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Opening extract from

Cakes in Space

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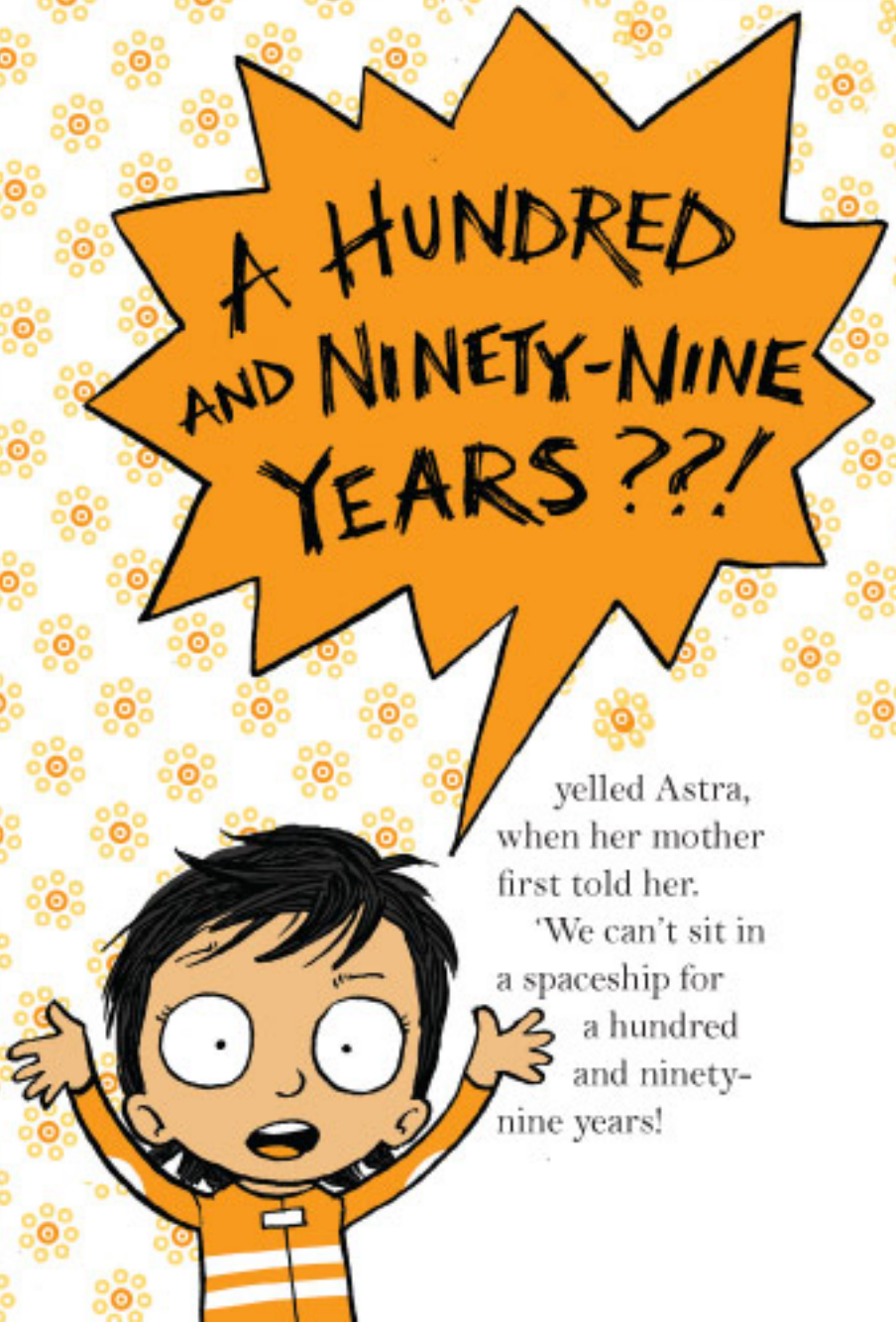


And here, all alone in the million billion miles of midnight, is one solitary moving speck. A fragile parcel, filled with sleeping people and their dreams.



To travel from the Earth to the Moon takes a few days. From Earth to Mars, a few months. To Jupiter, a few years, and to Neptune and Pluto, a few years more. But Astra was travelling further still. Much, much further.

The world called Nova Mundi, where Astra and her family were going to live, was so far from Earth that it would take them one hundred and ninety-nine years to get there.



yelled Astra, when her mother first told her.

'We can't sit in a spaceship for a hundred and ninety-nine years!

'It'll be so boring! There won't even be anything to look at out of the window. Even if spaceships *have* windows . . . which they probably don't! And I'll be old by the time we arrive! I'll be . . .' She counted on her fingers. 'I'll be two hundred and nine years old! I'll be all wrinkly!'

But Astra's mother just laughed, bouncing Astra's baby brother, Alf, up and down on her knee till he laughed too. 'Don't worry, Astra. We won't be awake. When we go aboard the spaceship, we'll get into special sleeping pods . . .'

'Like beds?' asked Astra.

'A bit like beds,' agreed her father. 'And a bit like freezers.'

'Won't we be cold?' asked Astra with a shiver. She imagined herself snuggling down among the frozen peas and tubs of ice cream, an Arctic roll for a pillow.

'We won't feel cold,' said her mother.

'We won't feel anything. We'll be fast asleep. The machines which run the ship will cool us right down so that we don't age. Then the ship will steer itself to Nova Mundi while we sleep, and when we get there it will wake us, and we'll feel as if only a single night has passed. And we'll be on our new home!'

'A whole new world!' said Dad.

'Nova Mundi!' said Astra.





She was excited to be going to Nova Mundi. She had seen videos and pictures of it. She and Mum and Dad and Alf were going to live in a big house there, between the wide green ocean and the fern forests, with a garden of blue grass. They would work at making the new planet ready for other people from Earth.

But she still didn't like the sound of this long, cold journey, even if she was going to be asleep.

'Will there be dreams?' she asked.

'Only nice ones,' her mum promised.

And that's how it was. Their shuttle blasted off from the spaceport.





BOO

¡WOOM!

Straight up it went, slicing through the clouds, through the sunlit air above, right up into orbit. As it rose, the clutch of Earth's gravity grew weaker and weaker, till it slipped away entirely and Astra felt herself grow weightless. Her hands floated up off her lap, her feet kept lifting from the floor. If it hadn't been for the harness that held her in her seat, she would have drifted up and bounced off the ceiling. A few objects which the other passengers had forgotten to secure did just that. Pens and cameras





and cuddly toys went tumbling through the cabin, and the shuttle crew flew after them, graceful as swimmers in clear water, catching the lost things and returning them to their owners.

