

HELP!
I'M AN
ALIEN



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troika books

For Eleanor and Cedric



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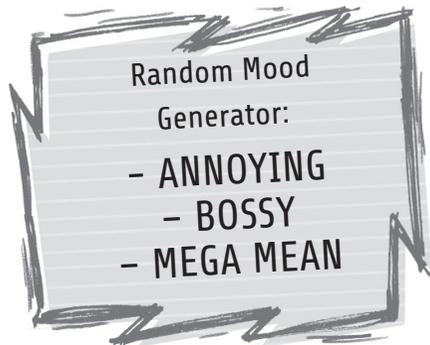
Things You Need to Know About My Family

I have NOTHING in common with my family.

Mum and Dad met on a nudist beach in Tenerife. These days they are only nudists in the shower. I found this out by accident when Dad had forgotten to lock the bathroom door and I didn't notice the sound of running water and . . .

I bought Dad a mega strength padlock for Christmas.

My incredibly annoying older sister Jessie has a Random Mood Generator. She's constantly on shuffle but her favourite tracks are:



When Mum lost her wedding ring she found it using a metal detector. It was in my baby brother Timmy's body. Mum had to dig through all his nappies until she found it. She still wears it. Gross.

We live at 26 Beechwood Road but Dad thinks 26 is boring so he renamed our house and stuck a sign on the front. He thinks 'Konnichiwa' (hello in Japanese) is cool. He is wrong.

No one in my family knows my name. They call me Bod, short for Oddbod, but I happen to know my name is Daniel Kendal.



The Big Fat Family Secret

I like to eat breakfast on my own before going to school. It's safer that way and quieter. Every day I eat four Weetabix stacked like two double decker buses parked next to each other. I need the calories to feed my growing legs which are very long and very hungry. But today I hadn't finished eating when Jessie came in to annoy me.

'What is it with you and those freaky long legs, Oddbod?' Jessie said, waving her hair straighteners around like a pair of manic chopsticks.

'There's nothing wrong with my legs.' I grabbed the cereal packets and built a wall across the kitchen table. I was unarmed.

'They're weird and I don't want them anywhere

near me.’ Jessie snapped her straighteners at my feet.

I pulled my legs back to my side of the table. No way was I letting her grab me with the super-heated jaws. I was already too tall for my age – I didn’t need to be covered with stinky burnt hair as well.

‘I don’t even know what you’re doing living in this house,’ she said.

‘I’m your brother.’

‘You reckon?’ Jessie pushed the cereal packets off the table and thrust her face at me.

I had a clear view up her nose. I’m not sure how Jessie got those hair straighteners up there without burning her nostrils, but the hair in my sister’s nose was already straight.

‘Wanna know the family secret?’ she said. ‘The one about you?’

‘There’s no secrets in this family,’ I said, quoting one of Mum’s favourite sayings.

‘No secrets?’ Jessie said. ‘Are you sure about that?’

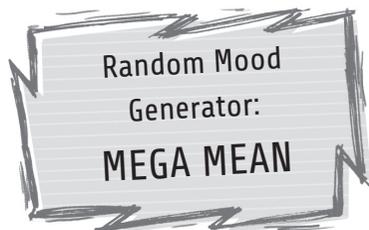
She was right and Mum was wrong. There are loads of secrets in our family and I know some of them.

My Top 5 Secrets of the Kendal Family

1. Mum says she's given up chocolate but I found a massive bar of Dairy Milk behind the microwave and the bar keeps getting smaller.
2. Timmy knows three rude words. I taught them to him last week.
3. Jessie had a puff on a cigarette at Uncle Jimmy's 40th birthday party and then she was sick. (Serves her right.)
4. Dad told Mum he was cutting Mrs Jenkins' hedge last week, but actually he was fixing Miss Duffy's car. Dad calls Miss Duffy 'Carol'. Mum calls her 'Killer Heels'.
5. I'm getting a new bike for Christmas. That's a secret I'm not supposed to know but there's a page ripped out of the Argos catalogue. I hope Mum orders the right bike because I hate pink.

There are loads of secrets in my family, but I don't think the big fat family secret Jessie was referring to was my new bike.

Jessie's Random Mood Generator was stuck on:



'You're not really my brother,' she hissed.

An icy chill of doom crept up my back and wrapped itself around my neck.

'You're an alien, abandoned on Earth by your alien parents.' She snapped her straighteners at me.

'Dad didn't want you.' *Snap.*

'I didn't want you.' *Snap.*

'But Mum felt sorry for you. And now we're stuck with you.' She whacked her stupid straighteners around my head as she got up to leave.

