

AS EASY AS ONE, TWO, THREE

BY SIMON COOKE



Emergency lights flashed. Alarms beeped.

“Warning!” said the ship’s computer. “Energy crystal damaged in crash landing. We are on an unfriendly planet. Oxygen level low. Life support failing.”

“Yes, I know,” said Mia, her heart racing. “Be quiet. I need to think.”

“Just doing my job,” said the computer. “Wait ... a message is coming.”

Tane’s face appeared on the com-screen. “Hey, sis – I’ve found another energy crystal, but I’ve got a problem. My jetpack ran out of fuel, and now I’m stuck in security goo right outside the Meruvian fortress. You’ve got to rescue me before the Meruvians find out I’m here!”

“Don’t worry,” said Mia. “I’ll think of something!”

But what? Tane had taken the last jetpack. She would have to go on foot. That meant passing through the Deadly Maze of Doom – the most difficult defence maze in the universe! At space-pilot school, they’d taught her that it’s possible to find your way through any maze. They’d said it’s as easy as one, two, three. Just take it step by step. She hoped they were right.

“OK,” Mia said to herself. “Step one: Grab an enviro-suit so I can breathe outside. Step two: Find a can of slip-slicker spray to dissolve the security goo and unstick Tane.” She sighed. “Now there’s just step three: Get through the Deadly Maze of Doom!”

She picked up a portable guide-bot and snapped it onto her wrist. Then she climbed out of the spaceship and walked towards the maze. It looked huge and frightening.

Mia switched on the guide-bot. "What's the quickest way through the maze?" she asked.

The guide-bot buzzed. A laser light shot out and shone on a section of the maze wall.

"That's not the entrance," Mia said.

"You asked for the quickest way," the guide-bot replied.

"The quickest way is straight through the wall."

"But I can't walk through walls," Mia groaned.

"You never told me that," said the guide-bot. "Humans! They never give enough information. And when things go wrong, they blame the poor guide-bot!"

The guide-bot led Mia to the maze's entrance. "Will I get to Tane in time?" Mia thought anxiously. "We don't want to end up as slaves in the Meruvian slime pits!"

She followed the guide-bot's light deep into the maze.

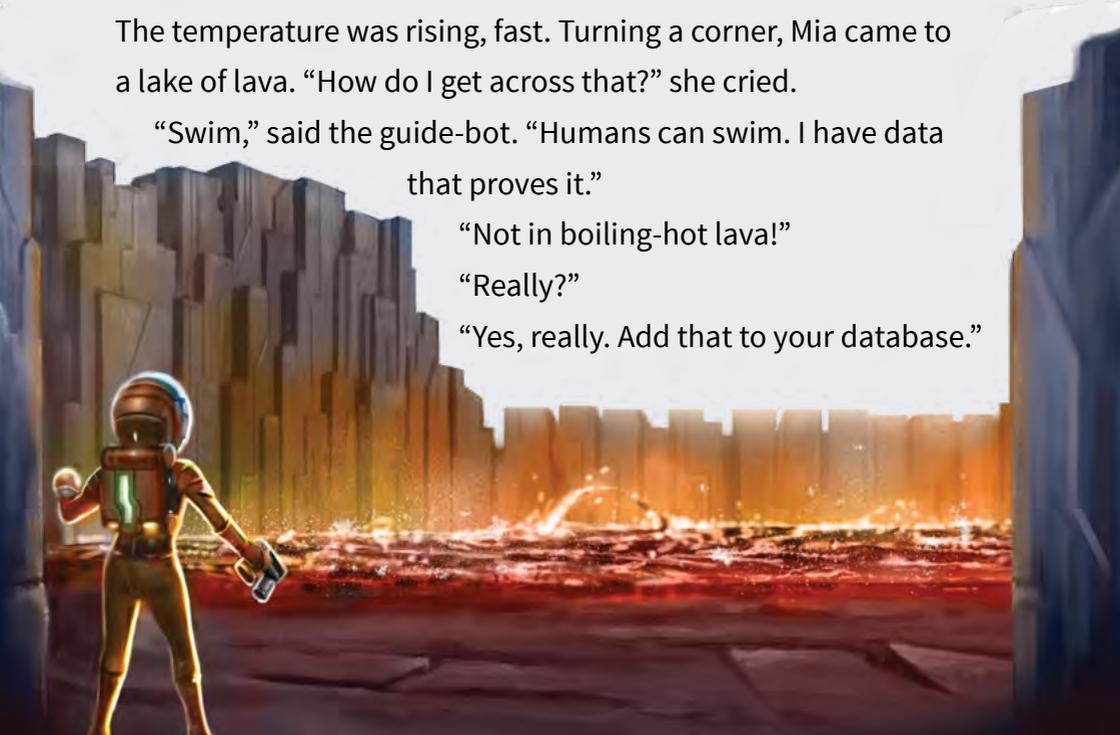
The temperature was rising, fast. Turning a corner, Mia came to a lake of lava. "How do I get across that?" she cried.

