

MEET *Lili Wilkinson*



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An Australian Government Initiative

Women in STEM
Ambassador

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Lili Wilkinson is one of Australia's TOP writers for young people. She's written 16 books and is the writer of FAR OUT!

She lives in Melbourne with her partner, and has a son called Banjo, a dog called Dame Maggie, and three chickens called Esme, Kiki and Professor McGonagall.



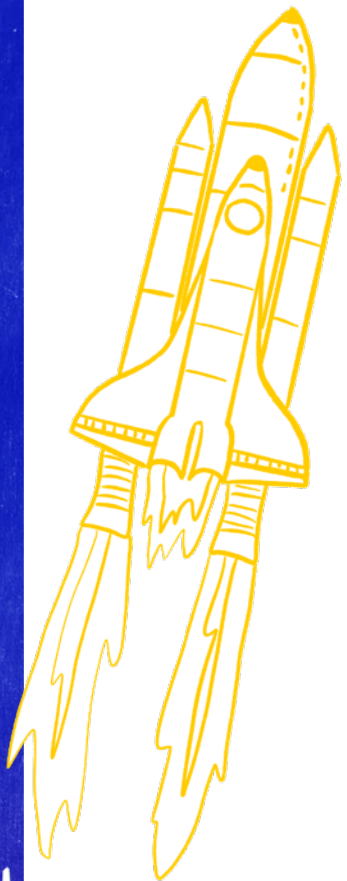
**You can find out more about Lili on her website.
www.liliwilkinson.com.au**

Tell us about Far Out!

Far Out! is a story set in the future, about a girl called Stella, who is leaving Earth on a spaceship, with her mums and her little brother Cosmo. They're headed to Callisto, one of Jupiter's moons, to help set up a base for humans to live. Stella is pretty excited, but her little brother Cosmo is scared. Luckily, Stella is a robotics whiz and has made Cosmo a special robot toy that sings his favourite song and does all the dance moves. But space travel can be dangerous...

And Far Out! is part of Imagining The Future. Can you explain how that works?

Imagining The Future is beginning with five stories, all of which take place in the future and explore the development of humanity's first deep-space outpost on Callisto, the second moon of the planet Jupiter. I've been working with four other awesome writers - Rebecca Lim, Alison Evans, Gary Lonesborough and Melissa Keil - our incredible editor, Kate Whitfield, and our producer Dan Prichard, to develop a timeline for the stories, the key ideas that we wanted to explore, and how the stories would connect to create a complete storyworld. Mine's the very first story of what we call The Callistan Cycle, it details the experience of the very first family to set off to Callisto to begin the process of community building.



Can you tell us something about the OTHER stories of The Callistan Cycle?

The stories are all very different because they come from five very different writers, and explore very different ideas and experiences of the future. They also explore different aspects of what is called STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths), because Future You is about getting young people to think about the future and about how people in the future will be tackling the problems that things like space travel and climate change will present. So, my story looks at robotics (through a dancing robot frog!) and space travel, while Melissa's looks at food of the future, Bec's explores resources (minerals, fuel etc) and robots too (including a robot dog!), Gary's looks at recycling and renewables, and Alison's is all about communication...

What did you get involved in the project?

At school, I was never very good at maths and science. I had plenty of teachers that encouraged my skills in English and Drama and other humanities subjects, but I got the impression that when it came to STEM, I was basically a write-off. But I really liked the ideas in the STEM subjects, even if I couldn't wrap my head around the technicalities of them. Looking back now, I wonder how things might have been different if STEM had been framed a little more positively to me. And so this project represented for me the opportunity to talk to young people about STEM but through stories, and stories that have strong, imaginative, intelligent and passionate characters as their heart.

Did you have to do a lot of research in write Far Out!

Oh definitely! I watched A LOT of NASA YouTube, learnt about pressure differentials in the vacuum of space, and read many accounts of how a shuttle launch feels. As the first story in the sequence, and the one closest to our own time, I wanted it to feel very grounded in reality, and our current scientific understanding.

What challenges did you face in the writing?

