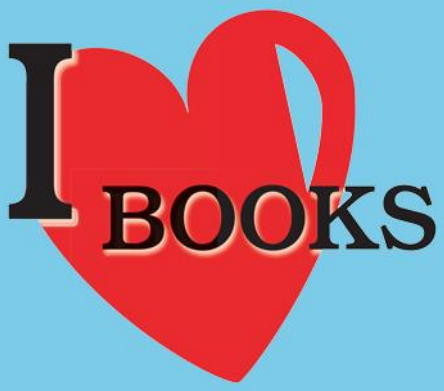


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Opening extract from

Space Ace

Written by

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Illustrated by

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To James, Lou, Monty and Theo Lovegrove

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Chapter 1
Blast-Off

The wall-screen in my room came on. It was Grandad.

"I've done it, Billy!" he said.

I jumped up. "You have? You've really done it?"

Grandad grinned. He looked happy, with his wild grey hair like a mad professor and his big smile.

"I've got the *Falcon Mark II* spaceship running," he said. "I was thinking ..." He stopped and looked at me.

"Yes?" I asked. My heart was beating like a drum.

"I was thinking, Billy, that you might like to test fly it with me?"

I was so excited that I couldn't speak. I just nodded.

"Good," Grandad said. "Meet me at the yard in five minutes."

I ran out of my room and grabbed my jacket. Mum was in the hall.

"Billy," Mum said, "where are you off to?"

"Grandad's," I said.

"You're not to go in any of his old spaceships!" she said.

"Don't you trust him?" I asked.

"It's not that I don't trust him," she said. "It's just that when he was an astronaut, he had a crash in space. Perhaps you should ask him about it. And remember – no spaceships, OK?"

But I was already running out of the house.



Grandad had been an astronaut for many years. He was the first person to set foot on Mars, back in 2035. That was 40 years ago, and now Grandad was too old to be an astronaut.



Now Grandad ran a spaceship junk yard instead. It was full of fins and wings and huge engines. There were whole spaceships in the yard too. I loved to climb inside, strap myself into the pilot seat and pretend I was off to space. It was amazing to think that all this scrap metal had once travelled to other planets and far away stars.



Grandad liked to build new spaceships from all the bits in the junk yard. He also kept a big journal full of amazing facts about the solar system. I was always reading it! I thought about what Mum had told me. Grandad had never said anything about a crash. Was that why he had stopped being an astronaut?

Grandad's head poked out of a silver spaceship shaped like the head of an arrow.

"Welcome aboard the *Falcon*!" he said.

I ran up the ramp and into the ship.

"It's fantastic!" I said. There were two seats in front of a large screen. There were more seats behind, like in a bus, with screens all round the side.

"It used to be a tourist ship," Grandad told me. "In the old days it took people around the Solar System, to see all the planets."



"Can we do that?" I cried.

"No," Grandad said. "We'll just make a quick orbit of the Earth, to make sure the ship works. Strap yourself in the co-pilot's seat and we'll blast off."

I jumped into the seat and strapped myself in.

I wondered if I should ask Grandad about the crash, but I decided to leave it till later.

Grandad sat in the pilot's seat and ran his hands over the control panel.

"Hold tight, Billy!" he yelled. "We're taking off!"

The *Falcon* roared and shot into the air like a bullet.

