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Opening extract from

The Usborne Official Astronaut's Handbook

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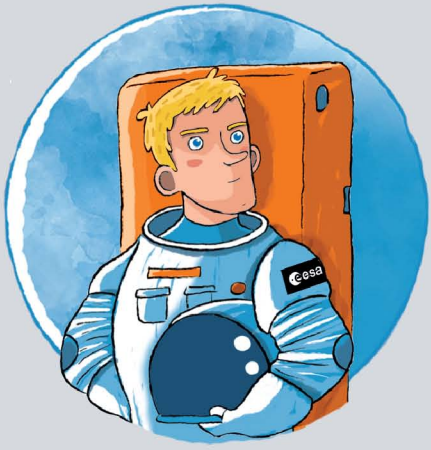
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Chapter One

ARE YOU CUT OUT FOR SPACE?



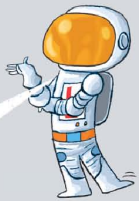
Want to be an astronaut? Of course you do. Who wouldn't want to float around in space, gazing back at our gorgeous blue planet, and zooming to work on a speeding rocket?

But it's tough out there. Have you got what it takes to fly in the harsh conditions of space? Or would you spend the trip terrified, screaming and shaking in a corner?

What is an astronaut?

It sounds a ridiculously easy question. An astronaut is someone who flies in space, right? Well, yes – but it's pretty difficult to say where space actually starts.

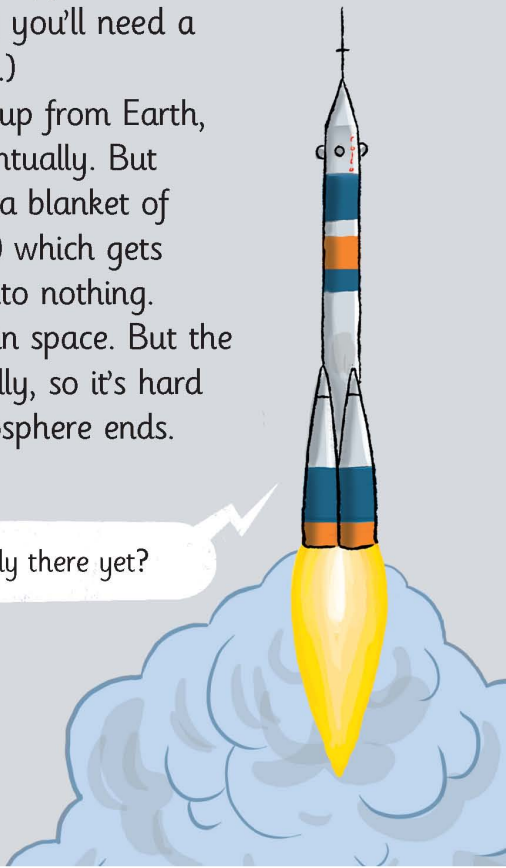
This sounds complicated. Can I just fly in a rocket now, please?



Patience, young space apprentice. (Patience is something you'll need a lot of as an astronaut.)

If you fly straight up from Earth, you'll get to space eventually. But before you do, there's a blanket of gases (the atmosphere) which gets thinner until it fades into nothing.

After that, you're in space. But the gases fade out gradually, so it's hard to say where the atmosphere ends.

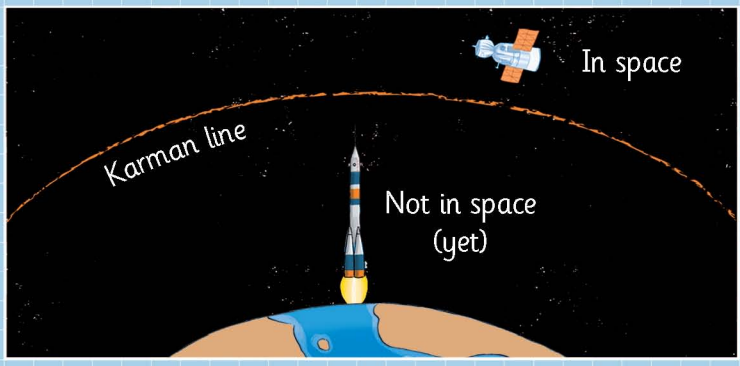


Are we nearly there yet?

