

# **Rolo the Pet Earthling**

Inside the Writer's Mind

by Hans Ness

## **Premise**

What if humans were pets? This premise is evident in the title, *Rolo the Pet Earthling*. It's unique enough to be considered "high concept".

The idea came to me when I was writing about psychology. I wanted to show how quirky human behavior would be to an outsider, so I created a pet guide written by an alien for aliens called "Understanding Your Pet Earthling".

## **Story Concept**

I started with this idea of an alien world with pet earthlings. I wanted to avoid the typical plot of alien antagonists conspiring against humans. Instead I wanted the aliens to be allies, just like dog owners are the allies of dog, not enemies. I also avoided collars and abduction because then it would be like slavery where the aliens are the bad guys. I originally chose a buddy story to contrast an earthling and an alien; however, I ended up making the aliens very human-like to be more relatable, so that contrast was dropped, but the buddy format remained. I wanted these characters to be thrown into a new place where they would solve a mystery together; this idea got refined so it's mostly Rolo the human protagonist, and the mystery became the lost history of Earth. With my background in psychology, I also wanted to give the characters deep internal conflicts.

## **Genre**

Science fiction—specifically *soft* science fiction for its comically absurd technology.

It is somewhere between literary and genre fiction. The world is clearly genre sci-fi with aliens, robots, and space. However, like literary fiction, the story is character-driven with complex inner conflicts. It does employ tropes, but less than in genre sci-fi.

I am a fan of animated family films, so I used a story structure similar to screenplays and thought much about visuals to give it a cinematic quality.

## **Setting**

Set on planet Blorx in the distant future.

I embraced the idea of "making the familiar strange, and the strange familiar," so this alien world needed to feel familiar. The physical world is strange, with purple grass, yellow sky, and odd creatures. But the society is very familiar, with suburban homes, an urban city, an earthling park (dog park), subways, a pet store, museum, tavern, harbor, and boardwalk amusement park. I used alien-ized words like flish, blirds, clickets, squirlers, blizza, blizbee, etc., so they'd be familiar enough to recognize, but different enough to remind you it's alien.

I avoided a utopia because it's hard to create conflict if everyone is wise and rational, but I wanted the mood lighter than a dystopia. So like our own world, Blorx is neither utopian nor dystopian.

The technology is futuristic, but also anachronistic to make it more familiar, like holographic newspapers, subway tubes that are wormholes, robots that do everything manually, etc. This also adds to the comic absurdity.

The aliens had to be much smarter than humans, just like humans are much smarter than pets. (Equal intelligence would make it slavery, not pet ownership.) I also made the aliens much bigger so they could pick up humans like we pick up cats and dogs, plus it shows who has the power. But if they were too logical and rational, it would be hard to relate to them, and it might easily slide into critical social commentary about humanity. Also we earthlings don't like to feel inferior, so I limited the aliens' intelligence to just science and made them socially and emotionally as flawed as humans, which also allows for more conflict.

*Spoilers Ahead!*

## Characters

*Rolo* — Earthling boy, age 13 but mature. (Age 5 in prologue.) Protagonist. He is an adolescent who wants more independence and purpose in life. His minor flaw is not speaking up for himself, which he overcomes to the point of defiance. He is more mature than Zira, which creates tension in their pet/owner relationship.

*Zira* — Alien girl, like age 10-11 (actually 70-78, but aliens grow 7× slower, like dog years). Flawed protagonist, lacking some empathy due to immaturity, which she overcomes. She is emotionally fragile, but also emotionally intelligent and open to growth. Even though she is hurting inside, I didn't want the mood to be sad and depressing, so she is outwardly chipper most of the time. Her name is from Dr. Zira in *Planet of the Apes*.

*Riffa* — Zira's big sister, middle child, like age 15-16. Supporting character who arcs from a typical kid, to a stereotypically withdrawn and dislikable adolescent, to a helpful big sister. Her name is like "rift", which she has with Zira.

