

***Cosmic* by Frank Cottrell Boyce**

A rocket, launched yesterday from a private site in northern China, is missing along with its crew of five. Yesterday the Internet was alive with rumours of a secret manned space mission. Today Nasa and the Russian Federal Space Agency both confirmed that a rocket did take off but denied it was theirs. The rocket entered high orbit and then disappeared into "deep space". No manned rocket has left Earth's orbit since Apollo 17 in 1972.

Mum, Dad – if you're listening – you know I said I was going to the South Lakeland Outdoor Activity Centre with the school? To be completely honest, I'm not exactly in the Lake District. To be completely honest, I'm more sort of in space. I'm on this rocket, the Infinite Possibility. I'm about two hundred thousand miles above the surface of the Earth. I'm alright . . . ish. I know I've got some explaining to do. This is me doing it. I lied about my age. I sort of gave the impression I was about thirty. Obviously I'm more sort of thirteen-ish. On my next birthday. To be fair, everyone lies about their age. Adults pretend to be younger. Teenagers pretend to be older. Children wish they were grownups. Grownups wish they were children.

It's not like I had to try very hard, is it? Everyone always thinks I'm older than I really am, just because I'm tall. In St Joan of Arc Primary, the teachers seemed to think that height and age were the same thing. If you were taller than someone, you must be older than them. If you were tall and you made a mistake – even if it was only your first day – you got, "You should know better, big lad like you." Why, by the way? Why should a big lad know better just because he's big? King Kong's a big lad. Would he know the way to the toilet block on his first day at school? When no one had told him? No, I don't think he would. Anyway a few hours back the Infinite Possibility was supposed to complete a routine manoeuvre and basically it didn't. It rolled out of orbit, wrecking all the communication equipment, and now we're very lost in space.

I've got this mobile phone with me – because it had pictures of home on it. It's got an audio-diary function. That's what I'm talking into now. Unless you get this message you won't know about this because we're on a secret mission. They already told us that if it goes wrong they're going to deny all knowledge of it. And us. There's five of us on board. The others are all asleep. Can you believe that, by the way? We're in a rocket, spinning hopelessly out of control and into Forever, and what is their chosen course of action? A nap.

When we got the manoeuvre just slightly wrong – just slightly enough to make us completely doomed – they all screamed for about an hour and then they dozed off. I can't sleep. I can't get comfortable in sleeping bags because they're always too small for me. Plus, I think if I stay awake I might have an idea. And save us all. That's why I'm recording this on my Draxphone. If I do get home, I'm going to give it to you and then you'll understand how I ended up in deep space when I said I was going pond dipping in the Lake District.

If you are listening to this though, and you are not my mum and dad, you are probably a pointy-headed, ninety-legged, sucker-footed alien, in which case, can I just say, "Hello, I come in peace. And, if you happen to have the technology, would you mind posting this to: Mr and Mrs Digby – 23, Glenarm Close, Bootle, Liverpool 22, England, The Earth, Solar System, Milky Way, et cetera. If it's not too much trouble."

The slightly worrying thing is that I am sort of enjoying this. Being doomed is Not Good. But being weightless is Outstanding. Every time I lean forward I do a perfect somersault. When I stretch my arms in the air I levitate. Back on Earth my only special skills are being above average in maths and height. Up here I've got so many skills I'm practically a Power Ranger. Then there's the stars.

On Earth, our house is right next to the New Strand Shopping Centre. The multi-storey blots out most of the sky. The only stars I ever really noticed were the ones on the "It's Your Solar System" glow-in-the-dark mobile I got when I was nine. And the only reason I noticed them was that they kept getting tangled in my hair. Mobiles do not make good presents for persons of above average height.

The stars look different from here. There's a lot more of them, for one thing. Big swirls and knots and clouds of them, so bright they hurt to look at. When you're in it, space looks like the biggest firework display ever – except it's on pause. It looks like freeze-frame fireworks. Even if you're Completely Doomed, you've got to be impressed.

The only bad thing about the view is that it doesn't include Earth. We haven't seen it since we rolled out of orbit. I said to the others, "Well, it must be somewhere. We're probably just facing the wrong way. We'll find it. Definitely." But that didn't seem to calm them down. One of them – Samson Two – drew me a diagram to prove that even if we were facing the wrong way we should still be able to see it. I said, "So what are you saying? That we've

fallen into some magic wormhole and come out on the other side of the universe?"

"Possibly."

"That the whole Earth just vanished? That it's gone?"

"Possibly."

They all screamed until they wore themselves out, and then they went to sleep. At least sleep uses less oxygen.

Now answer the questions below:

Building Blocks

- 1) Find the words in the table below from the text and write the sentence from the text that they appear in. Then write your own sentences with the words. The first one has been done for you:

Word from the text:	The sentence from the text:	Your own sentence using the word:
Pretend	'Teenagers pretend to be older.'	The children pretend to be cats.
Dozed		
Average		
Somersault		

- 2) **'I sort of gave the impression I was about thirty.'**

Which word is closest in meaning to impression? Circle the correct word.

Fact.

Idea

Reality

- 3) Look at the paragraph beginning. 'The only bad thing about the view is that it doesn't include Earth ...' **Find and copy one word** that means: not showing strong emotions.
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Word Detectives

1.

The boy told the truth about his age	
The boy is tall	
His parents knew about his space mission	
The passengers screamed for three hours and then went to sleep	
On earth his house is next to a shopping centre	

2. What was the name of the rocket?

3. How high above the surface of the earth is the rocket?

Thinking Caps

- 1) The boy says everyone lies about their age. Why do you think children, adults and grownups lie about their age?
- 2) Why do you think the boy has the mobile phone with pictures of his family with him?
- 3) Why might he be slightly worried that he is enjoying being on board the Infinite Possibility?