'Why don't you take your alien legs and go back where you came from? And you can take Serena Blake with you.'

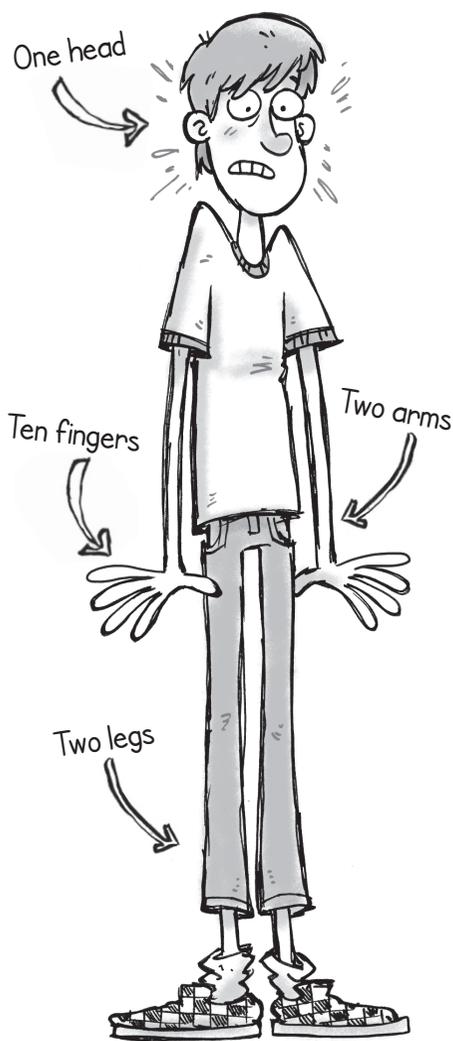
‘Serena Blake?’ I said. ‘Who’s that?’

‘A nutter in my year. See ya later, alien boy.’ Jessie threw a crust of toast at me and stormed out.

What did she mean? Aliens didn’t exist. Except in movies, and those aliens had tentacles, crazy black eyeballs or telescopic necks.



I wasn’t like that. I was normal. Well, not exactly normal, but I was convinced I was human.



5 Reasons Why I Must Be Human

1. My blood is red. When Timmy had a tantrum and bit my leg, my blood dripped onto the carpet. It left a reddish-brown stain. It did NOT burn a hole through to the floorboards. Human blood, not alien.

2. I have the normal human number of legs, arms and heads.

3. I've never been to outer space. I don't have the right passport.

4. Aliens speak weird languages. I speak English and Swearing but I only say the bad stuff when I'm really angry and there are no adults around.

5. Aliens only have one emotion: SEEK AND DESTROY. I have the full range of human emotions and right now the one on top is PANIC.

I was a hundred per cent human – so what did Jessie mean? She said I wasn't really her brother.

A rock of doom smashed me in the stomach.
Was she trying to tell me I was adopted?



The Problem With Photographs

I was still wondering who I was when Timmy charged in and pointed at me.

‘Bod. Bod. No good,’ he said.

‘Thanks, buddy, I’m beginning to realise that.’ I slumped on the chair, the rock of doom so heavy I couldn’t stand.

‘Bod. Bod.’ Timmy bashed his fists on my knees. I held his pudgy hands and looked at him closely. Then I thought about every other member of my family and what they looked like.

There was something very peculiar going on and I’d never noticed it before.

This is my analysis:

	Eyes	Hair	Height
Timmy	Baby blue	Blond, with Weetabix	Toddler
Jessie	Blue (evil)	Blond, with hair gunk	Teen plus heels
Mum	Blue (normal)	Blond, with help from hairdresser	Normal plus heels
Dad	Blue (bloodshot)	Missing	Shorter than Mum
Me	Mud brown	Curly Wurly brown	Taller than everyone else in my family, my school and my street

This is my conclusion: I don't have a single strand of DNA in common with any of my so-called family.

When Mum and Dad came into the kitchen, all I could do was stare. How come I'd never noticed it before? I look nothing like them.

‘Jessie gone to school, Bod?’ Mum said as she strapped Timmy into his high chair.

‘Lego!’ Timmy shouted.

‘She told me I’m not her brother,’ I said.

‘Oh!’ Mum and Dad said at exactly the same time, as if they were telepathic. It’s perfectly normal for best friends to be telepathic, but it’s totally weird between husband and wife, particularly when they are being telepathic about me. I think they were both freaking out at exactly the same moment because the truth about my misfit DNA was no longer a secret.

