

## CHAPTER 1

# A Hitch in Time

First — five important facts:

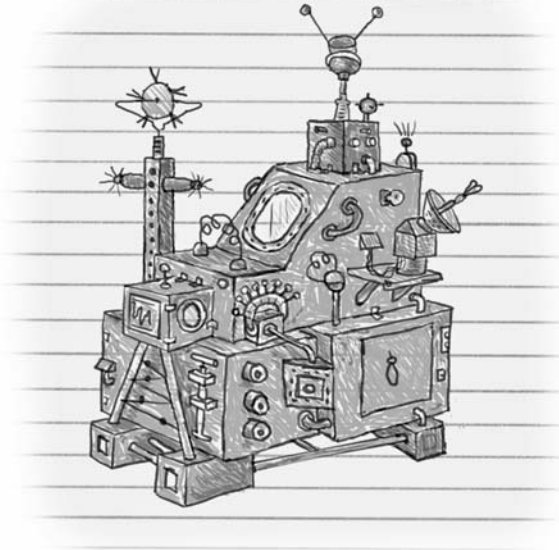
Fact #1: This is my third incredible journal. I write in it whenever I can steal a few minutes from my hyper-busy life to share my genius with the rest of the humdrum world. Consider yourself lucky to be reading it!

Fact #2: I'm probably the smartest human being on Earth. If you doubt that, just ask yourself what other scientist in the world today has single-handedly achieved the stupendous feat of constructing the world's first intergalactic spaceship mostly out of ordinary cardboard boxes!

Fact #3: I'm about to leave Planet Earth and explore the universe in my spaceship, Star Jumper, with the girl who sits in front of me in study hall. Her name is Zoe, and she's really neat.

★ 7 ★

## Star Jumper

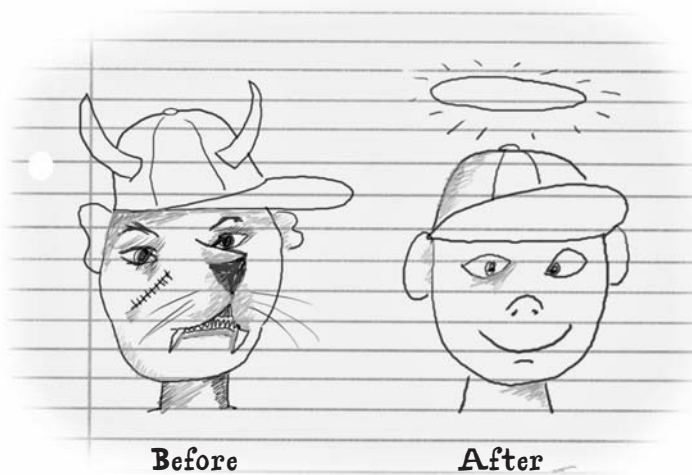


Fact #4: My little brother, Jonathan, is a rat-demon, psychopathic creep-slug of pure evil!

Fact #5: I finally tamed that rotten little snake. Not completely, of course. (Some things, after all, *are* impossible!) But enough to make Jonathan tolerable. And it was *so* easy. All I had to do was tell him he could come with me when I leave Planet Earth.

★ 8 ★

Ever since I came up with that lovely little lie, Jonathan has been falling over backward to keep on my good side. Every morning he pours my orange juice for me. He feeds my goldfish without being asked. He's quiet when he walks past my door. He stops asking questions when I tell him to shut up. He doesn't try to get me in trouble with Mom and Dad. And he doesn't insist on sitting next to me on the school bus anymore. He's even stopped calling me names like "poopy face" and shoving hate mail under my door!



That's the good news. The bad news is that we've hit yet another snag in our mission. Yep, it's happened again! Just when I thought Star Jumper was ready for final blast-off, a totally new and unexpected problem popped up.

This time Zoe discovered the hitch. After she finished maneuvering Star Jumper around my bedroom in Lift-Off Mode, Zoe expertly landed her on my bedroom rug, climbed out the main portal and sat beside me while I did some equipment checks.

"Nice work, Zoe," I said. "Now you'll be able to take over in an emergency."

"I'm still a little shaky with the gyro-stick," she announced with a sigh.

"Don't worry, you'll get the hang of it," I reassured her.

We were quiet for a while, and then Zoe cleared her throat and said, "Um ... Last night I read a little article on the Internet about relativity."

Zoe is mainly interested in biology and zoology, but she's curious about all sorts of things.

"That's great," I said. "The more astrophysics you know, the better."

"Well ... I can't exactly say I understood it all. In fact, most of it went right over my head. But one detail kind of stuck out."