So what DOES count as space?



To stop disagreements, scientists have come up with a made-up line – the Karman line – 100km (62 miles) above the Earth. That's where space starts, officially speaking. Get past that line, and you're definitely an astronaut.



Into space

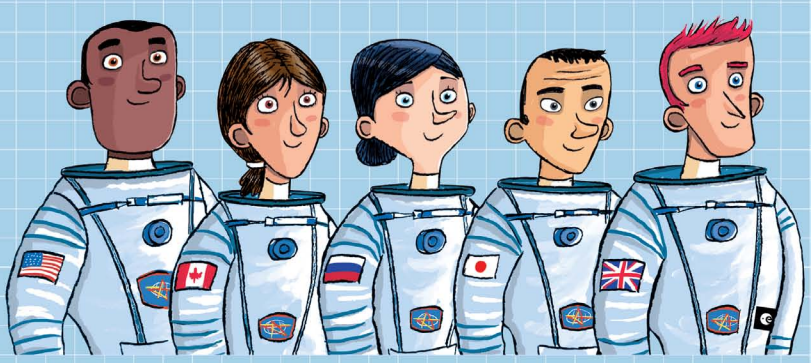
But getting *to* the Karman line is a problem. Not many people have spaceships, as they're the most expensive form of transport known to humanity. Rolls Royces? Private jets? They're bargain basement wheelbarrows compared to your average spacecraft.

Who's paying?

To get a ride into space, you will need to do one of these things...

1. Work for a government space agency

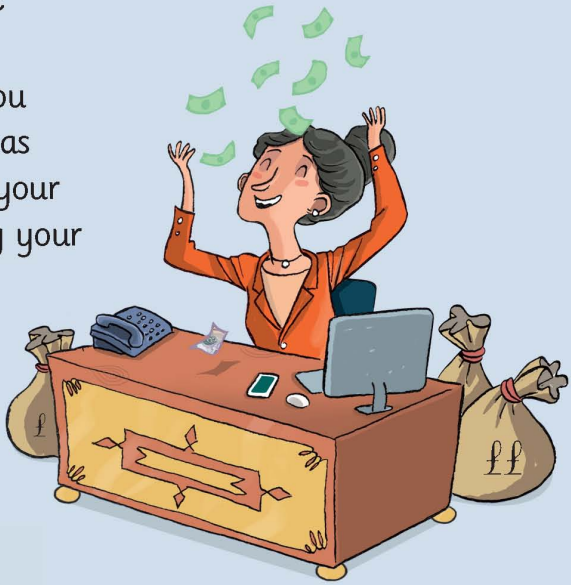
Government space agencies are the number one employers of astronauts (and owners of spacecraft). If you're American, you could work for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). If you live in Europe, go for the European Space Agency (ESA).



Russian? Choose Roscosmos. Japan, Canada and China have their own, too. If your country or region doesn't have an agency that hires astronauts, consider emigrating.

2. Become a billionaire

With eye-watering sums of money, you can go into space as a tourist. If that's your plan, start building your international business empire immediately.





3. Work for a billionaire

If you don't end up becoming one yourself, there are at least a few billionaires who have started private space travel companies. Get a job as a pilot with one of those, and you could soon be ferrying the rich and famous into space.

4. Win a competition

Some people have won tickets into space. But none of them have flown yet, so don't hold your breath.



5. Become incredibly famous, then die...

A select few people have had their ashes blasted into space, instead of a more humdrum burial on Earth. But you'd probably rather be alive to enjoy space. All in all, your best plan is to become a professional astronaut, working for a space agency.

