



CHAPTER 1

ALL BOOKS GREAT AND SMALL

It was Sunday morning in the quiet town of Lawnville, New Jersey. The time was eleven o'clock, part of that long, getting-hungry stretch between breakfast and lunch.

Simon Bloom was spending it doing his favorite thing: reading. He'd loved it since he'd first learned how, and the ability to control a few laws of physics hadn't changed that.

Of course, he could enjoy his powers, too. Simon was sitting above his bed . . . eight feet above. On the ceiling. His butt was firmly planted there as he sat, cross-legged, with his head hanging down toward his bed. He had used his control over the law of gravitation, changing it on himself so he was pulled up instead of down like everything else on the planet. For Simon, the ceiling *was* the ground. To him, the rest of his bedroom—his bed, his desk, his bookcases, the dirty laundry

he'd not quite gotten around to tossing into the hamper—appeared to be on the ceiling.

He preferred to sit that way whenever his parents weren't home and thus couldn't walk in on him. This was often, since his mother, Sylvia Bloom, was working on a new advertising campaign that had her putting in long hours in her office. His father, Steven Bloom, was focused on his own lab work as an astrophysicist, studying gravitational relationships between certain star systems.

Now, Simon was deep into one of his favorite books, about children in the future training in zero-gravity for an alien war. One brilliant boy gets stuck with terrible responsibility and pressure, but he just wants to be a kid.

Simon was distracted from his reading by a twisting sensation inside his stomach and his head. He wasn't sure what it was, but it made him feel something strange was happening. Something he should be prepared for.

He spoke a series of words that were complete gibberish to me; only a Keeper of the Book of Physics could understand them. Fortunately, Narrators can often read the surface thoughts of our Chronicle-subjects, so I knew he was using his second formula. This gave him control over friction, which he used to make the pages of his book stick in place: it worked much better than a bookmark. He then increased the book's friction to make it adhere next to him on the ceiling. Now his hands were free, if needed.



Simon looked up (down, really) and frowned at a blurry patch forming in the air above (er, beneath) him. Something was making a hole in the middle of his bedroom.

The hole was accompanied by the jarring sound of air ripping. It was a noise Simon knew well; it was about as pleasant as taking a swarm of bees, teaching them how to use maracas and finger cymbals, and putting them inside your ears for a music recital.

Simon's frown turned to a smile as he saw who his visitor was. The *Teacher's Edition of Physics* appeared, bursting out of the hole like a jack-in-the-box. Though it looked like an ordinary textbook, it was far more. It was a Book: one of those links to the endless power of the universe. It was also a dear friend of Simon's.

You see, Simon knew what every Keeper and Narrator did: the Books are more than just tomes filled with powerful formulas. They might not be alive, exactly, but they were aware. They could think. And, most importantly, they could act on their own. Simon Bloom found and was able to use the Book of Physics because *it* had chosen *him*.

"Hello, Book," Simon said aloud. He tried to be calm, but his heart started beating faster. He hadn't seen the Book on its own since it was returned to its previous owner, Ralfagon Wintrofline. Ralfagon, the Keeper and leader of the Order of Physics, was careful to keep the Book by his side.

"What are you doing here?" he asked it. "Is Ralfagon okay?"

The Book ignored his questions and floated over to him. Simon took hold of it in one hand (despite being the size of a huge textbook, the Book weighed about the same as a small paperback). He stroked its spine, and it glowed bright blue and vibrated in response. The scene was rather like a boy and his pet dog, although this dog was blue, hairless, rectangular, and could destroy the universe. Plus, it was house-trained.

You must get ready, Keeper, it said, using the mental link they'd developed.

"Ready for what?" If Simon's heart was racing before, it was sprinting now.

Ready for the end of things as you know it. For the next stage. And all the dangers that will bring.

What? Simon thought back to it. *What do you mean?*

Once again, the Book ignored his question. *Make sure Owen Walters and Alysha Davis are prepared, too.* It made a mental noise that was surely the Book version of a sigh. *The end is coming. You must make sure there will be a new beginning.*

The Book hovered silently for a moment more and then vanished with a noisy tearing of air and a *poof*. Simon stared with confusion and more than a little fear at the space the Book had been occupying. What had it meant? End? Next stage? Dangers? He remembered well the problems his friends and he had faced when he first found the Book. Some were a lot of fun, but some had been of the almost-certain-doom variety.



Simon glanced at his clock. Though it was upside down to him, the big, red digital numbers were easy to read. He was late!

I have to figure this out, Simon thought. But I've also got to go.

Simon stood up on the ceiling, bringing his head a few feet closer to his bed. He jumped, twisted in midair, and shifted his personal gravity back to normal. Suddenly the ground was his ground again. Simon landed feetfirst on his bed and bounced to the floor. After gathering a few items into his backpack, he went to his window.

He was halfway outside when he remembered the book he'd been reading; it was on the ceiling, still stuck by friction. With a snap of his fingers, Simon made the book drop down to his bed; it remained open to the right page.

Simon hopped outside his second-floor bedroom window, using his friction control to let him scramble up the side of his house like a much shorter, less-colorfully-dressed Spider-Man. He climbed onto the roof and glanced at the trees in his backyard. The beautiful autumn leaves were turning from lush green to vibrant reds, oranges, and yellows. They also hid him from neighbors or passersby who might glance up.

From the roof he gazed at the low clouds hanging sheetlike across the October sky. *Perfect. All the cover I'll need.* He rubbed his hands together, licked one finger, and held it up to test the wind (mild, southerly). He reached out with his mind and

sensed the twists and curves of gravity along his intended route, noting every falling leaf, strolling person, flapping bird, zooming plane, and suborbital satellite. He smiled. There was no danger of being spotted or, worse, getting smeared painfully in a collision.

It was time to fly.

