

A vibrant, futuristic theme park scene. In the foreground, a green alien character with three antennae and a red shirt is sliding down a blue slide. Other alien characters in various colors (purple, black, blue) are seen running and playing in the background. The park features colorful roller coaster tracks, a large blue and black structure resembling a spider, and a bright sun in a blue sky. The overall atmosphere is bright and playful.

# SPACE SCOUT

**THE KID KINGDOM**

H. BADGER

# SPACE SCOUT

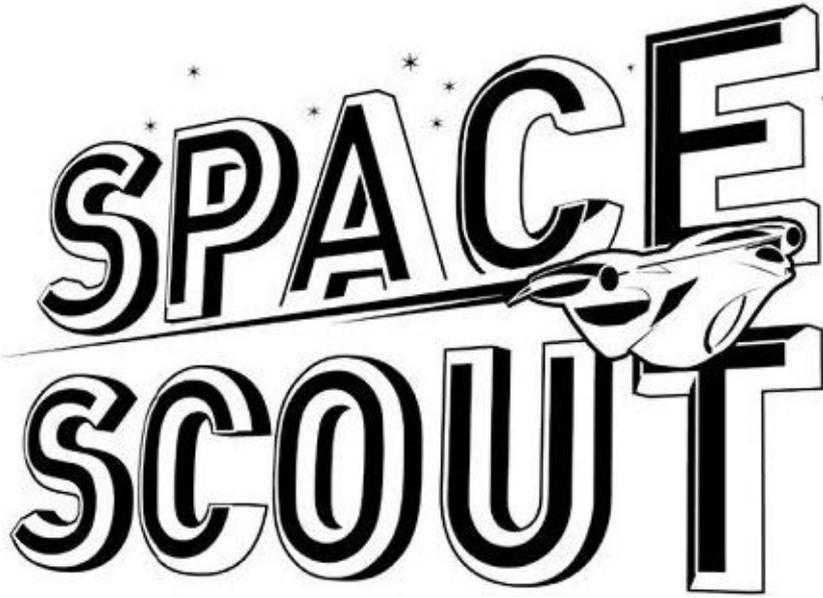
The background of the cover is a colorful, futuristic theme park. In the foreground, a green alien character with three antennae and a red shirt is sliding down a blue slide. Other green alien characters are visible in the background, some running and some standing. The park features various roller coasters, including a large black one with a blue ball and a yellow one with a tall tower. The sky is blue with a bright sun and stars.

**THE KID KINGDOM**

*H. BADGER*



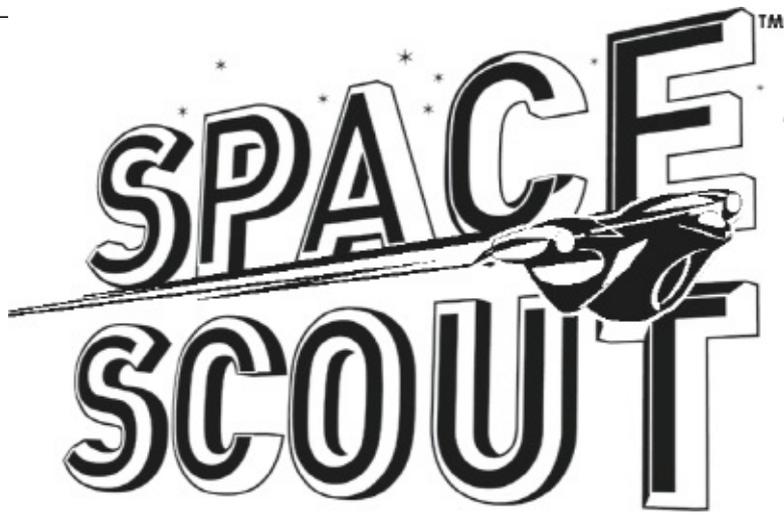
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The logo for 'Space Scout' features the words 'SPACE' and 'SCOUT' in a bold, stylized, outlined font. The word 'SPACE' is positioned above 'SCOUT'. A rocket ship is depicted in the center, appearing to fly from left to right, with its nose pointing towards the right. The rocket is integrated into the letter 'E' of 'SPACE' and the letter 'O' of 'SCOUT'. Several small stars are scattered around the text, particularly above the word 'SPACE'.

