

# THE STAR ZOO

HARRY GILBERT





## THE STAR ZOO

Humans are the most successful animals on the planet Earth – successful, that is, in the fight with other animals. If it's a question of fighting for food or land, then we humans always win. We cut down trees, build houses and factories, grow our own food. The animals must go and find another place to live . . . if they can.

We humans always win because we are intelligent. We can think, talk, use tools, make wonderful machines. We are extremely clever animals . . .

Perhaps too clever. Perhaps people in the future will think differently. Hummingbird (Hummy for short) is a girl of sixteen who lives in about 22,500 AD, on a planet a long way from Earth. She likes clothes and dancing, and worries about who she will marry. She has never seen a tree. She has never seen any animal or bird. She knows what animals are, of course, because there are stories about them in the Book of Remembering. But who can believe old stories like that?





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Stage 3 (1000 headwords)



OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

2000

Series Editor: Jennifer Bassett

Founder Editor: Tricia Hedge

Activities Editors: Jennifer Bassett and Christine Lindop

For Will

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## You must marry me

Nothing ever happens on Just Like Home – that's the name of the planet I live on. I get so bored!

But tonight was Remembering Night and that's exciting. There's the big fire where everybody must put on something that they love and watch it burn. Then there's the dancing round the fire.

But what I like best about Remembering Night are the clothes. We usually wear what we like on Just Like Home – but the clothes must have the name of our name-animal on them. For example, I always have the word 'Hummingbird' on my clothes, which means my name is Hummingbird – Hummy for short.

Nobody knows what a hummingbird looks like, but we know what birds are. Birds are animals that fly. The Book of Remembering tells us that.

I don't always believe what the Book of Remembering says.

Nobody knows who you are on Remembering Night because you wear black clothes that cover you from head to foot, and there is no name of your name-animal. You can only see people's eyes looking out of the eye-holes in the clothes.

It was dark outside. The only light came from the big fire. I held my father's hand at first and we danced together. My mother danced away and I couldn't see her. Soon I lost my



father. I didn't know where they were.

It didn't matter. I was dancing in the middle of the crowd. Our family would meet together in the robot plane afterwards.

There were about a thousand people round the fire. Too many people to count. Nearly everybody on Just Like Home was there.

Everybody, on planets all over the Galaxy, was dancing round fires at the same time. What a wonderful thing!

The last dance began. You hold hands in a big circle round the fire – everybody together. You dance round and round in a circle until . . .

Well, everybody knows what happens in the end.

I was holding hands with someone on my right and someone on my left. We were all shouting, 'BURN BURN BURN BURN BURN BURN BURN . . .'

The last dance went on for a long time. In the end somebody fell down. He pulled down the people on both sides of him. Then people on both sides of *them* fell down. Everybody was too tired to stay on their feet.

People fell down all round the circle. Falling. Dying.

We wear black clothes to remember. We remember the Burning.

We remember that we have a Galaxy, but we are alone. We are empty in our hearts. We are the only living things in the Galaxy.

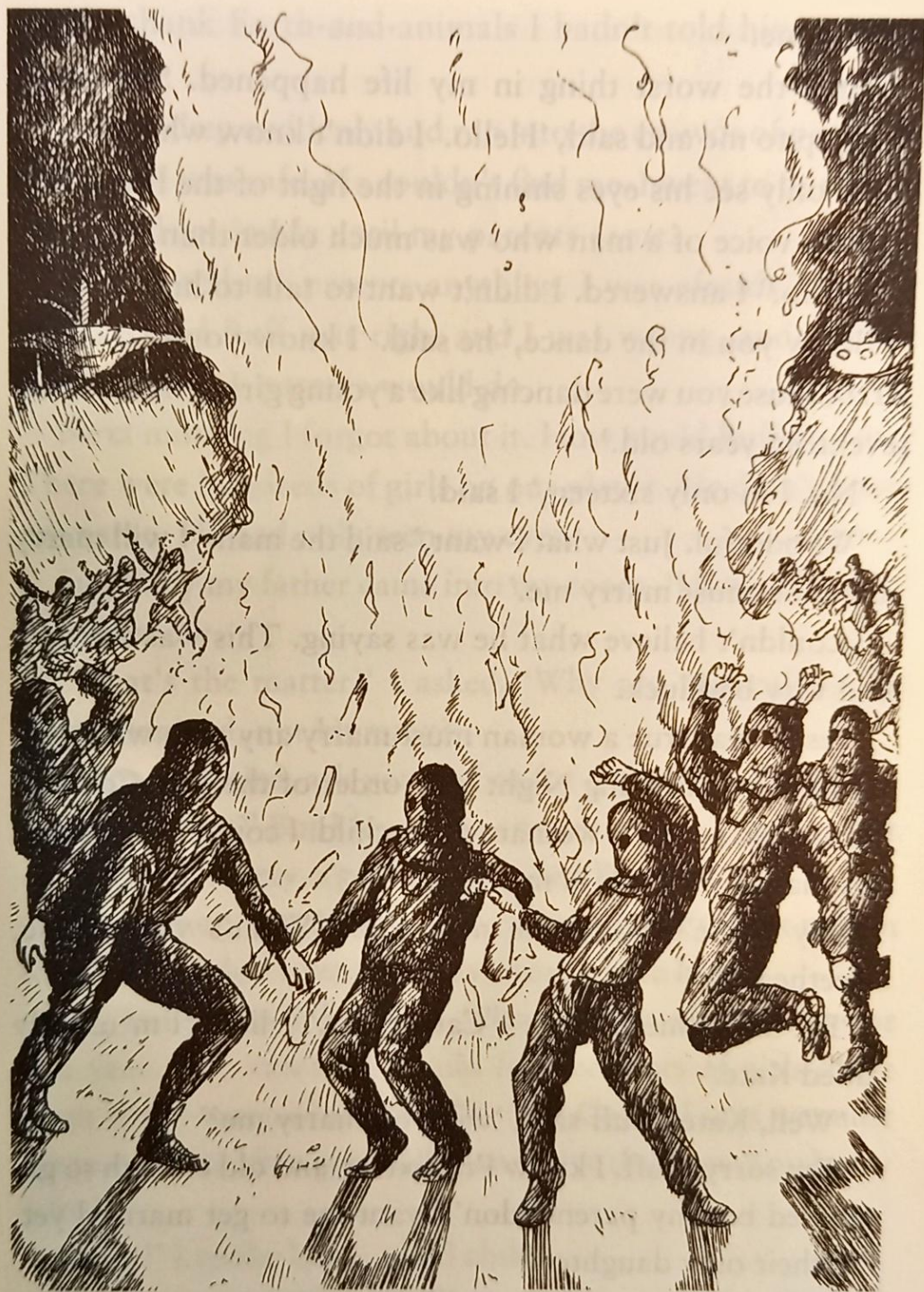
Sad. Lonely and sad.

I lay on the ground, very, very tired. I was happy and sad at the same time. Happy to be with everybody, sad that we



*You must marry me*

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*The last dance began. You hold hands in a big circle round the fire – everybody together.*