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CHRIS BRADFORD
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STELLAR

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Charlotte Grange

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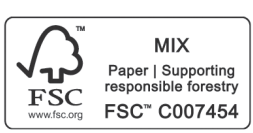
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To Ollie,

May you reach the stars in life ...

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Solar Probe

Probe name: Icarus 2

Probe report:

Event Recorded … Solar Flare

Event Recorded … Proton Storm

WARNING! RADIATION – Danger to life …

CHAPTER 1

Stars

"WOW! Ryan, look! The Milky Way!" said Stella as she looked out into Space from the Galaxy Space Hotel. "And there's Canopus! The second-brightest star in the night sky. Did you know that satellites and spacecraft use that star to help track their location?"

The hotel slowly spun and Earth came into view. Its dark side twinkled with the lights of a thousand cities.

"It's so beautiful!" sighed Stella. "Ryan, I can see London! *Ryan*?"



When she got no answer, she turned to her younger brother.

Ryan was slumped in a chair, VR glasses on and a game controller in his hands.

"RYAN!" shouted Stella. "You're missing this!"

Her brother lifted his glasses. "Sorry? I'm in the middle of a battle in *Star Commander*."

Stella glared at her brother. "I can't believe you'd prefer to play a virtual-reality game about Space when you're actually *in* Space!"

Ryan shrugged. "Stella, I get your interest. You're named after the stars. But to be honest, for me, Space is a bit … boring."

"How can you be *bored*?" cried Stella. "We've been in orbit less than two days. There's a zero-gravity basketball court, a restaurant with space burgers and star decks with views

out into Space to die for. I mean, just *look* at that sunrise!"

She pointed at the window where a ball of golden light now shone above the horizon. The Earth was crowned in a blue halo and its oceans glinted in the rays of a new dawn.

Ryan shrugged. "I suppose it's OK. But how many sunrises can you see in a day?"

"Sixteen," replied Stella. "The space hotel orbits Earth every ninety minutes."

"Exactly my point! We've another ten sunrises to go today. It's not like I have to watch them all."

Stella shook her head sadly. "Where's your sense of wonder?" she asked him.

Ryan tapped his VR glasses. "Right here. And I'm wondering when you're going to let me get back to my game?"

"I give up!" Stella yelled. "Space is wasted on you."

"Sis, *nothing* ever happens in Space," complained Ryan, slipping his glasses back on. "Got to go – aliens are attacking!"

Stella turned to the window to watch the sunrise alone. For a second, the sun shone brightly and Stella had to shield her eyes … then the flash of light faded.