*Lazro* — Zira's big brother, like age 16. He is kind and loving toward Zira, and helps mediate her tense relationship with their mom. His name is like Lazarus (his family presumes he is dead but hopes he will come back).

*Mom* — Rarely in the story; either stern, nagging, or absent. Zira has a tense relationship with her. (Their father is never mentioned.)

*Robots* — Antagonists, though more comical than a serious threat. They are like dog catchers, a *trope* in pet stories. Their overzealous, militarized approach to animal control is absurd humor. I didn't want aliens to be antagonists so I put robots in that role.

*Smuffins* — Rolo's best friend, an earthling boy. Content as a pet, he is a *foil* to Rolo's ambition. Very loyal and supportive, and asks smart questions. Like a bulldog, he appears to be aggressive, but he is actually friendly, a gentle giant, further contrasted by his silly name and pink bow given by his owner.

*Quiggles* — Rolo's pet, a non-speaking alien animal. He's mostly a comic sidekick, but he also enables the story—like a guardian angel, he guides Rolo to where he needs to be. As a mini *deus ex machina*, he helps move the story past obstacles that would otherwise be slow and cumbersome.

*Yoola* — Rolo's friend, an earthling girl. Like Smuffins, she is also a *foil*.

*Fabli* — Rolo's friend, an earthling boy. He is a show earthling, absurdly like a show dog. He is vain, but helpful. His name is like the model Fabio.

*Zeffro* — Homeless middle-aged man, a tough survivalist, like a stray street dog. As an unintentional mentor, his independence inspires Rolo.

*Grandam Zananna* — Wise, elderly museum curator. She intervenes to try to help Riffa with her personal conflict, and she provides Rolo more clues on his quest.

*Captain Blarzenhook* — A stock character of an old sea captain, but alien. He has a colorful personality and speaks in heightened poetic language. He fills in the final clues for Rolo's quest.

*Pet Store Clerk* — Provides Rolo the first clues on his quest.

### **Protagonists**

Rolo is the titular main protagonist. He is so determined that he makes others change, making him more static than dynamic. He does become bolder to speak up for himself, but this is a minor thread.

Zira is the second protagonist, because the resolution of her conflict enables the resolution of Rolo's conflict. Zira is a dynamic character. She reaches closure over her brother which enables her to become less clingy and selfish with Rolo.

### **Point of View**

The narrator is *limited omniscient*, alternating between Rolo's and Zira's perspectives, and sometimes objectively observing other characters' perspectives. The narrator is personified as an alien, passing judgment and addressing the reader directly. The characters' inner thoughts and the narrator's voice merge in *free indirect speech*.

The story starts and ends from Zira's point of view, but more of the story is from Rolo's.

### **Goals & Conflicts**

Rolo's external goal is first to get home, then to find Earth. His internal goal is to have more independence and purpose in life.

Zira's external goal is to bring Rolo home. Her internal conflicts are her sense of abandonment, lost connection with her sister, and shortage of empathy.

### **Plot**

Rolo's plot is the *Hero's Journey*. His boredom expands into a calling, and his run-in with the robots is the inciting incident sending him to a faraway land. His initial goal is to get back home, but his goal evolves and his journey turns into a quest as he learns more clues about Earth from several mentors.

Zira's and Riffa's conflicts are intertwined with Rolo's conflicts in a chain of cause and effect. The family was happy and secure until they lost Lazro. It's not stated explicitly, but that made Riffa sulky and she withdrew from everyone. As a result, Zira lost both of her siblings in a way, a deep sense of abandonment, which in turn made her clingy with Rolo. Zira repeatedly tries to reconnect with Riffa, and when they finally have a breakthrough, Zira feels secure enough to let Rolo have his own way.

## Themes & Motifs

*Growing Up* — Zira is finally old enough to get a pet, then she matures to be more selfless. As Rolo comes of age, he wants his independence.

