

SHERMY & SHAKE,

THE NOT-SO-NICE NEIGHBOR



Newbery Honor-Winning Author
KIRBY LARSON

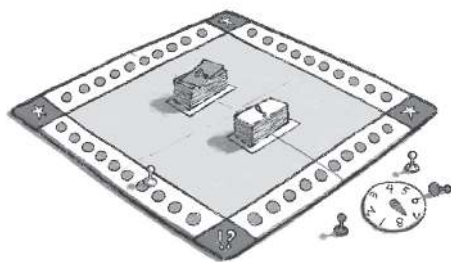
ILLUSTRATED BY
SHINJI FUJIOKA

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For Clio and the Real Grandpa Gordy
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To pck, hehe . . .
SF



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JUNE



GREETINGS, EARTHLING



Shermy scooped up the last of the Sweetie Flakes from his cereal bowl. This was the best bite of all—just milk and sugar sludge. He smacked his lips.

“Mom, make him stop that!” His big sister, Brynn, peeked over her coding book.

Shermy slurped again. Extra loud.

Brynn covered her ears. “MO-om!”



“Shermy, mind your manners, please.” Mom sipped her coffee. Quietly. “And don’t forget to take out the trash.”

Shermy squinted at the chore chart. He was sure it was Brynn’s turn. But even without his glasses, he could see the magnet by his name. He picked up his bowl and drank the last of the milk. Then—*CLANK*—he dropped his spoon into the bowl.

Brynn jumped up from the table. “I’m going over to Kelsey’s where I can concentrate.”

“It’s not me,” Shermy said. “It’s the cereal that’s noisy.”

“Brothers!” Brynn stomped out of the house, taking her book with her.

“Maybe I should start serving oatmeal,” Mom said.

Shermy groaned. Dad was the oatmeal chef, not Mom. His was smooth and slid right down. Hers had lumps. Not even ten scoops of brown sugar could help him swallow it.

Shermy tiptoed to the dishwasher and carefully put

his bowl inside. "I promise to chew quiet as a mouse the whole summer."

"Thank you." Mom took a good look at him. "A vacation from school does not mean a vacation from wearing your glasses." She wagged her finger. "Go put them on."

"You said to take out the trash!" Shermy grabbed the trash bag with one hand and pinched his nose shut with the other. He zoomed outside to the garbage can, holding his breath while he lifted the lid. *Clunk*. In went the bag. *Thunk*. Down went the lid. He made it! Not one whiff of garbage air. Shermy did a little dance. This was his lucky day.

"Gree-tings, Earth-ling."

Shermy spun around at the sound of the robot voice. "Wh-what? Who said that?"

"It is I, Earth-ling. Greetings."

Without his glasses, Shermy could only see things that were close by. "Where are you?" he asked.

"Here!"

Rustle-crackle-rustle. The branches of Mrs. Brown's apple tree did a little dance.

"You're a tree?" Shermy asked.

"*In* the tree," the voice answered.

Shermy looked around for protection. There was only the garbage can lid. He yanked it up, held his breath, and took one step toward the fence. He couldn't see anyone . . . or *anything*. "Who *are* you?"

"I am Falzar, from Jupiter," the voice answered.

"Are you . . . friendly?" Shermy asked. In the books he read, things didn't go well for humans if the aliens weren't friendly.

"When I'm not hungry," Falzar replied.

Shermy held the lid up higher and took a step back. "Are you . . . hungry?"

"I have come a long way, and my superpowers are running low," Falzar answered. "A Toaster Tart would taste very good."

"Toaster Tart?" said Shermy.

"Blueberry," said Falzar.

“How do you know about those?” Shermy asked.

