2006 Fuel Your Imagination! Winners

(No Title)
By Sarah
7th Grade
Florence Middle School

Today was like any other day at the Zelker house. Joe Zelker was reading Becky Zelker's diary while Becky was reading a book.

"Becky, watch your brother!" Mrs. Zelker called.

"Come on! We're going to be late!" Mr. Zelker bellowed. They got in the car, sped out the driveway and off down the street as if frantically trying to escape the pull of a Black Hole.

After they were completely out of sight, Becky decided to take Joe to the local museum. There was a new exhibit on Mercury that Joe had talked nonstop about for weeks. They turned left and headed for the subway station. "Two tickets for Baker Street," said Becky. It wasn't long before they were climbing the station steps and leaving the roar of the trains. "O.K.," Becky said, "Don't wander too far!" Of course, Joe never listened. Joe was quietly daydreaming while looking out the window when a guide took a group of unsuspecting tourists towards a magnificent rocket!

"Becky!" he squealed, "Look! There it is!" Joe grabbed Becky by the hand and dragged her through the turnstile, and into the courtyard they ran. The group had meandered by the rocket as if nothing was at all significant about the heavenly space explorer proudly standing in front of them. Joe watched the guards as they were distracted by one of the younger tourist in the group who had fallen and skinned his knee. From the sounds of this ridiculous screams, you would have thought aliens were taking him. Joe seized the opportunity to talk Becky into quickly entering the spacecraft. "Becky, sit here and just imagine what Alan Shepherd or Neal Armstrong might have been thinking when they heard they were close to lift off."

"Please Joe, we must leave!" squealed Becky. She knew she couldn't leave without him but could only imagine the trouble that they were about to incur. Joe was busy examining the aeronautical chart to his left while also playing with the control panel. He playfully picked up his headset and dramatized his communication with air traffic control. This led to the decision to try on the space suits. Although Becky was secretly predicting the final disaster of this goofy game, she surrendered to his pleas to "join in" after Joe promised they would leave immediately after they took a picture of each other.

They took the photos without a hitch. All was well. No guards were surrounding the aircraft and no instruments on the panel were broken. "Come on Joe! You promised," urged Becky. Joe reluctantly complied and reached to remove his helmet. Becky sighed a breath of relief and reached to remove hers when IT happened! Becky's suit got caught on the main engine switch of the panel board, the rocket immediately locked down and all engines fired up for take off! "Joe, what is happening?" she screamed with tears pouring down her face.

"Strap yourself down Becky! It looks like we're about to take off!" Joe yelled in return. Joe could see guards running in their direction, but felt helpless. He knew he had really done it this time. He had studied aerodynamics at camp but knew nothing about actually flying a rocket! Why did he always let his curiosity get him in trouble? This time it could cost him his life as well as his sister's.

Becky screamed, "Stop! Joe, don't let it lift off the ground." It was too late. They felt the gravitational force of liftoff push them back on their seats. Joe heard the command center on the headset but couldn't

understand anything over Becky's screaming. They were up! Joe knew they would have to reach a speed of roughly 25,000 mph to overcome earth's gravity and fly into space. His dream of soaring into space became a reality in what seemed like seconds. This was not how he had imagined his first flight. What about college? What about NASA? He was not prepared! The farther they went into space, the less the Earth's gravitational pull became. At 1,500 miles (2,500 km) away, it was only half as strong. They both began to panic as they floated around the cabin.

At last, a man from mission control appeared on the screen. He introduced himself as Commander Newton and compelled them to settle down as he walked them through a plan to bring them back home. There was only one small problem. The aircraft was programmed to visit the small planet of Mercury. It seemed this had been NASA's secret future mission. Although much had been done, it was not scheduled for flight for another ten years. Mercury, the planet closest to the sun, is very small. Joe and Becky knew their chances of landing on Mercury and returning safely were slim to nothing. Becky seemed to relax as Commander Newton assured them that the plan had possibility. She even smiled when she remembered that because gravity is much weaker on Mercury, she would only weigh about a third of her actual weight on Earth.