"Swim," said the guide-bot. "Humans can swim. I have data that proves it."

"Not in boiling-hot lava!"

"Really?"

"Yes, really. Add that to your database."



"New information added," the guide-bot said. "Removing all paths blocked by lava. Computing new course."

The new route led Mia to a room with five doors. The guide-bot's laser pointed at one of them. Mia paused, thinking hard.

"Guide-bot. More information for you. Don't take me down paths blocked by fire or pools of acid ... or Meruvian dragons."

The guide-bot buzzed. Then it chose another door.

"Ha," grinned Mia. "This *is* as easy as one, two, three!"

She crossed a bridge of ice over a river of nightmares. Then the path led into a long tunnel. The walls were covered in green hands that tickled as Mia went by. It seemed silly, but Meruvians were terrified of tickling.



Finally, Mia reached a long path of purple carpet. At the end of the path, she could see the Meruvian fortress. She was nearly there!

Mia began to run, but tiny purple tentacles suddenly rose up. They grabbed at her legs, forcing her back.

The guide-bot said in a small voice, "Shall I ...?"

"Yeah, yeah," said Mia. "Add it to your database."

"Done. So what about ...?"

"Oh, be quiet," said Mia. "Just show me the way."



“I was computing that if you don’t like tiny carpet tentacles, you might not like what’s coming up behind you.”

Mia turned round. A huge purple octopus was climbing over the maze wall. A tentacle the size of a tree trunk swept towards her.

Mia ran. “Add more data! No giant, girl-eating purple octopuses!”

“Computing new course,” said the guide-bot.

It pointed to a tunnel on the left, and Mia raced towards it. She had escaped the octopus, but the tunnel got narrower and narrower. Mia couldn’t go any further.

She glared at the guide-bot.

“Do you want to add more data?” it asked timidly.

“Yes,” snapped Mia. “Don’t take me down paths that are too narrow to get through.”

The guide-bot sniffed and began to compute.

“If only I had time to think about all the different obstacles I might run into,” thought Mia, “then the guide-bot would have all the data it needed.”

“Beeep! New course plotted. Follow laser.”

Mia set off after the light. This time, there were no more obstacles. After a few minutes, she turned a corner and was suddenly out of the maze!

“About time,” said Tane, grinning up at her. He was stuck in security goo up to his neck.



Mia sprayed her brother with slip-slicker and pulled him free. “Watch out,” cried Tane. “The guards have seen us!”

A group of Meruvian soldiers had come out of the fortress and were heading straight for them.

“Guide-bot,” said Mia. “Guide us back to the spaceship the way we came.”

“Reversing course,” said the guide-bot.

They hurried back through the maze. The Meruvians followed but gave up when they got to the tickly tunnel.

Back in the spaceship, Mia put the new energy crystal in place, and Tane got the ship ready for take-off. “Thanks for rescuing me,” he said.

“No worries,” laughed Mia. “It was as easy as one, two, three!”

“What about thanking me?” beeped the guide-bot.

