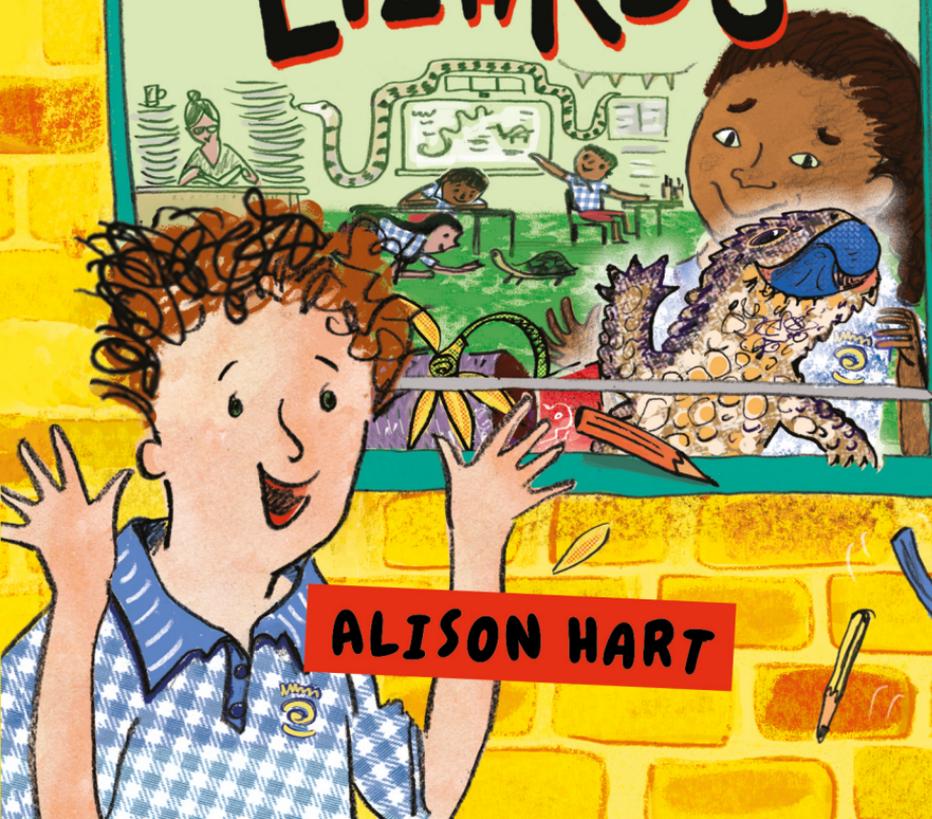


'A full-on fun fest!' OLIVER PHOMMAVANH  
author of *Thai-riffic!*

THE  
GRADE 6  
SURVIVAL  
GUIDE

# A CLASS FULL OF LIZARDS



ALISON HART

## ***Praise for School Rules are Optional***

'Jesse is the friend we all need.  
He'll get you into trouble, he'll get you out  
of it and he'll be standing right next  
to you in the principal's office.  
Prepare yourself for a rollicking ride!'

**NAT AMOORE**

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'A hilarious, heartfelt book that made me  
laugh, cringe and gasp, sometimes all at  
the same time. It's a full-on fun fest!'

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‘A super funny, highly witty and fantastically authentic look at Grade 6 life in Australia ... Screams fun and authenticity and holds its own against Diary of a Wimpy Kid, Tom Gates and Timmy Failure.’

***READING TIME***



‘Full of surprises and action. Make sure you read to the end because the last two chapters are the best!

I rate this book five stars.’

**DANIEL, AGE 9**

***KIDS' READING GUIDE***

A  
CLASS FULL  
OF  
LIZARDS

THE  
GRADE 6  
SURVIVAL  
GUIDE

ALISON HART

  
ALLEN & UNWIN  
SYDNEY • MELBOURNE • AUCKLAND • LONDON

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*For Mum*

# CHAPTER ONE



The first bell is already ringing as I walk through the front gate of Westmoore Primary. I know it's the first bell and not the second bell because everyone in the playground is ignoring it.

