PLANET RANSOM



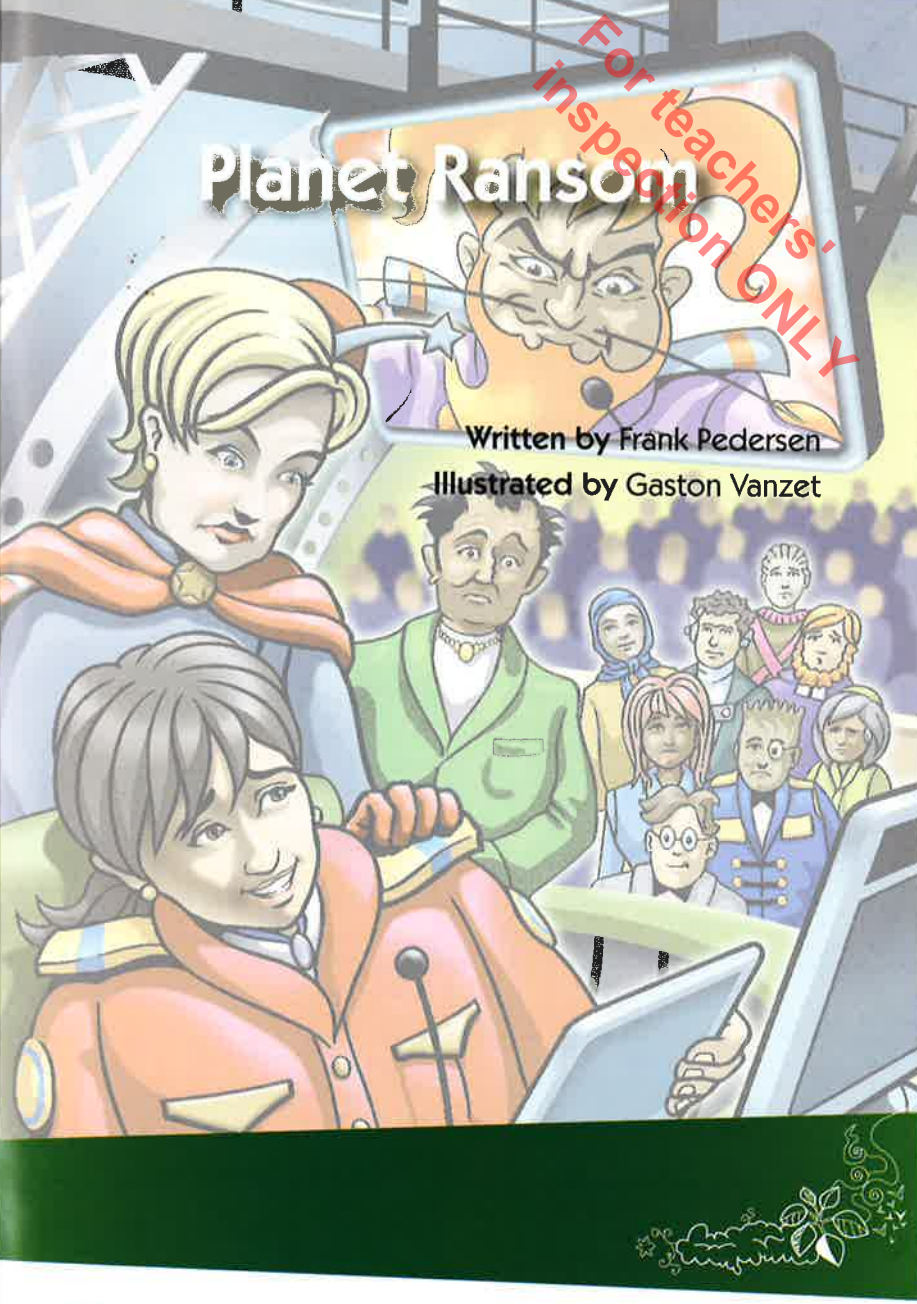
Frank Pedersen
Gaston Vanzet

Nelson Literacy Directions

For teachers' inspection ONLY

Planet Ransom

Written by Frank Pedersen
Illustrated by Gaston Vanzet



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Meet the Characters

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Mila Shovetzka

A Russian space scientist.