‘Lego!’ Timmy banged his fists down on the tray of his high chair.

‘Why did Jessie say that?’ I said. ‘I want to know the truth.’

‘Don’t take any notice of Jessie.’ Dad picked up the toaster and turned it upside down. He was pretending the bread was stuck inside but his bread was still sitting on his plate. I reckon Dad was studying the guts of the toaster as a way of avoiding my question.

‘Where did I come from, Mum?’ I said.

‘It all starts with a little egg and a little seed, but I haven’t got time for this now, Bod.’ Mum grabbed a cereal bowl and slammed it on the table. Her ears

had gone bright red, as if she was embarrassed about something. And I reckoned that embarrassing thing was the fact that I was adopted.

‘I know about the egg and the seed, but that’s not what I’m talking about.’ I kicked the chair. ‘I mean ME!’

‘Can we talk about this later?’ Mum didn’t bother looking up. ‘Timmy, it’s breakfast time. No Lego at the table.’

‘Lego!’ Timmy shouted.

‘Weetabix!’ Mum shouted back.

Timmy prefers toast. But Mum won’t give it to him since I taught him to play toast Frisbee and a rogue piece stuck to her bum. It could have saved her a trip to the sandwich shop at lunchtime, only a dog found it before she did and nearly ripped her skirt off on the way to work.

Toast Frisbee is now banned in this house.

‘How did I come into this family?’ I said.

Dad cleared his throat and stared out of the window.

‘Open wide, Timmy,’ Mum said as she tried to push the spoon into Timmy’s mouth.

‘Any more butter?’ Dad said.

‘In the fridge,’ Mum said.

I felt exactly like that piece of Frisbee toast. Lonely and stuck somewhere I didn't belong.

Dad was too busy avoiding the little egg/little seed talk to listen to me.

Mum was too busy looking after Timmy.

My parents didn't want to speak to me, their maybe-adopted son. I needed hard evidence – *then* they'd have to tell me the truth.

I grabbed my school bag and made out I was leaving the house. But I sneaked into the sitting room instead. The family photo albums were on the bottom shelf of the bookcase.

Every year on 31 December, Mum goes through all the photos she has taken that year and picks out the best ones to make a photo album. She's really particular about it. She says she likes to reflect on the year and remember all the really important things that have happened to us. She takes loads of photos all year, but only the best ones go in the album.

In among the photos she sticks other scraps. Old cinema tickets, flyers from museums we have visited, newspaper articles about family members.

I pulled out the album for the year I was born. I'd never looked at Mum's photos before. I didn't need to be reminded what an oddbod freak I've been for

ten years. I flicked through the pages. My birthday is in April, so I should have found myself a quarter of the way through the album.

Photos I Found

- Jessie in a Snow White outfit trampling over seven dwarfs
- Jessie ripping a teddy's arms off. (She hasn't changed.)
- Jessie with no clothes on at the beach.

I turned the page quickly. Jessie was only four in the photo and I hadn't even been born, but I didn't need to see her training to be a nudist.

After that the pages were completely blank.

In the year I was supposed to have been born, Mum's photo album was empty. There were no photos of me as a baby.

The rock of doom had left me. Instead I felt empty. Four Weetabix weren't enough to fill the howling

emptiness of not being a true member of the family.

I slapped the blank book shut. A scrap of paper flew out between the pages and floated to the floor. One of Mum's old newspaper cuttings. Probably something about Jessie winning the most beautiful baby competition or how Grandad had won a rosette for his prize marrow. I didn't need to read about their mega achievements but I didn't know where the scrap came from so I shoved it in my pocket.

I grabbed the next album off the shelf and flipped it open.

Jessie's first school photo. Jessie dressed as a pirate with a gap in her teeth.

I flipped the page.

At last, a picture of me. I was standing by the kitchen table with my hands in the air.

Mum had written *I can walk!* underneath.

In the photo I wasn't a baby. I was already a toddler.

I kept turning the pages. There I was:

- Me riding my push along car (knees up to my chin).

- Me on Dad's bike (in a child seat on the back, my long legs dragging in the dirt).
- Me at the seaside (using a Mr Whippy ice cream cone as suntan cream while the rest of the family eat theirs).

In every photo I was getting older and taller.

The next album was the same. They were all chock full of photos of Jessie and me growing up. The albums for the last two years included pictures of Timmy.

Jessie and Timmy looked like twins with an age gap. Blond hair, blue eyes, always smiling. I was always scowling, standing separately.