I nearly didn't make it to school on time because I waited *ten* whole minutes on the corner for Braden. He only lives four houses away from me so we usually walk to school together. But he didn't show up today.

His face appears through an open window in the corridor.

'Hey, Jesse!' he yells. 'I just remembered we were supposed to walk to school together!'

'I know. I waited for ages,' I say.

'How long?'

'*Half an hour,*' I say and laugh when his eyes go wide.

'Sorry! I forgot ...'

'Ha-ha ... just kidding. But didn't you go right past my house?'

'I did,' Braden says, 'but I was in the car. Dad dropped me off at school at eight o'clock.'

Eight o'clock! It's a good thing he didn't come into our house at eight o'clock. I was still in my pyjamas.

Braden's freckled face disappears back through the window.

There are no kids blocking the main steps to the corridor, which is good because I don't feel like taking the long way around. Inside, books and socks and half-eaten lunches are flying all over the place. Most of the kids from my Grade 6 class are standing in a nervous cluster outside our classroom. We can't put our stuff away because our teacher Mrs Leeman keeps the door locked before and after school, during recess *and* at lunchtime.

Our access is restricted to the six dreary hours we already have in there.

My friend Jun and a couple of other kids are staring at something on Minha's mobile phone. Minha is in

my class and Mrs Leeman will be here in about two minutes' time. What could be so interesting that she has her phone out *now*?

'Have a look at this,' Jun says when he sees me. '*Fish.*'

The picture is blurry, but I can see three little goldfish crowded around some miniature plastic trees stuck in coloured gravel. Ordinary goldfish. They're not interesting at all. I'm about to look away when one of them moves.

'It's a video?' I ask.

'Yeah, *look,*' Jun says again.

The camera follows the goldfish along the tank, past more trees, a treasure chest and a sunken hotel. There's more furniture in the tank than we have in our whole house. Right at the other end, in front of a ruined castle, there's another fish about five times as big as the goldfish. He's massive. He's got big, boggly eyes the size of peas stuck on each side of his head.

The other fish reach the castle, then turn around and start swimming back again. The boggly-eyed one doesn't need to swim around because he can see in every direction at the same time without moving. Mrs Leeman can see in every direction with normal eyes, which is why Minha should put her phone away.

Otherwise it will be the first confiscated item of Term 3.

The second bell goes. There's no sign of my best friend Alex.

It's weird because he's never late.

Mrs Leeman arrives at 9.01 am and we shuffle over a bit to let her through. She takes out a big bunch of keys and unlocks our classroom as if on the other side of the door it's the land of chocolate and not the sand bunker of boredom. For a minute I think we're in the wrong room because everything looks different. Posters on the walls about stuff we did *last* term have been replaced with maps and graphs about population density and stuff. None of us know where to sit because the desks have been moved around. Now they're arranged in two big blocks facing the front with an aisle down the middle. Like a movie theatre except it's all one level and there's nothing interesting going on up the front. We're instructed to find the desk with our name on it. Mine is on the aisle. I'm totally exposed on the right. Mrs Leeman can see what I'm doing at all times.

Class begins without any discussion about anything. A diagram of overlapping triangles appears on the interactive whiteboard. As we start a boring lesson

*about* the triangles, I have a quick look around the room. There are two empty desks: one up the front, and another up the back. Jun and Braden are sitting as far from me as possible while still being in the room. In fact, as I look around, I notice *everyone* has been separated from their friends. Mrs Leeman must have some kind of social network informant. No one is sitting anywhere near close enough to pass anything to or talk with their friends. Mrs Leeman would be really good at those games where you have to keep some things away from other things, so they don't get eaten or die.

About ten minutes into the lesson, Ian, the student teacher from last term, knocks on the square bit of window in our classroom door. Everyone jumps because Mrs Leeman insists on total silence unless she is speaking. We're too scared even to unzip our pencil cases. He opens the door a little bit and sticks his head around. I notice his hair is short now; the ponytail is gone. I wonder if he still has it somewhere. My nanna's still got her old hair in a yellow envelope from forty-two years ago.

Ian says, 'Hey, guys! Hi, Mrs Leeman! Sorry to interrupt. I was wondering if I could borrow Jesse for a tic?'

