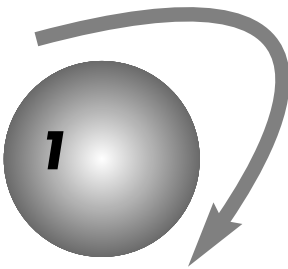


# **CHAPTER 1**



## **SIMON BLOOM FEELS THE BREEZE**

Simon Bloom lived in the northeastern part of the United States, in the northeastern part of New Jersey, in the northeastern part of Bergen County, in the northeastern part of Lawnville. His bedroom faced south.

His two-level house was on Jerome Street, a small road that ended a few houses down, turned a corner, and became the dead end Van Silas Way. Simon also lived a few blocks from Martin Van Buren Elementary, an ordinary school for students in kindergarten through sixth grade.

Simon looked ordinary, too. He had light brown hair, a light sprinkling of freckles on his average-size nose (which had a slight but unspectacular bump in the middle), and

wide blue eyes. He was average height for his age but, much to his dismay, was one of the youngest in the sixth grade: he wouldn't be winning any tallness awards.

On what seemed to be a perfectly normal Sunday, Simon was flying. He soared through the air over Lawnville and did a loop-the-loop. He laughed as he felt the wind wash over him—laughing because, let's be honest, anyone who can fly and do a loop-the-loop without being strapped into a fancy jet plane has a reason to be in a good mood.

Simon then hovered in midair and concentrated. His body vibrated and changed color, turning from pinkish peach to a yellowish red, then to blue and finally, searing white. Then he exploded in a brilliant burst of blinding light. Tiny, glowing Simon particles scattered across the sky like a human firecracker. Unlike most fireworks, these embers regrouped and turned back into their normal Simon shape.

Next, Simon gazed at the daytime outline of the moon and concentrated again. He disappeared, instantly transporting himself from Lawnville and reappearing on the moon's barren, airless surface. There he gleefully jumped about and ran around, leaving footprints all across the dusty moonscape. After a moment, he looked around and sighed at how empty it was. This wasn't much fun without anyone joining in.

It was then that Simon Bloom felt a tug inside. He glanced at the Earth and blinked, transporting himself back

to his bedroom. Where he was sitting at his desk chair, his eyes closed, imagining all this.

Yes, it's true: Simon only did those amazing things in his head. His was a very energetic mind. He was probably as active mentally as most professional athletes are physically, but Simon was a lot less likely to have his picture on a cereal box.

Actually, he hadn't left the house all morning, even though it was a beautiful day outside. His parents weren't home to urge him to go outside and enjoy the weather; both had gone into their offices to catch up on some work. Even when they were home, they were usually reviewing charts or notes.

His mother, Sylvia Bloom, was a high-powered advertising executive. She wore tailored business suits and tended to ask questions without waiting for the answer. His father, Steven Bloom, was an astrophysicist; he was completely obsessed with studying the universe. Sylvia often joked that Steven wouldn't notice a bomb going off near him, but that wasn't true: he'd probably study the nature of the explosion.

Simon didn't mind having workaholic parents. He kept to himself at home, at school, and everywhere in between. He was used to being ignored: his grades were good enough for his teachers to leave him alone, and he usually escaped notice from the bullies, too.

Sitting in his desk chair, Simon opened his eyes and

wondered where that weird tugging feeling had come from. He glanced around his room, looking over shelves and shelves of books, comics, and old toys: cars, spaceships, dinosaurs, superheroes, you name it. There were movie posters (mostly science fiction and fantasy), pictures of astronauts doing a spacewalk outside their space shuttle and bouncing on the moon, and a drawing by his all-time favorite artist, M. C. Escher.

Escher drew the impossible—the rules of reality bending in crazy ways. The one on Simon’s wall was called *Relativity*. It was the inside of a house with people walking up different stairways set at every angle. Some people were completely upside down in relation to others, but each person walked as if his was the normal stairway.

Simon looked at the book he’d been reading earlier: *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, by Douglas Adams. It was his favorite book, about a perfectly ordinary British man named Arthur Dent who goes with a group of aliens on an incredible adventure throughout the galaxy. Simon loved it because he wished he was Arthur.

But that book wasn’t the source of the tugging, nor was the Escher picture. It was something outside his window. Simon opened it, and that’s when he felt a breeze. No, the Breeze. Like the Books, it was important enough for the big B.

You see, this was not a normal puff of wind. It was soothing and exciting as it washed over Simon. It made him tingle with thoughts and possibilities. It gave him the tiniest

glimpse of a special, hidden part of the world. For a moment, he felt like he really was flying, really was a dazzling firework, really was teleporting to the moon . . . and more. Like he could do anything and anything could happen.

The Breeze faded away and Simon turned back to his room. But he didn't—he couldn't—forget that feeling.