Joe was not so easily amused and could only focus on the vast amount of possible complications. He knew that the only atmosphere on Mercury was carbon dioxide. Commander Newton was talking about leaving some equipment on Mercury. How would they survive for even a short walk with no atmospheric shield to protect them from the sun? Mr. Newton explained that the surface of Mercury would be bare, jagged, and dry. There would be no life. Commander Newton quickly demonstrated with various shaped balls the past theories about how Mercury always kept the same face toward the sun. He explained how now radio telescopes pick up radio waves from Mercury. "These waves have given us more accurate temperatures and now we know that the dark side of the planet is actually much warmer than anyone once believed," said Mr. Newton.

Becky began crying again and screamed, "Who cares if Mercury spins every 58 1/2 days? Just get me home!"

Commander Newton said, "Both of you control yourself. We have a journey ahead of us. We have a lot of knowledge about Mercury, and we can bring you home. We will be landing on Mercury's frozen side, so we must take precautions. We will need to perform several tests on our craft, and you must pay attention. The temperature shields must be performing perfectly, or you could freeze to death. If you linger too long, you could burn up from the sun's heat. You must also check your suits. You will be expected to leave the craft and secure equipment for future missions. NASA's upcoming project with the Laser Interferometer Space Antenna will need specific data that you will collect to help them with their research on gravitational waves caused by other galaxies or possible black holes."

Joe took a deep breath, counted to ten, and sat up straight. Becky passed out. Joe jumped up, fastened her securely to her seat, and gave her a slap on the back. Becky woke up, and, finally, they were both focused on their new mission.

They passed Venus on the way and excitedly gazed into the atmosphere as they slowly approached. Commander Newton guided them to a successful landing. They opened the hatch, said a quick prayer that they would not immediately freeze, and took a step onto the surface. Becky squealed with relief, "I'm not cold! The protective layers of insulation in suits are working!" After they had secured the appropriate equipment to Mercury's surface, they took about five minutes to play. It was like a nightmare and a dream come true, all wrapped up into one package.

They looked back and began to get weak in the knees as they noticed something weird happening. They hurried to the ship after noticing the ice beginning to melt. Once again Commander Newton was on the screen. This time there was urgency in his voice. "Joe, Becky, do you hear me? You must prepare to

leave immediately! We have miscalculated, and it is almost time for sunrise. The temperature will quickly escalate to over 700 degrees Fahrenheit. The ice is probably melting so fast it appears to be magical. If you do not leave immediately, you could melt from the sun's blazing heat. Please hurry!"

Joe and Becky listened carefully at Commander Newton's instructions. He told them how to turn on the thrusters for lift off. Commander Newton and the control tower programmed them to return to autopilot, and they began their wild ride home.

Mr. And Mrs. Zelker were leaving the mall when suddenly they heard a sonic boom. "What was that honey?" said Mrs. Zelker.

Mr. Zelker replied, "Oh, probably just some stubborn pilots from the base, refusing to obey rules. They can be like those cocky astronauts who are always living dangerously." Then, they got in their van and drove home.

As they came through the door, the phone rang. When Becky and Joe told them that they were leaving the space museum and rattled on about traveling to Mercury, they just laughed. "Our children, what wild imaginations they have!"

Mission to Mars
By Billy
Grade 5
Lake View School

<u>September 7, 2006 – 7:30am</u>
I woke to my phone ringing. I quickly scrambled out of bed and rushed to the phone, trying not to wake my wife, Jen. When I answered the phone, the Administrator of NASA, Michael Griffin, was speaking. "We're having our first meeting in my office today. It's very important. Don't be late." He hung up after that. Still in a haze, I went to the kitchen to get some breakfast, and then I went to my room. First, I got dressed. Then I woke up Jen to ask her to watch Matt, our son. "Listen, Jen, I've got to go to my first meeting. Please keep an eye on Matt, okay?" I whispered. "Okay," she said sleepily. "I gotta go, bye." I got into my car and started to drive to my first NASA meeting in Houston, Texas. The drive took about an hour. When I got there, Michael and a few astronauts were waiting for me.