# SPACE SCOUT

*SCOUTING THE UNIVERSE FOR A NEW EARTH*

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**SPACE  
SCOUT**

***THE KID KINGDOM***

***BY H. BADGER***

***ILLUSTRATED BY D. GREULICH***



**hardie grant EGMONT**

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*The Kid Kingdom*  
published in 2011 by  
Hardie Grant Egmont  
85 High Street  
Prahran, Victoria 3181, Australia  
[www.hardiegrantegmont.com.au](http://www.hardiegrantegmont.com.au)

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Cover illustration by M. Deeble  
Illustrated by D. Greulich  
Series design by S. Swingler  
Typeset by Ektavo  
Printed in Australia by McPherson's Printing Group

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

# CONTENTS

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[CHAPTER 1](#)

[CHAPTER 2](#)

[CHAPTER 3](#)

[CHAPTER 4](#)

[CHAPTER 5](#)

[CHAPTER 6](#)

[CHAPTER 7](#)

[CHAPTER 8](#)

[CHAPTER 9](#)

[CHAPTER 10](#)

# CHAPTER 1

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Kip Kirby was puffed. He was trying to put up a volleyball net. It wasn't easy, because Kip kept floating into the air. So did the net!

*Not surprising, Kip grinned to himself. I am on the moon.*

Kip and his best friend Jett were camping with their dads. It was the year 2354 and the moon was a popular weekend getaway spot. It was too crowded on Earth to go camping.

Kip and Jett were excited about playing lunar volleyball. The low gravity on the moon made it perfect for awesome jump serves and spikes!

Kip's dad was unpacking the camping gear, kicking up gigantic clouds of lunar dust. 'How do you know when the moon's angry, boys?' he asked.

Kip and Jett shrugged their shoulders.

'It shows you its dark side!' Kip's dad chuckled.

Underneath his space helmet, Kip rolled his eyes. *How did I end up with such an embarrassing dad* he thought.

Kip's image was especially important because he had a job as a Space Scout. Space Scouts explore distant galaxies to find a new planet to live on. There were so many people on Earth that they needed more room.

At 12 years old, Kip was the youngest of the 50 Space Scouts.

Kip loved his job. How many other kids had seen the awesome stuff he had on his missions?

'Coming at you, Kip!' Jett yelled.

Kip kept his eyes on the volleyball, which was floating over the net towards him.

'Got it,' Kip replied, leaping three metres into the air to lob the volleyball back to Jett.

'Not the volleyball!' Jett yelled. 'THAT THING OVER THERE!'

Kip turned to see a black football-sized capsule hurtling towards him.

Red-hot flames spewed from the back of the capsule, which was fitted with powerful mini-rockets. Splashed on the side in big letters were the words:

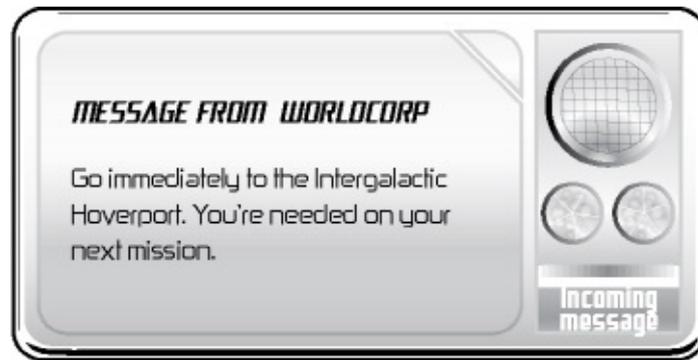
**WORLDCORP**  
**URGENT**  
**EXPRESS DELIVERY**  
**CAUTION - CONTENTS HOT**

With a second to spare, Kip ducked out of the way. His spacesuit was made from the latest ultra-light heat-resistant fabric, of course. But a sizzling hot capsule could still put a hole in it.

**SMACK!**

With a sickening crack, the capsule smashed into the moon's rocky surface. It broke open on impact and a wireless device floated out. It beamed encrypted data to Kip's SpaceCuff in seconds, and the SpaceCuff automatically decoded it.

A SpaceCuff was a communication device, translator and gaming console all rolled into one. Space Scouts would be lost without them.