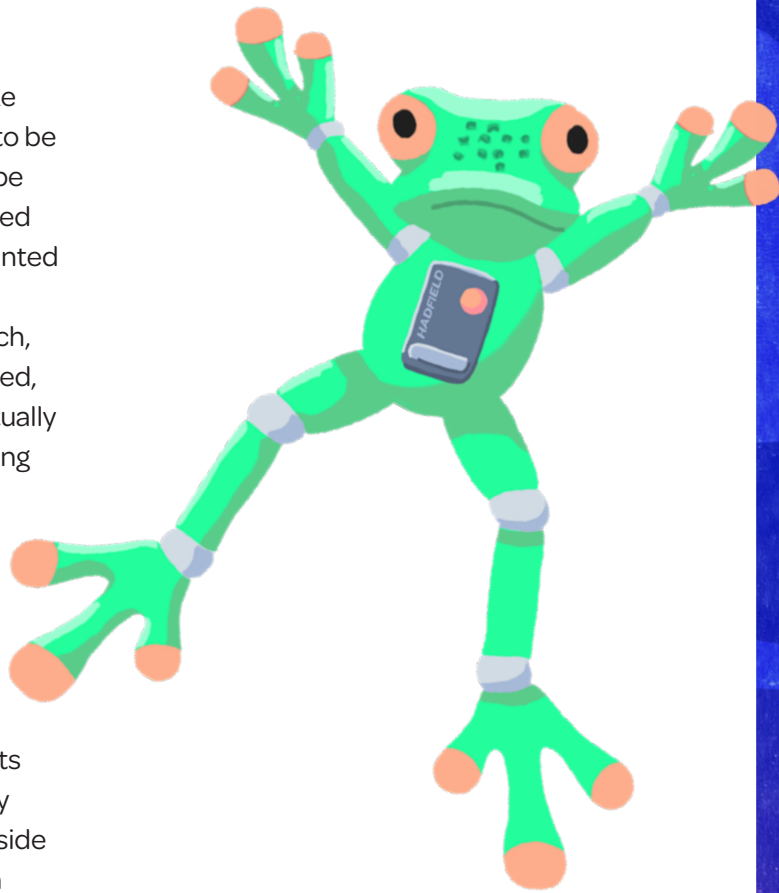
Many! Being the first story in the collection, I felt like my story had to achieve a lot of things - it needed to be exciting, but also speak to readers who might not be super comfortable with a strong sci-fi story. I wanted my protagonist to be relatable, but brave. And I wanted to capture the excitement of a shuttle launch. My biggest problem was that after doing some research, I realised that shuttle launches are highly automated, and that there is almost nothing for the pilot to actually do. Let alone the daughter of the pilot! So something needed to go wrong. I mean, REALLY wrong.

Did you learn anything interesting from your research?

SO MANY THINGS. Space travel is so cool. And dangerous! But the main thing was that the scene you often see in space movies where someone gets sucked through a tiny hole in a space ship isn't very accurate. The difference in pressure between outside the ship and inside just isn't that great. It is enough to suck out all the air, eventually, so you have to plug the hole. But if it's small enough you could just put your hand over it, or a folder. Or a robotic toy frog. The pressure will keep it in place and stop the air leaking out. It's a temporary fix, but it'll definitely work.

In Far Out! there's the mention of the song Galaxy Vibes, which has become the song Far Out! (Galaxy Vibes) which you can hear in both the podcast and as a full song in itself. How did that come about?

I wanted to show how the creative arts can help solve big STEM problems, and I thought a pop song would be a fun way to do it. When Dan (our producer) started talking to our brilliant sound designer Weronika Rażna about the podcast, they realized they wanted music across the series. So, they met with composer/ musician Freya Berkhout, and they very quickly decided that we would need to HEAR Galaxy Vibes. Freya went away and wrote the song, based on the snippets in the story. It was pretty amazing to hear a whole actual song emerge from a few lines that I wrote! It's a real earworm - I can't wait to see people across Australia dancing to it!



How do YOU feel about the future?

It's easy to feel despair, when we see news articles about our changing climate, wars and epidemics. But I spend a lot of time talking to young people, and I have a tremendous amount of hope for the future. Young people today are some of the most thoughtful, informed, passionate and kind humans that have ever existed on the Earth. They have a lot of work ahead of them, to undo some of the harm that previous (and current) generations have done to our planet. But I know they can do it. And that a LOT of the answers are going to come from people working in STEM. Remember: the fact that our lives are getting back to normal (well, a new TYPE of normal) is that STEMsters came up with a vaccine in an unbelievably short period of time, saving an estimated 20 MILLION LIVES. The next generation is going to save the world, and they're also going to journey far beyond it. And I will be cheering them on when they do. I can't wait to see what they come up with!

Thanks so much for your brilliant story and for talking to us, Lili!

Thank you and...see YOU in the future!



Have a question for Lili about shuttle launches, writing or Far Out!?



Get in touch through our TAKE PART portal, and we'll get back to you (and we'll be sending you some FUTURE YOU goodies too!).

Read and listen to Far Out!



Want to find out more about robotics or space as a future career for YOU?



Check out our FAR OUT! career resource on the Future You website.

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