

The Surfing Penguin



By Kim Maslin

Illustrations John Field

The Surfing Penguin

A collection of interactive short stories about growing up in the digital age

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This book is typeset in Helvetica, Print Clearly and Mountains of Christmas.

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Augmented Reality created by Marc Najera using ZapWorks, a service provided by Zappar Limited.

First Released on Amazon 2020

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It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are,
far more than our abilities.

- Albus Dumbledore

The Scary Plight of the Surfing Penguin



The smell of freshly popped sardines filled the room, as Pablo and Polo sat down to watch their Saturday night movie. Polo, the elder of the two, had been left in charge while their parents were at their dancing class. He hooked up the family laptop to their big television screen and began surfing through the available movies. There were so many options, from slapstick to singing clownfish! Suddenly, Polo stopped scrolling. "This one!" he cried out. "I've heard all about this from my mate Peg."

Without waiting for Pablo to respond—he never seemed to wait for Pablo to respond!—he hit play and dimmed the lights.

As the opening scene began, Pablo wasn't sure what to expect.

The introductory music was chilling and sent tingles down his spine. At first, there was nothing to see on the screen except the dark, rolling waves. Then, without warning, a huge great white shark jumped out at them, its teeth bared. Pablo let out a squeak of terror.

"Uh, Polo, I'm not sure we should be watching this," he said nervously.

Polo laughed. "Don't be such a scaredy bird. Peg says this movie is awesome."

Pablo sank further down into the couch, his heart racing. Over the next ninety minutes, the shark lurked and leered, preyed and pounced across the screen. Pablo let out a big sigh of relief as the movie came to a dramatic close. He had never seen anything so scary in his life.



Later that night, as Polo's snores drifted in from the next room, Pablo lay wide awake. He was unable to sleep. Every time he closed his eyes, he saw the shark looming closer and closer. Suddenly, he heard a long creaking sound followed by several tap, tap, taps.

Pablo sat bolt upright in bed. Oh my gosh, it's the shark! As terrified as he was, there was no way he was going to let that big scary brute eat his family. He slipped quietly out of bed and grabbed his surfboard to use as a weapon.

As he entered the dark living room, he was able to make out two large shapes moving around. Oh man, he's brought a hungry friend! He gripped the surfboard tightly and lifted it up above his head, ready to strike.

Just then, the lights flicked on.

"Woah, Pablo! It's only us."



Cautiously, Pablo peeked out from behind his surfboard. He found himself face to face with his stunned parents, who were coming home late from their dancing class.

"What's going on, Pablo? Is everything OK?"

Pablo knew he'd feel better if he just told them about the movie.

"I thought you were sharks," he said, placing the surfboard down on the ground. "We found this movie online, and it was so scary. The shark had such big teeth! And now I can't get to sleep."

"That must have been terrifying for you both," his mum said.

"No, just for me," Pablo replied. "Polo wasn't scared at all."

Just then, the three of them heard a little shriek, followed by the patter of flippers. Polo appeared at the door, breathing heavily.

"I . . . I . . . had a bad dream," he stuttered.

His dad smiled knowingly. "Let me guess. About sharks?"

Polo nodded.

"Hmmm," his mum said, looking at her two petrified little penguins and then at the surfboard. "You know, the internet is a bit like surfing. There's lots of fun to be had out there, but it can also be scary at times. And dangerous. You need to know what you're doing."

"And you also need to be supervised while you're learning," his dad added.

"We really shouldn't have left you with the laptop without putting some safe search filters on it first. We'll sort it out in the morning."

Polo nodded.

Anything that would keep the scary stuff away seemed like a pretty good idea to him.

Reflection



1. Why do you think Pablo and Polo watch the entire movie, even though they both find it scary? Are their reasons different?
2. Explain what safe search filters are. How will they help protect Pablo and his family?
3. Have you ever seen something online that made you feel uncomfortable or unsafe? How did you respond?

The Courageous Quest of the Smiling Quokka



This was Quinn's first home visit since starting at Spinifex State High School, and she was so excited to spend time with her family. She reached into her pouch and pulled out her phone. Standing up on her hind legs and smiling widely, she took a selfie in front of the sparkling turquoise ocean. She then uploaded it so that her new friends could see where she was from.

After a fun-filled day at the beach playing chasey—mostly being chased!—with her little twin brothers, Quentin and Quince, Quinn settled down with her family to watch the sunset.

Quinn heard her phone ding. Pulling it out of her pouch, she saw that her photo had received some comments from students in her PE class.

Yuck!!