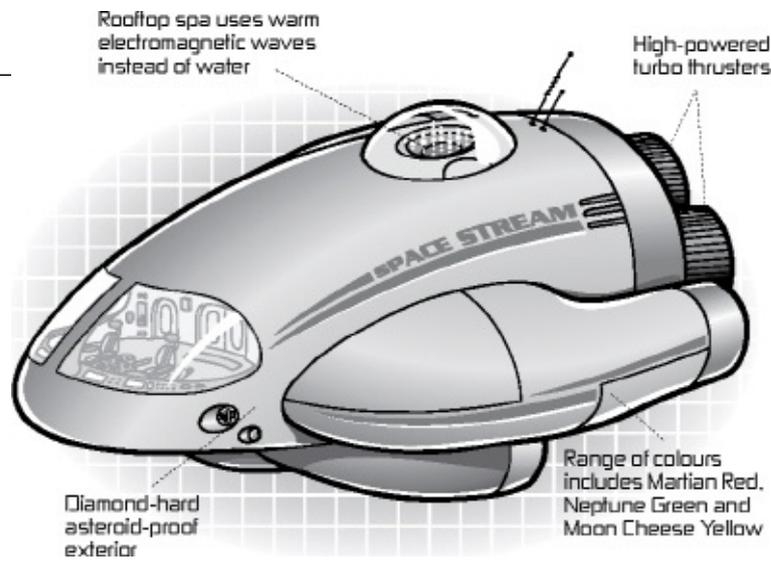
‘Cool!’ said Jett, who had read the message over Kip’s shoulder. ‘Where are they sending you?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Kip. ‘But I can’t wait to find out! The 27 only thing is...how do I get to the Hoverport?’

The Hoverport was 10 kilometres above Earth – a quick trip by Space Scout standards. But getting there from the moon was trickier.

Kip glanced around for inspiration. His eyes settled on his dad’s brand-new Space Stream flying motor home.

The Space Stream was sleek, silver and decked out with extras like multi-galaxy cable TV and a rooftop waterless spa. Kip’s dad never, *ever* let anyone fly it but him.



## *Space Stream Motor Home*

‘You’re not thinking what I think you’re thinking, are you, Kip?’ whispered Jett.

‘I’d just be borrowing it,’ Kip hissed back. ‘As soon as I get to the Hoverport, I’ll send it back here on auto-pilot. You guys can fly home to Earth, no problems.’

‘Your dad’s going to *kill* you!’ Jett said, shaking his head.

Kip shrugged, but inside he was grinning. Secretly, he’d always wanted an excuse to fly the Space Stream.



# CHAPTER 2

---

Kip looked over at his dad, who was staring at their camping gear, bewildered.

Even though the Space Stream had the latest vertical hammocks, Kip's dad insisted on sleeping in the great outdoors. Otherwise, he said, it just wasn't a proper camping trip!

Instead of tents, moon campers needed special inflatable structures with built-in airlocks. They were *supposed* to pop up in one go. But Kip's dad was having trouble with the instructions.

*Now's my chance!* Kip thought.

He felt a little guilty about sneaking off. At home, Kip had to do what his parents said, like any kid. It was only on Space Scout missions that he had complete control.

Kip's dad might be angry about the Space Stream at first. But Kip hoped he'd understand. He had to get to the Hoverport somehow. Earth's future could depend on Kip's next mission!

With a goodbye wave to Jett, Kip sneaked aboard the Space Stream. It was docked a little way from the campsite.

He jumped straight into the cockpit and commenced launch sequence.

As an experienced Space Scout, Kip was confident flying most vehicles. Besides, he'd watched his dad piloting the Space Stream heaps of times before.

With the roar of rockets powering up, the Space Stream took off into the air.

Through the windscreen, Kip saw his dad look up from the camping gear. His expression quickly went from surprised to mega-cranky.

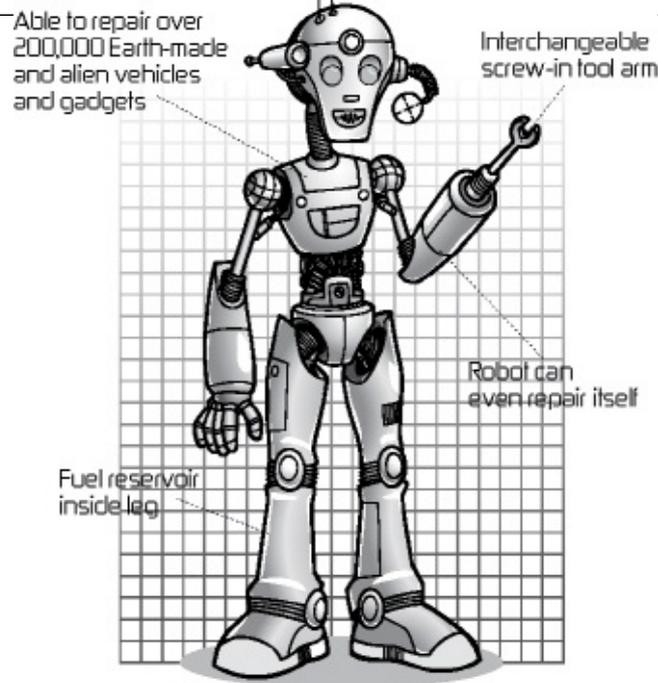
'I'll look after it, Dad,' Kip called. 'Space Scout's honour!'