*Growing Apart* — Both Rolo and Riffa have grown apart from Zira as they matured and she is emotionally stunted.

*Home* — Rolo is torn between the only home he's ever known and his ancestral home, Earth.

*Letting Go* — Zira needs to let go of Lazro's tragedy. Riffa needs to let go of resentment and blame toward Zira. Zira is like a possessive parent who doesn't want to let her teen leave home.

*Meaning of Life* — As Rolo comes of age, he has an existential crisis: he wants a more meaningful purpose than just being a pet.

*Empathy* — Zira's undeveloped sense of empathy is part of the story, contrasted with more mature empathy from Rolo, Smuffins, and Riffa.

*Grief* — Zira copes with grief by dwelling on the past, while Riffa bottles up her grief. This creates conflict between them.

*Food* is a motif — canned food, stolen snacks, fresh steaks, ice cream

## Tone

The tone spans a wide range—from broad, absurd comedy—to wry, witty humor—to lyrical prose—to heavy, intense arguments. *Comic relief* is used often, and scenes often contrast in tone to emphasize important changes.

## Humor

*Role Reversals* — Humans as pets, Young girl in parent role

*Science* — Nerdy science and natural history spoofs

*Stacking* — A pet has a pet, the moon has moons, aliens abduct aliens

## McGuffin

Lazro's model rocket is a *McGuffin* (an object important to the characters that enables the plot).

## Literary Comparison

No major literature has explored this premise of earthlings as pets to loving aliens.

*Lilo & Stitch* shows a bond between a kid and her pet alien on Earth, the mirror of this story. It also features a troubled girl fighting with her older sister.

*E.T. the Extraterrestrial* also features a bond of a boy with his pet-like alien. (Chapter 45 is an homage to *E.T.*)

*Home* is a buddy story about a human and alien.

*Planet of the Apes* has “alien” apes who are smarter than humans and treat them like animals, but the humans are devolved, not intelligent.

*Star Trek*, especially the original series, has many aliens who are significantly smarter and more powerful than humans, but they always find something worthy in humanity.

*The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* has similar absurd sci-fi humor. (An allusion is in chapter 26.)

### **Timeline**

Chapters 1-3 are the prologue, when Rolo is 5 and Zira is equivalent to 10.

Chapters 4 and 23 are the pivotal day in the family’s backstory. Rolo is 10, Zira is still like 10, and Lazro is like 16.

The main story is a single day. Zira is like 11, Riffa is like 16, and Rolo is 13.

## **Chapter 1. Zira's Wish**

The chapter starts in the middle of conversation. In the first 24 words we can immediately infer: 1) Zira is a kid who wants a pet, 2) not an animal but an earthling, which means 3) she must be an alien, and 4) her mom keeps saying no. Wanting a pet is a common and relatable conflict, but the alien/earthling part flips our perspective.

My goal is to introduce Zira as a likable protagonist with a strong personality, and to show that aliens are just like us—the argument, the groceries, her messy room, etc. are all very “human”.

The quirky humor sets the tone, and the narrator humorously insults us humans, but then reassures our fragile egos that we are special.

## **Chapter 2. Sulking**

We see Zira's close bond with Lazro, who mediates her tense relationship with her mom.

The theme of growing up emerges in both chapters 1-2. Like most kids, Zira wants to be seen as older and more responsible.

## **Chapter 3. Rolo's New Home**

We jump to Rolo's point of view. They treat him like both a dog and a child. He is also like an orphan adopted by Zira as his new mom, even though she is a child herself.

This chapter introduces Rolo's theme of “home”. It fulfills Zira's goal of getting a pet, and wraps up what is effectively the prologue over chapters 1-3.

## **Chapter 4. The Battle of Slime**

Several years later we see the playful bond between Rolo and the three kids. It paints an idyllic picture of childhood, then the narrator foretells that this will be shattered, which creates mystery. While playing, Lazro pretends to die, and Zira says to Rolo, “You can't desert me,” both of which are foreshadowing.

