

## CHAPTER 1

# My Secret Identity

Right now I'm in study hall. The kid at the desk beside me is drawing motorcycles on the dust jacket of his math book. The kid behind me is memorizing a vocabulary list and tapping his foot on the leg of my chair. (So annoying!) And I'm writing with a leaky pen in a notebook I bought at Cheap-Mart for less than a dollar. I know what I'm doing doesn't look very important, but you can take my word for it: this journal is destined to become part of the most monumental manuscript in the history of mankind! Someday when it's in a museum behind bulletproof glass, even the wealthiest billionaire in the world won't be able to afford the period at the end of this sentence.

★ 7 ★

Zoe Breen, the girl who sits in front of me, just dropped a crumpled scrap of notebook paper near my left foot. After checking to make sure Mr. Howard, the study hall teacher, isn't looking in my direction, I quickly bend down and pick it up:

Sorry, Alex, but I can't come over  
to your house today after school.  
I have to stay home and work on  
my science fair project.

— Z

My note back to Zoe is written on a tiny slip of paper that I slide into an empty ballpoint pen and ease onto the floor so it rolls near her desk.

That's okay. I have an *IMPORTANT PROJECT*  
I have to work on this afternoon anyway.

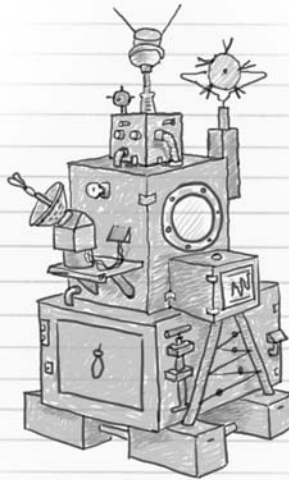
— A

Last year Zoe won first place in the statewide Science Fair with her study of the drinking habits of guinea pigs. This year she's working with gray squirrels. She's going to offer them three different kinds of peanut butter: one salty, one plain and one sweet, and see which they like best and how it affects their health.

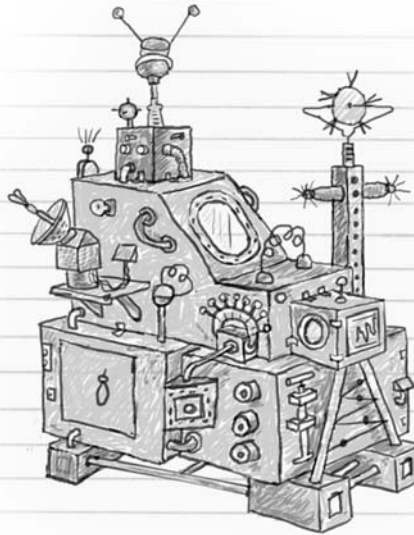
That's the kind of science Zoe likes. I'm more into astrophysics and space travel.

In my first notebook, *Star Jumper: Journal of a Cardboard Genius*, I described how I designed and built the world's first intergalactic spaceship. Unfortunately, I also had to give a blow-by-blow account of how that amazing spacecraft was destroyed in a senseless pillow fight with my rotten little brother, Jonathan. That's the bad news. The good news is that in the past two weeks I've been working on a new and improved Star Jumper. And it's almost finished!

## My First Spaceship



## The New Star Jumper



★ 10 ★

Compare the two drawings carefully. As you can see, the new Star Jumper is a lot larger, capable of carrying two passengers instead of just one. But that's the least of its new features. Notice, for example, the shoebox-sized unit duct-taped to its right side beneath the quad 4 ion-boosted radar dish. That's where the forcefield generator is located. This device is capable of erecting an invisible electromagnetic shield stronger than Superman's cape around the hull of my ship. Even a thermonuclear blast couldn't begin to dent it!