The Space Stream's powerful engine throbbed as Kip hit the throttle. He understood why his dad loved flying it! It wasn't long before Kip left the moon far behind. And only a short time later, he arrived at the Intergalactic Hoverport.

All intergalactic space flights left from the Hoverport. That's why Kip's starship, MoNa 4000, was docked there. MoNa was a huge, glossy black ship, with a pointed nose cone and extra noisy thrusters specially designed for extreme long-distance space travel. She was the ideal starship, apart from her bossy personality.

Kip expertly piloted the Space Stream into the massive landing bay on MoNa's lowest level.

MoNa had a team of maintenance robots aboard. Straight away, the bots began refuelling the Space Stream so it could return itself to the moon.



## ***WorldCorp Maintenancebot***

Kip punched the co-ordinates for the moon into the Space Stream's control panel, then leapt out.

The Space Stream took off and MoNa's voice came over the loudspeaker. 'Airlock closed. Now stop wasting time and get to the bridge.'

Kip raced to MoNa's command centre, where a familiar furry figure was waiting for him. It was Finbar, Kip's second-in-command. Walking on two legs and covered in white fur, Finbar was half-human, half-arctic wolf.

'Welcome back,' said Finbar.

Kip couldn't help noticing that he sounded stressed. 'Is the wormhole opening already?' he asked, looking out the giant windows into space.

Space Scouts used wormholes to travel quickly between different galaxies.

'By the time you've downloaded your mission brief, it'll probably be closed,' grumbled MoNa. She was an intelligent starship and could hear everything Kip and Finbar said.

Kip and Finbar exchanged glances. MoNa could be so crabby sometimes! She was busy flying them from the Hoverport into deep space and she hated interruptions when she was concentrating.

The bridge was packed with bleeping gadgets, but best of all was Kip's holographic console. He waved his hand above his head to activate it. It formed a cylinder of blue light around him. Kip hit the button that downloaded his mission brief.

**SPACE SCOUT  
KIP KIRBY  
MISSION BRIEF**



WorldCorp has received friendly communications from the aliens of a planet called Yufe. The aliens request help with developing their technology.

**Your mission:**

Assist the local aliens and decide if Yufe could be the next Earth.

*Awesome!* Kip thought. Friendly aliens were always a bonus.

‘The wormhole’s up ahead,’ said Finbar. ‘But we don’t have much time.’

Kip saw the wormhole, a clump of glowing, electric blue cloud. ‘Let’s go, Finb—’ he began. ‘Wait. what’s THAT?’

A ginormous rubbery blob, nearly as big as MoNa, was hurtling out of the wormhole. It was heading straight for them.

‘Call me crazy, but that looks like the universe’s biggest water bomb!’ Kip yelled.



# CHAPTER 3

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Back on Earth, Kip had seen a water bomb in a museum. It was a small balloon that kids used to fill with water and throw at each other for fun. Of course, in the year 2354, no-one on Earth had water to waste.

MoNa's system confirmed it. The blobby object was definitely a water bomb. But it was enormous. And the sub-zero temperatures of deep space had completely frozen the water inside. Now the bomb was full of solid ice!

An ice chunk that big would destroy MoNa if they collided.

'Do something, Kip!' Finbar howled, ears flat against his head. Although Finbar had many wolfish qualities, he was still prone to panicking.

There wasn't time to pilot MoNa out of the way. Kip would have to destroy the water bomb – fast! Desperately, Kip flicked through MoNa's range of guns on his holographic console.

Foam gun... No, that was fun, but only really useful for cleaning dirty starships.

Ray gun... That would explode the ice, but the debris would still smash into MoNa.

The emergency light in the bridge turned red. The giant bomb filled MoNa's windscreen. Finbar covered his eyes with his paws. Kip was almost out of time!

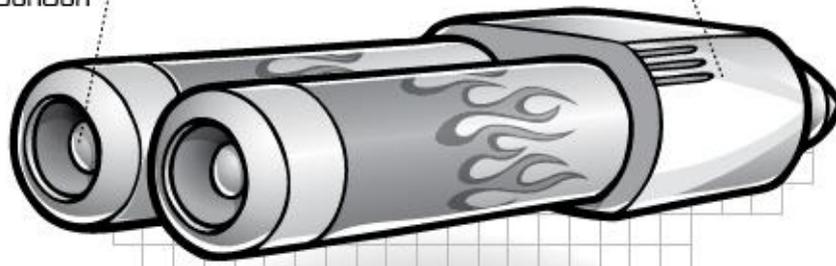
Then suddenly, Kip found just what he needed. MoNa's SunGuns!