<u>September 7, 2006 – 9:00am</u>
Michael spoke first. Directing everyone's attention towards me, he said, "We have a new guy today. He moved here from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida because he missed his family, who live around here. His name is Mark. He has been up in space twice already. He's thirty-two and lives about thirty miles away from here. Mark, this is Jack," he pointed to a tall, thin person with black hair. "And this is Jane," he added while pointing to a short, scholarly-looking woman. "Nice to meet you," I said, "I'm glad to be here. I have an idea I'd like to share." "What is it?" asked Jane. "Do you think that there could possibly be minerals on the moon?" I inquired. "If there are, then we could mine there and minimize the effect of depleting our natural resources here on Earth." "I doubt that there are minerals on the moon," Jack said, "and anyway, it wouldn't be cost-effective to mine there." "Yeah," I replied, "I would think so, too. But we could easily plant a little mining robot on the moon. Then, in a year, we could check on it and really know. Besides, if we do find some then that would mean that we have an alternate source of minerals since we've already mined quite a bit of Earth's minerals." "Maybe we could try it," said Michael. "I'll plant an exploratory device on the moon during our next lunar mission." Thrilled with the team's acceptance of my idea, I thanked them and went to my office.

November 7, 2007 - One year later
"I can't believe it!" Michael was shouting with joy. We looked through the camera that we put on the mining robot. Well, we hit the mother load! I asked, "When will we be able to ship it here?" Michael responded, "It's being transported right now. We're going to use the funds towards research on getting man on Mars. In fact, I'll let you go to Mars if we can get man on Mars within ten years. You've got a day off. You should celebrate with Jen."

February 22, 2015 – 10:00pm – Eight years later
"I can't believe this is happening!" Jen was yelling, "You, Mark, are going to be the first person on Mars!" "One of the first," I replied, "Don't forget that Jack and Jane are going, too. And to think, I'll be on Mars in just six short months!" Later that day, as I was talking with Michael, he said, "Listen, we've been able to build a shuttle that can travel up to 32,588 kilometers per hour. So, considering that Mars is 56 million kilometers from Earth, rough calculations figure that it should take approximately 72 days to get there." "Alright," I said, "We'll have to strategize on how to carry enough non-perishable food and water. We'll also have to use heavy suits. Mars' temperature can go down to -143 degrees Celsius. We can also conduct a few gravity related experiments because the gravity on Mars is only thirty-eight percent of that on Earth." "Just leave it to us, and you'll be fine," Michael said assuringly.

August 13, 2015
"Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one…BLAST OFF!" the loud speaker was booming as everyone in the world was watching the launch on television, the launch of the rocket that would carry the very first people to go on Mars. As I was being pushed against my seat, I was thinking about how exciting it would be to be the first man on Mars! In a few minutes, I felt the sensation of zero-gravity and started to float along with Jack and Jane. Jane and I were pilots while Jack was the scientist. It was ten weeks each way, so I had quite a while to wait. I had to eat carefully packaged food. I could have slept anyway I wanted to since there was no up nor down in space.

August 23, 2015
"Look!" said Jack, amazed. He pointed to a window. "Whoa," he said. Through the window I saw a tiny dot. It was Earth! We were farther from Earth than anyone had ever been before. "We're making history today," I said.

November 1, 2015
"We're here!" we shouted, "We're finally here!" Good job, Michael was saying over the radio. We started to prepare the landing, but then the engine started making a strange noise. "We're going to crash!" Jane screamed.