Dr Xerxes

A mad scientist.



President Sternov

The Russian president.



Rosco Fortescue

A greedy billionaire.



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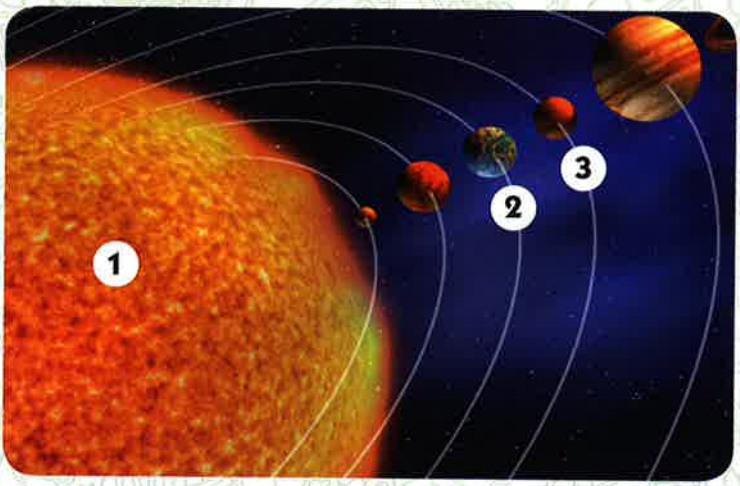
POSTCARD

Dear Reader

With over 2 billion people connected to the Internet, the information you can quickly find online is amazing. I was surfing the Internet one day, when suddenly I thought, "What could humans achieve if everybody online worked together on a project?" I guess it would depend on who was in charge!

Frank Pedersen
Author

The Solar System



1. The Sun 2. Earth 3. Mars

(Distances are not to scale.)

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The room fell silent. No one dared breathe. Every one of the hundred Mars council members gazed at their notes or looked at their shoes.

The only sounds were the footsteps of the evil Dr Xerxes, as he strode towards the lectern. Grasping its edges with thin, bony fingers, he glared at the council. An icy chill fell over the room.



Dr Xerxes ran a hand through his wild mane of flaming red hair. He basked in the silent fear that rose like an invisible cloud from the room. Then the president of Xerxes City, humankind's first space colony, shouted the first terrifying word of his speech. Every eye in the room was fixed upon him.


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Travelling at the speed of light, the images of the meeting on Mars sped towards the huge screens in the space centre in Moscow.

Until the first images arrived, the people there saw nothing but dark static.

"What's happening?" growled President Elenya Sternov, Earth's most powerful leader. "Why is it taking so long?"

Mila Shovetzka, the scientist in charge of the space centre, turned in her chair.

"Mars and Earth travel around the Sun in elliptical orbits," she said. "At their furthest point, they are over 400 million kilometres apart. Right now, they are at nearly their closest point – but that's still a distance of 58 million kilometres. From that far, signals from Mars take 193 seconds to reach Earth."

President Sternov scowled at Mila.

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Specks of light danced across the screen. Three and a quarter minutes later, an image of Dr Xerxes burst on the screen.

His wild eyes transfixed those watching on Mars and on Earth.

"Annihilation!" he shouted.

Across the vastness of space, a cold fear gripped the people of two tiny planets.

LOCATION: MOSCOW JAIL 10.04 am, 21 FEBRUARY

In a grey, dimly lit cell in Moscow's worst jail, Rosco Fortescue paced up and down. Outside, a blizzard raged. For weeks, only the brave had gone out into the icy storm. Now and again, a heavy truck rumbled by. The walls of the cell shook with the noise.

Rosco Fortescue was not alone in trying to shake off the chill that ate at his bones.



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For teachers' inspection ONLY

Millions of people in the Northern Hemisphere were seeing the worst blizzards for a century.

In contrast, those who lived in the Southern Hemisphere were sweltering under a long drought. Around the planet, food crops were poor. Power and energy systems were breaking down.

Once a billionaire, Rosco Fortescue had run many of Earth's food and power companies. But those companies had also depleted Earth's resources and polluted its atmosphere. When Mars had first been colonised, he had been too greedy and had fallen foul of President Sternov and Dr Xerxes.

Now he was in jail. Now, Earth and its people were in crisis.

