

**S.O.S.**  
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WINNER OF THE  
ELSIE LOCKE WRITING PRIZE 2018



Professor Amberley stared malevolently. The images made her stomach turn. Those perfect New Zealanders, plastic-free for ten years and now celebrating sanctuary status with their pristine emerald pastures, azure glacial rivers, and abundant natural forests. Cursing the surround-vision, which made you feel like you were *there*, she shut the Holographison down. The incessant birdsong was more than she could tolerate.

The disgruntled professor stared across at her sheep. They'd eaten through the day's plastic and were now pushing hard against the electric fence, not feeling the zaps any more. They wanted out. And in that moment, Amberley decided they could have it. Why carry on? Sanctuary Aotearoa had already stolen Australia's thunder. She stormed down to the lab paddock, opened the gate, and watched, scowling, as her experiment headed towards the beach.

The sheep wasted no time. They needed to get away from the lab, where they were forced to eat plastic every day. Every shred of instinct they had left told them to get back to soil. The sheep plunged into the ocean and started swimming. Years of ingesting plastic – combined with genetic modification – had caused them to store the plastic in their bodies. Consequently, they could float. They were also very strong and never wore out. So they just kept swimming. And swimming. And swimming.



Sanctuary Aotearoa's Atmospheric Guard was high above the Tasman, patrolling the borders for signs of drifting plastic sources. The image alert started flashing madly, so the guard on-beamed the satellite pictures to Tamati in Eco Patrol.

Tamati's microchip buzzed, sending a tickle down his arm. There was a border breach, involving plastic! KP, the office kākāpō, squawked indignantly.

"Sorry, mate," Tamati soothed. "I've got to go – you're in charge again."

Tamati guided the Alpha chase vehicle expertly through the floating offices of the offshore city, then raced past the aquatic villages. Homes here had hydropower self-sufficiency stations, and they were transportable. Plus they had earthquake-resistant variable tension anchors, so their appeal was huge. Every year, more green space appeared as people relocated to the floating accommodation, freeing up the mainland for organic farming and native species regeneration. Already, this land looked healthy, with crops and animals thriving in the pest- and plastic-free environment. The nation's pride in this achievement was now part of the culture. No one wanted to go back to the ignorance of previous generations.

As he approached the target co-ordinates, Tamati was astonished to see a herd of sheep swimming towards the coast. “Plastic sheep?” he said to himself. “No, wait, modified sheep!” Somehow, they’d ended up plasticised and were looking for a pure environment to detox in. Knowing he couldn’t risk these animals reaching Aotearoa’s shores, Tamati needed a solution – and quick.

“The oil rig!” he thought excitedly. The preservation society had left biodomes there when they’d finished analysing the historic structure. Tamati turned his Alpha. Within minutes, he’d located a biodome, disconnected it from the oil rig, and was heading back. Hoping desperately that the plan would work, he manoeuvred the biodome between sheep and shore. With relief, the sheep leapt aboard and immediately started devouring the fresh grass.

But now what? Tamati furrowed his brow. They couldn’t have plastic in New Zealand, but he couldn’t send the sheep back to lab life, either. Then he realised he was staring at the answer. New Zealand could gift the entire biodome to Australia! The sheep could live out their days regenerating. Sanctuary Aotearoa would be safe, the sheep saved, and Australia could show the world the importance of putting things right. Everybody wins!



illustrations by  
Daron Parton

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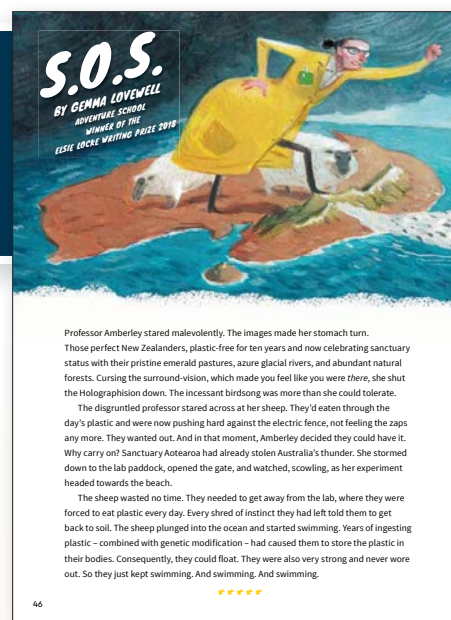
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