BOOM!! After they crashed, their communications broke down. They were all alone, stranded on a deserted planet, 56 million kilometers away from Earth. "No," I was saying, "this can't be happening. We've only got limited oxygen. We'll never survive. I can't believe this." Weakly, Jack added, "We're goners." We all started to sob. "What are we going to do?" Jane inquired. Jack replied that there's no hope of repairing the engine. He simply stated, "We're dead – the engine is completely smashed and our water supply has spilled." I said, "We have no water?! Wait! I've heard that a probe has found several frozen lakes. Maybe if we travel for a bit, we can find one." On the journey, though, something amazing happened.

"Wait!" Jane said, "I see something. It's over there, in the ground. C'mon, let's start digging!" We all instinctively followed. "Wow! It's spectacular! I can't believe my eyes!" Before them, lay a skeleton – not a weird alien skeleton, but a plain ordinary-looking, human skeleton. "Let's go back to the shuttle and see if there is any saved water," Jack said glumly, "and bring the skeleton, too." But when we got there, our

dilapidated shuttle wasn't there. Instead, we found a shiny, mint-condition shuttle. "Do you think," Jack started, but Jane cut him off, "Maybe," Jane said, "maybe." "C'mon, we probably have our communications back," I said. Through the radio, we heard, "What happened? We lost touch with you." I answered, "We'll tell you when we get home. Now let's get back to Earth."

Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one…BLAST OFF!

The Journey to Tronozard
By Troy
Grade 4
Aspen Elementary School

"Ahhhhh! Annoss quick! Get into the ship and fire up the engines!"

"But we haven't finished loading the fuel, yet. What's the rush?" asked Annoss.

"Hesnosian security forces are about to attack!"

"Good idea! Let's get out of here!"

My best friend Annoss and I narrowly escaped before the Hesnosians attacked - they really don't like humans very much - and we continued on our mission to find a planet for the inhabitants of Earth. Because of disturbances in the inner core, Earth's magnetic field began to weaken several years ago, exposing the planet to solar winds that have caused high levels of radiation and electrical failures. No one can survive there much longer, and they're relying on us to find a new home for those who do survive. When we left, the human population was moving to the underground cities that had been built for their protection, hoping that Annoss and I would return with some good news before too long.

The year is 3987 and our space travel capabilities have improved to the point where we can find and travel through holes in space, known as worm holes. These worm holes allow us to take short cuts through the universe, transporting us to distant galaxies in what seems like minutes. Annoss and I are heading to the planet Tronozard which we believe has an atmosphere very similar to Earth. Unfortunately, we are running out of fuel.

As we were speeding away from Earth, we suddenly encountered a meteor shower, which we were unable to avoid. It damaged our aerodynamics and created a fuel leak. Unfortunately, we had to land on Hesno at the edge of the Andromeda galaxy some 2.5 million light years from Earth. Hesnosians have long held a hatred for humans; something to do with an early encounter several hundred years ago. We pulled into a fuel center where we hoped to quickly purchase some frozen hydrogen particles for our atomic propulsion engines and get out of there. We didn't want to stay around too long. Luckily we were able to pay with universal currency and managed to load about half the fuel we needed before the Hesnosian security forces noticed that we were from Earth and began their chase. We had a very narrow escape with all those lasers shooting at us, but Annoss did a great job of avoiding them as we sped away.

Since we didn't get all the fuel we needed on Hesno, we had to get to another planet quickly, and I knew just the place: the planet X-ron. Unlike the Hesnosians, the X-ronians were very happy to see us. They had not seen any human visitors since 2548 when humans arrived on their first mission outside of the Milky Way galaxy. They gave us a lot of fuel and helped us repair our ship so that we could continue on our journey.

Soon after leaving X-ron, a worm hole appeared about 92 million miles away. Unfortunately we went too close to the X-ronian sun. I thought it would be easy to get away from the gravitational pull, but then we

noticed our boosters were only operating at half strength, so we didn't have enough power to escape from their sun. It looked like we were going to be drawn into the flaming orb of hydrogen gas, so we had to use extra fuel to get away and dove into the worm hole to break free. We weren't sure if it was the right one, but we had to take it. Within seconds we found ourselves in the Whirlpool galaxy - just where we needed to get to. Tronozard was only 2 million miles away. However, we had a problem. Since we used so much of our fuel escaping the X-ron's sun, we didn't know if we were going to make it to Tronozard or not! With no possibility of refueling, we decided to use the slingshot effect.