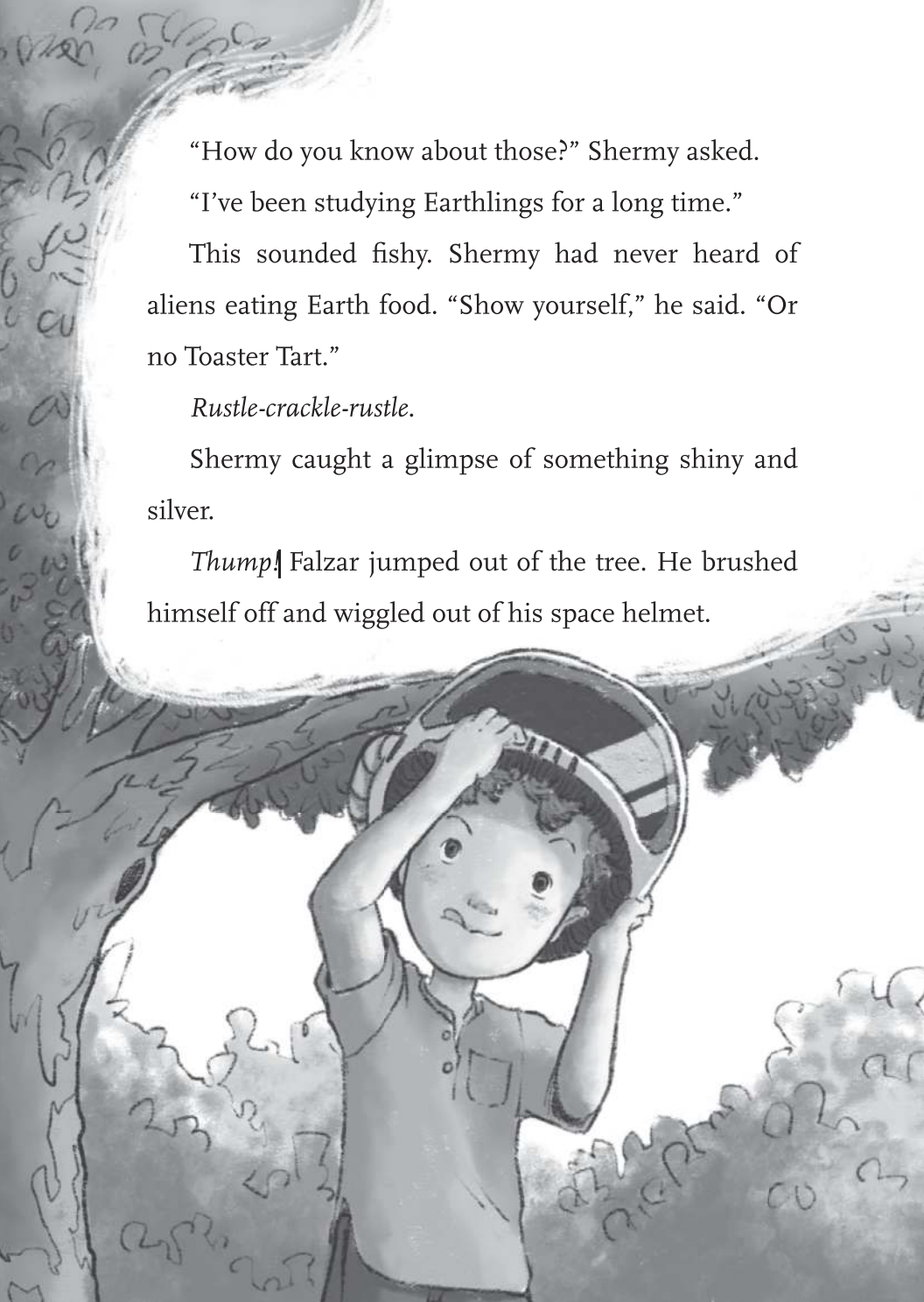
“I’ve been studying Earthlings for a long time.”

This sounded fishy. Shermy had never heard of aliens eating Earth food. “Show yourself,” he said. “Or no Toaster Tart.”

Rustle-crackle-rustle.

Shermy caught a glimpse of something shiny and silver.

Thump! Falzar jumped out of the tree. He brushed himself off and wiggled out of his space helmet.



"You're not from Jupiter!" Shermy set down the garbage can lid.

"You're right," said Falzar. "I'm from Walla Walla."

"Is that a real place?" This kid had already tried to trick Shermy once. Maybe he was doing it again.

"It sure is. And the people who founded it liked it so much they named it twice." The boy tossed the helmet in the air. "That's my stepdad's favorite joke."

"And you're not Falzar." Shermy should've figured it out sooner, seeing whose backyard the kid was in. "You're Mrs. Brown's grandson, Shake. She told me you were coming." Well, actually, Mrs. Brown hadn't told *Shermy*. She had told his mom when she came over for coffee. Shermy had been hanging around in case Mrs. Brown brought chocolate chip muffins again. But she hadn't brought anything except the news about Shake.

Shake's mom and stepfather were going on their honeymoon trip for the whole summer, so Shake was staying with his grandma. Shermy wasn't sure what a

honeymoon trip was, but he guessed that kids weren't allowed.

"I knew you weren't from Jupiter." Shermy shoved his hands in his pockets. That would've been too much to hope for, even on the first day of summer vacation.

"But I would still like a Toaster Tart," said Shake. "Do you have any?"

"Maybe." Shermy pointed to Shake's helmet. "Can I wear that?"

"I'll think about it," Shake said. "After the Toaster Tart."

The boys went inside. Shermy climbed on a chair to get the last box of Toaster Tarts out of the cupboard. There were only two left inside.

"I may not be from Jupiter, but I do have superpowers." Shake snatched both Toaster Tarts and shoved them in his mouth. Without the toasting part!

"No fair!" Shermy's mouth watered.

"I told you I had superpowers," mumbled Shake.