Mrs Leeman peers over her wiry glasses and says I can leave as long as I'm not away from class for too long. How do *I* know how long I'm going to be? I don't even know why I'm going. I don't even know *where* I'm going or why Ian is the one to take me.

I can feel everyone looking at me as I walk up the aisle towards the door. I follow Ian up to the administration building.

'I thought Alex might like a bit of moral support,' he says, mysteriously. He marches straight up to Mr Wilson's office and knocks on the door.

When we open the door, I'm only expecting to see Mr Wilson and maybe Alex, but the vice-principal's office is full of people. Alex is there and so are his parents. There's also a bearded guy with a hairy green jumper. Everyone stops talking and stares at us.

Hairy-Green-Jumper guy says, 'Jesse! Jesse? Tell me! Have you and Alex been friends for long?'

He must be one of those people who asks you a question when they already know the answer. Maybe it's a trick question.

I'm just thinking about how to answer it when he asks, 'So! Do you think Alex could be bored in Mrs Leeman's class?'

Now I *know* it's a trick. We are *all* bored in Mrs Leeman's class. If I was on TV, I would ask for a lawyer.

Ian leans forwards. 'Don't stress, Jesse. Alex will put you in the picture. We're just tossing around some ideas today.'

Mr Wilson announces to the room in general: 'Ian is our Wellbeing Officer.'

Ian's a *Wellbeing Officer* now? He didn't last very long as a teacher.

I have no idea what's going on. It's not until we're walking back to class that Alex explains what the meeting was all about.

'I might be going to St Brainiac's next year,' he says. '*Might* be ... they've offered me a scholarship.'

St Brainiac's is really St Bennett's college. It *sounds* like a boarding school from two hundred years ago and it looks like one too. I know because we've driven past it a few times. The building is really old and there's a big, high wall all the way around it. It's only for really smart kids, so there's no chance I'll be offered a place as well. 'I have to go every Wednesday to see if I like it better than here,' Alex says.

He says the guy with the hairy green jumper in

Mr Wilson's office is the principal! I can't believe it. He looked like he'd just wandered in from taking his dog for a walk.

The school costs a lot of money, which doesn't make sense because the kids are already smart. They should put the money towards kids who have a workbook full of impossible maths questions and feel like burying it.

As we walk up the steps to the corridor, I say to Alex, 'Have you ever noticed Ian speaks like the phrase-a-day calendar on Mrs Leeman's desk? *Let me put you in the picture ... I'm just tossing around ideas.*'

Alex starts laughing. 'Yeah. I have to see Ian about going to St Bennett's. He says he wants to *talk it over with me.*'

'I hope he *goes out on a limb for you,*' I say, and we both crack up.

We have to stop laughing before we reach class though because Mrs Leeman has no sense of humour and will ask, 'what's so funny?' and make us repeat it to the class. I don't say anything to Alex, but I secretly hope that St Bennett's has made a mistake and they don't have a spot for him after all. I just assumed we would go to the *same* school next year. I don't want to go by myself.

The triangles are off the board when we get into the classroom. I head back to my centre-aisle desk and Alex finds his desk right up the back. I can't even see him from where I'm sitting.

Mrs Leeman says we are going to study 'our closest neighbours'. She wants us to choose one neighbour and make a wall poster with a map, using proper information – at least three references.

Mr Mancini is my closest neighbour. I hope he doesn't mind being the subject of a wall poster. The information will have to be accurate because Mr Mancini and Mrs Leeman might know each other. He is really old, too. The map will be easy. I'll just put our street in the middle. I know he goes to the supermarket every morning and the Italian club every Friday night. I don't know about references, but I can ask him about the other stuff.

Mrs Leeman says this is a homework assignment and that we're not allowed to work together. I don't know who Alex will write about. He has a footy oval on one side and a mean old lady on the other who throws all her compost over the fence and into their swimming pool.

When the bell rings for recess, all the kids from the other grades pour into the corridor, but we're not

allowed to move until Mrs Leeman says so. Our friend Peta from the other Grade 6 class peers in through the window of our classroom door. I wish she wouldn't do that. It looks really funny, but smiling is frowned upon in our class and laughing is totally off limits.