Horrible pic.

My, what a big nose you have!

Take this down. And don't come back.

Quinn's eyes filled with tears. She sniffled, and her mum turned to look at her.

"What's wrong, love?" Quinn held out her phone so that her parents could see.

"Well, the answer is simple, isn't it?" piped up Quentin, who had been peering over their shoulders. "Just take a better picture next time."

"Yeah, preferably without you in it!" Quince chimed in. They giggled and gave each other a high paw. Their mum, however, silenced them instantly with a hard stare.





"Well, this is just horrible," her mum said, turning back to Quinn. "You need to delete these comments straight away and block those students so that they can't message you anymore."

"But first," her dad added, "take a screenshot of all the comments so that you can show them to Coach Coot next week."

"I'm not sure," Quinn said quietly. "Maybe it would be best just to delete the photo completely and forget it ever happened."

Her brothers looked at each other, wide-eyed, and then back to her. "Don't do that! We were just joking, you know," Quince said.

"Yeah, you actually look, you know, OK in that photo," Quentin added. Quinn gave a small laugh, which quickly turned into a cry as her phone gave another ding.

"I can't look," she exclaimed.

Her mum glanced down at the phone and smiled. "I think you'll want to read this one, Quinn."

She gingerly took the phone and glanced down. It was from another classmate, Balbina.

Oi, this isn't funny! It's mean. Just because you're jealous doesn't give you the right to bully someone.

Quinn, you look gorgeous in this photo xoxo.



Reflection

"That was a very kind and brave thing for Balbina to say," her dad said.

Quinn nodded, filling with hope. She quickly sent Balbina a private message.

Quinn: Hey B, thanks so much for standing up for me. You didn't have to do that!

Balbina: Of course I did! I wasn't just going to stand by and let them bully you. You know, when that video of me went viral last year . . . I received some hurtful messages as well, so I know how it feels.

Quinn: Really? What did you do? My parents have suggested I delete and block, as well as show a screenshot to Coach Coot.

Balbina: Yep, I did all that. But I also just kept being myself. I refused to let those bullies see they had upset me or stop me from being me.

Quinn considered what her friend had just told her. If Balbina could be brave like that, she thought to herself, then so could she! She quickly screenshotted the evidence, deleted the comments and blocked the bullies. Then she stood up on her hind legs and smiled at her family, still enjoying the sunset. She ruffled Quentin's fury head affectionately. "Come on, everyone, let's get a group selfie before the sun completely disappears!"

1. List the different advice that her parents and Balbina give Quinn to respond to the cyberbullying.
2. Explain what an "upstander" is. Describe how Balbina is an upstander in this story.
3. Have you ever witnessed cyberbullying? What actions might you take if you were to see it happening?

The Troublesome Episode of the Trolling Echidna



The rain was pouring down as Edgar made his way quickly through the mud towards the school library. During wet lunchtimes like today, the librarian would open the doors and allow students to play games on the computers. Edgar's friend, Esther, was racing along next to him when all of a sudden there was a great big squelch and Esther was face first in the mud. Edgar let out a loud laugh at the sight of her. Esther couldn't help but laugh along with him, accepting his paw as he helped her up. She shook her spines free of mud, and they quickly continued on their way.

"There's this new game Presley was showing me," Esther said, once they were settled in the library. "In it, you get to build lots of different things. He's sent me the link, so we can join the server they're all working on." She tapped away at her keyboard and then at Edgar's. A few minutes later, both screens were welcoming them to a new world.

Edgar could see a dozen or so different avatars moving around, controlled by Presley and his friends. They had certainly been hard at work. A great big castle loomed above them, surrounded by a muddy moat with a bridge stretching across it. Every now and then, short text messages flashed up on the screen, as different avatars called out instructions on how to finish off their construction.



Using his keyboard, Edgar moved towards the foot of the bridge. Everyone is way too serious, he thought, watching the avatars diligently build the castle, brick-by-brick. They're just like ants! It's time to make this a bit more fun. He remembered Esther slipping in the mud outside and laughed to himself. As one of the avatars approached his, he reached out and pushed it straight down into the moat. He laughed out loud at the little avatar waving around, stuck knee-deep in the mud. This is more like it!

Over the next thirty minutes, Edgar wreaked havoc across the screen. He pushed over more avatars, pulled out the bricks at the base of the castle and even managed to destroy the bridge. As the trapped and injured avatars posted angry messages telling the troll to stop, Edgar chuckled and wrote back that they should all take a chill pill. It was so funny watching them jump around while the castle slowly fell apart like a trodden-on ant mound.