How could someone build an entire spaceship in just two weeks? Well, the fact that I work mostly in cardboard certainly helps. Cardboard is the least appreciated, most underrated building material ever invented. Not only is cardboard light, strong and easy to work with, it's free. Cardboard is also a perfect way to disguise the greatness of one's true accomplishments. I rebuilt Star Jumper in my bedroom. My mom walked past

it every time she vacuumed my floor and picked up my dirty socks. But she never once suspected it was a *real* spaceship. She and my dad think it's just a toy. Something for me and Jonathan to play with. HA! He's the reason I want to leave Earth in the first place! I can't stand the thought of wasting the remainder of my precious childhood years living in the same house with that creep!



### **My Rotten Little Brother**

A fly just landed on my hand. Now it's buzzing around Zoe's long brown hair. In case you're wondering, Zoe is really smart, but she's not a supergenius like me. She does, however, work very

hard at whatever she tackles. Like right now she's hunched over her desk and concentrating so intently I can almost see smoke coming out of her ears! Hmmm ... I wonder what she's doing?

Hey Zoe, I can't see over your shoulder.  
What are you working on? —A

I'm doing my math homework: adding  
and subtracting fractions. —Z

I could add, subtract, multiply and divide complex fractions before I could walk. If Zoe let me help her, it would be done in two seconds.

Do you want me to do it for you? —A

No! I'll never learn if I don't figure  
it out by myself. —Z

When I first decided to leave Earth I just wanted to live in a Jonathan-free zone. But that was before I got to know Zoe. Now I also want Zoe to be my co-pilot and come galaxy hopping with me. That's why the new Star Jumper is a two seater. One seat for me and one for Zoe. But so far I haven't told her the truth about Star Jumper. Like my parents, she thinks it's just a toy.

Why haven't I told her? Well, a long time ago I decided I had to keep my inventions absolutely secret. Sure, it would be fun to "go public." I can see the headlines now:

**BOY GENIUS DISCOVERED:  
SMARTER THAN ALL OTHER  
SCIENTISTS COMBINED!**

Overnight I'd be rich and famous. But I'd also become a media freak. TV crews would hound me day and night, reporting on my every move. Other scientists would want to study my brain.

“How does he do it?” they would ask. “How can one person be so smart?”



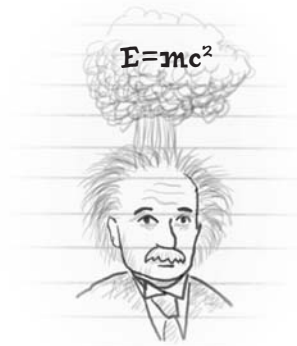
**Supergenius**

Worst of all, the military would attempt to use my designs to make weapons of mass destruction. Ridiculous, you say? Look what happened to Einstein. The first atomic bomb was based on his

★ 15 ★

formula  $E = mc^2$ . He tried to stop the bomb from being dropped, but nobody listened and people died! So it's not just for personal reasons that I sacrifice my own fame and fortune. It's for the good of the planet!

The less people know about how brilliant I really am, the better. For example, I hardly ever raise my hand in class. When I do, I often give the wrong answer on purpose. On tests I make it a point to get all the hard questions wrong and always leave a few spaces blank. You might think that's dumb. But it's how I blend in. Like any superhero, I have my own secret identity. Instead of revealing my true identity — Alex, Boy Supergenius — I pass myself off as plain old ordinary Alex, an average, mild-mannered student. It's easy, really. I just *pretend* to be normal.



**Einstein**

If I told someone about Star Jumper and he or she told someone else, even just one other person, the results could be disastrous. That person might tell someone else, and they would tell someone else, and pretty soon — well, you get the picture. The knowledge of my mind-boggling genius would spread like wildfire. The next thing I'd know the government would be knocking on my door and trying to steal my spaceship for “national security” reasons.

Clark Kent never revealed his secret identity to Lois Lane. But I intend to tell Zoe about the real me as soon as I *know* I can trust her one hundred percent. That's what my **IMPORTANT PROJECT** is all about. When I go home this afternoon I plan to complete and test my latest invention: the Trustometer.