## **Chapter 5. Just Another Day**

Three years later, we see the downside of pet life: Like a dog, Rolo is locked inside, bored. This starkly contrasts the joyful playing in the previous chapter.

## **Chapter 6. From Boredom to Bedlam**

Rolo tries escaping twice, like a dog, showing his goal for freedom, even if he doesn't really believe it's possible. Zira playfully says, “You'll never get away from me,” foreshadowing their conflict.

Rolo has mixed feelings toward Zira, as adolescents often do toward their parents. They still have a loving bond, but he has matured while she treats him like a baby. She also

plays too rough, as young kids often do with their pets, showing her undeveloped sense of empathy, which is her flaw to overcome.

Riffa is now withdrawn and irritable, not playful like before, with no explanation yet. Zira keeps trying to connect with her, but Riffa keeps rejecting her, which is their conflict to work through.

In contrast to the previous chapter, this scene is chaotic, showing Rolo is bounced between extremes. We also see more problems with pet life, including gross food (food is a motif). This drives Rolo's motivation.

### **Chapter 7. The Squirler Rivalry**

Zira's rambling story shows how much smarter alien kids are, even though they are still childish. The rest of the chapter is comedy and world-building.

### **Chapter 8. Cut the Leash**

The protestors plant a seed in Rolo's mind, which will gradually change his goals over the day. It is *dramatic irony* that they don't know earthlings are from Earth. The missing information sets up a mystery to solve.

### **Chapter 9. The Earthling Park**

The earthling park adds more comedy and world-building. Rolo wants to be with his friends, as teens do. But he yields immediately to Zira, subtly showing that he doesn't always stand up for himself, which is his flaw to overcome.

Again, Riffa rejects Zira's efforts to connect. We are reminded that Lazro is gone, but we still don't know why.

### **Chapter 10. Maybe Something More**

Rolo's story about the harness is another example of not standing up for himself.

Their playful banter shows their friendship. Rolo doesn't like how blorxlings talk down to him, like how adults talk down to teens. Zira embarrasses him as many parents do.

Fabli adds more comedy, showing the absurdity of dog shows. Smuffins often calls Rolo "dawg", playing on how earthlings are treated like dogs.

Their small talk reveals how life as a pet is so repetitive and unchallenging. Rolo expands on his thoughts from the protestors, wanting something more meaningful in life. As *foils*, his friends do not understand.

The earthling catchers add absurd humor. Dog catchers are so common in pet stories, so they are a *trope*.



### **Chapter 11. The Blorxian Subway**

This *inciting incident* starts Rolo on his *Hero's Journey*. He freezes at first, but Quiggles kicks him into action, like his guardian angel. Quiggles also draws Riffa into the chase, since she, too, will be needed for his journey.

The chase in the subway is broad comedy. (They each keep finding and losing each other like *Scooby Doo*.)

### **Chapter 12. Old Blorgton**

The rundown urban neighborhood contrasts with the pleasant suburban park. It feels dangerous, adding to the urgency.

Rolo's goal for now is just to get home. As readers, we might root for him to escape the indignities of being a pet and be free, even before he is willing to act on it.

### **Chapter 13. The Search Begins**

Zira and Riffa are now stranded together in a stressful situation, putting pressure on them to resolve their conflicts. Again it's hinted that something bad happened to Lazro, but it's left as a mystery.

### **Chapter 14. The Animal Control Force**

This magnifies the comic absurdity of the earthling catchers. The colonel is a comedic stock character. He is the main antagonist, but he and the bumbling robots are more comical than a real threat, secondary to the internal character conflicts. They add urgency, as Zira and Riffa must find Rolo before the bots do.

### **Chapter 15. Pet Vortex**

The pet store adds more humor and world-building. The caged earthlings evoke an uncomfortable comedy as we realize how normal it is to lock up people. It also reminds us that the aliens see earthlings as a "lesser species", just another animal to them.