Suddenly, Edgar heard a gasp from behind him.

"Edgar, you're the troll?"



He turned around to find Esther behind him, shocked.

He laughed. "Nah, I'm just having some fun, Esther."

"You're just being mean, Edgar," she said. "What you're doing isn't funny. Do you not realise that there are real echidnas and platypuses behind those avatars, with real feelings?"

Edgar thought about her words. To be honest, he had been so caught up in his fun that he hadn't stopped for a moment to think about who was on the other end of the computer.

"Yeah, but . . . well, you know . . . it's funny, falling in the mud and stuff!" he said, a little defensively. "Even you found it funny outside earlier."

"Yes, but there's a difference," Esther said. "I fell by accident. It wouldn't have been funny at all if you had deliberately pushed me."

"Well, no, but I would never do that!" Edgar exclaimed.

"But you kind of are," she pointed out. "That's me stuck there in the mud on the screen. And it hurts my feelings just as if you had done it in real life. Particularly when you also wrote back those horrible comments when I asked you to stop."

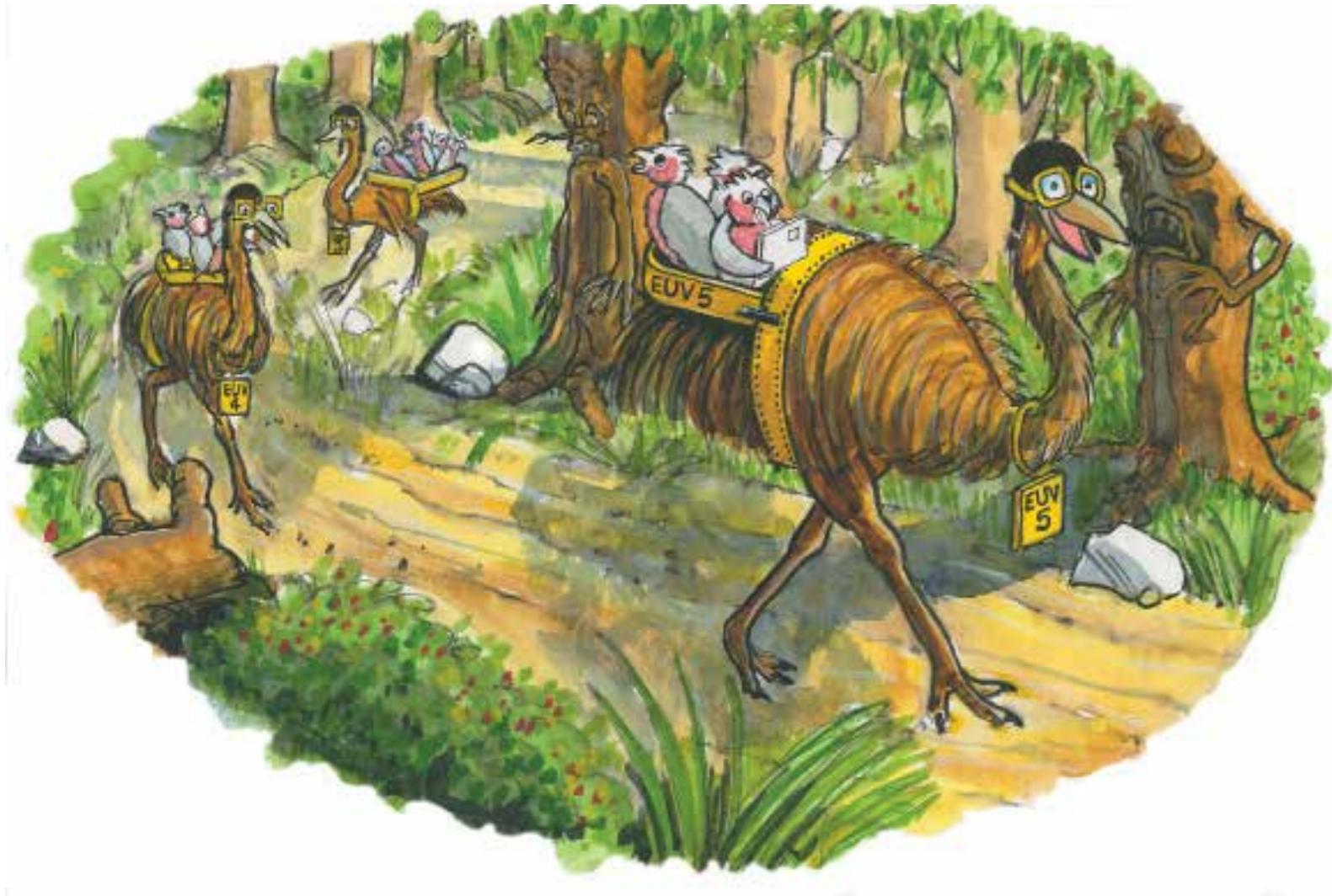
Edgar's cheeks flushed red with shame. He couldn't look her in the eyes.

