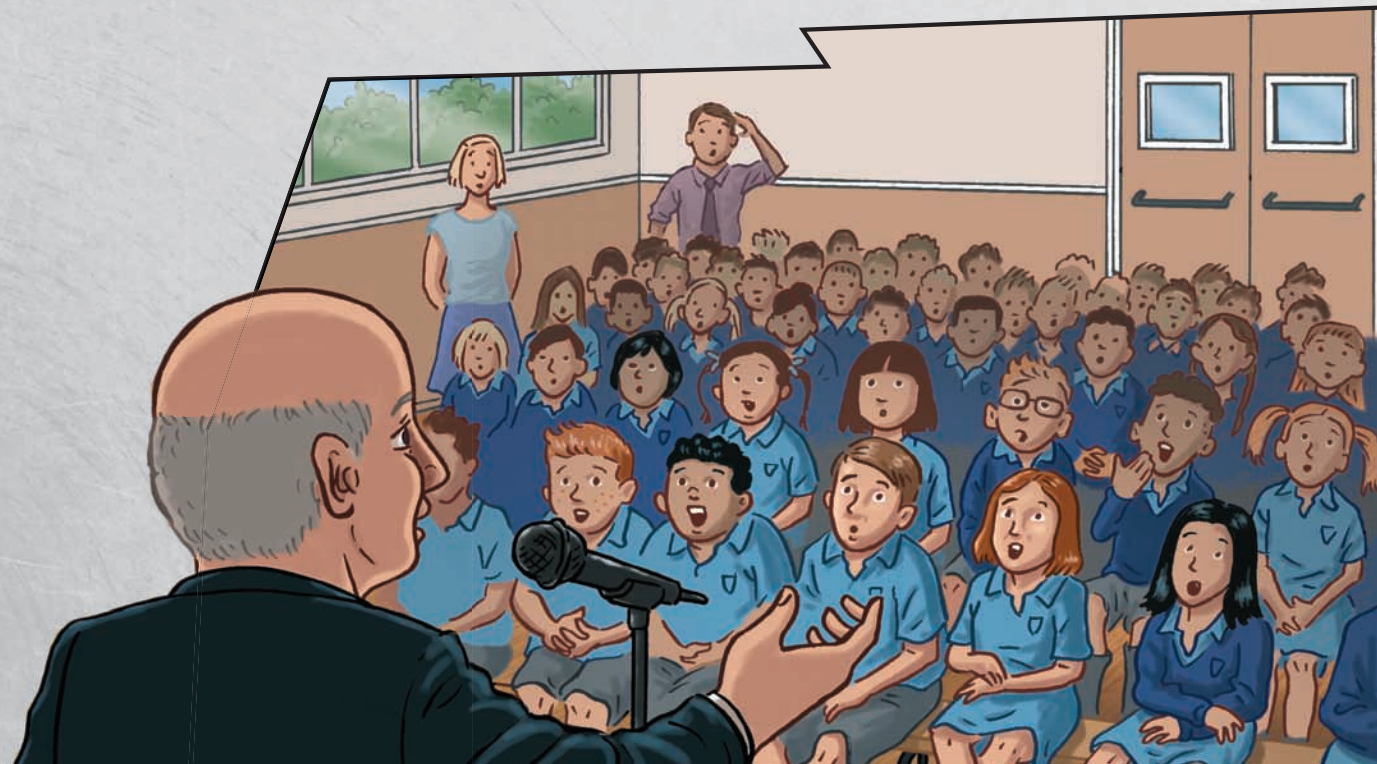
“But actually,” Mr Potts continued, “they weren’t aliens – they were time travellers.” This time I did laugh. Everyone laughed. Time travellers! I mean, how dumb is that?

Mr Potts held up his hand. “These people are from the future and have colonised another planet. They would like to come on a class trip to our school.”

We sat with our mouths open, even the teachers. Was he joking?

“Sometimes we visit museums,” said Mr Potts, “to see how people lived in the olden days. Well, it’s kind of like that. Anyway, I agreed. I’m sure it will be very educational.”

We were too stunned to talk, apart from Morgan. “But this isn’t the olden days,” he whispered. “This is *now*.”



The time travellers arrived the next day in a kind of bus. An adult-sized traveller came out first, followed by the children. All of them wore spacesuits and helmets. "They're nervous of germs," Mr Potts explained. "They don't have colds in the future." We were nervous of ray guns, but it looked like this time, they'd been left behind.

The children crowded close like *they* were scared of *us*! Mr Potts stepped forward and shook the hand of the tallest visitor. I guess it was the teacher. "Welcome to the twenty-first century," Mr Potts boomed heartily. The teacher bent forward at the waist, giving a small bow, and so Mr Potts gave a small bow back.