A double-barrelled SunGun was mounted on each side of the starship. As soon as Kip stabbed the 'Engage SunGun' button, the bright yellow guns powered up. Kip squinted through the gunsights and aimed at the giant water bomb.

'Cover your ears!' he yelled to Finbar.

Ultra high-grade lightbulbs to withstand the intense heat generated by the SunGun

Super-compact high-powered battery



Emits beams of light as hot as the surface of the sun

## *SunGun*

Then...

# **KA-BOOOOM!**

The SunGuns fired, and in a nanosecond, a wave of 6000-degree heat hit the water bomb.

The water balloon exploded in red, rubbery shreds. Steam hissed everywhere. The SunGuns had melted the ice on impact. The water inside was now boiling hot!

There was a roar as millions of litres of boiling water slammed into MoNa. For a moment, the world went white.

The full force of all that boiling water sent MoNa plunging off-course. Away from the wormhole!

At once, Kip grabbed the controls and switched them from auto-pilot mode. Bashing his holographic steering controls, Kip spun MoNa back towards the wormhole.

‘It’s about to close!’ yelled Finbar.

The swirling clouds were getting thinner and thinner. The wormhole had shrunk to practically nothing.

‘We’ll make it!’ said Kip.

With a determined stomp of his space boot, Kip engaged warp speed. MoNa jumped forwards so fast that he almost lost his lunch of powdered pepperoni pizza.

The wormhole sucked them inside like a vacuum cleaner. Kip piloted MoNa safely through until they popped out the other side, where everything was calm.

Kip wiped his sweaty face with the sleeve of his spacesuit. *Phew*, he thought to himself. *Made it.*

Ahead of them lay the planet Yufe. Comets streaked across the sky around MoNa. Kip wasn't worried, though. He switched MoNa back to auto-pilot. Her hazard perception systems would detect and avoid the comets.

Kip and Finbar went down to the landing bay. There, MoNa would transport their particles to the surface of Yufe using her Scrambler Beams.

The beams worked by splitting their bodies into tiny particles, sending these through space, and putting them back together on the surface of Yufe.

As Kip ran, his mind ticked over.

Did the aliens on Yufe send that water bomb into space? If they did, there must be a lot of water on their planet. That could mean it had Earth-like conditions.

*But why would the aliens be throwing water bombs through wormholes?* thought Kip. *Either that was an accident, or they're not as friendly as they seemed!*



# CHAPTER 4

Kip and Finbar's particles whizzed through space and reformed on the surface of Yufe.

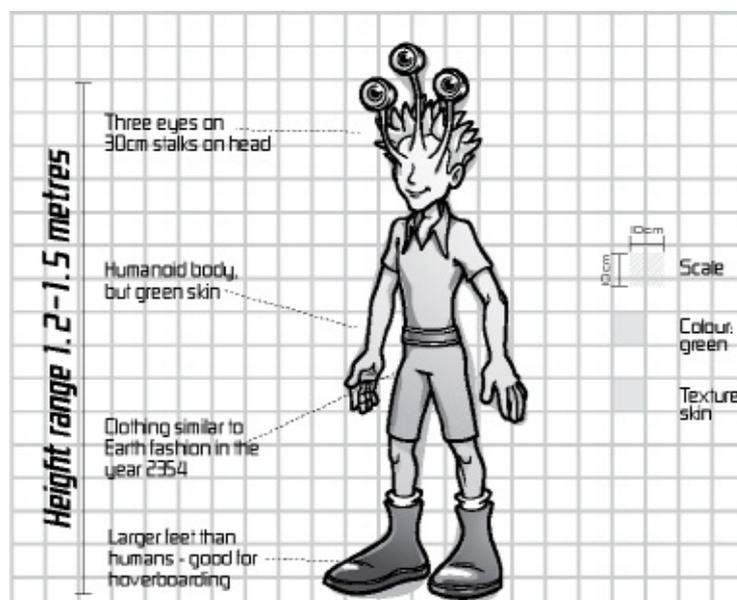
When Kip was in one piece again, he looked around and noticed it was early in the evening. Above them comets shot past, more common than stars in the Earth sky. And although it was getting dark, Yufe hummed with life. Everywhere Kip looked, he saw alien kids running around, but not a single grown-up.

*Those kids look about my age!* Kip thought. *Shouldn't they be home having dinner?*

The other thing that struck Kip was how much the kids of Yufe looked like him. They wore sporty shorts and T-shirts, just like Kip did at home. They walked like him, talked like him...they even rode hoverboards like him!

The big difference was that these kids had bright green skin and three eyes waving on long stalks on top of their heads.