We headed towards a nearby planet, entered its gravitational field, rode it to the release point, and blasted towards Tronozard. It was a perfect execution of gravitational assistance. We now had even more speed than we did before the assist and saved fuel at the same time.

In minutes, we landed safely on Tronozard and got out of the ship. This planet was just like Earth, but it was an untouched paradise. There were waterfalls, vineyards, fruit trees, grass up to our knees, towering mountains, and the most beautiful sun rising behind them. It was just like Earth before mankind evolved to destroy it.

"Roar!!!!"

"Ahhhh! Lion!!" Annoss and I screamed.

"Don't be afraid. You are welcome here on Tronozard. I am Trono, the ruler of this planet," the lion boomed in a deep voice.

"Well we are..."

"Humans, I know."

"And our names our Krekno and Annoss. We are on a mission to..."

"Find another planet like Earth to bring your people to. We know all about your misfortune and your desire to find a new home. However, we are very concerned about what you humans have done to destroy your home. We are compassionate creatures here on Tronozard and have decided to allow you to settle with us - on one condition: that you live under our rules and under my authority," said Trono. "Humans will not be allowed to destroy this planet."

Annoss and I looked at each other and wondered what to say. We had just spoken to a talking lion that was more intelligent than any human we had ever met, and he had offered us a great deal that would save the human population of Earth. But, would those same humans be able to live under the rule of animals? That's the question we took back home with us when we departed Tronozard with the message from Trono. Annoss and I wondered how our people would respond when we tell them, **"We can live there, but the animals will have the power on *their* planet."**

The choice was clear. Either live underground on Earth and try to rebuild the civilization that was destroying it, or move to the natural paradise of Tronozard and live under the rule of the animals.

What would you do?

The Long Journey
By Chris
Grade 8
Johnson Junior High School

We have been launching probes onto all of the planets. We are on the planet of Neptune. We are not going to go any further because we only have enough fuel to get back to Earth. Martin was the equipment collector and all of a sudden he fell. There was a hole in his suit and we breathed in a little bit of the gasses in the atmosphere. He was dead the second it hit his lungs.

We see a very large circle off into the distance of space. About 50 years ago, the planet Pluto got out of the gravitational pull of the sun. We really want to go check it out, but there is not enough fuel.

"You know that we do not have enough fuel to go all the out there, and we will probably be hit by one of the speeding comets in the Ort Cloud." I said to the very angry crowd of crewmembers, "We will go but we will have to stop at the moon to get some of the fuel that we store there. So we will leave at noon tomorrow."

"Please listen to me, when you get on the planet you better be sure that all of your suits are working correctly, you don't want to end up like Martin."

When we get to the planet of Pluto, we are going to try to push the planet back into the gravitational pull. We are going to put two of our crewmembers into the 3 mini ships that we have and send them to each of the backsides of the planet. Each of these ships has a combustion engine that has the power to move a planet.

We all got into our separate ships and were on our way to Pluto. We got out our maximum walkie-talkies, and sent message to the other two ships. We were all ready for the mission.

We started all of the engines and BOOM. The planet was off. It was heading right for were we wanted it to go. But all of a sudden the engine on the left broke off of the planet, so the engine went right into Neptune. CRASH. There was a colossal explosion. Meanwhile the planet of Pluto exploded right in its tracks.

"Where is everyone?" I said, "I can't see anything."

The only person that was missing was Jordan. So we all went around the planet looking for him. We split into the same teams that we were in the ships. We thought that it was taking too long so we decided that Tanner, James, and I will take the little ships and search the far places and the rest will just stay around here and look for him around here.