We showed the visitors the hall and the library. They all seemed very friendly. Then the smallest ones went with Mrs Brown to the junior classes. Two of the older ones, a boy called Xan and a girl called Zu, came to our room. Xan began to take photos. He had a tiny camera chip implanted in his finger.

"Cool!" Morgan said. "Do you take photos of your bogeys?"

"Only babies do that," said Zu.

Xan and Zu couldn't believe our whiteboard. In their classrooms, they are surrounded by screens, sort of like big, flexible tablets. And at lunchtime, the kids play in a virtual theme park.

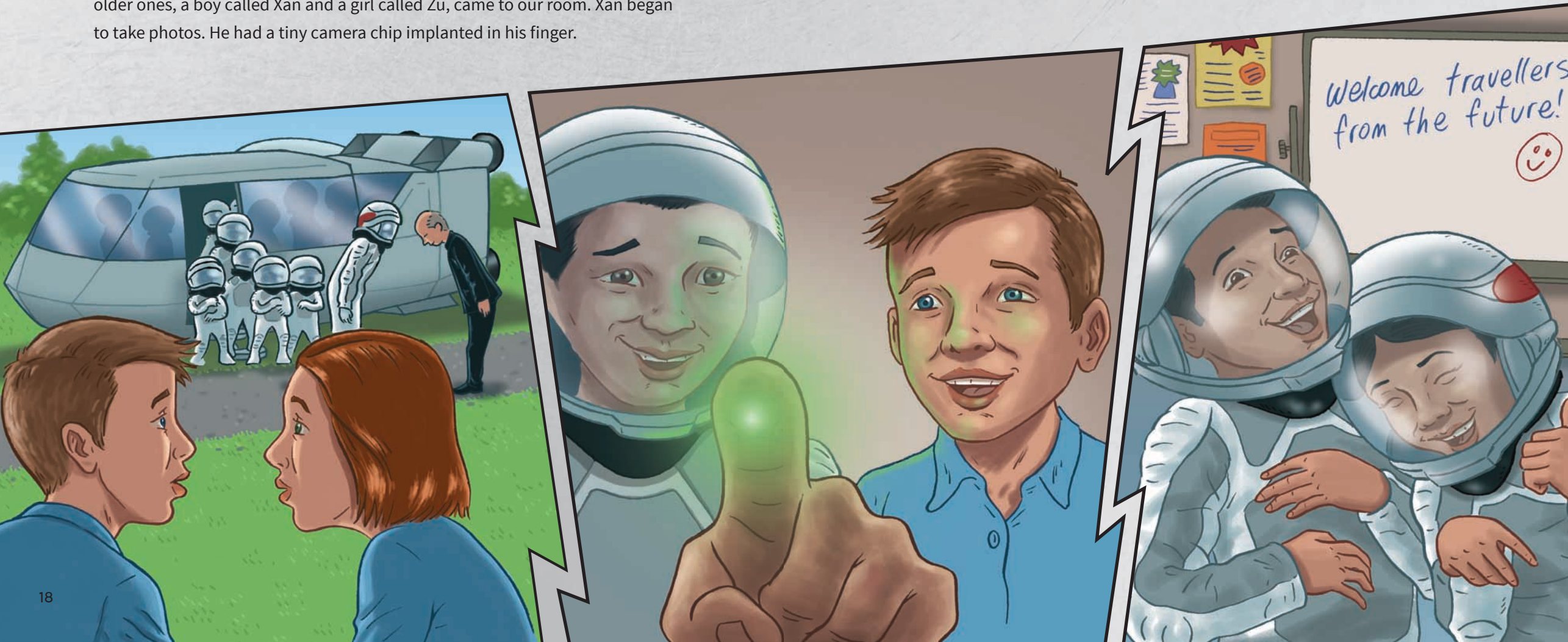
"Huh!" Morgan grumbled. "We only get swings and slides."

Xan looked confused. "What is a slide?"

We drew one on a piece of paper. Xan and Zu laughed at our paper, too.

"Slides look dangerous," said Zu.

"They're not dangerous," I said. "They're fun! Come and see. We keep them outside."



Mr Potts let us take the visitors out to the playground, even though it wasn't lunchtime yet. We have an awesome fort, with a slide and a rope ladder and a pole. Morgan climbed up the pole – to show the kids from the future what to do.

“We don't need to climb,” said Zu. She pointed to a button on her sleeve. “Our suits have anti-gravity. Watch this!” Zu pushed the button and shot into the air!

We played tag all around the fort. Xan and Zu floated into the air each time we were about to catch them. They laughed so hard their helmets fogged up.

