

# Rolo the Pet Earthling

Analysis by the author, David Hundsness

## Premise

What if humans were pets? This high concept is apparent in the title, *Rolo the Pet Earthling*.

This pet premise has never really been explored in any major literature. Movies like *E.T. the Extraterrestrial* and *Lilo & Stitch* show a bond between a kid and their pet alien; but this story is uniquely flipped.

## Genre

Science fiction, more fantastical than realistic. But the story is just normal family conflicts in an urban/suburban environment, so it may appeal to readers who don't like genre sci-fi.

## Setting

Set on planet Blorx, where everything is 3× too big for humans. While many aspects are alien—purple grass, yellow sky, strange foods, unique creatures—most of the setting feels very much like Earth today: suburban home, urban city, an earthling park (dog park), subways, pet store, museum, tavern, harbor, woods, and boardwalk amusement park. Word play shows alien equivalents—like flish, clickets, squirlers, blizza, blizbee, etc. It is neither utopian nor dystopian.

It feels like the future, but we don't really know until the end.

The technology is both futuristic and anachronistic: holographic newspapers, subway tubes that are wormholes, robots that do everything manually, etc.

Unlike most sci-fi, these aliens are much more intelligent than humans, and bigger too, which is necessary for a pet relationship, otherwise it would be slavery. But the narrator admits humans may be wiser, and the alien characters appear equally flawed as earthlings, making them more relatable and equally-matched. This balance also keeps it more of a feel-good story instead of critical social commentary.

## Characters

*Rolo* — Earthling boy, age 13 but seems older. (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. His name is like the candy, soft and round from the easy pet life.

*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. Her name is from *Planet of the Apes*.

*Riffa* — Zira's big sister, like age 15-16. Supporting character who arcs from a typically withdrawn and dislikable teen, to being kind and helpful. Her name is like "riff", which she has with Zira.

*Lazro* — Zira's big brother, like age 16. He is kind and loving toward Zira. 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 the dog catchers, a trope in pet stories. Their over-zealous, militarized approach to animal control is absurd humor.

*Smuffins* — Rolo's loyal best friend, an earthling boy. Content as a pet, he is a foil to Rolo's ambition. Like a bulldog, he appears to be aggressive, but he is actually friendly, 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 comical sidekick, but he also enables the story—like a guardian angel, he guides Rolo to where he needs to be.

*Yoola* — Rolo's friend, an earthling girl.

*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 male model Fabio.

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

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

*Captain Blarzenhook* — Old alien, like an archetypical sea captain. He has a colorful personality and speaks in a heightened poetic language. He fills in the final clues for Rolo's quest.

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

### **Point of View**

The narrator is limited omniscient, sometimes voicing Zira's [mis]perceptions, and sometimes Rolo's, and sometimes remaining objective; and occasionally voicing the colonel's POV. The narrator sometimes passes judgement and addresses the reader directly.

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

## 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. We may presume that caused Riffa to withdraw from everyone, which made Zira more clingy with Rolo. Throughout the story, Zira tries to reconnect with Riffa, and when they finally have a breakthrough, Zira feels secure enough to give Rolo what he wants.

## Themes & Motifs

*Growing Up* — Zira is finally old enough to get a pet, then she matures to be more selfless. In his adolescence, Rolo is ready to move away from home.

*Growing Apart* — Both Rolo and Riffa grow apart from Zira as they mature.

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

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

*Meaning of Life* — Rolo seeks 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 and Riffa grieve in different ways, causing their interpersonal conflict.

*Food* is a motif.

## McGuffin

Lazro's model rocket is a McGuffin, important to Zira and eventually Rolo.

## 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 abducting aliens

## **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 but feels older.

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

The first 24 words tell us so much: 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 very relatable conflict, but the alien/earthling part flips our perspective.

Zira's personality shines through, making her a likable protagonist right away. Despite being alien, everything feels familiar and relatable: the dialog, the groceries, her messy room, etc.

The quirky humor sets the tone, and the narrator humorously insults us humans, but then reassures us 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. Zira wants to be seen as older and more responsible, as kids do.

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

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

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, which we are told will be shattered soon. During play, Lazro pretends to die, and Zira says to Rolo, "You can't desert me!" both of which are foreshadowing.

### **Chapter 5. Home Alone**

Three years later, we see the downside of pet life: Like a dog, Rolo is locked inside, bored—in contrast to the joyful playing in the last chapter.

### **Chapter 6. Zira Comes Home**

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 last 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 will drive 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.

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

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

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

Fabli adds more comedy, showing the absurdity of dog shows. Smuffins says "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 a foil, his friends do not understand.

The earthling catchers add absurd humor. They are a trope, since dog catchers are so common in pet stories.

### **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 like *Scooby Doo*, where they each keep finding and losing each other.

### **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. Their mention of Lazro hints at something bad, but leaves it a mystery.

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

This magnifies the comic absurdity of the earthling catchers. The colonel is the main antagonist, an archetypical war movie hero. But he and the bumbling robots are more comical than a real threat. The internal character conflicts are more serious.

The tension builds as now the Animal Control Force, Zira and Riffa are all looking for Rolo.

### **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 image 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 often reminisces about their childhood because she is stuck in the past. We see more how much Zira wants to connect with Riffa. We may feel for Zira and fault Riffa for her coldness, but they are complex; Riffa did ask her to stop but Zira was bratty and unempathetic, and we're not even sure if Zira told the truth about her hand.

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

Smuffins is again a foil to Rolo's ambition. 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 part action hero.

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

Zeffro's life as a stray is dangerous and dirty, but also adventurous with an "exotic charm". He is an unintentional mentor; his mere 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 friends 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 a bit of 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 employs misdirection for tension: It feels like they are in the principal's office waiting for their punishment. But then in a cryptic way, Mme. 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 absurd, not nefarious like in much sci-fi. Zananna gives Rolo the second clues in his quest, with directions for where to find more clues.

There's an allusion to *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy*, which shares some of the same absurd sci-fi humor.

### **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 deep 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, the mood is tranquil. He is no longer in charge now that he is reunited with Zira. 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. Swamp Encounter**

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 of urban legends and aliens abducting other aliens.

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

The surveillance camera adds tension. Quiggles' mime routine adds comic relief after the last dramatic chapter. Rolo's goal now shifts back to learning about Earth.

### **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 an archetypical old sea captain, a lonely old man past his prime 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.

These are 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. Where is Home**

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, much like a teen.

### **Chapter 35. 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 most dramatic part of the story. 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 in their parent-child relationship.

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**

Although Zira struggles to understand others, she is highly aware of her own feelings, including her sense of abandonment by everyone. And she returned Rolo's shoes, overcoming her spite. 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.

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

When Riffa gets Zira's favorite ice cream (food motif), it shows 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 flip-flop 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 breaking through.

Zira sings the same song from chapter 17, but this time Riffa sings with her, resolving their personal conflict. The rest of the conflicts and mysteries will be resolved in the following chapters.

The song itself is all science metaphors, what you might expect in pop lyrics from such intelligent aliens.

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

The mood shifts from drama to the climactic chase, with plenty of 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. The story reincorporates Rolo's friends and the squirrels. The scenes are spliced with rapid cuts between Rolo and his friends to build tension.

Riffa throws the goal into 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. 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 allowing 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. Quiggles puts on a captain's hat to guide Rolo home, his guardian angel.

The ending is bittersweet. Unlike purely happy endings, 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.

This final scene is an homage to *E.T. the Extraterrestrial*, when E.T. leaves Elliott in the forest to go home. But everything is reversed.

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.

## **Epilogue**

The epilogue adds humorous closure for all the characters.

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

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

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.