Kip checked his SpaceCuff's Air Analyser. He wasn't surprised that the air on Yufe was safe for humans to breathe. In fact, when Kip took off his helmet and had a good look around, he saw Yufe was a lot like Earth in other ways too.



***ALIEN SPECIMEN: Yufian***  
***CONFIRMED LOCATION: Yufe***

Kip and Finbar were standing on a busy city street, lined with massive skyscrapers. The sky teemed

with single-person light spacecraft. There were buildings, roads and even a fountain nearby – just like there were in cities on Earth. Of course, not everything was the same. When Kip looked through a gap between two buildings, he saw a field full of awesome-looking rides.

He turned to Finbar, who was looking more closely at the fountain. Kip guessed he was hoping to find water.

‘Either the water here is brown and sludgy,’ said Finbar, ‘or that fountain’s full of melted chocolate.’

Kip analysed the brown liquid with his SpaceCuff. Finbar was right! It was chocolate. And judging by the way kids were swarming all around, it was free to drink from any time. Kip took off his space glove and stuck his finger in the fountain.

*A planet where chocolate’s free any time? he thought. That’s awes–*

## **WHOOSH!**

A three-eyed kid on a hoverboard whizzed past Kip’s head. The edge of the board clipped Finbar’s ear. But the kid didn’t even stop to say sorry.

Finbar growled and rubbed his ear. Kip was sorry Finbar was hurt, but he also felt excited. He couldn’t believe how many kids on hoverboards there were.

On Earth, hoverboarders were only allowed in special mid-air skate bowls. Grown-ups found them a nuisance on the streets. Kip broke the rules whenever he could, but it didn’t even look like there were rules here.

‘The more I see of Yufe, the more I like it!’ Kip said. This place was perfect for Earth 2.

Finbar pursed his lips. He was more cautious than Kip.

‘That must be where the water bomb came from,’ Finbar said. He pointed at the top of a distant hill where some kids were messing around with a silver machine.

‘It’s an ultra-long-range cannon,’ Finbar continued, eyeing the machine’s powerful gun barrel.

‘Somehow I don’t think it’s meant for firing water bombs,’ Kip said. The machine looked just like Earth’s anti-comet cannons.

They watched as the kids launched a huge green water bomb into space. This one nearly took out a low-flying satellite! The kids clearly had no idea how to fire the cannon properly.

‘Our water bomb was way bigger than that,’ said Kip. ‘Maybe it came from somewhere else.’

‘Irresponsible, anyway,’ Finbar sniffed.

Kip gave him a friendly punch on the arm. ‘But fun!’ he replied.

Finbar rolled his eyes towards the sky.

Then he stopped. ‘Kip, look at that comet! It’s much bigger than all the others.’

Kip glanced up. Finbar was right, but so what? There were all kinds of comets flying around this planet. Kip wasn’t going to let Finbar put him off Yufe.

‘My wolf senses tell me something’s weird about that comet,’ Finbar went on, his fur bristling.

Before Kip could tell Finbar he was overreacting, they were interrupted.

‘Welcome to Yufe,’ said a voice. It sounded just like Kip’s.

Kip and Finbar turned around to see an alien kid, exactly Kip’s height. His three brown eyes were the same colour as Kip’s. He wore a red T-shirt that was just like one Kip had at home. In fact, apart from his green skin and three eye stalks, he was a lot like Kip.

‘Er...hi,’ Kip answered, stunned that this alien kid even spoke his language.

Towering over the kid was what looked like a cross between a wolf and an alien being. He was furry all over. He looked a lot like Finbar, except his fur was black, not white.

A creepy, excited shiver ran up Kip’s spine. *I think we’ve just met our alien doubles!* he thought.

‘This is Fergus, and I’m Ker,’ said the kid. His three eyes twitched first left, then right. Kip noticed his middle eye stalk was longer than the others.

‘Ker’s the leader of Yufe,’ Fergus added firmly.

A kid in charge of an entire planet? Kip couldn’t believe it.

Kip noticed Fergus giving Finbar a yellow-eyed stare, as if daring him to disagree.

Kip had a bad feeling about Fergus. Something about that alien wolf seemed like trouble.