Eventually, their teacher came running. “Children! Come down this moment. Your suits aren't meant for that. Besides, that structure looks very unsafe!”

“Olden days is fun,” said Zu.

“It's primitive!” said the teacher. “Wait till we get back. You can activate the theme park.”

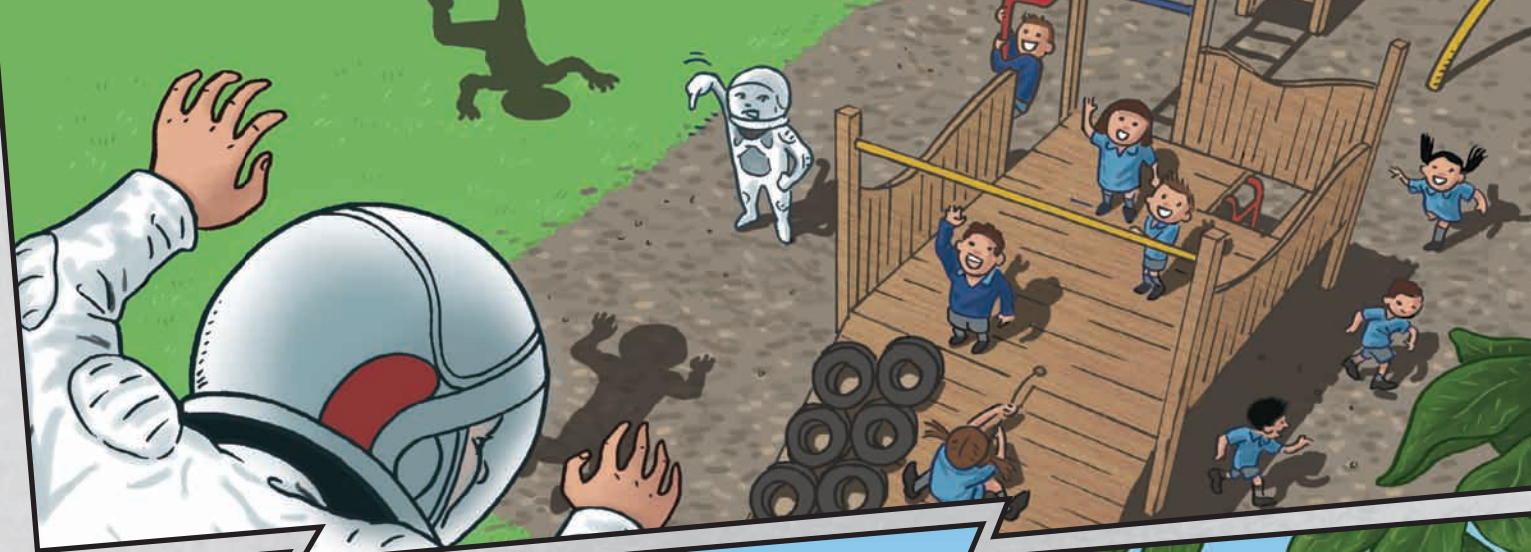
The lunch bell rang, and all the little future kids came running. They stared up at the fort like they wanted to play on it, too.

“Time to go,” said the teacher. “Children, what do you say?”

“Thank you,” they chorused. Mrs Hayes took a photo using her tablet while Zu floated in the air behind us. Then Mr Potts made us sing the school song – and it was over. The time travellers got back in their future bus, we all waved, and they were gone. Morgan still insisted on calling them aliens.

Before they left, Zu gave me something. “We found this when we were learning about newspapers. We got it printed on old-fashioned paper for you.”

It was a photo of us, with Zu hovering in the background – the same picture Mrs Hayes had just taken! Above the photo was a headline: “Time Travellers? Or a Clever Fake?”



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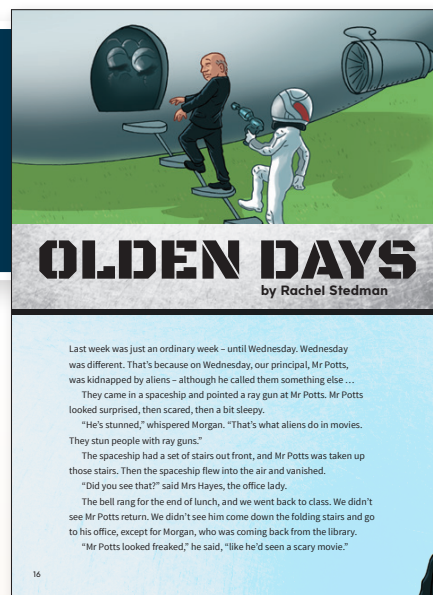
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