The pet store clerk gives Rolo his first clues about Earth and the next destination to find more clues, turning his journey home into a quest. Earthlings as "aliens" is a humorous role reversal.

### **Chapter 16. Rolo's Deal**

It's *dramatic irony* when Rolo and Smuffins find it difficult to imagine earthlings living independently. Rolo's goal has now evolved to learning about Earth. Smuffins is a *foil* against his ambition.

### **Chapter 17. Sing With Me**

Zira keeps reminiscing about their childhood because she is stuck in the past. We see more of how much Zira wants to connect with Riffa. We may feel for Zira and fault Riffa for her coldness, but Zira was the annoying one who wouldn't listen to Riffa, and we're not even sure if Zira was honest about her hand getting hurt.

### **Chapter 18. The Abandoned Warehouse**

Smuffins is again a *foil* to Rolo's ambition, asking smart questions. Rolo is now optimistically committed to his new quest, and the grimy city now takes on an optimistic beauty in this warehouse.

### **Chapter 19. Granglers Attack**

This uses misdirection to make Zeffro seem like a threat. Zeffro is the equivalent of a street dog, a homeless survivalist, and an action hero.

### **Chapter 20. Zeffro the Stray**

Zeffro's life as a stray is dangerous and dirty, but also adventurous and appealing. He is an unintentional mentor, because his independence inspires Rolo.

Food is a motif. The fresh meat is a contrast to Rolo's gross pet food in chapter 6. The kill is like living in the wild, and a callback to when Rolo said he maybe wanted to hunt in chapter 10. The steak is a taste of independence, both literally and figuratively.

### **Chapter 21. Blorzon Row**

We learn more about Zira's undeveloped sense of empathy, which Riffa crudely calls "selfish". Losing friendships is a painfully relatable problem for some kids; it adds to Zira's feelings of loneliness and abandonment.

We now see Riffa is more complex than just the teen stereotype we've seen so far since chapter 6. She may be cold and blunt, but she is observant, and might even be a good big sister if she were more diplomatic. The shopkeeper is *comic relief*.

### **Chapter 22. Smuffins' Solution**

The Animal Control tank builds tension, a ticking clock for them to decide whether to go home or to the museum.

Rolo's goal is unclear. He just feels a calling, with no rational reason or end goal. Smuffins is again a *foil*, but he still has empathy even if he doesn't understand.

### **Chapter 23. Quiggles the Wild**

The tiger scene is mostly comedy, but Quiggles' wildness does inspire Rolo.

## **Chapter 24. The Museum**

Rolo shows his cleverness by using Zira to get into the museum. We see more of their playful bond like when they were younger in chapter 4, not restrained like in chapters 6 and 9. The mysterious woman and the security guard add tension.

## **Chapter 25. Grandam Zananna**

This scene uses misdirection for tension: It feels like they are in the principal's office waiting for their punishment. But then in a cryptic way, Zananna reveals she is actually there to help. She is a mentor figure for Riffa. Her ambiguous questions are prescient, building mystery and foreshadowing what will be revealed later about Lazro.

## **Chapter 26. Planet of the Earthlings**

The mystery of the missing information is explained, which is actually comic, not a nefarious conspiracy like in much sci-fi. Zananna gives Rolo the second clues in his quest, with directions for the next destination on his quest.

## **Chapter 27. Unsettled**

Rolo's goal is now in flux. He learned about earthling origins, but there is still more to learn. As he rides on Zira's shoulders like a little kid, we see more of their bond. It seems like he may be content going home, but as readers we may still be rooting for him to find Earth, creating tension for us.

Another Animal Control tank adds the tension back.

This chapter is the start of a transition in Rolo's journey. The sun is setting, the neighborhood is more pleasant, and the mood is tranquil. Now that he is with Zira, he is no longer in charge. The plot is now focused more on inner conflicts, while the external conflict of the earthling catchers looms but does not advance.