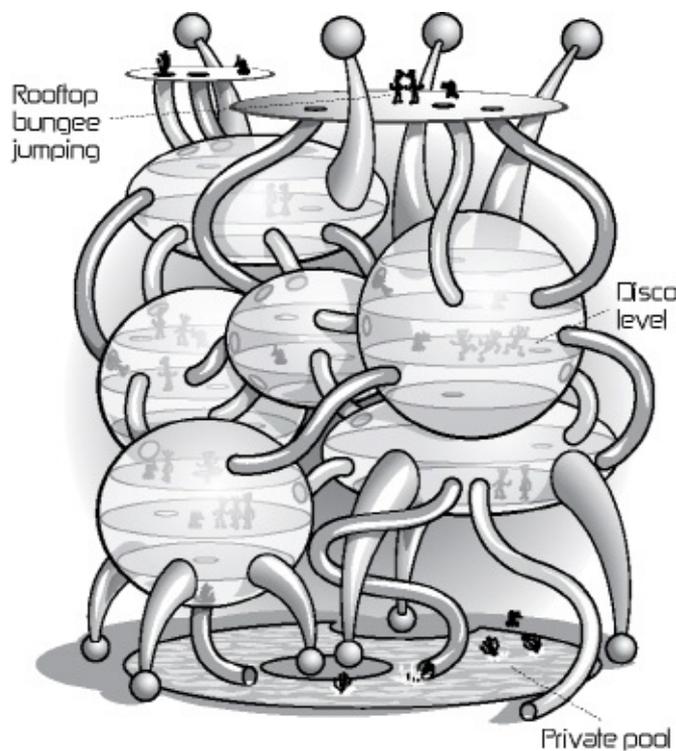


# CHAPTER 5

Kip and Finbar smiled uncertainly at Ker and Fergus. It was pretty freaky meeting an alien version of yourself deep in an unexplored galaxy, but Kip still thought Yufe was fun.

‘Come on,’ said Ker. ‘I’ll show you around. My place is over there.’

Like Kip, Ker lived in an apartment building. Kip and his parents lived in a tiny apartment thousands of storeys up. But Ker seemed to have this apartment building all to himself. And it was awesome!



## *Ker's House*

There was no lift between the floors. Instead, transparent chutes sucked you up the outside of the building, and slides ran from the top floor to the ground. At the bottom of the building was a swimming pool and garden.

Heaps of Ker's friends were relaxing on motorised lilos as Refresherbots brought them food and drinks.

Then Kip spotted something sailing through the air towards his head. It looked a bit like a chocolate éclair, except the icing was orange and the cream inside was frothing.

‘Food fight!’ yelled one of Ker's friends.

Ker whipped a portable mini-laser from his pocket and blasted the alien éclair to pieces. He laughed as cream splattered everywhere.

---

‘There’s nothing this cool on Earth!’ Kip said to Finbar.

‘Or this messy,’ Finbar muttered, picking blue baked beans out of his fur. ‘Shouldn’t Ker be more responsible?’ He’s supposed to be running this planet!’

But Kip was too caught up in the food fight to listen. His SpaceCuff was buzzing, but he ignored that too.

He grabbed a hamburger-shaped melon from a passing Refresherbot and lobbed it at an alien kid.

**SPLAT!**

‘I’m going to get you, Alien Boy!’ the kid shrieked at Kip.

Kip was swept into the game. Finbar hated getting his white fur dirty, so he ducked behind a tree.

Kip hurled a green ice-cream sundae into the air. It sailed into the street, smashing into a lone figure. The kid was wearing a long black cloak instead of bright colours like the rest of the kids.

‘Hey, sorry,’ called Finbar, as Kip ran off. ‘Kip didn’t mean to hit you.’

The kid didn’t seem to have noticed the ice-cream, though. Instead, he was staring anxiously towards the large comet in the sky. But at the sound of Finbar’s voice, the kid vanished down a narrow alley behind Ker’s apartment building.

The food fight had turned into a bombing competition in the pool. Ker and Kip were relaxing on deckchairs, green drinks bubbling over the top of their glasses. Fergus sat by Ker’s side.

‘Who was that kid wearing the black cloak?’ Finbar asked, coming over.

‘Probably your stupid sist—’ Fergus began, muttering under his breath.

‘Oh, who cares, Fergus,’ said Ker, grinning at Kip. ‘Fergus worries about details, but I just like to have fun. That’s what makes me a popular leader.’

‘And why Yufe is obviously the best planet EVER!’ Kip said. ‘In fact...’

Kip decided that now was the perfect time to explain his mission to Ker. As leader of Yufe, Ker could surely authorise Earth’s people to move in. To Kip, this planet looked perfect. Clean air. Water to spare. And non-stop fun all day!

After telling Ker about Earth’s situation, Kip asked the big question. ‘Could we bring some people here to live? Some more kids and their mums and dads?’

A puzzled expression crossed Ker’s face. ‘Kids? Mumsandads? What are they?’ he asked.

Now Kip was confused. ‘Kids are like us. Mums and dads are wrinkled old people. They make rules and talk about eating your vegies a lot. Oh, and they love telling corny jokes.’