Instead, he turned to face the screen, and with a couple of taps of the keyboard, his avatar headed towards Esther's, reached out a hand and pulled her out of the mud.

Reflection

1. Why does Edgar troll the others in the game? Is this out of character for him?
2. Distinguish between trolling and cyberbullying.
3. Have you ever experienced unkind behaviour while playing an online game? How did you and/or the other players respond?





The Galahs' Close Encounter with the Creeping Kestrel

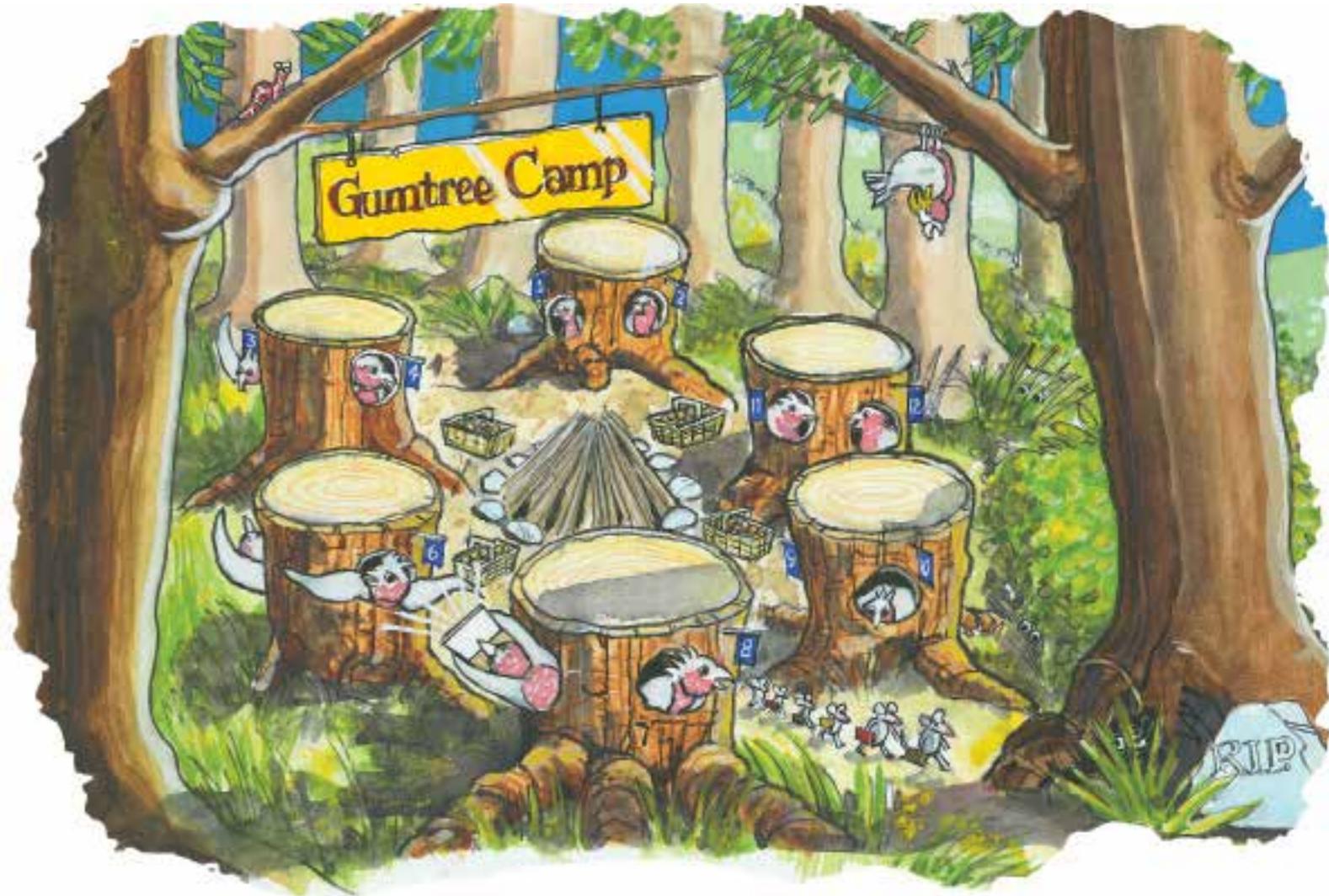
"What a day for it!" Gabbo exclaimed.