## **Chapter 28. Lazro's Rocket**

The mystery is now clearer that Lazro is either dead or missing. We see how much Zira misses him, and how Riffa blames her and again calls her selfish. They are each grieving in their own way.

## **Chapter 29. A Dark and Swampy Night**

This flashback finally reveals Lazro's mystery, the pivotal event in their backstory. Riffa unfairly blames Zira for "making" Lazro go. Zira feels especially abandoned because he left her alone despite her plea. The tragedy could have been easily avoided, making it more frustrating. The ambiguity of not knowing whether he is dead or might come back leaves it unresolved.

This scene sets tragedy against a comic backdrop—UFO sightings near swamps, and aliens abducting other aliens.

### **Chapter 30. In Search of Blarzenhook**

Rolo and Quiggles add *comic relief* after the last dramatic chapter. Rolo’s goal now shifts back to learning about Earth. The surveillance camera adds tension.

### **Chapter 31. ACF Surveillance**

This very brief chapter adds more *comic relief* and urgency.

### **Chapter 32. The Black Hole Tavern**

This colorful scene plays on archetypes: The tavern is very nautical, and Blarzenhook is a stock character, a lonely old sea captain who loves to tell tales. The sea and space are blended throughout.

### **Chapter 33. The Ballad of Blarzenhook**

The tale humorously distorts history: the aliens are greeted by the human “natives” like European explorers; dinosaurs lived alongside humans; aliens ate and domesticated humans; and humans built pyramids, etc., to worship the aliens. It also rewrites Noah’s Ark as a spaceship to rescue aliens, not animals.

Blarzenhook provides the final clues in Rolo’s quest, including the location of Earth. But Blarzenhook casts doubt on whether it’s real, employing *dramatic irony* since we know Earth is real.

### **Chapter 34. Home Planet**

Rolo’s goal evolves from learning about Earth to actually going there—the theme of home. He makes progress in finally standing up for himself, but he also falters and loses his temper, like many teens.

### **Chapter 35. Moonlight on the Docks**

As Rolo’s goal has fully crystalized, the setting is at its peak of beauty and serenity.

Rolo and Zira’s heart-to-heart conversation is the peak of their inner conflict. Rolo stands up for what he wants, but Zira’s undeveloped sense of empathy prevents her from understanding, and her fear of abandonment is triggered. Their fight is very relatable as a teen arguing with his mom who is too possessive and doesn’t want him to grow up and leave. But Zira is also an emotionally fragile child, and Rolo’s empathy and composure show he is more mature than she is, putting a twist on their parent-child relationship.

This falling-out between friends is typical in the story arc, bringing their internal conflict to an all-time low from which they must now recover. The Animal Control sub adds tension.

### **Chapter 36. ACF General Glirk**

The robots provide *comic relief* after the last two dramatic chapters, and the escalation of reinforcements adds tension. General Glirk is a *foil* to the robots, highlighting their absurdity over such a trivial matter.

### **Chapter 37. Abandoned by All**

Although Zira struggles to understand others, she is highly aware of her own feelings, including her sense of abandonment by everyone. And she overcame her spite when she returned Rolo's shoes. She seems very hurt by Riffa calling her "selfish" earlier, because there is truth to it, and we will see later she is still processing it.

The tone again is very dramatic. Riffa shows more complexity and empathy as she awkwardly tries to console Zira. When she sits with Zira, they are literally in the same boat. When Zira says Riffa doesn't love her, it poses the question of what is love, especially for teens who don't show it to their families.

### **Chapter 38. A Risky Impulse**

When Riffa gets Zira's favorite ice cream (food motif), it shows her empathy, since she knows what Zira likes, as they discussed in chapter 21.

Rolo's goal is cloudy again. The inscription warns against pursuing your dreams, but it's cryptic and ambiguous, filling both Rolo and the reader with uncertainty. Then he rejoins Zira, turning his journey back toward home.