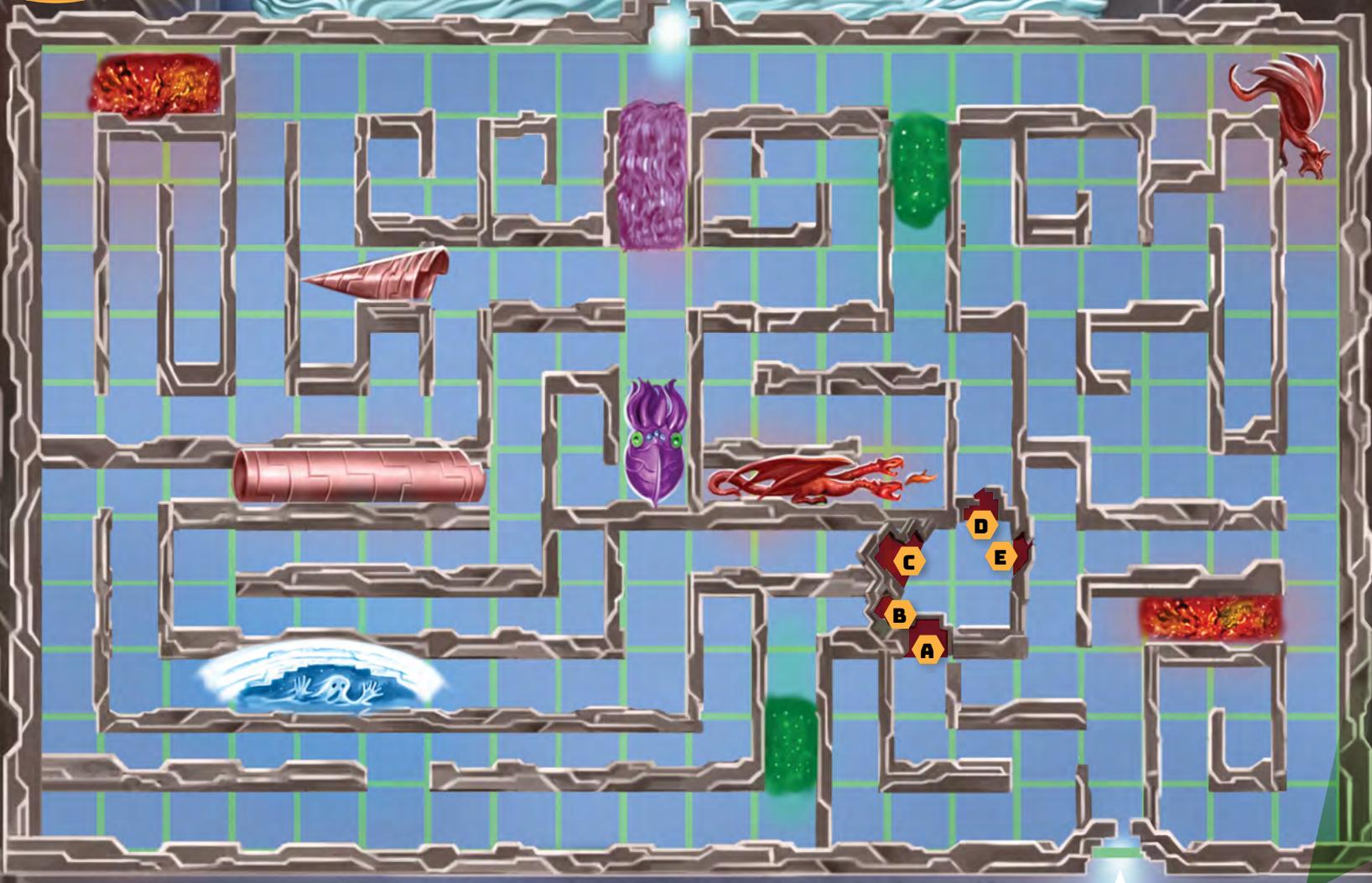
But Mia and Tane were too busy to answer. A Meruvian warship was closing in on them.

“New data,” muttered the guide-bot. “Humans are very rude.”





OK, you have to get through the maze and rescue Tane. You must avoid walls, boiling lava, fire, acid, dragons, purple carpet with tentacles, land octopuses, and tunnels that become narrow! All right ...



1. Go through the entrance. You are now on square 1.
2. Go one square north.
3. Go three squares west.
4. Go one square north.
5. Go through door A.
6. Go through door C ...



CAN YOU FINISH THE GUIDE-BOT'S INSTRUCTIONS?



As Easy as One, Two, Three

by Simon Cooke

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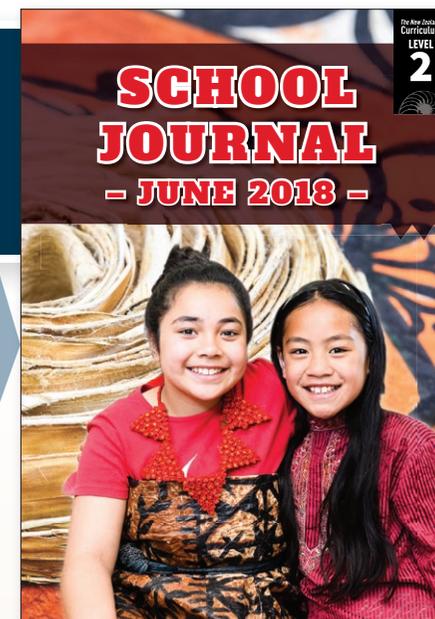
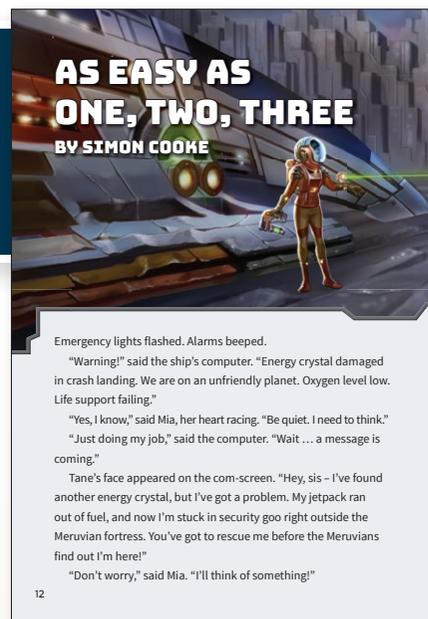
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