Ker made a fake spewing noise. ‘Mumsandads sound awful!’

Obviously, Ker didn’t know grown-ups even existed. It explained why the kids were running riot on Yufe. The planet was kids only!

*But if all they do is have fun, how did kids manage to invent the cool stuff they've got here?* Kip wondered.

---

Finbar had questions of his own. 'How are new kids born without grown-ups?' he asked.

Ker explained that no-one on Yufe was older than 12. Just before kids turned 13, they started aging in reverse until they were toddlers. No-one died or was born – kids just got older and younger over and over again.

Kip was stunned. With no grown-ups, life would be paradise. No school, no bedtime and no-one telling you what to do!

'Well, you're welcome to move here, Kip,' Ker said. 'As long as you like to have fun!'

Fergus gave a low growl. 'Ker's in charge, though – don't forget.'

Kip smiled. Even if Fergus was a bit unfriendly, Ker's offer was tempting. *Very* tempting.

'There's just one condition,' Ker added. 'You've got to leave all those horrible mumsandads behind!'



# CHAPTER 6

---

Space Scouting was full of big decisions. But this was one of the toughest Kip had ever faced. If he could convince WorldCorp that Yufe was Earth 2, then Earth's kids would be guaranteed a life of never-ending fun.

*Plus I'd get all the glory as the Scout who discovered the next Earth!* Kip thought.

But with a twinge he remembered his dad's jokes. Although he might be silly sometimes, his dad was still loveable.

*Could I really move to a new galaxy and leave my parents behind?* he wondered.

Kip was so deep in thought, he hardly noticed his SpaceCuff buzzing furiously.



'Where have you been?' squawked MoNa when Kip took the call. But strangely, she didn't sound furious.

*She just sounds... panicked,* thought Kip. He felt a prickle of fear in his stomach.

'My system detected a large comet near Yufe before you landed,' MoNa continued. 'Now my sensors are telling me it's gone rogue!'

*Oh no!* A rogue comet was one that'd broken its orbit. It would cause catastrophic damage if it crashed into a planet.

'That big comet we saw,' Finbar said gravely. 'I knew there was something wrong with it!'

Kip turned to Ker. He couldn't believe the look on Ker's face. He was *grinning*. It was as if Ker hadn't heard what Finbar said.

'Want to go and muck around on the 360-degree waterslide?' Ker asked.

'You're kidding, right?' Kip answered. 'Your planet is facing a massive crisis, and—'

'Crisis?' echoed Ker. 'What's a crisis?'

Kip shook his head. The kids on Yufe were used to having fun all the time. They were totally unprepared for danger!

---

‘Who are the smartest kids on Yufe?’ Kip asked Ker. ‘We’re going to need everyone’s help to solve this.’

Ker shrugged. ‘Why worry so much when you could be having fun?’ he said. ‘It’ll work itself out.’

Kip took one look at Finbar and knew what he was thinking. For the leader of a planet, Ker had no idea how to run things.

‘Do you think any of the other kids would take us seriously?’ Finbar whispered.

Kip thought it was worth a shot. Telling Ker they were going to have a better look around, he and Finbar left.

Outside, there were kids everywhere.

‘Find the 12-year-olds. They’re probably the smartest!’ Kip said.

Finbar nodded and they took off into the crowd. Kip ran up to a girl who looked about his age.

‘Excuse me,’ he said. ‘Your planet is in grave danger and we need your help.’

The girl’s eyes twitched. For a second, Kip felt hopeful.

Then...

‘You’re it!’ the girl yelled, running off.

Kip’s shoulders slumped. The kids were in the middle of a chasey game. They’d be impossible to distract now!

Finbar chased after a boy wearing a peaked silver cap. Running up behind him, Finbar reached out paw. But then the kid vanished! His silver cap fluttered to the ground.

‘Must be an Exploding Matter Cap!’ Kip panted, running up to Finbar.

Exploding Matter Caps used the same technology as Scrambler Beams. Electrodes inside the cap blew your particles so wide apart that you turned invisible temporarily. The effect wore off in two minutes or so, when your particles flew back together. *Excellent fun for chasey*, Kip thought darkly. *But downright annoying when you’ve got a planet to save!*

‘After him!’ Finbar yelled as another lanky kid ran by in an Exploding Matter Cap.

Kip sped after the kid and made a grab at him. Too late! The kid disappeared, leaving Kip holding an empty cap.

‘DON’T YOU REALISE THIS ISN’T A GAME?’ Kip yelled.

With no grown-ups to ask for help, Kip and Finbar were on their own.

‘We could call MoNa and ask her to send two Scramblers,’ Finbar said quietly. ‘At least we could escape that way.’

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