His friend Ginger laughed. "You always say that!"

It was the start of the annual Remote Flying Academy for Young Galahs Survival Camp, and the young galahs were sitting on the back of an EUV as Wing Commander Grey expertly drove them through the wild shrubbery. The only one more excited than Gabbo was his little sister, Gabrielle. It was her first ever survival camp. She bounced up and down next to Gudrun, snapping away with her camera phone.

As the EUV slowed down to a halt, they tumbled off and began setting up their camp site. Gabrielle hopped around, taking photos of everything, from Ginger setting up the twig sleeping mats to Gabbo safely storing away the yummy macadamia nuts that they would later roast for dinner. Once Wing Commander Grey had checked that everything was in order, he led them away from the camp site to start their adventures.

Gabrielle and the other younger galahs were still on their training wings, but that didn't stop them enjoying the hiking, cave exploring and abseiling. After a fun-filled day, they made their way back to the camp site, chatting eagerly about camp fires and macadamia nuts.





When they entered the clearing, however, they saw broken twigs and empty food bags strewn across the ground. They had been burgled!

Wing Commander Grey walked forward cautiously, sniffing at claw marks and inspecting a loose feather that had been left behind. "Kestrels," he said solemnly.

The class let out a gasp. Those birds of prey were known for creeping around, stealing other birds' food and nests.

"But how did they find us?" Gabbo asked.

"I'm not sure," Wing Commander Grey said seriously, "but it's imperative I go and scare them off so that they don't come back during the night. You lot stay here!"

After he left, the class slowly began cleaning up the mess. Grumbling to himself about the lost macadamia nuts, Gabbo began sweeping up the broken twigs.

He felt a tug at his wing and turned to see Gabrielle, who was staring at him nervously.

"Umm, Gabbo," she said in a small voice. "I . . . uh . . . I think I know how the kestrels found us." She held up her phone, which showed all the photos she had uploaded throughout the day. The photos not only had captions.

They also had ...

"Geolocation tags!" Gabbo groaned. With these tags included, it would have been all too easy for the kestrels to have tracked down their exact coordinates. "Oh, Gabrielle, how could you have been so foolish? Now the macadamia nuts are gone, and it's all your fault."

Gabrielle's eyes filled with tears. She turned and ran off into the darkening cluster of trees.

"That was a bit harsh, mate," Ginger said.



"You know, even you have made the mistake of putting something online when you shouldn't have, Gabbo," Gudrun added wisely.

Gabbo thought about her words and then sighed. "Ah nuts, you're right! I need to go after her."

He flew off in the direction in which she had disappeared. As he was a pretty good flyer by now, it didn't take him long to catch up with her.

"Gabrielle, I'm sorry!" he gasped, giving her a pat on the back. "Everyone makes mistakes. The important thing is we learn from them."

"I have," she sniffed. "I'm never going to post anything online again!"

Gabbo laughed. "That's not the answer. You just need to know how to post online safely. When we're back at the camp site, I'll show you how to set up Ghost Galah mode. That way, your location won't be included alongside your photos."

"But how will we ever find our way back?" Gabrielle looked around, scared. It was getting darker by the minute, and she had no idea where they were.

"Easy. This is a time when geolocations can actually be a good thing. Here, let me show you." And with that, Gabbo opened up his map app, and they followed its directions back to the camp site.



Reflection

1. How do location services contribute to the galahs' camp being robbed?
2. List three ways that different applications and/or websites use location services.
3. How do you feel about your physical location being displayed or used by different applications?

About the Creators



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Dr Kim Maslin is a digital technologies educator, researcher, and author. She has taught in early years, primary and secondary school contexts, and is the author of The Tweeting Galah series.

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Learn more at:
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Another collection of short stories about growing up in the digital age.

The much anticipated sequel to "The Tweeting Galah" sees new and familiar faces return to outback Australia, as they explore and navigate their way through the digital world. Together, they overcome challenges and learn how to be the best versions of themselves online.

Praise for "The Tweeting Galah"

"If you are a parent or educator please consider getting this excellent picture book that explores cyber safety in a fabulous and child friendly way. Kim Maslin has written a wonderful resource to help educate our precious children"

- Maggie Dent, Parenting Author and Educator



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