I can't smile for photos and my hair is different from theirs. I look like a neighbour dragged along for a Kendal family outing.

There was absolutely no photographic record of Baby Daniel – me. In a family where photos are taken all the time, that could only mean one thing.

I wasn't part of this family when I was a baby. I was born somewhere else.

I must have been adopted.



The Truth About Me and My Life

I left the house to walk to school. Only I couldn't walk, I trudged. The photographic truth weighed me down so I couldn't lift my feet off the pavement. I wasn't a true Kendal.

'Nice socks!' the postman said.

I looked down at my ankles to see what he was on about. I was wearing Snoopy socks.

I like to get dressed in the dark. That way I don't have to look at myself. Who wants to be reminded that they're too-tall-to-be-normal first thing in the morning? Unfortunately, today's socks were given to me by Jessie as a sick Christmas joke.

A builder wolf-whistled from the top of some high scaffolding.

'Nice socks!' he shouted.

I was going to be mullered when I got to school. Novelty socks are *not* cool. Who is Snoopy anyway? I ducked behind a wheelie bin and raided my school bag for a black felt tip. I coloured in Snoopy so that it looked like I was wearing black socks under my too-short jeans. Only the black pen rubbed off onto my skin so it looked like I hadn't washed for a week. Luckily the felt pen didn't smell so I reckoned no one would notice.

If Mum had bought me trousers that fitted, the whole 'nice socks' thing would go away. But obviously I wasn't as important to her as her other kids, the ones she'd given birth to.

I managed to get into my classroom without any more 'Nice Socks' comments, thanks to my fantastic black felt pen. Freddo was already there.

The Ideal Best Friend	Freddo, My Best Friend
Cool dude	Crisp addict
Sharp dresser	Fart master
Smart / clever / funny	Put-down king

'I've got a good one for you today, Dan my man,' Freddo said. 'Ready for the Toxic Samurai?'

Freddo is always trying to impress me with his extreme personal habits. Last week it was the world's biggest bogey. Only by the time he brought it into school, it had dried out and looked more like a mini rubber band than a snot-busting record breaker.

'Stand back,' he said. 'I could accidentally kill you.'

He tensed his body and raised his hands in a defensive kung fu position. He scowled and went cross eyed.

'Get on with it, mate,' I said. 'Mr Pitdown's going to walk in any minute.' Mr Pitdown is our class teacher. He's not impressed by Freddo's extreme personal habits.

Freddo hopped up and down on one leg and lashed out with the other, spinning his whole body round. As he whizzed past he let rip an enormous fart.

Pppppffffffffffttttt!

Totally immersed in his stinking whirlwind, his foot caught under a chair, throwing it into the air. It sailed over his head towards a huddle of girls who were too busy whispering and giggling to notice.



‘Watch out!’ Rooners, the captain of the Football Gang, shouted as he launched himself at the girls, shoving them out of the way.

The flying chair rebounded off the wall and flew into the centre of the room. The legs became tangled in a piece of string suspending a globe of the world from the ceiling. The world and the chair came crashing down onto Mr Pitdown’s desk.

‘How’s that?’ Freddo panted.



'Urghh!'



'Open the window!'



'Gross!' the rest of the class said.

'Toxic,' I said, holding my nose. I was far too familiar with the smell of Freddo's guts to risk breathing without taking precautions. I gave him the thumbs up with my free hand.

'Brilliant!' Freddo said as he balled his early-morning crisp packet and threw it in the bin. 'Class photo! I forgot my comb,' he said. 'Do you think anyone will notice?' He slid his crisp-encrusted fingers through his hair.

'Nah,' I said. 'Looks normal.'

Freddo wasn't bothered about stuff like washing his hair. I could see a few crisp crumbs in amongst the grease but I didn't say anything in case he tried to get rid of them and the teachers thought he was picking out nits. I didn't want Freddo to be sent home from school with a nit letter today. I had important adoption stuff to discuss with him.

'Great T-shirt by the way,' he said and slapped me on the shoulder.

T-shirt? I'd been so hung up on the sock problem, I'd forgotten I was wearing one of Dad's T-shirts. All my T-shirts were way too small for me so I'd grabbed

the nearest thing from the airing cupboard. I looked down at my chest. The T-shirt I was wearing had *World's Number 1 Dad* printed across it.

'I'm not ready to be a father yet,' I said.

'Try this one for size.' Freddo pulled a brand new T-shirt out of his school bag. 'Dad's got new stock in.'