I was double-checking some batteries to make sure they were fresh. As incredible as it may sound, Star Jumper's Stellar Drive works on just two AA batteries. But they have to be operating at full capacity for the quantum leap effect to function properly.

"It said Einstein predicted interstellar space travel will warp one's sense of time," Zoe continued in a casual tone of voice. "Do you know anything about that?"

Einstein is my hero. I know everything there is to know about him and his theories.

"Sure, I know all about that stuff," I said.

I took the batteries from the special recharger I had constructed from old radio parts and slid them into place. Then I turned on Star Jumper's operating system. Full capacity! I picked up my clipboard and crossed off "check batteries."

"So is it true that time seems to pass differently for anyone traveling at the speed of light?" she asked.

"It doesn't just *seem* to pass differently," I replied. "It *does* pass differently."

I did my best to explain without math. "You see, time and space are connected so they interact relative to one another." I even gave her an example. "Take two watches showing the same time. Put one of them in a spaceship and shoot it across the galaxy and back again at the speed of light. When that watch returns it will show a different time than the watch that stayed behind on Earth."

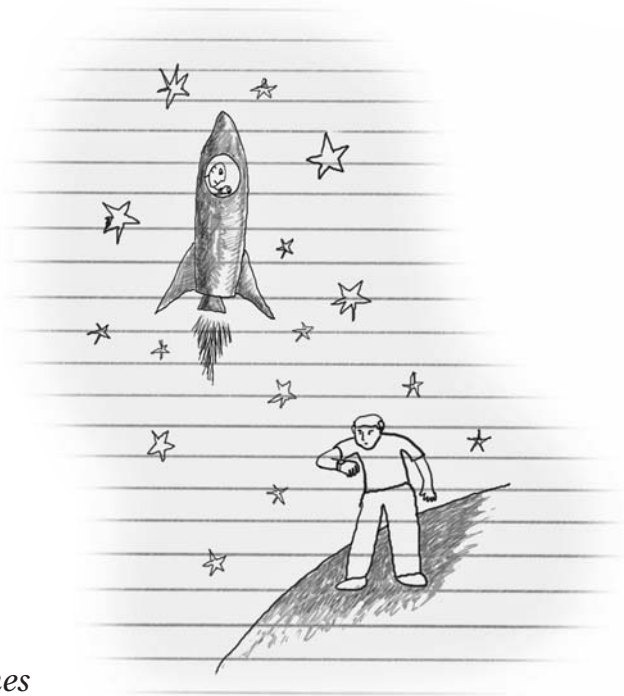
Zoe blew a strand of long, dark brown hair out of her face. “That’s *exactly* what it said on the Internet.”

“So why are you asking me questions if you already know the answers?” I asked. *Is Zoe playing games with me?* I wondered.

“I just wanted to know if *you* knew,” she replied.

“Of course I know! Einstein had it all figured out in 1915 in his general theory of relativity.”

I was getting a little annoyed.



**Space/Time Warp**

“So how much time will have passed for people on Earth when we return from our interstellar trip?” asked Zoe. “Do you know *that*?”

“Well ... no. I never bothered to crunch the numbers. But I’m sure it’s not much,” I said, wondering what Zoe was getting at.

“Never *bothered*?”

“Well, I just assumed it would be minutes, hours, maybe even a few days.”

“Oh!” she said, raising her voice a notch or two. “You *assumed*, did you? That’s not very *scientific*, is it?”

“Well —” I began, but Zoe didn’t give me a chance to explain. I had never seen her so worked up.

“Could it be a week?” she pressed.

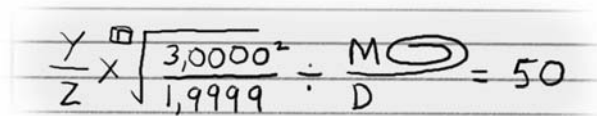
“Theoretically, yes,” I replied. “It could be. But —”

“How about a month — or a year? How about ten years? Twenty years? How about a *hundred* years?”

At last I could see where Zoe was going with all this.

I was about to say, "That's ridiculous. It couldn't possibly be that long." But then I stopped myself. I had to admit that I didn't really know how time would pass on Earth while we were away.

I reached for the little notebook and pencil I always have on hand and made some quick calculations.


$$\frac{Y}{Z} \times \sqrt{\frac{3,0000^2}{1,9999}} \cdot \frac{M \textcircled{O}}{D} = 50$$

### The Formula

"Hmmm ... This is interesting. According to these calculations," I said, trying not to sound too concerned, "even if we find a suitable planet on our first or second try and return in what will be only six or seven days for us, everyone we left behind on Earth will be ... er ... um ... approximately fifty years older."