When we are eventually let out, Alex, Braden, Jun and I find Peta still waiting in the corridor.

'Where were you all holidays?' Braden asks her.

'The first week I didn't do much, but the second week I went to stay with my brother,' Peta says. 'He has an emu farm.'

An *emu* farm? I didn't know there was such a thing. Emus give me the creeps. I hate the clonking sound they make and the way they step onto the bus if you're on a school excursion.

'Yeah, he's got six hundred emus,' Peta continues, 'and after their eggs hatch we—'

'How big are they?' Jun interrupts. 'The eggs, I mean.'

Peta holds her hands out to show us. It's about half the size of a football, only egg-shaped.

'Then what?' I ask.

'After their eggs hatch, people come to look at the chicks. We only let people hold them if they sit still, and don't hold them too tight.'

‘What if they don’t want to hold them?’ Braden says.

‘They don’t *have* to hold them.’ Peta giggles. ‘Most people just look at the chicks and buy stuff from the gift shop. We have emu oil, emu soap, emu candles and emu steaks.’

That would give me the creeps if I was an emu.

I stayed home all holidays because Dad said we’re spending our holiday money on a new roof because the one we have is full of holes. I don’t remember that discussion. My older brother Noah went away to Central Australia with his school, so that must not count. It was okay though because Alex and I had the house to ourselves. I always prefer it when Alex comes over to my place rather than the other way around. His house has no mess anywhere and you have to leave your shoes at the door. At our place we never take our shoes off and nobody vacuums until the dog hair is rolling around in balls all over the floor.

Instead of going straight down to the water tanks like we usually do, we have a bit of a look around the school. There’s been a few changes since last term. The adventure playground has been replaced and the new toilet block is nearly finished. The ground where they had to replace the pipe after it exploded is taped off so

kids don't run on the new grass seed. At the moment there's about five hundred pigeons eating it. Every time someone goes near it, the pigeons fly about twenty centimetres in the air then land again and keep eating.

Peta tells us we didn't have assembly this morning because our principal, Mrs Overbeek, isn't coming back to school until Wednesday. Her teacher, Ms Kendall, keeps their class updated about everything that's going on. Mrs Leeman doesn't tell us anything until we are about to do it or are already doing it. I hadn't even thought about assembly until then. How can Mrs Overbeek not come back until Wednesday? I'd like to go on holiday and not come back until I felt like it. I would never come back. Also, Mrs Overbeek should be concerned that school is running perfectly well without her.

She obviously doesn't do anything important.

We don't get time to look at the new adventure playground because the bell rings. We weren't going to play on it or anything, we just wanted to see what it's like. It's not fair we had to put up with the old one that was falling apart for years and now the school gets a new one when we're in Grade 6 and too old to use it.

Back in class, we all take our seats in the movie theatre. I've figured out I can see Alex if I turn right

around or bend down to pick something up off the floor. A couple of times, I turn my head upside down to catch his eye, but Mrs Leeman catches me doing it and asks me if I need to go to sick bay.

The threat of sick bay is enough to make me face the front for the rest of the lesson. Sick bay is in the office and so is Miss Creighton, the most horrible office lady in the Southern Hemisphere.

At lunchtime, the five of us – Alex, Jun, Braden, Peta and me – head down to the water tanks. There's no way we can hang out there now. It's still wet from the flood last term. The ground *looks* solid but if you step on it, your foot sinks into green slimy mud that stinks. We find a big branch about a metre long to see how far we can stick it in the ground. It disappears completely. We get a few more sticks and rocks and stuff and all of them sink under the surface. Now that I know Alex's dad is a groundwater hydrologist, I keep noticing water on and in the ground all the time. He would probably find this whole area cool and interesting and want to write a fifty-page report about it.

I'm happy when the others say they've had enough, because the smell is making me feel sick. Also, there are about a *billion* mosquitos.

Eventually we decide to relocate to the retaining wall opposite the classrooms. It's not a perfect lunch spot but then, we're at school – we need to keep our expectations realistic. We *are* a bit exposed, though. Everyone can see us. After about five minutes, Thomas Moore, my Prep buddy, comes running over to us even though we haven't had anything to do with our buddies since Term 2.