'Thanks.' I ripped the T-shirt out of its wrapper. Freddo has got some disgusting personal habits but is THE best friend in the world. Freddo's dad runs a market stall and Freddo has inherited his knack for always having exactly the right thing at the right time. And luckily for me Freddo likes to share.

Rooners shouted something about Mr Pitdown wanting us to go to the hall for the photo.

'Come on. The evil photographer awaits.' My Number 1 best friend shoved the shirt into my hands, let rip another evil fart and disappeared into the corridor.

I dashed into the toilets to get changed. Gordon, my second best friend, stood in front of the mirror adjusting his tie.

Freddo thinks Gordon may be a very short adult spy disguised as a kid. I don't agree. I think Gordon is just a geek with terrible taste in clothes. He wears full school uniform, including a blazer, which is

pretty sad as our school doesn't have a uniform. But Freddo and I let him hang out with us because he's



got loads of cool gadgets like a microdot camera, a tie-pin microphone and night-vision goggles. He lets us look at them if we've washed our hands.

Gordon also has a nasty habit of speaking the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. So I don't think he can be a spy because spies have to be very good at keeping secrets.

'Good morning,' Gordon said.

'Nightmare,' I said.

I pulled on the new T-shirt, and before I had a chance to look at myself in the mirror, the door to the corridor flew open and our class teacher came in.

'Gordon. Daniel. Hall, now!' Mr Pitdown shouted.

Gordon took one more look in the mirror and flicked an invisible speck off his blazer.

'Very smart.' Mr Pitdown nodded as Gordon left the room.

My teacher looked me up and down and muttered something under his breath.

I couldn't hear properly but it was something like, 'Where did *that* come from?' He was talking about me, of course.

I wasn't the World's Number 1 Dad any more but even Mr Pitdown, the weirdest teacher at school, could see I didn't fit in.



Photographs - Who Needs Them?

My class were already in the hall for the class photo. They sat on tiers of chairs so that everyone's head was roughly in line with the other kids on their row. For some reason when I walked in they all started laughing.

I took the only empty seat. Front row, far left. Freddo sat somewhere in the middle, a million miles away from me. Gordon sat at the other end of my row.

'Hey you! The abnormally tall one with the T-shirt!' the photographer shouted. 'Back row, please. You're ruining the shot.'

I slouched down in the seat, trying to make my abnormality smaller. I didn't know why he was

picking on me. I wasn't the only kid wearing a T-shirt.

'Back row!' The photographer waved a laser pointer at me. I thought I was about to be assassinated so I shuffled round to the back of the scaffolding.

'I'm not sure I can . . .' I looked up at the empty seat on the back row. 'That's high.'

'Daniel, back row. Now!' Mr Pitdown bellowed.

The whole class groaned as I clambered up the steps to join the boys way up on the back row. I swear those steps were made of jelly or something because the higher I climbed, the more they wobbled.

By the time I was at the top, the room was one great shimmering hologram. Nothing solid. Nothing real. I grabbed hold of something to steady myself. Then something screamed, and when I looked down I realised I had my hands full of girls' hair.

'Daniel, leave Susan Albright alone!' Mr Pitdown shouted.

The class burst out laughing.

'It's no good. Your head is now way out.' The photographer waved his red dot all over my face as if he was trying to scribble me out. 'Come and lie down at the front.' He drew a red laser line across the feet of the front row.

The minute my feet touched the floor the wobbly

feeling in my guts was replaced with a heavy feeling of doom. Lying at the feet of my class was a bad idea.

I kept hoping Freddo would do something to rescue me. But the best friend telepathy can't have been working. Freddo just grinned, stroked his top lip (which is our code for 'Mr Pitdown is a moron') and gave me the thumbs up.

Gordon sat at the end of the front row. I raised an eyebrow, hoping for a bit of solidarity, but he ignored me. His eyes were focused on the camera, ready to have his photo taken. Gordon always does exactly as he's told.

I lay down, with a class full of Year 6 feet a few centimetres away. I put my head in front of Gordon's feet. He was the only person I could trust not to kick me. Gordon doesn't do touching.

'What is that on your legs?' Mr Pitdown said.

My trousers had hitched up so everyone could see the dirty felt-tip marks on my leg.

'Please, sir, I can't sit here,' the girl sitting by my ankles said. 'I've got my best shoes on and my mum will kill me if I get them ruined.' She pulled her shoes up and hid them under her skirt.

'Daniel Kendal!' Mr Pitdown roared like Godzilla.

