

CHAPTER 1

My Mission

I found this notebook in the stationery aisle at Food King. I don't know how much it cost because my mom paid for it. But when I'm famous, I predict it will sell for millions of dollars. Maybe billions. It will be a historic document, like the Magna Carta or the very first Superman comic. Someday everyone is going to want to know what's written here.

After paying for the groceries, Mom asked the produce manager if she could have some cardboard boxes.

"They're for my son," she said.

"We usually crush all our boxes, but you're in luck," replied the manager. "A delivery just came in. How many do you need?"

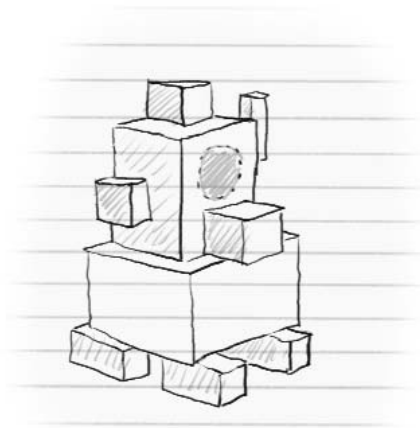
“According to my calculations, I’ll need about ten boxes to build a decent-sized spaceship,” I told him.

He smiled and took us to a room with enough cardboard boxes to build a fleet of star cruisers.

On the way home, I sat in the back of our van with the boxes and made some quick pencil sketches. By the time we pulled into our driveway, I knew exactly how I was going to use

each box to construct the hull of my ship. That’s the kind of genius I am. Not just brilliant, but fast!

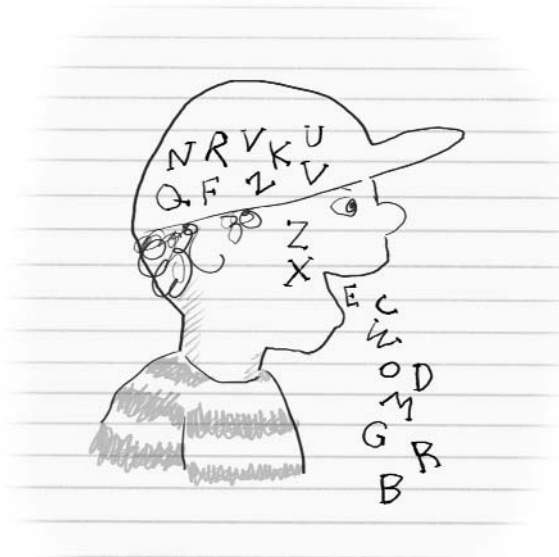
I’d like to say I’m on a secret mission to save the world or something noble like that. But I’m not.



I just want to put a few light-years between me and my little brother. His name is Jonathan and he's evil. Seriously.

To be honest, some people actually like my little brother. Grown-ups are the ones most likely to suffer from this form of brain damage. "Oh, he's such a sweet child," they say. *Sweet?* They wouldn't say that if they had to live with him like I do.

First of all, Jonathan never shuts up. Talk. Talk. Talk! His mouth is like a hole in his brain where questions leak out. He even asks them in his sleep. I'm not kidding. He does it all the time. When he was



little, he asked questions like “Does mud have a belly button?” and “How come babies are born naked?” Now he wants to know things like “Who invented ice cream?” and “How come the moon is yellow?” Just try listening to babble like *that* all day long!

And what a klutz! If you don’t believe me, just take Jonathan fishing and watch him try to put a worm on a hook. He can’t do it! He tries, but he can’t. The worm keeps falling on the ground, and I end up having to do it for him.

Okay. Maybe he’s not evil. Maybe he’s just rotten. But everything he does gets on my nerves: the way he never stops squirming when he sits, the way he shuffles his feet when he walks. Even the way he sleeps, curled up like a dog drooling on his pillow, drives me up the wall!

How that crybaby, brat, tattletale got to be a member of *my* family I’ll never know. He sure

doesn't have any of my good qualities. He knows nothing about dinosaurs or Z-Men or video games. He doesn't even know how to open a bottle of ketchup without getting it all over himself.

My mom says I'm normal. *Normal?* How can that be? She says all big brothers feel the way I do. But I know that's not true. There's a kid at school, Billy Rosenberg, who claims to actually *like* his little brother!

Mom tells me not to worry. She says, "It's just sibling rivalry, Alex." As if that explained it all. As if giving it a fancy name made it okay. According to her it's just a "phase" I'm going through.

Dad says, "You got all the love before your little brother came along. Now you're learning how to share it." I guess that's what you get when both your parents are psychiatrists: a lot of dumb advice. But it's not a phase I'm going through.

And I won't grow out of it!

That's why I have to leave.

Any planet with a breathable atmosphere will do. Mountains and lakes and green grass and trees would be nice, too. And volcanoes. I really love volcanoes. The important thing is to get as far away from Jonathan and Planet Earth as possible. So far away that no one — not even NASA — will ever find me and bring me home.

