

CHAPTER TWO

LIFE ON OTHER PLANETS

‘Freddie,’ Mum says, and I can tell she’s trying hard not to roll her eyes. ‘You are completely obsessed with all things space right now. It’s taking over your brain.’

‘That’s not true,’ I say defensively.

‘Freddie,’ Mum says again with a pointed look, ‘you turned up at breakfast yesterday dressed like an astronaut.’

That’s true, I did. I even made moon boots out of Mum’s Ugg boots and white paint. Mum wasn’t impressed.

‘You told Henrietta that the cupcakes she made for Granny’s birthday looked like they’d been hit by a meteor shower.’

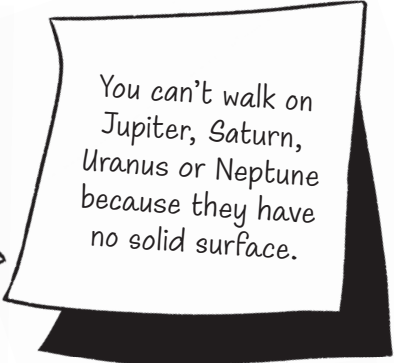
‘Well, they did.’

'Do you think maybe we need to take a break from space? It's all you can think about. Maybe we could go back to transport or dinosaurs or even, God forbid, human waste management.'


'I don't need a break from space,' I insist, walking backwards to my desk to cover up my latest stack of sticky notes so Mum can't see. They're covered in facts I wrote about space when I couldn't fall asleep last night. Really interesting facts like:




Sunsets on Mars
are blue.



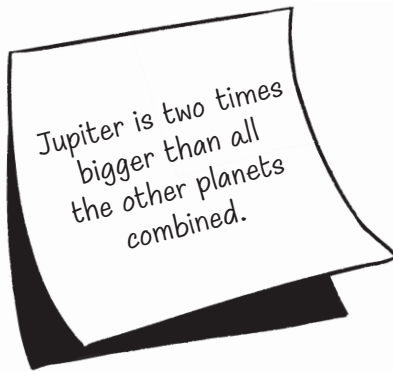
You can't walk on
Jupiter, Saturn,
Uranus or Neptune
because they have
no solid surface.



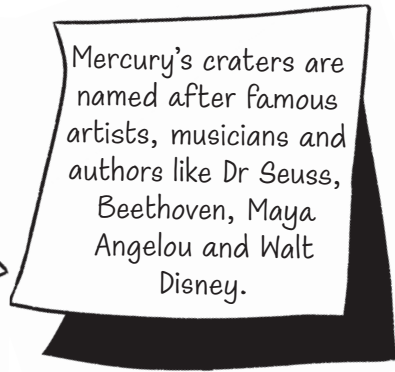
One day on Venus
is approximately
eight months on
Earth.



There are sometimes
huge dust storms on
Mars which last for
months and cover the
whole planet.



Jupiter is two times bigger than all the other planets combined.



Mercury's craters are named after famous artists, musicians and authors like Dr Seuss, Beethoven, Maya Angelou and Walt Disney.

I think planets are really interesting. They reckon there are 100 billion just in the Milky Way (our galaxy, not the chocolate). There are eight in our solar system. Last night, I even drew my own map.

‘My point is, you’re not thinking clearly, sweetheart,’ Mum goes on. ‘Space has taken over your brain. You’re letting your imagination run away with you.’

Now *I’m* the one rolling my eyes. I’ve heard this all before.

‘Do you think it’s got something to do with that astronaut talk tomorrow?’

‘No. Maybe. I don’t know.’

We’ve got a special live videochat with a real, actual astronaut at school tomorrow. This is a big deal because the astronaut is calling us all the way

from the International Space Station (also known as the ISS) and the school picked just five kids to ask her a question. I'm one of them.

I've been doing heaps of research so I can be sure to ask the exact right question. I don't want to waste my opportunity – who knows when I'll ever have the chance to ask an astronaut a question again. And, more importantly, I don't want to embarrass myself by asking something simple like,



‘What’s the difference between an asteroid and a comet?’ (For starters, an asteroid is made of rock and a comet is made of air and ice ... but we can get into that another time.)

‘That’s irrelevant anyway,’ I say. ‘I know what I heard.’

‘Those books you’ve been reading, they’re all scientific books, right?’

‘Right,’ I say slowly, wondering where she’s going with this.

‘Written by space experts, right?’

‘Uh-huh.’

‘Do any of them say that there has *ever* been a UFO landing on Earth?’

I open my mouth to answer but Mum interrupts.

‘*Confirmed,*’ she specifies. ‘Not suspected. And no conspiracy theories either.’

‘Well ... no.’

‘What about aliens? Has anyone ever seen one?’

‘No,’ I say, feeling frustrated. ‘But that doesn’t mean they don’t exist. Even NASA says that they can’t rule it out.’ I pick up a sticky note and wave it in front of her face. ‘See?’



‘Didn’t you tell me the other day that these experts suggest that even if there are aliens out there somewhere, it’s possible they’re not close enough for us to ever find them?’

‘That doesn’t mean they can’t find *us*.’

Mum presses her lips together. ‘I know I don’t work for NASA, but I can assure you there was no UFO landing here last night or any night. And I don’t think that now is the time to be worrying about what’s happening on other planets or who might be living on them.’

‘Who’s living on another planet?’ Henrietta pads into the room, rubbing her eyes sleepily.

‘If I don’t get more sleep, you’re going to wish I was,’ Mum says. ‘How about we revisit this at a more civilised hour?’

I don’t think 5 am is all that uncivilised, but I nod anyway.

‘Great. Can I please go back to bed now?’

‘You’re dismissed,’ I tell her.

Mum heads back to her room, but there’s no way I’m going back to sleep. I have way too many unanswered questions.

Henrietta doesn’t go back to bed either. ‘A UFO?’ she whispers to me, looking out the window. ‘For real?’

I nod. ‘I heard a crash and look at that hole. What else could it be?’

‘Nothing,’ Henrietta agrees. She presses her forehead against the glass. ‘Definitely a UFO.’ She steps back and looks at me. ‘So, now what?’

‘Now we need to work out where it came from,’ I tell her. ‘And who was on board.’ I drop my voice lower. ‘And, most importantly, where are they now?’