'You are ruining the photo on purpose. Out in the corridor, now! And take your rubbish with you.' He pointed at a scrap of newspaper on the floor.

I snatched up the piece of rubbish and went out into the corridor. I slammed the door shut so I didn't have to hear the sadist photographer telling everyone to say 'Cheese' ten thousand times.

There were no seats in the corridor so I sat on the floor, rested my head against the wall and stared at my reflection in the shiny metal bin shoved in the corner. That's when I saw what was on the T-shirt Freddo had given me.

'Thanks, Freddo!'

No wonder Mr Pitdown didn't like me. There was no way he was going to let me be in the school photo wearing that T-shirt. *And* he made me pick up someone else's rubbish as a punishment. I was about to ball the scrap of paper I'd picked up from



the floor to slam dunk it in the rubbish bin when I realised it wasn't someone else's rubbish after all. It was the newspaper cutting that had fallen out of Mum's photo album. I'd shoved it into my pocket at home without looking at it and it must have fallen out when I was being humiliated at the feet of my classmates. I smoothed out the paper to see what had been so important for Mum to keep in amongst the family photos. It was dated 25 April. My birthday.

METEOR CRASHES TO EARTH IN PARK

Police have been inundated by reports of a falling star crashing to Earth in local Park Hill Fields.

Police are mystified by a large crater that has appeared in the middle of the football pitch, but no evidence of the meteor itself has been found. Fragments of something from outer space may have been removed by meteor hunters.

The Ministry of Defence say that it is highly unlikely to have been an alien spaceship crash-landing on Earth.

It happened on my birthday. Mum kept the newspaper cutting because it was about me.

My head buzzed with a billion thoughts. I tried to line them up so they made sense.

My birthday.



Alien spaceship landed.



Baby alien inside.



Mum and Dad pulled alien baby from crashed ship.



Dad put remains of spaceship in a skip.



Mum took alien baby (me!) home.



They decided to keep me.



Baby alien becomes Daniel Kendal.



Mum keeps newspaper clipping to remind her of how I came to be in this world.

Jessie was right.

I wasn't just adopted.

I was an alien.

No wonder I didn't fit in. No wonder they didn't want me in the class photo. I'd tried being human for ten years but I'd been wasting my time. A shiver went up and down my extra-long body as my brain took in the truth. I was a different species. Maybe even a superior race. One that didn't belong on Earth.

I was the ultimate misfit.

I came from another planet.

A real live extra-terrestrial.

I was still digesting this awesome fact when Mr Pitdown called me back into the hall. 'Individual portraits now, Daniel. I hope you are going to behave.'

I nodded. My inner alien wanted to tell him I hadn't done anything wrong. Ten years of human experience told me not to bother arguing.

I joined the back of the line.

'These portraits are going to be very important,' Mr Pitdown said, addressing the whole class. 'We are going to create a Wall of Wonders in the classroom.'

'What's that, sir?' Susan Albright asked.

'I'm going to pin up all your portraits on the classroom wall and whenever you do a particularly

good piece of work or are picked for the school football team, I will post a commendation under your picture.' Mr Pitdown rolled the tip of his moustache between his finger and thumb. 'In addition, you can add personal messages to your friends' pictures. At the end of the year, each member of the class will have a full memento of their last year at this school.'

'Cool!' The Football Gang slapped each other's hands and whooped.

The girls huddled in groups and whispered.

I didn't want to have my photo taken with these humans. I didn't need anything that reminded me of my last year at human junior school. I had nothing in common with them. As I edged closer to the photographer, an epic idea started forming in my head. The empty feeling in my stomach changed into a warm, fuzzy feeling. A feeling of certainty. A feeling of strength. At last, I knew who I was.

I plonked myself on the chair in front of the camera.

'Too tall!' the photographer said.

'You could adjust your tripod,' I said.

'I really need individual pictures of the whole class,' Mr Pitdown said. 'Do as you are told, Daniel, just kneel down.' He pointed to a spot on the floor.

The whole class sniggered. Freddo shoved his hand up his jumper and pumped his elbow up and down while he armpit-farted the tune of *Mission: Impossible*.

Humans enjoy humiliating species from other planets. Even human best friends.

I sank to my knees.

'Smile!' the photographer said.

I pulled my most demented alien face and made a decision.

Click! The photographer took the shot.

Mum could stick the photo in her album if she wanted to, but that was going to be the last picture ever taken of me on Earth.

I didn't belong here. I needed to return to wherever I came from.

The alien known as Daniel Kendal was going home.