

An extract from Jazz Harper: Space Explorer

MARS YEAR 84

Nearly twenty Mars years ago, the extraordinary story of two children who discovered life on Mars heralded the beginning of a new era for the Marineris Colony and all humans living and working on the Red Planet.

Now, after many years, researchers have uncovered documents from the Marineris archives which shed new light on the discovery and the events that led to it.

Those documents are published here together for the first time. What follows is a story like no other...

28th May 2060

Dear Brand-New Diary of Adventure,

Today was our very last visit to Gran before our epic mission to Mars. Mum and I travelled there on the air tram, like usual. Did you know that air trams travel really, really fast? I looked it up on the map app on my webspectacles as we sped over the tall tower blocks and green parks. At one point, we got up to 147mph!

I asked Mum if that's how fast we'll be travelling through space. She said that the rocket will be much faster – over twenty thousand miles per hour!

Twenty thousand! That's mega-fast. That's stomach-churning, brain-melting fast. Sometimes, when we're on the air tram, I play games to make the journey more fun. Today, I imagined that I was a space pilot, speeding through the galaxy. Outside the windows, stars and planets zoomed past, blurring into streaks of light. An alien spaceship approached with lasers beaming but I was ready to zap it into another dimension as soon as it got into range.

"Pow! Pow-pow-pow! Pow!"

"Oh Jazz, you're not shooting aliens again," said Mum as the other people on the tram stared. "We like aliens!"

I explained that they had us cornered in the outer spiral arm of a distant galaxy and that I had no choice.

Mum said that I should at least try to bring one back alive so that she could study it. That's what Mum does for a living. She's an extraterrestrial-life researcher — an alien scientist.

I performed a lightspeed U-turn to capture an alien fleeing the shattered spaceship in a life raft.

"Hmm," Mum said, pretending to investigate my captured alien. "It has bug eyes, seven legs, a spiky exoskeleton and liquid brains. This is like nothing I've ever seen before, Jazz. We could win the Galactic Discovery Prize for this."

"Do you think that's what the alien life on Mars will look like?" I asked.

Mum laughed. "I doubt that they'll have seven legs. In fact, I

doubt that they'll have any legs at all."

I spent the rest of the journey thinking about Martians with tentacles and suckers, and some that crawled over the ground like slugs. When the air tram finally got to Sunset Heights, we released our seven-legged alien back into the wild and hopped onto the platform.

Gran lives in one of those old-fashioned retirement villages from the 2020s: all glass and steel and curving walls. When she isn't racing her friends around the courtyard on her hover scooter or throwing street parties on weeknights, she's in her top-floor flat, gazing through her binoculars at the happenings down below or inviting people over for curry so hot that it blows your head off.

I could smell Gran's curry as soon as we got upstairs. Even before the front door opened, my eyes watered.

