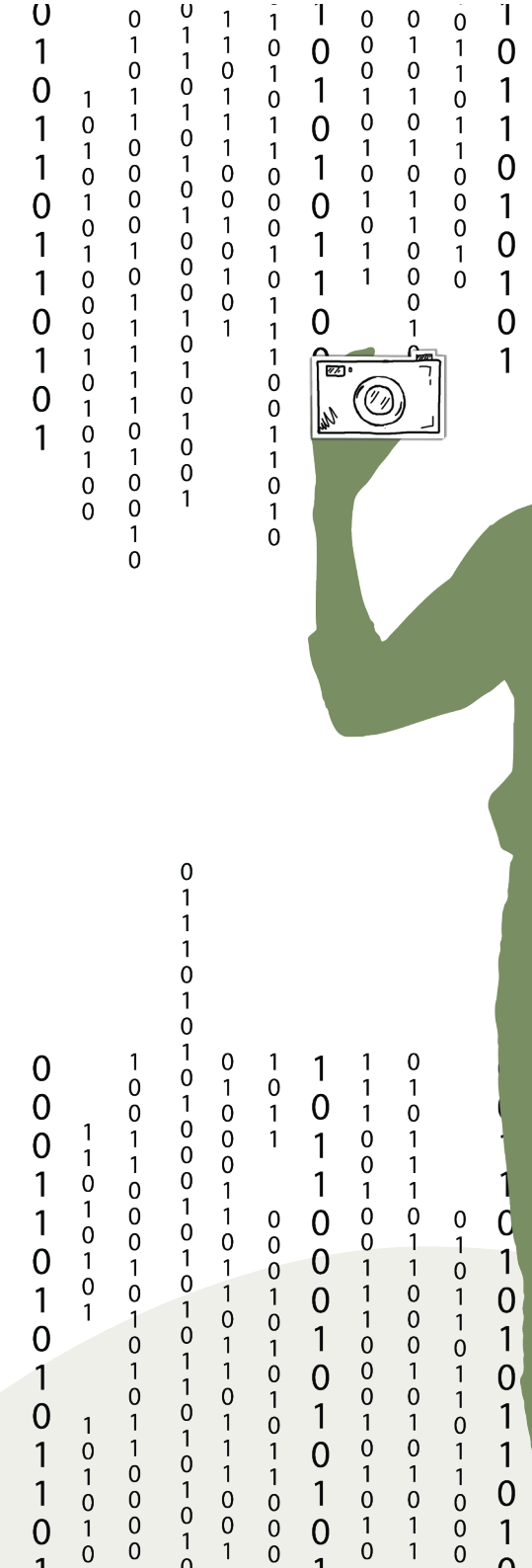
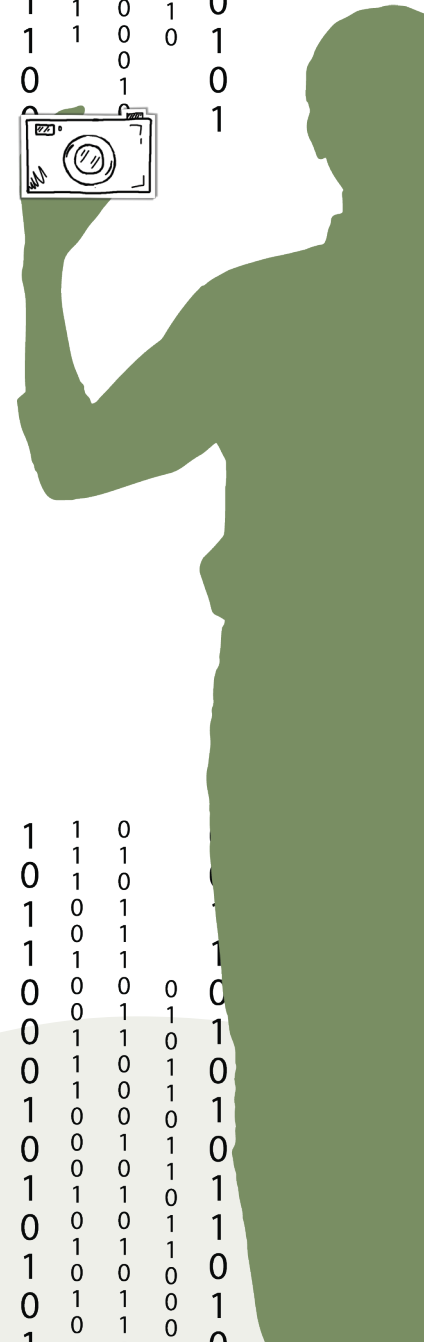


THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN <VIRTUAL> RACE



Chapter 2

'Amari!' You find it really hard to whisper and shout at the same time. 'Amari!' you say again.

You draw unwanted attention from the librarian who reinforces every stereotype as she glares over the top of her glasses and presses a rigid finger over her 'shushing' lips.

You give it one more go, dangerously loud. 'AMARI!'

In the corner, you see Amari's head pop up over the top of the desk dividers. He waves awkwardly as you head towards him and away from the librarian's disapproving stare. When you reach him he is gathering up a set of brightly coloured crayons. His fingertips are covered in

their vibrant residue.

'Sorry,' he says. 'I got lost in my drawing.'

'No problem. I don't think the librarian likes me anyway.'

You'd decided to meet Amari at the library – neutral territory – because you still don't know him very well. You thought this would be more relaxed. But you still feel a bit awkward.

Amari must be feeling it too. He keeps nervously pushing his glasses back into place. As he does, the colour from the crayons leaves a streak of blue and red along the ridge of his nose. You try to ignore it, but with each adjustment of his glasses the streak gets more noticeable. You know you won't be able to take him seriously with a red and blue nose!

'Um, you've got crayon on your nose, Amari,' you blurt out quickly. He wipes his nose with the back of his hand and laughs when he sees how much colour comes off.

'Oh wow!' he says and laughs, still embarrassed but

leaving gaping holes where the picture should be.

'No, we don't get the picture. Not a single one,' Amari says.

'There's no way we can answer questions about flags if we can't see them. I don't know about you, but I think this changes things. It's impossible, right? Ugh, I hate giving up on things. It's not my style, but what else can we do?'

You reach out to close your laptop but Amari stops you. 'I think we should keep going. I really do know a lot about flags. Take a look.'

Amari opens his sketchbook and starts flicking through the pages. Colour explodes from neat rectangles filled with lines and stars and crescents and crosses. They're flags. His whole sketchbook is filled with beautiful flags.

'You know flags,' you say in an impressed whisper. 'You really know flags.'

'Come on. Let's play,' Amari says confidently.

Dragging your eyes away from the flag sketches, you click start.

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As you sit back in your seat, Amari closes his sketchbook and runs his hands gently across the grainy, black cover.

'I know it doesn't seem cool or popular, but I really thought I wanted to become a vexillographer,' he says quietly.

'What's a vexiol ... a vexicolo ...?'

'A vexillographer. They design flags,' Amari explains.

'You'd be amazing at that!'

'Now I'm not so sure. Flags are important. They're not just decorations. They're so much more than shapes and colours. They have meaning. They carry centuries of history. They tell the story of people and pride.

They're about belonging and believing. That's a lot of

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responsibility.'

You pause and let Amari's words hang in the air for a while.

Finally you say, 'It sounds to me like you are exactly the right person to be a vexil ... a flag designer, Amari.'

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