'What are we doing today?' he asks me.

'We are not doing anything,' I reply. 'You have to play with the other Preps now.'

'None of them will play with me.'

'Oh. Maybe ask your teacher what to do?' I tell him.

'I did. Miss Agostino said to come and find *you*.'

'You'll be bored here with us,' Alex tells him. 'We don't play around or anything.'

'I don't mind,' Thomas Moore says.

'You can stay for today,' Peta says, walking over, 'until you find some friends.'

'Yeah,' Braden says, 'but don't bring all the Preps over here. This is our spot. Okay?'

Thomas Moore climbs up on the end of the wall.

'This is our spot,' he repeats, nodding.

In the afternoon, before we go home, Mrs Leeman says Minha has something she wants to share with the

class. Minha stands up but she doesn't walk to the front so we all have to turn around and find where the voice is coming from. Her desk is down the back, next to Alex's.

'Okay, yeah. We have some fish at the rescue centre at the moment that need a home,' Minha says. 'So, if anyone wants some fish, we've got some. They come with the tank and filter and everything.'

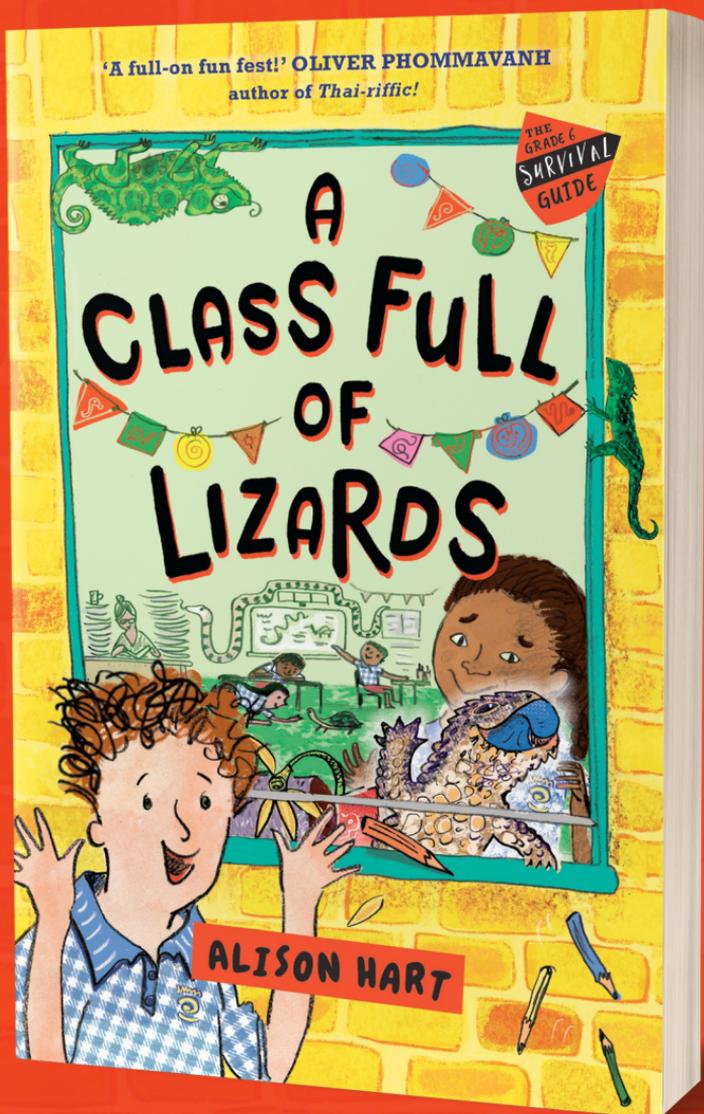
I think back to the video she showed at the beginning of the day. I wouldn't mind some pet fish. I wonder if I'd be allowed to have these ones?

Minha sits back down for two seconds, and then jumps up again. 'Oh, yeah! There's four of them. The little ones are called One, Two and Three and the big one is called Bubbles.'

*Bubbles?*

That's not what I'm going to call it.

# OUT NOW



  
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