"Did you guys hear that? It kind of sounded like…" Tanner was cut off of his sentence with the same sound. Now all of the questions come. What was it? Where did it come from? Who did it? Nobody had any answers. We all decided to go back to everyone else and leave. If Jordan did survive, there is only a ten percent chance he is on this planet. So we started to repair the ship.

The ship was way worse than we thought. It had a huge hole in the center, and most of the gas had leaked out.

"That is probably the big bang we heard earlier," said James. There was no gas left in the tank. The only thing in the tank was open air.

One of my colleges had a very good idea, he said that we should take the fuel out of the smaller ships and put the fuel into the big tank. So we did it. It took us about an hour or so, but we got it done. Plus we still have to make the repairs on the ship. We will not be able to leave this planet for another week or so.

So we proceeded with the repairs on the ship until everyone was too tired to work. We all had a lot of food left, because we had brought fifty pounds more food than we needed. We all ate up and then took a little nap.

I woke up first and the sun was right overhead, so I went to look for Jordan one more time. I went over the canyon that we were camped by and I seen nothing. I was going to go to the next canyon, but I heard all of the others getting up. We were still not done with the repairs, so we were still going to be here for a while. I decided that the worst mechanic should go and look for Jordan. The worst mechanic was Tanner. So he went off into the canyons screaming Jordan's name.

"JORDAN! Jordan can you here me! Please answer me," said Tanner, "If you are here please answer me!"

There was a loud screeching noise behind one of the craters. He did not know what it was. He pulled out his Zapomatic Gun and loaded it.

"Is anyone there?" asked Tanner, "I have a gun and I know how to use it."
Tanner got his gun and fired it into the crater. All of the other crewmembers heard the shot and came running with their guns in hand.

"What was that?" said James, "I heard a gunshot."

All of a sudden we heard the noise again, but this time it was not only one. It was about twenty. We did not know what it was so we just loaded our weapons and prepared for battle. All of a sudden a very big extraterrestrial looking like the modern-day alligator jumped out of the crater. This thing was so big that it was almost 10 feet long. It was also almost 4 feet tall. It started to run right towards us. BOOM. We all shot at it. It fell to the floor, but it was still moving so we all shot at it again. When we knew it was dead, we all had a look at it. It had very sharp teeth and a very big jawbone.

We got it because if we would take it back home we would be very famous for bringing home an alien. When we started to drag it to the ship, we heard the same sound again. It was coming from the same crater. Then all of a sudden, another thirty or forty of them jumped out and started charging right at us. None of us were foolish enough to stay back and fight, so we all dropped the carcass and ran. They all stopped at the carcass. They started to eat it. That gave us a little time to get to the ship. They were done eating the whole thing in less than a minute. Then they all started to charge after us again. By the time they got by us we were already in the ship.

It started nicely and it lifted us off of the ground nicely. We started to fly. We were on our way back to our planet.

We all heard a huge explosion. We forgot that the engine was still broken.

The explosion made all of us go flying into the sleeping quarters. Everybody was knocked out. Well at least I think everyone was. There was no sound. I thought that we had landed on something, because we were not moving at all.

I tried to get up but there was something heavy on my back. It was a body! When I noticed I tried to push it off but he was too heavy. It was DEAD! I heard someone moving.

"HELP!" I screamed hoping that the person up could hear me. He got over to me and I noticed that it was Jordan.

"Jordan, Is that really you? I thought you were a goner."

"I have been in here since the explosion of the planets. I was getting out some food from the closet, when the explosion forced the door closed. It got locked and I could not get out. Luckily I was stuck in the food closet, or I would have died of hunger. Well anyway, when the last explosion happened, it opened up the door. I got out and noticed that you all were knocked out."

He got the body off of me and we looked to see if anyone had survived. Nobody had. It was only Jordan and I.

We really started to panic when we knew that we were the only ones left. The feeling was too bad to put into words. There was no way that we could get off of the planet now. We were stuck. STRANDED.

To Be Continued