### **Chapter 39. ACF Closing In**

The robots bring more *comic relief* after the last two dramatic chapters. This short chapter builds pressure for the impending climax. The mood will continue to alternate each chapter.

### **Chapter 40. The Boardwalk**

Zira shows growth in empathy by apologizing to Rolo. This breakthrough makes it easier for Rolo to go back home, but he is still conflicted, and as readers, we may still be rooting for him to find Earth.

Zira once again reminisces about childhood, still stuck in the past. As she kicks the small stone forward, it symbolizes moving a boulder: Riffa. In earlier chapters, Riffa is deaf to Zira, then Zananna challenges Riffa, then at the harbor Zira starts cracking Riffa's stony exterior, and now this conversation is a breakthrough.

Zira sings the same song from chapter 17, but this time Riffa sings with her, showing a resolution of their personal conflict. The song is loosely about getting help from someone through the difficulties of life, such as a big sister. The lyrics are all science metaphors, what you might expect in pop lyrics from such scientifically advanced aliens.

This is the first resolution, with many more conflicts to resolve in the following chapters.

### **Chapter 41. ACF in Pursuit**

The mood shifts from drama to the climactic chase, with ample absurdity.

### **Chapter 42. Almost Home**

The mood shifts back to tranquility. Now that Zira feels some connection with Riffa again, she is ready to let go of Lazro. She apologizes for being selfish, showing she had been processing Riffa's words. They accept that Lazro is not coming back, closing that unresolved ambiguity.

### **Chapter 43. ACF 1st Cavalry**

The mood shifts again, now part two of the climactic chase. Rolo's friends and the squirrels come back into the story. The scenes are spliced with rapid cuts between Rolo and his friends to build tension.

Riffa throws the goal in an unknown direction when she leads them to the woods.

The robot antagonists are now defeated. (The colonel's line "magnificent mongrel" is like "magnificent bastard" from the movie *Patton*.)

### **Chapter 44. In the Woods**

The mood shifts back to tranquility. Riffa takes on a mentor role, truly becoming a big sister and filling Lazro's shoes. She helps Zira to empathize with Rolo, with parallels of letting go and the theme of home.

### **Chapter 45. Rolo's Wish**

Reconnecting with Riffa was the catalyst that allows Zira to let go of both Lazro and Rolo. Lazro's rocket is a *McGuffin* that enables Rolo to reach his goal. Zira calls him Rolo Polo, like Marco Polo the explorer. (It was an unknown coincidence that the rocket name "Pea-Pod" is like ship name "Pequod" in *Moby Dick*.) Quiggles puts on a captain's hat to guide Rolo home, like a guardian angel. Rolo takes off his ID tag, literally letting go of his identity as a pet.

The ending is bittersweet. Not a purely happy ending, they both must make difficult sacrifices. Rolo and Zira have such a loving bond, we want to see them remain together. But there is something bothersome about humans being treated like animals and having no freedom, so it feels more "right" for him to leave.

The first chapter is called Zira's Wish (to get a pet). This last chapter is called Rolo's Wish (to find Earth), which Zira grants by letting go of her pet, showing her growth in empathy and selflessness. It is a twist from when she said, "You'll never get away from me," in chapter 6.

(This final scene is an homage to *E.T. the Extraterrestrial*, when E.T. leaves Elliott in the forest to go home, including the line "be good" and the spherical spaceship. But everything is reversed.)

## **Epilogue**

The epilogue adds humorous closure for all the characters.

Zira's life is repaired, now closer to Riffa and even her old best friend. She chooses not to get another pet earthing, showing she doesn't need constant companionship anymore.

Rolo calls himself Commander Rolo like in chapter 4. (His space journey has allusions to *Star Trek*: giant green hand, viewscreen, recording a log.)

Any doubts about Earth are resolved: It does exist, Rolo does find it, and humans are still there. The setting is finally established as our future. The final line closes on the theme of home.